

# NEW VERSE

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## **ODE: AN EIGHT-PAGE POEM**

by **FREDERIC PROKOSCH**. Poems by **STEPHEN SPENDER**, **KENNETH ALLOTT**, **RUTHVEN TODD**, **K. C. DOUGLAS**, **PHILIP O'CONNOR**.

**REMARKS** on the *New Statesman*. **POETS AND POOR TOM**, and other Reviews.

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# O D E

## I

Morning. The million lawns of our western zones now  
Glisten with dew, and the sills of the long and snowy  
    Boulevards shine, and the wakening brows  
    In Rome or Lapland or the Sahara

And through this foliage trickles the hinting smile  
Of daybreak bringing delight to the opening eyelids  
    Of mortals : men the reflective, and also  
    The lynx, the condor, the smooth persimmon.

Centaurs once roamed these woods and Vandals slumbered  
Above these streams. And then came the chaste basilicas  
    Where scrolls and piety hissed like the autumn  
    Leaves. And then the dactyls of engines.

No longer the sloops sail home to their brilliant harbors,  
No longer the harvester gapes at Hesperus, the boding  
    Star, and ponders the weather. Places  
    And days have wilted, are patterns of human

Minds, governed by wish and rumor. No longer  
The pageants unfurl in the forest their reverent lyrics  
    And holidays come for the happy, and garlands  
    Of myrtle are hung. We suspect ! We suspect !

For they, the immortal furies who gave us our fire  
And our vision, the unexplorable talents for anguish  
    Likewise awarded, as in the brightest  
    Of Mays most darkly mutter the lonely.

## II

Once, the spider hanging under the hedge ; the tale  
Of the dwarf and giant ; the hollyhocks with faces ;  
The witch that shuffled along the brink of a forest,  
    And the doves in the twilight piazza : were childhood.

Once as a child I gazed at the evening streets  
Where boys like birds of another age went weaving  
Their cruel paths. The fountains were magic, and all  
The spires and maxims of towering Europe.

Then, the discovery of the body ; of Athens  
And the gymnasium. The javelin and the discus  
Shone in my palms and plans for a clear and living  
America. Those were the symbols of power.

And then, all the generous airs of the past, the scent  
Of the Norman tower, and the breath of another era  
Of learning : the charm of manuscripts found in the attic  
And the countless madrigals loved by Elizabeth.

Asia once held me : the visual leap through the limitless,  
A world all covered with hungers, the threatening swarms  
Of the past, migrations, and a belief in the perilous  
Magic of human memory. These held me,

And those who saw the worm incessantly coiled in  
The ageing heart, and the limits of love and sorrow,  
Walkers in cities, invalids, Hölderlin and the  
Sublime Racine. To these I listened,

For what I lovingly sought was some link or music's  
Conducting phrase : the pure and immediate channel  
From this small room, these papers, this catastrophe  
To the eternal : the lucid : the song. But

More sharply of late I have glimpsed how in visible shapes  
The actual terrors and victories transpire ; and slowly  
The meaning, the quiet, the power, out of the torrents  
Of night. And the soundless descent of the morning.

### III

The vines are heavy, and the laurels.  
A thousand paths through the glistening  
Meadow go winding, the lark is climbing his Everest,  
The factory smokes in the valley. And I am alone.

For I was created like all for curious  
Hungers and adorations : and so  
May the quiet eye regard the nervous, eccentric  
Ballet of shadowed events ; of battles and treaties

And a faltering vision. For, believe me,  
The heart is obvious. Look, I am standing  
Beside a river. This river into some twilight  
Will rove. But where come to rest ? And I think of rivers,

The traditional sauntering swans of the Thames,  
The Seine with her grieving beeches, the lovable  
Liffey ; the Neckar stripped of its songs ; and the low  
Willow and hawk-haunted dunes of the muddy Missouri.

For how should I know whether a native  
Calm is awaiting my world, or invention's  
Manias and miracles ? Better be blindly in love  
Than gloat on the lyric *was* or the lustrous *will be*.

And so on this windless morning, forgive,  
Lord, my superfluous words and narcissus  
Athletics. Hunger, control, the Eye and the endless  
Longing to love and discern: let these be my power.

#### IV

Sometimes at noon I hear in the filtering  
Sunlight upon the carpet, covering the roses  
And curtains, thunder ; and perceive the rigid  
Marshlike shadow of that Hand. And

In the recoiling, dappled corridor  
Suddenly feel the caress of the Ape, the hairy  
Centuried shape which huddles in the abysses  
Of sleep and all alone with the planets

Or falling slowly across the spidery  
Scrawl of a letter, breezes send through the library  
Window, a shaggy messenger : yes, the finger,  
The claw of another life and era

Rests on the staring page : the whining  
Prayers of the Ganges, the whim of madness, the tinkling  
Laughter of children, drawing a veil of suffering  
Over the words of the great, the learned . . .

O what is the lie, the chain, the terror ?  
The furtive, sickening need that haunts our history ?  
What was our sin ? To imagine ? And who are the monsters ?  
Dreams ? We wait. And the world is shivering.

## V

O happy the huntsman returns to his native wood,  
The warrior home from the Indies, the whittling sailor  
In front of his cottage, listening to the expected  
Voice of the evening bells encircling the valley :

Happy the watchman wandering down his lanes, and  
The fisherman spreading his nets on the scalloped beaches :  
Happy the lark and the whale : and the motionless angler  
Marking the trout : and the nodding life of the senses.

