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In view of the fact that the present volume commenced with the May issue, it will contain eight numbers. The issue of January, 1946, will commence Volume XII, and after that each volume will contain six numbers only. With the January number will be included an index to Volume XI.

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# THE NEW ENGLISH REVIEW

## COMMENTARY

(*Mr. Douglas Jerrold is abroad, and will resume his monthly notes on his return.*)

THE hope for this country lies not in any great leader, not in any political party, but in the ability of the people to re-animate themselves and their institutions. This will probably require some deep national introspection. Whether this mood could be consciously engendered is a matter for speculation. This consciousness could come from the press, if the widely divergent newspapers of this country agreed upon the highest common denominator of the known facts, and put them before the people: the problems that face post-war Britain—and especially the possibilities that lie within them. The B.B.C. could be the ideal medium to make the people of this country aware of what is actually taking place in the world around them, if it had an agreed direction. But then, who is to direct the directors? Who is to agree what is what? Organisations of intelligent and influential people might do a great deal to bring about this mood of philosophic appraisal and national analysis. The influence of the Fabians is clearly shown in the mental makeup of many of the best Labour members in the present House of Commons. This national introspection, which should be the chief concern of any honest, unself-seeking political party, will lie entirely outside the scope of politics until the political parties reverse their present conception of themselves—that they are the brokers of public opinion—and become national constructors. And that in a very wide sense.

Even so, even if Great Britain did manage to present the world with the example of a happy, co-operative, progressive, even prosperous, country, there are many reasons for believing that the other nations will not follow it. There are three Labour governments in each of the three Scandinavian countries prior to the war. Under them, it was freely and frankly admitted, civilisation, as we know it, had probably reached its highest development under capitalism. The complete absence of slums; universal, free, compulsory education—precisely the same quality for everybody; cheap, kindly, comfortable hospitals—utterly free of class privilege. Politically, the life of Scandinavia has, in modern times, had no effect upon the life of Europe whatsoever. Socially, even Great Britain cannot follow the example of Scandinavia's housing, its superb attitude toward

# LITERATURE AND THE ARTS

Edited by HUGH KINGSMILL

## LITERARY NOTES

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## LITERARY NOTES

### WHAT ARE POLITICS?

Times have changed since I edited the literary supplement of the *ENGLISH REVIEW* in 1935. In those days people assumed that a literary supplement was a literary supplement—that is, a collection of reviews written by individuals each with his own standpoint. Nowadays, if I may generalise from my experience since the spring of this year, a large number of persons approach a literary supplement with the assumption that it is a co-ordinated series of reviews planned to reinforce such political opinions as are expressed in the main body of the paper. On this kind of reader the mere contents of a literary supplement produce no impression at all, to judge from an article by George Orwell which I have just read in *Polemic*,\* a magazine whose policy, according to an editorial introduction, "is prejudiced in the direction of encouraging discussions about those trends in contemporary thought which we think are most significant".

Orwell's article is entitled "Notes on Nationalism", and is concerned with nationalism "as it occurs among the English intelligentsia".

By nationalism, Orwell explains, he means, first of all, "the habit of assuming that human beings can be classified like insects and that whole blocks of millions or tens of millions of people can be confidently labelled 'good' or 'bad'"; and, secondly, "the habit of identifying oneself with a single nation or other unit, placing it beyond good or evil, and recognising no other duty than that of advancing its interests". Among the eleven varieties of nationalism noted by Orwell in the English intelligentsia of today there is one

\* *Polemic*. Edited by Humphrey Slater. (Rodney Phillips and Co., Ltd.)

which he calls Neo-Toryism. The unit with which the Neo-Tory identifies himself, placing it beyond good and evil, is Britain; and the two chief blocks of alien millions whom he confidently labels "bad" are Russia and America. His organs of opinion are the literature of the Tory Reform Committee, the *English Review* and the *Nineteenth Century and After*; typical Neo-Tories are Lord Elton, A. P. Herbert, G. M. Young, and Professor Pickthorn; and among the writers who illustrate the tendency of Neo-Toryism or are psychologically affiliated to it are F. A. Voigt, Malcolm Muggeridge, Evelyn Waugh, Hugh Kingsmill, T. S. Eliot, and Wyndham Lewis.

*Animal Farm*, a fable of the Russian Revolution, revealed the poetry, humour, and tenderness in Orwell; but it seems to be only when he thinks of men as animals that he can see them as human beings and feel at one with them. In his direct relations with them he is always the party man, disgusted with all existing parties by repeated disillusionments, but still involved in the collective mania of the age, and determined to implicate everyone else in his own predicament. I understand this desire of his, but I see no reason why I should indulge it. Certainly it is harder to reply to a nonsensical charge than to one with some substance in it. Othello, firm and lucid in his statements after murdering and after murdering Desdemona, might have fumbled his opening sentences had an albino charged him with being an albino. But he would have become coherent, and I shall do my best to become so, too.

