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The Cracked Mirror and the Brazen Bull

Deane Mowrer

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The difficulties inherent in the omnibus review are so obvious that it may seem a waste of good typography to mention them. Nevertheless, since I surmise more than ordinary significance carelessly suspended between the date of this review and the task assigned, I should like to preface my precarious judgments with a more careful probing of problems and aims.

Modern poetry, like modern man, has come midway in this century. Banal as this statement may sound and bored as the reader may be with half-century annals and appraisals, neither the reviewer nor the reader, I think, can afford to overlook the relevance of certain outstanding poetic events which have decided and guided the course of twentieth century poetry. It can hardly be irrelevant that some who made those events, who set up and defended the first flamboyant barricades of modern poetic revolt, are still writing, are indeed represented in this review. Nor can one disregard the complex, muddled nature of that revolt, which assuredly did not move toward a single, clearly defined goal but sought its meaning ambivalently through those familiar antecedents against whom rebellion was aimed and those more abstruse forbears whose names were again emblazoned on the gaudy pennants of the avant-garde. Even so, the discerning reader will be aware that the critical problem can scarcely be resolved in terms so autochthonous, for obviously the strategy of each poetic rebel has been further qualified by every intellectual, economic, and political current of our time. A brief résumé of a few
of the high points in modern poetry should serve to underscore the complexity of action, reaction, and interaction.

Ezra Pound made his historic exodus to Europe in 1908, scattering seeds of dissenion and innovation wherever he went; sometime before 1910 Yeats had surely glimpsed that vision destined to peren so brilliantly in the gyre of his later poetry; Poetry, A Magazine of Verse, an important outlet for the century’s new poets, was founded in 1912; imagism and free verse are movements significantly associated with the second decade of our century; the same decade saw the publication of Robert Frost’s outstanding early books and the increasing recognition of the austere New England talent of Edwin Arlington Robinson; before this period Rubén Dario had diffused poetic hope and energy through the romantic somnolence of Latin-American poetry; more or less concurrently, in Europe Paul Valéry began to illuminate the technical brilliance of the symbolist tradition with the mind’s cold, inexorable flame, and Rainer Maria Rilke celebrated the apex of a career, the nadir of a sorrow, in his Duino Elegies; in England even the placid Georgians were somewhat ruffled by war’s unruly intrusion and the indecorous reaction of war-shocked poets; early in the 1920’s Eliot’s The Waste Land exploded the most lethargic of occidental literati out of the old miasmal mist; shortly afterward E. E. Cummings, William Carlos Williams, Wallace Stevens, and Hart Crane troubled the cultural waters with their esoteric breathing of the ancient word of poetry; meanwhile in Spain Federico García Lorca transfused his modern measure with the folk-deep wealth of balladry and gypsy song; and D. H. Lawrence, wherever he was domiciled, continued his quest for an apocalyptic vision in immediacy, time’s pollen-dappled petals which hold in gold suspension life’s first protoplasmic cry; 1930 saw the ascendancy of Auden and his group, poets of social protest, poets as public spokesmen, poets self-conscious of the Freudian unconscious; during these same years the strange liaison between marxism and surrealism attained fruition in numerous, though sometimes oddly assorted, poetic progeny; finally the 1940’s have marked an equally aggressive upsurge of new names and manifestoes, manifestoes which, in some instances, would seem to revoke those of the century’s turn; yet even a superficial reading of the most blatant neo-romantic will reveal, I think, a definite, though tenuous, continuum of influence—subject to crosscurrents and maelstroms as it is and has been—throughout the turbulent, murky course of modern poetry.
If this oversimplified survey of twentieth century poetry serves no other purpose, it should at least indicate a few critical exigencies. First, no modern poet can fairly be considered apart from the larger context of contemporary poetry. Second, that larger context extends laterally through the peripheral maze of present-day civilization and perpendicularly down through the remotest stratum of man's history. Third, the difficult problems posed by the above impose on every critic, not excluding the humble reviewer, serious limitations. Everyone—critic, reviewer, or reader—ultimately looks through a glass darkly, a glass sometimes no better than a cracked mirror which refracts with somber distortion personal flaws of understanding and taste.