But now what naiads whisper among our fountains ?  
What legends frequent our parks and what doting Penates  
Hide by our hearths ? The masks of idiots, the servile  
Platitudes of our stale, assiduous heroes.

Cities I see, their sons and processions and labors  
And countless desperate hopes and delights of the living,  
And parapets loaded with millions, all, o all of them  
Faltering, flowing like leaves to their own oblivion.

Have they too trembled at seeing the moon, the goddess  
Who loved the olive and cypress ? The blinding shadow  
Of desolation and solitude silently stepping through  
Forests like these ? These cities, o these valleys ?

And is there one, perhaps, who notes the eternal  
Responses ? Or sees ? Or loves ? Or wonders ? Or captures  
Here in the orchard the tragic dreams of an Emperor  
Or songs dropped out of a long-forgotten Africa ?

## VI

And now, her ruddy elbows loaded with trophies,  
Dusk is arriving. A dagger of fire  
Craves on the cloud, the leaf, the mountain  
Her subtle crises. This is the hour in cities

For the impulse : the sudden pity, the brusque and hasty  
Phrases of aunts, the embraces of sisters,  
The solace of music, the adored indifferent  
Kiss of the dark on the thousand desires of the ugly.

This is the hour of disguises. The small and unwanted  
Reflect on the coming of diamonds and kisses,  
On yachts, on balls, on the maid's lucky wedding  
And America. This is the hour before the withdrawal

Of light from trees and intentions, this is the hour  
When the gradual shade of the steeple obliquely  
Crosses the square ; of the faith in Mercy  
And Luck and the power of Money and the chance for Beauty,

While out in the elms the traditional birds of the evening  
Delight in the rhythms of nightfall. The grapes,  
Now moistened by dusk, are threatening crystals.  
One instant the wave comes to rest on the sunless shingles.

O where are you now, incessant wanderer, golden  
Explorer ? What wild Atlantic escarpments,  
What wondering African tribes now devoutly  
Receive and interpret your merciful, ageless ardor ?

## VII

Many now sleep in the swarming arms of the cities :  
    In listless Vienna, and southward where sinking  
Venice nuzzles her waters ; and broken Toledo  
And Prague, the city of endless saints and scholars ;

And sulky Berlin, instinctive and strict as a beetle,  
    And deep in her webs, the puzzles of Moscow,  
And eastward the enormous wall no longer the guardian  
Of magic and poise ; and frightened, frightening Tokio.

What they desire is a god, and the old simple power  
    To send their implacable chorus of thoughts  
From the fragile and singular body out to the theatre  
Of the collective father. To trust and forget.

What has faded away from the world is the voice of the simple,  
    The faith in the eye and the wish to linger ;  
And what has come is the victory by shock. Our nerves are  
The vessels of speed and destruction. O try not to fear

For women run through the flaming cities, hurling  
    Their childless, terrible arms : and the need to love  
Lurks still as a hare : and the murderous spitting eagle  
Floats over the severed brain and the loud hysteria.

O what, to the dead, is justice ? And to the living  
    Power ? For it is the unfulfillable  
Command to be loved which now has driven the vision  
Out to the desert and Iceland and into the sea.

## VIII

And now it is midnight. Mighty, o mighty the heavens  
And planets, the steadfast and comforting Pleiades, and  
Our favourite Orion : whom in the living water  
I watch. And I watch the fragments of fire forever

Seaward resolving. Goodbye, my rich and incomparable  
Day, and the total sunlight which splendor bestowed  
On each thought, and called into being the wish for truth  
And the fatal human desire for perfection. And love.

Now one last time alone I shall walk the accustomed  
Path. The wind stirs the leaves, the wind not only  
Of night. But ours. The season's. The world's. And  
History's. Farewell. Nothing is certain, forever

We still have to learn and endure how the marvel and vigor  
Of youth must vanish and from these arteries forever  
The springing delight will leak, and our sun-adoring  
Valleys and waves and wonder. Jupiter shimmers,

The night grows human and still. The moon his monastic  
Radiance continues to plant in the legends and forests.  
There is a demand, and a life. And the moving voices  
Of the forsaken shall now be my forest, my legend.

FREDERIC PROKOSCH

## DEJECTION

Yesterday travellers in Autumn's country,  
Tonight the sprinkled moon and ravenous sky  
Say, we have reached the boundary. The autumn clothes  
Are on ; Death is the season and we the living  
Are hailed by the solitary to join their regiment,  
To leave the sea and the horses and march away  
Endlessly. The spheres speak with persuasive voices.

Only tomorrow like a seagull hovers and calls  
Shrieks through the mist and scatters the pools of stars.  
The windows will be open and hearts behind them.

K. C. DOUGLAS

## SONNET

The world wears your image on the surface  
And judges, as always, the looks and the behaviour  
Moving upon the social glass of silver ;  
But I plunged through those mirrored rays  
Where eye remarks eye from the outside,  
Into your hidden inner self and bore  
As my self-love your hopes and failure  
The small flagged island on which I would have died.

Drowned in your life, I there encountered death  
Which claimed you for a greater history  
Where the free won, though many won too late.  
We being afraid, I made my hand a path  
Into this separate peace which is no victory  
Nor general peace, but an escape from fate.

STEPHEN SPENDER

## MUNICIPAL MYTH I

An aged horse dinged on a great highroad,  
And at once the aldermen flew abroad  
(With " Oh the cigar-butts in the Channel ")  
To forget their white hairs among the palms.  
Lovers blushed rosily in each other's arms  
And shut their eyes, like the spinster in the tunnel.  
Folks were as much confused as a visitor  
Up from the country on an escalator.