As I have never belonged to any party, I have no authority to speak for others, and shall therefore confine my remarks on Orwell's account of Neo-Toryism to its relevance to myself as a writer and as the editor of this supplement. The first thing which struck me about his list of Neo-Tories was the very faint connection existing between myself and eight of the other nine. Malcolm Muggeridge and I are old friends, but I doubt if even Orwell could join Muggeridge and myself the cell of a reactionary underground movement. Lord Elton I do not know; A. P. Herbert, except for a distant glimpse at the page, I have not seen since we were at Blandford twenty-nine years ago; from G. M. Young I have had two letters on non-political matters; I am indebted to Orwell for my introduction to the name of Professor Pickthorn; A. Voigt once wrote asking me to contribute a literary article to the *Nineteenth Century*, I replied that I should be delighted to, and, after two years of silence at the other end, wrote again in the same sense and with the same result; Evelyn Waugh I last saw when he was living in Golder's Green; T. S. Eliot I have met three times; Wyndham Lewis once.

These social jottings define the position I occupy in the Neo-Tory conspiracy to aggrandise Britain at the expense of Russia and America; though it is of course, open to Orwell to reply that I am a pawn in the hands of the big men; and that, when the hour is ripe, I shall receive my instructions from Professor Pickthorn.

I now come to Orwell's suggestion that, as a Neo-Tory, I am one of those who divide mankind into blocks of millions or tens of millions of people, label some blocks "good" and others "bad", and recognise no other duty than that

## "THE SOLITARY BIRD"

"Why should a bird in that solitary hollow  
Flying from east to west  
Seem in the silence of the snow-blanch'd sunshine  
Gilding the valley's crest  
Envoy and symbol of a past within me  
Centuries now at rest?"

"Shallowly arched the horizon looms beyond it,  
Turquoise green and blue;  
Not even a whisper irks the magic of the evening  
The narrowing valley through;  
No faintest echo brings a syllable revealing  
The secret once I knew:  
Down whists the snow again, cloud masks the sunshine—  
Bird gone, and memory too."

Love, religion, the innocent past, all fail the poet; only in his poetry is there a momentary respite from fear, so the metrical experiments continue and he sings, not to keep his courage up, but to occupy it, like an Elizabethan rebel weaving rich speeches for his scaffold:

"Not yet inert, but with a tortured breast  
At hint of that bleak gulf—his last farewell;  
Pining for peace, assurance, pause and rest,  
Yet slave to what he loves past words to tell."

The slavery which began by being a deliberate addiction, a heightening of the senses to assist creation, is now a craving:

"Yet not the loveliest song that ever  
Died on the evening air  
Could from my inmost heart dis sever  
What life had hidden there."

The final impression left by the book, however, is not depressing. It is invigorating to watch this septuagenarian revel in his mastery of technique. The daring of the verse, the attempt to combine old and new tunes, occasionally overreaches itself; but most is perfect. I particularly recommend "Lullay", "The Ditch", "The Creek", "Empty", and "Outer Darkness". Here is "Safety First":

"Do not mention this young child's beauty as he stands there gravely before you;  
Whisper it not, lest there listeners be. Beware, the evil eye!  
Only as humming-bird, quaffing the delicate glory  
Of the flow'r that it lives by—gaze: yes, but make no reply  
To the question, What is it? Whence comes it, this innocent marvel?  
Those features past heart to dis sever from the immanent truth they imply?  
No more than the star of the morning its image in reflex can ponder  
Can he tell of, delight in, this beauty and promise. Oh, sigh of a sigh;  
Be wise! Let your love through thought's labyrinths happily wander;  
Let your silence its intricate praises, its gratitude squander;  
But of speech, not a word: just a smile. Beware of the evil eye!"

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## LORCA AGAIN

GARCÍA LORCA. By Edwin Honig. Poetry, London. 7s. 6d.

Federico García Lorca was assassinated by soldiers of General Franco's army shortly after the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. There was no excuse for the crime, and none has ever been offered. Lorca's only claim to offence is that he was a poet admired by intellectuals and loved by the general public. He had no violent political allegiances, and the fact that he had expressed no warmth of feeling for the Falange could not, even by the Falangists themselves, be regarded as an eccentricity. He has become a symbol of what suffers under the guilty self-righteousness of Fascism, and it is right that he should remain so. At the same time it is possible to wonder if his tragedy is not being overplayed, and if we are not self-indulgently identifying ourselves rather often with the poet and his deplorable fate. Mr. Edwin Honig is aware of these possibilities. His study of Lorca is very badly written; it is overburdened with detail; his potted history of Lorca's literary antecedents is hard going for the reader; his analysis of the action of Lorca's early play *Así Que Pasen Cinco Años* must rank among the most exhausting and baffling pieces of expository criticism ever written; but at all events he does endeavour to remain alive to the dangers of martyrdom and untempered praise.

