

THE CONCISE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF

# Modern World Literature

EDITED BY GEOFFREY GRIGSON

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# The Concise Encyclopedia of MODERN WORLD LITERATURE

Edited by Geoffrey Grigson

Lawrence, Eliot, Yeats, Faulkner, and Hemingway in the United States and Great Britain—Rilke, Proust, Kafka, and Lorca in Europe—Pasternak and Gorky in Russia—Tanizaki and Lu Hsün in Asia: all these testify to the extraordinary range and vitality of world literature in the twentieth century. The wealth of creation that has been achieved in poetry, drama, and the novel is indeed impressive; it is excitingly *there*. Yet to thousands of educated people much of this literature is unknown.

The chief aim of this work is to aid readers in their discovery of the rich satisfactions which modern literature has to offer. It seeks to provide a method by which such appreciation can be attained, as well as to inform. It is, moreover, as readable in itself as are the many works it discusses.

Contributors to this book were asked by the editor, Geoffrey Grigson, to write "about what they have enjoyed, communicating their enjoyment without escaping into mere superlatives". Short biographical material is added to illuminate each writer's work, rather than as an end in itself, for it is the books that matter. These have been selected for full attention and unequivocal judgment.

The main part of this book consists of articles on individual authors: there are over three hundred of these. To enable the reader

to see these authors in a wider context of development, an introductory section is provided: it describes the growth of the major national literatures and the characteristic literary forms of our time. The book is fully indexed by both authors and titles.

The sixteen pages of full color illustrations and the 160 pages of black-and-white illustrations form an unrivaled portrait gallery of modern writers.

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## Editor's Introduction

There is one thing which the editor of a book about the literature or the arts of his own time dare not do. He dare not look back for too long at efforts which have preceded his own. He asks himself how the taste of those earlier editors can have been so deplorable, how they can have been so deceived, how they can have allowed the solemn discussion of so much that was so obviously ephemeral. Then he thinks about himself, and his own choice of the writing of his time which seems to him to have value. If he is not boundlessly conceited, he knows and admits – with reluctance – his own fallibility. Michael Drayton, no fool among poets, once wrote a verse letter to a friend, *Of Poets and Poesie*. He left out a number of good poets, and squeezed in only four lines of weak praise for Shakespeare. Yet shouldn't one make the attempt? W. H. Auden once wrote of the critic assuming that absolute values exist, though "our knowledge of them is always imperfect". Generation after generation mustn't we make that assumption, mustn't we sort, select, reject, and praise, to the best of our fallible ability? Some writers, we all know, are lamentably underestimated, some ridiculously overestimated. Some writers – or some individual books – need rescuing from what is almost or entirely oblivion. Some have escaped attention because they are not easy to categorize.

Bearing this in mind that "literature" is not really so common, in spite of publishers' advertisements, contributors to this volume were asked to write about authors they enjoyed, they were asked to communicate, in a level way, their enjoyment; and to avoid, in doing so, both superlatives and the various ways of evading literature. One way of our time is historical, so they were asked not to indulge in chatter about trends, influences, schools, traditions. They were asked for sensible dogmatism – at any rate, for the unequivocal statement, and (where space allowed) for quotation – i.e., some part of the substance of what they were writing about. Another way of evasion is biographical. They were asked to concentrate on the books of each author, not on his life (though a biographical fact may be relevant, Yeats, for example, dreaming of Bernard Shaw as a sewing machine which smiled and smiled). Even then, contributors were asked to concentrate on the books which mattered, instead of giving the neutral itemized survey which you might expect from a conventional encyclopedia.

Omissions are critically deliberate; which was the editor's concern, since he

preferred the charges which might follow to swathing this book in the damp flannel of compromise. But this bald statement needs qualifying. Literature, time, and language are qualifying agents.

Literature first. This has been taken for the most part as "creative literature" – novels, short stories, poetry, autobiography, etc., but not other concerns which may find a literary or at least a literate expression. So books of criticism are mostly excluded.

Time. Our time is the twentieth century. A glance at the entry on Hofmannsthal, with its assessment of his "Letter of Lord Chandos", will show the difficulty of interpreting the "twentieth century" too literally as all the years from 1900 until this year. A crevasse divides the century. Some writers continued the habits in thought, fancy, sentiment, form, of a decayed idealism, not transcending time. They are generally excluded. Others – obvious examples are Hardy as poet, and Hopkins – may belong by a strict chronology wholly or for the most part to the last century, yet are included since their work appeals with special force to ourselves.

Language. Primarily this is a book for those who read English. So fairly the greater space goes to writers in English. When it comes to writing in other languages, among the criteria for inclusion has been the amount of an author's better work available in English translation. This book aims to increase the pleasurable scope of good reading. It would only be tantalizing – and pedantic – to discuss the work of some great Russian or Japanese when not a line of it had been translated.

On the whole this is a volume of brief introductions to various writers who are worth reading, in the not infallible opinion of the editor and the contributors; a volume in which the tone is positive, and in which negation, while severe, is principally by omission. Condemnation often makes good reading; but remember Byron in *Don Juan*:

...complaint of present days

Is not the certain path to future praise.

One other comment. Poetry is supposed to be dying or nearly dead. An incidental thing which this survey shows is its quite extraordinary vitality in Europe and the Americas in our century.

GEOFFREY GRIGSON

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# National Literatures

## Anglo-American Literature.

To attempt to survey, in a few paragraphs, the whole of twentieth-century literature in the English language – a literature which includes the poetry of South Africa, Australia and New Zealand, the intense novels about youthful alienation by Canadian novelists and the recent literary efflorescence in the West Indies, as well as the whole body of English and American literature – is to undertake an impossibility. Never have so many books been written and published, never have writers tried so hard to master their time in art. The novels of Joseph Conrad, D.H. Lawrence, E.M. Forster (qq.v.) in England, and Henry James, William Faulkner and Ernest Hemingway (qq.v.) in America; the poetry of T.S. Eliot and W.B. Yeats, Ezra Pound, W.H. Auden and Wallace Stevens (qq.v.) – all this, to say nothing of many other major talents, represents a triumph for Anglo-American civilization and for the liberal ideal, a flowering of a dominant civilization.

Yet it is to some extent a hollow triumph, for there is increasing evidence that the artist's voice is a lonely one. Over this same period there has probably been less real interest in art in society at large, less conviction of its usefulness, than ever before. The separation of the serious artist from contact with a firmly felt audience, which had been won away, all but a few, by the less demanding non-artists of the mass-media, has gravely limited the artistic vision, and the artist has seen himself as more and more excluded from human councils. The influence exercised in the last century by novelists and poets has appeared to pass at one extreme to the psychologists and sociologists, and at the other to film stars and singers; and in consequence the artist appears more than ever the marginal man, concerned with increasingly private prob-

lems presented in personal language and seemingly obscurantist techniques.

In short, the *avant-garde* revolution of the early years of the century, which was supposed to lead society into a finer world, simply separated the artist from his society; he led, but few followed. Movements such as the classicism of Eliot and others have had their relevance, but it seemed less and less to be a literary relevance. Though in both England and America the new century brought in many new names and new literary techniques, brought the experiments of James Joyce and Gertrude Stein (qq.v.), of Virginia Woolf and E. B. Cummings (qq.v.), brought the brilliant twenties with Aldous Huxley and Scott Fitzgerald (qq.v.), the socially conscious thirties with Auden and John Steinbeck, George Orwell (qq.v.), James Farrell, Erskine Caldwell and John Dos Passos, brought a steady expansion of the novel and of poetry and drama, the expansion came in steadily diminishing shocks. For one thing, war was so much more dramatic, so much more disintegrative of old ways of thinking and so much better at ushering in the new era of thought than ever art could be. Moreover, it may be that literature functions best when it is able to celebrate the dominion of man over his society; and the recurrent experience, and thus the recurrent artistic theme, of the twentieth century has been the capacity of society to triumph over man. It may be that literature is essentially a liberal endeavour, concerned with the freedom of man and with winning respect for his humanity, and that all modern literature has been able to show us is the failure of liberalism to protect itself against chaos. Surely what some of the differing works of our time, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and *A Farewell to Arms*, *Dr Zhivago* and *Sartoris*, *A Passage to India* and *The Waste Land*, have

in common is the sense that it is hard enough for the respecter of individual virtue to protect even his own individuality in a world going rapidly away from the Golden Age. The artist, of course, sees as an artist, and has his own interest; and artists may be inclined to agree about the disastrous state of human affairs in a time when everyone is perfectly happy about his lot. But in a world in which the moral view of man has declined, the artist has been inclined to hold on to it; and Anglo-American literature has by and large defended liberalism and civilization at a time when they have been threatened from within and without. This is not an Anglo-American theme only; for one of the distinctive developments of the twentieth century has been the increasing internationalization of art. The writer writes for a world market; and he responds to the values of a world-wide audience.

The other great dilemma of the modern artist is that there is so much to know. There is (to use a phrase of André Malraux's, q.v.) an "imaginary museum" of knowledge, traditional and international, which the artist has to master. It is harder than ever to play, so to speak, in the world league, to respond to the best that is known and thought in the world. It is difficult to find a style or a theme when all styles and themes seem to be exhausted, and when man himself is no longer impressed by grand designs. This is one reason why much modern art is concerned either with pursuing extreme originality, or with taking on the comic note and the wry theme, or with being unashamedly provincial. A novelist like Samuel Beckett (q.v.) seems to typify all three strains. And in English writing at least there has been an evident closing in of interests; we have had a Silver Age, since the last war, with poetry ever more personal and private and with the novel ever more restricted and provincial. The exceptions to the case – let us say, for instance, Lawrence Durrell (q.v.) in the novel, Dylan Thomas (q.v.) and the Beat Generation in poetry – have staked their attempts almost entirely in language and rhetoric, or have simply tried to live their art in their lives. England has its remarkable writers – Graham Greene and Ivy Compton-Burnett (qq.v.), C.P. Snow and William Golding (q.v.) and Iris Murdoch – but it cannot at present claim any younger writers of the first rank. When the gap is remarked on, which happens rarely, it is suggested that the impetus that used to be in the novel is now in the drama. But a close look there among the Osbornes and Wes-

kers seems to show high competence but nothing more.

Can it be that we in England have grown provincial, that our interests generally are more limited than ever before and that we are either all too satisfied with things as they are or seeking only the rewards of social revolution, rewards which are, more conspicuously than ever, material? It would be a strange shift of balance if England now became the literary follower, and America the new cultural capital. For until the twenties America was very consciously the distant literary province, away from London, and so out of touch. London, one of the great cultural capitals, was a centre of English-language literature, drawing Oscar Wilde and Bernard Shaw (q.v.) George Moore and Yeats (q.v.), Joyce and J.M. Synge (qq.v.) from Ireland, Eliot and Pound and James (qq.v.) from America, Conrad (q.v.) from Poland. There was an international republic of letters, and to keep up, to be in the right place at the right time, was the essence of it.

The twenties and thirties were the period of great growth in American letters, bringing to notice novelists of the calibre of Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Faulkner, Nathanael West (qq.v.), Dos Passos, and John O'Hara, and poets from Wallace Stevens to Robinson Jeffers (q.v.). American literature was now distinctively itself; the new writers had an evident American stamp about them. Though many of their themes were international ones, and though they worked in conscious relation to the English literary tradition, it was to the American past that they looked most – to Whitman and Mark Twain, in particular, with their freedom of line, their vernacular style, their lack of interest in social themes and their preference for naked unsocial man, and with their large sense of responsibility for the quality of American society and the nature of American man. It is true that this stand often manifested itself in a desire to *épater le bourgeois*, to satirize the narrowness and provincialism of their country and to take the cynical view. But this was part of a wider alienation felt by American writers from American life, part of a sense that those who carried artistic and moral responsibility were quite cut off from those who carried political, economic and social responsibility. In one sense, the depression at the end of the twenties might be described as a consequence of the situation, and thereby its solution. For the Crash seemed to invite writers to take up once

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again their social duties – and the thirties were in America, as in England, the era of political literature, from *The Grapes of Wrath* by Steinbeck to *Waiting for Lefty* by Clifford Odets (q. v.).

If writers can be said to embody some of the energy and curiosity of the society out of which they come, then in the end perhaps American writers were, and still are, more stimulated by their circumstances and nationality than they realized. American culture is a cosmopolitan, a borrowing culture, because America is a borrowing society. English letters today seem narrow and out of touch in comparison with the energy and eclecticism of American writing – writing that comprehends the violent decadence of Tennessee Williams (q. v.) and Truman Capote, the sophisticated mysticism of J.D. Salinger (q. v.) and John Updike, the protest of Negroes like Richard Wright, the turbulence of Norman Mailer, the bright Jewish affirmation of Saul Bellow and Bernard Malamud (qq. v.). Perhaps the balance is changing, perhaps the expatriation of English writers to America is a sign that the new capital of Anglo-American writing in the context of the international republic of letters is now no longer London but New York. But mutual influence remains, and one of the determinants of modern English letters is the apprehension of the English-American audience for which the modern author writes. The sense of common tradition – though within that tradition there are different paths and different solutions to common problems – has surely become stronger and the American performance is showing the English imagination ways of seeing that it might not have reached alone. It is less and less with the Continent, more and more with the States, that English writers are finding literary kinship.

Anglo-American civilization has played in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries a part comparable to that played by French civilization in the eighteenth century or Italian civilization at the Renaissance. The flowering of democratic liberalism that it represents is reflected in its literary production. Though it may be foolhardy to try to represent the nature and the variety of that production, it is worth insisting that it has taken advantage of the economic and political power of its two nations to address the world and to dramatize for it the fullness and folly of our values.

