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Literature Abroad

By ERNEST BOYD

IN "South Wind" Norman Douglas set down with delightful humor the strange chronicle of the exiles, eccentric and otherwise, who have made Capri their geographical and their spiritual home. Now that book has an Italian counter-part entitled "Aria di Capri" (Naples: Casella), which is signed by a name hitherto unencountered in my diligent reading of all things Italian, Edwin Cerio. It looks to me very much like a pen-name, and my suspicions are confirmed by the un-Mediterranean flavor of the Christian name, and the fact that the surname, when pronounced, approximates remarkably to "Cheerio!" If I were to hear that Norman Douglas himself had a hand in it, and that "Cheerio-Cerio" is a pseudonym covering a collaboration of which he is part, I should not be surprised.

❧ ❧

In case there are readers anxious to expose my ignorance and claim personal knowledge of the estimable Edwin Cerio, I hasten to say that the question of the authenticity of this signature is merely idle and amused speculation, so far as I am concerned, for the book itself stands squarely upon its intrinsic interest and the droll humor of its style. Imagine "South Wind" in the form of a series of sketches, thirteen being "Men" and fifteen being "Things." The former are biographical and personal impressions of different eccentrics of genius who have added to the gaieties of life in Capri; the latter are stories of various unusual incidents in which those, or other, eccentrics were involved. Add the two together and "South Wind" is the result, with a little left over for a volume like "Siren Land." Edwin Cerio writes about these people apparently without fictitious names: "August Weber: Lunar Myth." "Oscar Westergaard: Solar Myth," "Miradois: the German Christ," "Bludoir: the Interim Christ," "Emilio Gilardi: the Fifth Evangelist," "Norman Douglas: Sirenologist."

I quote some of the chapters on "Men," although most of the people are known, I imagine, only to visitors to Capri, because the accounts of them differ in no respect from the accounts of Marinetti and Norman Douglas, whose existence is vouchsafed for by other witnesses than Edwin Cerio. It happens that no preliminary acquaintance with any of the gentlemen is necessary to the understanding and enjoyment of what is here related concerning them. Be they real or imaginary portraits, they constitute a collection of individuals as curious as any who marched through the pages of "Nightmare Abbey" or "Headlong Hall." The secret of the peculiar charm of Capri is revealed, and the why and the wherefore of Norman Douglas are no longer a mystery. Where else, if not in Capri, could he live; where find his inspiration? Let Edwin Cerio speak:

"Siren Land" is the only British possession which has been annexed to the Empire by right of spiritual occupation. . . . The English in Capri are dedicated to the export of Sirens, a southern marine product. They have installed on the island a breeding ground for the only mythological animal upon which their imagination can feed. The English intellectuals are sirenophagus gluttons, with a special liking for the Mediterranean variety of that charming amphibian, in which they do an active trade. . . . Sirens, which are born here spontaneously, by parthogenesis, are not found in England, and all attempts to acclimatize them on the shores of Britain have failed. Even the greatest attempt of this kind failed, "The Sea Lady" of H. G. Wells.

❧ ❧

Having described how Norman Douglas came to write "South Wind," "Siren Land," and "Old Calabria," Edwin Cerio is led to an enumeration of "England's intellectual forces in the Mediterranean:" Compton Mackenzie, Francis Brett Young, D. H. Lawrence, Rebecca West, and Hugh Walpole. These are a few of the writers who have from time to time been stationed in the waters of Capri, a squadron of powerful cruisers attached to the heavy battleships of the metropolitan literary fleet; Wells and Shaw, of established fame; J. D. Beresford, E. M. Delafield, Katherine E. Mansfield, Frank Swinnerton, Romer Wilson, James Joyce, Stella Benson, St. John Ervine, Aldous Huxley, Wyndham Lewis. . . . Amongst all these people Norman Douglas is an entity apart. . . . But for Douglas Capri would have become a refuge for respectable people, a pathway of virtue, a sink emptied of its iniquities. Douglas is the professional of imaginary sin. As an anonymous poet says:

Was there a sin Tiberius committed
Which might one moment find N. D. outwitted?
No, cry the rocks and the reverberate caves,
No, from their tombs proclaim a myriad slaves.

