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NEW SERIES

EDITED BY
ALAN ROSS

The London Magazine

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Ted Hughes · Sylvia Plath · Bernard Spencer · D. J. Enright
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Laurie Lee · Thomas Blackburn · Derek Walcott · Judith Wright
D. J. Enright · Thom Gunn · Charles Causley · Bernard Spencer
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Full text:

New Poems

C. Day Lewis

THE ROOM
for George Seferis

To this room—it was somewhere at the palace's
Heart, but no one, not even visiting royalty
Or reigning mistress, ever had been inside it—
To this room he'd retire.
Graciously giving himself to, guarding himself from
Courtier, suppliant, stiff ambassador,
Supple assassin, into this unviewed room
He, with the air of one urgently called from
High affairs to some yet loftier duty,
Dismissing them all, withdrew.

And we imagined it suitably fitted out
For communing with a God, for meditation
On the Just City; or, at the least, a bower of
Superior orgies. . . . He
Alone could know the room as windowless
Though airy, bare yet filled with the junk you find
In any child-loved attic; and how he went there
Simply to taste himself, to be reassured
That under the royal action and abstraction
He lived in, he was real.

Philip Larkin

NOTHING TO BE SAID

For nations vague as weed,
For nomads among stones,

Small-statured cross-faced tribes
And cobble-close families
In mill-towns on dark mornings,
Life is slow dying.

So are their separate ways
Of building, benediction,
Measuring love and money
Ways of slow dying.
The day spent hunting pig
Or holding a garden-party,

Hours giving evidence
Or birth, advance
On death equally slowly.
And saying so to some
Means nothing; others it leaves
Nothing to be said.

Thom Gunn

A CRAB

A crab labours across my thigh.
Oh. The first time I got crabs, I

experienced positively
Swiftian self-revulsion: me

unclean! But now I think instead
'I must get some A200,'

and feel (picking it up, watching
its tiny beige legs, a live thing

that wriggles in all directions)
neither disgust nor indifference,

but a fondness, as for a pet.
I'm glad it's nothing worse, and yet

it slipped and swung from one of us
to the other, unfelt because

the skin was alive with so much
else. It was a part of our touch.

Charles Causley

LETTER TO POSEIDON

Greasing the gun or ditching the gash I'd view,
The wrenching air weeding my hand, my eye,
In your dichotomies of driving blue,
Sewage, scum, flowers spinning slowly by.

Although I knew you built the walls of Troy,
Controlled the comber and the squall, the 'quakes,
I found your manner equivocal, coy.
Frankly, your attitude gave me the shakes.

I wondered if, when swallowed by your ire,
You thought for one cracked moment you had died,
Only to find yourself face-down, entire,
Ejected on the ruined mountain-side.

I mean, this may have caused some fatal flaw,
Nailed the rich wound within your ringing brain.
Between the sea-cup and the jerking jaw
We know what poisoned innocence may reign.

And when the world burst like a rotten shoe
Your coat of clichés was the poets' hell,
With 'azure' as the only word for blue,
And how, as usual, spray 'like diamonds' fell.

Often, unsleeping on your drifting den
I read the summons to your shaking lair,
Your bloody trident stuck with ships and men,
The fish at anchor in your fattened hair.

You see, I never went for all that stuff
About your chariot, and the smoking stud
That runs in weather rare, in weather rough,
Brilliantly through the thickets of old mud.

It was your origins I much preferred:
Escaped to sea, I note, from the spring's mesh,
The blood on your bright fingers somehow blurred
When legend, like your element, was fresh.

Your net of tongues fills with its draught of fears.
I lie, as David, on the listening sand.
Your face is Saul's. On my salt thigh appears
With spears of water your delinquent hand.

Your so-called music, scrawling staves of shore,
Offends the naked day with notes of bone.
Forgive me then if I, unlike the whore,
Prefer to go it more or less alone.

I see beneath the trident, dolphin, crown,
The map of mermaids and the singing stair,
Less than a lunatic old killing clown:
Nothing, in fact, of man or god is there.

Yet, folding up the wrecked, the rational day,
What, with the night's bell waking, do I fear?
Whose are those footsteps on my coast of clay,
And whose, ah whose, the loving voice I hear?

Judith Wright

LYREBIRDS

Over the west side of the mountain,
that's lyrebird country.
I could go down there, they say, in the early morning,
and I'd see them, I'd hear them.

Ten years, and I have never gone.
I'll never go.
I'll never see the lyrebirds—
the few, the shy, the fabulous,
the dying poets.

I should see them, if I lay there in the dew;
first a single movement,
like a waterdrop falling, then stillness;
then a brown head, brown eyes,
a splendid bird, bearing
like a crest the symbol of his art,
the high symmetrical shape of the perfect lyr
I should hear that master practising his art.

No, I have never gone.
Some things ought to be kept secret, alone;
some things—birds like walking fables—
ought to inhabit nowhere but the reverence of the heart.

Roy Fuller

BAGATELLES

To self-indulgent, poetry.
Stepping outside this morning, a drop
Fell from the gutter on my pen,
Subsequently diluting these words.

Or who could want to hear about
My boring love, myopic eye
That blurs the world of kings, examines
A portly spider tickling its navel
With the arms of a Hindu deity.

Geranium petals, finger nails
Of little oriental whores,
Scattered on summer stone.

This mole beneath her hair in the nape
Might be a deformity were she not
Lovely: is a deformity.

I stop my car to let a girl,
Carrying a dog, cross the road;
And think 'Girl with a Dog', but wonder
If in fact art is better than life.

Stain the stuff lightly with umber,
The eyes and foliage wash in
With running brown, and scumble breasts,
Thighs, belly, with a famished brush.
Closeness to life depends on the scumbled hand,
Distance from art upon the running eye.

Early morning: my cat at first refuses food,
Wishing to be reassured, no doubt, after the night.

Distinguishing in the glasses birds
From autumn leaves by an occasional shrug
Instead of the waving and revolving,
A greater glossiness of speckle
Even in the continuous rain,
I know I unfairly evaluate
The world's life, placing first myself,

Whose curiosity and love
Discover how birds make out in winds
That strip the boughs and shake my house.

Does a big nose go with playing Bach?
No more than a collection of Van Gogh
Postcards with the breasts of fourteen.

The chromaticism of '04
That almost anachronistically
We heard encased in whalebone on small
Gilt chairs in rows in gas-lit rooms,

Became the unrelieved agony
Of composers idly shot by soldiers
While taking the air at the end of wars,

Then cascades of notes in the right hand
Against old tunes composed for money,
Improvised beside the sea by negroes
To woo little ears nestling in poignant hair-dos.

I saw a lady in a car
Stop the machine and sound two pips
At which a little milkman quit
His meaner vehicle and, leaning
Where she had thoughtfully let down
The window, kissed her lips.

I walked on jealous of that swain,
Touched nonetheless by the resource
With which he'd left his sturdy heart
With bottles at her exalted door,
Making their passion mythical
Simply by being coarse.

Derek Walcott

THE ROYAL PALMS
... an absence of ruins

I

Dispersing cupolas of cannon-smoke
Wreathed, like the wild parabolas of the sword
In this sea light, our islands' architecture.
The howling mouths, the startled hair,
Stunned when the iron thunder spoke
Were never petrified in praise
Of felons, cannibals and castaways.

Here there are no heroic palaces
Netted in sea-green vines, or built
On maize savannahs the cat-thighed, stony faces
Of Egypt's cradle, easily unriddled;
If art is where the greatest ruins are,
Our art is in those ruins we became,
You will not find in these green, desert places
One stone that found us worthy of its name,
Nor how, lacking the skill to beat things over flame,
We peopled archipelagoes by one star.

II

And those who slew us, what was their disgrace?
They are our fathers just as those they slew,
A bastard composition like the race,
Conquistador, redleg, Sephardic Jew,
Cromwellian heretics, helots reeking gin,
With disinherited dukes drawn to the womb
Of weary Africa who had to let them in,
The bronze hue of her bastards is their tomb.

Since lust is not assuaged by statuary,
This should explain the absence of the arch;

Flesh fell so fast, the swiftest actuary
Cannot record the sword's triumphal march.
Flesh was the ravage of the phallic sword
That built its ruin in the conqueror's blood.

III

Chained hands from exile lost whatever skills
They first possessed to pattern stone or bronze,
Knit ceremonial masks; from hand to mouth
Was the last way to share the tribal truth.
No arches praise those origins but the palms
With their Corinthian plumes and earthen plinth,
The columns of our racial labyrinth.

Thomas Blackburn

TREWARMETT

Darkness, feathers are shed;
These birds are gathered back
By the enormous hand
That cast them at dawn seaward
In crumbs of living bread
To their forefathering rock.

Piercing the lense of a wave,
From the beat of it and the swell
The feathered life they have
Is indivisible,
As from the undertow
And skin of a nervous sea
Fish and themselves also
They reap perpetually.
Being clothed and without a seam

In the pouring waters they thread,
How can they miss their aim,
By the loose surge targetted
Forever towards their home.

Darkness, feathers are shed,
From this bird-whitened stone
I watch a cormorant pluck
Life from the nervous sea,
With a moon behind my back,
Conscious of God knows what
Anxious irrelevance,
As these birds swim in the eye
Of the green circumstance
From which I am undone
By my duplicity.

Watching a bird, and a man
Watching a bird in the surf,
Watched by a man, and that faint
Rim of horizon far off
Where darkness breeds from a glint
Of metal, I wait for the tide
To work its equation out.
Though hunger, compulsive dread,
By a moon's impetus
That takes the sea by the throat,
Are ghosts forever unlaid,
I assert as it gathers up all
Of night to one moment of stress
That is perpetual,
My own selfconsciousness.
The waters boom and rave,
Being human what else can I have
Than such good and growing pain,
Between the living and dead,
On this sea-shaken stone.

Ted Hughes

STILL LIFE

Outcrop stone is miserly

With this wind. Hoarding its nothings,
Letting wind run through its fingers,
It pretends to be dead of lack.
Even its grimace is empty,
Warted with quartz pebbles from the sea's womb.

It thinks it pays no rent,
Expansive in the sun's summerly reckoning.
Under rain it gleams exultation blackly
As if receiving interest.
Similarly, it bears the snow well.

Wakeful and missing little and landmarking
The fly-like dance of the planets,
The landscape moving in sleep,
It expects to be in at the finish.
Being ignorant of this other, this harebell

That trembles, as under threats of death,
In the summer turf's heat-rise,
And in which—filling veins
Any known name of blue would bruise
Out of existence—sleeps, recovering,

The maker of the sea.

Sylvia Plath

IN PLASTER

I shall never get out of this! There are two of me now:
This new absolutely white person and the old yellow one,
And the white person is certainly the superior one.

She doesn't need food, she is one of the real saints.
At the beginning I hated her, she had no personality—
She lay in bed with me like a dead body
And I was scared, because she was shaped just the way I was

Only much whiter and unbreakable and with no complaints.
I couldn't sleep for a week, she was so cold.
I blamed her for everything, but she didn't answer.
I couldn't understand her stupid behaviour!
When I hit her she held still, like a true pacifist.
Then I realized what she wanted was for me to love her:
She began to warm up, and I saw her advantages.

Without me, she wouldn't exist, so of course she was grateful.
I gave her a soul, I bloomed out of her as a rose
Blooms out of a vase of not very valuable porcelain,
And it was I who attracted everybody's attention,
Not her whiteness and beauty, as I had at first supposed.
I patronized her a little, and she lapped it up—
You could tell almost at once she had a slave mentality.

I didn't mind her waiting on me, and she adored it.
In the morning she woke me early, reflecting the sun
From her amazingly white torso, and I couldn't help but notice
Her tidiness and her calmness and her patience:
She humoured my weakness like the best of nurses,
Holding my bones in place so they would mend properly.
In time our relationship grew more intense.

She stopped fitting me closely and seemed offish.
I felt her criticizing me in spite of herself,
As if my habits offended her in some way.
She let in the drafts and became more and more absent-minded.
And my skin itched and flaked away in soft pieces
Simply because she looked after me so badly.
Then I saw what the trouble was: she thought she was immortal.

She wanted to leave me, she thought she was superior,
And I'd been keeping her in the dark, and she was resentful—

Wasting her days waiting on a half-corpse!
And secretly she began to hope I'd die.
Then she could cover my mouth and eyes, cover me entirely,
And wear my painted face the way a mummy-case
Wears the face of a Pharaoh, though it's made of mud and water.

I wasn't in any position to get rid of her.
She'd supported me for so long I was quite limp—
I had even forgotten how to walk or sit,
So I was careful not to upset her in any way
Or brag ahead of time how I'd avenge myself.
Living with her was like living with my own coffin:
Yet I still depended on her, though I did it regretfully.

I used to think we might make a go of it together—
After all, it was a kind of marriage, being so close.
Now I see it must be one or the other of us.
She may be a saint, and I may be ugly and hairy,
But she'll soon find out that that doesn't matter a bit.
I'm collecting my strength; one day I shall manage without her,
And she'll perish with emptiness then, and begin to miss me.

Bernard Spencer

BOAT POEM

I wish there were a touch of these boats about my life;
so to speak, a tarring,
the touch of inspired disorder and something more than that,
something more too
than the mobility of sails or a primitive bumpy engine,
under that tiny hot-house window,
which eats up oil and benzine perhaps
but will go on beating in spite of the many strains
not needing with luck to be repaired too often,
with luck lasting years piled on years.

There must be a kind of envy which brings me peering
and nosing at the boats along the island quay
either in the hot morning
with the lace-light shaking up against their hulls from the water,
or when their mast-tops
keep on drawing lines between stars.
(I do not speak here of the private yachts from the clubs
which stalk across the harbour like magnificent white cats
but sheer off and keep mostly to themselves.)

Look for example at the *Bartolomé*; a deck-full
of mineral water and bottles of beer in cases
and great booming barrels of wine from the mainland,
endearing trade;
and lengths of timber and iron rods for building
and, curiously, a pig with flying ears
ramming a wet snout into whatever it explores.

Or the *Virgin del Pilar*, mantled and weary with drooping nets
with starfish and pieces of cod drying on the wheel-house roof
some wine, the remains of supper on an enamel plate
and trousers and singlets 'passim';
both of these boats stinky and forgivable like some great men
both needing paint,
but both, one observes, armoured far better than us against jolts
by a belt of old motor-tyres lobbed round their sides for buffers.

And having in their swerving planks and in the point of their bows
the never-enough-to-be-praised
authority of a great tradition, the sea-shape
simple and true like a vase,
something that stays too in the carved head of an eagle
or that white-eyed wooden hound crying up beneath the bowsprit.

Qualities clearly admirable. So is their response to occasion,
how they celebrate such times
and suddenly fountain with bunting and stand like ocean maypoles

on a Saint's Day when a gun bangs from the fortifications,
and an echo-gun throws a bang back
and all the old kitchen bells start hammering from the churches.

Admirable again
how one of them, perhaps tomorrow, will have gone with no hooting or fuss,
simply absent from its place among the others,
occupied, without self-importance, in the thousands-of-
millions-of sea.

D. J. Enright

GOODBYE

This was my god.
No one has no god.
Mine was hardly godlike
(Who would like a god?).
This was my god.

This was my god.
It had a human face.
I would not worship it,
More than I would myself.
This was my god.

This was my god.
It had a certain power.
Was not omnipotent,
More than I am myself.
This was my god.

This was my god.
Imperfect, fickle, fallible.
A lifetime's job to measure these—
Degrees of imperfection and the rest.
This was my god.

This was my god.
Sure in one stand alone:
Against the highly trained,
The highly sure, the high.
This was my god.

This was my god.
Like God's, its ways mysterious.
The mystery unsolved,
It lives, and I must die.
For which I thank my god.

Hugo Williams

THE POOL PLAYER

I
This man never read books. He'd seen
What they could do to you. They provided
That false sense of security whisky
Gave you, a sense which divided

Your winnings by ten if it
Didn't land you in jail. No. He couldn't live
Without the threat of reality,
The repeated attempts it made to give

His own biography an epilogue. He'd
Shot pool across Amer ca since his 'teens.
He'd been in cabaret before that.
He used to help shift the scenes

After the strip-tease. They had one set
In the jungle and another in a big cage
And then he would ju ggle billiard balls
For those who hadn't gone backstage

To see what was left of the poor fat
Girls for them to enjoy. And after that phase
He knew all about the fronts of girls'
Bodies and also one or two ways

There were of softening them up
If you hadn't got half a dime. In fact
This man never had time to read books,
He soon found he could have all he lacked

By shooting pool. He used to go to Arthur's
Every day to practise and at night
Learnt how to hustle, which meant knowing
When you were safe and what to do in a tight

Corner if you didn't want your thumbs
Broken. Act as if you owned the whole shop.
Get nice and drunk, cool as ice inside, then
Switch on the talent and watch them hop

Out with their empty money-satchels flapping
Under their coats all the way to the door.
But it wasn't just the dollars that got him.
He'd never been King of anything before.

II

The way he felt was, anything could be great.
Bricklaying could be great if it built
Up something inside you, made you feel free.
And when he played pool he forgot his guilt

And why he was there and remembered instead
That he was Fast Eddie Felson and when
He had a cue in his hands, his arms were
Six feet long and he could show any hen-

Pecked, small-time billiard player what
The game was all about. He would slowly fit
The two parts of his cue together, then
Suddenly, Smash—and afterwards would sit

Back and watch their faces fall as the balls
Journeyed over the felt, directing one another
Into the designed pocket or position. It was
Like watching your destiny. There was no other

Player like Fast Eddie. He was doomed
It was no surprise to anyone. They all knew
Descent to be harder, feet blindly testing,
Than the upward climb, but only a few

Knew why he kept shooting all night
And all the next day, winning perhaps ten grand,
Only to drink his shots into oblivion
So as not to see it slip away like sand

Towards the evening, remorse arriving
In the morning like a bill. It was a compulsion
Which he had. To win until you lost was
Somehow more rewarding, an emotion

Taken from its simple preliminaries, through
To its natural fate. Not a sacrifice, an act
Like that of love, in which the sensual strokes
Of the game are superseded by the fact.

Vernon Watkins

TWO SOURCES OF LIFE

The time we measure and the time we know
Move in the branches drinking life, the giver.
Being young, we bathed here, and shook off the river,
Then stood above the stream and watched it flow.
An image in the water shone below,
Armed with a secret we could not deliver.
Those beams were like the arrows in a quiver
For which our expectation was the bow.

But ask: when was it that the current took us
So deeply into life that time forsook us,
Leaving us nothing but the need to give?
We were transfigured by the deaths of others.
That was the spring, when first we knew our brothers
And died into the truth which made us live.

Edwin Brock

THE LIFE-STYLE

Nobody interfered. My two uncles stood
close together in the midnight street and
punched each other until one of them
fell. On the edge of the crowd an aunt cried
and asked everyone to stop them, but nobody
interfered. They carried the one who had
fallen into the pub he'd left, and they
revived him with whisky and draught beer;
the other one walked away on the balls of
his feet. Always the family was like this—
at Christmas parties, Christenings and
similar occasions; it was, I suppose, the
Irish streak. On the other hand, it may
have been that, in that overheated kitchen
of my grandparents, I could find no love—
only envy and ingratitude. Often I am afraid:
most of the anger filtered through into
my parents' home, where I could find no
love. Now, in an overheated kitchen of my
own, I watch my wife and my own children.

Julian Mitchell

WESTERN

Slipping from your sleeping arms I thought,
This is the first time you have slept alone
9.

Since we were caught
Red-handed, handcuffed, prisoners of
The sheriff love,
And in his jail, each others' arms, were thrown.

Watching you sleep in our enormous cell,
I blessed his handcuffs that had set us free:
I could not tell
The limits of my freedom till
I lay quite still
And felt my fellow-prisoner dream of me.

Dead or alive, the same reward is his,
And we, who scarcely lived, now gladly die.
Our sheriff is
Quick on the draw as Cupid, and
His irons brand
For life, till death, beneath a western sky.

Anthony Thwaite

THE BOYS

Six of them climbed aboard,
None of them twenty yet,
At a station up the line:
Flannel shirts rimmed with sweat,
Boots bulled to outrageous shine,
Box-pleats stiff as a board.

Pinkly, smelling of Bass,
They lounged on the blue moquette
And rubbed their blanco off.
One told of where to get

The best crumpet. A cough
From the corner. One wrote on the glass

A word in common use.
The others stirred and jeered.
Reveille was idled through
Till the next station appeared,
And the six of them all threw
Their Weights on the floor. Excuse

For a laugh on the platform. Then
We rattled and moved away,
The boys only just through the door.
It was near the end of the day.
Two slept. One farted and swore,
And went on about his women.

Three hours we had watched this lot,
All of us family men,
Responsible, set in our ways.
I looked at my paper again:
Another H-test. There are days
You wonder whether you're not

Out of touch, old hat, gone stale.
I remembered my twenty-first
In the NAAFI, laid out cold.
Then one of them blew and burst
A bag; and one of the old
Told them to stow it. The pale

Lights of the city came near.
We drew in and stopped. The six
Bundled their kit and ran.
'A good belting would sort out their tricks,'
Said my neighbour, a well-spoken man.
'Yes, but . . .' But he didn't hear.

Elizabeth Jennings

EIGHTY-ONE YEARS OLD

She wants to die and all of us
Agree although we do not say;
Instead, we tend her every day,
Bring flowers and food without much fuss.
She stares at us and we stare back,
Each knowing what the others lack.

She cannot die. At times, her heart
Moves slowly, almost stops and then
The lingering life begins again,
New days of sickness have to start.
Someone must always be near by;
She must not be alone to die.