**French Literature.** Who is "significant" in French writing today? What distinguishes that literature?

It is not easy to answer these questions. How much trust, for example, can be placed in the elections to the Nobel Prize? Gide, Martin du Gard, Mauriac, Camus and Saint-John Perse (qq. v.) received it; Proust, Valéry, Claudel (qq. v.) did not. Official recognition by the Académie Française? If at last it opened its doors to the harsh and disconcerting Claudel, it was because it had become a scandal to keep them shut; the portals flew wide to receive the innocuous Cocteau (q. v.). The literary prizes, now so shrill a feature of French publishing, can only bewilder a reader innocent enough to regard them as anything more than one element of the manipulation of an author's assets in the ceaseless jockeying for position and sales.

An additional complication, virulent in France, is that a list of significant authors compiled by a literary critic on the political Right would differ from the list of a critic on the political Left, thus establishing a false equation between the Right and French literary tradition and an equally false equation between the Left and literary "freedom". The clamour of publicity and cultural publicity, and the battle of the generations encouraged by journalism and the economics of the book trade also have to be discounted; and there are moments when the confusion of the French literary scene appears so overwhelming that it is tempting to assert that its modern literature is Proust, Claudel of the *Cinq Grandes Odes*, *Connaissance de l'Est* and some of the plays, Paul Valéry with two or three poems and the notebooks – and leave it at that, except to add, perhaps, certain of the minor writers who cared only for perfection: Valéry Larbaud, Jean Paulhan or Charles-Albert Cingria.

Modern French literature owes its importance above all else to the fact that it has been a laboratory where the experiments have been watched with attention by all the writers of the world. "What are they writing in Paris?" The question is still asked, even in periods of francophobia. The significance of this Paris lies less in the *œuvres* it has produced (many of which, once lauded, have not worn very well) than in its history as an incomparable *école* – a school not merely of technical invention but of the human spirit pushing out beyond traditional humanism, a dangerous school, with its sad victims such as Antonin Artaud.

One should remember some lines by Guillaume Apollinaire (q. v.):

Pitié pour nous qui combattons toujours aux  
frontières  
De l'illimité et de l'avenir  
Pitié pour nos erreurs pitié pour nos péchés  
Voici que vient l'été la saison violente.

There have been three defined movements in the century: first, the writers animated by Apollinaire (q.v.), a group sometimes called Cubist from its contacts with Picasso and Braque; second, the Surrealists, with André Breton as tyrannical ring-master; third, the Existentialists, influenced by Sartre (q.v.). Yet it would be a mistake to over-emphasize the cohesion of these movements; each quickly generated a profusion of divergent and rebellious talents. In fact they are phases of a constant phenomenon: the *avant-garde*, a permanent feature of the French literary tradition since the invasion of Romanticism, claiming its ancestry in Nerval, Baudelaire, Rimbaud and Lautréamont. The *avant-garde* has developed its own orthodoxy (a conformity to nonconformity) which sterilizes the mediocre writer as efficiently as any academic tradition. Nevertheless these movements have been invaluable schools of literary apprenticeship and a necessary stimulus of creative excitement. Surrealism, for a few years, was a powerful contagion infecting all the young writers; yet most of the adepts of "pure" Surrealism have departed into oblivion, while the true poets it nurtured, such as Paul Eluard and René Char (qq.v.), attained their stature when they had discarded the movement's doctrinaire positions. Michel Leiris, Georges Bataille, Maurice Blanchot, Raymond Queneau (q.v.) – writers who at this moment are the most powerful influences on the latest movement, *le nouveau roman* – were themselves affected by Surrealism and Existentialism; thus the continuity of the *avant-garde* is established.

But it is in the writings of such a fanatical solitary and independent as Henri Michaux (q.v.) that the extravagances and obscurities of the *avant-garde* are transcended and in some sense justified. Michaux has held himself aloof, refusing labels, yet without this climate of intrepid experiment it is difficult to see how his strange genius could have come to fruition. For the English reader who wishes to enter this daunting terrain there is the work of Samuel Beckett (q.v.) whose most important writings were composed in French before he made their English versions. Indeed Beckett illustrates what only Paris, among the literary

capitals of the world, has been able to generate: the way forward from the solitary achievements of modern European literature, Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*, Ulysses by Joyce (q.v.), and the novels of Franz Kafka (q.v.).

This literature of research would be unable to exist if there were not also a more accessible literature encouraged by what is still, in spite of the general debasement of standards, the most intelligent reading public in the world. Between the reading-matter produced as a department of the entertainment industry and the literature of experiment there is, in France, a full and broad stream of writing which reflects the lucid and rational curiosity of the national character. The traditional novel called "psychological" continues its efficient career, as does the skilfully constructed play; collections of aphorisms even continue to perpetuate the memory of the moralists. The works of Colette, Mauriac, Giraudoux, Giono, Montherlant, Cocteau, Radiguet, Green (qq.v.), Maurois, Schlumberger, Arland, Jouhandeau, Chardonne and Aymé are "modern classics" not only for the French but for those everywhere who read with discernment.

When the European novelist set out, as he did with the advancing century, to map the transformations of social change, there were none who attacked the complications of the *roman fleuve* with greater skill than Georges Duhamel and Jules Romains (q.v.), or with more magisterial authority than Martin du Gard. When the turmoil of wars and revolutions had undermined the assumptions of liberal humanism and scientific progress, when the fundamental questions about the nature of man and his society were being asked, it was the novels of André Malraux (q.v.) and Georges Bernanos, of Camus, Sartre and Louis Céline which, by their sombre power, achieved a world reputation and came to represent in men's minds the literature of modern France. Malraux's *La Condition humaine* (tr. as *Storm over Shanghai*, 1934; in America as *Man's Fate*) and *L'Espoir* (tr. as *Days of Hope*, 1938; in America as *Man's Hope*); Camus's *L'Étranger* (tr. as *The Outsider*, 1946) and *La Peste* (tr. as *The Plague*, 1948) are works of art in which the men of this century grew conscious of their destiny; Céline's *Voyage au bout de la nuit* (tr. as *Journey to the End of Night*, 1934) is an uninhibited and horrifying transmission of a nightmare time.

This French writing between the wars responded to all the exigencies of tragic art. But it is impossible to

There have been several successful German attempts (by Wolfgang Borchert and Karl Wittlinger) to depict post-war disorientation in drama, but the most interesting developments have come from Switzerland – grotesque reflections of the spiritual and social realities of our time in plays by Friedrich Dürrenmatt and Max Frisch. The novel and short story have been notably enriched by the Austrian Heimito von Doderer (a great chronicler in an older tradition, who expressly opposes the “Utopian” or “trans-real” novel fashionable today), by Heinrich Böll (who combines a sharp eye for detail and a sense of the absurd with a rare moral concern), by Elisabeth Langgässer, Stefan Andres, Gerd Gaiser, Uwe Johnson and – again – Max Frisch; while in poetry the most promising (if minor) figures are Ingeborg Bachmann, Paul Celan, Helmut Heissenbüttel and the gifted Günter Grass, whose sense of the grotesque has shown itself to advantage in his novel *Die Blechtrommel* as well as in his haunting little poems. Recent years have also seen the rise of a new genre, whose most consistently successful practitioner so far has been Günter Eich: that of the *Hörspiel* or radio play, which still promises much.

**Greek Literature** in our century has been one of activity and energy in poems rather than prose. In the last century French Romanticism had bewitched the poets of the newly established Greek kingdom. This produced a reaction in the 1880s, a new movement rejecting the *katharevousa*, the artificial form of purist Greek in which the old Athenian Romantics wrote their verse, for the demotic, the modern vernacular. New poets attempted to establish a living Greek tradition touched by European influences. The verbal sorcery of Kostas Palamas (1858–1943), prolific in prose as well as poetry, helped modern Greek to become a language of exquisite lyrical richness. The poet Angelos Sikelianos (1884–1951) related himself to Greek tradition (much as Yeats related himself to a tradition of ancient Irishry), hurrying his readers on with a Dionysiac force of music and imagery. The Alexandrian poems of C.P. Cavafy (q.v.) added an idiosyncratic element, widening the new tradition, the fourth master of which is George Seferis (q.v.), born in 1900. Seferis in the thirties advanced matters by allying Greekness to a modern Symbolism. Poets were well served just before the Second World War by the periodical *Ta Nea Grammata*, and from the ex-

citement emerged such poets of our day as Andreas Embirikos, Nikos Gatsos, D. Antoniou, Nikos Engenopoulos, Nanos Valacritia, and above all Odysseus Elytis (1912), whose latest verse shows him to be maturing into one of the finest artists of modern Europe.

Greek fiction has been neither so assured nor so exciting. It was not until after the 1920s that a certain advance was made with the novels of Stratis Myrivilis (such as *The Mermaid Madonna*), Venezis, Theotokas, Politis, Prevelakis and Kazantzakis.

**Italian Literature** in our century has had a great many difficulties to contend with. Italian had been the first European language to reach maturity, and its greatest writers – Dante, Boccaccio, Petrarch – were first on the Western scene. But in the nineteenth century the Italians produced writers in isolation (Alessandro Manzoni, Giacomo Leopardi) rather than in a vigorous continuity. Contact was loose, since no capital city dominated the whole peninsula. The beginnings of the ascendancy of Rome belong only to the last few years.

As the twentieth century dawned, two great men of opposite temperaments shared attention, and the influence of neither was good. One was the flashy, amoral, verbose poet and novelist, Gabriele D'Annunzio, born at Pescara in 1863; the other the philosopher and critic, Benedetto Croce, born three years later near Naples. To D'Annunzio, the great decadent, we owe the arrogance and braggadocio of the “Fascist style”; to the followers of Croce, the great liberal, we are unfortunately indebted for a provincial critical spirit and Hegelian verbiage which makes the works of Italian university professors almost unreadable.

The modern movement looks to quite different sources. In the nineteenth century the novel was weak, as the theatre still is. There were, however, two great talents at the beginning of our period. One was Giovanni Verga, the Sicilian “father of the modern realist novel” who died in 1922, the pioneer to whom all the best contemporary writers have looked at one time in their lives. The other was the international and Jewish Triestino novelist, Italo Svevo (q.v.), the only Italian who interested himself in Viennese psychoanalysis. Verga was introduced to the English-speaking world by D.H. Lawrence (q.v.), who translated some of his work (rather badly); Svevo was

discovered by James Joyce (q.v.). Svevo's influence in Italy is slight, and he is accused of writing "pidgin Italian", an accusation also made by Italian critics against Ignazio Silone (q.v.), another writer more read abroad than in his own country. The Sicilian Luigi Pirandello (q.v.) probably owed as much to his native island for the torment and realism of his plays as Verga did for his novels.

D'Annunzio had no followers, unless we count the adventurous sensationalist, Curzio Malaparte (b. 1898), author of *La pelle* (tr. as *The Skin*, 1952) and *Kaputt* (tr. 1948). The poets, too, were looking in other directions. After Dino Campana (q.v.) came Giuseppe Ungaretti (q.v.), now well over seventy. His short, tremendously charged lines have a kinship with the French. Eugenio Montale (q.v.) is perhaps more indigenously Italian, and he, like Ungaretti, is of the epoch of Eliot and Valéry (qq.v.), not of D'Annunzio. Salvatore Quasimodo (q.v.) owes much to the Greeks and Romans whom he has translated.

The novelists of modern Italy divide simply into three different generations. The oldest generation, including men like Riccardo Bacchelli (b. 1891), author of *Il mulino del Po* (tr. as *The Mill on the Po*, 1952), and Aldo Palazzeschi (b. 1885), author of *Le sorelle Materassi* ("The Materassi Sisters"), is composed mainly of traditional stylists with strong regional characteristics (Bacchelli is from Bologna, Palazzeschi from Florence); to these we should add Massimo Bontempelli (b. 1884) and Emilio Cecchi (b. 1884), who is first and foremost a Tuscan essayist and aesthete.

The middle generation, after its early years under the dictatorship, only came into its own with the overthrow of Fascism. These writers, many of whom are still in the prime of their vigour and talent, have made one of the most vital contributions to the literature of the post-war world. For them style is secondary to energy. They are ridden with moral and political preoccupations, at least as private individuals, and for many of them the experience of the war and the resistance to the German occupation was almost traumatic.

Of these now middle-aged writers, by far the best-known and most prolific is Alberto Moravia (q.v.). He was born in 1907 and won fame and esteem at the age of twenty-two with the publication of *Gli indifferenti* (tr. as *The Indifferent Ones*, 1932), a telling and bitter attack on middle-class life in Rome. Save for a

pause during the war, when he had trouble with the authorities, he has been publishing at the rate of about a novel a year ever since. Among his best-known books are *La Romana* (tr. as *Woman of Rome*, 1949), *La Ciociara* (tr. as *Two Women*, 1958) and *Amore coniugale* (tr. as *Conjugal Love*, 1951); but possibly his most subtle achievements are his studies of adolescence and youth in the prosperous classes, such as *Agostino* and other long short stories. But he has not confined himself to the middle classes into which he was born. In his *Racconti Romani* (tr. as *Roman Tales*, 1956) he has turned to the poor and the inhabitants of the slum-suburbs round Rome. Taken as a whole, his work gives a unique picture of Roman life in the last thirty years.