Proceedings, of course, were taken in camera.  
Outside the crowds stood for hours in the snow  
To hear the culprit whinny. The cabby was fined:  
Dobbin led quietly into a field and shot.  
Leakage of this led many to inquire  
Why, after Dobbin, the cabby was not.

KENNETH ALLOTT.

## MAN ADDRESSES MILKBOTTLE

No, my bottle of milk.  
You're stuck squarely and anyone can see you.  
You're brave to the accidental gaze.  
You don't flinch. You face the fools and wise alike  
and remain your strong useful self.  
How bold the lot of you are, the jug, the table  
and even the brain. But how finching the column  
from brain to toe—  
to the incredible toes each raving to proceed  
to stately places, on ecstatic journies  
to the lands of frogs and whistling waters.

The house is that column for queer visitors—  
the heart and just now he's let in  
an enormity, bulky as smoke, swearing like a city  
about the too low roof, the crowding walls,  
and no windows, no windows. And too much central heating.  
The rough lodger who'll beat those walls,  
and ruin the house and climb up and down  
like a thief with a poison-gun madding my body  
to a bent desire.

You could be pretty loud, bottle,  
about your dead sense and your ghastly permanence  
like a hostile big-browed rock. But you're not.  
You're just silently stuck,  
you shiver to stillness with crinkly, sweet laughter  
in company with the room's still shake.

My legs could beat my thoughts to a rain  
Of splendid romanticism—raining slantwise  
summerilly soft intoxications. My brain  
could force my body to exult  
and grow like a large geranium,—but it doesn't—  
but it won't  
pour its vitalizing fluid down. It's locked.

It's tight on top. It negotiates—yes—  
but clothes me, never.  
To live forever without this clothing of my brain !  
Naked, whipped to social action,  
unseparate and rhythmic with the mass !

You bottle've got the gift of  
flinging me into the jitters. You've a powerful  
emanation that just stabs till  
I kowtow mournfully to you. You've won the day  
and I never doubted you would. Go on  
and kill me with your reactionary, fascist courage—  
go on, do the dirty like all the strong—  
till I kill you in revulsion.  
I'll break you. Pour the fetid, wicked liquid heart  
out of you to go seeping through a cat's daft tube.  
I'll crash your noisy skeleton,  
your queer, stark robe.  
I'll plunge you as bits into midnight glamour—  
you can decorate night with chaos.  
You or I, both.

PHILIP O'CONNOR

## P O E M

The tall detective on the landing-stage  
Waits the arrival of the master-crook,  
Time, smuggling drugs inside a clock ;  
Our sleuth, famed hero of his age,  
Wants credit for the villain's death—  
That super-murderer who destroyed  
The old squire and the village maid,  
And felt no satisfaction and no grief.

Watching the passengers as they descend  
His eagle glance would penetrate disguise ;  
Time, however, does not show his hand—  
Came by an early boat to trick those eyes ;  
For the great detective's plans depend  
Always upon completeness of surprise.

RUTHVEN TODD

## WAITING

To sit in the heavily curtained, old ladyish, waiting-room  
While upstairs the gloved surgeon operates on a loved one,  
Imagined as candle-still and unlike life, in the brilliant  
Gas-sweet theatre. To listen to the clock's "Doubt, doubt," and  
to hear  
The metal of the knives made ready; and not to know any news;  
That helpless fear.

Is it like that bad dream of knives, our counting the years  
Our listening to rumours until the guns begin and our vultured  
Delight in creating, our love, our famous words, and the personal  
Order of our lives is devoured when our streets become a furnace?  
I think so in times of despair, and the good in our random culture  
Woundable as a man is.

Yet know that from our crisis leads no white stair to a shut  
Door and the deftness of another's hands. What sickness threatens  
Our freedom to lounge in the green world, to be happy beneath the  
Clocks of its cities we largely know. If we live we have the pride  
To be capable of action, to speak out plainly. The wise and  
passionate  
Are on our side.

BERNARD SPENCER

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### THE NEXT "NEW VERSE"

*published in May, will contain the article on  
HÖLDERLIN by Edwin Muir, which we have  
had to postpone. The new Hopkins letters, also,  
have not appeared in time to be reviewed.*

*Poems by Auden, Spencer, Madge, Gascoyne,  
and others will precede REMARKS and a full  
survey of new books.*

*We announce for September a special "New  
Verse," examining Poetry and Society since 1918.*

# REMARKS

THERE ARE FEW MORE EXTRAORDINARY survivals than the Arts End of the *New Statesman*. A band of skinless and sensitive manikins worship and protect *culture*, which lies hidden, like the bone of a dead saint, in a Louis Quinze commode, behind a silk curtain (with designs on it by Duncan Grant), in the *New Statesman* office in Great Turnstile.

Week by week, these hierophants print in the Arts End of the paper a little of their intoning. At the other end, the highbrow journalists advocate the Socialism, which will eventually liquidate these hierophants, if it does not line them up against the garden wall of Lincoln's Inn. The hierophants regard themselves, there is no doubt, as the inheritors of Whig intellectualism and as the guardians of the culture of enlightened gentility. They defend a little totalitarian state—the State of Gordon Square. They exalt other manikins—E. M. Forster, Mrs. Woolf, Duncan Grant. They are the *bourgeoisie* in silken pants. They insert themselves everywhere. If you wish to go and look at Poussin in Trafalgar Square, you must first step on to a mosaic in which Mrs. Woolf, a Sitwell or two, and so on, figure as the Muses. But to capture and hold the Arts End of the one intellectual paper of the Left is really one of the biggest triumphs of the gigolos of the intellect. It puts them in the Van. It conceals their nature from others and no doubt from themselves.

