

POETRY

LONDON — NEW YORK

EDITED BY TAMBIMUTTU



the
lyre
bird

RIPLEY '56

ANN ADAMS • ARQ • LEAH ATIK • HAYDEN CARRUTH • JIBANANANDA DAS
C. DAY LEWIS • LAWRENCE DURRELL • JAMES T. FARRELL • DUDLEY FITTS
G. S. FRASER • MICHAEL HAMBURGER • ARDATH FRANCES HURST
JOSEPH JOEL KEITH • CLAIRE McALLISTER • CHARLES MADGE
NICHOLAS MOORE • HERBERT MORRIS • HOWARD NEMEROV
ANTHONY OSTROFF • RAYMOND PATTERSON • DACHINE RAINER
ANNE RIDLER • THEODORE ROETHKE • MAY SARTON • RICHARD SELIG
STEPHEN SPENDER • RUTHVEN TODD • D. B. STEINMAN

Cover by Dwight Ripley

PLNY

NO. 3

HALF A CROWN

PRINTED IN U.S.A.

SOME COMMENTS ABOUT PLNY

Critics have often speculated as to what course modern poetry would have taken if Tambimuttu had not been on the scene. Tambimuttu, as editor of *Poetry London*, made literary history. He introduced to the public a great many new poets, checked extremist tendencies, played up the unfashionable and played down the fashionable "rage-of-the-moment" poets. Now he is back again with the same policy and a new series: *Poetry London New-York*.—*The Indian P.E.N.*, Bombay.

Mr. Tambimuttu is a good editor . . . in view of what was being written at the time (the war years), the average number of *Poetry London* gave, if anything, a flattering view of the poetic scene. The reason for this can only be that Mr. Tambimuttu had a flair. . . . it was almost mediumistic, as if the pulse of poetry beat through Tambimuttu.—John Wain on the Third Programme of the BBC.

"The handsomest 'intelligent' poetry magazine I know of . . . You've shown, in your introduction, how much you believe in the good of poetry and in the mischief of cliques, rackets, scandal schools, menagerie menages, amateur classes of novitiate plagiarists. More subscribers and power to you."—Dylan Thomas in *Poetry London*, No. 2.

From 1939 to some years after World War II. . . . *Poetry London* was the best produced and most exciting British magazine of new verse. *Poetry London-New York* is similar in format but has an even more ambitious sweep . . . promises both to be representative in its choice of verse and a lively forum for critical discussion.

—*The Times Literary Supplement*, London.

. . . there is no doubt that *Poetry London-New York* is going to play an important role in the literary history of the next decade or two.—*Quest*, Bombay.

HELP! HELP!

Poetry London-New York can certainly lay claim to the muse for its inspiration, but we are most decidedly not watched over by angels. We are not worried about how many angels can cluster on the point of a needle, but we are innocent enough to hope that each reader will support PLNY and send a contribution now in addition to the regular subscription fee so that this publication may continue to carry on its function. Contributions are tax-deductible.

Submitted manuscripts, for which the editor holds no responsibility, should be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

SUBSCRIPTION FOR 6 ISSUES — \$5.00

Published by Editions Poetry London-New York, 513 Avenue of the Americas, New York 11, N. Y.

Distributed in the U. S. A. by The Eastern News Company, 301 W. 11th Street, New York, N. Y.

Copyright 1956 by The Poetry Institute, Inc., New York, N. Y., U. S. A.

Second-class mailing permit applied for New York Post Office, N. Y.

POETRY LONDON - NEW YORK

Editor: TAMBIMUTTU

Associate Editor: KATHARINE FALLEY

Managing Editor: VIRGINIA C. CHALK

Editor in Britain: KEIDRYCH RHYS, 40 Heath Street, Hampstead, London, N.W. 3

R. Pathmanabha Iyer
27-B, High Street,
Plaisiow
London E13 0AD

VOL. 1, No. 3

WINTER, 1957

Third Letter

If poetry is, nowadays, smug and dapper in a grey flannel suit, on the East Coast, or has become mild-mannered, tentative, weak-kneed and passionless in Great Britain, and simply wild, woolly and formless in San Francisco, it is not the poets themselves who are to blame, but a handful of journalists, critics and editors. On them rests the burden of distorting the contemporary picture and adulterating poetic values, as I have pointed out in a recent issue of *New World Writing*. This magazine believes that poets who have something of value to say find the audience they deserve and do not need the histrionics of these entrepreneurs with their Fleet Street-Madison Avenue flair for generating impossible ideas and, in the instance of the West Coast poets, their secret desire for Hollywood. Their coming has usually been accompanied by name-calling, where it was ill-deserved, simple distortion and suppression of facts and, of course, plenty of noise.

The two latest such events in Britain are the anthologies, *New Lines* edited by Robert Conquest, and *Poets of the 1950's* edited by D. J. Enright; and on the American side, *Evergreen Review* No. 2

which prints poets of the "San Francisco Renaissance".* The British anthologies are said to represent a new British "Movement", and the *Evergreen Review*, "The Confession of Faith of the (New) Generation" in America.

I shall reserve my comments on *Evergreen Review* and the poets of the West Coast for PLNY Number 4, and take the two anthologies first. These may be conveniently telescoped into a single book to point out what I think is wrong with both the poetry which has been carelessly garnered for presentation, and the critical gobbledygook of the editors. They feature the same poets except for Thom Gunn, who does not appear in Mr. Enright's anthology, although he is a prominent member of the group. *New Lines* is therefore the more representative collection and in noticing it we shall have dealt with the chief poets of "The Movement".

I may as well say, at the start, that I find nothing 'new' about the editors of the anthologies or the poets they have espoused as an antidote to what they, in

* Edited by Barney Rosset and Donald Allen

their innocence, suppose to have happened in the Thirties and Forties. To begin with, it is foolish to seize the loaf and divide it with the knife of ignorance into sections typical of the Thirties, the Forties or the Fifties. Only a mind hopelessly 'slanted' by academics would attempt this feat of Mr. Conquest's. "In the late 1920's a group of poets were starting to write who were to be the typical poets of the 1930's. Towards the end of the 1930's, a group of writers with quite different attitudes began to emerge, who were to dominate the 1940's . . . It was in the late 1940's and early 1950's that a number of poets began to emerge who have been progressing from different viewpoints to a certain unity of approach, a new and healthy general viewpoint. This book confines itself to poets who found themselves . . . in most cases in the 1950's". (This last bit of information is accurate enough, anyhow, since both the editors' writings and those of the majority of this group were well known to *Poetry London*, which had rejected them years ago as appendices to the neo-Georgian pages of *The Poetry Review*.) Though I was disconcerted when Nicholas Moore wrote to me "Nothing new has happened in Britain. Most of the new poets are those you or I or Richard March rejected from *Poetry London* as half-baked long ago", I am now convinced by these two anthologies that this is true. Theirs is indeed an anti-poetry. It says things in verse which could as easily have been said in prose:

As an address it pleased us for a while.
We liked to mention it before our friends;
Printed on notepaper, it gave us style.

We issued invitations at week-ends;
Even relations thought they ought to call,
Forgave our failures; we had made amends.

JOHN WAIN

If Mr. Wain had grasped his Auden better, he would have understood how to use the conversational style and objective approach, and yet write lines without entirely evaporating off the poetry. Audenesque or Empsonesque, his are the scribbles of a critic and an academician—a modern poetry of the wit, which is neither humane nor broad in its scope. When the poetic meaning is not too far removed from the prosaic, it unaccountably (for a modern writer) meanders away into the limbo of neo-Georgianism. This is equally true of the other members of the group—John Holloway, Philip Larkin, Thom Gunn, Kingsley Amis, D. J. Enright, Donald Davie, Robert Conquest. To quote from Mr. Gunn, who has been uncritically blessed with a volume of verse by Mr. T. S. Eliot:

The blue jay scuffling in the bushes follows
Some hidden purpose, and the gust of birds
That spurts across the field, the wheeling swallows,
Have nested in the trees and undergrowth.
Seeking their instinct, or their poise, or both,
One moves with an uncertain violence
Under the dust thrown by a baffled sense
Or the dull thunder of approximate words.
On motorcycles, up the road, they come:

Small, black, as flies hanging in heat,
 the Boys,
 Until the distance throws them forth,
 their hum
 Bulges to thunder held by calf and
 thigh.

The remaining member of the group is Elizabeth Jennings. Although she writes neatly, I see no innovation in her. She is but a paler and still forming reflection of her mentor of the Thirties, Anne Ridler:

All that I love is, like the night,
 outside,
 Good to be gazed at, looking as if
 it could
 With a simple gesture be brought
 inside my head
 Or in my heart, but my thoughts
 about it divide
 Me from my object. Now deep in
 my bed
 I turn and the world turns on the
 other side.

ELIZABETH JENNINGS

To compare this to Anne Ridler's well-known poem written for her husband during the last war:

Now that you lie
 In London afar,
 And may sleep longer
 Though lonelier,
 For I shall not wake you
 With a nightmare,
 Heaven plant such peace in us
 As if no parting stretched between us.

The world revolves
 And is evil;
 God's image is
 Wormeaten by the devil;
 May the good angel
 Have no rival
 By our beds, and we lie curled
 At the sound unmoving heart of the world.
 In our good nights
 When we were together,

We made, in that stillness
 Where we loved each other,
 A new being, of both
 Yet above either:
 So, when I cannot share your sleep,
 Into this being, half yours, I creep.

ANNE RIDLER

The vocabulary, tone and experience are similar. Taking this single poem of Mrs. Ridler's as the touchstone, let me quote from another of Miss Jennings' poems in *New Lines*:

You can project the full
 Picture of lover or friend,
 that is not either. (E.J.)

A new being, of both
 Yet above either: (A.R.)

So then assemble me,
 Your exact picture firm and credible,
 Though as I think myself I may be free
 And accurate enough.
 That you love what is truthful to your will
 Is all that ever can be answered for
 And, what is more,
 Is all we make each other when we love.
 (E.J.)

In our god nights
 When we were together,
 We made, in that stillness
 Where we loved each other,
 A new being, of both
 Yet above either:
 So when I cannot share your sleep,
 Into this being half yours I creep. (A.R.)

The parallelisms are innumerable and for those determined tweezers-and-scalpel-wielding dissectors of poetry (and I am not really one of them) I may recommend the second verse of *Afternoon in Florence*; the second verse of *The Island*; *Music and Words*; the last three verses of *Florence: Design for a City*; the last verse of *Not in the Guide-Books*; *A Way of Looking*; the last two verses of *Piazza San Marco* and *In the Night*. These titles in-

clude every poem of Miss Jennings' included in *New Lines*, and those who know Anne Ridler's poetry will realize that they have heard the voice before. It is a pity I have to take Miss Jennings' poems apart in this manner (some of them are included in this number and another appeared in No. 2), but, in view of the extravagant claims and misrepresentations in *New Lines*, it has become my unpleasant task to do so.

If the editor had familiarized himself more with the work of his contemporaries, he would have known that "The Movement" wish for "a rational structure" and the "real, rather than ideological" was carried out with greater éclat by the Objective Reporters in the Thirties and Forties, and that even such less publicized figures as Bernard Spencer or Keith Douglas were in every sense more interesting writers than those included in this volume. These present poeticisms are but a rehash of what has already happened, and, even worse, they are poor successors to the more debilitating parts of Sir Edward Marsh's Georgian anthologies. Nothing could be more hand-dog, more tonally insensitive, archaic, or more like assembly-line 'versifying' than these offerings from the massed company of Britain's latest Meistersingers:

- (1) He and she make an ocean
Of all complexity:
When not the lightest motion
Troubles the upper sea . . .
- (2) There'll be no sound: except the
echoing
Horn of a baffled ship, shut out from
home,
And the small birds that skirt the
stranded foam.
Dunlin and sanderling

Feed through the night, or lightly
they rake wing

Down the soft fog. So sharp
their pulse
Trills, and their dram of blood
burns up so clear,
Each minute, in their bright sight,
makes a year.
But you may catch the note of
something else.

JOHN HOLLOWAY

- (3) Once I am sure there's nothing
going on
I step inside, letting the door thud
shut.
Another church: matting, seats, and
stone,
And little books; sprawlings of
flowers, cut
For Sunday, brownish now; some
brass and stuff
Up at the holy end; the small neat
organ;
And a tense, musty, unignorable
silence . . .
- (4) An air lambent with adult enterprise.
- (5) That we insensately forebore
to fleece.

