ABOUT THE NEW CONTRIBUTORS

R. D. MARSHALL, born in 1917, was twice wounded in the desert, and wrote this story of personal experience in convalescence after losing an arm. He was a reporter on *The Glasgow Herald* before the war. He now instructs the Home Guard.

DOROTHY BAKER read for an English degree at Birmingham University. She married in 1936, and is now working for the British Council in the Midlands. She co-operated with Professor Hogben in his book *Interglossa*, which was recently published by Penguin Books, and has prepared an Interglossa Dictionary to accompany it. She has contributed stories to *The Listener* and *English Story*.

C. V. WEDGWOOD was born in Northumberland in 1910. She is well-known as a historian, and has published lives of Strafford and Cromwell, the standard work in English on the Thirty Years War, and, more recently, a biography of William the Silent. During the war, she has been literary adviser to a publishing firm, and is now deputy editor of *Time and Tide*.

B. J. BROOKE was born in 1908, and educated at Bedales and Oxford University. He is now serving with the R.A.M.C. in Italy.

DONALD BAIN was born in Liverpool in 1922. He left Cambridge in 1942 and was called up into the Royal Artillery. He has since been invalided out, and is now on the stage. Two of his poems were published in *Folios of New Writing* in 1941.

R. N. CURREY, a schoolmaster in civilian life, is now a lieutenant in the Royal Artillery serving in India. He is the author of one book of poems, *Tiresias*, and has contributed poems and translations from mediaeval French to a number of British and American periodicals.

LYNETTE ROBERTS was born in Buenos Aires of Welsh parentage. She has contributed articles and essays to British, South American and U.S.A. papers and periodicals. Her first book *Poems* will be published shortly by Faber and Faber.

Poetry of Edith Sitwell

THE PENGUIN NEW WRITING

Edited by

JOHN LEHMANN

21

PENGUIN BOOKS

HARMONDSWORTH MIDDLESEX ENGLAND

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CONTENTS

REPORT ON TO-DAY

*Specially written for this issue of Penguin New Writing.
†First publication in Great Britain.

And the air was softer and sounds were sharper
And colours were brighter and the sky was higher
And length was not measured by milestones and time was not measured by clocks . . .
And this end was a beginning . . .
And these words are the beginning of my thanks.

RADIO CRITIC

THE B.B.C. AND THE WRITER

I AM going to suggest that the B.B.C. is, or can be, the patron of the present-day writer. First, consider who has been the patron of the English writer in past ages.

Unless you count the mediæval Church, which certainly protected the scribes and scholars from the bad baron, patronage begins when the Crown grows all-powerful, and not until then. Chaucer found himself let down by Richard II, but by the time of Elizabeth, the Crown and some ministers of the Crown were the literary patrons of England. They provided money, some security from awkward questions about one's religion or personal habits, and, most of all, an enthusiastic and stimulating audience, to whose select ears a Shakespeare, a Marlowe, or a Jonson could write above the heads of the groundlings. Their disadvantages were those of personal caprice and dictatorial powers, which may have cost Marlowe his life, and which certainly gave Jonson and perhaps even Shakespeare some bad moments. Spenser felt the rougher side of royal favour. Skip another two hundred years and you come to the aristocratic patronage which Dr. Johnson attacked. He had plenty of reason to take a poor view of patrons. There was too much waiting about in ante-rooms, too many complimentary verses, too much schoolmaster, private tutor, and librarian work expected by the great Whig lords. But they were generous with the money they pinched from the country's funds, and at any rate they made a better job of it than the industrial bosses of the Victorian age, who succeeded them. These wanted solid return for their cash, and that meant paint, if it meant anything. So Millais earned £40,000 a year, and Browning remarked to Matt Arnold that they didn't get that by writing. The writer, in fact, found himself kicked out, unless, like Tennyson, he discovered some mysterious way to nobble public taste. Most writers said they'd damn well do without touting round for philistine patrons or die. In the nineties some died. The Georgians nearly all began poets and ended book reviewers for lack of cash. In the fifth decade of the twentieth century the writer is without a patron.

Or is he? What about the B.B.C.?

At first sight this may seem absurd. Patron and writer—surely that is, or was, essentially a personal relationship? How can a vast semi-bureaucratic monopoly organisation take the place of a personal tacit understanding between one man and another? But patrons change with the times, and in a bureaucratic age, when we are even admonished to blow our noses under departmental guidance, it is at least likely that the modern writer will get patronage in some bureaucratic form. In Russia he is already a State servant. What matters is not the form but the spirit. Since the writer in England is not self-supporting, what does he expect from a patron? What does the patron expect of him? Money on one side, and flattered dignity on the other is not sufficient explanation. Such relationships would degrade both parties. If we find out what James I and Shakespeare got from the royal patronage of the King's Players, we can apply the test to the B.B.C. and the modern writer. James got magnificent entertainment, not only for himself, but for foreign ambassadors. It helped his foreign policy, as well as gratifying the æsthetic sense he undoubtedly had. Thus he was able to indulge the taste for English plays which he had picked up while still merely King of Scotland, and to further his ungrateful country's business. Shakespeare got, apart from money, new theatrical conditions in the Banqueting Hall at Westminster, the chance to be spectacular, and use Inigo Jones's new mechanical stage settings. The future got, indirectly, *King Lear* and *The Tempest*. On the debit side Shakespeare had to pay due respect to the Government and submit to a finicking censorship about using the name of the deity; both points, incidentally, are insisted on to-day by the B.B.C.