In this brilliant generation we can include the late Corrado Alvaro, a Calabrian, who in his essays showed a preoccupation with Italy's unfortunate social inheritance second to none, and in his novels mostly used backgrounds from his native province with its rough morality and melancholy resignation. From Sicily came the late Vitaliano Brancati, whose *Il Bell' Antonio* is a comic masterpiece satirizing customs—especially, the subject being Sicily, the cult of male virility. From Sicily, too, comes Elio Vittorini (q.v.). His *Conversazione in Sicilia* (tr. as *Conversation in Sicily*, 1948), *Le donne di Messina* ("The Women of Messina"), *Il Garofano Rosso* (tr. as *The Red Carnation*, 1952) and other novels have a warmth of love for the poor and their lot which, as in Silone's work, has strong Christian echoes. Vittorini is also influenced by modern English and American writers whom he has translated and edited.

The north of Italy, richer in all other things, has been only about equal to the gifted south in literary artists. Piedmont has produced Carlo Levi (q.v.), whose *Cristo s'è fermato a Eboli* (tr. as *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, 1947) is one of the best-known of all Italian books published since the war; Mario Soldati, a brilliant writer of short stories; and the late Cesare Pavese (q.v.). To the Veneto we owe Guido Piovene, author of *Lettere di una novizia* (tr. as *Confessions of a Novice*, 1951); from Trieste comes Pier Antonio Quarantotti-Gambini, whose novels brood over adolescent life by the sea and in boats; from Florence, Vasco Pratolini (q.v.), of working-class origin, the most violent writer of his generation. Among women the most distinguished are Elsa Morante (q.v.) who writes with delicacy and passion and is in love with south



Italy; Anna Banti, Natalia Ginzburg, Gianna Manzini and Alba de Cespedes.

Outside all possible categories comes the late Giuseppe Tomasi (q.v.), Prince of Lampedusa, another Sicilian whose posthumous historical novel, *Il Gattopardo* (tr. as *The Leopard*, 1960), took Italy by storm at the end of the nineteen-fifties.

What of the youngest generation? Is the *élan* that Italy experienced after the war now losing its vigour? The tradition continues with writers such as Italo Calvino. In *Il Barone Rampante* (tr. as *The Baron in the Trees*, 1959) and other works, Calvino combines ironic fantasy with symbolic and moral preoccupations; like Vittorini before him, he suffered deep emotional disturbance on leaving the Communist Party. Bassani, Petroni, Fenoglio, Quintavalle, Trestori and Arbasino are names to watch.

One of the most controversial questions in the last few years in Italy has been that of the dialects. This came to a head with the publication of novels in *Romanesco* (the popular language of Rome) by Carlo Emilio Gadda and Pier Paolo Pasolini. Neither of them are Romans. Gadda's book *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana* is a comic *tour de force* on popular reactions to a crime in the Roman street that leads to St John Lateran. Pier Paolo Pasolini has written several novels about the poor and near-criminal populations, especially the children, who live in the Borgata, the new slums outside Rome. He owes a good deal to Moravia who has tended to incorporate many dialect intonations into his work, especially since *La Romana* and *Racconti Romani*. Pasolini's novels are difficult for non-Romans to read; but it is not easy to describe the life of the growing metropolis without recourse to the language spoken by the common people.

**Japanese Literature** in our century is chiefly one of fiction, with poetry and the drama occupying secondary positions. Although the modern novel has its origins in a rejection of tradition and a wholesale acceptance of the Occident, the results are distinctly Japanese.

By the mid-nineteenth century, when the long Tokugawa isolation ended, writers of fiction had become merely tiresome – by fits gossipy, school-marmish, and lewd. For some two decades after the Meiji Restoration of 1867 and 1868 the old tradition shuffled on. Then, toward the middle of the 1880s, the

two great heralds of the new literature appeared: Tsubouchi Shōyō (1859-1935), with a manifesto denouncing both didacticism and eroticism, the besetting evils of late Tokugawa fiction, and insisting upon objective recording of fact; and Futabatei Shimei (1864-1909), whose remarkable novel *Drifting Clouds* was something quite new in Japanese literature, a drably realistic study in fecklessness.<sup>1</sup>

The last years of the nineteenth century saw a brief revival of seventeenth-century realism, and, more significantly, a debate over literary language. Should novels be written in the ornate and antiquated Tokugawa style, or in the modern colloquial? The triumph of the latter was almost complete, and since the turn of the century the old literary language has virtually disappeared, save for an occasional display piece by someone who wishes to show he is still capable of managing it.

Modern Japanese literature may be said to begin in earnest with the "Naturalism" of about the time of the Russo-Japanese War. The movement thought of itself as deriving from the French. What Zola had done in France, the new writers would do in Japan: examine social situations with a cold, objective, scientific eye. If Zola could have seen the results, he would have been startled. Looking for situations to be scientific about, Japanese novelists found that in their highly compartmentalized and rapidly changing country the broader social situation was not easily apprehended. Almost the only object that would stay in place long enough to be examined was the writer himself, and so he turned to "self-examination" and confession. He thought himself true to his art if he kept no corner of his closets hidden from the public. The Japanese "Naturalist" therefore bears more of a resemblance to Rousseau than to the father he claims, Zola. Indeed modern Japanese literature is predominantly romantic, and one should not be led astray by the Western categories with which Japanese literary historians are fond of playing, Classicism, Realism, Naturalism, and the rest.

The Naturalists and their descendants make up the one unbroken line in modern Japanese letters, and few writers can be discussed except in some relation to them – as ally, descendant, or enemy. The "idealistic" novelists who succeeded the Naturalists were concerned with self-cultivation, and ended up as

<sup>1</sup> In this article the Japanese name order is followed, with the surname first.

You whose mouths are made in the image of God's  
Mouths which are order itself

Be indulgent when you compare us  
To those who have been the perfection of order  
We who seek everywhere for adventure

We are not your enemies  
We wish to appropriate vast and strange domains  
Where flowering mystery offers itself to whoever  
wishes to pick it

There are new fires there and colours never yet seen  
A thousand imponderable phantoms  
To which reality must be given...  
...Pity us who fight always in the front lines  
Of the limitless and the future.

This might be an epigraph for the literature and art  
of our century.

The translations have been taken from the *Selected Writings of Guillaume Apollinaire*, tr. and introduced by R. Shattuck, London and New York, 1950. There are prose translations in A. Hartley's *Penguin Book of French Verse, Twentieth Century*, 1959.

**Auden**, W[ystan] H[ugh] (1907- ), Anglo-American poet, born in York, made an early reputation as the chief literary spokesman for social commitment in England during the thirties. Unfortunately, many of his former admirers have failed to appreciate the power and growth of his less obviously "committed" verse, written in America in the forties and fifties.

Auden is primarily a moralist-poet, but a markedly English type of moralist: wry, idiosyncratic, protestant. His theme is man, moving through space and time, building his sociable and harrowed cities, capable of redemption through God's grace, up to his knees in the rich mud of moral choice – and gladly challenged by his total situation. Neither mystical experience nor the love-relationships of men and women much interest Auden, and his poetry lacks certain kinds of intimacy. It is marked rather by intellectual energy and rhetorical wit, a lively responsiveness to the contemporary climate of ideas, a novelist's eye for revealing detail, and a powerful drive to recognize a moral order within the disordered mass of experience. All these qualities made his poetry immediately exciting in the thirties – a time of "crisis and dismay" – when so much in the social climate evoked his characteristic barometric response.

Though Auden hates all conceptions of artistic decorum, he is a conscientious and dedicated craftsman,

gifted with exceptionally varied technical talents and constantly experimenting with manners and forms which will carry his distinctive explorations. Before the war he wrote, for instance, a sharply observed, pithy, adjectivally active epigrammatic verse (as in *Look, Stranger!*, 1936) which more than any other manner allowed him to capture the feel of the period. We tend to remember his work first by single lines and short passages – his lines, for instance, on Dover:

Steep roads, a tunnel through the downs, are the  
approaches;  
A ruined pharos overlooks a constructed bay;  
The sea-front is almost elegant; all this show  
Has, somewhere inland, a vague and dirty root:  
Nothing is made in this town.

A little later, learning from Rilke, Auden produced fine sonnets symbolic of psychological or social stresses (e.g. *The Quest*, 1941); in addition he began to practise a relaxed low-temperature conversational verse (*Another Time*, 1940):

About suffering they were never wrong,  
The Old Masters: how well they understood  
Its human position; how it takes place  
While someone else is eating or opening a  
window or just walking dully along...

Throughout all his thirty years of writing Auden has produced lyrics of an uncharacteristic stillness. Since he often reminds himself of the need for a receptive "sitting still", it may be that in these lyrics he celebrates and practises a virtue that runs against the grain of his more natural quick eclecticism. For almost all his lyrics have a bare moonlit music. Their sensuous effects are assured but limited. He once said that he saw his poems as "squares and oblongs"; the shapes of these lyrics are formed not from the elaboration of images but from the articulation of concepts, of moral issues. In the following instance the inner shape is formed by a favourite contrast, between the state of beasts and the state of man – the one experiencing pure and unchanging "being", the other a choice-making creature for ever "becoming":

Fish in the unruffled lakes  
The swarming colours wear,  
Swans in the winter air  
A white perfection have,  
And the great lion walks  
Through his innocent grove;  
Lion, fish, and swan  
Act, and are gone  
Upon Time's toppling wave.

We till shadowed days are done,  
We must weep and sing  
Duty's conscious wrong,  
The Devil in the clock,  
The Goodness carefully worn...

Soon after he became a professed Christian (he had by now settled in America) Auden wrote four book-length poems in whose structure and movement he sought to embody the complexities of the moral will, in action in society. None of the four succeeds as a whole, but all contain parts of great fascination; *The Sea and the Mirror* (1945) is the most nearly successful and *The Age of Anxiety* (1948) the most ambitious.

He continues to write in several of his established manners, ranging from laconic anti-Establishment verse to the hortatory or devout. *The Shield of Achilles* (1955) shows most of these manners to good effect. In the last ten years Auden has developed an entertaining use of the long line, especially in his poems of symbolic landscape. He is one of the least pastoral of poets, yet two kinds of landscape have always appealed deeply to him – one heavily-worked over, the other bare. The first is the landscape of urban sprawl, the “soiled productive cities” of western Europe and America, deeply scored with the evidence of human choice. The other landscape is stark, inhospitable and inhuman (e.g. the wilder northern Pennines), an involved geometric landscape (“squares and oblongs”) of rocks, mountains, valleys, rivers and plains. If the first landscape predominated in the thirties, the second has latterly come into prominence as deeply and instinctively symbolic of man's dilemmas. Here Auden's characteristic urge towards symbol, his search for order, his natural love for this type of landscape and his technical inventiveness, are happily joined together. The long, loping, syllabically counted line has the effect of musingly, colloquially and seriously, with both wit and concern, following the elaborate contours of the landscape so as to evoke its inner significance for him. One of the first of these poems, “In Praise of Limestone”, is still undoubtedly the best:

If it form the one landscape that we the inconstant ones  
Are consistently homesick for, this is chiefly  
Because it dissolves in water. Mark these rounded slopes  
With their secret fragrance of thyme and beneath  
A secret system of caves and conduits...

...Dear, I know nothing of  
Either, but when I try to imagine a faultless love  
Or the life to come, what I hear is the murmur  
Of underground streams, what I see is a limestone  
landscape.

Auden has already achieved much. If he has not yet fulfilled the highest hopes he raised this seems due, as much as anything, to unresolved tensions within himself: between his acute and often quixotic intellect and the intellectual austerity he seeks as a devout Christian; between the strong moralist and the artist who must achieve his moral effects indirectly; between the artist and the believer for whom “art is not enough”, who suspects much in the life of art. Auden's isolation within a mass-society – he lives alone, sometimes in New York, sometimes in England, sometimes on the island of Ischia – makes it difficult for him to establish firm contact with a known audience and probably encourages some of the uncertainties of tone (skittishness, bathos, compensatory portentousness) which still mar all but his best work. But this unrootedness also reinforces his peculiar responsiveness to crucial aspects of the condition of modern megalopolitan man – to those parts of his experience in which he feels a kind of public loneliness and loss, assaulted by his own works; but in which he still tries, “in all conscience”, to find his true individual way.

Auden wrote several works for the theatre in the thirties: *The Dance of Death* (1933), and, with Christopher Isherwood (q.v.), *The Dog Beneath the Skin* (1935), *The Ascent of F6* (1936), and *On the Frontier* (1938).

In these plays, characters of general or allegorical significance (Death, Mr and Mrs A, or the village simpleton Alan Norman) are deployed in short scenes which scorn the three-act technique, interspersed with songs in jazz rhythms:

On the Rhondda  
My time I squander,  
Watching for my miner boy...

There is a desire to teach and awaken by outrage and shock; characters rise in the audience to ejaculate slogans:

One, two, three, four  
The last war was a bosses' war  
Five, six, seven, eight  
Rise and make a workers' state...

There is a baroque obsession with death and destruction; an old master is hacked to pieces with a jack-knife as a music-hall turn; the ladies of Ostria dip their hankies in the blood of the executed revolutionaries:

So, under the local images your blood has conjured,  
We show you man caught in the trap of his terror,  
destroying himself.

All these are the signs of that Continental expressionism inaugurated by Strindberg at the turn of the century, continued in pre-revolutionary Russia by Andreyev and Evreinov, and brought to full power in the German theatre after the First World War.

But Continental movements which come to Britain turn into something else. The strongest forces in the Auden and Isherwood plays are not social protest, but Freudian (or Groddeckian) psychology and evangelical piety, lost to sight but putting out hidden runners underground:

Beware of yourself:

Have you not heard your own heart whisper: "I am the nicest person in this room"?

