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NEW WRITING  
AND  
DAYLIGHT

SUMMER  
1943

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## FOREWORD



Good wine, I hope, needs no bush ; the contents of this third volume of the combined *New Writing* and *Daylight* do not, I believe, require any explanatory comments ; nor will the scope and aims of the series, after the excellent reception of the first two volumes, be made any clearer by further prolegomena. Nevertheless, an Editor may perhaps be forgiven for celebrating a special pleasure the results of his labours have given him. When this volume came to be put together, I was struck by the high proportion of poetry in the manuscripts that claimed a place in it, and, in that poetry, by the high proportion of long poems. From the beginning of the war I had felt that there would be a gradual return to the lyrical and visionary in writing, whether in verse or prose ; but I would not have dared to prophesy that the conditions of the war would permit a revival of the long and highly wrought poem. That this was indeed happening, many poems published in the two earlier volumes of *New Writing and Daylight*, and in other periodicals as well, gave me grounds for hoping. The poetry in this volume confirms that hope ; but it also, to my mind, makes clear that this revival is only one side of a more general poetry revival, which reveals itself at the same time in the short lyric, and—equally significantly—in translation from the exciting manifestations of contemporary European poetry. This new temple of the muse, which is being constructed under our eyes, demands of itself a fourth pillar to complete its symmetry : new poetic drama. To any young poets who may be hesitating on the brink of such a venture, fearing the delays and difficulties involved in bringing a play in poetry before the public, *New Writing and Daylight* gladly opens its pages.

J. L.

# ROY FULLER

## FOUR POEMS

OCTOBER 1942

THE shade, the light, the figures, the horizon as  
An illness, daily retreating and advancing :  
A brilliant ball where no one ceases dancing,  
A darkened room whose objects all are mass—

Across confusion, movement, momentary  
Perceptions cut, as symbols present themselves  
To poets, though the convenient nymphs and elves  
They know fall short of truth as does a story.

And these : the giraffes that lope, half snake, half horse,  
A slowed up film ; the wildebeeste with faces  
Of mandarins ; and soft bright zebra racing  
Over the plain, unreal as rocking horses ;

And sometimes in the mess the men and their  
Belongings, paper thin, become detached  
From their background ; and my mornings all are patched  
With pallid newspapers about the war.

And should I be asked to speak the truth are these  
What I should try to explain, and leave untold  
The unformed wishes, the inexplicable and cold  
Actions, the phantoms of ancestors and trees ?

For what can be explained ? The animals  
Are what you make of them, are words, are visions,  
And really they are moving in dimensions  
Impertinent for us to use or watch at all.

And of the men there's nothing to be said :  
Only events, with which they wrestle, can  
Transfigure them or make them other than  
Things to be loved or hated and soon dead.

It is the news at which I hesitate,  
That glares authentically between the bars  
Of style and lies, and holds enough of fears  
And history and is not too remote.

## FOUR POEMS

And tells me that the age is thus : chokes back  
 My private suffering, the ghosts of nature  
 And of the mind : it says the human features  
 Are mutilated, have a dreadful lack.

It half convinces me that some great faculty,  
 Like hands, has been eternally lost and all  
 Our virtues now are the high and horrible  
 Ones of a streaming wound which heals in evil.

## THE TRIBES

I THINK of the tribes : the women prized for fatness,  
 Immovable, and by a sympathetic  
     Magic sustaining the herds,  
     On whose strange humps sit birds ;

And those with long dung-stiffened capes of hair ;  
 And those that ceremonially eat their dead ;  
     The ornamental gashes  
     Festered and raised with ashes ;

The captured and dishonoured king compelled  
 To straddle a sharpened horizontal stake,  
     Until, his legs hauled at,  
     The point burst from his throat ;

And all the prohibitions and the cheapness  
 Of life so hardly got, where it is death  
     Even to touch the palace  
     And poison expresses malice.

Now in the white men's towns the tribes are gathered  
 Among the corrugated iron and  
     The refuse bins where rats  
     Dispute with them for scraps.

Truly civilisation is for them  
 The most elemental struggle for bread and love ;  
     For all the tabus have gone,  
     It is man against man alone.

On waste plots and in the decrepit shanties  
 They begin to discover the individual,

And, with the sense in time,  
Of Adam, perpetrate crime.

The most horrible things you can imagine are  
Happening in the towns, and the most senseless :  
There are no kings or poison,  
Are laws but no more reason.

THE PLAINS

THE only blossoms of the plains are black  
And rubbery, the spiked spheres of the thorn,  
And stuffed with ants. It is before the rains :  
The stream is parched to pools, occasional  
And green, where tortoise flop ; the birds are songless  
Towers of whirling dust glide past like ghosts.  
But in the brilliant sun, against the sky,  
The river course is vivid and the grass  
Flaxen : the strong striped haunches of the zebra,  
The white fawn black, like flags, of the gazelles,  
Move as emotions or as kindly actions.  
~~The world is nothing but a fairy tale~~  
Where everything is beautiful and good.

At night the stars were faint, the plateau chill ;  
The great herds gathered, were invisible,  
And coughed and made the inarticulate noises  
Of fear and yearning : sounds of their many hooves  
Came thudding quietly. The headlights caught  
Eyes and the pallid racing forms. I thought  
Of nothing but the word *humanity* :  
And I was there outside the square of warmth,  
In darkness, in the crowds and padding, crying,  
Suddenly the creamy shafts of light  
Revealed the lion. Slowly it swung its great  
Maned head, then—loose, suède, yellow—loped away.  
O purposeful and unapproachable !  
Then later his repugnant hangers-on :  
A pair of squint hyenas limping past.  
This awful ceremony of the doomed, unknown  
And innocent victim has its replicas  
Embedded in our memories and in  
Our history. The archetypal myths  
Stirred in my mind.

The next day over all  
The sun was flooding and the sky rose tall.

## FOUR POEMS

Where rock had weathered through the soil I saw  
 A jackal running, barking, turning his head.  
 Four vultures sat upon the rock and pecked,  
 And when I neared them flew away on wings  
 Like hair. They left a purple scrap of skin.  
 Have I discovered all the plains can show me?  
 The animals gallop, spring, are beautiful,  
 And at the end of every day is night.

## WHAT IS TERRIBLE

LIFE at last I know is terrible :  
 The innocent scene, the innocent walls and light  
 And hills for me are like the cavities  
 Of surgery or dreams. The visible might  
 Vanish, for all it reassures, in white.

This apprehension has come slowly to me,  
 Like symptoms and bulletins of sickness. I  
 Must first be moved across two oceans, then  
 Bored, systematically and sickeningly,  
 In a place where war is news. And constantly

I must be threatened with what is certainly worse :  
 Peril and death, but no less boring. And  
 What else? Besides my fear, my misspent time,  
 My love, hurt and postponed, there is the hand  
 Moving the empty glove ; the bland

Aspect of nothing disguised as something ; that  
 Part of living incommunicable,  
 For which we try to find vague adequate  
 Images, and which, after all,  
 Is quite surprisingly communicable.

Because in the clear hard light of war the ghosts  
 Are seen to be suspended by wires, and in  
 The old house the attic is empty : and the furious  
 Inner existence of objects and even  
 Ourselves is largely a myth : and for the sin

To blame our fathers, to attribute vengeance  
 To the pursuing chorus, and to live  
 In a good and tenuous world of private values,

Is simply to lie when only truth can give  
Continuation in time to bread and love.

For what is terrible is the obvious  
Organisation of life : the oiled black gun,  
And what it cost; the destruction of Europe by  
Its councils ; the unending justification  
Of that which cannot be justified, what is done.

The year, the month, the day, the minute, at war  
Is terrible and my participation  
And that of all the world is terrible.  
My living now must bear the laceration  
Of the herd, and always will. What's done

To me is done to many. I can see  
No ghosts, but only the fearful actual  
Lives of my comrades. If the empty whitish  
Horror is to be ever flushed and real,  
It must be for them and changed by them all.

## HENRY GREEN

### THE LULL

#### I

THERE was a bar in this fire-station. On the bar was a case of beer. A fireman was taking bottles from this case, placing the full bottles on to shelves. He was alone.

Another came in. This one was minus his tunic. He wore a check shirt. The barman began to take him off, without looking up from what he was doing.

"You—you—you fool," the barman said. The way he spoke you would have thought one or the other stuttered.

"Ten Woodbines, thank you."

"Ten," the barman said.

A bell in the cash register. Then silence. These two men stood in silence.

"Cigarette ?"

"No, not just yet, thanks all the same, Gerald. I don't smoke such a lot these days."

"Not like you used to, eh ?"

What lay behind this last remark was that Gerald, the man

in the check shirt, was echoing an opinion widely held in the station, that this barman often put his sticky fingers, which were of the same length, into the till. But it was said without malice. The barman let it pass. He knew the personnel expected to be robbed, within reason. He lifted another full case on to the bar. After a pause, he said :

"They don't get any lighter. Is there anything on to-night ?"

He asked this pleasantly, to get his own back. He was referring to the fact that Gerald, because he did odd jobs carpentering for the officer in charge, was excused the tactical exercises held every evening to keep the men out of bed.

"Not that I know of," the other replied. His tone of voice was to show, elaborately, that he did not care.

"We want another blitz," remarked the barman.

"We do," he was answered.

Neither of these firemen stuttered.

"I saw old Sambo to-day."

The other did not make a move.

"Why d'you wear that bloody shirt ?" the first man went on. He kept his eyes on the bottles he arranged. "Has your Mrs. got such a number that she can't put your dusters to the proper use ? Because we could do with one or two at 'ome. Yes," he broke off, "I seen Sam."

"That fellow with a squint."

"That's right. Sam Race."

A short silence.

"You know the last time I seen him ?" the barman went on.

"On a working party ?" This was a reference to the fact that, because he pleaded he had to check his stock, the barman was excused fatigues.

"On a working party ! No ! Along Burdett Road the night of that bad blitz."

"Really ?"

"I've not seen 'im since the night Willy Tennant got down under the pump, when old Ted Fowler moved up one. It was surprising it didn't break his leg."

"The wheel went right over ?" the man in the shirt asked, as though enquiring whether the blackbird had got the worm.

"You're telling me. I was there. Yes, from that day until this morning I didn't set eyes on Sam. That's a strange thing, come to look at it."

They stood, in silence again, leaning each side of the bar. They pondered at the linoleum which covered the counter.

"Sure you couldn't do with a drink ?" the barman asked at last.

"Quite sure, thanks."

At this a third fireman came in.

"Well brother?"

That is to say the barman and the third fireman were both members of the Fire Brigades Union.

"I'll 'ave one of them small light ales, Joe, please. Will you try one?"

"No, thanks all the same. Been out on short leave?" He called it "leaf."

"Yes, I 'ad a drop of short."

A bell in the cash register.

"I was just tellin' Gerald," the first man went on, "I seen Sam Race as I was on me way round to the brewer's this morning."

"Wally Race you mean, Joe."

"No, Wally Race is the brother."

"Wally Race 'as no brother," the third man stuck to his guns.

"What'll you bet me, Gus?"

"Wally Race 'as no brother. 'E's lived at 'ome ever since I can remember. With 'is mother and 'er old man. No, he's an only child, Wally Race is."

"Come on, Gus, what'll you bet?"

"I wouldn't want to take your money, Joe."

"What if you do, that's my business! It's my money, ain't it? Come on now, just for a lark, how much?"

"What, on three fourteen and six a week?"

"Some of you chaps just won't 'ave a go. Forgotten what it's like I suppose."

The barman pretended disgust. He lifted two empty cases down. He began to polish glasses when Gerald, in his check shirt, turned all at once, and hurried out of the room.

"What's 'e making now?" the third man asked.

"Bedside table. Bloody marvellous the work he turns out. You can't see 'is joins, only with a magnifying glass."

"Yes. The Boy Marvel."

Silence yet again. Then a fourth man entered.

"Quite busy, thank you, this evenin'," the barman remarked in greeting. He meant it. "Bloody awful quiet it is in behind this bar sometimes. What can I do for you, brother?"

"Wallop," the fourth man demanded.

"Now then, Ted, you know there ain't none. We can do you light ale, in quarts or 'alf pints, ditto brown ale, or a nice bottle of Guinness."

"What, at eightpence 'alfpenny. Not likely."

They looked at each other, amiably.

"What's become of the Bar Committee?" the fourth man enquired.

"What's become of it?" the barman Joe echoed. "It's still in existence."

"Then it's time it 'eld another meeting."

"These small lights aren't bad, Ted," the third man said.

"I don't want none o' that. I like it all right, but those lights don't like me. Too gassy."

"All right then, mate, but make up your mind." Having said this, the barman began to polish glasses again.

"'Ow much a week, now, is this job you've got behind that bar worth to you?" the fourth man went on.

The barman ignored it. Instead he remarked:

"I seen Sam Race this morning."

"Well, I think I'll risk a brown, Joe. Out of the large bottle."

"Pronto. Yes, 'e looked very queer, did old Sambo."

"Sam who?"

"Sam Race. Why you must remember him, Ted."

"Wally Race you mean."

"No, Sam."

"What station?"

"'E's moved," the barman replied, nonplussed for the instant.

"I disremember where exactly," he went on rather lamely. This attracted the third man's attention, who asked:

"What station was 'e at?"

The barman had pulled himself together. He knew what to say to this.

"Where d'you think, Gus? Up Goldington Road, at 4U of course, with Matty Franks." He was improvising.

"With 'oo?" the fourth man objected.

"Old Matty Franks," the barman answered irritably.

A bell in the cash register. A pause.

"Never 'eard of 'im," the fourth man announced. "Good 'ealth," he said.

"God bless," the third fireman replied.

"Never heard of Matty Franks?" the barman went on.

"The rottenest old bastard in the Service. Up Goldington Road just past the Ploughshare?"

The two men looked at the barman, ruminating. The fourth man was about to object he was not acquainted with a pub of that name up that road when they all heard a sad cry of "Come and get it," from below, from the messroom.

"Already?" the fourth man asked aloud. He gulped his down. He left.

The third fireman finished his half pint, and went.

The moment he was alone the barman poured himself out a light from one of the quart bottles.

A bell did not ring in the cash register. Joe had his drinks on the house, when no one was looking.

Silence. He let a lonely belch. He pondered the linoleum which covered the counter.

After five minutes, a kitchen orderly for the day brought the barman up his supper.

"Fred," the barman said, "it's getting very slow in this bloody dump."

"You're telling me," Fred replied.

"I've 'ad Gus and Ted on about Sam Race."

"Oo?"

"Sam Race."

"I don't seem to recollect a Sam Race, Joe."

"No, nor there ain't never been. There's only the one Wally Race, who squints something 'orrible. Yet they wouldn't 'ave a bet on it. Not one o' them. What a game eh?"

"You've said it," Fred replied, uninterested. He went out.

The barman began to eat his supper.

2

Another evening. The same bar. Five or six firemen sat around. Two were without a drink. A fifth man held the floor.

"Yes," he said, "a great big woman, my aunt was, twenty-two stone she weighed. And a real wicked old lady. My dad wouldn't allow us kids to have nothing to do with 'er. I'll tell you what she did once. It was a Sunday morning, on the way to church."

"On the way to church?" another fireman asked.

"Yes, yes mate, that sort are churchgoers, very often. I'll never forget. Just as she came up on a sheep she put her umbrella right into it. 'Err,' she said, 'you horrid thing.' Went right in, the point did."

No one accepted this. He realised it. He had to go on.

"Terrible she was. Used to kill cats for the enjoyment. She was well hated. D'you know the manner she used to despatch 'em. By strangilation."

"Strangled them, eh?" another asked.

"Yes, mate. She put a cord round the neck with a slip knot. Then she'd pass the end through the keyhole. She took the key out first of course. Then she'd take a turn round her body with the free end. To finish up she just leaned on that door. With all her weight it didn't take more'n a minute."

"How d'you mean, a turn round 'er body?"

"Well, she'd entice the cat in first, see. After that she'd put a slip knot round its neck," and this fifth fireman went on into an involved description of the method favoured by his aunt. No one was wiser at the end. In the pause which followed two of the others started a quiet argument between each other as to the performance of a particular towing vehicle.

The fifth man began his last attempt.

"She was hated, real hated she was in the country thereabouts," he told them. "My dad always said she'd come unstuck at the finish. And so she did. It was remarkable the way it come about."

"What was that then, Charley?" someone asked, from politeness.

"The way she died, mate. It was to do with a duck for her supper. Eighty-six years old she was. She couldn't manage to wring this duck's neck. So she got out the old chopper, held the bird down on the block and plonk, the 'ead was gone. Well, this head, it can't 'ave fallen in the basket. When she bent down to pick up the 'ead, she let the carcass fall. And it fell right side up, right side up that bloody carcass fell, on its bloody feet and all. And did it run! Well she must 'ave taken fright. She must 'ave started runnin', with the duck 'ard after. She run out into the garden. The blood from the stump left a trail behind. It followed 'er every turn, that decapitated duck did. Until in the finish she fell down. Dead as mutton she was. 'Eart failure. She'd took a fright. But credit it or not, that duck landed on her arse as she lay there, stretched out. That's where my first cousin, the nephew, came on 'em both. Cold as a stone, she was, already."

"Damn that for a bloody tale, Charley."

"You don't believe me, ah? Well, I tell you, it's the bloody truth. It's the nerves or something. You'll see the same with chickens that's had their heads cut off. If it's done sudden they'll run around."

"Not that distance."

"I'm sayin' to you, this 'appened just like I told you, Joe. All right, disbelieve me then."

A game of darts was suggested. All joined in.

3

But it was noticeable that, whenever a stranger came into the bar, these firemen, who had not been on a blitz for eighteen months, would start talking back to what they had seen of the attack on London in 1940. They were seeking to justify the waiting life they lived at present, without fires.

A stranger did not have to join in, his presence alone was enough to stimulate them who felt they no longer had their lives now that they were living again, if life in a fire-station can be called living.

These men were passing through a period which may be compared with the experience of changing fast trains. A traveller on the crowded platform cannot be said to command his destiny, who stands, agape, waiting for the next express. It is signalled, he knows that it will be packed, it is down the line. The unseen approach keeps him, as it were, suspended, that is no more than breathing, but more than ready to describe the way he has arrived to a man he does not know, waiting in the same disquiet, at his shoulder.

## 4

It was an evening session in this bar. They had all had a few beers. The stranger, posted to this station for the night because it was short of riders, stayed bored, expressionless, without a hope of comfort. They were sitting back against the walls, in a rectangle. A silence fell. Then the sixth man began. He asked :

"Joe, remember the night we were called to Jacob's Place?"

"I'll likely never forget that, mate."

"Nor me."

Silence. But everyone listened.

"What was that, then?" a seventh man enquired.

"They called us on to Number five Jacob's Place," he began again, consciously dramatic.

"Number seventeen, Alfred," the barman said.

"You may be right at that," the sixth man answered, unwilling to argue because he wanted to get on with his story. "It's of no consequence," he added, already beginning to be put out, "the point is some geezer in the street tells us there's a job in the roof, so of course Joe here an' me gets crackin'. The rest of the crew set in to a hydrant, while the two of us run upstairs with the stirrup pump in case we can put it out easy. It turns out to be one of them houses where there's just a caretaker, like, an' all the furniture is covered with sheets be'ind locked doors. Ghostly. You know the kind, a smashing place, but 'aunted. There must've been fifteen or sixteen rooms. Well there's a lot of cold smoke choking us on the top floor, but we find the old trap-door to the roof all right. It was quite a pleasure to get out in the air again, it certainly was, wasn't it, Joe?"

"It was that," Joe said back.

"We begin taking a few tiles off," he went on, "and we find

a place where it's a bit 'ot, but we still 'aven't come on the seat of the fire, we're rummagin' about, like, on top of that bloody roof when all of a sudden there's a bloody blubbering noise up in the sky over'ead, yes, like a dog bloody 'owling in a bass voice, and coming down out of the moon though we couldn't see nothink. Was I scared. I thinks to meself it's another bloody secret weapon. I called out to you, didn't I mate?"

"You may 'ave done Alf. I was too busy tryin' to get down out of it."

"Yes, we had a bit of a scramble. Joe 'ere was nearest, so he goes down first. Well, there was no point in that 'after you' stunt, was there? Yes, and as I was coming last down through the trap-door, I looks up, and I sees what had put the wind up me to such an extent. Know what it was?"

Everyone in the room, bar the stranger, could have told him. They had heard this story often. And the stranger was not interested.

Alfred answered himself.

"A bloody barrage balloon," he said, "The shrapnel had got at it. The blubbering noise is occasioned by the fabric rubbin' together as it comes down, or the gas escapin' out of the envelope, one or the other. I couldn't rightly say. But it didn't half put the wind up me."

"And me," said Joe.

Silence fell again. Each man drank sparingly of his beer. Knowing the story had not been a success because it had been told before, Alfred tried to get some response from the stranger.

"What station are you from?" he asked.

This man awoke with a start from a doze of misery. He replied obliquely, saying:

"I'm a C.O. you know."

"A conchic? Well, why not," Alfred generously said.

"I've never been out on a job," the stranger answered. "And I don't know if I should put out fires," he went on, desperate, "I don't rightly know if I ought."

A heavier silence followed.

## 5

Hyde Park on Sunday. It was hot. A fireman in mufti and a young girl were, of an afternoon, by that part of the Serpentine in which fishing is allowed. They had put themselves back from dazzling water, on deck chairs.

A girl of eighteen went slowly by, dressed in pink, a careful inexpensive outfit, one of thousands off a hook. From her deck chair the other said, rapid and sly:

"La petite marquise Osine est toute belle."

He had been admiring the calves and tender ankles that girl dragged through thin, olive green grass. He laughed. He was caught out. He turned to his companion.

"Henry," she went on, bilingual, speaking only a little less fast, "surely you remember?"

He was sleepy. He shook his head. She recited, quick and low:

"Oui, certes, il est doux,  
Le roman d'un premier amant. L'âme s'essaie,  
C'est un jeune coureur à la première haie.  
C'est si mignard qu'on croit à peine que c'est mal.  
Quelque chose d'étonnamment matutinal."

He said, "Yes." He did not turn away again. He admired her nose, which had caught his eye, as it always did.

"Verlaine?" he asked.

She wondered what he was looking at so particularly about her.

"D'you think my hair's too long?"

"No, I don't," he replied, "it's lovely. That was Verlaine wasn't it?"

She thought, of course he's the one who likes my nose.

"You know you're the worst read man I've ever met."

"Worse than Archie Small?"

"No, not quite. I like Archie because he's not read anything at all. That's probably why he dances so well."

What lay behind the remark was that this man Henry could not dance. Before he had time to take it up she began again, lying back in the chair, looking at him with half-closed eyes, almost in a sing-song,

"Ses cheveux, noirs tas sauvage où  
Scintille un barbare bijou,  
La font reine et la font fantoche."

She was worried about whether her hair was right.

"Ah," he said. He stretched. She was wearing an olive green bow of velvet in it.

She shut her eyes, gated them with eyelashes. It was very hot. After a pause she went on, thinking of his youngest sister, her friend.

"La femme pense à quelque ancienne compagne,  
Laquelle a tout, voiture et maison de campagne,  
Tandis que les enfants, leurs poings dans leur yeux clos,  
Ronflant sur leur assiette, imitent des sanglots."

"Me, with you, I suppose," he remarked. "Go on," he said. He shut his eyes. "I'm enjoying this."

She wondered that he could see himself as a child with her, when he was old enough to be her father.

Both were sleepy from a good lunch. After a while she added slowly, in a low voice :

“ Bien que parfois nous sentions  
Battre nos coeurs sous nos mantes  
A des pensers clandestins,  
En nous sachant les amantes  
Futures des libertins.”

“ Henry,” she said, when there had been another silence. “ You don’t know where that comes from, do you ? ”

He did not open his eyes. “ Verlaine,” he said. He was smiling.

“ Yes,” she answered, and shut her eyes. “ It’s called ‘ La chanson des Ingénues.’ ”

“ Nous sommes les Ingénues  
Aux bandeaux plats, à l’oeuil bleu,  
Qui vivons, presque inconnues,  
Dans les romans qu’on lit peu.”

“ How sweet,” he said, rather dry. At that moment the syrens sounded. Everyone looked up. It was cloudlessly bare and blue.

“ Goodness,” she remarked, without conviction and not moving. “ How worried Mummy will be about me.” They sat on. They did not close their eyes again. It was awkward.

Then he suggested they might go to a film, saying it was waste to spend a leave day in the Park. She jumped at it. They hurried off, arm in arm, to the U.S.A.

## 6

The ninth fireman said :

“ A ’ornet? No, I can’t recollect that I ever met with a ’ornet. But crows now. I remember the first time I seen a crow, to really notice, like. Yus. I was out on the allotment. On the previous leave day I’d put me beansticks in just lovely. But this mornin’ when I comes to see how the beans was shapin’ there’s not a bloody beanstick stood in the bloody soil. They was by far too ’eavy for ’em. I couldn’t make it out at first. But just as I’m bendin’ to ’ave a look, there’s a bloody great bloody black think that comes swoop at me out of the sky. I thought it was the blitz all over again for a minute. So then I puts me ’ands up and ’as a peep. There was seven of the buggers in the oak tree there at the bottom, where the road goes along by our allotments. An’ can’t they ’alf ’oller. Kraa, kraa. A chap come with a gun and killed three. Bloody great things

they was. The rest never came back. No, we never seen them no more."

7

Two firemen were walking back to the station from the factory in which they made shell caps for the two hours during which they were allowed short leave, every second day.

The tenth man said to the eleventh :

"I'm browned off Wal, completely."

The eleventh answered :

"You're not the only one."

"Wal, d'you think there'll ever be another blitz?"

"Well, mate, if he doesn't put one on soon we shall all be crackers."

"You're telling me."

"And they are going insane, in every station, every day. Have you heard about the patrol man over at 18.Y.?"

"What was that, Wal?"

"Well it seems that the officer in charge finds something to take him out of his office, and as he comes out he sees no one on guard on the gate. So he looks around, and still he can't spot the patrol man. Till something tells him to look up. And there is the chap that should have been on the gate, sitting across the peak of the roof, hauling on a long line (120 feet of rope) he has between his hands. So he calls to 'im, sarcastic, 'Ow are you gettin' on up there?' And this is the answer he gets : 'I've saved five.'"

"No."

"It's as true as I'm here. So this officer in charge he climbs as far as he can get inside the building, till he comes to a window across from where his patrol man is sitting. He's one of those fat bastards, and he's a bit out of breath with the climb, you understand. He doesn't know what to make of it. So he calls out :

"You've saved five, 'ave you?"

"Yessir. And I'm about done up."

"'Ang on there, then, and I'll be with yer," the officer in charge sings out to him.

"You can't," is the answer he gets. "I'm surrounded." Surrounded by fire he meant. In the finish they had to call out the turntable ladders to bring him down. To anyone not acquainted with this job it seems hardly possible, do it?"

"They'll be bringing the plain van any day for me," the tenth man replied. They walked on, silent.

The passers-by despised them in this uniform that, two years ago, was good in any pub for a drink from a stranger.

# LOUIS ARAGON

## TWO POEMS IN DEFEAT

*Translated from the French by Louis MacNeice*

### THE LILACS AND THE ROSES

O MONTHS of blossoming, months of transfigurations,  
May without a cloud and June stabbed to the heart,  
I shall not ever forget the lilacs or the roses  
Nor those the Spring has kept folded away apart.

I shall not ever forget the tragic sleight-of-hand,  
The cavalcade, the cries, the crowd, the sun,  
The lorries loaded with love, the Belgian gifts,  
The road humming with bees, the atmosphere that spun,  
The feckless triumphing before the battle,  
The scarlet blood the scarlet kiss bespoke  
And those about to die bolt upright in the turrets  
Smothered in lilac by a drunken folk.

I shall not ever forget the flower-gardens of France—  
Illuminated scrolls from eras more than spent—  
Nor forget the trouble of dusk, the sphinx-like silence,  
The roses all along the way we went ;  
Flowers that gave the lie to the soldiers passing  
On wings of fear, a fear importunate as a breeze,  
And gave the lie to the lunatic push-bikes and the ironic  
Guns and the sorry rig of the refugees.

But what I do not know is why this whirl  
Of memories always comes to the same point and drops  
At Sainte-Marthe . . . a general . . . a black pattern . . .  
A Norman villa where the forest stops ;  
All is quiet here, the enemy rests in the night  
And Paris has surrendered, so we have just heard—  
I shall never forget the lilacs nor the roses  
Nor those two loves whose loss we have incurred :

Bouquets of the first day, lilacs, Flanders lilacs,  
Soft cheeks of shadow rouged by death—and you,

Bouquets of the Retreat, delicate roses, tinted  
Like far-off conflagrations : roses of Anjou.'

THE UNOCCUPIED ZONE

CROSS-FADE of grief to nothingness,  
The beat of the crushed heart grew less,  
The coals grew white and lost their gleam ;  
Drinking the wine of summer's haze  
In a rose-castle in Corrèze  
I changed this August into dream.

What could it be that of a sudden  
Brought an aching sob in the garden,  
A voice of low reproach in the air ?  
Ah not so soon, ah do not wake me ;  
This merest snatch of song must take me  
Out of the barracks of despair.

I thought for a moment that I heard  
In the middle of the corn a blurred  
Noise of arms—a theme that sears.  
Whence did this theme return to me ?  
Not carnations nor rosemary  
Had thus retained the scent of tears.

By hook or crook I had got relief  
From the dark secret of my grief  
When lo—the shadows redivide ;  
My eyes were only on the track  
Of apathy that looks not back  
When September dawned outside.

My love, within your arms I lay  
When someone hummed across the way  
An ancient song of France ; my illness  
At last came clear to me for good—  
That phrase of song like a naked foot  
Rippled the green water of stillness.

# RAYMOND MORTIMER

## FRENCH WRITERS AND THE WAR

WITHIN range of our Dover guns, only two or three minutes distant by air, France has been since 1940 more remote from us than ever before in history. During the Napoleonic Wars, for instance, cross-Channel communication seems to have been fairly common : smugglers continued their regular business and ships sailing from France for America called at English ports. Now one may occasionally meet somebody just arrived from France, but of current French literature and painting we know hardly anything. I have in front of me a few books and periodicals, some written by Frenchmen in exile ; some written in France and reprinted in Canada ; a few actually printed in France, which by happy hazard have reached me here. It would be absurd to base any confident generalisation on such meagre and haphazard material. The heading of this article is therefore rather delusive ; and though I can give some scraps of information, my chief purpose is to offer a warning against rash deductions. Only highly expert eyes can interpret the air-photographs of damage in German cities : allowance has to be made for skilful camouflage, since lakes are disguised as factories and barracks as public gardens. Similarly in order to interpret such evidence as we may possess about French intellectual life, we need to use all our imagination. We must allow for all the contrasts between their experiences and ours ; we must read indefatigably between the lines, remembering the severity of the censorship. Above all we must resist the temptation to over-simplify.

Even so I write with a certain hesitation. I consider that the denunciation of traitors should as far as possible be left to their compatriots, and unluckily it is difficult to discuss " French writers and the war " without giving an unfavourable account of some individuals. If I take this risk, it is because I believe that the intellectual life of England must in the future as in the past be inextricably linked with that of France ; and therefore we cannot afford to ignore what happens on the other side of the Channel. I must devote to the collaborators a proportion of space quite out of keeping with their numbers and influence, because the existence of any such persons naturally puzzles the English reader. But I think we should be infinitely careful to avoid any feeling of pharisaical superiority. If England had been occupied, can we doubt that we, too, should have spawned a few collaborators ? The Fascist sympathisers, including some of our best-

sellers, would, I feel sure, have run true to form, though to-day they may seem ardently bellicose. One of our most popular novelists has boasted his indifference to the fate of Poland and Czechoslovakia, another has broadcast for the Nazis from Berlin. Many of the French who were pro-Franco have collaborated with the Germans : let us not forget that Franco had many advocates in England. There are still in the House of Commons Englishmen who were not ashamed to applaud the news that German submarines had sunk British ships sailing to Spanish ports. When we condemn the men of Vichy, we must remember the warning of M. Bernanos : "Englishmen, if the Munich spirit had prevailed with you in June 1940, you would have fallen into the same hands as we French have."

Englishmen often divide the French into pro-German and pro-British, which is grotesque. They further assume that the supporters of Pétain are all pro-German ; and sometimes that in France the Right became solidly collaborationist, the Left solidly resistant. The facts are much more complicated. Big Business, as a whole, has indeed collaborated, so has a section of the Paris aristocracy, but the "hobereaux" or landed gentry have usually been most resistant. The most courageous daily papers have been the reactionary *Figaro* and *Le Jour*, both of which have been repeatedly suspended. (Of course, no left-wing papers are allowed, but the sham Socialist *Mot d'Ordre* has included many brave articles.) Two Catholic periodicals, *Esprit* and *Temps Nouveaux*, have been suppressed. Brittany, which is largely Catholic, has been unsurpassed in opposition to the occupying power ; the parish priests, the Dominicans, the Jesuits, and lately also some of the Bishops have been actively anti-German. Similarly, while the poorer classes on the whole have been exemplary in their patriotism, some of the most ardent collaborators come from the Left parties, which contained a large pacifist minority. Probably ninety-five Frenchmen out of a hundred long for the defeat of Germany, but it is difficult to carry further a satisfactory classification. I have made a rough attempt, because I think it necessary if one is considering the currents of intellectual life in contemporary France. I will begin with the tiny, collaborating minority :

- A. "Wars are suicidal, and France, weak in population and industry, cannot go on fighting Germany every thirty years. A Europe united under German hegemony is the best hope for civilisation. The Germans, when no longer resisted, will cease to be barbarous and oppressive."

- B. "Russia is more to be feared than Germany, because Communism menaces both religion and the hierarchy of classes."
- C. "America is more to be feared than Germany, because it menaces the whole conception of quality as opposed to quantity."

These three classes delude themselves that in a Europe dominated by Germany France can preserve her intellectual vigour and independence. They remember Horace : "*Graecia capta ferum victorem cepit.*" They consider the British a power without a future. (There is also a small class to whom we are a boggy, consistently Machiavellian and dominating the world through Freemasonry and an ubiquitous, melodramatically potent Intelligence Service.)

- D. "Fascism gave Germany the power to recover from and avenge her defeat. Democracy leaves countries a defenceless prey. Let us collaborate with Germany now in order to follow later her example."
- E. "The Germans, the Russians, the British, and the Americans are all hostile to our ideas. The more they weaken one another the better. Let us stand aside, and in the end we may find ourselves the arbiters of the world."
- F. "We agree with the collaborationists in many of their complaints. The British have let us down. They refused us the Rhine frontier, they helped the Germans to become strong, they made a naval treaty with Germany without consulting us, they would not allow us to prevent the military occupation of the Rhineland, which was the last opportunity to stop Hitler. If they win this war, they may again encourage Germany to become powerful. The Russians for their part precipitated the war by signing the Russo-German pact, and then the Communists here did their utmost to cripple our war effort. Nevertheless, the future of France depends upon an Allied victory. Let us therefore quietly help the Allies as best we can but without illusions."

It is in these three classes that most supporters of Pétain could be placed.

- G. "Communism is the only hope for civilisation and peace. We will do anything to help the Allies, so long as Russia is part of the Alliance."
- H. "The British made criminal mistakes between the wars, but so did we. The best hope for the future of France

is an Allied victory, followed by the closest Anglo-French alliance."

This classification does not pretend to be complete. The categories merge into one another, and in every country there are persons without any political ideas, though these are rare in France. Some writers have retreated into an ivory tower ; others write for the German-controlled press of Paris, accepting the *status quo* fatalistically, and cynically.

The immense majority of Frenchmen, I believe, can be classed G or H, but a considerable proportion of the bourgeois agree with F or even E. The total occupation of France has however demolished the remains of Pétain's prestige, and his old supporters now mostly look to the already legendary General de Gaulle. Only a very small group can be classified as A, B or C, that is to say are in any sense pro-German ; and while some of these are honestly convinced, others are merely selfish—magnates who are profiteering from their country's servitude, intellectuals who obtain privileges by doing propaganda for the enemy.

We can expect a Frenchman to be anti-German, but we have no right to expect him to be pro-British. It is therefore particularly important to distinguish classes D and E from classes A, B and C. I think the pro-Germans are either knaves or dupes, but it was possible for an intelligent patriot to be driven to Fascism by watching the feeble flounderings of the democracies in face of the growing threats from their neighbours. The employers did their utmost to reduce production under the *Front Populaire* government, nevertheless many Frenchmen who have no natural sympathy with Fascism feel that the forty-hour week would have been an admirable measure in a pacific Europe, but was an ostrich folly at a time when the German armament factories were doubling and redoubling their production. (While the French communists insisted on less work, their Russian comrades were practising Stakhanovism.) All the continental democracies have been overwhelmed, for all were utterly unprepared for war. Can we wonder if the name of democracy does not sound sweetly in every Frenchman's ears ? Increasing confidence in an Allied victory and hatred of the present tyranny are restoring the traditional French love of democracy, but no Frenchman can regard without dismay the last years of the Third Republic. Among the supporters of Vichy there were certainly some men of honour who saw in a native form of Fascism the only hope for the recovery of France. To-day the circumstances are changed, and adherence to Vichy seems to me impossible to defend—it has indeed become rare, except in some colonies.

Another distinction, though of much less practical importance, must be made between those who were Fascists before the war and those who have become pro-German since the German victory. There are in fact two main types of French Fascist (more indeed, since Pétain's Fascism is different from Déat's or Doriot's, but I am now discussing motives rather than doctrines). On the one hand there are those who are actuated by exasperated and, as it has turned out, short-sighted patriotism. Some of these proclaimed their opinions before the war, some have been converted by the apparent logic of events. On the other hand there are those who were bought by the Germans and Italians before the war, or who have since announced their conversion in order to curry favour with Vichy or the occupying power. The former, however violently one may detest their beliefs, are not intrinsically contemptible.

Without some such classification as I have sketched, one cannot, I think, begin to understand the present grouping of French intellectuals. But there is a further difficulty : we cannot with any confidence decide in which category to place individual writers. Aragon and Malraux and Eluard presumably are G : Gide, Schlumberger, Mauriac, and Bernanos, different as their convictions may be, seem near to H. So probably is Soupault, who was put in prison by the Vichy authorities in Algeria. Claudel, Giraudoux, and Valéry I suspect of having been E or F but of now approaching H. Some of the undisguised collaborationists, including perhaps Montherlant and even Drieu la Rochelle, are probably D. But I cannot emphasise enough the inadequacy of the evidence. Colette, for instance, has published a serial novel in the scurrilously anti-Semitic and anti-British *Gringoire* ; Giono contributes to the overtly pro-German *Nouvelle Revue Française*—and to write for such papers is undeniably compromising. But do not assume on this account that either of them wishes for a German victory. Giono is a pacifist and internationalist, who went to prison as a conscientious objector, and who blinds himself to ugly facts ; Colette, I suspect, is just an old lady who cynically writes for the paper that pays best. Some who come under suspicion of collaboration are victims merely of blackmail, poverty, vanity, or even political ignorance. Others are drug-addicts, and thus marked as the helpless prey of the powers that be. When France is liberated, the people will avenge themselves on the collaborators ; and indeed such Frenchmen as have sought profit at the expense of their compatriots—those, for instance, who have denounced the resistant—deserve the extreme punishment. But it is to be feared that many who have been merely weak and some

even of the innocent may be the victims of a justly enraged nation. This may be thought a purely French matter, in which it would be impertinent for an Englishman to interfere ; but I think we are entitled to use any influence we may possess to plead for the most indulgent interpretation that is possible of each individual's behaviour. At the least it is our duty not to throw any further fuel on the flames.