Edwin Cerio, like many another admirer, tried to extract from Norman Douglas some biographical facts. The answer received was: "The only more or less respectable event in my life was my birth. The rest is not fit for publication." Nevertheless, he contrives to give an outline of the history of this "celebrated pantheist explorer." First he entered the diplomatic service, and was secretary at Petrograd, but "owing to insubordination on the part of his superior, the Ambassador," he left the Foreign Office and went to India to write a report on imperial tariffs. Encouraged by this, and having learned from Darwin that there are no toads on volcanic islands, he proceeded to the volcanic island of Lipari, discovered a toad, and presented it to the South Kensington Museum. Whenever he heard that an animal was unknown in a certain place, he would go to that place and inevitably produce the animal aforesaid. On the island of Stympalos in Greece he found a frog that ought never to have been there; in the Orkneys some snail, and in the lake of Saima, in Finland, "a rare, or rather a unique sea-lion, which ought not to have been in the lake of Saima."

After such a training Norman Douglas was "ripe for Capri," and the account of his doings there follows in a mock-serious vein which is highly entertaining: he wrote monographs on the flora and fauna of the island—" as soon as there was a subject in which nobody was interested, about which any work was bound to be a commercial failure, Douglas studied it thoroughly and wrote a monograph on it—discovered Siren Land, and gradually emerged as the author in whom so many of us delight.

The other sketches are also written in this semi-serious style. August Weber, the German artist, on first beholding the sea which separated him from Capri could not see how he could get there without a boat, so he bought one for forty lire and, after various maritime adventures, landed triumphantly on its enchanted shores, oblivious of the regular steamer service which would have saved him his few remaining coins. Gustave Julius, Friedrich, Otto Döbrich, alias Miradois, carries his rücksack, his pilgrim's staff, and his baby and milkbottle, because a suckling child should be taken from its mother after six weeks, and by the time its teeth have grown, the mother should have another baby. Also it is his business to teach theosophy, Christian humility, and the new pan-German doctrine of expiation. Marinetti made the mistake of postponing his visit to Capri until after he was celebrated. Fame in Capri is local and peculiar, and the island is jealous of its prerogatives. To Edwin Cerio it should be for ever grateful for one of the most diverting books ever written about genial eccentrics.

French Poets

MODERN FRENCH POETRY, AN ANTHOLOGY. Compiled and translated by JOSEPH T. SHIPLEY. Greenberg, 1926. $3.

Reviewed by FREDERICK BLISS LUQUIENO

AS Mr. Shipley says himself, his task was twofold: to select and to recreate. There is no fault to be found with his selection. His explanatory notes, moreover, are excellent. Taken all together, they form a delightful essay on the modern French poets. But he has seldom accomplished successful recreation. He could not, given his method. "Some of the present renderings," he says, "contain words that may seem affected or inept, inversions and other forms that may seem awkward; before condemning the English, the reader should reflect that facility is perhaps easier than faithfulness, and that the purpose of this volume is not to demonstrate the technical skill of the translator, but to convey the spirit of the original."

But the spirit of most of the poetry in question consists in large part of just what Mr. Shipley does not, by his own confession, try to reflect. Its spirit is *music.* The motto of the Symbolists and their followers was "De la musique avant toute chose." So the translator who is willing, even for the sake of faithfulness, to use such unmusical rhymes as *twilight—high light—wry light,* and *horizon—flies on,* and *stilly—lily,* all in the same short poem, cannot hope to recreate the spirit of an original that does nothing of the kind. Moreover, the lack of music in Mr. Shipley's translations is not only the result of poorly chosen words. It is often due to the substitution of unmeasured for measured lines. The translation of Verlaine's "Chanson d'Automme," for example, is much less rythmical than the original, each verse of which is carefully measured:

The heavy thrall	Les sanglots longs
Of the sobbing call	Des violons
Of the fall	De l'automme
Weighs, nor departs,	Blessant mon cœur
Like my heart's	D'une langueur
Pall.	Monotone.

