

phony (Victrola 1249), the Beethoven Septet (a delightful bonus in an album devoted to the nine symphonies—Victrola 8000, eight discs), Debussy's *Iberia* (Victrola 1246), Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker* (Victrola 1263) are a few particularly good ones. But it is invidious to pick and choose from this prodigal collection of reprints. Their price is low, the sound (given the basic limitations of the original material) good, and the interpretations never without interest. More Toscanini reissues are promised for 1968, incidentally, including the complete *Aida* and *Bohème*.

THE PERFORMANCES new to records are contained in an album entitled "A Toscanini Treasury of Historic Broadcasts" (RCA Victor 6711, five discs), more than half of which is devoted to two composers not ordinarily associated with the conductor, Sibelius and Shostakovich. The former is represented by his Symphony No. 2 and *Pohjola's Daughter* (both played with a refinement this composer seldom receives), the latter with his First and Seventh Symphonies. The remaining records are given over to Haydn and Brahms. There are first-rate things here—the Haydn Symphony No. 99 in a typically lithe and singing interpretation, a stunning razorsharp reading of the perky Shostakovich First, and the Sibelius pieces noted above—but they are mostly footnotes to the Toscanini legacy and their belated issue has struck many observers as a rather lame way of celebrating his hundredth anniversary.

What some of us had hoped for was an album devoted to rehearsal excerpts. Any musician who played under Toscanini will tell you that his rehearsals far surpassed the subsequent concert performances. This theme runs like a *leitmotiv* through B. H. Haggin's collection of interviews. Thus, violist Nicolas Moldavan reports: "His great moments were not at the concerts; they were at the rehearsals; and anybody who missed them, missed Toscanini . . . that was where there were the moments of beauty and intensity that only Toscanini could achieve."

My own favorite Toscanini record, the one I return to more often

than any other, is a private-label pressing of segments from his rehearsals for *La Traviata*, including the long scene between Violetta and Germont in which the old man sings both parts in a raspy but ever so expressive croak. Here the interpretation is more spacious, more relaxed, more lyrical than in the published broadcast performance, and the record fully bears out the testimony of his players that Toscanini's really towering achievements took place when he was alone with his musicians. A sizable archive of rehearsal sessions exists on tape, and their dissemination on records might perform wonders in helping to revive the Toscanini image.

For his image today is decidedly tarnished. The sale of Toscanini records has fallen off precipitously, and young opinion makers now pay him little heed. In part this is due to the deficiencies of the recordings, in part to the normal posthumous reaction against a figure so oversold and overpublicized in his

lifetime. But the explanation goes deeper than that. If Toscanini is less of a hero today than he seemed twenty years ago, it is because the terrain he fought for is now safely secured. Today an entire school of conductors, men who fell under his influence in their formative years, carries forward (with varying degrees of success) the guiding precepts of his interpretative approach.

Such musicians as Szell, Steinberg, Karajan, Solti, and Leinsdorf hold in common the same basic gospel—fidelity to the composer's text, the most exigent standards of orchestral execution, strict maintenance of tempo, a classic rather than a romantic orientation—and that gospel stems directly from Toscanini. The tradition he established has thus become the Establishment. But in music as in the other arts, the man who says it first usually says it best, and there are still a good many of us who have yet to find an entirely acceptable substitute for the old maestro.

## A Christmas Play

They act this play out in a northern cold,  
Four angry children fighting over parts.  
One, weary at the Inn-door, has become  
A raucous Magus who forgets his part,  
And will not sing, or will not sing the words,  
Resenting he must give up what he is  
To what he never was or will be; in the end  
The Virgin has become a Shepherd Boy,  
And Joseph bellows *glorias* upstairs,  
Sent there to be an Angel, but born obstinate  
In being; one won't play at all,  
But sits and strokes the plaster Ox which stands  
Four-square beside its empty stall and chews  
A year's dry upstairs-closet dust; the night  
Is thickening with snow, and none believe  
They take their part to any end, but are  
What blood of season makes them out to be,  
Virgin, Angel, King, or bitter Spouse.  
They fight to play whatever part they take; none fight  
To play a mute child unattended in the straw,  
But watch the snow dust on the windowcreens, and taste  
A dust of Eden thicker than the snow.  
Beasts roar outside, grown frantic with the cold.  
Their voices freeze in gardens on the glass.