Only very few prominent writers have championed collaboration. The most gifted is Montherlant. He has a beautifully crystalline style, but the creator of Costals must be morally warped as well as humourless. His behaviour therefore is more lamentable than astonishing. The other gifted collaborationist is Drieu la Rochelle, now editor of the *Nouvelle Revue Française*. He has for years been a Fascist and a follower of Doriot. A remarkable novelist—*Une femme à sa fenêtre* I place very high among modern French novels—he has always substituted a sense of elegance for a moral sense. Like Montherlant, he has the intellectual frivolity to regard modern war as a game, and pretends that it is sportsmanlike to accept defeat. I like him personally, and have had violent discussions with him : his view, like that of Yeats, seemed to result from a delusion about the nature of Fascism. But that excuse is no longer valid. Nevertheless, if Montherlant and Drieu la Rochelle are executed, as seems likely, I shall regret it, for I believe them to be disinterested as well as courageous, and no country can afford to lose such gifted artists. Moreover, their attitude is largely the consequence of what they endured at the Front in the last war. Then there is Ramon Fernandez, a thoughtful if rather heavy-fisted critic who was converted from Communism to Fascism before the war ; Chateaubriant, the novelist ; and Céline (whom I believe to be neither disinterested nor sane)—these three were Fascists before the war. The most conspicuous of the recent turncoats are Chardonne, very honourable as a novelist, Abel Bonnard, and Abel Hermant. The last must be senile, but on such evidence as we have none of these three deserves anything but contempt. These, so far as I know, are the only celebrated writers who are open collaborationists, unless we are to include Paul Morand who is serving under Laval.

I cannot over-emphasise the distinction between the enthusiastic collaborators of Paris and the half-hearted collaborators of Vichy. The Paris gang are revolutionary, pagan, plucky, and mentally youthful. The Vichy set are reactionary, cowardly, senile, and conventionally Catholic. They reflect the feebleness of the Marshal, they weep over the sins of France, they resemble the old women in black who collect chair-money in French

churches. Henri Bordeaux and Tharaud in the *Revue Universelle* and a number of less widely read writers follow this line. They are a discredit to France and a danger to the Church.

Of the writers outside France, Bernanos and Maritain are active in their championship of French resistance, as are journalists such as Mme Tabouis, Kerillis, Philippe Barrès and many less well-known persons. André Breton and Jean Wohl have also spoken out. Two writers who are free to make clear their allegiance have disappointed their admirers because they are in America, Jules Romain and André Maurois. Neither of these has made any pro-German declarations, but Romain has produced a book that shocks by its conceit and its remoteness from reality. Maurois, so far as I know, has, at least until a month or two ago, been careful to conceal any sympathy he may have for the Fighting French or for the Allies in general. He is presumably pro-Vichy, Class E or F. I find his attitude rather puzzling. I cannot condemn it as merely ignoble, for it is opposed to his most obvious material interests. A more resistant line would have increased his popularity in America as well as in England. Moreover he must know that in a Fascist France he, as a Jew, can have no future. His oddly reserved attitude is specially regrettable because he is so popular a writer in England, and no one was in a better position to interpret to the English the continuing gallantry and resistance of most Frenchmen. While the prospects of the Allies become more cheerful, we can look forward with some confidence, I think, to the support of M. Maurois.

It is immensely difficult for writers in France to express their hatred of collaboration and their hope of an Allied victory. Not only is courage necessary, but great skill in evading the censorship. Gide, Mauriac, and Aragon have, however, contrived to make their position admirably clear—and any one of these is worth more than all the collaborators put together. For I think it can reasonably be suggested that Gide is the most distinguished of living French writers, Mauriac the best novelist, and Aragon the best poet—except for the aged Claudel. And though Claudel composed an ode to Pétain he has since written a noble letter to the Chief Rabbi of France about the persecution of the Jews. His attitude is said now to be all that his admirers could wish. About the other eminent writers I have little information; but if any had been active in collaboration, I should probably be aware of the fact. It must be emphasised that apparent neutrality amounts to anti-Germanism, for great privileges are attached to collaboration. By supporting Germany, a writer can obtain food for his family, the return of his son from a German prisoners of war camp, or even the release of a Jewish husband from the

inferno of a concentration camp. We can conclude that, with the exceptions I have mentioned, the good writers of France have remained, as indeed one would have expected, faithful to the great traditions of their country and their vocation. Silence spells dissent. A recent number of the *Nouvelle Revue Française* confirms this conclusion. Drieu La Rochelle regrets that he can obtain no contributions from writers who do not share his views, and admits his isolation: "Presque toute l'intelligence française, presque tout le lyrisme français, est contre nous."

It must not be supposed that even the *Nouvelle Revue Française* has been rigorously Nazified. Though the editor has toyed with some vulgar anti-semitism, the great names of Jews and half-Jews such as Einstein, Bergson, Pissarro, and Proust still are mentioned with due honour. Aragon has been attacked, with quotations from his pre-war anti-patriotic writings, but Gide still commands nominal respect. I fear that the frequency of contributions from Jouhandeau suggests that this remarkable writer has thrown in his lot with the pro-Germans, but his scripts are anodyne, and similarly most of the journal is non-political. It has printed letters of Mallarmé, Chabrier, Laforgue, and Apollinaire. The intellectual standard remains high. While Drieu la Rochelle's articles are much the best written and most trenchant of the political sort, Armand Petitjean, one of the younger members of the pre-Armistice N.R.F. team, deserves attention because his views are probably shared by other young intellectuals. He asserts vigorously his patriotic fervour, and at the same time welcomes the German victory because it may precipitate a revolution of the type he desires—which is not the clerical dictatorship of an octogenarian, still less the rule of a Laval who represents the scum of the old Republic. He fancies that Hitler will give Africa to the French because they have had so much experience of that continent! Strange though it must seem to us, the illusion that France has a future in a world controlled by the Axis still flourishes, providing a pitiful excuse for collaborationists who profess to be patriots. The human capacity for self-delusion is unlimited, but in professed intellectuals such hallucinations are unpardonable.

Fortunately at Algiers a new magazine sprang up after the Armistice to take the place of the Germanised N.R.F. This was called *Fontaine*, and though the Vichy censorship prevented any open expression of resistance or any free political discussion, the feelings of the editor were clear. I think nobody was asked to contribute whose patriotism was not above suspicion. I will quote one poem from it, by Eluard, which can be taken to represent the general feeling among French writers.

## BIENTÔT

De tous les printemps du monde  
Celui-ci est le plus laid  
Entre toutes mes façons d'être  
La confiance est la meilleure

L'herbe soulève la neige  
Comme la pierre d'un tombeau  
Moi je dors dans la tempête  
Et je m'éveille les yeux clairs

Le lent le petit temps s'achève  
Où toute rue devait passer  
Par mes plus intimes retraites  
Pour que je rencontre quelqu'un

Je n'entends pas parler les monstres  
Je les connais ils ont tout dit  
Je ne vois que les beaux visages  
Les bons visages sûrs d'eux-mêmes

Sûrs de ruiner bientôt leurs maîtres.

The *Cahiers du Sud* edited at Marseilles is another literary paper of which the spirit has been admirable. Etiemble, Yassu Gaucière, Roger Caillois are among the young writers who have contributed to such papers. And at Buenos Aires there is a resistant, high-brow quarterly called *Lettres Françaises*. Until the occupation of the Vichy zone it was able to obtain contributions from writers in France, including Gide, Malraux, Benda, and Valéry, as well as from those in the Americas such as the admirable Supervielle and St. Jean-Perse. *La France Libre*, published in London, maintains a remarkable intellectual standard, and is of course dedicated to the revival of France.

I have seen too few recent French books to attempt any account of French literature since the Armistice. It is tantalising to come upon criticisms and advertisements of books one cannot obtain, but there is not much by the better-known writers. There have been books of poetry by Eluard, Pierre Emmanuel, Audiberti and Cocteau, a play in verse by Cocteau about Rinaldo and Armida, novels by Colette, Giono, Ramuz, Marcel Aymé, Simenon, and Paul Morand, a book by Giono about Melville, a book by Corbusier, memoirs by Léon Daudet, Léon-Paul Fargue, and Romain Rolland, a book on Taine by his niece Mme St René Tallandier, books on Mallarmé by Charles Mauron and Henri Mondor. Many translations from the German, of course, but

also new translations of works by Chaucer, Shakespeare, Isaac Walton, Synge, Middleton Murry, R. C. Sherriff, E. M. Delafield and Enid McLeod. Fabre-Luce, an intellectual who was already a Fascist before the war and now champions collaboration (Class A), has translated some of the T. E. Lawrence letters. A number of books have appeared about experiences during the war, most of them hasty and ill written, if we are to believe André Thérive, who is an intelligent critic. (Writing in Paris he says that some such books, published in Vichy France, are unknown in the occupied zone—it is hard for us in England to realise how effectively the Germans cut France in two.) I am told that there has been one remarkable novel, *La bête à Concours*, by a new writer, Georges Magnanne, describing the grimness of student life—an unvarnished *Vie de Bohème*. But paper is rationed on the basis of an author's previous circulation, so that young writers receive only a minimum and their books are difficult to obtain. It is to be expected that when the French recover their liberty, there will be a magnificent release of literary vigour.

Everyone I have met arriving from France is agreed that there is a striking revival of interest in poetry, and that much good poetry is being written. The habitual obscurity of contemporary verse facilitates the expression of forbidden patriotic feeling, and the lover of poetry has had a long training to help him penetrate a disguise which would baffle the ordinary censor. Incomparably the best and most moving post-Armistice books I have seen are the two volumes of poetry by Aragon, *Le Crève-Cœur* and *Les Yeux d'Elsa*, the latter published in Switzerland. The former was published in Paris by the *Nouvelle Revue Française* (the publishing house still under Gallimard retains its connection with the review but has not been Nazified), but it was then suppressed in the occupied zone. Too patriotic. It has appeared here thanks to the combined efforts of *Horizon* and *La France Libre*. Aragon has been inspired by the war and the defeat to a large, direct and human lyricism, reminding one not only of Guillaume Apollinaire but of the great French Romantic tradition. These poems speak better than any others not only for the unbroken spirit of France, but for all men in every country who fight for liberty. Let me quote from *Les Yeux d'Elsa* a poem that has not previously appeared in England.

RICHARD COEUR-DE-LION

Si l'univers ressemble à la caserne  
A Tours en France où nous sommes reclus  
Si l'étranger sillonne nos luzernes  
Si le jour aujourd'hui n'en finit plus

## FRENCH WRITERS AND THE WAR

Faut-il garder le compte de chaque heure  
 Haïr moi qui n'avais jamais haï  
 On n'est plus chez soi même dans son cœur  
 O mon pays est-ce bien mon pays

Je ne dois pas regarder l'hirondelle  
 Qui parle au ciel un langage interdit  
 Ni s'en aller le nuage infidèle  
 Ce vieux passeur des rêves de jadis

Je ne dois pas dire ce que je pense  
 Ni murmurer cet air que j'aime tant  
 Il faut redouter même le silence  
 Et le soleil comme le mauvais temps

Ils sont la force et nous sommes le nombre  
 Vous qui souffrez nous nous reconnaissons  
 On aura beau rendre la nuit plus sombre  
 Un prisonnier peut faire une chanson

Une chanson pure comme l'eau fraîche  
 Blanche à la façon du pain d'autrefois  
 Sachant monter au dessus de la crèche  
 Si bien si haut que les bergers la voient

Tous les bergers les marins et les mages  
 Les charretiers les savants les bouchers  
 Les jongleurs de mots les faiseurs d'images  
 Et le troupeau des femmes aux marchés

Les gens du négoce et ceux du trafic  
 Ceux qui font l'acier ceux qui font le drapeau  
 Les grimpeurs de poteaux télégraphiques  
 Et les mineurs noirs chacun l'entra

Tous les Français ressemblent à Blondel  
 Quel que soit le nom dont nous l'appelions  
 La liberté comme un bruissement d'ailes  
 Répond au chant de Richard Coeur-de-Lion

The other writer who has given intensity of expression to his unhappiness and his hopes is Georges Bernanos. Violently Catholic, he had the courage to denounce the Franco atrocities of which he was a witness in Majorca. After Munich he left France in disgust, and his book is published in Brazil, where he has made his home. It is called *Lettres aux Anglais*, but it is to be feared that not many English will read it, for he has taken little account of the audience he pretends to address. The book can be recommended only to those specially interested in France,

and even they are likely to find it repetitive. Yet Bernanos is in my opinion one of the greatest living masters of French prose, and this book is extraordinarily ardent. He uses language like a flame-thrower, and his powers of expression are equal to the prodigious strength of his feelings. He is a modern Tertullian. He upholds with noble fanaticism the claims of the human personality, because he accepts in full the Christian belief in the importance of the individual soul. Bureaucracy and the bourgeoisie are for him the enemies, especially as they present themselves in the pharisaical garb of the *bien pensants*. The oppressive state, whether frankly anti-Christian as in Germany and Russia, or nominally Catholic, as in Spain and Vichy France, he loathes as idolatrous and pagan. Of the Vichy government with its Maurrassian ideology he writes : " Ils violent la France dans le coma, et ils s'imaginent qu'ils lui feront un enfant viable." Again :

Aussi longtemps que je vivrai je répéterai que la défaite morale de mon pays doit être mise au compte de ceux qui étaient les gardiens naturels de sa conscience, et la preuve qu'ils ont failli c'est que nous les voyons exploiter cyniquement cette faillite à leur profit. Le même espèce d'hommes exploitera demain notre victoire. . . .

L'actuelle bourgeoisie française n'est plus guère qu'un carrefour où se rencontrent les transfuges du prolétariat, et qui méprisent la classe dont ils sont sortis. . . .

Hàir qui commande est un sentiment bas, bien que naturel, hélas ! Mais hàir ce qui est au-dessous de soi dénonce une ignoble perversion de l'intelligence et du coeur.

Vous pensez que notre bourgeoisie, à l'exemple de la vôtre, est légitimement issue de l'ancienne, alors qu'elle l'a dévorée comme elle a dévoré toutes les institutions de la monarchie.

The indictment is too general. If M. Bernanos had been in France during the last two years, or even in England, he would have learnt that courage and honour have been common in every French class, except perhaps the Big Business set. But I must quote one more passage :

Ainsi donc, entre tant de ruines, le demi-dieu totalitaire a, du moins, rendu un immense service aux hommes d'Europe : ils savent maintenant ce que c'est qu'un Tyran. Quelques années encore, peut-être, et le mot de révolte n'eût exprimé qu'une simple attitude intellectuelle, presque toujours déformée par le cabotinage. . . . Nous voyons la liberté se dégager peu à peu de ses définitions juridiques ; elle redevient humaine, elle s'incarne, elle est de nouveau la compagne vivante de l'homme.

Of the other French books published outside France the only one I have read with much admiration is Saint-Exupéry's flying novel. It has been published in English under the title *Flight to Arras* but it is better to read it in the French edition published in the United States. The author commands a most distinguished style. The book reveals the state of mind of those French who, knowing that heroism had become useless in front of the German mechanical superiority, nevertheless fought obedient to their orders with undiminished courage. It ends with an affirmation of faith in the future of France. Saint-Exupéry has unluckily not, so far as I can discover, formally dissociated himself from Vichy.

Only a few books from France itself have come my way. I have enjoyed Giraudoux's script for a film based on Balzac's *Duchesse de Langeais*—an enchanting work with all Giraudoux's elegance and poetic wit. (In the preface, I notice, he applauds Chaplin, who is very ill-thought of by the present rulers of France.) Mondor's biography of Mallarmé is informative, thorough and very intelligent. Mauriac's novel *La Pharisiennne*, printed in Canada as well as in Paris, is one of the richest works of this magnificent novelist. It has no reference to the war. Another book published in Canada as well as in Paris contains memoirs about Alphonse Daudet by his son Léon Daudet, the *Action Française* polemist who has died since the Armistice. This is full of fascinating anecdotes and evocations.

A very well-known French novelist who has recently escaped to this country told me that a number of writers preferred to publish nothing in the present circumstances. "They feel disinclined to write about anything except the one feeling predominant in their hearts and brains—and of this they are not allowed to speak." This is confirmed by a quotation on the back of one number of *Fontaine*. It is taken from Charles du Bos, who died before the war, but it is so appropriate that I can imagine no better end to this article :

La France n'a jamais plus beau visage que lorsqu'elle se tait. Sa grandeur est monumentale, bien davantage qu'oratoire ; l'oratoire, l'éloquence, est toujours au contraire son danger. C'est qu'elle a le silence le plus expressif qui soit.

# STANISLAW BALINSKI

## THE LAST MELODY\*

*Translated from the Polish*

ON a day full of unwanted roses,  
When Paris expired like a ghost—  
I ran to the shop at the corner  
To say, before all had been lost,

Goodbye to the French midinette  
With a face as fresh as Maytide  
Who had dreamed that freedom and France  
Were one country, that none could divide.

But I found the shop closed with a padlock,  
Through the window I saw empty gloom,  
In the distance came only the echoing  
March of the Germans like doom.

Someone had torn from a calendar  
Half a leaf as they fled as from fire,  
And with trembling fingers had written :  
*Fermé jusqu'à la Victoire !*

That leaf and its simple inscription  
Pinned there in a silence of tears  
Have haunted me in my wanderings  
And sound like a tune in my ears.

Paris arises behind us  
Like that shop full of phantom desire,  
With the notice, which someone had written :  
*Fermé jusqu'à la Victoire !*

\* Stanislaw Balinski was born in Warsaw, and has been in the Polish Diplomatic Service for many years. He is the author of a number of books of poems and short stories, and his last book in Polish, *The Great Journey*, was published in London.

# NIKOLAI TIKHONOV

## THE APPLE TREE\*

*Translated from the Russian*

IN the shelter the lights went out. It was at once filled with cries and the grating of chairs and benches, and then a loud voice shouted :

"Quiet, comrades, keep calm and sit where you are. There's nothing really wrong."

And so they continued to sit in the pitch darkness. The raid had already lasted for several hours. The artist sat on the folding stool which he used to take with him on his sketching expeditions. This light, three-legged stool of his own construction came in very handy nowadays. The artist lived in a small, one-storied house, one of those many veterans which still stand on the broad streets of the Petrograd district, spared by all the wars and revolutions. The little house had a front garden, and in the garden there was even an old, neglected fountain, with its rusty pipe and moss-covered granite. Now it lay beneath the deep snow, and the last thing the artist thought of at this moment was the house, the garden and the fountain.

His mind vaguely registered the conversation of his neighbours, the exclamations of horror and astonishment, the weeping of children, the creaking of the door. The black, solid murk enveloped him from head to foot like a cloak.

"I ought to have gone away from Leningrad long ago," a voice said in irritation. "Yes," the artist thought to himself, "How silly it was of me not to have gone away too." There would have been nothing cowardly about it. He was now designing posters, posters that were very popular ; they were displayed in the streets, in clubs and dug-outs at the front. That was all true. But it was not at all essential that he should do them in Leningrad. What was more, conditions had become such that it was almost impossible to work. It was cold in his studio, his frozen fingers could scarcely hold a pencil, the tiny stove hardly emitted any heat and there was no way of warming himself. Naturally, there was no shelter in his little house, and each time he had to run to the large neighbouring building and sit for long hours in its cellar. He had caught cold, he was weary and was

\* Nikolai Tikhonov is one of the most original of the middle generation of Soviet Russian authors. He was born in 1896, and fought in both the Great War and the Civil War. He is a great traveller and has written both poems and short stories about many of the wilder parts of the Soviet Union.

coughing badly, and he had not had a square meal for ever so long. He felt twinges of rheumatism or something like it. He found it difficult to walk the long distance from his home to the Artists' Club ; the street cars were not running. And now the lights had gone out. Yet he had been told that he had only to travel to the Volga, and there he would find lighted towns, warm rooms and abundant food. There his colleagues were living who had left in time. . . . Yes, how silly it was to be sitting here in the dark, cold and hungry, and to wait for the bombs to fall on one's head.

From time to time the house shook from top to bottom : everybody fell silent, and then for several minutes wild pandemonium reigned. Then gradually calm was restored. The blackness seemed to be growing thicker. The artist lost all sense of time. He had come to the shelter in the evening ; now it must already be very late. The raid was dragging out abominably. Again the thud of an explosion, and again, and again. . . . " They are dropping bombs," he thought drearily. How the city he loved had changed ! It was painful to think of, it almost brought tears to one's eyes. How sad and miserable it all was. Soon the alarm would be over, the all clear would be given ; he would emerge into the street and perhaps he would see the fresh ruins of houses, fires, and piles of shattered fragments. . . . Oh, those apartments, with beds and clothes cupboards hanging in the air, caught in the beams, and portraits on the stark exposed walls—pitiful relics of this unstable, casual human life ! . . .

An unseen child whimpered in the corner. Through the murk, the artist tried to picture that childish head with the wide-open eyes full of tears. Perhaps it had been sleeping and had awakened, and had begun to cry from terror in the darkness. Should he paint a picture of a shelter, one like this say, only illuminated by candles ? The trembling flames flickering on the faces, the black shadows on the walls, the taut anxious figures, the old women wrapped in worn winter coats, the young people whispering in the corner, the infants clasped to the breasts of young mothers. . . .

How difficult it was, he thought, for an artist to be equal to these extraordinary times. The great masters of the past would have fearlessly depicted all the gloom and grandeur of the epoch. Goya would have drawn Leningrad with a bold and firm hand, and would have signed his sketches as he did over a hundred years ago : " This I saw . . . "

A light flared on the staircase, and through the open doors came the sound of the all clear. The raid was over at last.

The artist made no effort to hurry. He waited until the dark,

solid crowd had been absorbed by the narrow exit and was one of the last to leave, groping his way along the cold walls.

He was afraid that ruins would meet his eye as soon as he emerged into the street. He thought of how he would make his way, stumbling, to his little house which was only a few paces away.

As he came out into the street he stopped in amazement and confusion.

Everything was bathed in the mighty, dazzling, light of the moon, which hung, almost violet in colour, in the frosty haze above the house walls, high in the greenish-blue sky, which was studded with white fleecy clouds that looked like a flock of sheep. The sky seemed to be ringing with cold and light. The blank walls of the high houses looking on to a piece of waste ground seemed built of bronze. The snow crunched softly underfoot. Blue velvety shadows lay on the snowdrifts piled high along the street, which, always so commonplace, now gleamed with an unknown splendour.

He strode towards his house, and could scarcely recognise it. He found himself in a garden that was as fantastic as a dream. The trees were covered with hoarfrost three fingers thick. Every twig seemed to have been picked out by a master hand, and sparkled, radiating a soft iridescence. Strange lights flickered in the summits of the trees, where the snow lay like caps of ermine. It was as if the trees were clad for some solemn dance and would soon break into a stately measure around the artist, joining hands and scattering emeralds all around.

In the middle of this miraculous garden stood a tree of enchanting beauty. On it, all that adorned the other trees—the tinsel, the radiance, the spangles and the emeralds—was multiplied. And on it everything attained a perfection which it was beyond the power of human skill to create. The tree burned in a cold and wonderful light; like a white bonfire, it threw off snowy flames, and never for a moment did those flames cease their iridescent play.

The artist stood amazed, lost in dumb contemplation. He did not recognise the spot and could not understand how he had arrived in this garden, or where he was at all.

He glanced around him. He heard the gay laughter of young people as their feet crunched the snow down the street. He took off his fur cap and stood for a moment with closed eyes. Then his senses returned to him. As he opened his eyes he seemed to have come back to earth. He was in his own garden and walking straight to the fountain covered with snow. How had he passed the fence surrounding the garden? The fence had

disappeared. The powerful blast of an explosion had carried it away and dropped it far down the street, stripping off its old and rotting boards. The tree of dazzling beauty was his old familiar apple tree, which always stood modestly near the fountain. Here, too, stood his house, dark and quiet in the midnight.

He looked round and saw the city bathed in the bewitching light of the violet moon. The splendid city rose up around him in unspeakable and inimitable beauty.

The artist gazed at it as if he had been born anew. All the gloomy thoughts that had irritated him there in the shelter disappeared. He suddenly knew that he could never abandon Leningrad until the enemy had been driven from its gates. This amazing world of such beauty, of such heroic labour and sacrifice was too precious to him. And the artist stood and stared, and there was no end to his wondering delight and pride.

## VÍTĚZSLAV NEZVAL

### HISTORICAL PICTURE\*

*Translated from the Czech by Norman Cameron and Jiří Mucha*

WHILST the crowd continually shifts along the streets<sup>1</sup>  
Empty features mirroring the lamp posts hollow struts  
Over the laments from town to town a voice orates

Night's umbrella rises over hands together clasping  
Pitchy wreaths of mingled stars and rain come downward slipping  
All the bells in all the towns the angelus are lipping

A monotonous and silent voice makes ceaseless prayer  
To the crowds that in their hurry stop and peer  
Up the darkened alleys though the rain and anguish pour

Heads of women that the rain has moulded like a clout  
Heads of city women tightly huddled to a clot  
Hear with dread the voice that prays unto no paraclete

\* This poem, by a famous Czech poet, was written in German-occupied Czechoslovakia and published in Prague in 1940. Its theme in its first part (verses 1 to 35) is largely the German occupation in the spring of 1939, and in its second part (verses 35 to the end) the handing-over of Czechoslovakia to the Third Reich at Munich in the autumn of 1938. In the published original the change is signalled by a subtle quickening of the metre, but no break is indicated by spacing between the two parts, whose reversal in chronology is typical of Nezval's poetical methods. The publication in this country of the poem itself and the following translation was undertaken without the author's knowledge.

Whilst somewhere a message goes by galloping night-rider  
Whilst the gates shut to behind the envious marauder  
Whilst afar the rifle-bolt rings out surrender render

Whilst the sun sets and the strains of the Hail Mary steer  
Through the city a procession headed by a star  
To the roar of angry organs in the rain astir

Whilst a golden-headed woman silently discourses  
With the enigmatic ghost beneath the lit-up crosses  
Still disaster closes closes closes closes closes

In the ancient inn that history long since forsook  
Where no mercenary sleeps now on a straw-stuffed sack  
In the mediaeval inn with timbers grimed by smoke

From the oven-hole another voice begins to scoff  
Reservoir and dyke are broken Nobody is safe  
Save yourself each one who can yourself yourself yourself<sup>2</sup>

Whilst the heavy heads of the companions sink and tremble  
Heads of veterans each head bowed down with weight and trouble  
See a shaggy hand lifts crosses over the card-table

Like the thief abroad the wind has struck the candles blind  
Through the inn the doors lock of themselves The birds are limec  
thirty basses hoarsely utter land our land our land

From the stables suddenly there comes the muffled clank  
Of a troop of horsemen Hooves and bridles click and clink  
Glasses glasses calls the landlord twelve o'clock o'clock

Heads of veterans each head as heavy as an iron casque  
Heads on the oak tables heads that meditations cark  
Hear the din of spinning-wheels<sup>3</sup> aroar and bolts acreak

After midnight with their locks aflutter on the stairs  
They can hear like corpses rotting under evil stars  
Daughters and descendants screaming to their ancestors

Since the dawn the bells have tolled above the black tail-coats  
Over flag-poles tugging at the clouds with their regrets  
Children by the locked-up school no longer fly their kites

Children clutch their dogs and cower in dread they cower  
At the sight of their own fathers dressed all black and queer  
This day is the day when wounds are difficult to cure

This day is the day when illnesses take graver turns  
'Midst a dirge that's sung to kneeling villages and towns  
Dogs and old men prick their ears to danger's overtones

Whilst a messenger who gallops on a sweating beast  
Grunts head fallen forward till his chin is on his breast  
One year past just one year past just one year past year past

Since the dawn in all cathedrals organs have been snarling  
At the founder's grave a sable cloud of grief is kneeling  
And the bell is knelling knelling knelling knelling knelling

Wound unspeakable this anniversary of wound  
Women's eyes are wet and old men's faces drawn and wanned  
Birdless weathervanes are turning where there is no wind

This day is the day when a new messenger takes rein  
Messenger whose hair is grey and utterance a groan  
Ruin ruin ruin ruin ruin ruin ruin

From the depths of night a portal's turning hinges wail  
And a muffled tenor shouts beneath the castle wall  
But the sentry answers silence silence sleep all's well

Afterwards the bolt upon the portal creaks and stirs  
In a mask the night-time prowler hastens up the stairs  
As the churches' clocks are chiming five upon the towers

Every sentry grasps his firelock in an anxious fist  
Cocking half an eye towards the castle's central fort  
Each one mutters to himself let's fight let's fight let's fight

In deep night before the gate six ruffians have bawled  
Filthy curses at the raven that has croaked abroad  
Things look bad look bad look bad look bad look bad look bad

Somewhere a hand vainly clenches in a frantic grip  
From a mouth that hardly speaks for pain the two words drop  
Over and again a trap a trap a trap a trap

On the staircase the accursed shadows reel in swoons

Like conspirators beneath the weight of their own sins  
With the words his blood on us on us and on our sons

Now already in the city squares the people cram  
Whilst the speaking-trumpet<sup>4</sup> begs them calm be calm be calm  
Just be quiet and disperse you see it had to come

Through the crowd from mouth to mouth dismaying rumours whirl  
Fists are brandished from amongst the thousands toe to heel  
Someone's strangled throat is calling hail all hail all hail

This becomes a cry that like a started night-owl flits  
Past the open window and the candle-flame that floats  
In a haze of tears from eyelids like pale violets

In the barns the harvest is locked up with seven locks  
Winter crops are scarce in fields that no man overlooks  
Dusky fields on which the curse of someone nameless lurks

Crowds assemble round a voice that calls to them like chicks  
Gather and disperse with hanging heads and burning cheeks  
Fleeing from the voice that calls to them O Czechs O Czechs

Now they pass into a wakeful sleep with foreheads drooped  
On wood settles stained where candle-wax and tears have dripped  
Whilst a wailing from the sleepers' throats tells what they dreamt

On the walls decaying crosses crumble into flakes  
Crosses at whose open wounds the tongue of morning licks  
Nodding heads depressed by their own weight sink and relax

This day is a day that since the dawn has been bespelled  
In the shops on such a day the curtains are not pulled  
Soon beware upon our midst the comet will be spilled

Wives are busy changing-over wicks in all the lamps  
On their husbands' uniforms they're ironing the loops  
Sisters fit the masks around their younger brothers' lips

Fires are smouldering in barrels of the pointing guns  
Smouldering awhile before the final blaze begins  
In the black gun-barrels of the aimed and pointing guns

This day is a day when people do not lock their doors

Waiting as if midnight called them out to secret tours  
This day is a day that's not for laughter or for tears

Men move in the streets like actors in a silent scene  
Only with their hands exchanging gestures few discern  
This day is the coming-true of every secret sign

The insistant signal of the harp calls folk from slumber<sup>5</sup>  
In the darkness flails and Hussite dirks and lances glimmer  
The terrific comet nears watch over us Redeemer

From the speaking-trumpet once again the password's clanging  
Men are leaving wives and grandams to their armchairs clinging  
Up above the darkened town a vaulted sky is climbing

In the darkness men are folding up their dreadful gear  
Linen still exhaling scents of soap and lavender  
Saying as they leave this is the hour the hour the hour

On the dreadful hush a multitude in movement breaks  
Feet are leaping into stirrups over saddles over brooks  
Men to-day recall the prophecies in ancient books<sup>6</sup>

In dead towns beneath the stars is heard a voice of woe  
Ah my God how long a road my God how long a way  
Or a secret whisper only war war war war war

Now they bar the windows with black paper-strips and paste  
Bluish lamps grow pale beneath the sky's bright palimpsest  
And a bat and after it another bat glides past

Little lamps are flickering between the carriage-wheels  
Horses' hooves like jack-o'-lanterns scare the dogs to wails  
Dogs are wailing at the planets wailing at the owls

In the hush one hears the water stir behind the tap  
Creaking of a turning key or creaking of a step  
Strangers on their way to death salute and do not stop

In the darkened houses where the bluish lighting winks  
Broken families reform their decimated ranks  
On this night the combs again begin to give off sparks

On this night the stars again absorb the pristine glamour

Of the new-made universe laid out before its framer  
On this strangled night of stars this night of late September

Towns to-night are filled with howling of the dogs the strays  
That from woody mountain hamlets tracked their masters' spoors  
Dogs that howled on village greens howl in the city squares

Through the lightless town a woman searches everywhere  
After someone who by more than name was known to her  
Through the stone-pale night she wanders with her golden hair

Vainly signing to the phantom of a coach that passes  
Vainly signing to the dogs whose howling never pauses  
Vainly signing to the clocks from which the midnight pulses

Now a row of houses seems to reel and overturn  
Through the ruined kitchens and the roots of trees upturn  
She pursues the coachman to the quarry by the town

Running past the brick-kilns and across the hills afar  
With a crowd of terrible companions to her fear  
Hiding in the haystacks that the stars have set afire

Running like a maniac through villages and barns  
Running from the image of destruction in her brains  
Running with a torch of hair that burns and burns and burns

God why have you brought upon Your Nazareth this trouble?  
Whilst our sisters keep the hospitals the cards will tumble  
Brothers to decide your fate upon a green baize table

Innocent and guilty all alike shall be condemned  
You have no recourse against a verdict preordained  
Winds are shuffling through the cards whose issue is foredoomed

Here's the end of tourneys and Olympic festivals  
Gnashing teeth can't stop the dreadful creaking of the quills  
That shall bring unheard-of sadness on the land of Wales

Still monotonously creaking runs each rusty pen  
Brothers all our country's ancient honour is in pawn  
You have formed your battle lines in vain in vain in vain

Your historic raven croaks again you have been warned

Thrice the man has wept aloud and thrice the woman swooned  
Woe upon the traitor in whose toils you have been wound

You should seek in vain the rogue who led you thus astray  
Hanged beneath the tree of night upon the gallows-tree  
'Tis a ghost who weeps not for his bloody sophistry

'Tis a ghost who at this hour is making a good meal  
Of applause for his sweet farce that made the war-gods smile  
He is bringing home his laurels seated on a mule

From the fields the roughly hooded heavy wagons rumble  
They are straggling back with lamps extinguished in a rabble  
Drinkers curse and thump the beer-drenched tables till they  
tremble

Underneath the hoods the company with shame half-wild  
Waits whilst elsewhere and by someone else its fate is willed  
Hush young nomads this is not the end of all the world

In the streets the tramped mud begins to spurt and boil  
Like the blood where now they're busy slaughtering the bull  
Even the beggar swallows down his quid in a tight ball

Vainly now the crowd gathers round the voice that calls its chick  
Gather and disperse with hanging heads and burning cheeks  
Fleeing from the voice that calls to them O Czechs O Czechs

Vainly now the fists are brandished from a thousand sleeves  
Vainly now in every square they gather in conclaves  
'Tis the end of hope the end the end of all one loves

Whilst across the land the evening throws a dusky crimson  
Hidden voices call towards the desolate horizon  
Treason treason treason treason treason treason treason

Horses without masters now along the streets are roving  
Horses with their stable doors left open for the reiving  
Wander to the fields to hear the croaking of the raven

Other horses in their stalls prick up their ears and sidle  
At the touch of trembling hands that fasten on the saddle  
For the last time they shall see the land that was their cradle

Village streets take on the semblance of a market-fair

Tears of the departing exiles fall upon the dead hearth-fire  
As they lead their children off in search of homes afar

That's the end now of a human grief that's had no peer  
Through a land without a flag the chilly breezes pour  
On the tears of people who have learnt what is despair

Regiments without their flags or arms or discipline  
Straggle back across the moribund September plain  
That's the end of every grief the end of every plan

Ancient glory comes back home upon the killer's shield  
Haughty teeth dig into lips The father with a chilled  
Last embrace upon this day casts arms about his child

Soon his voice drowns in the whispers of his living tomb  
Whilst a nation's folk are asking what will come of them  
And the echo answers time and time and time and time

<sup>1</sup> In the autumn of 1938 spontaneously formed processions moved through Prague to the Castle, in silent demonstration against the Munich settlement.

<sup>2</sup> Threatening broadcasts in Czech were put out by the German wireless, and the threats were spread around by a few Czech traitors. In Czech the "voice from the oven-hole" is the voice of the mischief-maker.

<sup>3</sup> In Czechoslovakia the spinning-wheel is a commonly used cryptogram for the ancient rights of the Czech Crown, which, according to an old saying, were a heritage by the sword and by the spinning-wheel, that is, hereditary by both men and women of the royal family.

<sup>4</sup> In mediaeval times news, etc., were disseminated to a town by a speaking-trumpet on the castle wall. When the German troops entered Prague, wireless amplifiers called on the people to be orderly.

<sup>5</sup> i.e., the Prague wireless signal, late at night, on September 24th, 1938, preceded the order for general mobilisation.

<sup>6</sup> In the autumn of 1938, a prophecy was being widely repeated in Czechoslovakia, of a terrible war in which the rivers would be swollen with blood and the country would be saved in its darkest hour by the Knights of the Mountain Blanik, who would ride out, led by St. Wenceslas on a white horse.



## THEATRE AND BALLET



# WILLIAM CHAPPELL

### DEVELOPMENT OF THE BALLET\*

THE curtain rises and reveals the scene : the moonlit glades of *Les Sylphides* ; the Russian fair of *Petrouchka* ; the haunting, luminous tableaux of *Apparitions*.

The performer, glimpsing from beneath a lifted arm—a crescent with curled fingers—that vast body beyond the dazzle of the footlights, that hydra headed creature, with a thousand eyes intent on his every movement, may wonder how much it understands of what it is seeing. Does it realise, the hydra head, what has gone before to produce the ballet it is watching? Does it see there the adumbrations of the ballet's future? The adumbrations of next year, the year after, ten years hence?

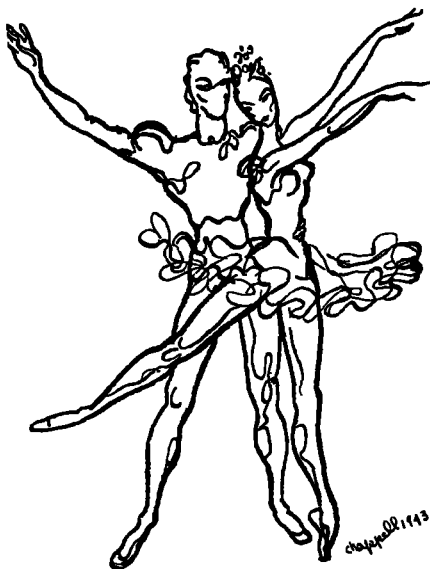
There are, of course, the obvious pictorial qualities that the whole audience mentally receives in the same manner. These are the legs of the dancers, delicate as antennæ or the stamens of flowers, yet strong as steel, and hard as iron. The white ballet skirts, the hooped ball dresses, the ruffled plates of the tutus. The elaborate painting of eyes and lips. The leaps, the pirouettes, the glissades, and entrechat. Every one of the effortless movements that make the ballet performance something unreal, so many hours of escape into a dream world.