It is to be regretted that Mr. Shipley did not give more heed to "facility," and did not, besides, keep more faithfully the promise, made in his Introduction, of retaining "the line-length, and freedom or strictness of foot," of his originals. An unmusical Verlaine, or a Verlaine that is only relatively rythmical, is not Verlaine at all.

Three Anthologies

THE OXFORD BOOK OF PORTUGUESE VERSE. Chosen by AUBREY F. G. BELL. Oxford University Press. 1926. $3.75.

SONNETS AND POEMS OF ANTHERO DE QUENTAL. Translated by S. GRISWOLD MORLEY. University of California Press. 1926.

SONNETS WITH FOLK SONGS FROM THE SPANISH. By HAVELOCK ELLIS. Houghton Mifflin. 1926. $3.

Reviewed by RUDOLPH SCHEVILL

THE Portuguese may claim the rare distinction of having composed some of the choicest of the world's lyric poetry, and this anthology has been prepared by Mr. Bell with admirable taste. It contains an unusual number of songs remarkable for their charm and perfect craftsmanship. Possibly no greater meed of praise can be given to the little collection than to say that it is not only a fitting companion volume for the "Oxford Book of Spanish Verse," but that for sheer lyricism together with beauty and depth of thought it very frequently surpasses it. The history of Portuguese verse shows three epochs noteworthy for their extensive productivity: the mediæval, which runs well into the fourteenth century, the great flowering period of the sixteenth century, at the forefront of which stand such unique poets as Gil Vicente, Camoens, and Bernardim Ribeiro, and the last hundred years in which are prominent such names as Almeida Garrett, Herculano, Anthero de Quental, and Castilho; writers like Guerra Junqueiro and Teixeira represent the national lyric genius well into our own days. The introduction gives an appreciative account of Portugese lyric art.

Since the general reader does not as a rule become acquainted with this verse in the original, such a volume as Professor Morley's translations of Anthero de Quental's sonnets and poems cannot be too highly recommended. He has caught to a remarkable extent the poignant beauty, the depth and the technical excellence of Quental's verse, notably in the case of the sonnets. Others have ventured to make translations of Quental, but none can so frequently claim to have worthily rendered a most difficult original.

Mr. Havelock Ellis's volume containing original verse mingled with translations from the Spanish, is of inferior worth, and the name of the distinguished author alone lends an interest to its pages. The sonnets, all written between the ages of seventeen and twenty-five show, on the whole, a genuine sincerity and much of the warmth and color inherent in youthful productions; but they also betray a stiffness and lack of inspiration. The little stanzas of four verses, by which Mr. Ellis renders the Spanish *coplas* are amusing, and now and then catch a successful note; but the monotony of their English form gives no adequate garb to these infinitely varied popular songs. This the author admits when he says that his translations are faithful verbally, but that they avoid "most variations of effect" and present "a certain loose uniformity." Possibly a volume of translations would do better without the interspersed sonnets.

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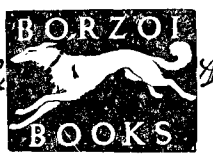

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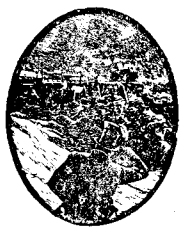

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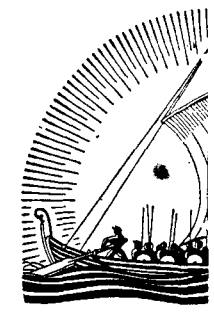