And that is what she longs for most—
To be alone, when no one stands
With filled but with unhelping hands.
Even the priest who brings the Host
Cannot provide the peace but stays
To join in mumbled words of praise.

An empty space, a dusted room—
These will be left when she at last
Becomes her own self-willed outcast.
And guilty thoughts, no doubt, will come
To nurses who had wished her dead
And now have nothingness instead.

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Full text:

Context

The following questions were sent to a number of poets, for them to answer individually or to use as a basis for a general statement about the writing of poetry today.

(a) Would poetry be more effective, i.e. interest more people more profoundly, if it were concerned with the issues of our time?

(b) Do you feel your views on politics or religion influence the kind of poetry you write? Alternatively, do you think poetry has uses as well as pleasure?

(c) Do you feel any dissatisfaction with the short lyric as a poetic medium? If so, are there any poems of a longer or non-lyric kind that you visualize yourself writing?

(d) What living poets continue to influence you, English or American?

(e) Are you conscious of any current 'poeticization' of language which requires to be broken up in favour of a more 'natural' diction? Alternatively, do you feel any undue impoverishment in poetic diction at the moment?

(f) Do you see this as a good or bad period for writing poetry?

ROBERT GRAVES

(a) Personal issues are all that interest people, not newspaper issues.

(b) I have no political and no religious affiliations.

(c) Lyric is a bad word: as connoting the incompleteness of a short poem which has no musical accompaniment. Campion's poems are lyrics. Mine are not. The long poem may occur if one is in a diffuse or idle mood: but I haven't written such for thirty years.

(d) None ever has: except in the capacity of a friend.

(e) English has been in decline as a *reliable* poetic language since 1650; but can still be used if one takes enough trouble with it.

(f) There's nothing wrong with the period, but where are the poets?

GEORGE SEFERIS

(a) I do not believe that the poet can *a priori* decide which poetry is more effective. He has to express *himself*; in other words to express what is in his guts. There the issues of our time might very probably be also found.

(b) All our views are bound to influence the kind of poetry we write. In what way? That is another story.

(c) I don't quite understand this question. For example I read the other day, in a Sunday paper, a very short lyric by Theodore Roethke which seemed to me quite effective. All forms of poems, lyric or dramatic, can be satisfactory provided they are, at a given occasion, the only means of expression for a good poet.

(d) I am at a loss to speak about influences. Their ways are so concealed. For example, I discovered influences in myself many years after my first contact with a certain work of art, not necessarily poetical.

(e) This question is difficult for me to answer; the problem of Greek poetical expression being fundamentally different from the English.

(f) Our age might not be bad, but I feel it is certainly a difficult period for writing poetry. I would need much more time to make this point clear.

STEPHEN SPENDER

I shall answer the questions *en bloc*, because I think that, taken separately, they tend easily to become meaningless, but taken together, a meaning emerges.

For example, questions about the 'issues of our time' are difficult to attach meaning to, unless they are taken in a wider context. One difficulty of answering these questions, is that there is the danger of suggesting that one thinks that poetry ought to be about general issues, or that one is trying to write about them oneself—and, of course, what I do everyone should do. . . . My own feeling is that there is no obligation on any poet to write about public issues, in fact if there is any question of obligation it is to be as private and personal as possible. (I have always thought this, and so I think have most of the thirties' poets. The public poetry of the thirties was a kind of conscripted poetry, conscripted by the conscience on behalf of victims.)

All the same, whenever a poet successfully writes about what concerns us all, I have a feeling of a window being broken and some air let in. Auden's *Refugee Blues* gave this feeling. Michael Hamburger has just sent me a poem about the Eichmann case which gives me it.

I can hardly say whether my views on politics or religion influence my poetry. The answer might be that I think I have no views about either, or very few, only feelings, but sometimes a poem enables me to discover I have views. What I mean by politics are things like freedom, justice and peace, but these are hardly realized by political parties. If politics as practised are an illusion, one might, nevertheless, in philosophy and poetry, delineate ideal causes. In

this sense I do think poetry has a kind of use. It makes experience, feeling, or idea come alive, and this may trigger off some kind of action. What is poetry in D. H. Lawrence has such a use. I think the conscious uselessness (the feeling you get when reading it that this isn't going to do anything to anybody) of much current poetry is depressing.

This brings me to (c). I feel no dissatisfaction with the short lyric, but I still retain the absurd ambition to write a great poem, and a great poem would be a long poem. I am writing a long poem, but I don't know whether it is a great poem. Every attempt to break down the complacent, correct, superior, and above all *routine* attitude of current poetry has my sympathy: for example, Mr Toynbee's *Pantaloon*. For a short summary of my views on nearly everything I think poetry ought not to be, the reader may turn to the concluding pages of Miss Elizabeth Jennings's British Council pamphlet on the English poets of the fifties. Elegance, which to Miss Jennings seems to be the supreme virtue of her contemporaries, might be the *sine qua non* of poetry (Mr Toynbee is far too inelegant) but the idea that it is the goal seems to me absurd. No one can be elegant in the eighteenth century way today who has anything to say worth being clear about. Clarity should only be of the kind that is terrible, and terror isn't elegant.

I don't think that any living poet influences me. Occasionally I see others do something which seems quite beyond my own capacities and therefore I try to do it. But this isn't being influenced, and anyway I don't succeed.

'Poeticization' and 'impoverishment' are not necessarily alternatives, they may be the same thing. One of the big mistakes of the modern movement was to think that to break down the poeticizations of the Georgians (they certainly did have to be broken) and to write idiomatically was enough. Idiomatic modern English is that spoken in literary broadcasts on the Third Programme —the same way that characters in T. S. Eliot's plays speak. It is not a bad style, and is of our time, but it is not idiomatic in the sense of being local and common. Being currently idiomatic is not enough. English poetry today could do very well, I think, with a few poets who invented a special language for their kind of poetry, as Milton did in English, and as German poets have nearly always done (surrounding German being so appalling that there was no question of German poets just being idiomatic—like Hitler). The most extreme horrors of the self-conscious idiomatic (American) are to be found in Ezra Pound, when he is being chatty. Attacks on Milton for not (like Dr Leavis) writing pure English, have contributed to the impoverishment of our English-Lit-gone-through-the-New-Critical-Laundry poetry.

I say this with humility, feeling that my own language, as such, is very impoverished. Less impoverished are Robert Graves when he is being dragonish and scarey, and Dylan Thomas, when he is being the opposite of Miss Jennings.

To conclude, I think it is a good period because it is a hopeless one, providing problems which can only be resolved by miracles. In all the arts I believe so completely in miracles, that I don't feel myself involved enough to be able to say anything helpful in this discussion. Everything that one can say about the arts is what one really doesn't care about the moment one's said it. It is a kind of patter carried on, while someone at the corner of the stage, who might perhaps just possibly be oneself (but it does not matter who it is and it does not matter what one is doing oneself) might saw the White Goddess in half.

C. DAY LEWIS

The overriding issue of our time is whether civilization will destroy itself, instantaneously with hydrogen bombs, or gradually through over-population. Poets, like everyone else, had better be concerned about this; but I don't believe their poetry will interest more people more profoundly because they are. Social and political issues during the thirties gave certain poets a subject and a point of view: but I doubt if the audience for poetry was numerically increased as a result, or more deeply responsive. Only a profound poem can interest people profoundly; and on topical issues, however tremendous, profound poems can only be written by the rare genius who is able to see them either prophetically or (it is perhaps the same thing) in perspective with the past.

For most poets, the shadow of the Bomb is best seen as a background against which the commonplaces of nature and human life show up more vivid, precious, momentous. No poet can *choose*, though, what shall be momentous to his poetry. I am myself a socialist and an agnostic: but my socialism now affects my verse indirectly, if at all, whereas several poems I have written during the last few years have turned out, much to my surprise, to be religious poems. My *Requiem for the Living*, which set out as a sequence of poems based on the order of the Requiem Mass, to make a *de profundis clamavi* on simply humanistic lines, soon went beyond that intention and became, if not an appeal to a god, an expression of man's need for one. It had to, because the mind of man has shown itself inadequate, in the present crisis, to shape his destiny aright. This *Requiem* was written for choral singing, since I hoped it might reach thus and influence a wider audience than the minority public for poetry.

When I write a poem, I am trying (a) to make something that will stand up

when I get out from inside it, and (b) to explore and define a state of mind. For my own states of mind, the short poem or a sequence of them is usually adequate. But I also want to explore the mental workings of people different from myself: here, the extended dramatic monologue is a form that has recently attracted me. It offers scope for changes of tone, for the tightening and relaxing of the verse texture, for various kinds of awareness and irony, which in the short lyric cannot be managed. The dramatic monologue also gives one an opportunity to use, in the same poem, different levels of language, from the highly 'poetic' to the naturalistic or the flatly colloquial, following the contours of the imagined speaker's thoughts and feelings.

PHILIP LARKIN

One of the pleasures of writing actual poems is the final and honourable release it bestows from worrying about poetry in the abstract. In an age that sees poetry as syllabus rather than menu this is luxury of the thickest pile. Another similar release is from reading poems by other people. In youth—say up to twenty-five—inarticulacy compels one to accept the expression of feeling second-hand, and inexperience ranks literature equally with life. Later, all poetry seems more or less unsatisfactory. Inasmuch as it is not one's own, and experience makes literature look insignificant beside life, as indeed life does beside death. Such reasons may contribute to the growing disinclination that I find in myself to keep up with poetry. Within reach at the moment are collections by Hopkins, Whitman, Wordsworth, Frost, Barnes, Praed, Betjeman, Edward Thomas, Hardy, Christina Rossetti, Sassoon and Auden, but the living writers I order before publication are not (with the exception of Betjeman) primarily poets: Waugh, Powell, Amis, Gladys Mitchell, Barbara Pym. I should say my mind was now immune from anything new in poetry. Whether this represents saturation, anaestheticism, or purposeful exclusion of distraction I could not say.

Although the admission seems natural enough to me, I can see it might be taken as damaging. There is a theory that every new poem, like an engineer's drawing, should sum up all that has gone before and take it a step further, which means that before anything worthwhile can be written everything worthwhile must be read. This seems to me a classroom conception. Reading is a normal part of early life, as I have said, but all it can really do for a poet is to develop such poetic muscles as he possesses and to show him what has been done already (with the implication, at least to my mind, that it should not be done again). A style is much more likely to be formed from partial slipshod

sampling than from the coherent acquisition of a literary education.

What one is not released from is the constant struggle between mind and imagination to decide what is important enough to be written about. I suppose that most writers would say that their purpose in writing was to preserve the truth about things as they see it. Unfortunately to write well entails enjoying what you are writing, and there is not much pleasure to be got from the truth about things as anyone sees it. What one does enjoy writing—what the imagination is only too ready to help with—is, in some form or other, compensation, assertion of oneself in an indifferent or hostile environment, demonstration (by writing about it) that one is in command of a situation, and so on. Separating the man who suffers from the man who creates is all right—we separate the petrol from the engine—but the dependence of the second on the first is complete. Again, the imagination is always ready to indulge its fetishes —being classic and austere, or loading every rift with ore—with no responsible basis or rational encouragement. Very little that catches the imagination, in short, can get its clearance from either the intelligence or the moral sense. And equally, properly truthful or dispassionate themes enlist only the wannest support from the imagination. The poet is perpetually in that common human condition of trying to feel a thing because he believes it, or believe a thing because he feels it.

Except when springing from those rich and narrow marches where the two concur, therefore, his writing veers perpetually between the goody-goody-clever-clever and the silly-shameful-self-indulgent, and there is no point in inclining towards one kind of failure rather than another. All he can do is hope that he will go on getting flashes of what seems at the time like agreement between their opposed impulses.

LAWRENCE DURRELL

(a) Poetry is concerned with the said issues at a psychic level; not a political, ethical, moral level—unless it is satire.

(b) Views might influence choice of subject matter, but poetry itself is free of the studied attitude.

(c) At the moment I'm not writing, and don't think about it.

(d) My answer would be a platitudinous list starting Auden, Eliot, etc.

(e) I'm exploring through verse plays this problem; but my findings are still too tentative to merit a pronunciamento of any sort.

(f) It's always too good or too bad; but somehow poetry gets itself written regardless of the weather.

ROY FULLER

(a) In a sense poetry now is very much concerned with 'the issues of our time'. For example, in a recent first book by a young poet almost successive pages dealt with killing animals, the Bomb, the Camps, capital punishment. I think poetry would be more 'effective' if it were concerned with those issues less directly or with less obvious issues—as, say, Auden's *Paid on Both Sides* was concerned with the issues of its time.

(b) The use is essential, the pleasure incidental.

(c) Yes, great dissatisfaction, both for myself and others. I visualize myself writing several kinds of longer or non-lyrical poems but doubt whether I shall ever manage any of them. Donald Davie is one of the few of my contemporaries aware of this tide in poetic affairs, but I hope the unease will spread.

(d) I think I am possibly too old to be influenced afresh.

(e) Of course, one isn't aware that diction *has* become artificial until the new diction comes along. There is much 'poeticization' even in the plain diction used currently by many poets—in the very convention of the sort of poem that starts 'I remember my accountant father' or 'I see an earwig cross the path'. Perhaps this is 'undue impoverishment' though.

(f) I think it is not too bad. World affairs are so frightful that they seem to have passed beyond the paralysing effect they had in the thirties—DOOM no longer insists on coming in at the end of every poem. (On the other hand we are at a rather awkward distance from the experiments of the Eliot revolution.) I just wish English poets would be less cosy and self-satisfied and inbred as a group, and that their poems would take imaginative flight from the first person.

ROBERT CONQUEST

Most of these questions can be answered by the single point that you can't 'programme' a poet as you can a computer or something; he can't even do it to himself—the things that strike what one might call his poetic imagination adequately are not necessarily those that his political, or even his artistic, conscience (or any other conscious force) would prefer him to write about. But, in more detail:

(a) Not more effective *as poetry*. *The Thousand Worst Poems About the Atomic Bomb* is an imaginary collection rivalling in awfulness even *The Hundred Worst Poems About the Death of Dylan Thomas*.

(b) No doubt, but only indirectly: I have strong political views in some spheres, but at most two or three poems out of six score odd I have published show much sign of this (perhaps because my political views themselves involve

hostility to the exaggerated pretensions of politics). I can't distinguish between use and pleasure here: pleasure (or 'elation' as Dr Davie puts it) is the use of poetry.

(c) I suppose all poets have a vague notion of a historical or cultural quasi-epic they'd like to write. But an enormous amount can be said in forty-seventy lines. Perhaps if one never wrote a poem longer than ten or twelve lines, one would get restive.

(d) Consciously, none. Unconsciously all that I like, I suppose. I find Auden cropping up when I don't want him, and Gunn in a more welcome way, but not *thus* as major influences, which mostly come undifferentiably, in an undeliberate compost.

(e) I agree with Pasternak: the bane of modern verse has been 'dreams of a new language'. He adds that the real creator 'uses the old language in his urgency and the old language is transformed from within'.

(f) As good as any, so long as the poet ignores the unprecedentedly noisy voices presuming to issue his marching orders.

LAURIE LEE

(a) Poetry is always an issue of its time, like love and murder. So is the poet an issue of his time even if he's wrapped in glass-wool in a cave. The value of poetry is not only to the reader but also to the man who writes it.

Even so I would like to see more humour, more indignation, more magic and more care in what is being written today. Poetry should weave spells, comfort, enchant and challenge. It should also burn truths in raised letters on the memory. It should never be written sideways with an apologetic cough, or be ashamed of itself, or whine, or ramble.

Poets should use the weapons the age gives them; and here I think many of us fail. The poetry of our time, in terms of impact, is clearly the pop-song lyric—designed to be taken with a built-in jazz-beat and an electronically erected virility. Much of it is none the worse for that. We could try to make it better.

(b) Giving pleasure is surely one of the unquestioned uses of poetry, as it is of much music, painting and dancing. But poetry is not a stick of rock lettered 'pleasure' throughout. It can be what it chooses, do what it will—seduce, shock, call out the army, start revolutions—it simply depends on the poem.

(c) I like poetry to be portable; I like to carry it about in my head; I think we've become slaves to the printed page. In the past those people with the most vigorous poetry were often the dispossessed, the wanderers, forced to

travel light and to distil their experiences into memorable, portable patterns. I also like to travel light, so the short lyric suits me perfectly. Most of the long poems I know—with a few classic exceptions—seem to suffer from grievious inflation. Indeed, much that is memorable in Shakespeare often turns out to be a diamond lyric bedded in a huge clay cliff of rhetoric. (Roy Campbell used to say that almost everything he'd ever read—including *War and Peace*—he felt could have been put better in a twelve-line lyric.)

I don't think I want to attempt a long poem, ever. I have always been content to write lyrics of a length that never required the reader to turn over the page. Incidentally, one of the few poems of mine ever to break this rule has since twice been reprinted in anthologies with the last two verses missing. The editor just hadn't turned over the page.

(d) Among others, the poets who specially give me pleasure are Auden, MacNeice, Hughes and Gregory Corso. Two are older than I am; two much younger. I don't know whether they influence me.

(e) To choose to write in a 'poetic' language is, of course, equally as phoney as to choose an 'un-poetic' one. What comes natural is all that counts. Anyway the poem should write its own language.

(f) I prefer silence to work in, and in this small respect the present age is not too good for me. On the other hand, audiences are larger than ever before, more people are writing poetry than ever before—most of it bad, but it was probably always like that. But in this rich age of communications—even though some may be blurred round the edges—poetry remains one of them, and could even prove the most powerful. The resolution of present chaos and the word that is to save us (if there is such a word) is more likely to come from the poet than the politician. One may judge this, therefore, to be a good period for poetry—perhaps the most crucial ever.

THOMAS BLACKBURN

There are as many 'Issues of our time' as there are people alive in it. As opposed to 'academic' versifiers who are making verses for the sake of verse, the contemporary poets who interest me are writing about the complexity of our present age, and so they are concerned with these issues.

What seems important to me is whether we can gain some lucidity and self-knowledge and stop wishing away our own negative emotions on to other people. On this depends whether or not we will blow ourselves to blazes, and this planet.

I believe that the international situation is only the individual predicament

writ large and so coarsened and simplified. In both the personal scheme and the general there are human beings behaving more or less insanely, and so the same psychological principles apply to both. It's a question of ugly scenes and temper tantrums, and whether we can gain enough sanity to straighten them out and make our behaviour reasonably lucid.

In the thirties poets often wrote about the human situation writ large in politics. Perhaps there was something particularly glaring about the evil of that time which made such an approach inevitable. On the Continent it was the SS Men and Concentration Camps; at home it was the hunger marchers and the unemployed at their street corners. Now we have some social justice at home, and it's difficult to think of countries in terms of black and white; neither wholly good or bad they all appear a rather shabby grey. That is our own colour as well, and a realization of this means that evil should return to its true habitat, 'the foul rag and bone shop of the heart'.

It seems to me that the most interesting contemporary poets are writing about just that, and attempting to explore and clarify in their work some confusion or turmoil of man as it expresses itself in a particular situation. This seems a most important activity, since on our waking up to the fact that we have psychological conflict, and that it conditions our behaviour, may depend whether or not we have a future. Of course on another plane this clarification of motive is a question of what Catholics call 'making our souls' and has a religious significance. As regards the 'Poeticization' of language you mention, I do think there is a tendency for some poets with academic training to indulge in a kind of literary incest. All their energy seems to be ploughed home into the mother tongue as an end in herself. The result is some very nice mating of noun and adjective and pretty verse movement, but the merest nail paring of significant statement. It is my belief that poems should say something about man and his environment; so I deplore verse about writing or not writing verses, about haircuts, or what it would feel like to be a poem if one had not been written.

As to whether this is a good period for writing poetry, it's all we have got either to live or write in, and I strongly suspect that in some curious way we are the situation into which we are born. One remembers *Under Milk Wood*, how Polly Garter remarks to her baby, 'Isn't life a terrible thing; thank God.'

DEREK WALCOTT

(a) I think poetry has very little influence on politics, but a fair amount of contemporary verse, especially in America, engages large issues like the Bomb,

Race, etc. Yeats and Auden are examples that come to mind of political poets, but the effect of a poem is personal, not popular. To be really effective as rhetoric a poem has to be bad, which isn't good for the poet or the public.

(b) I have no particular politics, but hope I am religious in an active sense. Religious feeling can become blurred in verse, whereas political feeling can be a rather ephemeral thing. I think that poetry is separate from religion and politics but that it can comprehend both. The uses of poetry are in its beauty, and beauty in the spiritual meaning is a useful thing for a society or an individual, and the beautiful thing, if it can be recognized, pleases.

(c) No. The short lyric is eternally difficult and as much can be said sometimes in four lines as in four pages. I am writing long poems, not narratives, and trying to keep a lyric element in them for as long as the poem lasts. When the element expires the poem is over, whatever its length.

(d) Do I have to choose? When I began to write, Spender, Auden, MacNeice, Eliot, Pound, Yeats, Hopkins, Dylan Thomas, John Crowe Ransome, Lowell. Residually they must still be in here, but of late, Graves, I suppose. This is outside the question but now also, Aime Cesaire of Martinique and St Jean Perse from Guadeloupe who are from my region.

(e) While I enjoy the 'tough reasonableness' or 'reasonable toughness' of poets like Hughes, Gunn, Plath, Fuller, Graves, *et al.* in which the self and voice of the poet can be heard, I hear a lot of the lecturer, critic and academic in the tone of contemporary verse which has its own artificiality and archness, in other words, that the natural diction is itself becoming poeticized. I live in a region where the accent is different, and I have to try and relate its rhythm to my style. It is a rich opportunity, and a different problem to English or American writing. As for part two of your question, I think that poetic diction at the moment is very close to high-grade journalism, which is not good.

