

NEW VERSE

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POEMS IN THIS NUMBER BY

EDWIN MUIR, LOUIS MACNEICE, ANDREW YOUNG,
HUGH CHISHOLM, PHILIP O'CONNOR, GEOFFREY
GRIGSON, GEORGE BARKER, B. H. GUTTERIDGE,
BERNARD SPENCER, KENNETH ALLOTT,
A. J. M. SMITH.

Reviews, etc., by W. H. AUDEN on HOUSMAN, LOUIS
MACNEICE, KENNETH ALLOTT, GEOFFREY
GRIGSON, and others.

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1937

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BAGPIPE MUSIC

It's no go the merrygoround, it's no go the rickshaw,
All we want is a limousine and a ticket for the peepshow.
Their knickers are made of crepe-de-chine, their shoes are made of
python,
Their halls are lined with tiger rugs and their walls with heads of
bison.

John MacDonald found a corpse, put it under the sofa,
Waited till it came to life and hit it with a poker,
Sold its eyes for souvenirs, sold its blood for whiskey,
Kept its bones for dumb-bells to use when he was fifty.

It's no go the Yogi-Man, it's no go Blavatsky,
All we want is a bank balance and a bit of skirt in a taxi.

Annie MacDougall went to milk, caught her foot in the heather,
Woke to hear a dance record playing of Old Vienna.
It's no go your maidenheads, it's no go your culture,
All we want is a Dunlop tyre and the devil mend the puncture.

The Laird o' Phelps spent Hogmanay declaring he was sober,
Counted his feet to prove the fact and found he had one foot over.
Mrs. Carmichael had her fifth, looked at the job with repulsion,
Said to the midwife "Take it away; I'm through with over-
production."

It's no go the gossip column, it's no go the Ceilidh,
All we want is a mother's help and a sugar-stick for the baby.

Willie Murray cut his thumb, couldn't count the damage,
Took the hide of an Ayrshire cow and used it for a bandage.
His brother caught three hundred cran when the seas were lavish,
Threw the bleeders back in the sea and went upon the parish.

It's no go the Herring Board, it's no go the Bible,
All we want is a packet of fags when our hands are idle.

It's no go the picture palace, it's no go the stadium,
It's no go the country cot with a pot of pink geraniums.
It's no go the Government grants, it's no go the elections,
Sit on your arse for fifty years and hang your hat on a pension.

It's no go my honey love, it's no go my poppet ;
Work your hands from day to day, the winds will blow the profit.
The glass is falling hour by hour, the glass will fall for ever,
But if you break the bloody glass you won't hold up the weather.

LOUIS MACNEICE

P O E M

If a good man were ever housed in Hell
By needful error of the qualities,
Perhaps to prove the rule or shame the devil,
Or speak the truth only a stranger sees,

Would he, surrendering to obvious hate,
Waste half eternity in cries and tears,
Or watch in hope Hell's little wicket-gate,
Motionless through the first ten thousand years,

Feeling the curse climb slowly to his throat
That, uttered, damns him to rescindless ill,
Forcing his blessing tongue to run by rote,
Eternity entire before him still ?

Would he at last, persisting in his station,
Kindle a little hope in hopeless Hell,
And sow among the damned doubt of damnation,
Since here someone could live and could live well ?

One doubt of evil would bring down such a grace,
Open such a gate, all Eden could wander in,
Hell be a place like any other place,
And love and hate and life and death begin.

EDWIN MUIR.

PICKED CLEAN FROM THE WORLD

Picked clean from the world by the speed of our train
We lay the uneasy night
Seeming to lurch through cloud
To drop like an aerial jumper
To explore at random the cisterns of the rain
The deafening workshops of the thunder.

In the morning, the sunny plateaux, shrubs
That claw up fierce from an earth baked dry
And writhe black arms like a fire's stubs,
Feathered olives, and the lolling maize
Dangling its carter's whips,
And the vine, knee-high.

To enter alertly a new town-square,
To cross the equator of shade and glare,
To smell and touch snow ;
New adjustments to a new life shaped
By female harbour or river's flow
—Mind needed these as body bread.
At home, in an industrialized country
No other wish will do instead
Of that ancient disruptive wish, springing naked
Like a dream whose sense we are made to know.

Just as at Pont du Gard
Where the river is broad across the gravel,
Grateful because of the shade, and level,
Bathers who look up are
Hit with astonishment,
Seeing suddenly the Roman viaduct,
Its trampling arches of yellow stone,
With its stilted valley-stride
Fill all the sky one way,
Enduring and monstrous in its image of travel.

