

# Contents

## VOLUME ONE: NUMBER TWO

Editorial Committee: W. H. Oliver, E. Schwimmer, H. Witheford and the Victoria University College Literary Society.

Address manuscripts and other correspondence to the Secretary, W. H. Oliver, History Department, Victoria University College, Wellington.

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## *Arachne*

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IN THE PUBLICATION of *Arachne* the editors have to meet the problem of the form of such a magazine as this. The purpose that has to be served is the progress of literature. This limits *Arachne*, unfortunately, to the stature of what is usually called a 'little magazine.'

In the field of fiction, English-speaking countries have both the literary fiction magazine and the little magazine. The former type—for instance *Penguin New Writing*—publishes a good proportion of the best: that is, if it has a plot. If a story has no plot it goes begging among the little magazines. Although most of the best prose written in English still has a plot, a very important part has not, and it is the role of the little magazine to foster this minority.

*Arachne's* task is to publish both types. In the absence of a New Zealand magazine concentrating upon better-class fiction (it would be impossible, in any case, to obtain enough material for such a magazine) a combination of traditional and experimental writing is the only possible course.

A similar position applies to the essay. Since Chesterton there has been a widespread horror at the subjective type of essay; the *avant-garde* magazine alone prints an essay in which the author's attitudes and the workings of his mind mean more than the thesis put forward. In many ways this type is still more fruitful than the objective essay, at present an over-formalised medium. *Arachne*, however, will feature both forms, recognising the danger of overspecialisation as well as the value of the subjective essay, especially when new fields are explored.

Poetry is the only literary form in which the little magazine publishes the mainstream of what is being produced. The larger magazines do not publish more than an occasional few verses; the only important media are the volumes and the little magazines, and these two supplement each other.

From these considerations it is possible to form a picture of the standard British little magazine. Its peak will be in the verse; the essays will be either personal or lyrical, or they will discuss a problem with which the readers of such publications are especially concerned; the stories will be lyrical or plotless, or intended to examine a peculiar state of consciousness, one not generally understood. For the rest, there will usually be notes of various sorts.

Now this definition allows a wide scope, the expression of a whole region of experience which would otherwise be not easily brought before a public. The core is a despair of being generally understood. This form has to be moulded to our conditions. The scope in New Zealand is wide; the variety of thought and experience published commercially is smaller than in Britain, so that we can collect a greater diversity of material. On the other hand the conventions within the community exclude a good deal of this thought and experience from the range of topics suitable for communication. It will be especially necessary to fight the belief that some things are too harmful or too corrupt for communication. Where the idea of communication fills the writer and his public with unusual horror, there it is likely that the essential secret lies concealed. The greatest danger is to be found in the merely decorative; we aim to print work that has a cathartic quality. It is immaterial whether or not this involves novelty and a disregard of conventions, though the editors regret that it often does, and are glad when it does not. But the conventions of decorative dissimulation are largely responsible for any emphasis upon

innovation.

In all these matters, *Arachne* will provide a free forum; it will allow the unsuspected and the remote to be expressed, and expressed in public.

## ***The Empty Country***

*An Attitude to Wordsworth by W. H. Oliver*

IF ONLY UPON the most easily evident level, Wordsworth is a poet who should hold considerable attraction for New Zealanders, and especially New Zealand poets. He was partly, and perhaps most successfully, a poet of the natural world; I find it difficult to believe that people can write in New Zealand and avoid a certain concern for the characteristics of landscape. The greater number of New Zealand poets do, in fact, feel this attraction, though with great difference in emphasis. The relation of poets to landscape is complex. To say that some feel impelled to account for the impact of landscape, and that some others do not, does less than justice to the sheerly individual qualities of each poet's approach. Indeed, this sharp individualism is as important a feature as any. But if this caution is borne in mind it remains a valid generalisation to say that a good number of New Zealand poets are characteristically impelled to incorporate into their work the impact of landscape. Further, they do so in more or less complete isolation. This isolation extends to cover the whole of their writing, whether concerned with landscape or not, and is moreover, quite as notable a characteristic of those poets who in no way share this concern. Poets in New Zealand, even those most concerned with landscape, do not form a school, nor yet a number of groups; they have strikingly little effect upon each other. The generalisations of the thirties, and the direction then assumed, left many poets writing at the time quite untouched; most of those who have appeared since have implicitly repudiated any such hypothesis. A tension remains, but it is no longer expressed only in terms of geography and history.

Given then, an occupation with landscape, and an isolation that accompanies it and extends beyond it, in what way can the situation of Wordsworth help to identify present problems? I suggest that once differences of talent and changes of circumstance are recognised, his situation can be seen as the prototype of that of the greater number of modern poets, and, with especial relevance, an image of that of the New Zealand poet.

Wordsworth's chief inspiration derives from his experience of an empty country; the moments of spiritual exaltation in which his poems had their beginning arose in the crucial encounter of poet and landscape, a relation which always tended to become that of saint and divinity, oracle and godhead. But he was never content, except in the glorious moments of experience, with such a relation; and, when youth had gone by, these moments were less frequent and less sustaining. Essentially, I think, the relation is unsupportable. Man, it has been remarked, is no longer a man when he is beyond society; he must become either beast or god. Wordsworth was neither; he was almost exclusively a poet. It can be argued that in a life which is socially valueless even such remotely sociable products as poetry are unrecognisably damaged. Lack of social value in the ordinary actions of men leads to the destruction of some aspects of personality, and a destruction of this nature is not limited to the aspects destroyed. The lack of balance so caused affects the whole of the man. The destruction of a social sense, in itself a damaging feat, may well mar and distort those activities which seem solely the fruit of solitude. This, however, was doubly the case with Wordsworth. His joy in nature was not pantheistic—landscape turned him outwards to other men, to moral education, to the cultivation of the feelings, and to general human improvement.

*Long time in search of knowledge desperate,  
I was benighted heart and mind; but now  
On all sides day began to reappear,  
And it was proved indeed that not in vain  
I had been taught to reverence a power  
That is the very quality and shape  
And image of right reason, that matures  
Her processes by steadfast laws, gives birth  
To no impatient or fallacious hopes,  
No heat of passion or excessive zeal,*

*No vain conceits, provokes to no quick turns  
 Of self-applauding intellect, but lifts  
 The Being into magnanimity;  
 Holds up before the mind, intoxicate  
 With present objects and the busy dance  
 Of things that pass away, a temperate shew  
 Of objects that endure, and by this course  
 Disposes her, when over-fondly set  
 On leaving her encumbrances behind  
 To seek in Man, and in the frame of life,  
 Social and individual, what there is  
 Desirable, affecting, good or fair  
 Of kindred permanence, the gifts divine  
 And universal, the pervading grace  
 That hath been, is, and shall be. Above all  
 Did nature bring again that wiser mood  
 More deeply re-established in my soul,  
 Which, seeing little worthy or sublime  
 In what we blazon with the pompous names  
 Of power and action, early tutor'd me  
 To look with feelings of fraternal love  
 Upon those unassuming things, that hold  
 A silent station in this beauteous world.*

THE PRELUDE, Bk. 12

Wordsworth felt required to populate these bare places, and in this task he was aided by the existence, though only the vestigial existence, of an English peasantry. Peasants were, he thought, people who lived as men in this country, who passed as normal beings before the landscape, people whose normality was based, not upon ignorance or neglect of the bare places (this was the death of the soul), but upon the very communion through which he himself received power. Their life was not prose, but poetry. And their speech, simple and unaffected, was (once shorn of vulgarity and lifted by high feeling) serviceable to the poet. Clearly the lineaments of such a race form an ideal not an actual picture. Wordsworth's peasants, where they are real to us and command our attention, seem to be Wordsworth himself. Where they are not, where they represent attempts to bring known people into the verse, they often dissipate in vulgarity and silliness. Where the attitudes are those of the poet, though disguised as peasant, they are compelling. Where they are such as we might imagine a decaying peasantry (the livelier were quickly making their way to the new industrial centres) to employ, they are trivial. Wordsworth's attempt to populate his empty country was a failure; he himself, reflected in a thousand mirrors, remained the sole inhabitant. Nature directed him towards *Man*, but the only knowledge of men it gave him was of an ideal race—'silent in this beauteous world'—the inhabitants of a stern rural Utopia. This, I think, is the intimate connection between Wordsworth's preoccupation with landscape and his failure to find scope for feelings which should have led to social action. Nature may teach a man a good deal about himself, about a select similar few, and about the many as they ideally might be. But little about men in their actual condition—the condition which must be known before it can be changed. And change is the end proposed by moral instruction.

The pain of isolation remained, the miracle was seen by one man only. There was no social milieu 'of unassuming things that hold—A silent station in this beauteous world'—a community in which the miracle was an exciting but not eccentric event, and one in which it could be put to purposes of moral improvement. The poet was still required to be beast or god—and to be either was to be silent; a beast cannot speak, and a god need not. The dilemma was excruciating—the visible world was at once the spring of the singing voice, and the advocate of silence.

II

The dilemma may be looked at in another way. More fortunate ages had had the benefit of mythology, and others that of a settled and vital religion. Mythology and a religion have this much in common, that they are both (at least in part) a way of clothing the bare and elemental in a sociable and communicable guise. They can

refer the experience of the individual (arising in this case from the relation of poet and landscape) to a fund of common metaphor. Had Wordsworth indeed been the pagan who saw Proteus rising from the foam, he would have been more fortunate. His particular experience of the miracle would have been to some extent moulded by an existing and traditional way of looking at these things, a metaphor. And this metaphor would have been in turn modified by the strikingly new experience of the poet. But this, of course, was not the case. Classical mythology had always been an exotic in the English scene—a more profitable source of wit and instruction than of illumination. And Wordsworth was decidedly not an exotic. Traditional religion, once so fertile, had surrendered to the infiltrations of the eighteenth century. When Wordsworth accepted its ministrations, he too succumbed. The urbanity of city life repelled him; education and learning left him mostly untouched. For him there was only the empty country, which, after every effort, remained empty. Wordsworth was left alone with the visible world, and with his own image. Neither mythology nor religion linked his illumination to a common body of experience. He found no true cure for isolation, and utter isolation is silence. And silence was equally the result of adopting a social attitude invalid upon all other grounds. The result is the tragedy of his later life—the dissipation of magnificent talent upon uncongenial topics—the moral requirements of duty, the excellences of the established church, and the evils of popular enthusiasm.

There were two stresses in the life and writing of the young Wordsworth: a notable affinity, amounting at times to a dangerous identification with natural objects (in one place he speaks of his failure to treat trees and men as different and rightly recognised this as a state of mental disease) and a keen awareness of the need for human improvement. These two stresses, abstractly regarded, *need* not conflict except to produce an agreeable and fruitful tension. Ideally, the poet need give no more to his society than his poems; Wordsworth would be living a full social life if he translated his rural exaltation into verse which would itself be a vehicle for moral improvement. But, ideally, a third factor must enter—the communal and traditional metaphor which would make strange sights communicable. Without such a metaphor, there may be the most exciting privatism; the poet may well sing to the glory of God, but not for the edification of the multitude. Many poets may go on writing for the ear of God alone, and occasional human beings may eavesdrop to their profit; this, however, was not the role Wordsworth chose for himself. Men, ordinary men, 'unassuming things,' were to be his audience. Because the ideal situation did not exist, the conflict between the two stresses bred more than a tension; it developed into open warfare. One of the two had to go down—the poet with nature, or the poet among men.

