

# NEW VERSE

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## POLITICS: AND A REQUEST

**T**HE FIRST NUMBER OF NEW VERSE has sold well, and validates trust that both need and public for it exist. Every poet is asked to send in his work; and is warned again that NEW VERSE has no politics. 'New' does not mean a deterministic end or postulate an unplanked-ditch between present-future and the whole past. It means only fresh, contemporaneous, new written, and we shall work to find verse to which these epithets belong, to publish criticism which is of value and not only of propaganda value. Individualism is required. If there must be attitudes, a reasoned attitude of toryism is welcomed no less than a communist attitude. This is not two-faced, since poetry is round and faces all ways. Readers are asked to remain aware of this, and not to damn NEW VERSE politically where damnation is invalid.

NEW VERSE can go better, though it has gone well. It needs to be known by more people. If purchasers of single copies subscribe for the year, and if subscribers procure other subscribers, there can be more pages and those who contribute can be paid more as they deserve.

## COWARD'S SONG

Tone down the soul,  
 Plane safely away the storm ploughing mountain summits,  
 The sun and whole,  
 The total sorrow,  
 Because your soul my man is not a sphere.

Speed through vicissitude  
 Sensibly streamlined,  
 Not only speed increased  
 But lessen friction  
 Against the inward heart, soft inner engine.

From nineteen pointed celestial star  
 Roll into dull stone  
 The soul lying on the seashore,  
 Even by the ubiquitous sea unnoticed  
 And ignored.

GEORGE BARKER

## ON HEARING A LEGEND PLAYED ON THE VIOLA

This X  
 bland above her breast  
 is no holy cross  
 but the crest of sacrifice

Some sacred instinct  
unfolds the frond  
of sullen sound  
Now the air

is anguish  
beauty is born  
a wailing child  
held high

above the crystal  
bastion high  
above the geometry of tendons  
round which the blue veins twine

The eyes are shut  
the brow  
taut  
in the equation of joy and pain

Through expectant space  
falls a tender flail  
tense the bow  
sings after its expended

fiery arrows  
the laws of steel  
are static now  
the labile life of blood returns

the ulterior crane  
swings into rest  
its load of sifted sound  
The body burns

HERBERT READ

## INSTRUCTIONS

### I

In giving you this, I expect you to take over  
Something adjusted to a fine precision  
Whose mechanism you as a specialist should  
Appreciate; the calculations were completed  
Not without study, and now this living child  
Is ready to take up its function, healthily.  
The point of balance has come by adaptation,  
Tendencies to friction had to be got rid of,  
And we are not satisfied that the organism yet  
Has reached the uses aimed at.

I am sorry  
That some workers in this field prematurely  
Published results and claimed exactness:  
We have under-estimated the difficulty,  
And this is realised.

A revolutionary change  
In method and materials is apparent  
But until there is corresponding alteration  
In the basic conditions of our work  
All will continue immature.

### II

Surely now you are aware of life and how  
The flood of people has come down, the pressing blood  
Beats all day on the gates, and the old death waits  
Crumbles, tries to keep his head, and knows he's dead:

Surely now any doubts you ever had are over  
You, when you reflect the world, and you too  
When your nerves and muscles all are awake, then  
Receptivity can begin and the news comes roaring in.

We will not talk to the dead any more, or let them walk  
In the streets and the open places we will look at other faces;  
As we go about alive they will drop right out  
And the great high wave will carry us on when they are gone.

We shall free the political prisoners, the impulse, the desire to be,  
Our joy shall be as strong as the wheels of Dnieprstroi  
Deep in the racing blood revolving and dissolving  
Hard lumps of pain, electrolysing slumps.

Along our cables flowing and in our streets going  
Into the houses breaking and the doors banging and shaking  
Marching along with drums and humming high in the pylons comes  
Power and the factories break flaming into flower.

### III

Being in love is being  
Seeing in love is seeing  
Doing in love is doing

Done in love is twice done  
Twice round time's bevel runs  
Love's odds are two to one

Love's manifesto claims  
'The straining of relation  
Will lead to revolution'.

Love on us cannot happen  
Without cracking the atom:  
What is it when we tap him?