BERNARD SPENCER

P O E M

The clock ticks on ; the wild-fingered hand
of a dark wet evening strokes the face
and combs the hair out-of-doors,
and traffic and expressions are woof and warp
of a cruelly-clear understanding. The people drag a train of
ancient monsters,
cumbersome shadows with banners
of factory hours and weekly wage. Sirens of contempt
whistle in the incidental phrase
and the metre of a force prepared to impel a change
gives words the white outline of chairs seen in fainting,
here we have a room of drastic furniture waiting the remover's
approach
(and he comes solemn as two girders
in a bridge, intent as the dead timber floating under it.)

No foaming running cloud of the night
can disengage hysteria locked in the pounding heart
slowly rejoining the serene wide-open eye.

P. O'CONNOR

P O O R I N N O C E N T

It is a gentle natural (Is it I ?) who
visits timidly the big world of
the heart and stares a little while at love
as at a plaited and ringleted paleblue
seascape whence escapes a new, untrue,
refracted light, a shade or two above
the infra fringe beyond which does he move
he moves unsurely in an air askew.

This pretty simpleton, myself or not,
squints at the filagree of weed and wave,
scanning the frothing for the Lord knows what—
the foam-born rising maybe, nude and swell,
or—*Back to your kennel, varlet ! Fool, you rave !*
Unbind that seaweed, throw away that shell !

A. J. M. SMITH

ALLEGORY OF THE ADOLESCENT AND THE ADULT

It was when the weather was Arabian I went
Over the downs to Alton where winds were wounded
With flowers and swathed me with aroma, I walked
Like St Christopher Columbus through a sea's welter
Of gaudy ways looking for a wonder.

Who was I who knows, no one when I started,
No more than the youth who takes longish strides,
Gay with a girl and obstreperous with strangers,
Fond of some songs, not unusually stupid,
I ascend hills anticipating the strange.

Looking for a wonder I went on a Monday
Meandering over the Alton down and moor,
When was it I went, an hour a year or more,
That Monday back, I cannot remember.
I only remember I went in a gay mood.

Hollyhock here and rock and rose there were,
I wound among them knowing they were no wonder ;
And the bird with a worm and the fox in a wood
Went flying and flurrying in front, but I was
Wanting a worse wonder, a rarer one.

So I went on expecting miraculous catastrophe,
What is it, I whispered, shall I capture a creature,
A woman for a wife, or find myself a king,
Sleep and awake to find Sleep is my kingdom ?
How shall I know my marvel when it comes ?

Then after long striding and striving I was where
I had so long longed to be, in the world's wind
At the hill's top, with no more ground to wander
Excepting downward, and I had found no wonder.
Found only the sorrow that I had missed my marvel.

Then I remembered, was it the bird or worm,
The hollyhock, the flower or the strong rock,
Was it the mere dream of the man and woman,
Made me a marvel? It was not. It was
When on the hilltop I stood in the world's wind.

The world is my wonder, where the wind
Wanders like wind, and where the rock is
Rock. And man and woman flesh on a dream.
Now I look from my hill with the woods behind,
And the world like the sea's chaos below.

GEORGE BARKER

P O E M

(FOR ANTONY)

Come out from your expensive feasts and lusts,
Come out from the Sphinx's shadow, the easy silence.
These are the days of the crazy men and the crusts
Of bread on the bench, when the Babylonian talents
Confound the tribes from the plains and the mountain saints,
When Babel tickles the lame ascetic's foot,
And patience and the humorous complaints
Waste in the face of shirts and the salute.

Come out with your camels that understand the thirst,
Come out from the land you know, knowing the woman,
And watch us dying, dying, and the worst,
Not death but living with the death, the omen.

Or, from your Egyptian ditch, send word
Of love's identity with worm and sword.

HUGH CHISHOLM

WALKING IN MIST

At first the river Noe
Like a snake's belly gleamed below
And then in mist was lost ;
The hill too vanished like a ghost
And all the day was gone
Except the damp grey light that round me shone.

From Lose Hill to Mam Tor,
Darkness behind us and before,
I gave the track its head ;
But as I followed where it led,
That light went all the way
As though I made and carried my own day.

A. J. YOUNG

P O E M

Walking beside the curtained edge of wood
I feel it hang across the folds of down
Like an Assyrian beard laid out flat.

And thoughts take shape as caution of a shadow,
Will catch you up, or the two shadows of fear
Wait at the apex of their terrible paths.

Over the fields comes music from a fête.
And in the papers of Sunday articles
Stories of wars and our complacent lives ;

So much is consolatory, alludes
To what we learn and to our lucky home.
The hopeless trekking of an intuition

Forced down to rumour in uneasy minds,
Leaves us to stoop and find the consolation
Remote from fear, invalids' trust in flowers :

Holiday sightings of a life as though
Telescoped from a hill, the distant
Recognition of face that suddenly fades,

Or wood top will seem thick for walking on,
And holding in a mist ; white archangel
Broken short lines of cream in a full hedge.

