

NEW VERSE

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TO SUBSCRIBERS

WITH this number NEW VERSE is a year old. Subject to the goodwill of its subscribers, it will now begin a second year. In six numbers, some thirty poets have been represented, most of them young, some of them little known and some of them unknown. Whatever the quality of their work, it has found always between thirteen and fifteen hundred readers, from London to Chicago, Tokyo, and Zanzibar. Will all those who wish New Verse to go on, renew their subscriptions with less than the usual delay? We hope to increase the size of each number. This will mean extra postage; and for that reason the subscription has been advanced from 3s. 3d. to 3s. 6d. This and uncertainties of exchange also necessitate increase of American subscriptions to one dollar.

An annual subscription to NEW VERSE makes a cheap and (we believe) a good Christmas present.

THE BROWN BOOK OF THE HITLER TERROR

In Bednib's shop I picked up a book
An actor came in with a floating gown
He gave me an objective look
I put the book down

And went into the sunlit street
Where cars like shuttles passed my eyes
Discreet, I cried, discreet, discreet
And only Socrates was wise.

HERBERT READ

THREEFOLD TIME

Time's armies are the seconds soft as rain,
Whose wound's so fine it leaves no scar nor stain,
Whose feathery arrows rankle in my heart,
Yet are so light, though each a mortal dart,
That like Sebastian in the picture I
Can watch vicarious battles in the sky,
While this cruel plumage, stagey and absurd,
Of a plucked angel or half-naked bird,
Betrays my state to all eyes but my own.
Or I'm like Socrates at Marathon,
An absent hero with a pensive sword,
Ears cocked for his slick daimon's idlest word
Touching the scene, the caste, the spurious play,
The Gods and Time, while Time brings down the day
Like a great wrestler, fells it like a tree
With all its fruit, defeat or victory.

What though ? All strategy here is plain retreat,
And the sure issue of this war defeat.
See, at the thought these arrow pricks grow sharper.
Oh, Plato himself was only Time's poor harper
Playing to bid him pause, Shakespeare a wile
To make him turn his head and once beguile
His wolfish heart. I know where ends the course,
And there my body like a headstrong horse
Will bear me without stop or hindrance. There
These archers will surround me quite, the air
Turn to a sea of feathers, and all art
End in a new yet long fore-suffered smart.

Time is a sea. There if I could but sail
For ever and outface death's bullying gale
I'd ask no more. From that great pond I'd fish
At pleasure every poet's and conqueror's wish.
The treasure of that deep's unbattered hold

I'd rifle clean till it and I were old,
And of that salvage worlds on worlds would make,
Newer than tarried for Columbus' sake.
Until I dream, in that vast more and more,
I'd find Eternity's close-hidden shore,
And the Gods, so old, so young, I'd not know which,
And Time between shrink to a shallow ditch.
Each wish is traitorous, and a dupe the wisher !
It is not I but Time that is the fisher.
Me he will catch and stuff into his net
With mortal sweepings, harp and banneret.
He'll dredge the very heavens ; dull stars will rust
Among my own and miscellaneous dust,
Light dust of fame that floats, heavy that sinks
Into this drunken sea that drinks and drinks.

Time's a fire-wheel whose spokes the seasons turn,
And fastened there we, Time's slow martyrs, burn.
To some that rage is but a pleasant heat,
And the red fiery bower as summer sweet.
Others there are that lord it in the flame,
And, while they're burning, dice for power and fame.
A choicer company ignore the pyre,
And dream and prophesy amid the fire.
And a few with eyes uplifted through the blaze
Let their flesh crumble till they're all a gaze
Glassing the fireless kingdom in the sky
That is our dream as through Time's wood we fly
Burning in silence, or crying in ancient rhyme :
Who shall outsoar the mountainous flame of Time ?

