

NEW VERSE

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The Use of Poetry & The Use of Criticism

T. S. ELIOT

Mr. Eliot's lectures as Visiting Professor of
Poetry at Harvard

"THE MOST COMPREHENSIVE AND REASONED
CRITICAL WORK THAT MR. ELIOT HAS YET
WRITTEN."—The Spectator 7s. 6d. net

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24 Russell Square, London, W.C.1

TWO POEMS

SEE see Christ's blood streams in the firmament . . .

This planetary blood
streams crucifixion
in the space of bounded life's
attraction and repulsion

widening on the rude
improvisation that the senses build
staking extremities
to mark the victories

WHOSE

the streaming blood-bright
iron-torrent of the wounds
surpasses
as the cloudy mansions
melt into clouds themselves
extensions
beyond the fought-on
woman-wept victory-vaunted
dimensions.

ONE DROWNED OVERSEAS

He dead extends upon
the horizon
of the razing ocean

that severs night from day
and sight from eye
bloodsheds sun's axon ray.

eyes sunk in death
in the waters of birth
that make memory green earth,

miltonic orbs of sight,
pearled in oyster lidded night
blind recollections light

seen in the moon's third face
lights sun lost
and earth illumined once,

the supposed natureless
nature of these since
sufferers of sense.

K. J. RAINE

BIRMINGHAM

Smoke from the train-gulf hid by hoardings blunders upward, the
brakes of cars

Pipe as the policeman pivoting round raises his flat hand, bars
With his figure of a monolith Pharaoh the queue of fidgety machines
(Chromium dogs on the bonnet, faces behind the triplex screens)
Behind him the streets run away between the proud glass of shops
Cubical scent-bottles artificial legs arctic foxes and electric mops
But beyond this centre the slumward vista thins like a diagram :
There, unvisited, are Vulcan's forges who doesn't care a tinker's
damn.

Sprayed outwards through the suburbs houses, houses for rest
Seducingly rigged by the builder, half timbered houses with lips
pressed

So tightly and eyes staring at the traffic through bleary haws
And only a six-inch grip of the racing earth in their concrete claws ;
In these houses men as in a dream pursue the Platonic Forms
With wireless and cairn terriers and gadgets approximating to the
fickle norms

And endeavour to find God and score one over the neighbour
By climbing tentatively upward on jerry-built beauty and sweated
labour.

The lunch hour : the shops empty, shopgirls' faces relax
 Diaphanous as green glass empty as old almanacs
 As incoherent with ticketed gewgaws tiered behind their heads
 As the Burne-Jones windows in St. Philip's broken by crawling
 leads

Inspid colour, patches of emotion, Saturday thrills—
 "This theatre is sprayed with June"—the gutter take our old
 playbills,

Next week-end it is likely in the heart's funfair we shall pull
 Strong enough on the handle to get back our money ; or at any rate
 it is possible.

On shining lines the trams like vast sarcophagi move
 Into the sky, plum after sunset, merging to duck's egg, barred with
 mauve

Zeppelin clouds, and pentecost-like the cars' headlights bud
 Out from sideroads and the traffic signals, Crème-de-menthe or bull's
 blood,

Tell one to stop, the engine gently breathing, or to go on
 To where like black pipes of organs in the frayed and fading zone
 Of the West the factory chimneys on sullen sentry will all night
 wait

To call, in the harsh morning, sleep-stupid faces through the daily
 gate.

LOUIS MACNEICE

ÆNEAS AT WASHINGTON

I myself saw furious with blood
 Neoptolemus, at his side the black Atridæ
 Hecuba and the hundred daughters, Priam
 Cut down his filth drenching the holy fires :
 In that extremity I bore me well
 A true gentleman valorous in arms
 Disinterested and honorable ; then fled.
 That was a time when civilization
 Run by the few fell to the many and
 Crashed to the shout of men the clank of arms ;

Cold victualling I seized and hoisted up
The old man my father upon my back
In the smoke made by sea for a new world
Saving little—a mind imperishable
If time is, a love of past things tenuous
As the hesitation of receding love.
To the reduction of uncited littorals
I brought chiefly the vigor of prophecy
Our hunger breeding calculation
And fixed triumphs.