Go to the centre of the wood and stand
Sometimes where hounds run, and the last rabbit
Disappears from ride as a bed time story.

The music follows and you cannot hide
Details of luck and the unhappy charms ;
Bordered by rooks among their darkening trees,

Just know, that even from failure has flowered—
Although along the great and menacing edges
Remote sounds seep in past the crumbling stakes.

B. H. GUTTERIDGE

A DEAD MOLE

Strong-shouldered mole,
That so much lived below the ground,
Dug, fought and loved, hunted and fed,
For you to raise a mound
Was as for us to make a hole ;
What wonder now that being dead
Your body lies here stout and square
Buried within the blue vault of the air ?

A. J. YOUNG

AROUND CADBURY CASTLE

(FOR JOHN AND MYFANWY)

Walking around Cadbury Castle
on the last day in June,
admiring the elder flowers, the yellow
stones and the emery mole-hills,

And blue Glastonbury, which
we enjoy so little, and will not
admire so soon, startling up
the flies from the green dung

To rising like an irritated flight
of bombers, watching the evening
and excellent sun which would
as soon watch a lizard, or the grey

Flowers of grass as the clerk
washing the cups and sugary spoons
Or the girl in pink walking
Up the black lane between the limes

In June, recollecting Rubens, the wife
And husband quarrelling in the car,
The brown skin round the knuckles
of eighty, by the plate of strawberries,

Recalling the cockerel malice of the
Fresh-faced writer, and the dry
tongue, and the shell, and the broadcast vanity,
the shifty liberal, and the short moustache,

the sincere man with his vote,
the rotten lung, the preference for dogs,
the strange geology that directs the stream,
the evil that I share, good I do not do . . .

GEOFFREY GRIGSON

LAMENT FOR A CRICKET ELEVEN

Beyond the edge of the sepia
Rises the weak photographer
With the moist moustaches and the made-up tie.
He looked with his mechanical eye,
And the upshot was that they had to die.

Portrait of the Eleven nineteen-o-five
To show when these missing persons were last alive.
Two sit in Threadneedle Street like gnomes.
One is a careless schoolmaster
Busy with carved desks, honour and lines.
He is eaten by a wicked cancer.
They have detectives to watch their homes.

From the camera hood he looks at the faces
Like the spectral pose of the praying mantis.
Watch for the dicky-bird. But, oh my dear,
That bird will not migrate this year.
Oh for a parasol, oh for a fan
To hide my weak chin from the little man.

One climbs mountains in a storm of fear,
Begs to be unroped and left alone.
One went mad by a tape-machine.
One laughed for a fortnight and went to sea.
Like a sun one follows the jeunesse dorée.

With his hand on the bulb he looks at them.
The smiles on their faces are upside down.
“ I’ll turn my head and spoil the plate.”
“ Thank you, gentlemen.” Too late. Too late.

One greyhead was beaten in a prison riot.
He needs injections to keep him quiet.
Another was a handsome clergyman,
But mortification has long set in.
One keeps six dogs in an unlit cellar.
The last is a randy bachelor.

The photographer in the norfolk jacket
Sits upstairs in his darkroom attic.
His hand is expert at scissors and pin.
The shadows lengthen, the days draw in,
And the mice come out round the iron stove.
“ What I am doing, I am doing for love.
When shall I burn this negative
And hang the receiver up on grief ?”

KENNETH ALLOTT

P E R C H I S T S

Intricacy of engines,
Delicacy of darkness ;
They rise into the tent's
Top like deep-sea divers

And hooked from the mouth like fish
Frame their frolic
Above the silent music
And the awed audience,

Hang by their teeth
Beneath the cone of canvas,
The ring beneath them
An eye that is empty

Who live in a world
Of aery technic
Like dolls or angels
Sexless and simple

Our fear their frame,
Hallowed by handclaps,
Honoured by eyes
Upward in incense.

On the tent's walls
Fourfold shadowed
In a crucifixion's
Endless moment

Intricacy of,
Delicacy of,
Darkness and engines.

LOUIS MACNEICE

THE NEXT NUMBER

will contain, after the poems, an article on HÖLDERLIN by Edwin Muir, with translations, reviews of "A Vision" by W. B. Yeats, the "Further Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins," "Victorian Street Ballads," etc.

"Remarks" will appear in every number, discussing things of special concern to writers and readers of "New Verse." Readers are invited to suggest alterations, improvements, topics, and to report things of interest.

REMARKS

AN ANONYMOUS EXHIBIT arrived at the London show of surrealist objects before Christmas. It was a glass witch ball. Pointed, smart moustaches of various colours were stuck round it. There was a paper frill on top encircling a trotter which held a cigarette between its nails. It was labelled with a newspaper cutting "Auden Receives Royal Medal."