EDWIN MUIR

THE UNFINISHED RACE

No runner clears the final fence,
The laurels have long since gone stale.
They must be a cardboard pretence,
These watchers crowded on the rail
—What reason to stay watching so
To see a race that has no end ?
How many centuries ago
The runners came up round the bend ?

Always they baulk at this last leap,
And then recoil to try once more.
From pride or custom still they keep
On striving—those once at the fore
Distinguished only from the ruck
By their impressive long run back.

J. N. CAMERON

POEM

*I saw the Clyde an old man's mouth
That wanted artificial ships
To fill the sockets of the slips.*

In the pub by the petrol pump some yokels,
Awkward and residual, sit
In tailor-made suits that do not fit.

A party from the summer school
With canned music and synthetic beer
Enjoy the old-world atmosphere.

Their leader's that fat Oxford don.
Come, hear the errors of communism
Refuted by a syllogism.

For English freedom's still great stuff
 While you can have a bass, old son,
 Though I prefer a Worthington.

The gilded calves all gape at him
 And specially the heifers stare
 To learn what lads the Romans were.

And with epigram, and apt quotation,
 Along the runs well worn and deep
 The shepherd leads the chosen sheep.

Of agricultural statistics
 They know nothing, nor of trade returns,
 Or even what the potman earns.

Though æsthetically acute they feel
 How bad a chain of pylons looks
 Across the Amberley wild brooks.

*I see the Weald a woman's face,
 Unfurrowed though the goodman clips
 The thistle-down around her lips.*

ALEC CRAIG

POEM

(Even so it is not so easy to be dead)

As those who are not athletic at breakfast day by day
 Employ and enjoy the sinews of others vicariously,
 Shielded by the upheld journal from their dream-puncturing wives
 And finding in the printed word a multiplication of their lives,
 So we whose senses give us things misfelt and misheard
 Turn also, for our adjustment, to the pretentious word

Which stabilises the light on the sun-fondled trees
And, by photographing our ghosts, claims to put us at our ease ;
Yet even so, no matter how solid and staid we contrive
Our reconstructions, even a still life is alive
And in your Chardin the appalling unrest of the soul
Exudes from the dried fish and the brown jug and the bowl.

LOUIS MACNEICE

SLIDING TROMBONE

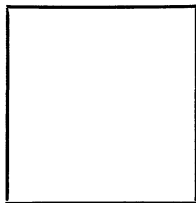
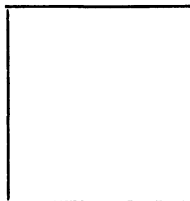
I have a little windmill on my head
Which draws up water to my mouth and eyes
When I am hungry or moved to tears
I have a little horn full of the odour of absinth in my ears
And on my nose a green parrakeet that flaps its wings
And cries ' Aux armes '
When from the sky fall the seeds of the sun
The absence from the heart of steel
At the bottom of the boneless and stagnant realities
Is partial to crazy sea-fish
I am the captain and the alsatian at the cinema
I have in my belly a little agricultural machine
That reaps and binds electric flex
The cocoanuts thrown by the melancholy monkey
Fall like spittle into the water
Where they blossom again as petunias
I have in my stomach an ocarina and I have virginal faith
I feed my poet on the feet of a pianist
Whose teeth are even and uneven
And sad Sunday evenings
I throw my morganatic dreams
To the loving turtle-doves who laugh like hell.

G. RIBEMONT-DESSAIGNES
(Translated by David Gascoyne)

POEM IN SEVEN SPACES

2 golden
claws

a drop
of blood



white spiral
of wind upon
two great
breasts

the yellow
field of
folly

3 galloping black horses

the legs of
chairs break
with a dry
crack

all objects have gone
far away and the sound
of a woman's steps and
the echo of her laugh
fade out of hearing

ALBERTO GIACOMETTI
(Translated by David Gascoyne)

