

# NEW VERSE

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## POETRY AND POLITICS

*Their turns of thought and language are too much raised above a vulgar audience, and fit only for persons of an higher education.*

ISAAC WATTS

**I**N THE LAST NUMBER OF NEW VERSE, Geoffrey Grigson successfully confused the issues raised by Stephen Spender in his essay on Poetry and Revolution. These are important issues for readers of NEW VERSE, so I ask them to pay attention while I start all over again.

It is probably true that in the form of controversy, no good will come from printed discussions of poetry. As controversy, Stephen Spender's essay might be contradicted in every line. For example:

Of human activities, writing poetry is the most revolutionary. A successful poem does not call a halt. It gives the order to march.

The sense of balance that follows is that of the bicyclist—balance in motion. The problem which the poem solves is not the poem's but the poet's problem. As a consequence of the poem it is the poet, or his reader, who moves. There is no world but the world and that world is the poem's world.

If there were such a thing as essentially poetic material, this would mean that a certain number of things contained aristotelian poetic essences; that the mind would poeticise some things and not others. But this belies the original poetic nature of the mind. There is an order in which things will be poeticised, but the mind is a poetic instrument and so is poetic despite itself even when it sets out to be scientific, as any text-book proves. "Thinking" can never escape its origins. The early concepts are fantastic; "thought" emerges as an accommodation of fantasy to the logic demanded by practice. Words generalise experiences. Poems are complex words. Words and poems survive if they are relevant to the experiences of many people in many places at many times. "Sprache, das praktische, auch für andere Menschen existierende, also auch für mich selbst existierende, wirkliche Bewusstsein."

But if we are going to do more than contradict each other, we must realise that there is a sense in which a poem is separate from the rest of experience, and a sense in which it is continuous with it. In the latter sense it will be shared and used. The two senses are always present, but one or the other may be the more conscious. Each has its own survival value—good private poetry is likely to be handed on from one small group to another for a long time; bad private poetry will perish instantly. Good public poetry is more easily replaceable but by the wideness of its influence has in the end a longer life than any, and forms the main stream to which the rest are tributaries. Second-rate public poetry may flourish for a time, but in the end falls flattest of all. This gives two standards for poetry—subtlety for the few, vitality for the many. The admitted fault today is the partition of verse between these two. Crusaders for minorities or majorities are likely to go wrong if they do not realise this. That is why Spender's analysis was one-sided, and why by contradicting him I might have missed the point.

The "danger" which Spender recognises is not the result of over-

doing politics. Poetical poetry has suited in the past; political poetry, very well. But poetical politics will never do:

*Crazy parrots and canaries flew west  
Drunk with Maytime revelations  
Crossed the Appalachians.*

We must certainly be on our guard against political feelings taken at third hand. But the remedy is as certainly not to be found in keeping out of politics. It is not a question to be decided by our two standards of subtlety and vitality; but by a third standard, that of competence, which includes originality.

In 1933, the separatists are definitely returning from their "little worlds of the imagination". Some however still regard themselves as separatists:

*The city builds its horror in my brain.  
This writing is my only wings away.*

These poets cannot settle down. They are to be found with a knapsack in the Tyrol, or sitting in a Café at Perugia. Though they have the sense of continuity, their poems are acts of suspension from it; they get relief from speaking of the horrors they have seen and from pictures fulfilling their wishes for a better world—not another world, but this world remodelled. They can therefore be read as propaganda, though not written as such.

But there exists another category: those who have got jobs, mostly as schoolmasters. Their poems are not separate from the rest of their activity:

*The clocks strike ten: the tea is on the stove  
And up the stair come voices that I love.*

This is someone who likes his job, summing it up after a hard day's work, and laying plans for the future. His poems are a running over of the sense of activity, not a solidification away from it. His sense of the breach is disappearing:

*You need us more than you suppose  
And you could help us if you chose.*

To this poet and those like him, Spender's dictum "our artists should not be led astray into practical politics" seems just a tem-

peramental aversion to activity. "He will go out into the street and walk down to the harbour. He will go to the small club behind the Geisha Café. He will ask whether there is a meeting tonight. At first he may be regarded with suspicion, even taken as a police spy. And quite naturally. He will have to prove himself, to prove that he isn't a mere neurotic, an untrustworthy freak. It will take time. But it is the only hope. He will at least have made a start."