(f) I like poetry so much that I would try to write it under any conditions, and so would any poet. The period is only bad when the poetry is not good.

JUDITH WRIGHT

Categorical imperatives drawn up by the intellect are generally the death of poetry, which is an organic growth if it is anything at all, and takes on the colours and shapes and limitations of its time and its writer, whatever his notion of poetry may be. That is, poetry has to be concerned with the 'issues of our time', even if only by implication or omission. But then, what are the issues? Not the obvious scarehead issues; not even perhaps the fall-out or the

colour-bar or the tear-gas bombs flung over the wall, but something a good deal deeper and less temporal. A reconciliation with ourselves, perhaps?—which implies a reconciliation with the others, who are also ourselves.

If that is true, poetry has a good chance of becoming once more an influential art-form—if poets take it and themselves seriously and rightly. Poetry, like the significant dream in an analysis, is a reconciling force where self and outer image can come together in understanding. Precisely, poetry only happens when being and image clash and generate a spark—that's poetry. A way of finding a difficult balance: relating inner and outer.

That has always been the immediate problem for writing in a new country. The European consciousness, particularly here in Australia, was plunged suddenly, after centuries of growth inside traditions, into a totally new situation where the traditions went ludicrously astray. We have had to discover just what has happened to us, and in discovering, laboriously make the happening true. Even when it has looked from the outside as though we were merely imitating—building mock-English sandcastles—Australian writers have been occupied with something quite other; trying to find a way to make these new pressures, shapes, events mean something to a consciousness trained to expect everything to be other than it was. When East becomes North and West is under you feet, your compass spins frighteningly. To calm it, you must find for yourself a new axis.

For us, it has not been easy. We have been stripped of a great deal; poetry's validity was deeply tested, and much that did not apply melted like English snow in an Australian December. What came through intact, what even increased in meaning, was poetry's assertion of the holiness of being, the relationship of man and man, and of man and his imaged world, created through language.

D. J. ENRIGHT

(a) Poetry *is* concerned with 'the issues of our time'. If it isn't, it has no meaning, and therefore is not poetry. The trouble begins when you try to define these 'issues'. Where poetry is concerned, each poem must be judged on its own merits—whether or not it deals with such 'issues' won't be the sole criterion, obviously, and may not even be a *conscious* one.

(b) I don't see how they could help but do so, to some degree. If you live in an ivory tower, then you can write in one. If not, not. Not that I claim any striking views on either politics or religion—I have some fairly strong views on views, views being what they often are: short-sighted and bullying.

(c) Other sorts of dissatisfaction loom larger, alas. I just try to visualize myself writing another poem.

(d) I don't think I am much influenced by the living poets I admire, except in the obvious way: Go and do thou half as well otherwise. More influenced, I suspect, by the ones I don't admire: Go and do thou otherwise.

(e) The language of poetry always requires a certain 'poeticization'—poetry is not small talk—and it always requires 'to be broken up in favour of a more "natural" diction'—because 'poetic diction' soon ceases to be poetic. In a successful poem the two processes are going on simultaneously and at rates nicely (though hardly consciously) adjusted.

(f) I suppose this period has its peculiar disadvantages. Perhaps one of them has to do with the Cold War and the tendency to ascribe writers to one or other camp though they belong to neither—that attitude on the part of readers, though more pronounced on the part of organizations, of 'he that is not with me is against me'. In the part of the world where I now live, politics is practically everything and practically everything is politics, and so whatever one publishes is likely to be interpreted politically, i.e. crudely. (Political readers can't read.) But this is an objection to publishing—it can be an added incentive to *write*.

Then there is the phenomenon of full employment, or over-full employment. It's not easy to starve in a garret these days. They won't let you—even if they did, you wouldn't let yourself. And so the poet may find too much of his time and energy disappearing into other activities, some of which (being human) he may even enjoy and take a pride in. You need considerable faith in yourself to starve—even more to commit your family to starving. And this brings me to a more fundamental consideration: belief in the usefulness of one's writing.

The Romantics believed in their own usefulness, as poets; so did Pope and Johnson. Ours is a scientific and technological age, etc. (because we are convinced of the *human* importance of science and technology, or because of their political implications?), and the arts are merely peripheral. There will be a time for them hereafter—as the better-disposed will tell you, especially in my part of the world, where people are blunter than elsewhere—first things first. (The trouble is, the first things take so long.) Many writers are bound to feel doubts of this sort. We suffer from a deficiency of the Egotistical Sublime. Unfortunately the Egotistical is rarely Sublime, these days—more often disastrous.

Every period has at least one advantage—that one happens to be living in it.

THOM GUNN

Diction: The terms 'natural' and 'poetic' are not that relevant to us, implying that we are in the situation of Wordsworth or Pound, who were faced with a 'poetic' language gone stale. But their battles have been won, and we all use natural language nowadays, John Masefield, John Betjeman, Jon Silkin, everybody.

The distinction that is relevant is between formal and informal kinds of natural diction. They are both available. It looks, for example, as if the potentialities of William Carlos Williams's informal language are at last being exploited intelligently by some of the young Americans, and another kind of informality has been used with imagination and sensitivity by Amis and Larkin; while the potentialities of formal language in poetry are as rich as ever—as can be seen from the diversity of its success in the work of Edgar Bowers, Hyam Plutzik, Ted Hughes, Donald Davie and Robert Conquest (whose 'On the 1956 Opposition of Mars', in the PEN *New Poems 1957*, is one of the best poems since the war). What is important is that two kinds of diction can at last coexist—and they must continue to, if we are to get away from the boring up-and-down of alternating fashions in poetry.

Though diction is only a part of it. After all, diction, form, subject, and tone depend on each other. There appears, for instance, to be a relationship between the use of free verse or syllabics and a particular kind of informal language. When I began writing poems in syllabics a few years ago I found that I suddenly had access to a certain spontaneity of language and perception that I hadn't been able to get when using traditional metres. Yet I feel uneasy about the split in my work between the two kinds of poems I write, the metrically intense and the syllabically casual. Each excludes too much of the other. The poem I want to write, in fact, is one in which the qualities of each could exist: it would be a kind of equivalent in poetry to the best of Isherwood—for example, the passage about the liner in *The World in the Evening* or the first two pages to the second 'Berlin Diary' in *Goodbye to Berlin*, where the particularity of the things described does not diminish the intensity of their implications and where the language is plain, unornamented, and eloquent.

CHARLES CAUSLEY

Sometimes I think the central attraction of writing poetry is that like the act of sex, and unlike most other art-forms, it can with a little ingenuity be practised anywhere, at any time. Perhaps this explains, partly, the inevitable resurgence of poetry in wartime. All the same, the present day doesn't seem

to me any more, or less, propitious for the writing of poetry than any other moment of history. What is important, always, is the presence of the poet on the scene, any scene, and the vigilant exercise of his gift of experience and talent.

The poet doesn't gather material like a child picking blackberries. He has to learn to let life happen to him, as well as the poem. He learns to play patience with fate, and not strain his eyes anticipating which card's going to turn up. He must be wary of the poet's greatest danger, impatience: the impatience Goethe warns writers against when he says, 'We must be right by nature so that good thoughts may come before us like free children of God, and cry "Here we are!" '

An attendant danger, more easily recognized, is the stern pressure put on him to earn easier, more 'real' money, in other ways. Almost everyone wishes that the poet wrote something *else*. I feel that in the final count the poet can't also be, for example, the novelist. He runs too much risk of missing the single target, let alone two. For me, Hardy's novels are the dull disasters of perhaps the greatest poet of the last century. One can only be relieved at the accident of geography and history that turned Shakespeare to the only place where the poet, half-outside his own calling, may survive: in the theatre. Here, a dangerous world, the poet more often than not commits verbal hari-kiri.

The poet mustn't read too many books: printer's ink in large quantities is fatal to the system. He should organize his solitude with the gentle determination that most men reserve for their bowels. He may never waste time coyly awaiting 'inspiration', but must somehow invoke it from the messes of speech, paper, feelings, thought, ink, at hand. At the same time, he must be careful never to write a poem unless he has something to say. Who still thinks that a poem is merely an arrangement of words in a pretty way?

But each poet has to work out the answers to the problems of writing himself. Only one thing is certain as death: that unlike arithmetic, the answers may all be correct, yet all different.

What does the poet need most in addition to his own talents? I'd say, as with all creative artists, courage. If he is to get immediately out of life what most other people get at second-hand out of a work of art, he needs it.

BERNARD SPENCER

(a) Yes, it would probably interest more people, but I don't think, in the present state of English society and education, very many more. The dangers would be the over-simplification which we have been familiar with in our own

lifetimes, over-simplifications due to the unaccommodating subject-matter and the temptation to try to lush-up a public to whom poetry has always been foreign. If he didn't worry much about that public I don't see why a poet who felt warm enough politically shouldn't cultivate a side-line in political satire on the model of Byron's.

I think the principal issue of our time is the survival of the loving, feeling individual against the political-social spook—so every good poem is eventually taking sides.

(b) Almost not at all. Politics and religion in their present forms do not affect me at the deep level from which poetry starts. On the other hand, I can imagine a poem about the human disaster caused by some doctrinaire political or religious concept.

Apart from its pleasure, poetry must have a score of uses. Perhaps the most important one is that described by Shelley, that it makes the writer or the reader of it go out of himself in that act of sympathy which apparently underlies the main virtues.

(c) The short or medium-short lyric is how poetry happens to me. I have enough trouble with that.

(f) A good period, anyhow in English-speaking countries, first in the sense that there is a good confusion in the world around the poet and in himself to be sorted out. Secondly, the poet now has almost limitless possibilities of form and general treatment, since there is no Dr Johnson to tell him how to write. I welcome this—it makes each poem more of an undertaking, more of a risk. What each poet has got as a guide or control or fertilizer is the nature and history of his language, without there being any widely accepted critical opinion about which aspects of this he ought to be guided by.

Then, although there isn't usually much money from a poem or book published, the poet can get a lot of publicity considering how few people read new poetry. Anthologies keep rolling out, even school anthologies (which is a good reminder to the poet not to be a bore, since some child somewhere who has happened to be preserved from literary fashions may see clearly what he actually wrote). University jobs, contracts for radio programmes or for lectures not infrequently follow publication. The long-term financial rewards for writing a few good poems are probably greater than they have been before in this century, and they may be less embarrassing to collect than in periods of private patronage.

VERNON WATKINS

If I were not myself a practitioner I might feel very differently about writing poetry. In theory I believe in every variety of poetic activity, in every creative form, but in practice I find myself much more compelled by a certain kind of poetry than by other kinds.

I feel that a poet cannot choose his material, that it is offered to him in an uncompromising way. My own experience is that I am always pulled back to the demands of a poem from the wide, speculative areas which lie outside it. As for other poets, I am sure that it is better for a poet to give all his attention to the object of his imagination, even with a total disregard of the issues of our time, than to give a part of it to those issues from a feeling of duty.

Certainly my poetry depends, for its existence at all, on a religious attitude to life.

I believe that lyric poetry is closer to music than to prose, and that it should be read as exactly as a musical score. I also believe that it is always a gift, the reward of tenacity and minutest attention, and that unless it comes out of exaltation or moves towards it, it is not worth writing.

I suppose every writer, in applauding another's work, undergoes a modulation of sensibility, but I cannot see how any poet whose roots are deep can be fundamentally influenced by a living contemporary. I never think a true style can be learnt from contemporaries.

A good poem is one that can never be fashionable. What is fresh must also be ancient, and a poem is not finished until it attains its most ancient form. The more ancient a poem is, the more modern it becomes; and will remain so, when apparent modernity is obsolete.

The handling of language is inexhaustibly mysterious. To write poems in the order of natural speech can be very good, but that is by no means the only criterion of excellence. Every restrictive theory of writing leads to monotony, and unforgettable poetry springs only when theory is abandoned, and from recognition that the order of imaginative emphasis is right, whether it is the order of natural speech or not. Natural speech is a corrective of artificial poetic diction, but form is itself artificial, and unless the artificial demands of form are satisfied in a poem, its impulsive life will not be held in a lasting form.

I think every age is as good and bad as possible for writing poetry. The more the fledgling is pampered, the sillier it becomes. There is now an abundance of talent in Britain and America. Some poets employ strict form, others what is almost a prose idiom. The potentialities of prose as a medium of communication must not be under-estimated, but ultimately one is bound to ask whether the

virtues of the poem are prose virtues. Perhaps, if they are truly memorable, it does not matter.

TED HUGHES

The poet's only hope is to be infinitely sensitive to what his gift is, and this in itself seems to be another gift that few poets possess. According to this sensitivity, and to his faith in it, he will go on developing as a poet, as Yeats did, pursuing those adventures, mental, spiritual and physical, whatever they may be, that his gift wants, or he will lose its guidance, lose the feel of its touch in the workings of his mind, and soon be absorbed by the impersonal dead lumber of matters in which his gift has no interest, which is a form of suicide, metaphorical in the case of Wordsworth and Coleridge, actual in the case of Mayakovsky.

Many considerations assault his faith in the finality, wisdom and sufficiency of his gift. Its operation is not only shadowy and indefinable, it is intermittent, it has none of the obvious attachment to publicly exciting and seemingly important affairs that his other mental activities have and in which all his intelligent contemporaries have such confidence, and so it receives no immediate encouragement—or encouragement only of the most dubious kind, as a flagellant, questioning his illuminations, might be encouraged by a bunch of mad old women and some other half-dead gory flagellant; it visits him when he is only half suspecting it, and he is not sure it has visited him until some days or months afterwards and perhaps he never can be sure, being a sensible man aware of the examples of earlier poets and of the devils of self-delusion and of the deusions of whole generations.

Wordsworth himself is a good example of both the true poet and the false, the man trusting his gift and producing the real thing, and the man searching for his satisfaction among more popular and public causes. And his living poetry is a good example of how the greatness and even the timely significance of poetry depends on qualities of depth, breadth, intensity and accent in the spirit of it, rather than in reference to many matters.

The important issues of the two decades following the French Revolution were, in England, overwhelmingly social and political, one would say. Wordsworth and Coleridge and Blake were the great poets of that time, in English, and were as involved, intellectually, in those issues as anybody well could be, but that seems to have had very little to do, directly, with their poetry. From their surviving poetry alone one might suspect Wordsworth would have done better to leave his mountains and broaden his mind somewhat on life, that

Coleridge ought to have wakened up to his time and come out of the dark ages and away from those fogs of the South Pole of all places, that Blake needed friends of a more worldly and liberal conversation. This flower, this little girl, this bird, this old man paddling in a pool, this boat-stealing and woodcock-snaring, these soul-notes of a mountain-watcher, and these magical damsels in a magical forest and this dream flight with a dead bird, and these angels and black boys and roses and briars, all this infatuation with infancy and innocence, what did these have to do with the great issues of the time? Nothing whatsoever, till the spirit that worked through Wordsworth and Coleridge and Blake chose them for its parables. And looking back now, if we wish to see the important issues of those two decades, we see nothing so convincing and enlightening to so many of us, as the spirit which seems to touch us openly and speak to us directly through these poems.

Damon, quoted by Plato, says that the modes of music are nowhere altered without changes in the most important laws of the state. Is a musician to listen to his gift then, or study legislation? The poet who feels he needs to mix his poetry up with significant matters, or to throw his verse into the popular excitement of the time, ought to remember this strange fact.

His gift is an unobliging thing. He can study his art, experiment, and apply his mind and live as he pleases. But the moment of writing is too late for further improvements or adjustments. Certain memories, images, sounds, feelings, thoughts, and relationships between these, have for some reason become luminous at the core of his mind: it is in his attempt to bring them out, without impairment, into a comparatively dark world that he makes poems. At the moment of writing, the poetry is a combination, or a resultant, of all that he is, unimpeachable evidence of itself and, indirectly, of himself, and for the time of writing he can do nothing but accept it. If he doesn't approve of what is appearing, there are always plenty of ways to falsify and 'improve' it, there are always plenty of fashions as to how it should look, how it can be made more acceptable, more 'interesting', his other faculties are only too ready to load it with their business, whereon he ceases to be a poet producing what poetry he can and becomes a cheat producing confusion.

SYLVIA PLATH

The issues of our time which preoccupy me at the moment are the incalculable genetic effects of fallout and a documentary article on the terrifying, mad, omnipotent marriage of big business and the military in America—'Juggernaut, The Warfare State', by Fred. J. Cook in a recent *Nation*. Does

this influence the kind of poetry I write? Yes, but in a sidelong fashion. I am not gifted with the tongue of Jeremiah, though I may be sleepless enough before my vision of the apocalypse. My poems do not turn out to be about Hiroshima, but about a child forming itself finger by finger in the dark. They are not about the terrors of mass extinction, but about the bleakness of the moon over a yew tree in a neighbouring graveyard. Not about the testaments of tortured Algerians, but about the night thoughts of a tired surgeon.

In a sense, these poems are deflections. I do not think they are an escape. For me, the real issues of our time are the issues of every time—the hurt and wonder of loving; making in all its forms—children, loaves of bread, paintings, buildings; and the conservation of life of all people in all places, the jeopardizing of which no abstract doubletalk of 'peace' or 'implacable foes' can excuse.

I do not think a 'headline poetry' would interest more people any more profoundly than the headlines. And unless the up-to-the-minute poem grows out of something closer to the bone than a general, shifting philanthropy and is, indeed, that unicorn-thing—a real poem, it is in danger of being screwed up as rapidly as the news sheet itself.

The poets I delight in are possessed by their poems as by the rhythms of their own breathing. Their finest poems seem born all-of-a-piece, not put together by hand: certain poems in Robert Lowell's *Life Studies*, for instance; Theodore Roethke's greenhouse poems; some of Elizabeth Bishop and a very great deal of Stevie Smith ('Art is wild as a cat and quite separate from civilization').

Surely the great use of poetry is its pleasure—not its influence as religious or political propaganda. Certain poems and lines of poetry seem as solid and miraculous to me as church altars or the coronation of queens must seem to people who revere quite different images. I am not worried that poems reach relatively few people. As it is, they go surprisingly far—among strangers, around the world, even. Farther than the words of a classroom teacher or the prescriptions of a doctor; if they are very lucky, farther than a lifetime.

EDWIN BROCK

Judging by the sales of poetry, the question 'what is the use of poetry?' must be asked by a good many readers. And it is asked justifiably, for those editors and publishers who do use it treat it as though it were produced by the victim of some rare disease, who must be kept alive so that the doctors may have something to write about. Keeping the disease alive is even given a name —it is called Prestige.

Why, then, does the poet go on doing it? If this is a 'bad period' for poetry, why doesn't he give up and try to write the successful novel which would at least solve his financial problems? And what is his disease?

William Barrett, in a comment upon man in today's society, has this to say: 'Every step forward in mechanical technique is a step in the direction of abstraction. This capacity for living easily and familiarly at an extraordinary level of abstraction is the source of modern man's power. With it he has transformed the planet, annihilated space, and trebled the world's population. But it is also a power which has, like everything human, its negative side, in the desolating sense of rootlessness, vacuity, and the lack of concrete feeling that assails modern man in his moments of real anxiety.'

For the existentialist (Mr Barrett is writing of existentialism) the moment of anxiety is the moment of decision: that point in time when, having been made acutely self-aware, a man is most capable of choosing between this future or that one. For the poet, this moment produces poems; and it is the poet's inability to accept abstraction which is his disease.

But why poems? Why is the cry made in this form which, for so many readers, is an anachronism?

The clue is in the phrase 'lack of concrete feeling'. It is the tangibility of poetry, the heightened self-awareness, which enables a poet to express in *these* words the most concrete realization of *this* man in *this* situation. Prose can't do it for, in the main, it accepts abstraction as its starting point; and, in any case, is already in the hands of the enemy—writing market reports, theses, and accounts of the Royal Family.

But what about abstract poetry? I deny that such a thing exists. For me, the adjective and noun cancel each other out. I cling to the concrete by the skin of my teeth, and hope that by paring it down, simplifying it, expressing it in the most colloquial manner, its reality will shine through.

At best, this attitude produces a poetry where the language is the situation which is the poem—it could not, for instance, produce the discursive 'philosophic' parts of the Four Quartets. I suspect it is an attitude which confines its expression to short lyric poems (you cannot prolong a cry) unless you extend your definition of poetry to include plays like *The Caretaker* and *Waiting for Godot*.

HUGO WILLIAMS

(a) 'The issues of our time', I feel as though I'm hopping over quicksand: one false move and you're in the muck. No. I have enough trouble with my

own negotiations. Such things, however, have always been implicit in certain personal conflicts and are sometimes realized when they're being worked out in poems. L. S. Lowry is widely accepted as being a great socialist painter, but he does not know, he is not interested, he paints people. This is the true level of poetry. It could only slacken the wire to be hypothetical. Poetry should be concerned with the heart of the matter, the conception, not the birth: i.e. the modern mental attitude. Once it moves on to the issue itself it is starting at the end of the poem. It can never dictate. It must be a complete equation in itself.

(b) Of course poetry has uses as well as pleasures. The poem is the pleasure, the use is the continuation of the thread, the spun web. But it must essentially be an entertainment; if it is written for its use alone it becomes a utility: not poetry but propaganda, and we can't issue the pure at heart with propaganda.

(c) When I feel like writing a long non-lyric poem, I shall begin a novel. Poems are short as far as I am concerned.

