

# NEW ENGLISH AND AMERICAN MUSIC

## SCORES.

### EDMUND RUBBRA :

- Symphony No. 3 (Boosey and Hawkes, 40/-).  
Two Madrigals, Second Set (Winthrop Rogers, 5d. each).  
*The Dark Night of the Soul*, for chorus and small orchestra (Joseph Williams, 1/6).  
Five Sonnets from Spenser's *Amoretti* for voice and string quartet (Joseph Williams, 5/-).

### MICHAEL TIPPETT :

- Fantasia for piano and orchestra (Schott, 5/-).  
Piano Sonata (Schott, 7/6).

### BENJAMIN BRITTEN :

- Sinfonia da Requiem (Boosey and Hawkes, 25/-).  
A Hymn for St. Cecilia for S.S.A.T.B. (Winthrop Rogers, 3/6).

### GERALD FINZI :

- Let us Garlands Bring, Five Shakespeare songs (Boosey and Hawkes, 6/-).

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### AARON COPLAND :

- Piano Sonata (Boosey and Hawkes American edition).

### ROY HARRIS :

- Piano Quintet (25/-).  
Three variations for string quartet (7/6).  
Soliloquy and Dance for viola and piano (7/6).  
(Schirmer, agents Chapell).

### WM. SCHUMAN :

- Symphony No. 3 (10/6).  
American Festival Overture (7/6).  
Newsreel in five shots for band (12/6).  
Four Canons, Requiescat, Holiday Song, and Prelude for mixed chorus (2/10d).  
(Schirmer, agents Chapell).

## SAMUEL BARBER :

- Adagio for strings (10/6).  
Overture, *The School for Scandal* (7/6).  
Essay for orchestra (7/6).  
Sonata for 'cello and piano (12/6).  
Dover Beach for voice and string quartet (5/-).  
Re-incarnations for mixed chorus (8d. each).  
Three Songs from Joyce's *Chamber Music* (8/-).  
(Schirmer, agents Chapell).

## CARLOS CHAVEZ :

- Ten Preludes for piano (10/-).  
(Schirmer, agents Chapell).

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RECORDS.

## ROY HARRIS :

- Symphony No. 3 played by Boston Symphony Orchestra, conducted Koussevitsky (H.M.V., 12/- plus Purchase Tax).

## E. J. MOERAN :

- Symphony in G Minor, played by Hallé Orchestra, conducted Leslie Heward (H.M.V. under the auspices of the British Council, 24/- plus Purchase Tax).

## ALAN RAWSTHORNE :

- Four Bagatelles for piano, played by Denis Matthews (twelfth side of above).

## BENJAMIN BRITTEN :

- Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo, sung by Peter Pears, accompanied Benjamin Britten (H.M.V., 7/3 plus Purchase Tax).

This has been a good quarter for English and American music : and the collation of all the works listed above seems to provide occasion for a few reflections on the musical situation in the English speaking world. In attempting this I will first start from a point of technical procedure as manifested in two English composers and two American; and will then spread outwards to embrace the more general compositional-sociological problems on both this side of the Atlantic and the other. The two English composers I want to start from are Rubbra and Tippett; the two Americans, Copland and Roy Harris.

Rubbra and Tippett, in my opinion the two most distinguished of contemporary British composers, are so completely different in