PHILIP LARKIN

- (6) A fragment of weak flesh that
circles round
Between the sky and the hot crust
of hell
I circle because I have found
That magic circles are a useful spell
Against contentment, which comes
on by stealth,
Because I have found that from
the heaven sun
Can scorch like hell itself,
I end my circle where I had begun.

- (7) In fine simplicity
I cry on either side
Far as the eye can see
These fields as green as wide
Are my master's property.

THOM GUNN

(Continued on Page 44)

WILLOW SONG

Willowleaves that sweep the pond
Wept when fair Ophelia smiled,
When Desdemona grew too fond;
They weep for sweetest wits gone wild.

Weed-tangled floors I see beyond
Say, let no looking-glass beguile;
Search no man's eye if it grow fond:
Their deaths were dark, their eyes were mild,

Their songs—O were they black, or bright?
I hear the beating of those wings—
Ophelia swims across the night
And Desdemona, combing, sings.

I'd hear you, love, but a cold wing stings;
The willows whisper, joy-exiled;
Hell-doors fly open, and they sing
Of boughs and herbs as would a child.

And now ripe scent of threshed alfalfa,
Of daisy, timothy, clover of June,
Strokes the air, it brings them nearer:
Fields are with their fragments strewn.

The June air growing denser, colder
Shuts my eyes, and still I see—
Smoothing linen, Desdemona
Robes the night with willowleaves.

O blossoming beans, the glittering grain,
Honeysuckle softened breeze,
As close as April grass to rain,
I see them, sad as northern seas.

The blonde hair tangles, ever bright.
All flowering weeds are those she brings.
Ophelia swims across the night
And Desdemona, combing, sings.

I held your face, love; then they stepped
Beside you; then the willows touched

The throat to song, and singing yet
Love wanders down, with willows clutched.

Indue me to that element,
To clear the throat, do gentle deeds,
Describe the day that was. Lament
Sings all the songs, colors the weeds.

Turn hell to favor with refrains,
Remembering how Ophelia turned
The tables upsidedown. The games
Are tricked; tell me what gambler won.

Play on, to lose, until the last,
Let no ears hear what silence heard;
If they ask why the song is black,
Say a weeping willow stirred.

CLAIRE MC ALLISTER

INVISIBLE DEER

They came just after sundown with the snow
And seemed for all the world so like the wood
That only those who lived here long could know
How deer can look the way a forest should

And stand so still, with antlers dusted white
And look upon a road that leads to town
And think the soft thoughts deer must think at night
When hunters have no will to run them down.

Their antlers, that was all that one could see;
Their heads and bodies were invisible
As trees are seen by midnight witchery
When falling snow has made their branches full.

But then I knew for certain it was deer
And by a way all countrymen can tell:
A distant hound howled down this winter's spell
And snowflakes fell from antlers trembling there.

RAYMOND PATTERSON

*R. Pathmanaba Iyer
27-B, High Street,
Plaistow
London E13 0AD*

LOVE POEM

Tell me why do you sigh;
Be seated by the table,
The heart's mahogany,
In conference, be able

2

Sometimes to go to words'
Border, for something felt,
For something seen or heard,
Where blood casts stone: when salt

3

And tears begin to groove,
And you have understood,
Lover turn to your love
The cheek's dry coat of blood.

ANN ADAMS

AD DETRACTOREM [V:lx]

Allatres licet usque nos et usque
et gannitibus improbis laccessas,
certum est hanc tibi pernegare famam
olim quem petis in meis libellis,
qualiscumque legaris ut per orbem.
Nam te cur aliquis sciat fuisse?
Ignotus pereas, miser, necesse est.
Non derunt tamen hac in urbe forsan
unus vel duo tresve quattuorve
pellem rodere qui velint caninam:
nos hac a scabie tenemus ungues.

VALENTINE TO A DETRACTOR

Keep up your yap-yapping at me, you yap,
spit out the dirtiest insults you know:
you'll get no fame from me,
the look of your name in my book, for the world to see.
You exist, yap, you exist,
but why should anyone know? You won't be missed
when you die, as you've lived, obscure.

Sure,
there may be a man, or two men, or three, who'd stoop

so low as to claw that hide of yours.

Not I:

let me keep my fingernails clean from that infection.

AD VXOREM [XI:civ]

Vxor, vade foras aut moribus utere nostris:
non sum ego nec Curius, nec Numa, nec Tattius.
me jucunda juvant tractae per pocula noctes:
tu properas pota surgere tristis aqua.
tu tenebris gaudes: me ludere teste lucerna
et juvat admissa rumpere luce latus.
fascia te tunicaeque obscuraque pallia celant:
at mihi nulla satis nuda puella jacet.
basia me capiunt blandas imitata columbas:
tu mihi das aviae qualia mane soles,
nec motu dignaris opus nec voce juvare
nec digitis, tamquam tura merumque pares.
masturbabantur Phrygii post ostia servi
Hectoreo quotiens sederat uxor equo,
et quamvis Ithaco sternente pudica solebat
illic Penelope semper habere manum.
pedicare negas: dabat hoc Cornelia Graccho,
Julia Pompeio, Porcia, Brute, tibi;
dulcia Dardanio nondum miscente ministro
pocula Juno fuit pro Ganymede Jovi.
Si te delectat gravitas, Lucretia toto
sis licet usque die: Laïda nocte volo.

TO HIS WIFE: A MANIFESTO

There's only one thing for it, darling: put up
with my 'degenerate ways', as you call them, or
go home to Mamma.

Admittedly, I'm not one
of those stern & rockbound types, homespun
whiskers, bores
bugling from pulpit and podium.

When I drink
it's a long wet night for me: you go to bed
with a bumper of water at sunset.

When I make love,
I want every light on full blast: you insist
upon darkness,
a nightgown,

a wrapper,
& blankets—
(For me, who've never found
a naked girl naked enough!)

—Kissing? I like it,
but I like it as doves kiss, beaks ajar: you kiss
as though you were greeting your grandmother at breakfast.
Loving?

What loving! Paralyzed! Wordless! Not so much
as a wandering hand:

your hand's reserved, I suppose,
for Ladies' Day at the altar.

Ah the old time
when his wife rode Hector, that bucking gay horse,
and the Phrygian slaves
played with themselves outside the bedroom door!
The halycon days
when Ulysses snorted asleep, yet wise Penelope
employed her instructed fingers!

Those blessed days
when good Cornelia gave (what you deny)
herself reversed to her Gracchus;

and Julia to Pompey; and

Portia, Brutus, to you!

Fortia, Brutus, to you: When Juno herself
was Ganymede enough for Lord Jupiter!

All right.

This is my point: I can bear Lucretia by daylight,
but at night

I want a Lais in my bed who knows her business.

Translated by DUDLEY FITTS

SCENARIO

Last night I saw a toad.
No princess kissed him back.
Today a tortoise slowed
And wept on the race track.

Things change. The saint grins
In wax, stiff as pride:
Who could describe sin
Now locks truth inside.

And all that we have cherished —
The blonde girl in the tower
Whose ivory love perished
Hour by longing hour ;

And the knight forever arriving
To lose the day—the gay,
The comic, the sad contriving,
More than these decay.

The omens left are turned
Like mirrors. We dispose
The freak to swandom, earn
His pain by magic, close

The dark millionaire,
And like a tall tale
Floodlight the aware
Keen eye of the whale.

But though that great fish
Be ringed by beggars, Death
Dream like sleep, awash
Beneath the reef of breath,

He yet may sound, involve
All seas with one
Jonah who dissolves
In the real leviathan.

ANTHONY OSTROFF

THE CITY AT 4 A.M.

Hear the stir and the breath of the sprawling giant,
the steady rise and fall; the predawn rumbles
deep in the bowels of the vast one soon to waken,
soon to lift towers where musty castles were tumbled.

Soon the whistles will blow and men in tunnels
shall burrow their way toward light; still others feed
the bulging belly of the titan, loud, rapacious;
shoveling in his ever demanded food.

Hear his servants; hear the bracing showers
poured cold and fresh upon his thighs and muscles.
Listen: the herculean vessel strengthens
all the weak-blooded pigmies he has hustled.

Up, up in air the ant-men walk on girders;
up goes the clock in the largest of his jewels.
Countless, the eyes look up at the silent ticking.
countless, the slaves are fetching the giant's fuel.

JOSEPH JOEL KEITH

TO SAMUEL BARBER

No conductor with his wand
Can reverse the tempo, and
Bring back that distant day upon
Which, in 1937, London,
I listened to you sing your music.
In all the streets there is no physic
To question what the windows say:
"Both your heads have turned quite gray."

"I was" lies within "I am"
That you were Sam is to be Sam.
"We were" "we shall be" says "we are"
However past, however future.
In your music, in my books,
We both are being, if each looks.

STEPHEN SPENDER

SPRING PLANTING

Conflict has been our climate for so long,
All we know gleaned from high jagged places,
And not a question there of right or wrong,
But only foothold on the mountain faces,
A balance for the self upon those sheer
Dizzying cliffs, then crampon, creep on somehow
To where we came to master at least fear;
In this way learned the little that we know:
And managed to exist, following hunches,
Acutely wary of the avalanches.

How then accept this ultimate plateau,
The calm arrival after the harsh climb?
For here we must learn simply how to grow,
Now we are safely balanced. There is time.
The self is gardener and not mountaineer,
Handles a spade or hoe, scatters new seed,
No wish for stronghold now there is no fear,
But to learn joy as well as rooted need.

A strange, a different virtue is required
Here where the winds are kind, the temperate sun
Brings slowly up the green shoots we desired,
Now there is grace, and desperation gone.
Dear love, here we are planting—and so high,
Close to the cloud, visited by the snow—
A human world consoled by a great sky,
How grow from peace all that we wish to grow?
It is no small task. At last we have come
To plant our anguish and make for it a home.

MAY SARTON

FIRE OF THE NIGHT

Down in the curve of darkness blooms a fire,
Petalled in all the colors of the sun:
Deep in a hollow, where the shadows run,
A cruel garden grows upon a pyre.

Panther-eyed watcher, crouching on a crag,
Knows a like blossom in his inky soul,
Colored of terror and of glowing coal,
That opens slowly as his spirits lag.

Red-calyxed flowers, blossomed in the night,
Bind a black panther in a noose of fright.

ARDATH FRANCES HURST

OF WINTER

The winters come, our tasks are never ended,
ours is no mercy of a yearly rest;
let the small people sleep in secret hollows,

bounded by reaches of forgetfulness;
we are not deep-sleep-hidden in the forest,
we are not sphered in balls of silent fur:
we are enmeshed in trappings of our living,
laden with burdens, rowelled by the year.

ARDATH FRANCES HURST

ASKING NOTHING

If wishes were granted when asked
Of the winter wind, there's little enough
I would need, for want has been husked
And the shell is empty of all but love.

Would I, perhaps, have my bruised heart back?
I doubt it. It belongs where it is.
Surely it's had its share of misuse, and luck?
A plaything it was, at the call of a kiss.

Obedient to every beckon and call
It seemed it would never grow tired;
But now it cries it has had its fill
And wants to rest where richness is stored

In the hands of one whom it knows it loves.
And it might as well stay there, begging peace;
For the ups and downs on which nothing thrives
Have taught it, at least, to honor the place

Where it's treated as if it were something worthy,
And its love is accepted, a solid fact.
And nobody cares that it's mired and earthy
So long as its love earns its own respect.

Now, if the wind would grant me a favor
I would not know what to ask or why:
Only perhaps that its gusts would cover
And heal the scars, and that every day

Would confirm and prolong the present now,
Making my love, like a first love, new.

RUTHVEN TODD

IDEAS OF REFERENCE

Here where I stood aside to let the angels pass
The truffles grow
And good white mushrooms ring the April grass
Where my saints go ;

But where I sat surrounded by my sins
The toadstools spread
And where I kissed and fondled Fault begins
The wormwood bed.

ARQ

AESTHETIC DOG

James, when the harp gave meltingly its sound,
Howled in delight and rolled upon the ground.

Such fierce vibrations in his delicate ears
Would, had he been a man, have led to tears.

ARQ

ALL THE MUSICIANS

Then as I sang along the inland sea
Hundreds of gulls came hurrying to me.

Tonight in the brush the mocking birds quote
The gulls in a lovelier, liquider note

And quote the frog, and quote the loon
In a note as white as the ocean moon

Until I hear by the inland sea
Bird mocking mocking-bird
now mocking me.