Instead of an institution which could keep this conflict within profitable bounds, Wordsworth accepted the misty mis-relation of the Anglican communion, and the social attitudes which it sanctioned. The sin of his conservatism is not the volte-face from boyish revolutionary joy—it lies in a much deeper denying of the life of the spirit. The Anglican Church, like all Christian groups of the time, was singularly unfitted for the task of co-ordinating social and individual action. Its beliefs and practices meant little to its age. It had manoeuvred its way into a restless agreement with Enlightenment and Utility; it had lost spiritual urgency and power. At its best, it shared the finer qualities of the aristocracy, a cultured urbanity and a sense of graceful leisure; at its worst, it was afflicted with non-residence, plurality and clerical sloth. At its most enthusiastic, at the level of the evangelicals, it spread, with Methodism, like an enervating contagion among the lower classes. No spiritual depth was there—no such depth as would be necessary to hold the two sides of Wordsworth's nature together. Nor could the church give him the common metaphor he needed—the church did not speak the language of the common people, and meant as little to them as did the poets. Indeed, the only sorts of language familiar to the common people were, first, that of the exhortatory Methodists, and second, that of the political agitators. And it is as hard to imagine Wordsworth a hot-gospel preacher, as it is to see him in the role of an 'Orator' Hunt. All the doors seem to have closed upon Wordsworth, but the one he opened led nowhere as surely as would any other. He became, indeed, 'a pagan suckled on a creed outworn,' but he was no longer visited by Triton and Proteus.

### III

Wordsworth's dilemma is characteristically modern—more likely to be repeated than avoided in this century. It is easy to see that he took the wrong path, but impossible to claim that there was a true one available to him. When we look back at him after a hundred years, our first impression must be of the distinctive excellence of his early poems. But the second impression must be of tragedy. The poems arose from a radically pure relation between man and the Other—the being experienced in and through the visible world. But the very purity of that relation prevented it from lasting, because it could not be carried on in a suitable social or spiritual environment. It is, indeed, generally supposed that romantics are distinguished by alternating mastery and victim-hood: a mastery that stems from moments of kinship and re-creation, and a victimhood which arises from the intractability of isolation. The connection between the two is not so apparent. When, as in this case, the mastery is achieved only after the rejection of current social values, and unsupported by a common and

continuous fund of belief and metaphor, its inevitable concomitant is isolation. And isolation as thorough as mastery so achieved implies, means the damage of life without company, and the despair of thought without intellectual context. Wordsworth, moreover, was given a social mission, though without any such mission the damage of a socially valueless life would have been acute enough.

The bearing of this discussion upon the problems of authorship in New Zealand is quite close. There are immediate similarities. We have, perhaps to an unparalleled degree, an empty country, more severe than any known to Wordsworth. I find in some parts of his work an immediate relevance which I do not discover in many other English nature poets. In some poems and passages of blank verse there is no specifically English landscape. The landscape is an elemental matter of mountains, water and sky.

*... I struck, and struck again,  
And, growing still in stature, the huge Cliff  
Rose up between me and the stars, and still,  
With measured motion, like a living thing,  
Strode after me. With trembling hands I turn'd,  
And through the silent water stole my way  
Back to the cavern of the Willow tree.  
There, in her mooring-place, I left my Bark,  
And, through the meadows homeward went, with grave  
And serious thoughts; and after I had seen  
That spectacle, for many days, my brain,  
Work'd with a dim and undetermined sense  
Of unknown modes of being; in my thoughts  
There was a darkness, call it solitude,  
Or blank desertion, no familiar shapes  
Of hourly objects, images of trees,  
Of sea or sky, no colours of green fields;  
But huge and mighty forms that do not live  
Like living men lived slowly through the mind  
By day and were the trouble of my dreams.*

#### THE PRELUDE, Book I

I suggest that New Zealanders can find a special profit in the poems of Wordsworth; a kind of profit to be met with in few other English poets. And I would advance, though tentatively, for this would require a critical analysis, the suggestion that the influence of Wordsworth is an important one upon the body of work represented in *A Book Of New Zealand Verse*.

But the analysis has a more important bearing than this. I have said earlier that while a good number of New Zealand poets share a concern for their specific landscape, all of them are marked by their isolation. Indeed, pre-occupation with landscape is an especially effective method of achieving isolation. This is more than usually the case, when as in New Zealand, the landscape is particularly inhuman and remote. Poets here are more or less isolated from their society, from traditional beliefs, and from each other. They may be on the best of terms with each other, they may respect each other's work very much, but they have very little effect upon each other. Again, they frequently play an important part upon the margins of social activity. They are, in many respects, good citizens. But all too frequently they are citizens with only a fraction of their personalities. Their poetry is their most important world, and it is a carefully preserved one. Finally, they are cut off from any body of belief, any religion or mythological system which would relate their individual discoveries to a common and accepted tradition. Sometimes the beliefs of any one seem chaotic; in other cases, where there is an appearance of order, this order is achieved only at the price of the rejection of customary and social values, and of the beliefs of people in a position similar to their own. Isolation, upon all levels, is thoroughgoing and portentous. But while one admits the danger, that admission is no great access of wisdom. One pronounces Wordsworth's remedy false, but cannot point to a true one; similarly one cannot to-day find a way of thinking and acting that is not isolated—that is, if it is to be valid upon other and necessary grounds.

This multiform isolation is just that of Wordsworth. Some source of illumination is found, some field of relationship with the Other. The illumination leads to a certain mastery, a habit of re-creation through which poems are written. But this same mastery is accomplished only after isolation in its many forms has been accepted. The habit of isolation is reinforced by the experience and the mastery. Its price is a too thorough rejection. For Wordsworth the result was a victimhood which extended over the greater part of his life. The

possibility of a similar fate is before New Zealand poets—there is the general cause of an even more thorough dislocation of belief and habit in this century, and the specific cause of the compelling presence of an inhuman landscape, an empty country which commands both exaltation and silence.

## Sunday

*A Short Story by Yvonne Du Presne*

NOW THAT THE SUMMER holidays were here, they often had afternoon tea on Sundays out on the lawn. They sat under the very new maple tree which sent a few spidery thin shadows fingering over the cups and the lace tea-cloth and watched the pine trees moving stiffly along the division between the tender little garden and the paddocks, rolling away to the foothills. As the light faded, they would watch the hollows in the hills grow fuzzy; then it would go and the pine trees would be just a line of trees marking no boundary at all.

Nancy was going to high school next year; her Standard VI books lay yellowing and curling up on the shelf under her window. She wanted to go to Wellington these holidays (the harbour and little wooden houses perched like birds on the hills), but the cannas bloomed richly in the creek and Mother's voice went on and on about her rockery. Father flicked and flicked nervously at a crumb on his jacket and answered too quickly—'All right—but I haven't got time, I tell you—there's no time.' Nancy fingered her spoon and didn't look up. She knew her Mother's mouth was trembling. 'But Dad, only a few rocks, you could get them in a few minutes . . .'

'Nancy!' he shouted so quickly that she jumped. 'Go and get some more sugar—hurry!' She trailed over the lawn, looking for daisies. 'Put your shoulders back!'; she was inside before he could think of anything else.

As the glass sideboard doors swung out she saw three Nancies gazing at her—she looked at one of them, smoothing the basin in her hands, and the small dark girls gazed back, lifting their heads nobly, their hands all arched beautifully around three basins. She crossed her feet as the dancers had and drooped her head over her hands. She swayed on her toes and the dark reflections moved. A distant shout shook the silence to pieces, broke up the still faces and jerked the room and lawn back to her, before she ran noisily down the passage and over the grey slipper verandah, back to Mother with her wet handkerchief tucked under her cushion.

'Get these things inside quickly—we don't want them spoiled. All right Em, it's all right; I'll bring in the dishes.' The sudden rain was cold on their skins, the cloth was starred.

'Come on Mum,' Nancy said. 'Look, I'll carry your chair. Come on.'

'You can't stay out here, Em . . .'

 But her mother suddenly pushed them both away and ran through the rain to the house, dropping her crochet hook on the lawn. Father said gently to pack up the things and run inside. She said, too eagerly, 'Can I go to Wellington, just on the service car? Go on, could I?'

'Now don't start again, do you hear? Clear away this gear.' The rain fell faster and slipped down the sides of the silver tea-pot. She couldn't find the crochet hook. Father shouted 'Leave it—leave the damn thing,' and she rushed up to the verandah and dropped her load on the step and went on to her own room.

'Nance—Nance' came faintly from Mother's bedroom. Nancy slammed the door. Her mother called again. She stood quite still. 'Go to hell,' she said softly.

The rain went on until the afternoon was dark and wet. The linoleum was cold. She heard Dad go into the room up the passage, voices murmured, Mother cried and Dad's voice came more loudly; then she heard them go into the sitting-room and close the door. They would be sitting in front of a fire, she could hear it snapping, and the rumble as Mother drew the sofa up. Was it safe to go in? She tiptoed out into the passage and leant forward to listen. Her parents were talking quietly, the rain drummed on the roof. She walked heavily into the sitting-room. Mother's eyes were puffy, Father was reading; his foot twitched as if someone was sitting with his chin in his hand on the fender jerking a string monotonously. The fire rustled quietly, burning in the brown polished piano and the dark window pane and the china cabinet. Nancy wished they would say something. She wandered up and down from the bookcase to the window and back to the fire, leaning on the mantelpiece until Mother jerked her legs back and shivered and Father's face reddened.

The geese screamed in the next paddock, the cars swished along the road. The rain thrummed and whispered in the pipes, filling the upturned flowers and bowing the grass. The light suddenly shone on to the tallest trees in the bush and filtered into their garden. It looked like a damp shell burning with wet colours. Would her voice echo thinly back from its sides if she ran into the centre of the garden and shouted? Mother looked at her, her needles still flashing and clicking, and smiled as Dad turned the wireless on. There were some boys singing in a large church. How dark Sunday afternoons were. In her bedroom it was darker still with the cold top of her dressing table shining in the half-light and a stale smell of scent coming out when she opened her handkerchief drawer.

Now one voice broke away and hung by itself, a bird poised on one wing, that will not, will not turn and rush down the wind, wheeling and planing; but hands trembling, waiting, and the impatient air burns about it.

She couldn't wait—she broke in clumsily. 'Mum—could I go to Wellington?' and Mother smiled and nodded her head, looking warningly at Father and mouthing Shsh.

'On Wednesday—can I?' Dad gestured sharply, Mother screwed up her face excitedly at Nancy.

The voice shook, it was going to turn, to glide down the wind, through the flashing air—out of the dark Sunday, out of the turbulent rain. Dad wanted to listen, she nodded and glowed at Mother. What would come in Wellington, curled up, waiting for her to lift the tissue paper? She pressed her hot face to the damp pane. How quiet it was. Ah—she thought—every blade of grass, every dry little tree growing among the rocks in the mountains is covered with soft rain and darkness, and wind shaking the leaves, gently, gently, from pole to pole. She wrote WELLINGTON on the glass. The fire flapped like a flag, and a little voice cried out in the wood, on and on, and snapped off as an ember crumbled.

## ***Verses by Six Poets***

Alistair Campbell

### **Death of Hylas: Nymphs' Song**

We sucked on his mouth  
When he drank;  
Grabbed his golden hair (whoops!)  
Down he sank.

We drank his love-blue eyes;  
Crushed his flesh  
And bubbling mouth on ours:  
Mortal trash.