Auden *has* received the Royal Medal. He and Mr. Masfield had an audience of the King, and the Royal Medal changed hands. There are many possible explanations. We do not know the right one. If it is one of the hostile explanations which do Mr. Auden no credit,—well, Balzac was not always as good as his novels or Dryden as good as his poems. It may be true that the joke is much more on the medal than it is on Auden. Anyone who knows Auden will realise that, but there is no good reason for taking the Royal Medal, all the same. We rather regret that Mr. Auden has taken it; we rather regret the office of Poet Laureate, and we rather regret that Mr. Masfield ever had anything to do with establishing a Royal Medal.

Left penetration into the Right, or into Right esteem, is something which the Left and the penetrators want to scrutinise. After all, ambitions can be justified to oneself in that way. Compromise is a dangerous whore with seven-and-elevenpenny silk stockings; and among writers, anyhow, better Cripps than Attlee. NEW VERSE had an argument over the telephone the other day with a director of a publishing firm who refused to supply a review copy of a verse-play if it was going to a particular reviewer. This director actually said that, since so few people would publish verse anyway, verse-reviewers ought to establish a kind of Popular Front *i.e. all verse by poets with the angels ought to be reviewed kindly*. A "Popular Front," like muscling-in, is a shadow in which all sorts of toad stools can grow up.

We are not Trotskyists, but we should like to know more about the arrest of Boris Pasternak.

“ *Boris Pasternak is considered by some to be the greatest Soviet poet, but it is clear from a mere perusal of his works that he is far removed from Soviet actuality. . . . It is significant to note that Bukharin, at the Conference of Writers, implied that the future development of Soviet poetry should be along the line of Pasternak, rather than Mayakovsky, and only after the recent trials was it made clear that even on the front of culture was there a conscious attempt to stifle the genuine line of Soviet poetry—that is the line of Mayakovsky.*” Left Review November 1937.

It is a pity that “ *Contemporary Poetry and Prose* ” has come to an end (though it was one of those papers founded by one of those poets who could not get his verse into “ *New Verse* ”). “ *Axis* ” and Mr. Julian Symons’s “ *Twentieth Century Verse* ” (which has just published a good double number on Wyndham Lewis) and “ *New Verse* ” ought not to be the only papers in London continuing the very useful tradition of the “ little magazine.”

TRADITION AND THE TIMES

“ *The London Mercury (Christmas number 2s. 6d.) begins with a poem by Walter de la Mare on “ Memory,” which is, as much poetry now is not, in the right tradition.*”

THE TIMES

APPROVED COUNTRIES

“ *From other countries of which we approve come : ‘ The Booster ’ ‘ Wales ’ ‘ Poetry ’ ‘ Mesures ’ ‘ Commune ’*”

LIFE AND LETTERS

ROSES AND RAPTURES FROM RAYMOND

“ *Really ravishing pictures which one would like to own.*”

RAYMOND MORTIMER

JEHOVAH HOUSMAN AND SATAN HOUSMAN

A.E.H. A Memoir. By Laurence Housman. (Cape. 10s. 6d.)

Heaven and Hell. Reason and Instinct. Conscious Mind and Unconscious. Is their hostility a temporary and curable neurosis, due to our particular pattern of culture, or intrinsic in the nature of these faculties? Can man only think when he is frustrated from acting and feeling? Is the intelligent person always the product of some childhood neurosis? Does Life only offer two alternatives: "You shall be happy, healthy, attractive, a good mixer, a good lover and parent, but on condition that you are not overcurious about life. On the other hand you shall be attentive and sensitive, conscious of what is happening round you, but in that case you must not expect to be happy, or successful in love, or at home in any company. There are two worlds and you cannot belong to them both. If you belong to the second of these worlds you will be unhappy because you will always be in love with the first, while at the same time you will despise it. The first world on the other hand will not return your love because it is in its nature to love only itself. Socrates will always fall in love with Alcibiades; Alcibiades will only be a little flattered and rather puzzled"?

To those who are interested in this problem, A. E. Housman is one of the classic case histories. Few men have kept Heaven and Hell so rigidly apart. Jehovah Housman devoted himself to the emendation of texts of no æsthetic value and collected thunderbolts of poisoned invective in notebooks to use when opportunity arose against the slightest intellectual lapses; Satan Housman believed that the essence of poetry was lack of intellectual content. Jehovah Housman lived the virginal life of a don; Satan Housman thought a good deal about stolen waters and the bed. Jehovah Housman believed that slavery was necessary to support the civilised life; Satan Housman did not accept injustice so lightly.

*But they've pulled the beggar's hat off for the world to see and stare,
And they're taking him to justice for the colour of his hair.*

But they had one common ground upon which they could meet ; the grave. Dead texts ; dead soldiers ; Death the Reconciler, beyond sex and beyond thought. There, and there only, could the two worlds meet.