outlook that they may be said to symbolize two main alternatives in the evolution of our musical history. Rubbra is almost entirely a textural composer, thinking always (a rare phenomenon nowadays) in terms of the voice and polyphony, who aims to recreate the symphony by absorbing 'shape' into 'texture'; with Tippett, on the other hand, what comes first is the formalizing consciousness, the attempt to establish order out of the multiplicity of experience—or of movements, tonal centres and thematic phrases—and he aims rather at absorbing texture into shape: broadly speaking, the difference in attitude is parallel to that between the fugal Bach and the late work of Beethoven. The lyrically germinating first movement of Rubbra's Fourth—or for that matter the extremely beautiful *The Dark Night of the Soul*—is the clearest possible illustration of what Rubbra meant when, in response to the 'how-do-you-compose?' query, he replied 'I usually begin at the beginning and then go straight on'; and it is a corollary of this attitude that there can for Rubbra be no distinction between texture and composition and (*cf.* Bach) no interest in tone colour *per se*. On the other hand the extremely subtle arrangement of key centres in Tippett's *Fantasia*, the placing of the moods of the variations, of the cadenza, fugue and thematic restatement, make clear that the formalization of the work was the first shape the emotional impetus behind the music assumed, that the figurative detail, even perhaps the actual contour of the themes, were only, as it were, precipitated out of the formalization.<sup>1</sup> In both composers there is an insistence on clarity of line and lucidity of texture but whereas in Rubbra's work there is no distinction at all between texture and composition, in Tippett's work texture is *used* to define the composition. (Significantly Tippett's tonal basis is more diatonic, less fluidly modal and vocal than Rubbra's: compare the fugue of the *Fantasia* with the fugue at the end of Rubbra's Third). Viewed from this angle I think one can understand why Tippett, potentially a composer of great lyrical power (*cf.* the *Fantasia's* long cantabile variation), should have learned much about the physical stuff of music—the noises instruments make—from Stravinsky; and why the spacing of the parts should in some of his work give an uncanny originality and beauty to passages that look on paper undistinguished. Tippett's interest in the 'shape' structure of the variation, a technique not really congenial to Rubbra despite the lovely variations in the third symphony, is by no means accidental, particularly when one remembers the enormous importance the variation form had for Beethoven

<sup>1</sup>Ernest Newman pointed out how Beethoven's Sketch-books—the clearest example of the workings of the 'formalizing consciousness' known to musical history—reveal how, whereas in Bach 'everything that happens is simply an emanation of the theme', Beethoven conceived the whole structure of a work, particularly its modulations and rhythmic figuration, first, and arrived at the actual themes only at a very advanced stage of the creative process.

in his final attempts to embrace texture within the formalizing consciousness.<sup>2</sup> It is illuminating to observe, in the work of these two English composers, how the fugal lyrical style of Bach and the formalization of late Beethoven are still the pivots of European musical evolution round which the creative musician revolves in his eternal struggle with the problems of musical speech.

An almost exact parallel to the Rubbra-Tippett contrast is provided by comparing two of the American works listed above—Harris's Symphony and Copland's piano Sonata. Harris's work, which as much as Rubbra's symphonies, might be called a 'gigantic instrumental motet', is continually fluid and (until at least the final fugal dance section) vocal in idiom, even modal in tonality, with its opening lyrical lines of a distinctively plainsong-like contour. The whole work is a germination and blossoming from a melodic seed, the only difference from Rubbra's method being the relative absence of any attempt to reconcile this polyphonic concept with the 'shape' of classical diatonicism and a typically American tendency to rhythmic disintegration in the final fugally treated dance section. (The effect is curiously ambiguous, a kind of mating of the jaunty middle-west dance-hall with the mediaeval hoquet). So completely textural is the symphony that its sections are not so much contrasts as extensions; and it is the rhythmic and tonal freedom of the polyphony which gives the original 'pioneering' temper to harmonies that by themselves might at times seem quite Wagnerian; that rejuvenates, by extremely free 'vocal' dialogues between wind instruments, some passages of characteristically Sibelian cross-rhythmed *moto perpetuo*; that gives such perky delineation to the six-four three-two opposition of the brusquely 'American' fugal dance.

Harris's symphony and also the very contrapuntal piano quintet, is all linear evolution; Copland's sonata depends essentially on formalization. The melodic ideas, though distinguished, are all brief: the 'composition' lies in the order and balance of the phrases—the pattern made out of them. Texture is here the servant of the integrative process and the spacing (as in Tippett's work and for that matter the final works of Beethoven) and rhythmic articulation are immensely important factors in the composition: one has only to consider the amazing opening to the last movement, a formal integration of material from previous movements very close to the

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<sup>2</sup>To the more directly lyrical slow movement Beethoven's characteristic 'prenatal' formalization was less apposite than to the symphonic allegro, and his early interest in the variation form in slow movements may have been largely, as Newman suggests, a means of 'papering over the cracks'—a necessary consequence of his lack of interest in textural evolution: but it became in his late works, I think, one of the chief means whereby he gave his shapes their significant textural rejuvenation and more analogous to the sixteenth century conception of variation than to the Mozartian.