Now what of that—and the same might be said, with variations, of eighteenth-century aristocratic patronage—exists, or could exist, between the B.B.C. and the writer? We have seen that there must be some common bond of literary appreciation; James knew the value of good literature even when he was using it to impress the Spanish ambassador. It is no good for writers to regard the B.B.C., though some do, as an easy way of earning a few guineas to pay the rent or an awkward bill. It is no good for the B.B.C. to regard the writer as a machine which, paid a few guineas, will trot out a literary feature on the latest war headline. In America the Columbia Workshop gives well-known writers a large retaining fee and a free hand to write what they like for broadcasting. That is a system whose good results have been heard over here, but which has not so far been adopted, and it comes near to being a real and satisfactory form of artistic patronage. Writers sometimes object that radio work is not an art form, but in spite of some puerilities it does bear a sufficiently close resemblance to what should be surely the job of a writer—that is, writing.

But how does the writer establish contact with a departmental octopus? How precisely will he get the moderate security, encouragement, appreciation, and opportunity to do creative work which the older patrons all provided? Should he join the B.B.C., become a member of the staff? The answer is almost certainly no. There are no opportunities like those provided by the Columbia Workshop within the B.B.C. as it is at present constituted. Whoever joins the B.B.C. will have to do a great deal of routine office work. He will become entangled in inter-departmental politics; his energy will be spent in composing inter-departmental memos. He might as well be in the Civil Service itself, and have done with it. A writer of a specially stubborn or resilient type might survive all this, as some have survived the Civil Service, and live to benefit the B.B.C. and himself, but the experiment is a risky one.

To whom, then, should the writer turn if he is writing as a free-lance outside the B.B.C.? Clearly, to the heads of those departments which are concerned with literature and the drama. Here he has some hope. These are generally men of some creative or critical ability themselves; there is a common bond of literary appreciation. They are prepared often to recognise merit, and either to put forward a writer's work to the programme planners, or to see that such work is commissioned. It is not their fault if their efforts are sometimes swamped in an unintelligible wave of general policy. They are the human links, which represent, as nearly as possible, potential patrons. If they are forgetful and harassed by other duties, that is a malady incident to patrons. Eighteenth-century writers did not blame their grandees for being temporarily caught up in politics at election time. There is no

doubt of their genuine endeavour to do the writers of our time some service, and that this brings them prestige for being the discoverers of successful programmes is as natural as James I's uses of literature. The only doubt is this. They can encourage and present a writer's work; can they insure that he will be adequately paid for it? Unfortunately, they usually cannot, for, as the B.B.C. is a bureaucracy, that is referred to another department, and the writer finds himself transferred from a smiling assistant director or producer to a hard-faced haggle over performing fees. Niggardly payment is one of the worst features of the B.B.C., as Herbert Farjeon pointed out in *The Listener*. His remedy, more performances for each work, is a sensible and practical one; at present a work is extremely lucky if it receives a second transmission. But even with single performances, a writer, if prepared to bargain firmly, can live on his broadcast fees. He only earns half what he might in the theatre and not a quarter of what the films offer, but he is usually more sure that his work will eventually be performed, and he certainly gets more intelligent appreciation of what his work is meant to be.

The final consideration is whether a writer's work for the B.B.C. always bears enough relation to his real literary aims. Can he, any more than the writers within the Corporation, avoid being corrupted by routine work that he may be asked to do? Those jobs, the equivalent of complimentary verses and the state effusions of a Poet Laureate, are not so large a part of the B.B.C. programmes that the writer need find himself with nothing better to do. As I have already suggested, it is unprofitable to argue whether radio can be considered an art-form. The only difference that matters between radio writing and any other writing is that you are writing for an audience which can neither see the speakers, nor turn back the page to re-read their words. That is the sole and simple mystery about what is known as the technique of radio writing, though the B.B.C. has invented the term 'radiogenic,' to try and keep up the end of its own writers. Radio writing must obey and use its limitations, like any other form. It is not to be despised by serious writers; it may stand between them and virtual extinction. There is no C.E.M.A. for the writer, no Min. of Lit. Stage-hands are being state-aided sooner than playwrights. I do therefore suggest that writers should look to the B.B.C., with all its faults, as their modern patron, and see what they can make of—not out of—the relationship.

And now—any questions?

Q. I should think so! What you say about the B.B.C. being the new patron of the writer may be all very well, but judge by results, and look what rubbish it produces in the way of original work! Fake Michael Arlen romances in the He and She and the Park in Spring style; propaganda plays full of pre-1914 comic-brutal Huns; ineptly dramatised information about the great, dead or alive, but always talking; oh, yes, and following the example of the theatre at its worst, some of those middle-class family comedies whose war-cry seems to be: 'St. George and Margaret for Merry England.' As a special treat, the more ambitious of these works are punctuated by squirts of music, commissioned from some reputable composer, but apparently coming out of the wrong end of the oboe. Short-story writing for radio is enlivened by that man-of-all-letters L. A. G. Strong—good luck to him—but the time allotted hardly allows room for anyone else. If poetry has been written specially for radio, I haven't heard it, and I'm not sure I should want to. In conclusion, can you tell me one work of any worth that has been written specially for the B.B.C.?