### **Coming of Spring**

Already a brittle light chills  
And hardens the wind-bent trees.  
A post away a morepork shrills  
In sudden short alarm. Cows on knees

Deep-buried in the grass turn  
Ceremoniously their steaming heads  
As we walk past. How strangely burn  
The daffodils in your arms! So we tread

The long valley home with no word  
Spoken, and into deeper night  
Where cold air rushes like a bird  
Released, into our faces, and the light

Cast by the daffodils illumines  
Your brow and eyes so dark  
In their anguish, and past the pines  
Where the leaping farm-dogs bark.

## From the Persian

The stars are marigolds  
Tossed into a canopy of silk  
By happy children;  
Or delicately worked by girls  
In costly thread.

The moon is a white bull  
Deliciously stepping on velvet.

## 1914

Charles Spear

So long ago, in tears, she turned  
To watch, on that radiant autumn day,  
When it seemed that Europe smoked and burned,  
And the Guards began to march away.

She stood by Chelsea Barracks, and her tears,  
Her filmy hat, like a perching butterfly,  
Her eager shyness, who would heed, when cheers  
Stormed up to heaven for those who marched to die?

Unknown she came, and she disappeared unknown,  
And what she has meant to me who shall say?  
But, with the Coldstream marching, time has flown,  
And her world and my world passed away.

## Poem

E. W. Entrican

Sweet water bear my body down  
The river like an Autumn leaf,  
And in your willow murmur drown



My too intelligible grief.

Oh let your reed thin voice imply  
The sadness of forsaken girls  
Whose lips were lovely as the sky  
And rounded as the river curls.

Sweet waters slow to singing turn  
My little cry of human shame,  
And let my deep-drowned body learn  
Your beauty, virgin as a flame.

## **A Figure at the Window**

W. H. Oliver

That was a vacant gesture. The wind  
At four o'clock in the morning knew it well,  
Too well, for you whose desperate small hand  
Stretched only as far as the light from your window fell,  
Not to be broken. But the wind that rides along  
The empty street and over the shuttered sea  
Will tell you her wisdom is you will listen long  
To her voice. Then it will seem, for she alone is free

That it was not without a certain grace,  
The ritual rising and falling of a closed hand.  
In another, more remote and timeless place  
It may be well founded. This renunciation may stand  
Sculptured and spare, as cold as a dreaming face  
And always have meaning in that wind-filled land.

The face of this land is pitted with antique marble,  
The wind tells stories among colonnades;  
Her voices whisper through deserted rooms, able  
To wander at will, she can rule where the shades  
Are perpetual, among the slender statues and the ruins  
Of an early tormented time. Her tales enhance  
The pale untortured beauty they assume  
Under the dead light, in their perfect trance.

And one looks on with eyes as pale as glass,  
Whose hands held, one time, joy and grief and pain;

But now among the marble trees he moves,  
Sings with the homeless wind, as wordless as  
A gathered spirit. And at last attains,  
Here in this paradise, his world, and all its sorrow proves.

Spring thunder over the sleeping country  
Carried from the high blue mountains a tremor of doom,  
So that you asked the wind—are the heavens angry?  
But the wind was ignorant, the wind played her own tune.  
And again you asked—can the mountains mean murder?  
But the falling leaves were indifferent, the pillars, the trees,  
Would not answer. Then you wondered, can there be further  
Destruction in a dead place, can the numbed hand freeze?

But the spring thunder was merciless, and an eddy of air,  
Cold from serene mountains, swept all leaves  
From the rooms, from the corridors, from the immaculate gardens.  
Then the wind's breath, rising, sang with a severe  
Hatred, like a spirit grieved by lost and remembered lives,  
And you were running, running, gripped by a familiar pain.

## The Morepork

Basil Dowling

A quiet night, and over the hills fog  
After a day of late December heat.  
I listen to the stillness; then of a sudden the sharp  
Clear double shout of a shepherd calling his dog  
On the hill, but no answering bark or bleat:  
Then the call again and again, as the driven silence goes.  
No shepherd it is but an owl  
As old as Europe and as full of woes  
Hooting from under his cowl  
Of bush on the lonely height;  
A native of no country but the night  
Of whose wide city he is sentinel  
Going his noiseless rounds to cry the hours  
To the somnambulist moon and watching stars.  
'Twelve of the clock, and all's well'  
Might be his words now as I go indoors,  
And yet I cannot sleep  
For that most melancholy voice up on the hill  
Monotonously calling, mustering the midnight sheep.

## Spring in Roxburgh

This grey and legendary tableland  
Thronged with stone sagas like a sculptor's yard:  
Heraldic figures; anvils in a forge;  
Old gods and gargoyles, altars and cromlechs stand  
Keeping majestic, melancholy guard  
Above the graven grandeur of the gorge.

In the antlered valley, every orchard bough  
Is trimmed with blossom like suspended snow.  
Before rich earth and pruning hook and plough  
Minted their gold, men hunted for it here  
At fever heat. I see them with their gear,  
Uncouth battalions, crumpled hat on head,  
And swag worn crosswise like a bandolier;  
And think of all, by ridge and river-bed,  
Who died in the Great Blizzard long ago.

## Wanaka Holiday

Valley and scarp, fierce desert and poplar shade;  
The lake half pond, half ocean the wind has made;  
Far off, beyond Glendhu Bay, silent white-throned Aspiring:  
At hand, campers and cribs, bathers, and boats for hiring.

Molten and bare the hills; the rivers rage in their beds:  
By the dusty road are blues and yellows and reds  
Of bugloss and furred mullein, stonecrop and centaury,  
And on that pine-warm island the wild strawberry.

We, visitors or inhabitants, pass through:  
Splendour remains, indifferent to what we do.  
Peak, ridge, and pilgrim waters still remote, untamed,  
Charted but all intractable, anonymous though named.

(I)

## Thunder in the Oaks

Peter Alcock

Seas in her ears, by airy trees,  
A girl as a gull goes,  
Grace full. Breaks the breeze

Back. Grimm rose.

Steps too through tornadoes of time  
To space spell bound  
Where oaks hours intersecting mime  
Magically masked what

None knows. That Knot.  
Drums. Dark. The burning Imago  
Roars in the glass ground.  
The world is a war, a wedding, a window, there.

Rich as the rose,  
And poised impaired in a time-tossed frieze,  
A girl as a gull goes,  
Seas in her ears, by airy trees.

**(II)**

## **Dispossession**

The character of a man was his desire,  
Sturdy and tough and timeless as an oak,  
A brain of ice commanding a heart of fire,  
After a life or nine it looked a joke.

Loudly he laughed with a lurch of laughter  
Smiling naively he forgot to frown  
Within thin clothing as the year ran colder.  
In a lake of peace I watched him drown.

**(III)**

## **Chorus One**

Toiling on our rolling rock  
Every man's a tramp.  
Stripped to every staring star  
Stands this camp

Where fires don't seem to warm the good  
And the damned are never cool,  
And to a land of fury goes  
The flame-blind fool

Who seeks a mother in the sea,  
A father in the sky.  
Man is married to simple clay,  
In clay will lie.

Under all the falling rain  
Round the warm earth,  
The stop of life's death,  
The stop of death, birth.

## **He Rests. He has Travelled**

*Watering the red rose of a rich neurosis  
Let him settle in a cabin by the sea.  
Nine bean rows will he have there, ecstatic apotheosis,  
And a hive for the honey-bee.*

*Inquisitor of ecstasy, at the burning window  
Of his inward I entranced,  
Leave him that island where the waters worship  
At the sands where Ariel danced.*

*Leave him a childhood. We work  
In cities where to all  
Whimpers from Moscow and the Alamo  
Death's dull call.*

## ***The Eclipse of the Market***

George Fraser

ONE OF THE MOST startling results of the early development of capitalism was the swift break-up of an organic society (held together by the threads of church and state) into a Babel of unconnected individuals. No sooner was this apparent than it was embossed with the blessing of an eternal principle—the doctrine of enlightened self-interest, which laid it down that each, by pursuing his own interests, was contributing to the welfare of society.

Looking at Dickens, with his gory pictures and absence of any idea of revolution, one is surprised that such apparently calamitous changes could have been brought about with so little coherent or successful opposition. No doubt a condition of punch-drunkenness was induced, leaving many dazed with shock; ambition was

another factor—the belief that by hard work, thrift and initiative, every cotton mill worker could be a Courtauld, and every foundry hand a Guest, Keen or Nettlefold.

But surely the greatest and most frustrating factor was the postulating of an unpersonalised God, the market, and the relating of all effects to its automatic working. This quality of impersonal automatism remained its strength up to the present day, and the attempt to gain control over it proved to be the most vulnerable point in reformism and the political economics of the welfare state.

When the market became master, the difference between good and bad became a matter of degree. Gradgrinds, Engels, Morris and Bounderby all had to keep in step with the same tune; murderers of children in the pits together with despoilers of hamlets and the countryside all sheltered behind its screen. No-one could be blamed—the market could not even be identified with banks, joint-stock and limited liability companies. These also were its victims. All prices and ill practices were ultimately attributed to it. It was in truth the classical economists' Monster.

Of course even Dickens himself challenged the market as an institution, but it was not until well into the present century that the challengers could muster enough political strength to relegate it to second or third place. The implications of this decision, introducing the welfare state with its price controls, subsidies, full employment and social legislation, have never been fully understood by the challengers. While there is still oratorical room for argument between the partisans of free (*sic*) enterprise and the planned (*sic*) society, the welfare principle is so firmly established that the market can hope at the most for only a temporary recrudescence. The dominance of the welfare principle in Britain is clearly indicated in the following extract from the London *Times* editorial of the 9th February of this year:

'... it is in their social policies and in their common adherence to the so-called welfare State that the parties stand most plainly on common ground.'

New Zealand experience, however, has shown that while repudiating the market the majority of the people are opposed to the consequences of that repudiation. It appears that the customer is only king by the grace of the divine market, and that without this god the average man must accept a humbler position in the economic scheme.

In this quasi-capitalist society of ours, full employment must involve a policy of inflation; in fact the body politic has become like the body diabetic, and its continuous existence depends upon regular intravenous injections of the insulin of spending power. Inflation means more money than goods, more tram fares than seats, more students' fees than desks, and once this stage is reached we leave the ancient economics of supply and demand, and enter the stage of controls, priorities and shortages, politely known as war economics. And here's the rub—instead of the anonymity under which naked capitalism was able to operate, the Government in a multitude of ways becomes more and more responsible for the break-downs and imperfections in the supply of goods and services.

Let us take the practical example of an ordinary housewife—because it is assumed that this group made their household bills their election manifestos and the shop counters their polling booths. Let us assume that she is really an ordinary housewife, and not the wife of a doctor, a brewer, a bookmaker or an importer of ball-point pens; in her shopping assays, instead of being confronted with a range of nearly-as-may-be alternatives as in the good old days, she will continually find that her itemized demands are thwarted by non-availability, and that her traditional course of changing her retailer is likely to worsen rather than improve the situation. She will be offered ducks' eggs for fowls' eggs, barley for rice, Ruritarrian pilchards for sardines, and so on. Naturally she will be angry, but how much is that anger warranted? For some psychological-cum-sentimental reasons people to-day tend to think of full employment and more adequate money wages as compatible with the same supply and demand pattern which existed when jobs and money were scarce. This attitude is purely an illusion of grandeur, and the fact is that unless consumers have improved their class or bargaining position in the past decade (for example plumbers who have become sanitary engineering contractors) they are basically the same breadliners as they were ten years ago.