method—not of course the ‘sensibility’—of Beethoven’s last works, with comparably hollow and transparent ‘scoring’. The whole work, tonally balanced between diatonic consonance and an acute dissonance largely founded on ambiguity between the major and minor triad, ‘sounds’ superbly (*cf.* Tippett and Stravinsky and Copland’s own orchestration), whereas one feels that for Rubbra the tone-qualities are a secondary consideration. With Copland, the process of formalization of course entails the characteristic duality of rhythm which I referred to in writing of him in last April’s *Scrutiny*—the agility of the detail, the slowness of the pattern. This is particularly so of the Scherzo, which as it were continually chases its own tail; and ends by biting it off; even the more modal and lyrical slow movement owes its characteristic loneliness and poignancy to the extremely delicate formalization which is given to the various motives—the pattern they make and the spacing of their articulation. However often repeated the phrases do not themselves grow (though the movement does); the emotion precipitates from the design they create. In Harris’s work, except briefly in the coda, there is no literal restatement of theme, and with Rubbra repetition is so inseparable from evolution that sonata recapitulation is assimilated into texture.

Fine as is Harris’s work at its best, Copland seems to me in toto the more important and authentic composer, and that some integration of their respective tendencies may be possible is suggested by the vital *Third Symphony* of a young pupil of Harris, William Schuman, for although the music’s fluidity, bounding lyrical drive and somewhat crude exuberance clearly stem (in a personal way) from Harris, and although the idiom is mainly polyphonic (the movements are Passacaglia and Fugue, Chorale and Toccata), it is quite free from the (however originally used) Wagnerian harmonies that sometimes give Harris’s music a Whitmanesque blurring of emotional contour antipathetic to the sharp definition of the most significant American art. Its relatively austere fourth-founded harmonies, and a tendency in the Symphony to curb his youthful efflorescence of invention by a much greater concern for the alternation of mood and sonority through the contrasting sections of a work, unmistakably betray Copland’s influence, if they have not his maturity and sophisticated lucidity of articulation; and the orchestration in particular, though still massive, with Harris’s sharp opposition between brass, woodwind and strings, has much greater clarity and more effective spacing than in earlier works. As technically Schuman leans from Harris to Copland, so his choral works exhibit explicitly if not very impressively (but one can see the transitional significance which this preoccupation with prose rhythm and hollow counterpoint is having for him) a characteristic which even composers as different as Harris and Copland have in common—the search for the indigenous idiom, the vernacular that will of course be influenced by the vernacular of modern speech. If Schuman’s line in the Symphony is less directly vocal than Harris’s

and even, though richer and more fulsome, relatively Hindemithian, the choral works make clear that the abruptness of the tonal transitions (not to mention the more obvious case of the line of the brilliant *American Festival Overture* and the gay *Newsreel Suite* for band) really relate back to American speech, much as the odd tonal transitions of Holst's prose rhythms relate back to his search for an English vernacular: and if Harris's vocalism has hints of plainsong it is more, I think, because of the closeness of plainsong to speech than because of any tendency towards the ecclesiastical—certainly his language is, though sometimes noble in a pioneering fashion, habitually a racy, slangy vernacular which, with its rhythmic complexities and prevalence of fourths, is demonstrably the product of a culture similar to that behind the vigorous vernacular of Copland. Tippet's rhythmic subtlety is also derived from his (originally subconscious) desire to keep his work, however sophisticated, in touch with the vernacular of modern life, which produced jazz; and the recitative in his oratorio *A Child of our Time* is a closer approach to the musical consummation of the true temper of contemporary speech underlying jazz (and commercially blurred by elements of machinistic propaganda), than anything in 'English-speaking' music except the extraordinarily moving 'modern American recitative' of Marc Blitzstein's *No for an Answer*, particularly such numbers as the 'explanatory' character-sketch of Mike: it is illuminating to consider Blitzstein's and Tippet's recitative with reference to the social and indeed economic significance both of the intimate relation between English music and English poetry in the Elizabethan age, and of the failure of the English operatic venture in the seventeenth century. (I'm also inclined to think that Blitzstein's line seems the easier, the more natural, because American speech is more intimately related than English to the evolution of industrial civilization).