A. Yes—one. Did you listen to *The Rescue*, by Edward Sackville-West, with music specially composed by Benjamin Britten? It had its faults—a certain stiffness of dramatic technique, a lack of passion where the tremendous drama of the home-coming of Odysseus most needed it. But what a much higher standard, in theme and treatment, both author and composer achieved, when you compare it not only with other radio work, but with much contemporary work in other arts. Britten's music alone would justify a revival, and goodness knows why we have not been allowed to hear it again. Apart from that, doesn't your complaint wilfully limit the usefulness of a patron? A patron can't be judged merely on the work he commissions. What about works, not specifically commissioned, to which he gives a chance of performance? Did you hear the reading of John Heath-Stubbs's elegy, *Wounded Thammuz* the other night? The B.B.C. allowed twenty good minutes to a work by a very young poet of great promise; that means that half a million people probably heard this work

for the first time. I don't know what the sales of *Wounded Thammuz* were, but they certainly weren't that. Then there was V. S. Pritchett's neat literary analysis in his *Contemporary Portrait—Novelist*, again this time specially written for broadcasting—not creative work, you may say, but a very subtle and amusing piece of criticism. If these are not works 'of any worth'—but you probably didn't listen to them.

Q. Well, you may be right. I wouldn't know. But even assuming what you say is true—that the B.B.C. will sometimes encourage and commission original writing of high quality—*if* that is true, what about the feelings of the author who receives this honour? I mean, when he hears his work broadcast. Do you expect writers to be enthusiastic when they know in advance how their work will be mangled by the B.B.C.? A poet may like to know that his work will be heard by half a million listeners, but can you expect him to feel so happy at its being badly read? If there's one thing that should put writers off it's the low standard of performance in the B.B.C. We all know the horrors of the Poetry Voice, those readers who have learnt only too well their elocut-i-on lessons, in whose mouths the gristle and bone of good poetry is turned to be-oot-iful soup. What about those broadcast plays, in which all the voices are either male or female, and that's about all you can say to distinguish them. How often do we get the sensation that these actors and actresses—member of the B.B.C. Repertory Company, as the announcer grimly adds—are doing anything except what they *are* doing—that is, standing or sitting round a microphone, reading (fairly accurately) from their scripts, and trying not to rustle the pages as they turn over? No competent theatrical producer would allow for one moment the dragging tempo, the lack of light and shade, the unmeant and unmeaning silences that distinguish English broadcast drama from anything else on earth—and he certainly wouldn't fill in the gaps with gramophone music either, except, as a merciful provision, to drown the actors. Does any writer seriously wish his work to be treated in this way?

A. He doesn't, and when it is he gets as angry as you do, and probably decides never to write for the B.B.C. again. It's no good pretending these things don't happen; but it's as well to remember that they don't always. There *are* intelligent people concerned in artistic presentation in the B.B.C.,

and they do their work well. There are producers of first-rate theatrical and film experience, such as John Burrell and Walter Rilla; there are people of first-class ideas in the creation and criticism of literature, such as Stephen Potter and Edward Sackville-West. The real trouble about the B.B.C.'s repertory actors is that they are not chosen for all-round adaptability, but are practically all character actors, mostly of the same character. It is a football team of eleven left backs. One or two of these consistently raise themselves above the general level; Gladys Young can give a fine performance in everything except poetry. But a visiting actor, or more rarely, a visiting producer, can suddenly excite the air with moments worth remembering. Tyrone Guthrie, producing Ralph Richardson in a shortened version of *Peer Gynt*, did that; and Marius Goring, acting with Lucie Mannheim in his own version of Dostoevsky's *The Gentle Maiden*, had a quality which the B.B.C. at least recognised by allotting a second performance—it should have had six. It's the elocut-i-on schools and dramatic academies that teach elocut-i-on. And shouldn't the poets who complain be sure that they can read poetry themselves? I hate to record it, but the few poets who broadcast poetry are among the worst offenders. It may be nerves, but the result is just as bad on the ear. To sum up, the writer *can* get a good performance of his work if he is prepared to see that the right producer handles it and the right readers and actors are engaged. He may make himself unpopular, but with luck he'll be respected, and the result will be another step towards a better standard of radio.

Q. But why do radio critics in the daily and weekly press never seem to like anything on the radio programmes? I see that one of the B.B.C. producers you mention appealed the other day for a higher standard of radio criticism, but aren't all you radio critics crying out all the time for a higher standard of radio writing? If it wasn't for that, some of you would hardly be able to fill your articles. What's the reason for this universal chorus of complaint? Other critics quite often praise a play, a film, or a book. Doesn't this almost unanimous line taken by professional critics show that there is something wrong with the B.B.C.?

A. Or with the professional critics? I don't go as far as Stephen Potter—if you meant him—in demanding a Hazlitt

to write radio criticism. I'm not so sure that the B.B.C. has yet deserved its Hazlitts, but he was right enough to ask for a higher standard than it gets at present. The standard of criticism is low. Even the standard of accuracy could be improved. Some critics do not even bother to copy their details from the *Radio Times*, which, admittedly, is not a very exciting product of broadcasting (surely the B.B.C. could do something about *that*). Other critics do usually take the trouble to read the programme of a play or the title-page of a book, but more than one regular radio critic is guilty of not doing as much. The trouble is that broadcasting, like the strategy of a war, is something about which everybody has a number of floating but uninformed ideas. Instead of criticism of broadcast works, we get random suggestions about the way to run a broadcasting company, which would be more properly the province of a business or financial correspondent. I don't suggest that critics should give, week by week, a catalogue of programmes they have listened to, with good and bad marks attached, but when a critic boasts that he has listened to nothing, it really amounts to an abuse of the public trust in him. And that brings us back to our main theme. Writers who make a virtue of saying that they never listen to the B.B.C. and would never work for it are often just the people who should. They are neglecting what is to them, they say, an unknown medium, but one which, with their interest and co-operation, might be of immense value to them and to literature. I can't honestly suggest that they are looking a gift-horse in the mouth, nor have I suggested that it would be healthy for them to regard the B.B.C. in this way, but they do seem to be shutting their eyes to something that might solve many of the problems of the present-day writer. Anything else?