This quality of unreality which is one of the greatest enchantments of the ballet is, at the same time, a potentially self-destructive element, that can easily send it drifting away out of sight, far from its rightful place in the theatre. It will not be safely anchored in that place until criticism, appreciation, and understanding, have been properly adjusted. Meanwhile the public, drugged by heaven knows what mysterious visions, are busy setting each ballet away by itself on a small floating island of false exoticism, the best side by side with the worst ; for, in their determination to wrest the same amount of beauty and satisfaction from every dancer and every ballet, they are losing all discrimination. They are forgetting there is a logical culmination to be found in the trend of the choreographer's invention, and they do not stop to wonder what will be the final theatrical significance of each important new work that is produced.

Until the audiences, the writers, and the critics, can arrive at a

\* William Chappell was one of the principal dancers at the Sadlers Wells and designed the décor for several of their ballets. He has been in the Army for two years.

proper understanding of the ballet's place in the theatre it will not become, as it should, a natural part of national entertainment, as usual and satisfactory as Shakespeare. Instead, there will continue to be the false periods of prosperity when the whole world is, willy-nilly, "mad" about the ballet; followed by equally false periods when there is no interest whatsoever shown in it.



Classical *pas-de-deux*: the essential is the elegant, clean line, and the distinctly opposed roles of the male dancer and the ballerina

The ballet must become more common; but not commonplace. Common in the sense of being an everyday part of the best theatre, but not commonplace in seeking to please that inspiration-destroying force, the Box Office, a monster that can, and will, turn and destroy its too ardent worshippers. A knowledge of the important part the choreographer can play, in strengthening almost every aspect of creative theatrical production, is badly needed. This knowledge will help to bring a more correct and balanced mode of thought about the ballet, seeing it as a theatrical force, rather than an exotic art. It might also help to break down the revolting edifice, fashioned from adulation and sentimental hysteria that has been built up round the ballet by its fans in the last ten years.

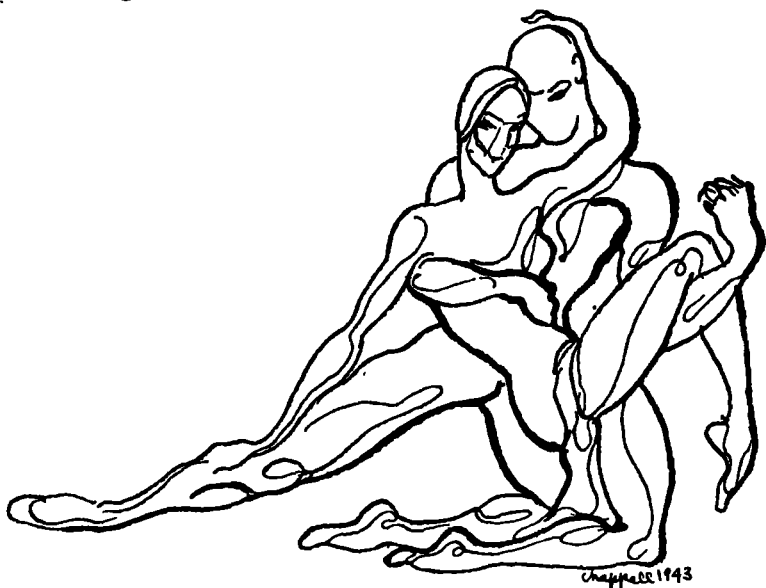
To find this knowledge, it is necessary to turn back to the first Diaghilev period, and trace the changes and developments, that

have to-day brought this branch of theatre art to a place where two roads lie open before it.

It is also necessary to try and realise the comprehensive quality of the ballet as theatre, comprehensive in that it blends, more naturally than any other form of entertainment, painting, acting, music and dancing.

Looking back on the structure of the ballet over the last thirty years, I see it as a necklace made with wonderful craftsmanship, and yet, irregular in its design.

At one end, the setting is elaborate, and barbaric in shape. The stones are opaque, of strong definite colours. This part of the jewel is *Scheherazade*, *Prince Igor*, *Thamar*, *Petrouchka*, *The Sleeping Princess*, by Bakst, *The Fire Bird*, *The Midnight Sun*. The pre-Great War cycle of choreography in which Fokine was dominating the scene.



*Pas-de-deux* of to-day : a complicated pattern made from the dancers' bodies, with no sharp distinction between the male and female roles

The centre of the necklace, that portion which usually holds the largest and most important jewels, and has the heaviest setting, is here, strangely fine. The setting almost invisible, the stones pale, sharply glittering, semi-precious jewels; carved crystals, aquamarines and moonstones, arranged in minute and angular patterns. This represents *Les Biches*, *Zephyr* and *Flora*,

*The Cat*, *Romeo and Juliet*, all the creations of the post-war period, one of the most evolutionary the ballet has ever known.

From this point, the necklace becomes splendid again ; but with a different splendour. There is more order, a more classic shape in the design, and with it, something new in the juxtaposition of the jewels. What remarkable jewels they are, having a depth and light that few of the others possess. This third and final fragment is the ballets of the 'thirties and 'forties. The necklace is practically complete. The circle is almost made. It needs one thing. The perfect clasp, that will join and make harmonious yesterday, to-day and to-morrow.

Examining this valuable work of art, it would be wise to ponder, for a time, over the intricacies of the central section, for, it is here, in the post-war ballets that we can find the real link between *Cleopatra* and *Jeux d'Enfants* ; between *Spectre de la Rose* and *Nocturne* ; between *The Good-Humoured Ladies* and *The Rake's Progress*.

The ballets of the nineteen-twenties were the real breeding ground and the direct reason for, the shape and style of the best work done to-day.

Many of the present-time audiences have never heard of them. To the more knowledgeable, and to those who saw them, they are only ghosts.

*Petrouchka*, *Prince Igor*, *Les Sylphides*, and *La Boutique Fantasque* still hold their place in the repertories ; but *Les Biches* and its contemporaries are dead. In spite of the short time they existed, they did more to perfect ballet than any of the immortal and established favourites. That this should be so of the work belonging to a period in dancing that has been labelled " effete," " amusing," " decadent " and even—most damning and dangerous of all—" chic," may seem incredible. Yet this epoch, though on the surface it had an air of sterility, was excessively fecund, and proved to be the beginning of a renewed vigour in an art that might easily have become old-fashioned and repetitive.

In the years immediately preceding the last war, the descent of the Russians from East to West in a cloud of colour, with unheard-of vitality, flashing eyes, beautiful bodies, and a shocking vivacity of expression, must have been a thing at which to marvel. It was a period of pure dancing. The mime, handed down from the days of Petipa and Ivanov, was still slightly unreal. Although it had escaped the set gestures, the traditional poses, and was expressed in wide beautiful movement, it was far removed from life. This was of no importance. The ballet was exultantly alive, and for its time that was sufficient. A climax of splendour and superb dancing made a fitting swan-song to this phase, in the

Diaghilev production of *The Sleeping Princess* at the 'Alhambra, London.

This was ballet produced on a scale that has never been achieved since. The cast was laden down with ballerinas. The ballerinas were laden down by Bakst at his most decorative, and the whole thing was a magnificent failure.

It was not because the audience had grown tired. It was because the change that was to alter the whole tendency of ballet design had begun to take place. There had been an upheaval in the minds of all thinking artists, an upheaval brought about by a force which it is difficult to define. Whether it came from without, and was part of the world atmosphere, the tragi-comic tone of the post-war years, whether it was from within like a need for something totally dissimilar from what has gone before, that assails a person recovering from a terrible sickness—it is impossible to say.

Nevertheless, there was a convulsive movement, in which the writers, poets, painters, musicians, and choreographers, turned away from the romantics of the pre-war world, and started to gaze—a little sideways, for people at this time were not anxious to look too directly at anything—towards where they seemed to see another universe. A wide, empty plain with a mirage shimmer, far off, on the horizon. The pale earth spotted with plants and trees that bore oddly shaped flowers.

This landscape, that they glimpsed from out of the corners of their eyes, appeared the perfect scene in which they could create. For four years, the air of the world they knew had been so heavy with the scent of death that it was difficult to breathe. It had been wracked by so many larger-than-life-size emotions that now anything resembling the obvious in thought, sound, or colour disgusted them.

So they took the first steps that led towards the heart of this newly discovered country.

The masterpiece of this period, the ballet that was to have the most far-reaching effect, appeared in Nijinska's *Les Biches*. A work in which style meant everything, it belonged completely to the new world of art, and was to be the forerunner of the nineteen-twenty cycle of choreography.

This "House Party" where nothing was stated, and everything was suggested, where each gesture was a question, every look an invitation to nothing at all, was a vivid reflection of an attitude of mind, an outlook, that was exclusive to the nineteen-twenties, and gave them a "period" atmosphere as strongly stylised as Edwardian days, or the 'nineties.

This outlook that skimmed the transparent surface of the mind,

suddenly diving like a water bird, and bringing to the surface a thought, odd as an insect ; that set store by the unusual in shape, sound, and line ; that loved the slight, the unexpected, and the most delicate ideas ; that laughed at itself before anyone else had the chance to smile, and set the witty freakish gesture high above the solid and praiseworthy—this attitude was all



Classical group : the pyramidal effect is achieved in a regular, formal pattern

intellect, absorbed in the complexities of thoughts that people hardly knew existed.

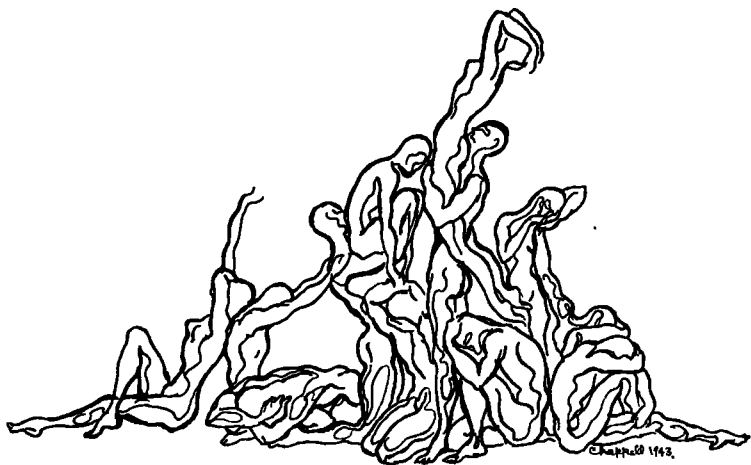
Every mind in the ballet world was working in the same direction, and in *Les Biches*, the Laurençin decor, the Nijinska choreography, the single ostrich plume that sprang from the brows of the *corps de ballet*, the white-gloved hands of Nemchinova were as one conception. Each a perfect expression of the limpid unanswerable queries of the Poulenc score. This mental approach symptomatic of the change that was creeping across the ballet scene made these works so particularly part of their own time that they could not live beyond it.

A ballet is the most evanescent form of creative work. Not possessing the durability of a painting, a book, a piece of sculpture, or a building, it can only be kept alive by the mind, for a universally satisfactory dance notation has not yet been invented. Like a folk tale, a ballet is passed from lip to lip, ear to ear, eye to eye, by speech and gesture.

In the nineteen-twenties the musical world was in a ferment,

undergoing one of its periodical upheavals. Painters were experimenting in every direction. The choreographers were going to extremes, to find different shapes into which they could twist the plastic bodies of the dancers. Artists were only interested in seeking out something fresh. Suggestion was the ideal, never definition. And if few words were to be used to express many ideas those words must be particularly carefully chosen. The result of this fastidious care gave these ballets of the mind a very perfect style. The Ballet had lived for one period. The Ballet had thought for one period. Neither of these was sufficient in itself and the moment was due, when life and thought were to mingle. Before this came about, there was to be a stillness that would seem, at the time, final as death. In reality it was only a slumber, deep and enchanted as Aurora's in *The Sleeping Princess*. When it rose again from its trance, it rose with an added beauty, a deeper light in the eyes that had seen wonderful dreams behind the closed lids.

At the close of this phase in the ballet's maturing, small indications of its final development were apparent. They were



Modern group : the pyramidal effect is the same, but the dancers' bodies are arranged in a more irregular and expressive pattern

most noticeable in the work of Georges Balanchine who was then chief choreographer to the Diaghilev company. His ballets had shown from the beginning a rich invention, a gift for unusual and beautiful movement, and a capacity for creating a disturbing atmosphere that was to be more fully exploited in the 'thirties

when he produced *Cotillons*, one of the most romantic and enchanting of the new ballets. Earlier, in the opening movements of *Apollo Musagetes*, in the emotional style of his *pas de deux*, the dramatic climax of *Le Fils Prodigue*, and his use of a singing chorus in *Barabau*, he was revealing his awareness of the wide scope of the ballet. The Diaghilev Company was reaching the end of its long career. The rocket flare of invention that had burst at the commencement of the nineteen-twenties was beginning to burn a little erratically.

The search for novelty had grown feverish. Many of the ballets were failing to make their effects by striving overhard to achieve them. The mirror was being held too near the obvious aspects of modern life. Ballets on industry—*Pas d'Acier*—ballets about film stars—*Pastorale*—were weak and uninspired. They had an air of effort.

The culmination of Nijinska's work for Diaghilev came in her simple, and deeply moving, *Les Noces*. Although it appeared a far cry from the elegant mockery of *Les Biches*, it was, in fact, the natural maturing of the mental approach that had been brought to the ballet with the opening of this middle period of its development.

Towards the end of the 'twenties Nijinska and Massine were in Paris forming a company for Ida Rubinstein, actress mime, the exquisite Cleopatra of the early Russian Ballet days. When rehearsals commenced the prospect promised plenty of interest, with the two great choreographers in charge. There were new works by Stravinsky, Ravel, Sauguet, and Auric. Classic composers orchestrated by Honegger and Milhaud. Decor by Benois, unlimited money, and a full symphony orchestra. It proved to be a gorgeous, ungainly bird, whose plumage was so rich that its weak wings could never lift it from the earth. The list of illustrious names associated with its formation gave this company none of the vivid life that might have been expected. It was an odd freak of theatre that in all the work it produced, nothing of any importance was seen. It might have been assembled, with all the attendant trouble and expense, for the sole purpose of bringing to life five of the best dancers and one of the most notable choreographers of to-day.

By doing this its existence was justified. As a creative unit it had practically no justification, for it lacked the impact of the early Russian ballets, and showed only glimpses of the invention of the middle period.

Both Massine and Nijinska designed as though they were smothered. Their leading dancers were capable and uninteresting, and the mysterious eyelids, and elegant, strange line of

the prima ballerina Mme. Rubinstein, were out of place in a ballet dress.

The productions were overburdened by the huge scholarly sets of Benois, and by the elaborate old-fashioned costumes.

The interest—for those with prophetic vision—was centred in a small group in the *corps de ballet*. A group that consisted of Nina Verchinina, Jasinsky, Shabelevsky, Lichine, a brilliant American dancer Arthur Mahoney, and Frederick Ashton. Had any of our writers and critics of the ballet been present in those days at a rehearsal or a class in the Salle Hoche on the Avenue Hoche, in Paris, it is interesting to wonder if they would have singled out those six figures in the darned woollen tights from the crowd of young dancers who sprang across the room, repeating again and again the complicated rhythms of Nijinska's steps—or stood, grouped about her with respectful expressions, whilst she explained the theory of her brother's magical elevation. The drawing-in of the breath on the upward movement, the holding of the breath at the highest point of the leap, the slow release on the descent.

Of the six names that have been mentioned, the dancing qualities belonging to the first five were fairly obvious. With Ashton—although his deep appreciation of Nijinska's style made him a good exponent—it would have been necessary to know him, and to see his single-minded purpose at this time, to realise that the year he spent with the Rubinstein company was a part of the logical development of choreographic production.

It was as though he were subconsciously aware of the part he had to play later in helping to lead the progress of the ballet, and there is little doubt that this tour of the opera houses of Europe—The Scala, the San Carlo, the Vienna and Paris Operas, the theatre at Monte Carlo so imbued with associations of the great past of the ballet—was the real starting-off point of his career.

The death of Sergei Diaghilev came as an overwhelming blow. The onlookers, and its creators themselves, saw the ballet world disintegrate before them. Dancers and choreographers were scattered indiscriminately, into revues, musical plays, small companies, and distant theatres in South America. The public appeared to lose interest. Ballet, people said, was finished. Not to be thought of without its galas and symphony orchestras, its startling novelties, and crowd of exotic foreign dancers. The Russians broke up and vanished. Ashton returned to England to work with Marie Rambert. There was no ballet. Only the seeds of a third and final flowering were germinating, and were soon to be noticed as strong plants thriving in several unexpected places.

To cover fully every shade of the progression of this last move-

ment, which gave us the ballet that we know to-day, would fill a large volume. Here, only the barest outline can be shown of the vast slow transfiguration that took place over a number of years. A transfiguration brought about by the way of the life of the world ; the mysterious promptings that stir in the mind of creative genius ; the rich decay of the dead work fertilising the products of to-day.

The difference in form was at first so slight that it passed unnoticed. It was present mainly in a leaning towards a form of choreography that showed a need to embrace every other branch of theatrical art. Ballet is a form of stage production that has always been too wide in scope to be kept within a limit. A too specialised approach, and too circumscribed a boundary, helped to assist in its apparent collapse at the death of Diaghilev, whom the public had appointed sole guardian of its past, present and future. The danger that is ever present in the shape of the audience's preoccupation with the dream qualities of the ballet was very real at that time, and even more apparent than it is now. This preoccupation, that places ballet, apart from theatre proper, in a separate province of its own, was and still is doing it a real injury. Only an understanding of the choreographer's possibilities as one of the dominating theatrical factors of to-day can save it from another collapse. A brief survey of the work of the late twenties, the thirties, and the ballets produced since the outbreak of World War II, will show how the natural need of the ballet to express itself completely by fulfilling every demand of real theatre, has been striving to make itself felt.

To reach back to the roots, we should, perhaps, examine the masques of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the ballets of the nineteenth century, Greek plays, and the folk dancing of all countries. The canvas of the ballet of the last thirty years alone, is so large, and so filled with detail impossible to tabulate in a short article, that it must suffice to mention the most obvious examples that catch the eye.

Works important as artistic creations, but having no particular bearing on the subject in hand, may have to be ignored, and subjects of great interest, such as the choreography of Nijinsky, merely glossed over. His insight was beyond the knowledge of his time, and his work was seen, long before it could be realised as part of the general development. *Sacre du Printemps*, *L'après Midi d'un Faune*, and *Jeux*, were born out of their place. Their suggestion of the elemental forces of life was the voice of a prophet crying out of events that were to come.

Between the death of Diaghilev, and the re-awakening of the ballet a gulf had to be spanned.

In making a bridge that was strong enough and beautiful enough, across this emptiness, ballet in England owes almost everything to the gifts of one choreographer, and to the persistence, courage, and organising ability, of two women.

The choreographer was Frederick Ashton, the two women were Marie Rambert and Ninette De Valois.

Through the vision, and the efforts, of these three people, the ground was prepared for a renaissance in England, and indirectly, in the world.

It was in this country, where the minds of the audience were trained towards the ballet again, that dancing and choreography came to their fullest maturity.

The new forms were based on the best of the classic-romantic tradition, enriched by a wisdom, and having a parallel to ordinary human emotion that they had hitherto been devoid of. A use of themes taken from the fundamental impulses of life ; the ceaseless battle between the good and evil in man, and the world ; the demands of the body and the spirit ; the splendour and despair of love, death, and loneliness. The incorporation of these into dance forms, accounts in no small part for the wider appeal of the ballet, and the steady growth of its audiences during the last five or six years.

The Fokine and Massine works of the early Russian Ballet were sparkling pictures from a fairy book. Their characters were dolls, or porcelain figures from the *Commedia dell'Arte*. The world they moved in was a land of princes and princesses, harlequins and columbines, butterflies, and Oriental toys in brilliant colours. There was beauty, and vigour, and movement, but very little heart. It was the most exquisite puppet show the theatre has ever seen. The nineteen-twenties, expressed by the work of Massine, Nijinska, and, later, Balanchine, were the first change, with a reflection of the undertones and overtones of the mind. The ballets produced then were an imitation of life. *Les Biches*, *Le Train Bleu*, *Le Fils Prodigue*, dealt with people who were not myths or fairy tales, but were transparent copies of human beings. It was in these inventions that the first signs of emotion were shown.

Balanchine was to carry it further. During 1933, in a disorganised season at the Savoy Theatre, he produced several particularly interesting new works, and amongst them one which had real portent. This ballet, *Anna-Anna*, to Kurt Weill's music, was one of the first striking examples of the blending of ballet with singing, acting, and speech.

This tendency to draw on the sister arts in the theatre had been manifested in varying degrees for some years before.

It made its earliest appearance with the introduction of choral singing, as an aid to sharpen and enhance the choreographer's effects, or to create a certain atmosphere. This served its purpose well in *The Three-Cornered Hat*, in *Barabau*, and later in the Rubinstein seasons abroad, when the *pas de deux* in a ballet to Borodine was danced to the accompaniment of soprano and tenor.

In small ways, apparently meaningless, yet each having a special significance, these manifestations continually revealed themselves.

Diaghilev engaged an entertainer from the gallery queue, to play the spoons during a scene in *Les Matelots*. The importance of what might have been considered a joke, specially made for the Press and the smart public, was only realised when a dancer took over the part. In Massine's *Ode*, an actress was given the role of Nature.

Choral singing was to appear, again and again. In Ashton's *Rio Grande*, and in de Valois' *Birthday of Oberon*, and *The Haunted Ballroom*. It was used to its very best advantage, latterly, in the brilliant and fanciful Ashton-Stein-Berners work *The Wedding Bouquet*.

That the English ballet has shown the strongest predilection for emphasising the use of speech, acting, and song, combined with dancing, is only natural.

The Theatre in England is founded on a great tradition of acting. That tradition is flourishing now more convincingly in the ballet than anywhere else. But an interest in the legitimate drama has revealed itself in every corner of the dancing world. Dancers turn into actors and actresses.

Zorina, and Baronova, Lopokova, and Helpmann, have moved from ballet to acting, from acting to ballet with complete success.

How much a dancer can bring to the drama was convincingly demonstrated when Helpmann played Oberon at the Old Vic. Here at last was an Oberon who was not a human being, simply because a wealth of movement was superimposed on to the performance, giving it an unearthly glitter that the legitimate actor, however rich his voice, could never produce.

Helpmann is an actor first, a dancer second, but definitely a dancer. He has rarely given an awkward performance in the most exacting technical role, because any discrepancies in his technique are more than compensated for by his ease of movement, and his uncanny sense of performance.

The best work of Ninette de Valois has the same ingrained feeling for the drama. She is at her strongest when her ballets are least like ballets. She is a producer first, a choreographer second, but definitely a choreographer, because there is no legitimate producer who has the technical ability to make a full

plastic use of his actors. Nor can he emotionally affect his audience by the special shapes a choreographer can find for his performer's bodies. De Valois' *Rake's Progress*, *Job*, and to a lesser degree, her *Bar Aux Folies Bergère*, are dramatic productions rather than pure ballets, but they could only have been produced by a dancer and a choreographer.

The same kind of danced drama is found in the ballets of Kurt Jooss. He has designed two outstandingly successful compositions, *The Green Table* and *The Big City*. His invention in movement, not having sprung from the fertile ground of the classical ballet, is more limited than that of the other choreographers. This limitation which the Central European School imposes on its adherents, though it enhances the dramatic effect in *The Green Table* and *The Big City*, by enforcing a good simplicity, removes them even further from ballet and brings them closer to the straight theatre.

Choreography has reached the point, where it needs a wider stage on which to spread itself. The theatre and the drama desperately need the choreographer to revivify their almost inanimate bodies.

The old road of dancing is a dead end. Technique is not enough. Circus acrobats are probably the most technically brilliant performers in the world of entertainment, and though they please and excite the spectator, it is a pleasure and excitement that cannot go on indefinitely repeating itself, because there is no new, no unexpected stimulus to be found in it after the first showing.

It could be the same with the ballet. As pure dancing it has said all that there is to say. It said it as long ago as *Lac des Cygnes* and *Les Sylphides*. The reason for their immortality lies in their being the supreme examples of their type. Anything more of the same school can (like the acrobats) be nothing more than a variation on a master theme. Fortunately the ballet is only now entering on its maturity, and it has found a range, and a greatness of conception, that is making it overrun its former boundaries, and spread towards further corners of the theatre.

That it is absolutely safe for it to do so, and not only safe but necessary, the choreographers began to prove in the nineteen-twenties. They made it more apparent in the 'thirties when Massine produced *Les Presages*, and when Ashton was showing all the magnificent gifts that had been waiting to release themselves during the months he spent with the Rubinstein company. Ashton resembles Balanchine in that he is a choreographer first, last, and foremost. He is so splendidly endowed for his work, and, his work being something that can permanently enrich the

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theatre, he should eventually make the dramatic producer's perfect collaborator.

There is practically nothing from Shakespeare to Shaw, from melodrama to music hall, from Congreve to Cabaret, that a partnership in production between legitimate director and choreographer would not imbue with a fresh and more vital life.

Massine's work in *The Miracle*, and *La Belle Hélène*, Ashton's production, in New York, of Gertrude Stein's *Four Saints in Three Acts*, with a negro cast, were pointing the direction for the ballet. Man's struggle with Fate, in *Les Presages*; the pity and horror of war, so graphically revealed in *Dante Sonata*; the experience of a lifetime in *The Wanderer*. These are examples of the choreographer's lately discovered power, and that power is turning, naturally and inevitably, towards the larger world of the whole theatre.

Let the ballet devotees regard this movement soberly and deeply; losing a little of their interest in the personalities of the art they love, and gazing further ahead. Then they may help it to escape the confines into which they have tried, unthinking as a possessive parent, to hold it. They may assist it to reach a more permanent, and important place in the theatre.

A close partnership between the dramatic producer and the designer of ballet, could not fail to be mutually beneficial.

The blending of dance, and drama, choreography, and stage production, made with thought and discrimination will provide the clasp that is needed to join and complete the necklace of the ballet.

When it has been fashioned the theatre can place it round her neck. I think she will find that it becomes her very well.

## JOSEF KODIČEK

### PROGRAMME AND PRODUCER IN THE CZECH THEATRE\*

*Translated from the Czech*

WHAT gave the Czech theatre in the days of the Republic its distinctive quality?

It would perhaps be an exaggeration to say that the theatre in Bohemia maintained an unbroken connection with the religious basis from which all theatrical art is derived. There can how-

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ever, be no doubt its social function in the life of the nation is of a far more intimate character than in the case of Western nations. It has still remained, to a considerable extent, a moral institution in the deeper sense of the word.

The reasons for this are to be found in the political development of the Czech nation. As recently as at the beginning of the nineteenth century the Czechs still had to struggle to save their language from the encroachments of German culture. The theatre played a very important part in this struggle. Theatrical art is not only a most spiritual, but also a most physical art, it is an art in which a collective and social sentiment is essential if it is to prove effective. It is a choric art. That is why it possessed an altogether unusual significance in the struggle waged by the nation. In the eighteenth century, the nation whose culture, menaced in its very foundations, was almost a thousand years old, rallied to the theatre to hear its native language—a language which in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries still possessed great literary resources, but which was, then said to be fit only for artisans and servants. These artisans and servants were allowed two afternoon performances a week in the “Stavovské Divadlo,” that aristocratic theatre where Mozart’s *Don Juan* was first performed. It was at those afternoon performances that the old popular tradition of the Czech theatre was revived, a tradition which from those days onwards has formed the basis of the Czech theatre.

Since then the theatre has continued to be one of the centres of Czech national life. Only in Moscow can one find so serious a conception of the social function of the theatre as in Prague. The National Theatre in Prague, where performances took place every day to full houses, besides receiving a municipal grant, had a state subsidy amounting to £100,000 a year. The building itself had been paid for by a national subscription and cost about £1,000,000.

The Czech theatre differs from the theatres in Western Europe in two respects. First of all by the wide scope of the programmes, and secondly by the predominant importance of the producer. The chief Czech theatres are repertory undertakings. The number of plays prepared annually for performance in these theatres amounted to about twenty. Significant and successful plays continued to form part of the fundamental repertoire. The actual choice of these plays was an important and responsible feature of cultural policy, and was often the subject of public discussions and controversies. The literary directors of the theatre were entrusted with the task of familiarising themselves, not only with the leading classical plays but with the outstanding

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modern dramatic works of all countries, and of setting up a programme which was not a random collection of international successes, but a selection based upon constructive thought. By means of this system, as well as by the number and variety of theatres aiming at a synthesis of ideas, the Czech Theatre achieved a remarkably high standard of programmes, one may even say a unique standard among the theatres of Europe. In the course of a single season the Prague theatres regularly put on plays which ranged from the ancient classical drama down to the experimental works of the latest advanced writers, including plays representative of all nations, all tendencies of thought, and all possible varieties of form. The literary directors of the theatres vied with each other in making noteworthy discoveries, and the subsidies which the theatres received, as well as the keen interest shown by the public, made it possible to perform works which are generally regarded as unsuitable for the stage. Thus, in a single season, the playgoer could see plays by Aeschylus, ten plays by Shakespeare in entirely new settings, plays by Marlowe and Corneille, Shaw's *Man and Superman*, Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*, Verhaeren's *Dawn*, Kraszinski's *Undivine Comedy*, the two parts of Goethe's *Faust*, a dramatised version of Dostoievsky's *Crime and Punishment* performed on two successive evenings, as well as Czech classical plays, Czech and foreign vanguard and experimental plays. It not infrequently happened that foreign plays, the staging of which presented special problems, were performed in Prague earlier than in the country of their origin. Those who shaped the course of Czech stagecraft, not being tied down by economic considerations as their counterparts in other countries, exerted themselves to the utmost so that the national theatrical institutions, while maintaining a high standard, should not acquire the rigid dignity of museum exhibits.

We now come to the second important point, the significance of the producer on the Czech stage.

The problems which the theatres of Western Europe have been trying to solve, for the most part, only in theory, were in the leading Czech theatres handled practically. The London "producer" or "manager" would be designated in Central Europe or Russia with some less impressive title. As regards the Czech stage, the producer is actually rather more important than the conductor of an orchestra. He has to create the scenic effects as a uniform whole, to decide upon the form which each particular play must assume on the stage, to decide upon the basic effect which the play is to produce, to establish the kind of atmosphere which he wishes to suggest to the audience, to fix the rhythm, pace and colour of the dialogue, and in regard

to all these factors, his artistic perception must impose a uniformity upon them. There can be no doubt that this attitude towards the functions of a producer limits to some extent the traditional supremacy of the actor on the stage, although ultimately it enhances the actors' achievement. The fact remains, however, that many performances are performances for which the credit is due primarily to the producer. The audience is not intent upon how some leading actor or actress will interpret the part which he or she is playing, but eagerly awaits the manner in which the producer transforms the internal content of the play into a plastic stage reality. The unifying will of the producer's conception limits to a certain extent the actors, and sometimes even relegates the author himself slightly to the background, but it imparts to the life of the stage as a whole a vividness and diversity which were previously unknown. It was the discovery of the producer as an autonomous artist which bestowed upon cities like Moscow, and Prague—and Berlin in the best of its pre-Hitler days—an intensity of theatrical interest which made every first night such an outstanding event in national life.

Prague, which, as regards theatrical life, stood at the cross-roads between German and Russia, absorbed numerous suggestions from both these countries. Stanislavsky's spiritual realism provided it with the same measure of inspiration as the dynamic constructivism of Meyerhold and Tairov, the radiant humanity of Brahm, the impressionism of Reinhardt or the expressionistic of Jessner. These inspirational factors did not quench the independent and purely Czech element in the Czech exponents of stagecraft. Thus, Jaroslav Kvapil whose methods approximated to those of Reinhardt, became the creator of modern Czech theatrical art as producer of the bulk of Shakespeare's and Ibsen's plays. His successor, K. H. Hilar, a personality of extremely great powers of conception and courage in execution, developed a highly advanced Czech stagecraft. There was no theatrical form with which he had not concerned himself, but he nevertheless retained his own creative originality. Hilar trained and collected around him a large number of theatrical workers who must be mentioned in connection with the most progressive theatrical experiments of recent times. He it was who put into effect upon the Czech stage the principle that experiment and only experiment can keep the theatre alive for artistic achievement.

If in this context I might be allowed to say something about my impressions of the English stage, I should be inclined to make the following points. First, I have rarely come across such a lavish abundance of artistic values and possibilities as in the English theatre. It possesses so many talented actors and actresses

that if we had them at our disposal on the Continent we could create not one, but dozens of theatres with the highest standard imaginable. The intelligence, charm, imagination and personality of English actors are altogether extraordinary. What is lacking, however, is a central artistic personality, a man like Stanislavsky, Reinhardt or Hilar, possessing the energy, the artistic individuality and the organising ability in an economic respect, which would enable him to concentrate around him this abundance of artistic talent, and by uncompromisingly imposing his ideas as producer upon playgoers and critics, to bring into being a sense of expectation and tension without which there can be no theatrical culture in the fullest sense of the term. It is only to the lack of a producer with an inspiring personality of this kind that I can attribute the fact that conversational and realistic pieces which do not demand any consistent transposition in respect of form, are played in England brilliantly. A performance like Gielgud's production of "The Importance of being Earnest" satisfies the most stringent demands. On the other hand, works containing poetic fantasy or heightened emotional tension, works necessarily demanding a sense of style for their scenery and setting, are too often played in England in a chaotic and shallow manner, as if they were being improvised, without any sense of unity and producing an amateurish effect. This applies more or less to all the performances of Shakespeare which I have hitherto seen in England. On the Continent this would be repudiated as the result of spinelessly clinging to a stagey tradition which was out of date forty years ago. I am convinced that with the acting material at his disposal here a great producer could create a new theatrical tension which would transform the old classical works into great modern theatrical events.

### "THEATRE IN PEKING"

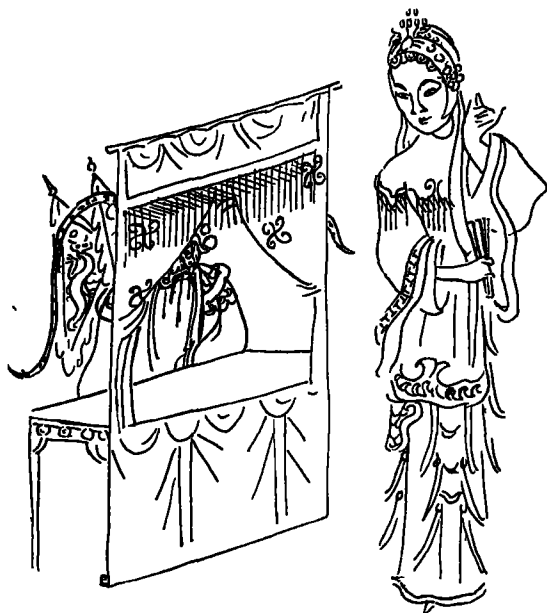
For a picture of the Chinese Theatre there must be a frame. It is a picture so unusual that unframed it would seem out of touch, even of another sphere. The frame must be chosen carefully—it must describe the surroundings of the theatre, it must bridge the gap between reality and unreality and again give some clue of the origin of this realm. The frame we will choose is Peking.

Peking is itself separated from the western world by deserts,

wilderness and the ruins of ages. It is also enclosed within itself by vast red walls, and is as unique and strange as the theatre it has produced. One feels there the age of Genghis Khan to be near in time and space, for beyond the Western hills and the Great Wall is nothing before his capital, in Mongolia, of Ulan Bator. In winter, when the winds are not bringing the clouds of dust and sand from these wastes and the air is clear, the sky somehow still reflects the yellow sand turning it green instead of blue ; otherwise the landscape itself is colourless, and it must have been because of this lack of variety that the colour in the architecture was made so vivid. Theatrical effect is everywhere apparent, whether it be at the Summer palace of the Manchus or at the tombs of the Ming Dynasty. At the one there is a large junk in the Kun Ming Hu lake built of marble with windows of stained glass. Now, since it is winter the junk is marooned in a sea of ice and lotus roots. Here also is the Camel Bridge of which the reflection forms a perfect circle. At the tombs it is the long avenue of beasts, petrified and isolated on the sand, which leads to the gold glazed roofed temples, that seems to be a prelude to some gigantic pageant. A further example of such theatrical effect nearer to Peking, and just beyond the Altar of Heaven and the execution wall is Heaven's Bridge. It is here that many aspects of the Chinese theatre have their origin. The name deceives, for Heaven's Bridge is but a sprawling suburb of dilapidation to the quickly passing eye—tents and huts, corrugated iron and mud, with all the encumbrance of disease and poverty compose the trappings of this sunfair. Here are the acrobats of Tang China, here the archers with studded belts and leather caps, contortionists and conjurers and booths, embryonic of the stage. It was here that before the Revolution the Tan Chueh\* actors came to begin their careers. Here and around the walls they trained, where now crocodiles of child actors are still seen shivering along forced to sing against the wind and the dust. It is to harden their voices, and their teachers accomplish this with the determination of a Squeers. The Tan Chueh actors have now been replaced at Heaven's Bridge by girls to whom acting is a side-line, but it is men that teach them even the rudiments of stage-craft. Mei Lan Fang himself, China's greatest Tan Chueh actor, started at Heaven's Bridge, and he alone was able to rise above the prejudices of a nation and bring honour to an actor. For in old China actors together with the sons of prostitutes were alone unable to enter into state examinations. They were a despised profession.

\* Actors who play only female roles.

There is a Ku Un Chiang play at the theatre and it is there that a rickshaw will take us. Already down the street is the sound of a strange new music. Nothing similar can be heard in the world, and it is only to the toys of childhood hanging in the window with strips of painted glass which jangle in the wind that one can even remotely liken it . . . or again to the



pigeons of the Peking Temples that have each a reed pipe of different note tied to their legs and when in flight produce an orchestration of tiny flutes. But the illusion still escapes as now cymbals clash and drums beat the pipings to an undertone.

These are, however, only a foretaste of what is to come.

We have arrived, and walk under the red entrance gate with its gilded characters to tell of the night's entertainment. Then a halt, for the Theatre has become a laundry. A thousand towels are being washed in great vats with a delicious scented smell to help us to forget the smallpox germs they may conceal. The ticket office eludes us and it is through a restaurant and finally its kitchen that we enter the auditorium. In many theatres the parterre is the restaurant with tables and chairs, but here it is separate and a comparison is at once possible. It is the Theatre of Shakespeare. . . . A similar stage juts into

the hall and in the private theatres of former Manchu Princes even the upper stage is found for the entrance of Gods and divine beings. Here there is none and the stage is picked out as for a boxing contest by two blinding electric lights. The cold becomes intense and the draughts converge from every side, but vendors arrive with pots of tea and baked melon seeds ; any refusal of these is impossible, and the cold soon forces their necessity. Something has flashed past and is caught in mid air by a boy in a blue, padded coat. The towels are ready for use and fly from attendant to spectator with alarming precision. They are to wash the hands, wipe the brow, or mouth, or generally to refresh the person.

The theatre has been open for hours and several comedies and acrobatics have already been given, but the time is at hand for the chief play which itself lasts under an hour, and servants



are hurriedly relinquishing the seats they have been warming for their masters.

Spitting and eating, chattering and cursing are continual throughout the performance and sweets of a poisonous hue with a thick coating of dust and flies are sold. Money for the chosen seat is finally collected and the gallery crame forward. Men and

women are segregated in the audience, and on the stage in the genuine classical theatre no woman may ever appear.