This assertion can be explained statistically: since about 1939 the total volume of consumer goods has risen by per cent., but the number of people to be fed and clothed has also increased. Meanwhile total money incomes have risen by over 100 per cent., and the net increase in the volume of consumer goods available *per capita* has risen by no more than 11 per cent. But a large part of this increase must consist of luxury or near luxury goods (in greater supply because less effectively price-controlled) and I hope that it is now becoming clearer that if we were working plugs in the 'thirties we are still working plugs in the 'fifties; a bottle of whisky will still require an entrance fee of four dozen bottles of beer unless we happen to know someone who knows someone.

There is nothing wrong with the feeling of annoyance which this generates as long as we also appreciate that full employment is not synonymous with full enjoyment, and that because 'welfare' has taken the place of the market we are necessarily better off than we were in terms of material goods. If we remain unaware of this

we will continue to make judgments on standards which no longer apply, and allow suppliers, politicians and producers meantime to get away with murder.

To-day, the following cause-and-effect sequence can be multiplied: there are not sufficient eggs to go round; producers blame the shortage on the inadequate Government subsidy and the lack of sufficient fowl food, which in turn is blamed on the high extraction rate fixed for baker's flour, which has been fixed to make our local cereal production stretch further, which is done to conserve our overseas currency. The net result is that if you have a car and pass that little place you know on a Sunday you can get all the eggs you can pay for. If you are a tram traveller you probably do not need the extra protein which driving a Fortyniner requires anyhow.

Talking of cars, imports may give a better example of what I have been trying to explain. In the 'Thirties only a fraction of those who wanted a car owned one, but who ever heard it said that too few were being imported; our friend the market saw that all who could afford them had their choice; sturdy boots and bogeys for fifty-six seaters were imported for the remainder. The changeover is significant and easily understandable. An internal currency policy aimed at maintaining purchasing power and thus employment within New Zealand cannot permit that local currency to be spent indiscriminately abroad. Free trade is as dead as the dodo, as also is the fluid exchange of currencies; unless we are willing to import slumps as well as booms, imports must continue to be controlled and every permit for one type of commodity must of necessity mean an exclusion of another. Government 'responsibility' in this field is clearly unwarrantably unpopular and misunderstood.

Controls, particularly import control have had a paradoxical impact on the habits of the commercial community. May I quote from a pamphlet 'Stabilization or Socialisation?' published by the New Zealand Fabian Society:

'The trader, especially the wholesaler, has become an agent, in many cases selling his goods in advance of delivery; scarcely handling them . . . and charging his price on the basis of a considerable percentage mark-up on total costs.'

This is particularly applicable to the importer whose energies are now diverted from selling his goods to the securing of a license, but once that license is obtained it becomes a negotiable instrument and is frequently exchanged as such.

The eclipse of the market has not only affected physical goods and services; our pattern of living is being unconsciously altered. One example will have to suffice: a secondary or university education is no longer the monopoly of the wealthy and for that reason no longer will the watersiders, the miners, and the W.E.A. continue to throw up leaders of the ability or astuteness of Harry Holland, Peter Fraser or Walter Nash; these leaders will as likely as not be stockbrokers, university lecturers, scientists, or administrators.

In the cultural field, the welfare principle leads to the appointment of many people to physically unproductive jobs—librarians, teachers, musicians, museum curators, research men, disc and saddle jockeys may well enhance the quality of living, but unless the remainder of the community can take advantage of more efficient industrial techniques and increase production, the volume of available material goods is certain to fall. This is not going to lead into an exhortation to work harder. National orchestras and library services and less crowded classrooms may well be better than extra butter and cakes twice a week; they could well build a more cynical and discriminating community, but we can only have them if we put out of our mind the notion that we can have Havana cigars, French brandy, unlimited choice and full employment all at the same time. What's to be done?

Unless we are prepared to change society radically and step up physical production, and thus have it both ways, the one obvious course at the moment is to recognise that the market is finished as a primary mechanism, root out our own illusions of grandeur and set about putting something in their place and thus make sure that if we do not get the quantity which we would like at least we can get variety and quality. Against the growing power of the government as a successor to the market must come the growing power of the consumers, who must set up their own organisations to police our shops for quality, price, and supply. Consumers must not be fobbed off by nominated representatives on national tribunals or boards of trade, but must start right off on a local basis. There is no insuperable difficulty preventing housewives setting up their own organisation to analyse the production costs and dietetic value of the patent foods and medicines which they buy. (If the law of libel is archaic it must be brought up to date.) There is no reason why men should continue to pay the same price for tobacco which is 90 per cent, stalk as they pay for that which is only 75 per cent, stalk, or the same for beer which is 5 per cent, alcohol as for that which is 7½ per cent. Without such organisations, the repudiation of the market will continue to mean cheap milk but dear wine, free education but expensive books.

If we are willing to allow the same small groups to ride the Fortyniners the ordinary men and women cannot be expected to increase the volume of production leaving the shares in the same unequal proportion, but we can ensure that those goods which are available are worth buying.

If we have banished the market let us banish the judgments with which it is associated as well as our

illusions of grandeur. Let us take the commercial community at their word and demand the service which they profess to strive for. The consumers could be the most powerful force in New Zealand to-day—they have nothing to lose but their chain stores.

March 1950

## ***Background to a Magazine***

Hubert Witheford

THE CONDITION which *Arachne* is committed to explore is, from the side of the individual, his isolation—from that of the community, its disintegration. Hence the use of the myth which gives its title—the poet is defeated by the unregarding power of Pallas. This is of course only one aspect of his situation. As his relation to the community is broken new tasks are imposed upon him. But let us consider this severance more carefully.

For the individual, isolation; for the community, disintegration. By the first of these we should not suggest that there is an interruption of those immediate human contacts which have made up the major part of life at all times though there is a danger that those too may become less real. But a community which is no longer the receptacle of any general tradition or purpose does lose some essential quality, degenerates into a mere aggregate of individuals who are in this sense 'isolated'. 'The true community does not arise through people having feelings for one another (though indeed not without it), but through, first, their taking their stand in living mutual relation with a living Centre, and second, their being in living mutual relation with one another.'

How do the ideas of isolation and disintegration describe our situation in New Zealand to-day? A colonial society is likely to have gone at once not so far and farther than its parent society along the road that leads to dissolution. Greater distance from the source of a tradition means at once separation from tradition and from the criticism of it. This is true only of intangibles whose immediate utility is not obvious. In clearly practical matters Anglo-Saxon colonial societies show much boldness in innovation. In other fields of life the story is generally one of outward stability, inward decay. These new societies are in this way very old as well as very young.

This may be illustrated at the point where ideals and interests chrySTALLIZE into the patterns of political action. Constitutional, as distinct from democratic, government has not thrived in New Zealand. The concept of a body of principles not having the force of law to which elected persons must yet conform has had little appeal here. Witness the fate of the Legislative Council since 1890, the prolongation of the life of Parliament in 1934 because the misery of the country made the moment inopportune for an election, the abolition of the country quota in 1945 by a party which had studiously avoided discussion of the matter for many years. This cynicism as to constitutional principles adds to the power of the government of the day while it diminishes its moral authority.

While the constitution, the spirit of government, has languished, the state, its apparatus, its practical consequence, has grown enormously. This is in part the result of the very virtues of a colonial people—the willingness to take novel and drastic action to remove economic injustice and prevent social schism. Such action has generally involved the extension of state power. Colonial society was such a *tabula rasa* that nowhere else was there any authority or group which could take over these new functions. The real, as distinct from the popularly imagined evils of this extension were mostly so much less tangible than those it was designed to amend that it was difficult to oppose it. But by its very success the welfare state has helped remove the moral issue from politics. The struggle of well-fed pressure groups for larger shares in the national booty is not a battle which engages the highest faculties of the human heart or mind. It is the consequence of our material health as well as of our spiritual sickness that from the exaggerated structure of the state there emerges something less than the human voice.

The anarchy, which in New Zealand is veiled and respectable, has found in some other parts of the world its expression in physical violence. Most often this is the violence of those who would hold a disintegrating society together by force or by arousing hatred against the enemy within and without ... 'while his agents of lower rank, who had established themselves in the clans, fostered anarchy, the initiated penetrated into the civic offices and the magistracy, and there won the reputation of men of deeds who would bring the mob to its senses.' This is the backcloth to the cosy squalour of our domestic politics.

In the passage I have quoted, Martin Buber speaks of the manner in which a community has its origin through people 'taking their stand in living mutual relation with a living Centre.' Our western society found this Centre in the Christian faith; in the gospels the dying Roman world and the barbarians around it found their creative Word which has been uttered through the western civilization, with fruitful or perverse variations, for almost two thousand years. It is only in the derivative feeling of humanitarianism that it is now of general



importance. Humanitarianism flourishes where life is most easy, that is for the 19th and 20th century west, where the fiery core of religion is most nearly extinct. This new sense for the sufferings of others is an extension of the human consciousness that we cannot repudiate, but I do not think it can survive long in its present form. It defeats itself by looking too closely and exclusively at the material conditions of life. In a situation such as that of the western powers before Germany in 1938, or Russia in 1950, it degenerates into panic or paralysis. Moreover, there is about the humanitarian ethic a dreariness that tempts to evil or what, by its standards, is evil. One cannot regard the trim state housing settlements without thinking that they imply the atomic bomb.

We must hope, then, for a new ethic, or more precisely, a new view of the world that may be the basis of an ethic. The Christian faith has fallen too much into the hands of men and even a return to the Gospels would have to be a rediscovery, a creation rather than a restoration. There is, of course, a sense in which it is absurd to speak of a 'new' ethic. 'For whensoever the law fails and lawlessness uprises . . . then do I bring myself to bodied birth. To guard the righteous, to destroy evildoers, to establish the law I come into birth age after age.' But though Krishna is the same in essence for each incarnation his teaching and his myth must vary according to the capacity of the peoples whose need has called it forth.

In any such revelation the part played by the human will is obscure. It would be begging the question, anticipating the new theology which is yet to be built, to define the limits of what can be achieved by scattered individuals and groups who seek to give form to what they see and believe. At least we may believe that it must be a consciously and passionately apprehended need that brings down the lightning from heaven. At the most we may think of the new ethic as a new style of life, the creation of innumerable people all over the world facing situations which left them either to achieve the new act of creation or to perish. It may be that the first view is true but one cannot know and it is natural that at this stage of the day it is the latter which is nearer one's heart.

In a time of dereliction it is necessary to fix the flux of one's experience in concrete image and abstract doctrine. The alternative is existence without aim or proportion, a marsh of shallow emotions, the betrayal of every rigorous and delicate purpose. Kierkegaard wrote justly of such a life, current in 19th century Denmark as in 20th century New Zealand, when he said that it was so far removed from the Divine Presence as to be incapable of that conscious rebellion against it which is properly called sin.

From the remnants of our own tradition and of the other traditions which to a disintegrating culture are no more remote we must take what guidance we can. Such remnants can be for us no more than raw materials which the travail of our own lives may fuse into some new form. In action as in art the problem is one of style—the appropriateness of the outer form to the inner life, the achievement of that exact economy which effects no more and no less than is necessary to resolve the need of the heart.

One way of describing the present crisis of our society is to say that communal life has lost this style because of the drying up of the inner tide which once gave meaning to its institutions and habits. Only here and there are there words and actions which give form to an inner life. We cannot be sure that these will be too weak to link the dispensation which is passing with the new one for which we hope.

*Arachne* is committed by its policy to explore the dissolution of the community. Also, by the very fact of its existence, it is committed to a solicitude for the new patterns in word and action, in poetry and politics, which emerge amid and against that dissolution. This implies a belief, not in the favourable issue of the crisis but of one's need to define in it one's own position.