THE MANLESS SOCIETY

Morning trickles over the bruised vegetables
like a drop of sweat over the lines of my hand
I crawl over the ground
with stern and wrinkled mouth
the sun swells into the canals of monstrous leaves
which recover cemeteries harbours houses
with the same sticky green zeal
then with disturbing intensity there passes through my mind
the absurdity of human groupings
in these lines of closely packed houses
like the pores of the skin
in the poignant void of terrestrial space
I hear the crying of birds of whom it used to be said
that they sang and implacably resembled stones
I see flocks of houses munching the pith of the air
factories which sing as birds once sang
roads which lose themselves in harvests of salt
pieces of sky which become dry on verdigris moss
a pulley's creaking tells us that a bucket rises in a well
it is full of limpid blood
which evaporates in the sun
nothing else will trouble this circuit on the ground
until evening
which trembles under the form of an immense pinned butterfly
at the entrance of a motionless station.

PIERRE UNIK

(Translated by David Gascoyne)

TWO POEMS

THE OFFICES OF THE FIRST AND THE SECOND HOUR

What is the office of the first hour ?

TO ABJURE

To abjure the kindness of darkness, humbly
To concede the irrelevant spite of the spirit,
The nightlike melancholy fleshcase, and the
Romantic unnecessary cape of the naked heart.

*Is the rude root and manlike shape
Of articulate mandrake still godlike in this light ?*

NAY, WE HAVE GIVEN

Nay, we have given our flesh to the mouth and our
Hearts to the fingers of oblivion. The darkness
Is drained out of us slowly, and these are no more
To us.

What is the office of the second hour ?

QUIETLY TO ATTEND

Quietly to attend the unfolding light's stark
Patience, inhuman and faithful like a weed or a flower,
Empty of darkness and light.

NEWS OF THE PHOENIX

They say the Phoenix is dying, some say dead—
Dead without issue is what one message said,
But that was soon suppressed, officially denied.

I think, myself, whoever sent it lied,
But the authorities were right to have him shot,
As a preliminary measure, whether he did or not.

A. J. M. SMITH

MORNING DISSERTATION

Wakening, peering through eye-windows, uncurious, not amazed,
Balance the day, know you lie there, think : ' I'm on earth.'
Remember death walks in the daylight and life still through filter
seeps,
While you will remain unchanged, perhaps, throughout the day.
Time like an urgent finger moves across the chart,
But you are you, Time is not yours alone,
You are but one dot on the complex diagram.

Then are you a star, a nucleus, centre of moving points ?
Are you a rock-crumb, broken from cliff, alone ?
Or are you a point of a greater star, moving in unison ?
If you are isolate, only a self, then petrify there where you stand ;
Destinies crumble, bodies run down, the single sconces burn out,
But you are complete if without you completion is lacking,
Then you blaze with the perfect light and are Time's bodyman.

DAVID GASCOYNE

POEM

The cold renunciatory beauty of those who would die
to hide their love from scornful fingers of the drab
is not that which glistens like wing or leaf in eyes
of erotic statues standing breast to chest
on high and open mountainside.

Complex draws tighter like a steel wire mesh
about the awkward bodies of those born under shame,
striping the tender flesh with blood like tears
flowing ; their love they dare not name ;
each is divided by desire and fear.

The young sons of the hopeless blind shall strike
matches in the marble corridor and find
their bodies cool and white as the stone walls
and shall embrace, emerging like mingled springs
onto the height to face the fearless sun.

DAVID GASCOYNE

AUDENESQUE FOR AN INITIATION

Don't forget the things we taught you by the broken water-wheel,
Don't forget the middle classes fight much harder going down hill,

Don't forget that new proscriptions are being posted now and then,
Dr. Johnson, Dr. Leavis and the other Grand Old Men—

For, although they've often told us that they try to do their best,
Are they up to the Full Fruit Standard, would they pass the
Spelling Test ?

—Because we've got our eyes to keyholes, we know everything
they've done,
Lecturing on minor poets. ' Literature is quite good fun.'

And if you should try to fool us, imitate them, do the same,
We'll refuse your dummy bullets, we've had time to take our aim.