Rubbra, thinking in terms of song rather than speech, has never manifested much interest in the problem of the vernacular, perhaps because, being the most clearly traditional of these composers, he has less need to. This is all well and good if, like Rubbra, you're really creative and capable of recreating a tradition that is meaningful for you: but most artists to-day have to steer a wary course between the Scylla of traditions that have hardened into conventions or broadened into eclecticism, and the Charybois of a vernacular that has softened into provinciality. The work of Samuel Barber is a good example of the first type—that of the tradition that is no longer creatively operative; for although his music is always accomplished and elegant, with at times (as in the *Adagio* for strings) something of a personal fervour, and although his setting of English verse (as represented by the Joyce songs) is exemplary, he has not personality enough to attain to a vernacular adequately expressive of his environment, and so accepts ready-made a late-nineteenth century European tradition which for him is moribund.

In Barber's work the failure to create a vernacular leads to the

passive acceptance of a dead convention, rendering his music little more than a pleasant academy piece; on the other hand in the work of Gerald Finzi the acceptance of a provincial vernacular leads to the inability to find a tradition of more than local validity. While it would obviously be absurd to complain (since they have such different ends in view) that the line of Finzi's songs, exquisitely moulded and sensitive to the English language as it is, has a less vital contact with contemporary speech than the line of Blitzstein, it is certainly true that its folkly inflection carries it so far from present traditions of European music as to render it little more than a dialect; though one must admit that if you want a dialect music you could hardly have a more elegant one than his: (the new Shakespeare songs are however by no means up to the level of his best work, such as *Proud Songsters*). How impossible it is to merge so restricted a dialect either into a vitally contemporary speech or into the main European traditions is revealed clearly in the chaos of E. J. Moeran's Symphony—the lack of adequate formalization and the intermittency of its textural interest—for while this work no doubt contains material for three or four rural elegies of about four minutes each it is as a 'modern' symphony an anachronism. The kind of success that is possible for a contemporary composer in this vein is indicated by the yearning anguish which is given to the first movement's modal, folksong first subject by a sinuous twist of rhythm and tonal centre at the end of the phrase; but it is not the kind of virtue that can be developed to symphonic proportions. This first movement has climaxes in plenty, it stops and starts with no doubt all kinds of thematic inter-relations, but it has no emotional growth because there is a fundamental cleavage between the folksong and Delian elements and the attempt at modernity—a cleavage still more patent in the ostensibly 'tragic' finale with its melodramatic metrical ferocities out of Walton's Symphony, its canon on the brass from Vaughan Williams's Fourth. Potentially the most interesting movement is the *lento*, which begins well in the Baxian manner, a wild 'celtic' lament with surging strings and chromatically gurgling woodwind; but here again it lacks direction, and it takes Delius at his best to doodle around and get away with it. Nothing could be further from either the concentrated evolution of a lyrical idea in Rubbra's symphonies, or the sharp lucidity of the articulation of the sound pattern in Copland's sonata, than this verbose, opulent, wailing, provincial music. Even if you succeed in being influenced by, rather than parasitic on, Vaughan Williams and Delius (which Moeran by no means always does) they are still too dangerously nostalgic elements to be readily miscible with other attitudes. One sees relatively, how wise Finzi was to restrict himself almost entirely to songs, where the formalization is controlled by the verse structure; and even so fastidious an artist as he fails when in some of the more 'cosmic' Hardy songs he attempts to combine his folksong idiom with a tentative polytonality.

English folksong, unalleviated, is patently not an adequate



vernacular for a contemporary composer; yet primitive indigenous Mexican music can merge naturally into Carlos Chavez's characteristic contemporary mode of speech, with its clear hard texture, its monotonous repetition and ellipsis of simple diatonic and pentatonic phrases, its steely resonance and occasional strident dissonance over the bases of fourth, fifths and seconds, I suppose because the temper of primitive musics (which popular Mexican Indian music still is) is sufficiently remote from us to be exploited without nostalgia. In particular the rigid repetition of a modal and percussive pattern and the incisive heterophonic two-part writing (hence the prevalence in Chavez of major seconds and sevenths) of aboriginal music can be transformed into a procedure as sophisticated, intellectual and electric as, and analogous to, the pattern-formalization of Copland, though of more limited emotional range. (The restriction may be less obvious in Chavez's unique 'stratospheric' orchestration, but though the keyboard writing is equally original and clearly related to the orchestration, the exquisitely tender pentatonic fourth piece is the only one of these Preludes to give any intimation of a possible contrast of mood such as is presumably necessary in Chavez's large-scale compositions). At the same time, this is authentic music, with real roots, even if they are cactus-roots in a sun-parched desert. Its assurance of manner is brought out by contrast with the incisive Hindemithian piano pieces of Alan Rawsthorne which are very accomplished and yet without personality, an English language or a stable tradition.

