

COMMENT

SIX numbers of *Horizon* have now appeared. Six more may reasonably expect to see the light; let us consider, at this half-way house, how our policy is shaping. It is a literary policy, and nothing more, and therefore meets with opposition from the non-literary, and unsleeping criticism from those within the ranks. Mr. Priestley, for example, says we have too much poetry; it is no longer, he claims, a cultural export, and should be treated as a literary by-product. In fact, we are inundated with poems, not only by professional poets, or even amateur ones, but in many cases by people who have never written a poem before, and yet find it come to them as naturally as blowing out a paper bag. Poems arrive on regimental notepaper, or on the shoddy white foolscap (used only in communicating with their equals!) of our suave bureaucracy. We have had poems sent from schools and prisons, and even from large country houses. From these amateur poets we can learn one important fact. Poetry is still the natural national form of self-expression, the one to which we take most readily. It is neither artificial nor decadent, and as the volume of poetry written would appear to have increased since the war, so the likelihood of great poetry being written in this country—which possesses the language and the emotional reserves necessary for it—must increase, particularly when it is taken into account that the poetry of to-day is classless and is no longer the preserve of the educated and leisured. From the professional poets another fact can be learned; that a fascinating struggle is going on between the technicians (the ‘poets’ poets’, the ‘avant garde’) and the traditionalists. It is a struggle rather between technique and imagination, and *Horizon* has tried to give expression to both. Thus, in this number, we have a long poem by William Rodgers, an Ulsterman of thirty, which is dependent entirely on its technique, its inner rhymes, dry assonances, practical images, all, of course, in their turn proceeding from the solid thought

which binds the long poem together. Translate this poem into a painting of *Bank Holiday* and it would approximate to Seurat's *Grande Jatte* or to the art of Coldstream. Not that it is a work of social realism, but that it is a detached and coldly philosophical observation on the way in which we spend our leisure, and the forces which impel us to it. Empson's poem in No. 5 was another technical achievement. Words unblushingly prosaic were strung together by the poet's sense of harmony and discipline into a lyric which produces on the sensitive reader an impression of deep nostalgia, of extraordinary relief from pain. Such poems as these extend the bounds and possibilities of English poetry, and reclaim themes and words and images for it as the Dutch reclaim the unpromising Zuyder Zee. Brian Howard's poem in the last number combines technical skill with a penetrating cry of grief. Dylan Thomas's poem, on the other hand, is governed by a kind of wild bleak inspiration. Technique and imagination are perhaps false distinctions: all one can say is that in some poems, and they are the most interesting, technique has worked over imagination to the extent of almost causing it to disappear. The direct emotion which the poet feels is like the clay figure which the sculptor models—a mould is taken of it and recast in bronze, the original material is thrown away.

The two poems by Prokosch which *Horizon* has printed are examples of romantic poetry. They are packed with strong feeling and do not achieve their effects by technique. The two poems by Auden are didactic. The technique is clumsy, and the versification careless, but the thought, the argument, is deeply poetical, although lumps of the raw material of his poetry are too often left in. Betjeman's 'Upper Lambourne' was, however, entirely traditional, a Georgian poem in which the nostalgia and imagery had been brought most subtly up to date. Thus we begin to recognize the new directions in which modern poetry is going, and can distinguish certain extremes. The pure technical virtuosity of Empson's poem comes at one end, with Rodgers's rather near to it; the lyrical rhetoric of Prokosch or Brian Howard

in the middle, together with Auden's profound and didactic poetry, or Eliot's 'East Coker' (where polished technical passages are succeeded by more awkward emotional ones), and at the other extreme the great bulk of ordinary artless, thoughtless English verse. Dylan Thomas and some of his Celtic imitators are unclassifiable; he resembles a kind of mad hit-or-miss experimental scientist who may at any moment either split the atom or produce from his laboratory a few test-tubes fizzing with coloured water.

In *Horizon* No. 4 we published six young and little-known poets. Laurie Lee (who was earning his living by playing the violin through the streets and cafés of Spain when the Spanish war broke out) contributed a direct emotional experience, 'A Moment of War', Adam Drinan's 'The Gulls' represents the didactic trend, and L. S. Little and Nicolas Moore incline towards Dylan Thomas's technique. Terence Heywood's 'Bestiary' was dry and satirical; like Rodgers and Empson, he would seem a poet less of the heart than of the head, while the Reverend F. Buchanan has the approach of Hopkins or the religious Eliot. In short, the poetry which *Horizon* has printed is an inexhaustible subject; there is still much that could be said about Barker's attempt to revive the Elegy in his 'Austrian Requiem', about Day Lewis's delicate handling of traditional material in his translations of the Georgics into a colloquial, yet rarefied and poetical English. We are in a nest of singing birds, and for all we know any mail may bring the first notes of a new Milton into the office. Mr. Priestley is quite wrong, English poetry was never more interesting or thriving; for even if the Milton does not appear, there is much excellent work being done by serious young poets with a sense of vocation.