So, in *The Ascent of F6*, the flat Morality characters give place to a full study of Michael Ransome, climbing a mountain like a true *Boys' Own Paper* hero, and grappling in spiritual dialectic with a Tibetan abbot before the peak and the mother-image claim him.

Auden has written a great deal of occasional prose, ranging from those essays which explore aspects of his psychological, moral and spiritual interests (e.g. on Kierkegaard, Freud or Niebuhr), to those which deal with problems of writing or discuss particular writers who interest him (e.g. the essay "Squares and Oblongs" and his inaugural lecture as Professor of Poetry at Oxford, *Making, Knowing and Judging*, 1956, and the essays on James, Yeats, Kafka and Rilke, which are close penetrations of aspects of each writer). He has published one full-length prose work, *The Enchafèd Flood* (1951), which is composed of a series of lectures. In this he deals with the psychology of poetic symbols, and pursues the mutations of sea and desert imagery, considered as complex images for man's spiritual wanderings. The book is an indispensable introduction to the liveliness and depth of his prose and a useful commentary on his later poetry.

See his *Kierkegaard*, selected and introduced, London, 1955; "Squares and Oblongs" in *Poets at Work*, introduced by D.D. Abbott, New York, 1948; Introduction to *The*

*American Scene* by Henry James, London and New York, 1946; "Yeats as an Example" in *The Permanence of Yeats*, ed. J. Hall and M. Steinmann, New York, 1950; "K's Quest" in *The Kafka Problem*, ed. A. Flores, New York, 1946, and London, 1947; "Rilke in English" in the *New Republic*, C, New York, 1939; "The Ironic Hero" in *Horizon*, 116, London, 1949; "Criticism in a Mass Society", in *The Intent of the Critic*, ed. D. A. Stauffer, London and Princeton, N.J., 1941; "A Literary Transference" (on Thomas Hardy) in *The Southern Review*, 6, I, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 1940.

About Auden: R. Hoggart's *Auden; An Introductory Essay*, London and New Haven, Conn., 1951; and his *W.H. Auden*, London, 1958.

Ayala, see Pérez de Ayala.

## B

**Babel**, Isaak [Emmanuilovich] (1894-1939 or 1940), Russian short story writer, born in the ghetto of Odessa, discovered and encouraged as a writer by Maxim Gorky (q.v.), was the only true inheritor of the talent of Turgenev and Chekhov. The greater part of his writing, so far as is known in the West, consists of short stories; but since these are most of them autobiographical, it is possible to reconstruct his life with some detail and accuracy. At ten he was to see his family shop looted and his father kneeling vainly in the street to a Cossack officer in yellow gloves who "rode slowly, not looking right or left. He rode as though through a mountain pass, where one can only look ahead."

As soon as he was able, Babel escaped, first to Kiev, then to St Petersburg, where he endured two years of the frosty Russian equivalent of Grub Street life. Here he encountered Maxim Gorky. He served in the Tsar's army on the Rumanian front, and, after the Revolution, in a number of campaigns with the Bolsheviks, culminating in his appointment as a supply officer to Budenny's Cossacks during the ill-starred Polish adventure of 1920. He began his more serious writing in the early twenties; and from his experience with the Cossacks came Babel's principal work, the stories collected in *Konarmiya* (1926, tr. as *Red Cavalry*, 1929).

His position could not have been more anomalous. In the first place there was the paradox of the Cossacks, the traditional instruments of Tsarist oppression, fighting on the Revolutionary side. But this was nothing to the paradox of a Jew, a man "with specta-

Surrealists have used in their way; like a Dali or like a Magritte (*l'œuf de coucou*), he has created a poetry at once personal and a pastiche of accepted modes; and he has used it in collection after collection – *Continual Dew* (1937), *Old Lights for New Chancels* (1940), *New Bats in Old Belfries* (1945), and *A Few Late Chrysanthemums* (1954) – all summed in his *Collected Poems* (1958), to satirize (himself a cuckoo's egg in the nest) the ways of being of those who automatically accept such modes of sound.

Yet matters are not so simple; "satirize" is too strong. In his themes of a nostalgia which is not quite sentimentality, in his evocation of buildings and places which were the velvet-lined shell of a once secure and prosperous bourgeoisie – Victorian churches, residential suburbs, Surrey highlands, Cornish summer holiday shores; in his celebration of the beefy tennis-girl; in his Anglican's fun and in his sudden appalling onsets of the fear of death, he loves what he mocks – and also compensates for what he was not – to such a degree that the other nestlings take the hatched cuckoo in their nest, with some justice, as one of themselves after all; the cuckoo also naturalizing himself as one of the species – until this poet is now well on the way to becoming established, by democratic-televisionary means, as the *arbiter elegantiarum* of the English.

Decidedly he is a provincial poet of local interest, harping on local associations, facile and happy in his form. Borrowing his metres, he makes each of them his own: the nostalgic "Ewemilking" metre, for instance, or the "Graves of Blarney" metre. By appealing through the same dual reactions in himself both to the foolishly reactionary and the wisely reactionary with no great care or ear for poetry, he has become today's best-selling poet in England – witness the success of his autobiographical poem, *Summoned by Bells* (1960).

See also the American selection of his poems *Slick but not Streamlined*, 1947, introduced by W.H. Auden. Betjeman is himself to blame if his poems invite too much a sociological criticism. The most discerning account of him is Philip Larkin's essay *Betjeman en Bloc*, in *Listen*, III, 2, spring, 1959.

**Betti, Ugo** (1892-1953), Italian dramatist, born at Camerino, was by profession a magistrate, occupying so to say the royal box in the play of the courts. He had published several volumes of lyric poetry and a number of short stories before taking to the theatre.

His first play *La padrona* was produced in 1927, after which came *La casa sull'acqua* (1929) and *Un albergo sul porto* (1933); all three were dramas of low life whose surface realism Betti could use to frame his strong ethical concerns. *Un albergo sul porto*, set in a cheap hotel frequented by dockside characters, is the most dramatically realized of the three. The chambermaid Maria is in love with Diego, but in his absence is seduced by Simone, the proprietor of the hotel. Diego, returning to marry her, finds her pregnant. The play ends with all the derelicts and down-and-outs clubbing together to help Maria with gifts of food, money and clothes, so that she can run away and have her child in happier surroundings: there is good in even the worst of us.

Betti at this time had more than one manner, and other plays differ in outlook and style. *La donna sullo scudo* (1927) is a fable which is set outside time and space, *L'isola meravigliosa* (1930) is a dance-drama about emperors and magic islands, *Il diluvio* (1931) a farce satirizing the ideals of the bourgeoisie. This rather shiny theme Betti took up again in his plays of the later thirties and forties, for instance in *Una bella domenica di settembre* (1937), set, not in Italy, but in one of the Nordic countries, a play in which two middle-aged people, a clerk and a housewife, attempt to rid themselves of the dull routine of their lives, but eventually find themselves submerged by the weight and force of the conventions that had been stifling them for years. Frustrated, they revert to being their commonplace, impersonal selves. The idea was not exactly fresh in 1937, and it served Betti no better than it served J.B. Priestley who used it nearly twenty years later in *Mr Kettle and Mrs Moon*.

*Frana allo scalo nord* (1933), *Il cacciatore d'anitre* (1940), and *Notte in casa del ricco* (1942) are plays with an abstract quality, which frequently use symbolism, and are, it must be admitted, a good deal too wordy. These foreshadow the achievement of Betti's last plays in the fifties. The first of this group, *Frana allo scalo nord*, is a play with a social conscience. Justice is its subject: the possibility or impossibility of strict, impartial justice. Betti answers his own questions with a humanity and compassion which make this one of his best things. In the other two Betti's concern for people tends to get lost in philosophical argument. The characters have ceased to have any reality for him: only the ideas are real.

Much indeed of Betti's output is not intrinsically

suitable for the stage, is not really felt in terms of the theatre. He continued to write plays during and after the war, most of them concerned with the problem of religious belief, seen from a strictly Christian point of view. The best of these are *La regina e gli insorti* (1949) and *L'ainola bruciata* (1951), which have been seen on the English stage as *The Queen and the Rebels* and *The Burnt Flower-Bed* (tr. in *Three Plays by Ugo Betti*, 1957).

**Blok**, Aleksandr Aleksandrovich (1880-1921), Russian poet, playwright, essayist, and translator, was born in what is now Leningrad and studied in the law and arts faculties of the university there. Brought up in a world of subtle yet self-deceiving refinement, of *fin-de-siècle* symbolists and gnostic thaumaturges, *salon* Pruffrocks and impotent Trofimovs, he welcomed the revolutions of 1905 and 1917; and his whole life, with the agonizing conflicts it involved, may be described as a search for transformation, for the renewal of his society, his friends, and himself. He was a passionate man, a visionary, and a bold and original poet.

The early poetry of Blok, as in the collection *Stikhi o prekrasnoi dame* ("Verses about the Beautiful Lady", 1904), was musical and mystical, filled with images of a restless yearning, its theme a vague quest for some embodiment of combined beauty and wisdom, symbolized by the tantalizing face and shifting shimmering presence of the Lovely Lady, the Mystic Maiden, the Soul of the World. This was the voice of an idealism still turned in upon itself, though it was clearly an accomplished voice. Between the unsuccessful 1905 rebellion and the First World War came the "terrible years" in Russia which, as Blok said, "hung on our shoulders like endless, sleepless, phantom-ridden hours of darkness". In this time of oppression and fear and disappointed hopes, Blok's personal disquiet reflected more and more the society he lived in. "On the Field of Kulikovo" (1908) shows Blok, through his historical imagination, hearing uneasy rumours of battles and sufferings to come. Russia and its singular destiny grew to be a main theme in his work. His genius seemed instinctively prophetic, as in these stanzas from "The New America" (1913):

The steppes: the endless, escapeless ways,  
The wind on the steppes, the wind... but now:  
Towering fabric of factories,  
Shantytowns, workers, sweat of brow!

Your wild and heartless distances  
Are still as wild, and yet are changed:  
You gaze at me with a new face,  
And the old vision goes estranged.

Black coal – the catacombed messiah,  
Black coal – the tsar, the bridegroom too,  
And you the fearless bride, my Russia –  
O throat of stone such song breaks through!

Coal rolls and grumbles, salt lies white,  
The iron ore begins to roar...  
Empty steppes in a new starlight:  
My nova, my America, soar!

Blok's intimations of the "new man" and the new age were often expressed with such a vehement apocalypticism, such a Yeatsian embracing of destructive and metamorphic power, that it is not surprising to find him – Blok, the fastidious lyrical poet of the Divine Maiden – exclaiming ironically: "Ah, I am a hooligan, a hooligan!" To understand his irony, however, and to be clearer about his two famous poems of January, 1918, *Dvenadtsat* ("The Twelve") and *Skify* ("The Scythians"), one should read his remarkable essay "The Intelligentsia and the Revolution" (also of January, 1918):

What then is our plan? – To transform all things. To make all things new, so that this filthy hypocritical tedious ugly life of ours will become a clean and just life, a happy and beautiful life... A shock awaits those who think the revolution's only gift will be the fulfilment of their dreams, however fine and noble these dreams may be! A revolution, like a thundering whirlwind, like a blizzard of snow, always announces the new and the unforeseen... The very pith of living is to lay immeasurable claims to life: all or nothing; to expect the unexpected.

These lucid, ringing phrases help to explain the enormous force which drives through "The Twelve" and "The Scythians", though they do not explain the artistic and formal triumph of "The Twelve". Blok's twelve Red Guardsmen striding with their guns through the Petrograd streets, with the wind and snow around them, the red flag ahead of them, and the starving dog at their heels, are very real figures, but they are also symbols in history, and so, though they do not know it, they are led by Christ, the prototype revolutionary and stumbling block to the complacent and the compromisers. No wonder "The Scythians" presents Russia as a Sphinx gazing diligently westward; these two poems amount to a question which Europe is still struggling to answer.