In general the position of American composers, from this standpoint of the vernacular and tradition, is both more difficult than that of European composers (because American composers still don't know, and must be continually on the alert as to, where their traditions are going to come out); and easier (because this very uncertainty means that the interaction between vernacular and evolving tradition can be more plastic than in Europe); certainly the work of Copland, Harris, Schuman and Blitzstein is the most rewarding attempt to merge an American vernacular into a stable tradition I've so far come across. On our side, perhaps the clearest expression of the vernacular-tradition problem lies in Tippett's compromise between European wit and grace and English lyricism and waywardness. One gets an idea of his position if one contrasts it first with the real tradition of a Byrd, a Dowland or a Gibbons, which allows you to be simultaneously and unselfconsciously both local and European; and then compares, on the one hand, Tippett's relationship with English folksong with that of Finzi or Moeran, and on the other hand the quality of Tippett's sophistication with the eclecticism of Benjamin Britten.

Whereas Rubbra and Harris almost conceive of texture and composition as synonymous, and Tippett and Copland use texture to define their organization, Britten in many of his works seemed almost to regard texture as an end in itself, apart from line drawing or formalization. One can understand his desire to escape from the



provinciality of the English vernacular, during the years in which he started composing, to more continental standards (this is not to deny the cultural—and intrinsic—significance of Vaughan Williams), but the assimilation of European tradition to an English sensibility requires a certainty of direction and a creativeness that Britten didn't seem to have. An appeal to continental sophistication cannot excuse melodic material that is inherently undistinguished, and I don't complain of the facility and virtuosity of (say) the piano concerto, only that facility is not facile and ingenuity not ingenious unless the result is interesting music; no more than texture, does technical ingenuity exist in vacuo. I'm all for wit, but I do insist that, as in Tippett's music, the wit should be intrinsic in the melodic sense rather than added by the effects department.

Britten's first big, serious work, the *Sinfonia da Requiem*, seemed to suffer from the same uncertainty of direction. The first movement is an entirely textural affair, germinating from a single stem like the first movement of Rubbra's fourth, exciting and convincing, differing from Rubbra in that the lyrical ideas are relatively insignificant (and of course less vocal) so that the intensity of the music centres directly in the technical virtuosity. The other two movements seemed to me emotionally cheap and parasitic on such unlikely (for a contemporary English composer) nineteenth century sources as Mahler and Fauré, and although talent was undoubtedly required to bring it off so successfully, one couldn't legitimately claim that such eclecticism solves the problem of recovering for the English tradition a European status. Rubbra's original 'austerity' (the epithet seems to have stuck, the critics cottoning to the lack of surface graces rather at the expense of the music's passion) comes nearer to it, not to mention the more conscious attempt of Tippett.

I agree with whoever it was who remarked that the *Sinfonia* is reminiscent rather of *Citizen Kane* than of a service for the dead: but the talent that is latent in it is certainly more apprehensible in the *Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo* for tenor and piano, a work which leads one to believe that the promise of the very early *A Boy Was Born* may after all yet reach fulfilment. One reason for their success is, I think, the restriction of medium to voice and piano—for exploiting the virtuosic possibilities of the voice amounts more or less to exploiting the inherent resources of melody and is almost ipso facto a step in the direction of tradition. Again the restriction to one type of manners—the Italian baroque line from Monteverde to Puccini—is less dangerous than the eclecticism of the *Sinfonia*, partly because all the manners are mutually conformable, partly because the Italianate line, perhaps because of its fundamentally vocal nature, has always been a universal of European tradition which crops up without restriction of time and place, so that one accepts it in these songs, if not as easily as one does in Dowland or Purcell, at least with less difficulty than one could accept the French line of the Rimbaud songs, which one couldn't regard as much more than competent genre pieces. Writing as he must without