We've been drinking stagnant water for some twenty years or more
While the politicians slowly planned a bigger reservoir

But we've dammed a different river, the water-wheel is going again.
Now we've stopped designing sweaters and we've started in to train.

We've given up the Georgian poets, teaching dance bands how to
croon,
Bicycling in coloured goggles underneath a pallid moon.

We've destroyed the rotting signposts, made holes in all the
pleasure-boats ;
We'll pull down ancestral castles when we've time to swim the
moats.

When we've practised we shall beat you with our Third or Fourth
Fifteen,
In spite of Royalists on the touchline. ' Oh, well played, Sir !'
' Keep it clean !'

Our backs are fast as motor-cycles, all our forwards 20-stone.
Each of them can score unaided, running strongly on his own.

Every minute scouts give signals, come reporting what they've
seen.
' Captain Ferguson is putting.' ' Undermine the 18th green.'

Before next month we'll storm the clubhouse. Messages are coming
through :
' Darwin, doing cross-word puzzles, tries to find the missing clue.'

The ' Times ' Third Leaders are decoded, pigeon-holed for future
use ;
Tennyson has been convicted of incessant self-abuse.

We've been sending notes to Priestley, orange pips to Johnny
Squire—
' Don't defend the trench you're holding.' ' Now the fat is in
the fire.'

We've got control of all the railways and the perfume factories,
We're supercharged and have connection with the strongest
batteries.

So if you feel like playing truant, remember that the game is up
Or you'll find that quite politely you've been sold a nasty pup.

GAVIN EWART

SURREALISM FOR THE ENGLISH

**Αρκτου παρούσης ἵχνη μὴ ζήτει.*

The name of a movement, and some exhibitions of pictures, are in people's minds and before their eyes in London, some ten years after they were first heard of in Paris. The achievement of the artists and poets is out of doubt. Their philosophy and propaganda are of interest to other philosophers and propagandists. But the essential relation between the philosophy and the achievement should not stop us from being certain that the philosophy is, like all philosophies, a reflection of that history in which we ourselves are actors : and that the achievement is an achievement in any case, with or without propaganda for it.

Miro and Max Ernst have been exhibited to the British public. Surrealist poems and translations have been printed. But before exposing ourselves to a ten-years-belated imitation of Paris, there is need of perspective and a remedying of our own ignorance.

Surrealism is, like all the offspring of Hegel, dialectical in its nature. That is to say, its aims are not best served if English writers imitate the work of French ones, nor if they simply adopt the name of 'surrealist.' Close study of the philosophical position of the French surrealists is needed to extract the essential purpose from the formal appearance of their work. But English writers will need something more : namely, a knowledge of their own language and literature.

In order to amplify this, and point out one of many lines of approach, I shall mention and quote from the English poet Edward Young, author of the 'Night Thoughts.' After his first sleep, Young spent the greatest part of the night in meditation and in the composition of his works ; when he rose, at an early hour, he had only to transcribe them. In this he resembles Blake and Coleridge. Lautréamont confessed that the 'Night Thoughts' cost him many nights of sleep. Breton has called the same poem 'surrealist from cover to cover.' Young, Blake and Coleridge have been

described as practising 'automatic' writing; the two last-named would have denied that such a description was complete, and Young has left a perfectly clear record of his own opinion in his excellent remarks 'On Lyric Poetry':

'It is the genuine character, and true merit of the ode, a little to startle some apprehensions. Men of cold complexions are very apt to mistake a want of vigour in their own imaginations, for a delicacy of taste in their judgments. . . . Thus Pindar, who has as much logic at the bottom as Aristotle or Euclid, to some critics has appeared as mad; and must appear so to all who enjoy no portion of his own divine spirit. Dwarf understandings, measuring others by their own standard, are apt to think they see a monster, when they see a man.'

This reads true enough of some critics who have lately visited the Mayor Gallery. Men of cold complexions are bred by the score in an age of preventive hygiene.