There is only a lapse of a few minutes between the plays and it is difficult to realise when the main play has begun as the orchestra continue to move about, smoke pipes, or scratch themselves, and being seated on the stage together with scene-shifters and actors the bedlam is enhanced. The lack of scenery is well known, and the symbolic movements of hand or sleeve, fan or foot or sword, which helps to dispense with it are too numerous to describe except in a monumental tome. A mirror for final make-up, two clocks painted and therefore timeless, and possibly a curtain between the entrance and exit doors form the entire back of the stage. A table is often used to convey a hundred things, from mountains to ramparts, and if a city gate is needed a curtain with bamboo poles is brought in by the scene shifters with the gate painted upon it. When its function is fulfilled it is carried away. However, these few "accessories" are quite enough to enchant the eye. They are all of the most brilliant coloured satins and studded with sequins and outlined in golden thread and braids. Peacocks and dragons are embroidered on them and together with the costumes produce a jewel of unreal brilliance. These costumes are from the original court clothes of the Han, Tang or Sung dynasties, though the face paintings have changed and have tended to become even more elaborate, culminating at the Manchu dynasty. The "Masks" painted on the faces, of which there are 200 varieties, are no less brilliant than the costumes, and hours of work are needed to produce the intricate lines and tones, each of which will mean a different trend of character. Twenty kinds of smiles are used and each is distinctly recognisable to a Chinese audience, and should an actor make some false symbolic move hisses and shouts, "thousand-year-old eggs" and even spittle, unless it has meantime lodged on another spectator, will reach him. Being often unable to read or write, with the hard training and frequent painful necessities such as painting the pupils of the eyes with indian ink to enlarge them and the nick-name for Tan Chueh actors of "Ssu Fang" (or "public quarters"), an actor's life seems worth little. The salary for an ordinary actor is approximately a dollar a day and this is uncertain, as the theatre manager hires a troupe to play certain plays and as every actor can only act certain roles and never step outside his type of character, it necessitates long periods of unemployment. Should he reach the summit of the profession the salary may be from 5,000 to 20,000 dollars a year, but it is the instinctive fun of dressing up which can always hold him. If an actor is late for a performance he

is fined and on no account may he look through the Green Room door at the audience for fear of drawing a bad house. All such superstitions are minutely observed and many dozen could be listed.

The attention of the audience seems wandering . . . they are still eating and talking, and towels continue to flop through the air. The play to-night is one act of the "White and Black Snake," which formed the basis of Grimm's tale of the same name. Two snake demons have been changed for good conduct



into virgins and the white snake has the black one for her servant. She decides to reward a young mortal, who in her previous life has helped her, by becoming his wife. Observing a temporal custom, Hsu Huan, the young husband, drinks one day the appropriate wine and not realising it is fatal for snakes gives it to his wife. In the night she is thereby turned back into a serpent and Hsu Huan, terrified, dies of the shock. At morning, the wife again herself, sees her husband dead and realises what has happened, but is quickly able to find the correct herb to bring him back to life. She is so anxious to please Hsu Huan

after this that he is given endless gifts, which however, have been taken from the people and have ruined them. An abbot tells him of this and the truth about his marriage, and advises him to seek refuge in his monastery. The two snakes, in a rage, follow, and drawing swords have a great battle with the abbot, who turns himself into a dragon and puts the snakes to flight. Still not outwitted, they cause a flood to submerge the island monastery, but the abbot in his turn is able to make the island rise to counteract it. Kuci Shing (a divine being) then arrives and puts an end to the quarrel.

This play is a play of civil life : the chief division in the Chinese theatre is between civil and military plays and not between comedy and tragedy. There is no great literary style in any plays. They had a purely religious origin closely akin to the Greek drama. Shadow plays, still seen in China and Java, are recorded as early as 140 B.C. and the Bugaku and Gigaku dances in Japan have remained unchanged since introduced from China for the opening of the Todai Ji temple at Nara in the eighth century. The theatre in North and South China varies slightly, in the North it is usually harsh and concentrates on the music, whilst in the South the music is softer and it is more the eye to which the appeal is made. In both, however, self sacrifice and fidelity are extolled, though the entirely separate comic interludes are often of aristophanic obscenity.

The music of the "White and Black Snake" is Ku Un Chiang and was originated in the Ming dynasty by Wei Lliang Fu. This style of music is slow and plaintive and is easier for the singers to sustain in a play filled with pantomimic action. The orchestra here consists of a skin drum, guitar, castanets, reed organ, gongs, kettle drum, and in Ku Un Chiang music alone a Chinese clarinet, which produces a deafening squawk. Flutes are also much used in this particular play.

The cold seems to have lessened and we no longer notice the draughts ; since there are no visible signs of heating, like the little charcoal stoves given to each spectator in the Japanese theatre, the heat must be human, as the crowd huddle together in their blue coats and fur-lined hats, but it is also the feverish activity on the stage that grips us. The actors have already announced which character they represent since in the programme only their name is written, and the play is begun.

The White Snake lady is of dazzling beauty, she wears a white satin costume embroidered with purple fuchsias and a wide collar of turquoise blue sewn with sequins and edged by a fringe of cherry pink thread. The head-dress is entirely of pearls with coloured stones and pompoms ornamenting it. The head-dress

worn by a warrior or general is even more elaborate and is sometimes completely glued over with kingfishers' wings which, together with carmine-spotted pompoms and blue mirrors embedded in them and the five foot long Argus pheasant feathers used in symbolic fighting, frame the scarlet blue and black face make-up. The voices of the snake lady and her servant are plaintive whines and softer than the harsh croaks of the Kabuki actors, and it is hard to realise that in everyday life these exquisite dolls with their dead-white make-up and enlarged eyes are men wearing black shoes and often spats.

The battle between the snake lady and the abbot is now a whirling mass of colour and the music works itself up to a rhythmic crescendo which brings a spontaneous *hao* of praise (there is no clapping in China) from the audience. Should a warrior be killed he will immediately afterwards get up and walk from the stage, but in time these customs, strange to a Western stage, pass entirely unnoticed. With a final burst of the So Na (Clarinet) music the play is over and we shuffle out into the icy midnight air. The wind has died down and the rickshaw boys quickly hurry forward, and it is then we can realise the years it will take to understand an art still mediæval in its progress where every colour has a separate meaning, every gesture a separate mood, every face a different mask of make-up, and every smile another sense.



# ROBERT GRAVES

## SATIRES AND GROTESQUES

### THE PERSIAN VERSION

TRUTH-LOVING Persians do not dwell upon  
The trivial skirmish fought near Marathon.  
As for the Greek theatrical tradition  
Which represents that summer's expedition  
Not as a mere reconnaissance in force  
By three brigades of foot and one of horse  
(Their left flank covered by some obsolete  
Light craft detached from the main Persian fleet)  
But as a grandiose, ill-starred attempt  
To conquer Greece—they treat it with contempt ;  
And only incidentally refute  
Major Greek claims, by stressing what repute  
The Persian monarch and the Persian nation  
Won by this salutary demonstration :  
Despite a strong defence and adverse weather  
All arms combined magnificently together.

### THE WEATHER OF OLYMPUS

ZEUS was once overheard to shout at Hera :  
“ You hate it, do you ? Well, I hate it worse—  
Boreas all May, Sirocco all the Summer.  
Hell take this whole impossible Universe ! ”

A scholiast explains this warm rejoinder  
Which seems too manlike for Olympic use,  
By noting that the snake-tailed Chthonian winds  
Were answerable to Fate alone, not Zeus.

### APOLLO OF THE PHYSIOLOGISTS

DESPITE this learned cult's official  
And seemingly sincere denial  
That they either reject or postulate  
God, or God's scientific surrogate,  
Prints of a deity occur *passim*  
Throughout their extant literature : they make him  
A dumb, dead-pan Apollo with a profile  
Drawn in Victorian-Hellenistic style—  
The pallid, bald, partitioned head suggesting  
Wholly abstract cerebral functioning,  
Or nude and at full length, this deity

Displays digestive, venous, respiratory  
And nervous systems painted in bold colour  
On his immaculate exterior.  
Sometimes, *in verso*, a bald, naked Muse,  
His consort, flaunts her arteries and sinews,  
While, upside-down, crouched on her chaste abdomen,  
Adored by men and wondered at by women,  
Hangs a Victorian-Hellenistic foetus—  
Fruit of her academic god's afflatus.

## THE BEACH

LOUDER than gulls the little children scream  
Whom fathers haul into the jovial foam,  
But others fearlessly rush in, breast high,  
Laughing the salty water from their mouths—  
Heroes of the nursery.

The horny boatman, who has seen whales  
And flying fishes, who has sailed as far  
As Demerara and the Ivory Coast,  
Will warn them, when they crowd to hear his tales,  
That every ocean smells alike of tar.

## THE VILLAGERS AND DEATH

THE Rector's pallid neighbour at The Firs,  
Death, did not flurry the parishioners.  
Yet from a weight of superstitious fears  
Each tried to lengthen his own term of years.  
He was congratulated who combined  
Toughness of flesh and weakness of the mind  
In consequential rosiness of face.  
This dull, and not ill-mannered, populace  
Pulled off their caps to Death, as they slouched by,  
But rumoured him both atheist and spy.  
All vowed to outlast him (though none ever did)  
And hear the earth drum on his coffin-lid.  
Their groans and whispers down the village street  
Soon soured his nature, which was never sweet.

## THE OLDEST SOLDIER

THE sun shines warm on seven old soldiers  
Paraded in a row,  
Perched like starlings on the railings—  
Give them plug-tobacco !  
They'll croon you the Oldest-Soldier Song,

## SATIRES AND GROTESQUES

Of Harry who took a holiday  
 From the sweat of ever thinking for himself  
 Or going his own bloody way.

It was arms-drill, guard and kit-inspection,  
 Like dreams of a long train-journey,  
 And the barrack-bed that Harry dossed on  
 Went rockabye, rockabye, rockabye.

Harry kept his rifle and brasses clean,  
 But Jesus Christ, what a liar !  
 He won the Military Medal  
 For his coolness under fire.

He was never the last on parade  
 Nor the first to volunteer,  
 And when Harry rose to be storeman  
 He seldom had to pay for his beer.

Twenty-one years, and out Harry came  
 To be odd-job man, or janitor,  
 Or commissionaire at a picture-house,  
 Or, some say, bully to a whore.

But his King and Country calling Harry,  
 He reported again at the Depôt,  
 To perch on this railing like a starling,  
 The oldest soldier in the row.

## GROTESQUES

## I

My Chinese uncle, gouty, deaf, half-blinded,  
 And more than a trifle absent-minded,  
 Astonished all St. James's Square one day  
 By giving long and unexceptionably exact directions  
 To a little coolie girl, who'd lost her way.

## II

The Lion-faced Boy at the Fair  
 And the Heir Apparent  
 Were equally slow at remembering people's faces.  
 But whenever they met, incognito, in the Brazilian  
 Pavilion, the Row and such like places,  
 They exchanged, it is said, their sternest nods  
 Like gods of dissimilar races.

## III

Dr. Newman with the crooked pincenez

Had studied in Vienna and Chicago.  
Chess was his only relaxation.  
And Dr. Newman remained unperturbed  
By every nastier manifestation  
Of plutodemocratic civilisation :  
All that was cranky, corny, ill-behaved,  
Unnecessary, askew or orgiastic  
Would creep unbidden to his side-door (hidden  
Behind a poster in the Tube Station,  
Nearly half-way up the moving-stairs)  
Push its way in, to squat there undisturbed  
Among box-files and tubular steel chairs.

He was once seen at the Philharmonic Hall  
Noting the reactions of two patients,  
With pronounced paranoiac tendencies,  
To old Dutch music. He appeared to recall  
A tin of lozenges in his breast-pocket,  
Put his hand confidently in—  
And drew out a black imp, or sooterkin,  
Six inches long, with one ear upside-down,  
Licking at a vanilla ice-cream cornet—  
Then put it back again with a slight frown.

## IV

A Royal Duke, with no campaigning medals  
To dignify his Orders, he would speak  
Nostalgically at times of Mozambique  
Where once the ship he cruised in ran aground :  
How he drank cocoa, from a sailor's mug,  
Poured from the common jug,  
While loyal toasts went round.

## V

Sir John addressed the Snake God in his temple,  
Which was full of bats, not as a votary  
But with the somewhat cynical courtesy,  
Just short of condescension,  
He might have paid the Governor-General  
Of a small, hot, backward colony.  
He was well versed in primitive religion,  
But found this an embarrassing occasion :  
The God was immense, noisy and affable,  
Began to tickle him with a nervous chuckle,  
Unfobbed a great gold clock for him to listen,  
Hissed like a snake, and swallowed him at one mouthful.

# WILLIAM SANSOM

## IN THE MAZE

### I

THE tourist was surprised to find himself being led down a side street, in just the opposite direction to where he was sure the maze lay. However, he made no mention of his misgiving. He had been impressed by the sincerity of his guide at their first meeting on the station platform, and for this reason could not believe that the man intended to lead him astray. Perhaps this side street curved to meet a lower main road to the maze? Yet it was odd that his guide had not accepted one of the carriages that waited on the high road by the station gate.

Once again he glanced over his shoulder. The maze was receding below the gables of a house on the corner: twin gables that mounted as their passage took them lower down the hill, so that the black crest of the distant maze appeared to set like a dark sun behind the irregular horizon of the roof-tops. Then it was gone! And the tourist had only the memory of his first view of the maze from the station gates upon which to base his speculations.

The maze had been plainly outlined on the brow of a hill some five kilometres away. Even at that distance its huge proportions had been evident. Several houses lay on the slope of the hill, and the maze loomed above these monstrously, with no perceptible animal shape, yet with the presence of something that lived and waited. It hung across the whole length of the hill, which must have measured at least two kilometres. Yet this façade represented only the narrow beginning of the great maze: the guide himself had explained that its shape was generally like that of a halberd-head, and this façade its narrowest extremity. The hill was really a gradual escarpment introducing the immeasurable plateau that lay above: as far as was known, the maze's dark vegetation quite covered this flat, upper plain.

The cobbles of the side street scrambled steeply down between tall houses that obstructed any further view. Thus the tourist fixed his eyes on the back of his guide, who walked always a few steps before him. The guide—who would more correctly be styled "topiarist"—wore a suit of rough hempen material designed, with subtle buttoning and certain discreet twists of the stitch, to infer a uniform, though at the same time the general effect was informal and thus calculated to reassure a sensitive

stranger. On his head he wore a shooting cap, but round his waist was clasped a light brown belt from which hung only a long pair of shears. He walked confidently, with long and certain legs, and every so often he glanced back at his charge with a considerative smile. The tourist was impressed by this combination of discreet efficiency and cordiality: this topiarist was a fellow with whom one felt secure!

They stepped from the cobbles on to a wide mud-track. Now the land to either side was again visible. As he splashed along in the wet mud behind his guide, the tourist noted that their way led towards what appeared to be a basin of marshland, judging by the clustered reeds and the sunken trunks of old trees that rose and fell forlornly in the flat, black earth ahead. But away to the left—on the opposite side of the mud-track to the maze—there rose a high city. The tourist was astonished at the size and height of this city: for he had not noticed it from the train and, apart from the maze, it seemed the most prominent edifice of the neighbouring landscape. At first it seemed that the city, too, was built on a hill: but soon it became plain that this was an illusion caused by a gradation in height from the modest houses on the outskirts of the city to the towers and tremendous minarets of the centremost buildings. Every variety of brick and tile and stone seemed to have been used in the construction of this town: elevated motorways wound gracefully through the mass of buildings, curling always upwards to the summit of the highest tower: high raised platforms awaited the descent of aircraft: and over the whole there whispered a sense of continual movement, as an unending stream of far-away beetles crawled up and down the motorways and as midget helicopters circled the upper air with the inconsequent industry of a cloud of gnats.

The tourist could contain himself no longer. He doubled his stride to catch up with the topiarist. Taking him by the arm, he asked, respectfully, but with a certain insistence, "Possibly there has been a misunderstanding? My intention was to inspect the maze—not this town. Surely our road"—he gestured vaguely towards the direction of the plateau—"should lie that way?" Throughout this question he had tried to define the topiarist's eyes: but these lay so deep in the shade of his peaked cap that, although the tourist peeped now with almost impolite insistence, he could see nothing at all.

"Don't worry," answered the smiling lips of the topiarist. "Although another route might have brought us to our destination with more speed, yet this is the only road by which a visitor may reach the maze with intelligence. One might say, the motive

for the maze lies along this road. In a moment I shall explain : meanwhile, we have plenty of time."

This news hardly reassured the tourist, who now watched closely the smile on his companion's lips. Divested of the eyes, the mouth formed a smile which might have been more disdainful than affable. Could this be an illusion created by the absence of soft eyes? Enhanced by the intrinsic quality of a mouth, with its predatory teeth and lascivious lips? The tourist would have pressed home his question, had it not been for a sudden shadow that darkened their path and forced both to look quickly above.

It had approached in complete silence. Its huge horizontal propeller cut the air without sound. It hovered directly above their heads, within hailing distance—a giant helicopter glistening streamlined white.

A low voice broke from the helicopter. "Perimeter Patrol. Any way I can assist you gentlemen?"

The topiarist gestured impatiently with his arm as if to wave the great air-ship off. "Nothing," he shouted. And the helicopter, with a muttered, "Thank you," darted up and away, as though attached elastically to a higher altitude above the town. Now the tourist showed great consternation as he grabbed the topiarist's arm afresh. "It seemed to me," he stammered anxiously, "that the helicopter itself spoke! What a strange illusion! It could not have been. . .?"

But the topiarist interrupted him. "By all means—the helicopter spoke. It is true now to say that. Of course, there are still men somewhere inside it. But long ago they surrendered their personalities absolutely to the machine of their building. Now they have not only merged with the machine—they have lost themselves in it. They have, in the natural order of such matters, been superseded by their invention. Yes, the helicopter spoke."

The tourist glanced nervously at the city, then sucked expertly at a hollow tooth. This was a nervous habit that cleared his mouth of inefficiency. It pulled things together. As usual when he was embarrassed, when the alignment of his thought was upset, he repeated his companion's last words. "In the natural order of such matters—you mean that all your people are consumed in this fatal way by their invention? You mean that?"

The mud was growing blacker as the marshland approached. Also deeper. The topiarist had to draw a cloth from his pocket and wipe away some of the slime that was splashing up on to his bright shears. At the same time he spoke, with an easy derisive laugh that seemed to mock the tourist's ignorance. "You come to me with a permit to see the maze. But it is

becoming plainer every moment that you have little idea of the maze's real significance. Perhaps you are joy-riding? Perhaps you come to marvel only sensually, in a spirit of credulous disbelief, with no intention at all of understanding?" The long peak of the shooting cap and the deep mask of the shade beneath regarded the tourist sternly, yet with a degree of tolerance, as though the tourist, although guilty, was of no great matter and in any case could hardly be capable of escape. For his part, the tourist resented his companion's attitude of comfortable, derisive strength: nevertheless he made no complaint, feeling indeed a trifle awed by the man's certainty. So—"I am only a tourist," he explained.

"Quite so. And as Topiarist I feel it my responsibility to bring you understanding of the things you see. In addition to your own desire, as a tourist, for titillation. That is why I have chosen for you this circuitous route past the town and the halcyonry. The halcyonry lies immediately ahead, on the marsh."

The topiarist now took the tourist's arm, gently, but with irrefutable certainty, in order to swivel the tourist in whichever direction the exposition of his story demanded. They had entered on the marsh proper. The track continued, but now the soil was black and fibrous with peat. Tall reeds and low, big-leaved bog-plants decided one side of the path: on the other flowed a slow stream. Their steps now made no sound but a short, resilient sucking as they trod into the watery earth. Over all else lay the dead quiet of soft textures. To the west, high against the sky, rose the towers of the city, their summits blurred by the helicoptrous cloud.

"You asked me whether all our people are consumed by their invention," began the topiarist. "The answer—gratefully no—has been made possible by the halcyonry here, the maze, and a wise man whose name has long been forgotten but who is respectfully referred to nowadays as the Arboretor. It is like this. Many years ago the Arboretor took his evening stroll along this same mud-track. Tired out by the incessant striving of a day spent within the city, he found repose in this peaceful dwelling of the halcyons. He liked the quiet mud, he enjoyed the surrounding disintegration that stocked so much new life. He liked the halcyons and their primitive nests. It was one evening when he stood silently regarding the skeleton of a bird that had died on its nest of mud and fishbone, that his eyes wandered to a living halcyon which stood alone in splendid colour on the bank across the stream, and thence, above the proud bird, to the towers of the distant town. Between these three objects he found

a relation, and read into it a meaning that has since altered the direction of our lives.

"Come, let us for the sake of simplicity recreate the scene as the Arboretor first saw it, and as thousands have seen it since. It should be easy. The hour is twilight."

From beneath the peak of his cap, which seemed to have grown longer and more pointed, until it began to resemble the beak of a bird, the topiarist scanned the stream with his shadowed eyes. He led the tourist along the bank until they arrived at the outskirts of the halcyons' great nesting place.

Here thousands of the live birds lived among the bones of their ancestors. Brilliantly feathered, long-beaked, they stood by the banks of the stream, each one alone, each in solitary conjecture. Among the reeds and the marsh plants lay the nests, primitive rounds of dried mud interlaced with the bones of captured fish. Some of these were the nests of living birds: others were the dead nests, on which still sat thin, eyeless skeletons of the departed. A wide, wild ossuary, where the living birds stood and thought with the appearance of brilliant ghosts.

"You will notice," said the topiarist, in tones of reverence, "how the halcyons recognise the measure of their significance. They break from their eggs, they build their fairly involved nests, they live with their dead, and they die. They do not hide death away. They do not say, 'We, who can build such fine, involved nests, shudder to think that our glory shall never increase. We must hide away the insignificance of death.' No. For them death has its own significance. It is a fulfilment. It throws into correct perspective the value of their achievement, the nest. They do not deny that the nest has great value, nor that the instinct and the proud hopes that inspire its building are also of great value. But they do realise that the achievement is not greater than the instinct. Thus they live beyond the building of their nests. They live with the bones of their achievement." Here the topiarist raised the darkness of his upper face towards the town. "It is a different matter with the people who used to populate the town. They never saw that hope was finite in itself. They yearned always towards the achievement bred of their hope, and gave hope itself no place in their estimation. It is, of course, right and natural to regard the achievement as important, otherwise hope could not exist. But the people gave fulfilment the prior importance, and forgot to see that in the meantime they lived."

The tourist frowned. "Nevertheless, you will admit that the hoped-for achievements of your people were more complicated than these miserable nests?"

"More complicated, yes. More difficult ever to realise, yes. But of more ultimate meaning, of greater value?"

The tourist blurted angrily, "Please be sensible. You forget that man has a brain, to say nothing of a soul. Whereas these fine halcyons of yours are after all comparatively clumsy creatures guided by simple instincts."

The tourist's complaint was met only with the same laughter, though perhaps the derision was now more marked, as though the smiling lips has approached nearer the core of their humour. "That is the point," said the lips. "The Arboretor realised that man was sharply distinguished from other species by a brain. The Arboretor then saw that the brain was not the transcendental matter of its own self-assertion—but merely another limb, peculiar truly to man. So the Arboretor climbed outside his brain to look at his brain from the outside, and saw his brain, though miraculously still through the agency of his brain, as a limb—certainly an unusual limb, with an unusual function, a phenomenon of the same order as, say, the tongue of an ant-bear."

"Don't be absurd. You are just like a writer, who once wrote a story, and was overjoyed at the alliterational coincidence of a tourist, a topiarist, and a tapir, which he found at the same time stupid and deep with meaning. Perhaps this was because he had just seen, through the window, a sparrow snatch up a fallen flower of jasmine in its beak and brandish it in the air—with much the same guileless exuberance as a puffed trader delivering himself to the ecstasy of a riviera rock. Perhaps the writer climbed outside his brain then, for he welcomed this wild phenomenon, which is commonly the battlemate of ordered achievement."

The topiarist sighed. "But it hardly matters whether this writer was a fool or whether he truly realised the possibility of the moment. However, you did say 'ordered.' Now that is a stage further in our journey, and the temporal voyage of the Arboretor."

"Temporal." The tourist sucked impatiently at his hollow tooth. "You mean that your Arboretor denies what is called the spirit? The soul?"

"The gentleman in question—let us not mention his name again, for somehow a passing condition of our brain derides repetition—had a feeling that the spirit, or the soul, was a refinement of the brain, conceived only by the brain, and therefore to the brain as brain's child, beyond question. For it is an eternal certainty that the idea of the spirit and the brain has been perceived only through the mechanism of the brain. And the brain, a selfish limb, is adamant in the applause of its own function."

The tourist's brain was offended by this statement. Through the tourist's eyes it turned to regard the topiarist freshly—and its grey cells paled with sudden doubt. For, in sympathy with his statement, the topiarist had altered. The peak of his cap had grown so long, the black mask beneath so profound. The hemp of his suit and the buttons of his breeches were suddenly evocative of some nightmare nostalgia that lay waiting in the tourist's youth. Eyeless, the figure seemed the more all-seeing. Somehow, with the hemp and the beak and the darkness, the topiarist looked like a rat-catcher, tall, grim, with the untouchable, solitary knowledge of a man who does what other men detest. Darkly he stood alone and fingered his shears. The grey cells in the tourist's brain pounded with the terror of doubt. Now he knew that he wanted to escape. Quickly. So he said :—

“ I understand. But what has all this to do with the maze ? ”

The topiarist laughed. “ You will see.”

“ I think perhaps . . . the hour . . . my train. . . . ”

“ We have plenty of time,” smiled the topiarist, and he began to lead the pounding brain off the mud-track, through the reedy catafalques, and on to the first slopes of the hill surmounted by the maze.

As they climbed, the topiarist continued, speaking slowly, with definition, expounding, with lasting emphasis, “ So the Arboretor saw that men attached too earnest an importance to the fulfilment of their invention and their searching. Mind you, never for a moment did he deny that importance altogether. No, he loved the idea of fulfilment : but he did not idolise it to the detriment of living. Thinking thus, he began to watch the working of these brains, these peculiar limbs—and he noticed one consistent factor. Inside each brain there was a square and a straight line ! Always a square and a straight line ! Only rarely were there the beginnings of a circle ! Always a square and a straight line ! Remember this—and you will understand better the significance of the maze.”

## II

Although the maze had seemed forbidding to the tourist from a distance, this quality of threat receded as they approached, until, when they had arrived almost beneath its shadow, the maze appeared to be an ordinary hedge of yew. Certainly it was high, higher than a man. Certainly it was dark ; but then the yew leaf, in colour and in the immobile set of its leaves, is naturally brother to the cypress and the urn. Certainly the maze grew suddenly, a still sharp cliff of shadow against the young green of the attendant turf. “ I regret that you were frightened,” said

the topiarist, whose peak seemed now to have shrunk again to its original size. "Normally, you should have lived in the halcyonry for some weeks. Realisation would then have been gradual. But you are a tourist, and therefore imagine that you have no time. I made you a concession there."

Together they mounted the wooden steps of a rakish gazebo that overlooked the maze. They emerged on to an upper platform from which for the first time the tourist could survey the panorama from its clear beginnings to the confused distance of its far horizon.

The maze had no main entrance. In fact, there was no certain entrance at all. Each man who entered cut his own passage with his own pair of shears. Confronted by the penetrable mystery, he moulded his own way. Every man first cut himself a straight path, precise as a plumbline. Later, according to his degree of interest, he turned to the left or right, doubled back on himself, marched in squares, hurried forward, lingered back, clipping assiduously the convolutions of his chosen passage. One factor alone was constant. Each man clipped in straight lines. There were neither curves nor circles. As far as the eye reached, and forever further, men could be seen clipping their squared progress through the huge shrub. And always along the façade there were more men, each choosing a moment and a place of entry, each having climbed the hill from the halcyonry, each provided suddenly with shears, each confronted now with his individual task of penetration. "Come," said the topiarist, taking the tourist's arm and guiding him gently back to the steps, "Now you have some idea of the perspective, you will wish to examine our work in detail. Yes? Meanwhile I'll tell you about the night when the Arboretor listened."

But this time it was difficult to swivel the tourist immediately. For although the tourist yielded slowly with eyes fascinated by the incredible panorama before him, yet his free hand had already darted to his waistcoat pocket. From this he drew a large watch. As the watch thrust itself forward, just as it began to glint in the twilight—so in proportion the tourist's resistance increased, until finally he turned of his own accord, even attempting to drag the topiarist with him. "I should dearly love to investigate at closer quarters your remarkable work, your truly extraordinary work," he said, stuttering slightly as though pre-occupied with his feet and his coat-tails that flew in front of him towards the steps. "But I really must catch my train. My train leaves almost immediately."

"One night many years ago," said the topiarist, continuing his story quite evenly, "the Arboretor lay down in the halcyonry

on an erection of mud, half nest, half bed, and he began to listen for his own brain. There in the dark night, amid the silent rushes and the sleeping birds, this man lay alone and listened for his brain. The birds slept with heads bowed into their puffed chests, eyes half open, so that they appeared more deep in thought than sleeping. No wind stirred the rushes. Above, the stars twinkled a million miles off, yet without sound. In this kind of immeasurable quiet, the Arboretor began to exercise the parts of his body, one after the other, and soon confirmed that he could feel each separate part perform its special motion. He felt each definite movement, he heard each separate movement in his brain. Then he thought—I can feel my thumb move, I can hear my knee-cap revolve. But often both these parts of me are still. My brain, alone of all my organs, is never still. My brain is the eternally active limb—yet I cannot ever remember hearing it move! The physicians tell me it is made of grey cells, of curling matter. Now, as I think, these cells should surely pump, this matter should expand and retract. An organism that by its nature is always on the go must surely perform a motion that is perceptible! So the Arboretor lay in the dark and listened for the pumping of the cells of his brain.

“Through the night he listened. Once he almost felt a tremor of movement within the bright darkness that lay within his skull. He nearly imagined the point, the dark point, where part of his brain actually touched the interior bone of his skull. But in a second the sensation was lost. And again he strove, listening, listening, every muscle relaxed, every fibre of nerve eased, his eyes turning up behind closed lids towards the lost recess within him, his ears thrilling to every stealthy possibility. Through the long silence of the night he listened. He never noticed the darkness cool to dawn. But the night’s silence was broken abruptly by a sharp clap of thunderous music—the first chord of the dawn, when all the birds sing together. Startled from his reverie, the Arboretor sprang to his feet and from that time forever he was convinced of the brain’s limit. The brain could not perceive itself! The Arboretor saw that he perceived all things through his brain: how then could the brain ever perceive itself through itself? There lay its first limit. And if the brain admitted one limit, why not others?

“A year later the maze was planted and the Arboretor was leading the people down from the city to the halcyonry. There they lived for some weeks. From the black mud of that vital necropolis they gazed up at their own live city and were able thus to study their error. Then the Arboretor led them up the hill to the maze. As he went, he explained the ultimate necessity

of the maze, of whose purpose the people were almost ignorant."

The tourist's eyes lit with some sort of excited pleasure. He had turned his face to the topiarist's mask, and was gazing up into it with deep interest. But his hand still clutched the watch, and now he both asked a question and confirmed a statement in the same breath, as if he wished to utter both messages at exactly the same time. "Tell me, tell me—what then is the purpose of the maze? . . . I must most certainly catch my train. I cannot remain here a second longer. . . ."

They had reached the bottom rung of the gazebo ladder. Without turning his head, nor altering his speed, the topiarist smiled again. "There is plenty of time," he said. And with his free right arm—for he had the tourist grasped firmly in the other—he reached down and unbuckled his shears. "Plenty of time," he repeated, perhaps to the tourist, or the shears, or to the wall of yew that rose darkly above them.

Abruptly the topiarist released his grip on his companion's arm, swung the shears to the front, and started to cut a passage into the thick shrub. The tourist was free! His arm was free! His legs danced wildly! His eyes laughed out towards the station! . . . Then he heard the sound of the shears. Poised in the very act of flight, his body relaxed. He turned slowly back towards the hedge. The watch sprang back to his pocket. It seemed that he was impelled towards the hedge by a curiosity from which he could never now escape, though just a moment before his will had hastened in precisely the opposite direction. The topiarist clipped without effort, his tall body erect and supple, so that he scarcely seemed to move his arms. It appeared that he was inevitably certain of his passage. The dark yew fell easily. So swiftly did the topiarist clip that he was able to proceed at a leisured walking pace. Soon they had passed into the shadow of the evergreen.

Together they traversed some fifty metres when suddenly the shears changed their tune. The muffled clipping rang suddenly loud and metallic. The shears were cutting on air! It was plain that they had penetrated some alley already cut. The topiarist quickly silenced the new sound. He bent down to press his face closely against the thin screen of leaves and branches that remained. He indicated silence with a raised forefinger and beckoned the tourist to bend down also.

Through the screen the tourist saw some twenty people slowly clipping an avenue through the yew beyond. They clipped with precision, taking great care that the walls of their avenue were perfectly straight. They appeared just at that time to be engaged

upon a right-angled turn. The hedge corner was cut with fine, sharp squared exactitude. As they bent to their shears, the people talked. To the tourist, prying through the interlaced leaves, they seemed ordinary people, dressed ordinarily, and of ordinary conversation. All twenty were talking about people of their acquaintance, discussing with relish each foible of their recollection, arguing at length each idiosyncrasy of their subject. Occasionally one or other of them giggled ; sometimes one would whisper a tremendous item of news ; then another would shrug his shoulders with scornful finality, and with a satisfied sigh, mutter "What *else* would you expect of her ?"

The tourist and the topiarist peered through the hedge for quite a time. They watched the twenty gossipers turn the corner, they waited until, apparently having completed a square, the party returned to view. Clipping and gossiping. Gossiping and clipping. They never paused in their clipping, they never ceased to chatter. One felt that this procedure continued indefinitely, for all the hours of daylight, into the night, and then afresh the next morning. The tourist shuddered. There was no reason why the people should not combine conversation with their work. That would be normal enough. But somewhere the tourist sensed a connection between the clipping and the conversation, as if each were complementary of the other. Just as he could sense a hopeless void, something emptily perpetual—although for all the tourist really knew the party might at any moment have dropped their shears and made off home. "No, not hopeless," said the topiarist, smiling softly with his teeth. "Hopeful. Remember, the clipping is voluntary. These people are living with hope." "But come," he added, turning his shears into the shrub again, "you must see some of the others."

They walked for some time between the high walls of yew. Leaves scattered the freshly cut pathway. Their feet trod into the smiling prepucced berries that winked pinkly in the green. Now the topiarist made no effort to lead his companion. The tourist followed, fearful yet willing, lagging yet curious, driven by strange possibilities, welcoming despite all his formal horror some inviting attitude that was scarcely believable—or had not yet taken shape enough to be believed.

Once more the shears rang as they clipped air, once more the two men bent to survey the alley they had nearly entered. Ten men and two women were clipping carefully the walls of an arbour. The arbour was perfectly rectangular. In the centre stood a square pillar of yew. It was plain that the men were business men. They wore dark suits and high white collars : the women wore pince-nez and suits of severe couture. All

twelve people talked as they clipped, discussing with each other the trends of the market, the vagaries of the exchange, the formation of trusts that might control trusts that dispensed trusts. "I paid three eighths for the preferred—then unloaded them for lei. Lei bumped up three points the next day," said the nearest man, who was just then engaged in clipping, with meticulous care, a small buttress that protruded from the arbour's wall. Another, who was working at the bottom of the hedge, near the ground, remarked to one of the younger men, "The romance of commerce! That's what you must see in the figures on your desk. The big steamers, the spices plucked by languorous hands in some tropical paradise. . . ." The young man smiled brightly with absent eyes that saw nothing beyond the figures which had weakened them.

Now the tourist felt the beginnings of panic. Wildly he sucked at his reassuring tooth. For the first time he had noticed that the arbour had neither entrance nor exit! The twelve people were completely hedged in! There seemed no possibility of escape—unless, of course, they were to cut their way out. But despite this possibility, the very sight of twelve persons confined in such a closed green box affected the tourist with a claustrophobia, admittedly indirect, but none the less unpleasant. How he wished to go! His panic rose urgently. He imagined that he still retained the independence of his going and coming. He attributed his presence in the maze to a personal and voluntary mood of curiosity. Nevertheless, before taking to his heels, he grabbed the topiarist by his sleeve and whispered quickly, "Tell me, how did they get there? Will they escape?"

The topiarist pointed to a vertical strip of the wall where the yew showed a lighter green. "See the fresh leaves?" he asked, turning his unseen eyes to the tourist. "That is where they entered. Since then the yew has grown again across their passage. Those people will never retrace their journey, although perhaps they will often cast backward a longing glance. Yes, they will sometimes wish to return: but all they will remember of their path will be brought to them by the illusory green of the fresher shoots—just a vague recollection of their past as they screw up their eyes to follow where the new yew has not yet grown to the height of the older walls. Nevertheless they will return no further than by the measure of their longing." As he spoke, the topiarist took up his shears and started to cut a new passage forward. "But the function of the maze," he added, "mitigates any need for these nostalgias."

The tourist had listened to his words with apprehension. He fingered his collar. He pulled at his watch. Fearfully, he

glanced behind him. Yes, the new shoots were already forcing themselves out of the walls that had so recently been cut ! The yew grew fast ! In some places fresh branches from either side were nearly interlaced ! Soon, thought the tourist, the passage by which I have entered will have disappeared ; soon all escape will be improbable ! He pulled wildly at his watch. Around him lay the incomprehensible workings of a new way of life : somewhere in the dry dust at the yewroots and in the attitude of its people he sensed a wisdom and a high standard that opposed directly the essence of his old life. This life was his to adopt—now—if he willed it. But only by the sacrifice of his old ways. He found himself wishing clearly for strength to adopt the topiary : but just as this wish grew clearer, so his love for the old ways loomed larger. It did not recede, as he would have imagined, in relation to his new desire. Instead, both inclinations grew equally to be giants that wrestled within him. Unable to decide, he found himself following the topiarist, stepping uncertainly, looking ever backwards to see that the weaving of the new shoots had not finally straddled his old path.

The topiarist had stopped again. Through the leaves they saw a small group of oldish men pre-occupied with the clipping of an intricate pattern. Sometimes one or the other would disappear within this minor labyrinth, only to re-emerge soon, clipping as he came, the sap dripping green blood from his shear-blades. These men did not talk so much. "Astronomers and men of science," whispered the topiarist. Then he bent his head to either side, as if listening for some sound that whispered beyond the walls of the alley in which they stood.

The tourist glanced hurriedly at the sky. It was still twilight. The thick walls of leaf were silhouetted, yet still remained green. One or two berries winked pinkly. Suddenly the topiarist began clipping the hedge to either side. He spoke over his shoulder, "An excellent place of vantage. We can see a lot from here. . . ." And it seemed that he was cutting a spacious polygon from which they could look out in many directions. As he finished each side, he motioned with his peaked cap for the tourist to look through to the scene beyond. The tourist walked from wall to new wall. Through each new screen he saw an arbour or an alley in which men and women of different categories were either talking or musing—but always clipping. "Artists !" whispered the topiarist of a group who were carefully re-erecting new walls from clippings they had recently sheared. And again—"Cryptologists, astrologers. . . ." of a party preoccupied with the combinations of a series of squared pillars. "Spiritualists. . . ."