'the seventeenth century background,' that seems to me a tribute to the integrity of Britten's personal re-creation of the foreign idiom in this work, and to the sinuous fervour of his line: at the same time he will never evolve a stable idiom merely by the process of reaction, however understandable and (as here) intelligently carried out, and I believe that the greatest service one could do for Britten would be to deplore the ridiculous claims that have been made in some circles for these elegant songs and to say rather that on the evidence of them it seems likely that Britten may one day write songs which rely on no manner other than his (English) own, into which Italianism (and what else) is assimilated; in other words that he will solve the dual problem of creating a valid vernacular from his native language and of reconciling this vernacular with European tradition. Largely homophonic the sonnets aren't textural as are Rubbra's Spenser Sonnets (for an account of which see *Scrutiny* for January, 1942) nor, since the structure is dictated by the words, do they use texture, like Copland and Tippett, in the interests of formalization. But one can say of them that in their more limited sense the texture and spacing of voice and piano part are well-nigh perfect and a joy to listen to—that here the ingenuity of writing is really ingenious because it is beautiful. I suppose it's the alarming copiousness of Britten's output that has made one forget that he's still, compared with most of the composers mentioned in this review, quite young; young enough at least, and potentially talented enough, to be put along with Rubbra and Tippett as a (smaller) reason for feeling relatively sanguine about the future of British music.

One hopes that the period of absorption in vocal technique which Britten appears to be undergoing (it is most lucidly revealed in the settings of sonnets XXX, XXIV and LV, the latter very sensitive in line and with an economical piano part built out of a syncopation and a semitonal dissonance) may prove of crucial importance to him. Further evidence of it is provided by the choral *Hymn to St. Cecilia*, to words of W. H. Auden. Largely homophonic, or in airy dancing counterpoints rather than evolving polyphony, this work is not altogether sustained in interest and much more eclectic than the sonnets. Yet in its very weaknesses the piece has certain advantages over the sonnets; for if its eclecticism patently indicates that Britten hasn't solved the vernacular-tradition problem as cleanly as has Tippett, at least beneath the eclecticism the Hymn remains the product of an English sensibility as the more completely consistent Michelangelo sonnets can hardly be said to. As a whole the music is charming in its diatonic simplicity of outline and sophisticated suavity of detail, and the 'casual as birds' section seems to me almost the most beautiful thing Britten has given us, with a true delicacy and tenderness of spirit poles apart from the facetiousness that in some of his earlier works passed for 'lightness of touch'. The contrast with the pure noble polyphony of Rubbra's madrigals is extreme: Rubbra's entire utterance is texture; Britten's texture is certainly an integral part of his sensibility in this unpre-

tentious piece, but it entails something that one may without opprobrium call 'showmanship'. Again, the music 'sounds' delightfully. Another new, more deliberately popular, choral work of Britten—*A Ceremony of Carols* for women's voices and harp—re-establishes direct contact with the English tradition on which Britten had drawn in *A Boy was Born*. I heard the work in circumstances too unfavourable to warrant my passing judgment on it; but in any case the directness, and the renewed contact, are, I think, significant.

The Copland Sonata, one of the most representative and interesting of his recent works, with a most tenderly beautiful finale, is unfortunately not obtainable in this country. All the other works mentioned above can (and many of them should) be bought. The recording of the Harris is not too good, being harsh on the surface and woolly in the details, and there are one or two awkward passages in the recording of the Britten songs, which are however in general mechanically very satisfactory, and are certainly superbly sung and played. One is so glad to have these records that one would tolerate much worse technical blemishes than these, for I would put the records among the most interesting issues which have appeared since the outbreak of war. May we not now have an English pressing of the American recording of Copland's *Quiet City*? Or of any of his, or Harris's, or Blitzstein's works? The recording of the Moeran Symphony and the Rawsthorne pieces is very good and the symphony is given an exceptionally vital performance under Leslie Heward: Denis Matthews plays the Rawsthorne with impeccable clarity.