'And indeed,' Young continues, 'it seems to be the amends which nature makes to those whom she has not blessed with an elevation of mind, to indulge them in the comfortable mistake, that all is wrong, which falls not within the narrow limits of their own comprehensions and relish.'

There follows an important declaration: 'Judgment, indeed, that masculine power of the mind, in ode as in all compositions, should bear the supreme sway; and a beautiful imagination, as its mistress, should be subdued to its dominion. Hence, and hence only, can proceed the fairest offspring of the human mind.'

'But then in ode, there is this difference from other kinds of poetry; that, there, the imagination, like a very beautiful mistress, is indulged in the appearance of domineering; though the judgment, like an artful lover in reality carries its point, and the less it is suspected of it, it shows the more masterly conduct and deserves the greater commendation.'

This might well be memorised by the young poet. The comparison of poetic creation with a love relationship is undoubtedly a true one. The poet, one might say, is *Œdipus*; the muse is his mother, his father is tradition.

Nowadays instead of finding Pindar as logical as Euclid or

Aristotle, we would be justified in considering Euclid and Aristotle as poetical as Pindar. The air of conviction which passes and has passed for logical proof, is poetic in origin. (This being, of course, the poet's way of putting it.)

Of the methods of inducing this conviction, none is more effective than poetry. Hence the importance of didactic poetry, and the truth that all poetry is, in the end, didactic. Among the virtues of the eighteenth century was a dawning recognition of this fact. It is clearly stated by the learned and ingenious Walter Moyle : who, starting from some lines in the Georgics, has this to say :

‘ . . . *nec longum tempus : et ingens
exiit ad cælum ramis felicibus arbor ;
miraturque novas frondes et non sua poma.*

Here we see the Poet consider'd all the effects of this Union between trees of different kinds, and took notice of that effect which had the most Delight in it, to express the Capacity that was in them of being thus united. This way of writing is everywhere much in use among the Poets and is particularly practis'd by Virgil, who loves to suggest a Truth indirectly, and without giving us a full and open view of it : To let us see just so much as will naturally lead the imagination into all the Parts that lie conceal'd. This is wonderfully diverting to the Understanding, thus to receive a precept, that enters as it were thro' a Byway, and to apprehend an Idea that draws a whole Train after it. For here the Mind, which is always delighted with its own discoveries, only takes the Hint from the Poet, and seems to work out the rest by the Strength of her own faculties.'

This passage should be compared with these typical statements of surrealist theory. 'La poésie est la découverte des rapports insoupçonnés d'un élément à un autre.' (Crével.) 'Il ne suffit pas de créer un objet, il ne lui suffit d'être, pour qu'on le voie. Il nous faut le montrer, c'est-à-dire, par quelque artifice, exciter chez le spectateur le désir, le besoin de le voir.' (Nougy.) Surrealists insist on the scientific value of their work, in the spirit of Lenin's commentary on Hegel. 'N.B.—La connaissance est

l'approche éternelle et infinie de la pensée vers l'objet. Le *reflet* de la nature dans la pensée humaine n'est pas à comprendre comme mort, "abstrait," sans mouvement, sans contradictions, mais il faut le comprendre dans le processus éternel du mouvement, de la naissance et de la négation des contradictions.'

Such ideas have often been expressed by English writers, with varying success. Thus Alexander Bain : 'The happy comparison—by classification, analogy or simile—and the pointed contrast, are the agents that vivify the mind with reference to what formerly lay unheeded before the open eyes.' This is what Ernst has called 'L'intensification de l'irritabilité des facultés de l'esprit.' Again, the nineteenth-century logician, John Stuart Mill, excuses 'even an improper use of a term, when, by means of it, some familiar association is called up which brings the meaning home to the mind, as it were by a flash.' The same sentiment is versified by the nineteenth-century poet Tupper, who defends 'arabesque conceptions, half cherub and half flower,' on the ground that

'. . . ideas are oftentimes shy of the close furniture of words
And thought, wherein only is power, may be best conveyed by a
suggestion :
The flash that lighteth up a valley, amid the dark midnight of a
storm,
Coineth the mind with that scene sharper than fifty summers.'