Just then two young verdurers dressed like the topiarist came

shearing their way into the polygon. They carried trays slung from their necks. Busily, without glancing at either the topiarist or the tourist, they passed through the opposite wall. There they commenced to brandish the various objects that littered their trays, apparently offering them for sale to the people clipping. The tourist, peering anxiously through the screen, heard them cry, "Dockets? Anyone for dockets to-day? No? Well, something else? Here's the plumbline you've always wanted! No? Not even a plumbline? Well . . . perhaps a pigeon-hole?" And as they gesticulated, the people crowded round the trays and made their purchases with a great show of excitement. Yet, curiously, as they chattered, they never mentioned the purchases. They talked, though more excitably, of whatever they had previously been discussing. It was as if the act of purchasing was a ritual which could be performed in perfect mime by part of themselves while their real interest remained undiverted.

Again this strange complement of action and thought—but with no intermingling!

The tourist glanced back at the topiarist, then sucked his tooth efficiently to allay a sudden terror. The peak of the topiarist's cap was again growing longer. The shade of his eyes was growing deeper. Above, the twilight had begun to fade. Darkness hovered above them, slowly digesting the dead light. The topiarist raised his long shears and beckoned to the tourist. "Look through this screen, perhaps the last," he said. "This is the final grade our people have yet reached. . . ."

As the tourist thrust forward his head, trembling mechanically, like the head of a tortoise, fevered by the imminence of discovery, fearful of choice—he felt the shears cut through his waistcoat, he felt his watch fall to the turf!

From behind the yew a voice spoke. Each word hung on the air enclosed in its individual sphere of inviolable silence. \**"IT in itself is vague, impalpable. Yet within there is FORM. How profound, how obscure! Yet within it there is a vital principle. . . ."* And another voice answered:

*"It is the form of the formless: the image of the imageless. . . ."*

The tourist parted the leaves and saw beyond them a small arbour. Three aged men sat on the smooth turf. They were clipping, with the most tranquil technique, a low hedge of calm pattern—in the manner known to verdurers as box parterre. But, the tourist felt, this arbour is different from the others! Here is a distinct variance! But how? He tried to marshal the darting of his veins, he tried to stretch smooth his temple skin and direct the working of his brain. He studied the men.

\* Taken from the Taoist teaching.

They were ancient, their beards hung long and white. Yet there was no decay in the texture of these men. Their skins were neither crusted nor dry. Their faces were certainly lined, but the flesh bordering each wrinkle was rounded and smoothly polished. These were in no way the disordered markings of senility. The lines curved over the old men's faces in a formal pattern. They were a comment on senility. They ran as decidedly as the pigment tracery on a ceremonial mask; yet thinly and multiplied, subtly inscribed, traced with the light genius of a chinese brush. The words proceeded . . .

"It is a great square with no angles. . . ."

Although it was dark, the long bill of the topiarist's cap threw a blacker shadow across the tourist, who was now kneeling with his face pressed into the screen of leaves. Alone in this softer, greater darkness, the tourist felt his first real fear. Previously, he had feared perhaps only the idea of fear, the possibility of fearful atmospheres. But now the presence of each leaf, the sad violet of the sky, the silhouetted hedge-tops, the hidden roots, the wetly furred turf—each was charged with threat. The topiarist, who had grown so much taller, loomed above him. Somewhere behind his eye he felt the glittering of the shears. In the arbour beyond sat the three white old men, shining serenely in the darkness. This was the deepest twilight moment, the Grand Dusk—when the silence roars and the dew can be heard to drop. The tourist held his breath. At some moment now, at any moment, the husk of the secret would split, and the secret would overflow. . . .

"Even these wisest men cannot eradicate the brain's old system," whispered the topiarist, somewhere above. "But as you see, they alone are attempting the construction of a curved hedge."

So that was the difference! The old men were making a curve!

"But do you see? Do you see how they are setting about it? Look—they are constructing their curve from a numberless series of short straight lines! They have freed themselves of the right angle. But still they are slaves of the straight line—even with their intentions purified."

Grimly the tourist clung back to his old traditions. Deep in his pocket he gripped the key to his door, the locket of his wife, the cube-wrapped sample of his work, the ticket to his old life. These things had been sufficient. He shrunk from discovering the new things he longed for. For the new things would enlighten him. His reason would forever be torn from the peace of the old illusionary habits. He would have to change!

The topiarist was speaking again. "Quite quickly, and very

roughly, we have walked through some of the people's work. Just as the people work here in the maze—so they used to work in the city across the valley. Many matters conditioned the way they worked. Observing these detachedly, the Arboretor marked that a limitation in their minds conceived only two methods of work. Speaking pictorially, the people loved squares and they loved straight lines. How they enclosed their lives in squared boxes ! How they rushed their children into cubes ! How they muttered, over and over again, as they hurried from task to task, 'The straight line is the shortest distance from point to point !' The Shortest Distance ! The Straight Line ! It was a duty whose enchantment never waned. Oh, how these people measured ! They were lost in measurements ! They patted their strategies and inserted them neatly into pigeon-holes. So neatly that—you could say it without doubt—not a hairsbreadth of space was lost ! The strategies were packed vacuum-tight ! The greatest achievement was the plumbline of generalisation. Thrash a matter out, squarely. Get a decision. Compress those multitudinous details into a phrase, four by two ! That was the way of generalisation. Docket all doubt ! Commerce, art, law, ethic, anything—it made no matter what the subject was. Somehow marshal the worrying patterns into a simple, immortal rectangle !

"It was the way of the people's brains. The brain, the little new limb, undeveloped, still at a first moment of its evolution—the brain sized things that way, calculating its food to the measure of its limitations. It had perforce to work that way—the Arboretor knew that. It would be presumptuous to expect more. It was only healthy for it to work that way, for it was built to work that way. But—and this was the Arboretor's fear—the brain would by its very nature inevitably over-emphasise the importance of its working. It would deliberate in squares, dream on towards greater squares—and consumed only with these intentions, finally by-pass altogether the essence of living.

"So the Arboretor made his condition. While working, the Arboretor proclaimed, the brain must stand aside from itself and survey its work. The brain must not cease to work, but it must learn to smile at its ways, relegate itself to its proportionate importance in the unenumerated scheme of things.

"That was why the Arboretor led the people from the city to the maze. In the maze they exercise purely in the squares they love, but at the same time they are able to see what they do.

"Previously some of the people had attempted this in other ways. Some had lain on cushioned palace roofs and welded their eyes to the passing clouds. Others had tried to immerse

their first consciousness in a deadlock with the navel. Some had starved themselves, others had sliced away their genitals and aspired to rise, like aeronauts with their balloons freed of ballast, to the clearer skies above. The Arboretor deplored these methods. For, he said, the senses and the brain's first intentions were thus abandoned or diverted. They were wrenched from their natural part. Rightly, they should be not diverted—but absorbed.

"It was the Arboretor's belief that only through an artificial mechanic could the spirit achieve not peace, not happiness, not rest—but a satisfactory freedom, a right place in the chaotic present that is part of a perpetual, thoroughly imperceptible harmony.

"But the mechanic should be such that it absorbs the first senses, uses them, and at the same time discards them to their position in the whole perspective. A mechanic such as the maze.

"Look, tourist! Press your eyes between the leaves and drink in a fine phenomenon!" (For they were on their way again, striding more swiftly than before, whirring through the shrub at a new and urgent speed, the little shorn leaves now milling behind them in a green cloud.)

The tourist saw what he thought were three more of the old men. Three white shapes sat thoughtfully in a circle on the dark turf. The half-light gleamed on their bald heads. But unlike the others—they were not patterning the yew. Instead, each held an instrument. One plucked the strings of a lute. Another strayed his fingers over a formation of chessmen. The third pondered over a sum of figures inscribed upon a mathematical board. Suddenly the tourist realised that these were not old men. They were children.

"The prodigies," said the topiarist, "are at work in this special arbour. Do you see? Children, who somehow have been born with a prescience of abstract pattern! Chess, music, mathematics—these are the only three gifts of the prodigious children. It is never otherwise. Now, tourist, what does this suggest? Why should the pure matter of these brains inherit this extraordinary grasp of abstract pattern? Whence the knowledge? What power has dispensed it?

"How can we tell? Perhaps it is a legacy of all the past. Perhaps the spermcells of a thousand ancestors have added up the sum of their knowledge in those tiny, enormous brains. No, we cannot be sure how the knowledge was transmitted. But its fact suggests to us an idea. The idea that a pattern, a balance and a harmony, do fundamentally, universally, perpetually exist. That these great perceptibles are not the delusions of our daily

minds ! They are ! There *is* balance, there *is* an eternal complement. A tree, flowering its wild intricacy of leaves, with no apparent direction, with no intended design—nevertheless emerges wholly balanced. The turn of each leaf, the vagary of each wild twig, the journey of each great branch, begins chaotically yet finally takes its part inseparably in the complete pattern.

“And the brain—the little brain—tries to solve this ! The brain is not content with the pleasant company of great pattern ! No, it presumes, the little brain, to analyse and docket the mystery, applying its own insignificant limits ! Why, tourist, should reason presume to bridge the abyss between the earthly and the moving essence ? How can it think to impose its ridiculous conceptions of beginning and end to this essential non-form ?

“Even the wiser people, the old ones who attempt a curve, speak of their discovery as ‘a great square with no angles !’ These men approach understanding—still it is apparent that they assume the possibility of a square, though negatively, from the very choice of their words.

“Surrounded with the lozenges, the sacs, the conches, the discord shapes of nature, it is phenomenal that the people should still mould their plastic creations in the grim rectangle and in the myth of the round wheel. Yet their own bodies, if they look down, are composed from shapes with no symmetry. Nevertheless, with this evidence not only before their eyes but in them, they gasp for the illusionary finite.

“No, tourist, rather let the people delight in the sense of mystery than its solution. That is the real æsthetic, the true satisfaction of living. Cast off the earnest of importance. Accept the role of the twig, incoherent in itself, only significant as part of the whole. Accept your temporal chaos and love it. Love it as a thing without form, yet know gratefully that a timeless pattern is nevertheless fulfilled. All things are different, yet all things are equal. Laugh away the millennium cult, welcome the sweets of disorder.

“Yet never cease to live every precious fraction of the moment. Taste everything. Keep on trying to build. The search of the square must continue. It is valuable as effort. But synchronise the search with a smiling cathartic. Remain aware of your perspective.

“The Aboretor despised values of the absolute. He revered only the hymns of degree and extent.”

The last words sang out high over the tremendous maze. The topiarist towered up into the twilight sky. His huge shape stood

silhouetted like a giant monument against the pervading violet glow. The tourist knelt humbly, a speck at his feet. The shears were dangling above his head.

Then—everything moved ! The giant topiarist shrivelled to the size of a fly ! He whirled up again to his full height ! Again he shrivelled ! Again he was great ! And all the while he laughed. Fly-size, he roared with a deep laughter. "Ho, ho. Great or small ? Does it matter ? Am I the same ? Topiarist, fly ! Fly, topiarist ! The delusion, tourist ! See it ? Then get off your knees and live !"

The giant shadow swelled finally to the skies. Now the figure was greater than ever before. So huge, so terrifying, that terror became pleasurable. This was the ultimate time when pleasure and pain, love and hate, loss and gain, were all one. With a last suck at his hollow tooth, the tourist arose from his knees. The topiarist beckoned and started to walk forward. The tourist dragged his old emblems from his pocket ; key, ticket, sample and locket went whirling away behind him as he strode freely forward in the path of the increasing and diminishing giant.

"Come," said the topiarist. "We have plenty of time. And as we walk, I shall tell you a story. 'Once there was a tourist and a topiarist. . . .'"

## PETER YATES

### THE MOTIONLESS DANCER\*

TURNING from movement to sky  
Accepting the wind and the lime,  
A statue resting in time  
Singes the living with thought.  
Loving the fleshless and pure,  
How muscular limbs endure  
Like thresholds tempting the eye !

A feather descending the air,  
Bruising the loneliest nerve ;  
Insisting duration's curve  
In menace of growing space !  
See how they linger and burn,  
Too wildly living to learn  
His poise on the highest stair.

\* Peter Yates was born of British parents in India in 1914. For some years he led a vagabond life in America ; was a rubber planter in Sumatra ; taught English on the Continent before the war ; and has recently been invalided out of the Army. He has published one book of poems, *The Expanding Mirror* (1942).

Watching the movement of birds,  
The tear and the falling leaf,  
The frictional force of life  
Renewing the earth with green ;  
Can living interpret his face ?  
Apollo's immobile grace  
Dividing the Word into words ?

Tempting the mind with the eyes,  
Unfolding their form like shrouds,  
The restless flowering clouds  
Deride the thought which is still ;  
But whispering blood remains  
In the hairy ropes and stains  
Where the ivy clasps his thighs.

In thought he has always been :  
His pure and motionless force,  
Like dying without remorse,  
Troubles the living with calm ;  
For balancing loving and grief,  
He masters the daring leaf  
Which brushes his lips with green.

Ask is he living or dead,  
This god in durable stone ;  
Himself the ultimate bone  
Which sings in the flesh of all.  
Calling the new and the strange,  
The winds of eternal change  
Circle his arrogant head.

Is he the labour and end,  
The final of mind's resource—  
This cold detachable force  
Like pain in a frozen tear ?  
Slowly the spirit may climb ;  
He rests forever in time,  
Knowing the will must bend.

Movement encircles his base.  
Is it for living they strive ?  
This bitter creative drive,  
Lifting the blood out of flesh,  
Cooling its danger with thought ?

## THE MOTIONLESS DANCER

For only the act is caught  
In the sorrow that haunts his face.

Column surmounting the verge,  
Lifting his head into sky !  
While craving the movements die  
He bridges the gulfs of life,  
Moulding the ashes with form ;  
Calm at the centre of storm,  
His effortless ease the urge.

Living uncovers the lie  
Of the restless moving waves,  
And the wind whose veering saves  
With its lovely voice of change.  
In the forests ancient groan,  
His pure symmetrical stone  
Teaches the living to die.

Rivers unwinding their source,  
Splinter the valleys with light,  
Claiming that movement is right,  
And the pure duration life.  
See how the water's flowing  
Prolongs its glitter of going,  
Tempting the mind on its course !

And daily the baffling sea,  
Exerting its ageless change ;  
Proclaiming the far and strange  
Expanding nature of world ;  
Tempting the blood as it sings,  
A tremor of vibrant wings  
In the carnal rose to be.

Invisible rivets bind  
His powerful upward urge  
As his shoulders touch the verge  
Of horizon's shadeless line.  
Living may throb at his base,  
But never define that face  
Which beckons the daring mind.

Skirting the fringe they move  
Like frail articulate birds,

Lovers creating their words  
To arrest the darkening flood.  
Calm on their wave of desire,  
The fingers playing with fire  
Deny what living will prove.

But calm which loving has left  
Breathes out of the lonely bone  
The candour which gives the stone  
Its secret of living death ;  
Bursting the prison of sense  
His being is made intense,  
And lives by living bereft.

A passion without desire—  
Who in these genitive storms  
Deciphers in ancient forms  
The truth of its dazzling nil ?  
Will ever the strong and live,  
Who accept and proudly strive  
Acclaim its terrible fire ?

Though watching a falling leaf,  
The blood may long to be still ;  
The hesitant human will  
Divides the source of its calm :  
Charmed by the glitter of act,  
Living can never retract  
The passionate taint of life.

Brushing the foam of the clouds,  
Releasing an inward storm,  
His pure symbolical form  
Stands over the curving world.  
Dying interprets his face ;  
Still its inflexible grace  
Propels the shivering crowds.

Is ever his secret caught,  
Resolved in the mind and known ;  
Desired for joy alone ?  
Imagined and motionless dance ;  
Centre of mobile storm—  
His is the ultimate form  
The flesh into Word has thought !

Piercing the tremulous heart ;  
 Deriding the natural laws ;  
 Asserting himself the cause  
 Of all that ever remains ;  
 This force which nothing can kill :  
 A glimpse of his haunting nil  
 In delicate bones and art.

## DEMETRIOS CAPETANAKIS

### NOTES ON SOME CONTEMPORARY WRITERS

"Arts are tools . . ."—*Herman Melville*

#### I

THOSE who mix up things and expect anything new in the arts to look eccentric, wonder why *New Writing*, which never publishes anything particularly eccentric, was given its name. Yet it is clear to anyone who looks carefully into its origins, that this periodical was founded in order to combat, besides other things, novelty for novelty's sake in the arts. Its founder and editor, in a poem which he wrote two or three years before the first volume of *New Writing* appeared, and in which he expressed a conception of life and literature common among the writers of his generation, saw the "eccentric style of writing" as a symptom of "illness which brings illness." It was in order to fight what they considered as the illness of the times that the young writers of the 'thirties, who had first collaborated in *New Signatures*, in 1936 came together again, with a number of fresh names, in the pages of the new book-periodical. Writing was a most serious matter to them. The "new" they asked from literature was not novelty, but a healthier, more human world. This world did not come as they expected and prophesied, but, at the moment of failure, another world they were not looking for was revealed to them.

Here I would like to sketch a few thoughts suggested by the search, the adventures, the failure and the success of those among the young writers of the 'thirties, whose seriousness was so deep that it made them embark upon that perilous and dramatic journey : the philosophic quest.

One of them, Stephen Spender, who often strikes an astonishing depth in speaking about poetry, in one of his last essays described the poet as "pursuing philosophic truth through interpretation of experience." The poet must be driven to writing poetry by philosophical anxiety—the anxiety which asks : "What is the

meaning of life? What do I live for? Why do we live, and why must man suffer?" Sometimes these questions lead to abstract speculations, that is to philosophy in the strict sense, while at other times the anxiety behind them finds outlet and expression in artistic creation. And that is what usually happens in England. The most genuine philosophical anxiety of the English is to be found not so much in the works of their philosophers, as in the works of their poets, their dramatists and their novelists. There certainly is more philosophical anxiety in Shakespeare than in Bacon, in Donne than in Locke, in Virginia Woolf than in G. E. Moore. I do not know any English philosopher of to-day who described the subject of all philosophy as vividly as Virginia Woolf did in *To the Lighthouse*: "The old question which traversed the sky of the soul perpetually, the vast, the general question which was apt to particularise itself at such moments as these, when she released faculties that had been on the strain, stood over her, paused over her, darkened over her. What was the meaning of life? That was all. A simple question; one that tended to close in on one with years. The great revelation had never come. The great revelation perhaps never did come. Instead there were little daily miracles, matches struck unexpectedly in the dark; here was one . . . Life stand still here, Mrs. Ramsay said. 'Mrs. Ramsay! Mrs. Ramsay!' she repeated. All was silence."

This seems to me very similar to what Aristotle must have meant when he described the subject of philosophy as the question always asked and never answered. There is no answer. Silence is what surrounds our lives. But we usually do not realise it. We speak so much and so loudly almost all the time, that we forget all about the menace hidden in the silence in which our lives move. If we listened to it, we would be profoundly disturbed, and no one likes to be disturbed. Yet sometimes we become aware of the silence which is all round us. We call, but no response comes. What can this mean? Who could tell what it does mean? And anxiety—philosophical anxiety—begins. One has to ask the same question over and over again, but no answer is heard, and the more conscious one becomes of the silence, the more anxious one's questions grow.

Very few people know this anxiety, since very few people take life seriously enough to pay any attention to what surrounds it. Even poets and writers, whom one would expect to face life in all its reality, do not always bother about any ultimate questions. That is why it is so exciting and moving when one detects the tremor of philosophical anxiety in the verse of a poet, especially when this poet is a contemporary.

The passion for truth is what makes so interesting the most gifted among the young poets and writers of the 'thirties.

## II

"The true poets must be truthful" they had been taught by Wilfrid Owen, the poet whose seriousness had appealed so much to theirs, and to whom they listened more than to anyone else. Writing was a way to find truth for them. In one of his earlier poems, John Lehmann described what writing meant to him and, in some way, to all the group of poets who collaborated in *New Signatures* first and, later on, in *New Writing* :

To penetrate that room is my desire,  
The extreme attic of the mind, that lies  
Just beyond the last bend in the corridor.  
Writing I do it. Phrases, poems are keys.  
Loving's another way (but not so sure).  
A fire's in there, I think, there's truth at last  
Deep in a lumber chest. . .

These lines are one of the most complete expressions of philosophical anxiety that I know. Those whose mind is disturbed by this anxiety cannot be satisfied with the meaning which life seems to have. They are always looking for another, more satisfactory, more profound meaning hidden behind the appearances of the world. For them beyond all rooms open to common experience, there must be an "extreme attic," a truth, in which one could find a greater security and warmth. There must be a certainty somewhere hidden behind all the uncertainties of life, a secret order behind the disorders of the world. But how can one find them? One is kept awake by the anxiety which never stops asking: "What is the meaning of all this? Is there any meaning at all?" But no one knows how to read the cryptogram. Yet in some moments of extreme concentration, in moments of union with the beloved or in moments of artistic creation for instance, one sometimes feels that somehow the cryptogram is going to yield its secret. The secret is never revealed, of course; but one is given the impression that if one devoted oneself completely to love or to artistic creation, one would be nearer to the meaning of life.

The failure to which all philosophical efforts inevitably lead was described by John Lehmann in this same poem, and by C. Day Lewis in his *Transitional Poem*, which is a typical example of a work born of philosophical anxiety :

Sometimes I'm near,  
But draughts put out the matches, and I'm lost.

Sometimes I'm lucky, find a key to turn,  
Open an inch or two—but always then  
A bell rings, someone calls, or cries of "fire"  
Arrest my hand when nothing's known or seen,  
And running down the stairs again I mourn.

. . . the flash  
That bleakly enlightens a few sour acres leaves but  
A more Egyptian darkness whence it came.

Nevertheless, in spite of all failures, philosophical anxiety, which grows stronger with each failure, does not let one—give it up. "Sleep on, you fells and profound dales," we read in this same poem by Day Lewis :

There is no  
Material wind or rain can insulate  
The mind against its own forked speculation,  
When once that storm sets in.

Once one has experienced the need to find the meaning of one's life, one cannot easily resign oneself to a life without the hope of a meaning. One must try to find it, even if something tells one that one may never find it. Those who feel that love is the way for them to be nearer to the meaning of their lives, must love as much and as completely as they can. Those who feel that writing can give them the key to the "extreme attic of the mind," must apply themselves to writing with all the seriousness of their being. Both ways, of course, are dangerous to everyday happiness. Love as well as artistic creation, when they are taken seriously as ways which could lead to the revelation of the meaning of life and not as pleasures which make one forget the anxiety of one's existence, are full of perils. One must be really brave to choose love or writing as one's guides, because they may lead one to the space in which the meaning of our life is hidden—and who can say that this space may not be the land of death? In the works of all writers who wrote driven by philosophical anxiety one often finds the shudder given by the nearness of death. This shudder often runs through the rhythms of the poets I am considering here. I remember some lines by Auden :

Nights come bringing the snow, and the dead howl  
Under the headland in their windy dwelling  
Because the Adversary put too easy questions  
On lonely roads.

I also remember *A Pure Despair*, which in its bare simplicity, is to me one of the most beautiful poems of the 'thirties :

He did not die with loathing for the worms,  
 Or fear of pain, or tunnel's gloom ahead,  
 But with a pure despair refusing terms  
 That suns of summer for their kindness made,  
 Turned his desire from green and flowered growth  
 To rocky dark and long before he died,  
 A lonely miner, worked new ores of death.

## III

But to the young writers of the 'thirties, writing did not only mean a way by which they could come nearer to the truth they needed as individuals. They had grown up in the midst of the disorder and suffering of the last war and of the years which followed the war, and the problems of disorder and suffering never stopped haunting them. But in their earlier works it is not only the feeling that there is something wrong with the world as it is, which strikes me. These young writers were conscious of something else too—of their own lives as full of possibilities, promises and aspirations. And the strength and hope of youth that was in them made them feel that they had a mission to fulfil. The world was not as it should be ; it needed changing ; and since they felt strong and full of life, why not do all they could for this changing ? Poetry is a power. Why waste it, and not use it for putting right the things that were wrong ? Poetry should be used for creating history.

The young writers of the 'thirties looked at the "truly great" of history with jealous eyes. They wanted to become makers of history themselves, creators of a new man and a new society in which there would be no disorder and no suffering. "Writing" could help not only their own selves, but also others to find the meaning of life. Their ambition as writers was boundless : they wanted to abolish human misery.

Only people who know nothing of the poetry of the 'thirties can describe it simply as "Marxist" or "Freudian." What obsessed its poets primarily was human misery, not as it was described by Marx or Freud, but as they came to know it themselves, and the new society and the new man they were prophesying were not simply second-hand visions of Marx or Freud, but above all creations of their own poetic imaginations. They wanted a social revolution, because there was too much disorder and suffering in society as it was. They also wanted man free from inhibitions and denials, which mean illness, unhappiness and deadening of life. They dreamed of a society based on the love of man for man, and of a man who would be a man. There is a well-known poem by Stephen Spender—*Oh young men, oh young comrades*—in

which the coming free men, free from the bonds of society and from those of their own selves, are invoked :

Oh comrades, step beautifully from the solid wall  
Advance to rebuild and sleep with friend on hill  
Advance to rebel and remember what you have  
No ghost ever had, immured in his hall.

Such dreams of a beautiful, luminous and joyful humanity were only one of the ways by which the preoccupation of the poets with the ugliness, greyness and misery oppressing and deadening man, was expressed. In some of their prose works, for instance John Lehmann's *Evil was Abroad*, one can see what the suffering caused by social injustice meant to the writers of the 'thirties. It was a kind of cipher of the meaning of life to them. Their sympathy for the poor and the oppressed sprung out of their need to approach man in all his reality, out of their fear to be excluded from a most significant part of life. The desire to make out the meaning of a humanity oppressed and deformed physically and mentally by social injustice became to the writer of the 'thirties a craving "like the need for light, or water." The hero of *Evil was Abroad* felt that the close contact with the oppressed "was bringing him new understanding of the poetry" in which he was interested, "just as much as the poetry was bringing him towards the living." In this remark I find much that explains the passionate interest of the poets of the 'thirties in social problems. It was their philosophical anxiety, the anxiety that made them write in order to penetrate deeper into truth, which also made them attempt to enter the lives of the starving, to meet them in sympathy and friendship with no social barriers between them as human beings.

I am jealous of the weeping hours  
They stare through with such hungry eyes,

wrote Stephen Spender;

I'm haunted by these images,  
I'm haunted by their emptiness.

In *The Losers*, one of C. Day Lewis's most disturbing poems, we can clearly see how closely related to their philosophical anxiety was the interest of the poets in social justice :

What can we say of these from the womb wasted,  
Whose nerve was never tested in act, who fell at the start,  
Who had no beauty to lose, born out of season ?

Early an iron frost clamped their flowing  
 Desires. They were lost at once : they failed and died in  
 the whirling  
 Snow, bewildered, homeless from first to last.

Frightened we stop our ears to the truth they are telling  
 Who toil to remain alive, whose children start from sleep  
 Weeping into a world worse than nightmares.

At the time when *New Writing* was being founded, the poets were obsessed with the truth which the poor and oppressed, "the losers," were telling, more than with anything else. The first numbers of the new publication appeared to many as pure revolutionary propaganda. But they were a great deal more than that. They expressed the philosophical anxiety of their young contributors, who felt impelled to fix their eyes upon human misery in order to read its disturbing meaning. What they read in it was more than the necessity of a social revolution. It is interesting to compare the end of *Evil was Abroad* with a poem by David Gascoyne. This is what I read in the novel :  
 "He was haunted by the description of the dishevelled outskirts of a city at twilight. . . . As he went over it in memory, he found himself making the scene curiously exact : there was a lamp which had just been lit, behind the black back-wall of an unfinished, isolated house-block, and beyond was a sort of common, covered with scrap-iron and rubbish. And then, just as if he were watching a film or play, he saw a figure cross the common, with head averted ; and the figure was unmistakably Rudi, from the hair, from the way he moved. . . ."

And here are a few lines from the poem which this passage brought into my mind :

And in a flash  
 Of insight I behold the field's  
 Apotheosis : No man's land  
 Between this world and the beyond,  
 Remote from men and yet more real  
 Than any human dwelling place :  
 A tabernacle where one stands  
 As though within the empty space  
 Round which revolves the Sage's Wheel.

#### IV

What is interesting in the early volumes of *New Writing* is not propaganda, but the expression of the philosophical anxiety of its contributors, who craving for truth and justice had to stop

and concentrate before the most baffling cipher, the fact of injustice and suffering. Stephen Spender, who wrote :

There is no consolation, no, none  
In the curving beauty of that line  
Traced on our graphs through history, where the oppressor  
Starves and deprives the poor.

Paint here no draped despairs, no saddening clouds  
Where the soul rests, proclaims eternity.  
But let the wrong cry out as raw as wounds  
This Time forgets and never heals, far less transcends ;

Stephen Spender said in one of his latest essays—actually in the same essay in which he described the poet as “pursuing philosophic truth” : “It is as well to keep this suffering of humanity in the forefront of our picture of the situation of the poet-artist. It is far truer to do so than to talk of the Pink Decade, Left Wing, and so on, terms which tend to be fashionable jargon.” If one thinks that the preoccupation of the young writers of the 'thirties with human suffering was more important than their “communism,” one will find that these writers have not changed much since their revolutionary days. Even if they have stopped writing as if they were making communist propaganda, they have never stopped being revolutionary. Now they must hate the order of the world as it is even more than they used to before. To-day the meaning of human suffering must appear to them more baffling, more disturbing than a few years ago. Their own bewilderment has gone even deeper and has become a terrifying knowledge.

It seems as if the poetry of the 'thirties has been a failure. The change which it preached and prophesied has not come ; the evils which it tried to prevent, have not been prevented ; the dream of a new humanity has proved only a dream. Its words seem as if they dissolved in nothing. Even the poets themselves know that they failed.

But failure is something spiritually fruitful. Those who wrote because they wanted to know more about truth, the meaning of life, the reality of man, have been taught much by their failure. Failure reveals the terrifying abyss over which humanity moves, better than anything else. And it is this abyss which gives depth to human existence. In the works of these poets man has now taken his proper depth, at least in the works of those among them who have not been led to aberrations, because some of the young writers of the 'thirties have been led into aberrations.

Sometimes a man haunted by philosophical anxiety loses

patience and begins to think that a seemingly quicker and easier way to truth is preferable to the long and difficult one. One such seemingly quicker and easier way is mysticism, another is intellectualism.

The first seems to have been taken recently by Christopher Isherwood, the most talented, perhaps, of all the young prose writers of the 'thirties. Mysticism is a way of life which from time to time gives one the experience of personal annihilation in the depths of a night in which there are no distinctions, no differences, no divisions, no conflicts, in which all is one, and in which one is not separate from all. This is achieved by a negation of the intellect, this power which struggles to keep one in a lighted and divided world. To get rid of the intellect and sink oneself into the depths of a night, which seems the only reality, is, to my mind, a much too easy and much too doubtful way to truth.

Auden in his *New Year Letter* seems to have taken the opposite, but equally doubtful way to truth, intellectualism. Intellect has always been a danger in Auden's poetry, but in his best moments its mobile and cold unreality was always filled with the glowing and solid reality of feeling. His intellect did dance even then, but its dance was not empty, but full of a warm and suffering reality. Personally I prefer those lines of his which move in a slow way, in which there is more solidity of feeling than agility of intellect, such as :

Doom is dark and deeper than any sea-dingle.  
 Upon what man it fall  
 In spring, day-wishing flowers appearing,  
 Avalanche sliding, white snow from rock-face,  
 That he should leave his house,  
 No cloud-soft hand can hold him, restraint by women ;  
 But ever that man goes  
 Through place-keepers, through forest trees,  
 A stranger to strangers over undried sea,  
 Houses for fishes, suffocating water,  
 Or lonely on fell as chat,  
 By pot-holed becks  
 A bird stone-haunting, an unquiet bird.

Unfortunately, in *New Year Letter* he let his intellect dance free from much passion, and when the intellect comes and goes left to itself, or almost to itself, its dance is empty of real meaning, graceless, boring and useless. It does not lead anywhere. It plays with all the words philosophers use as tools for finding truth in abstract speculations, but the play is only a play, it does not make much sense. It is painful to make this

remark about a poet whom I had much in mind when at the beginning of this essay I wrote about the seriousness of the young writers of the 'thirties.

## V

Both these writers, Isherwood and Auden, expatriated themselves from England a little while before the war broke out. Those who remained at home—and I do not want to say by this that home is the best place for the quest of truth—remained also in the difficult and necessary way they had to follow. They accepted their failure with humility and dignity. Even Cecil Day Lewis, the proudest of all poets of his generation, who until quite recently preferred to keep out of his verse anything that could sound like the confession of defeat, or even of weakness, as if it were not becoming to a man to feel his weakness, or be defeated—even proud Day Lewis confessed his failure and his grief in a most moving, but not less masculine or poetic way than when he sung his power and triumphs :

It is the logic of our times,  
No subject for immortal verse,  
That we who lived by honest dreams  
Defend the bad against the worse.

Such an acceptance of the duty imposed by reality on the dreamer, is the best proof that his dreams were really honest. It is moving to remember what illusions about the power of verse the poet used to have, while one reads this :

Our words like poppies love the maturing field  
But form no harvest :  
May lighten the innocent's pang, or paint the dreams  
Where guilt is unharnessed.  
Dark over all, absolving all, is hung  
Death's vaulted patience :  
Words are to set man's joy and suffering there  
In constellations.

Humanity which has always been in the centre of C. Day Lewis's poetry, as in the works of all the most gifted writers of his generation, is now pictured in his work, as in theirs, more complete, deeper, as if with one more dimension, the meta-physical one :

Always our time's ghost-guise of impermanence  
Daunts me ; whoever I meet,  
Wherever I stand, a shade of parting lengthens  
And laps around my feet.  
But now, the heart-sunderings, the real migrations—

Millions fated to flock  
Down weeping roads to mere oblivion—strike me  
Dumb as a rooted rock.

Here humanity is represented in the dark infinite which surrounds it and which belongs to it. The poets who were trying to embrace the complete man in their works, have now discovered his metaphysical depth. For them now Man is more than a mere physical, psychological and social reality; he is also a metaphysical one. And that makes him infinite. Infinite as his solitude, or eternity.

This new image of man is now to be found not only in Cecil Day Lewis's poems, but also in Stephen Spender's recent poems—in the end of *The Ambitious Son*, in *Fates*, and in the all-embracing *Elegy*—and with a disturbing and powerful suggestiveness in John Lehmann's last poems. In his prose poems *Vigils*, the person addressed is seen "out there, in that black, heaving desert of the sea," or "among the white skulls and sandstorms of Africa," in the terrifying emptiness surrounding man's life. This empty space and the greatness of man in it, of man who fills the boundless void with the boundlessness of his solitude and despair, are suggested with the most haunting power in *Summer Story*. Here are the last lines of the poem :

. . . Those comrades from the citadel

One afternoon of dust and songs  
Turned and were swallowed in the glare ;  
Yet still goodbye, though few remained  
Grew a weed of rank despair,

Till I was left alone to meet  
(As I had always known must be),  
In the damp house, at summer's end,  
The dark Lieutenant from the sea.

The poetry of the 'thirties has not been in vain, since it led to this new land, which, although it is not the country this poetry was dreaming of, is a space in which man is seen in all his greatness. No one thinks that Columbus failed because instead of discovering the route to Cathay, he discovered America. The poets we have considered here started their voyage dreaming of a new man. They did not find this man in flesh, but, instead of him, when one night they stranded upon the rock of necessity, an image of man that exceeded in greatness all they had ever dared to dream of, was revealed to them. Their failure was their success.

# HENRY REED

## THE END OF AN IMPULSE

WHENEVER our art declines, we are tempted to blame history for it. Yet it would be unreasonable to blame history for the present decline of the lyric and the short story, for these appear to be earnestly bent on their own decline, and to have chosen carefully the paths it shall take. Little remains of the short story but its shortness ; it has become increasingly its habit to have so little story in it that now, if its action spreads over more than a day, one wonders if it is not trespassing on the domain of the novel. This static quality is rarely compensated for by the one thing that can justify it, penetrating observation of the point at which the story stands still. There is a parallel to this atrophy in the disintegrated form and the trivial content of many contemporary lyrics. "Decadence" is a word with unfortunate and often ridiculous associations, but it can be used literally of the present state of poetry, since one can point to certain definite things, once healthy and promising, which have decayed ; and one can trace the process of decay. It is of a surprisingly thorough-going character, for not only has technical accomplishment degenerated ; the general morality of the poetry-producing class—it is big enough to-day to be called a class—has degenerated with it. And though there are several young poets writing who possess, in varying degrees, individual voices and, assuming that such a thing is possible, a sense of objective dedication, they are vivid exceptions in their generation.

If one attempts generalisations about lyric poetry, superb misfits are apt to prove one wrong. But tentatively one may remark how much good lyric poetry seems to derive from a background of consciousness which is fairly coherent to the poet himself, and how much bad lyric poetry is the journalistic exploitation of a bright idea or a private reaction. We observe that the best work of a good poet of our own time, Mr. W. H. Auden, is fairly consistently and naturally related to a background of consciousness whose area each poem does a little to enlarge. It is not easy, perhaps, to define this background ; but one may say of Mr. Auden that this work is concerned with the building up of a vision of behaviour which shall take account of the limits to our freedom of will ; it is accompanied by an increasing curiosity about ethics, and an increasing religiousness. One is thinking here only of Auden's best ; that this vision is in recent years

presented more and more mechanically, does not alter its validity. He may at times paraphrase his sources woodenly :

Nowhere else could I have known  
 Than, beloved, in your eyes  
     What we have to learn,  
 That we love ourselves alone :  
 All our terrors burned away  
 We can learn at last to say :  
 " All our knowledge comes to this,  
 That existence is enough,  
 That in savage solitude  
     Or the play of love  
 Every living creature is  
     Woman, Man and Child."

But at his best, even when introducing his favourite concepts (Eros, the Just) rather glibly, he can express his vision movingly :

Defenceless under the night  
 Our world in stupor lies ;  
 Yet, dotted everywhere,  
 Ironical points of light  
 Flash out wherever the Just  
 Exchange their messages :  
 May I, composed like them  
 Of Eros and of dust,  
 Beleaguered by the same  
 Negation and despair,  
 Show an affirming flame.

This relation to a background, or a vision, or whatever we choose to call it, and the gradual development of it, the sense of a dedication to something outside the mere fact of writing, is outstandingly not true, on the other hand, of many of the younger poets whose work is sufficiently voluminous and striking for us to judge, nor is it true, in my opinion, of the later work of such a poet as Mr. Stephen Spender. The mere indulgence of strong emotions is not particularly profitable in poetry ; private suffering is only tolerable in art when it is related to a general penetrating insight into human consciousness. It is true that many poets are to-day depicting things about themselves which are perhaps tragic and are at least sad, and which happen in the lives of a few other people. But universality seems to be as little a part of their aim as it is of their achievement. And the most lasting impression one gets to-day is of poets drifting from one moment of inspiration to another, and from one poem to another.

The exhalations from this situation provide the characteristic climate of poetry to-day.