At the same time, while no-one wants to discourage the recording of any serious contemporary music and while it is pleasant to have such a fine performance of Moeran's symphony to listen to once in a while, one cannot help asking—not so much because the music is poor as because it is so remote from the significant trends in British music to-day—what possible service to our national culture the British Council imagines it is performing by sponsoring a recording of this work for export as propaganda to our military allies. I do not for a moment suppose there is any policy behind the choice; had it been a deliberate intention to record a work of nostalgic latterday romanticism surely—and I note that Edward Sackville West recently made the same point in the *New Statesman*—one of the symphonies of Bax (preferably No. 3 or 5) would have been musically immeasurably more worth recording, since their idiom, whether one likes it or not, is certainly authentic in a way that makes the amorphous bogey-bogey stuff of Moeran's finale sound like background music to a Hollywood epic about the Nazis, and about as 'modern'. (Besides, Bax has the additional propaganda value of being Master of the King's Musick). It is, however, precisely the absence of policy which is so disquieting and makes this apparently trivial matter worth commenting on at the end of a review of the musical situation in the two English-speaking worlds. How sanguine can one feel about state support for contemporary music (however

desirable in itself) when we are presented with Moeran's lengthy symphony as an example, presumably, of what British composers can do on their mettle, while there are no recordings of the third and fourth symphonies of Rubbra, of any music of van Dieren, of the larger works of Tippett, Britten or Rawsthorne, or even of the *Pastoral Symphony* and *Job* of Vaughan Williams (without whom Moeran would never have written a note); certainly all these composers except van Dieren could, given the chance, reach a public as wide as Moeran's, probably wider.

There may be many gloomy things about America but at least it takes its composers sufficiently seriously to have recorded almost all the big works of Copland, Harris and Blitzstein as well as a good sprinkling of works by other Americans significant and insignificant; we cannot claim in extenuation that the American works are 'easier' to listen to than most of the English works listed above. Perhaps there's some justification for the feeling tentatively intimated on another occasion in these pages that a certain unreality pervading the relation between composer and audience over here is on the other side of the Atlantic agreeably less evident.

W. H. MELLERS.

# CORMAC'S RUINED HOUSE

## A SURVEY OF THE MODERN IRISH NOVEL.

### I.

IN his fine book *The Hidden Ireland*<sup>1</sup>, Daniel Corkery shows how the Renaissance left Ireland, alone in Europe, almost untouched, for, in his own words, 'whatever of the Renaissance came to Ireland met a culture so ancient, widely-based and well-articulated, that it was received only on sufferance'. The truth of this statement is borne out by the very interesting account Corkery gives of the Gaelic poetry of the eighteenth century. That poetry was as different from the contemporaneous English poetry as it could well be, and in fact we should have to go back to the poetry of Langland and Chaucer to find anything vaguely similar. To take a concrete example, the Jacobite *Aisling* or Vision Poem—obviously (though not closely) comparable with the dream allegory of the *Roman de la Rose* and certainly comparable with nothing in the European eighteenth century—was actually at its peak-point early in that century and did not become extinct till after 1798. And Brian Merriman's (Brian Mac Giolla Meidhre) famous poem *The Midnight Court*, a long animated discussion of marriage having points of resemblance with Chaucer's *Wyf of Bathe*, Dunbar's *Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo* and the medieval Courts of Love, was written in 1780, only a few years before the French Revolution and the publication of *Lyrical Ballads*.

We can see what Joyce meant when, in an early squib-pamphlet, he described his country as 'the most belated race in Europe' (he was deploring the fate of the Irish Literary Theatre, presumably its decline into a spate of popular peasant-plays), but had he known more about Gaelic poetry he probably would not have expressed himself quite in those terms, for what really deserved attacking was not so much the absence of the 'modern spirit' in Ireland as the thinness and half-heartedness of that ancient spirit which is what we call the Gaelic Tradition. From the seventeenth century onwards, Ireland had changed only in one way: she had lost touch with her past without forming for herself a present—neither a present which, in Douglas Hyde's words, should be 'a rational continuation of the past', nor a 'present' in the sense one might apply the term to America. The national life was in the hopeless state of being neither one thing nor the other, and that is a fact for which Ireland herself will not take all the blame, or even the greater part.

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<sup>1</sup>*The Hidden Ireland: A Study of Gaelic Munster in the Eighteenth Century* (M. H. Gill and Son, Ltd., Dublin, 1925). Daniel Corkery is at present Professor of English at Cork University.