Why, we fall. But whether inwards  
Our occident or outwards  
Is by some heads disputed

But it is agreed that when  
We hit rock bottom then  
We become other men

Men of a new sign  
 Who both ways on a line  
 Extend and are divine.

I am in love with you  
 Tautology comes true  
 But senses far too few

And communism alters  
 Unseen, a change in waters,  
 And we are now three quarters.

#### IV

This poem will be you if you will. So let it.  
 I do not want you to stand still to get it.  
 You will have it if you go high-speed; it slides in  
 Between velocities; you will not need to begin  
 But to have begun and to be going; to have started,  
 To be not separate but flowing; not to be parted  
 From the smooth spate; be in action; and be there  
 Not because you are a fraction, but anywhere  
 Let all and you be all and in relation . . . .

Not as a thrown-in stone fall; separation  
 Is standstill; that is breakdown; that is the end;  
 You cannot get it so; cannot make and cannot spend.  
 When we fall sick, heart stops, and no more breath  
 But when the moment a stone drops, that is death.

#### V

After the revolution, all that we have seen  
 Flitting as shadows on the flatness of the screen  
 Will stand out solid, will walk for all to touch  
 For doubters to thrust hands in and cry, yes, it is such.

The cells that have divided in our brains towards birth  
The genetic characters of new heaven and new earth  
These as warm bodies leaping out through the low door  
Will laugh and shout and run, light now, lurking before.

The new world lying in ambush round the corner of time  
Us waiting, eyes on the gauge, watching the mercury climb:  
Till we hear on all lips a new song in the street all day,  
Spreading from house to house without wires. This new song has  
come to stay.

We shall be differently aware, we shall see all things new  
Not as a craze or a surprise, but hard, naked, true.  
And trash heaped up, torn scraps, mud, all shall glow through and  
through  
When the electric moment passes in, making them new.

Back of the streets and houses, back of all we had,  
Back of our rooms, furniture, systems, words said,  
The flow went on; we feel it now; the future was in our bones  
And it springs out, bursts in drums, trumpets and saxophones.

It shines and we see it in the eyes and smiles of the stars,  
It laughs in the newspapers and underground, plays in the headlights  
of cars,  
In words it ripples and breaks in spray, and in rooms and in those we  
meet  
Is lively, and in loving we find airways for feet.

CHARLES MADGE

## FIRST DRUMS HEARD

How will I hold myself  
how will I keep my stance  
now at the frontier of commonsense  
now I am faced about  
to meet my chance?

Is it much easier  
 to hold on with one's fear  
 to grip a rifle in the frightened air  
 crouched on the knees  
 to wait the word to fire?

Would it be better thus  
 with little more explained  
 than where artillery is being trained,  
 how to put on a mask  
 if gas is in the wind?

It would be simple surely,  
 hero in all opinions,  
 to accept discipline in the battalions  
 safe in the company  
 of fearing millions?

How will I stand apart  
 how will I keep my stance  
 in the dark crisis of the present tense,  
 when I am face to face  
 with every chance?

JOHN PUDNEY

## BACCHUS

The laughing god born of a startling answer  
 (Cymbal of clash in the divided glancer  
 Forcing from Heaven's the force of earth's desire)  
 Capped a retort to sublime earth by fire  
 And starred round within man its salt and glitter  
 (Round goblet, but for star- or whirled-map fitter?  
 Earth lost in Him is still but earth fulfilled)  
 Troubled the water till the spirit 'stilled  
 And flowered round tears-of-wine round the dimmed flask  
 (The roundest ones crack least under this task;

It is the delicate glass stands heat, better than stone.  
 This is the vessel could have stood alone  
 Were it not image both of earth and sky)  
 Which trickled to a sea, though wit was dry,  
 Making a brew thicker than blood, being brine,  
 Being the mother water which was first made blood,  
 All living blood, and whatever blood makes wine.

WILLIAM EMPSON

## SONG

Why can't we sleep a little more? I'm sleepy.  
 -Why can't we sleep a little more? I'm sleepy.  
*Rattle shuffle; rattle shuffle;*  
*Rattle shuffle, rattle shuffle.*

The train's coming.  
*Rattle shuffle,*

The train's coming quickly, coming  
 LOUDLY.