It was not, it seems to me, the climate in days, more buoyant than our own, when the Auden-Spender-Day Lewis group began to publish. And if we are to understand much that is distressing in the condition of poetry in the present year it is to the early 'thirties that one must turn. I belong to a younger generation than the group of writers who emerged at that time; I share a good deal of the disappointment which most readers feel at what has happened in the later work of some of them; and I believe their later work in some cases explains and extends defects in their earlier work.

Yet it is fitting, first to pay homage to these writers, and next to try to understand and to focus them, for their influence has been widespread and protracted, and to this influence may be traced things in later poetry with which they are only unwittingly connected. In trying to focus them we shall not—how indeed should we?—get much help from the poets themselves, though we may at other times be glad of their efforts to interpret each other. But it is always important not to take a group of writers at its own assessment. And this group seems steadily and always, to have misinterpreted itself as a group of *rebels*. This conception seems to have been prompted by nothing more substantial than the transient ebullience of political enthusiasm. In connection with their idea of themselves it is interesting to note their idea of their forerunners. Mr. John Lehmann, writing in 1940, says of "the giants of the 'twenties":

"... however much they fell out of fashion with the vanguard of the intellectuals in the next decade, and however much they may be neglected by the general reading public in years to come, it is difficult not to conclude that their achievement was very great, and that in the eventual perspective of history it will be recognised as such."

Yet to any approaching modern literature during the 'thirties, the "giants of the 'twenties" still seemed the outstanding figures of the time. The completest and most important works of the 'thirties were *The Waves*, *Murder in the Cathedral*, *The Family Reunion*, *Finnegans Wake*, and the later plays and poems of Yeats. And growing up in their shadow were admirable smaller buildings of which any generation in its first decade of writing might be proud—Auden's *Poems* (1930) and *Look, Stranger!* Spender's *Poems* (1933) and *Trial of a Judge*, MacNeice's *Poems* (1936), *The Earth Compels*, and his translation of the *Agamemnon*, Isherwood's *Lions and Shadows*. That is how in skeleton form the

'thirties seem to me to look now ; put on the end of the 'twenties, that is how they gradually emerged into one's view.\*

These later works, however far from perfect, however provincial the youthful vision of some of them appeared when contrasted with that of their mature contemporaries, were positive accomplishments ; and there was much more that was promising by them and by writers associated with them. As late as 1937 it was still possible to feel a great interest in their future ; and to feel that MacNeice in his apologia, *Modern Poetry : A Personal Essay*, published in 1938, was writing about a movement of great vitality. Yet looking at the relevant pages in John Lehmann's *New Writing in Europe*, published a few years later, one felt that though Mr. Lehmann's comments were equally detailed and penetrating one was reading about ghosts.

If one considers the developments of certain of them, one may see why. Two only of the poets of the time seem to me to have followed a normal line of progress : Mr. MacNeice, though he has never extended his range very far, has never lost his characteristic poise, and the best lyrics in his last volume *Plant and Phantom* have all the old radiance, music and colour ; Mr. Charles Madge, a poet of limited output, and oddly neglected, published in 1941 his second volume, *The Father Found*. It contains the most difficult poetry of our day, yet the simpler poems are of an eloquence unsurpassed by his contemporaries, and even in his most impenetrable moments he strikes one by his assurance of language and rhythm.

It is the later work of Day Lewis, Auden and Spender that is surprising. It is only in recent years that Day Lewis has become as considerable as his contemporaries. His "New Country" period now appears as a prolonged effort in a mistaken direction ; and if one wanted a parody of that period it is to Mr. Day Lewis's work that one would go. Lately, however, his work has found naturalness and grace, and his latest poems are remarkable for their beauty and warmth. The later work of Auden and Spender—infinity the most spectacular of these writers in their beginnings—has been, in the opinion of some even of their more generous contemporaries, quite extraordinarily disappointing. Auden's *New Year Letter*, indeed, casts light on unsatisfying features always apparent in his work. Quite apart from his gifts as a poet, he has always been an extremely brilliant versifier ; though perhaps less brilliant than some of his colleagues suggest, for when writing in

\* To these books should, of course, be added works of distinction by less widely publicised writers : Graham Greene's *The Power and the Glory*, for example, and Miss Bowen's *The Death of the Heart*, by writers whose position between these two generations reminds one of the absurdity of such a division.

difficult verse-forms taken from earlier writers or traditions, he regularly simplifies them in some way (an example of this is the *Letter to Lord Byron*, a notable exception the brilliant *sestina* in *Look, Stranger!*). Auden's frequent adaptation of other writers' manners leads him to be regarded favourably as a virtuoso, unfavourably as a *pasticheur*. The former is, I think, nearer the truth, but the effect of his particular kind of virtuosity on his later work has been disastrous. His own idiom is individual, recognisable (and sadly imitable), but he has developed only its potentialities for jocularity, sentimentality and preaching. Consequently the poetic instrument fit to synthesise the different aspects of his thought and vision and to explore them further has never been satisfactorily fashioned. In *New Year Letter* one is greatly struck by the inadequacy of the medium of expression to the frequent grandeur of the ideas: he has taken the light rhyming couplets used in Butler's *Hudibras* and elsewhere, rendered them invertebrate by the extirpation of their characteristic cæsura and applied them to philosophical subject matter which they merely render banal. The result, though the intellectual sources might have enabled such a writer to produce his first great work, is a poem which only duty compels one to read twice.

Yet our equipment all the time  
 Extends the area of the crime  
 Until the guilt is everywhere;  
 And more and more we are aware,  
 However miserable may be  
 Our parish of immediacy,  
 How small it is, how, far beyond,  
 Ubiquitous within the bond  
 Of an impoverishing sky,  
 Vast spiritual disorders lie.

The sonnets in *Journey to a War*, though one may discover moving ones among them, show a similar misapplication of another poet's technique: the manner of Rilke, emerging from a different experience, is grotesquely unsuited to this field of exploration. (One is reminded of the questionable uses to which certain prose writers have put Kafka.) It is as an artist, as a maker of poems, and not as a thinker, that Auden seems to fail in his later works. One may, for example, share, as I do, his belief in the theories of Groddeck; yet his versification of these—as in the opening of the poem *Pascal*—can induce (to parody Coleridge) an *unwilling suspension of belief*, a “poetic distrust.” Mr. Spender is a more difficult poet to deal with, and I have

already hinted at some of the reasons for the disappointment one feels with *Ruins and Visions*. Others I deal with later. His most successful works, since the fine concluding poems of his first volume, are his play, *Trial of a Judge*, and his novel, *The Backward Son*: the more exacting a form is, the longer it has to be worked on, the more successful he is with it. Both works are highly disciplined and well executed, and the novel, apart from its choice of epigraph, displays here and there the merciful gift of humour which sometimes breaks into Spender's reviewing. When one reads them one sees more clearly that the principal damaging factors to Spender's lyric verse have been his self-pity, his lack of a self-critical faculty, and his assumption that his private life must interest all.

I have dwelt on these developments, because they contribute greatly to the picture of to-day. In the 'thirties, as we have seen, writers who had already great achievements to their names, continued to increase their range. Of these only Mr. Eliot remains; he is still the most interesting writer of our time; but his presence does not compensate for the absence of flourish in poets who are in their thirties. And "history," or the war, cannot account for this.

What, we may ask, has gone? I spoke earlier of a background, a coherent reference, in the work of Auden. If we return to the early 'thirties we shall notice that the young poets of that time *all* actually had, however fortuitously, something in the nature of a background. It was perhaps accidental, it was certainly impermanent and incapable of development, but it gave their work as a whole a coherence which the obscurity of occasional separate poems did not destroy. It was a background of shared ideas: they were, with the exception of MacNeice, communists, though rarely of an orthodox kind, or of a kind tolerable to orthodoxy.

The common background their political beliefs provided seems to have deputised for a truer background of apprehension and understanding. And it gave them, when their work began to be published, the appearance of being fully armed from birth. Their ideas also provided a foreground: their work was by no means uniform in style, diction or form; but their imagery and scenery inevitably had a great deal in common, and a parallel to the list of quotations which Mr. Lehmann has recently compiled as representative of to-day's poetry at its most "pooled" could be compiled from the anthologies "New Signatures" and "New Country." The common lingo of that time is no longer sufficiently living to give pleasure, though it seems to me more satisfying than the common lingos of to-day; can it be that

it is already sufficiently dead to induce nostalgia? A foreground and background were not all that these men had in common. There was the deeper background of their own position in society—again it was something they shared, a common upper middle-class origin, and this seems to have held them together even more effectively than their opinions. One is, throughout their early work, enormously conscious of their origins. Perhaps their world seems doubly solid as compared with the world which has succeeded it, for its more sensitive members were drawn together by a knowledge of its impending collapse. It is less easy to-day to reach out across the rubble and the fallen masonry; and perhaps it does not greatly matter.

The effect of this group on the subsequent generation was appalling, for in addition to the purely poetic influence which it was destined to have on its successors, its moral influence was extreme. Unity and success: these were what the younger generation noticed particularly about their predecessors; and to these things must be added the obscurity which was the characteristic of them most widely commented on; it was an obscurity which Auden would later describe as being due partly to inability and partly to swank; it was also partly due, one imagines, to indifference to an audience from which the artist was financially independent. Consciously or unconsciously, these things were involved in the ego-ideal of the young writers who followed. The latter had neither the common bourgeois background of the Auden-group, nor, it seems, the same amount of inter-communication; and communism was no longer attractive or was too exacting; certain poets seemed to decide that a background, a common aim, must therefore be artificially faked to hold people together. And at least one association grew up—they called themselves the Apocalypse—which seems to have been held together by no stronger bond than the fact that six people can shout louder than one. The myth that the Auden-group were rebels had been sedulously fostered by the Auden-group themselves; it was therefore necessary that the newcomers should be rebels also, this time (it was almost a dialectic process) against the politically-conscious, over-intellectualised writers of the early 'thirties. It was not much of a rebellion. It took mainly the form of an occasional cautious dip into the pre-conscious, and was expressed by means of an imagery which dealt with hearty robustness in wind, blood and bones—though never with anything distasteful enough to be interesting. It affiliated itself to a poet of strong and vital gifts, and almost no organising power, Dylan Thomas; its work bore as much relation to his in vitality and daring as that of Fiona MacLeod

does to that of Yeats. Its flowering was brief; and again its writers have found themselves forced back on the problem of earning their own spiritual living.

This has been the nearest approach to anything that could be called a movement since the Auden-group. Possibly the war has prevented the formation of others. But there is a more striking thing which has emerged in recent years, which one feels is a consequence of the flamboyant success of the Auden-group, though the Auden-group is not to be blamed for it; this has been the astonishing increase of competitive spirit in a sphere where competition is the most ravaging of evils. Though there is no reason—as I said at the beginning of these remarks—for inclusive condemnation, one can not unfairly say that some younger writers of to-day recall the struggles to reach the sun that are found among overcrowded vegetation. It is forgotten that art may be produced in the dark, and that advertised argument is not inevitably a sign of virility. In considering a poet's work it is better to ask "Wherein lies So-and-so's magic and power?" than to ask "Who is better than Whom?"

The latter question is the one most often asked to-day. It finds its most perfect enunciation in these grotesque sentences from Mr. Francis Scarfe's *Auden and After*, a study in poetic enslavement:

"W. H. Auden will also be an important poet. He is a poet who is destined to miss greatness, but who might achieve importance by his synthesis of the typical thought and practice of poetry of his own time. But Spender might yet prove a greater poet: while the place of 'important' poet might well be wrested from him by T. S. Eliot. Eliot is unquestionably a finer poet and a better craftsman, with better taste, a more sane sense of proportion and a firmer control of language. Indeed, Auden owes many of his best qualities to Eliot. Auden has no individual poem which can rival 'Prufrock,' 'Ash Wednesday,' 'The Waste Land,' 'East Coker,' 'Dry Salvages,' unless it be his poem 'Spain,' which would give Eliot a score of five to one against Auden. This is a crude method of assessment, but any reader knowing the two poets will agree that with this quantitative estimate are implied also the great variations of method and style which are covered in Eliot's five poems. Nor has Auden done anything in the drama which, to my mind, Eliot has not done."

That is a fair sample of the literary morality of our day. Poets have been so much interested in the growth and state of their

reputations that their poetry has been left to fend for itself. And if we examine some characteristic points in the technique of modern verse we shall see that the later period has been one of drift.

Young poets, I have suggested, look to their living elders, especially to their immediate predecessors, for sanctions as to what is to be allowed. And the mannerisms of young poets may frequently be licences derived from misinterpreted actions of their forerunners. Two great characteristics in the poetic habits of to-day illustrate this. The first is the well-loved trick of near-rhyme. The effect of this on English poetry has been catastrophic. Yet it began well. In many poems Wilfrid Owen made singularly beautiful use of what have been vaguely called assonance and dissonance. But it is clear that Owen's rhymes set him a problem which only effort, application, a conscious testing of sound, and a perfect ear solved. His near-rhymes are a clear, definite musical *gain*. They are limited in their resource, and one feels that Owen was conscious of this. Yeats, who was also using near-rhymes as early as 1916, achieves equally satisfying effects.

There are poems in Auden's first volume which use this device with equal care; it is an irritating device if it becomes a semi-conscious habit, and the rhymes give a definite pleasure in this book, especially in satirical poems such as "Will you turn a deaf ear," and "We made all possible preparations." But after a time the device clearly became—and has largely remained—simply a means of making the writing of verse easier, a great boon to any writer whose principal desire might be to slip down on paper anything that came into his head and to leave it at that. In Auden's second volume of lyrics, *Look, Stranger!* the poems are much more formal, with a corresponding increase in the demands of the rhymes. And we find that the more complex rhyme-schemes are rarely managed perfectly. There is often a vaguely distressing raggedness, due sometimes, one suspects, to the fact that one's ear may be retaining an unsatisfying mixture of resolved and unresolved harmonies, which a casual placing together of true and false rhymes produces, and which a more cunning organisation would avoid. One does not notice this in MacNeice, whose ear is far more certain. One rarely finds in MacNeice, what is common in Auden, a feeble and disappointing succession of rhymes at the climax of a poem, as at the end of the lovely poem "Fish in the unruffled lakes":

Sighs for folly said and done  
Twist our narrow days,  
But I must bless, I must praise  
That you, my swan, who have

## THE END OF AN IMPULSE

All gifts that to the swan  
 Impulsive nature gave,  
 The majesty and pride,  
 Last night should add  
 Your voluntary love.

There is usually enough accomplishment in Auden to compensate for this sort of gaucherie ; but elsewhere the development, or rather desiccation, of rhyme in English is one of its dreariest pages. The rhymes in the later poetry of Spender and the first poetry of some of the younger poets litter their work like dead leaves or scraps of used paper. "*Tomb*," Mr. Auden has said somewhere, "in English is a rhyme for *womb*." An age which finds it an *indiscriminately* appropriate rhyme for team, bomb, therm, farm, limb, Shem, Ham, norm, climb, home and bum, as well as for the plurals of these, is getting near the point where reaction may be wistfully hoped for.

A second and much more serious disintegration has taken place in rhythm. English is a language which, being strongly accented in itself, gives enormous licence to its poets ; its firmness and its pliancy are such as to render rhyme totally unnecessary in poems of any considerable length. It can also juxtapose successfully, without regular pattern, unrhymed lines of different length without the rhythmic impulse being submerged. This fact, discovered in the later days of Shakespeare, when poetry was still being spoken on the stage, was forgotten soon after and not rediscovered till the early days of Eliot. It is essentially a dramatic device, and we see it exploited again in the dramatic meditations of Mr. Eliot's *Gerontion*, and in *The Waste Land*. The elasticity and variety of Eliot's poetry opened up possibilities to the 1930's poets. We find its influence at its most satisfactory in the later poems in Mr. Spender's first volume—it is doubly satisfying because Mr. Spender's diction and material in no way derive from the same source. Mr. Spender has rarely equalled the force and beauty of those poems :

Near the snow, near the sun, in the highest fields  
 See how these names are fêted by the waving grass  
 And by the streamers of white cloud  
 And whispers of wind in the listening sky.  
 The names of those who in their lives fought for life  
 Who wore at their hearts the fire's centre.  
 Born of the sun they travelled a short while towards the sun,  
 And left the vivid air signed with their honour.

As his work has gone on one has noticed that the danger implicit in free blank verse has materialised with overwhelming effect.

That danger is the absent-minded insertion of prose, the disappearance entirely of an already liberal pulse ; it is a danger to which unrhymed irregular short lines are even more exposed than long ones. In Mr. Spender's later verse, and in the verse of many young poets, that pulse has vanished, and inevitably the destruction of rhythm has affected the sonority. The disappearance of horizontal melody has been accompanied by the disappearance of vertical counterpoint ; and a fatally nagging note has entered :

In the theatre,  
The actors act the ritual of their parts,  
Clowns, killers, lovers, captains,  
At the end falling on the sword  
Which opens out a window through their hearts  
And through the darkness to the gleaming eyes  
Of the watching masks slightly bored,

Of the audience  
Acting the part of their indifference,  
Pretending the thrusting pistons of the passions,  
Contorted masks of tears and mockery,  
Do not penetrate the surface fashions  
Covering their own naked skins.

In many poems of recent years unrhymed and casually-rhymed non-strophic verse has tended to become a series of arbitrarily divided prose statements.

The mechanics of poetry are as absorbing and fascinating as those of music, and it would be interesting to trace the brief florescence and atrophy of other innovations ; it would be interesting, for example, to follow the trail of Auden's unrhymed regular stanzas into the work of other poets. It would be interesting to trace the debasement of certain elements in diction. And when poetry reacquires stature, and criticism reacquires detachment, this will be done. At the moment, except in the work of a few independent spirits such as I have named, one has continually a sensation of declining devotion and assiduity, of valuable treasure and discovery debased.

A writer's criticism of his contemporaries is bound to have at best only doubtful validity, for consciously or unconsciously he may be doing little more than devising tests which his own work passes or tries to pass, and which that of others does not. Or he may, in assessing the work of others, be defining the territory in which he himself wishes to work.

There are few writers, however, who have offered definite *advice* to other writers, as Rilke does in his *Briefe an einen jungen Dichter*. In these letters, Rilke offers counsel to a younger writer who had submitted poems to him and who is now hardly known save as the recipient of these replies. It is small wonder indeed that Herr Kappus is almost unknown as a poet, for he appears to have taken Rilke's advice almost literally, advice which includes this: "Withdraw into yourself; seek out the necessity that makes you write, and see if its roots push down into the furthest reaches of your heart; and say honestly if you would die if you were forbidden to write. This above all: ask yourself in the dearest hour of your night: *Must I write?*" This is a question so exacting that few poets will ever have the courage to ask it of themselves, and fewer still to answer it. And indeed there is something as amusing and outrageous as it is wise and charming in what Rilke, already the author of a dozen published volumes, says to this young and unhappy man. In his first letter Rilke had said, among other things:

"You ask me if your verses are good. You ask *me*. You have already asked others. You send them to literary journals. You compare them with other poems and are upset when certain publications send your efforts back. Now (since you allow me to advise you) I beg you to give all this up. Your eyes are turned towards the outside world, which above all you must avoid. . . . Don't write love poems."

This, and much more, Rilke, beloved of modern poets, tells his junior. His advice is difficult, and few will ever take it. But who could call it unhealthy? One thinks of the minor gangsterdom of some contemporary literary life, of the metropolitan literary pubs—and of Rilke gravely counselling *Einsamkeit*; one thinks of the scramble for publication and notice—and of Rilke's *Sie sehen nach aussen*; one thinks of publicly advertised private relationships—and of Rilke's *Schreiben Sie nicht Liebesgedichte*.

But no one will ever pay much attention to warnings so hurtful to the *amour-propre*. The only thing one can hope for, if the decline of poetry is to be stemmed, and if the amount of bad verse published is to decrease, is the gradual resumption of very much higher standards of judgment and criticism. It is observable that young writers of to-day tend more and more to think that literature consists of their own generation and the one immediately before it; if they happen to write of Shakespeare or Milton or Wordsworth, they show signs of being under the impression that they are unearthing a long-neglected

master. And our critical standards have come to be based on memories, not of the "best that has been thought and said," but merely of the latest. With our example before them, we may confidently expect that in 1953 young writers will be reading only each other. If so, they will provide themselves with their only audience.

## MAY SARTON

### TWO AMERICAN POEMS\*

#### DOWN ON THE DELTA

It's a watery world down on the Delta below  
New Orleans where the tourists never go,  
Land rich as black gold that the giant river  
Has stolen from America, old thief, great giver,  
Who brings Kansas, Illinois, Louisiana as a present  
To that ocean woman for whom they were not meant,  
Creates a tropic tongue under a Flemish sky  
Where marshes drip with hyacinth and egrets fly,  
A thick explosion of life from the dripping mud—  
The river surges through it like a placid god ;  
Unseen behind the dykes, unseen but near, it shakes  
The roots of the small houses and sometimes wakes .  
Millions of wild geese where the lighted liner passes  
Sending a rush of wings up from the shaken grasses,  
A god who feeds the plump sleek otter and the hunter,  
The trees of golden apples and the anxious planter  
Who pays the nigger children to crack whips  
Over the greedy rice-devouring crows—a land of ships,  
Where the wild fishermen can take their "cajun" gals,  
And drink their liquor up and play the slot-machines,  
It is a land of great skies and of tropic greens.

But the birds have French names and this is the queer thing  
That in the night a song your mother used to sing  
May sound out of the darkness and make you weep,  
"Au clair de la lune" or the one about the sheep,  
And now in evil days for France a bird called "Tricolore,"

\* May Sarton lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts. She has recently been lecturing on poetry at various American Colleges. She has close connections with England, and had made several visits here before the war.

## TWO AMERICAN POEMS

One saying "Prier Dieu" over and over again, is more  
French than anything in France, and O the "Rouge Moqueur"  
Can shriek his anger here upon the lonely air.

## IN TEXAS

In Texas the lid blew off the sky a long time ago  
So there's nothing to stop the wind from blowing  
And it blows all the time. Everywhere is far to go  
So there's no hurry at all and no reason for going.  
In Texas there's so much space words have a way  
Of getting lost in the silence before they're spoken  
So people hang on a long time to what they have to say,  
And when they say it the silence is not broken  
But it absorbs the words and slowly gives them  
Over to miles of white-gold plains and grey-green hills  
And they are part of that silence that outlives them.  
Nothing moves fast in Texas except the windmills  
And the hawk that rises up with a clatter of wings  
(Nothing more startling here than sudden motion,  
Everything is so still). But the earth slowly swings  
In time like a great swelling never-ending ocean  
And the houses that ride the tawny waves get smaller  
As you get near them because you see them then  
Under the whole sky and the whole sky is so much taller  
With the lid off than a million towers built by men.  
After a while you can only see what's at horizon's edge  
And you are stretched with looking so far instead of near,  
So you jump, you are startled by a blown piece of sedge,  
You feel wide-eyed and ruminative as a ponderous steer.  
In Texas you look at America with a patient eye  
You want everything to be sure and slow and set in relation  
To immense skies and earth that never ends. You wonder why  
People must talk and strain so much about a nation  
That lives in spaces vaster than a man's dream and can go  
Five hundred miles through wilderness, meeting only the hawk  
And the dead rabbit in the road. What happens must be slow,  
Must go deeper even than hand's work or tongue's talk,  
Must rise out of the flesh like sweat after a hard day,  
Must come slowly, in its own time, in its own way.

## B. L. COOMBES

### A MINER'S RECORD—III

THE day came when we balloted on the question of pit-head baths. The majority was ten to one in favour of having baths, so we expected to have a change in our conditions of working and washing in a few months. We were disappointed.

Many things had to be arranged. The necessary years of work had to be in the coal seams and the grant had to be secured from the Welfare Fund. That took a while because it costs a large sum of money to build a bath with cubicles and lockers to cope with over a thousand men. None of these things, however, was the cause of the delay that went on until two years had passed since our voting and still no foundation had been laid. Neither the Welfare Fund nor the colliery company were to blame—what we failed to get was a site to build on.

Around and about the colliery are hundreds of acres. These are barren lands where the only growth is bracken and a coarse, reedy grass, so unappetising that even the mountain sheep do not eat it, preferring to creep into the villages, jump the garden walls, and nibble at whatever may be in the gardens ; for these mountain sheep have wings concealed somewhere—you ask any of our allotment holders, although he will not concede that they have any other affinity with angels.

This mountain ground is unused and stretches around us whenever we come out from work. There is room for thousands of houses and scores of pit-head baths. So with the grant procurable, the men willing and eager for baths, the company equally ready and eager, and unlimited ground empty and suitable, there did not seem to be any obstacle to the building of those fine baths wherein the men who risk their bodies to cut wealth—for some—from under the earth will be able to wash and go home clean.

Yet there is an obstacle, a formidable barrier which to us in the mining area is never seen but always felt. It is the landowner—and to us that means royalty owner also.

Finally, it seemed that the conditions imposed would make it impossible ever to have baths and the idea was abandoned until the colliery company offered a piece of land near the screens that was under their control. It was not very suitable because the dust from the screens blew over it, and it was not large enough so the baths had to be built in two storeys, and—final drawback—it was over a bog, which meant that months of extra work was necessary before a satisfactory foundation could be made.

It is not often that one finds a colliery company so anxious to benefit the men by introducing better facilities. Our company and head officials did everything they could and it is probable that the start would have been much longer delayed without their help—if indeed we should have had those baths at all.

The men became quite excited as the baths neared completion. No longer did they count time by "so many days until Bank Holiday," they measured it by how many more times they had to bath at home. What surprised me was the anxiety of most of them to have complete privacy for their bathing.

We were given a booklet of hints. It was called the Bather's Handbook. By the time we had studied it the great day had arrived and we travelled to work in our pit clothes, with our clean clothes in bags, suitcases, or parcels. Several of the officials worked very hard during those first awkward days and they were responsible for things going off as smoothly as they did, because it was quite complicated at the beginning.

We were guided through one of the main doorways to where some officials gave each of us a key to which was attached a coloured and numbered card. The colour was different for each block of clothes lockers and a section of bathing cubicles were coloured to correspond—so the men whose lockers had a red disc were to use the cubicles that were marked with red bricks. Each locker had a special key ; each man had his key number that suited the clean and dirty lockers. Life was getting more complicated. We had so many numbers. A collier had his coal number, his lamp number, his tool number, his bath number, and his unemployment card number.

It could be seen that the bringing of a spare suit to work had been difficult for many of the miners because they had only one suit apart from their pit clothes. These men had to go into debt to get a cheap new suit or wear their only one—and the dusty atmosphere around the bath building soon spoiled the freshness of clothes.

We were told which floor and guided to the correct corridor ; then we very soon found the number that corresponded with our key. We placed the clean clothes on the hooks, locked up and went out through a doorway marked "To the Pit."

In work we were all unsettled that night, for we knew the old method was changing and we had a fresh experience waiting for us in the morning. Rigid insistence on time was waived for a few days as in the confusion it took us all longer to dress, but after the first week things got going normally and no-one was any later.

We hurried from work full of apprehension, and went in through the "Dirty Clothes" entrance on to the section for pit clothes. The lockers were in double rows, seventy-two in each "street." In our locker in this section we found a towel hanging and the small bag that held our soap and tray. There were openings at the bottom allowing the warm air to circulate through the lockers—which were of aluminium.

There were slight drawbacks : the lockers were small and the upper ones difficult to get at ; but there was also a wealth of thought and experience behind the building of those baths.

After we had stripped and hung up our pit clothes, we locked the door, wrapped the towel around our waist and started off for the cubicles, carrying the bag and looking like a nudist going to market.

The water supply was cleverly arranged. The same spray delivered it hot, tepid, or cold. It depended on the way it was controlled and we did not learn the knack immediately—there were quite a few squawks and spells of bad language when men got under a shower that was either too hot or too cold.

One man walked under the shower and left his towel in position. By the time he had found out his mistake the towel was no use for drying. Another left his trousers on, then knelt down under the shower as if he was kneeling at the tub ; another, failing to control the shower, knelt down and scooped the water out of the gutter. We are experienced bathers now and have to watch that the next man does not push his hand through the cubicle division and turn the cold water on just as we are wiping our toes. That shower of cold water on our bare bodies is sure to produce a gasping "Ouch" or, very probably, some wording much more emphatic.

After we had satisfied ourselves, by staring in one of the little glasses on the side, that we were clean and had got most of the dust from our eyes, we wrapped the towel again in place, put our washing tackle in the bag and took it and ourselves through the opening to the clean clothes lockers. Here the clothes were nicely warm and ready to put on. Dressed, we hung the bag in the locker, and the towel so that it would dry while we were home, then walked out through the "Clean" doorway and towards the bus—clean and refreshed men.

That was the first morning our bus had taken its load of men home clean after a night's work. We could hardly realise it, and when I got out by our house I was beginning to feel dubious as to whether I had really been working. Previously, to come home clean meant that there would be no pay for that day as no work had been done, but the contact with pit clothes made it necessary to bath all over. Here I was coming home clean and I had

worked a shift. I stood to consider this new situation for some seconds and my wife came out to have a look at me.

"Well," she said, laughing, "you do look strange coming home clean from work. Don't seem right somehow, does it?"

I believe that pit-head baths have been the greatest boon in the lives of the miners. Many thousands are still without them and their erection should be hurried until no woman has to put the boiler on the fire, struggle in with a tub, and clean the room up after the pit clothes have been put by. That time has passed in our lives, and, if I can avoid it, there will be no return.

We are seasoned bathers now and know the benefits. Our clothes are dried and warmed better than they possibly could be in a house. We have revolving brushes with which we clean our pit boots and grease pots to soften them. In almost every way the baths are a benefit and there is a better feeling about going to work. If we travel to the colliery and something stops us working, we are still clean and have saved the work of bathing. Now we see one another as human beings who look quite decent in ordinary clothes; not as black objects in heavy boots, strapped trousers and mufflers.

Of course we have a small proportion of die-hards, those types who are found in every class and in every industry. They stick to their dirty clothes and make things miserable for those who travel with them. One insists that "If my wife can't clean up the dirt as I takes home I'll get another as will." A strange mentality that—I should have thought it would have been much easier to get the new wife without the dirt.

Wattie is tremendously busy at bathing-time. He trots about washing other men's backs and examining them for little spots of dirt on the legs and back—usually getting so much behind that he has to scamp his own washing.

A deal of confusion occurs when some of the men take clothes home to be washed or mended and forget to bring them back. One thing I have noticed—all our worries about privacy have passed. Hardly anyone wears a towel now. I noticed a group of collier boys, about sixteen years old, yesterday. They had stripped completely—not one had as much covering as a postage stamp. Every spot of their bodies was black with coal dust. They were arguing in the corridor and it was easy to imagine oneself in Africa listening to a debate by a group of nigger boys.

Crush will not use the canteen. He stays outside, peeping in, like a boy getting a free view at a circus, and complains loudly about "the time as them la-de-dahs takes to drink that blasted tea." I have tried to get him inside, if only to sit down, but he refuses on the grounds that "there ain't nothing to drink

there for a real man." I told him there was tea there and he sniffed.

"Well, there's milk there, too," I persisted.

"Milk!" his tone was shattering, "what d'you think I am, hey, a blasted lamb? Milk! Milk! Who ever heard of a collier filling coal after drinking milk?"

If a sawn tree is examined the rings which can be seen show the years it has been growing. It can also be seen whether the seasons were mild or severe because the width between each ring will show whether the tree developed a great deal, or very little, during any year. There may be something in the human body which corresponds to the marking in trees and, if there is, I am sure the clearest marking in mine relates to a thing that happened a couple of years ago.

I had become hardened to the sight of battered bodies, having treated men both inside and outside the mine in almost every conceivable type of accident. Apart from my ordinary work, my ambulance knowledge was very often necessary along the roads near our home. Yet in every bad accident previously, I had arrived just after the happening and so was not upset quite so badly as those who saw it occur. This time, however, I saw it happen. And since then three o'clock on a Tuesday morning has had a tragic significance for me.

A man, one of my workmates, asked me for the sledge, reached out his hand to take it—and was smashed in front of my eyes. That memory has never passed and I do not think that life has ever been the same since.

Once I saw a cat crushed by a 'bus, its flesh ground into the stones of the road. What I saw happen to this man was no different; even the wooden handle of the sledge which had just left my hand was crushed to splinters.

I was stepping away on the instant that it fell and the outside stone of that huge fall just touched my back, sending me ploughing the dust of the roadway with my face. My eyes, nose, and mouth were blocked with dust. I was sure I had seen fire flashing before my eyes but suddenly I was ice-cold all over, then sweating, then shivering. My limbs were a useless weight that I struggled to move. I groped with my hands and found that my face was against the ground. I pushed my arms out, then whimpered with the relief of finding that I could move my legs and that my back was not broken.

I could feel something running down my back; blood surely. Above, below, and around everything was black with no sign of

light. Others were not far away, however, and they came swiftly at the call. It is one of the most wonderful sights to see miners rushing to the rescue of a mate. Very soon the place was bright with the lights of scores of lamps. I could see that a great heap had fallen, burying my mate completely. The place was all alive, creaking above and around us. Posts back in the gob were cracking—cracking—as if someone was firing a pistol at irregular intervals.

Above the men, who were straining to clear the fall so that they could get at the man, was a great hole going up into the blackness. Huge stones had started to fall, but had slid against other falling stones until each checked the downward movement of the other. They were locked in that position but remained balancing, half fallen, until the slightest jar or movement of the upper top would send them crashing down on the men beneath. There was a continual rolling and rumbling above. Little stones flaked from the larger ones and dripped on the hurrying workers. Every time a stone dropped all the men leapt swiftly back. Their experience told them a small stone is usually the warning of a bigger one on the move.

Some of the men stood upright, holding their lamps up to show light on the stones above. They kept their mouths open so that a warning could issue without check. The rest, rumbling and lifting at the fall, did not hesitate when a warning sounded—they sprang at once and made certain that no one stood behind them to impede their swift movement.

Men can lift great weights when fear forces their strength. These stood six in a row, then tumbled large stones away until only the very big one in the centre was left. That one had to be levered, so a man knelt alongside to place the ends of two rails in position. He had to be careful that the ends were not placed on a man's body.

Several then put their shoulders under the rails and prised upwards. As the stone was slowly lifted they made sure of every inch gained by blocking up with smaller stones. With the stone two feet from the ground they paused; surely it was high enough. There was some hesitation, however, for something had to be done that each man dreaded; then suddenly, as if their minds had worked together, two of them knelt down and, very slowly, they drew out what had been my mate.

We retreated with our burden, leaving the sides to do what crushing, and the roof to do what falling, it wished. The pain in my back had been severe all the time. Now when the excitement had passed I felt sick and unable to stand alone. I leaned against one of the others for support and he put his arm around

me gently, as if I was a woman. My mate seemed to be no more than half his usual size. Someone took a watch from a waistcoat hanging on the side. They held the shining back against what they thought must be his mouth. Thirty yards away another stone crashed down on top of the others; the broken pieces flew past us whilst dust clouded the air. The seconds ticked on loudly in that underground chamber whilst a crowd of coal-black men watched one who was holding a watch. When he turned round someone lifted a lamp so that they could see. The shining back was not dimmed. We had all known, yet somehow we had dared to hope.

When we reached the main roadway the journey of empty trams had been brought ready. We placed the loaded stretcher across one tram; four men sat alongside it. We started to move outwards slowly because the engine driver had been told it was not coal that was being drawn this time.

Outside, it was dark and raining. The lamps at the pit-mouth were smeared where the water had trickled through the dust on the globes. There was a paste of oily mud and wet small coal that squelched under our feet. We handed our lamps in, telling the lamp-men to note the ones that were damaged, and we answered their inquiry as to "Who is it this time?" They returned our checks, but placed the one that was not needed into a small tin box.

A smear of light was brightening the sky, but it was raining heavily when we started on the journey to his home. We felt our clothes getting wet on our bodies and the blankets on the stretcher were becoming caked with a paste as the rain mixed with the dust that was in them. Water rushed down the house-pipes and glistened in the light of the few lamps that brightened the grey street.

Many of the houses had their downstairs light on, although it was not more than five o'clock; for news of disaster always spreads quickly—besides, it was time for the next shift to prepare. The handles of the stretcher scraped the wall as we went round the sharp turn which led to the kitchen door. This was the only downstairs room they had, so we prepared to wash him there. All was ready, for the neighbours had been busy (they always get busy in a mining area when this thing happens). A large fire was burning; the tub was in and water was steaming on the hob. His clean pants and shirt were on the guard just as if he were coming home in the ordinary way.

I think that is all. I have re-lived the events of that night fifty times, yes, a hundred times; and each time have felt a more intense hatred of the conditions under which he was killed.

Had that stone hit my back just a little harder I might have been compelled to lie the rest of my days in bed with a broken back. In that case we should have had to live on twenty-six shillings a week, compensation, for the rest of my life.

Had I been a yard farther back I should probably have suffered the same fate as my mate. I would possibly have been worth four hundred pounds, which is near the maximum that they value a husband and father—if he is a miner.

I don't believe I touched food for the next two days. And I certainly did not sleep at all during those nights. I could see they noticed how my hands trembled and my features twitched ; in spite of my attempts to appear composed.

Now I realise why men who have been through it will starve sooner than go back under. I know three who have been through exactly the same experience. It was the last day under for any of them. The fright has caused one to stutter so badly that he can hardly make himself understood—another will not stay in the dark by himself. There was a time when I was inclined to joke at their expense. May I be forgiven ; for I did not know.

So I stayed indoors ; hoping that time would ease my torment, but jumping with alarm at every sudden word or slam of the door ; and dreading the coming of each evening when the darkness of night would remind me of that black tomb which had held my mate but from which I had escaped.

Then again on the third morning, after I had heard the clock striking all through the night, I must have surrendered to my exhaustion and slept, for I did not remember anything after four o'clock had struck. At five o'clock someone hammered on our front door. In an instant I was wide awake ; the bed shook with my trembling. That crash on the door was the roar of falling rock ; the darkness in the room was the solid blackness of the mine ; and the bed-clothes were stones that held me down. When the knock was repeated I had discovered that I was safe in bed. In bed—how can I describe what that meant ?

Then I pondered what that knocking could mean ? Had it been a nightmare that this sudden waking dispelled ? Then I realised that it could not have been because I had helped to wash his body—what parts it had been possible to wash without them falling apart.

I dreaded to look yet could not refuse, so I stumbled across the room, lifted the window and looked down to the darkened street. A workmate was there. He was on his way to work and had a message for me.

After he had gone I got back into bed. I was careful to put the light on because it would be a while before the daylight

would become strong enough to defeat my dread of the darkness. I lay in bed, and thought of the inquest. I was to be the only witness and on me would depend whether his wife would get that four hundred pounds or not. The verdict must be "Accidental Death" or else the insurance company might refuse to pay.

This was the first time I had been a witness or had had any connection with the police court. I dreaded the thought of the legal proceedings. I should have to tell what happened in pitch darkness about two miles underneath the mountain. They would be listening to me in the brightness of the daylight and in the safety of ordinary life. They would think that they understood, but I doubted it. They might put the questions in a way that was strange to my experience and so muddle me. Nothing but the truth—it sounded so simple, but I whispered my thoughts to myself so that I should be question-proof when the time came.

Be there at four—so I must start about three. It was some distance away and I had other things to do before the inquest. I had to draw the wages, his and mine, and take them to the house. That had been my custom. About two pounds twelve for each of us, and next week I should be short of the days I had lost since the accident. I have worked at collieries where one-sixteenth of a shift was deducted from men who had carried an injured miner home just before the end of the working day. Our firm would not be so drastic as that; they are more humane in many ways than most of the colliery companies.

