

# Our Time

July 1946

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*Writers of Many Lands* by Storm Jameson

*Bernard Leach: English Potter* by T. S. Haile

*In Search of New Music* by Thomas Russell

# Our Time

July 1946

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Incorporating  
"POETRY AND THE PEOPLE"

Editor: Edgell Rickword.  
Film: Humphrey Swingler.  
Theatre: Montagu Slater.  
Art: F. D. Klingender.  
Music: H. G. Sear.

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## Notes and Comments

### The National Art Collections

WE WERE IMPRESSED BY THE CONFUSION of purpose and practice among the national art collections." These words in the Massey Committee report, just published, are the key to its proposals. This Committee, which included four past or present directors of the collections, recommended sweeping changes which deserve a warm welcome. There has been some resentment because the report takes in the British Museum's water-colours, which were not included in its terms of reference; but the committee was right in regarding them as necessary to its assessment. Its basic recommendation is that the Tate Gallery should have two departments: a National Gallery of British Art of all periods and another of Modern Art. The first of these should include a representative display of sculpture, but the nation's main collection of sculpture should be housed at the Victoria and Albert; it should contain an adequate collection of British water-colours, most of which it should obtain from the British Museum; and it should raid the V. & A. for the Constables and other British masters there. The Tate Gallery of Modern Art should release periodically any works over a hundred years old; these would be claimed by the National Gallery in Trafalgar Square—which should remain a collection of masterpieces—by the Tate British Gallery, or by the Victoria and Albert. Any works not so "directed" would become available for provincial galleries. This is not altogether encouraging for them, but they would gain directly from the recommendation that the major part of the present collection of paintings in the V. & A. should be released to other galleries.

We should thus have four collections: masterpieces, principally foreign, in Trafalgar Square, sculpture at South Kensington, British art and modern art on Millbank. Everyone, whether Londoner or visitor, would benefit by this arrangement and the British collection,

in special, would have an impact that is at present lost by diffusion. The Committee has also made bold and necessary recommendations on the Chantry bequest and on a purchase grant for the Tate Gallery, which at present has none.

### The Arts in Society

THESE IMPORTANT SUGGESTIONS FOLLOW closely those made in *The Visual Arts*, the report just published by P.E.P. and the Oxford University Press on behalf of the Trustees of Dartington Hall. For the first time in any country, it is believed, an enquiry has been made into the place of the arts in national life: the training and livelihood of the artist, his relation to industry, the nature of amateur activity, the part played by art in general education, and other cognate questions. If the arts are to be an essential part of our society we have to make many basic changes; and buildings, lending services, reproductions, must be made to do far more for the whole community. The account of the visual arts given here—by no means a complacent one—affords a perspective for planning and provides much valuable ammunition for all those who are struggling to establish the arts in society.

Every aspect of art provides its own opportunities. Bristol, for example, which has had for some time a very lively Writers' and Artists' Group, now has its own Arts Club, with Mr. P. R. Morris as its President. Mr. Morris, the new vice-chancellor of Bristol University, was previously Director of Army Education: those who knew him there will recognise that he will have a positive contribution to make. If Corsham Court in Wiltshire becomes, as is proposed, a residential College for art teachers it can become a centre for valuable pioneer work; it is in the schools that the major transformation must be achieved. But one of the most encouraging things at the moment, in school-age activity, is the exhibition just shown at the Geffrye Museum in Shoreditch. The paintings, modelling, and other work by children between five and

thirteen are not as yet of outstanding quality; what is important is that so many youngsters come freely in their spare time to this very happy little museum. They are given paper, paints, and clay, but no advice unless they ask for it; and they go ahead.

## The Housing Problem

THE ARTS CAN BE OVER-HOUSED, BUT THERE is little danger of that at the moment. The shortage of buildings remains acute and we need to be specially resourceful. The Arts Council is making a fresh move to prevent waste and loss: it intends to rescue, as far as possible, buildings suitable for public entertainment that are in danger of being put to other uses. Will readers co-operate by writing to us, or to the Arts Council, if they know of any old theatre buildings or halls that might be reclaimed for public use?

The new Coventry arising from the ruins is to have a special cultural centre in the Hall that is to be built to the memory of Tom Mann. A centre of robust creative enjoyment will be a fitting tribute to that brave and tireless champion of the common people.

