

He has had since his (negatively) educating years at the Ecole de Guerre:

*Der hohe Sinn des Papsts,  
Er sieht das Kleine klein: das Grosse gross.*

Maybe he leaves too many of the petty things to his *commis*, as Barbey d'Aurevilly left living to his valet, but that imperial confidence, that desire to see things grand and not to be the victim of the easy triumphs of the minute, is not a fault we can attribute to any of the other leaders of "the Free World."

## Leaves of Grass

**The Book of Grass.** Edited by GEORGE ANDREWS and SIMON VINKENOOG. *Peter Owen*, 37s. 6d.

IT IS CURIOUS to reflect that many of our great-grandparents were junkies. In sickness or depression, so letters and diaries of the last century tell us, the kindly family doctor prescribed opium and laudanum, or the parlour-maid was simply sent round the corner to the obliging chemist. The High Victorians, in fact, were often high; and one may wonder whether their recourse to drugs was not an unconscious counterpart to the extreme severity with which so many of them ordered their lives.

In our own century, all this has altered. Though it is quite possible that just as many people, if not more, take drugs of various kinds as ever did, the practice—except in the small minority of cases of medical prescription—has become illegal, at any rate in the Western world. As new drugs are discovered, they are as quickly banned; and local and international narcotics agencies are set up to enforce these prohibitions. Yet at the same time both addicts and enforcement officers confirm that the habit is growing rapidly, with one consequence—among many—that a new "criminal" group, numbering hundreds of thousands if not millions, has now come into being: a class that has not, except in its delinquent fringe, the social characteristics which, hitherto, have been regarded as belonging to the "criminal classes."

This situation gives rise to various questions, among them:

Are these drugs different one from another in their social and physical consequences?

Do they have any beneficial effects, or are they entirely malignant?

Do states have valid reasons for trying to prohibit drug-taking altogether?

Is it really possible to enforce their prohibition, and what are the social side-effects of trying to do so?

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All these questions are interrelated, and the answers to them might, at first sight, seem simple. Thus, to the four given above, the conventional replies would probably be "No; No + Yes; Yes; and Yes + Good." Mr. Andrews' book suggests that the answers are far more complex and often the opposite to those conventionally held.

An initial difficulty about forming an opinion on these matters is that so very little is known about them. Thus, if one considers, for the moment, simply the addiction in England to Indian hemp (cannabis, marijuana, or the "grass" of Mr. Andrews' title), one discovers that not much is known about the extent of this addiction nor, except among those who use it, what are really its effects. If addiction to hemp be considered, as it usually is, a sickness (let alone a crime), one would expect to find a volume of information about so grave a medical and social evil. But not only does this not exist, but one even discovers that doctors are not encouraged, or even in most cases allowed, to examine hemp-addiction clinically, as they would any other malady before pronouncing on its consequences and cure. Or, if one goes on to consider the by now considerable variety of hallucinogenic agents that are in use in England, one finds that, even in official reports, these are lumped together as "drugs" with little attempt at differentiation. This ignorance does not, of course, prevent the most categorical public pronouncements about them by publicists and even educated authorities.

MR. ANDREWS HAS TRIED to pierce some of these veils. It should at once be said that his attitude is sympathetic to the use of certain drugs, for instance cannabis and LSD, though not so to others, for example heroin and cocaine; and his book will consequently be read by those hostile to all drug-taking (for whatever reason, or for none at all) with appropriate scepticism. His method is the oblique one of not speaking in his own voice (except in one short essay) but of collecting together information—or opinions—about addiction from dozens of sources, nations and even centuries. These essays he groups under history, experience, medical opinion, techniques, and legal aspects. Though most of Mr. Andrews' contributors are, predictably, favourable to some kinds of addiction (or, at most, neutral in their attitudes), they do not disguise altogether what they consider to be its dangers and disadvantages.

The book makes out an eloquent if disjointed case, and certainly one that even the hostile must, if objective, try to consider; but it has many defects, apart even from questions of opinion. The first of these is editorial, and here

it seems to me that Mr. Andrews falls down badly in his task. For example, he quotes again and again authorities without telling us who they are, how qualified, or indeed anything about them—so much so that many of them must seem, even to the trusting reader, to be inventions. It is not, for instance, really helpful to be confronted with an essay on *Médicaments Végétaux* by Drs. Pic and Bonnamour without having the remotest idea who these savants are or what the degree of their expertise may be. Occasionally, it is true, Mr. Andrews gives us a clue, but always a very meagre one ("British Army in India, 1894"). Thus, though I am sure this was not Mr. Andrews' intention, his book sometimes takes on the aspect of those sexological studies in which an obscure text is burdened by quotation from even more obscure authorities.