C. H. MADGE

## PHALLUS IN WONDERLAND

I shall draw strange fowl from this foul nest.

WEBSTER

GRAMMARIAN:

"Prima coitio est acerrima" (Terence);  
 In 1889 I first encountered woman  
 And copulated unsatisfactorily  
 Owing to ignorance.

ANTICHRIST:

The soul rises  
 Persistently, like yeast;  
 The curate eagerly pursues  
 The prurient attitudes  
 Of the full-grown priest.

CRITIC:

Rudyard Kipling has  
 "Immortalised" Surrey;  
 Euripides lies entombed  
 In Professor Gilbert Murray.

Cherries in brandy are  
 Passive to the eye and docile;  
 Time, Place and Genius  
 Re-appear as fossil.

Water, falling from the air,  
 Is hard earth's solvent;  
 The wind blowing over hardens both  
 And shows the way the mole went.

Ice deals in details,  
 Picturing hard and subtle;  
 It is the back-thrown ink-cloud  
 Obscures the deep sea cuttle.

## GRAMMARIAN:

"Non cuivis homini  
 Contingit adire Corinthum": but I have hopes  
 And I am writing a commentary  
 (With marginal notes) on Dr Marie Stopes.

## ANCIENT:

I have driven many parasangs into the wilderness  
 Of human inconsistencies and fears  
 And have discovered no oasis  
 Undried by passage of years.

My borders are stocked with pelargonia  
 Whose distended fragrance hits the sense  
 Pleasingly, pleasingly.  
 The drowsy hum of the Romantics  
 Is in keeping with the reliquiae  
 That straw my sanctuaries  
 And the sundial has an old inscription  
 That induces reveries.

## STUDENT:

While the Persians  
 Undoubtedly were given to  
 Several interesting perversions

I consider  
 The political customs of England  
 Were, in growth, far rapider.

## ANCIENT:

When the end comes and my sensoria  
 Cannot pick up Wordsworth on any wave-length  
 The ironists will say: "Sic transit gloria  
 Mundi". I shall not have strength  
 To quote the appropriate Tennyson  
 And soon I shall be "nearer Nature"  
 Than all the ornithologists and flower-enthusiasts.

## CHORUS:

Let him drink hellebore,  
 Since he will be,  
 As he knows, in time  
 An usufructuary of Ge.

## THE SAPIENT MAN:

The application of standards  
 Has led me to be called an "intellectual snob"  
 By the hairy partisans of true Unwisdom,  
 Whose clash of fives gloves serves to them as swords,  
 While the movement of the ball is their delight  
 As it finds its secret corners fishlike  
 In its unenclosed aquarium.

## PERSON:

My friends are pleasant.  
 How long they will continue so  
 I do not know,  
 Yet if there were Hell or Heaven  
 I would wish them out of the fiery lake  
 For sentiment's sake.

## YOUNG MAN:

Only three buttons on her bosom  
 Winked at me in the light;  
 Yet I thought of Herrick  
 Half the night.

Many theologians have donned  
The triple-breasted waistcoat of The Word  
Without inheriting the wit  
Implied in the verb,

And have obscured, unsolved, the problem  
Of Individual and Fate;  
The waistcoat in fact, though ornamental,  
Was lunatic and strait.

OBSERVER:

The hair over the forehead, the straight body,  
The upward eye  
May show proficiency at golf or swimming  
Yet betray a man to women.

All things in love continue flowing;  
The pleasure-going  
Lip, haste-bitten, will bleed  
And men emit seed.

PUBLIC SCHOOLBOY:

Though as lustful as a stallion  
I behave like a scullion;  
Kissing housemaids in linen-cupboard or pantry  
Is the height of my gallantry.

POET OF THE GENERATION:

We are swept away by a strange tide.  
Did Mr Eliot at Hyde  
Park Corner in 1917 boarding a bus  
Foresee it? He was not born in us

But we in him.  
He gave us a voice, straightened each limb,  
Set us a few mental exercises  
And left us to our own devices.