Was it in mockery that the sun came out so brightly and the laurel leaves glistened as they moved? I went the lonely way through the woods and never had the world seemed so lovely. Yet another few inches and I might not have been able to enjoy it.

I wondered if a woman can be faithful to a useless body that cannot move from its position? It is easy to talk of duty, but there is often a more insistent mentor—human nature—and poverty does not help a poor human to refuse temptation. Human nature has won in several cases that I know—and is it fair to blame it? Would it not be better to blame the conditions that force people to go wrong?

And the children growing up. I wondered what feeling they could have for a parent that could not join in their play and was always an encumbrance. Would they realise that they were poor not because he was helpless, but because he had been unfortunate when he had risked his body so that they should have food and shelter?

No criminal went to his trial more unwillingly than I went to the inquest. Yet it was brief and there was no great difficulty.

There seemed a desire to ease the sufferings of those concerned and every courtesy was shown. One of the solicitors asked what I thought utterly foolish questions about colours of stones before they fell. (Everything underground has but one colour—black, or rather, grey-black. And when it falls it has only one effect—it hurts.)

I know there is a law governing colliery inquests, but still there are difficulties. In a small village where can you get men to sit on the jury who know the conditions of mining yet are not connected in some way with the colliery company or its workings? Probably there is but one company in that area.

It would be possible to get men who were outside the mining industry, but what a farce that would be, because they would not have the least idea of the conditions on which they were giving their verdict. I would prefer to select the miners and rely on their being impartial.

I told Crush of the question about coloured stones and his reply was, "What d'you expect from that sort of guy?"

He has a joke that he uses to show the ignorance of outsiders at an inquest. When a post is placed upright a couple of inches is left between it and the top—or roof. A flattened wedge, known as "the lid" is driven into that space. This holds the post in position and spreads the support over a wider area. At one inquest a shortage of timber was mentioned. One witness stated that no timber was available—only enough for a "lid." The foreman of the jury got busy and demanded to know why they did not use the "lid" until more timber was available. It is equal to suggesting that a builder ought to put the roof of a house on first, then add the supporting parts afterwards.

The quicker one fights a fear the sooner it is conquered, and I could not afford to be one day from work, so I re-started before I should have—and with dread in my being. I was on the jump all night and for many nights. I could see danger in every break in the top; each crack was going to bring a fall on top of me. When a roller started to turn I thought the first sound was the groan of my mate as he went down under the crush. At three o'clock—that was the time it happened—I was sweating with fear. Gradually a week passed and there were times when my alarm slackened—only to be stirred again by some unusual sound.

When Tuesday mornings came I would reconstruct it all—so many weeks at this time. I went to the doctor and asked him if he thought I was liable to suffer from nerves more than some others would. His reply was definite—"Up till lately you have had far better nerves than the majority. Your record proves that. It is the result of a terrible shock and no one realises how bad it

can be until they have suffered themselves. Time and your own mind are the only cures."

So time went on, and the tension eased. Those who say that time is a healer are not always right. To me it has been a soothing thing, but not a healer.

As soon as I could look back on those days without a shudder I began to think. When a big accident happens and many men are killed the whole country knows of it and for a short while the conscience of the people who govern our lives is stirred. Relief funds are started and the consumers realise how dear their coal is to those who cut it ; but they forget quickly. Yet every working day the smaller accidents are happening, unnoticed by the majority of the public, but terrible in their effect on the families concerned. You see, when a lot are affected they can comfort one another, but when it is a single case, those concerned must bear their suffering alone.

The tragic thing is that the mines are less safe than they were twenty years ago. Large sums of money have been spent on research and many sincere men have given their lives to a study of the problem, but while speeding up is allowed the toll will always increase.

Machinery for coal-cutting must be used if coal is to be won economically but it should be used with more discretion than it is. Piece work in the mines is the cause of very many accidents and I feel it should be abolished.

I do not wish to deny that there are compensations in our work. There are times in winter when it is better to be working inside than out in the rain and cold. We are in a job that makes a man keen and alert ; are part of a community that shares one another's sorrows, and we belong to an industry the workers in which have led the way in forcing many great reforms—who have been ready to fight for the betterment of others also.

There is a spice of adventure in our work that is attractive to most men, and the ever-present changing of the conditions prevents monotony. We are fighting nature and we are giving a life-time of skill—the result of many generations of mining—to that fight. We are not surprised when Nature wins, for that must be expected frequently. I do not point to shorter hours as gain to our industry because many of us are ten and eleven hours from home, but coal at about half the ordinary cost is another distinct advantage.

# PETER HEWETT

## SONG FOR CORNWALL\*

### I

THE piled-up droning car on the last hill  
Was me, driving through Devon, for the sea ;  
The road rolled up behind us in the shires,  
And the great Lizard magnet pulled our bonnet  
Through the leaves' shadow and the swirling plain.  
Stonehenge was brown and drowsy on the ridge,  
Wiltshire was frothy parsley by the hedge ;  
Devon was green and twirling roads ; and then  
The file of cars strung out across the moor  
Till Bodmin concertina'd them together.  
Past Truro I was Johnson on his mare  
Deep in the ruts of Hebrides : was Clarke  
In alien Abyssinia, Magellan's soaring heart  
His soaring sails grey through the Chile cliffs.  
And then we were along remembered lanes  
Across Goonhilly Downs ; left at the crossroads,  
And from the channel night crept up, and saw  
The unfamiliar roof of cliff-top tents.

Next week at work the words will seem as stale  
As Clifford's week in Clacton, Wright in Wales . . .  
Have been in Cornwall : yet it was not the same ;  
Where have we been to ? What have we seen ?

I saw flowers blowing blooms against the sea  
Down the huge swirl and swoop of cliffs ;  
The cliff-path twisted where small sedums hung  
Grimly to tiny holes in stony walls ;  
And past the next bend, down the sheer fall  
To a small cauldron foaming down below,  
Hung fifty yards of fleshy green and pink,  
Huge sunny flowers looking out to sea.  
The water down below was palette colours,  
China-blue streaks, bottle-green in shadow  
Long lines of navy, turquoise by the cliffs  
Edged like a soapy dinner-plate with white,

\* Peter Hewett is twenty-nine years old. After several years studying English at Oxford, he taught at a secondary school in East London. He has been in the Army for more than two years.

Against the grey sand and potbrown cliffs.  
Down in the bay the rocks were veined and streaked  
With pastel pink, metallic green, brick-red ;  
And in the pools were bright blue weeds, and amber  
Groping anemones and placid limpets.  
Inland the lanes were hot and quiet,  
Edged with the dainty campion's spindly head,  
And fringed by ferns beneath the grateful cool  
Shade of the wains. Round seven bushy bends  
Was small Poltesco, dead cottages and peace,  
With a busy useless stream happy on its pebbles.  
The red-brown farmer looked up to the stone-blue sky,  
Pondered, and slowly said how fine it was ;  
And on the harbour wall was talk of neap-tides  
Bait from Porthleven, the cricket team from Ruan.

Two miles along the cliff-path is the tent,  
A spot of white behind the grassland breast ;  
And there, to-night, the sea wind smooths my cheek  
While guyropes whine in the soft cosy dark.  
This morning as I climbed the thistly hill  
Up the long slope with canvas buckets splashing,  
The tent-eaves crept deliciously in view  
The toy car's dazzling headlights in the sun.  
The primus breakfast caten on my haunches,  
The grim shave on my stomach in the tent,  
And then the lonely walk, the texture contrasts,  
The thin-stemmed downgrass and the upland's gorses,  
The cushion plants, the age-smooth stepping stone.

Down through the cottage whitewash and the pink  
Of tufted high valerian sit the men,  
With navy jerseys, golden necks, and pipes,  
Looking at their beached boats, their rounded prows,  
Their April varnish winking in the sun ;  
Thinking and thinking of their willow crab-pots  
Baited on Thursday, out there in the bay,  
Full now perhaps with slow bewildered crabs,  
Or lobster's jointed feet and stalky eyes,  
And the quiet terra-cotta hands are shadowed  
By the sharp twine of nets. They sit and smoke.

By half-past eight we climb up to the pub,  
Leaving the butterflies among the thrift,  
And from the hot slope of the dusty road,

Lift up the latch and find the cool low room.  
The fat pint sits before us as we talk,  
Its placid body laced with fangs of rum :  
The barrel's level sinks as shillings slap  
Hard on the bar, and someone starts a song.  
It is a room of faces, and of smoke,  
And while we swig and sit, the sun goes down  
Sad on the black far bushes of Coverack.  
The room is singing, booming in the bass  
Or trembling nightsweet treble ; as it dies  
Someone says " Proper," wipes his mouth across :  
Our sun-warmed happy face goes in our glass.  
Then it is Time ; and out into the cool  
Night with its sea-wind and unsteady road ;  
The quartet sings again and the deep chords  
Swing dark out to the sea ; the florin moon  
Grins brightly down on us its benediction.  
The hills are shivering ; the cliffs are tumbling off,  
In the great sky are other stars than stars ;  
Men are for singing friends, girls are for love,  
The sky is rosy and the shore is soft,  
And I could swim to Normandy for nothing,  
Or fly above the trees to Edinburgh

## II

Yet these were dreams of beer and sun : for Cornwall,  
Fluid and flowery, yet rots and slowly dies ;  
The symbols we have seen, the roads we rode,  
The floating buoys, the whitewash walls, the boats,  
All these were built on strong and hard foundations,  
Sinews of fish, the gaunt ridged curved of fields ;  
Without these feeding roots the sweetness parches,  
The rafters smile at skies, the men are dead :  
Without production's taproot all is doomed,  
This moving age-long life a poet's plaything,  
The social scenes a show, trinkets for tourists.  
This is where Cornwall heads for : the long lines  
Of two-leaved grey-green seedlings on the loam  
Of last year's spring are yellow-green umbrellas  
Blooming in a wild waste of weeds ; and Pollard,  
Old and stiff, tries to keep up his crops  
With his own marrow and the half-wit boy.  
So the sweet ivy by the feckless stream  
Hides the great crossbeams, carted and built with passion,

And now slow food for worms ; someone's strong dreams,  
Ivied over with dark forgetfulness.  
Up on the top runs miles of lumpy down ;  
They call it pasture (rough) ; its spidery grass  
Fodder for three old spavined cows ; and gorse,  
Blackwood, sloe, bramble, with their toothy roots,  
Bite in the flank of the rich futile soil.  
How could the harrow sweep across this land  
Where now only a night-time bumping binder offers  
Bitter gorse bundles to the local men !  
And round the little strips of scratchy earth  
The hedgerows grow perversely high and thick,  
Lovely and barren in their fruitful flowers.

The village is old men ; their bronzy sons  
In the police or with the merchant service ;  
Three under forty fish ; the rest are gone  
With lumpy throats to China or the North.  
The dealer comes by car three times a week  
And takes the hard-caught crabs from knuckled hands,  
Paying a pittance, giving back a tithe.  
The old men know their blood for salt, and creak  
Deep in their joints to think of shining shoals—  
How many silver bellies drive off Poldhu Cove  
Beneath the silver surface ; pollock and mackerel,  
And the thin pilchard with his tragic eye :  
Yet all they pull in on the windy morning  
Is for their baited pots, or their own pot ;  
None for the small hands on the Barnsley table,  
None for the rusty North, or the starved Ridings.

The old men sit and sing below the pub  
Four-part unhappy songs, or booming ballads  
Of the drowned centuries' bravery or love ;  
And at the end they sing of their own times :  
A Jacobean fervour lights old eyes,  
As the old throats shout, heart-wrung, Good old England ;  
And so all stand, and so they sing, with sheer  
Power and conviction, Land of Hope and Glory :  
While the fish spawn and shoal out in the bay  
And the deep soil sends up its prickly thorns.  
Let the men-children come forth, and the girls  
Sing in their pride of blood, and breed their kind  
Smiling back at the smiling sea ; for North  
In the grim cities we take up their battle.

- In time to come there will be nets hung deep  
 . With silver scales as the night boats come home :  
 Later there will be singing in the bay.

## MANUEL DA FONSECA

### THE TOWER OF SILENCE\*

*Translated from the Portuguese by Charles David Ley*

SITTING on the steps in the square, beneath the stars, Campanelo told the story of the Tower of Silence. And, while his slow words bore them all far away, he drew a packet of tobacco out of his pocket and a book of cigarette-papers and rolled himself a cigarette.

The fixed look in the children's eyes increased the deep silence. Only the man's voice and the paper being rolled could be heard.

Everything moved slowly—voice, cigarette-rolling, everything ; no hurry, because the story, like the night, had only just begun. He stopped, and drew in the first breath of smoke. Then he laid his hands on his knees and waited while the children came in nearer, feeling how intensely exciting the story was going to be. They had their eyes and their ears wide open. Campanelo spoke slowly, accentuating every syllable.

" . . . Now the fairy said :—

' Follow the track :  
 Always go forwards,  
 And never go back.'

So the little boy went on walking and walking, and at last he saw the Tower of Silence all huge and black, far away in the distance ! "

At that moment, the moon broke out from behind the walls of the Castle and lit up the square. The children looked at the moon, and the shadows in the road, and the whitewash of the houses gleaming so that it looked as if the houses were frightened, too, in the stillness of the night.

Only the small boy in black did not move. He was thin and dark, and you could see the outline of the Tower of Silence in his eyes.

" But supposing he *was* frightened and looked back, with all the cries and horrible shapes in the forest ? . . . Campanelo, supposing he looked back ? "

\* Manuel da Fonseca has a high reputation as a story writer among the youngest literary generation in Portugal, and his first book *Aldia Nova*, published last year has been an outstanding success.

The man drew his cigarette out of his mouth and said slowly :—  
“He’d have been changed into a statue of cold stone, like Prince Littleheart. If you look back, it’s because you’re frightened.”

The man stopped speaking unexpectedly, and the small boy made the others jump with the eagerness with which he said :—

“Go on, go on, Campanelo !”

And the thought came to him—for the first time, now, though he had heard Campanelo so many times—that his own life was just like that of that little boy who had no father and mother and wandered alone through the world. . . . It seemed to him that another voice was whispering sadly and slowly in his ear.

He was growing up as best he could, like the other boys in the square. He had explored everything for miles around the town, striking out across the roads and tracks, and crossing the lines of cacti which surround the vineyards, at the risk of a hidden gun in a trap firing salt into his legs. Not even high walls with watch-dogs barking ready to bite could protect anything there was to be seen behind them from his curiosity. And sometimes he climbed trees to look for nests. Sometimes he found a very small one with four little open beaks in it. And then he touched it, but at once forgot it, as he swung there in the boughs, and was simply happy to be so high up. Far away from the town, in the deserted dunes, he had found such well-disguised and easy hiding-places that when he was playing “policemen” and “burglars” (he was always a “burglar”) no “policeman” could ever catch him.

He, too, often felt worn out with walking along tracks and through woods, exactly like the little boy Campanelo was telling them about. Then he would lie with his hands clasped behind his head, in the shade of a bush. The whole silence of the country, which he had been disturbing till then with his footsteps and movements, descended about him, and it was such a great silence that he soon felt he was asleep. Asleep with his eyes open looking at the things around him. Principally at the plains undulating in front of him. And there seemed to be something shaded and mysterious on the horizon like the forest Campanelo called up, with its cries and its shapes. His eyes lingered for a long time on that mystery.

His friends from the square often came and disturbed him. He answered by pointing at something far away with his outstretched arm.

“Don’t you see? Right over there !”

But the boys didn’t like looking at those things in the distance. Not even Toino. One evening a thunderstorm had blackened

the view very much nearer in than the horizon, and suddenly the darkness opened out into flashes which lit up the surface of the ground further off than they had ever wandered. He had pulled Toino's arm and said : " Look ! " but Toino had not been able to hold in an exclamation of fear :—

" How big the world is ! "

It was only when the coming of night ended the storm and the distant views that he noticed he was alone. The sky was still quite light but the ground was dark ; and Toino had fled. Then he felt that he could not run ; he just shuffled down the slope of the little hillock into the night that came up from the earth.

Only the Fairy in the story did not appear to him at these times saying : " Go that way. Far away there is a little girl locked up in a black tower. And though you have nothing in the world now, if you free her, you shall have everything you want. But you must never look back ! Listen to what you hear, but never look back ! "

On other days it was different. It was as if someone had told him : " Go on and don't look back ! " He ran on and on and did not get tired. He discovered so many new extraordinary things that it did not give him time to think. Almost always, the night came up round him suddenly with the town miles away.

Then he felt he was ready for anything, and the small boy seemed to grow taller and taller as he came back along the road. And when he reached the square he felt he was a man and had had a great many adventures. He only remembered his discoveries when he saw the street-lamps. The others looked at him with wonder and he said :

" I've discovered a place ! "

They all asked him about it, and crowded round him, excited. The small boy felt very sure of himself, but all he said was :

" It's a place none of you'll ever be able to discover. "

After that he went straight home, and they all looked after him, dazzled with the mystery of the place he had not told them about.

But when his grandmother saw him, she thought it was late, and called through the window, asking him where he had been to. He did not know how to explain to her properly what he had seen and heard, so he always said :

" I've been in the square, granny. "

So he grew up as best he could, like the little boy in the story who had no father and mother. He felt the same kind of sadness at his parents going away as he did about his brother dying. He felt he was wearing his black clothes because of three deaths.

The grief was getting less and less but sometimes came back so hard that he felt a stone had hit him on the head. And it was that which gave him the strength to run faster than any of the other boys in the square.

Like the little boy Campanelo talked about he was at the mercy of his fate and his own will. But he was always something greater than his own small strength made him, and he was eager to tire himself out running in the direction in which his parents had gone away, and at last lie down on the plains running his eyes over the walls of the Castle back there. Only the Fairy did not come with her wand and show him the way. "Go on, and don't look back!" The sails of the windmills on the hillocks in front of him swung round, swung up to the sky, slowly like the sad hopelessness of heads drooping behind the bars of a prison.

The small boy felt a need to cry rising in him. He jumped over the wall and ran down the hill. He wanted to run somewhere far away and wait for night and sleep. But he stopped in the square, tired out. He wanted to play the games the others played, to blunt his feelings with tough struggles and leaping about. If the least thing went wrong, he quarrelled. He fought with the first person who contradicted him.

The women called their children. They must go off somewhere else, they didn't want them to be with him. Immediately they went an irresistible desire seized him; he ran after them throwing stones.

The only one who did not run away was Toino. He stopped at a distance looking at him.

One evening Chica Nora came up to him calling him names. As the small boy did not try to get away and stood there daring her she let her hand fall hard.

The small boy felt his face burning and his chest rising. He lifted his arm with all the strength he had. And he saw the stone fall to the ground and roll away and the woman put her hand to her forehead, with a trickle of blood coming down her face, and run off home shrieking.

That time even Toino disappeared, and he was left there alone in the middle of the square.

Then he went and told his grandfather everything. He was very sorry for the woman and the boys in the square when he told him. He said it just as it had happened; his missing his parents; the boys who did not want to play with him; and the blow, the blow!

His grandfather was silent a long time. And the small boy was there in the middle of the room looking down at the ground.

He could not speak and he felt sadder than ever when his grandfather called out :—

“Lift your head up, and don’t cry !”

He looked up and was shot through with a sudden joy.

“Men don’t cry. Come with me.”

Only after that did he hear his grandmother asking what it was all about, where were they going ? But his grandfather did not look at her or listen to her. He shut the door in the way he always did and went down the road beside him.

There were people in the square and in front of the woman’s door. In the midst of the group, Jacinto Nora’s arms were waving as he talked. Immediately he saw the grandfather and grandson he threw his hat on the ground and made the men in front of him move off.

The small boy clutched a stone so hard that his fingers hurt him. He felt the rough edges of the pebble cut into his flesh but he could not help gripping it harder and harder. Woe betide Nora if he came a step further forward than the place the boy had marked out !

But his grandfather’s voice seemed to cut its way out from beneath his clenched teeth.

“Jacinto Nora, if you touch my grandson, if you touch a hair of my grandson’s head, I shall kill you like a savage dog !”

The man stopped, uneasy. He was tall and strong ; he had a thick four-days’ growth of beard on his chin and his shirt was open at the chest. But the boy’s grandfather, though he was old, was tall, too, and he had deep, unswerving eyes, and his face was stamped with hardness as if it was of stone.

The small boy felt that something terrible was happening. An anxious pleasure made him raise his eyebrows ; he had grown bigger at his grandfather’s side. He heard his voice echoing long and distantly in the silence of the square.

“I shall kill you like a dog.”

The group opened out a large space and the two were left together. A woman shrieked.

The old man was white-haired and quiet ; his arms were slightly raised ; his face was twisted with emotion. Jacinto Nora looked away and hung his head before the other’s power and strength. Jacinto Nora covered his face with his hands, and went into his house with a bowed head.

Only then did the small boy breathe freely again. His whole body was aching. He wanted to open his hand and could not. He went and stood in front of his grandfather and looked at him as if he was the only living being in the world.

. . . And the voice of Campanelo stirred all this inside him.

"Campanelo, my grandfather never looked back."

Everyone all round was surprised. The man looked at him for some time, and then said :

"Yes. Parral, the old master never looked back. He is a man !"

He returned to his story, without taking his eyes off him. It seemed as if he was only telling the story of the Tower of Silence to him.

"Nobody who's a coward comes back from the Tower of Silence."

"Campanelo, my grandfather went there, and came back."

"Then the little boy broke open the iron-plated door and went along the corridor. It was so quiet that the little boy's hair stood on end. Just at that moment——"

And Campanelo, without taking his eyes off the boy, finished the story another way. After all those dangers, the boy was leading the girl out through the corridor when the old woman appeared, and, with the help of the giant, tied them both to a wall. The little boy tied up with chains to the wall !

The children's faces all looked very sad.

The man saw the small boy in black get up ; his eyes were wet with tears. He looked at his outstretched hand and heard his anguished voice.

"Campanelo, where is the Tower of Silence ?"

The man smiled and pointed vaguely at the square, the roads of the town, the countryside.

"How do I know ? Somewhere. Only, listen, if you are like your grandfather, you shall go to the Tower of Silence and come back again."

In the circle of children, the small boy was taller than all of them, standing there. He was taller than Campanelo as he sat on the steps in the square, beneath the stars, in the stillness of the night.

# JAROSLAV SEIFERT

## PRAGUE DRESSED IN LIGHT\*

*Translated from the Czech by Stephen Spender and Jiří Mucha*

I WALKED in the late dusk one day  
—Then Prague seemed lovelier than Rome—  
This dream would never pass away  
I thought, and I not wake, when come  
Stars from their daylight place of hiding  
The winged, armed gargoyle, whose dark form is  
Under the old cathedral cornice  
Like a sentinel protruding.

One day I walked in the first dawn  
(I thought it useless to sleep more)  
The bolt of the great gate was drawn  
I was afraid to knock the door.  
Alas, the pilgrim waits outside  
The spring morning with no key !  
The gargoyle I had wished to see  
At dawn, when the stars cease to hide.

But I saw a grave ; and I went to it :  
Being alone, I had no fears.  
Like a wreck was the dead man's shoe : its  
Tip was pointing towards the stars.  
Above the sleeping brow, when the flame  
Trembled, I saw the shadow steal.  
And I could hear the spinning wheel  
And, from the vineyard, singing came.

We wove in the mantle of the king  
Grapes gray as human breath at dawn.  
In the nave, four ladies sleeping  
The dead one on their breasts have borne.  
Greet the woods round Castle Tyn  
Falling gently into the plain  
O greet that Karlův Tyn again  
And the hillsides flowing with wine.

\* Jaroslav Seifert was born in 1901 in Prague. He is, together with Nezval, Hora and Halas, one of the leading poets of the present Czechoslovak generation. The poem printed here is the first part of a cycle written and published in Prague in 1940 under the German occupation.

From his deep grave, he raised above  
The pillars grown under his palm,  
A white skull : made only for love  
His hands which loved it were a balm.  
It was made sacred by the song  
Of the people, with parched lips ;  
It strengthened him, a charm that slips  
From the great heirloom wrecked so long.

How could his lips do else than parch ?  
Ceaselessly on a sword he slept.  
For ages past the chorale march  
With ardent watch his surety kept.  
The saint is covered with the wings  
Of angels, and a shield of prayer.  
He broke white bread which the poor share  
And crushed grapes with his feet, a king's.

Dazed near the Majesty so great,  
Towards the beggars' doors I creep.  
I did not come to weep into the agate,  
The time has passed when I could weep.  
A broken stand opens the music.  
Someone has torn the embroidered altar.  
The heels of boots, without falter,  
Hollow on the gold mosaics, click.

## VOICES FROM ALL THE FRONTS



### G. R. GILBERT

#### DON'T WAKE THE DEAD\*

"Don't wake the dead," he said.

"What dead?" I asked.

"Leave them alone," said the man, "leave them alone, they're doing no harm."

"It's not decent," he said, "disturbing them now. Leave them alone."

"What dead?" I asked. "There aren't any dead round here. The cemetery's miles away. It's across the harbour."

"They are everywhere," said the man. "Everywhere that I know of."

"Anyway," I said, "who are these dead? You've been drinking too much."

At the time, and it might have been last year or this year, or last week or some time to-day, I was doing guard duty. I was guarding a petrol tank. I had a gun, and a bayonet, and some bullets. The idea of my being there was to discourage action by the fifth column.

Well, it was about two o'clock in the morning and I hadn't seen the fifth column, I hadn't even seen a dog or a rat. It was two o'clock in the morning and I was lonely.

I had been thinking about my part in the war-machine. Of how I functioned and how the war-machine functioned. How beautifully we pulled together, me doing guard-duty, and the war-machine attending to the details. I was feeling a bit proud of the war-machine as though it were my doing. As though I had the saying of yes, or no, or perhaps—sometime later; in choosing the colour of the uniforms and the length of the bayonets. In fact, I was standing in front of the petrol tank kidding myself about how important I was to the war-machine because I was lonely.

It was 2 a.m. Anyone has the right to be lonely at that hour. It's not the silence, or the dark, or the watching that gets you, It's the whole damned malignant world of earth that is after you. You can feel it folding you up inside itself, taking every piece of you and changing it until you are a stranger, a terrible unknown

\* G. R. Gilbert is a New Zealander who has recently joined the Air Force. He has published short stories in periodicals over there, and recently collected them into a volume, *Pres to Laugh and Dance*.

stranger waiting desperately in the dark for yourself to get back. But suppose you never did? That's what I was thinking. Suppose you never did? That the great, terrible world of earth got you and kept you, and left you fearing in the silence, waiting in the dark, fearing the man who was standing guarding the petrol tanks because he might be a stranger to you.

So I began thinking about the war-machine, and how important we all were.

I was doing this when the man walked up. "Don't wake the dead," he had said.

And now he said "Give them a fair chance son. They're doing no harm to anyone. Just lying quietly in the earth doing no harm. But you're waking them up. Let them be son, leave them in peace."

"I'm only walking up and down," I said, "there's no trouble in that. My footsteps won't wake anyone."

"Your footsteps are all over the world," said the man. "Everywhere the dead are being forced to listen. It's gets on their nerves when all they want is a little peace."

"I can't help about that," I said, "I've got my duty to do. It is my duty to march up and down with this rifle and bayonet guarding this petrol-tank. I don't want to do anyone any harm, or upset anyone, but my duty is here with this gun, etc."

"They've only been asleep for twenty years," said the man. "You won't give them a chance. They are no sooner comfortably at peace in the earth than you start waking them up."

"It's not my fault," I said, "we've got to do our duty. The war has to be fought to a victorious conclusion, we didn't start it. Blame them."

By now I was excited. Being told how I was to blame, and I only doing my duty helping my country.

"There's more in it than them," said the man. "One's as bad as another."

"That's all very well," I said, "It's only my duty. I can't help it if they wake."

"Who are you anyhow? Why did you come here? I warn you now it is my duty to challenge you, and take appropriate steps if you are unable to give the correct answers."

"Haven't you seen me before?" asked the man.

"No," I said, but was thinking: he is like some one I know very well, although I have forgotten who. Maybe it is imagination.

"Who are you?" I said.

The man looked at me saying nothing that could be heard in the ordinary way, then he spoke:

"I am your father," he said.

"It's a lie," I cried. "It's a dirty lie. My father is dead. Like that. Dead. He was killed before I was born. In the last war. He fell gallantly at Passchendaele at the head of his company."

"I am your father," he said.

"Take that back," I cried, rage sweeping over me, I pointed my rifle at him. "It's a dirty lie."

But the man remained still and only said :

"The others told me to come and ask you to let them sleep in peace. They meant no harm."

I trembled with rage, I pressed the trigger of my pointed rifle.

"It's a lie," I cried, "a lie."

And all the time I was thinking of peace and war and my father and the terrible marching to and fro over the whole surface of the earth. And how I had my duty which I must do.

So I pressed the trigger and worked the bolt until the rifle was empty.

And the sound of it was hideous and final.

## LAWRENCE LITTLE

### SIGNALS SECTION

Be pleasant with these men,  
Some are old-time soldiers ; some  
Are raw from families, and smart  
At every khaki clatter on their heart.  
A few welcome the company, after the crumb  
They knew as friendliness in towns  
Where banged the bleating pinstripe clowns  
Upon their Commerce kettledrum.

Then, there was always work, without end,  
Though work to fools is its own end,  
And Finance, that's too cut-throat for a friend,  
Jumped on the youngsters, pick-a-back,  
And took them from this corner into that  
From nine till six, or seven until eight,  
From slight of sun till black.

And some grouse, saturnine,  
Wrestle what's unfair and miss the fine,  
Or sit upon an ill-admitting spine

To wait discomfort ; rub their sores in brine.

Yet, if I hold them up, I show you but yourselves  
Haphazardly ; we khaki toys  
Are you removed from graded shelves  
And have your mannerisms, make your noise :  
Are timid Pucks turned murderous elves  
Our civil world employs.

## ROGER ANSCOMBE

### THE WATER BOAT\*

SILENTLY, one after the other, these great ships come in to anchor. They once were luxury liners but now they are painted dull grey. They glide inexorably along as though on rails. You don't notice them stop, you just become aware that they must have stopped because they are at anchor.

These are the troopers, a great convoy that has come in for stores and water. The ships are gigantic, the number of ships and the number of men in them is gigantic, the organisation of the whole must also be gigantic.

They are going half way round the world to kill some people : if they don't do this some people will come to kill them. The logic is also gigantic.

You yourself have got to be non-gigantic to get the full significance of this. If you are one of the soldiers in the gigantic business you can do it easily, too easily. And you can if you are one of the sailors in one of the scuffling little ships that give the convoy stores or water.

Not being one of the first, you are one of the second.

The watering job begins immediately. You approach the first trooper (which three years ago was a luxury liner more luxurious than a wedding cake) and its sides tower above you like a super-bastille. You notice a plate where one of the rivets isn't quite in line.

Despite prolonged blasts from your little ship's air-horn it is nearly half an hour before the beings in charge of the troop ship are aware that you are alongside. They are probably "having one" to celebrate safe completion of the first lap.

When you are finally made fast and the hoses (they can only

\* Roger Anscombe was born in Hertfordshire in 1913. He was educated at Summerhill School, and returned there as a master in 1933. His first story appeared in *The Adelphi* in 1935. He gave up teaching with the intention of turning to journalism, but became a Merchant Navy Radio Officer in Spring 1940.

take three, they say) have been heaved up and stuck into the interior and the pump set plodding, you can stand back and gaze at the port holes and see the faces of the men who are going to kill some people the other side of the world. Nearly all the faces are young. Some are rather shockingly young.

You think suddenly : there are men here from ten cities and a hundred countrysides. Surely there must be one whom I know. But you never see him. He is never amongst them.

A young face, bearing the look of patient boredom, shouts down to you : "How long have you been out here ?"

"Six months," you shout back. "Six months too long."

It's always the same question and nearly always the same answer, and you always have to watch the pathetic look of envy spread over the young face because he would give his very all to be on your chubby little insignificant water-boat. He wouldn't have to go to kill the people who might kill him then. He wants to go but he fears to go. He wants to be brave but he fears to be cowardly.

Making your eyes ache looking upwards to the thousands of bored men who line the rails, you can get the feel of their conflict : *I'm bored to bloody death. I shall go crackers if I have to stay on this bloody trooper a single day more. I wish to Christ we'd get there but when we do get there I'll be offering my right arm to be back in the trooper, so what the bloody hell ?*

When number one tank is almost dry and the pump is starting to suck air you switch over to number three because we're keeping number two, which has exactly 110, for a cruiser.

As you finish twiddling the wheel-valve shut on number one the next inevitable question is shouted from a face at a port hole above.

"Any idea where we're going ?"

"Haven't the faintest."

They don't know where they're going. You don't know either. But they not knowing makes war seem horribly silly : these gigantic forces of men all hating the enemy and having pictures of them in their minds and trying to be ready to kill them fiercely and crisply and well. And all the while they don't know who the enemy people are or where they are. Perhaps these young men might hate and kill crisply the people in a British territory if the convoy became confused and went to the wrong place by mistake. On the other hand, you say to yourself, if freedom and humanity itself is at stake one must be prepared to risk such tragedies and tolerate such intolerable sillinesses.

The pump thuds on, ker-BLAM-sog, ker-BLAM-sog, and the moist hoses pulsate as they lie across the deck and hang from

their leather straps where they bridge the space between the two vessels. The troops discover that our black crew will run and fight madly for pennies or cigarettes thrown down to our deck. A sixpence pings and rolls under the electric winch.

"Jimmy Green," you call to a small, rather pathetic Negro in a plush multi-colour cap and ragged trousers. "I tink so there be sisspence—"

He runs to where you are pointing but big confident Charlie Grant has seen and rushes up and snatches the sixpence while Jimmy is still dazedly searching on the wrong side.

The pump is still thudding, ker-BLAM-sog, ker-BLAM-sog, when the sun has gone, leaving the air a chance to cool off a little. Darkness falls quickly and you have to switch your deck lights on, in case someone falls down a tank, and so that you can measure how much more water there is to go.

You can see the men's cigarettes like fire-flies up there, and from time to time a thoughtlessly thrown butt-end comes flipping on to the deck. Thoughtlessly thrown. Don't put cigarette ash on the little water-boat, it isn't polite. Great big men like you who are going off to war ought to know better.

They begin to sing.

"Love is the sweetest thing  
What else on earth can ever bring  
Such happiness to everything . . .  
. . . I only hope that fate may bring  
Love's story to you."

You feel you'd like to join in with them but it seems almost sacrilegious to do so. They have to go and kill or be killed, while their whole consciousness is longing to love and be loved, whereas with you it's merely a wish and a thought.

The soldiers towards the stern of the great liner get out of time with those forward and finish the song several bars ahead. One of them has an accordion. He starts to play "The Washing On the Siegfried Line." The singing swells to a rousing roar. It makes you feel cheered: they can sing that song of disaster and sing it with enthusiasm and not give a darn for its associations.

Then they sing "Doing the Lambeth Walk," and they are probably trying to get the sensation of Saturday night dances with their girls and friends. Down below them in the gloom you can tell it's a failure by the weak "Oi's." The contrast is too great. They know they are not doing the Lambeth Walk and everything is not free and easy and their girls are not with them.

You hear a bugle faintly blowing "Lights Out," if that's what

it is, and the singing stops and the glowing cigarette tips are doused.

In the still warm darkness, after the pumping has finished and you have closed all the lids and switched the decklights off, you can vaguely see the outline of the troop transport's huge funnel, just the top of it, and the grey unearthly smoke drifting away into the starlit sky.

You are doing your small but vital share . . . you are proud to be alive at this great transitional period in human society . . . you look forward to the new and splendid world that is now in the process of being born. . . .

The only thing that troubles you, when you climb into your bunk in the little water-boat, is the heat. Your fan is broken and to-night there is no soft breeze coming in through the port hole because the gigantic troop ship is in the way.

## ALUN LEWIS

### ON EMBARKATION\*

#### I

CONSIDER this silent disciplined assembly  
 Close squadded in the dockyard's hooded lamps,  
 Each blur a man with some obscure trouble  
 Or hard regret as bulky as the cargo  
 The cranking derricks drop into the hold.  
 Think of them, as the derrick sways and poises  
 Vacantly as their minds do at this passage,  
 Good-natured agents of a groping purpose  
 That sends them now to strange precipitous places  
 Where all are human and Oh easily hurt  
 And—the temptation being to forget  
 Such villages as linger in the mind,  
 Lidice on the road from Bethlehem—  
 Ask whether kindness will persist in hearts  
 Plagued by the snags and rapids of a curse,  
 And whether the fortunate few will still attain  
 The sudden flexible grasp of a dangerous problem  
 And feel their failures broaden into manhood ;  
 Or will they take the Bren's straightforward road  
 And grow luxurious at the sight of blood ?

\* Alun Lewis was born in 1916 in Aberdare. He has been a schoolmaster in Glamorgan, and is now serving in the R.E. abroad. His first book of poems, *Raiders' Dawn*, was published last year.

Each of us is invisible to himself,  
Our eyes grow neutral in the long Unseen,  
We take or do not take a hand of cards,  
We shake down nightly in the strange Unknown.  
Yet each one has a hankering in the blood,  
A dark relation that disturbs his joke  
And will not be abandoned with a shrug :  
Each has a sunken inkling of the Good.  
And one man, wrapped in blankets, solemnly  
Remembers as he bites his trembling nails  
The white delightful limbs, the nest of peace  
That angels do without, but man forever seeks.  
And one who misses what it's all about,  
Sick with injections, sees the 'tween-decks turn  
To fields of home, each tree with its rustling shadow  
Slipped like a young girl's dress down to its ankles ;  
At noon the lovers lay in chestnut shadows,  
And horses came there from the burning meadows.  
And these things stay, in seasonal rotation  
Within the cycles of our false intention.  
But others, lacking the power of reflection,  
Broke ship, impelled by various emotions.  
The police are seeking men of their description  
As sedulously as their own promotion.

## 2

Before he sails a man may go on leave  
To any place he likes, where he's unknown  
Or where he's mentioned with a warm inflexion  
And hands are shaken up and down the street.  
Some men avoid this act of recognition  
And make the world a dartboard for their fling ;  
Oblivion is the colour of brown ale ;  
Peace is a backscat in the cinema.  
But most men seek the place where they were born.

For me it was a long slow day by train.

Just here you leave this Cardiganshire lane,  
Here by these milk churns and this telegraph pole,  
Latch up the gate and cut across the fields.  
Some things you see in detail, those you need :  
The raindrops spurting from the trodden stubble  
Squirting your face across the reaping meadow,  
The strange machine-shaped scarab beetle

His scalloped legs clung bandy to a stalk,  
 The Jew's-harp bee with saddlebags of gold,  
 The wheat as thin as hair on flinty slopes,  
 The harsh hewn faces of the farming folks,  
 Opinion humming like a nest of wasps,  
 The dark-clothed brethren at the chapel gates ;  
 And farther on the mortgaged crumbling farm  
 Where Shonni Rhys, that rough backsliding man  
 Has found the sheep again within the corn  
 And fills the evening with his sour oaths ;  
 The curse of failure's in his shambling gait.  
 At last the long wet sands, the shelving beach,  
 The green Atlantic, far as eye can reach.  
 And what is here but what was always here  
 These twenty years, elusive as a dream  
 Flowing between the grinding-stones of fact—  
 A girl's affections or a new job lost,  
 A lie that burns the soft stuff in the brain,  
 Lust unconfessed, a scholarship let go  
 Or gained too easily, without much point—  
 Each hurt a search for those old country gods  
 A man takes with him in his native tongue  
 Finding a friendly word for all things strange,  
 The firm authentic truth of roof and rain.  
 And on the cliff's green brink where nothing stirs,  
 Unless the wind should stir it, I perceive  
 A child grow shapely in the loins I love.