His historical section, in addition to this blemish, has the further one that it is completely unmethodical. What it consists of is quotes—often interesting, but sometimes footling—from undefined authors with such titles as "The Assassins," "A Moroccan Folk Tale" and "Sitting Bull's Vision of Victory." It is true that Mr. Andrews calls the section "*Traces in the Course of History*," yet some attempt at synthesis, even if embellished with quotations, should surely have been attempted. Incidentally, though personally sympathetic to many of Mr. Andrews' implied conclusions, I do not find myself particularly impressed to be told of the ancient lineage of drug addiction. This is of course undisputed, but the suggestion that its very antiquity makes addiction somehow valid is not a convincing argument in its favour, since many a human activity—murder, for instance—has also impressive historical precedents.

The section in which addicts describe their raptures is, as one would expect, a disappointment, despite many illustrious literary names being pressed into service. This is understandable, since hallucinations are notoriously difficult to describe even in poetic, let alone realistic terms—just as, indeed, mystical visions are to those who have not themselves experienced them. Mr. Andrews himself has a bold try in *Steady Roll* but alas! soon falls into the language of the copy-writer—"Crouch above the fumes at Delphi, rave to the profane, muse on the fate of mortals" could almost be lifted from an ad for the Greek Line. Henri Michaux is more convincing, largely by being more factual, and is specially interesting on those areas of consciousness to which the undrugged intelligence has no access. Aldous Huxley is, as ever, extremely plausible and (also as ever, to me at any rate) totally unconvincing.

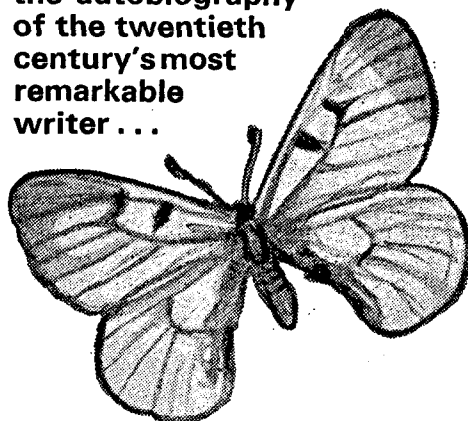
Among incidental facts and speculations of some curiosity, we may learn that George Wash-

ington, if not himself a pot-head, "Sowed Hemp at Muddy hole by Swamp," that the Caterpillar in *Alice in Wonderland* was almost certainly a junkie and tried to turn Alice on, and that *Jack and the Beanstalk*, as well as its Freudian and other undertones, is a parable on the virtues of Indian hemp. Most curious, to me, was the demonstration, by a Dr. S. H. Goff of Amsterdam, that the sensations induced by free fall from an aircraft resemble a psychedelic experience, for I have always believed that addicts have much in common, psychologically, with those who seek violent sensations in general—test pilots, Everest climbers, deep-sea divers, and even gamblers.

The section of medical opinions will be read with doubt by many, if only because a hostile view point is not put. The consensus of those quoted would seem to be, roughly, that cannabis, if used in moderation, is almost entirely harmless in its physical and social effects, though it is not denied that it may sometimes result in "the horrors" and that psychotic persons who take it are likely to become more so. In a positive sense, its beneficial effects—chiefly by evoking in the subject happiness, sociability, and relaxation—are generally agreed upon. As for *LSD* (which is not, of course, the principal theme of the volume), opinions are divided, the even more extraordinary nature of the hallucinations being affirmed, as well as the increased possibility of acute anguish matching the greater beatitude. There is unanimity throughout the book that neither of these drugs (and also mescaline and peyote) is to be compared with opiates like heroin and cocaine, since the first group is deemed to be innocuous, and the latter personally and socially deleterious—an opinion that is supported, in "Cannabis and Opiates," by no less an authority than Mr. William Burroughs. In this sense, the volume has a curiously—and unexpectedly—moral flavour, as might a treatise on the joys of alcohol that roundly condemns the ill effects of absinthe.