Sometimes something goes wrong. There was a general knowledge paper in the *New Statesman* before Christmas. It was absolutely the Arts End. It was *bookish*. It was *artish*. It was Mortimer and Bell; and the readers of the *New Statesman* liked it no more than they like the ahs and ohs, the "enchanting," "refined," "ravishing," "rapt," "exquisite" wordiness with which Mortimer records his sensations before the masterpieces. Professor Hogben (who is somewhat philistine when he is not being a scientist) wrote to object to such a paper in such a periodical in such a year. He even went so far as to say that every article he read by Raymond Mortimer inclined him, a life-long socialist, to go out and buy a copy of "Action."

The *New Statesman* first reproved him: tut, tut, Professor. Then the *New Statesman* tried humour, why, why, Professor Hogben. Then it had in some correspondence from Culture (from E. M. Forster and—in bad verse—W. J. Turner). At last the editor, with the air of a well bred undertaker who has disposed of an August corpse, managed to bury the whole affair in a *well reasoned* article with brazen handles and a plush lining.

But the commode had been a little chipped. A bullet, a premonitory bullet, had gone through the curtain. As far as *New Verse* is concerned we only wish that the slightly Philistine professor had not fired it quite from the angle which he chose. For that concealed how much contempt there is for the Arts End of the *New Statesman* and for everything it represents. The little totalitarian state has never yet produced a first rate author or artist: it has had its Stracheys, its Woolfs and so on; but it has had money, reputation, periodicals, a publisher, and

power. It has strongly diluted the force and reality and truth in art and writing in England for some thirty years.

Observe the process as it affects the younger poets: What do Auden, MacNeice and others owe to Mr. R. M. or to the *New Statesman*? Occasionally they are patronised. Occasionally they are allowed space for a poem, given a pat on the head, or a condescending review. Condescension—yes, to condescend is the typical movement of our most cultured Mortimers. They condescend to Auden or MacNeice. They are happier, though, ascending high to the publication of verse by Herbert Palmer, Siegfried Sassoon, or Stevie Smith, happiest if they can rescue from under the nettles which cover the hip baths and the old iron, some period nonsense by Lytton Strachey:

*Oh, let me dream, and let me know no more  
The sun's harsh light and life's discordant roar.  
Let me eclipse my being in a swoon  
And, lingering through a long penumbral noon,  
Feel like a ghost a soft Elysian balm,  
A universe of amaranthine calm,  
Devoid of thought, forgetful of desire. . . .*

Or as Mrs. Woolf said—"I do not know what I mean by rhythm nor what I mean by life."

Assuming the obvious, however, that there is validity in the best modern verse, that it comes from the "spontaneity of the time," it ought to be given much support by a left-wing journal like the *Statesman*. But all it has had from Great Turnstile is this condescending neglect modified by cautious temporising. The old tactics are in progress. Mr. Clive Bell, it is said, was delegated once to take Eliot out to dinner, at a time when Eliot's culture value, and therefore his danger, were still undecided. "A very decent chap," was his report. "And he speaks English with hardly any American accent."

What are the politics of this business? Left? Hardly. Mortimer and that odd intelligent literary *farceur*, Mr. Connolly, indeed all the little State of Bloomsbury, are scarcely very far to the Left. Their culture—Fascism easily possesses anyone who is too sensitive to be able to recognize the excellence of the prick of reality—is crypto-fascist, if anything ever was. It would flourish easily under a dictatorship. It would need only to be pruned—an operation which the English hierophants could do without much wincing. Indeed a parallel Italian culture flourishes very well under Mussolini. It is described in Mario Praz's excellent "Italian Chronicle" in the *Criterion* for the January quarter. Praz analyses the "*Biedermeierkultur*" (Biedermeier was a German schoolmaster poet whose very Victorian, small-world poems were much burlesqued) of Italian novelists and poets, its bourgeois character, its affinity with the "half-humorous half-yearning presentation of Victorian life one notices in Lytton Strachey, the Sitwells, etc.," its elegant cynicism, its shrinking pathos influenced by Proust and by Virginia Woolf.

Now I do not think that any one could find that Mrs. Woolf differs very much from the Old Jane, or indeed from any Sitwell, in her attitude towards *culture*. They are both Biedermeier. Both (see Mrs. Woolf's *Common Reader* essays) nourish a bric-a-brac, bower-bird fancy. There is

nothing in the novels of the one, or the poems of the other, which cannot be admired by the culture-loving Tory. But Sitwells and Woolfs do not only meet in tesseræ. Consider just for a minute Mr. G. M. Young. Mr. Young is emerging late as an Elder Critic compounded of MacCarthy a little, and Gosse a great deal. He has a *Biedermeierkultur*, but well-informed, interest in the Victorian age. He is a traditionalist. In his book *Daylight and Champaign*,\* he has written an article called "Forty Years of Verse." It is a noble, a notable piece of condescension. Mr. Young lectures, first, Mr. Yeats (he is reviewing—or so he thinks—*The Oxford Book of Modern Verse*), partly for including too little of Rupert Brooke. Then he lectures the poets who write for *New Verse*. He takes a line from Day Lewis to prove that their lines *do not scan*. Then he lectures Gerard Hopkins—the call being that younger poets all imitate his rhythmic peculiarities—and he concludes that, on the rhythms of English poetry and of *Samson Agonistes*, Hopkins had "an ignorance . . . so profound that he was not aware that there was anything to know."