## 3

In all the ways of going who can tell  
 The real from the unjustified farewell ?  
 Women have sobbed when children left for school  
 Or husbands took the boat train to pursue  
 Contracts more tenuous than the marriage vow.  
 But now each railway station makes and breaks  
 The certain hold and drifts us all apart.  
 Some women know exactly what's implied.  
 Ten Years, they say behind their smiling eyes,  
 Thinking of children, pensions, looks that fade,  
 The slow forgetfulness that strips the mind  
 Of its apparel and wears down the thread ;  
 Or maybe when he laughs and bends to make  
 Her laugh with him she sees that he must die  
 Because his eyes declare it plain as day.  
 And it is here, if anywhere, that words

—Debased like money by the same diseases—  
 Cast off the habitual clichés of fatigue  
 —The women hoping it will soon blow over,  
 The fat men saying it depends on Russia—  
 And all are poets when they say Goodbye  
 And what they say will live and fructify.

## 4

And so we wait the tide, and when the dark  
 Laps round the swelling entrance to the sea  
 The grey evasive ship slips into line.  
 The bell clangs in the engine room, the dark  
 Shrouds the cold faces watching at the rail.  
 Till suddenly from headland and from wharves  
 The searchlights throw their lambent bluish cloaks  
 Clothing the fairway in a sheen of silk.  
 The steel bows break, the churning screw burns white.  
 Each pallid face wears an unconscious smile.  
 And I—I pray my unborn tiny child  
 Has five good senses and an earth as kind  
 As the sweet breast of her who gives him milk  
 And waves me down this first clandestine mile.

## J. E. TAYLOR

## CONVOY ATTACK\*

WE make our way reluctantly to the upper deck in answer to the shrill call of the boatswain's pipe and the cry of "Ha-a-nds turn to and wash down the upper deck." We shiver as we leave the warmth of the mess deck.

"Get a move on now," says the Buffer, "get the hose going and get busy with the brooms."

We form up near Mac and start to scrub the deck with the reverse side of the broom heads, where the salt water from the hose is frothing across the deck planking.

"Dear mother," says Jimmy, "here we are again still seeing life from the end of a broomstick."

"Well what about putting a bit o' weight on it for a change," growls the Buffer. The Buffer is always cobby in the early morning.

"No bloody pressure on this hose as usual," growls Mac, "slip

\* J. E. Taylor was born in South Africa in 1910. He was at sea in the Merchant Navy from 1927 to the outbreak of war, when he became an R.N.R. officer. He started writing in his spare time on board a year ago. He is married and has one child.

down and tell that — stoker to give us some pressure Charlie."

Charlie drops his broom and moves off whistling softly. The tune is "I've got sixpence." He has been whistling it for more than six months to the extreme irritation of some. That is why he still whistles it.

"Tubby says you have all the goddam pressure the pump can give," he announces on his return. Nevertheless the water starts to spout and splutter from the nozzle with increased force.

"That was a bit of orl right I saw you with last night Griff," says Hank, "only a bit of a kid too; what you up to now you dirty old man—cradle snatching?"

"Yah, dirty old man Griffy," chorus the others.

Griff squirms his shoulders and grins shyly. He is a married man with five children and is the most sober-mannered and well behaved man in the ship's company. His mind is almost virginal, but there is a standing conspiracy of pretence that Griff has a Jekyll and Hyde character, and he is credited with all the vices. The joke never loses its freshness. There is an exquisite pleasure in watching Griff's embarrassed squirms and shy grins on every occasion.

"Cor, you should 'a seen the Judy I saw the Buffer with last night," continues Hank, carefully noting that the Buffer is too far away to hear him, "damn great piece she was, lapping over the gun'als of her corsets and a backside on her like the starn end of a cruiser!"

Little Parsons looks up from his scrubbing and makes one of his rare utterances. "I like a girl to be small and neat," he says precisely.

There is a delighted hoot from all of us, and little Parsons blushes and immediately tries to hide his embarrassment at attracting so much attention, by scrubbing furiously with his broom. We do not say anything though when our laughter dies, for he is going to be married soon and lives in a secret world peopled by himself and his Sally. For some reason we respect that secret world of his and rarely encroach on it. "We were going to be married a year ago," he confided when he applied for marriage leave, "I was earning good money before I was called up." Then with an anxious pucker on his brow added, "Do you think the war will be long, because my girl wants me to get on, and I can't do that till I get back to my job?"

We follow Mac and the hose into the port waist amidships. From the open door of the radio cabin the Telegraphist watches them with the superior air of one who is above such menial tasks. Charlie grins his precocious schoolboy grin at him and says, "Whatcher Highbrow s'pose you think you have a hard day ahead

'cos we're going to sea.—The lily of the field, he toils not nor spins," he announces to the rest of us.

The Telegraphist tries to hide his annoyance with little success. He was a bank clerk before he was called up and considers himself a superior young man.

Hank and Lofty lean on their brooms and discuss the film they saw last night. The Buffer is safely out of sight. "Blimey, can't Micky Rooney rattle them drums?" "Ay, and Judy Garland is a bit of 'orl right." Hank spots a pair of rolled-up semaphore flags in the radio cabin, grabs them, and commences a syncopated tattoo on the rails with their sticks. Lofty breaks into an intricate dance that has its origins in some African jungle. We all stop work and watch.

Tubby, who has come up from below, moves over to the galley ventilator and takes a deep breath. "Don't smell so bad," he announces.

There is an immediate interested silence.

"Smells a damn sight better than it tastes I'll bet," says Lofty.

"Swing, Sex and Sustenance," says the Telegraphist in lofty tones, "that's all that ever enters your minds—don't you chaps ever have a serious thought?"

"Not so bad either, 'specially if there's plenty of the second," retorts Charlie quickly. There is a general laugh.

"Do you people think you are on holiday?" breaks in the quiet voice of the First Lieutenant.

We all bend to our work and scrub vigorously for several minutes. When he moves away we grin at each other surreptitiously. We know that Jimmy the One is liable to jump on you hard before he has had his breakfast.

The ship has been underway for about an hour, heading out to sea. Astern of us nearly forty large merchant ships snake along the estuary channel.

"A good day for Jerry," remarks the Captain, looking upward, and almost on top of his words the first plane appears from the base of a ragged, low-hung mass of cloud, passes swiftly across the bow from port to starboard in a shallow gliding swoop, and disappears into the clouds as though it had never been. We are left wondering if that flashing glide and passing whirr of engines really happened, until the Captain's voice says sharply, "Make to the destroyer. Enemy aircraft crossed ahead flying west."

The Signalman picks up his Aldis lamp, puts his eye to the telescope, trains it on the leading destroyer, and works the trigger rapidly. "Message passed, Sir," he announces when he has finished.

# FRANCIS TOLFREE

IT HAS HAPPENED SO OFTEN\*

(*On reading of the loss of H.M. Submarine "Utmost"*)

MUST the chapter always close with sadness,  
shut with a bang, like a hard steel gate  
on a summer garden of light and gladness :  
leaving the lonely figure with the ring of voices  
contrasting strangely with the silent madness ?

It has happened so often, the easy start  
of a friendship, beginning with a smile,  
as ours did, when we two took part  
in the sailing race and held the sheet  
together, our two young bodies forming an arc  
over the water, balanced from the gunnel,  
with the spray and wind tearing through our hair.  
Later we often sailed together, the tunnel  
of understanding was complete, each happy  
with the same pleasures : all was well.

Then war parted us, you still at sea  
and I for years gazed over the Hamoaze ;  
twice you returned and we  
strode the moors, smoking the same pipes,  
laughing, happy as we used to be :

. . . when in the Rade de Brest, our backs sore  
with the sun, in a cutter on a week-end picnic,  
singing in the firelight, when we  
had six peasant visitors who gave us wine  
and in return first drank the English tea ;  
those hours we spent, heads sunk in hands  
listening deeply to music on a borrowed gramophone  
in the small cabin of our divisional officer ; on the sands  
of Morgat, two Cadets talking bad French  
calculating our wealth in francs with both our hands . . .

The conversation hums on, the paper slipping from my knees  
reminds me of the issues of this struggle,  
the slight rolling of the ship on the wide seas  
rocks you too, deep under the Mediterranean,  
and the Russian offensive talks from the yellow leaves.

\* Francis Tolfree was born in 1920. He entered the Royal Navy in January 1939, and served as a cadet in the cruiser *Vindictive*. He was appointed to the R.N.E.C., September 1939.

# DAN DAVIN .

## NIGHT BEFORE BATTLE\*

BEATEN low is the barley, and weary its gold  
On yellow clay,  
A flat and trampled harvest in the sun's  
Last ray.

Grey and green the olives, darkening the light  
With their shade,  
Brood long on Gethsemanes where others  
Have prayed.

Bivouacked the soldiery, sprawling and sad,  
Home in their sleep,  
Reap brief rest on the barley their blood soon  
Must steep.

Wild as the ghost of a lost ardour the wind,  
Keening cold,  
Pierces to grief pent memory, in heart's  
Deep hold.

## A. GWYNN-BROWNE

### THIRTEEN AIMS—WHAT IS YOURS ?\*\*

THE first has one and one and won and one one and won and won one. The first one won has one and one won. Thirty per cent. is considered high praise. He weighs the balances, explores avenues and turns stones. He sits in Parliament and represents the People's Will. Oh dear, another one has won one.

\* \* \* \*

The second likes love, quick tunes and muses. He is partial to darts and surreptitiously estimates the significance of ruffled blouses. Make it the same again, please.

\* \* \* \*

The third is reading it. His aim is to soothe. Facts with

\* Dan Davin was born in New Zealand in 1914 of Irish parents. He came to England in 1936, and fought with the New Zealanders through the campaigns of Greece and Crete, when he was wounded. He is still serving in the Middle East.

\*\* A. Gwynn-Browne was born in 1904 in Shropshire. He went to Malvern College and Oxford. Afterwards he began to work in the hotel business, starting as a stores and cellarsman in Cardiff and ending as a manager in London. He joined up in 1939 and was in France with the B.E.F. He wrote a book about his experiences, called *F.S.P.*

practise can be adjusted to convey how reversals of fortune are advantageous and benign. He loses nothing. He has victory up his sleeve. Truth is adjustable. It is like an old round stone washed smooth by seas in repetitive tides : time is also on his side. The third is reading it. What a tedious stooge !

\* \* \* \*

The fourth is firm and climbs high hills at noon and at dawn. Can he reach it ? There is an element of surprise. Can he and does he reach no grass grows graciously here. Luckily he is lean and well armed.

\* \* \* \*

The fifth stays still and likes it as it is. His aim is negative but very, and he knows it. He is reliably informed. He thrives on precedent and the administration of biased laws and is closed to argument. He likes it as it is.

\* \* \* \*

The sixth sails secretly seawards. Is it if it is. Is it it if it is his it is it if it is, it is his. The clouds converge upon the distant shore. The boats are manned ; details memorised. Please thank seamen sincerely if it is. Yes it is his, it is theirs and ours.

\* \* \* \*

The seventh grows leeks and trees. He aims to please his seeds and peas. He has, too, cheese and geese, salsify grain herds lime hay wheat sheep and lard and beans and reeds. The seventh is a friend. The seventh heaven is indigenously supplied. Who owns it anyway.

\* \* \* \*

The eighth sits erect in an office all day. His industry is prodigious. He seeks authority for what he does. Come in, Come in, stand to attention my man. Come in, Come in, I say old boy have you heard this one.

\* \* \* \*

The ninth aims to protect an important point from important enemy forces of aggressive intentions. Who goes forwards and outwards backwards and inwards leaps instantly to his keen grey eyes. The ninth one co-ordinates co-operative schemes and inclines to the belief that by winning the war it is won. Still, who goes outwards and backwards is most important after all is said and done.

\* \* \* \*

The tenth aims then they were men. Who would have thought it. The tenth ten then they were men. It took time and shouting, diligence and delay, resistance and frustration, sorting and doubting, but the tenth ten men they were men. Who

would have thought it, the tenth ten men feel fighting fit to kill men now.

\*            \*            \*            \*

The eleventh landed in Libya. This cannot be said to be an aim it just happened to be there.

\*            \*            \*            \*

The twelfth defines accurately the position of the Allied Cause. He has maps and flags and knows the latitude of Chungking. He sticks little pins in Sing Song and Sing Sing, and his Wednesdays follow Tuesdays regularly well. Hip hip hip hurrah !

\*            \*            \*            \*

The thirteenth feels the necessity for fundamental change: his aim is vague. He is restless and disturbed. His aspirations are classified as the thin red end of the wedge and he is beguiled or liquidated according to expediency or power. The thirteenth makes notes of promises pledged in his name and dismisses them : they are superimposed. They are emanations of society already soiled and blamed whose language is inoperative ; their words mean not what they say. The thirteenth has been misled too long to hear or care for the interpretation of views and the maintenance of pious vows. He is shaping images like concrete piers sunk in the bed of his mind, deeper than words. The cement is setting. He will not easily give way, for the thirteenth is forming a white hard core of contempt and anger supported by rising pride. He bides his time. Do we, do you, will they ?



# TERENCE TILLER

## THE BIRTH OF CHRIST

AFTER that vast possession it was she  
lay in the dark, the strangely quickened womb,  
and yet was nothing, no person ; God.  
Then from without, touched her amazed flesh  
with hands, trembling, full of love and pity ;  
was everywhere so foreign : but a virgin.  
Where the great wings had beaten with no pain  
and the light, the light, only a small cold pulse  
opened and shut like an eye ; and the smooth breasts  
were not erect or struggling ; nothing ; she  
was like a cool bed newly made. Beside her,  
night after night, the old man lay and would not  
sleep for wonder ; would not touch, for doubt  
and terror, the girl's body stolen from him  
and from the world by those invisible walls.  
Soon she desired him and that unknown act  
of human passion ; her dark was tears,  
and craving of the parted mouth, sharp waves  
in the arrayed flesh : but he lay more still,  
more distant, than a shy boy. So at last  
only the shame was left ; to be rejected :  
I to be temple of divine seed, I  
an old man's irritable lust refuses,  
I who am dry with lust ? This also was  
the Hebrew dream, and was not : how shall God  
swim in my scorned flesh that no man desires ?  
Nothing. Only my silent bed. And ageing.

The second month was leaning against wind,  
clutched from the sudden blow, reeling in  
confused and battering fingers. She knew.  
No way out : a wild road to walk lonely :  
the burden, pain, all to be borne ; and no  
way out : the motherhood of God ; God growing  
in the dark salt inward blood ; fed with her soul ;  
two natures clasped and struggling in her, self  
and an appalling vastness, a new world,  
to bear from shrinking and in dissolution :  
she the weak virgin, the soft wand of pity.

And the great roaring terror folded her.

Thenceforward he slept from her : Joseph, half  
in stabbing jealousy of doubt, who long  
ago heard her denial, doubting ; half  
with God's hand in his fear : and spoke with hatred,  
with reverence or love ; but always little.  
She, like a string drawn tight with terror, yet  
was glad to be alone : his presence gripped  
too hard on tender places where the mind  
had not its armour. So avoiding speech,  
seen but unreal and intangible  
to all, she wore in silence, like perspective,  
her dedication to the endless waiting.

And wondered serpent things, when things of man  
turned from her like a glass : for no-one came ;  
for nothing came. Would not the calm angel  
speak in the rainy curtains or the dove ?  
No message, no protection ? But a pulse  
stronger and stronger in her numbness. Now  
she was a cup, only a cup, with God  
as wine within her ; growing wine. And time  
crushed her with new fear : Can time hate, time hurt,  
so ? Oh shelter this enclosed vine, let it  
flourish and be fruit. And all her future  
hung to that sweetness like a swarm of grapes.

In those unreal acres of her days,  
Herod and Egypt—flight and foreign speech,  
all the pursuing cloud, desert and strangeness,  
and her clear image in the holy well  
—lay dimly, the unfinished balance : and  
imagination blindly groping towards  
that legendary pain of birth. She was  
no longer woman, but a symbol. All  
were symbols : Joseph ; God ; and one to be.  
But she desired no meaning. She observed  
curiously and with wondering—not to call  
love or hope—human children ; and they seemed  
as far as birds or jewels or as visions  
from her life and the life within her, that  
she could not picture like them : not a child,  
separate in the sun. He was an hour,  
a custom and a future way. An organ.

And inwardly that crouching fishlike beast  
ripened through history and became a God.

A stirring : and her head lifted in joy,  
gazing into unearthly distance ; at  
a white moon growing heavy. Oh strange moon  
of women, gradual and proud, heeding  
no darkness, and not dead. Strange pride of women,  
the body leaning backwards like a shadow  
from a filled lamp, yet bearer of the lamp.  
And moving slowly like a sleep-walker,  
she felt the alien life beating beneath  
in its close cradle, its world-cradle : different  
from her quickened heart ; not terrible,  
but trembling upon terror ; a world waking.  
And the world's weight was majesty, was a still  
pride ; a smile, delicate and unthinking  
as water-light. A deepening content.

Only a restlessness, the coming of  
the Bethlehem road and Sinai, and the green  
thin line of Egypt : longings for men's faces  
half-understood, but formless. Yearnings for  
gold, and myrrh, and frankincense ; and unknown  
water. For a music never heard.  
She gathered thorns. The cold abundant earth  
flowered, with her longing, to an empty grave.  
She knew the trouble of desire ; its breaking ;  
aimless desire that steals and cannot build,  
and has no power of will. She was loose flame.

And all the past, inaccessibly calling.

The Bethlehem road was real. Her heavy body  
forced on the slow too-swift way between  
successive darkneses. But she knew nothing.  
Day was a dream of infinite toil : night *was*  
—limbs loosed from outrage, the thick excitement  
mounting in her for the imminent birth,  
and the vague nightmare of the journey : all  
faded into the insistent life  
already more intense than hers. To nothing.  
Sleep. And one night was Bethlehem : three lives  
beating at closed gates : for the warning clenched  
her body like a fist. Again. She must

not yield. Again. Till, without knowledge, she lay down between the animals : and waited.

Till the god fought in her like anger, and her body fought ; till her soul withered, that this agony was not the end : but how long ? There was no time. Like a dying house, all that was she, shook down. The heavy breath, moaning, the gradual mounting of the scream, were not of woman but inhuman flesh unendurably fighting a blind power : Ah world of pain ; how shall this tiny body hold you, that roar like water through me ? Over me : real as iron, moving the flesh like wind, tearing the flesh like storm : grinding the soul. Oh you enormous wind against our small and yellow lights : infinite darkness moving ; oh heaven-striding cold, the dancing-floor of merciless vacancy : oh be my garments : I am alone : vast world and little walls are weight upon me : oh unhelpers, distant and never clearer—shelter, break through to me. Ah but the crying ! Was it I that cried ? This is no longer I : I am the pain folding this wrenched and weaving body of an unknown woman, crying. Oh thick harsh anguish of the cries ! Now. Could I save her, out of the beating space about us, watching, enemy : rolling the atrocious quern of her torn body, and her staring thought. No longer I ; I could not endure. . . .

Then passive suffering without thought ; the patience of animals. Long inarticulate pain : pain like a wheel ; red armour of the last explosive swallowings into birth. Then only an emptiness—such fierce and long reality over—a lightness ; and no memory. Smooth with accomplishment, inert, she lay and was a cool bed newly made : for it was she brought helpless to the foreign air, wailing : she had been born. The child was she. He had come through the portal she alone bore, among mothers : the last pang of birth her bridal stab—closing one circle in

one point. She dared not look to see what stain  
or imperfection marred his body : God,  
her God, her child a monster, horrible.  
Only believed him God, and waited for him.

And over his thin cry, the noise of angels.

## JOHN LEHMANN

### THE ARMoured WRITER—III

ONE fact among many others which make this war different from any of its predecessors, is the enormous machinery that has been developed to record it. Not only are there cameramen and film units with sound apparatus, B.B.C. recording vans and perambulating microphones wherever battle is engaged or bombs fall, but also a host of war correspondents with far greater privileges and opportunities than were ever accorded them before. The basic idea of all this activity is simple, though it is often concealed under distorting names and is not always clear to those whose chief business it is to facilitate it. It is to make of the war as fully shared an experience as possible for the whole community ; to restore out of the complex scattered fragments of modern warfare that sense of oneness which was a source of such strength to a small city-state like Athens two thousand years ago.

There have been films, and I would instance *Desert Victory* and *Coastal Command*, which on the whole achieve this aim admirably, within the limits set by security and natural tact. They take the raw material of the news films, and arrange and adapt it to form a continuous story which is interpreted intellectually and in human terms ; so that at the end you are made to understand why and how the operations were fought, and why they succeeded or failed, and what it felt like for the men engaged in them. They have a serious approach to the artistic problems involved, conscious and careful shaping, and even poetry, though there is room for a good deal more of this, for a human expressiveness that every man or woman in the audience with a son or a husband or friend in the fighting must be looking for.

But have the war correspondents produced anything on this level as yet ? They cable their columns to appear daily in the newspapers, they contribute longer articles to the weeklies and

monthlies when they return ; and these are only prelude to the books which pour off the presses when the publishers have got to work on them. They have the opportunities which most writers who are not journalists have lacked in this war : they can see everything on the spot, they can hear about it on the spot and behind the lines as well, they have the time to put it all down in words. They are given everything to make it possible for them to create the true epic of our times.

I propose in this article to examine some war correspondents' books which have appeared recently, to see how far they have grasped their opportunities. The material is abundant if one includes the Americans, but I shall confine myself to the works of British writers. One thing one should continually bear in mind : that the books which have already been brought out may be equalled or exceeded in number by those which are being prepared in slower processes of metabolism. It was some years after 1918 before *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* was completed.

The skilled modern journalist, living at a furious tempo, spoiled darling of the headlines and telephone wires, with money fountaining out of cables and into the pockets of shady contact-men and the owners of expensive bars, falls an easy victim to two grave occupational diseases. The first—it has been said often before—is the obsession with the “low-down,” the sensational details about Prince So-and-so's mistress which are apt to take an altogether disproportionate place in the picture he paints as history's witness. The second is excessive fondness for his own kind, a wide-eyed tenderness so highly developed that events which are transforming the lives of millions of people in agony and bewilderment seem sometimes reduced to a non-stop journalists' beano, which is renewed in city after city, tent after desert tent and cabin after wave-tossed cabin, with ever more brilliant wisecracks and furious bubbling of spirits. These engaging details of how the happy family rolls along from one world disaster to another, though harmless enough in small outbreaks, grow tiresome and finally insufferable as the fever grips hold.

It is these two diseases which have disfigured the books that some even of the best-equipped correspondents have written about various phases of the war. How excellent, for instance, is the impression of the obscenely disintegrating Balkans David Walker manages to convey in certain chapters of his *Death at My Heels*, how moving the sudden flashes of human insight ; and yet he and his journalist friends are so firmly established in the foreground that one feels sometimes like a small boy who has to wriggle through the legs of massive tweed-coated

spectators in order to get a glimpse of a football match. This is good fun to write, good if you want to create a legend in the public's mind of the semi-divinity of the rare few who tell you in your morning's papers what is happening in the world, and what to think about it. But it is not a serious approach to what should be an important branch of art. It is partly the same fault that is responsible for the disappointment with which one closes G. L. Steer's story of the freeing of Abyssinia, *Sealed and Delivered*. One judges the author of *The Tree of Gernika* by the highest standards. He has written a breezy, vigorous narrative, filled with a real enjoyment of adventure and touches which reveal his sympathy for and understanding of the Abyssinian peoples ; but it is definitely not a powerful human document as his famous book on the Basque War was. As an essay in the practical application of propaganda to field operations it has a special value ; but it is not literature, and for a lucid analysis of the actual course of events one must go to the perhaps over-discreet but nevertheless soberly effective H.M.S.O. publication, *The Abyssinian Campaigns*. In Steer's book, the uninitiated reader loses himself among the affectionate nicknames which are attached to the chief actors, and the schoolboy jollity of the outing palls a little, especially in the fourth year of a murderous war. Only in rare passages do the author's finer gifts emerge, as in the account of the Propaganda Unit's journey through the Jack-in-the-Beanstalk land ruled over by Chief Zelleka Birru on the western edge of the Gojjam, or the final passages describing the Emperor's triumphal return to his capital :

" Looking through the ends of the van one could see the expressions of the crowd as we descended through the skirting forest. The shock of the first news ; the recognition ; the faces wrinkling up in a mixture of sorrow at memory, and of release from sorrow ; tears starting suddenly from the faces of old people ; wrinkled women raising their arms in ecstasy to the sky ; lines of men and women going flat on the ground and kissing it ; dignified judges of the Quarters at one moment lifting high their inscribed silk standards and flowers, then bowing low till their foreheads touched the earth ; before the centre of the town was reached and the streets were clogged, flocks of people running alongside the Emperor's car shouting proverbs and throwing flowers ; old faces in the crowd that one had not expected to see again. . . .

" The rain came down and washed Addis Ababa into grey as I pressed my nose against the window-pane of Menelik's crumbling audience-hall, and saw the Emperor

and British staff-officers drinking champagne within. Outside, the loudspeaker car passed up and down ceaselessly, conjuring the people to sit in patience until the Emperor returned. At four the gates opened and he went back in the storm to his own Little Palace, the building that he himself had planned and that Aosta had left intact for his occupation. I looked at the watch on my dripping wrist. Four o'clock in the afternoon of the fifth of May. How vain are the hopes of men, how fragile the buildings of the great, how much better it is to live placidly, and humbly, and read a book and go for a walk with one's wife and drink with the friends of one's youth, and let sleeping dogs lie. At this very hour five years ago Badoglio drove past our gates at Addis Ababa and proclaimed the Italian Empire immortal.

"The dripping white horses cantered by and slipped on the tarmac. The armoured cars slithered into place. Our driver swallowed the end of his sandwich. We shoved up the cover of the Emperor's car and rescued his camel-hair coat from the slush. He, whose cousins had been marched before the firing-squad and whose favourite son-in-law Desta had been shot as a prisoner-of-war for his head to be exposed on a stake, had nothing to say about the Italians but this: '*We shall take his weapons from the enemy and make him return by the way that he came.*' He went back to the Little Palace smiling."

That is a passage worth a thousand pages of chatty reminiscences describing the wisecracks and personal idiosyncrasies of other correspondents, assistants and their friends. Or indeed of the ever-flowing un-ordered reflections and sentiments which form the major bulk of, for instance, J. L. Hodson's 200,000 word war-journal called *War in the Sun*. One cannot read such a book by a gifted correspondent without feeling a sense of enormous waste, because the fine and moving passages are lost in the waste-paper-basketful of general notes emptied all round them; without realising once again that art is always necessary, even where the natural interest of what one has to say seems to promise success whatever one does.

A small book, scarcely more than jottings, and one imagines very much circumscribed by the security requirements of its subject, but which nevertheless shows a far more promising approach to the material, is A. B. Austin's *We Landed at Dawn*. It is an account of the Dieppe Raid worked up to through all the phases of training of the men who took part in it. Austin shared their life, and that is no doubt one of the reasons why

his unpretentious story is so much more successful than many written by correspondents who descended like Gods from the Machine of Fleet Street. His senses as well as his mind are continually alert, and one feels in his observation of small natural details—such as how during a landing exercise, the meadow-sweet was heavy on the mild wind and a boy was holding a kitten up to his face—and his noting of the casual but characteristic remarks of the men, a guiding intention to make one share through as transparent a screen of words as possible the experience of “Combined Ops.” The passage where he describes the first sight of the French coast is a good example of the living tension of his prose :

“ I wriggled my leg and arm a little until the pins and needles went. Anderson, beside me, was crouched forward in sleep. There was just enough light to show the dozing huddles of men all down the boat, with faint sounds, sniffings and mutterings coming from them like a dark fowlhouse clucking itself awake in the early morning.

“ Next to Anderson was a Frenchman who kept wriggling to his feet, being cursed in various English accents which he did not understand, and being pulled down again. . . .

“ Now it was light enough to see, though very faintly, the outline of the Bren gun braced on the starboard thwart, or the silhouette of a sailor as he ran forward silently along the steel canopy from the engine room to the bows.

“ And then suddenly we became aware of France. The coast was still far away, but we could hear a muffled booming, and see white flashes in the sky. I supposed it must be the preliminary air raid on Dieppe. It sounded like the distant crump of bombs, but of course there was a chance that it might be guns firing at our ships, or mines exploding somewhere.

“ Did that mean that our surprise was a failure? That they were waiting for us? You couldn't tell. No use wondering. Still, it was an uncomfortable sound in that first unfriendly light of that false dawn, with the morning air cold on your unshaven face.

“ More white flashes, strangely regular. Anderson whispered : ‘ Should be a lighthouse somewhere ahead, near where we're going. Wonder if. . . . ’

“ A sergeant, straightening himself up a little on the back centre seat, whispered : ‘ It is, sir. It's the lighthouse flashing. . . . ’

“ He paused, peered ahead intently for a few seconds, and whispered again in a thick, excited voice : . . .

“ ‘ I can see the cliffs.’ ”

Austin's book is only a fragment, a beautifully realised detail in a vast picture. By far the most important of the books I have read, which try to cover a whole campaign and a major theatre of operations, is Alexander Clifford's story of the Eighth Army's November offensive in Libya in 1941. *Crusader* starts rather creakingly with a few short and undistinguished chapters about the campaign in Persia and a visit to the Congo, but when Clifford gets to the desert, his prose develops a finer texture which by itself shows how much more deeply he had felt and thought about his time with the Eighth Army. It is indeed a controlling emotion *about the event witnessed* which is so often lacking in the contemporary books of the war correspondents, and which one realises, as one reads through them, is the only quality that can give them spiritual depth and therefore significance as art. Nine-tenths of the time Steer is just telling a tale, as jauntily as he can, but he only becomes memorable when, as in the passage quoted, emotion is powerful enough to fuse with reflection about what he is describing. And that is what happens in *Crusader*, so that one gets not only a sense of the whole scene, which no ordinary soldier within his limited sphere could have had, but also a vivid close-up of selected details which gives the scene life, and beneath the outward drama glimpses every now and then of what it meant to the human individuals inside the armour-plating and behind the barbed wire. One such detail is Clifford's account of the first tank battle he witnessed :

“ The first shots snapped out just as we arrived. . . . Then they met and intermingled, and there was utter confusion. There was noise—the quick jarring crack of tank guns firing, the pulsing clamour of mighty engines going all out, the rasping, squeaking clatter of the tank-treads, the grinding of the gears. There was dust, a hundred separate cyclones of whirling, choking dust. There was smoke—the thin bitter smoke of explosives and the exhaust smoke from a couple of hundred roaring engines. There was flame—the quick, stabbing flame of guns firing, the red-black blaze of a tank set on fire. There were grotesque firework displays when a shell got in among a tank's ammunition or Very lights. But there was no pattern or design or coherence about it at all.

“ Inside that frantic jumble tanks were duelling with tanks in running, almost hand-to-hand fights, firing nearly point-blank, twisting, dodging, sprinting with screaming treads and whining engines that rose to a shriek as they

changed gear. As each new tank loomed up ahead gunners were swinging the muzzles of their guns automatically, eyes strained behind their goggles, fighting through the smoke and dust to discriminate friend from foe. Men told me afterwards that they were not even conscious of the two-pounders going off almost in their ears, so tense was their concentration.

"The battle swung away and back again, careering across five miles or more of desert. To us it was just a greying, blackish-yellowish fog shot with flame. But inside it men were lying in agony, waiting helplessly with the acrid stench of shell-fire in their nostrils and the deafening clamour in their ears, waiting till it should stop, till night should come, hoping the ambulance would find them. Tanks got on fire or exploded, men ran or crawled from the wreckage and tried to get out of the battle before someone ran them over or the criss-crossing shells got them. After the initial charge it had become a crazy 'free-for-all'—all rules, all conscious tactics and training and drill forgotten, nothing left but a blazing instinct to kill before you were killed yourself. . . ."

Many other passages stand out, in which Clifford displays the same descriptive power and sensitive feeling, such as his account of the Rats of Tobruk or the return of the British to Derna and their discovery of their own wounded in the Hospital there. The effect of the book, however, comes not merely from these isolated moments but from the continuous sobriety and awareness of the narrative. Clifford's eye, one feels is on the war itself and not the surface froth of it; fundamentally, he appreciates it as a tragic drama and not just a schoolboy outing. *Crusader* is not a great work of art, but well above the journeyman's botching that most of the war correspondents' books have been, and perhaps as far as we shall get until men with the instincts and training of poets and novelists are given the same opportunities on the battlefield.

One correspondent has, indeed, already cast his experience in the form of a novel, and provides a very interesting comparison with the straightforward narrative. James Aldridge was accredited to the Australian Imperial Forces as war correspondent, and saw the campaigns in Greece and Crete with them. Later, owing to an accident in Syria, he was invalided back to Australia, and then took another newspaper job in America, where he found time to write *Signed With Their Honour*. It is a novel, but the events it describes are real events, even a great many of the people real people, as anyone can verify for himself by comparing

Aldridge's pages with what American journalists who were on the spot have written. What then, does he gain by turning his experience into a novel? There is certainly a far greater opportunity to concentrate on the individual drama, and to describe as from first-hand a number of happenings and sensations into which one has only imagined oneself from the accounts of others. A clever author can thus bring the war closer to those who have not experienced it than could perhaps be possible in direct reporting. He can also select his material to suit his central idea, and even rearrange it without losing fundamental truth. There can be gains, but on the other hand, if—as is the case with Aldridge—the object is to make more real a piece of history and not to make an aesthetic statement about life, there can also be certain drawbacks. One can involve oneself, for instance, in unnecessary plot-mechanism. From this drawback *Signed With Their Honour* undoubtedly suffers; the love-affair between the British Flying-Officer John Quayle and the Greek girl Helen Stangou, has a certain laboured unreality about it, not simply because Aldridge lacks, or deliberately excludes humour, but because the historical drama against which it is set is so tremendous that nobody but an extremely skilled master of his craft—and Aldridge is young and inexperienced—could fill the foreground with a single personal relationship. One can also fall into certain mannerisms of style which one would certainly not affect if one were writing as a reporter. Aldridge has unfortunately fallen head over heels into the Hemingway bucket and emerges dripping with his master's used soap-suds. He has nevertheless written an extremely readable and moving book, in which one can forgive the awkwardness, the mannerisms, and the failures in characterisation for the positive and promising points of achievement. There is, for instance, the picture of the patient suffering and indomitable spirit of the Greeks themselves; the confusion and squalor of the retreat and collapse; the convincing atmosphere of the life of the young British pilots who know, and pretend not to know, that they are doomed—the human end of an Ally's generous but momentarily useless gesture; and, like a terrible and splendid theme that returns again and again in music, the vision of brilliant air, thunder-laden clouds and mountain peaks, and death like the air itself around the flashing machines that twist and plunge thousands of feet above the earth and shudder with the spitting of their guns as the moment of battle races by.

The qualities and defects of Aldridge's prose as a medium to be compared with the other extracts I have quoted, can be gauged from one of his most memorable passages, in which

Quayle, his wounded fellow-pilot Tap, and two Greeks come to a deserted village on their way from Janina to Athens :

"It was dark in the village because there was no one there. No one, and the great silence dominated the place. Then the little Greek became quickly surprised when he saw the old man sitting on a heap of ruins, wide-eyed and with puzzlement in his face.

" 'Hullo, Father,' the little Greek said. 'Where is everybody?'

"The old man was silent, then he looked up blankly.

" 'They have all gone into the hills,' he said flatly.

" 'And they leave you?'

" 'I am old,' he said.

" 'Shouldn't you have gone too?'

" 'I am old,' he said again.

" 'Do you know where there is any gasoline?' the little Greek said.

" 'I am old,' was the blank reply. The little Greek looked at the old man for a moment, made a clicking noise with his tongue, and walked away.

"Quayle was walking through the ruins of a small house to the back, where there were chicken runs, and he could see the mess of domestic utensils strewn out on the earth and the chairs and tables smashed. There was nobody about, and he looked up at the monasteries and wondered whether there was anyone there.

"Helen, standing near the car, was wondering about the quiet too. She did not like it so quiet when Quayle was not around. It was not an entirely feminine fear, either. There was uncertainty and hopelessness in the quiet as there has been back at the hospital in the confusion. It was waiting for something. She could see the quiet in the smashed village as she could still physically see the quiet in the confused hospital. It was all the same. And it was depressing. She was feeling the quietness getting into her when Tap came back.

" 'Nothing here,' he said to her. 'Not even food.'

" 'How far will the petrol get us?'

" 'To this next place maybe. This place looks as though everybody just up and left it.'

"The big Greek came back and he was wiping his free hand on his trousers.

" 'If we were only nearer Germany and could do this to their towns,' he said to Helen.

" 'Did you find any fuel?'

" 'Nothing. I thought I saw a tin, but there was a man very squashed.' He wiped his hand again. .

" 'Nothing doing.' Quayle said when he came up. Only the little Greek was not back.

" 'Maybe he's left us,' the big Greek said as he got into the car.

" 'He will not do that,' Helen said. 'And please let him be. He is too old and should not be here anyway. Leave him be.'

"The little Greek came and Helen watched his small face and the light eyes over the creased nose and cheeks that were furrowed like his forehead, and the black stiff hair of his head and beard and the smallness and bentness of his frame. His eyes blinked quietly when he was near her and he said nothing but got into the car. Quayle started his engine and moved off quickly. He did not go fast but he went just fast enough so that too much of the gasoline was not used. They passed the long shadow caused by the rock with the monasteries, and they were on the flat road again, passing over the small bridges that were bomb-cratered around ; and all along the road now there were the fresh-earthed craters from the fifty-pound and hundred-pound bombs."

*Signed With Their Honour* has the power of moving us which *Fighter Pilot* and William Simpson's *One of Our Pilots is Safe* have, because authentic stories of what young men have dared and endured in the air, when related to the background of their private emotions and peace-time dreams, have an overwhelming effect and seem to concentrate the heroic and tragic quality of the war as intensely as in a convex mirror. *Signed With Their Honour* gains by being able, as a novel, to exploit a far wider range of experience : but it also loses some of the authentic quality by the obverse of the same process. All these three books have, in varying degrees, a spiritual depth that the ordinary war correspondents' books have so far missed ; but none of them have the depth and power of St. Exupéry's *Flight to Arras*, which, though it cannot be classed as a straightforward personal story, like *One of Our Pilots is Safe*, is nevertheless a good deal closer to it than *Signed With Their Honour*. One cannot escape the conclusion : the opportunities that a war correspondent's privileges offer for the true epic writing of this war will not be fully exploited until a writer of St. Exupéry's calibre, a poet, dramatist or novelist, is given those privileges. Unless, of course, a young man, a potential poet who has not had the chance to realise himself in peace-time writing, and not yet

infected with journalism's occupational diseases is, by a piece of pure luck, given the job—has, perhaps already been given the job.