On the topic of alcohol many writers adopt a hostile attitude almost as virulent as that of a prohibitionist. Mr. Paul Bowles, for example, is scathing about the intolerance of alcohol-consuming societies towards hemp addicts, and makes out what seems to me a good case for alcohol being more dangerous socially and physically. The conventional acceptance of alcohol, he (and others) believes, is due to factors beyond that of mere historical custom. There is an immense vested interest in the sale of alcohol and conversely, yet with similar effects, an immense criminal vested interest in the prohibition of all drugs, and even such an interest among the burgeoning personnel of the narcotics bureaux. Whereas alcohol induces aggression,

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hemp invites to withdrawal, and this "positive" personal attitude is more acceptable to Protestant Anglo-Saxon societies than is the "negative" effect of hemp, which they deem decadent and "oriental." Most of all, those in authority fear the extended use of hallucinogenic drugs because their users tend to withdraw from the hurly-burly of polemical dispute, making pot- and acid-heads unsuitable material for political control and manipulation. (This diagnosis may seem accurate if one can judge by the trend among U.S. campus addicts away from politics of protest into a private psychedelic paradise.)

The section about whose conclusions most readers will probably agree (or at any rate, far more than will about the value of pot and LSD) is "The Scene Today and the Law," in which Mr. Andrews quotes hair-raising instances, from different lands, of the penalties meted out to addicts. The best known of these, of course, is Dr. Timothy Leary's sentence to 30 years and a \$30,000 fine for carrying a small quantity of marijuana, and however sceptical one may be of Dr. Leary's pseudo-religious pretensions (which seem to me, from what I have read of them, both spurious and fanatical), this penalty is clearly monstrous. Even in this country, I know several hemp smokers of otherwise impeccable character who have been jailed for long periods for doing what I myself believe to be harmless both to themselves and others, and none of the business of the state anyway.

CONCLUDING ON THIS PERSONAL note, I would offer tentative answers to the four questions posed at the beginning. There seems no doubt to me that hallucinogenic drugs can differ enormously in their effects, the distinction, for instance, between taking cannabis and cocaine, being almost total; and if this be so, to lump both together as identical drugs seems to me medically, socially, and legally grotesque. (The

argument that hemp is the inevitable first step to heroin is, in my experience, baseless.) As for the "beneficent" effects of hemp, unless one excludes the validity of intoxication of any kind (which our society, permissive to alcohol, does not), I cannot see any objection to each making his individual choice in the matter—I mean moral choice, not legal, for so far as the law goes, the pot-head has no choice. It would be a relief, on the other hand, if those who are simply out for "kicks" when they take hemp would frankly admit it, and not go on at such pretentious length about the pseudo-religious value of their "mystical" experiences: for I am sure that many a merely self-indulgent pot-head would be amazed were he to read the metaphysical claims that are made for his activities by some of the contributors to Mr. Andrews' book. In the matter of malignancy, this unquestionably exists with opiates like heroin and cocaine, possibly with LSD (about whose long-term effects I do not think we yet know enough), and marginally, if at all, with cannabis. The reasons authority advances to prohibit the use of non-addictive drugs (excluding, that is, the compulsive opiates) seem to me extremely suspect, being based on a mixture of ignorance, prejudice, and moralising malice.

As to the final question as to whether these prohibitions can really be enforced, I would say this is henceforth impossible. The ancillary consequences of trying to do so, in the form of a vast increase in criminal drug-pushing (comparable to that of liquor at the time of prohibition in America), and of a massive counter-espionage by narcotics agents, have already been suggested. But the real difficulty is a practical one. A bootlegger, to satisfy one client, must import clandestinely at least a bottle. But one bottle of LSD solution of equivalent size would be more than adequate to "turn on" tens of thousands of persons since a single drop works the magic; and as this precious fluid has no taste, smell, or colour, and can be marketed simply by sending someone a letter impregnated with a drop, I do not see how it can be effectively prevented. As in the case of homosexual prosecutions, this will result in a lottery by which, for every "criminal" arrested, hundreds will remain invisible. Even in the case of hemp, slightly more recognisable and bulky, the difficulties of prohibition are already considerable. Mr. Andrews tells us of a resourceful pusher who produced an anti-marijuana tract printed on marijuana paper, and handed it out with the whispered injunction, "After digesting the medical information, the informed may roll up the last chapter and smoke it."

