

*The countryside were old ideas  
Found lying open to the elements.  
Of the gods' houses only  
A minor premise here and there  
Would be balancing the heaven of fixed stars  
Upon a Doric capital.*

The poem continues its luminous way into a present as aware of the deep essentials: olive, oil, light, air, and the scream to understand:

*This first glass I down  
To the last time  
I ate and drank in that old world. May I  
Also survive its meaning, and my own.*

I will end this brief glance at Merrill's capacity to look out of a subject instead of at it by examining a love poem called "Poem of Summer's End." Two lovers who have been such for ten years are in a town in Italy during a very hot spell. They twist and turn all night and go about daily life as though in a trance because of the heat and because of what that heat and sweat symbolize. Toward the end of the poem they are in a restaurant where a young waiter is helping them to "think of what we want."

*I do not know — have I ever known? —  
Unless concealed in the next town,  
In the next image blind with use, a clue,  
A worn path, points the long way round back to  
The springs we started out from. Sun  
Weaker each sunrise reddens that slow maze  
So freely entered. Now come days  
When lover and beloved know  
That love is what they are and where they go.  
Each learns to read at length the other's gaze.*

The skill with which Merrill brings the circle full round in this poem and his use of heat/love, eat/love, is/love motifs suggest a perspective on the subject that is quite new: a focus on the qualities of fusion and wholeness rather than on the piecemeal of the incidental rendezvous. It is love as a state, as a way of life that brightens the poem onto this ledge of discovery. Here as in so many other poems in this extraordinary volume, Merrill has shifted the emphasis from the thing or state *observed* to the thing or state *experienced*.

— Nancy Sullivan

*The Small Rain.* By Raymond Roseliep. Westminster, Md.: The Newman Press. 81 pp. \$3.95.

MANY WRITERS and more readers feel uneasy about the category of Catholic poet. A poet is a poet in virtue of his humanity, and poetry is the naked exercise of all his faculties. But at least in all but the greatest writers, their work seems to have grown out of special

quirks and limits of experience: a good poet may have lived with some mental illness, or worked in a clay-mine, or been drunk and in debt, or have been a discarded court favorite. This is so generally true that one may reasonably suspect the most ordinary mask to conceal the most bizarre experiences. There could only be a true Catholic poetry if Catholic religion were the same sort of limit, the same specialization of experience. In practice the daily routines and moral habits of twentieth century American Catholics could perhaps impose on a poet or on some poets this special point of view: if that is now happening, then the poetry will be as specially American and specially modern as it is specially Catholic. Out of these brambles of special experience burns this fire, man, with this loud crackling voice, poetry.

The poetry of Raymond Roseliep has a dry, tonic clarity which is genuinely American and of now. Some contemporary American poets — a great part in fact of the swarms of names that come and go in the magazines — fail by not being clever enough. They are unable to write with the irony and penetration which modern prose has made us demand; just as the taste for spirits has created the demand for drier wines, writers like Hemingway, Carson McCullers, Sillitoe, Greene, and the early Salinger have made it impossible to relish these loose and starry-eyed verses. A good poem has to be at least as proficient as a *New Yorker* poem. Where Father Roseliep gains over many contemporaries is in the amount of himself which sheer, uninhibited intelligence has brought into play. His attack is freestyle, and the poetry is in the style, in the degree and quality of personality.

It is hard to make a proper estimate of any poet from his second book (particularly if one had not discovered him with his first), but there is the sense in many poems in *The Small Rain* of the sort of forbidding and severe spring which may come before a marvelous summer. Father Roseliep is in control of his material without playing round with it, and fully conscious of himself without the boring suppressions, those endemic dishonesties of the good, which one might fear for him as a priest. He has the power and sting of a writer like Spingarn, and at the same time a little of the charm of Louis Simpson. (He is good enough and modern enough to recall to one's mind only American poets later than Lowell.) If he has a recurrent fault, it may be the occasional clotted, sweet images like squashed fruit which derive remotely from Father Hopkins and from the randy eye of Ruskin.

Raymond Roseliep's second book is the most refreshing and invigorating discovery to have come my way in months; it may prove to have been important. There are few enough genuine poets even in America for it to be worth watching them closely. This is the book of a poet worth watching.

— Peter Levi S.J.

*The Inheritors*. By William Golding. New York: Harvest Books. \$1.65. (Paper)

LIKE THE BEATLES and *Beyond the Fringe*, the novels of William Golding have become one of those rare exportable products of British culture which are enthusiastically adopted in the United States. The publication of *The Inheritors* as a Harvest paperback means that all of the novels are easily available, and one of his books, *Lord of the Flies*, has now apparently replaced *The Catcher in the Rye* as the object of a cult among younger readers.