*Rattle shuffle, rattle shuffle—*  
 STOP.

And how many bones will be crushed to powder,  
 How much blood be scattered on the rails?

Oh, why can't we sleep a little more? I'm sleepy.  
*Rattle shuffle*  
*Rattle shuffle.*

THEODORE SPENCER

## THE MEANING OF LIFE

Think about it at will: there is that  
 Which is the commentary and that other  
 Thing which may be named the immaculate  
 Conception of its essence in itself.

It is necessary to distinguish the weights  
 Of the two methods lest the first smother  
 The second; the second be speechless without the first.  
 I was saying this more briefly the other day  
 But one must be explicit as well as brief.  
 When I was a small boy I had my home  
 For nine years in that part of Old Kaintuck  
 Where the mountains fringe the Blue Grass;  
 The old men shot at one another for luck.  
 It made me think I was like none of them;  
 At twelve I was determined to shoot only  
 For honor; at twenty not to shoot at all;  
 I know at thirty-three that one must shoot  
 As often as one gets the rare chance—  
 There's more in killing than mere commentary:  
 Our sense of the proper decoration alters  
 But there's a kind of lust feeds on itself  
 Unspoken to, unspeaking; subterranean  
 As a black river full of eyeless fish  
 Heavy with spawn; with a passion for time  
 Longer than the arteries of a cave.

ALLEN TATE

## GROWING UP

Lying awake at night in awkward positions  
 The past is abstract, an account, a reading,  
 How much have I put by, how far climbed  
 From Log Cabin to White House?  
 I'll have to hustle or I won't make it;  
 What with missing the route and forced landings  
 I've got less time left than the others, so  
 I MUST HURRY. Tomorrow  
 I'll fly for thirty hours at a stretch.  
 A star's life is a short one they say  
 With new and younger stars found every day;  
 And I'm not getting any younger, its a shame

Thought Cinderella, regarding sadly her curled  
 Lashes in the mirror, going over  
 One by one her points of beauty.  
 Will no strange conqueror out of a clear sky  
 Drop (not rumbling his engine) some quiet day  
 And take possession of this country, hills  
 And fertile valleys, set up laws, exclaim  
 In alien tongue, O my  
     Miss America?

Will no one?...The Heavens are empty.  
*O Romeo that she were, O, that she were*  
*An open etcetera, thou a poperin pear.*  
 As they run they are drawn, those  
 Who are not anxious  
 Who desire annihilation of themselves  
 Drawn without hurt  
 Drawn by a line bound to their heart.  
*Verus philosophus est amator dei.*  
 So was I once to the three-sided field  
 High-hedged, mysterious to a child,  
 Montrose, in exile, to the Bohemian Queen,  
 Daughter of an enchanted court, was drawn  
 In a time weighted with eternity,  
 With love superior to inevitable loss:  
 Dido, after thoughts of revenge,  
 Put her soldiers to building castles out of sand.

But being now grown up  
     I am sold a pup  
 Desire for the beloved face  
     Becomes a race  
 Seed's dissolution into flower  
     The will to power  
 Great feats for city's glory  
     A front page story  
 All the unedifying cases  
     Of stars and aces.

GILBERT ARMITAGE

## DEMOCRACY THROWS UP A PROPHET

“There is something naïve and uncritical in Mr Wells’s acceptance of the modern American ideal of material prosperity as the one end of life.”

Straying from the sheep paths, sheep bells  
Round our necks; the pseudo-shepherd  
Of sheep. (I recollect  
In the evening, something about dream flocks.)

Straying from the sheep paths; within the hollow  
An imitation Moses strikes the rock.  
There is water for the sheep, beer for the shepherd;  
The door of the fold is bolted; knock  
And he will answer;  
Certainly, the vision  
Is tied to the halo with a length of string.

The Word made flesh  
Comprehends the flesh  
Christ, being risen shortly after breakfast,  
Has Vermouth with sausages.

EDGAR FOXALL

## E C L O G U E

*Ixion, aiming  
To embrace Juno, bosomed but a cloud  
And begat Centaurs: 'tis an useful moral.*

### I

We are grass reflected in water; not of it;  
How can we reach to that, dissolve to that medium?  
We are the arms, cloud-grasping, empty;  
Ixion our symbol; our children centaurs.  
We are out of step lest we break the bridge;  
We are limp like the soft red comb of a cock;  
We are liquid clay not heated to brick.

