

the 17th,' or it may, for all I know, be the 47th, is about to resolve into *do, mi, sol* by some stellar hat trick.

To the uninitiate I think there will come simply the feeling of cleansing acid, call it cacophony, which wakes the hearer or washes his inner ear—possibly scrapes it, so that there is a bit of sensitive nerve ready for the next exquisite set of whippers.

The good old hymn-tune chords bump on an insensitive callus. The laws of Pythagoras go further than the relations of 2 to 3, 3 to 4; and such simple arithmetic. Honegger has constructed an astrological marvel; he has sent his imagination up past the Gordon-Bennet Cup-racers into the high thin air over the breathable air and earned at least more gratitudes than mine in the process.

Alban Berg is regretted. It would be unfair to compare three movements of his Lyric Suite to a solid quartet composition. There are, as they say, moments. I cannot write without conviction. My only conviction about Berg is that Endré Gertler and Pierre de Groote certainly know more about his music than I do, and they believe in these three movements which they find very beautiful.

At any rate, music of 1936 is active and various. Berg is nearer to Bartók. You can measure the music geographically. It seems to me a bit weak to call a man 'the most talented of Schönberg's epigons,' but I suppose it is meant for a compliment.

BUDAPEST, Vienna, Paris!—and to measure them you have got to listen to Hindemith. Or put it another way, the richness and abundance of music in 1936 is infinitely greater than it was in the 1920's, when most of us could deeply admire no one save Igor Stravinsky (though a handful, including myself, enjoyed Antheil, whose work from 1922 to 26 still deserves more attention than has been given it).

In Hindemith's own field no one can touch him. I haven't a quartet in my mind to illustrate this point. His Viola

Concerto (*Der Schwanendreher*) was finished last October (i.e., 1935). I wonder has any man ever heard a composition which so grows like a tree in absolute evolution from the lead throughout all of its details?

I heard Hindemith play it. A composer has divine and human right to the best possible execution of his own work. Music that is nothing but music or at least that exists independent of any concurrent arts; that draws the auditor's mind not out of itself toward some further objective, but keeps it concentrated on the actual sound being presented to it! In this kind of music, no one, and least of all his greatest contemporary and our lasting delight Igor Stravinsky, competes with Hindemith. From the viola lead grow all the sounds of the orchestra. My emphasis is on the verb *grow*.

Conscious or unconscious, the composer is impregnated with the sense of growth, cellular, as in the natural kingdoms. From the initial cells of the root-heart out to the utmost leaf of the foliage, in this case the harp notes, the *Schwanendreher* is natural in its liveliness. That dominant fact is worth more than any fragment of it, and if the critic be worth his salt he will want to convey that main fact, above all else, however much he admires specific minor events in the workmanship, as, for example, the acceptable use of the harp, which is the last instrument other composers ever use with efficiency. There is authentic gaiety in the active movement before the finale. We have had so much spurious gaiety that this robust outbreak is notable, though it is a minor facet in relation to the totality of the work.

GUADARRAM, MY GUADARRAM!

THE natural sympathy that all Russian *literati* feel for Spain has been lately expressed in a form that is far from felicitous—an anthology entitled *We Are With You*, gathering

together Russian poems on the Spanish situation. This book has fallen into the hands of Ilya Ehrenburg, the famous Russian author, who is at present covering the Spanish front; we reprint from the Moscow *Izvestia* his reaction to it:—

The unequal struggle of the Spanish people against German and Italian Fascists, the heroism of women, children, and old men, the blood of those shot down in Badajoz and Seville, the shade of the poet Garcia Lorca demand either inspired words or modest silence. There are, however, some poets in our midst for whom Spain's tragic struggle is merely a pretext for some poetical exercise, a few exotic names, and some new rhymes.

The content of these poems will amaze anyone who has been following the Spanish events. I do not want to name the poets, for I know that they are much better than the poems which they have dedicated to Spain. I shall, instead, use numbers.

Guadarrama is a ringing name. One poet decided that it is even more heroic with a masculine ending—Guadarram. Every one pounced on poor 'Guadarram.' Poet number 1 writes:—

*From Toledo on the Tagus River
From the sloping hills of Guadarram (!)
Like a song or poem to us comes ringing
Of your vict'ry every telegram.*

Poet number 2 prefers a reversed process:—

*The song from Moscow comes to you
Swifter than bird
Or telegram.
Ah me, how tall
Are the hills of Guadarram . . .*

Poet number 3 gives utterance to a statement which might interest a carpenter as well as a surgeon:—

*Like a door the wound is creaking,
Blood spurts forth in horrid spray.
'Guadarrama, Guadarrama. . . .
Give me back my gun, I say!'*

The name of one of the leaders of the Spanish people, comrade Dolores Ibaruri, went completely to the poets' heads. Poet number 4 expresses a desire:—

*In the battle's burning tide,
To await the midnight's coming
With Dolores at my side. . . .*

Poet number 5 is a little bit more modest in his aspirations, and is content with remarking that he wouldn't mind facing

*The perils grave that lie before us
With women, comrades of Dolores.*

Poet number 6 turns to Spain with a somewhat strange exhortation:—

Spain, to the barricades!