Q. Yes. Come out into the open. Which side are you on? Do you really and honestly believe that anything of permanent value can come out of broadcasting? Do you? Come on, now!

A. I—I shall appeal for a vote of confidence on that question! . . . Ah! . . . Now, perhaps, we shall have some peace!

HENRY REED

THE POETRY OF EDITH SITWELL

EXACTLY what a war poet is, I do not know. The people who heard calling out for them in the early years of the war were people who had till then shown themselves, one had thought, rather indifferent to poetry; and anything likely to satisfy their needs was not likely to satisfy one's own. But one's own needs did exist, though one scarcely noticed them until, unexpectedly, poems appeared here and there which reminded one of these needs, or created them and satisfied them. This is the classic process of poetry; and some poetry of the time fulfilled it. There was an early war-poem, for example, called 'Triumphal Ode, 1939,' by Mr. George Barker which was an unforgettable picture of horror and pity. To read it now is to recall exactly one's sensations during the invasion of Poland—and whatever our later experiences have brought, the war has probably presented no more awful picture to the mind; it was the beginning of the war, and it seemed the end of the world. Eventually there were other good war-poems, though never very many. There were the late Alun Lewis's poems describing with a most touching pathos, the shabby, unloved exile into anonymity of the soldier. These were strikingly simple and honest. Then there came the war-poems of Miss Edith Sitwell. They were unlike any other poetry of the time, and no other poetry like them has emerged. The world is, one cannot but feel, as God made it; and however much we may blame and hate ourselves, it is a world for the most part, and for most of the time, fatally unequal to the deserts of most of its children. I think that Miss Sitwell expressed this world with unexpected power. Two poems in particular stood out, the first called 'Lullaby'

> 'Though the world has slipped and gone,
> Sounds my loud discordant cry
> Like the steel birds' song on high:
> "Still one thing is left—the Bone!"
> Then out danced the Babioun.

She sat in the hollow of the sea—
A socket whence the eye's put out—
She sang to the child a lullaby
(The steel birds' nest was thereabout).

"Do, do, do, do—
Thy mother's hied to the vaster race:
The Pterodactyl made its nest
And laid a steel egg in her breast—
Under the Judas-coloured sun.
She'll work no more, nor dance, nor moan,
And I am come to take her place
Do, do.

There's nothing left but earth's low bed—
(The Pterodactyl fouls its nest):
But steel wings fan thee to thy rest,
And wingless truth and larvæ lie
And eyeless hope and handless fear—
All these for thee as toys are spread,
Do—do—"'

Almost all of our world seems expressed here; and there is no need to pick apart the layers of it. The image of the baboon nurturing an orphaned baby is unparalleled in its rightness as an image for to-day; and I sometimes think the poem which contains it could only have been written by someone who has experienced in maturity not only one but two Great Wars, and who can therefore get an unblinkered glimpse of war's real nature.

'Red is the bed of Poland, Spain,
And thy mother's breast, who has grown wise
In that fouled nest. If she could rise,
Give birth again.

In wolfish pelt she'd hide thy bones
To shield thee from the world's long cold,
And down on all fours shouldst thou crawl
For thus from no height canst thou fall—
Do, do.'

In another poem which appeared at a much later date the image of mother and child is returned to, again with great

symbolic force. This time it is the child who is dead; the mother says:

'But the roads are too busy for the sound of your feet,
And the lost men, the rejected of life, who tend the wounds
That life has made as if they were a new sunrise, whose human speech is dying
From want, to the rusted voice of the tiger, turn not their heads lest I hear your child-voice crying
In that hoarse tiger-voice; "I am hungry! am cold!"
Lest I see your smile upon lips that were made for the kiss that exists not,
The food that deserts them,—those lips never warm with love, but from the world's fever,
Whose smile is a gap into darkness, the breaking apart
Of the long-impending earthquake that waits in the heart.
That smile rends the soul with the sign of its destitution,
It drips from the last long pangs of the heart, self-devouring
And tearing the seer.'

What the poet sees in this poem is something wider and more generalised than the war: it is a whole social disconnectedness, of which the war, referred to in the last line of the poem as 'the worlds that are falling,' is only a partial symbol. There is, no doubt, spiritual disintegration coupled with this vision, but more unique in poetry is the poet's sense of the horror of poverty, want, frustration, ignorance, loss and destitution. They are more agonizingly portrayed than is usual, because—it seems to me—they are more distantly focused than they can be by the middle-class writer; and the writer bred to poverty is naturally not always in a place to see the contrasted world of freedom, beauty, grace, wealth and fulfilment of desire sufficiently well to love it and include it. In this remarkable poem there is something exceptionally wide in its understanding, as in its gentleness and pity. It recalls, in these qualities, another unexpected work, and a rather neglected one, Henry James's *The Princess Casamassima*, which also by the application of a profound and cultivated sensibility to the horror which is made explicit when the world's physical ugliness and its physical beauty are juxtaposed, achieves a poignancy beyond the range of writers who are compelled to start from other directions. The amplitude of Miss Sitwell's

later poetry, its wide sweep of feeling, which takes in agony and faith almost simultaneously, the repeated magnificence of its language, have sometimes occasioned surprise. So does *The Princess Casamassima*; but whereas James's novel is aside from the track, so that one is right to be surprised, Miss Sitwell's later work is the emergence into full power of things which have been either natively implicit or consciously aimed at in her work for a couple of decades. Her early work is, now, not always easy to read; but we may make fascinating discoveries while reading it.