ARQ

BEFORE THE FALL

Yes, the most excellent beauties come unearned,
I think as I look at you :
But quite unpaintable, unprintable, and alas
Unmemorable too.
That face which the camera fixes on a sheet,
That smiling daisy face,

Becomes a changeling that memory rocks in the cradle
In the living child's place.
The look of a foreign child, the smell of a bonfire,
Will come to mind at a call,
But not you, sand-hopper, builder of falling towers,
Whose beauty seems eternal.
We shall know too many of you as time goes on
To keep one image clear . . .

A stranger would paint first the aureole
Of hay-and-spun-glass hair,
And then, coming to the imp's eyes, might pause.
But still for a little while
Glory and mischief agree together, and
To cross the social will
Is a good joke, since nothing really divides
You from the milk you spilt;
And so, having no sense of separation
You have no sense of guilt.
To glory in mischief—this is the happiness to which
The lunatic and criminal aspire,
Remembering that they were once adorable
In all they did, and were warmed by impartial fire.
But you, urchin, *hérichon*, with prickles
Of temper and restless trotting feet,
Can do outrageous things unblamed, because
Your gazing self is lost
In what it contemplates, like the seraphim that know
The cherubim that love most.

ANNE RIDLER

SALT

Now I can say
this is the night that, should you waken,
weeping the childhood body that you leave
for prouder mansions,
my ears shall hardly falter nor quite weaken
holding the grief of bone you spill:
the nights this summer go down deep as love.
It is the sea

I hear as well:
these are the nights the gull and porpoise

swim out the soaring star light in the brain,
the gill and feather
flawless in that sheer passion to which their purpose
perfects and whittles them these nights,
come clean enough for magic from the brine
packing their will.

So weep a salt
crystalline as the house of bone
grown to and deeply given you this summer :
weep for a world
air and ocean that for long has been
awaited by the fin and wing
hungering somewhere in the profoundest swimmer
against the silt

and drift that choke
the coasts and cause the lungs' obstruction.
Or walk upon the daylight from your bed,
immaculate
with morning, brilliant beyond the sun's abstraction,
so that it be your house you reach
spangling with day, your very bone you bid
be bold as chalk.

Or cry the white
your limbs learn lovely all the noon,
and move into the evening some pure weapon
cut out of love
and frocked wholly in salt the way a nun
walks in the garb of her devotions.
Cry for the rooms we have constructed, weep in
my hands their weight

vast on the wind
these nights, the elements we mine
breathing at last, the blood in which we lave
long into summer
from all the storied mansion which we mean
builds in the nitrates of this night
by elemental bone, by salt of love
blown to the wound.

HERBERT MORRIS

THE PRAIRIE

In that strange return when even the leaves were angry,
Small birds broke from the boughs in savage singing.
It was late May: drought champed the new stalks,
The sun shingled the pale earth, the wind coughed.
My sweat was all the juice from east to west
That freely flowed, my veins the fullest rivers,
My skull the coolest cave. Winter wheat lay stacked,
The buzzards wheeled, the lean jack rabbit jumped
And lizards licked their supper from the air.

How can I tell you, stranger? Is drought more harsh,
Prairie more desolate, because some painted men
Whom space and pride had taught that beasts were spirits
Wandered here and fought unequal skirmishes
Against strange weapons and a stranger greed that could not stop?

RICHARD SELIG

RUINS: MYCENAE

That citadel was crushed, where princes bathed and bred,
By patient weather, hoofs of sheep; by weeds, the wild
Anemone; by poor, dirt-breaking men, their seed
So numerous it rots the stone and plants the child;
By slack and secret water, roots of olive trees;
By mincing scrape of tourists sucking like bees

Their ruined portion from an ancient treasury.
Dispelled from roofless chambers, that lethal vanity,
Those legends buzz in the brain like locusts suddenly.
One sees the sky, how the light falls, where mountains lie,
Knowing the view is similar when the great ones die.

Between the human and the inhuman, between charged womb
And raging clouds; scuffed shoe, tumbled column,
Potsherds and bones—and that cold law beyond the tomb
Diminishing man's dignity, ignoring him—
The Cyclopean is too small, too soft and loose,
To last out change of weather or of use.

RICHARD SELIG

THE GATE

FOR T. R.

In the foreground, clots of cream-white flowers (meadowsweet?
Guelder? cow parsley?): a patch of green: then a gate
Dividing the green from a brown field; and beyond,
By steps of mustard and sanfoin-pink, the distance
Climbs right-handed away
Up to an olive hilltop and the sky.

The gate it is, dead center, ghost-amethyst-hued,
Fastens the whole together like a brooch.
It is all arranged, all there, for the gate's sake
Or for what may come through the gate. But those white flowers,
Craning their necks, putting their heads together,
Like a crowd that holds itself back from surging forward,
Have their own point of balance—poised, it seems,
On the airy brink of whatever it is they await.

And I, gazing over their heads from outside the picture,
Question what we are waiting for: not summer—
Summer is here in charlock, grass and sanfoin.
A human event?—but there's no path to the gate,
Nor does it look as if it was meant to open.
The ghost of one who often came this way
When there was a path? I do not know. But I think,
If I could go deep into the heart of the picture

From the flowers' point of view, all I would ask is
Not that the gate should open, but that it should
Stay there, holding the colored folds together.
We expect nothing (the flowers might add), we only
Await: this pure awaiting—
It is the kind of worship we are taught.

C. DAY LEWIS

THE QUARREL

Even the warmth's a separating thing;
One stoops within his chair, his head between
His hands, her hands are still. The dark coals cling

Together, fall apart. Flames intervene
And cleave between the coals. But two still sit
As though the bright flame were a darkened screen.

Shadows leap up the wall and seem to fit
The room, a kind of curtaining; these two
Within the room have now no need of it.

Coldly they linger when the fire is low
But even ashes fall together when
The flame expires (the hearth warm) but these two

Have no place for cold ashes to lie in.

ELIZABETH JENNINGS

THE AGE OF INNOCENCE

We call it innocence because we see
Only the ends of actions not the means,
A whole past painted into books, the scenes
Boldly stand out. We do not see the way
The whole thing started. There is not delay
At all for us. We think we have the key

To their whole story. What we fasten on
Is this or that particular moment. Thus
We muddle up the ending and the cause,
Cancel perhaps the real motive by
Setting the sequence of the time awry,
Make do with what the child might have done

But never really managed. Which is best,
To look with muddled eyes upon confusion
Saying there is no plan, all is illusion,
Or make one way of looking wholly clear
So that the furthest object draws quite near?
Each way is partial, a half-truth at most.

Or shall the causes claim our whole attention?
The age of innocence be flung back to
Violent beginnings, how the child grew
Out of no stillness? No, for we should miss
The look of innocence, resemblances
That mock all gropings back, all intervention.

ELIZABETH JENNINGS

PEELING A POTATO

Holding this bomb-shaped object in my hand
And slicing its thin skin off with a knife
Gives me occasion to reflect on life,
Not as the scientist does nor as the soldier
Nor those whom heaven favours more than most,
The lucky and the bland

In well-kept suits who in their offices
Hold the attractions of the busy soul;
But as one who exists upon a dole
Of slender talent and great artifices,
Helping to keep myself away from this
Pride of great premises.

Buildings are tall that hold the houses of moles
Or busy ants, heaped up upon the ground,
But easily razed by mowers: so this mound
Of private enterprise in its excesses
Gives little permanence to happiness
Or profit to their souls.

And I, what then of I, who profit less
From advertising than I do from poor
Yet honest speculations, one more Moore
Devoted to the singular bliss of singing
In a present voice of life and death and things
Beyond their power to bless?

Yet, too, I profit from their wealth and vice,
Peel my potato with a rosy hand,
And write for those who may not understand,
But from their riches reach for lines to cover
The loneliness that comes from ingrown love,
The old wish to be wise.

Symbols, like atoms, whirled away in dust
To some great mushroom of poetic store:
Images dropped like peelings to the floor
And everywhere the makings of our passions
For girls, for gardens—all of what must pass,
Save here, in this, I trust.

NICHOLAS MOORE

HART CRANE AND THE BRIDGE

He felt the spell of it—the span that arched
Above the harbor-traffic and its sounds.
For his growing fever to create
A spelled out order from the city's maze.
He found the vision and the symbol here,
The bridge's arc that a man had made
To tilt the sky above the city's tides.

Spirits and echoes still lingered there—
Within the house, that very room, within whose walls
Another man in torment had lived
And made his bid for immortality.
From this same attic on the Brooklyn shore,
Through years of pain and loneliness,
The stricken builder of the Bridge had watched
His dream take shape in shining stone and steel.

With a quickened pulse his flight was launched,
Of cities and the open road he sang;
Of iron rails, workers in the fields,
Of boyhood memories, of lake and star
Of rough South Street and the sailor's chants,
Of Istanbul, sunken continents, and China.

In a mighty pulsing like the march
Of pioneers across the western plains,
A nation's march from ocean to ocean,
He flung the Bridge and heard its singing strings,
A chain of strength to bind a continent
And leap through space to reach his goal
—Fulfillment of man's hunger.

He saw the throb of machines
Emerge from the earth's dark into light,
Transformed like the Bridge in its skyward curve,
A giant hand to set free man's longing
—And lift him to the stars.

His journeys now were done;
Broken, spent, the poet sang no more.
But still driven by a restless fire,
Southward he sailed, and found the peace he sought
In one last leap into the sea he loved.

D. B. STEINMAN

SHADOW RENDEZVOUS

Come when I ask among the sooty houses
That fly the ragged flags of demolition
And we will crouch together in the cave
And watch the turning and be sensible
Of colors in the sky, changes of light.

Come over to me when the falling night
Is peopled with an artificial light—
Since fear of darkness is like fear of death
Leading men to discover paradise—
On the sad edge of some consuming year

And I will meet you, at the violet hour,
Will meet you in the night and couple with you
And realise a strange equality,
An evocation out of dust and air,
In which the glimmering million can be born.

I am approaching now with careful steps.
Each step is planted like a tender seed
That will grow up into a forest tree.
And I arrive like the sun on the sky's rim
And I am recognized in the hired room.

We share illusion entering that room.
What do we see? a faded counterpane
That slowly kindles into threads of gold
And the low ceiling raised into a vault
And filled with softly chanting cherubim.

We feed the worn and hungry substances,
Discarded and forgotten properties,
Carpets and curtains, hired for the last time
To furnish out a cage for a lost bird,
And so we conjure whiteness in that room

Like people from the stone age and with stones
We flake ourselves under a gruelling sun
Of unrevolving light that tells no time
But shuts and opens instantaneously,
The physical tomb of an impersonal power.

Infant and pilgrim of the century
We shed our own light by our nakedness.
Stripping ourselves until, stripped of ourselves,
We go in absolute bare poverty,
Out on the steep diagonal shaft of light,

And from ourselves have wrought with help of demons
The desperate noise of a tuned violin,
Exorcising the bits of wood and string
Into the nervous net that is our will
Till we rejoin the sphynx under the sand.

And then when it is time to leave the room
With the light turned off and the curtains drawn
And their chairs and the bed which was their love
Obscurely splendid, and we close the door,
Our relics are a match stick and some ash.

And afterwards there lingers in the room
A haunting angel somewhere on the walls,
As a large landscape with imagined wings
And piping flight of the invisible race,
Hangs in the shadows like an inclined face.

Far on those sandy fields a single tree
With bleeding bark and an ingenuous stream
Fetch for the sun a present of wet shade:
As to the glass-blower with his thirsty fire
There comes the rest-pause and the beakered drink:

While on the underside of the deep sphere
Already they prepare a world of wire
And between cupolas and over floods
The motion of trapezes is conveying
A folded insect with a grain of mind.

CHARLES MADGE

THE PURIST

His temple, built with care—
The ratios exact.
A symmetry dwells there,
Akin to classic grace.
(For in a perfect face,
One small fleck can detract.)

All that he observes
In numbers he defines.
Where nature acts in curves,
He plans his dreams in lines.
The moon, his compass binds,
The world, his theory proves—
And lost, all else that moves.

What of the too-bright eye?
The mouth that pain sucks in?
The nose twitch when we cry?
A smile distorts the chin.
Love has convulsive limbs,
And drains a fevered thigh.

The sap the purist thins
Gives his work the lie.