The thirsty dove I saw

In the glowing fields of Troy, hemp ripening
And tawny corn, the thickening Blue Grass
All lying rich forever in the green sun.
I see all things apart, the towers that men
Contrive I too contrived long, long ago ;
Now I demand little. The singular passion
Abides its object and consumes desire
In the circling shadow of its appetite.
There was a time when the young eyes were slow
Their flame steady beyond the firstling fire ;
I stood in the rain far from home at nightfall
By the Potomac, the great Dome lit the water
The city my blood had built I knew no more
While the screech-owl whistled his new delight
Consecutively dark.

Stuck in the wet mire

Four thousand leagues from the ninth buried city
I thought of Troy : what we had built her for.

ALLEN TATE

P O E M

The earth turns over, our side feels the cold,
 And life sinks choking in the wells of trees ;
 The ticking heart comes to a standstill, killed,
 The icing on the pond waits for its boys.
 Among the holly and the gifts I move,
 The carols on the piano, the glowing hearth,
 All our traditional sympathy with birth,
 Put by your challenge to the shifts of love.

Your portrait hangs before me on the wall ;
 And there what view I wish for, I shall find,
 The wooded or the stony, though not all
 The painters gifts can make its flatness round—
 Through the blue irises the heaven of failures,
 The mirror world where logic is reversed,
 When age becomes the handsome child at last,
 The glass sea parted for the country sailors.

Where move the enormous comics, drawn from life ;
 My father as an Airedale and a gardener,
 My mother chasing letters with a knife :
 You are not present as a character—
 Only the family have speaking parts.
 You are a valley or a river bend,
 The one an Aunt refers to as a friend,
 The tree from which the weazel racing starts.

False ; but no falser than the world it matches,
 Love's daytime kingdom which I say you rule,
 The total state where all must wear your badges,
 Keep order perfect as a naval school :
 Noble emotions organised and massed
 Line the straight flood-lit tracks of memory
 To cheer your image as it flashes by ;
 All lust at once informed on and suppressed.

Yours is the only name expressive there,
And family affection the one in cypher ;
Lay-out of hospital and street and square
That comfort to the homesick children offer,
As I, their author, stand between these dreams,
Son of a nurse and doctor, loaned a room,
Your would-be lover who has never come
In the great bed at midnight to your arms.

Such dreams are amorous; they are indeed :
But no one but myself is loved in these,
And time flies on above the dreamer's head,
Flies on, flies on, and with your beauty flies.
All things he takes and loses but conceit ;
This Alec still can buy the life within
License no liberty except his own,
Order the fireworks after the defeat.

Language of moderation cannot hide
My sea is empty and the waves are rough :
Gone from the map the shore where childhood played
Tight-fisted as a peasant, eating love ;
Lost in my wake my archipelago,
Islands of self through which I sailed all day,
Planting a pirate's flag, a generous bay ;
And lost the way to action and to you.

Lost if I steer. Gale of desire may blow
Sailor and ship past the illusive reef,
And I yet land to celebrate with you
Birth of a natural order and of love ;
With you enjoy the untransfigured scene,
My father down the garden in his gaiters,
My mother at her bureau writing letters,
Free to our favours, all our titles gone.

W. H. AUDEN

NEW YEAR

Here at the centre of the turning year,
 The turning Polar North,
 The frozen streets and the black fiery joy
 Of the Child launched again forth,
 I ask that all the years and years
 Of future disappointment, like a snow
 Chide me at one fall now.

I leave him who burns endlessly
 In the brandy pudding crowned with holly,
 And I ask that Time should freeze my skin
 And all my fellow travellers harden
 Who are not flattered by this town
 Nor up its twenty storeys whirled
 To prostitutes without infection.

Cloak us in accidents and in the failure
 Of the high altar and marital adventure ;
 In family disgrace, denunciation
 Of bankers, a premier's assassination.
 From the government windows
 Let heads of headlines watch depart,
 Strangely depart by staying, those
 Who build a new world in their heart.

