

NEW VERSE

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POLITICS: AND A REQUEST

THE 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

I N S T R U C T I O N S

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

ECLOGUE

*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 limped 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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