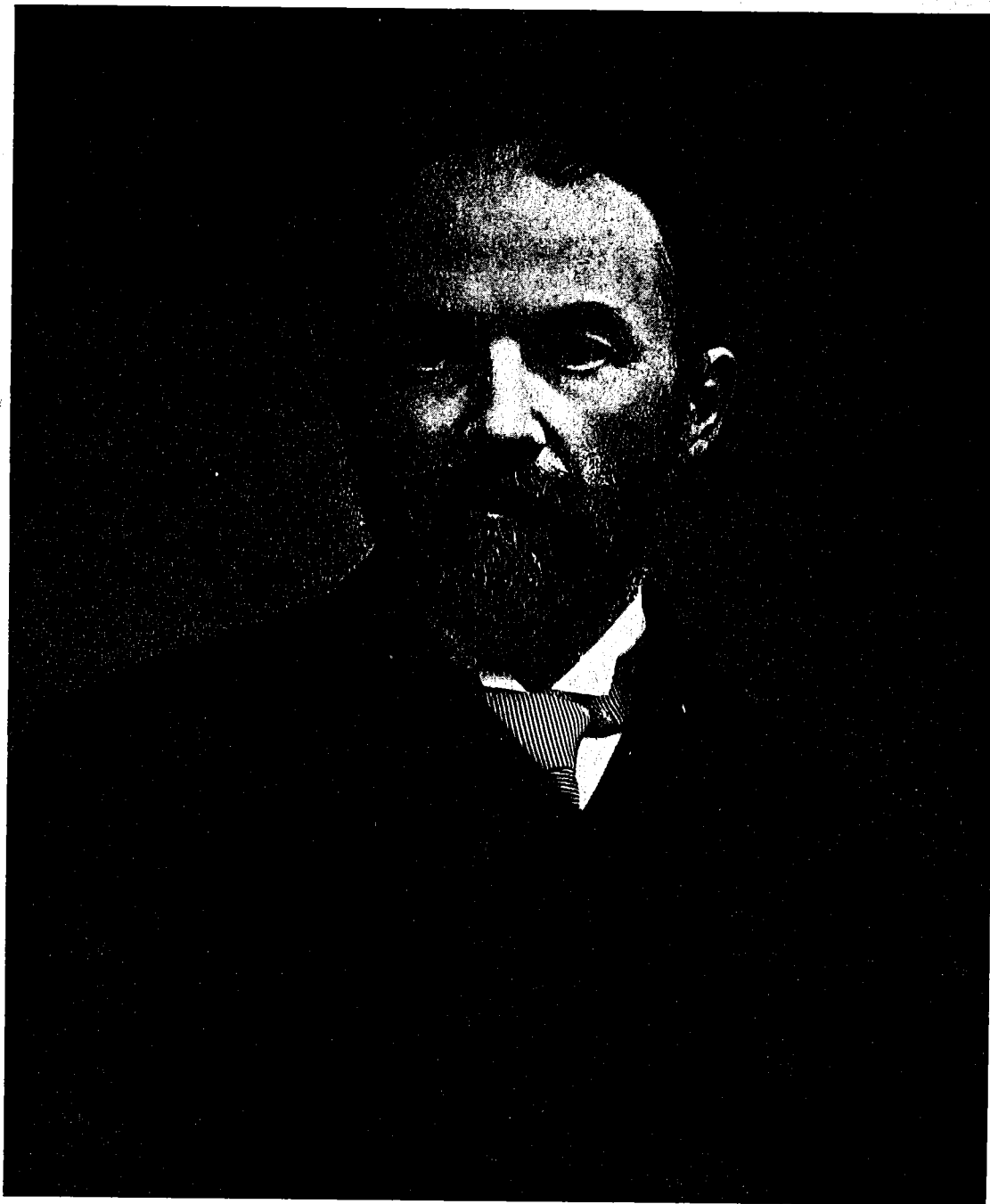


Plate 55. THOMAS HARDY (1840-1928), English poet and novelist.

## H

**Hammett**, Dashiell (1894-1961), American novelist, born in St Mary's County, Maryland, wrote at least one book, *The Glass Key* (1931), which was a remarkable novel as well as a brilliant crime story. Hammett used here an orthodox setting (orthodox, that is, in the context of the detective story). A man is murdered, there are clues and suspects and the climax comes with the revelation of the criminal. But within this frame Hammett managed to show, as effectively and less portentously than the patient documentarians of the later thirties, the corruption of American city politics, conveying with great subtlety the relationship between the political boss Paul Madvig and his bodyguard and brain Ned Beaumont, and commenting with under-emphasized irony on the range and variety of American social snobbery. This was done in a style as sharp and economical as that of Hemingway (q.v.), and without Hemingway's spoiling touch of sentiment. Implicit in the story was an attack on the nature of American urban society. The book exemplified Hammett's belief that "it is impossible to write anything without taking some sort of stand on social issues".

Hammett's career as a serious writer covered less than a decade. In his late twenties, while still a Pinkerton detective, he began to write stories in the American magazine, *Black Mask*. There was probably no single originator of the American "hard-boiled" crime story, but Hammett's early work stands out from that of his fellows, who were writing the same kind of violent story in the same clipped language, by the ingenuity of his plots and by something crudely veridical in the writing. His nameless detective, the Continental Op, is the central figure of many stories which have not been published in book form in England. *Red Harvest* (1929), his first full-length novel, was a dream of hard violence, deeply shocking to a public taste still accustomed to the detective story's polite evasions. This book and *The Dain Curse* (1929) gave Hammett a small, odd literary reputation. *The Maltese Falcon* (1930) made him almost immediately famous, and it is the pattern set by this book, rather than Hammett's other work, that has been imitated by inferior writers. What was chiefly imitated was his creation of Sam Spade, the ruthless, violent, but basic-

ally honest private eye who seems for three-quarters of the book to be a crook, ready to join the gangsters who are after the jewelled falcon, and to take his share of the proceeds; though in the end he turns over to the police the murderess he has slept with, and loves. Imitations of Spade range from detectives like the Philip Marlowe of Raymond Chandler (q.v.) who are knight errants in rather rough disguise, and psychologically battered Left-wingers (rather like Hammett himself) who are in the business because they are disillusioned about their wives or the Soviet Union, to the sadists whose violence is described by their creators with a positive relish.

*The Maltese Falcon* was the only book in which Sam Spade appeared, although he is the central character in one or two short stories. Perhaps Hammett regretted his creation. *The Glass Key* contains no detective as such, and *The Thin Man* (1934) is a comedy in which the activities of Nick Charles are not taken very seriously. After that came Hollywood success; a good many film scripts marked by Hammett's flair for dialogue; and no more books.

**Hardy**, Thomas (1840-1928), considered here as poet rather than novelist, since his novels are outside the chronological scope of this book, went to London from his native Dorset in 1862, working there at first as an architect. In the eighteen-sixties he wrote many poems which remained for the most part unpublished for thirty years. In 1871 he published the first of the series of "Wessex" novels, which occupied him for the next twenty-four years. In 1874 he married his first wife, Emma Gifford, the cause in him of many of his most moving poems; in 1875 he noted down an idea for an epic on the Napoleonic Wars, which thirty years later became *The Dynasts*. When his last novels, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891) and *Jude the Obscure* (1895), outraged conventional opinion, he abandoned fiction and went back to poetry, which was his first love. His transition from Victorian novelist to twentieth-century poet was remarkable.

In 1912 Hardy's wife died. He married again in 1914. His second wife, Florence, published a biography of her husband in two volumes after his death: *The Early Life* (to 1891) appeared in 1928, *The Later Years* in 1930. These books were compiled from notes and memories provided by Hardy himself. So they are not merely authorized biography, but must be regarded in part at least (the



earlier volume especially) as autobiography. In *The Later Years* Hardy records, under the year 1896, when the *Jude* controversy was at its height:

Poetry: perhaps I can express more fully in verse ideas and emotions which run counter to the inert crystallized opinion – hard as a rock – which the vast body of men have vested interests in supporting. To cry out in a passionate poem that (for instance) the Supreme Mover or Movers, the Prime Force or Forces, must be either limited in power, unknowing or cruel – which is obvious enough, and has been for centuries – will cause them merely a shake of the head; but to put it in argumentative prose will make them sneer, or foam, and set all the literary contortionists jumping on me... If Galileo had said in verse that the world moved, the Inquisition might have let him alone.

For these reasons, and with these aims, Hardy took up poetry again (he had hardly written any verse in the seventies and eighties). He also collected the poems of his early years. The result was *Wessex Poems* (1898), his first book of verse. He was then fifty-eight. Seven more volumes of lyrics followed, ending with *Winter Words* (1928), published posthumously. *The Dynasts* was his epic of the Napoleonic Wars, a vast failure in which he expressed his view of human life without the restraints which Victorian taste had imposed on his fiction. Much of this work was first written in prose and then turned into blank verse, a form which perhaps came less naturally to Hardy (like Swinburne in *Atalanta*, he had no living tradition of the spoken word to write in) than the timeless lyric choruses in which he commented on the action spread out panoramically below. In *The Dynasts* Hardy developed the belief – found in *Tess* and *Jude*, in Aeschylus and in some modern philosophers, for instance Schopenhauer – that the universe is governed by Necessity. It is a pessimistic world-picture, which Hardy often defended; he writes in one of his note-books in 1895: "Was there ever any great poetry which was *not* pessimistic?" He had reached his sombre view of the human condition with the deliberateness of "one who, past doubtings all, waits in unhope". To compare, say, his "A Necessitarian's Epitaph" with a lyric by Housman (q.v.) is to isolate an element of hysterical posturing in Housman's pessimism which is absent from Hardy's mature and steadfast vision.

Well, World, you have kept faith with me,  
Kept faith with me;  
Upon the whole you have proved to be  
Much as you said you were,

he wrote in a poem for his eighty-sixth birthday, to which he gave the characteristic title "He Never Expected Much".

The technique of Hardy's lyrics is not spectacular. He is fond of repetitions (as in that quotation), he occasionally coins a new word or revives an old one ("daysman", "gaying", "hap", "ween"), he rhymes outside the narrow convention, outside expectation; he likes considerable variation of form (in this one of his masters was the learned Victorian poet, William Barnes, his friend and neighbour), yet within the imperative of form his style is natural and conversational, like that of his successors, Robert Frost, Robert Graves, John Crowe Ransom, and W. H. Auden (qq.v.) and unlike the style of his Victorian predecessors, Barnes again excepted.

He felt an analogy between poems and architecture, seeking to achieve a "Gothic" spontaneity or irregularity in his metres and stanzas, working by stress, not syllables, and by "poetic texture rather than poetic veneer" (see the passage – his own? – on the reception of his poems in the second volume of the biography, pp. 78-9). Also he gives rhythmical evidence of having read Browning, Coventry Patmore, Barnes and Swinburne.

Hardy combined great powers of observation ("he was a man who used to notice such things", as he says in his poem "Afterwards") with a reflective irony and wryness. The poems in the little group, *Satires of Circumstance* (1911), are notes on the relationship between men and women, in which he contrasts outward conformity with the secret lives underneath. When he writes of love, it is usually of love frustrated or lost, as in "A Broken Appointment" (in *Poems of the Past and Present*, 1901), or in the poems recalling the courtship of his first wife, in Cornwall, notably "The Voice", "After a Journey", "The Phantom Horsewoman" (in *Satires of Circumstance*) and "He Prefers her Earthy" (in *Moments of Vision*, 1917); he is always conscious of the irony by which time mocks human pretensions, and of the shutting up of the excellent scene:

Closed were the kingcups; and the mead  
Dripped in monotonous green,  
Though the day's morning sheen  
Had shown it golden and honeybee'd;  
Closed were the kingcups; and the mead  
Dripped in monotonous green...  
("Overlooking the River Stour")

In a number of poems, for example "The Imperipient" in the *Wessex Poems* of 1898, Hardy considers the illusions, such as natural beauty or religion, by which men live, and his own inability to be comforted by them. In "An Experience" (the first experience of meeting Emma Gifford?), in *Late Lyrics and Earlier* (1922), he notices the astonishment caused him by a "new afflation", "an aura zephyring round", adding

The hills in samewise to me  
Spoke, as they grayly gazed,  
— First hills to speak so yet!  
The thin-edged breezes blew me  
What I, though cobwebbed, crazed,  
Was never to forget,  
My friend,  
Was never to forget!

In "The Darkling Thrush" (1900) he symbolizes this same inability by the winter song of the aged thrush which he could think told of

Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew  
And I was unaware.

Yet he is prepared to give these fancies every consideration as in "The Oxen" (in *Moments of Vision*) in which he says he would like to find that the cattle in the byre were kneeling at midnight on Christmas Eve, according to the legend.

At times Hardy's sense of human ill is so intense that he is prepared to imagine God must share it too, and to create divine sanction for human despair "and wonder if man's consciousness was a mistake of God's". He defended his poems against fashionable romantic escapism by labelling them "explorations of reality". Hardy is a man plodding conscientiously and responsibly through life, taking fresh notes all the time into his eighties, never losing his interest in life, dutifully prepared to alter his world-view should the evidence warrant this, but never finding reason to do so. His consistency, and his deep sympathy with human struggles, his ingenious lyrical freshness, set him among the greatest poets of this century, as one, in his own terms, and as other poets now acknowledge, who carried the flame of poetry a stage further.

Hardy wrote — or published — nearly a thousand poems. Besides those already mentioned, the essence of him is to be found in "Neutral Tones", "Rome: The Vatican: Salla delle Muse", "Lausanne: In Gibbon's Old Garden", "To an Unborn Pauper Child"

"The To-Be-Forgotten", "A Trampwoman's Tragedy" (the poem Hardy considered his best), "At a Country Fair", and in his poem (published oddly enough in the *London Times*) on the armistice of 1918, "And There Was a Great Calm".

All of Hardy's poems, except *The Dynasts* with its choruses and lyrics, are to be found in the *Collected Poems of Thomas Hardy*, reprinted in 1952. *Thomas Hardy's Notebooks*, ed. Evelyn Hardy, London, 1955, are a disappointing supplement to the *Early Life and Later Years*. There is criticism worth reading — especially by John Crowe Ransom and W.H. Auden — in the *Southern Review's* centennial number on Hardy, for the summer of 1940. See also *Some Recollections by Emma Hardy with some Relevant Poems by Thomas Hardy*, London, 1961.

Hecht, Anthony (1923– ), American poet, born in New York, aims, according to the epigraph to his book *A Summoning of Stones* (1954), "to call stones themselves to their ideal places and enchant the very substance and skeleton of the world". He is pre-occupied, as this quotation from Santayana suggests, with the right moral deduction from the *donnée* in each poem; and so far his writing adheres texturally, as well as by a metaphysical and "witty" assurance. At times he is a little Audenesque. Incidental yet charmingly decorative images and a certain "indirection" or sideways approach also suggest an indebtedness to Wallace Stevens.

He will write such lines as "My demoiselle, the cats are in the street", and in "La Condition Botanique" he sees the Garden of Eden as a museum piece, a Botanical Garden to be inspected during visiting hours. Most of his poems are very different though, in substance, and in tightness of texture, and a knobby personal rhythm. Wittiness only preludes or contains a tough earnestness — for instance in "Japan":

... They were very poor.  
The holy mountain was not moved to speak.  
Wind at the paper door  
Offered them snow out of its hollow peak.