LEAH ATIK

SABBATH EVE

Dim, my father's eyes;
Hushed, his chants, stilled.
(My mother's gentle sighs
Profaned his mystery.)
Dim, his eyes, filled
With shapes the candles weave—
He holds an angel's sleeve.

My father, pale, receives
The welcomed, waxen guest;
With fumbling hands cleaves
To him, his worn soul's quest,
Round whom the candle weaves
Hush and chant and flame:
I know his temporal name.

Perhaps my vision's blurred;
I see no angel's wings
But only waxen things
That melt, forever lost.

Chant of flesh and scents,
Myrrh and frankincense
In both of us are stirred;
Mine, of an earthen ware,
His, of the Terrible Host.
Orphaned, I, and bare.

ANONYMOUS

ON FIRST READING POETRY TO BABY THERESE

We beggars of this muse read in a descending time,
Against the hurrying weather,
And against the guttural rattle of your maracca.

On the chill west slope of Mount Tobias
Against the pale thin autumn sky, we read,
At my side, an infant innocent of winter, assured, invulnerable.

Upon the failing grass, against the scowling sky
Summer still ripens your waving laughter,
Your hazel eyes listen, and from the book I read:

In this descending time, we are beggars of our fate.
But you, within your infant order, protest:
"I am". Imperiously. "I am what I please."

Ah, all seasons for you are innocence,
For I, too, am what you please, or become what pleases you,
Your triumphing fate more precise than my contrivance.

Turning, astride the turning world, your form is minor,
Your vision, uncontracted and gargantuan.
Mighty dreams and meagre realizations divide my time.

Kick upon the anxious grass. Your free establishment
Beggars mine. But you, who cannot endure reflection,
And random I, without calamity, can tryst this muse,

For hers is an absence of memory and desire,
Yes, a forgetfulness of summer at the Pole,
In the permanent weather: you and my fate are one.

DACHINE RAINER

SAILOR

The sailor has a sense of defeat as he gets up with
a start

And finds that instead of taking his post at the helm
He has dozed off hoping that his ship at mid-sea
Will take care of itself.

He pulls himself together, resumes his position of watch
and toil.

Sun—the din and hurry of a port nearby
And the row of palms hail him.
His ship moves on.

To the priestess with a shock of golden hair
The evening sun seems like the egg of the bird of
paradise,

To the farmer a plaything amid his acres of ripening
wheat.

Human heads huddled together in dark
Have a glimpse of the sun-ray's slant
Piercing like a lance into their hovel;
They look, rapt, at the golden beam and the motes
in it

Rapidly throbbing and flying—flying and throbbing;—why?
to what end?

O Sailor, you press on, keep pace
with the Sun;

You have been caught awhile in the mirrors of Babylon, Nineveh,
Egypt, China and Ur;

Loosened yourself and headed for other shores,
The impulse from Vaishali—Byzantium and Alexandria
Has been to you like thin, straight candles glowing
on remembered beaches.

They are good, but whet the quest;
You want deeper knowledge, completer experience.

As long as honeybees with wings sparkling like spray
fly in the sun

And the heron with a surer touch than the jet plane
Brings home the virgin vastness of the blue
Man will not rest content;

Purged of follies, sin and tragic mistakes
His sailor-soul will fare forward
To move into a better discovery of life on
this planet,

A greater joy—a deeper communion.

JIBANANANDA DAS

(Translated from the Bengali by the author)

REPLY TO A LADY EDITOR

If the Poem (beginning "I knew a woman, lovely in her bones") in The London Times Literary Supplement has not appeared here, we offer you \$75 for it. Could you wire us collect your answer?

Sincerely yours,

Alice S. Morris
Literary Editor
Harper's Bazaar

Sweet Alice S. Morris, I *am* pleased, of course,
You take the *Times Supplement*, and read its verse,
And know that True Love is more than a Life-Force
—And so like my poem called *Poem*.

Dan Cupid, I tell you's a braw laddie-buck;
A visit from him is a piece of pure luck,
And should he arrive, why just lean yourself back
—And recite him my poem called *Poem*.

O print it, my dear, do publish it, yes,
That ladies their true natures never suppress,
When they come, dazedly, to the pretty pass
—Of acting my poem called *Poem*.

My darling, my dearest, most-honest-alive,
Just send me along that sweet seventy-five;
I'll continue to think on the nature of love,
—As I dance to my poem called *Poem*.

THEODORE ROETHKE

EVA BRAUN'S DREAM

First come the Infantry in scented bodices,
Deployed, and after them the Birdwomen,
(The Ladies Air Arm) clad in shirts of male,
And riding gravid chargers shod with spurs.
They pass capitulation like some endless wife.

After them in rumbling families
Symbolic engines only found in Jung,
Bombs polished on the lathe like eggs,
Grey mammary tanks, forceps and hooks with eyes,
Unbuttoned panzers, huge uncircumcised artiller,
Grave in procession rustle past the stand.

"One age, one land, one leader and one sex."

LAWRENCE DURELL

Contemporary Portrait No. 3: Horace Gregory

Years ago, I read a brief essay in which Arnold Bennett remarked that it was "the passionate few" who sustained literature. Horace Gregory—along with his wife, Marya Zaturenska, a lyric poet and distinguished prose writer in her own right—is among those "passionate few". He has performed many services to American writers and to modern American literature. But, above all else, he is a poet, one of America's outstanding living poets.

I first read Gregory's poems twenty-seven years ago in Chicago. On and off through the years, I have gone back to them. Seen over a span of years, they reveal a remarkable personal evolution and growth. All writers repeat certain themes which are linked to their way of seeing life. But the themes, patterns and problems are repeated in a way which inevitably manifests growth, when these are elaborated in different contexts, when they are treated anew at successive stages of life, and when fresh language and enlarged feelings and concepts expand their significance. Growth brings evolution, but Horace Gregory's evolution has not been purely thematic. He has revealed an ever-increasing range in insight, in conception and in facility. His words come clear, fresh, and, although his feelings and emotions are complex, he is neither obscure nor guilty of over-simplification.

Much is said about courage, both in poetry and elsewhere. Horace Gregory's poetry deals with courage, moral courage. Rather than a mere assertion of courage, one finds a natural expression of courage of spirit. Eloquent, elegaic, lyrical, some-

times factual, sometimes merely stating, often affording us short and crisp or flowing lines, which convince us that a door has been opened into that difficult world of human feeling and experience, his poetry has the quality of endowing the way we feel with importance. It states and expresses with dignity and conciseness that range of central emotions, of hopes and fears, which we all know and feel in our inner being. Gregory has opened his feelings to us in many lines that expose the hurts and wounds of a man's psyche. Many other lines have soared with aspiration and with a love of life and of what we loosely call beauty. And out of this dedication, one of self-exploration and of reflection and observation, he has developed a voice of his own which eloquently expresses his courage.

But Horace Gregory does not only reveal moral courage in his poetry. He has exemplified it in his life. Overcoming an early physical handicap, which might well have broken the will or maimed the responses of many, he has lived a normal, productive life. He is generous and understanding as a friend, honest and perceptive in all his relationships, and his enthusiasms are always very real. He is a man with the pride which comes from both self-respect and inner dignity.

A youthful but still emotionally mature character is not easily retained against the wearing pressure of the years. All men have their problems, their spells of moroseness, but for Horace Gregory these are his very own, to be kept to himself. Instead, he shares with his friends his

wit, his charm, his enthusiastic awareness and knowledge of literature.

I recall a windy April evening in 1931, when I journeyed to Sunnyside, Long Island to meet Gregory and his wife for the first time. Then I was young and unknown, and trying desperately to find a publisher for my first novel, *Young Lonigan*. The Gregorys and I talked easily and, for myself at least, it seemed as though I had known them for a long time.

The few poems of Gregory that I had at that time read in magazines had not only won my respect, they had stimulated and influenced me. The best effect that a poet can have on a writer is to penetrate his psyche and energize what latent impulses and creativity he may possess. And that is what happened to me when I initially read these first poems. As a person, Horace Gregory's effect upon me was similar. Then and now, one evening with the Gregorys always sends me home with a new desire to write better.

Gregory lives poetry as he wears his hat. Poetry is as much a part of his home as the pictures on the walls. But he does not live the literary life as it is known in the popular circles of literature. He and his wife live quietly and modestly, surrounded by their many shelves of books, which have been read and cherished and reread through the years. Loving good books, he constantly suggests books for his friends to read. "Read it, Jimmy. You'll like it," he has often said to me.

We share certain enthusiasms, especially Yeats. And when Gregory reads Yeats aloud, the poems are rendered with all of their feeling: his voice is clear and richly melodious. He reads slowly to permit

the hearer to grasp the meaning of the words, yet he does not lose the flow. The pauses, the slight changes of inflection emphasize and achieve a dramatic quality, but never a false one. He arches his head, moves it to one side as an emphatic gesture, when there is a strong effect in the poem itself. And at the end, he closes the book, pauses, then says, as if to ask: "You see?" And in a moment he begins to comment.

Some of my fondest memories of Horace Gregory are of the times we have laughed together—the jokes, the many anecdotes told of grotesqueries, whimsicalities, oddities observed in the so-called literary world, the tales involving those who attempt, with false pomposity, to play the role of the pale poet or author. Gregory's capacity for gaiety and humor is enormous and the laughter is always natural and unforced and often turned upon himself. I remember him, years ago, shambling along, wearing a black hat and dark coat, on his way to see an amateur boxing tournament. Suddenly he burst out laughing at the fact that he was involving himself in an activity which suggested a preposterous irrelevance in his life.

And I remember, also, listening to him relate a tale involving a deceased relative, a fireman named Patsy McLaughlin, whose greatest and bravest exploit was the rescue of a dead person from a burning house. The incident was described in a sonorous eulogy of long and elaborate sentence, all leading up to the "moral" of the story: that, like Patsy McLaughlin, too many men are forever rescuing the dead from burning houses. They rescue dead sentiments that have become senti-

mentalities, dead ideas that have become platitudes and dead loves that have turned to cold. The real poet, however, rescues living feeling from the ever-burning house, which is the life of man. He embodies this feeling in his character, in his life, in his art. I have seen this embodiment in Horace Gregory, growing continually over a hard stretch of years and nourished by his awareness of his beginning, as well as his acceptance of his end.

II

"This is the day that I began; . . ."

Going through the poems of Gregory the other evening, this partial line from his "Birthday in April" became very meaningful to me. In the same poem, he refers to "... the hours fixed in a man's brain . . ." Life, living for all of us, is compressed in that short span of time which moves pitilessly from "... the day that I began . . ." until the day when I will end and will be no more in the continuity of days, of hours and of the living experiences which make up our common adventure on this planet. Time has been treated in many ways and has been variously conceived by poets and novelists. The feeling for time, time that is lost in what Nietzsche termed "the pathos of distance", the emotions wound around the inevitable destruction of days and their equally assured re-creation—all this constitutes a major theme in Horace Gregory's work. Again and again, he winds metaphors around his emotionalized sense of time

Gregory seems modern, post-Pound and post-Eliot in his form and presentation; in spirit, in outlook, he is at the same time a traditionalist. He is a traditionalist, not only because he has read much and carefully in the literature, the *belles*

lettres, of other periods and respects the great achievements of other writers: he is a traditionalist in the sense that he finds meaning, inspiration and emotional vividness which remain fresh and new for him in the themes and emphases which have occupied the attention of poets down through the centuries. Looking before and after, pining for what is not and never can be, we hunger to have lived and felt and seen and loved in the destroyed yesterdays and at times we ache to live in a future that will be forever closed to our eyes, our lips, our bodies, our hearts and minds. What men have thought and felt intrigues us, excites us, and we see in this the threads upon which our new and concrete experiences are knitted. What poets have thought and felt, what they have expressed, flowers in time and in the future. Horace Gregory appears to feel the past in this way, with mingled joy and sadness—joy, because "... stones, spires, earth . . .", the physical and imaginative monuments and memorials of men all answer death. They exist and influence man after his own fixed sum of days and hours has been spent. In his "Praise to John Skelton", about whom he became very enthusiastic back in the 1930's, Gregory conceives of the long dead poet in his "... quick, immortal state . . ." and

body, hands, lips and eyes
speak metered gold.