It must therefore seem ungrateful to suggest that at the moment Mr. Honig is yet another of those critics who insist on getting in the way. The works by which we could most fairly be expected to judge Lorca have not yet been published in translation in this country, and so far all we have is a small number of selected lyrics and his remarkable *Lament for Ignacio Sánchez Mejías* (we still for some reason try in this country not to be outraged by bullfighting). These have been accompanied by a mass of eulogy; it has even been suggested that as a poet Lorca is comparable in importance with Eliot, Rilke, and Yeats. To be a poet on their levels, and to be of interest outside your own country, you must have a quality of subject-matter, of things said, which is at least moderately apprehensible in translation. Rilke has this; and so far as we can yet tell, Lorca has not.

Mr. Honig says of him in his concluding chapter: "His drama celebrates the life of instinct; which is to say, it does not come bearing a message. It comes in the ancient spirit of the magician and soothsayer—to astound, to entertain, and to mystify; it also comes in the spirit of the jongleur, to invent a world and people with whose pathetically valorous lives the audience is quick to identify itself." Mr. Honig appears to discern no limitation in this, and like many critics he seems to over-value the element of popular song in Lorca. But this in fact seems as much a drawback as an advantage, so far as one may dimly see. There is no inherent advantage in staying in the ballad-period of your literary history. Lorca was a pianist and composer; and a practical knowledge of music may be of great help to a poet. But Spanish music, as "vital", impressive, and immediately attractive as any music, is at the same time extremely limited in character. (Of all prominent contemporary composers, de Falla is the least profound.) Few readers can fail to be delighted by the flashing succession of images in Lorca's poetry and by their daring *dérèglement*; but it is idle to pretend that it is more than a minor form of poetry.

With Lorca's dramas it is doubtless a different matter. But hitherto, for the English reader, criticism has preceded demonstration. Mr. Honig's book is one more preliminary announcement; he gives us detailed accounts of the plays, including the puppet and surrealist plays, and like Señor Barea a year ago he piques our curiosity about *Bodas de Sangre* and *Yerma*; but he has not the acute critical power which will sometimes convince without a full text. Above all, Mr. Honig has little new knowledge about the poet himself to give us; it is surely rather tantalising to hint at a major unhappiness of a personal kind if you are unable to give any details of it; nor does he offer any suggestion as to why the theme of two

of Lorca's principal dramatic works is sexual sterility, though no thoughtful reader can avoid being impressed by this fact: It is discouraging to record that as a whole the book really adds very little to the impressions given by Señor Barea's interesting study and by Señor Prieto's sympathetic and charming drawing of Lorca in the nude.

HENRY REED.

### VOLTAIRE

VOLTAIRE: MYTH AND REALITY. By Kathleen O'Flaherty, M.A., Ph.D. Cork University Press, Oxford: B. H. Blackwell. vii + 169. 10s. 6d.

This is a readable and useful book. Its author knows her subject. She takes him seriously. Yet it is almost a pity that she does so. For in Voltaire was nothing serious except the love of Voltaire. It is unfortunate too that she takes Mr. Noyes seriously. His was a gallant but not a good book—certainly not worth Dr. O'Flaherty's powder and shot. After all, it is not easy to be expert in a subject with such a bibliography, and Mr. Noyes is not an expert. Moreover, Englishmen are often mistaken about foreigners. If Dr. O'Flaherty had allowed herself to forget her controversial interest and simply written a life of Voltaire for fun, her knowledge, precision, and lucidity would have enabled us to answer the question, *What was Voltaire?* She proves beyond doubt that he was a liar, but the truth is, rather, that he was a lie: His whole life was a self-fantasy. He created and, with incredible skill and energy, maintained a pseudonymous screen personality. He was interested in anything that served to exhibit this fictitious self, and afraid of anything which might interrupt or injure the production. This was all his art, all his religion. He never failed in its service long enough to contribute a single fact or a single thought to the sum of human wisdom. But as an artist in egoism, as a showman producing the comedy of himself, he is unsurpassed. And what a comedy it is—disreputable and amusing, brilliant and contemptible, like so much else in the life of his century. Dr. O'Flaherty has the knowledge required to show us this queer thing, this glittering mirage called "de Voltaire" which dances and grins with an almost convincing resemblance to a human being, and the sincerity to show us also that there is no substance in it but salt and sand. Voltaire is a trick of light and atmosphere, a reflection of certain aspects of the eighteenth century, but not a man. The man's name was Arouet, a very different creature.

