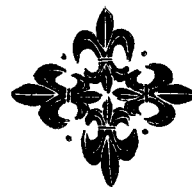


A World Redeemed



"The Green Wall," by James Wright (Yale University Press. 93 pp. \$2.50), a new volume in the Yale Series of Younger Poets, is the work of a fine new poet demonstrating a unique quality of human compassion.

By Philip Booth

JAMES WRIGHT has his nerve: in a day when poems are too brightly pyrotechnic, he asks to say "something humanly important instead of just showing off with language." The wonder of his first book, "The Green Wall," is that he does precisely this. As W. H. Auden points out in his introduction to this newest volume in the Yale Series of Younger Poets, the human beings who people Wright's poems are "social outsiders"; and in this Wright acknowledges his debt to both Robinson and Frost. But his poems are uniquely his own in their view of the world, as is evident from the opening "Fit Against the Country," one of the best poems in this fine first collection.

Poetry by James Wright has been appearing for several years in many magazines, both here and abroad. Taken together, these poems seem more impressive individually than as a whole, but that is only to say that they are less various in their techniques than in their subjects. At times, as in the last seven lines of "The Horse," a rhythmical sameness deadens a poem, and (perhaps because the book is longer than most) a similar lack of variation carries over between poems and weights the third section, where there is too little of the energy that marks "Eleutheria" and her kinetic kissing.

What is strongest in James Wright's poetry is the huge human compassion he individually owns. If the celebrations for George Doty or "A Lady With an Assumed Name" seem too consciously to take a poetic stance, "She Hid in the Trees" has the moving quality that is wholly natural and genuinely Wright. Then, too, he is at home with death as few young poets are; he can get voices to rise off the page, and he is able to make lovely lyrics out of such apparently small actions as a hostess's saying good night or "A Call From the Front Porch." Indeed, Wright is that rare poet who can achieve the "common in

experience—uncommon in writing" that Robert Frost has asked for. And nowhere is this more evident than in his most domestic poems: whether the ballad-wit of "A Song for the Middle of the Night," or the plain magnificent "Mutterings over the Crib of a Deaf Child."

"How will he hear the bell at school
Arrange the broken afternoon,
And know to run across the cool
Grasses where the starlings cry,
Or understand the day is gone?"

Well, someone lifting curious
brows
Will take the measure of the
clock.
And he will see the birchen
boughs
Outside sagging dark from the
sky,
And the shade crawling upon the
rock.

"And how will he know to rise at morning?
His mother has other sons to
waken,
She has the stove she must build
to burning
Before the coals of the nighttime
die;
And he never stirs when he is
shaken."

I take it the air affects the skin,
And you remember, when you
were young,
Sometimes you could feel the
dawn begin,
And the fire would call you, by
and by,
Out of bed and bring you along.

"Well, good enough. To serve his
needs
All kinds of arrangements can be
made.
But what will you do if his finger
bleeds?
Or a bobwhite whistles invisibly
And flutes like an angel off in the
shade?"

He will learn pain. And, as for the
bird,
It is always darkening when that
comes out.
I will putter as though I had not
heard,
And lift him into my arms and
sing
Whether he hears my song or not.

For that one poem, this beautifully designed book would be worth its

modest price. But there are other poems, equal in their deceptive quietness, in which any reader who has heard about Adam's fall can find his world redeemed by what James Wright has to say about it. And that saying, more than any showing off with language, is the thing that is "humanly important." It is, in effect, the world that Wright lifts into his arms; and whether or not we hear it, the song is there to be heard.

Conceits and Whimsy

"The Persimmon Tree," by Peter Viereck (Scribner. 80 pp. \$3), is a new collection of pastoral and lyrical verse by a Pulitzer Prize-winning poet. It is reviewed by Selden Rodman, author of numerous books of verse and editor of a number of anthologies.

By Selden Rodman

SUCH is the state of book-reviewing in general, and of the reviewing of poetry in particular, that if the reviewer casts a cold eye on the latest work of one who has been a friend, whose work he has hitherto praised, and who has upon occasion praised the work of said reviewer, it will be instantly assumed by many readers that (a) reviewer and reviewed are no longer friends; (b) that reviewer has become embittered by some real or fancied slight; or (c) that reviewed has discussed unfavorably (or worse, not reviewed at all!) some book by reviewer.