The poets who had come and gone before "... *the day that I began* . . ." are among the alive and elect voices which render the joy and pain of life meaningful. They are a "chorus for survival", and, taken together, they have left their spires standing as the days continue their endless

cycle of destruction and recreation. Time and traditions are highly emotionalized in Horace Gregory's poetry. In a new introduction to his translation of *The Poems of Catullus*, written in 1956, Gregory writes of the Roman poet:

"The secret is, I think, in the timeless, yet *immediate* effect the poems have upon the reader: . . . the veil or writing, even the printed page, seems to drop away between the reader and the poet. In all forms of literature that kind of contact is extremely rare, and that is why, to the reader of English poetry, Catullus' poems, though written in an age called 'classical', create the illusion of being 'romantic'." The past, a music echoing from dead centuries, illuminates the present. Although Gregory has not expressed it precisely in this way, I believe that one can assert that for him tradition is indeed an illumination of life. Many echoing notes of the past in his poetry are expressions of this kind of feeling.

However, there have been changes in Gregory's poetry over the years. The first poems, in *Chelsea Rooming House*, are mostly direct and simple, with much less complication of lines and rhythm, and with a greater shading out of his own directly revealed personal emotions. There is a mixture of lyricism and balladry and morbidity in some of the poems. Thus:

Hagen is dead.
His girl remembers
his well-washed hands
his quick, bright head,
and his lean fingers
and how his cough stained
her bedroom floor.

And in the poem, "Prisoner's Song", we can note some of the same qualities:

O Mary's lovelier than anything
that grows
out of spring trees that stir
April when my mind goes
around and over her

.
Sometimes, my blind dreams float far
—like a wanderer
I go away, remote;
then I return to her
with panic in my throat.

You discover a range of feelings in these poems: hope and despair, controlled hysteria, a yearning for nature and for serenity that will enable you to "*get away from here*". These feelings are usually communicated with a directness and intimacy of manner, as though one were being addressed almost personally from the depths of a hurt inner life. In some of the poems, the mind seems to speak out, unable to rest, torn and bruised by the wounds of living and

There is no victory in the mind
but desperate valor
shattering the four walls,
disintegrating human love . . .

The poems of *Chelsea Rooming House* have their origins in the 1920's, the decade when Gregory first came to New York after having attended the University of Wisconsin. *No Retreat* and *Chorus for Survival* grew out of the 1930's. Reacting to changes in America—social, economic, political—there are different overtones of moods in the two latter volumes, as might be suggested by their very titles. But the social scene does not come fully into Gregory's poetry. Rather, it is translated into a new grasping after emotions, different from those which would constitute "desperate valor". The elegaic

quality in his poetry becomes more pronounced, and with it there are lines of a more pure lyric feeling than any in *Chelsea Rooming House*, as for example, in his "Stanzas for My Daughter". But the lyric feelings end in the recurrent theme of separation from all others. The poems of *Chelsea Rooming House* suggest a humanity with minds walled in, able only to speak out about the hurt and the wound which they feel in their melancholy and sometimes morbid isolation. The poem, "O Metaphysical Head", from the first volume, begins:

The Man was forever haunted by
his head

This haunted feeling fades from Horace Gregory's later poetry, but, in balance with a stronger lyricism, there remains the ever-recurrent awareness of loneliness:

for the waking limbs divide
into separate walls again.

Gregory begins to play a memorial note and his emotionalized sense of the past, as I have characterized it above, is introduced. And he writes of Columbus, Emerson, Randolph Bourne, John Skelton, presenting them as images from the past who have evoked his own feelings and reflections. But a continuing theme is to be found also in *No Retreat*: that of smallness in space. The Metaphysical Head, the voices of the mind in *Chelsea Rooming House*, seem to be enclosed. The metaphor of enclosure persists in *No Retreat*. In "Salvos for Randolph Bourne", there is

Only a small room and a million words
to be written before midnight . . .
and

Columbus who believed his own
miracles,
had for country

" . . . a small stone room at night . . . "

In the past, as in the present, man with his complex of feelings is encompassed.

Perhaps unconsciously, Gregory continually repeated throughout his first two volumes this metaphor of smallness and enclosure—of the detached head, the walled-in mind, the small room—as a spatial symbol matching his emphasis upon man as being limited in time. In other words, the melancholy attached to our impermanence is also the melancholy of our spatial limitation. We feel much, and deeply, in a small space and in a small temporal span. In the past, it was the same. The cry of the heart was heard then, as now, and this ineradicable loneliness, predicting that final loneliness—this is man's experience. There are "*a million words to be written*," and the sky, often metallic, is big. But each man is the creature of temporality.

The thought for survival, then, is not solely conditioned by the thirties. It is more a personal response, not a prescription for others. It is expressed with overtones of stoicism. Death and impermanence are not written of or imagined in fear and anger, but as inescapable. They are there to mark and end the journey of every man. Not to retreat, but to survive—this is more an act of stoicism than a mere socio-political reaction.

Chorus for Survival is both more complicated and more impressionistic, and Gregory's poetry opens up in range and reference. The figure or symbol of enclosure fades away, and is replaced by a sense of movement, as though the very lines, as well as the mood and feeling of the poet, were in motion. From a house, the poet has come upon a street. He seems

to be walking and his thoughts and emotions seem to be moving along with him. There is an increase of classical references and a searching out, through references, to grasp a fuller sense of America. The book walks, flows, and the mind and heart of the poet seem to be flowing all through this volume. There is more of a feeling of contrasting darkness and light. This is something of a change from the earlier writing. There is more pain and darkness in the first two volumes, especially in *Chelsea Rooming House*. But in *Chorus for Survival*, Gregory expresses a feeling of light, of more space, of love ever returning, of the present. Suddenly you almost feel that a past, "*a better time that never was*", is forgotten for a present hour of sight and movement, with the "*head always to face the sun*". Although the word survival is emphasized, the dominant feeling in the volume is that of release, of expansion.

In his later work, printed in *The Selected Poems of Horace Gregory*, the quality of feeling and vision reveals further change. The mind projecting outwards and speaking through the walls of a symbolic Chelsea rooming house is beginning to vanish. Gregory writes with growing clarity, but the air of confidence which his lines shed is not purely a technical gain in control over his material. It is also emotional. The past is registered with a sense of immediacy and the present is more a place of sun and garden than of walls and rooms. The poetry has begun to take on an added reflective quality and an increasing number of comments about experiences are offered. The tone is calmer, and sadness is somewhat muted. The shades of the mind have been pro-

gressively opened. "*It is still a temporal hour*," he writes, but, in that temporal hour, he has now come to feel and to express a confident spirit about living. He reflects a felt world more full of textures than his earlier universe.

To see the world without profit or grief
One must lean into it as through an
open window;

He sees, then through an opened window, a sky that is less metallic than previous skies. The wind can still blow all in life away, but his poetry provides a new bracing in the face of the wind. A common notion is that, with the years, the melancholy of a writer's work deepens. This is not always true. The later poetry of Horace Gregory is less melancholy than his earlier work. In his poem, "Voices of Heroes (Overheard in a Churchyard Dedicated to the Memory of 1776)", he puts into the mouths of the dead:

Better to die
Than to sit watching the world die,
Better to sleep and learn at last
That terror and loss
Have not utterly destroyed us,
That even our naked shades
Still looked and talked like men—
That when we wake,
A little courage has earned our
right to speak.

One should look, too, at the concluding lines of his "Homage to Circe":

Lady, our journey has outstripped your
spell,
We have destinations beyond your kind
distractions:
We have passed, are passing
To the sober shores of hell;
It is cold among the waters of the dead,
A less feverish province than the animal
kingdom
That is always at your side.

We have found no haven,

And our long night has just begun,
 Yet over Hades something opens like
 a sky;
 Perhaps in darkness we are closer to
 the sun—
 There is no misfortune as we wave
 'Good-by'.

The sun to which we come closer, perhaps even in darkness, is the sun of self-recognition, of self-realization. It is suggestive of a basic answer to some of the questions we feel personally and intimately: what is it like to find and to recognize oneself, and to know what one

thinks about time and love and death, about one's joys and anguishes and those of others, about the long past before "*the day that I began*", that short time of feeling that is life, the quickness of today and that long tomorrow to follow? In answer to all this, what can one say to others and how can one say it? What Horace Gregory answers, what he has said and is saying and how he says it constitutes distinguished poetry.

JAMES T. FARRELL

Mysticism and Particularity

Declensions of a Refrain, by Arthur Gregor. Editions Poetry London-New York (Dodd, Mead & Company). 1957. \$3.00.

As when reading an ordinary novel one may at a certain point regret the hero's progress, preferring him in his original state of innocence or simplicity, and disdain for a moment to read any further, even though it is evident that the novel may have a happy ending: so I think it is possible to regret the inevitable changes in a poet's imaginative life, preferring the freshness of his first approach to poetry, even though his progress toward maturity of thought and feeling is not only unavoidable but may in the long run—if he surmounts the excruciating episodes of growth—produce something much finer than his early poems. Arthur Gregor's first collection of poems, *Octavian Shooting Targets*, was published several years ago. At the time it was customary for reviewers to say that here was a new hope for the avant-garde, a writer who was carrying on the experimental tradition in the 1950's. I think this was a mistake; it placed too much emphasis on the externals

of Gregor's poems. In point of style Gregor had developed a way of writing which, though personal, was firm and fully achieved and certainly not experimental, certainly not ostentatious in the manner of a self-conscious product of the avant-garde. What we ought to do now, I think, is to agree that Gregor is a very good writer and go on from there.

The value of the poems in *Octavian Shooting Targets* was in their particularity. It could be said that this is what we mean by poetic ability: a love of the particulars of experience and a talent for invoking them in language. In this sense Faulkner is one of our great poetic (*i.e.*, factive) writers, as has recently been pointed out by Alfred Kazin. Gregor, however, ranged further than any novelist could. His theme was generally elegiac: "A past is gone." He wrote in terms of the drama of place—persons and ideas in their proper locations, glittering with detail, and

all hallucinated in a sorrowful collapsing
of time:

And when we came to
the valleys of the Tatra
where for centuries
the partisans had put up
tents and fires

we were aware of a
strong smell of hay and
the sounds of horses
galloping across the
meadows

Some of these were remarkably effective poems, written simply and with great precision and naturalness, full of things which managed to escape being gaudy by virtue of their profound relevance.

Now Gregor has published a new book, *Declensions of a Refrain*, which consists entirely of poems written during and after a trip to India. Some of the new poems deal tangentially with the surface aspects of Indian life, but the main point is that the new book presents a new theme and a new poetic attitude. Gregor now writes with a deeper conviction, a more profound sense of commitment, a new urgency and humility. All of this derives, I believe, from the poet's new angle of vision. His poems now are frankly spiritual, mystical, idealistic, optimistic, and although I am inexperienced in such matters, I should say that their tone is Oriental—specifically, as we should expect, Indian. If I read these poems correctly most of them are statements of the unity of experience, or, going further, the unity of reality as perceived inwardly in the repeated experiences of metaphor. I say that the tone is Oriental because there seems to be an extensive, almost spatial unity with God, described in terms which

are characteristic of Indian philosophy. (But the same strain has cropped up often enough in Western mysticism and, of course, in the New England of a century ago.) This oneness, which is, as the poet says, akin to “nothingness,” is the end of metaphor and the aim of the poem, which must proceed by ever closer and closer approximations.

The regret I spoke of earlier is evoked by the poet's submission, in his humility, to his theme and its urgency; thus a saint may turn in his need to the dreadfulest devices of propaganda. Not that Gregor does this, or anything like it, but he does, it seems to me, sacrifice some of the good qualities of his earlier poetry to a felt need for linguistic refinement and ever narrower accuracy of conceptual statement. Consider the opening of his title poem:

More or less is a relative gesture,
as is gain or loss.

This is exceedingly abstract language which I think for purely tactical reasons makes an unfortunate beginning for a poem, and it is rather far from the excellent opening lines which one sees when thumbing through Gregor's earlier book. The poet's inner experience has carried him closer to a universal, and his language, quite understandably, has proceeded toward a center too. But in the case of art the center of technique is commonness. Does the question reduce itself simply to saying that if Gregor wants to convince us again of the genuineness of mystical insight he must find a novel way of putting it? This seems to give too much value to novelty, yet there is this much reason in it: the poet must give his experience a location before we can join him, a par-

ticular location. Gregor does this in some of his poems, but never as effectively, it seems to me, as in his former work. This does not mean a retrogression. I hope I have made it plain that Gregor is going ahead very courageously. But it does mean that, perhaps through suddenness and a kind of esthetic shock—am I being too presumptuous?—the poet's technical resources lie partly scattered and need to be recollected.

