

invites them to accompany the "colonial administrators" from the North, "to discover unknown gold" among the fishermen without boats and the peasants without land. It is the intelligent and educated Italians whom he seeks to convince that "the man of the South is not different from others."

Thus, almost, might an anthropologist have written about tribal Africa, or a European sociologist about the life of the Indian ryot. A century after Italian unification, the South is to the rest of the country a neglected, backward, alien dependency. Only recently has the public conscience been stirred into action. Apart from the various projects of the Fund of the South, private industry is venturing gingerly into the unknown land and making surprising discoveries, of which the Olivetti experiment is an example.

Few Italians are likely to contribute to this awakening of the public conscience with more devastating impact than Dr. Ottieri. He has written a tragic and moving study of a human problem, without rhetoric and without any easy, superficial appeals to the emotions. Excellent as a factual novel of industrial development in Southern Italy, "The Men at the Gate" has the rarer quality of rendering the Southern Italians for what they are: men seeking economic security and human dignity in a world that offers them little sympathy or hope. "The Men at the Gate" is a work of fiction, but it has a compelling ring of actuality that will make it endure in the literature of reform.

—GABRIEL GERSH.

FATHER TO THE MAN: A scene erotic, a scene exotic, a scene psychotic—these are the visions of life summoned up by the young Italian writer Renzo Rosso, in three long stories collected under the title "A Distant Summer" (Houghton Mifflin, \$3.50). The most successful is the title story, which deals with the casual, voluptuous encirclement of a seventeen-year-old boy by a dreamily beautiful married woman who, before the boy's eyes, shockingly turns from ethereal to earthy in a lusty liaison with a transient at a summer hotel. The other two tales—"The Bait," an account of the fascination of a shy and uncertain boy with a Communist *bravo*, and "A Brief Trip Into the Heart of Germany," which tells of a visit to a former Nazi war criminal—are less effective, because their themes are less clear and compelling. Indeed, at times they seem more like inchoate novels than finished stories. But, like "A Distant Summer," they testify to the skill and facility of this talented author.

It is clear that Renzo Rosso has insight into the workings of the mind:

without obviousness or exaggeration he occasionally weaves together conscious act and subconscious motivation with real brilliance. He knows that the child is father to the man, and he uses that knowledge to illuminate the character of the protagonist in "The Bait," who "grew up with a deeply ingrained sense of unfathomable absence . . . forced through no fault of his own to put off forever . . . the hard and painful operation of grafting into his consciousness the reality of a father." Then, too, Rosso is an observant writer with considerable descriptive power, as in the account of the loose, full-figured Venus of "A Distant Summer." And he knows how to enlist in his cause the simple, telling metaphor: "Her eyelashes [were] like restless insects on his skin," he remarks in a moving moment in "The Bait."

After reading "A Distant Summer" one is left, if not entirely satisfied, at least very hopeful. The dissatisfaction comes largely from the very nature of the book; three stories, related only in the broadest sense, cannot give the deeper pleasure transmitted by more sustained narrative. There is a further danger that Rosso will sink into obscurantism or sensationalism (such tendencies appear in "A Brief Trip"). Sometimes his dialogue is curiously stilted and unreal—not at all, for example, like the dialogue of Ivy Compton-Burnett, which is stilted but very real indeed. From the evidence here, there is reason to hope that this writer has in his arsenal much of the weaponry he needs to produce a mature, full-length novel.