An important move is being made by the National Council of Social Service to encourage the building of properly-equipped village halls, which should do much to restore the cultural balance as between town and country.

## The Hirsch Music Library

THE TIMES HAS RECENTLY POINTED OUT that the Hirsch library at Cambridge, probably the most famous private musical collection in Europe, is likely to be sold to an American purchaser unless something is done about it here. The advantage to this country of acquiring such a collection is obvious: we can no longer be called an unmusical people but we need greater resources than we have at present. This is an opportunity to reinforce our musical life and to build for the future: which body is to have the honour of acquiring such a collection?

## Hampton Court Music

EVERY SATURDAY, SUNDAY AND PUBLIC holiday evening at 6.30 until August 5th, the Jacques String Orchestra and the New London Orchestra are playing alternately in the Orangery of Hampton Court Palace.

The programmes are an admirable blend of classic and modern: Handel, Haydn, Bach, Mozart, Warlock, Tippett, Sibelius, Bartok, Vaughan Williams, Samuel Barber and many more. Half of each programme is drawn from the four composers first mentioned; and the soupier romantics, Tchaikovsky, Wagner and Brahms, are so sparingly included that there is no real danger of hearing any of them.

The soloists: Schumann, George ("Brandenburg") Eskdale, the Goossenses, Brain, Thurston, Korchinska, Semino, Lucille Wallace, Irene Richards, the Cantata Singers—in fact just about the best we have. And not one pianist.

You can get there by boat or by train from Waterloo. It is the nicest possible way of passing a summer evening. But don't arrive late or you may find yourself immediately behind the horns, which is fatal.

# Opera

**THE PARTISANS** by Inglis Gundry  
Reviewed by **H. G. Sear**

INGLIS GUNDRY'S OPERA IS UNIQUE IN SEVERAL respects. Certainly no opera dealing with contemporary events well known to all of us has been presented for a century. It was commissioned, mounted and published by a working-class organisation. Current folk-songs of partisan fighters were incorporated into the score, falling into place as if they belonged there. It is good music and good entertainment.

The whole story turns on the derailment of a train by a company of mountain guerillas who are inevitably associated with Yugoslavia, although no particular country is specified. Artistic unity is effected through the symbol of the mountains. His Chieftain looks to the hills for spiritual sustenance: his first aria, "Mountain, you who are higher than I," reappears as the mysterious voice of the mountains, when Michael, wounded and tormented, dwells with horror on the possible fate of his Tanya in a Fascist round-up.

Gundry has worked the folk-song material writings on the subject into his scheme with singular skill. Not for one moment does it appear to be a mere appurtenance. There is a powerful and exquisite episode, when, returning from the derailment, the men sing one such song while the women are singing another. These living and authentic melodies are skilfully fused with the composer's idiom.

The Derailement Chorus itself is a vivid number which describes and celebrates the occasion. Here Gundry is at his best. Although his use of melody and his handling of recitative are remarkably unstrained there can be no doubt that his strong suit is dramatic choral writing. It has a veracity which is more than ordinarily effective.

The production of *The Partisans* suffered mostly from sheer lack of finance. The stage at St. Pancras Town Hall is too small. Dancer's movements were hampered and therefore lost much of their significance. The motivity of the chorus was cramped. The subject matter calls for a much more striking setting than the Workers Music Association could run to. For them *The Partisans* was a considerable achievement.

# Books

## Recent Novels

**THE LIFELINE** by Phyllis Bottome. *Faber, 9s. 6d.*

**AUTO DA FE** by Elias Canetti. *Jonathan Cape, 15s.*

**BRIGHT DAY** by J. B. Priestley. *Heinemann, 10s. 6d.*

**ENGLISH EPISODE** by Charles Poulson. *Progress Publishing, 8s. 6d.*

Reviewed by **Patrick Rice**

BECAUSE WE ARE NEITHER IN IT NOR FAR from it, it is difficult to appreciate objectively what the Nazi occupation of Europe meant in human terms, but *The Lifeline* is an attempt to do so. Indeed, born into one class or another with limited experience as a result, it is difficult to write about any part of the contemporary world except subjectively. Miss Bottome plays safe in *The Lifeline*, for her central characters are all professional workers; and she has a variety of incident in her story which keeps it fast the whole way—underground message-running in Berlin, murders, ski-rides from the Nazis again, horse-stealing, love on a mountain and lunacy. Within the limitations which her choice of characters imposes upon her, the story has a certain tender, sympathetic quality, a humaneness, that moves one; but to tell of the Underground through the mind of an Eton housemaster and with the conversations and actions of a Jesuit priest, a psychiatrist and an artist, is to risk a drastic clash with anyone who read the wartime dailies. Though to make the chief setting a lunatic asylum was perhaps the best defence.