## II

I met an old man in the subway; I said  
Are you afraid of the automobiles?  
Yes, I am afraid of the automobiles.

There was a woman hiring servants;  
Cooking was troublesome; the baby was troublesome;  
She wore gardenias in her dress.

And the man with the stone tied round his neck  
Suddenly began to ask this question;  
Troublesome as living?  
Are they as troublesome as living?

Then as we waited for what would be said,  
The man, the mother, the shade of Ixion,  
Waiting to hear and possibly to act,  
We all at once began to laugh.

Come, said the woman; Come, said I;  
Come, said even the man from the subway,  
Let us join hands and  
Dance.

This seemed to us a delicious notion,  
We felt something surge, we wanted an answer,  
And we all took hands and danced around the maypole.

## III

We danced, that is, until we saw  
Shadows rise from the water, and come,  
With boy's eyes—man's eyes—skull's eyes,  
Stalking toward us, saying, Father.

This destroyed our game entirely.  
We dropped hands; we stared at each other;  
We returned to our former occupations.  
We crept away.

We crept away.

THEODORE SPENCER

## NOTES ON A TRADITION

What gave us that music to celebrate  
 biological phenomena?  
 By whose leave do we chirp with fiddle-strings  
 light-headed prolegomena  
 to trite cohabitation, the inflicted end?—  
 from flowery stanzas to the flat repetend.

Who shall fathom us, shall say what we deserve  
 so softly, with such feeling?  
 Before the lifted motions of the pudic nerve  
 are we snake-charmers, to be so appealing?

This, like politeness, makes life nicer.  
 One treasures a nosegay, one a letter.  
 Would it be more pleasant to be wiser?  
 We are probably madmen: does it matter?

ALEX GLENDINNING

## POEM

Among these turf-stacks graze no iron horses  
 Such as stalk such as champ in towns and the soul of crowds,  
 Here is no mass-production of neat thoughts  
 No canvas shrouds for the mind nor any black hearses:  
 The peasant shambles on his boots like hooves  
 Without thinking at all or wanting to run in grooves.

But those who lack the peasant's conspirators  
 The tawny mountain, the unregarded buttress,  
 Will feel the need of a fortress against ideas and against the  
 Shuddering insidious shock of the theory-vendors  
 The little sardine men crammed in a monster toy  
 Who tilt their aggregate beast against our crumbling Troy.

For we are obsolete who like the lesser things  
Who play in corners with looking-glasses and beads;  
It is better we should go quickly, go into Asia  
Or any other tunnel where the world recedes,  
Or turn blind wantons like the gulls who scream  
And rip the edge off any ideal or dream.

LOUIS MACNEICE

## FAITH OR FEELING?

*New Country.* Prose and Poetry by various authors.

Edited by Michael Roberts. Hogarth Press. 7s. 6d.

*The Magnetic Mountain.*

By Cecil Day Lewis. Hogarth Press. 3s. 6d.

I condemn in this first book its union clamping disunion and its editorial ideas of "novelty". What joins these writers except paper? How, as an artist, is Auden united with Day Lewis, Day Lewis with Spender, Spender with Upward? How are any of these four linked to Michael Roberts, the editor? Roberts in a long preface "usses" and "ours" as though he were G.O.C. a new Salvation Army or a cardinal presiding over a Propaganda. "I think, and the writers in this book obviously agree, that there is only one way of life for us." "I feel" Roberts should say. He does not think. He feels without thought, and feeling without thought is passive. It is sentimentality. It is not action in politics; or action in literature, which is art. He *feels* that we must repudiate the present system and live by fighting against it. So may Mr Goodman, Mr Plomer, Mr Hampson, Mr Isherwood, Mr Beachcroft, Mr Tessimond, Mr Brett (or Uncle Lansbury). They may all feel, but who profits by the *statement* of their feelings? Those who feel only can be united, if they wish, in any book, any club, any party; but it disgusts me to find feeling made more than art and the good artist styed here with sentimentalists or ineffectual propagators. Spender is a good artist. Auden is another. Upward, who alone *creates* anything among the prose-writers, appears to be a third. Day Lewis cannot make himself entirely a bad