Colin MacInnes

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**Alun Lewis: Selected Poetry and Prose.** With a Biographical Introduction by IAN HAMILTON.  
*Allen and Unwin, 30s.*

MR. HAMILTON, himself a poet, and editor of the indispensable magazine *The Review*, proved in his anthology *The Poetry of War* (1965) to be one of the very few critics who have been able to evaluate the poetry written by servicemen during 1939-1945. What he did in the anthology seems very simple; just to apply sound standards of judgment to the muddled reputations and mass of material that came out of the Second World War; but that for most critics the issues are still bedevilled by extraneous considerations is shown by notices and by other collections that have appeared since. The introduction to the present book demonstrates a perhaps even greater imaginative sympathy. It does not claim to achieve a critical "placing" of Lewis, but for the reader that is precisely what has happened when he has finished the discreet biographical detail, the sharp ideological investigation, of Mr. Hamilton's extended essay. It uses Lewis' unpublished as well as published work, particularly an unpublished journal; and such fugitive things as an anonymously-published article (in the *New Statesman*) which Lewis wrote about his experience at Battle School: again, obviously germane when produced but needing a true critic to uncover.

TO MANY like myself, whose roots were in the '30s, the main point about Lewis was the sense that his last Indian poems were an abdication from the responsibility of making a poetic statement about oppression and hope, about the soldier's life and the issues of the War:

*... we who dream beside this jungle pool  
Prefer the instinctive rightness of the poised  
Pied kingfisher deep darting for a fish  
To all the banal rectitude of states  
The dew-bright diamonds on a viper's back  
To the slow poison of a meaning lost  
And the vituperations of the just.*

(Lewis' death in 1944 seemed part of the same process, for there were rumours that it was self-inflicted.) This responsibility was all the heavier for the poet of 1939-1945 because of his feeling that in trying to follow Owen and Sassoon he was merely a *farceur*—being well apprised of Marx's apophthegm about history repeating itself! Lewis himself began with an acute and uneasy awareness of his larger and more innocent ancestors (particularly Edward Thomas), and

the best of his earlier poems (such as "Odi et Amo") are a brave attempt to make something universal out of the training and camp life of the "phoney war."

*My body does not seem my own  
Now. These hands are not my own  
That touch the hair-spring trigger, nor my eyes*

*Fixed on a human target, nor my cheek  
Stroking the rifle butt; my loins  
Are flat and closed like a child's.*

One of the virtues of Mr. Hamilton's introduction is its demonstration that Lewis' development towards an interior poetry was not merely a result of taking a commission or the confusion of war aims and wartime alliances or a failure of nerve (though such crudities no doubt played their part). It arose from his essential poetic personality; indeed it arose from an essential need (which it was an evidence of talent in Lewis to find objective correlates for in the physical circumstances in which he was placed) to deepen and strengthen his verse. His turning (on the voyage to India) to Rilke is a crucial example of this. Probably most wartime poets got hold of the little Leishman-translated selected Rilke which came out in the New Hogarth Library in 1941 (and one guesses that this was Lewis' immediate source) but few or none save Lewis were then able to make use of it. Before coming to the key lines of Lewis' poem, "To Rilke," Mr. Hamilton quotes two passages from the journal of the time about a strange dream, and then about Lewis' reading of Rilke: "He approached me as we were lying off India and I asked him about *silence*, and what price one paid for going my way—through the panzer divisions of the century—and whether he would have found his silence there. . . ." This kind of procedure (it is paralleled several times in the introduction) is especially illuminating with a writer like Lewis, partly because of his immaturities—the prose needs reinforcing with the verse, and sometimes the other way about—and partly because the tone of the verse is so quiet that we are apt to miss its reverberation:

*Rilke, if you had known that I was trying  
To speak to you perhaps you would have said  
"Humanity has her darlings to whom she's entrusted*

*A farthing maybe, or a jewel, at least a perception  
Of what can develop and what must be always endured*

*And what the live may answer to the dead.  
Such ones are known by their faces,  
At least their absence is noted;  
And they never lack an occasion,  
They, the devoted."*