But the consequences of such a belief for Tupper were clearly different from what they are for Eluard. And they should be different again for the English poet of today. The theory of metaphor and the double image—Young's 'Connexion exquisite of distant worlds' and Lautréamont's 'rencontre fortuite sur une table de dissection d'une machine à coudre et d'un parapluie'—should guide the poet to development of his own tradition, the product of his own environment. In France, the history of the poetic word has been very different from its history in England. When Eluard writes :

'Boire
Un grand bol de sommeil noir
Jusqu'à la dernière goutte,'

he is using a device which is new to the French language, but which is familiar to us ; for example

or ‘ *Holla, sylvans ! sure, they’re caves*
 Of sleep, those, or else they’re graves !

 ‘ *Pity like a naked new-born babe,*
 Striding the blast.’

This is the style of which Young wrote, with much perspicacity :

‘ It holds true in this province of writing, as in war, “ The more danger, the more honour.” It must be very enterprising ; it must, in Shakespeare’s style, have hair-breadth escapes ; and often tread the very brink of error ; nor can it ever deserve the applause of the *real* judge, unless it renders itself obnoxious to the misapprehensions of the *contrary*.’

A contemporary period of poetic acceleration must needs be part of the same historical process as gave rise to the surrealist group in Paris. Superficially there may be little resemblance. Young’s remarks on imitation are not without application here :

‘ Originals only have true life, and differ as much from the best Imitations, as men from the most animated pictures of them. Nor is what I say at all inconsistent with a due deference for the great standards of antiquity ; nay, that very deference is an argument for it ; for doubtless their example is on my side in this matter. And we should rather imitate their example in the general motives and fundamental methods of their working, than in their works themselves.’

C. H. MADGE

MISS RIDING’S ‘ DEATH ’

The Life of the Dead. Laura Riding. Arthur Barker. 30s.

Miss Laura Riding aims at a somewhat fantastic simplicity. There is not much good simple poetry in the world and what there is has been silted out from a wealth of experience or erudition in the

poet. I suspect that Laura Riding is not so wealthy. All her previous poetry which I have read has seemed to me appallingly bleak and jejune. 'Voltaire' was futile, 'Laura and Francisca' dreary, 'A Joking Word' appealed by its blend of subtlety and naiveté but most of its tropes were too facile (there is nothing so easy as rehashing metaphysical paradox). Her new poem, 'The Life of the Dead,' is more interesting than any of the above. It has two additional props in the form of designs by Mr. John Aldridge and a French version of each section preceding the English one. Even so it has no body. It begins and ends well but the mass of it is half-baked. She might say (and one could not argue it) that therein it is appropriate to its theme. But in the last three years theme has again become important in poetry (however vulgar a necessity) and Laura Riding's 'Death' is not a theme like Dante's 'Death' or Homer's. About her Death one can only make negative judgments. Her mythical figures are obsessed with the merely possible. A mystic may be greater than a philosopher but his statement of his ecstasy is not good philosophy; so Laura Riding's statement of Death, though it may be 'truer' than those of the great poets, is not such good poetry. She dissipates where they consolidate. Shakespeare makes even suicide (e.g. Cleopatra's) a solid act of creation, Dante bodies out Hell with Florence; this may be Told to the Children but it is the method of poetry. Miss Riding perhaps has passed beyond that half-way house and should try another form such as yoga. She lacks a healthy vulgarity and Death, I think, is not readable about unless slightly vulgarised. How refreshing to turn from her sophistication to e.g. Mr. Auden (however bragging or bogus his nigger-cum-Lenin-cum-gearbox virility) or to Mr. Eliot (however unctuous his romanticism or after-dinner his pedantry). Laura Riding's poetry I only find attractive where, presumably, she would find it vicious—where her line fails to be colourless and lapses into the grand style, e.g.