Where scythe shall curve but not upon our neck
 And lovers proceed to their forgetting work
 Answering the harvests of obliteration :
 After the frozen years and streets
 Our tempered Will shall plough across the nations.
 This happy train that punishes no valley,
 This hand that moves to make the silent lines,
 Create their beauty without robbery.

STEPHEN SPENDER

TWO POEMS

LET HIM LOOSE

Should the hot, aching man of blood within
Ever achieve the surface, as he wishes,
Flushing his veins up over all the skin,
Net of splenetically throbbing meshes,

Why, then, I'm hot on the hot world, indeed.
The inner and the outer conflagration
Are spilled together, and one giddy creed
Spins off with the last wisp of demarcation.

But this is false ; for he is not my foe.
He struggles only to rejoin his kind.
But let him loose a moment, watch him go
Into a cloud, or travelling down some wind.

THE DISUSED TEMPLE

After the scourging prophet, with his cry
Of " money-changers " and " my father's house,"
Had set his mark upon it, folk were shy
To enter, and the fane fell in disuse.

Since it was unfrequented, and left out
Of living, what was there to do except
Make fast the door, destroy the key ? (No doubt
One of our number did it while we slept.)

It stays as a disquieting encumbrance.
We moved the market-place out of its shade,
But still it overhangs our whole remembrance,
Making us both inquisitive and afraid.

Shrewd acousticians hammer on the door
 And study from the echoes what is there.
 The Röntgen rays with which others explore
 Are vain—the photographic plate is bare.

Disquiet makes us sleepy. Shoddiness
 Has come upon our crafts. No question that
 We'll shortly have to yield to our distress,
 Abandon the whole township, and migrate.

J. N. CAMERON

THE SOLID SEA

Inside in the inner bedroom of the bungalow
 My love my love ? lies. The windows fit
 And the door is shut. It is a plush room,
 And most warm, a womb.

She nests in the feather-tie ;
 Here yet not here but where
 I try to climb, in the verandah room,
 Most boards have fallen. Dead nails

Protrude their inches from dry rot
 Darkness cuts itself flowing back
 And back again over the cracked vee
 Of the French window pane.

There is no storm ; if it were less dark
 You could see these waves
 Which are solid, and which crumble.
 Their green-dark and their tall unmotion
 Which go round and round

MARTIN BOLDERO

ONE FOR ALL

One or many
The sky lying on the storm
The birds covered with snow
The sounds of fear in the harsh woods

One or many
Ravens are laid in shells of clay
With faded wings and landslide beaks
They have gathered the red fantastic roses of the storm

One or many
The collar of the sun
The sun's immense strawberry
On the bottleneck of a grove

One or many
More sensitive to their childhood
Than to rain or fine weather
Sweeter to know
Than sleep on sweet slopes
Far from ennui

One or many
In whining mirrors
Where their voices are torn in the morning
Like linen

One or many
Made of crumbling stone
And of scattering feather
Made of cloth alcohol froth
Of laughter sobbing negligences ridiculous torments
Made of flesh and of unmistakable eyes

One or many
With all their woman's faults
All their merits

One or many
 The face tightly covered with ivy
 Tempting as new bread
 All the women who rouse me
 Dressed in what I have desired
 Dressed in calm and freshness
 Dressed in salt, water, sunlight
 Tenderness audacity and a thousand caprices
 In a thousand chains

One or many
 In all my dreams
 A new woodland flower
 Barbaric flower with bundles of pistils
 Which open in the burning circle of its deliriums
 In the murdered night

One or many
 A youth to die of
 A violent unquiet youth saturated with ennui
 In which she has taken part with me
 Not caring for others.

PAUL ELUARD

(Translated by David Gascoyne)

THE NEW WYNDHAM LEWIS

One Way Song. Wyndham Lewis. Faber. 7s. 6d.

Before the appearance of "One Way Song" it was difficult to "see" Wyndham Lewis as a poet: now it is equally difficult to think of him as anything else. This is probably due to some extent to the surviving influence of the exploded and debilitating heresy that there exist subjects which are, and subjects which are not, proper to poetry. A more creditable explanation is that it was truly impossible to conceive the familiar Lewisian material and viewpoint embodied in any permutation of contemporary verse modes. It follows that the success of "One Way Song" compels us to modify, *pro tanto*, our current conception of poetry.