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The second Autumn list of THE VIK
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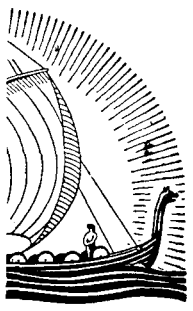

ɔr more than a season

ɪɢ Press is presented in these pages. August, The Viking Press, merged ɪs followed the policy of "*fewer and* ɪtions each season to a few carefully Among its publications have been ɪd Warner, and "The Time of Man" Book-of-the-Month Club selections; ɪy prize novel, by Emile Henriot; ·nard, "the best poem that has ever s of Negro Spirituals; "The Island Hauptmann; the critical work of Feuchtwanger. The current list of ɪnd ideals. The books are suitable, fied tastes of a discriminating group l live for more than a season.

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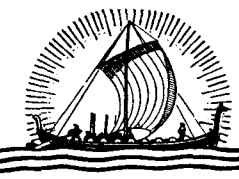
V I K I N G  NON-FICTION

The Viking Press published as its first non-fiction volume *The Book of American Negro Spirituals*. The present season's non-fiction list includes a second volume of spirituals; a biography of *Mohammed* by R. F. Dibble; the critical essays of Edwin Muir, leader of the younger English critics; *Gautier* by John Garber Palache, a new American bellettrist in the field of Strachey and Guedalla; and *Satirical Poems* by the English poet, Siegfried Sassoon.

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Rainer Maria Rilke

By Ludwig Lewisohn

RUMORS of the poet reached me everywhere. In the Styrian mountains Hofmannsthal, remembering the days of his own youth, spoke of Rilke. The towers and gates of Prague, the river and the Hradschin trembled in the wan sunlight of the poet's vision. Finally he was supposed to be at Foyot's in Paris. Perhaps he was. But I let the days drift by. Why trouble him with the importunity of my admiration? When I inquired he had already slipped away to that lost tower in Switzerland which has been his home since the war estranged him from all the cities of men.

Strangely enough it was Paris that continued to emphasise the most hushed of poets and most withdrawn of men. The *Nouvelles Literaires* wrote of him at length even before the Franco-German literary relations had been reestablished by the receptions accorded to writers as different as Alfred Kerr and Thomas Mann. It was recalled that Rilke had been Rodin's secretary, that he had lived here and written some of his most important works in an apartment in the Rue de la Campagne Première. The French were pleased. They were more pleased when a volume of French poems, Vergers, by Rilke appeared. Next came the news that he was translating the works of Paul Valéry into German. An extremely handsome gesture was made. Among the excellent Cahiers du Mois there appeared one the other day called Reconnaissance À Rilke. Thirteen French men of letters, including the really eminent Valéry contribute; appreciative voices from all countries save England and America, swell this little chorus of praise and gratitude to the works and personality of a mysterious and difficult poet.

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Whence comes this feeling which Francis de Miomandre calls "nostalgie de Rilke?" How many of this group of critics, French or Spanish or Polish, can hear the poet's rich, slow, incomparable music or those words of his which seem not to have been set down through the operations of a willing mind, but to have come like falling dew or drifting leaves? Of all this they hear an echo only. But upon that echo is borne to them the voice of Rilke's inner spirit, of his world-piety, of his grave, deep and mystical denial of all the vain works of man.

His vision was full and perfect long before the world war was dreamed of. But it is since the war that that vision has seemed most pertinent and persuasive to minds wearied and bewildered by the destructive thunder of the wheels of a mechanical civilization. They turn to Rilke; they seek to stand with him at that point of the inner life at which the self and the universe are no longer divided, at that point at which the soul *consents* to its continuity with an order unmiraculously perceived as divine and receives all phenomena into itself. A great vigilance and a great stillness of spirit have lead Rilke to an attitude unique in the history of either letters or thought. It is in vain that critics speak of Dostoevski, of the undoubtedly decisive effect upon Rilke of his visit to Russia. It would be equally in vain to speak, as I am tempted to do, of Wordsworth and of his "wise passiveness." Experience rather than learning will open that door. But most people, hot of heart, violent of will, are excluded from the moods that are the material of Rilke's poetry. Unlike Wordsworth he does not need the grander aspects of nature; he avoids the complications of the human scene. A face, a street, a remembered legend, a caged animal, an heroic gesture suffice to induce in him that mood of contemplation in which he sees "into the life of things" by being no longer divided from them. In this habitual mood of his the common contradiction between mind and nature, subject and object, is abolished. But there is, be it remarked, no deliquescence of personality, no mystical union of the I with a non-I. There is the profound perception of the identity of God and nature and the self which becomes literally