At first we ran up trees in distraction,  
 Mimicked his every action,  
 But now are back on earth again  
 Sheltered by a gourd and sane.

INDIVIDUALIST:

How can a man "live fully"  
 Sealed in his psychic cell  
 Or in a narrow playground  
 With entrances: Sight, Taste, Hearing, Touch, Smell?

SCIENTIST:

...Evolution, you see, has no appeal—  
 No human interest,  
 So that no woman in the gallery would clap her hands,  
 Stamp her feet or sweat in her vest.

POET:

Blowing my trumpery trumpet,  
 Looking for hounds for my horn,  
 Shall I revert to ancient themes  
 And wish that I'd never been born?

No use: for man is created  
 Lower than angels and higher than hedgehogs.  
 Nor day-dreams nor comfort sustain him,  
 Romantic poets nor fur rugs.

MAJOR:

Novels by ladies  
 From York to Cadiz,  
 Deified Appeal  
 From Bombay to Louisville,  
 Cinema and press and evening dress  
 Bring conversation to the Officers' Mess.



“LOVE THY NEIGHBOUR AS THYSELF”:

I cannot live in another man's skin.  
I cannot grow fat when he grows fat,  
Grow thin when he grows thin.

I cannot live in another man's flat.  
I cannot live in a spider's web  
Or the hole of a mole or a rat.

I cannot feel beyond myself,  
Feel with the fly in its agony  
Or the spider unlow on a shelf.

I am shut in, short-circuited;  
And of this kingdom the ruler  
My own brain in my own head.

PROMISCUOUS PERSON:

A car's head-light seen behind trees,  
Erotic light behind a blind:  
Can re-create the lust of the body  
In the pantheistic mind.

PSYCHO:

A man puts his hand down a woman's dress,  
Presses a curve;  
The curve on the graph of his loneliness.

A man without woman is quite alone.  
She at his birth  
With inconstant light as a star shone.

She, as his lover, was predestined  
To dance with him,  
Shaking his cocktails in the West End....

## ANCIENT:

Deliver me from fornication and hockey.  
 Let me not see the fool leaning over my fence.  
 The best sweet peas are Surrey's and Kent's  
 And an horse cannot win without a jockey.  
 These are axiomatic, desires and riddles;  
 Eighty years of pushing the pedals  
 Has led me to these as my goal.  
 Now I cannot see the light I sought  
 But am blind, as a mole.

## YOUTH:

There is an energy that works in me,  
 Drives me like an engine or a tin me.  
 This is the force that would split my coffin-boards  
 If its loss were not the occasion for those funereal gauds.

## SENSUALIST:

Perfume can make me love,  
 Challenging like a glove,  
 Meeting me face to face,  
 When flight is disgrace.

Touching can make me lust,  
 Before bright senses rust,  
 Pushing me over the cliff  
 Before my lips can say "If".

Hearing a softened voice  
 Presents me with a choice:  
 Shall I believe what it says,  
 Or we go our ways?

Seeing can make me ache,  
 But not for a tooth's sake,  
 Ache with the whole of me,  
 Knowing I am not free.

## AMBITIONIST:

I should like to see  
Better become best;  
I should like to see the savage  
Wear both shirt and vest.

I should like to see  
The Daily Press  
Taking its cues  
From the weekly reviews.

## THE GREAT:

We do not see the resurrectory gibbet;  
We do not hear our brains dissected in the lecture room;  
When our equestrian statues are dusted  
We do not feel the feather-broom.

The lack of sense can bring  
Certain definite compensations;  
We cannot read the ironic obituaries  
Tastefully written by our near relations.

## GHOST OF THE ANCIENT:

Now the gardener's boy who  
Makes water on my careful flower-beds  
Is more than me: and yet we both complete  
The nitrogen cycle. For soon I'll rot,  
Manure for daffodils and tulips—

But the young continue to be young  
And the old continue to be old.  
If two faces differ it is only by centimetres  
And one cannot show mysteries to a foetus.