Mr Laurence Housman's memoir of his brother records a great many interesting facts from which the reader must construct his own theory of what happened to Housman to cause this division, of why, for instance, he did not work for Greats, and why he did not allow his family to come to see him in those critical years from 1882-1892. But however fascinating such speculations may be, they are of minor importance. What happened to Housman happens in one way or another to most intellectuals, though few exhibit the symptoms in so pure a form.

*The stars have not dealt me the worst they could do ;
My pleasures are plenty, my troubles are two.
But oh, my two troubles they reave me of rest,
The brains in my head and the heart in my breast.*

*O grant me the ease that is granted so free,
The birthright of multitudes, give it to me,
That relish their victuals and rest on their bed
With flint in the bosom and guts in the head.*

Yes, the two worlds. Perhaps the Socialist State will marry them; perhaps it won't. Perhaps it will always be true that

*Wer das Tiefste gedacht, liebt das Lebendigste,
Hohe Tugend versteht, wer in die Welt geblickt
Und es neigen die Weisen
Oft am Ende zu Schönem sich.*

Perhaps again the only thing which can bring them together is the exercise of what Christians call Charity, a quality for which, it will be remembered, neither Jehovah nor Satan Housman had much use, but of which perhaps they were both not a little frightened.

W. H. AUDEN.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

SIR,

In the last number of *New Verse* Mr. Kenneth Allott wrote an article entitled *Auden and The Theatre*. I wish to object to his remark that 'The Group Theatre productions have been notable only for slack production, poorish acting and too much art and craftiness.'

As for art and craftiness that is an element which is liable to appear in any plays which are at all expressionist in their technique. It ought to be kept down as much as possible but it is unfair to attribute its occasional appearance wholly to the production.

'Poorish acting' seems to me a false accusation, especially if Mr. Allott is considering, as he seems to be, *The Ascent of F 6*, which was not one of the Group Theatre productions proper. Mr. Doone, who produced *The Ascent of F 6*, has in general a remarkable knack for collecting intelligent and sympathetic actors who have also had considerable experience.

'The Group Theatre productions have been notable only for slack production. . . .' This seems to me a shocking falsehood and possibly malicious piece of snobbery. The Group Theatre productions have been limited in many ways by circumstances—lack of money, of time and of a theatre—and I think Mr. Allott would find few producers who in face of such difficulties could have made as good a job of these plays. Perhaps Mr. Allott thinks that no one should attempt to produce unless he is already a power in the commercial theatre. In that case our poets had better write their plays only for reading.

In the case of my own play, *Out of the Picture*, I found that when produced by the Group Theatre it took on a unity and drive on the stage which it lacked on paper. *Out of the Picture* is hardly a good play, but the example, I think, holds good. Most successful playwrights (including the Greeks and Shakespeare) wrote *directly for the stage*. Their writing was consequently limited, but also developed, by the production. 'I have an idea' says Mr. Allott, 'that poets still feel uneasy in the theatre.' He is quite right. Perhaps Mr. Allott will feel uneasy the first time he plays polo. He would be easier no doubt without his horse, but would it then be polo?

I am Yours etc.

Louis MacNeice.

* (Of course, one can be grateful—up to a point—to Mr. Doone. But it is a well backed charge that the Group Theatre productions have been dilettante, and that their dilettantism, or art-and-craftiness, does not entirely come out of the technique of the plays. It is all very well for Mr. MacNeice to retort 'shocking falsehood' and 'malicious snobbery': the productions have been 'slack'—that is to say, there has not been apparent behind them an impersonal, clear, attractive and well-founded enthusiasm (in which they show up badly against the Unity Theatre).

A symbol, and small example, of the artiness which has repelled many people from what they have felt is Mr. Doone's Organization is the remark (Group Theatre Paper No. 5) that the chorus masks for Mr. MacNeice's *Agamemnon* "in combination with the modern jackets are intended to give an effect of timeless formality, *the masking resembling a leaded head in a stained glass window.*"

Even after the recent changes, the Group might still be purged of an overload of the art-and-class snobbery which is the chronic disease of all English movements.)

MACNEICE, MACLEISH, AND
ANDREW YOUNG

Out of the Picture. By Louis MacNeice. (Faber. 6s.)

The Fall of the City. By Archibald MacLeish. (Boriswood. 3s. 6d.)

Nicodemus. By Andrew Young. (Cape. 3s. 6d.)

Out of the Picture is very nice and very MacNeice. English plays by intelligent poets are always pieces of bare statement rather than statements by implication. I think that is wrong—and as wrong in Marlowe as in MacNeice; but taking things as they are, what is there to say about this play? It has a clumsy plot and the prose dialogue is rather unenterprising. The poetry is extremely agreeable and attractive. It springs from a valid attitude of sympathy and parody of sympathy at the same time, which has a wider reference than MacNeice's own feelings. But why is verse never used to express objective conflict at any real crux of the play? The way verse is used here (and in Auden's plays) still points to poets writing poetry for plays and not poetic plays.