*Auto da fé* also has Austria (Vienna here) for background, but is a more deliberate study in lunacy. At its very opening the central character, a great scholar, is already book-crazy, worshipping, talking to and living with books, refusing even the most casual of human contacts, preferring silence. But Mr. Canetti does what Miss Bottome refused to do, he extends his story beyond the limits of a class and fails by distorting everything beyond those limits. The scholar's madness gradually becomes credible; but his housekeeper's frigidity, sense of propriety and avarice do not, nor does the porter's sadism, nor does the dwarf's grotesquery—though the psychiatrist's method (back inside the limits again) may be true enough.

The first two Parts of the book are spoiled for me by this; the scholar is carefully built together piece by piece there on the paper; and then, crash, the whole story tumbles down at another character's entry—back to the scholar—crash. This is particularly annoying since much of the writing has a hard, cold brilliance to put the book way above the studies in neurosis, the armageddon blues, of which it might so easily have been only a more recent version.

In one incident in *The Lifeline* the artist, Pirschl, tells how he put aside his creative work to paint pictures for the Nazis, keep in their good books and work for the Underground. One day he tries to create again and cannot: he is an artist and he cannot create. . . is quite

## FORTHCOMING PUBLICATIONS

### *Aeschylus and Athens*

GEORGE THOMSON

This is a new edition of this important book—A Study in the Social Origins of Drama. *The Listener* said of the first edition . . . "It is a satisfying experience, as refreshing as it is rare."

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### *Illusion and Reality*

CHRISTOPHER CAUDWELL

A new edition of this unique and stimulating book is in preparation and will be especially welcomed by the many who failed to obtain it at its first appearance, nine years ago.

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### *English Chamber Music*

ERNST MEYER

Analyses the great period of English chamber music from the middle ages to Purcell in relation to the social background of the period. In addition to about 100 musical examples in the text there is an appendix of 80 pages of complete pieces many of which are not otherwise available to the general public.

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LAWRENCE AND WISHART

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the most moving moment in the story. It is also true that the madness which finally overtakes the scholar in *Auto da Fé*—when everything appears or behaves as its opposite—is tragic to a degree which completely overshadows the faulty, distorted outlines of other characters and almost gives grandeur to the book. But neither of these passages, though they are, I believe, central to the stories Miss Bottome and Elias Canetti have chosen to write—even to the whole emotional complex of our times—are central to the books they have actually written.

A writer, working on his last film script, begins thinking about his early life, its promise and the superficial success that has come to him. Deeply disillusioned by the cynicism of the industry of which he is a part, he decides to make a break and do—what? Half of *Bright Day* is concerned with his work in films and this decision to leave it; the other half, by means of flashbacks, reconstructs his youth in the Yorkshire wool town of Bruddersford where the disillusionment began before the first Great War.

The story is told in the first person, perhaps unfortunately because, though it begins in a slick, hectic style well becoming a character with Hollywood behind him, it soon eases down to the comfortable measure of Mr. Priestley's own voice. This would hardly be worth noting were it not for the fact that it betrays again that phenomenon of left-wing writing—a carelessness in technique which seems to mount side by side with rising political enthusiasm. Sentences like the following are allowed to slip through: "And

because I was so fond of her I didn't want us to start anything now that we had kept away from so far if we were not prepared to go straight on with it." and irritating confusions like this: "... their front door would open—on a hall full of girls all smiling and wide-eyed—never to be closed to me again."

But nothing can hold back Mr. Priestley when he starts taking the lid clean off the film business and showing the cold-blooded destruction of a craftsman's pride in his job which the capitalist set-up entails. He does it with gusto, with roundly observed characters (the successful capitalist alone is nearer caricature) and, especially in the flashbacks, with a great deal of charm.