This poet evidently does not know that there is a civil war going on in Spain, and that workers and peasants are fighting on ten fronts. He is, besides, anxious that Spain should show sufficient courage:—

*Yes, at this solemn fateful hour
I beg of you with many tears:
Oh, crush the snake—there still is time:
Fight now means peace in coming years.*

In the column next to the poems quoted there are printed despatches from Soviet correspondents mentioning the high courage of the Spanish people. The poet really does not have to 'beg with many tears.'

Poet number 7 devotes his efforts to describing the tragic landscape of war:—

*Quivering wings of foreign bombers
Fill the heart of Spain with chill.
Our girls by their machine guns
On their fronts lie bravely still!*

A pathetic picture, no question about it—girls lying on their fronts!

Poet number 8 tells about the death of a militiaman. This is the way he describes it:—

*Burning sun and fragrant breezes,
Apple blossoms—all for naught.
Comrade Pedro lay a-dying
On the field on which he fought.
On his deathbed lay he, thinking
'What a lovely fix I'm in! . . .'*

If there were not in Spain so many thousands of Pedros who are really dying for Republic and Revolution, we might even laugh at these lines.

Poet number 9 strains at the leash:—

*My country rallies to your side
And so do I.*

True, our country rallies to the side of Spain with good butter and good shoes, while poet number 9 rallies to her side with execrable verses.

Poet number 10 describes the heroic deed of a Spanish flyer:—

*He flies into the aerial battle's din;
He's called upon to down a Rebel plane
Of German origin.*

It looks as if this poet—and he is no novice, but a recognized poet—had sat down at a table and said to himself:—

*I am called upon to write a rebel verse
Of phony origin.*

Poet number 11 seems to have hesitated. He asked himself:—

*I don't know, if, in poetic rapture,
I should tell the world my ardent dreams.*

Obviously he has decided that perhaps he *had* better. His dreams prove to be most peculiar. He dreams about

*. . . the fragrance of Madrid's gunpowder
and roses
in the open gardens of Granada.*

These roses of Granada are not unique. Fortunately, after a few unsuccessful attempts, the Carmen motif disappears for good from these poems about Spain's revolution. Nevertheless there does remain the 'gurgling of the Guadalquivir,' the roses of Granada, swords, and serenades—all the pseudo-Spanish stuff that the Spaniards themselves contemptuously call *Españolada*.

Some of the poets, evidently considering the possibility of Franco's projected blockade, attempt to pass their poems for goods now particularly in demand in Spain. For example, one wants to be 'a barrel of dynamite.' Another assures us that the women of Oviedo

*. . . load their heavy rifles
With the fragments of my broken heart.*

We can only hope that the fighters of Spain will find other cartridges of better quality.

BOOKS ABROAD

THE POETIC DRAMA

THE ASCENT OF F6. By *W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood*. London: Faber & Faber. 1936.

(Stephen Spender in the *Left Review*, London)

WHILST the Novel and the Stage run efficiently along their sterile but well-oiled grooves, the Poetic Drama offers herself to the writer as the most problematic and perhaps the most fertile of forms. What are her special attractions? Well, she has connections with the audiences of the Music Hall and Variety Stage, tougher collaborators than those of the novelist who attains the gilt-edged visiting cards of the Book Society or the Hawthornden Prize. Moreover, in the theater, the audience is notoriously both critic and creator: it applauds or throws eggs; it identifies itself with the hero.

Yet perhaps even more important than the over-discussed relationship of the audience as a 'group' to the actors and author of the play (for, after all, not even Auden and Isherwood have as yet, in any wide and established sense, found their audience), is the solution which the theater offers to the poet simply of the problems of writing contemporary poetry. I see the poetic drama above all as a way out of isolation and obscurity. There are a dozen forces in modern life which tend to make the single poem, in which the poet is 'aware' of this complexity of impulse, more and more difficult. To mention only two factors, there is the distraction of the surface of the whole modern world of frustrated appearances: the traffic moving without any very evident benefit to anyone, each path of specialized living—the bank clerk, the scientist, the poet, the unemployed—becoming boxed away from all others. Next, there is the isolation of the individual in this world; his very percep-

tion of the significance of what is going on round him often becomes a means of imprisoning him in his own personality.

The single poem, then,—and to some degree the single work of fiction when it attains to the highest kind of art,—tends simply to express this isolation: a negative, ingrown attitude which finally bores the poet himself. 'Dramatize, dramatize,' is the cry of Henry James throughout the prefaces of his immense life-work of described poetry—which is what his novels are—and he was right. The most successful modern poems have nearly all been highly dramatic: *Prufrock*, *The Waste Land*, *A Communist to Others*, the later poems of Yeats. Yeats wins the victories of a lifetime devoted to poetry in an unashamed passion of self-dramatization. Auden is most simple, passionate and effective when he can present the attitude of the Communist poets to the workers on the one hand and, on the other, to the bourgeoisie; the earlier Eliot when he can contemplate a *Prufrock* who is not so much himself as a groove of life down which some phantom, in whom he can recognize his own features, is forced.

All this is only to state some of the poet's private problems which make him turn to the stage. Once he begins to write poetic drama, the state of the contemporary theater, the mood of audiences, the condition of acting, become practical problems, demanding immediate solution.

If one is unaware of these factors, one's judgment of *The Ascent of F6* by W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood—or, indeed, of any other contemporary poetic drama—is likely to be abstracted and unhelpful. On the one hand, then, the poet takes to poetic drama with a widening of the impulse that leads him to write single poems; on the other, he is faced with the enormous difficulty of entertaining an audience brought up to appreciate drawing-