Miss Sitwell is almost an exact contemporary of Mr. T S. Eliot. They have both in their time been regarded as *enfants terribles*, and Miss Sitwell at least appears to have enjoyed this. They have both become as popular, and as consolatory (or 'helpful') to the general reader as a poet well can become without compromising with popular or vulgar taste. Neither of them has in fact deviated from a dedication to the art of poetry and from the due relation of their art to the facts of personal experience. There are other points of comparison which cannot be ignored: and first the great sense of continuity which one gets when reading the work of either of them.

With so much art, so much history, and so many contrasting biographies behind us, it is almost impossible when thinking of artists of the past not to think of their lives as marked off into periods: one thinks of this man's early novels, middle novels and later novels, that man's last quartets, another's 'period of the great tragedies,' another's 'rose' period. It is difficult now for a serious artist not to think of his own life as having —or, more often, as about to have—similar configurations. Most artists have moments of dedication and re-dedication, and some, like Wordsworth and Dante, have told us about them. And, beyond this, it is inevitable that at some time an artist should see something before him more detailed than a mere effulgence, however wide and however bright: some suspicion of the successive instruments which it will be his destiny to use, some idea of the ardours of preparation he will have to endure in order to use them. Even when, for a moment, the beauty and accomplishment of so much of Miss Sitwell's work are set aside, her *œuvre* is remarkable both for its continuity and for its consciousness of this. And since an author cannot be so well aware as Miss Sitwell is of the before and

the after implied in any work she is engaged on, without the reader's participating in that awareness, one can look at her recent work, think of it in relation to what has preceded it and conjecture a future. It is worth adding that Miss Sitwell has also a strong sense of her own position in the history of English poetry; not her eminence, but her situation. She is conscious of the writers before her; and, like other fine artists of her century—one thinks at once of Hardy, Yeats, Mr. Forster, Mr. Eliot—she is conscious of the writers after her, and can bear to treat them with courteous sympathy in an age notable for neither courtesy nor sympathy between its generations. (It is pleasing to find in her latest volume a poem dedicated to a much younger poet, of whose work she had written appreciatively and discriminatingly elsewhere).

There are also two points of contrast between Mr. Eliot and Miss Sitwell; Mr. Eliot is a formal Christian, including in his beliefs a kind of assimilation of other ways of living; while Miss Sitwell is—I think— a formal pagan, with also an assimilation of other ways of living. There is a final and more important difference. Mr. Eliot is a man, Miss Sitwell is a woman.

The nun Hrotswitha—she lived in the tenth century, and was the first woman playwright in European literature—says in a prefatory *apologia* to one of her plays: 'Though the weaving of verses is hard for woman's wit to accomplish, nevertheless I have attempted in this small book to sing in dactyls.' Miss Sitwell, in a brief foreword to her *Collected Poems*, published about a thousand years later, says much the same thing: 'No critic can be more severely conscious of the faults in some of these poems than am I. The writing of poetry is at all times a difficult matter; but women poets are faced with even more difficulties than are men poets, since technique is very largely a matter of physique, and in the past, with the exception of Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market*, there has been no technically sufficient poem written by a woman.'

Here one sees Miss Sitwell's elected path set out before her. It implies a determination to acquire mastery by arduous and unremitting application, experiment and observation. Her later poetry is that of a poet who knows that the only way for most poets to write is to try, with all the strength and self-possession possible, to penetrate a poem from beginning to end

with a complete technical consciousness akin to that of music. The central core, or starting-point of a poem may remain an eternal mystery of creation, like a great musical 'subject'; but its development dare not be automatic.

Her studies—and a large part of her early poetry consists precisely of *études*—have taken three forms. First, there has been the study of what can be done with the language, the study of verbal orchestration—of 'the effect that texture has on rhythm, and the effect that varying and elaborate patterns of rhymes and of assonances and dissonances have upon rhythm. To this part of her work belong the pieces in *Façade*, many of the *Bucolic Comedies*, and some of the songs in *Prelude to a Fairy Tale*. Secondly, there has been the search for mastery over a 'line' which will be both a discipline and a liberation into freedom of expression: her mastery over the varied blank verse line, and over this line casually rhymed, and over the rhyming couplet are her achievements here. And though her finest work—with perhaps the exception of *The Ghost Whose Lips Were Warm*—has not been done in the couplet, the individuality and freshness she has given it make it her most remarkable personal triumph. Her third study has been the study of diction, the acquisition of a personal voice, the selection of vocabulary.