If a millennium come or a triumph  
I shall be under the hooves of the horses.  
Although I too have lived and been  
The man in the saddle is not my kin.

GAVIN EWART

**NEW VERSE**

It seems to be in so much doubt  
What all of this is all about  
And what is what we are without

And if there is an is at all  
Beyond whatever it is we call  
The where we are as usual

And any noun that we can find  
Is it in sight or out of mind  
And whether of another kind...

So it is easier to try  
Keeping away from all that, why  
Wondering round-the-corner I

For if our ghost-or-skeleton keys  
Should ever fit such locks as these  
Inside it may be well there is

Mouth and a gap, teeth and in  
The crack to slip, prick bubble-skin  
Pass out and let the other win.

CHARLES MADGE

**BUT  
BETWEEN FLOWER AND FLOWER**

Not, not longer  
Lover's complications  
Not agitations, negotiations of new beauty  
On platforms of tube stations  
Not marigold profusion  
    Sown by self  
But order of correct path  
But sanction  
Of elegant border  
But disciplined spickness of gladioli  
Drawn up, drawn  
Strict  
At attention?

But  
Between flower and flower  
But hellsheath, but  
Icecrag of Asia

But why but why  
Shall I cross them?

MARTIN BOLDERO

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**THE THAMES NEAR ITS SOURCE**

Here at original source, in water meadows  
here I have retreated, am pacing it to and fro,  
testing a tendon, trying a muscle's ease,  
watching the Thames, its quickening silver division,  
knowing its flowing, paces, swift approaches,  
and bridges, whirlpools, arches and hesitations,  
how it will become tidal.

Now it is April, metal the skies, taut over, steep above  
awakened orchards, cornlands.  
Branches, the bearing wood pointing all pointing growth,  
bending in sapling strength  
braced with the wind's strict tension.  
And the roan mare, her fullness anxious now,  
is pacing careful, wary of her foaling.

Now it is plain: here avenues, ways begin,  
April to June, river to tidal basin,  
this summer's crop and new stock on the farm.  
This is where I, abashed to hesitate,  
in eagerness must pause, and O my love,  
certain that I must gather strength, with you  
tidal become, the traffic way for ships.

JOHN PUDNEY

## SUMMER DOGGEREL

One day down-sitting in the purple sun  
 That green with orange cloves stood in my eyes,  
 Beside the smell of meadow-sweet and weeds,  
 Platform for zebraed insect and blue fly  
 And green, and gold; sitting in cotton dress  
 All pink and billowy and girlish-garden,  
 I heard a clatter in the yard behind,  
 The clump of hob-nailed boots, and starting, saw  
 A staring sweep, with windmill brushes cocked  
 Like feathery One o'clocks, upon his shoulder.  
 So black he looked and grim, I'd rather  
 Daun Pluto, his father.

ELIZABETH HEATON

## EARTHSCAPE

they are excavating under the briars of Paestum  
 a parian fragment of an old Goddess:  
 tackle is hoisting  
 the earthy torso up.  
 the season is nearly over  
 and russet roseleaves in recognition  
 deserting hips and sere bedeguars  
 sacrifice themselves  
 in libation Upon her.  
 she is Cold as they prise her up:  
 they are forcing her out of season:  
 for spring is her time, whoever she,  
 spring is her time to return  
 not this,  
 unrecognised by spade or diggers  
 another to join many  
 a goddess evading collection.

her Return from death to antiquity  
 the fall of a crabapple is pointing  
 like a single bell.

on sard hard ledge of a distant mountain  
 a drab clad man  
 is he sitting? standing?  
 too minute for a thick finger to indicate.

walls of a harem in a narrow street  
 are peeling open:  
 corner of a house on the opposite side disclosing  
 half a group of women, looking:  
 as thirsty enclosed cattle look  
 on boats that row up and down a river:  
 with large round eyes  
 on orientals thronging the streets  
 merchandising without wine  
 obedient to books their authors have forgotten.  
 the stripes on the feminine clothes  
 Swing to the distant rock:  
 but the Scale is incommensurate.