Human endeavour clumsily betrays  
Humanity. Their excrement served in this;  
For planting rice in water, they would raise  
Schistogomiasis  
Japonica, that enters through  
The pores into the avenue  
And orbit of the blood, where it may foil  
The heart and kill, or settle in the brain.  
This fruit of their nightsoil  
Thrives in the skull, where it is called insane.



Plate 79. LOUIS MACNEICE (1907- ), Anglo-Irish poet; photograph taken in 1953  
at the funeral of Dylan Thomas.

Congress in 1939, and then was influential in the Roosevelt administration as Director of the Office of Facts and Figures. In 1944-5 as Assistant Secretary of State he had a hand in drafting the constitution of Unesco. In 1949 he went to Harvard as Boylston Professor of Rhetoric.

Where was the poet behind this activity? MacLeish has shifted from extreme and deliberate subjectivity, as in *The Hamlet of A. MacLeish* of 1928, to advocacy in the extreme sense, of "engagement" and "committal", in his essays *Poetry and Opinion* (1950).

The MacLeish of the twenties called poetry "involute" from politics and current affairs; the later MacLeish has been well described as "a phenomenon of our time and culture: poet, scholar, gentleman and librarian."

MacLeish's earlier verse, as in *The Hamlet of A. MacLeish*, is marred by the clash of egoistic theme and heavily rhetorical manner. The emphasis is all on style and exposition, and MacLeish was not happy until he found an overtly "public" theme in the conquest of Mexico, the result of which was his long poem *Conquistador* (1932).

In 1937 MacLeish, descending from the ivory tower he had uneasily occupied in the twenties, stated at the Congress of American writers that, vis-à-vis fascism, writers who contended for freedom were willy-nilly "engaged" and, as a wholly committed liberal and rhetorician, he has less in him to offend those who are diagrammatically opposed to him in their literary views than perhaps any other similarly orientated writer. His poetry does not go very deep, and there is little more tension in his verse-drama – for instance, in *This Music Crept by Me on the Waters* (1953), which has been described with some justice as a "mood-play", though it performs better than it reads. But in his plays he does catch speech rhythms with effect.

**MacNeice, Louis** (1907- ), Anglo-Irish poet, born in Belfast, son of an Irish Protestant bishop and an Irish mother, both from Connemara, was educated at an English public school (Marlborough) and at the University of Oxford, and has lived most of his life in London; a free citizen of mixed environments.

His first volume of verse, *Blind Fireworks* (a title characteristic of his feeling for ephemerality), was published in 1929; and although its poems were immature, their (in a good sense, and partly a visual

sense) tinkling manner, their colour and conceit at once marked him as a very different poet from some of his contemporaries.

There has been an exaggerated, even remarkably callow and foolish habit of dividing poets of the last thirty years rapidly up in the Monday sheep-pens of a time-market, or a school-market, or an influence market – or a political one. For what it is worth, it may be remarked that Louis MacNeice veered less than, say, W.H. Auden (q.v.) in his earlier work, to ideas of poetry as a means of political action, statement or committedness, in a decade which began with world depression, had its emotional climax in the Spanish Civil War, and ended with the war against fascism. Asked if he took his stand "with any political or politico-economist party or creed", his reply was "No. In weaker moments I wish I could" (*New Verse*, October, 1934). In his "personal essay" *Modern Poetry* (1938) MacNeice pleads for an "impure" poetry, part criticism, part entertainment, a popular poetry which would deal with the problem, not of man in isolation, but of man in society. But he has always been less confident than some of his contemporaries in offering advice, or solutions to these problems.

His poems reacted against the esoteric art of the twenties, Joyce and Eliot – "luxury writing", MacNeice called it – with its aloofness

recalling things that other people  
have desired.

MacNeice quotes Eliot's line in his essay and comments that he and others preferred to write about their own desires, and to introduce moral judgments into their work. After going down from Oxford, MacNeice was a lecturer in Classics at Birmingham, where, he says in his essay, he realized that the "short square fingers stuffing pipes" observed from the outside and recorded as an Imagist vignette by Eliot, were the fingers of real people – "were, in a sense, my fingers".

Lyrical or at length, his poems, from the lyrics which appeared first in the early numbers of *New Verse* (the pages of which give the lie to easy fancies of a unifying "political" school of poetry in the English thirties), form a lucid autobiographical window looking both ways, on to man through himself, on to himself and man through nature. They have rococo qualities of movement, glitter, tinkle, selectivity, controlled by a critical sense of style and

an honesty of natural vision; also a fairly persistent note of confessional melancholy or acceptance, visible in early or recent poems:

...no matter how solid and staid we contrive  
Our reconstructions, even a still life is alive  
And in your Chardin the appalling unrest of the soul  
Exudes from the dried fish and the brown jug  
and the bowl.

(from "Nature Morte", in *Poems*, 1935)

This excellently sophisticated and *reconstructing* talent has its analogues in the order and colours of a Chardin, the order and the tea yellows of Poussin, the formal ease of a Horace or of a George Herbert.

MacNeice's world is the world he sees, knows, tastes – neither urban exclusively, nor rural, neither exclusively a world of artifacts nor a world of nature; if he makes a free use of modern urban imagery he does not use it in the Eliot manner, to express rejection, disgust and fear. If he uses rural imagery, he does not use it (necessarily) to express escape. His imagery expresses and accepts what is true for all rather than distressing or special for one:

And now the woodpigeon starts again denying  
The values of the town  
And a car having crossed the hill accelerates, changes  
Up, having just changed down.  
And a train begins to chug and I wonder what the  
morning

Paper will say  
And decide to go quickly to sleep for the morning  
already

Is with us, the day is to-day...

(from *Autumn Journal*)

His observed nature, though, tends to shape or construct itself to the artifact. When he once owned a dog in his London flat, the dog was a Borzoi, which bent in angles around the furniture, as little canine in shape or texture as could be. Urbane, sensual, hedonistic, with an easy style, a fondness for feminine endings, a flair for rhetoric, and a recurrent delight in catchy "popular" (yet highly individualized) rhythms, he sees both sides of a situation, without severity. In longer poems (such as *Autumn Journal*, written in 1938 and published as a separate volume in 1939), he develops his ideas freely, ranges from one subject or emotion to another, producing a kind of easily portable poetic hold-all. *Autumn Journal* remains highly readable, because of its concrete images, genuine

lucidity, easy rhythms, and supple style – qualities of all his best work.

"Praised be thou, O Lord, for our brother the sun"  
Said the grey saint, laying his eyes in colour;  
Who creates and destroys for ever  
And his cycle is never done.  
In this room chrysanthemums and dahlias  
Like brandy hit the heart; the fire,  
A small wild animal, furthers its desire  
Consuming fuel, self-consuming.  
And flames are the clearest cut  
Of shapes and the most transient:  
O fire, my spendthrift,  
May I spend like you, as reckless but  
Giving as good return – burn the silent  
Into running sound, deride the dark  
And jump to glory from a single spark  
And purge the world and warm it.

He continues that the room goes cold, that the flicker of the fires fades, that the crow's-feet have come to stay, but that we should take on trust that life is

The only thing worth living and that dying  
Had better be left to take care of itself in the end.

The passage shows his readiness to *accept*, and his belief that, although the civilized man should ask all the questions, he should not expect to find all the answers. It also shows his method – a series of statements (he is the least private of poets in his imagery) which form immediate responses to life.

Louis MacNeice assembled his many earlier books of verse into *Collected Poems*, 1925-48, London, 1949. Since then, two books have been published in London and New York: *Eighty-five Poems*, 1959, and *Solstices*, 1961.

**Malamud**, Bernard (1914- ), American novelist and writer of short stories, has been linked with Saul Bellow (q.v.) as one of the best of those modern writers in America who are specifically Jewish in their work. Bellow is the more obviously experimental, Malamud the more traditional, both in his devices and his moral concerns. Yet Malamud writes a highly original prose, transposing into English the rhythms, metaphors and usages of the Yiddish-speaking generation of American immigrants. These immigrants and their children, who are most often his protagonists, he sees as poor, humble, often embittered people, who are yet capable of a rare degree of moral growth and insight.



Plate IX. EUGENIO MONTALE (1896- ), Italian poet.

fact Orihuela), where, in *Our Father Daniel*, Paulina, the daughter of Don Daniel, marries a grimly austere traditionalist hero, Don Alvaro; Daniel is then virtually cut off from her, and dies unhappily. The sequel tells of the restricted way in which Paulina's son, Pablitos, is brought up, with the result of thwarting his love for the no less frustrated Maria Fulgencia. This sounds exceedingly and provincially Spanish; but in both these novels there is one figure who reconciles sensuality and devotion, the cleric Don Magin, who leads a spontaneously happy life at one with the exuberant Mediterranean vegetation of Murcia; other characters, Don Alvaro and especially Father Bellod, deliberately cramp the natural world inside them. The conflict between natural joy and repression is reinforced most subtly by the imagery Miró takes from nature and scrupulously elaborates with an all too conscious artistry. In this, as in the slow pace of his novels, Miró recalls Proust (q.v.)

A more extraordinary book evokes the characters, major and minor, concerned in Christ's Passion, the scene of which is transferred from the Palestinian end of the Mediterranean to Miró's end. In this *Figuras de la pasión del Señor* (1916, tr. as *Figures of the Passion of Our Lord*, 1924) Miró builds up the characters of Judas, Pilate, and Christ himself, in dense, meticulous phrases, which convey a certain human sympathy, but a great deal more aesthetic pleasure in static portraiture.

The word repeatedly applied to Miró is sensuality. Added to his urge for aesthetic refinement, sensuality does make his work evocatively powerful. He goes for intensity of description and evocation for their own sake; and that is both his strength and his limitation.

Miró's "El abuelo del rey", 1915, will also be found tr. as "The Schoolmaster", in *The Spanish Omnibus*, ed. W.B. Wells, London, 1932.

**Montale**, Eugenio (1896- ), Italian poet, and writer of some of the most striking, concentrated and distinctive verse of our time, was born in Genoa, served as an infantry officer in the First World War, worked with a publishing house, and then, till 1938, as a librarian in Florence. In 1947 he became editor of the *Corriere della Sera*.

He is the poet of three not very thick volumes. *Ossi di seppia* ("Cuttle-bones", 1925) established him; *Le occasioni* ("The Occasions", 1939) developed new themes and deepened the ones which he saw now in

the more sombre light of the nineteen-thirties; and *La bufera* ("The Storm", 1956) added two or three of his most remarkable poems among others which are rather wispy and over-private.

Montale's verse is unusually strong and tangy, yet subtle; its texture – in rhyme and assonance, alliteration and onomatopoeia – is apparently dense and rich, yet it often shimmers and dances with a taking lightness of movement. Exploration of intense individual experience, especially of frustrations, desolate moods and memories, perilous but persistent hopes, and moments ("occasions") of revelation and joy, merges insensibly with an exploration of Montale's own time and country, and of the frustration and hopes of a modern writer isolated in an uncongenial society – a chip in the terrible eddy of history. So in "Mediterranean" ("Mediterraneo", VII, from *Ossi di seppia*) he says to the sea:

Rugged, elemental, is how I would have had  
myself -  
Whirled about like your pebblestones,  
Bitten hard by the salt;  
A splinter cast from time, a witness of the power  
Of one uncaring, unrelenting will.  
The truth was different: I was a man transfixed,  
Watching in myself, and in others,  
The swift seethings of life – a man perplexed,  
Tardy to act when no act is destroyed...  
I wanted to find the evil  
That gnaws and rots the earth, the tiny lever  
Twisted awry that brings  
The structure of things to a halt; and I saw all  
The events of every minute  
About to fly from their bonds in disorder, and fall.  
(tr. Edwin Morgan)

Uprooting and exile, absence and perplexity, are common themes in Montale's verse. Places revisited emphasize a loss (in "La casa dei doganieri"); communication is like casting a message in a bottle into the sea (in "Su una lettera non scritta"); truth flashes suddenly, but it is neither the political arc-light of the factory nor the religious candle in the church (cf. "Piccolo testamento"). In a few of the more "hermetic" poems Montale is perhaps contracting out of the world of ordinary experience, though even in those ghostly phonaesthetic structures (where he shows some kinship with "pure" poets like Mallarmé and Paul Valéry, q.v.) there are many tantalizing intimations of life. Generally he writes within recognizable contexts and uses vividly recognizable im-

agery: fishermen hauling nets, hotel windows glittering, the rumble of distant trains, cries of children, awnings flapping after a shower, shoes squeaking over shingle, a weathercock whirling, an accordion being played in the twilight, the wind lashing the leaves, the sea thundering on the Ligurian coast.

The sea he returns to again and again, as a disturbing but life-bearing force. In one of his finest poems, "L'anguilla", he takes the migrating eel, in its heroic journey from the Atlantic Ocean up the estuaries and rivers and streams of Europe, as a symbol of some unquenchable urge, an urge towards the perpetual renewal of life, which is found too in man himself.

Montale is a stoic, but a stoic who is tenacious of joy, and, if he sometimes writes elusively, he is no enemy towards what is clear, towards the sunflower:

Bring me then the plant that points to those bright  
Lucidities swirling up from the earth,  
And life itself exhaling what central breath!  
Bring me the sunflower crazed with the love of light.  
(from "Portami il girasole", tr. Edwin Morgan)

English readers especially may like to gauge Montale's transmuting power in his poem "Eastbourne", one of the moments of revelation from *Le occasioni*; a translation will be found with other excellent translations, opposite the Italian text, in Edwin Morgan's *Poems from Eugenio Montale*, 1959.