Technically the most remarkable feature of Mr. Lewis's poetry is its directness. T. S. Eliot has written in his essay on *Metaphysical Poets* :

“ Our civilisation comprehends great variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity playing upon a refined sensibility must produce various and complex results. The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning.”

Without necessarily assenting to the validity of Mr. Eliot's remark as a prediction, it may be taken, I think, as a pretty true statement concerning the bulk of poetry of any significance produced since the war. A complex of social and historical factors (into which it would be irrelevant to go here) appears to have produced a situation in which a poet cannot—or at any rate could not—express himself with the precision required of poetry except in the manner indicated by Mr. Eliot. Admittedly not many poets actually found it necessary to append explanatory notes to their poems, as Mr. Eliot did to the “ Waste Land,” but they did, nevertheless, tend to leave out of their poems the kind of stuff which Mr. Eliot put into his notes. In other words they left the reader to construct the poem's framework of logical “ meaning ” for himself, if he demanded one; they never explained their parables. Mr. Lewis, however, unlike Mr. Eliot, believes that

These times require a tongue that naked goes
Without more fuss than Dryden's or Defoe's.

Mr. Lewis's “ meaning ” may be, and often is, far from simple, but it is always *there*, in the written poem, requiring only to be understood, not interpreted. (Section four of “ If so the man you are ” might perhaps be adduced as an exception to the generality of this proposition. Certainly the function of the young marine is not logically clear to me, though this is probably the result of my own denseness. Moreover in Mr. Lewis's hands the employment of this technique has led to no sacrifice of precision or subtlety; nor has it been the occasion of what might be called “ interference,” by permitting the intrusion of secondhand crystallisations of experience—emotional clichés.

The organic relatedness between the substance and the technique of poetry is so universally admitted as to have become a commonplace of criticism. Now in a time like the present, saturated with politics, it is probable that much of the material of poetry will be political. It is also probable that some poetry will degenerate into political propaganda. The peculiarity, the novelty, of the present age, as Mr. Lewis sees it (and it is with him we are concerned), consists in the invasion of all departments of life and thought by politics, to such an extent that the primary classification of any human product or activity is as Left or Right *politically*. The unvarying attitude of the "radical" romantic, time-bound, change-for-change-sakers, the "revolutionary simpletons," and "one way men," is, in spite of all their affectations of detachment, one of those who are not for us are against us: art and science for them are either revolutionary or reactionary in a political sense: there are no other distinctions.* It is against this unnatural and usurping dichotomy that Mr. Lewis's "Enemy" campaigns are waged. "A plague o' both your houses" is his reply as artist—and it is essential to realise that it is from the specialist, occupational, standpoint of a plastic artist that Mr. Lewis deliberately elects to speak†—to capitalist Capulets and communist Montagues alike. It is not difficult to see that the holder of such an attitude must occupy a position of isolated independence in the politics of the politicised art of today.

I have dwelt on Mr. Lewis's attitude as an artist towards politics, and on his position in the politics of art, because I think these are basic elements in the composition of Lewis the writer. The single-minded intensity of his devotion to art (as evidenced by his writing) cannot be too much insisted upon.‡ For one thing it differentiates him sharply from the poets who attach themselves to theological, political or philosophical absolutes. Thus, when he gives expression

* See especially the concluding sections of "The Diabolical Principle" on this subject of the politicisation of art.

† "It is in the service of the things of vision that my ideas are mobilised."—*Time and Western Man*, p. 8.