While pursuing her studies Miss Sitwell has had to do what other poets have to do: to live, not only through a good deal of experience, but through a good deal of literature as well. (It is true, I believe, that any English dramatic poet—and Miss Sitwell's later poetry is dramatic as well as lyrical—has to live through the English blank verse line, in some way or other, before he is able to give it his own inflection or distortion or variation). That period of living through such poetry of the past as is important to him should ideally be done by the poet in the laboratory of unpublished work (though one doubts if unpublished work exists anywhere any longer); some of it must doubtless be done simply in the mind, some perhaps even unconsciously. But in fact what usually happens is that poets begin to publish while they are still under the tutelage of other poets. And one would scarcely forego the Marlowe in Shakespeare, the Milton in Keats, the Laforgue in Eliot.

Nor would one wholly forego the Rimbaud in Miss Sitwell.

Indeed it is difficult to see how one could, for he dodges about her pages continually right up to the present day; this is natural, since he is a poet to whom anyone at all affected by him fells continually impelled to return. In his way, he is the Arch-poet; the prose-poems, and a few of the verse-poems such as *La Rivière de Cassis, Entends comme brame . . .* and *Bonne Pensée du Matin* bring their reader nearer to the sources of poetic inspiration more vividly than any other poetry, for the pictures they present seem to have been transfixed in words almost as soon as the poet glimpsed them. I have neither the space nor the authority to write about this most remarkable of poets, but a few of the things which Miss Sitwell owes to him or shares with him must be remarked on. He announced as an imperative for poetry *le dérèglement raisonné de tous les sens*: the systematic derangement of all the senses, the power (presumably) of perceiving with all the senses objects normally appealing to only one or two. The famous sonnet *Voyelles* will be recalled, where the colours which the vowels suggest are described. His dictum is quite apprehensible, but it seems to be more practicable as a way of receiving sensations than as a regular way of communicating them. Miss Sitwell, in a good deal of the poetry in the collected edition, enjoys describing certain things in terms usually associated with other things; but the effect is very often of an engaging eccentricity and sometimes of a tiresome one. Occasionally it is a strange, beautiful effect, as in the gardener's song in *The Sleeping Beauty*:

> 'The dew all tastes of ripening leaves;
> Dawn's tendril fingers heap
> The yellow honeyed fruits whose clear
> Sound flows into his sleep.
>
> Those yellow fruits and honeycomb. . . .
> "Lulla—lullaby,"
> Shrilled the dew on the broad leaves—
> "Time itself must die—
> (—must die")'.

And in the pathetic *Aubade* (in *Bucolic Comedies*), a little song about a gawky kitchen-girl coming down in a sleepy stupor to light the fire, the reluctant morning light, which is referred to

continually in terms of sound (it 'creeks' and 'whines') composes the whole picture most touchingly. But more often the *dérèglement* takes on the character of a little stunt.

Miss Sitwell shares furthermore with Rimbaud a love for the quick, bright image of a building or a human figure against a shifting background. Her control over these backgrounds is by no means as virile and brilliant as Rimbaud's; she cannot flash a picture at one as quickly as he; but her method is the same, and in *The Sleeping Beauty*, though one may know where one is at any given moment, one never knows where one is going to be at the next.

The most moving thing in Rimbaud is the way suddenly a 'set' of illuminations, a succession of visual images, can collapse into an agonized personal cry, as at the end of the well-known *Bâteau Ivre*, or at the end of the poem *Mémoire*:

> *'Jouet de cet œil d'eau morne, je n'y puis prendre,*
> *ô canot immobile! oh! bras trop courts! ni l'une*
> *ni l'autre fleur: ni la jaune qui m'importune,*
> *là; ni la bleue, amis, à l'eau couleur de cendre,'*

or at the end of the prose-poem, *Villes I*, where a detailed, almost gossipy account of an imaginary mountain-city finishes with a breath of lament: '*Quelle belle heure, quels bons bras me rendront ces régions d'ou viennent mes sommeils et mes moindres mouvements?*' The best parts of some of Miss Sitwell's longer poems—the *Elegy on Dead Fashion* for example—occur at very similar moments, when the artificial stagery of a rustic fairyland drops apart and the true note of sorrow and lament is heard. But Miss Sitwell seems not often to contrive these changes adequately—perhaps because they are not an effect which can be brought about by contrivance alone. The scenery in her poetry of this kind does not spontaneously erect itself out of nothing as the visions of Rimbaud do. In Miss Sitwell there is an immense fabrication: the goddesses, the shepherdesses, the water-falls, the ondines, the strawberry-beds, the mandolines, the tourelles, the turbans and the dews are summoned to assemble themselves from stage dressing-rooms. There is an air of triviality about them; amusing and engaging at times, no doubt, and always pretty; but one is always waiting for the moment when they shall go. And sometimes,

as in the solemn, splendid poem about death called *Metamorphosis*, one is at first debarred from getting to the real body and music of a work by the inevitable preliminary skirmish with these artifices.

It is probably Rimbaud whom Miss Sitwell has in mind as an example for her more striking experiments in rhythm, texture and sound. These experiments have always been the best-known part of Miss Sitwell's work; one has to be a dull sort of reader not to enjoy a gay, clever pattern of sound divorced from sense, or with only a dream-like thread of nonsense going across the dance of words. They are meant, of course, as transitional works; they are still part of the effort towards confidence in technique; but many of them are highly-finished and delightful; and just as music would be regrettably poorer without the music by Mr. William Walton which some of them have inspired, literature would lose something delicious if we were without *Black Mrs. Behemoth, Trio for two Cats and a Trombone*, '*I do like to be beside the Seaside*,' *Hornpipe*, *Old Sir Faulk*, or the waltz and the polka from the *Prelude to a Fairy Tale*. And often they pass beyond the brilliant jazzy stage into something mellower and gentler, as in the *Aubade*, and a few others which approximate to an English equivalent for the kind of experiment which Rimbaud makes in *Fêtes de la Faim* and *Bonheur*.