the eye with which the universe
Beholds itself and knows itself divine.

Identity, or, rather, once more—continuity, undividedness. This strictly modern mystic wants no abrogation of the natural order. The natural order is the divine order. "Perform no miracle for my sake," he prays. "Let thy laws prevail which become more visible from generation to generation." And then in verses probably matchless in our time he celebrates the law of gravitation and achieves a poetic conquest of the special ideas of that time which is far to seek in the writings of those poets who have celebrated the mere mechanical aspects of civilization:

Wenn etwas mir vom Fenster fällt
[und wenn es auch das Kleinste wäre),
wie stürzt sich das Gesetz der Schwere
gewaltig wie ein Wind vom Meere
auf jeden Ball und jede Beere
und trägt sie in den Kern der Welt.

To the eternal laws all things yield themselves up with a trust and a humility that are prayer, security, goodness. We only in our arrogance thrust ourselves forth from the unity of things into an empty space of freedom. . . . To paraphrase Rilke thus is, of course, to distort and betray him and that marvellous texture of his work in which form and substance, flesh and spirit, the word and its incarnation are indivisibly one. But an intellectual apprehension of his central attitude is necessary to a right appreciation of all his work and, especially, of Das Stundenbuch which is like no other philosophical poem and will, in all likelihood, take its place gradually as one of the very great works of the poetic faculty and imagination. It calls toward flight from "this poor city of time," toward a new sense of that oneness in which there is neither low nor high, neither trivial nor important which but in all things and through all things breathes the ineffable breath of God:

Es gibt im Grunde nur Gebete,
so sind die Hände uns geweiht,
dass sie nichts schufen was nicht flehte;
ob einer mahlte oder mähte,
schon aus dem Ringen der Geräte
entfaltete sich Frömmigkeit.

Significant for Rilke's development are, I suspect, the poems in which he remembers his childhood and adolescence. He retained, long beyond the wont of men, the child's ability to let day and dream be a continuous country. Later day and dream became appearance and reality, became the self and the universe, became the thing and God. This retrospective blending of two worlds carried over into the present of the poet's imagination is well illustrated by the beautiful Dream of Boyhood:

Oh, I should love to be like one of those
Who through the night on tameless horses ride
With torches like dishevelled tresses wide
Which the great wind of gallop streaming blows.
And I would stand as on a shallop's prow,
Slender and tall and like a banner rolled,
Dark but for helmeting of ruddy gold
That glints and gleams. Behind me in a row
Ten men who from the equal darkness glow
With helmets of the changeful gold designed,
Now clear as glass, now dark and old and blind.
And one near me blows me a vision of space
Upon a trumpet glittering that cries,
Or makes a solitary blackness rise
Through which as in a rapid dream we race:
The houses slant behind us to their knees,
The crooked streets to meet us bend and strain,
The squares flee from us: but we grapple these
The while our horses rustle like the rain.

As the boy stood within his dream the mature poet stood within his world. From the periphery where one *observes*, his temperment carried him effortlessly to the center where one *experiences*. Truth comes to him who keeps the vigil of eternity. . . . From these interpretative statements it is easy to derive Rilke's silent opposition to the naturalistic movement in literature; it is equally easy to see why all the expressionistic poets consider him their master . . . .