The reasons for such an adoption are perhaps the province of the sociologist rather than the critic, but Golding himself has suggested an interesting explanation in a recent interview. He argues that *Lord of the Flies* is popular among younger readers because it faces up to the problem of evil in the universe. It does not pretend that there is a built-in human inclination toward goodness. Instead, Golding's novel re-affirms the doctrine of original sin, and presents a human nature that is imperfect and corrupted from the start, so much so that a band of innocents turn an island-paradise into a nightmare of terror and murder. The doctrine is a traditional one, but apparently it comes as a fresh and plausible theory to those who have been brought up on a vague theory of infinite perfectibility which history seems to deny.

*Lord of the Flies* (1954) is a portrait of the basic savagery that can emerge in civilized man. In *The Inheritors*, first published a year later, Golding turns to a study of primitive and presumably savage man before the process of civilization has begun. The two books are thus closely related in theme and should be read together, for it is only in the second novel that a more precise idea of Golding's definition of original sin emerges. Among his Neanderthal heroes he finds a kind of primeval innocence which civilized man can never hope to attain, an innocence based on immediate sympathy with all creatures, a fear of violence, and the absence of any particular awareness of self. Taken together, the two novels are a gloss on a proverb which Goya chose as the title of one of his *Caprichos*: "The dreams of reason breed monsters." Violent, selfish, and self-assertive, civilized man destroys the Neanderthal Eden in *The Inheritors*, and in *Lord of the Flies* he reverts to a savagery far worse than that of men who have never been civilized at all. Progress seems to lead to the loss of innocence, but a return to a primitive life does not restore that innocence. Instead, the sudden removal of control from civilized man's life inevitably reveals the absence of innocence.

From a study of already corrupted childhood, Golding thus moves to a study of the childhood of the species, and in *The Inheritors* he faces one of those simple and extreme situations which occur in all of his works. The schoolboys marooned on their island, the

hero of his third novel, *Pincher Martin* (1956), who dies on a jagged rock in mid-Atlantic, and the tiny group of Neanderthal men who call themselves "the people" and believe that they are alone in the world—all are isolated, and all are suddenly forced to confront the basic realities of life and death.

In all three novels the situation is the same, the break-up of an organization (in Martin's case his personality, which protects him against the world). The hierarchically-organized schoolboys of *Lord of the Flies* soon lose their discipline, Pincher Martin disintegrates emotionally and physically, and in *The Inheritors* the tribe is dissolved. At the beginning of the book the tribe is a unit, so tightly organized that they share mental pictures without speech, but under the repeated attacks of the "new people" they are physically and emotionally separated. The new arrivals—Cro-Magnon man, with all his affinities to the modern European, inventive, artistic, verbal, aggressive, and self-centered—destroy the Neanderthals one by one. First they cause the death of old Mal, the father and leader of the eight-member tribe and its mind. Then they kill Ha, also a thinker, and attack the tribal cave to kill the old mother who presides over the fire, to put out the fire, to kill another of the women, and to kidnap the two children. The future and the past are thus destroyed together. Only a man and a woman are left, Lok and Fa. They frighten the invaders, causing the death of one man and terrifying a girl into madness, but they are too guileless and too unaggressive to prevail. At the end of the book the kidnaped girl is dead, the new people have fled with the surviving infant, Fa is dead, and Lok is left alone, the last useless fragment of what was once a group personality.

But these external events, important as they are, operate simply as the cause of another drama, that which goes on in Lok's primitive mind, and the convincing representation of such a mind is Golding's most impressive technical achievement. In eleven of the twelve chapters, events are filtered through Lok's consciousness, and Golding manages the difficult feat of conveying to us the processes of a gradually awakening primitive mind, and of presenting them in appropriately simple language which is, at the same time, precise enough for his subtle purposes.

Lok will not kill. His meat must be found after other animals have killed it, and when he discovers a dead doe he is uneasily aware of "violence . . . meat and wickedness . . . a kind of darkness." "This is very bad," he tells himself. "Oa brought the doe out of her belly . . . This is bad. But a cat killed you so there is no blame." He is so guileless and pacific that he believes the Cro-Magnon arrows to be presents for him, and he yearns for the new people and their ways with a mixture of timidity and fear. He cannot imagine their hostility and aggression, much less their fear of him, as he watches them affectionately and tries to share their feelings. The