artist and symptoms of good art show in the verse of Rex Warner and Charles Madge. Too conscious of "novelty", too aware that he is "modern", a member of a "generation", Roberts in his preface offers correct feeling, but in this and in "Non-Stop Variety" (an example of the old tired of "future" judgement on contemporary activity), he offers also platitude ("I do not think that a man is likely to write well if his inspiration is purely literary", etc.), sincere ineptitude and dish-cloth vulgarity of idea and expression. In his poems, he offers feeling only in traditional though disguised rhythms.

Other contributions are as full of correct feeling, but they are not semi-politically active as Day Lewis's "Letter to A Young Communist", valuable in ideas as Spender's article "Poetry and Revolution", or active as art as some (only) of Auden's and other verse and Upward's prose.

Spender's article, Auden's poems and Day Lewis's "Magnetic Mountain" prove it stupid to keep in fancy these three as triune. The three are distinct. Auden's system is being created by Auden. Spender is far from the others and though not as creative (so far) as Auden, he seems to criticise himself more sharply than either.

Day Lewis's new poems do not differ as they should from Day Lewis's Letter. He is allowing verse "to spill over into our world of confused emotions" (Spender's metaphor). One strong enthusiasm for living freshly and valuably in a pre-communist manner to a vague foregone state commands his book and lessens his power, I think, of being sensuously affected and makes him able to unify fewer and less paradoxical impressions. Such dominance endangers a poet still more when he tells his reader to obey, and it damages Day Lewis who has not shown such a tensile imagination that he can dare strain it. Though his images are usually muscled well into his verse, they are seldom its bone. He sees, I think, and recollects in plane and does not create dimensionally. His words do not belong entirely to him or to each poem; and if he spills into propaganda, the vigour of his writing may be considerable, but the resultant surprise is not intense and does not continue.

There is good verse in the "Magnetic Mountain", there is *a degree* of synthesising valuable diversity of experience. There are poems within the poem which are complete and which "solve the poem's

problems", and there is dramatic activity which was not present in his previous books. But I wish that Day Lewis could work more by individual poems and less by succeeding "œuvres" of one idea, which become disastrous to themselves as they move to ask for obedience. For anything but instant completed action, the weakest propaganda is propaganda. Do what you are told and what is left (though to be a communist is as difficult nearly as to be a Christian)? Obey as far as you can, revert, and will you read again once-emptied propaganda? Briefly the best propaganda is art; and Day Lewis is too able to wither himself as a poet by being politically active. He (and all who imitate him or Auden without their ability) would gain by most thoroughly submitting to the truth of Spender's "Poetry and Revolution". Spender recognises danger. In unambiguous, sensuous words he valuably exposes it and usefully explains a present hardship of the poet.

GEOFFREY GRIGSON

*The English Muse.* Oliver Elton. Bell. 16s.

*Modern English Poetry.* R. L. Mégroz. Nicholson. 8s. 6d.

This podgy, uncorseted English Muse should be bedded with the Oxford Book of English Verse. Both are past the time of consent and should comfort each other with harmless warmth in a season which they find (one hopes) more and more uncomfortably cold. Dr Elton chatters on every dead English poet and chatters like a professor ("the lyric note", "disarms criticism" etc.) who has long been limpeted to the rock of accepted judgement. George Herbert's "best lyric" is "Sweet day, so cool, so calm, so bright" and it "is chilled by the final quip about the 'whole world' turning to coal". The Revenger's Tragedy is "for the most part a nightmare of incoherences". Darley's best lyric is still "It is not beauty I demand". Hopkins is "deliberately queer and invincible".

As little percipient as Dr Elton, Mégroz is not even corrected by the rigidity of scholarship. If he admires Hopkins, and regards Bridges as a "scholarly minor poet", he praises W. W. Gibson as "a modern and greater Crabbe", groups Edith Sitwell with Eliot and writes of Pound without mentioning "Mauberley". His survey regards dignity, order and quality as little as a remover's van.

Allen Tate's review of Stephen Spender's "Poems" has been held over unavoidably.

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