Another way of saying the same thing would be to point out that there has been a kind of symbolic writing in verse which certain British poets have developed and used very well. It probably derives in part from the example of medieval allegory, though Kafka is an obvious modern influence. It is opposed to the French school of symbolism in this respect: whereas French symbolism has been chiefly dramatic or dialectical in nature, the British symbolists I have in mind have been concerned with the symbol as a single unity. They have written poems which are themselves whole and in a sense simple symbols (or metaphors) and therefore need no internal symbols (or metaphors). Perhaps I can best define the group I mean by saying that I think its greatest living member is Edwin Muir, though many others have contributed to the concept and certain young American poets, such as W. S. Merwin, have imitated the method with more or less success. It is a method which is distinctly limited; unfortunately the number of useful symbols in the repertoire of racial experience is rather small. But within these limits much can be done, and I think Gregor, quite independently and by using vastly different materials, has arrived at a similar con-

cept in many of his best poems. The danger of the method is the danger of allegory—a reliance on abstract equivalences and hence a dry vacancy within the poem itself. Many examples of such failure can be found in the works of Muir's imitators. But Gregor, who has already shown us his instinct for particularization, his attachment to the specific losses that have occurred in time, is especially well equipped to give his poems the fullness of life, and I see no reason why the method should not be projected within the tradition where Gregor now finds himself.

My remarks about *Declensions of a Refrain* have sounded negative, I realize, although my intention has been to suggest rather than to criticize. Let me end by saying that the book contains a number of fine poems, notably the ones called *Poem*, which begins:

Venice at night, and I
like the wakeful dreamer
or the dreaming walker,
like the hooded watchman
counting time, awake . . .

Song; Siena (for a Children's Book); Wasting Architecture; In the South of India; at Kovalam; and That I Be Taken. These are poems of an interior perspective, curiously weightless, poems that levitate, so to speak, in their own language, pulling all upward. To write convincingly of suprarational knowledge is, of course, the poet's supreme difficulty and proper domain, possibly because the mystical vocabulary must by its very nature remain radically unstable; but Gregor has done this well. One is aware that he will do it even better before long.

HAYDEN CARRUTH

Synthesis and Syntax

The Unmediated Vision, An Interpretation of Wordsworth, Hopkins, Rilke and Valéry
by Geoffrey H. Hartman. Yale University Press. London.

Articulate Energy, An Inquiry into the Syntax of English Poetry by Donald Davie.
Routledge & Kegan Paul. London. 18s.

If there is still such a person as the common or general reader, this person probably lives in justifiable terror of the kind of literary criticism that reports on the wood by analyzing a microscopic section taken from one of the trees. *The Unmediated Vision* may appear to belong to this class, if only because Geoffrey Hartman was a student of comparative literature at Yale and originally offered the present study as a thesis. But the New Criticism has become less new and a great deal less terrifying; and Mr. Hartman's method combines all the virtues of the analytical method with the possibility of arriving at a large and challenging synthesis. His aim, in fact, is "criticism without approach", a criticism that proceeds from the scrutiny of a single text to a general characterization of its author, thence to a comparison between different authors and to a new insight into the nature of modern poetry. If this aim is an ambitious one, Mr. Hartman deserves all the more praise for having made his method work. He has written a remarkable and illuminating book.

His argument is too close and too complex to be summarized here. All a reviewer can do is to indicate the method used and a few of the results. Mr. Hartman begins each of his main studies with a single text—part of "Tintern Abbey", Hopkins' "The Windhover", Rilke's "Die Erwachsene", Valéry's "La Dormeuse"—but he cites passages from other poems in support of his observations. He discovers that

"in the imagination of Wordsworth everything tends towards the image of sound and of universal waters"; that "... Hopkins views the world through the actual body of Christ, instead of through His spiritual body, which is the Church" and that this view is "against tradition"; that Rilke's poems are dominated by certain "fundamental gestures", which Mr. Hartman specifies, and that they fulfill Rilke's demand that "the qualities are to be taken away from God, the no longer utterable, and returned to creation, to love and death"; and that Valéry desired to "know reality without the aid of symbol", his "mind haunted by an inexhaustible visual desire".

In two concluding essays, "Pure Representation" and "The New Perseus", Mr. Hartman compares the four poets and defines the "unmediated vision". Each one of these poets aspired to "visibility without image, audibility without sound, perception with percepts". The difference between modern poets and those writing in the Judeo-Christian tradition is that the modern poet "does not acknowledge or does not know a mediator for his orphic journey. He passes through experience by means of the unmediated vision. Nature, the body, and human consciousness—that is his only text."

Though he investigates the philosophical and theological causes for this change, Mr. Hartman resists the temptation to indulge in heresy-hunting—a pastime much in vogue with those contemporary

critics, who do not keep their noses glued to their microscopes—and he remains a critic “without approach”. What is more, he shows that religious orthodoxy is not a preservative against the “unmediated vision”. One hopes that Mr. Hartman will apply his excellent method—and the mind that makes it work—to other problems and other poets.

Donald Davie's short examination of the function of syntax in English poetry would be rather hard on the reader if it were “an exercise in detachment”. Fortunately, it is nothing of the kind, but a skillful and powerful defence of values very much in need of so able a defender. Since Dr. Davie is himself a poet, his book is also an apology for his own practice and for the practice of other young poets who share his convictions. Those who protest, at this point, that values and convictions have nothing to do with so “technical” a matter as poetic syntax are particularly urged to read Dr. Davie's book. Professional poets and critics will read it in any case, but they are not likely to be converted, if they belong to the opposing side. There will always be poets, good and bad, who are less conscious than Dr. Davie of what they are about; and these will not profit by being told to mind their syntax. On the other hand, *Articulate Energy* should be read by those who have been led to believe that poetry is not modern if it is not obscure, for, as Dr. Davies shows, the obscurity—as distinct from the mere difficulty—peculiar to modern verse is due to a change in the use of syntax and to the philosophical assumptions that determined this change. Modern poets who reject those assumptions are quite

capable of writing verse that is not obscure.

The book begins with Hofmannsthal's “Letter of Lord Chandos”, the confession of a fictitious poet no longer able to articulate, because, for him, everything has “disintegrated into parts, those parts again into parts”. The poet who has experienced such a crisis may give up writing poetry, as Chandos does, or he may look for a technique that presents the disintegrated part without relating it to a larger metaphysical or logical scheme. In the latter case, he will have little or no use for regular syntax, for syntax serves to put phenomena in their place, to co-ordinate them. He may even argue, as T. E. Hulme did, that syntax is unpoetical.

Dr. Davie examines the theories of Hulme, which, together with those of Ernest Fenellosa, constituted the decisive influence on the Imagists and Ezra Pound, and he objects that “to refuse to articulate is itself articulation”. He also discusses the theories of Bergson, Fenellosa and Susanne Langer, who regards poetry as an art essentially akin to music. He then analyzes, from the point of view of syntax, a good many poems ranging in time from Thomas Sackville to Terence Tiller and Richard Murphy. He defines and gives examples of five different types of poetic syntax: “subjective”, “dramatic”, “objective”, “syntax like music” and “syntax like mathematics”. He defends the value of the copula (“is”) against Fenellosa's disparagement and the use of so-called abstractions against Pound's view that these should be replaced by the “concrete” image. To do so, he undertakes an excursion into Berkeley's philosophy and he concludes that images are not neces-

sarily concrete, while "most apparently abstract words are in fact symbols."

The crux of Dr. Davie's argument is that the abandonment of syntax is the result of a "loss of nerve", a "loss of faith in conceptual thought". His book is an attempt—and a highly persuasive one—to refute "the assertion or the assumption (most often the latter) *that syntax in poetry is wholly different from syntax as understood by logicians and grammarians*". He states that "for poetry to be great, it must reek of the human"; that

it is "a queer understanding of 'poem' which obliges us, when we judge it as such, to leave out of account all the originality and profundity in what the poem says". This conclusion is one that was taken for granted by most writers and critics of the pre-Symbolist era. But Dr. Davie has had to fight his way back to it by a most strenuous campaign. Those who care about poetry—and these include persons committed to the opposite side—will agree that is a campaign worth fighting.

MICHAEL HAMBURGER

London Letter

My dear Tambi,

Since you have asked me to describe the current atmosphere in London for poets and those interested in poetry, perhaps the easiest way to start is to contrast the situation as you undoubtedly remember it in the late 1940s with the situation that exists today. Your world and mine in those days was a world of pubs, stretching from the Fitzroy and the Wheatsheaf on Oxford Street southwards to the French Pub at the end of Dean Street on the edge of Shaftsbury Avenue. There was your favourite Hog in the Pound in Oxford Street; and there were the B. B. C. pubs, the Stag and the George in Mortimer Street and the Bolivar, where one used to meet old Roy Campbell, all near Broadcasting House. The Bolivar is a B. B. C. club now (I met Terence Tiller there the other day) and, of course, the Hog in the Pound is no longer the place it used to be. At the French Pub and the neighbouring Caves de France one occasionally comes across such well-known faces as Randall Swingler, John

Gawsworth, Paul Potts and the Scottish painters, Colquhoun and MacBride. But the atmosphere has become, at least for me, a gloomy one. It is as if people had been sitting on the same bar stools for ten years and, for the last five of these years, had had nothing new to say. One almost feels oneself to be in an actively hostile atmosphere. One has strayed into one's old haunts to find them peopled by the inhabitants of a wrong world—the world of those who keep regular hours and earn a regular living. The B. B. C. pubs have more liveliness, but, on the whole, it is not around Soho and Fitzrovia that one strays now if one wants to "meet the poets". Nobody has really taken your place as a social focus for us all, any more than anybody has taken your place as an editor.

The new poets no longer gather together, with the older poets to companion them, as they used to, under your wing, in your day. At my flat in Chelsea I have for some years been running monthly informal poetry readings (to which the

only passport is a bottle—I mitigate culture with wine!), but I find on the whole that year after year the poets who have begun to make a reputation—the Singers, the Logues, the Wains—gradually drop away and I am left with a core of old faithfuls (good friends, if sometimes mediocre versifiers) and with a succession of new generations of beginners. Poets, who, like yourself, were centres of conviviality and hospitality in the 1940s, are now less so. Roy Campbell, that great-hearted generous man, is dead, as is Dylan Thomas. William Empson spends much of the year in Sheffield, where he is now Professor of English Literature, and Kathleen Raine spends much of her year either in Cambridge, where she is a research fellow at Girton, or in her cottage in the West Highlands. How many friendships one owes to the splendid parties, which you and Roy and William and Kathleen used so regularly to give!

Other old familiar faces are now more or less gone from us: John Heath-Stubbs teaching in Alexandria, Tom Scott training to be a schoolmaster in Edinburgh, Gavin Ewart and Bernard Gutteridge lost in the expensive world of copywriting. Nicholas Moore designing rock gardens and writing books on the shorter bearded iris, Hamish Henderson travelling around Buchan recording bawdy surviving folksongs with a tape recorder, Lawrence Durrell in Paris, David Gascoyne more often in France than in England, Patrick Anderson now in a crammer's in the North of England, now in Singapore, now in Tangier—all, all are gone or only intermittently not gone, the old familiar faces! Julian MacLaren Ross, wearing dark glasses now, which have

mirrors that exactly reflect one's own face and utterly conceal his eyes, is occasionally seen around Christmas in some Chelsea pub, but he no longer props up, night after night, his familiar corner at the Wheatsheaf, earning drink after drink by his proficiency at the game of spoof. W. S. Graham is in a coastguard's cottage in Cornwall. Some say that he is earning a living as a coastguard; others, that he lives largely on crabs and lobsters that he can trap on the beach. London, of course, is not absolutely denuded of poets, but one no longer has the sense of there being a community of poets, as before.

However, perhaps more is being done *for* poets today in Great Britain at an official or semi-official level than was being done in the 1940s. I am sometimes astonished at myself, for instance, when I consider how far somebody, so inept as I am for the rigours and compromises of the public life, has gone towards becoming a kind of poetry bureaucrat. I sit, as an example, on the Poetry Panel of the Arts Council. I sit on the management committee of the Institute of Contemporary Arts. I sit on committees that give prizes for poems, or volumes of poetry. I was, last year, one of the three selectors of Choices and Recommendations for the Poetry Book Society. For a year or so I devised a regular programme for the B. B. C. Third Programme, called "New Poetry", a bi-monthly anthology, with commentary, from new volumes (there is another series of broadcasts—very good ones—of unpublished poems, called "New Verse"). I lecture up and down the country at such places as Sheffield, Leeds, Newcastle and Tunbridge Wells on recent poetry; and I conduct a week-end course on poetry at Adult Education Colleges.