## ***The Convent***

Marcel Bisiaux

THE TOWN ALWAYS mentioned it with a certain uneasiness. Nobody, however, could have said exactly why. Very old stories were still whispered around. Others which had been quite forgotten, more terrible ones perhaps, and which people sometimes tried to surmise, had left a sort of persistent and indefinite suspicion behind, of a degree of intensity long since fixed and unchanging, which, it was well-known, would never stop now without yet ever growing or decreasing. Thus rare or beautiful rumours pass from mouth to mouth and from generation to generation, and they will always be rumours as nobody desires to know more than their mere existence.

Perched high upon the craggy hill, or mound rather, but it was curiously steep, stood the black convent. What stone had been used to build it? What dust had been carried by the winds that had for centuries blown against it? It rather seemed as if it had not always served for a convent: it was no doubt a quaint old castle from before the middle ages, a primeval building, one of the first ever to be designed, sprung from the naive wayward fancy of a restless lord, or rather some refuge for brigands who had made a fortune and who, after

their adventures, had suddenly settled there through the exigencies of new mystery.

The convent was black and dominated the town. What could happen in such a convent? Almoners were seen entering. The curious lay in watch, peering patiently. After long hours the almoners came out and returned to their own homes, but with their faces incredibly changed, their eyes downcast and averted, twisted with pain and stepping quickly and jerkily, seeming to flee forever from a forbidden domain, where yet, as they well knew, they were soon to return free and determined. And people also wondered from where all those visiting girls might come, seen in the town especially on winter evenings, when the sun sets early, mournfully dressed and seeming to be lost on the pavements, stumbling against passers-by, never the same ones but for ever vanishing at the end of a few days, after no more than wandering through the suburbs and around the station, as if gone astray, while nobody, however bold, dared to say a word to them or make any proposals. Small towns sometimes have such mysteries which all accept but obstinately refuse to plumb.

Had not one morning a thief, not knowing the town or the stories, suddenly put himself in the hands of the police? He admitted having scaled the convent walls at night and, as he crossed the central garden towards the buildings, he had been terror stricken at a ghastly sight: a group of vague figures were moving in the light of two torches; chants, barely murmured, came forth from this group. Between the two torches was a ditch, beside it the white body of a small child, a few days old at the most. The child was placed in the ditch, the ditch filled in and the place marked only by a mound of earth. And, as the shapes departed murmuring their last chant, preceded by the two torches, the frightened thief had been able to see that the garden lane along which they advanced, was bordered on both sides by a countless number of little knolls such as the one that had just been made. And the thief had given himself up: they had expelled him from the town, treating him as a madman.

The friend whom after long separation I was visiting with my wife, had told me all these tales without my feeling more than a curiosity unmixed with irritation, but also with that unthoughtful pleasure which had, it seemed, possessed so many. My wife appeared rather impressed by this story. The conversation, however, had passed from this topic to another with uncommon abruptness: the daughter of the house had an unexpected fit of anger, suddenly got up and, asserting an amazing personality, which she had never shown before, to her parents' consternation, had cried:

'If I could, I would go away.'

Her father had promptly answered in the most simple and natural manner:

'Go, you have my permission.'

The girl had then looked at her father for a long time and had not left. It seemed that yet all had been sincere and considered and that everyone was inwardly convinced of this. There was absolutely no justification for the girl to have remained in that house. None at all. I took care not to take part in these happenings in any way and signalled my wife to say and manifest nothing.

We were not slow to leave. I had the impression that my wife left that house with some regrets. However, there are feelings which cannot be talked about. Their realm is elsewhere, in occurrences repeated or recognized, in gestures believed to be accidental but in fact the calculated and precise manifestations of the great power we obstinately refuse to control from generation to generation.

The communications are never verbal. Then they are but a dreadful parody, sluggish and prepared, a perfect counterfeit, a masterly pattern of impostures and errors to which the minds of the weak and the satisfied restrict themselves.

The station was not very far: down to our right at the end of the street. To our left was the hill and one of the high convent walls which, recalling the conversation, I carefully scrutinized on the way. Suddenly, above the wall, I saw a white object in rapid movement, appearing and vanishing. Its identity soon became clear: it was an arm, a hand which, in a curious way, brandished a large white sheet of paper, definitely trying to attract the attention of someone outside the convent. I turned round. There was nobody. It must have been me at whom this was aimed. Then I saw a nun's head in her white cornet appear. I stopped, amazed. She saw I had noticed her and signalled wildly at me, asking me to come close to the foot of the wall. I hesitated. My wife had seen the design and thinking I know not what, strangely kept her eyes on me. I did not feel at ease. There was something indefinite against which I was powerless. Then the nun seemed rapidly to rumple the paper around some object, a stone most likely, threw it in front of her over the wall towards us, and disappeared. I dashed forwards but my wife held me strongly by the arm.

'Do not go.'

Perplexed, I looked at her.

'Do not go,' she repeated with an air of authority I had never seen from her before.

I stayed with her and we continued on our way to the station.

At the end of the road on the left we caught sight of the great massive convent gate. It was wide open and inside the sisters were busying themselves in the yard.

'I made enquiries,' said my wife. 'The door is never closed. Is it then necessary to be always so uneasy?'

(Published first in "84", No. 13; translation: E. Schwimmer)

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## Reviews

### The Lure of the East

(R. Guenon, *Introduction to the Study of the Hindu Doctrines*, Luzac & Co., London, 1945.)

Reviewed by Peter Munz

THE AUTHOR BELIEVES that people in the West could become conscious of what they lack by reading his introduction to the Hindu doctrines. I have no quarrel with his exposition of the doctrines. It is probably a sound, clear and correct description of those doctrines. His intention to describe them sympathetically from the inside rather than to translate them literally into Western terms has everything to recommend it. And his criticism of professional Orientalist erudition, of theosophy and of all naturalist approaches to religion is both valuable and acute.

The first two parts of the work consist, however, of a criticism of the Western stand-point in religion and philosophy which appears to me both questionable and dangerous. The author starts indeed from the peculiar assumption that there is only one kind of metaphysics; and that all other beliefs are due either to a sentimentalisation of metaphysics, such as religion, or to the naturalistic bias of our Greek habits of mind. On the whole he displays a quite unreasonable prejudice against Western civilisation. He dislikes its unstable character, the continuous quest for new ideas and the growing egalitarianism of our society. As to the first two points, he only states his dislike; as to the third he has a vein of argument; egalitarianism is unsound because human beings are unequal. This we must grant. But he believes that it follows that we must have an hereditary caste system. As if a caste system were not equally unsound for the simple fact that the known inequalities of human beings have never run parallel to any known caste system. The latter rides as roughshod over the inequalities of men as an egalitarian society.

These, however, are minor points. His main thesis concerns the character of metaphysics. He believes metaphysics to be something that is apprehended by intellectual intuition (pp. 116-7). It is a spiritual doctrine of an ultimate synthesis, concerned with the Universal. This ultimate synthesis transcends all individual points of view; it combines them all and it is in the last analysis inexpressible (p. 158). It seems to be a state of ultimate spiritual awareness in which 'one is two and two is one' and all differentiations are reconciled in the one. To embrace all possible states as the principle embraces all its consequences is the state of yogi, the real metaphysical realisation (p. 282). The highest Principle is both personal and impersonal and everything is resolved in the unity of a superior synthesis (p. 224). This theory is in fact the description of a very important and very basic experience. From the East it was carried to Greece and taken up by Plato and other philosophers, although the author does not seem to know this. He merely remarks that Aristotle and the schoolmen showed a rudimentary understanding for such metaphysics (p. 138). He would like his readers in fact to believe that these heights of Eastern thought were never reached by Western thought and that, when they were approached, Western thinkers were prevented by their innate lack of talent from understanding them and had to drop them very soon.

He reinforces this strange belief by his definition of metaphysics. 'To oppose knowing and being ... is the negation of all true metaphysics' (p. 169); and 'to men who are metaphysicians by temperament, naturalism . . . only appears as an aberration' (p.43); and again 'non-dualism . . . alone is genuinely and exclusively metaphysical in its essence.' (p. 155) What he does say is in fact an identification of one specific doctrine with 'metaphysics' He follows from this identification that all thought which rejects this doctrine cannot be meta-physical thought. How far the author is willing to go in his narrow-minded dogmatism is indeed shown by his statement that 'heterodoxy and absurdity are really synonymous' (p. 191). The kind of 'absurdity' he means is illustrated by his argument against atomism on Even the most rudimentary acquaintance with logic would have shown to him that the argument is not a proof but a begging of the question and that it does therefore not in the least establish the;absurdity' of atomism.

The author is in fact naive. Unfortunately all he knows about Plato is that Plato was a subtle dialectician (p. 40). If he knew more about Plato he would have realised that for instance the doctrine of *dharma* described by the author on p.211 corresponds exactly with Plato's theory of justice (*dikaiousune*) and that that wearisome speculations of the *Timaios* are concerned with just the same sort of idle 'cosmology' or theory of the Universe

as the author describes on p.214. And since the influence of Plato was very considerable—Platonism does indeed represent one half of all Western thought—it seems naive, to the present reviewer, to maintain that these heights of metaphysical doctrine were never explored by Western philosophers.

These heights were not only explored by the West; they were eventually even criticised. All criticism is of course heterodox; and therefore, according to the author both absurd and unmetaphysical. But since I do not share this strange dogma, I must be permitted to maintain the superiority of Western philosophy over the Hindu doctrines as expounded by the author. It is certainly true that the Hindus made a startling discovery once, when they developed their metaphysic. And it is also true and generally accepted that the Greeks owed this discovery to the Eastern world. (The author thinks scholars deny this and devotes therefore the first part of his book to a futile polemic against nine-pins he has set up.)

But whereas the Indians stopped at this discovery, the Europeans have examined it. Owing to their restlessness which the author naturally enough despises, they have expanded or criticised or denied these doctrines. They found that these doctrines did not take the natural world sufficiently seriously; they discovered that they lacked in moral sense; they finally even laid bare the questionability of the method of 'intellectual intuition' (Kant)

The author apparently brushed aside the weighty arguments of Kant by one simple statement: 'intellectual intuition, the reality of which has been constantly denied by modern philosophy, which has failed to grasp its real nature whenever it has not preferred simply to ignore it'. (p. 117).

and worked out that a good many inferences on which it was based were either tautological or false (mathematical logic). No wonder that the author finds it necessary, if he wishes to uphold the Hindu doctrines, to deny that Western thought is real thought at all. I fail to understand how any serious person can be sufficiently naive to accept the proposed identification of metaphysical thought with the Hindu doctrines. The best that can and has been said of these doctrines is that they are one metaphysical doctrine and that they should be evaluated as such.

This naivety, however, surely is not genuine. It is rather an attempt at a rationalisation: the author, for reasons unknown, is dissatisfied with the present state of Western thought. He believes that a radical remedy is required and therefore, for reasons also unknown, turns towards the East. For reasons unknown, the East has indeed little evidence for persuading anybody that it holds a promise of spiritual truth. It may do so; but all the *material* evidence at least obliges us to believe the contrary. When I suggested once to one of my Indian friends that I would like to visit India in order to study its mode of life, I was told that there was only one mode of life: to imitate the West as much and as far as possible. The author then has turned to the East in his quest for spiritual satisfaction: and since his choice of the East is quite irrational, he has endeavoured to rationalise it by elaborating the weird dogma that the East alone has been capable of metaphysical thought. We have to take cognisance of this choice; we ought to despise however the naively thought out rationalisation. And since this reviewer is more interested in truth than in spiritual satisfaction he will himself continue to walk along the arduous path of critical thought indicated by the tradition of the West. And to all his friends who seem to feel strongly tempted by the lure of the East he would call out what Goethe called out to the young men who were about to read the story of the unfortunate Werther: 'Be a man and do not follow him!'