The Group Theatre production last month was satisfactory and the sets were much better than usual. Best acting: by the Listener-In and by the Announcer in one extraordinary explosion of virtuosity. All the principals were up to scratch. Whether Mr. Doone or the author altered the play from the text for production I do not know: the alterations certainly increased both plausibility and effect. Other points: the scene outside the travel bureau served no *dramatic* purpose; the religious atmosphere of the auction recalled too closely the operation scene in *The Dog Beneath the Skin*; the 'Nobody-Anybody' recitative was remarkably effective; the two sung choruses were inaudible; the play should have ended on the word 'Going' not 'Gone.'

The Fall of the City is a verse-play for radio, not bad but not very exciting. It has a good myth, the right technique (and I need convincing that Auden and MacNeice would not find their plays come across better on the air than on the stage), a dignified and sincere though insufficiently vital use of language. Colloquialisms ('They are milling around us', 'He's telling them off') ring quaintly like dialect words in Spenser. MacLeish will not raise your blood-pressure, but he is not just a sedative. He is a peculiar kind of gentlemanly American, and I would not switch off my set if *The Fall of the City* seeped out on the National wavelength.

Andrew Young is now, for lack of the wider audience which must be there, the pet of the cognoscenti. *Nicodemus* is a mystery-play and as a play pure and simple the best of the three reviewed here. There is no sense of strain or difficulty about it. It is not a 'big' or 'important' work, thank God: plot and meaning are compact like a kernel; characters are realised to the edges of the convention; and the language is sometimes poetry without ever being poetical. If religious plays on X-tian subjects are going to be written, they have advantages in being written like this.

Unlike the crouching, wary, defensive stance of *The Rock, Nicodemus* is wide open for attack and as safe as houses. A dramatist is much less likely to be flurried writing a play as Andrew Young does: and, to be brutal, the best kind of propaganda is often to look the other way.

K. A.

DIFFERENT MIXTURES

The Disappearing Castle. By Charles Madge. (Faber and Faber. 6s.)

Calamiterror. By George Barker. (Faber and Faber. 5s.)

The poems of Charles Madge are a good illustration of the difficulties that a poet has nowadays in getting his own and his public's assent to writing at all. Among the twenty-seven poems you will find a whole Paris Exhibition of styles, from Eliot's incantation and Hopkins' grammatical play to the poetry of Romance (p. 146) and a weird Gray-cum-Johnson (pp. 50-56). I don't consider that this device succeeds in lending any of the sought-for authority to the poems. What it does do is to antagonize. But in this wholesale assault on the assent of the reader, styles are not the only weapons used. What about that unsifted reverence and emotion that still attach to the symbols of astrology? So Madge returns to the charge, marshalling his celestial goats, his bulls, his crabs, and his virgins. See pages 16, 17, 21, 24-31, 39, 64. It would be pleasanter to read him if there wasn't so much to swallow. Some of the best of these poems, e.g. on pages 16, 17, 20, 21, written in a severely grand style of Madge's own, have deservedly got into well-known anthologies. What is good in them, their dramatic imagery, their conciseness, is good enough to outweigh the starry demands they make on one's credulity. The series of Marxist poems, *Delusions*, written in the eighteenth century style, are simply dull, but dull in a manner which seems to say "Ah, but this will last, this is TRADITIONAL!" Among the best things in the book are the prose pieces, *Government House*, *Bourgeois News*, etc., which by means of surrealist juxtapositions made admirable fun of the Press, popular science, and life in the Dominions.

George Barker, in a less sophisticated way, has the same difficulties of expression as Madge. *Calamiterror*, in its ten books, has its theme in the finding of an objective, adequate, view of the world. (Question: How to make my poetry *acceptable*.) The solution chosen is to advance from self interest, the "bowels," to social responsibility:

I rose and felt the throes of Spain.

In the place of Madge's astrology, you are asked to take quite literally a number of visions:

Then the figure of Milton frequented my bedroom.

I remember the disturbance in the ivy leaves outside the window.

And again :

*It was on Sunday the 12th April I saw
The figure of William Blake bright and huge
Hung over the Thames at Sonning.*

Calamiter is adolescent, all or nothing, redundant. At the same time it has lines and verses which are compellingly beautiful or compellingly nightmarish. They go on sounding in the ears after you have shut the book. In spite of its ghosts, its tiresome heraldic birds and beasts, and its hysteria, it is a publishable long poem and deserves to be read.

x.