There are prose translations in *The Penguin Book of Italian Verse*, ed. G. Kay, 1958. See T.S.Eliot's *Criterion*, June, 1928; and G. Cambon's article on Montale's poetry, *Sewanee Review*, LXVI, No. 1, 1958.

**Montherlant**, Henry de (1896- ), French novelist, dramatist, and essayist, born at Neuilly, demands from the reader the right balance between cultivation and temperament. If one likes his attitudes, one may make too much of him; if one dislikes them, one may make far too little of him. Temperamentally, and up to a point in subject, the work of this aggressive Frenchman is either headily attractive or repellent. He is pagan and Catholic, a romantic writing out of his peculiar self, who is against romanticism. He adulates – at any rate he exalts pride, pursuit of pleasure, the sun, athleticism, action, aristocracy, authority, force, blood, death, stoicism, but also a mutual tenderness. The aristocrat acknowledging the defeat of aristocracy, and perversely dwelling upon it, he analyses a "decadence" in which these cross-equations are at a discount; he objurgates

democracy (cotton-wool around the feeble), and women (softness without carapace, but pleasurable for men, though he believes in a mutuality of pleasure and tenderness.)

At ten years old he wrote a life of Scipio; at twenty-four he published *La Relève du matin* (1920), the young power of which has not evaporated; at thirty, *Les Bestiaires* (1926, tr. as *The Bullfighters*, 1927), after years of fighting in the bull ring which culminated in a severe wound. In 1927 he celebrated the active limb, the athletic young Spartiate body, in *Les Olympiques*. After years of active travel in the appropriate Spain and the appropriate Sahara, he published in the thirties *Service inutile* (1935), important to an understanding of him, and two of his best known novels, *Les Célibataires* (1934), an ingeniously constructed, economical, ruthless, satirical, yet in the end poetically moving history of the uselessness of two elderly aristocrats, and *Les Jeunes Filles* (1935-39). These two were translated – *Les Jeunes Filles*, which is savagely against women, in two volumes as *Pity for Women* (1937) and *The Lepers* (1940); *Les Célibataires* as *Lament for the Death of an Upper Class* in London (1935), and in New York as *Perish in their Pride* (1936), at a time hardly favourable to de Montherlant's brand of French reactionary and aggressive literary egotism. His eminence as a stylist, his objectivity and his formal mastery (in his maturer books), his sharpness of vision, should now have a better chance of combating what is disagreeable or offensive or silly in his attitudes and convictions. He is a writer who has something in him of a self-chastened Wyndham Lewis (q.v.), or of a T.S.Eliot (q.v.) – "Anglo-Catholic, classicist, royalist" – if one can imagine an Eliot activated and prodded out of cautious reservations and qualifications.

A part of his unpublished novel *La Rose de Sable*, 1930-32, was published in translation as *Desert Love*, 1957. An authorized series of translations, ed. by Peter Quennell, began with *Selected Essays*, 1960, an excellent introduction to his ideas, a new version, *The Bachelors*, 1960, of *Les Célibataires* and *The Dream*, 1962, from his early novel *Le Songe*. Plays by him have been tr. in *The Master of Santiago*, etc., London, 1951.

**Moore**, Marianne (1887- ), American poet – born like T.S.Eliot (q.v.) in St Louis, Missouri, where she was brought up by her grandfather, a Presbyterian minister – must be the only creative artist anywhere, let alone in Brooklyn, who has found a constant source





Plate III. LUIGI PIRANDELLO (1867-1936), Italian dramatist.

tion was that of the provinces, moulded by the nearness of Asia, by age-old traditions and beliefs, with no clear aim, doctrine or leadership, only the peasants' burning thirst for fairness, equality, brotherhood ("Communism is principally love", Pilniak says in *Mahogany*). That was their religion. The peasants were pulling Russia "back to the seventeenth century" and had to clash with the Bolsheviks dragging Russia forward to the twenty-first century with their own religion – industrialization – and their own God – machinery. But the machine, according to *Machines and Wolves*, "in throwing her into a factory, would wipe out her uncomplicated morality and ethics along with the bloom of her cheeks". The Bolsheviks, with their hated, cold, foreign, scientific religion, were bound to win and force the peasants into the factories.

The Party did not like this part of Pilniak's truth.

He turned away from the revolutionary theme (in *Spilled Time*, a collection of short stories) to return to it in 1930 in the novel translated as *The Volga Falls to the Caspian Sea* (1931), which is in fact a version of *Mahogany* altered to fit Party requirements. But he could not dissimulate: his truth appeared in the person of half-demented war hero Ozhegov, "a true Communist until 1921", who is the elected leader of a group of "tramps, beggars and semi-lunatics of Soviet Russia", who were the real Communists expelled from the Party in 1921 for their idealism and humanism.

The Party rejected this novel, and Pilniak after this published only two books of moment, *O.K.* (1932) on his impressions of the United States and *Sozrevaniye plodov* ("The Ripening of the Fruit", 1936) about former icon painters trying to fit into the new order.

Pilniak's novels have virtually no orthodox plot, construction or main characters. He begins in the middle of a story, leaves off for a flashback, then tells us the end, interrupts to quote at length and irrelevantly from an ancient book or a wall newspaper; and so he jumps back and forth and sideways, with a sentence repeated verbatim several chapters later as the only link. Like his narrative, his characterization has to be pieced together. This disjointed style, which helps to create an atmosphere of chaos where improbable coincidences become likely and logical, fits the content perfectly.

Pilniak delights in juxtaposing archaic, colloquial, bookish and dialect words, creating new words freely, twisting syntax, grammar and even spelling, and

thereby achieving a kind of rhythmical prose of great power; his language too suits his matter perfectly.

See the collection of Pilniak's stories tr. as *Tales of the Wilderness*, 1924.

**Pirandello**, Luigi (1867-1936), Italian playwright, and Nobel Prize winner (1934), born at Agrigento in Sicily, published several volumes of poetry, essays, and a few novels before he began to write plays; by the end of his life he had written into the bargain more than three hundred short stories. He rejuvenated twentieth-century theatre, with his extraordinary gift of translating abstract ideas of philosophical concepts into the visual, the human, and the dramatic. His plays bring into the theatre a world that lies on the border-line between philosophy and psychology, where philosophical doubt merges with paranoia. The nature of reality, and the sufferings of men faced with uncertainty, are Pirandello's recurrent themes. "When someone lives", he wrote about his own work,

he lives and does not watch himself. Well, arrange things so that he does watch himself in the act of living, a prey to his passions, by placing a mirror before him; either he will be astonished and dismayed by his own appearance and turn his eyes away so as not to see himself, or he will spit at his image in disgust, or will angrily thrust out his fist to smash it. If he was weeping he will no longer be able to do so, if he was laughing he will no longer be able to laugh. In short, there will be some manifestation of pain. This manifestation of pain is my theatre.

Not all Pirandello's forty-three plays are of equal achievement and importance. The earliest of any note is *Pensaci, Giacomino!* (1916), which was followed soon by *Così, è se vi pare* (1918, tr. as *Right You Are – If You Think You Are*, 1922). In this play a clerk arrives to take up a position in a small provincial town. He has two women with him, his wife and his mother-in-law. The townspeople are suspicious when they discover that he never allows the two women to see each other, and finally they insist on an explanation. The clerk gives it. His mother-in-law, he says, is mad. She thinks that the woman he is married to is her daughter. But her daughter was his first wife who was killed in an earthquake, and to prevent her from being forced to realize this, he allows her this harmless delusion, and keeps her away from his wife. The mother-in-law has her own explanation: it is her son-in-law who is mad. He imagines his wife was killed,

but of course she wasn't, he is still married to her, and the old lady submits to being separated from her daughter, just to humour him. The wife herself is questioned. The truth, she says, is this: "I am the daughter of Signora Frola and the second wife of Signore Ponza... as for myself, I am nothing... I am - whatever you choose to have me."

Here, says Pirandello, the reality is in the appearance. If it seems so, it is so. The reality of the wife cannot be questioned more closely without endangering the reality of either the mother-in-law or the husband. *Il piacere dell'onestà* (1917, tr. as *The Pleasure of Honesty*, 1923), though occasionally performed, is of less interest, and *L'uomo, la bestia e la virtù* (1919) veers uneasily between satire and farce.

In 1921, Pirandello's first masterpiece appeared: *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* (tr. as *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, 1922.) This brilliant play moves on several levels, juggling superbly with art and life, illusion and reality. Its characters are ambiguous, and they retain their mystery. Are they psychotic or symbolic? The play moves with a melodramatic swiftness, carrying one with it by the originality of its technique as well as the striking quality of its imaginative force. *Enrico IV* (1922, tr. as *Henry IV*, 1922) is almost its equal, a great modern tragedy on the typically Pirandellian themes of madness and sanity, the mask and the face. Worthy of particular mention, too, is *L'uomo dal fiore in bocca* (1923, tr. as *The Man With the Flower in His Mouth*, 1928), the central character of which is a man doomed to die within a few months, from cancer of the mouth. The desperate frenzy of his grasping at these last days of life is poignantly portrayed, with economy, power and sympathy. *Vestire gli ignudi* (1922, tr. as *The Naked*, 1925) is another of Pirandello's most effective plays, and others which add to his reputation are *Questa sera si recita a soggetto* (1930, tr. as *Tonight We Improvise*, 1932), and *Come tu mi vuoi* (1930, tr. as *As You Desire Me*, 1931.)

See D. Vittorini's *The Drama of Luigi Pirandello*, Philadelphia, 1935.

**Ponge**, Francis (1899- ), French poet, born in Montpellier, who prefers to be called "poet", the inverted commas being a sign of humility. All the same, there is no poet in France with a fiercer pride in his vocation. Like Malherbe and Boileau he claims the glory which a poem reflects on the poet and

which the poet bestows on the world. The poems of Ponge are dedicated to the Genius of France and his ambition for them is that they may find their place with a fable of La Fontaine's, a suite by Rameau, and paintings by Chardin or Braque. He regards such "totems or magic objects of certain civilizations" as instruments of serenity, restoring men to their human measure. Braque he describes as an artisan who "has opened a workshop and undertaken the repair of the world with such fragments of it as are presented to him." Ponge has set himself the same task.

He is commonly considered the poet of one book: *Le Parti pris des choses* (1942), but this displays only the first stage in his development. Each "text" or prose-poem attempts the transformation of an object (Orange, Candle, Basket, Cigarette, Bread, Fire, Water, etc.) into an arrangement of words. He calls the butterfly in his prose poem "Le Papillon" "a flying match, with no catching flame".

...And anyway, it comes too late and can only ascertain which flowers are out. It doesn't matter. Acting the lamp-lighter, it checks each flower's amount of oil. It fixes on the top of flowers the atrophied rag it abandons, so avenging that long humiliation of a caterpillar shapelessness below the stalks.

These "texts" are more than virtuoso exercises in description; they are the scene of ironies and ambiguities which shock the reader from his acceptance of the way the thingness of things has become displaced by human interference. Ponge has a double intention in his poems: "to assist men to see things and to see themselves through things". He is a moralist who evokes a humanist moral from his contemplation of objects, as dexterously as La Fontaine evoked such a moral from his fables.

There were signs in *Le Parti pris des choses* that Ponge was becoming dissatisfied with an approach to the object which did not exact an equally rigorous approach to language. He began, at this time (1945-52), to publish his notebooks on the making of poems - prolegomena to poems - in which he wrestled with the meanings of words. Littré's dictionary became as important as the mimosa or wasp he was studying. *Le Carnet du bois de pins* ("The Notebook of the Pine Wood") is the arena of his most intense struggle; it has been reprinted, with other pieces of this period, in his book *La Rage de l'expression* (1952).

Ponge is now in his maturity; his poems, scattered in rare editions and periodicals, await collection. His



Plate 134. STEPHEN SPENDER (1909- ), English poet.

beginner is recommended to read not less than six straight off. About a third of them have so far been translated into English: it is to be deplored that they have very frequently been farmed out to drudge-translators whose command of English is far from equal to the precision and elegance of Simenon's French.

**Sitwell, Edith** (1887- ), English poet, born at Scarborough, Yorkshire, first excited attention in the nineteen-twenties, in that period of experiment when abstract music and painting were shocking or puzzling the conventional. Style tended to be separated from, and to seem more interesting than, content, and these heresies produced some mannered work which had a vogue. Edith Sitwell's poetry belongs historically to this period. She has herself described her early poems, *Façade*, as "abstract": "that is, they are patterns in sound. They are, too, in many cases, virtuoso exercises in technique of an extreme difficulty".

*Façade* is a sequence of thirty-seven poems written to be recited through a megaphone against a musical accompaniment by Walton. As an entertainment, it is clever and effective; and one should hear a gramophone record of the work before reading the poems, since their rhythms are often difficult to grasp at first sight:

And Robinson Crusoe  
Rues so  
The bright and foxy beer –  
But he finds fresh isles in a Negress' smiles –  
The poxy doxy dear.

A number of ghost-like characters dance in a strange ballet through *Façade* – Black Mrs Behemoth, Mr Belaker (the allegro Negro cocktail-shaker); along with historical characters brought in to tease – Lord Tennyson, for instance, and Queen Victoria. The allusions are colourful, sometimes remote, sometimes private, sometimes literary. Sometimes they verge deliberately on a charming and very English kind of nonsense.