Possibly Mr. G. M. Young has given more study to English rhythms than Hopkins ever gave. Possibly this elderly civil servant who dabbles in history has considered Milton with more feeling, with more understanding, and with more knowledge than Hopkins was ever able to employ on the same job. Or possibly Mr. Young uses urbanity and general knowledge to conceal particular ignorance and insensitivity? It is curious, anyway, that Mr. Young should pray that modern poets may learn better, and should then discover, on the last page, "one poet of our days, in whose work I do see the promise of a modern verse which shall be verse as well as modern."—"Conceive now a poet who needs a full line; who, being a poet, cannot sing unless he knows his chorus are following him and, being modern, cannot fit himself into even the stateliest measures of the past. What will he do? One need not ask, because he has done it: he has written"—out slips the singing mouse—"the *Canons of Giant Art*."

Those who wish to estimate Mr. Young's qualification for lecturing Hopkins must have a thorough look at Mr. Sitwell's book of verse. I can see myself the urbane, inward, and no doubt charitable, smile which will spread across the aging mammoth when, denying him any qualification at all, I call this gross self-deception of his equivalent only to a form of crypto-fascism; but fascism is more than a ready term for what the non-fascist dislikes: it is preferring convenience to inconvenient reality; it is imposing upon the reality of events a fake, and in some points a pseudo-traditional, cover. And I need mention only two more things about Mr. Young's hero and Mr. Young, to round off my whole argument. If Mrs. Woolf is 'left,' Sacheverell Sitwell is pro-fascist, decidedly: the one book of "modern" verse approved by Mr. Young ends with some lines, on which Mr. Sitwell comments in this way: "In so far as any poem can have a political intention, it is true of this final passage of the whole book.† It is in praise of Fascist Italy. All the arts, and, if half the history of the world, certainly the agreeable half of it, have come out of Italy. With this in mind, an increasing number of people would

\* Cape. 8s. 6d.

† No one need expect Mr. Sitwell's grammar to be more accurate than his history.

prefer the world to be conducted, in future, on Italian, rather than on Russian or American lines of progression. The whole book of poems ends, therefore, in Italy, where I have spent the happiest years of my life, and wherein, as ever, I believe the future happiness and wisdom of Europe are to be found." That is one fact. The other is that some of the essays by this Mr. Young, who is a traditionalist, a Tory, a *Biedermeier*, and an admirer, almost alone among modern poets and poems, of a pro-fascist poet and pro-fascist book of poems, were printed, first of all, in the *New Statesman and Nation*. Mr. Kingsley Martin would not allow the political fascist—Major-General Fuller or Sir Oswald Mosley—to write in his paper, but will he allow culture-fascism to come along in without scrutiny of its credentials? That is what the hierophants call the safeguarding of culture. That gentlemen, is the fluttering, or the Open, Mind.

G. E. G.

## SCIENCE AND MASS-OBSERVATION: POETS AND POOR TOM

Because it is a special Tom Harrison number, and because Mr. Harrison, who is connected with Mass-Observation, contributes to it an article observing *Letters from Iceland*, *The Year's Poetry*, *The Auden New Verse*, and *New Writing 4*, we have been asked to review *Light and Dark*, Vol. II., No. 3, February, 1938 (2 George St., Oxford. 6d.).

That is to say, we have been asked to review Mr. Harrison's article. But Mr. Harrison's article is not observation: it is a pile of dotty and emotive language, by which he tries to arouse feeling against poets, on the ground that they oppose Mass-Observation, and prefer Art and Death to Life. And, as it happens, the sportive fancy of Mr. Harrison, his wild unreason and his unfounded attacks, e.g. against Auden and MacNeice, have been very well exposed already. Readers of NEW VERSE will find all the reviewing they need in a most able pamphlet by George Dudman and Patrick Terry (Hall the Printer, Oxford. 3d.) called *Challenge to Tom Harrison*. Mr. Harrison's evidence is selected by fancy and made serviceable by mutilation. The method is this: if MacNeice or anyone writes, "Few men are fools enough to paint their hair with rose-pink paint," Mr. Harrison will quote him and say "Few men are fools" *opinionates MacNeice. How sweet-Fanny-Adam! Doesn't Mister-Irish-MacNeice know the facts of life? Can't he recognise a fool when he meets one?*" (He can, of course, and so can we.)\* Now we do not care so very much about Mr. Tom Harrison. However, we do care for Mass-Observation as a technique for studying the behaviour of human beings in civilisation; and so we must, we really must, read Mr. T. H. (and the other controllers)

\* Mr. Harrison's ignorance is so extreme that he attributes one of Wordsworth's most famous lines to Auden (*Light and Dark*, p. 12: "Nor is he [Auden] a naturalist. *And the sun did shine so cold* is his cry. *He never could understand how anybody could long for the sun, the blue sky*, reporter Isherwood writes"). Wordsworth's line had been quoted in the Auden number of *New Verse* to exemplify a kind of image.

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a short, simple, reminder. You, Mr. Harrison, try to bully or to persuade, not to reason. You serve up cow-dung for sallets. Your way has not "that *humility* and *innocence*, which can never be separated from true knowledge." "Of all the studies of men, nothing may be sooner obtain'd than this vicious abundance of *Phrase*, this trick of *Metaphors*, this volubility of *Tongue* which makes so great a noise in the World." Read further on in Bishop Sprat, and you will come to the classic sentence, which describes the way in which the Royal Society attempted to replace emotive language with scientific language: "They have exacted from all their members, a close, naked natural way of speaking; positive expressions; clear senses; a native easiness: bringing all things as near the Mathematical plainness, as they can: and preferring the language of Artizans, Countrymen and Merchants, before that, of Wits, or Scholars."