And Faith beats down the enemy's last gate,
But listless then within resistless halls
Dies of its enemy's death.

Such poetry—thoughtful, crisp, hard to detach from its context, and coming from a poem which is in itself one

of the most extraordinary statements of the principle of dialectic materialism (thesis, antithesis, synthesis) to be made in verse—gives one new hope for the future of literature in England, and *Horizon* is fortunate in being able to print it.

It is a secret of good writing that it takes up very little room and expands in the remembering. The paper shortage, which will rid us of the books not worth publishing and the news not worth printing, may bring publisher and reader back to poetry, which is now the only kind of writing so concentrated as to be economically justified.

In prose we have gone out for the short story, the critical essay, and, where we can find it, the imaginative writing which was once known as the prose poem. Here again a new trend is noticeable, that is to say a return towards fine writing, towards a use of all the rich vocabulary of literary English, and the prose of the imagination. This is reinforced by the strange phenomenon of the Welsh renaissance, for prose is being affected by the Celtic rhetoric of the Welsh writers. We have printed stories by Rhys Davies, Pritchett, and G. F. Green which illustrate this kind of writing, and this month, in contrast, we publish a story by an unknown writer, which is not only an excellent comedy (and those who find no comedy in a satire on English justice should remember how tolerantly the Americans have accepted in Faulkner or Dreiser criticism of a similar nature), but also an attempt, like that made by Hemingway, to write entirely in a spoken vernacular. The attempt succeeds, because the quality of the material (India) is so rich and exotic that it can stand the economy of the treatment. The two hundred and fifty word vocabulary of Adams is enriched by his background, just as the vernacular of American gangsters is adequate as long as violence and action inform it. Where the colloquial writers break down is in the attempt to describe ordinary life, a Lyons' Corner House, for instance, in the words of the Tough Guy. The next stories to be published are two, by Elizabeth Bowen and Julia Strachey, which are 'literary', and another, in demotic American, by Alfred Perlès.

In regard to critical essays, we have attempted to get the best we can, excluding those which are too academic, or which are not coloured by a real passion for the subject. Clement Greenberg's article was reprinted from *Partisan Review*, and is an example of American criticism, just as Jouve's *Mozart* was of French. Orwell's 'Boys' Weeklies' was a *tour de force*, Quennell's 'Romantic Catastrophe' was no less revolutionary, and R. Ironside's 'Burne-Jones and Moreau' carries under its learning the implication that English art is at its best when literary and imaginative, and has perhaps been ruined by contact with the French. Such articles, careful, passionate, and unsettling are what a Review exists to produce.

In the political articles, we have endeavoured to present various points of view; as the war increases in intensity, so the efficacy of political articles decreases. There seems no point in advocating political theories which no one is in a position to implement, and so the space is better given to creative writing, and to those articles which bring closer the culture of France and America. For there can be no doubt that the war (crippling though it be to the artist who is affected economically, or by conscription) is yet causing a deepening interest in art and the artist by which they may later profit. An English renaissance may be on its way, and triumph with an English victory: for it is possible that the war, with the upheaval it has caused in English life, may finally destroy those class barriers which segregate the talents of the few from the potentialities of the many. *New Writing* (Hogarth Press, 5/-) has just come out, and in it writers of the calibre of Henry Green and Rosamond Lehman are fellow travellers with Indians and Chinese.

This number of *Horizon* also reflects a changing England: the young coalminer is an old Etonian, the short story writer is on the dole. In their fate is bound up that of the embryo new democracy which may bring humanity, opportunity, and a flowering of the arts to our stuffy island, and to the whole of Europe, or which may be deformed by reaction and suffocated by defeat.

W. R. RODGERS

SUMMER HOLIDAYS

New every morning now the clerk docks off
Yesterday's desk-date, jerks back the needle
On duty's disc, and noses and slides on
Round the ingrowing ring and exact track
Of old tactics till the day's contracting
Circle ends, and suddenly the idle needle
Skids wildly into zig-zag freedom
And tidy tailspin, the clerk knocks off
Abruptly, buttoning-up his coat.

And later, no doubt, you will see him
Nosing and sliding in orderly line
Into pin-lighted cinema, being led
Alertly to allotted seat of ease,
Relaxing with eyes like asterisks;
Or note him standing in stadium rind,
Eager for joy to be unconfined, the
Electric hare let loose to recapture
Its first fine careless rapture.

Even here at the day's convenient halt
And within its convolvulus ring
He has his own hugged track, his strangling string
Of ingrained act, his railed and ready ease;
And coiled in this roundabout and tail-chase
Of private scope and escape is ever
The spin of flesh on the spindle of bone
Concentering all, with its brute ambitions,
Its acute and terrible attritions.

But few look up to see or consider
This, the slack and screw of their happiness,