## **New Attitudes in New Zealand Poetry**

*SHADOW OF THE FLAME, Poems 1942-7 by Hubert Witheford. The Pelorus Press, Auckland, 1950, 7/6. (Lim. Ed. 15/-)*

*MINE EYES DAZZLE, Poems 1947-49 by Alistair Campbell, The Pegasus Press, Christchurch, 1950, Lim. Ed. 15/-*

*Reviewed by E. Schwimmer*

THE APPEARANCE of a first volume from two of *Arachne's* most important regular contributors is, for the magazine, a landmark. It means that the view of poetry implied in this work will now be impressed more forcibly on the New Zealand audience. Although Witheford and Campbell are as different as poets can be, their position in the history of New Zealand poetry has similarities. It will be necessary for the reviewer to trace this position briefly, even though this is not the most important point to make concerning the poetry.

I am of course referring to the problem of writing in a largely British tradition at so great a distance from Britain. The former generation found the solution of treating the history and scenery of New Zealand in the same way as the contemporary British poets dealt with new subject matter; this was made simpler by the fact that the techniques of the thirties were largely designed for the purpose of dealing with new subject matter.

Baxter's poetry was not infused with this spirit, nor with the idea of being a species of poetic civil servant, which it implied. Mr Baxter however is attracted by many of the techniques of the thirties and, what is more, is a thorough-bred moralist, which restrained him from altogether breaking with the New Zealand localist

tradition.

The break is only complete with the appearance of these two volumes, with their unusual rootlessness and without memories to provide a local backdrop—only a memory of death. Nor is there any home or any reference to the daily experience that clutters up life. One may call the volumes 'unsullied' by all history and social matters. Their purity excludes also, for the first time, any evidence of local impacts. It is only the cold undedicated consciousness of beauty in both books that hints at their land of origin by showing its spiritual contours.

\* \* \*

Mr Witheford must take credit for being the first New Zealand poet able to express his deepest experience through the medium of hard abstract thought illuminated by the poetic imagination. Although the moralists have often attempted this, no New Zealander had yet achieved the level of subtlety and the striking and accurate phrasing of such poems as *O ache to turn to words* or *Now I begin to know*, nor the cerebral virtuosity of such lines as these:

This is the trysting place, its certain signs—  
The congealed sea, the bones of ancient fire  
And in the ruined cliffs a shallow cave.

Only a superior intellect can range symbols with this clarity and economy and with sufficient strength in the imagination not to disturb the apodictic flow of the verses. Such vivid thought directs the spiritual explorations throughout the volume. It is driven along by a number of recurring images rooted in the deepest experience, but used simply as parts of the pattern of the poet's spiritual development. Such images—some are quoted above—have the disadvantage of being rather generalised, but this is often outweighed by the evocative phrasing. The success of this sort of verse often hangs on the precarious question of the evocativeness of a phrase. It becomes like tightrope dancing, or so it seems to me, and there may, in the long run, be no alternative for the poet than a fuller treatment of the experience itself. However the intensity of the quest, and the joy of the discovery save this volume.

The book falls naturally into three consecutive groups, the first, groping part ending at p. 20, and the second small intermediate group at p. 26. In the last part the pace quickens and the poems become thoroughly interconnected; the style comes close to the hymnic, and the volume ends in a strong affirmation.

The inclusion of the first part of the volume is, through what it reveals, an act of courage; the attitudes of these poems are manifestly held in contempt by the poet of the later work. There is an obvious spiritual confusion here, the centre-piece being, I imagine, the Baude lairean statue of Happiness (p. 13), while the chronicles of dejection form the background. From this ruthless statue the road is open to almost any spiritual progress; with Mr Witheford dejection becomes identified with moral impurity; the struggle is then waged as one against impurity to which, I think, all desire for opposites is held to belong.

In the second group there is a somewhat sudden separation of the poet's self from this earlier identity. This is described rather beautifully:

The tempest that drives on his limbs I hear  
As pastoral music in Arcadia.  
His Questing hands, his dreams,  
His onward driven steps,  
As drifting clouds in summer pass before me.

During this period the poet can contemplate both his identities and easily move from the one to the other. The newly found and higher form of the self has somehow dragged the lower one along on its quest, as is shown in this fine address to the creative spirit:

Die and I would not grieve  
For you, nor for the pride  
Laid upon your grave  
As once upon my mind.

The hymnic section contains the illumination, which appears to have something final, through its

concurrence at the end of the book. In fact of course, it is no more than another intermediate stage, and was clearly felt to be so at the time of writing. It is rather, perhaps, a beginning. The poems are beautiful because they have grown out of a great discovery. It is, however, a dangerous one, as the ancient strengths which are revealed to be behind the scheme of the universe, but only direct us when we will, have to be served in a spirit of sacrifice, which, on the face of the words, means a spirit of entire non-activity.

This is not a quibble; it is the essential question: the poet has eliminated conflict, and in the service of the giant powers appears to have nothing to do. Small matter, one may say. Yet this dullness and non-activity is precisely the starting point of the quest—i.e. it existed at the time before the poet had ever noticed the cruel statue of Happiness in the marsh.

Yet the hymnic part of the volume is the most powerful, one great advance being the concreteness of the visions in some of the poems (*O coal black horses and Alone*). The most remarkable conception, intellectually, is that the 'giant powers' suffer pain through the corruption of the world and have to await the time when they are 'heeded'. There is still the personal pain due to a consciousness of corruption, at the back of the hymns:

Your patience bears the ruin of the world,  
A grain of salt upon a seagull's wing.

It is part of this philosophy that the giant powers are only made visible by the existence of death and destruction. The point is not, as some readers appear to have thought, that the poet is in love with death, but that the 'patterns of glory' (or the giant powers) have arisen from 'the rhythms of mortality' as the poet clearly says (p. 34). This then is a balanced idea of the universe in which beauty and destruction are inseparably one. At the same time this volume is spiritually only a beginning, as I pointed out, and poetically the occurrence of central phrases that are clearly insufficiently plumbed still mars the best verses: 'travailings of the worlds' (p. 35). This is the kind of phrase one only uses before the beginning or after the end.

\* \* \*

The same general symbols, as untainted with the everyday world, and based upon as narrow a range of experience as Mr Witheford's in his *Shadow of the Flame* occur in Mr Campbell's songs of the disasters of the sun. In these poems the forgotten terrors of desolation revive; the disinherited boy finds much to admire in an adamant world. The splashed sun illumines the land; on the stony crag the hare and the goat leap and the mountaineer dies. Forgotten loneliness hides in a corner while graceful splendour wastes itself in a thousand performances. And this hardness is life, but as there is also death there flows the sweeter pain of sympathy and gentleness. There is so much grief, so many tears: Man turns to stone or stares himself blind in the sun.

The first verses written by Mr Campbell occur, it seems, in the second section of his work, called "Love Poems". The pain in these poems has everywhere turned into small smooth stones. Mr Baxter has said, very fittingly: "There is no relationship". The love poems do not imply, any more than Mr Witheford's published verse or Mr Sargeson's early stories, a relationship, but it goes further than that: There is not even direct experience. The grief itself is not expressed: the pride, the very beauty of that which caused the grief, would prohibit that. The pain becomes hardened in defined, torturing images and they become, with time, smoothly polished, and then these images grow into one of Mr Campbell's early love poems, with a show of decorativeness and a view of love as being merely ritual. As long as there is growth towards such a decorative and ritual element from the state of pain, this is remarkable, but in some of the poems a danger is apparent of these things being pursued for their own sakes. Not too often; the pain still trembles, for instance, in the apparently ritualistic "Warm heart, warm mouth" (p. 23). Deceptively stinging is also a line like this one:

Her hand  
Lay cool as a stone against her dress.

The Yeatsian influence has been most fruitful technically, in teaching how the hardness of splendour can be shown through the cadence of the verse. The style grown from this adaptation combines sweetness with a division of the stanza into brief, economical periods, in other words, to develop a modernist form of expression through the pure song tradition rather than through the blank verse tradition.

The carry-over of Yeatsian metaphysic through certain attitudes and phrases was less appropriate, and mars accuracy:

A piece of bronze, more air than bronze

This leads directly to philosophies with which Mr Campbell would not agree.

The best of the *Love Poems* are, I think, V (Lie on the sand, my dazzling driftwood) and VIII (At the great

waters edge). These poems somehow strike deeper levels than the others. V strikes at the spiritual essence of these women with effortless insight; in VIII there is unfettered and profound self-expression. As the themes unfold the entirety of the poet's personality resounds, instead of a selected part of it; the result is a few novel and remarkable poems of far more importance than the general run.

The occasion for the *Elegy* was a stormy night on a fruitfarm when the poet remembered a friend who died on the mountains. The primeval force of the landscape around the fruitfarm blends with the landscape in which the mountaineer died. The inhuman strength of the Cromwell Gorge (location of the fruitfarm) is even, one may say, a central theme as much as the death: the mountaineer also was grand, serene and inhuman, in contact with those hard animals of speed, as much as the gorge. It is also possible to see a bridge between the mountaineer and the women. He, too, was admired as a ritual. He too was lost. However, the distinctive and appealing quality of the *Elegy* is that we do not only have these smooth pebbles, the images of pain, but that there is a strong directness:

Dear head, struck down; bright flesh  
That made my black night sweet  
All bruised and bleeding

The concluding poem is most remarkable in this way and also 'Driftwood'. But I find *Reverie* especially fine, as it moves in profounder regions than the rest of the *Elegy*, penetrating through the shell of the general philosophy of the book into the true motivation of these attitudes. I quote in full:

Sleep on, restless heart,  
In the wild fruit-tree;  
Be growth and all things sweet  
Your love-brimmed reverie.

Sweetness at the root,  
May the tree climb high;  
Close against the sun  
Let all its branches sigh;

Pride and glory lost  
When hill-streams are dry:  
—O lay to your wild breast  
Wind's disconsolate cry.

This reminds of James Joyce's poetry in the abbreviated way in which the ideas are indicated. The sun is scorching the fruit trees; the rain will not come in time; the fruit will never ripen. The sweet fantasy and the agony of the fruit tree becomes an image of the death of the mountaineer and all beautiful things.

The great achievement of the *Elegy* is the sustained tone, the horror of the storm and the rain gripping the reader from poem to poem, all forms of desolation bound together in a sort of symphony and the images yet polished and careful, obviously long cherished.

The poems in the last section, although on a high level of competence, bring little that is new, after what has been said. They are objective poems, most of them, by far the best being the last, called *The Return*. The lines concerning the dead Dionysos are among the most beautiful in the book.

Like Mr Witheford, Mr Campbell has made a beautiful book out of that full, but shifting and untidy period of life called adolescence; while Mr Witheford pursued the peace of the spirit, Mr Campbell pursued the grace of the mountain animals. The great question, with New Zealand poets, in the past, has always been what they would do after adolescence. To this Mr Campbell's poems do not give a full answer. However, even if this answer is never found, *Mine Eyes Dazzle* can stand on its own with its remarkable qualities of rhythm and sound, with its portrayal of the world of storm and desolation, of the ritual of hard animal beauty, and especially, with its capacity to exalt a life into verse.

The Pegasus Press has shown great skill in matching the printing with the atmosphere of the poetry.