Your language, Mr. Harrison, is podgier and more ridiculous than Ezra Pound's. In your article there is very little science or true knowledge, and your method is altogether unscientific in a way that discredits Mass-Observation.

What we should like to do is to bury you in a bag with Houston Stewart Chamberlain, Alfred Rosenberg, and Major Yeats-Brown.

## EDUCATION IN THE TWENTIES

*Lions and Shadows.* By Christopher Isherwood. (Hogarth Press. 7s. 6d.)

"Up to this moment, we had been a pair of romantic conservatives, devil-worshippers, votaries of 'Beauty' and 'Vice,' Manicheans, would-be Kropotkin anarchists, who refused to read T. S. Eliot (because of his vogue amongst the Poshocracy), or the newspapers, or Freud. Now, in a moment, all was changed."—The moment is when I. A. Richards began to lecture at Cambridge, the "we" is Christopher Isherwood and "Chalmers." "Poets, ordered Mr. Richards, were to reflect aspects of the world-picture." This was 1925. The world-picture, the War, the Waste Land, and Thomas Hardy worked through I. A. Richards into the young. A Truth, a Necessity, a Fact, rather distorted, but still real enough, pricked through him into the young, and Sir Edmund Gosse's head was cut off. But for all that, the change was not complete. Isherwood went down from Cambridge after serving up Tripos papers in Punch humour, sonnet form and concealed verse. He and "Chalmers" knew there was a realness and a wrongness. But in the General Strike, Isherwood was still neutral, though things had got so far that he hated himself for being neutral (the reviewer reflects that he went with the Oxford exodus to break the strike at Hull: but then, at least, Garrod or Brett Smith were the Oxford substitutes for I. A. Richards). Still the strike was over, the political period had begun.

Now the point of Isherwood's autobiography is to present an, or rather

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his, education in the hinge-period of the Twenties: and it was no accident that the Twenties produced all the writers of the Auden Age. Before the Twenties, Romantic Conservatism and being a Writer (inspired or mannered: Quennel and so on); in the Twenties, Art, or Being a Writer, with Interest in men (not man); after the Twenties, the Political Age: authors, and poets, die away among undergraduates. The October and Labour Club for them, and Gollancz books, and Hunger Marches: art-activities only for the Conservatives, that is, for the cloddish and the non-political; and what activities there are in the Universities a bit Blundenesque and reactionary. Isherwood shows how we, of our generation, have become by a difficult, embarrassing, humiliating process aware that we, being ourselves, exist now, here, in such a situation, in which such things are happening (though the truth is we are not so free and real yet as we should like to be).

It is a very good Isherwood book. It is very simple, very human, very interesting. It is again the Isherwood *talk* as if there were no book at all in the business, with exact presentations and descriptions—*e.g.*, the card sharpers (pp. 161, 162), the amputation (pp. 293, 294, 295), or the caricatures, Isherwood calls them, of Auden as a child and a writer (Hugh Weston), of Spender (Stephen Savage) and Edward Upward and others. The book ought not to be read just for curiosity about these caricatures or about Isherwood, for the discovery of Moxon, the Watcher and other items of Audenesque mythology, or for the early Auden poems (pp. 186, 187); but, obviously, for these things, and for its main cause, *Lions and Shadows* will always be a reference and key book of the Auden Age and the Auden Circle.

G. E. G.

## THY CHASE HAD A BEAST IN VIEW

*A Vision.* By W. B. Yeats. (Macmillan. 15s.)

*The Herne's Egg.* A Stage Play. By W. B. Yeats. (Macmillan. 5s.)

*Essays.* 1931 to 1936. By W. B. Yeats. (Cuala Press. 12s. 6d.)

*The Living Torch.* By A. E. (Selections from his periodical criticism. Macmillan. 12s. 6d.)

A good way to think of *A Vision*, indeed to think of Yeats just now, is to think of Goya's *Caprices* and *Disasters of War*. Each in the second half of his life, how did Goya, and how does Yeats, employ his idiosyncrasy, his peculiar interests and particular experiences? How much did Goya and how much does Yeats answer to the real quality of the disasters of his time? Yeats has had affinity with magical authors, Goya had affinity with Jerome Bosch. Goya made his affinity serve other men. And Yeats? To emphasise by exaggeration, Yeats has compelled his magic to serve Mr. Yeats.