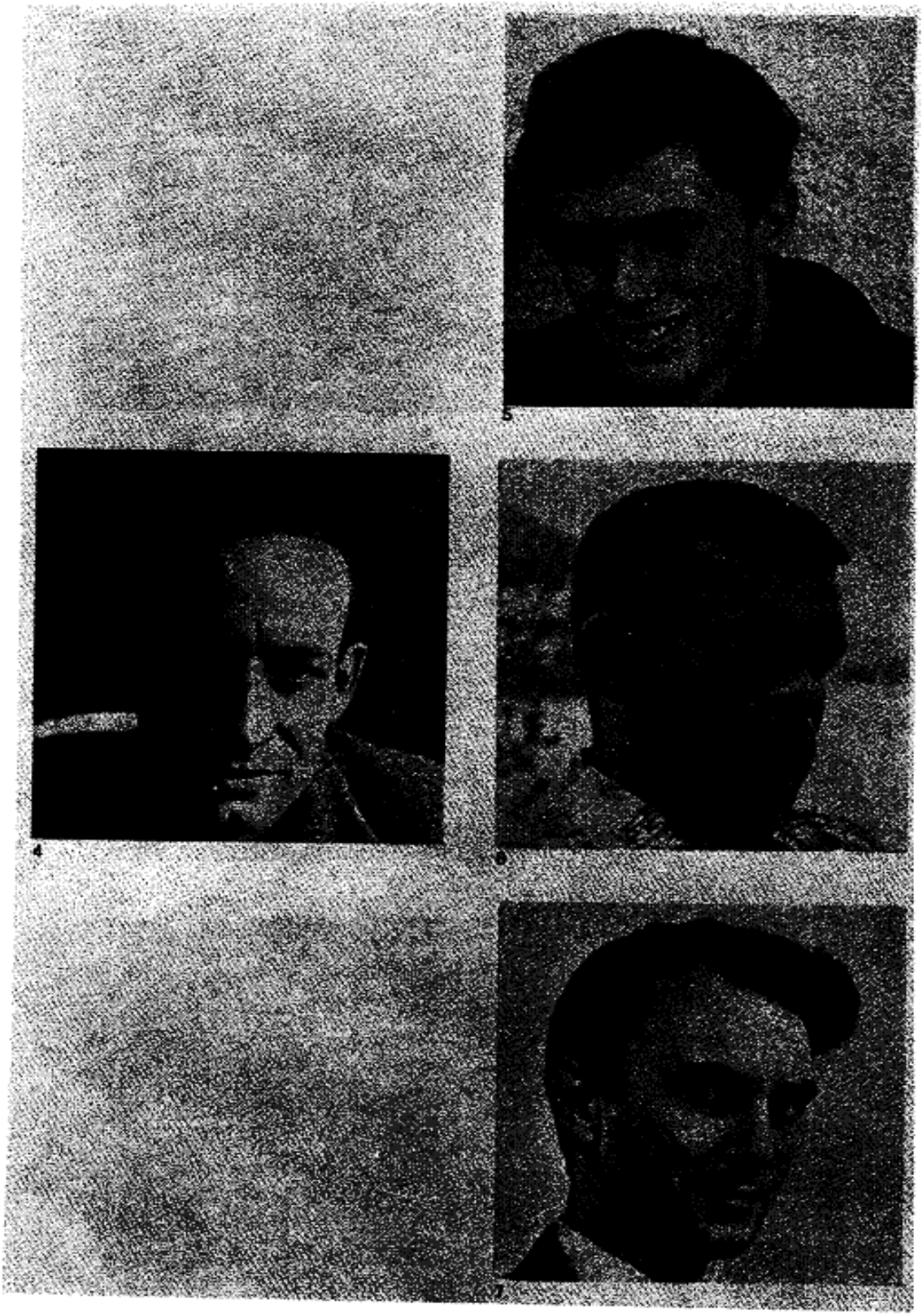
(d) I am influenced by every poet I read. I am easily influenced, and as easily warned. (A few minutes ago I heard a girl on Radio Luxemburg confess that she had 500 pictures of Billy Fury and every disc he'd ever cut and yet she'd never liked him.) But to recognize influences in the finished product and to make a deliberate attempt to reproduce the tensions of another poet are two quite separate things: one involves style, the other does not. How gladly would I accept blood transfusions from W. H. Auden, C. Day Lewis, Robert Graves, Roy Fuller, Thom Gunn and Ted Hughes. I have always greatly admired Dorothy Wellesley.

(e) I cannot answer this question as I feel myself to be in the dock rather than among the jury. Naturally I plead innocent.

(f) All periods are equally good, equally tough, because of the compensating differences. You gain a sharpness through the loss of each successive element; but the epoch has little to do with the quality of poetry. It all depends on what sort of mood the poet's in.

JOHN FULLER

(a), (b) and (c). A related group, because I think the problem of reaching a wider audience is one of form rather than content. By seeking the audience, one finds something bigger and better than the lyric (political satire? opera? cookery verse?). I myself am very interested in the possible alliance of poetry with music and the stage. What one writes about comes next, and one may have to try to interest more people *less* profoundly to keep poetry alive at all.



4. Thomas Blackburn
5. Hugo Williams
6. Derek Walcott
7. Anthony Thwaite
8. Norman Nicholson
9. John Fuller
10. D. J. Enright

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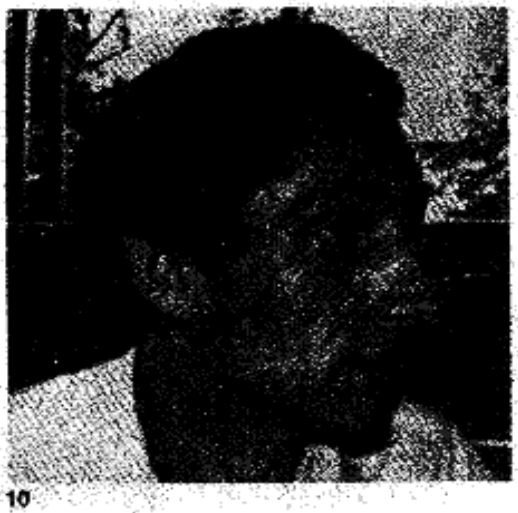

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11. Roy Fuller

12. Vernon Watkins

13. Bernard Spencer

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Surely one should always write about what interests people? It's just that this happens to cover fairies *and* the Fall of Man, the French Revolution *and* the damsel with the dulcimer, Miss Gee *and* Spain. Nor can one help writing out of one's beliefs, but one needn't write of them or under their orders.

(d) If one can name influences, one is also probably trying to avoid them. By the time he can risk a post-mortem, the poet can be as wrong as the next critic. However, I still like Auden, Tate, Empson, Marianne Moore, etc. And, surely, aren't dead poets always the submerged nine-tenths of influence? It makes any list one can give very misleading.

(e) Words should be as simple, ideas as original as possible. Almost the reverse is true of the most noticeably bad contemporary poetry. But I am in favour of formality of diction as well as formality of prosody, though I like it to be direct rather than pedantic or abstract.

(f) It is on the whole a bad period for poetry because there is far too much published in a very limited sphere without there being a regular poetry magazine with high critical standards. There are signs of a fresh lease of life for verse as an aural art: I find this exciting, not so much in the field of the reading or poetry festival, but as a broadening of scope which might aid a plunge into drama. But plays with songs, rather than verse plays, i.e. Brecht, not Eliot.

JULIAN MITCHELL

Poetry is one of a number of possible literary forms: most things can be done better in prose: most of the poetry that is written at any given period is simply awful.

Given the first of these axioms, it follows that *for me* there is nothing wrong with the short lyric. It is, in fact, the medium most suitable for the kind of personal statement that I need, from time to time, to make, and which will not go into prose. But being, in my own estimation, a better prose writer than poet, prose usually serves, and I don't imagine that I shall write a long non-lyric poem in the forseeable future. If I did suddenly want to write such a poem, the problem of form would be fascinatingly difficult—it might, in fact, be insoluble. What I do see myself doing, however, is a certain amount of experiment on the border between verse and prose—though this would be for essentially prosaic rather than poetic purposes. I don't mean anything linguistic, but rather a means of obtaining certain effects through stylistic variation.

There is, I feel, a real question lurking beneath your concern with the 'poetic' versus the 'natural', which is, simply: Why is so much poetry so

deadeningly dull? Well, apart from axiom three above, there is, I believe, a current 'poeticization' which needs to have the guts knocked out of it. Pound once said that poetry should 'have nothing, *nothing*, that you couldn't in some circumstances, under stress of some emotion, *actually say*.' You can say most poetry today, but when you read it aloud you notice to your horror that *it isn't in anyone's voice*. It's this conformity of voicelessness that needs denouncing rather than any verbal tricksiness, I think. I know several poets whose conversation is far livelier than their verse, largely because they daren't use the rhythmic variety of their natural speech. It's part of the accepted rhetoric of dullness, if you'll forgive the phrase, which is just as phoney, just as hollow, as the razzamatazz and the woof and the warp stuff it's alleged to be reacting against. God save us from a return to the Wind Cannot Read School, of course, but their anonymous nonsense was not really any more boring than most of the sober-sided solemnities of current fashion.

But really one shouldn't bother about the ebb and flow of fashion, one should keep one's ear tuned to the ground-bass of the iambic pentameter and acknowledge the masters of one's language, then see what one can do. If I felt more confidence in myself as a poet I would be experimenting with complex regular stanzas, with and without rhyme, trying to combine rhythmical variety with the satisfaction of rigid technical demands. As it is I've been writing prose for months and months and the poems don't get much further than first drafts which are so far from the sort of thing I want to do that they end up in the waste-paper basket.

Thus right now is a bad period for writing poetry for *me*. I don't think 'the times' are ever bad for writing poetry, nor are they ever good. I think prose is almost always better than poetry at dealing with public issues, but one's politics and religion, or lack of them, will always affect one's writing. It is probably better that this should happen unconsciously.

I am influenced by everyone and everything, especially when in love.

ELIZABETH JENNINGS

Poetry, if it is any good at all, is always about issues which concern everyone. Myself, I do not think that the poet should be too anxious about selecting subjects which have a special relevance to the present time. Poems, and good poems, have been written about atom bomb explosions and surgical operations, but they were successful simply because these subjects absorbed the writers as completely as, say, a love affair or a death might absorb another writer.

I am quite certain that my views on politics and religion (my politics are

uncertain because I cannot feel wholly satisfied with any single political party, but my religion is Roman Catholic) have influenced my work. I believe firmly that every poet must be committed to something and, if his religion or political convictions mean anything to him at all, I do not see how they can fail to affect his poems. Their presence may be very silent sometimes, but I see no particular value in clamour, let alone in preaching.

I am glad to be writing at the present time, partly because the fairly short formal lyric, which was given fresh life in the fifties, seems to suit my particular talent, and also because there is plenty of opportunity for literary experiment now. I don't myself *always* want to write the rhyming lyric of thirty-odd lines. Indeed, I do at times feel positively inhibited and exasperated by the form. At the moment, I am extremely eager to write longer poems, dramatic verse (I would, for example, like to write the libretto for an opera), and prose poems. But I am still as fascinated as I was when I was thirteen by the marvellous variety within strict English lyric verse. As for the 'poetic language' of today—there are times when I feel that it is too dry, too intellectual, sometimes, even, too facile. Maybe it needs a little rough treatment, though I can see absolutely no virtue in confusion or obscurity for their own sake.

I have been, and still am, greatly influenced by Wallace Stevens, Edwin Muir, Robert Graves, Richard Wilbur, and, of course, Eliot and Auden. My own most urgent poetic problem today is to bring into my poetry more personal experience directly and *in detail*; there have been times when I have been happily and deliberately an observer and commentator. I don't want to be those things any more. There are moments when I hate everything I have ever written. Every year, I feel more acutely the need to learn more about the actual craft of poetry. I am terrified of becoming slick, and I am also sometimes haunted by the thought of 'drying up'. Poetry makes enormous demands on one yet, for some inexplicable reason, one goes on trying.

ANTHONY THWAITE

'The issues of our time' seem to me to have been pretty extensively dealt with in poetry lately, if by 'issues' are meant cruelty, love, violence, poverty, the family bond, sexual hysteria, elation, oppression, birth, copulation and death. But I suppose 'issues' have a narrower application than that. I think it's rather too late to attempt to interest more people more profoundly in poetry, but this has little to do with poetry's subject-matter: poets aren't really going to win more readers for themselves, are they, by writing about the H-bomb, the Common Market or African Nationalism? The reasons why not many

people nowadays read poetry are more complicated than that; but I think it ought to be remembered that not many people are profoundly interested in literature, or art, at all.

I have certain firm religious beliefs, and other feelings, less certain than beliefs, about politics. Sometimes these get into my poetry in a direct sort of way, but not often. And I would say that these poems are not my best. I feel that my best poems spring quite specifically from some event that has happened to me, or some incident or object I have seen. In other words, it would be conceivable for me to write a goodish poem about my going to a meeting in Richmond and hearing my MP say that he would rather be dead than Red, but almost impossible for me to write anything at all about Hiroshima. This, I'm sure, is a limitation, but there isn't much I can do about it.

I should like to write long meditative poems, using immensely elaborate stanzas, and I should like to write even longer narrative poems, using a relaxed and fluent verse. As it is, I just plug away at poems which never, or almost never, seem to stretch beyond 60 lines. I sometimes think that if I gave up my job and lived in Crete I would write an epic; but I'd like to have more practical evidence that this would happen before booking my passage.

Rigidly sticking to 'influence', rather than just 'poets I like', I think Auden is still a tremendous figure. After that, I have a great admiration for Philip Larkin's poems, and am often annoyed at how much they creep into my own. I think he has a fine originality, which hasn't been properly considered.

I always attempt natural diction, though I don't at all think that this is the only manner for a poet today: I enjoy a good deal of George Barker's poetry, for example. But I think the aim is always, by whatever means, accuracy and relevance.

It is a good period for writing when I've just finished a good poem: a bad one when I've written nothing for a couple of months. I'm sure Cowley wrote that remark about 'a warlike, various, and a tragicall age' being the worst time to write in during a temporary personal drought.

NORMAN NICHOLSON

Verse is primarily the literary medium of the illiterate. It began as an oral art, useful in two ways. First, it was incantatory or bardic, useful for spells and ritual. And second, it was mnemonic: at a time when reading was unknown or known only to a few, verse was the most reliable method of remembering and communicating laws, advice, social instruction, tribal records, biography

and favourite fiction. Oral verse has continued, though with diminishing importance, right down to the present day, and written verse has not entirely forgotten its oral origin. Epic and lyric, in particular, have preserved the convention of the reciter or singer, while spoken verse has proved the best of all media for stage dialogue—where, incidently, it has the practical advantage of being more easily made audible.

All these kinds of verse draw largely on the incantatory tradition and I suppose it is inevitable in a literate age, when most people read rather than listen, that it is as incantation that poetry will chiefly be valued, as a means of stirring the imagination, of saying things too subtle or complex or ambiguous or even too dangerous to go easily into prose. But I do not think that the old mnemonic function is out of date or ought to be disregarded. For one thing, we are quite possibly at the beginning of a new age of general illiteracy, for modern man scarcely needs the written word for ordinary communication and certainly not for entertainment. Letter-writing, the newspaper, the magazine and the story book may pass out of common experience, while the degree of literacy needed for text-books and manuals of technical instruction is not high enough to maintain a large reading public. In such circumstances verse might well become once again a popular medium, one that could range over all subjects and adapt itself to most of the purposes for which the spoken word is used.

To say that poetry would 'interest more people more profoundly if it were concerned with the issues of our time' is, however, very doubtful—presuming that the material of the news is what is meant by 'issues of our time'. For poetry at present is read almost entirely by a highly literate public which does not turn to it for that kind of information or comment. To me this seems a most unfortunate state of affairs which limits not only the poet but the reader of poetry, for it conditions his response from the start, making him put on a special kind of face even before he begins to read.

Obviously, then, I feel that my views on religion and politics influence the poetry I write. If they did not, I should not want to write it. The didactic and the hortatory are among the strongest of those impulses which impel men into rhythm, and it is no accident that of all 'forms' of prose the sermon is about the closest to the poem. I think it is quite ridiculous to rank as inevitably inferior those poets who have 'a palable design upon us'. A man who has no design upon me is a man, on the whole, who is not interested in me and I can hardly be blamed for not being interested in him. Of course, if you limit poetry to what Mr Eliot calls its First Voice—that of the poet speaking to himself—then this question does not arise. But I don't want to limit poetry at all.

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BRIAN GLANVILLE

The Dying Footballer

'That's right!' he said, in a loud, brash Geordie voice. 'That's right! A big fellow with a bullet head! I heard you! I heard you in the cinema!'

Sitting there, he seemed to rise out of the bed as sudden and irrelevant as a Triton; the rough grey jersey, the square, red, wind-whipped face, belonged not to a sanatorium but to ships, fields, stadiums.

'I don't know . . .' I said, and stopped, the attack too strong and unexpected. I had probably made the remark, but then I had never seen him, had only heard about him, and the image I had formed was precisely that: a big fellow with a bullet head. Looking at him now, I could see that he was big indeed, but that the head was uncompromisingly square. In the bed beside him, Williams, a small, grey-headed Welshman, smiled a secret and diverted smile, and reached for the sputum mug on his pedestal.

'I was right in front of you,' Marshall said. 'Now then!' His expression was one of challenge, as though he dared me to deny it, his voice the same brass monotone, and it was several moments before I realized that he was not annoyed, that this vehemence might simply be his way of statement. But embarrassment had paralysed me; I mumbled quickly the message I'd been given for them, and left the room.

A few days later I had cause to visit them again, this time with a trolley of library books. All those patients who were out of bed had jobs to do, and this was one of mine. Their room was at the very end of the long, dim ground floor corridor and when I reached it I hesitated before knocking on the door.

'Come in!' The voice was not that of a sick man; again I wondered what had brought Marshall here.

'What, fetched us some books?' he asked, without reproach. 'Let's see 'em, let's have a look at what you've got.'

'Here you are, then,' I said, annoyed that he should take it for granted.

'Daphne Du Maurier? That's no bloody good to me! Haven't you got something new? Something by Micky Spillane? Something with a bit of meat in it?'

'No.'

'Then I'll get 'em from home,' he said, 'I will,' and leaned back against his throne of pillows.

I had planned to talk to him about his club—the one he managed, and the others he had played for—but at this I muttered, "All right, then,' and wheeled the trolley from the room.

'Here, come back!' he called, 'come back!' but I took no notice.

A week later Dr Cowley said to me, his lean, brown face alive with a joke he would not share, his smile private and condescending, 'You can talk about football all day long now. Mutual therapy. I'm moving you in with a professional.'

'Billy Marshall?' I said. 'But can't I stay in this room?'

'We need it,' he said. 'For a much more serious case than you. We're only keeping you because we want to teach you some discipline anyway.'

'But isn't there someone else?'

'No one else,' he said, his anger rising quickly, as it always did when he was opposed. He was at the door now, disdaining to look at me. 'No one else. If you don't want *that* bed, you can go home.'

The next afternoon, I moved in with Billy Marshall.

'Hallo, lad,' he said. 'I'm glad to see you here. I'd rather have you than that other fellow; coughing and spitting all the time, hawking into his cup. It was filthy; filthy.'

I nodded morosely at him, and looked out of the window. Beyond the putting lawn, where a group of patients was engaged in desultory play, a rank of pine trees grew like watch towers, their pale, thick bark like the scales of immense crocodiles. Through them, again, one saw the Norfolk fields, pale and unemphatic, gently rising into a grey distance.

'How old are you, lad?' Marshall asked, behind me. 'Nineteen? That's a bit bloody young to be in a sanatorium. They tell me you're an Arsenal fan, as well.'

'I am,' I said, turning round slowly.

'You're a bit of fan of something else, too. Eh? *I've* seen you here, from the window. *I've* seen you with that girl, that what's it.'

'Have you?'

'Ah, and you needn't try that,' he cried, with pointing finger, 'making out you don't know what I'm on about. *I've* seen; I'm not bloody blind.'

'I'm sure you're not.' I undressed in silence, got into bed, and opened a book, without another word.

'Here, have you seen this?' he said. There was a rustle, something landed

on my bed, and, looking up, I saw that a green newspaper, a *Football Final*, was lying there, irresistible. I thanked him.

'Two goals up,' he said, 'and let in three in the last twenty minutes. I know 'em. There's no one there to talk to the buggers. They let up, it went to their head.'

The paper came from the Yorkshire coast-town whose Third Division club he managed. There was a kick by kick match report, spreading over two pages—'Town were moving well now and a sizzling twenty yard drive by star forward Jimmy Wall smashed against United's upright, United's goal was bearing a charmed life'—a honeycomb of local League results, a page of minute, compulsive team analysis.

'You were unlucky to go down last season,' I said.

'Unlucky? We weren't unlucky, we were swindled down, it was a bloody scandal. What about the team that stayed up, eh? What about the last match of the season, the one they won away from home, when their centre-half went round the other dressing-room with a bundle of five-pound notes?—You can't prove it, you can't get at them, but when I see bloody Stewart, I'll tell him, he'll hear something. I've never had time for that bugger.'

'The manager of Rovers?'

'If I had my way, he'd be manager of bloody Dartmoor. I've told him so, I've known him twenty years. He's a rogue, that's what he is, a rogue. I knew him when we were both running clubs in the Lancashire Combination; he was with Runcorn, I was player-manager of Rossendale. We went there for a match one day and the gateman said, "Where's your card? You can't come in without your card, Mr Stewart's orders," and I said, "Bugger Stewart, I'm the manager. You go and tell Stewart I'm here."