*'Poor comic fœtuses fast-tumbling to the ground
Through all the dateless turns and spans of infancy.
And there they waste no time in dimpled babble.'*

I am fairly sure, however, that if the poem had satisfied me throughout, it would have been no use at all to its author. Good poetry can't be good for everyone.

LOUIS MACNEICE

A NEW WRITER

Thirty Preliminary Poems. George Barker. Parton Press.
2s. 6d.

The title of this book may be interpreted as showing a certain awareness that the author could write better poetry than most of these thirty poems. That is also the reviewer's impression, for the best of the poems are worthy of better companions. The best is indeed a very suggestive and interesting best. The poem with the most immediate and clear appeal is the Ode, which is a simple invocation, confidently phrased. A greater sensitivity is shown in the Verses for a Nursery Wall, Elegiac Stanzas and Stanzas. A short novel called *Alanna Autumnal* was published at the same time as these poems, and if one reads these two books together, it becomes obvious that Mr. Barker is a writer, who is at present rather oppressed by his sensibility, but who should soon write with freedom and power.

S. H. S.

CROCE THE DEAF

The Defence of Poetry. Variations on the theme of Shelley.
Benedetto Croce. Oxford University Press. 1s.

Signor Croce is always worth reading on the subject of poetry—his essays on Shakespeare, Ariosto and Corneille are full of valuable criticism. But, as he shows in his critical approach to the plastic arts as well as to poetry, he belongs to that type of academic scholar who may be trusted in the historical past, but who is

devoid of any specifically modern sensibility, and therefore of any capacity to appreciate contemporary forms of art. No critic has done more to establish the essential distinction between real poetry and oratorical verse ; and we need no more satisfactory definition of poetic genius than this :

‘Poetic genius chooses a strait path that has on one side merely natural feeling, and on the other the reflection and criticism which is twice removed from nature ; a path from which minor talents find it but too easy to slip into an art either convulsed and distorted by passion, or void of passion and guided by principles of the understanding. Then they are called “romantic” or “classical.”’

Then compare such urbanity with the prejudice evident in his description of modern poetry :

‘To avoid misunderstanding, it might be better to call the poetry thus set before us as our ideal, “mystical-voluptuous,” since its mark is the union of sensual gratification with turgid emotion, as if in this sensuality we fathomed the mystery of the universe and attained a kind of beatific ecstasy. This ideal of poetry and the arts is connected, in devious ways, with what is called “decadence,” whose chief symptoms consist precisely in the confusion of matter with form, of the sensuous with the ideal, of pleasure with morality ; so that the former are disguised and honoured as the latter, and a witches’ banquet celebrated where the devil sits enthroned and worshipped.’

But worse is to come :

‘We need not exclude the possibility that the manufacturers and amateurs of these verbal or phonetic drugs labelled “pure poems,” granting that their physical raptures are no affectation but as real as they are capable of feeling, may be some kind of erotic maniacs.’

The honest man (and the writers of pure poetry, from Monsieur Valéry downwards, are singularly honest, simple, even ascetic men) is rather flattered when he is taken for a daredevil, so no great harm is done by such diatribes. They add, as we say, to the gaiety of nations. ‘Pure poetry’ is not, of course, a very acceptable phrase, but it cannot be explained away so casually as Croce

assumes. Croce refers to the test line always brought up in this dispute—Racine's :

La fille de Minos et de Pasiphaë,

and says of it :

‘It is beautiful because these sounds, these syllables and accents, bring before us, in an instantaneous imaginative fusion, all that was mysterious and sinister, all that was divine and fiendish, all that was majestic and perverted, both in the person and in the parentage of Phædra. And this is expressed by two epic names, that of the royal Cretan legislator and that of his incestuous wife, at whose side rises, in our imagination, the brutal figure of the bull.’