‡ "What I am concerned with here, first of all, is not whether the great time philosophy that overshadows all contemporary thought is viable as a system of abstract truth, but if in its application it helps or destroys our human arts."—*Time and Western Man*, p. 129.

to a negative emotion aroused by some phenomenon which he considers hostile to the interests of art, or of the individual freedom demanded by art, the feeling of his diatribe is *purely* negative, in the sense that it is not implied advocacy of a standpoint antithetical to the one he is attacking. "About *nothing* am I absolutely clear," he writes; yet his *practical* certainty as to what has value for himself seems sufficient to give him an easy and masculine assurance in the use of words, not always characteristic of the poets who are perpetually gravid with some portentous and formulated absolute. Perhaps it is because Mr. Lewis's absolute, like a healthy liver, omits to obtrude itself upon its owner's consciousness, that he is able to write straightforwardly and directly—"without more fuss than Dryden or Defoe"—and not in gothic hints and half tones.

Another consequence of Mr. Lewis's blazing enthusiasm in the cause of art is the seriousness, ferocity almost, with which he engages in art politics, and his intense, and even dramatic, realisation of his own position therein. In the opening paragraph of his editorial article in the first number of the "Enemy" he wrote:

". . . there is no 'movement' gathered here (thank heaven!), merely a person; a solitary outlaw and not a gang. What has driven him into the bush or out under the greenwood tree is the usual thing. Not to build a labyrinth in the gatehouse of my paper, then, the nearest big revolutionary settlement lies some distance behind me. I have moved outside. I found it impossible to come to terms with the canons observed in it. Outside I am freer."

Now a normal man, in whose scheme of life art was by no means the central and all-absorbing preoccupation, would probably not make much of this passage. Indeed one can conjecture such a person dismissing the author of it for good as a morbidly self-important egoist; a judgment he would feel was emphatically confirmed in the "Enemy Interlude" sections of "If so the man you are." It is nevertheless in a sense a crucial, a test, passage. No one who was unable to understand and sympathise with (not necessarily agree with and approve of) the attitude it expresses could hope to appreciate Mr. Lewis's poetry to the full: failure to

comprehend the necessity of such an attitude *for the writer* would especially render much of the magnificent rhetoric of "If so the man you are" (the most exciting piece in the book, in my opinion) empty and bombastic. In this connection it is worth while calling attention to a just and penetrating remark in T. S. Eliot's essay on "Rhetoric and Poetic Drama," namely: "The really fine rhetoric of Shakespeare occurs in situations where a character in the play *sees himself* in a dramatic light." Here is Lewis :

The man I am to blow the bloody gaff
 If I were given platforms ? The riff-raff
 May be handed all the trumpets that you will.
 Not so the golden tongued. The window sill
 Is all the pulpit they can hope to get,
 Of a slum-garret, sung by Mistinguette,
 Too high up to be heard, too poor to attract
 Anyone to their so-called 'scurrilous' tract.

The above quotation not only illustrates Mr. Lewis's power as a rhetorician, but also affords a taste of his quality as an artist in words. The affinity with Dryden is manifest. The unforced, natural diction, the large virile utterance, are both there ; so, too, I think, is the resonance, the "gonglike" note, perhaps more obviously recognisable in such a line as

No half-way house beyond the frosty bay.

On other occasions one is reminded of one of Dryden's latest direct descendents, Byron—particularly in "One Way Song" itself. The slangy, almost jocular, tone of such lines as

and To me Old Gaffer Time would just look strange
 and To please King Kronos or his latest bitch
 and Once that's achieved, O.K., Leibnitz allows
 (I'm with the old dog there) as much as Gauss

is close to "Don Juan." A comparison, however, of Byron's stanzas on Berkley in "Don Juan" with the passages in "One Way Song"

from which I have just quoted reveals a frivolity in Byron—his great admirer Goethe said of him “The moment he reflects he is a child”—with which the flippancy of Lewis is quite untinged. Moreover, Lewis is generally a better versifier than Byron. There are yet other occasions when Mr. Lewis uses words in an *imaginative* manner, more allied to the sixteenth than to the eighteenth century, for example :

The quixote-fingered. Mild-horned coptic ram,
and
Give me a sunflower and I'll chop their heads.
(That's where the chicken got the chopper lad.
Upon his curly sunflower discus pat.)

And lastly the “snooty tit-for-tat,” in sections 27 and 28 of “If so the man you are,” recalls the temper and tempo of Donne's fourth satire, directed against the court. It may be suggestive that Donne was a philosophically minded artist, with much in him both of the ardent reformer and the instinctive anarchist.