miniature parables  
 to the sun does he compose?  
 among the stars hymenopterous mysteries?  
 and humbly lay his forehead on the rock?

heraldic Light is quartering the escutcheon,  
 how Dare we call this sunlight pitiless?  
 tenderly it warms the chilled widowed,  
 only in daylight the tortured wife has peace,  
 gently it revives dim philosophers,  
 compensates exhausted gunners  
 moleminers and batclerks  
 and trousered savages knowing only  
 that something has changed in the world,  
 who cluster to carry in annual procession  
 a mutilated image of a virgin.



through men's provinciality  
she Returned from her virginity  
to fulfil herself in vain.

her open eyes are not fixed on her child any more  
nor question heaven any more  
but Rise to the receding mountain.  
is he a Demiurge?  
a steward of the heavenly bodies?  
their banker, telling each how its account stands  
and where at any hour it ought to be?  
away from him an eagle and a fulmar  
are Swinging: they will cross  
over the valley  
hillside woods where jays fight  
finches flash in honeycomb leaflight  
badgers freshen warrens  
bees lie crazily with careful orchids  
and lonely oxlips.  
over vetches fields they will cross  
and jackdaws playing with rooks and performing plovers,  
watermeads in which  
blue herons fish and rushes flower,  
just visible roofs of a country town:  
too High for little eyes to see:  
Uncaricatured,  
for they are getting rare now  
and were beautiful.

he does not see them.  
to know everything he has made himself Astigmatic:  
two men on two rocks  
disregarding two landscapes  
slightly superimposed.

where his height meets level ground  
is a quiet Group.

twisted aluminium and torn matter  
an aeroplane stands with its tail erect  
and crushed nose  
driven deep in earth.  
from the silence, from the suspense  
is made the recognition of Death.  
the workers from the jam factory  
shocked and astonished, Watch:  
navvies have come to Watch  
with hops and wheat in their bellies:  
respectful reporters chase away  
bran-fed inquisitive pullets, and Watch:  
vegetable sheep and potato pigs  
come up to Watch:  
and the sleepless sun pours down.

the bulk of the corpse-to-be  
balances the bulk of the old earthgoddess.  
Many goddesses, Many women,  
little richness in barren Apices:  
but brown Earth is an honest Plinth  
that underlies  
and is replenished by the sun.

I, as I painted this  
becoming conscious of foliage  
on my breast and back and shoulders,  
paint in the bottom corner  
as symbol and signature  
the Hands that have touched me.

JOSEPH GORDON MACLEOD

**RISORGIMENTO**

Not from a new soil  
Unchurned by insistent roots,  
Not out of any small miraculous seed  
Nor plucking timid sustenance with soft fingers in the earth  
To be a hieroglyph of growth shown  
On fostering air

But like the blessed pilgrim staff  
That was dead  
And that became alive with many flowers,  
Grace in its own hard fibres groping

For emergence is  
A deposition of small virginites,  
And that obscene virginity  
Which squatted on our shoulders like  
An old man of the sea with writhing legs  
Is clutched and flung down  
By hands unhusked.

RAYNER HEPPENSTALL

## INVADE, INVADE

Walled and rolled to road once tracked  
 Strait in mud from here to there  
 Had selfway footpad, Bare and Bowler  
 At will walked Wise, Fool followed line  
 Fool romanised geometrised  
 "Keep off the Turf don't tug the Chain"  
 Stonescrap, clinkers strictly ditched  
 Straight from here to there and here  
 Crossing coombs redscrawled with clayscab  
 Under tar's piped Andakilso  
 Romanised geometrised is cut with compass  
 Every seas lid into chart lines.

Invade, invade

Put fire to furze  
 Dig long hobnails into turf  
 Will off street scab walks through walls  
 Pulls down red lights narrows gauges  
 Cuts off tulips scatters dailies  
 Breaks beer-bottles in the Mall  
 Learns to tread on edge with selfsole  
 Packs the Kings to Kiss-my-Ass.  
 Skies the Cabinet on Kamet  
 Bishop wets in Budley Water  
 Prints the Times on Piddle Island  
 Gelignites all Eddystones  
 Makes the Olympic's port of call  
 Angmagssalik Southend Lizzen  
 Akureyri Kotor Kew  
 Masculates all twiddling nancies  
 Makes a man, a man of two.