Whatever the explanation of the magic of the line, this is certainly not the true one. If Signor Croce had tried the simple experiment of testing the line on a person with poetic sensibility but no knowledge at all of the significance of the names Minos and Pasiphaë, he would have found that the poetic appeal of the line still existed. Croce's explanation therefore falls to the ground. The appeal of the line is probably one of pure verbal music, mingled with a vague wonder at the significance of such musical names ; but that is not to say that all poetry, even all ‘pure’ poetry, is an affair of verbal music. Modern poetry has other sanctions, in poetic tradition, in philosophy and in psychology, but Signor Croce remains unaware of them.

H. R.

MURRY ON BLAKE

William Blake. Middleton Murry. Cape. 10s. 6d.

Mr. Middleton Murry's study of Blake is an important work. It contains an exposition of the mystical philosophy in the Prophetic Books which is as profound and significant as the interpretation of Keats in “Keats and Shakespeare.” Mr. Murry follows the development of Blake's philosophy from the Songs of Innocence to the great manifesto of the Marriage of Heaven and Hell, and thence to the Everlasting Gospel. This book is not only a vindica-

tion of Blake as one of the greatest of all psychological writers : it also has two aspects which are of contemporary significance. Firstly, it is a vindication of the principle of the free development of identity as opposed to the principle of absolute values and an absolute moral law. "The Self is self-conscious, deliberate, and negative ; the Identity is largely unconscious, instinctive and positive. Blake's distinction is closely allied to Keats's distinction between the Man of Character and the Man of Genius ; and, again, it is intimately related to Keats's declaration concerning the Poetical Character, that it 'has no Self.' 'The Law' (and also the conception of the standard of absolute values) 'is that which denies the Identity of things and creatures and men.'" This is interesting in view of the school of criticism which has grown up during the last few years in the search for new absolute standards of criticism. Mr. Murry's quotation, at the end of the book, of Goethe's remarks about the relation of religion and the churches is also very much to the point.

Secondly, it is interesting that Mr. Murry, as a passionate and converted Marxist, should have written this book at all. It is an extreme example of what Thomas Mann calls letting "Karl Marx read Friedrich Hölderlin." Indeed, perhaps that is why Mr. Murry wrote it, for the book throws light not only on Blake but also on the contemporary scene.

One of the advantages and also the greatest disadvantage of Mr. Murry's critical method is that all Blake's statements are equally valued as objects for his inquiry.

Lines such as :

*"Then those in Great Eternity who contemplate on Death
Said thus : 'What seems to Be, Is, to those to whom
It seems to Be ; & is most productive of the most dreadful
Consequences,'"* etc.,

are as much grist to his mill as the noblest of Blake's poetry. The rewards of this method and patience are obvious. The disadvantage of it is that Murry is never faced with the question of the greatness of Blake's poetry, and he never stops to ask whether some of the lines he quotes are better than others, and if this has any significance.

If he had paused to do this, I think one very obvious fact would have struck him : that Blake had two completely different styles, the mystic, imagist style of the Prophetic Books, and the extremely realistic style of the Songs of Experience, especially in poems such as "London." Had Blake written his longer poems in this very immediate, easily realised style, there might have been no romantic movement, and the whole history of literature in the last hundred years might have been altered. That is perhaps a foolish conjecture but it illustrates what I wish to say. Mr. Murry compares Lawrence to Blake, as though Lawrence were a feeble imitator of the Prophetic Books. That is not so. If Lawrence resembles Blake, he resembles the Blake of the Songs of Experience, and though he never excelled any one of those poems, he retained that immediate vision at the point where Blake was forced to invert symbols and to become a mystic.

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life, self and soul, out of his life-sharing, out of his love for "the uncontrollable energy and daring of the great creators."

*From man's blood-sodden heart are sprung
Those branches of the night and day
Where the gaudy moon is hung.*

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