GILBERT ARMITAGE

THE USE OF POETRY

The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism. T. S. Eliot.
Faber. 7s. 6d.

Mr. Eliot's most valuable work as a critic of poetry has been to defend literature against the invasions of biography, sociology and philosophy. He has no general theory of poetry, nor any talent for abstract speculation. He has insisted, and insists here again in his praise of Johnson (p. 64), that there is a philosophic borderline which the critic must not transgress too far or too often ; he must not become an astronomer, a moralist or another thing : and keeping to these limits, as a student of the craft of writing, in

detailed appraisal and the comparison of specific passages he has educated the taste of many people in the recognition and enjoyment of poetry, and has at times had those sudden illuminations which he marks as the poet's true contribution to criticism. But it is by no means certain that the special abilities, methods and self-restrictions of a critic of poetry are required also by the perfect critic of criticism : indeed in these lectures Mr. Eliot again and again emphasises the fact that Criticism must be studied in its whole environment (esp. pp. 127-8) ; but he himself plays " Tom Tiddler's Ground " with religion, sociology, psychology and all, and runs away hard when Tom Tiddler tries to catch him. Countless problems are raised to be explicitly dismissed without discussion. He has " a passion for exactness in the use of words and for consistency and continuity of reasoning " (the lack of which he charges against Arnold), but finds himself unable to satisfy it in the widespread subject-matter of this book except in indeterminate quibbling controlled by negative purposes and the desire to sacrifice to a conclusion no opening.

In the penultimate chapter " The Modern Mind " there is evidence for thinking that this dry inconclusiveness of argument is due to terrible moral and philosophical perplexity from which Mr. Eliot is at present unable and unlikely ever to free himself. Yet this perplexity need not have obtruded here. It is not the state of a philosophical or sociological critic, but of a poet. The poet-critic cannot be the perfect critic of criticism, and Mr. Eliot has not qualified for the vocation of a " ruined man " by the possession of even such talents as he would allow to Coleridge (p. 69) for metaphysics and political economy ; he remains a poet still. The really interesting parts of the book are those in which he does speak as a poet of his own experience of reading and writing poetry, where (to use his own quaint phrase of Keats) he keeps " pretty close to intuition " ; but these are isolated, and in the greater part of the book he turns away from material in which his insight would have been fruitful, on which we wanted his " sudden illuminations," towards that which can provoke his unfortunate passion for reasoned exactitude and his love of borrowing. For instance, there is a discussion of Jonson's *Discoveries*, but no mention of the *Con-*

versations with Drummond ; nearly ten pages are given to showing that Shelley's ideas were immature, while just over two are spared for Keats's Letters : yet in these two it is said : " There is hardly one statement of Keats's about poetry, which, when considered carefully and with due allowance for the difficulties of communication, will not be found to be true."

It is this careful consideration and the elucidation of this truth which we want from a poet-critic : it is the centre of his subject, for Keats's criticism was not, like that of Sidney, Wordsworth and others, an advertisement or apology for his poetry, but a living product concurrent with it. Again, in the " Introduction " we come upon the sudden sentence : " I wish we might dispose more attention to the correctness of expression, to the clarity or obscurity, to the choice of words whether just or improper, exalted or vulgar of our verse : in short to the good or bad breeding of our poets." The poet speaks as a craftsman ; yet he takes up no discussion of the training of poets in their craft, scarcely mentions the Elizabethan educationists, says nothing of the effect of such training as the *Logonomia Anglica* upon Milton, or of the neglected earlier chapters of *Biographia Literaria* (the title of which is persistently mis-spelt) and only recurs to the subject of education, so boldly raised, in the " Conclusion," where it is quickly consigned to a footnote. These are not charges against the perfect critic of criticism as omissions, but marked as lost opportunities of making *this* into a more valuable book.