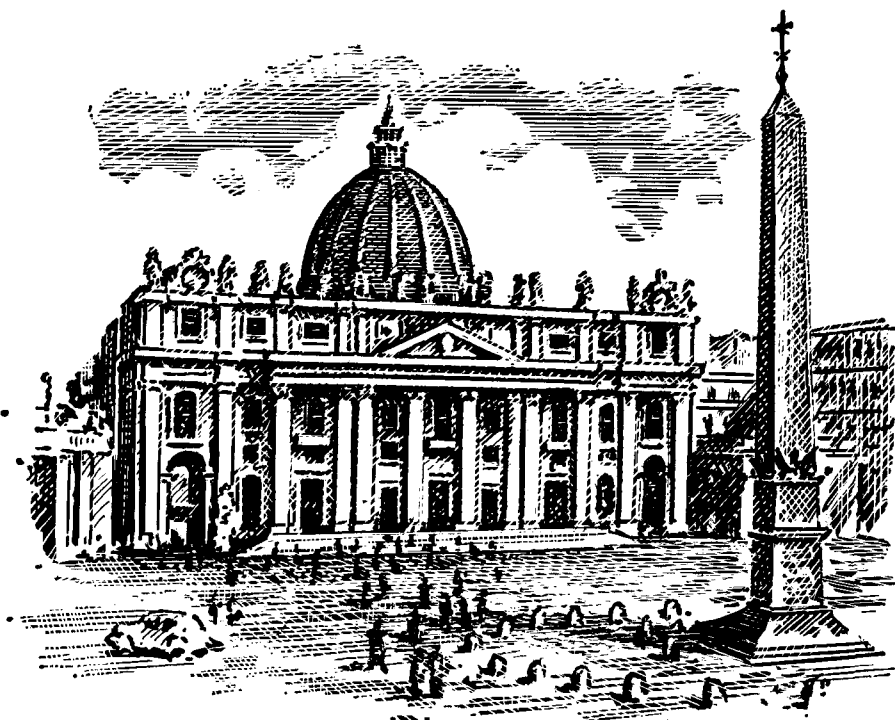
Two of these stories have appeared

in Italy's best literary magazine, *Botteghe Oscure*. The present translation by Archibald Colquhoun, who did such a marvelous job with "The Leopard," is impeccable.

—WALTER GUZZARDI, JR.

DEATH AND EXPIATION: Not a new work, nor exactly "a novel" as the dust jacket announces, "Two Brothers" (Orion, \$3.95) was originally published just after the war as "*Cronaca Familiare*" ("A Family Tale"). In the same year (1947) the author, Vasco Pratolini, published his best and best-known novel, "*Cronache di Poveri Amanti*" ("Tales of Poor Lovers"). The similarity and the differences between the two are telling. For, as Sergio Pacifici remarked in an excellent chapter on Pratolini in his recent "Guide to Contemporary Italian Literature," the novelist has become one of the half dozen leading writers of fiction in Italy today through "expanding from the restricted 'frame' of family life"—which is exactly the frame of "Two Brothers"—"into a vast interpretation of Italian life."

"Two Brothers" is a short autobiographical memoir of Pratolini's relationship with his younger brother, Ferruccio (the book is in fact addressed to Ferruccio), and the relationship of both with their grandmother and mother and with Ferruccio's adoptive parents at certain meaningful and vivid moments between 1918 and 1945. It is probably factual; but through its uncluttered lyricism of tone and feelings and its steady sense of the tears in things, the pathos of sheer mortality, it rises toward that broader significance that mere fact can only suggest. More-



over, its Tuscan purity of style is excellently rendered by the translator, Barbara Kennedy.

Death punctuates this little story, not psychological or metaphysical death, but the flesh's fatal weaknesses and the body's extinction. We begin with the death of the mother, a housemaid, three weeks after Ferruccio's birth and as a result of it; whereupon Ferruccio is adopted and brought up by a well-to-do couple of higher social position, overseers of the Tuscan estate of a wealthy English baron. The turning point, years later, is the death of the stalwart old grandmother, also a servant, in an Old People's Home. Out of their common affection for her the long-estranged brothers have come together. And the final pages deal, at somewhat harrowing length, with Ferruccio's painful death at the age of twenty-six in a Roman hospital, of an undiagnosed intestinal disease. Between death and death, the two brothers lose and find one another and are again separated, to be reunited finally in and by the older one's imagination.