'So *he* came out and I said to him, "What's all this about?" and he said, "You know you're meant to have your registration card, you know it's a League rule," and I said, "Bugger that," and I pushed him in the chest, I pushed him all the way down the corridor.'

I could imagine him doing it. The first, giant tactlessness, the sudden gesture, and now this anecdote, revealed him as a force of nature, devoid alike of ruth and malice, so that the common courtesies were not disregarded, but simply unknown. Thus, our days together were pregnant with suprise; my own surprise at brutal violations of tact, and his surprise at my resentment. Then there would be temporary silences, each of us prisoned in our own astonishment, until the silence would change in quality, from hostility to armistice, and a gesture—usually his—would bring peace again.

He had two visitors during our first week together. One was his wife; she was his own age, a blonde matron-figure, fitting shapessly into shapeless clothes, all smiles and mild, clucking amazement. Her cheeks were heavy with rouge. She, too, was from the North East, but she had its soft, persuasive accent, where his was vehement and hard; they talked together with a quick, low intimacy. Now and then, there were moments of apparent tension. I could not hear what they said, but she seemed to be pressing him, and his voice would rise, with a note of obstinacy. For all his present illness, I had an impression that she had somehow abdicated from life, while he had not.

There was a son, born late in the marriage, ten years old, but he hadn't come; when Marshall spoke about him it was with a certain reluctant pride, as though he were aware of an Achilles' heel. 'Kicks well, he does that; left foot or right.'

The second visitor was less expected. She came one afternoon when Marshall was asleep, her auburn head peering round the door a moment, uncertain. Then, opening the door a little farther, she tip-toed into the room, a tall, handsome, large-breasted woman, perhaps in her early thirties. 'Billy?' she whispered, and again, a little louder, 'Billy?'

His head turned on the pillow, he gave a snort, then sat up very quickly, looking at her. 'I'll be buggered. I was asleep.'

'I wrote you I was coming.' She spoke with a Yorkshire accent.

'I know you did, I know.' He gestured at me and said, 'This is Brian.'

'The other one's gone, then.'

'Well, tell me,' he said. 'Come on, tell me.' He took her hands and she sat down by him, on the bed. I picked up a book and turned my back on them, in deference to their intimacy, but they spoke very little, only a murmur now and then, and once their silence grew so protracted and intense I imagined that they must be kissing.

When she'd gone, he did not talk about her, and it was three weeks before she came again. I wondered if his wife knew, and had a notion that she did; at times I'd sensed in her attitude a lurking reproach, and in his an evasive guilt.

It wasn't long before he, too, was allowed to get up and begin the series of graduated walks across the bland, flat country; to the white gate, the stone bridge, the village, and at length, beyond it, to the windmill, the church, the railway station, the sea shore. Marshall would put on corduroy trousers, his jersey, a tweed cap; sometimes he would carry a stick. He walked with a slow, heavy stride, saying, 'Go on, lad, go on, I can't keep up with you. I wish I

had your wind.'

There was something about him that was vaguely obsolete, and at the same time, reminiscent. Later, I identified this feeling with an old, forgotten photograph—of footballers abroad on a Continental tour, between the wars; flat caps, baggy suits off the peg, an impression of stiffness and unease, the Depression invisible in the background. It was from these years that Marshall had emerged, as player, first, then manager, one of the 'old school', cut off from the new wave of blue blazers, muted accents, quiet conformity—'If you eat peas with a knife, now, they won't put you in the England team.' He'd been born in one of those little Northumberland mining villages where footballers sprouted like dragons' teeth, had turned professional—'Newcastle bloody daft and I signed for Sunderland'—played five times for England, become a player-manager, then a manager.

While we walked, he would talk about all this; of goals, games, players, great victories, unjust defeats. Through his whole narrative ran a thread of rough acceptance; you were hard and football was hard, and football was hard because life was hard, too. 'I had bloody Dougald with me, three year before the war; there was still no one could play like him when he wanted; he could still have played for Scotland, only they'd never have him again after what had gone on; drunk every bloody night. I took a risk, see; I gambled on him. One morning they had a fight in the dressing-room, him and that bloody Irishman, Lonnon. Lonnon gave him a black eye, and by the time I'd heard of it and went down there, they'd gone; they'd gone to bloody Dougald's house for dinner! I wanted to suspend the two of them, but the Board wouldn't have it, so I took 'em both down to Fulham for the Saturday and Dougald broke his bloody leg.'

He wouldn't be in the sanatorium long—he was sure of that, and so was I. 'Lie on the bed, do this, do the bloody other. I said to the sister the first day I was here, "Look, bugger off," I said, "you can ask me," I said, "you can't bloody well tell me, nobody can." Then he comes round the other day, the little one with the big nose, the patients' committee. He says, "You're up now, you're delivering papers down this corridor." "I'm bloody not," I said, "not if you put it like that. If you ask me properly I'll do it; willing. Started off selling papers in Newcastle, I don't mind going back to it now." '

Even Dr Cowley was wary of him, playing him carefully and respectfully, like some angler who has inadvertently hooked a shark. 'All right today, Marshall? Temperature still on-side?'

And Marshall, looking at him, cautious and impassive, 'Ay, all right,

doctor. Just tell me the day I can go. that's all.'

He had a posse of friends. Northerners, like himself, who would emerge from their nooks and crannies—from lofts, from chalets on the hillsides—to surround him for a steady grumble, for mutual rough consolation: Jack Grace, with his bald head and his insinuating chuckle; little Dave Oliphant, with his auburn moustache, his bent shoulders and his grinding ominscience; Ernie Jacks, who was sixty, a Yorkshire leprechaun, living in a private and inaccessible world. 'The doctors? Booger the doctors!'

'Ay, but you can't bugger them all, Ernie,' said Marshall.

'He can!' chuckled Grace. 'Can't you, Ernie?'

They were all polite to me, but I wasn't one of them, hadn't the common experience, the years, the vernacular, the responses and reactions. I was cautious with them when we were together, glad they seldom joined us on our walks, some because they were still largely bed-ridden, others because we went too fast and far. 'Mad boogers, the pair of 'em,' Ernie would say.

Sometimes, as we walked, Marshall would ask, 'What am I doing here?' echoing the question that was in my own mind. What, indeed? 'Never a *day*'s ill health; never a day. Two cartilages out and a broken leg; that's the only time I've ever been in hospital.'

'Then how did you get *this*?'

'How? I don't know; buggered if I do. I asked the doctor at home; he said, overwork. Overwork? I said. I've worked like this for twenty years. He said, ay, but you're not young any more. Well, I'm not old, I said; I'm not so bloody old.' I could see, at that moment, that in his own eyes he would always be young, and it was this that made his wife seem older than he, this that enabled him to keep the auburn girl, with her big breasts and her nascent sensuality. 'I'll be out in a month,' he said. 'Two months and I'll be running the bloody club again. I told 'em.'

In the meantime he went to the clinic once a week, 'to get pumped up'—or for his 'AP refill', as the other patients called it. But Marshall never acquired the sanitorium vocabulary; 'thora', 'APs', PPs', 'refills', 'strep', 'PAS'. It was as though, by rejecting it, he somehow denied the reality of his illness, his involvement with the rest of us.

The next time his wife came, she brought their son. He was a lively, fair-haired child, with sturdy, plump pink knees; he climbed on the bed in his excitement while behind him, his mother uselessly exclaimed: 'David, don't crawl on him! Get off the bed, will you?'

'He's all right,' Marshall said, grabbing the boy and rolling him on his

back. She watched them without more protest, almost with resentment, as if she knew that she would always be excluded.

'I were in the school team, Dad! I played and I scored three!'

'You're coming on, you're coming on.'

Marshall was beginning, now, to agitate. When Dr Cowley came round in the evenings, he would say, 'How about a date, then, doctor? My temperature's still down. I'm gaining weight. I feel well.' And Dr Cowley would reply, 'Not yet, not yet, it won't be long.'

'Ay, but how long? Two weeks? A month?'

'Softly, softly catchee monkey,' Dr Cowley said, and disappeared with his crooked, self-conscious smile.

'I'll give him monkey. We'll be up for bloody re-election by the time I get out.' For his team wasn't doing well, in that Northern Section where the names fell like dry ice on the heart; Barrow, Rochdale, Tranmere, Accrington. It was Accrington, indeed, who beat them 6-0, after they had failed to win one of their last four home games. 'I wrote to them. I told them they'd get a hiding there, if the wing-halves carried the ball. Both of them go up together, the others break away and they've got the whole park in front of them. And they send missionaries to Africa....'

Autumn turned to winter. It snowed, and the snow dropped slowly from the pines and lay thick upon the hill, with its pink roofed chalets. The little red flags of the putting lawn rose here and there above the snow carpet like buoys in a white sea. We would spend hours together in the recreation room, playing a game called Disc-Bat Cricket; a game at which I always won.

'Makes his own bloody rules!' he would shout, calling on all present to bear witness. 'Two fielders inside the circle; *he* can do it; *you* can't!' And sometimes I would lose my temper, shouting back, forgetting that to him a shout meant as little as a shrug, and must never be taken at its face value.

The draw for the F.A. Cup was made; by chance the Rovers, 'Bloody Stewart's' club, had been drawn to play nearby, at Norwich. 'I'll be there if it does for me,' said Marshall. 'I'll be there if I go in a bloody ambulance.'

The auburn-haired woman came again, and this time, I was able to go out of the room and leave them. An hour later, returning to go back to bed, I found she was still there. Marshall had already got into bed, and she sat there as she had before, her hands in his. 'I'll go out,' she said, but before she could move there was an eager pattering in the corridor, the door was hurled open, and Marshall's little boy appeared.

'Hallo,' said Marshall, looking up. 'Clash of fixtures here.'

The women, confronted, gave each other one pregnant glance—shock and detestation on the one side, guilt, resentment and a covert defiance on the other—then there was silence. The three of them might have been frozen by a Gorgon's head, with only the little boy bewildered and alive.

'Well,' the younger woman said at last, 'I'll be going, then.' She climbed off the bed, pulled her dress down with a crisp defiance, said flatly, 'Get better soon, then, Bill,' exchanged tight-lipped goodbyes with Mrs Marshall, and left the room. As the door began to close Marshall found his voice, roaring after her, 'Look after yourself, now.'

'She's always done that,' his wife said, with low intensity, while the little boy cried, 'Who's that, Dad? Who's that lady? Why did she go?'

'Just a friend, that's all,' he said. 'She was passing through. She was going to Norwich.'

Lying on the next bed, I feigned that I could neither see nor hear, sharing their agony, wondering how long his wife would stay, what they could find to say while she did. But it was the little boy who saved them, busy with his questions, so that Marshall could talk to him while his wife, still sitting there, withdrew, till such time as she could decently leave him. I sensed in her hostile farewell to me that I was included in her indictment, that simply through being here, when she was not, I had somehow conspired to betray her.

'These things happen,' Marshall said, when she had gone, 'you can't help them,' but within half-an-hour, resignation gave way to good cheer, and he was telling me about Fred Westgarth, the manager of Hartlepools, 'he's a rough diamond. Fred, a rough diamond. I rang him up once about fixtures. He said, "When shall we play?" I said, "New Year's Day." He said, "New Year's Dee? New Year's Dee? When's that?" '

As the day of the Cup-tie approached, he talked increasingly of 'Bloody Stewart'. 'He'll be surprised. He'll never reckon on seeing *me* there. And I'll tell him in front of the lot of them. I will.'

We stood by the mill pond, beneath the silent windmill; three swans floated motionless, haughty and serene. 'I'll wake 'em up,' said Marshall, 'sitting there like they own the place.' He beat his stick hard and fast against the boards skirting the pool, and at once the three swans turned and made towards him in a menacing glide, quick and effortless, the mean little heads extended at the end of their long, white, powerful necks. 'I'll show 'em. Break their bloody necks I will.' For the moment, they were Stewart-surrogates.

The first swan hissed and struck, and I backed uneasily away, but Marshall merely stepped aside and nudged it with the flat of his stick. 'I should leave

them,' I said, 'they'll be out of the water.' But he took no notice, defiant, just as in past days he must have defied a packed defence.

'Go on! Get off, you buggers!'

With a flap of wings, a second swan climbed out of the pond, but again Marshall side-stepped, pushing it away, until the three of them confronted him, hissing and dripping, he motionless, the stick extended. The tableau lasted for perhaps thirty seconds, then all at once dissolved as the swans, one by one, turned and scuttled back into the pond. 'There you are,' said Marshall, 'I told you. Stand up to them. That's all you've got to do.' And somehow the whole incident seemed characteristic of him, not only for his defiance, but for the aggression which had made defiance necessary.

At first, Dr Cowley did not want to let him go to Norwich; to deter him he assumed his 'ruthless' tone. 'If you really want to get pleurisy, you can go, so long as you don't expect me to look after you when you've got it.'

'I don't expect anything, doctor; I never have, never in me life.'

And so we went, the two of us together, went by taxi, with two tickets for the directors' box. 'He'll get a shock,' Marshall kept saying, as we sped over the snow-powdered roads, past the dappled fields, past the villages, with their neat Tudor churches. We ate at a Norwich restaurant, full of rowdy, red-faced men, wearing the green and gold favours of the City, shouting in the broad, quick Norfolk accents, 'Up the Canaries!' and from time to time burst into song: 'On the ball, the City! Never mind the *dan*-ger!'

Beyond the ugly railway siding, down the mud track, past the bleak canal, the stadium was a vacuum pump, sucking the city dry. The air was crisp and very cold, and there was movement everywhere; the fans were bowling along together, side by side, as though to a family occasion.

'I'll give him bloody relegation,' Marshall said.

A commissionaire showed us to the boardroom, afume with whisky, beer and cigarette smoke, but the sanatorium had conditioned us and we sheered away, making for the open air. Beneath the directors' box, the stadium surged with colour and expectancy. The Norwich mascot was a tall, gaunt man with an umbrella, dressed up to look like a canary, with a great artificial beak, a mass of green and yellow 'feathers' and a bell which—together with the nose—completed a sinister resemblance to The Bellman, in the *Duchess of Malfi*.

When Stewart climbed into the directors' box, Marshall greeted him with, 'Now then, Tommy!' and Stewart recoiled, as far as his short, plump figure would allow him; a little, round-faced man with silver hair and quick, pale, cunning eyes. 'Never thought *you'd* be here, Billy.'

'Ay, I bet you never did.'

'Heard you'd been ill,' Stewart said. It was one of those voices which had begun in the North, to be planed and deracinated by years in the South. 'Getting better, are you?'

'None the bloody better for seeing you,' said Marshall, while the directors' box filled up, each newcomer pausing to observe the cameo, astonished, interested or wary. 'Just tell me how you won that last match, eh? Just tell me how you kept out of the Second Division. That's all I've come to ask you.'

'I don't know what you mean, Billy,' Stewart said, looking away from him.

'That last match at Frinton Park. *You* know.'

'Fair and square, Bill,' said Stewart, 'we won it fair and square. I'm surprised at you, complaining.'

'Bought it fair and square, you mean!' cried Marshall, while a hubbub of voices rose to drown his own, and Stewart cried, 'You be careful, Bill! I can have you into court for that, it's slander!'

'Have me, then!' Marshall shouted. 'Have me if you bloody dare! And have your bloody centre-half, as well! The one with fivers!'

Forgetting, once again, the special nature of his violence, I wondered whether he was going to hit Stewart, and then, what I would do if he did. For he could not be allowed to do anything so self-destructive, so reckless of the sanatorium code of careful preservation. 'Billy,' I said, taking his arm, but he paid no notice to me. Stewart was very still and quiet, like some hunted animal which seeks escape through stealth and self-effacement—his eyes turned slyly away. Below the directors' box, spectators were standing up and looking round, and indeed, all over the grandstand clumps of people were rising to their feet, heads were turning curiously towards us. How the scene would have ended I don't know, but it was destroyed in a moment by a sudden, surging roar, a roar taken up all over the stadium—'*Up* the Canaries!'—as the Norwich team, in green and gold, ran on to the field.

'I told the bugger,' Marshall said, and sat down, evidently satisfied.

At half-time in the boardroom, people were chary of us, but Marshall was heartily at ease, greeting those he knew, sweeping them into conversation despite themselves. In any case, one saw he was a popular man, and apart from Stewart and the Rovers' directors, whom he now ignored, they all seemed glad to let reserve be demolished.

In the taxi, on the way back to the sanatorium, his vitality abruptly seemed to leave him. He sat silent, breathing a little heavily, unwontedly withdrawn, as if he were at last coming to terms with the treason of his body. 'I wish I had

your energy, Brian.' Once, he began to cough, and the coughing grew, feeding on itself, raucous and resented, louder and louder, as though he were fighting against each new eruption. He pulled out a large, drab-green handkerchief, bending his head to it, and the bitter, private battle went on, till he relapsed, with an exhausted sigh, in his corner.

'Are you all right now, Billy?'

'I'm all right,' he said, in a ghostly wheeze of a voice.

In bed that evening, his temperature had gone up to 100, but he marked it on his chart as 98·4.

'Well, did you both shout yourself hoarse?' asked Dr Cowley. 'Did the best team lose?'

'Ay, it did that,' said Marshall.

'You look a bit pink,' said Dr Cowley. 'No double whiskies with the directors, afterwards?'

'Never touch it, doctor. Haven't touched it since I've been ill.'

'Temperature down?' asked Cowley, taking the chart.

'Same as usual, doctor.'

His coughing woke me in the night. I opened my eyes to the dim effulgence of his bedside lamp and saw that for the first time ever, he was using the abominated sputum mug.

'Can I get you a drink of water, Billy?'

'What?' he said, with a quick, covert turn of the head, 'you awake then? No thanks, boy, I'll be all right.'

Next day, instead of getting up for lunch, he stayed in bed. His temperature had not gone down; this time he did not record it at all.

'I told you what would happen,' Dr Cowley said, at last in a position of command. 'Your temperature's up, you're getting sputum, and I wouldn't be surprised if you've got pleurisy as well.' Yet he spoke without recrimination, as though it were sufficient for him to be proved right.

'Ay, I should have listened to you, doctor,' Marshall said, in a slow, reflective voice, and he stared out across the room. 'I'd no right to go.'

'Perhaps it's taught you a lesson,' Dr Cowley said. 'You can't play about with this disease, even if you're a footballer. Perhaps you'll take my word for it when it's time to let you go home.'

'I will that,' Marshall said, half-audible.

His friends came to see him in the afternoon: Jack Grace, Dave Oliphant and Ernie Jacks. 'What's the matter with you Billy? Shamming? Don't you want to go home to the wife, then?'

'I got a cough going to Norwich, that's all there is to it. Cough and a bloody temperature.' But from the strange lack of emphasis, I knew he feared there was more to it than that. He was still coughing frequently, and whenever he had to use his sputum mug, he would turn his back towards me.

'He's had the last laugh, then, Bloody Stewart. If I *have* got pleurisy, I wouldn't be surprised. I wouldn't. When I cough I can feel it there.'

'Come along to the clinic and we'll have a listen to you,' Dr Cowley told him. He was in their hands now, an acquiescent body to be sounded, drained, painfully rehabilitated; no better than the rest of us.

'I *have* got it, then,' he said, shuffling back into the room, in dressing-gown and slippers. 'I can give this season up, the whole of it. They'll have to stay off the bottom without me.'

'Oh, they will,' I said, 'they won't have to be re-elected.'

'I wish I was as sure as you are.'

He was entirely confined to bed, now, fretting the supine days away, dabbling now in a book, now in a magazine; now putting earphones on, to listen to the radio. He spent two hours one morning in the clinic. 'Sticking this in me, sticking bloody that in me,' he said, kicking off his slippers with subdued disgust. 'They turned me into a bloody dartboard; I thought they'd never be done. Honestly.'

The following evening, Dr Cowley came in and said, 'Your sputum's positive.'

'Thanks,' he said. 'I'll be here with you for life, then, doctor.'

'You might be,' Cowley said, with his diabolic grin, and he was out of the door.

In the weeks that followed, Marshall displayed a restless stoicism. It was, as he told his wife when next she came, 'me own fault, no one else's. Except Bloody Stewart's, maybe, and you can't blame him, really. You can't.'

His wife sat with him in melancholy silence, a double reproach in her eyes. Once, I heard her say, 'You shouldn't have gone, Billy. You know you should never have gone.'

'Ay, I know, but it's done now. I've learned me lesson.'

He was eating less, pushing his meals away with a disgust directed at his own lack of appetite as much as at the food itself. 'I can't get interested, staying in bed the whole time. It's not natural.'

The ritual weighing, which took place each Monday morning in the hall of the sanatorium, now became a ceremony as important to him as to the rest of us. The matron would sit beside the weighing chair, slender and pretty in her

white cap and narrow, blue, archaic dress, surrounded as always by an aura of bitter-sweet unfulfilment.

'Well, Mr Marshall, is the centre-forward still carrying too much weight?'

'Too little, matron,' he replied, drawing tight the sash of his red silk dressing-gown, and grimly climbed into the chair. His face remained set during that silent hiatus in which the weights poised and chinked in her narrow fingers, then at last she said, 'You've lost four pounds.'

'Wasting away, matron,' he said, shaking his head and heavily getting up. 'There'll not be any of me left, soon.'

Looking at him closely, in our room, I could see his ruddy cheeks had withdrawn a little, yet I could never imagine the face being anything but robust and full.

Later that week, I was moved out of the room, to a chalet on the hillside. It was fresher there and less oppressive, a great step towards ultimate release, and yet I felt I was deserting him.

'You go, lad; good luck,' he said, pushing my apologies aside.

'Come out soon and join me.'