I lecture, as a matter of fact, on poetry to everybody from Oxford and Cambridge undergraduates and midshipmen at the Royal Naval College at Greenwich to nice old ladies in the country and sullen national service men to whom a week's culture course is an escape from uniform.

Has it all some point? (I can see you yawning—it *is* dull!) Is it perhaps helpful? It is machinery—the typical public-spirited machinery of committee or platform work (mostly unpaid) with which, in England, we fight against commercial standards: against television and the tabloids and the growth in every class of a new generation of intellectually passive and sensually short-sighted, greedy and emotionally aggressive louts. (It is to women, largely, that we shall have to look for a carrying on of the living nerve of culture. I was recently at a party given by a clever and beautiful Somerville girl in her middle twenties. The girls were enchanting, but the young men, mostly on the Stock Exchange or in Insurance—something, anyway, in “The City”—with the same background and the same advantages, were awkward and surly boors). Certainly what one does now to keep poetry in being, to keep the *idea* of it in being, lacks the freshness, the excitement, the feeling that one is going to discover something new and life-giving that one felt in the old days, when one dropped in, finding many poets there, to your offices in Manchester Square. Now it is rather as if poetry were a frail plant and one were training it on a stick, pruning it gingerly and watering and manuring its jaded and shallow soil!

One has the feeling also (I have already hinted at this) that a lot of even the best newer English poetry is being written

neither out of a deep inner need nor as a kind of groping towards the large (by which I do not mean the mob) audience, but as a kind of verse exercise for an audience either of fellow-sufferers (the Froebel notion of poetry, the natural self-expression of the child, given the environment) or of “academic wits” (the grammar school notion of poetry, poetry not exactly as an art, but as a skilled and difficult craft, an exemplification of know-how). Both of these attitudes are wrong—both “Sob, sob, you too, see how *I* suffer!” and “Look, I have got the knack, I can bring it off! I too, am one of *us*!” To take the university wit approach: new poetry tends to come much more predominantly from the universities (primarily from the English schools at Oxford and Cambridge) than it used to in your day, so it is often full of allusions that only a professional Eng. Lit. man can pick up easily—to an episode in Beowulf, say, or a line of Sir Thomas Wyatt's or a passage from Bishop Berkeley. There is no reason, of course, why good poetry should not be learned. What is odd, however, is to find this “knowing” allusiveness combined quite often, as in Kingsley Amis, with an attitude that might be summed up as “Wipe your boots on the mat of culture, I know more than you do about it, culture is a ramp!” It seems strange that this jolly, beery, belching attitude should be grafted to a “Knowingness” that seems partly a tactic for (to adapt Sam Goldwyn's phrase) including the common reader out.

I attended the other day at the I. C. A. a symposium led by four young men, just down from Oxford or Cambridge and training for professions (one is going to be an architect, one a doctor, and so on)

on the problems—particularly the cultural problems—of our time. John Wain was in the chair—a good chairman and, I think, as much depressed by the lack of fire in the proceedings as I came to be. I was disgusted—apart from the contributions of one young man from Cambridge, who is potentially a very good critic, Karl Miller—by the caution and tepidity of the general range of attitudes expressed. There was, for instance, the usual comparison of today with the 1930s. Could we not feel about Hungary, it was asked, as Spender (or one might say, on the other hand, as Roy Campbell, who went into the Spanish war on the unpopular side with the pure spirit of a Crusader) felt about Spain? No, the answer came from the platform, we can *do* nothing about Hungary and, where you cannot *act*, it is a waste of energy to *feel*! Again, one young man on the platform, a Roman Catholic and also an architect, was asked about the relevance of his religious vocation to his professional vocation. He said there was none: being a Roman Catholic was like being a member of a club, which promised you certain advantages, if you tried to obey its rather austere rules. I thought of Belloc and Chesterton, of Maritain, of Peguy, of Bloy. Again, Spender, from the floor, asked this young man if, being an architect, he did not feel a need to help create a society in which the building—the general building—not necessarily of great but of good buildings would be feasible? The feeling of the platform seemed to be that this was a naive remark. (Stephen Spender, who seems to me one of the kindest and most sensitive men and also, in many ways, an unexpectedly *capable* man—tetchy as he may sometimes be and slow

and cumbrous in the organising of his kindness, his sensitivity and his capability—is a favourite target these days for the young). Apart from such points as these, I was depressed by the explicit assumption of all the speakers (it was social and cultural, not political: they may all vote Labour, for all I know) that the handing on, the keeping alive of “cultural values” is solely a business of the “professional classes”, who, as far as the arts go, are amiably illiterate. On the other hand, many of the poets whom you or I have known well or fairly well—Roy Campbell, Dylan Thomas, George Barker, David Gascoyne, W. S. Graham and Tom Scott, for instance—were not members of the “professional classes” and were the opposite of everything that one means by a *universitaire*. And, although nobody admires genuine scholarship either in poetry or in criticism more than I do, I think from what I have seen of English university life (frequent visits to Oxford and Cambridge and more sporadic raids on the outlying universities) that it does not provide an ideal setting for a poet. In one sense, the university setting is too sedate and snugly smug, or smugly snug; in another, there is too often an atmosphere of intrigue and pettiness and personal spite

Like frogs in air pumps, to subsist we strive
on joys too thin to keep the body alive,
that makes the easy, ambling, quarrel-
some yet forgiving, shabby yet dedicated
atmosphere of the bohemian London liter-
ary life, as you and I have known it, seem
in comparison a very large and generous
atmosphere. A great scholar can often be
a small man.

Such, then, is the general picture. And perhaps as a natural consequence of what

I have been discussing, one finds that people are much more excited today in England by new novels or new plays than by new poems. Yet, if new poetry is not much read, it is much discussed. There has recently been a great row in *The Times Literary Supplement* about an article entitled "Too Late The Mavericks". This article put forward, though not in orthodox Marxist terminology, what was in effect a Marxist argument for "committed writing" and against "formalistic" criticism, or against, I suppose, the critical way into a poem by the route of how effectively it seems to be written. The article suggested that two rival anthologies, Howard Sergeant's and Danny Abse's *Mavericks* and Robert Conquest's *New Lines* (the "Movement" anthology) were much more like each other than they seemed. Sergeant and Abse, though insisting that their contributors did not form a "school", seemed to put their emphasis on "feeling" or "passion", on "dionysian" poetry, while Bob Conquest's emphasis, in his preface, was on what he called an "empirical" attitude to poetry and also to life, on a distrust of systematic and dogmatic approaches, on the high part that intelligence, as well as the "image-making powers", has to play in the creation of poetry. I think the contrast between the two statements was not so much a refurbishing of the old (and, on the whole, quite boring) romantic-classical contrast as it was between an individualistic and a social view of poetic *tone*. Should the poet talk (chant, sing, intone) to himself and hope that others will overhear and ultimately understand? Or should he from the start imagine himself as addressing, or pretending to address, in a poem, a group

of understanding friends? His ideal stance, is it that of outsider or insider? However, the main point of *The Times Literary Supplement* article was that this abstract theoretical difference didn't prevent a lot of the poems in both anthologies being disturbingly like each other. It was not that the Mavericks had no sense of tone or form, or the "Movement", no feelings, but that both sets of poets seemed, in the facing of everything that confronts us today, oddly evasive. The Mavericks did not really "explode like bombs" and the "Movement" poets, with their cult of ironic control, did not seem to have strong and dangerous feelings that they needed to control. Without adhering in the least to the Marxist or to the, in some ways, comparable Roman Catholic position, one can perhaps agree that a lot of recent English poetry is either cramped by the fear of deep feeling or weakened by a belief that any, even splurgy and incoherent, direct expression of feeling *must* be deep. Commitment, in the crude political sense, is not the answer. But the answer might exist in the conviction—unflattering to the vanities of so many would-be poets—that what makes a good poem is neither (socially) correct sentiments in (reach-me-down) correct metres nor "sincerity" crawling, like liquid from a spilled glass, over the page—neither abstract form imposed on feeling nor feeling (or what feels like feeling) in a jelly-fish sprawl without form—but the awful, patient, slow discipline of *art*—which is not a jolly or a groupish thing.

But more of this anon. I have been meandering on for too long!

Yours ever, Tambi,

G. S. FRASER

(Continued from Page 4)

- (8) Under the winter street-lamps, near
the bus-stop,
Two people with nowhere to go
fondle each other,
Writhe slowly in the entrance to
a shop.

- (9) She hung away her years, her eyes
grew young,
And filled the dress that filled
the shop;
Her figure softened into summer,
though wind stung
And rain would never stop.
A dreaming not worn out with
knowing,
A moment's absence from the watch,
the weather.
I threw the paper down that
carried no such story,
But roared for what it could not have,
perpetual health and liberty
and glory.

D. J. ENRIGHT

- (10) Raleigh's Guiana also killed her son.
A pretty pickle if we came to see
The tallest story really packed
a gun
The Telemachiad an Odyssey.
.....
'Leave for Cape Wrath tonight!
They lounged away
On Fleming's trek or Isherwood's
ascent.
England expected every man
that day
To show his motives were
ambivalent.

DONALD DAVIE

- (11) Across the long-curved bight or bay
The waves move clear beneath
the day
And rolling in obliquely each
Unwinds its white torque
up the beach.
Beneath the full semantic sun
The twisting currents race and run.
Words and evaluations start.
And yet the verse should play
its part.

Below a certain threshold light
Is insufficient to excite
Those mechanisms which the eye
Constructs its daytime objects by.

ROBERT CONQUEST

The banging rhythms and tin-pot
rhymes are so shocking: *complexity/sea*
(Mr. Holloway); *simplicity/property*
(Mr. Gunn); *see/Odyssey, ascent/ambivalent* (Mr. Davie); *eye/by* (Mr. Conquest), the lines so banal ("But roared for what it could not have, perpetual health and liberty and glory") or so tone deaf ("An air lambent with adult enterprise . . . that we insenately forebore to fleece"—(Mr. Larkin), that I doubt whether these verses would even have made the grade for *The Poetry Review*. The could well be mistaken for the innocent outpourings of a schoolboy who has been weaned on Palgrave's *Golden Treasury*. Compare, for instance, extracts (1) and (2) above to Southey's:

No stir in the air, no stir in the sea
The ship was still as she could be;
Her sails from heaven received no motion,
Her keel was steady in the ocean.
Or take some lines at random from Mr. Conquest:

The silver sun is yellow, now the yellow
sun is green: the sky
No longer alight, now the sky is heavy
and near. The thick air sighs
And the light around us slowly moulders
—but what,
More dreadful, mercifully distant,
happens beneath the sea's tight skin?
The passes and the bay once more is
full of angels.
The sea's harp ripples and the air is sharp
with sudden scents:
Cafés and cars disgorge—good, bad,
indifferent—and the bay is full of men.
"The sky . . . alight, the sky . . . heavy
and near", "The thick air sighs", "the

sea's harp ripples", "light around us slowly moulders" are truly trite. When it is not banal, the versification is so raw that it uncomfortably conjures up the butcher's block for me. Thom Gunn was the one poet in this group I had thought might be interesting, having seen a couple of his poems in British periodicals. But having read the T. S. Eliot-sponsored volume, "The Sense of Movement", I find that he is in no manner different from the others:

I think of all the toughs through history
And thank heaven they lived, continually.
I praise the overdogs from Alexander
To those who would not play with
Stephen Spender.

While the better writers in England are holding their peace (I would, for instance, recommend the poems of J. C. Hall, Michael Hamburger, David Wright, and others in yet another British anthology, "Mavericks", edited by Dannie Abse), these Movementers are the poets of monotone and unsubtlety who are banging the big-drums in Britain today to the utter confusion of greyheads like T. S. Eliot. The subtleties of half-rhyme and internal rhyme have been engulfed in the crudities of Mr. Gunn's *hell/spell/hell* and *simplicity/property* or Mr. Holloway's *sea/complexity*. The highly evolved complex rhythms of modern verse which afford the poet a full tonal range, have dwindled to the hard foot-slogging of Mr. Conquest's selection of verses. Imagination has given way to platitudinous theorizing about the nature of writing, or to undergraduate pranks and undergraduate wit. Such then are the characteristics of the poetry of "The Lost Generation" which grew up during the Second World War and remained out of touch with what actually

happened during the Thirties and Forties, and which is now helplessly at sea, with no sense of direction, not knowing what it actually wants or is so voluble about.