BLACK AND RED

Blasting and Bombardiering. By Wyndham Lewis. (Eyre and Spottiswoode. 15s.)

Mr. Lewis's autobiography is not a book to do with verse, but it decidedly is to do with the conditions in which verse can be written, or novels worked out, or pictures painted.

In a sense, it is an account of the conditions for the making of art from 1910 to 1937: the pre-war lull, in which artistry was extremely diligent in going back to first principles, was the last of the more or less good period for artists from 1780 to 1914. The Peace and Post-war was a chop-change, flim-flam period of it-wont-all-come-back-but-I-wish-it-would, well illustrated by Mr. Lewis on the old Jane, the death of Kit Wood and the marriage of Roy Campbell. The present is the period, in Mr. Lewis's estimate, moving towards the exclusive absolutes of Red against Black, in which—"martial law conditions have come to stop. The gentler things of life are at an end"—the arts will have no chance at all. "Deprived of art, the healthy intellectual discipline of well-being is lost. Life instantly becomes so brutalised as to be mechanical and devoid of interest." That is Mr. Lewis's view (in coming to which he has not left out religion and metaphysics). "And human nature—not Nature this time—has brought us to Ice Age conditions. The mass stupidity and helplessness of man, with all the power of machines to back it, threatens us with a new 'scourge of God,' and we certainly shall have to put aside our books and pictures. *And every time this happens, in the history of our race, we take them up again, when the dark age is over, with less assurance and with less of genius.*"

The Berts of *Left Review* will certainly shoot the Cyrils and Raymonds of the *New Statesman*. We may clap at that; it will be small loss. But as the years pass they will shoot the Audens and the MacNeices and the Isherwoods. The course of action is not reaction, but integrity and a sharper scrutiny of Liberal Love and Audenesque charity.

G. E. G.

REX WARNER

Poems. By Rex Warner. (Boriswood. 5s.)

Mr Rex Warner has been named in poems by Auden and Day Lewis: he is in the Circle (or the Triangle), and so first we must disengage his book from the reputation created for him in this way.

Mr. Warner's poems are made up of misgivings about the present, apostrophes to the future, and description of such things, which please him, as wild duck, dippers, choughs, and tom-tits. Sometimes misgiving, apostrophe and description are combined, sometimes not. But between Mr. Warner and the world hangs, at present, a thick soft curtain, at some points more, at other points less, opaque. He has read Auden, Day Lewis, "The Seafarer," and "The Windhover," and still, unlike Auden, he does things in the Anglo-Saxon-Hopkins manner:

*but be aware
of tilt tilt tremble of the leaning thrush
of how rag bag and bone
linger and lean and rush.*

This manner is the curtain, and standing by Mr. Warner, we can see through it only a blur of ornithology and a blur of love, pity, and enthusiasm.

Of course, the simple things taken in by Mr. Warner's senses need a style as simple in verse, nearly, as Mr. Isherwood's in prose. To ape the style of a Jesuit, who clamped the exercises of St. Ignatius down onto his extreme sensualism, is an error of inexperience and taste, which is also, if continued, an act of foolishness. Mr. Warner's taste, his taste in sound, selection, language, message and so on, is not extraordinary. We find no fresh reality in a dipper, when Mr. Warner calls it *urbane, rotund, secretive, dashing*, in sunshine on a tree, when Mr. Warner writes

*The brightness, the peculiar splendour
of sun on bark,*

in the sky, when he mentions *the reeling blue serene*, in a long-tailed tit, when, with peculiar bathos, he calls it "a spot of spirit," in leaves in October when he says they are 'summer's coinage spent.' A communist should know more about money as a medium of exchange than to use an image that weighs so very little (why 'coinage'? 'spent' upon what?), a poet should know more than to use an image so trite: and an admirer of Hopkins more than to use one so inaccurate, and to commit as well so many other inaccuracies, every one of which is, morally, a falsehood. *Nile Fishermen, Egyptian Kites, Fellaheen* (with children in it, who are *angels for a little each with a nimbus of flies*) and *Chough* (*desolate that cry as though world were unworthy*) are the poems which are at all good, and which are not either boring or embarrassing. They are the simplest in style, and the ones most nearly without manner.

At present, Mr. Warner owes more to his position than to his performance: as a poet he is now—whatever he may be—less interesting than several who are not so well publicised, who have no friends in the Book Society, and have not collected their poems into a book (Mr. Gutteridge, for example, or Mr. R. B. Fuller).

G. E. G.

POETRY BY THE YEAR

The Year's Poetry. Edited by D. K. Roberts and Geoffrey Grigson. (Bodley Head. 5s.)