'I'll try, I'll do me best.' But now he seemed to speak without optimism.

I visited him every day, and knew that he was grateful; there was a sentimental core to him, however vigorously disguised: it showed obliquely and occasionally. 'If you're looking for a film, *The Barretts of Wimpole Street*; that's the one they ought to show. Everyone would enjoy it. Honestly.'

Once, climbing the steps to the sanatorium, I met the auburn-haired woman coming out. I think she would have liked to glide past, but I stopped her, anxious to show I did not judge her. 'What do you think of him?'

She looked away, saying at last, 'He's not good, is he?'

'He'll get better quick enough.' I was convinced of it.

'I don't know. He's got so thin, like.' Seeing him each day, it was something which had not impressed me. 'Half-a-stone he's gone down, since I was here.' I could think of nothing to say, and it was she who spoke again, at last. 'I brought him a steak. Maybe they'll cook it for him.' Then she was off.

After another ten days Marshall, too, was moved from the room; to a single room on the floor above. 'I asked him, "What does it mean? Am I getting worse, then?" But they won't tell you. I said, "I'm entitled to know," I said. But they put you off, they won't tell you anything.' The next day, when I visited him, he told me, 'They're going to collapse the other lung,' and a few days after that, 'I've sent my resignation in. It's not fair to the club. I won't be ready by September, not at this rate.'

It was a watershed, the second, just as the moment in the taxi had been the first. He was admitting, now, that he could no longer control his future.

I went to visit him on the day they'd collapsed his second lung, but at my knock on the door a busy Irish nurse emerged, a tiny, red-haired hoyden, shooing me away. 'He's not to be seen by *anyone*!'

He could not be seen on the second day, nor on the third. When I asked Dr Cowley for news, he responded, with his grin, 'Complications. Nothing abnormal. You look after *your* convalescence, we'll look after him.'

Yet still I was not seriously anxious; that great strength, that inflexible will, were sure to see him through.

On the fourth day, the nurse popped out and whispered, 'You can go in for a *minute*!' Marshall was lying on his back. His face, tilted to the ceiling seemed suddenly to have fallen away, its cheeks ravaged from within. 'Is it you, Brian?' he asked, in a hoarse, husky voice. 'They've really buggered me about.' He stopped then and his eyes closed, but all at once he opened them to say, 'Rate I'm going down, I'll be seeking re-election to the sanatorium.' But when I asked if there was anything I could get him, he replied, 'Nothing, lad, nothing; it's only the after effects.'

The days passed, and one's visits were still restricted. His northern friends gathered sombrely in corners, my optimism too brittle and callow for them. 'They'll bloody finish him,' said Ernie Jacks.

But to me, Marshall was doubly impregnable; impregnable both in himself, and because death, at nineteen, was something which could happen neither to me, nor to my friends. My faith was untroubled even when Marshall's wife arrived, to stay in the village.

We met now and then, sometimes in the sanatorium itself, sometimes while I was on my walks. Her suspicion of me seemed to be diminishing; as we crossed each other at the bridge one afternoon, she said, 'You've been good to him. He says you go in every day,' and, again, 'It's his own doing, he knows it is. Headstrong, he's always the same. He ought never to have gone that day; he'd no business.' She was forever bringing him something to eat—a chicken, jellies, a Yorkshire pudding—coaxing the appetite which had grown so small.

'You can't even see him now,' Ernie Jacks complained, coming gnome-like down the stairs, one evening, as I went up them on my way to visit Marshall. 'God knows what they're up to.'

It was true; they even had a notice on his door, 'No Visitors Without The Permission of Matron'.

I took my walks alone, now, thinking of him lying there, alone in the room;

of the hollowed face, the mottled hands which looked, resting on the sheet, like the broad skeleton of hands. I would walk very quickly, down the mud-tracks, across the fields, along the sea shore with its dead seaweed and myriad of tiny dead starfish, thinking of the stories he'd told me, all of them implicit with his vast, animal force. The paradox was too huge to reconcile. Soon—after a week, perhaps, a month—the tide would turn, or rather would be turned, by that very force. He was a footballer, and footballers like him were indestructible; I wished I could convey it to his wife, his friends, his mistress.

It was ten days after they had made him incommunicado again that I came out of my chalet, before lunch. It was a clear March morning with a bright sun, and from the hillside, I could see far along the white road which led from the sanatorium to the village. All at once, around the farthest bend, two women came in sight, walking very slowly, side by side. It was almost a minute before I could see that one head was blonde, the other auburn, and it was only then that I knew that he was going to die.

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JEAN RHYS

Let Them Call it Jazz

One bright Sunday morning in July I have trouble with my Notting Hill landlord because he ask for a month's rent in advance. He tell me this after I live there since winter, settling up every week without fail. I have no job at the time, and if I give the money he want there's not much left. So I refuse. The man drunk already at that early hour, and he abuse me—all talk, he can't frighten me. But his wife is a bad one—now she walk in my room and say she must have cash. When I tell her no, she give my suitcase one kick and it burst open. My best dress fall out, then she laugh and give another kick. She say month in advance is usual, and if I can't pay find somewhere else.

Don't talk to me about London. Plenty people there have heart like stone. Any complaint—the answer is 'prove it'. But if nobody see and bear witness for me, how to prove anything? So I pack up and leave, I think better not have dealings with that woman. She too cunning, and Satan don't lie worse.

I walk about till a place nearby is open where I can have coffee and a sandwich. There I start talking to a man at my table. He talk to me already, I know him, but I don't know his name. After a while he ask, 'What's the matter? Anything wrong?' and when I tell him my trouble he say I can use an empty flat he own till I have time to look around.

This man is not at all like most English people. He see very quick, and he decide very quick. English people take long time to decide—you three quarter dead before they make up their mind about you. Too besides, he speak very matter of fact, as if it's nothing. He speak as if he realize well what it is to live like I do—that's why I accept and go.

He tell me somebody occupy the flat till last week, so I find everything all right, and he tell me how to get there—three quarters of an hour from Victoria Station, up a steep hill, turn left, and I can't mistake the house. He give me the keys and an envelope with a telephone number on the back. Underneath is written 'After 6 p.m. ask for Mr Sims'.

In the train that evening I think myself lucky, for to walk about London on a Sunday with nowhere to go—that take the heart out of you.

I find the place and the bedroom of the downstairs flat is nicely furnished—two looking glass, wardrobe, chest of drawers, sheets, everything. It smell of jasmine scent, but it smell strong of damp too.

I open the door opposite and there's a table, a couple chairs, a gas stove and a cupboard, but this room so big it look empty. When I pull the blind up I notice the paper peeling off and mushrooms growing on the walls—you never see such a thing.

The bathroom the same, all the taps rusty. I leave the two other rooms and make up the bed. Then I listen, but I can't hear one sound. Nobody come in, nobody go out of that house. I lie awake for a long time, then I decide not to stay and in the morning I start to get ready quickly before I change my mind. I want to wear my best dress, but it's a funny thing—when I take up that dress and remember how my landlady kick it I cry. I cry and I can't stop. When I stop I feel tired to my bones, tired like old woman. I don't want to move again —I have to force myself. But in the end I get out in the passage and there's a postcard for me. 'Stay as long as you like. I'll be seeing you soon—Friday probably. Not to worry.' It isn't signed, but I don't feel so sad and I think 'All right, I wait here till he come. Perhaps he know of a job for me.'

Nobody else live in the house but a couple on the top floor—quiet people and they don't trouble me. I have no word to say against them.

First time I meet the lady she's opening the front door and she give me a very inquisitive look. But next time she smile a bit and I smile back—once she talk to me. She tell me the house very old, hundred and fifty-year old, and she and her husband live there since long time. 'Valuable property,' she says, 'it could have been saved, but nothing done of course.' Then she tells me that as to the present owner—if he is the owner—well he have to deal with local authorities and she believe they make difficulties. 'These people are determined to pull down all the lovely old houses—its shameful.'

So I agree that many things shameful. But what to do? What to do? I say it have an elegant shape, it make the other houses in the street look cheap trash, and she seem pleased. That's true too. The house sad and out of place, especially at night. But it have style. The second floor shut up, and as for my flat, I go in the two empty rooms once, but never again.

Underneath was the cellar, full of old boards and broken-up furniture—I see a big rat there one day. It was no place to be alone in I tell you, and I get the habit of buying a bottle of wine most evenings, for I don't like whisky and the rum here no good. It don't even *taste* like rum. You wonder what they do to it.

After I drink a glass or two I can sing and when I sing all the misery goes from my heart. Sometimes I make up songs but next morning I forget them, so other times I sing the old ones like 'Tantalizin' ' or 'Don't Trouble Me Now'.

I think I go but I don't go. Instead I wait for the evening and the wine and

that's all. Everywhere else I live—well, it doesn't matter to me, but this house is different—empty and no noise and full of shadows, so that sometimes you ask yourself what make all those shadows in an empty room.

I eat in the kitchen, then I clean up everything nice and have a bath for coolness. Afterwards I lean my elbows on the windowsill and look at the garden. Red and blue flowers mix up with the weeds and there are five—six apple trees. But the fruit drop and lie in the grass, so sour nobody want it. At the back, near the wall, is a bigger tree—this garden certainly take up a lot of room, perhaps that's why they want to pull the place down.

Not much rain all the summer, but not much sunshine either. More of a glare. The grass get brown and dry, the weeds grow tall, the leaves on the trees hang down. Only the red flowers—the poppies—stand up to that light, everything else look weary.

I don't trouble about money, but what with wine and shillings for the slot-meters, it go quickly; so I don't waste much on food. In the evening I walk outside—not by the apple trees—but near the street—it's not so lonely.

There's no wall here and I can see the woman next door looking at me over the hedge. At first I say good evening, but she turn away her head, so afterwards I don't speak. A man is often with her, he wear a straw hat with a black ribbon an gold-rim spectacles. His suit hang on him like it's too big. He's the husband it seems and he stare at me worse than his wife—he stare as if I'm wild animal let loose. Once I laugh in his face because why these people have to be like that? I don't bother them. In the end I get that I don't even give them one single glance. I have plenty other things to worry about.

To show you how I felt. I don't remember exactly. But I believe it's the second Saturday after I come that when I'm at the window just before I go for my wine I feel somebody's hand on my shoulder and it's Mr Sims. He must walk very quiet because I don't know a thing till he touch me.

He says hullo, then he tells me I've got terrible thin, do I ever eat. I say of course I eat but he goes on that it doesn't suit me at all to be so thin and he'll buy some food in the village. (That's the way he talk. There's no village here. You don't get away from London so quick.)

It don't seem to me he look very well himself, but I just say bring a drink instead, as I am not hungry.

He come back with three bottles—vermouth, gin and red wine. Then he ask if the little devil who was here last smash all the glasses and I tell him she smash some, I find the pieces. But not all. 'You fight with her eh?'

He laugh, and he don't answer. He pour out the drinks then he says, 'Now,

you eat up those sandwiches.'

Some men when they are there you don't worry so much. These sort of men you do all they tell you blindfold because they can take the trouble from your heart and make you think you're safe. It's nothing they say or do. It's a feeling they can give you. So I don't talk with him seriously—I don't want to spoil that evening. But I ask about the house and why it's so empty and he says:

'Has the old trout upstairs been gossiping?'

I tell him, 'She suppose they make difficulties for you.'

'It was a damn bad buy,' he says and talks about selling the lease or something. I don't listen much.

We were standing by the window then and the sun low. No more glare. He puts his hand over my eyes. 'Too big—much too big for your face' he says and kisses me like you kiss a baby. When he takes his hand away I see he's looking out at the garden and he says this—'It gets you. My God it does.'

I know very well it's not me he means, so I ask him, 'Why sell it then? If you like it, keep it.'

'Sell what?' he says. 'I'm not talking about this damned house.'

I ask what he's talking about. 'Money,' he says. 'Money. That's what I'm talking about. Ways of making it.'

'I don't think so much of money. It don't like me and what do I care?' I was joking, but he turns around, his face quite pale and he tells me I'm a fool. He tells me I'll get push around all my life and die like a dog, only worse because they'd finish off a dog, but they'll let me live till I'm a caricature of myself. That's what he say, 'Caricature of yourself.' He say I'll curse the day I was born and everything and everybody in this bloody world before I'm done.

I tell him, 'No I'll never feel like that' and he smiles, if you can call it a smile, and says he's glad I'm content with my lot. 'I'm disappointed in you Selina. I thought you had more spirit.'

'If I contented that's all right,' I answer him, 'I don't see very many looking contented over here.' We're standing staring at each other when the door bell rings. 'That's a friend of mine,' he says. 'I'll let him in.'

As to the friend, he's all dressed up in stripe pants and a black jacket and he's carrying a brief case. Very ordinary looking but with a soft kind of voice.

'Maurice, this is Selina Davis,' says Mr Sims, and Maurice smiles very kind but it don't mean much, then he looks at his watch and says they ought to be getting along.

At the door Mr Sims tells me he'll see me next week and I answer straight

out 'I won't be here next week because I want a job and I won't get one in this place.'

'Just what I'm going to talk about. Give it a week longer Selina.'

'I say 'Perhaps I stay a few more days. Then I go. Perhaps I go before.'

'Oh no you won't go,' he says.

They walk to the gates quickly and drive off in a yellow car. Then I feel eyes on me and it's the woman and her husband in the next door garden watching. The man make some remark and she look at me so hateful, so hating I shut the front door quick.

I don't want more wine. I want to go to bed early because I must think. I must think about money. It's true I don't care for it. Even when somebody steal my savings—this happen soon after I get to the Notting Hill house—I forget it soon. About thirty pounds they steal. I keep it roll up in a pair of stockings, but I go to the drawer one day, and no money. In the end I have to tell the police. They ask me exact sum and I say I don't count it lately, about thirty pounds. 'You don't know how much?' they say. 'When did you count it last? Do you remember? Was it before you move or after?'

I get confuse, and I keep saying 'I don't remember' though I remember well I see it two days before. They don't believe me and when a policeman come to the house I hear the landlady tell him, 'She certainly had no money when she came here. She wasn't able to pay a month's rent in advance for her room though it's a rule in this house.' 'These people terrible liars,' she say and I think 'it's you a terrible liar, because when I come you tell me weekly or monthly as you like.' It's from that time she don't speak to me and perhaps it's she take it. All I know is I never see one penny of my savings again, all I know is they pretend I never have any, but as it's gone, no use to cry about it. Then my mind goes to my father, for my father is a white man and I think a lot about him. If I could see him only once, for I too small to remember when he was there. My mother is fair coloured woman, fairer than I am they say, and she don't stay long with me either. She have a chance to go to Venezuela when I three-four year old and she never come back. She send money instead. It's my grandmother take care of me. She's quite dark and what we call 'country-cookie' but she's the best I know.

She save up all the money my mother send, she don't keep one penny for herself—that's how I get to England. I was a bit late in going to school regular, getting on for twelve years, but I can sew very beautiful, excellent—so I think I get a good job—in London perhaps.

However here they tell me all this fine handsewing take too long. Waste of

time—too slow. They want somebody to work quick and to hell with the small stitches. Altogether it don't look so good for me, I must say, and I wish I could see my father. I have his name—Davis. But my grandmother tell me 'Every word that come out of that man's mouth a damn lie. He is certainly first class liar, though no class otherwise.' So perhaps I have not even his real name.

Last thing I see before I put the light out is the postcard on the dressing table. 'Not to worry.'

Not to worry! Next day is Sunday, and it's on the Monday the people next door complain about me to the police. That evening the woman is by the hedge, and when I pass her she says in very sweet quiet voice, 'Must you stay? Can't you go?' I don't answer. I walk out in the street to get rid of her. But she run inside her house to the window, she can still see me. Then I start to sing, so she can understand I'm not afraid of her. The husband call out: 'If you don't stop that noise I'll send for the police.' I answer them quite short. I say, 'You go to hell and take your wife with you.' And I sing louder.

The police come pretty quick—two of them. Maybe they just round the corner. All I can say about police, and how they behave is I think it all depend who they dealing with. Of my own free will I don't want to mix up with police. No.

One man says, you can't cause this disturbance here. But the other asks a lot of questions. What is my name? Am I tenant of a flat in No. 17? How long have I lived there? Last address and so on. I get vexed the way he speak and I tell him, 'I come here because somebody steal my savings. Why you don't look for my money instead of bawling at me? I work hard for my money. All-you don't do one single thing to find it.'

'What's she talking about?' the first one says, and the other one tells me 'You can't make that noise here. Get along home. You've been drinking.'

I see that woman looking at me and smiling, and other people at their windows, and I'm so angry I bawl at them too. I say, 'I have absolute and perfect right to be in the street same as anybody else, and I have absolute and perfect right to ask the police why they don't even look for my money when it disappear. It's because a dam English thief take it you don't look,' I say. The end of all this is that I have to go before a magistrate, and he fine me five pounds for drunk and disorderly, and he give me two weeks to pay.

When I get back from the court I walk up and down the kitchen, up and down, waiting for six o'clock because I have no five pounds left, and I don't know what to do. I telephone at six and a woman answers me very short and sharp, then Mr Sims comes along and he don't sound too pleased either when I

tell him what happen. 'Oh Lord!' he says, and I say I'm sorry. 'Well don't panic,' he says, 'I'll pay the fine. But look, I don't think. . . .' Then he breaks off and talk to some other person in the room. He goes on, 'Perhaps better not stay at No. 17. I think I can arrange something else. I'll call for you Wednesday—Saturday latest. Now behave till then.' And he hang up before I can answer that I don't want to wait till Wednesday, much less Saturday. I want to get out of that house double quick and with no delay. First I think I ring back, then I think better not as he sound so vex.

I get ready, but Wednesday he don't come, and Saturday he don't come. All the week I stay in the flat. Only once I go out and arrange for bread, milk and eggs to be left at the door, and seems to me I meet up with a lot of policemen. They don't look at me, but they see me all right. I don't want to drink—I'm all the time listening, listening and thinking, how can I leave before I know if my fine is paid? I tell myself the police let me know, that's certain. But I don't trust them. What they care? The answer is Nothing. Nobody care. One afternoon I knock at the old lady's flat upstairs, because I get the idea she give me good advice. I can hear her moving about and talking, but she don't answer and I never try again.

Nearly two weeks pass like that, then I telephone. It's the woman speaking and she say, 'Mr Sims is not in London at present.' I ask, 'When will he be back—it's urgent' and she hang up. I'm not surprised. Not at all. I knew that would happen. All the same I feel heavy like lead. Near the phone box is a chemist's shop, so I ask him for something to make me sleep, the day is bad enough, but to lie awake all night—Ah no! He gives me a little bottle marked *'One or two tablets only'* and I take three when I go to bed because more and more I think that sleeping is better than no matter what else. However, I lie there, eyes wide open as usual, so I take three more. Next thing I know the room is full of sunlight, so it must be late afternoon, but the lamp is still on. My head turn around and I can't think well at all. At first I ask myself how I get to the place. Then it comes to me, but in pictures—like the landlady kicking my dress, and when I take my ticket at Victoria Station, and Mr Sims telling me to eat the sandwiches, but I can't remember everything clear, and I feel very giddy and sick. I take in the milk and eggs at the door, go in the kitchen, and try to eat but the food hard to swallow.

It's when I'm putting the things away that I see the bottles—pushed back on the lowest shelf in the cupboard.

There's a lot of drink left, and I'm glad I tell you. Because I can't bear the way I feel. Not any more. I mix a gin and vermouth and I drink it quick, then

I mix another and drink it slow by the window. The garden looks different, like I never see it before. I know quite well what I must do, but it's late now—tomorrow. I have one more drink, of wine this time, and then a song come in my head, I sing it and I dance it, and more I sing, more I am sure this is the best tune that has ever come to me in all my life.

The sunset light from the window is gold colour. My shoes sound loud on the boards. So I take them off, my stockings too and go on dancing but the room feel shut in, I can't breathe, and I go outside still singing. Maybe I dance a bit too. I forget all about that woman till I hear her saying, 'Henry, look at this.' I turn around and I see her at the window. 'Oh yes, I wanted to speak with you,' I say, 'Why bring the police and get me in bad trouble? Tell me that.'

'And you tell *me* what you're doing here at all,' she says. 'This is a respectable neighbourhood.'

Then the man come along. 'Now young woman, take yourself off. You ought to be ashamed of this behaviour.'

'It's disgraceful,' he says, talking to his wife, but loud so I can hear, and she speaks loud too—for once. 'At least the other tarts that crook installed here were *white* girls,' she says.

'You a dam fouti liar,' I say. 'Plenty of those girls in your country already. Numberless as the sands on the shore. You don't need me for that.'

'You're not a howling success at it certainly.' Her voice sweet sugar again. 'And you won't be seeing much more of your friend Mr Sims. He's in trouble too. Try somewhere else. Find somebody else. If you can, of course.' When she say that my arm moves of itself. I pick up a stone and bam! through the window. Not the one they are standing at but the next, which is of coloured glass, green and purple and yellow.

I never see a woman look so surprise. Her mouth fall open she so full of surprise. I start to laugh, louder and louder—I laugh like my grandmother, with my hands on my hips and my head back. (When she laugh like that you can hear her to the end of our street.) At last I say, 'Well, I'm sorry. An accident. I get it fixed tomorrow early.' 'That glass is irreplaceable,' the man says. 'Irreplaceable.' 'Good thing,' I say, 'those colours look like they sea-sick to me. I buy you a better windowglass.'

He shake his fist at me. 'You won't be let off with a fine this time,' he says. Then they draw the curtains. I call out at them. 'You run away. Always you run away. Ever since I come here you hunt me down because I don't answer back. Its you shameless.' I try to sing 'Dont trouble me now'.