She tells the true story of the Calas incident and shows clearly enough that Voltaire knew nothing and took no pains to learn anything of the case. All he wanted was a stick to beat the *parlement* and the "white penitents". This was a good line. In the Sirven case he tried it again: "I have set my heart on bringing the Sirven affair to a successful conclusion: it will not create the same commotion as that of the Calas family: unfortunately nobody was broken on the wheel." The journalist had a keen eye for headlines. Fanaticism was a fruitful topic; it stirred people up. But how did he react to cruelty in itself? Well, for example: "They say that the Rev. Father Malagrida has been broken on the wheel. God be praised." "Someone wrote to me that they have at last burnt three Jesuits at Lisbon. This is a very consoling bit of news." "I am engaged at present in obtaining a job for a priest in the galleys." "While waiting for our theatre to open I amuse myself by hunting Jesuits from the lands they have usurped and by trying to send to the galleys one of their priest friends."

Did he care at all for the victims of fanaticism? Calas' widow he calls "that imbecile of a Huguenot". Of Lally he writes: "Do you care much about Lally's gag and about his fat neck which the eldest son of M. the executioner cut very clumsily at his trial shot?" In like manner he hates war—because it imperils his investments, and invents a war machine and spends years in fawning upon those

pacific monarchs Frederick II. and Catherine II. The father of pacifism is also the father of democracy—as thus: "This world (I am forced to agree) is made up of rascals, fanatics, and imbeciles, among whom there is a separate flock called good society: this little flock, since it is rich, well brought up, cultured, polite, is, as I were, the flower of the human race." And: "We draw near the period when men will begin to grow reasonable. When I say men I do not mean the populace. . . . I mean the men who govern or who are born to govern." "The people will be always stupid and barbarous. They are oxen who need a yoke, a goad and hay." Did he mean these things? The question is irrelevant. It was gratifying to say them. As he says, "we resemble monkeys" and "monkeys are more like mountbains than an organised people". He used language seldom to express the real and unimpressive thoughts of M. Arouet, but usually as the make-up of M. de Voltaire. That is one reason for his popularity with the uprooted journalists whose convictions are not their own, but those of their journal, party, government, time; whose end is not truth but publicity. He is the ancestor of Goebbels and of *Pravda*. This perhaps is his real historical significance. He first clearly understood the secret, which the other philosophers never really discovered, of emancipating language from sincerity and using it for policy.

Dr. O'Flaherty devotes half the book to Voltaire's philosophy and religion, to his assault on Christianity. She quotes the letter in which he describes his method, the method of the Rationalist Press Association: "I believe that the best manner of assaulting the infamous thing is to appear to have no desire to attack it, to disentangle the chaos of antiquity a little, to try to awaken some interest in ancient history and to make it more attractive, to show how much we have been deceived, etc." But surely Dr. O'Flaherty could have allowed her instances and quotations to speak for themselves, for, if Voltaire's wit makes one laugh, his theology is pure joy. It must be hard to find in any literature any grave nonsense more exquisitely ridiculous. It reveals that encyclopædic incompetence, that almost miraculous debility which besets the modern apologist of infidelity like a fate. And it is eloquent: No matter, Voltaire was too ignorant to feel any misgiving. Above all, he made a commotion and showed himself emancipated. It was part of the Voltaire make-up. It was delicious to speak of the miracles of Christ as "pranks"; of His Transfiguration as dressing up in a white coat; of the Gospel narratives as "blasphemies". No need, surely, to controvert this kind of thing. If she had used her material in a straight story and a psychological diagnosis, it would have been just as devastating and perhaps more amusing. It would have saved the reader from wondering whether she had picked her examples unscrupulously, when the fact is that she has erred on the side of charity. Mr. Noyes is the trouble here. Or it may be (one suspects it is) that she is too good a Christian or too much of a scholar to enjoy the exquisite pleasure of sympathetic contempt. She cannot bring herself to get inside the skin of this monstrous fake. Her fidelity to facts, however, raises the question which anyone who reads the Correspondence must often ask himself.

How did it happen? This literary technique, this wit, this astonishing fecundity and resource and command of a perfectly civilised language—all employed at top speed for half a century to turn out a mass of writing which its author was often ashamed to acknowledge yet eager to circulate—lies, calumnies, mystifications, insults, flatteries, sophisms, dirt without a single original idea or indisputable fact or honest impulse. He tells his correspondent with circumstantial detail of things that happened—only they didn't happen or happened otherwise. He generates a tremendous hate which he serves with clever and complicated methods of dishonour; but it isn't hate. He takes great pains to injure not only without cause but without even any interest in his victim. Why? There are many reasons. But perhaps the chief reason is that the real M. Arouet, who loves money and notoriety and the sense of power, has got on in the world, and so he must anxiously maintain the appearance and importance of "M. de Voltaire". It is a theme for Balzac.