

# Reed's map

HENRY REED, who died last Monday at the age of 72, first became known as a poet just after the war, with his book "The Map of Verona." It contained his one famous poem, "Naming of Parts"—where a chill war-time lesson about the way a gun is constructed takes place among gardens full of fragile almond blossom.

His parody of T. S. Eliot, "Chard Whitlow," also caused great amusement in the literary world about this time, and was regularly recited by Dylan Thomas: "As we get older, we do not get any younger. . ."

Later he became a very successful radio dramatist, writing a number of remarkable plays with an Italian background, and a comic sequence about English literary life "Hilda Tablet."

This included memorable characters like one General Gland, supposedly modelled on Field-Marshal Montgomery.

In the late 1960s he wrote some further beautiful poems, sad and self-satirical, a few of which I published in the *Listener*. At that time he was a man

of very striking appearance: he had an enormous head, long and very deep, and this fine building-block seemed to sink with its weight into his large plump body. But he was often pale and quivering all over, his thin cigar trembling in his fingers, his coffee-cup wobbling alarmingly as he held the saucer.

He was much less urbane than you might have thought from his writings.

When I accepted a poem, he would constantly reappear in my office, full of doubts about phrases and rhythms, until I had to insist that the poem was finished and printable, and that I was now going to print it.

He was difficult and hypochondriac but always amusing and unexpected. Once when I invited him to lunch he rang me up at five to one to say he couldn't come.

"Oh, I'm very sorry. Why's that, Henry?"

"I'm not hungry."

It was impossible to feel offended—and I'm glad to say we tucked into a very good dinner together a few nights later.

*Derwent May*