—JOHN ENGELS



## Two Ladies of Legend

DANIEL HOFFMAN

**T**HE LAST YEARS OF A REBEL: A MEMOIR OF EDITH SITWELL, by Elizabeth Salter. Houghton Mifflin. \$5.

THE COMPLETE POEMS OF MARIANNE MOORE. Macmillan/Viking. \$8.50.

Edith Sitwell and Marianne Moore come together, in Miss Salter's memoir, when Miss Moore, in London, visits her ailing friend. "Their conversation reached out and never quite made a connection. . . . Edith closed her eyes and returned to sleep." This sense of debility, of opportunities come to little, runs through Miss Salter's book. She was Dame Edith's secretary during the seven years before the poet's death in 1964. The period Miss Salter witnessed was not a happy ending for this self-dramatizing, egocentric, and talented woman. Her memoirist recounts her need to put down someone who failed to acknowledge her honorary doctorate with a tart note to which she signed "D. Litt." four times, once for each award of the degree.

No more endearing is her need to humiliate anyone who, after her elevation to the O.B.E., omitted her title. Such overweening pride of place seems more vulgar than one would expect from the granddaughter of the Earl of Londesborough, or from a woman whose poems had won the

praises of Yeats, Gertrude Stein, and Stephen Spender—indeed, who was regarded by many after the Second World War as England's greatest living poet. But we are unfair to judge her by *gaffes* of her waning years. Such mock battles and rude ripostes served as a tonic to the ailing controversialist, reduced to conquering ennui by conducting splenetic vendettas against chance correspondents or hostile reviewers. Bad luck for her that the latter by then included such makers of contemporary taste as Robert Conquest and A. Alvarez; it was not always so.

It is a merit of Miss Salter's story that although Edith Sitwell is shown as proud, impatient, testy, and demanding, the reader is yet won over by her spunk and her own kind of integrity. Under all that bluster and those Elizabethan robes and jewels, she was, it appears, terribly unsure of herself. Her life had a pathos that the reader of her poems might suspect as little as would a nonreader who knew her only as a public figure appearing always either in costume or in controversy.

Growing up in the household described in her brother Osbert's autobiography, Edith Sitwell not surprisingly was thought, and was made to feel herself, an ugly duckling in Horseback Hall. Her peremptory

and opinionated father forced Edith, when young, to be strapped into a device for the correction of her posture and the shape of her nose. Who could outgrow such humiliation? The poor girl was fated to write a book about English eccentrics, and to try to become one. Although her portrait by Tchelitchev (with whom Miss Salter says she had been in love) shows Edith Sitwell, then in her thirties, to resemble the princess in *Le Roman de la Rose*, she could never think herself other than as plain as her "Jane, Jane,/Tall as a crane." When asked, on her seventy-fifth birthday, if she had enjoyed her years, she replied, "I must say no—I have had an extremely unhappy life."

MISS SALTER calls her memoir *The Last Years of a Rebel*, but as she takes her subject's stature for granted and does not discuss her writings, the significance of Edith Sitwell's rebellion is not quite clear. Hers was a personal revolt against the constraints of her upbringing, a revolt expressed both by the controversies she relished and by the poems she wrote. The petty feuds of the last few years were the habitual gestures of one who had, four decades earlier, really tilted against the Philistines. But if her feuds and her stagy presence belong, as F. R. Leavis once rather cruelly said, to the history of publicity, her best work belongs—although that critic did not think so—to the history of literature. Her best work transcends her personality and gives expression to her time.

Since her death three years ago, her reputation has sagged. Her late writings are, I think, less relevant to us now than the poems from 1915 to 1929, with which she startled a generation already subject to many aesthetic shocks. Her later poetry, written after a ten-year silence and during conversion to the Roman Catholic Church, was vatic and oratorical, heavy with religious themes, and in debt to a stock Romantic vocabulary. Gone were the lightness of touch, the zany humor, the irrationality with fear breaking through that gave her early work its distinctive stamp. No doubt "Still Falls the Rain" brought sacrificial dignity to what England was enduring in the air raids in 1940, but it now seems rhetorical and lack-