*English Episode* is a vigorous reconstruction of the Peasant's Revolt in 1381. The main characters in a book bristling with lesser ones are two serfs (one of whom escapes to London and becomes an apprentice), and a hedge priest, all three well drawn—though less distinct than they might have been, I feel. This may be due to a tendency, commoner in historical novels than elsewhere, to treat life as being made up of a simple alternation of economic and sexual intercourse. The story is episodic in structure, moving between the two main pivots of a boisterous, proud London and the serf village with its terror and its growing hope. Each compact, contrasted episode builds up towards passages of excellent imaginative writing when towards the end the Peasants have occupied London—especially is this true of the meetings with the King. Mr. Poulsen has certainly succeeded in bringing to life a vital period of history.

## Books of Poems

CITIES, PLAINS, AND PÉOPLE by Lawrence Durrell. *Faber*, 6s.

A MAP OF VERONA by Henry Reed. *Cape*, 3s. 6d.

THESEUS AND THE MINOTAUR by Patric Dickinson. *Cape*, 5s.

THE ISLES OF SCILLY by Geoffrey Grigson. *Routledge*, 5s.

FOR THOSE WHO ARE ALIVE. An Anthology of New Poetry edited by Howard Sergeant. *Fortune Press*, 6s.

Reviewed by *Randall Swingler*

YEAR BY YEAR, THE POETRY READER MUST become more like a bird-watcher. He must be equipped with a recondite, massive and complicated lore. He must be prepared to go into strange and remote places, and concentrate his attention perhaps for weeks before he recognises the flash of wing or the curious cry. Though it is the eye more than the ear which must be trained. Poets are known more for their plumage than their song these days.

Birds shun a battlefield, so that most of ours are migrants. We ordinary countrymen see them pass over sometimes, flying high, perhaps admire the strong directed flight, but their point of departure and destination are alike unknown to us.

*Through the ambuscades of sex,  
The follies of the will, the tears,  
Turning, a personal world I go  
To where the yellow emperor once  
Sat out the summer and the snow,  
And searching in himself struck oil,  
Published the first great Tao  
Which all confession can only gloze  
And in the Consciousness can only spoil.*

That is Lawrence Durrell, whose haunts are the Aegean and the Levant, a very rare bird with a pellucid plumage of words, a halcyon, but very few of us will ever be able to follow his remote and elusive flight.

*Us too and our days completely the years  
shall cover,  
But what rediscoverer save me shall come  
curiously  
To plot by the stars and the sun the exact  
positions  
Where we built . . . .*

That is Henry Reed, a sub-Arctic migrant, with a strong, set, and solitary flight, but again in regions where our maps are useless and the compass variation is enormous.

Then there is something we can all recognise:—

*A woman's heart is a wild swan  
That knows the flight and the pursuit  
And Leda loved by Jove;*

That's the unwise thrush, who sings each song twenty times over, infinitely imitative, and always in the same metre. In this case it is Patric Dickinson, who is making a courageous effort with his poetry programmes on the B.B.C.

Geoffrey Grigson is also an inhabitant of these islands, but only the rocky edges of them: a sharp, precise bird, with a short and pricking flight, a stonechat perhaps—but I have carried my metaphor too far, for Mr. Grigson does

**HARRAP**

For publication August 8

## *A Sword in the Desert*

HERBERT PALMER

One of the foremost poets of this century attacks and exposes, directly and indirectly, the worst abuses in modern poetry and art, and the many wrong attitudes in recent thought, vision and behaviour. The *Sword* is a symbol of fire and song, and the desert the wasteland of literature and ethics.

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Edited by : J. W. MARRIOTT

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not really belong with the migrants at all, but represents that other aspect of modern poetry, the sidelong glance, the poetry which is not really an expression of the poet's life at all, but notes and observations on the margin of a life expressed in quite another medium, a crystallisation of Imagism. Here too there is an impression left of intellectual fear, a shrinking away from the central movement of life in our time, as if the poet said: "It has become altogether too much for me. I will keep within my own garden of thought and feeling where I am unassailable."

I think a historian would deduce from all this poetry a people obsessed by death, not the positive, analytic and levelling agent of Webster or Donne, but the *néant*, the vacuum created by the very swiftness and suddenness of change.