Yeats, and the poets of his year, believed they should be always on the track of BEAUTY. If finding, or following beauty served other men, the service, in order of rather more than words, came second. Art obtrudes too much. "The passion of the artist for perfection" must be talked about (AE p. 252); and poetry (AE p. 344) must be "the spiritual essence of life." It is true that *A Vision* has been cut and concentrated since it first appeared in a private edition, but it remains an entirely impossible monster. The partly symbolic system which it presents for world, life and time, was arranged by Yeats from his wife's automatic writing. Provided through Mrs. Yeats for the benefit of Yeats by "the Instructors," this partly symbolic system, for all that, is subjective, arbitrary, and magical. However: "*Some will ask whether I believe in the actual existence of my circuits of sun and moon. Those that include, now all recorded time in one circuit, now what Blake called 'the pulsations of an artery,' are plainly symbolical, but what of those that fixed, like a butterfly upon a pin, to our central date, the first day of our Era, divide actual history into periods of equal length? To such a question I can but answer that if sometimes, overwhelmed by miracle as all men must be when in the midst of it, I have taken such periods literally, my reason has soon recovered; and now that the system stands out clearly in my imagination I regard them as stylistic arrangements of experience comparable to the cubes in the drawing of Wyndham Lewis and to the ovoids in the sculpture of Brancusi. They have helped me to hold in a single thought reality and justice.*" Very well. Yeats may hold, and we all may agree, that his poetry "has gained in self-possession and power," and Yeats may ascribe this rightly to his Instructors. Their "instructions" forced Yeats to a more severe meditation, and he planted out new co-ordinates for himself. But quack remains quack. Quack remedies from a quack doctor leave—they must leave—some traces of their fraudulence. As for that, there is fraudulence in *The Herne's Egg*, which is probably extravagant

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beyond the extravagance justified by meaning, and in the *Essays* as well, which include Yeats's broadcast fantasia about modern poets. One noticed in that essay, and also in the *Oxford Book of Modern Verse*, how little in a poem is needed by Yeats to make him read into it *his* desires and *his* fantasies and *his* significance. A child will draw three lines and then call them a banana or a train passing over a bridge.

And how much hold of reality and justice is there in Yeats *now*? Respect for an able and aged poet does not preclude scepticism about his opinions. The hunt for beauty in Yeats, the rather ridiculous preference for aristocrats on the assumption that there must be aristocratic liquor in the aristocratic vessel, the submission of reason to the instructions of magic, make him something of a gigantic wraith in the Europe of 1938. Compare the statement by Thomas Mann, quoted later in this NEW VERSE, with Yeats's

*Hurrah for revolution and more cannon shot ;  
A beggar upon horseback lashes a beggar upon foot ;  
Hurrah for revolution and cannon come again,  
The beggars have changed places but the lash goes on*

in the *London Mercury* for March, or with his new *Lapis Lazuli*. If one asks the aristocratic-democratic Tory (Eden, for example) his view of fascism, he is careful to reply: "I deplore the politic philosophy of Herr Hitler, Signor Mussolini *and Stalin*." Is Yeats, too, to make the politician's answer? If one's chase has Beauty, or Reality, in view, the danger is

the danger of not recognising *beauties* or *realities* (which explains the insubstantiality of the AE and his poems and his pronouncements, the ineffectuality of many prophets, philosophers and Liberals, and perhaps the weakness of Stephen Spender). The value of Yeats is nothing but the sum of his expressed moments of reality: the value of Communism, or the value of Fascism, is the sum of its working truths or realities. What is shocking about Yeats is asking us to declare only for Reality, in general, in the singular. *All things fall and are built again*. How comfortable! We have no right to listen to Yeats, no right at least to stay outside. To be free as a poet, to be free and to be allowed to have Reality in view, enjoins upon us, that, as clearly as we can with our imperfections of reason and sensibility, we must recognise, and not evade, realities of the present. We must risk (this is for Eliot as well as Yeats) having a bad press with posterity; or else the Beauty in view becomes a beast. What Goya remarked to Yeats was "The sleep of reason produces monsters."

G. E. G.

## VICTORIAN STREET BALLADS

There are several reasons for buying *Victorian Street Ballads*, edited by W. Henderson (Country Life. 7s. 6d.). It contains more than a hundred of the popular ballads sold on the street in the last century.

Some of them are good verse, most of them are good evidence of the fantasies and desires of ordinary men. Our own songs are mainly lyrical relief fulfilling our sexual want. The Victorian ballad answered many more requirements. It was cinema, song, and *News of the World* at once; and *Daily Mirror* as well through the use of wood blocks. It celebrated crime, public events, and poverty and humour, and love, and so the objective world enters into it very much. Mr. Henderson's apology that "with hardly an exception, the ballads and songs assembled here have no claim as poetry" is nonsense. No doubt his view of poetry is the romantic one that the poet must always be the high poet. Yeats, Mr. Henderson explains, based "Down by the salley gardens" on a street ballad, and there is good verse scattered about through many of them, e.g. in *Mary's Lament*:

*For unshrouded he lies on a sandbank to sleep  
And his lips are all white with the salt of the deep;*

or in *Polly Perkins*, whose eyes were as black as the pips of a pear. Several songs are good all through, e.g. *My father kept a horse, and my mother kept a mare* and *There never was a nun, sir!*

Others especially worth reading are *Walking in the Zoo*, and, as samples of England before gentility, *Queen Victoria's Baby* (1840) and *Old England Forever and Do it No More* (1844). In the one

*When the Princess was born the nurse loud did shout—  
"Little girl, does your mother know you are out?"*

In the other Victoria begs Albert to "do it no more"; Albert, in the name of pleasure, declines. This book goes well with *The Poets' Tongue*.