MARTIN BOLDERO

## A NEW ARTIST

*Poems.* Stephen Spender. Faber & Faber. 5s.

Mr Stephen Spender's book contains thirty-three poems that will have a distinct influence upon his contemporaries, not only in England but, I believe, in the United States where for the last twenty years the best verse in the English language has been written. Mr Spender's originality though limited is genuine; his range as yet is slight but his quality is not surpassed by any other English poet since the war. For one thing, he has not been compelled to circumvent Eliot in order to speak for himself. Within the general terms of the intellectual crisis of the age, Spender has defined a personal crisis of his own; he begins a solution of the problem in the only way that art is capable of solutions—by giving the problem a fundamental restatement. There is a danger, however, that the meaning of this quality in Spender's work will be missed for a time: his faults will certainly be imitated, his "philosophy" (as such) mistaken for his style, and a kind of rambling accumulation of sensitive perceptions (see poem xxxii) will become the latest mode of Communist verse.

It is one of the defects of revolutionary thought, in this age, so far as poetry is concerned, that it is not assimilable to any great body of sensuous forms. It was possible for Shelley to imagine, at least, that he was rewriting the classical mythology. Our own contemporaries have the gospel according to Father Marx, certain passages of which are almost as moving as Dickens; most of it is merely engaging dialectically, leaving the young humanitarian to flounder in an opaque mass of abstraction that is not easily translated into the mere physical objects that the distressed Platonist, in all times, is compelled to see. The raw initiate into the Society of Friends would suffer, as poet, a similar disability. In the case of Mr Spender, there is a tendency to work out his philosophy as he goes along, as if he were making a literal translation of the doctrine into metaphors:

*The architectural gold-leaved flower  
From people ordered like a single mind,  
I build.*

Or this:

*...larger than all the charcoaled batteries  
And imaged towers against that dying sky,  
Religion stands, the church blocking the sun.*

Such translation probably precedes the creative moment, and the best poetry is probably written by men who are not even aware that it has taken place: the actual expression is the total thought. In these passages, Mr Spender oscillates between two social relatives that have imposed upon him as poetic absolutes. The verse is didactic and as dead as Blackmore and Ambrose Phillips. As social and political men we may, if we choose, select all the provisional absolutes that we desire; as poets we must be selected by some absolute. We may then criticize it or even reject it, but we cannot get rid of it; like Lord Tennyson's God, it is nearer than hands and feet.

If there is a single good dogma in poetic criticism it is possibly this: that no philosophy is good enough for a poet unless it is so seasoned in his experience that it has become, like the handling of the gravediggers' skulls, a property of easiness. It is not what a poet "believes" (Mr Richards' theory) but rather what total attitude he takes towards all aspects of his conduct, that constitutes the "content" side of the aesthetic problem. Belief is a statistical and sociological category as applied to the arts: does the poet believe in the trinity? does he believe in votes for women? There may be an equally good theory that modern poets believe entirely too much—that is to say, more than they can, as poets, understand. One might derive from this slender volume more specific beliefs than from the whole of the *Divine Comedy*, in which "belief" in Mr Richards' sense of the term does not appear.

It is not necessary to give to Mr Spender's philosophy a name; it has been necessary to describe its function in his work, in order to clear the ground. All his best poems convey *single emotions*. And these single emotions are created, in the sense that a table or a chair is created; they are not believed. Poem xiv ("In 1929") is one of the best, possibly the best in the book, and certainly one of the finest English poems of the century. These lines possess an absolute clarity, a complete mastery of words, that has been absent from English

verse since Landor (Mr Spender's metrics deserves separate discussion: he has obviously studied the later Yeats, but without trying to become Yeats):

*Now I suppose that the once envious dead  
Have learnt a strict philosophy of clay  
After these centuries, to haunt us no longer  
In the churchyard or at the end of the lane  
Or howling at the edge of the city  
Beyond the last beanrows, near the new factory.*

It is this quality that should influence the contemporary scene.