## Refuge in Craftsmanship

*Poetry London* 17. Editions Poetry London Ltd. January 1950. 2s. 6d.

HENRY MOORE'S DELICATE LYRE BIRDS HAVE flown from the front cover, their places being taken by an elegant Sean Jennett mandala. Tambimuttu had already left the editorial corner-seat; Richard March stays on and Nicholas Moore moves from associate to co-editor. John Heath-Stubbs, Jon Manchip White, Alan Curnow, and Elisabeth Cluer have poems which deserve the attention of any reader of verse, while, of the reviewers, Hugh Gordon Porteus, one of England's most remarkable younger poets, compares Pound and MacNeice in a way which is always engaging, frequently perceptive and not too often merely amiable.

W.H.O.

Meanwhile the editorial of the new management states, somewhat apodictically, a new policy rather like a French garden. It is, one notices, not entirely in accordance with many poems in the volume, which retain the wild-flower style. The policy pretends to fit the conditions of 1950, opposite to those of 1940; like all such policies, it assumes a simplified idea of time and history. However it is interesting to see, from this editorial as well as other signs, that the emphasis has shifted from a large and universal style (1940) to a precise and limited one (1950). The editorial says:

'The "profound" stanzas full of high-flown, vague emotion and undigested philosophy are not likely to be the most successful ones.'

'What is needed is not so much the "inspired" poem as a renewal of *style*: first-class workmanship rather than the prophetic tone.'

*Poetry London* is less concerned here with the effusions of the Dylan Thomas school than with philosophical and occult poems or stanzas trying to state ideas in direct style. The problem of the individual or the artist in a society developing towards collectivism has been one of the chief subjects treated; there is no doubt that much dullness has been perpetrated on this topic.

In New Zealand it is difficult to have much sympathy with the remedy suggested in the editorial. The main problem here is not dull thinking coupled to wild inspiration, but a great deal of thinking coupled to a dead inspiration. To be not sufficiently solid or careful is a rarer vice. On the other hand one does feel some nostalgia for a society of a sophistication such that it can aim at style and perfection as chief pursuits. Here one is fortunate to be able to deliver the goods at all, even if they remain somewhat rough. Finesse cannot at present become a major preoccupation.

E.S.

BOOK WORTH HAVING \* Mine Eyes Dazzle ALISTAIR CAMPBELL THE WORK of this young poet is attracting widespread attention for its bare rhythms and its direct and passionate quality. LIMITED EDITION ON HAND MADE PAPER 15s. \* TO BE PUBLISHED SHORTLY The Journal of Edward Ward A FIRST publication of a hundred year old private journal of a young Canterbury Colonist who voyaged to Lyttelton on the Charlotte Jane, 1850. "A thoroughly absorbing story" \* PEGASUS PRESS CHRISTCHURCH

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## The Gleaming Lens

Peter Alcock

ANYTHING THAT MAY HELP TO HOLD civilization together a little longer is probably a good thing. Risen concrete factories and toppling incredible churches seem to have blown the world wider open than any belated bomb, and over enormous areas, industrial and primitive, people are hungry and angry. When priests appear to them irrelevant and art either obsolete or private, what do people live by? Food, marriage, and friendship are fundamentals, but after that the answer, in New Zealand anyway, seems to be a mixed grill of gambling, football, beer, and cinemas, of which the last appears (if we leave out Tibet and Antarctica) to be an International Common Factor, for film distributors know no boundary but the stratosphere, 16mm projectors go where even Coca-Cola is unknown, sight and non-linguistic sound convey some intelligence to almost every human. And so to alert politicians a film studio is a dump of high explosive, and among the arts the gleaming lens, more powerful than any printing-press, is at bottom an ape and an unbred democrat. A kind of horror fills us that those fascinating cans of coiled celluloid are prototypes of collective art in a Brave New Whirlpool of suicidal undifferentiation. Even to-day and in our agricultural country cinema shows are as inevitable as bars,



and a pretty large number of people are psychologically motored by the stirring shadow of Clark Gable.

At the century's end it is possible that 16mm cameras may be as common as portable typewriters and the main rules of editing as widely diffused as shorthand. To-day the crude aesthetic absurdities of industrialization only add to the immeasurable power of commercial film. And that enormous power rests, it seems to me, on the fact that the basic appeal of the projected shadow—irrespective of the sound welling out of enveloping darkness—is purely visceral, and intellect then plays no part at all beyond the elementary ordering of perception. Apart from the prevalent dollar-spinner of the photo-play ('Edward My Son', 'Mourning Becomes Electra', most comedies) the highs in all good (meaning 'effective') film are deliberately intended to club you over the head, drag you down the aisle, and cast you out into the foyer, in Montreal, Mombasa, or Magnetogorsk, a semi-hypnotized hysteric. To quote Scott Fitzgerald's tragic producer in 'The Last Tycoon', the target is your guts. A hit there winds us all.

In New Zealand ninety-nine point nine recurring per cent of the staple cultural diet in our population centres, film, comes from more important parts of the world, but a few private companies caper nimbly on the skinny 16mm string of private industry, and a Government wisely awake in war to film's political significance was persuaded to turn a travelogue agency into the simply equipped National Film Unit. This is the centre of what cinema work we do. The Unit is a queer fish in the Public Service net and in these piping times of peace it keeps itself in countenance with the Government by making Departmental films, travelogues, and a not unreasonably propagandist newsreel, all of a continually high technical standard. But nobody in their senses would confine a broadcasting service to such a treadmill, or expect the State Literary Fund to finance nothing but parochial histories. There is room inside and outside the Unit for a hundred per cent more vigour, imagination, and, above all, experiment. Financial conditions, thank heavens, completely bar feature film production, but there's room for the production of twenty minute documentaries on a hundred subjects. And in this connection the Unit could well assist and be assisted by the more intelligent and earthy members of film societies, drama groups, and broadcasting studios. It has already shown itself able to hit and hold a good simple aesthetic standard ('The Coaster', 'Oranges', 'Maori School', 'Railway Worker', etc.) and with a little more sophistication it could surely, such is the key position of film now and in the years ahead, become the front window of New Zealand and earn international

repute for the country, the Government, and itself. A first step towards this is the regular despatch of members of the Unit overseas to keep in immediate touch with the constantly changing set-up in cinematic centres.

But another and much more urgent step is necessary outside the Unit, the slow creation *and organization* of a body of people knowledgeably conversant with the basic theory and practice of film. Through them or from them would come most New Zealand recruits to the film world anywhere, and they would constitute a body of undoubtedly conservative but at least authoritative opinion, as opposed to the existing anarchy of ignorance. A first step towards this would be the co-operation, if practicable, of the Film Unit, the National Film Library, the Film Institute, film societies, adult education, drama groups, community centres, and anyone else the reader can think of, in the purchase of one or two 16mm cameras, the loan of a couple of portable projectors, and the establishment of yet another Summer School. This is a simple, unambitious, and practical move, and one pretty necessary, for the monthly flicks of the film societies and their bulletins of press clippings can hardly hope to cope now with the rolling cameras of the world's studio floors.

Three pamphlets which the courtesy of the French Legation has permitted me to borrow illustrate the last point. One is last year's synopsis of twenty-nine lectures on film at the Sorbonne Faculty of Arts. They are inevitably sketchy but nevertheless discuss most aspects from psycho-analysis via trade unions to optics. The second is the brochure of the state-controlled 'Ecole Technique de Photographie et de Cinematographique', which outlines gruelling two and three year courses for cameramen and technicians. The third is the forty-eight page prospectus of the Parisian 'Institut des Hautes Etudes Cinematographiques', an establishment of full-blown University rank providing courses of from one to three years for script-writers, directors, assistant directors, producers, studio managers, camera directors, cameramen, assistant cameramen, sound operators in all branches, art directors, editors, continuity girls, and (*douce France!*) 'dessinateurs-createurs de costumes'.

Before entering the Institut students have to pass a stiff written and oral examination demanding a standard of education higher than that necessary to enter any New Zealand university, specifically orientated towards cinema and the cinematic talents, and subject to rigid restrictions on age that differ with each course, but range between eighteen and twenty-seven. The training is admitted to be only basic. The terse introduction says this. '... If there is a Conservatory to teach the technicalities of music and the stage, a School of Fine Arts for future architects, the cinematographer must also have his University. . . . To substitute order for hazard, to encourage vocation, to broaden the field of film knowledge, such is the goal of the I.D.H.E.C.'

In these narrow islands it is likely to be some time before anyone can take a course in camerawork at a Technical College or issue from a bewildered University as a Bachelor of Cinema, but such a Summer School

is an excellent interim arrangement for those who are worried about the world, those who, like Grierson, 'want their drama in terms of some cross-section of reality which will reveal the essentially co-operative or mass nature of society, leaving the individual to find his honours in the swoop of creative social forces', those who know too well why Lenin said 'for us, the most important of all arts is the cinema those who think like Eisenstein 'the perspectives of the possibilities of the film are unlimited. And I am convinced that we have barely touched the possibilities', and those who like moving pictures.

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**Sir,**

## Letters to the Editor

In my essay on *Anarchism in New Zealand* I suggested that a doctrine of non-possession would be well suited to this country. I was not advocating that isolation should be our aim. It is true that among the many events which occur before, during, and after an act of non-possession, withdrawal in a certain sense is present. At the same time, non-possession may increase the sense of conflict and heighten the involvement before the actual release. In a sense withdrawal is only an aspect of conflict and vice versa. The mere idea of withdrawal implies its opposite, and conflict implies what was before it. It seems to me that each is necessary and that a dialectic operates between the two with some fruitfulness.

Lorna Clendon

In the correspondence between Mr Hart-Smith and Mr Oliver Mr Hart-Smith is airing more than a personal grievance. Like him I believe we should view New Zealand published works not as a demonstration that we publish 'only the best', but as the products of a workshop where a craft is being developed. When the emphasis is laid exclusively on the formal excellence of artistic work in a young country talent withers. With due respect to Mr Oliver, I am therefore glad that Mr Glover published *Christopher Columbus*. Had this sequence of poems not been published neither Mr Hart-Smith nor your readers would have had an opportunity of discovering where the poem fails. The writer whose manuscript rots in his drawer learns nothing.

Moreover it was not worthy of *Hilltop* to say 'Hart-Smith's mediocre volume' without substantiating the claim, and if the editorial was not the opportune place for a more fulsome treatment of the book then it had better have been left unsaid. The cheap jibes which some times take the place of literary criticism in this country do not so much reflect literary integrity as insecurely held values. This view of the matter seems confirmed by the last issue of *Arachne*. For while Mr Oliver (one of the editorial committee) maintains his position in regard to Mr Hart-Smith, we are presented with an editorial so obscure in its purport that not one of five people who read it could explain what the author was driving at. The same attention was given to, and the

same difficulties encountered in, the poems of Mr Spear although it was generally conceded that they showed a command of language and image from which a certain amount of satisfaction was drawn. And for pure subjectivity of outlook, who could beat the note on *Here and Now* where E.S. naively protects those contributors to it who also appear in *Arachne*.

It is true as Mr Hart-Smith says that we are a people who can scarcely spell let alone write consistently good prose or verse. The literary lapses of quite eminent 'writers' who appear in various national magazines, when coupled with their pretensions, are worthy of Stephen Leacock. I am advisedly giving neither names nor instances here. It is kinder and wiser to suggest that those who doubt this statement simply be on their toes when they read these magazines.