In *Gold Coast Customs* (1929) Edith Sitwell attempted to apply the same techniques of assonance and repetition to something more serious – a prophecy of armageddon. Here the fashionable parties of Lady Bamburgher, a typical *Façade* ghost-character, are contrasted with, and gradually overwhelmed by, a vision of barbarism and corruption, depicted in

African imagery of plague, cannibalism, bloodshed. Less sophisticated than *Façade*, the poem has some of the rhetorical vigour of Vachel Lindsay (q.v.).

Edith Sitwell's later work derives from religious feeling. But she remains a romantic, and her imagery continues to be derived from her own personal artificial landscape, in which nature is shaped by art into a formal garden where all times and lands, all flowers, fruits, jewels, smells, exist together in eclectic exoticism. In "Colonel Fantock", her moving autobiographical poem about her own and her brothers' childhood (her brothers are, of course, Sir Osbert Sitwell and Sacheverell Sitwell), perhaps the best she has written, Edith Sitwell says "I always was a little outside life". Certainly her poetry belongs to its own world, though in fighting for it she has sometimes confused the means with the end. She is gifted with words, but she has seldom used them to convey any common experience.

**Smith, Logan Pearsall** (1865-1946), Anglo-American epigrammatist and literary gleaner, was born to actively Quaker parents at Milville, Pennsylvania, and died eighty-one years later in Chelsea. When he was a child his comfortable but enclosed upbringing did not preclude an affectionate, longstanding friendship with Walt Whitman; and on the day before his death he was telephoning to his friends a belated enthusiasm for George Orwell (q.v.). Yet he himself chose to live, if not at secondhand, at least cautiously, preferring at all times the reflection of experience to the bitter draught.

After Harvard and a spell in Germany he returned to New York and entered the family business. The manufacture of glass bottles did not engage his enthusiasm; coming to England, with which his family retained long and close connections, he entered Balliol College, Oxford, in Jowett's last years; and, though he did not much care for the spirit of the college as it then was, fell totally under the spell not only of Oxford but of the whole of that expansive late-Victorian and Edwardian England, of perpetual high summer in the well-kept gardens of a country house. (But he never quite hit it off with his fellow-enthusiast and expatriate, Henry James, q.v.). The marriages of his sisters, one to Bertrand Russell, the other to Bernard Berenson, still further established him in the highest reaches of European civilization as it was then understood. Becoming a British subject in

his cruelty and sex perversion all go almost unnoticed. He made pornography respectable because it was hidden by the beauty of poetry.

His poetry has to be read *en masse*, not one poem at a time, and then the resulting satisfaction is unbelievable: the reader or the listener is carried away by the ever-changing yet repetitive rhythms, by the euphonic quality, purity and clarity of the sounds, his intellectual receptivity is reduced almost to nil, he finds himself in the state of near-hypnosis, drugged and craving for more of the drug – and – he finds himself accepting Sologub and his art. This respectable-looking, tall, bald bureaucrat was once described by Zinaida Hippus, one of his fellow-poets, as a sorcerer, a caster of spells; and it is true that his poetry never fails to cast its spell over the reader and take him beyond the border of reality – which is Sologub's aim.

Obviously, Sologub's poetry is untranslatable. The verses:

Lilá, lilá, lilá, kachála,  
dva tél'no-ályie steklá,  
belyéy liléy, alyéye lála  
belá bylá ty i alá...

though their grammatical and syntactical construction is perhaps correct, have no sense because there is no logical connection between words, some of which have even no meaning (there is no word "lála" in Russian). Translated –

She poured, poured, poured swung  
Two body-crimsoned glasses,  
Than lilies whiter crimsoner than lala  
White were you and crimsoned

– these verses must altogether lose the spell.

While Sologub's sadism, perversity, satanism, his general rejection of life, do not, perhaps, matter in his poems, they cannot be overlooked in his euphonic prose. All the wickedness, filth and amorality of his outlook are fully revealed in his novel *Melki bes* (1905, tr. as *The Little Demon*, 1916), all the unreality, irrelevance and futility, in his *Tvorimaya legenda* (1908-12, tr. as *The Created Legend*, 1916). The hero of *The Little Demon*, Peredonov, a provincial teacher, is a mean, malicious, crass, stupid coward; everything that is decent and clean is loathsome to him; he denounces his colleagues and torments his pupils – all this without a trace of feeling, without a justifiable or even understandable reason. He finally develops a perse-

cution mania (his main persecutor being the "Nedotykomka", the petty demon, which represents nothing, which is Nothing) and in a fit of delirium he cuts the throat of his friend. The "positive heroes" of the novel are a perverse girl Lyuba and a young boy of exceptional feminine beauty Sasha, whom she awakens to the erotic life and corrupts.

Other translations of Sologub are *The Old House and Other Tales*, London, 1915; and *The Sweet-Scented Name and Other Fairy Tales, Fables and Stories*, New York, 1915.

**Spender**, Stephen (1909– ), English poet, born in London, has written plays, fiction, criticism, autobiography. For the last twenty years he has been prominent in the literary activities of the English, promulgating, in the wake of E.M. Forster (q.v.), a loving-kindness, the importance of human relationship, and the respect owed each to each by society and the free individual. Yet it seems likely that he will be remembered mostly for his first published book, *Poems* (1933). This short book of forty poems sustains to an extraordinary degree at once a newness and an awareness. The young Spender is portrayed in *Lions and Shadows* by Christopher Isherwood (q.v.): "He burst in upon us, blushing, sniggering loudly, contriving to trip over the edge of the carpet – an immensely tall, shambling boy of nineteen with a great scarlet poppy-face, wild frizzy hair, and eyes the violent colour of bluebells... In any and every sort of company he would relate, with the same perfect simplicity, the circumstances of a quarrel, the inner history of his family or the latest developments of a love affair." This is more relevant than it may seem to this best book of Spender's poems. "He would relate, with the same perfect simplicity", standing in the midst of his poems, new feelings of ecstasy, hope, sympathy, dismay, with a pellucid simpleness, yet in lines which often say much in a short length: "Passing, men are sorry for the birds in cages", "Early beds in huts, and other journeys", "I longed to forgive them, yet they never smiled".

The concern of these poems is love and *now* and humanity and delight, attacked by death, and not only by death, by injustice, by absence of love, by inadequacy, but by *then*:

The decline of a culture  
Mourned by scholars who dream of the ghosts of  
Greek boys.

(from xxxi: "The Funeral")

A few of the forty poems said something of machines, and one or two could be taken as statements of an ideal communism, or an attained, at least attainable, Utopia. This has formed a handy stick for commentators who could not adjust themselves to the freshness of a contemporary style, and for categorizers who like to divide writing by generations and decades, and to consign it, securely labelled, to a historical luggage van, going nowhere, and removing poems from the danger of being read.

That good, or love, resides in light is a sense running through the poems. It might have been raining five minutes ago, twigs of promise might now be glittering in sunshine:

Passing, men are sorry for the birds in cages  
And for constricted nature hedged and lined,  
But what do they say to your pleasant bird  
Physical delight, since years tamed?

Behind centuries, behind the continual hill,  
The wood you felled, your clothes, the slums you  
built  
Only love knows where that bird dips his head,  
Only the sun, soaked in memory, flashes on his neck

After a while this poem (xxvi) ends with admirable good sense:

But if you still bar your pretty bird, remember  
Revenge and despair are prisoned in your bowels.  
Life cannot pardon the ideal without scruple,  
The enemy of flesh, the angel and destroyer,  
Creator of a martyrdom serene, but horrible.

In other poems the love most generally effective is the love (as you would expect) which in its immediate object happens also to be the most particular – "The quick laugh of the wasp gold eyes":

Here are  
Gestures indelible. The wiry copper hair  
And the mothlike lips at dusk and that human  
Glance, which makes the sun forgotten.

(from xxvii)

These are poems of the always extraordinary encounter between receptivity at its pitch of youthfulness, environment and the first realization of loving. The particular time at which this consciousness matured – the late twenties and early thirties of the revival of torture in Europe – helped them to their pellucidly earnest universality.

Stein, Gertrude (1874-1946), American novelist,

poet, literary experimentalist, who was born at Allegheny, Pennsylvania and made her home, from 1903 onwards, in Paris, was a verbal technician to whom the American literary revolution has been greatly indebted. Both Hemingway and Sherwood Anderson (qq.v.) went to her to learn. "Begin over again – and concentrate", she told Hemingway; concentration on the tools of writing, the words and structure, was her special emphasis. American and French writers met at her house at 27 rue de Fleurus which, at the height of the American literary expatriation in the nineteen-twenties, was a salon for a surging new American literature.

In *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933), Gertrude Stein (for the book is in fact written by Miss Stein herself, in the *persona* of her companion) describes her literary development; her wide reading, her student experiments in automatic writing and her classes with William James, her interest (developed by her brother the critic Leo Stein) in modern art, and the growth of her famous collection of paintings, her concurrent attempts to do in prose something of what her friend Picasso had done in art, her belief that America is the oldest country in the world since it started on the twentieth century long before anyone else, her faith that "Language as a real thing is not imitation either of sounds or colors or emotions it is an intellectual recreation..."

In spite of her long battle to get published, she never ceased to regard herself as a genius and the centre of modern literature; indeed, in later years, she attributed her reputation to the fact that she always had small audiences. Her notion of language as a toy, a deculturalized object to which one could award new meanings and attributes (an American enough notion), and her sense of the importance of modernity, took her through a host of experiments with meaning and words. Her earliest stories, *Quod Erat Demonstrandum* (written in 1903 and published posthumously as *Things As They Are*) and *Three Lives* (written 1904-5) are the most accessible and structurally organized of her writings.

In 1906-8 she wrote *The Making of Americans*, expressing here a fascination with psychology and with the mental structure of her race. The larger theme, the attempts to disinter subconscious forces, and the increased complexity of language certainly begin by exciting and certainly end by tiring the plain reader. In later years her elephantiasis of the

aesthetic sense was matched by a dwindling of her critical sense; free-flow superseded a sense of structure; and her production, though immense, does not offer great rewards for much hard work (see the Yale Edition of the Unpublished Writings of Gertrude Stein, in eight volumes).

Her two popular autobiographies, *Alice B. Toklas* and *Everybody's Autobiography* (1937) show her gifts – and her considerable wit. “Composition as Explanation” defines her technical discoveries.

**Steinbeck, John [Ernst]** (1902– ), American novelist, winner of the Pulitzer Prize (1940) and the Nobel Prize for Literature (1962), was born in California, which provides the setting and material for most of his work. He was educated at Stanford University, and worked at a variety of humble jobs before embarking on his literary career.

A brief phase of experimental writing preceded his first popular success, *Tortilla Flat* (1935), in which he describes with affection and humour the world of the Monterey *paisanos*. After this came a novel about a strike of migratory fruit pickers in California, *In Dubious Battle* (1936), and *Of Mice and Men* (1937), the story of two wandering farm labourers, Lennie, a moron of great physical strength, and his friend George, who dedicates himself to his care. *Of Mice and Men*, an effective amalgam of pathos and melodrama, won great acclaim from critics and public alike, and was equally successful in its stage and film adaptations.

Steinbeck's generous concern with the plight of the landless farm worker found its most ambitious expression in *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), an epic story of a refugee family of Oklahoma farmers (“Okies”); their flight from the appalling conditions of the Dust Bowl, and their crushing disillusionment in the “promised land” of California, are portrayed with a moving realism and compassion. This novel has often been compared with that archetypal American “protest” novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and with good reason: to some extent they both depend on the pathos inherent in their subject-matter, and on the admiring acceptance by the reader of the authors' humane intentions.

Although Steinbeck's compassion often lapses into sentimentality, his best work is sustained by his flair for vivid and realistic description.

**Stevens, Wallace** (1879–1955), American poet, born at Reading, Pennsylvania, came to eminence with his first volume, *Harmonium* (1923), and followed this with five more volumes. In 1954 appeared *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens*, and in 1957 *Opus Posthumous*.

In the now vigorous run of American poetry Stevens had the uncommon gift of turning the subtleties of formal and logical thought into the illogical structure of verse. He was an innovator in diction and attitude rather than in patterns of versification or metre. His philosophical concerns set him a trifle apart from the imagist revolution before the First World War; yet he as well is less a poet of history (Eliot, Pound, *qq.v.*) than a poet of the immediacy of objects and their right definition. But as he defines, he asks, and answers, in the poem, the question, why define?

Diction makes his first impact; his use of language is rhetorical, and odd, and modern both in comedy and a sense of cultural remoteness. Like the collector decorating the wall with the horse-brasses his grandfather used as work objects, Stevens collected words. His self-conscious use of the poetic equipment (language, though, more than metre) brings his modernity first to mind. He shocks with titles (“Frogs Eat Butterflies. Snakes Eat Frogs. Hogs Eat Snakes. Men Eat Hogs”, “Two Figures in Dense Violet Night”, “Floral Decorations for Bananas”, “The Emperor of Ice-Cream”, “Le Monocle de Mon Oncle”) and with lines like the opening of “Late Hymn from the Myrrh-Mountain”:

Unsnack your snood, madanna, for the stars  
Are shining on all brows of Neversink

– to such an extent that the reader is so caught up with diction that meaning seems impossible to come by.

Yet the effect of Stevens' language is not only comic – it makes us think again at his use of words; he redecks the ordinary with surprises. To his theme, he comes always by indirection, philosophic as well as technical. There are, he says in one poem, thirteen ways of looking at a blackbird. Many of his poems (one might say all of them) are about writing poetry, and about the uses of poetry: in “Man Carrying Thing” he begins:

The poem must resist the intelligence  
Almost successfully.



# Notes on the Contributors

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*The Evidence of Love*, London, 1960; and contributions to *Commentary*, *Encounter* and *The New Yorker*.

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