The Year's Poetry is worth buying. Some of the things to avoid in it this year are Mr. Richard Church's *Secret Service*, the bit of Tottenham Court Road modernistics by Mr. Ronald Bottrall, the absolutely flat poems by Mr. Tessimond and Mr. Geoffrey Parsons, which ought not to have slipped past Mr. Grigson and Mr. Roberts. It is easy to make this kind of collection monotonous, and poems like the ones above, which are quite empty, lower and level the tone. Still, the tone is not very low, and there are a good many interesting and novel inclusions. There are translations, one (inaccurate) from a very good sexy poem by Lorca, another from an energetic bizarre poem by the Chilean Neruda, two from Rimbaud, one from Jarry, and one from Eluard. There are poems from American poets, Aiken and Prokosch (there should be more Americans another year); and in the rest there is a variety of kind and weight.

Andrew Young's poems are not very big, but they are authentic observations, nicely out of fashion. The Auden and MacNeice poems 'O who can ever look his fill,' 'Journey to Iceland,' 'Song for the New Year,' 'Epilogue,' and 'Now that the Shapes of Mist' are easy winners. From Prokosch to the end, every poem but three or four has at least one merit, though it is curious to mark the way Mr. Spender's poems are below the level for skill, and everything else, of many poems all around them by poets not so well known. E. V. Swart's "Casey Jones" is one kind of poem of which there should be more in this anthology; in which, also, there is only one woman writer. Next year Mr. Roberts and Mr. Grigson should try to find more satire and more light verse—Mr. Auden's ballads are waiting and what about a little even from Woolworth song books, and so on? Cole Porter is a better poet than Mr. Tessimond, Mr. Parsons, Mr. Bottrall or Mr. Richard Church, after all.

MARXIST CRITICISM

The *Critics Group Series* of pamphlets published by the Critics Group in New York, and handled in London by Collett's, of Charing Cross Road, are not as well known yet as they should be. The most useful and important we have read is Plekhanov's *Art and Society: A Marxist Analysis*. This, and *Shakespeare: A Marxist Interpretation* by A. A. Smirnov, *Pushkin: Homage by Marxist Critics*, *Ibsen*, by Engels, Mehring, Plekhanov and Lunacharsky, *Balzac* by V. Grib, all came out in 1937 and cost eighteenpence each. The Group has also published several numbers of an occasional paper 'Dialectics,' sixpence each, and "A Spectre Is Haunting Europe," a shilling pamphlet of poems of the war in Spain by Alberti.

Selected Poems by Allen Tate (Scribners 7s. 6d.) is Mr. Tate's self-selection of his work up to 1937. Allen Tate's intelligent but sometimes blank gentility is honest but not quite of such value as many American critics believe ; but we cannot claim that there are many poets in England writing better poems than, for instance, *The Mediterranean* and *Aeneas at Washington* (which appeared, by Mr. Tate's kindness, in *New Verse*).

Authors Take Sides on the Spanish War (Left Review 6d.)—148 writers reason, apologise and appeal. Poets for the Government : Ackland, Abercrombie, Armstrong, Auden, Barker, Day Lewis, Ford Madox Ford, Gascoyne, Grigson, Hewett, Lehmann, Lindsay, F. L. Lucas, Macdiarmid, MacNeice, Madge, Palmer, Read, Rickword, Spender, Stephens, Sturge Moore, Swingler, Warner (Sylvia Townsend), Warner (Rex). Neutral: Eliot, Pound, W. J. Turner. Poet against the Government: Edmund Blunden.

New Writing No. 4. (Lawrence and Wishart 6s.)—Auden contributes two of his ballads, which are extremely good fun (see MacNeice's 'Letter' in the Auden "New Verse": a third ballad appears in the current number of *The Ploughshare*) and a poem; MacNeice, a good poem, 'June Thunder.' Verse also by John Cornford, Margot Heinemann, Mallalieu, and translations from Lorca and a Georgian poet, Tizian Tabidze. 'Down at Mendel's' a story by Willy Goldman, 'The Last Parade' an impressionist document of the Paris Exhibition by E. M. Forster, and 'Spain invites the World's Writers' a sincere, sentimental but informative note on the International Congress, Summer 1937, by Stephen Spender are among the prose pieces best worth reading.

Arthur Waley has translated the early Chinese book of poems, the *Shih Ching*, under its English name of *The Book of Songs* (Allen and Unwin 10s. 6d.). In translation the high, clear quality of the poems with their solid imagery balanced against its application does not seem finer, for instance, than the quality of the Gond poems translated by Shamrao Hivale and Verrier Elwin two years ago; but folk-songs of a jungle tribe in India have not the prestige of a great civilisation behind them. Mr. Waley's fairly clean 'Liberal' English

*Going home to supper from the palace
With step grave and slow*

seems much queerer and more lifeless than it did in 1918.

"*How old I grow, how out of date*"—Edmund Blunden on p. 73 of "An Elegy and Other Poems" (Cobden-Sanderson 6s.).

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