ALLEN TATE

## ROBERT GRAVES

*Poems, 1930–1933.* Robert Graves. Barker. 6s.

Long training in expression before having very much to express, investigation of fortunate influences—folk-verse, Skelton, Laura Riding, John Crowe Ransom—and a sensibility which has so far refused to be vulcanised by time are all united with a deepened experience in these poems. Mr Graves' extreme skill amalgamates usually all his virtues and all his borrowings. Compare such poems as "Nobody", "The Legs", "To Whom Else" or "The Cell" with any poems he once wrote as a near-Georgian. In these four mature improvements the Riding influence is clear; but adapting the "un-literary" distinction which belongs to Miss Riding they have the Graves rhythm or quality (and naturally the Graves experience). The type of imagination in a few poems such as "Ogres and Pygmies" resembles that of John Crowe Ransom and Skeltonic sound is obvious, for example in

*Devilishly disturbed  
By this unready pen.*

Yet none of these influences makes Mr Graves into a literary or imitative poet. His own personality dominates, since each word is right for its place in each poem and is not borrowed from someone else's poem.

Occupied by central problems of being alive, many of these new poems—"The Cell", "Largesse To the Poor", "To Whom Else", "Time", "The Legs"—have only been equalled in organic worth (by Mr Graves) in his last unlimited collection. His words nearly always are relevant and necessary. The wholes they make are simple, without the intricate confusion of realistic verse. The imagination of his work, most fantastically obvious in "What Times are These?", "As It Were Poems", "Ulysses" or "The Bards", becomes most powerful when most strictly and simply applied. In brief, these poems are made by a right balance between "pure" art and art attached to human culture; and by their semi-dramatic type they are made more valuable.

GEOFFREY GRIGSON

*The Red Front.* Louis Aragon. Translated by E. E. Cummings. Contempo Publishers, Chapel Hill, North Carolina. 50 cents.

This is a translation of a propagandist poem. The poem is divided into four sections. The first section describes the corrupt state of capitalist society which has only vaguely heard the rumour of

*Unhappy Russia*  
*The URSS*  
*The URSS or as they say SSSR*  
*SS how is it SS*  
*SSR SSR oh my dear*  
*Just think SSR,*

like a far off train. The second section is an exhortation to the proletariat to unchain its force and to fire on Leon Blum. The engine, whose pistons go SS RR and SSR SSR SSR, is now nearer. The third section describes the building of the new state, to an accompaniment of the bursting of gunfire which "adds to the landscape a hitherto



unknown gaiety". The fourth section is exalted, metaphysical exhortation, in which the proletariat is told that

*Each of your breathings begets  
Marx and Lenin in the sky.*

The express has now reached its destination.

It seems to me that in spite of its effective cinematographic imagery this poem fails, because it does not convince one that the writer knows why the proletariat should kill and oppress the bourgeoisie except because the bourgeoisie is now oppressing the proletariat. He assumes that there is some absolute value in the proletarian which makes his atrocities glorious whereas the atrocities of the bourgeoisie are sordid. Yet M. Aragon is much too good a materialist to explain what this absolute virtue of the proletarian is. The only reason for getting into his train seems to be that

*No one remains behind  
waving handkerchiefs Everyone is going,*

that is to say Everyone except those who are shot for not going. This poem is really as much a threat as a piece of propaganda. The young communists are told:

*You hold in your hands a laughing child  
A child such as has never been seen  
He knows before he can talk all the songs of the new life.*

Precisely. And he had better not learn to talk.

If this type of propaganda has any effect at all, I do not see what that can be except to breed in people a superstitious belief in the necessity of murders and reprisals. This seems to me an excessive simplification. It is so simple that unfortunately it is effective. Before the revolution the intellectuals preach violence which to them has a merely pictorial significance, but after the revolution they are horrified at the force they have let loose. If bloodshed is a criterion of communism, Hitler is as much a communist as Messrs Aragon and Cummings, and his rhetoric is even more effective. The intellectual capacity of Hitler and these writers seems about the same. Readers of this poem should compare it with any speech by Hitler.

STEPHEN SPENDER

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