The residual effect of these experiments on Miss Sitwell's work it is neither possible nor necessary to examine, though one knows that the music of the later poems is not got by native innocent talent alone. There is one poem, however, *Gold Coast Customs*, where the *bizarrerie* of some of the lighter pieces is used all but perfectly in a serious theme. *Gold Coast Customs* has a position in Miss Sitwell's work comparable to that of *The Waste Land* in Mr. Eliot's. It is itself about a waste land: the ostensible scene of the poem is a nightmarish orgiastic funeral procession through the filth and squalor of a Gold Coast village. By allusion the scene is identified with the delights of our own civilization. It is a poem of considerable length, and it is one of the finest achievements of modern poetry, a triumph over a painful and tragic subject, a superbly successful use of a daring technique. The *staccato* jazziness is there, and it is in its right place. The *dérèglement* of the senses is there, and at last no more fitting application

can be imagined; for in this savage hectic scene it is right that the light should squeal and that the mud should screech.

> 'I have seen the murdered God look through the eyes
> Of the drunkard's smirched
> Mask as he lurched
> O'er the half of my heart that lies in the street
> Neath the dancing fleas and the foul news-sheet.
>
> Where, a black gap flapping,
> A white skin drum
> The cannibal houses
> Watch this come—
> Lady Bamburgher's party; for the plan
> Is a prize for those that on all fours ran
> Through the rotting slum
> Till those who come
> Could never guess from the mudcovered shapes
> Which are the rich or the mired dire apes
> As they run where the souls, dirty paper, are blown
> In the hour before dawn, through this long hell of stone.
>
> Perhaps if I too lie down in the mud,
> Beneath tumbrils rolling
> And mad skulls galloping
> Far from their bunches of nerves that dance
> And caper among these slums and prance,
> Beneath the noise of that hell that rolls
> I shall forget the shrunken souls
> The eyeless mud squealing "God is dead."'

This poem is very much the kind of poem Rimbaud might be pleased to receive from the hands of a disciple. Inevitably; for it is just such a *saison en enfer* as Rimbaud might have written of Abyssinia.

So much for the experimental and the spectacular; but we have also hinted at Miss Sitwell's preoccupation with developing more traditional forms of writing. Her devotion to Pope has brought with it a devotion to the rhyming couplet, which she has softened and mellowed for her own grave purposes; her later work is in much freer forms, but she can still, with the utmost discretion, drift into and out of a run of couplets. The poem in which she most successfully employs the couplet is, I

think, the last of the *Four Elegies*: *The Ghost whose Lips were Warm*, which is, with *Gold Coast Customs*, her most completely satisfying poem before 1930. In all of the *Four Elegies* one discovers a new and greater expansion of feeling and expressiveness, and at the same time an elimination of the trivially pretty. A wide-compassed instrument is used throughout.

The *Ghost whose Lips were Warm* is a small masterpiece, both in its writing and its interpretation of a source. A passage from Aubrey's *Miscellanies* is quoted at the head of the poem:

> 'T.M., Esq., an old acquaintance of mine, hath assured me, that . . . after his first wife's death, as he lay in bed awake . . . his wife opened the Closet Door, and came into the Chamber by the Bed side, and looked upon him and stooped down and kissed him; her Lips were warm, he fancied they would have been cold. He was about to have Embraced her, but was afraid it might have done him hurt. When she went from him, he asked her when he should see her again? She turned about and smiled, but said nothing.'

The poem is a dramatic monologue; its loose couplets, manipulated with no trace of mechanicalness or strain, are enclosed by two remarkable effects: an isolated stanza opens the poem with a feeling of great desolation, before the speaker relaxes into his meditation:

> 'The ice, weeping, breaks,
> But my heart is underground.
> And the ice of its dead tears melts never. Wakes
> No sigh, no sound,
>
> From where the dead lie close, as those above—
> The young—lie in their first deep night of love,
>
> When the spring nights are fiery with wild dew, and rest
> Leaves on young leaves, and youthful breast on breast.
>
> The dead lie soft in the first fire of spring
> And through the eternal cold, they hear birds sing,
>
> And smile as if the one long-treasured kiss
> Had worn away their once loved lips to this

Remembered smile—for there is always one
Kiss that we take to be our grave's long sun.'

The poem continues, the speaker enunciating his belief that his heart has become a 'black disastrous sun,' whose former heat his wife has borne away to her grave. It concludes:

'But when she had been twelve months in her grave
She came where I lay in my bed: she gave

Her kiss. And oh, her lips were warm to me.
And so I feared it, dared not touch and see

If still her heart were warm . . . dust-dun, death-cold
Lips should be from death's night. I dared not hold

That heart that came warm from the grave . . . afraid
I tore down all the earth of death, and laid

Its endless cold upon her heart. For this
Dead man in my dress dared not kiss

Her who laid by death's cold, lest I
Should feel it when she came to lie

Beside my heart. My dead love gave
Lips warm with love though in her grave.

I stole her kiss, the only light
She had to warm her eternal night.'