To come to the subject that aroused this initial digression: Peter Viereck was and is a friend of mine. He gave the best of my own books of verse the most favorable review it received. His publishers quote me as having bracketed him (in 1946) with Dylan Thomas, as one of the original voices in postwar poetry. Nothing—but nothing—has come between us since to affect our friendship. I find his new book, "The Persimmon Tree," diffuse, sentimental, academic, boring, and (with the exception of one poem) disappointing.

In respect to the epithet "academic"
(Continued on page 38)



SR's Spotlight on World War II:

"The Invasion of France and Germany"

Author: Samuel Eliot Morison

The Author

By John Haverstick

AT SIXTY Samuel Eliot Morison, whose latest volume of his mammoth "History of United States Naval Operations in World War II" has just appeared, is well aware of the fact that scholarly fashions have their effect on historians. For example: thirty years ago the history writers were depicting the Pilgrims as grim, steeple-hatted fellows living in log cabins and planning witch hunts as holiday diversions. But today, according to Morison, things have gone to the opposite extreme. Now, he says, it is all a good historian can do to persuade his students that the Pilgrims were *not* exactly jolly fellows perennially sitting on artful early American furniture, with one arm around a pretty Priscilla and the other reaching for a jug of hard cider. Another example: fifty years ago the history books were unanimous in presenting the Federalist-Whig-Republican point of view in their interpretations of U. S. political history; today it would be hard, he says, to find a good general history of the U. S. that does not follow the Jefferson-Jackson-F. D. Roosevelt line (a line which Morison himself believes is the "best

line of actuality" but which he also believes has gone too far, tending to create what he terms "a sort of neo-liberal stereotype").

To Morison, the historian's professional duty is to set down the facts of what actually did happen—and why; and to accomplish this aim in his own work he has gone to unfashionable lengths unfamiliar to whole generations of historians. For a Pulitzer Prize-winning biography of Christopher Columbus he once retraced in small sailing vessels four routes that Columbus had followed to America. In 1942, shortly after the beginning of World War II, Morison, then a professor of history at Harvard (he is a Boston-bred patrician), reached right back to 431 B.C. for his historical methods—to an example set by Greek historian Thucydides, who went off to the Peloponnesian War, lived in the field in order to get the unvarnished facts, and then proceeded to write his famous first-hand (though incomplete) formal history of the entire encounter. Until World War II Thucydides's example had been largely ignored by successive generations of historians, most of whom preferred armchair comfort and mellifluous phrases to first-hand knowledge. But Professor Morison persuaded President Roosevelt to assign him as a modern Thucydides to

the U. S. Navy, thereby instigating a presidential directive which resulted in on-the-spot histories of each of the armed services (though none except the Navy's were channeled through the pen of one man). As a result of this direct historical approach he has come into sharp conflict with other past and present eminent historians. In an address before the American Historical Association, when Professor Morison (who was retired from the USNR as a Rear Admiral in 1951) was serving as president of that organization, he roundly criticized the methods of historian Charles A. Beard, whose philosophy of history was that no historian can escape his personal limitations as an interpreter of the past and that therefore the historian should select and arrange the facts of history so as to influence the present or the future in the direction that the historian considers socially desirable. Said Morison: "Beard's personal guess was that American history was moving forward to a collectivist democracy." The result, according to Morison: Beard interpreted the past to suit his own ideas of the future. Critics of Morison's "History of United States Naval Operations in World War II" have pointed out from time to time that Professor-Admiral Morison's interpretations, too, have been sometimes emotional and sometimes factually inaccurate. Nevertheless, with his passion for writing history to the best of his ability as it actually happened (and with commendable literary grace), there can be little doubt that historian Morison's history will prove valuable to future scholars long after that of many of his contemporaries has perished.

The Book

By S. L. A. Marshall, *chief U.S. Army historian in the European theatre during World War II.*

EVEN when rewriting a thrice-told tale, as he is doing in "The Invasion of France and Germany" (Little, Brown, \$6.50), Admiral Samuel Eliot Morison contrives to bring to it a fresh ring of authority and a crispness in expression which makes it as new as the next second.

This talent and his boundless prodigiousness set him apart from other American field historians of World War II. All others who did his kind of labor, no less ploddingly and sometimes with greater inspiration, while the fighting was on have long since tired of the grind and forsaken



—From the book.

Alpha Red beach, D-day—Operation Dragoon, August 1944.