Don't trouble me now
You without honour.
Don't walk in my footstep
You without shame.

But my voice don't sound right, so I get back indoors and drink one more glass of wine—still wanting to laugh, and still thinking of my grandmother for that is one of her songs.

It's about a man whose doudou give him the go-by when she find somebody rich and he sail away to Panama. Plenty people die there of fever when they make that Panama canal so long ago. But he don't die. He come back with dollars and the girl meet him on the jetty, all dressed up and smiling. Then he sing to her, 'You without honour, you without shame.' It sound good in Martinique patois too 'Sans honte'.

Afterwards I ask myself, 'Why I do that? It's not like me. But if they treat you wrong over and over again the hour strike when you burst out that's what.'

Too besides, Mr Sims can't tell me now I have no spirit. I don't care, I sleep quickly and I'm glad I break the woman's ugly window. But as to my own song it go right away and it never come back. A pity.

Next morning the doorbell ringing wake me up. The people upstairs don't come down, and the bell keeps on like fury self. So I go to look, and there is a policeman and a policewoman outside. As soon as I open the door the woman put her foot in it. She wear sandals and thick stockings and I never see a foot so big or so bad. It look like it want to mash up the whole world. Then she come in after the foot, and her face not so pretty either. The policeman tell me my fine is not paid and people make serious complaints about me, so they're taking me back to the magistrate. He show me a paper and I look at it, but I don't read it. The woman push me in the bedroom, and tell me to get dress quickly, but I just stare at her, because I think perhaps I wake up soon. Then I ask her what I must wear. She say she suppose I had some clothes on yesterday. Or not? 'What's it matter, wear anything,' she says. But I find clean underclothes and stockings and my shoes with high heels and I comb my hair. I start to file my nails, because I think they too long for magistrate's court but she get angry. 'Are you coming quietly or aren't you?' she says. So I go with them and we get in a car outside.

I wait for a long time in a room full of policemen. They come in, they go out, they telephone, they talk in low voices. Then it's my turn, and first thing I notice in the court room is a man with frowning black eyebrows. He sit be-

low the magistrate, he dressed in black and he so handsome I can't take my eyes off him. When he see that he frown worse than before.

First comes a policeman to testify I cause disturbance, and then comes the old gentleman from next door. He repeat that bit about nothing but the truth so help me God. Then he says I make dreadful noise at night and use abominable language, and dance in obscene fashion. He says when they try to shut the curtains because his wife so terrify of me, I throw stones and break a valuable stain-glass window. He say his wife get serious injury if she'd been hit, and as it is she in terrible nervous condition and the doctor is with her. I think, 'Believe me, if I aim at your wife I hit your wife—that's certain.' 'There was no provocation,' he says. 'None at all.' Then another lady from across the street says this is true. She heard no provocation whatsoever, and she swear that they shut the curtains but I go on insulting them and using filthy language and she saw all this and heard it.

The magistrate is a little gentleman with a quiet voice, but I'm very suspicious of these quiet voices now. He ask me why I don't pay my fine, and I say because I haven't the money. I get the idea they want to find out all about Mr Sims—they listen so very attentive. But they'll find out nothing from me. He ask how long I have the flat and I say I don't remember. I know they want to trip me up like they trip me up about my savings so I won't answer. At last he ask if I have anything to say as I can't be allowed to go on being a nuisance. I think, 'I'm nuisance to you because I have no money that's all.' I want to speak up and tell him how they steal all my savings, so when my landlord asks for month's rent I haven't got it to give. I want to tell him the woman next door provoke me since long time and call me bad names but she have a soft sugar voice and nobody hear—that's why I broke her window, but I'm ready to buy another after all. I want to say all I do is sing in that old garden, and I want to say this in decent quiet voice. But I hear myself talking loud and I see my hands wave in the air. Too besides it's no use, they won't believe me, so I don't finish. I stop, and I feel the tears on my face. 'Prove it.' That's all they will say. They whisper, they whisper. They nod, they nod.

Next thing I'm in a car again with a different policewoman, dressed very smart. Not in uniform. I ask her where she's taking me and she says 'Holloway' just that 'Holloway'.

I catch hold of her hand because I'm afraid. But she takes it away. Cold and smooth her hand slide away and her face is china face—smooth like a doll and I think, 'This is the last time I ask anything from anybody. So help me God.'

The car come up to a black castle and little mean streets are all round it. A

lorry was blocking up the castle gates. When it get by we pass through and I am in jail. First I stand in a line with others who are waiting to give up handbags and all belongings to a woman behind bars like in a post office. The girl in front bring out a nice compact, look like gold to me, lipstick to match and a wallet full of notes. The woman keep the money, but she give back the powder and lipstick and she half-smile. I have two pounds seven shillings and sixpence in pennies. She take my purse, then she throw me my compact (which is cheap) my comb and my handkerchief like everythin' in my bag is dirty. So I think, 'Here too, here too.' But I tell myself, 'Girl, what you expect eh? They all like that. All.'

Some of what happen afterwards I forget, or perhaps better not remember. Seems to me they start by trying to frighten you. But they don't succeed with me for I don't care for nothing now, it's as if my heart hard like a rock and I can't feel.

Then I'm standing at the top of a staircase with a lot of women and girls. As we are going down I notice the railing very low on one side, very easy to jump, and a long way below there's the grey stone passage like it's waiting for you.

As I'm thinking this a uniform woman step up alongside quick and grab my arm. She say, 'Oh no you don't.'

I was just noticing the railing very low that's all—but what's the use of saying so.

Another long line waits for the doctor. It move forward slowly and my legs terrible tired. The girl in front is very young and she cry and cry. 'I'm scared,' she keeps saying. She's lucky in a way—as for me I never will cry again. It all dry up and hard in me now. That, and a lot besides. In the end I tell her to stop, because she doing just what these people want her to do.

She stop crying and start a long story, but while she is speaking her voice get very far away, and I find I can't see her face clear at all.

Then I'm in a chair, and one of those uniform women is pushing my head down between my knees, but let her push—everything go away from me just the same.

They put me in the hospital because the doctor say I'm sick. I have a cell by myself and it's all right except I don't sleep. The things they say you mind I don't mind.

When they clang the door on me I think, 'You shut me in, but you shut all those other dam devils out. They can't reach me now.'

At first it bothers me when they keep on looking at me all through the night. They open a little window in the doorway to do this. But I get used to it and I

get used to the night chemise they give me. It very thick, and to my mind it not very clean either—but what's that matter to me? Only the food I can't swallow —especially the porridge. The woman ask me sarcastic, 'Hunger striking?' But afterwards I can leave most of it, and she don't say nothing.

One day a nice girl comes around with books and she give me two, but I don't want to read so much. Beside one is about a murder, and the other is about a ghost and I don't think it's at all like those books tell you.

There is nothing I want now. It's no use. If they leave me in peace and quiet that's all I ask. The window is barred but not small, so I can see a little thin tree through the bars, and I like watching it.

After a week they tell me I'm better and I can go out with the others for exercise. We walk round and round one of the yards in that castle—it is fine weather and the sky is a kind of pale blue, but the yard is a terrible sad place. The sunlight fall down and die there. I get tired walking in high heels and I'm glad when that's over.

We can talk, and one day an old woman come up and ask me for dog-ends. I don't understand, and she start muttering at me like she very vexed. Another woman tell she she mean cigarette-ends, so I say I don't smoke. But the old woman still look angry, and when we're going in she give me one push and I nearly fall down. I'm glad to get away from these people, and hear the door clang and take my shoes off.

Sometimes I think, 'I'm here because I wanted to sing' and I have to laugh. But there's a small looking glass in my cell and I see myself and I'm like somebody else. Like some strange new person. Mr Sims tell me I too thin, but what he say now to this person in the looking glass? So I don't laugh again.

Usually I don't think at all. Everything and everybody seem small and far away, that is the only trouble.

Twice the doctor come to see me. He don't say much and I don't say anything, because a uniform woman is always there. She look like she thinking, 'Now the lies start.' So I prefer not to speak. Then I'm sure they can't trip me up. Perhaps I there still, or in a worse place. But one day this happen.

We were walking round and round in the yard and I hear a woman singing—the voice come from high up, from one of the small barred windows. At first I don't believe it. Why should anybody sing here? Nobody want to sing in jail, nobody want to do anything. There's no reason, and you have no hope. I think I must be asleep, dreaming, but I'm awake all right and I see all the others are listening too. A nurse is with us that afternoon, not a policewoman. She stop and look up at the window.

It's a smoky kind of voice, and a bit rough sometimes, as if those old dark walls theyselves are complaining, because they see too much misery—too much. But it don't fall down and die in the courtyard; seems to me it could jump the gates of the jail easy and travel far, and nobody could stop it. I don't hear the words—only the music. She sing one verse and she begin another, then she break off sudden. Everybody starts walking again, and nobody says one word. But as we go in I ask the woman in front who was singing. 'That's the Holloway song,' she says. 'Don't you know it yet? She was singing from the punishment cells, and she tell the girls cheerio and never say die.' Then I have to go one way to the hospital block and she goes another so we don't speak again.

When I'm back in my cell I can't just wait for bed. I walk up and down and I think. 'One day I hear that song on trumpets and these walls will fall and rest.' I want to get out so bad I could hammer on the door, for I know now that anything can happen, and I don't want to stay lock up here and miss it.

Then I'm hungry. I eat everything they bring and in the morning I'm still so hungry I eat the porridge. Next time the doctor come he tells me I seem much better. Then I say a little of what really happen in that house. Not much. Very careful.

He look at me hard and kind of surprised. At the door he shake his finger and says, 'Now don't let me see you here again.'

That evening the woman tells me I'm going, but she's so upset about it I don't ask questions. Very early, before it's light she bangs the door open and shouts at me to hurry up. As we're going along the passages I see the girl who gave me the books. She's in a row with others doing exercises. Up Down. Up, Down Up. We pass quite close and I notice she's looking very pale and tired. It's crazy, it's all crazy. This up down business and everything else too. When they give me my money I remember I leave my compact in the cell, so I ask if I can go back for it. You should see that policewoman's face as she shoo me on.

There's no car, there's a van and you can't see through the windows. The third time it stop I get out with one other, a young girl, and it's the same magistrates' court as before.

The two of us wait in a small room, nobody else there, and after a while the girl say, 'What the hell are they doing? I don't want to spend all day here.' She go to the bell and she keep her finger press on it. When I look at her she say, 'Well what are they *for*?' That girl's face is hard like a board—she could change faces with many and you wouldn't know the difference. But she get results certainly. A policeman come in, all smiling, and we go in the court. The

same magistrate, the same frowning man sits below, and when I hear my fine is paid I want to ask who paid it, but he yells at me. 'Silence'

I think I will never understand the half of what happen, but they tell me I can go, and I understand that. The magistrate ask if I'm leaving the neighbourhood and I say yes, then I'm out in the streets again, and it's the same fine weather, same feeling I'm dreaming.

When I get to the house I see two men talking in the garden. The front door and the door of the flat are both open. I go in, and the bedroom is empty, nothing but the glare streaming inside because they take the Venetian blinds away. As I'm wondering where my suitcase is, and the clothes I leave in the wardrobe, there's a knock and it's the old lady from upstairs carrying my case packed, and my coat is over her arm. She says she sees me come in. 'I kept your things for you.' I start to thank her but she turn her back and walk away. They like that here, and better not expect too much. Too besides, I bet they tell her I'm terrible person.

I go in the kitchen, but when I see they are cutting down the big tree at the back I don't stay to watch.

At the station I'm waiting for the train and a woman asks if I feel well. 'You look so tired,' she says. 'Have you come a long way?' I want to answer, 'I come so far I lose myself on that journey.' But I tell her, 'Yes, I am quite well. But I can't stand the heat.' She says she can't stand it either, and we talk about the weather till the train come in.

I'm not frightened of them any more—after all what else can they do? I know what to say and everything go like a clock works.

I get a room near Victoria where the landlady accept one pound in advance, and next day I find a job in the kitchen of a private hotel close by. But I don't stay there long. I hear of another job going in a big store—altering ladies' dresses and I get that. I lie and tell them I work in very expensive New York shop. I speak bold and smooth faced, and they never check up on me. I make a friend there—Clarice—very light coloured, very smart, she have a lot to do with the customers and she laugh at some of them behind their backs. But I say it's not their fault if the dress don't fit. Special dress for one person only—that's very expensive in London. So it's take in, or let out all the time. Clarice have two rooms not far from the store. She furnish them herself gradual and she give parties sometimes Saturday nights. It's there I start whistling the Holloway Song. A man comes up to me and says, 'Let's hear that again.' So I whistle it again (I never sing now) and he tells me 'Not bad'. Clarice have an old piano somebody give her to store and he plays the tune, jazzing it up. I say,

'No, not like that,' but everybody else say the way he do it is first class. Well I think no more of this tell I get a letter from him telling me he has sold the song and as I was quite a help he encloses five pounds with thanks.

I read the letter and I could cry. For after all, that song was all I had. I don't belong nowhere really, and I haven't money to buy my way to belonging. I don't want to either.

But when that girl sing, she sing to me, and she sing for me. I was there because I was *meant* to be there. It was *meant* I should hear it—this I *know*.

Now I've let them play it wrong, and it will go from me like all the other songs—like everything. Nothing left for me at all.

But then I tell myself all this is foolishness. Even if they played it on trumpets, even if they played it just right, like I wanted—no walls would fall so soon. 'So let them call it jazz,' I think, and let them play it wrong. That won't make no difference to the song I heard.

I buy myself a dusty pink dress with the money.

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Theatre

JOHN WHITING

The Popular Theatre

There is a sense of innocence in those theatres where coach-loads of people roll up, pour in, roar, and pour out again. Mr Brian Rix's mug under a flat cap at the Whitehall Theatre; the nice, sexless voices of *Salad Days*; the automatic *Mousetrap* at the Ambassadors; *My Fair Lady*; all these things have a quality very hard to define, but which is at once apparent, even if you arrive on foot and not on a bus. Yes, thinking about it, I'd say the nearest you can get is a sense of innocence.

It is a direct, if debased line, from operetta. This can still be found in glory in Germany and Austria, very rightly so, and the buses roll up there, too. The curtain rises, and Putzi once more meets Mutzi, or Edwin, who is of course the son of a Prince, has once again fallen in love with Sylva, who is a noted night club singer. The plot is kept on the boil by Boni and Stasi, and we are away. The clear bright voices ring out and we are put back into a youth which never was.

It was in Munich, I think, some time ago that I came across a production of a Johann Strauss operetta which some idiot had tried to stage in a modern style. The result was disaster. Fortunately, neither singers nor orchestra seemed much affected by the ridiculous costumes and settings. The music blazed through, and all was well.

Conservatism is the life-blood of the popular theatre: radicalism its death. Clever young men must not be let into it. It carries too high a purpose for mere experiment. It has a curious faith all its own which must not be tampered with.

Fine examples, the art at its best, can still be found. At the Teatro Sistina in Rome is a piece called *Rinaldo in campo*. It is splendid. I staggered into the street well after midnight having seen only the first act which went on for over two hours. This act alone contained a fine belting tenor, comics, revolutionary songs, animals, mountain scenery, knockabout, love, patriotism, and culminated in a puppet show and chorus. There was also an actress in the lead who made our young ladies of the English theatre look very pale indeed. Starting in crinoline and pigtails the complex plot carried her to tight black trousers, shirt and cropped hair. She sang like a bird, acted like an angel, danced, both formally and acrobatically, was rolled about in a basket, had her bottom smacked, fell in love with us, the audience, as all good actresses should, and we fell in love with her. She also took the first act curtain call with great composure. I shall never know the extent of her repertoire because I crept away. Ah, we Englishmen, with our small meals and short plays! What we miss. As I left the Romans were refreshing themselves with mountains of ice-cream and going back for the rest of the play.

Of course, far from the glitter of the Teatro Sistina, the solid gaiety of the Volksoper and the tea and buns of the Whitehall, there are other, more remote, and infinitely sad places where the popular theatre is found.

It is amazing how many English provincial towns still house desperate little nomadic shows, here today, gone to-

morrow. Nobody seems to know where they come from, or where they go. Yet it is a world which will not die. John Osborne recorded it well, with love and hate, in *The Entertainer*.

Strange performances can be found on Sunday nights in French provincial theatre. In these great, echoing, bitterly cold buildings, with stages the size of football fields, tall thin ladies with despairing voices represent La Chaste Suzanne, or something of the sort, and play out hideous comedies of misunderstanding with small, fat, trembling men.

Then again, further afield, there is the very fag-end of show business. One evening last summer in the Camargue a small boy arrived at the café and stuck up a poster. It bore the face of a tiger, and the words 'Terrible Menagerie'. This could hardly be called advance publicity, for already the harsh voice of the promoter could be heard on the tannoy speakers through the village. I walked towards it. As I approached I passed a chimpanzee relieving himself against a bicycle. The white horses were starting, and looking apprehensively at a thunder-storm coming in from the sea. Brilliant lights, hung from trees, beat down on a little open circus ring which had been set up in the square by the garage. Three handsome, filthy boys were erecting tight wires and assembling a trampoline. A dark, angry woman was shaking a money box in the faces of the audience, which was very small. The animals were packed in a compartmented truck, set to one side. It is true, there was a tiger. I waited. It was obvious the numbers did not make up a quorum. Nothing could happen with these returns. No nonsense here about the show having to go on. It began to rain. The chimpanzee wiped the drops from his forehead, nodded at me, shrugged. I saluted this Archie Rice of Provence, and walked away.

The business of entertaining the public. What does the public want? Not always to laugh, it seems. An old woman coming out of a cinema, her face blotched with tears, and a ball of a handkerchief still squashed against her nose. She speaks to a friend: 'I thought that was a really terrible film, really terrible. Not a thing to be said for it. Waste of time and money. . . .' Her voice and snivelling go into the crowd. This is true.

Is it to do with our being touched by something we know to be demonstrably true, a fiction, a confidence trick upon our deepest emotions? I don't know.

When I was a small boy I lived in a part remote from theatres. One day a friend, about the same age, that is eight years old or so, came to me and said he had been to a London theatre and seen Lord Nelson on the stage. Weary sophisticate that I was I patiently explained to him that what he had seen was an actor *representing* Nelson. The boy would have none of this. He had seen Nelson in person. But Nelson was dead, I said. This made no difference. A form of re-incarnation had taken place: Nelson was there on the stage. I persisted. I began an explanation of illusion and reality, fact and fiction. This so maddened the child that he picked up a piece of lead piping which was lying by, and struck me on the head so that I fell senseless to the ground. It is a lesson I have never forgotten. And it is a lesson which might well be remembered by those who write for the popular theatre. Fact, reality if you like, has nothing to do with it.

From Lehar, Kalman, Abraham and Leo Fall we have come to the theatre of

Bernstein, Loewe and others. There is an increasing tendency to treat subjects which present problems. This may arise from American puritanism. It will not do. We must resolutely refuse to be impressed by the announcement that someone is making a musical from *The Uses of Literacy* or *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. We must yawn when we are told that the sexual problems of the young are going to be sung and danced out before us. We must turn away when a *significant* figure appears on the popular stage. If we don't make a stand about this life is going to become like one of the serious Sunday newspapers. Intolerable. A place where food and sex are classified, where you are told where to go for your holiday, and men bully you into reading this and seeing that. We have, thank God, the silly theatre. Let us cherish it.

Some years ago a clamour of voices rose from a certain place against the middle-class dramatists' treatment of the working-class. These writers, these indolent fools, it was said, never looked at life. Why did they always make working people comic? How insulting it was to represent the honest artisan as a gormless idiot. With social love working away these dissenters set about putting people on the stage as they really are. And what happened? The working people represented stayed away from such plays in their thousands. And where do they go? They go to Mr Brian Rix's theatre, the Whitehall.

And what does Mr Rix present? He puts on with loving care a series of farces with such titles as *One for the Pot*, *Dry Rot* and *Simple Spymen*. Generally playing a leading part himself, he ranges from a North Country simpleton to a young man in direct descent from the Aldwych farces of the 1920s. This may not be a wide range, but it is enough for his audience, which loves him. He has a semi-permanent company (I feel sure that Mr Rix has referred to it on more than one occasion as just one happy family) which has become adept at farce technique. Masters of the double-take, the tea-cup business, the going through the door business, virtuoso on and under a sofa, and of the funny hat, they rock the Whitehall Theatre. It says so outside.

The characters they play? (Oh, peace, Miss Littlewood.) They are of indeterminate class. Upper-lower might be the best definition. There are hen-pecked husbands, formidable landladies, nice common girls, some in bathing suits, cretinous, adenoidal maids, irate fathers, all comic, all a downright disgrace to their class. And the busloads which should have rolled up to the Theatre Royal, Stratford East, roll up to the Whitehall instead.

I am just as confused by all this as anybody else. The difference is, I take it rather less seriously than some. For the popular theatre loves to create such anomalies.

It loves to create mysteries, too. Nobody knows how the road shows of England originate, how they exist without support, and where they end. What immaculate conception creates those one night performances in Bordeaux and Lyons? And how does *The Mousetrap* keep running? This play, we are told, is in its Tenth Imperishable year. Who on earth goes to see it now? Is there some kind of permanent audience, utterly dedicated, which sees it time and time again? Has the management come to 'an arrangement'? There have been dark hints recently that the play closed after

one night, but that some paranoiac has created the myth of this monstrous run. This might bear investigation, because it is very difficult to find anybody who has actually seen the play.

This is all good stuff, though, well in line with the tradition and philosophy of show business. How it warms the heart to pass a theatre where a musical has opened the night before and see the notice 'Booking now for 1984'.