There are two particularly beautiful things about this ending: first, the haunting echoes—deliberate or unconscious, they are equally satisfying—in the rhythm of the last seven lines, of King's great *Exequy on his Dead Wife*, a perfect musical allusion; secondly the accomplishment of the contraction, from a five-beat line to a four-beat one, in order to make this allusion: it is surely not at a first or second reading that one discovers that the contraction has actually taken place in mid-couplet, with the subtle help of an *enjambement*?

I referred earlier to the third of Miss Sitwell's studies: diction. In this poem the simplicity of the language is already noticeable; and in fact Miss Sitwell's advance in diction has—

unlike that of many poets—involved a limitation rather than an increase of vocabulary. It is natural that this should be so, first for the physical reason that a complex vocabulary does not work well in such complicated sentence-structures as those which characterize Miss Sitwell's recent work. Secondly, a poet's language can, in its most individual and personal resources, be only the product of his vision, bearing the same relation to that vision as his face and hands do to his character. None of Miss Sitwell's recent poems are translucently simple in their total effect; they have often to be read many times; and we are usually impelled to read them many times by their sensuous grace, their muscular contour, their sweeping eloquent quality of singing. But their vision is, in the end, simple. The world of her imagination has its own set of co-ordinates, around and between the repeated images for which, she spins her poetry: the same things recur and recur, like the objects of heraldry, yet always newly ordered at the dictates of a new penetration into experience; and though these basic images are few, they seem to include everything, and to constitute a whole mythology: the young and the old, the earth, the sun and the moon, the country roads, the dust, the butterflies and the winds, the wild animals, the blood, the flesh and the bone—and the heart. Her world is a world of archetypes, brightly lit, but lit by natural light. Here is one of the shorter pieces from a late volume; its title is *Heart and Mind*:

'Said the Lion to the Lioness—"When you are amber dust,—
No more a raging fire like the heat of the Sun
(No liking but all lust)—
Remember still the flowering of the amber blood and bone
The rippling of bright muscles like a sea,
Remember the rose-prickles of bright paws
Though we shall mate no more
Till the fire of that sun the heart and the moon-cold bone are one."

Said the Skeleton lying upon the sands of Time—
"The great gold planet that is the morning heat of the Sun
Is greater than all gold, more powerful
Than the tawny body of a Lion that fire consumes
Like all that grows or leaps . . . so is the heart
More powerful than all dust. Once I was Hercules
Or Samson, strong as the pillars of the seas:

But the flames of the heart consumed me, and the mind
Is but a foolish wind."

Said the Sun to the Moon—"When you are but a lonely white crone,
And I, a dead King in my golden armour somewhere in a dark wood,
Remember only this of our hopeless love
That never till Time is done
Will the fire of the heart and the fire of the mind be one."'

Her later poetry is extremely impressive. No woman poet in English, or, so far as I am aware, in any other modern language has added so largely to that body of poetry which one will wish repeatedly to turn to; and though her best work has been produced in the last five or six years, no point of dichotomy can be found between her recent work and the work which has preceded it. It is rather that at some point there have become accessible to the poet new springs of power and fertility; there is a complete liberation from the inhibitions of which the early prettinesses were perhaps the outward signs. Regularly in her later work there are echoes and whole quotations from earlier poems. (*The Ghost whose Lips were Warm* is quoted or paraphrased almost entire in the much more elaborate later poem *One Day in Spring*.) One has the sense that the poet, after long heart-searching, has at last found an adequate and consistent context for earlier, more fragmentary, illuminations. Her landscape, like her idiom, is her own; it appears at first as a wholly personal landscape because her imagery and her cadences are so certainly not available to the *pasticheur*. But it is a universal landscape, humanly inhabited; with the world of thought, feeling and passion that lies behind and beneath it, one has an underground allegiance not always consciously acknowledged. In no other way can I define what it is that ties one to her poetry even when the meaning of a poem is unprecise. And the poet who can command and sustain that allegiance from a reader is not, I believe, in any sense to be called a minor poet.

C. V. WEDGWOOD

POETS AND POLITICS IN BAROQUE ENGLAND

THE restlessness of the seventeenth century is a massive restlessness, reflected in gigantic convolutions of stone and tempestuous statuary. In Western Europe this was perhaps the most unhappy century until our own time, and it is closer to our own than any other in the causes of that unhappiness. Between the joyous experimentalism of the sixteenth century and the intellectual serenity of the eighteenth, it interposes a period of bewilderment: a time (like ours) in which man's activities had outrun his powers of control.

The change from a land to a money basis for society, and the conflict between state and individual were important elements in the unrest of the time, but they were not its fundamental cause while the apparent struggle between Catholic and Protestant was a mere pendant of political issues. A mental conflict stronger than the material quarrels which set Europe's entangled dynasties and growing nations against each other divided the mind of the individual against itself: the struggle between reason and revelation.

Fascinatingly, slowly, the planets had begun to move in the sixteenth century. The solar system became apparent through the eyes of Copernicus. When Galileo, in the early seventeenth century, set the world itself spinning, the Holy Office stepped in; too late. Only a few years afterwards William Harvey discovered a yet more intimate circulation, that of the blood in the human body. The static world dissolved in motion.

But at the beginning of the seventeenth century, the ordinary educated man lived, as he had lived for the past thousand years, by revelation. The day-time of the faith was over, but the sun had not set: far and fading, it was still the light men knew. Saint Teresa was newly dead, and very newly canonised. Men had seen miracles, and were to see them for some years more. The curtains had not yet been drawn and the artificial lamps of reason lit. There was the deceptive conflict of the inward and the outward light. Not until the latter half of the century