Literary integrity and an exclusive attitude are not one and the same thing in the way Mr Oliver conceives. For example, let us consider the criticisms lodged by Mr Bertram in *Landfall*, June 1948, against Mr Hart-Smith's verse. From a different reviewer the same criticisms might have worn a different aspect. Instead of worrying about the failure of the Caxton Press, such a reviewer would have accented the good verses and ended by expressing the hope that in some future volume Mr Hart-Smith would avoid the theatricality which mars Christopher Columbus, and develop that more architectonic form such an epic requires. As it is, Mr Bertram did say Hart-Smith was a dedicated poet and it is this kind of poet we should welcome. There is something to be said also for the mere conception of a poem sequence as long and sustained as Mr Hart-Smith attempted.

Mr Hart-Smith in his letter unfortunately contrasted Australia with New Zealand. A

better case could have been made by citing the Elizabethans whose splendid passages of verse and prose were set amongst much that was merely florid. The illustration is not unique. A great deal of Renaissance art was not in *Arachne's* sense worthy of its best. Individuals leap to the mind, Blake, De Quincey, Christopher Smart, etc.

An eye for the best, a feeling for noble vision, and a generosity of temperament towards those who are dedicated to their work will do far more towards furthering New Zealand letters than a mere insistence on literary good form. Please note the qualification, for I have myself benefited too much from informed criticism to suggest that it has no place at all.

John Summers

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In our opinion the only purpose of poetry is to delight and, in some cases, instruct the reader. There seems to be no point in publishing a poem that has failed, merely to allow readers and writers to discover how and why. Mr Glover himself would probably not agree that he published *Christopher Columbus* for the reasons advanced by Mr Summers.

'... we are presented with an editorial. . .' There was no editorial in *Arachne 1*. There was an introductory story which had no meaning beyond what is visible on the face of it. It comes as near to explaining why the title was chosen as anything could; the choice of a title is an unreasoned, mysterious affair, in which a number of people continue to shout words and more words at each other until one suddenly satisfies everybody's mood. It states, if anything, a collective emotional condition; it is perfume rather than a symbol.

*Here and Now*. This review was written before there was a journal *Arachne*. The contribution most highly praised was by Mr Blake, who has not contributed to *Arachne*, although he would be welcomed. Other people whose work the editors like have already had work published in both magazines.

E.S.

## ***The Evaporation of Social Democracy***

THERE HAS BEEN NOTHING IN NEW ZEALAND politics since the fall of the Labour Government last November to suggest that there is as yet even a faint beginning of the revival of life in the left of this country.

To expect a mass movement at this stage would be unrealistic. But the situation of New Zealand socialism today is much less flourishing than it was in the early 1920's. The social democracy that was an exciting possibility in those days has been in part realized and in part rejected and it is necessary to begin once more with the articulation of a body of thought which will offer a better hope than the idolisation of either the profit motive or the wisdom of commissars.

The situation has been well illustrated by events in the trade union movement. The militant unionists who broke away from the Federation of Labour at the Easter Conference had indictments against both the industrial and political wings of labour—against the Federation that it was too subservient to political Labour and against the latter that when in power it made too little progress towards socialism. These charges are not necessarily inconsistent with each other but if they are to serve as the basis of a new movement a more precise conception of 'socialism' is necessary. Communists and some others seem to believe that *real* socialists could never find themselves in conflict with *really* militant unionists. But those who do admit such a possibility will have noticed that as states extend their control of 'the means of production, distribution and exchange' they become increasingly and necessarily anxious to control the people who do the producing, distributing and exchanging. Hence the importance to socialist governments of docile trade union movements.

The syndicalist ideas which were said to have some currency in the breakaway New Zealand Trades Union Congress seemed to offer the beginning of a solution to this dilemma

confronting the socialist but undocile trade unionist. Communal control of economic life might well be a very different thing if it were not imposed from above by the state but built up and managed by those concerned in a particular industry. Such a form of decentralised socialism would need to rest on the effective local organisation of consumers as well as producers.

It is more to be hoped than expected that the Trades Union Congress or the Federation of Labour or the Labour Party will develop such ideas or take their stand upon them. But unless they do it is hard to see how any amount of uninstructed militancy, even if it achieves political 'success'—which is improbable—can lead to anything more desirable than the piling up of a few more stories on the topheavy structure which was repudiated by the people in November 1949.

The danger of war between the West and Russia is so much more alarming than the crisis within, that it is natural that many people are disinclined to devote much thought to the latter. But the decline of social democracy is not confined to New Zealand. It is the general inability of the Western countries to solve the problems sketched above that makes it so difficult for their left wing groups to offer any convincing opposition when rightist governments think and act as if Italy or Korea must enjoy the benefits of 'free enterprise' or tread a path that leads ultimately to Moscow. This illusion both brings war nearer and makes success in war less likely. It is a far graver weakness in the Western position than any temporary weakness in military strength. It is not likely to be remedied until there appears a mode of social organisation which is not a compromise between capitalist exploitation and communist tyranny but a true contrary of both. 'The way to do is to be.'  
H.W.

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## ***Valerius Flaccus as a Poet***

E. Schwimmer

THE STUDY OF LATIN HONOURS AT VICTORIA College leads into some of the byways of Latin literature, though by the guiding hand of some handbook carefully delineating the limits of each author concerned so that the student will not, in his ignorance, magnify his stature. There is, in golden letters, the phrase of Quintilian's 'si vacet'. All these minor poets should only be read then: 'si vacet'—if you have some leisure: to hunt, perhaps, for a felicitous line or phrase or other small matter. This for the student is adequately frightening, for leisure he has not.

The other approach to the minor Roman poets is if one happens to be concerned with their subject matter.

Following up the classical references to the romance of the Argonautical journey, I came upon Flaccus who wrote the *Argonautica* under Claudius' principate and died young, and against whom I was also warned. The classical sources wrote as if they had found some delight in reading Flaccus' version, but according to the handbooks he suffered from most of the Silver Latin flaws which are extremely frightening to the student—long-windedness, involvedness and obscurity, which means a great expense of time for little pleasure.

I accordingly went over the first three books seeking for that which poets can impart to a romance: a new way of viewing the situation of the characters. I copied some lines which now are on my table, and I find Flaccus is rather close to me and a good friend. In copying I must have been helped by a destiny that brings people together for I was quite unconscious of it then.

The first passage comes from the first book, the moment when Jason hears his uncle's command that to obtain the throne he has first to conquer the golden fleece. One imagines the bold powerful young man but unaccustomed to the world and the court and romantic, having both the vigour and the vulnerability of one brought up in a Centaur's den, who has made many boastful statements and who is now

suddenly tied down to the reality of a very difficult job to do. His first reaction is to think of the miraculous aid that would help him through, of the world of phantasy and romance in which he has now ceased to live:

*nunc aërii plantaria vellet/ Perseos aut currus et quos frenasse dracones/creditur, ignaras Cereris qui vomere terras/coluit, et flava quercum damnavit arista.*

*Argonautica I, 67: 'Now he wished he had the sandals that enabled Perseus to fly, or the chariot to which even dragons were yoked by that hero who ploughed the field of the unknown grain and banished the acorn with the golden ear.' The hero was Triptolemus; before his time men ate acorns for staple food.*

These airy phantasies have accuracy beyond that of the mythological priggery which they pretend to be.

Another instance is the passage in the second book where the Lemnian wives kill their husbands. The husbands, I would think, were terrified, even more than by the violence, by the utterly changed behaviour of their wives, the sudden elimination of any vestige of tenderness and weakness; nothing of the former relationship had remained. It is not a matter of flight and survival; it is a matter of facing this change. Flaccus depicts the incident in these words:

*sed temptare fugam prohibetque capessere contra/arma metus; adeo ingentes inimica videri/diva dabat, notaque sonat vox coniuge maior.*

*Arg. II, 224: 'But flight and resistance were prevented by fear; so huge did the hostile goddess make their wives appear; even their voices sounded louder than those of the wives they used to know'. Here the hostile goddess is Menus.*

As this might seem preposterous to the contemporary critic, Flaccus invented elaborate divine intervention stories to rationalize experiences such as this. Everyone was compelled to do this; the field of experience of the first century a.d. contained as much of the chimerical as ours and one had to speak of illusions brought about by a god for a certain reason to bring these experiences within the scheme of things.

Some of my notes merely show Flaccus as a good follower in the Vergilian tradition, as the reference to the Thracian concubines who were also murdered by the Lemnian women:

*mixti gemitus clamorque precantum/barbarus ignotaeque implebant aethera voces.*

*Arg. II, 240: 'Confused complaint, an outcry of imploring women in a foreign tongue and alien sounds filled the air'*

The Vergilian touch is in the words 'barbarus, ignotae'. In a scene of this kind the most memorable, the essential detail is that the girls spoke a language the Lemnian women could not understand. The consciousness of such details is strong in Flaccus, partly because he could not help being inspired by Vergil.

More typically Flaccian is the story of the death of the good king Cyzicus whom the Argonauts killed by some gruesome mistake. He undergoes the terror of prognostication of his own death a moment before it occurs:

*audit fremitus irasque leonum/cornuaque et moras videt inter nubila turres./tunc gravis et certo tendens stridore per umbras/Aesonii venit hasta ducis latumque sub imo/pectore rumpit iter.*

*Arg. III, 237: 'He hears the angry roaring of lions and sees horns and moving turrets among the clouds. Then comes the heavy lance of the chieftain of Aeson's blood passing through the darkness with unmistakable zooming and ends its journey deep within his breast'.*

It takes Flaccus a full hundred lines of the most involved divine intervention narrative to justify this description of experience. It may be there is a pattern in these quotations: that Flaccus was conscious of a split between the world of reason and of sometimes beautiful sometimes terrifying phantasy. In any case he lends to the occurrences I quoted a new life in which all layers of the mind are represented and in which, even more important, a general consciousness of the meaning of the Argonautic expedition is conveyed. There is a distinction not to be bridged between his version and a concoction like for instance Robert Graves' *The Golden*

*Fleece* in that Flaccus retains the view of the expedition as an adventure and a dream.

My last note concerns the death of Hylas, Heracles' young companion, who was desired by a watery nymph and drowned as he was mirroring himself in the water of her little lake. There was a strong Ovidian tradition which enabled the Roman poet, better than any of us, to understand the passion of a water-nymph, who is both a nymph and an embodiment of the water. But Flaccus has a very different attitude from Ovid: the sweetness, the beauty of this love, and the way in which Hylas passes from the world of the expedition to that of her love. There is not the slightest terror in Hylas, he is entirely charmed and mastered, he is, in every sense, enveloped:

*stagna vaga quasi luce macant, ubi Cynthia caelo/prospicit aut medii transit*

*rota Candida Phoebi,/tale iubar diffundit aquis: nil umbra comaeque/turbavitque sonus surgentis ad oscula Nymphae.*

Arg. III, 558: 'As a lake glitters in diffuse light when Cynthia looks out from the sky or the radiant wheel of Phoebus passes its zenith, such was the radiance spreading over the water; he was startled in no way at the shadow, the tresses and the rustle of the nymph rising to receive her kiss'

Why is the nymph so utterly unconscious of the harm she is doing? Because Juno has fooled her, being opposed to the expedition: he has told her that her bridegroom was near.

In spite of this rationalization Flaccus gives the essential: the experience of Hylas and the watery nymph corresponds to true human experience, although of a peculiar kind, and not to be described more clearly than Flaccus did in the symbol quoted. Hylas, then, fits well into some Orphic analysis of the Argonautic adventure: a certain kind of love bound to be experienced at a certain stage in the journey. It is not known whether this was Flaccus' intention.

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