It is remarkable that the passage about the breeding of our poets and the educated awareness of their readers (a re-statement of what Mr. Eliot has said before) should recur in this context ; for in the personal passages of the lectures he shows himself holding for the writing of poetry a doctrine of spontaneous genesis at times when the poet is capriciously released from inhibitions and wishes to be " a moment merry," and choosing for his own work an audience of illiterates. The stages between no education and perfect education are swept aside. Why must we have a black-white decision ; and what does Mr. Eliot really want ? He seems to have fallen into the same kind of false dilemma as that from which Coleridge (too much pitied here) rescued Wordsworth.

On the Poetry and Belief question Mr. Eliot does not clarify

his earlier position (*Selected Essays*, pp. 255 ff.) ; the immaturity of Shelley's beliefs certainly depreciates their value as beliefs, but is their intrusion upon the reader due to this, and not to an independent but accompanying defect of style ?

HUMPHRY HOUSE

TWO FIRST BOOKS

Difficult Morning. Randall Swingler. *Spring Encounter.* John Pudney. Methuen. 3s. 6d. each.

These writers have contributed a poem or two to NEW VERSE, but that would not excuse complimenting them kindly with lies or half-lies. Both their books are dull. They lack, one more than the other, qualities which are natural to the early verse of poets. Rhythm, obviously individual, and form ; individualised imagery, wealthy experience expressed through a body of fictions, from which it cannot be divided—these are demanded from an Eliot or Yeats. From new poets one may expect assimilated rhythms, some sensivity of imitation, some evidence of being percipient, some green hint above ground of a growing experience and mythology. Mr. Swingler, like Mr. Pudney, seems ill-read. Unselectively he employs Hopkins, Mr. Eliot, Mr. Day Lewis, Mr. Spender and Mr. Auden, borrowing from them kinds of words, of word arrangement, of imagery and of attitude ; but he appears devoid of what Mr. Eliot calls “ auditory imagination.” His words do not join into rhythm ; they tumble together turgidly. They are automatic ; they have a dictionary but seldom a poetic meaning.

Mr. Swingler observes only the obvious. So does Mr. Pudney, but he is more able to express it. His poems exist through some rhythmical and formal virtue. He borrows more like an artist, but uses what he borrows and what he provides insipidly. His poems possess a character, but one like stale water ; they seem to suggest, but they suggest either nothing or little. If his words are clear and simple, they are too simple and too clear. They combine into sheets of glass, having at the most some slight engraving through which one looks at a void. Mr. Swingler certainly, Mr. Pudney perhaps, should give up poetry for politics or prose.

GEOFFREY GRIGSON

AUDENESQUE

The Dance of Death. W. H. Auden. Faber. 2s. 6d.

“We present to you this evening a picture of the decline of a class, of how its members dream of a new life, but secretly desire the old, for there is death inside them. We show you that death as a dancer.” But there are very few passages in the rest of the play as good as these opening lines. Indeed much of the verse that follows might have been written by Mr. Coward or Mr. Herbert, almost by any writer of dance lyrics :

“ If this is true
It’s mean of you.
Is this a game ?
We think it a shame.”

It is too near the original to be effective as parody and although the allegory throughout is a good one and the intention can be recognised as satirical there is nowhere any touchstone by which the various degrees of stupidity and vulgarity can be gauged. In Auden’s better verse the personal comment lies in the rhyme ; an opposition is set up :

“ Creatures of air and darkness, from this hour
Put and keep my friend in power ;
Let not the reckless heavenly riders
Treat him or me as rank outsiders.”

and in “ Sweeney Agonistes ” Mr. Eliot seems to express himself in some of the speeches of Sweeney :

“ When you’re alone like he was alone
You’re either or neither
I tell you again it don’t apply
Death or life or life or death
Death is life and life is death
I gotta use words when I talk to you
But if you understand or if you don’t
That’s nothing to me and nothing to you ”

but in this poem the Auden "attitude" is only present by implication and never reaches a statement; the comment is supplied, perhaps, by his previous verse. This would explain the limpness of the versification; there is none of the vigour of "The Orators," none of the "aliveness" that distinguished the "Poems." The Group Theatre is perhaps to blame for the demands it makes on its members; the words seem certainly to be "words for music" rather than words existing in their own right. But good opera is not good literature.

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