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of Poetry can afford to miss the material published in LEFT REVIEW. Here are some examples of work which have appeared in Volume III (1937-8) :

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## INCANTATIONS BY BLAKE

*The Illustrations of William Blake for Thornton's Virgil*, edited by Geoffrey Keynes (Nonesuch Press. £1 1s.), is a book about Blake of much value. It gives the whole history of the 17 small woodcuts made by Blake to illustrate Ambrose Philips' imitation of the first Eclogue. Blake put into those woodcuts, particularly into the one of the moon "blood-stain'd in foul eclipse," as much of his pure illumination as he put, almost, into anything. The blocks were mishandled and mutilated; Dr. Keynes reproduces (i) the engravings as they were printed, together with the Ambrose Philips eclogue; (ii) the proofs taken from the blocks before they were cut down, which Blake gave to Linnell; (iii) Blake's original pencil drawings; (iv) a set of prints, loose in a pocket folder, taken direct from electrotypes of the original woodblocks; these show, as Dr. Keynes declares, the real beauty of the Virgil engravings for the very first time. These miniature works show supremely well how a simple idea can be bodied out with an extraordinary force of images, and they enable one, in a very clear way, to understand at least the start and finish of the imaginative process. Dr. Keynes's book, when it comes to exploring Blake as a poet and painter, is worth volumes of esoteric commentary. It is necessary too for understanding the exciting letters, art, and mind of Samuel Palmer, whom the engravings moved so much.

## IRISH LYRICS

*The Silver Branch* chosen by Seán O'Faoláin (Cape. 5s.) is "a collection of the best old Irish lyrics, variously translated." It is worth buying for a number of fine poems which, even in bad translations, have one particular quality absent from the verse of all of the young Irish mannerists around Mr. Yeats (except F. R. Higgins?). That quality is the sensuous record of pure observation. Here are good examples: "Each shining furrow is a river *and a full lake each ford*," as an image of winter and storm; "the path of the seals is smooth," as an image of summer; or,

*It is Cascorach the Bloody, who killed  
the woman. He let her lie—  
Her head upon the sand  
the foam about her thigh;*

or, from "Midir's Invitation to Etain":

*There is no thine, or mine, in that land,  
Where teeth are white, eyebrows jet,  
Eyes shining—great their host—  
And each cheek bright as the foxglove.*

Mr. O'Faoláin's scholarship and his use of language in translation, or rearrangement of other translations, are both rather poor. "There is" he believes, "nothing 'romantic' or in the least 'pseudo' about this book"—but, alas, there are scores of clichés of sound and phraseology in the versions by Mr. O'Faoláin—"when, bold, and proud, he lay in sleep," "vats of good cheer," "everyoung victorious dawn," and so on. Mr. O'Faoláin's introduction also effects very little indeed.

It is full of ideas which are second-hand and which have about them, in import and in language, a frail æsthetic flavouring of 1910.

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supreme poems and plays. *March, 1914.*

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Polynesian. *April, 1914.*

I'm so uneasy—subconsciously. All the vague  
perils of the time—the world seems so dark—and  
I'm vaguely frightened. *July, 1914.*

But there's a ghastly sort of apathy over half the  
country and I really think large numbers of male  
people don't want to die—which is odd. I've been  
praying for a German air raid. *Xmas, 1914.*

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## POLITICS AND WRITERS

*The Writer in a Changing World*, edited by Henry Hart (Lawrence and Wishart. 6s.) is a book of speeches made at the Second National Congress of American Writers in New York last year. Though the contributors include Hemingway, MacLeish, Granville Hicks, Newton Arvin, nothing very striking is said anywhere in the book. But, still, it shows that American writers are less bemused than our writers about where they stand. Thomas Mann is twice quoted: ". . . the delusion of the German citizen, that one may be a man of culture yet not of politics—this madness to which Germany owes her misery"—"In the Word is involved the unity of humanity, the wholeness of the human problem, which permits nobody, to-day less than ever, to separate the intellectual and artistic from the political and social." That truth goes through the book and at least improves the quality of the simple affirmation or the simple opposition.

## PERIODICALS

*The Modern Quarterly* (2 Parton St., W.C.1. 2s. 6d.) looks like being one of the very few English periodicals that intelligent men will have to read. Its aim is to oppose scepticism about the validity of science and disregard of human values, and the mysticism which they produce; and to help social practice to catch up more quickly with scientific knowledge. It is materialistic: it will cover art and science. The editorial board is strong, with such men on it as J. D. Bernal, Joseph Needham, P. M. S. Blackett, and J. B. S. Haldane. In No. 1, among other articles, J. D. Bernal on the *Social Function of Science*, Erick Roll on the *Decline of Liberal Economics*, and F. D. Klingender on *Realism and Fantasy in Goya*.

*Verve*, the new art magazine from Paris, handled here by Zwemmer's, of Charing Cross Road, starts in some ways well, in other ways badly with its first number. The layout ("Verve has adopted a traditional form") is hideous; but money saved in this way can no doubt be spent on the abundance of illustrations. In No. 1 there is a Miro lithograph in colour, and a great many reproductions in half-tone and heliogravure (Picasso's "Guernica," Watteau, Delacroix, Courbet, David, Matisse, Derain, Maillol, Léger). The texts are in English; the authors include Gide, Lorca, Malraux, Elie Faure. There are also unpublished letters from Cézanne to Zola.

We have also received *XX<sup>e</sup> Siècle* No. 1 (Zwemmer. Every two months: 3s. 6d.), which is an art review with no tendency. It is well produced, and though none of the articles (by Kandinsky, Chirico, Arp, Corbusier, etc.) are very important, there are good reproductions of the odd Arcimboldi, Pascin, Kandinsky, Dali, Claude. It is rather striking that these Paris magazines remain so still. The work they deal with revolves about and about two or three centres.

*The London Mercury* suffers so much from the equivocations and skin-deep sensibilities of Liberalism, that there is seldom any reason for buying it. The current number for March, though, does contain eight poems of great, and depressing, interest by Yeats (comment on page 21). Two poems by Day Lewis hint that *New Verse* was a pretty good soothsayer.

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