New Lines has ushered in the poetic doldrums in Great Britain. Though the editor claims a 'new and healthy viewpoint', I think this volume represents a definite set-back to contemporary poetry. Poetic perception itself has become a stultified mannikin in a world of formulas and slogans. Before these young men materialized with their tape measures, distorting mirrors and bagful of tricks, there had been a hopeful growth from *The Waste Land* and the barrenness of the 'rational' approach of the Objective Reporters to the 'magic' of such poems as George Barker's *Elegy on Spain* or Dylan Thomas' *Fern Hill*. These new young writers cannot be very serious about poetry if they minimize the achievements of their predecessors, as they do.

Their attitude is decidedly not new. The other champion of "The Movement", Mr. D. J. Enright (Editor of *Poets of the 1950's*) wrote an article, "The Significance of *Poetry London*", in *The Critic*, some ten years ago—to which Mr. Conquest's introduction in *New Lines* owes a heavy debt. In that piece Mr. Enright was very nasty indeed about the poetry of Dylan Thomas, W. H. Auden, Louis MacNeice, Stephen Spender, George Barker, David Gascoyne, G. S. Fraser and every other poet with a reputation that he could think of. Unaccountably enough, he gave a high rating to my adolescent *Ceylonese Love Songs* written twenty-one years ago. The Movement's view is a most egocentric, uncritical and unpoetic one. I think I can guess what has

happened. There is more truth than Mr. Conquest realizes in his statement that the reason for *New Lines* was that "for a very long time there was no specialized verse magazine with any serious authority."

The absurdities of Mr. Conquest's arguments are too obvious to those people who are familiar with what really happened during the Thirties and Forties. What does he mean, for instance, when he says: "In the 1940's the mistake was made of giving the Id, a sound player on the percussion side under a strict conductor, too much of a say in the doings of the orchestra as a whole. As it turned out, it could only manage the simpler parts of melody and rhythm and was completely out of its depth with harmony and orchestration. This led to a rapid collapse of public taste, from which we have not yet recovered." Who were the typical writers of the Forties? To accept Mr. Conquest's arbitrary method of classification and to take only those whose collections were published by Editions Poetry London, the poets of the Forties included: Bernard Spencer, Anne Ridler, G. S. Fraser, Keith Douglas, Ronald Bottrall, G. S. Fraser. If the Id was on the percussion side, as Mr. Conquest says, these poets must have used the wood block and not the bass drum. They wrote with the utmost clarity, excelling in strict verse forms. Their poems had an intellectual backbone which, unlike the Movementers' was worthy of admiration—a natural outgrowth of finer minds and finer poetic perceptions. Although they wrote poems which were moving and convincing, their conceptual world was 'objectively' so well articulated that it would have passed muster with the Objective Reporters. As

a matter of fact, some of them appeared in Geoffrey Grigson's *New Verse*. These names could be multiplied with those from other publisher's lists to show that Mr. Conquest's recent gambit is only a shot in the dark, a wild and irresponsible circumambulation not dissimilar to that of the West Coast Movement.

To deal with Mr. Conquest's next remark that the orchestra of the Forties could only deal with "the simpler parts of melody and rhythm, and was completely out of its depth with harmony and orchestration", the readers will see for themselves, from the verses I have quoted, that this remark is actually true of Messrs. Conquest and Enright and the other Movementers, and not of the poets they have down-graded. (It would be tedious to have to prove the point with further extracts and comparisons). Nor need we take seriously his other statements: "The most glaring fault awaiting correction when the new period opened was the omission of the necessary intellectual component from poetry" and that previous to his dramatics in *New Lines*, the appearance of the "good and new" was "a sort of by-product of the publication of material of lesser quality". This can only be true of the provincial and neo-Georgian publications on which he seems to have been so solidly reared. He does not seem to care whether he contradicts himself several times in his very short introduction: "If one had briefly to distinguish this poetry of the Fifties from its predecessors, I believe the most general point would be that it submits to no great systems of theoretical constructs or agglomerations of unconscious commands. It is free from both mystical and logical compulsions and—like modern philosophy—

is empirical in its attitude to all that comes." Far from being empirical, the Movement's unilateral, dictatorial view is theory-ridden and nineteen-thirtyish. The Editor's argument that "This reverence for the real person or event is indeed a part of the general intellectual ambience of our time", is a dead mouse lifted bodily out of the slop-pail of the Objective Reporters. *New Lines* is indeed the Old Lines that put poetry into an intellectual straitjacket in Britain during the Thirties and would allow of no differences in a poet's highly individual approach to his writing. The existence of different literatures with their own significance, at the same place and time, was incomprehensible to them.

Mr. Conquest and his "Movement" believe in a monolithic poetry of the wit, without variety, whereas this magazine has always welcomed Walter de la Mare, Dame Edith Stillwell, Roy Campbell or Dylan Thomas (when they were supposedly out of fashion) and printed them alongside W. H. Auden and Louis MacNeice; or Maurice Carpenter and George Scurfield, who wrote the popular type of ballad, or Diana Menuhin who wrote clerihews. The ballad and cleriheiw must simply disgust Mr. Conquest. He compares the taste for poetry during 1930-1950 to that of "Some people who love music, not wisely, but too well" (he is quoting from Aldous Huxley) "who love to listen to Negroes and Cossacks . . . the Russian balalaika . . . the disgusting caterwaulings of Tziganes . . ." "This describes, only too clearly, the sort of corruption which has affected the general attitude to poetry in the last decade." In common with Indian, Andalusian, Hebrew or Balinese music, we have always

found the folk music of the gypsies worth listening to, along with the music of Negro origin. It is good to recall that *Poetry London* published *The PL Yearbook of Jazz* 1946 and *The PL Jazzbook* 1947, since it believed in folk and popular art forms like the ballad, both recited and sung, and the theatre, as possible media for the modern poet to use in getting his message across to a whole nation, as Lorca did with his *Gypsy Ballads in Spain*, or Nanduri Subbarao, to the Telugu-speaking people in South India. Mr. Conquest's precious and, I should say, unthinking, unreceptive mind has forgotten the popular folk origin of poetry. It is sterile academics of this sort where, as Ortega Y Gasset has pointed out, the culture has become separated from the vitality which created it that has alienated the public. Mr. Conquest also rants against "the Lallans mongers", the dialect poets of Scotland, and I can see him equally hot under the collar over the folk songs from India collected by W. G. Archer or Verrier Elwin or those movingly executed versions of Quechua songs from Peru, by Ruth Stephan, which were recently published.* It is quite obvious that "The Movement" and *Poetry London - New York* are far removed from each other.

All the (unsolicited) advice I can offer "The Movement" poets is to cut the cackle now and produce some writers who are worthy of our serious attention. What seems to have happened so far is that one little mountain has labored and brought forth a mouse—a dead one.

TAMBIMUTTU

*The Singing Mountaineers, University of Texas Press.

CORRESPONDENCE

Dear Tambi:

Reading some of Amis' verse recently I recalled your attack on Empson's imitators, and perpetrated the enclosure, which may entertain you. I'm not suggesting that you publish it.

JUST A SMACK AT EMPSON'S EPIGONI

Some turn the trick, but few can weave
the spell:

Spinning the phrase, the while they braid
the rhyme.

Empson knows how to make a villanelle:

The echo must have something fresh
to tell

The mirror show more than a brilliant
mime.

Some turn the trick, but few can weave
the spell.

"It is the pain endures . . . The waste . . ."
The knell

Repeats, repeats, and startles every time.
Empson knows how. To make a villanelle

Is easy if you would not do it well.
Some fancy themselves dancing on a
dime—

Some turn the trick, but few can. Weave
the spell,

And we'll be happily at home in hell,
Trying on punishments to fit the crime.
Empson knows how to make a villanelle.

Hear them: they're still trying to ring
the bell,

Who cannot tell a chimney from a
chime.

Some turn the trick, but few can weave
the spell,

Empson knows. "How to make a
villanelle?"

With best wishes,
BABETTE DEUTSCH

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Ann Adams: Young American poet, who lives Greenwich Village. First publication.

Arq: Identity unknown. Anyone possessing information about his (or her) name and whereabouts kindly contact PLNY.

Leah Atik: A recent graduate of Sarah Lawrence College, now teaching in New York. Second publication.

Hayden Carruth: Critic and poet. Former editor of *POETRY: A MAGAZINE OF VERSE AND PERSPECTIVES U. S. A.*

Jibanananda Das: One of the most prominent poets of Bengal, whose recent death constitutes a great loss to contemporary Indian literature.

Lawrence Durrell: A regular contributor to PLNY, whose novel *JUSTINE* has recently received great acclaim in the United States. Now living in France.

Dudley Fitts: Poet and critic, who lives in Andover, Mass.

Michael Hamburger: British critic and poet. His study of German literature, *REASON AND ENERGY*, was recently published in America by The Grove Press.

Anthony Ostroff: One of the most interesting of the young poets from the West whose work is becoming increasingly well known.

Joseph Joel Keith: Another Californian whose poems have appeared in *KENYON REVIEW*, *POETRY: A MAGAZINE OF VERSE* and *HARPER'S MAGAZINE*.

Anne Ridler: Her poems and plays have been an interesting feature of the British landscape for the past twenty years.

Richard Selig: Young American whose death this year was much regretted on both sides of the Atlantic.

Nicholas Moore: Rock gardener and an expert on irises, especially of the tall bearded variety. Raises bulbs for Telkamp's of London. Three collections of his poems were issued by Editions Poetry London.

Dachine Rainer: Lives in a log cabin in Bearsville, N. Y. where her concerns include a slide trombone player and a four year old daughter.

Charles Madge: Well known British poet (born in South Africa and educated at Cambridge) whose first American collection will be issued by Editions Poetry London-New York.

Claire McAllister: American. Her first collection of poems will be published by us next fall.

Ardath Frances Hurst: Lives in Texas.

Ruthven Todd: British poet, novelist and critic who has made his home in America. A recent book of poems was published by Bonacio and Saul (Grove Press).

Theodore Roethke: Professor at the University of Washington.

PLNY *Editions Poetry London-New York*

DECLENSIONS OF A REFRAIN by Arthur Gregor

Mr. Gregor's second collection of poems which, though it may not be immediately apparent, shows a considerable advance on his earliest poems. \$3.00

THE DUAL SITE by Michael Hamburger

Mr. Hamburger's first book of poems to be published in this country where he is already known as a critic, and as a translator of Hoelderlin's poems. \$2.00

A WORD TO THE WISE, Poems by John Moffitt

HOUSE OF THE LIE, A Novel by Jean Garrigue

DODD, MEAD & COMPANY

new books from

NEW DIRECTIONS

WHEN WE WERE HERE TOGETHER *Kenneth Patchen*

Strong new poems by the writer of whom the late Paul Rosenfeld said "gives evidence of a progressive, massive concentration of the poetic energy, the sacred fire." \$3.50

POEMS 1906-1926 *Rainer Maria Rilke*

Translated, with an introduction by J. B. Leishman

A major collection of poetry, most of it never previously translated, written during the last 20 years of Rilke's life. \$4.75

LETTERS TO VERNON WATKINS *Dylan Thomas*

A vital view of the poet and his poetry in the warm, delightful letters he wrote to his friend, poet Vernon Watkins, editor of this book. \$3.00

THE SORROWS OF PRIAPUS *Edward Dahlberg.*

Illustrated by Ben Shahn

The strange animal, man, poetically discussed in challenging and masterly prose by the writer whom Sir Herbert Read calls "the greatest prose stylist of our times." \$6.50

NEW DIRECTIONS

333 Sixth Avenue

New York 14

R. Pathmanaba Iyer
27-B, High Street,
Plaistow
London E13 0AD

PLNY

RECORDINGS

A special series of 33-1/3 long playing records of contemporary poets reading from their own works are being released by *Poetry London-New York* in collaboration with The Spoken Word Inc.

Available in January are:

SW 111 ARTHUR GREGOR:

Readings from *Declensions of a Refrain*
and *Octavian Shooting Targets*. \$5.98

SW 122 W. S. MERWIN:

Readings from *A Masque for Janus*. \$5.98

The PLNY Contemporary Poetry Series will be available in your favorite record shop or the recordings can be ordered direct from EDITIONS POETRY LONDON-NEW YORK, 513 Sixth Avenue, New York 11, N. Y.