Such traditions must be respected. There have been too many inroads made into the popular theatre in the last few years. We have seen the musical in danger of becoming a social document. People have started adapting Dickens and Shaw. We must protect the amorous prawns of our theatre. Miss Evelyn Laye and Miss Cicely Courtneidge must never be allowed to appear in a play by Mr Arnold Wesker. The problems of *Probation Officer* must be kept to the little dark screen.

'The Countess Rosalie, deeply in love with Stefan, although secretly engaged to the repulsive Baron von Klopstenheim, retires to her castle. Her devoted friend, Blonda, madly in love with the Gypsy, Zstzy, although secretly engaged to the highly laughable Sosi Pfitzner, welcomes her. The gypsy band is heard. . . .'

Oh, yes, it is the thing. Quite definitely the thing.

Ballet

OLEG KERENSKY

The Dance as Drama

What is ballet? Twenty-five years or so ago, people thought they knew. Ballet was the Russian Ballet, as revealed to the West by Diaghilev and his successors; it consisted largely of one-act works of the type invented by the choreographer Michel Fokine. Fokine had not only created an enormous number of new ballets, which were staple items of the repertoire. He was also thought to have created the New Ballet, based on reforming principles which he himself had enunciated.

His memoirs[1] show that he himself originally thought he had inaugurated a new era in ballet, sweeping away frivolous and inartistic earlier works. Later he came to see, to his bitter regret, that younger choreographers broke or ignored his cherished principles. One of these was that dancing and mime have no meaning unless they are used to express dramatic action; another was that ballet should allow for complete equality with the companion arts of music and scenic design. For years it became generally accepted that dance, drama, music and decor are more or less equal ingredients in this thing called ballet.

Now, however, Fokine's works no longer form the basis of any repertoire. One of them, 'Les Sylphides', has certainly become a 'must', being performed by every company from the largest and most established to the smallest touring groups. It is danced far more often, in far more countries, than any other ballet, though most of these performances would not have satisfied Fokine or his principles. 'Carnaval', 'Spectre de la Rose', 'Prince Igor', 'The Firebird', 'Petrouchka' and 'Scheherazade' are all revived fairly frequently, but none of them are really top

[1] *Fokine, Memoirs of a Ballet Master*; Constable and Co. Ltd, 42s.

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favourites with today's ballet public. The rest of Fokine's eighty ballets are almost entirely forgotten. His very success in fusing all the arts, and in taking such care over production details, makes his ballets more elusive and more difficult to revive successfully than works which depend simply on dancing. (One may be shocked, but one can surely understand the question put by the ex-Soviet dancer Rudolf Nureyev after seeing his first 'Firebird' recently at Covent Garden: 'But where is the choreography?')

Instead of Fokine's works, ballets which break or ignore his principles now dominate the repertoires of the world's leading ballet companies. These ballets are the old pre-Fokine classics, the new full-evening works modelled on those classics, and modern 'abstract' ballets. Dancing for its own sake, which Fokine regarded as a frivolity, is more popular than ever and ballet dancers have reached new heights of applause-winning virtuosity. The ballerina's short tutu, which Fokine called 'repulsive' and thought fit only for the Follies, has become even shorter and more revealing. And so on. . . .

Has ballet slipped back, then, into the decadent state it was assumed to be in before Fokine raised it to the level of Art? Or were the claims made by and for Fokine exaggerated and misleading? I suspect that many of the older generation of ballet-goers and critics still cling, consciously or unconsciously, to Fokine's principles, on which they were reared. This probably accounts for the poor critical reception given in London to the New York City Ballet (whose repertoire consists almost entirely of George Balanchine's 'abstract' ballets), for the disappointment expressed in many quarters about such Frederick Ashton ballets as 'Les Deux Pigeons' (which uses a naïve story and an undistinguished, though tuneful, score as excuses for original and exciting dancing), for the bewilderment caused by the Leningrad Ballet (whose productions clearly subordinated decor and drama to the dance), and for the general feeling of dissatisfaction which pervades much writing about present-day ballet.

This dissatisfaction is made explicit, for example, by Mr A. V. Coton, one of the most senior and experienced British critics, in his contributions to a controversial new symposium[1] which discusses this and many other problems of ballet today. He pleads specifically for a return to Fokine's principles.

Yet what do these principles mean in practice? They mean an attempt to restrict ballet to one particular form—the highly integrated, expressive one-act work in which Fokine himself excelled. Let us see what happens if we apply the principles to the contemporary repertoire.

The old classics are ruled out because they are too artificial. The dramatic action is interrupted by irrelevant pas de deux and divertissements, by applause and by dancers taking calls. The costumes are usually inappropriate to the period and social status of the characters; the story is told in stereotyped conventional mime.

Of course everyone will agree that the classics should be produced as convincingly as possible, though I doubt if many people would really want Giselle or Swanilda to be dressed precisely like a peasant girl. But surely all these con-

[1] *Ballet Here and Now*, by Clive Barnes, A. V. Coton and Frank Jackson; Dennis Dobson, 21s.

ventions which Fokine condemned are just as easy to accept as any of the other conventions which we must inevitably accept every time we go to the theatre. Ballet, in particular, must of its nature be a highly artificial and conventional art; it can never be wholly realistic, thank goodness. I do not believe it is any more difficult to be convinced and moved by Swan Lake or Giselle, for all their artificialities and conventions, than it is to believe in Fokine's puppet Petrouchka coming to life or his Spectre of the Rose dancing with a sleeping maiden.

The new 'abstract' ballets are ruled out because 'dancing has no meaning in ballet unless it is expressive of dramatic action'. What nonsense this is! Balanchine, Ashton, Kenneth MacMillan and others have shown us that movement can have meaning just by adding an extra dimension to music, that it can be aesthetically satisfying like painting or sculpture, or physically exciting like athletics. They have shown too that human emotions can be engaged without any specific dramatic action. Even Fokine's 'Les Sylphides', evocative though it is, can hardly be said to have 'dramatic action'.

Ballets without scenery or costumes, performed against plain curtains or a cyclorama in practice dress, are presumably ruled out too, for violating the equality of ballet with scenic design. Yet a moment's thought shows that ballet can exist without decor; it can even exist, some choreographers have shown, without music. It obviously cannot exist without movement; there can no more be ballet without movement than opera without singing. Therefore the quality of the movement invented by the choreographer of a ballet, and the quality of its execution by the dancers, are not of equal importance with the other ingredients; they are paramount.

This argument does not diminish Fokine's importance as the creator of a new type of ballet, which made history and enriched the international repertoire, influencing all his successors. The point is that he did not *change* the whole nature of ballet, as he himself thought. He did something much more valuable—he *extended* it. As Mr Clive Barnes argues, our modern choreographers are now combining many of the virtues of Fokine with those of his predecessor Petipa and, given adequate financial support, they will continue to develop and enlarge the nature of ballet. One of the glories of ballet is its variety. It cannot be restricted, as various pundits keep trying to do, to pure dance, or to mime-drama, or to lyrical poeticism, or to the perfect blend of dance, drama, music and design. It embraces all these things, and may embrace many more besides.

Selected Books

JOHN DOUGLAS PRINGLE

THE ENGLISH GENTLEMAN by Simon Raven. *(Blond. 21s.)*
JOHN BULL'S SCHOOLDAYS. Edited by Brian Inglis. *(Hutchinson. 18s.)*

A few weeks ago I read a letter in the *New Statesman* in which the following passage appeared. (It was written, I think, by a nuclear disarmer, though he did not make it very clear.)

> I suggest we are in the hands of men beyond intelligence, reason and

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The new 'abstract' ballets are ruled out because 'dancing has no meaning in ballet unless it is expressive of dramatic action'. What nonsense this is! Balanchine, Ashton, Kenneth MacMillan and others have shown us that movement can have meaning just by adding an extra dimension to music, that it can be aesthetically satisfying like painting or sculpture, or physically exciting like athletics. They have shown too that human emotions can be engaged without any specific dramatic action. Even Fokine's 'Les Sylphides', evocative though it is, can hardly be said to have 'dramatic action'.

Ballets without scenery or costumes, performed against plain curtains or a cyclorama in practice dress, are presumably ruled out too, for violating the equality of ballet with scenic design. Yet a moment's thought shows that ballet can exist without decor; it can even exist, some choreographers have shown, without music. It obviously cannot exist without movement; there can no more be ballet without movement than opera without singing. Therefore the quality of the movement invented by the choreographer of a ballet, and the quality of its execution by the dancers, are not of equal importance with the other ingredients; they are paramount.

This argument does not diminish Fokine's importance as the creator of a new type of ballet, which made history and enriched the international repertoire, influencing all his successors. The point is that he did not *change* the whole nature of ballet, as he himself thought. He did something much more valuable—he *extended* it. As Mr Clive Barnes argues, our modern choreographers are now combining many of the virtues of Fokine with those of his predecessor Petipa and, given adequate financial support, they will continue to develop and enlarge the nature of ballet. One of the glories of ballet is its variety. It cannot be restricted, as various pundits keep trying to do, to pure dance, or to mime-drama, or to lyrical poeticism, or to the perfect blend of dance, drama, music and design. It embraces all these things, and may embrace many more besides.

Selected Books

JOHN DOUGLAS PRINGLE

THE ENGLISH GENTLEMAN by Simon Raven. *(Blond. 21s.)*
JOHN BULL'S SCHOOLDAYS. Edited by Brian Inglis. *(Hutchinson. 18s.)*

A few weeks ago I read a letter in the *New Statesman* in which the following passage appeared. (It was written, I think, by a nuclear disarmer, though he did not make it very clear.)

> I suggest we are in the hands of men beyond intelligence, reason and

AESOP-TO-DATE

The Early Bird and the Elephants

A singing Bird did so entrance
A pair of simple Elephants
That they implored the songstress tell
What was it made her sing so well.
It must at least be Guinness Stout
That brought such rapturous
twitt'rings out.

Alas! the eager pachyderms
Found that her diet was of worms,
And though at first they were upset,
They said "We'll trill like Birdie yet,"
And started singing semitones
On Things they dug up under stones.

At length one day at crack of dawn
Their trumpetings announced the morn.
The neighbourhood so rudely stirred
Not only gave them both the bird,
But further concerts they implied
Might end in elephanticide.

The Moral: Nature knows what's best.
And that's where Guinness stands the test,
For barley malt and yeast and hops
Make this a drink that's really tops.
And music-makers can go far
On several Guinness to the bar.

Guinness is good for you—and me

G.E.3675.D

> sanity. Surely, for a man to give over his life to the headless discipline of Service life is scarcely intelligent. A man who allows himself to be trained to suppress, extinguish or wipe out any resistance to his own particular brand of patriotism is hardly reasonable. And the man who dedicates one half of his life to his wife and family, while the other half presupposes he will make them widow and orphans at the first opportunity is hardly sane.

I suppose it was this sort of attitude which provoked Simon Raven to write his amusing book in defence of *The English Gentleman*. For when the abuse is subtracted, this letter almost exactly describes what generations of Englishmen regarded, with genuine approval, as the proper duty of an officer and a gentleman. Voluntarily to accept the discipline of Service life, to train himself to fight for his country, to put his duty to his country before his obligations to his family, and finally, if need be, to give his life—what more could a man do?

Simon Raven, who is as intelligent as he is amusing, would admit, of course, that nuclear weapons have made this sort of thing a little vieux jeu. Indeed the whole thesis of his book is not only that the military functions of the gentleman are outmoded, but that the moral code by which he judged himself and others is also out of date. 'The traditional gentleman, one, that is, whose life is founded in truth, honour and obligation, has been done down by certain hostile social pressures, envy and materialism being paramount among them. These pressures have compelled him either to abandon his standards of excellence, or, if he should retain them, to recognize that they are unwanted anachronisms, objects at best of mockery and at worst of hatred.'

The English Gentleman, then, is a lament for a vanished class. In order to side-step the charge of romantic snobbery Simon Raven neatly disclaims the title of gentleman for himself, pointing out (with splendid lack of reticence) that one who has been expelled from Charterhouse 'for the usual thing', sent down from King's College, Cambridge, for refusing to pay his bills, and encouraged to leave his regiment because of gambling debts, could hardly hope to qualify. To make doubly sure, he has also invented an Aunt Sally which he calls the upper class (as distinct from gentlemen) consisting of those very few, very rich men and women who appear in the gossip columns of the popular press. I find this disingenuous and—dare I say it?—dishonourable. I prefer Mr Raven when he has the courage of his convictions.

Nearly everything Simon Raven says about the English Gentleman proper seems to me to be true, though historians may quibble about his description of the gentleman's origins and others may find his model, Sir Matthew Tench, almost as boring as Mr Evelyn Waugh's Crouchback. Where I quarrel with him is his apparent assumption that such qualities as honour, independence, a sense of obligation and loyalty are confined to that class. I should have thought, for instance, that they could be found just as easily at the coal-face, let us say, of a Durham mine-field; and I cannot see that it is less self-sacrificing for a Scottish (or Australian) working man to volunteer to fight the Germans than for Sir Matthew Tench.

The great fault of this well-written but rather muddled book is not that Simon Raven overrates the English

Gentleman but that he underrates the English people. They are not nearly so despicable as he seems to imagine. Is it really true, for instance, that they distrust and resent personal excellence? (What about Bertrand Russell, Winston Churchill, Father Huddlestone, Aneurin Bevan?) Does the public really want 'a chaste army'? (They are not chaste themselves.) Obviously there is a case to be made against democracy, but it's no use trying to make it by attributing every possible fault to 'the public' or 'the people' without any attempt at proof or argument.

It is true, of course, that only a minority of any class will *naturally* have the virtues and qualities Simon Raven praises. The rest will have to be taught. That is where the public school comes in. For if the public school had any purpose at all, it was a deliberate attempt to impress these virtues on an elite. This point—almost the whole point, I should have thought—seems to escape nearly all the contributors to *John Bull's Schooldays* except Simon Raven himself. They complain, with amusing detail and often with admirable style, that they were unhappy at school, and Brian Inglis, the editor, points out that the more their parents paid for their education the more unhappy they seemed to be. But public schools, at least until the last war, were not trying to make boys happy: they were trying to make them honourable, independent, accustomed to endure pain and hardship without complaining, loyal to some larger unit—house, school, country—disciplined and capable of leadership. On the whole—pace Brian Inglis, who makes my own school, Shrewsbury, sound like Belsen—the best of them succeeded. Of course there was a price to be paid. Sensitive boys, like Brian Inglis and myself, were often miserable. Conformism and 'the code' suppressed some, though not all, individuality. The arts, though not learning, were neglected. It is easy enough to criticize the public schools as a system of education, but it is not much use writing about them unless you see what they were all about.

Of the twenty-five contributors, only half of whom went to public schools themselves, Malcolm Muggeridge gets nearest the truth when he says that his own education, at a Borough Secondary School, 'had the great advantage that it made practically no mark upon those subject to it. Scholastic and other deficiencies were more than compensated for by the fact that one's first vivid impressions of life were provided, not by a closed and essentially homosexual community of schoolboys under the direction of masters who had themselves been through the same process, but by men and women actually living and earning their living. How much I preferred the ribald, noisy, dangerous world to any walled garden, however elegantly arranged and full of summer fragrance! No one ever seems to forget Eton. I easily forgot my Borough Secondary School.'

I accept this as true, and think—like Simon Raven, Malcolm Muggeridge, most of the twenty-five other contributors and the Labour Party—that public schools are now out of date in their present form. But we might still be able to learn something from the public schools about how to give as many boys and girls as possible a sense of honour, truth and obligation. It is at best arguable that what was good for the gentlemen of England, might be good for everyone else.

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RONALD GASKELL

COLLECTED POEMS by Ronald Bottrall. *(Sidgwick and Jackson. 25s.)*

THE RE-ORDERING OF THE STONES by Jon Silkin. *(Chatto and Windus with the Hogarth Press. 12s. 6d.)*

HOWRAH BRIDGE by James K. Baxter. *(O.U.P. 10s. 6d.)*

THE EARLY DROWNED by Hilary Corke. *(Secker and Warburg. 15s.)*

The collected poems of Ronald Bottrall represent thirty years' work, from *The Loosening* of 1931 to poems of the last year or two. Few of them are not worth reading and reading again. The writing, if occasionally awkward, is never slack or glib.

The earliest pieces make a determined attempt to see the rootless life of industrial England clearly, not in the sharply lit perspective of the Marxist but in a wider, more humane context:

> Not for nothing was I born
> Within earshot of that iron sea, where
> Across the hedge the calf milked
> Its mother astride the webbed dew and the share
> Yearly uptore fresh paths beckoning the seed
> To a resurrection.

There is no nostalgia. For opposed to the disorder of power-house stacks and girder-ribs is not the rhythm of an older, agricultural way of life, but the alertness and balance of a mind living in the present. The senses are alive, under the scrutiny of a mistrustful intelligence. Hence images are used not to realize personal experience (experience itself is mistrusted) but to illustrate an argument. The point made, the image is discarded.

It is partly this logical play of images, partly the formality of the diction, that gives the poems their cerebral cast. The writing is difficult because it is grappling with emotions of some complexity. The parallel, in fact, is not with Auden but with Eliot and Pound, from whom Bottrall has learned a good deal. And the limitations of his early work are a reminder of how recalcitrant, to any but the most powerful imagination, is the material they engaged. The innovations of *Mauberley* and *The Waste Land*—the disruption of syntax, the intensification of metaphor, the recourse to allusion—were not just ways of invigorating a moribund poetic tradition but a strategy for dealing with the collapse of a civilization; and perhaps only men whose consciousness was formed before the crack-up could find the strength to master it.

To say that Bottrall learned from Pound and Eliot is not to say that his verse is parasitic. His debt is not for images nor, except in a few professed imitations, for rhythms. What he owes to Pound and Eliot is an artistic stance, at once detached from the emotional banality of our society and committed to an inspection of its confusions. The astringent phrasing, the flat, controlled rhythms are his own. They combine to form a poetry that rewards the attention it exacts: though a poetry that convinces the intellect and moral judgement rather than the imagination.

This description would have to be qualified for one or two poems in Bottrall's second and third volumes. But

it is in his fourth, *Farewell and Welcome*, that his writing is most assured. If the themes are less ambitious here, there is still an awareness of difficulties that are more than personal. Three or four lyrics ('Assignments', 'Icarus', 'One Cornishman to Another') have a remarkable intensity of feeling, and something of this intensity is carried over into the analyses of love ('Evidence Evalued', 'Orders of Love', 'The Middle Kingdom'). The sustained energy of syntax in these poems and the discretion with which images are used point to a study of the *Four Quartets*; but the Quartets have been studied intelligently, their rhetorical and linguistic strength understood. The result is impressive.

Bottrall's work rarely has the rhythmic inevitability that commands immediate assent. It is rather, as here, the trained, ironic intelligence of the writing that makes the best of his poetry durable. It comes through, to take another example, in the sestet of a recent sonnet, 'Attic Shepherd':

> Now the sweet sour smell of sweated leather
> And clothes hanging heavy as a wet fleece
> On the patched cob walls in the scrawny heather
>
> Shape me a shepherd ragged at the knees
> Bones crying out from the frost-bitten weather
> With a dried-up past, no present, and no peace.

Jon Silkin's new collection, though a good deal more limited, has something of the same intellectual and moral grip. The notation is exact, the verse closely knit. Sometimes the writing is so curt, the rhythm so faint, that the result is a miniature moral essay rather than a poem ('Respectabilities', 'The Measure', 'The Wall'). Yet the half dozen best pieces in the book have a precision and a discriminating charity that are valuable. The principal themes—weakness, solitude, pain—are defined through the recurrent imagery of stones and the terse, impermeable phrasing. That this laconic style can deal effectively with other themes is evident in a poem on Geneva:

> The river drifts through
> The town, falling massively
> Under a low bridge.

Nor is the precision simply, or even primarily, sensuous. The poem proceeds to an analysis of this city, where

> The life of a great
> Intelligent continent
> Falls through the space
> It has made in itself
> With too much intellect.

In two poems at the end of the book a love relationship is analysed with comparable force. The rhythmic impulse is still meagre rather than disciplined, but the accuracy of the phrasing holds the reality of the experience clear.

Mr Baxter is content with a softer focus. As in his previous volume *(In Fires of No Return)* he feels most at home with a predictable iambic beat; and the emotion, though genuine, is often too slight to hold the stanzas taut. The diction is vivid rather than incisive, the imagery picturesque. A first, and even a second, reading is agreeable.

'Remember, Odysseus,
How day climbed from the cave
Of the summer nymph. Exhaustion
Following the deep spondaic thrust,
Honeysuckle, arbutus,
Trailing down the rock of lust,

A belly like a brown gourd,
Broad nostrils, mouth of broken clay
Beside the talkative island wave . . .'

But the rhythmic interest of this is unusual, the ineffectiveness of the sixth line characteristic. Mr Baxter is most successful in the wry appraisal of 'Election 1960' and in one or two ballads where a vigorous regular metre is appropriate. But after the bone and muscle of Mr Bottrall's work, or Mr Silkin's at its best, this is an easy-going poetry.

Hilary Corke's first volume, too, is decidedly relaxed. The writing is fluent, colourful:

Sleep, calm winter sleep, the rides are woollen
Over the dreaming roots, thick snow in sunlight
Is sugar under the trees, wool or sugar,
Immaculate, crystalline, soft. All night this has fallen.

Too often a sensuous and emotional facility seems to release these poems at a good deal less than half pressure. But Mr Corke's style is evidently still unformed, and there are signs towards the end of the book that this facility has been recognized.

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