In the literary criticism of the last ten years there has been a great deal of talk of the search for myth, for a coherent *corpus* of reference upon which the poet can mould his experience. Durrell, Reed and Dickinson are myth-makers: the story is cohesive and clear, but the key to it rests with the poet, either in his private experience or his personal erudition. The referenda are not even as public as those of Eliot or Joyce. And if we are to take the anthology "For Those Who Are Alive" as really representative of the "younger poets . . . who have emerged during the last few years", then the personal myth is becoming more obscure and much less cohesive:

*Meaning has no shape,  
Only the shadows move against the light,  
The flame of stone.  
The shadows grow or shrink,  
blowing in curtains through the body and  
the mind,  
and leave the question open who it was that  
came,  
and what his going may have been a  
record of or what foretold.*

—and the marginal note a great deal more blurred and more banal:

*grim war has not made manifest his might  
there is no need of pity or regret  
and love is deep, a sea, a limitless ocean.*

These poets, like birds, have a different kind of life from ours, enviable perhaps, and usually unaffected by our great affairs, though we make them symbolic of our smaller ones, our nostalgias and irrational sorrows. The poetry-reader, like the bird-watcher, must be a special kind of person too, removing himself from common life and experience to go into out-of-the-way places, read up strange, old, forgotten books. Not many of us have the time or the opportunity.

The question remains, and it is one for the sociologist more than the critic, how can we bring our poets back to the places where men live and work, from which the crises of industrial monopoly have frightened them?

TALKING BRONCO by Roy Campbell.  
*Faber and Faber, 7s. 6d.*

ROY CAMPBELL HAS SPENT SOME 25 YEARS of poetic life yowling for blood and action, and making himself adept with the more spectacular and outmoded literary weapons. He reminds me of a sergeant-instructor in bayonet drill who had spent the whole war at a weapon-training school to

which I was sent after two years of battle experience. His stories of the front we had just left were quite blood-curdling—so was his expression as he lacerated the old sacks. Certainly he was more handy with his bayonet than Campbell is with his satirical couplets; the weapon is blunt now, and the enemy is never in sight, and neither is very sure which war is on at the moment.

It is a pity Campbell puts on this swash-buckling act because he writes some lovely lines when he forgets it, but poem after poem is completely spoilt by verbally the same old dreary diatribe against Left-wing poets, Jews and Reds—stuffed sacks taken over carelessly from Wyndham Lewis some years ago.

The only new and rather embarrassing thing is that Campbell purports to speak for the fighting soldier—well, thanking you, Mr. (or is it C.Q.M.S.?) Campbell, lay off it! The bronco, talking or silent, is not used in modern warfare, but the braying pack-mule still is: a treacherous, sly, touchy fellow with abundant crude energy. But he doesn't go up to the front-line either, however much he may boast to his farmyard colleagues when he gets back. Those who lived long in the fighting area learned to tell a base wallah by his "gripping" (boasting).

Nowadays it is risky to "grip" in public. That silent civilian in the corner is probably a demobilised 8th Army man, and it would be shaming to have to admit that you have hung up your hat in those very "funk-holes in the B.B.C." and "posh editions" against which you have been so bombastically blaring.

## Post

### O'CASEY'S PREDICAMENT

IN YOUR CURRENT ISSUE J. B. PRIESTLEY HAS some good things to say about dramatising the English, but nothing at all that is pertinent to the work of Sean O'Casey. The development of O'Casey's method has nothing to do with the substitution of the English for the Irish. Priestley is perhaps unaware that after *Within the Gates* O'Casey wrote three Irish plays, and that his first non-realistic play *The Silver Tassie* was also written about the Irish.

Priestley also forgets that "dullish people in drawing rooms and lounge halls" are only about five per cent. of the English, and not the kind O'Casey is interested in; that Shakespeare, too, became more symbolical in the course of his writing, and that there are no "characters" in Priestley's sense in *The Tempest* or even *Coriolanus*; that all good poetry is dramatic, even when it is complicated and liable to be pored over (Shakespeare again); that no "man of genius" can "return to his old method—just for fun if he likes" and such advice is rather impertinent.

I, too, am disappointed in the play, for precisely the opposite reason: the fine symbolism of the prelude and the ideas of the stage directions are only worked out in patches in the play, which has too much realistic and trivial incident.

Peter Newmark.

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