The three books of Das Stundenbuch—Concerning the Monastic Life, Concerning Pilgrimage, Concerning Poverty and Death—are expansions, infinitely rich and profound and often intricate, of the last three verses of the poem I have translated. Implicit in those verses, as well as in the preceding ones, is Rilke's pantheism—a word that omits all the warmth and humility and love of his vision—his quietism, his cultivation, unique and perhaps uniquely needed in our age, of the life of utter contemplativeness. Yet like all major poets, like every spirit who deserves the name of master, Rilke rises in the book Concerning Poverty and Death from the intense hush of his usual verses to the monition and the stronger music of a messianic cry. It is the cities with their false mechanical civilization, with their lie concerning progress that keep man from nature and from God, from divine poverty and from ripening like trees toward the ultimate beauty of their death. Power must be broken:

The kings of this world are grown old
And leave not any heirs behind them;

metal, now money and machines, must shrink back into the veins of the hills. Men must become conscious of their slavery. An iron note enters Rilke's description of the false and bitter lives of the slaves of the cities:

Und ihre Menschen dienen in Kulturen
und fallen tief aus Gleichgewicht und Mass,
und nennen Fortschritt ihre Schneckenspuren
und fahren rascher, wo sie langsam fuhren,
und fühlen sich und funkeln wie die Huren
und lärmen lauter mit Metal und Glass.

But his more habitual note is not one of condemnaion. It is that of a compassion at once aloof and tender:

For, Lord, the crowded cities be
Desolate and divided places.
Flight as from flames upon their ways is,
And comfortless of any graces
Their little time fades utterly.
And men who dwell there heavy and humbly move
About dark rooms with dread in all their bearing,
Less than the springtime flocks in fire and daring,
And somewhere breathes and watches earth for faring,
But they are here and do not know thereof.

And children grow up where the shadows falling
From wall and window have the light exiled,
And know not that without the flowers are calling
Unto a day of distance, wind and wild—
And every child must be a saddened child.
There blossom virgins to the unknown turning
Who for their childhood's faded rest are fain,
And do not find for what their souls are burning,
And trembling close their timid buds again.
And bear in chambers shadowed and unsleeping
The days of disappointed motherhood
And the long nights' involuntary weeping
And the cold years devoid of glow or good.
In utter darkness stand their deathbeds lowly
For which through gradual years the grey heart pants;
They die as though in chains, and dying slowly
Go forth from life in guise of mendicants.

In the cities the rich are not rich nor the poor poor; all are the prisoners of things dead because torn out of their natural and divine place and order. Men do not lead their own lives nor die their own deaths. In page after page of great and perfect verse Rilke calls for a savior from the disgraces of our lives. The savior will bring life that is vision, death that is ripeness. In verses like the resonance of golden trumpets Rilke prays that that savior be established in the grace and ancient radiance of God and that he himself may be dancer before that new Ark of the Covenant, proclaimer, tongue, and baptist of the Messiah:

Du aber gründe ihn in deine Gnade,
in deinem alten Glanze pflanz ihn ein;
und mich lass Tänzer dieser Bundeslade,
lass mich den Mund der neuen Messiade,
den Tönenden, den Täufer sein. . . . . .

I have spoken of only two of Rilke's volumes, Das Buch der Bilder and Das Stundenbuch and have omitted both his fitful prose as well as his earlier and later verses. He is so little known among us—more like a legendary name than a living poet—that what is needed is first of all to make him and his work accessible to the lover of poetry. If this is a difficult task in respect of the poet's spiritual character, it is an even harder one in respect of the form in which that spiritual character is so completely incarnated. For that form has, superficially viewed, two marks that seem contradictory. Even from my few quotations and my wholly inadequate versions it will be seen that Rilke uses the entire vocabulary of the language. There are no prosaic words. He writes "Gesetz der Schwere" (law of gravitation); he writes "Fortschritt" (progress); he writes "Gleichgewicht" (equilibrium). In the texture of his verse these words are not only thorough-

(*Continued on page* 386)

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