Pratolini says in a forenote that "Two Brothers" is a work of expiation, written out of his regret "that he but faintly, and too late, divined his brother's nature." I myself have yet to divine that nature fully; it seems to be a disturbed and wistful ghost, capable of modest heroism but charged with stifled and undefined aspirations. What one can perceive, though faintly, is a parable of environment and its effect upon character and especially upon the would-be communion between persons—a theme Pratolini, here as elsewhere, handles with delicate insistence and great comprehension. "You had an exaggerated and misguided respect for the educated, privileged classes," Pratolini tells his brother. "You lived in a kind of moral prison."

—R. W. B. LEWIS.



POETRY QUARTERLY

To Each Man His Own Muse

By ROBERT PACK, *the author of "Guarded by Women."*

THERE is a lot of talk about simplicity of style these days, as if it were the easiest (if not the only) way of achieving honesty in writing poetry. As always, such criticism is the result of fear or snobism that needs, for its own self-esteem and aggrandizement, to reduce poetry to one thing, to pronounce negative judgment on all poetry that does not conform to certain limitations.

There is no limit to how a poem may sound, or what it may be about. The proper questions are: *when* is stylistic or linguistic simplicity appropriate, and *when* is rhetoric — high-flown and hopped-up language — appropriate? When is a strict, symmetrical form appropriate, and when an irregular, open form? (Let us avoid calling an irregular form "free": no good poem has a "free" form, and the word is drowned in misleading overtones.) When we must ask such questions, let us beware of generalizations. They rarely work. It is better that we ask about a particular poet, or, better still, a particular poem.

Winfield Townley Scott (*"Collected Poems 1937-1962,"* Macmillan, \$7.50) is a poet who uses essentially simple, almost-as-if-it-were-prose language:

Beyond grown taller pines there's the
same house.
Below the house the pond, shrunken
by drought,
Is pocked with red and yellow leaves.

Richard Eberhart in his *"Collected Verse Plays"* (University of North Carolina Press, \$5) uses a more elaborate, often outrageous, "fantastical" language:

This knotted animal, this freight of
growth,
This ego hit between the eyes with
love
From the mere look and propagation
of the air,
This spirit in a world of worsening
spirit
Is face to face with brazen violence,
His blood cut off from the roots, his
blood dying,
His anger engendered and his whole
force engaged
And we should hail him the modern
man of wrath
Who in creative ecstasy is come
To purge the world and make us see
again.

Given their gifts and their intentions, both are absolutely right. Both have written rich, true books. Scott's is marked by an easygoing sense of what is satisfying in the physical world and by a strong love of human excellence. Eberhart's group of plays, which in many ways are really one play, is a masterpiece of comic extravagance, of prestidigitation; the collection is an avalanche of ideas, a Fourth of July of images and round rhetoric. It has in it, rolled together, Shaw, Pirandello, and Wallace Stevens. And, in *"The Jacob's Ladder"* (New Directions, paperback, \$1.55), Denise Levertov's language (no less fitting for her intentions than the others), is colloquial yet quietly eloquent, more melodious than Scott, less exalted than Eberhart.

Scott is at heart a narrative poet, though several of the poems here are lyrics and descriptive pieces. His strongest poems seem to come from an impulse to tell a story or to present a character. The autobiographical source of many of these poems become objectified in scenes or situations, in tales, in episodes, so that the poet's sensibility rather than the poet himself shows forth. In his narrative strength he is like Robinson and Frost, and it is here that his simplicity is most appropriate, most effective; for, were he to draw attention to the language itself, were he to move and excite us with rhythms and images, the unfolding of the details that constitute his "story" would be too slow; their primary importance would be obscured. Image and rhythm are used, rather, to support the movement of the narrative as if nothing stood between the storyteller and the presentation of his character:

Let us not begrudge Mr. Whittier his
white beard, his saintliness, his
other foibles;
Let us remember him when he was
young, not to begrudge his rise
As a goddam Abolitionist hated not
only in the South,
Hated by manufacturers, politicians,
the neighbors, our folk, all
Who hate the outspoken radical and
know a safer way.

Although it is essentially true, I believe, that Scott prefers (or is better at) portraying character through action and detail to expressing feelings through images, nevertheless these two approaches sometimes come together with marvel-