At this point, the intelligent reader may well inquire: What of modern criticism? Are the explorative techniques provided by the critics of an age which has achieved astounding triumphs through exploitation of analytical methods completely inadequate to cope with the poetry of that same age? Few will deny, I think, that modern criticism has provided incomparably clever devices for esthetic measurement and poetic dissection. Most serious readers of modern poetry will surely acknowledge a debt to many critics who have so often brilliantly clarified the meaning, intention, and methods of poetry. T. S. Eliot, I. A. Richards, Kenneth Burke, Yvor Winters, John Crowe Ransom, Edmund Wilson, R. P. Blackmur, F. O. Matthiessen, Allen Tate, Cleanth Brooks (whose important Modern Poetry and the Tradition has been reissued in an English edition), William Empson—to name only a few—are critics, some of them also poets of distinction, hardly to be disregarded in contemporary criticism. Those familiar with their work, however, will be aware that their critical positions and conclusions are often startlingly divergent, that the method of one may work with singular efficacy when applied to certain poems or poets but fail dismally when applied to other poems or poets. It is perhaps even more unfortunate that some who clutter the retinue of these and other great critics often succeed only in baffling the reader with demonstrations of personal ingenuity which leave the poem shrouded in pedantic dust. Confusion, moreover, seems to be added to confusion by the nonpoetic, scholastic quibbling implicit in the recent trend toward criticism of criticism. That this overemphasis on critical analysis, even by critics professedly anti-scientific, is directly related to the scientific, urban-industrial, materialistic temper of our time seems clear enough. That the strange position of poetry itself, half outcast from polite society, half changeling child trailing clouds
of somewhat sullied glory from a nobler heritage, is likewise closely related to the same temper and the manifold factors which produced that temper should be equally plain. There is, nevertheless, too marked a dichotomy between poetry and criticism, even when they stem from the same person. It is not improbable, I think, that many readers, as well as poets, are beginning to suspect that criticism has become an end in itself. Indeed the unwieldy body of modern criticism might, in certain aspects, appear a mirage-engendered, foundationless structure of polydizzied architecture, from the pendulous turrets of which lean enigmatic figures whose bulging, stony eyes assert a blearied omniscience and whose gargoyled, schismatic tongues spew Olympian venom on the prostrate form of poetry.

The best statement of this particular dilemma was made, I think, by a nineteenth century philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard, in his Either/Or. "What is a poet?" Kierkegaard asks. And answers thus:

A poet is an unhappy being whose heart is torn by secret sufferings, but whose lips are so strangely formed that when the sighs and the cries escape them, they sound like beautiful music. His fate is like that of the unfortunate victims whom the tyrant Phalaris imprisoned in a brazen bull, and slowly tortured over a steady fire; their cries could not reach the tyrant's ears so as to strike terror into his heart; when they reached his ears they sounded like sweet music. And men crowd about the poet and say to him: "Sing for us soon again"; that is as much as to say: "May new sufferings torment your soul, but may your lips be formed as before; for the cries would only frighten us, but the music is delicious." And the critics come, too, and say: "Quite correct, and so it ought to be, according to the rules of aesthetics." Now it is understood that a critic resembles a poet to a hair; he only lackS the suffering in his heart, and the music upon his lips. Lo, therefore, I would rather be a swineherd from Amager, and be understood by the swine, than be a poet and be misunderstood by men.

There you have it. The plight of the poet. The sterile relationship of critic and poet. Of reader and poet. Above all, the tortured isolation which must be the lot of every poet in an age dedicated to Mammon and his sacrificial altar-idol, the brazen bull.

Those who are familiar with Kierkegaard's philosophy will be aware of the importance he attached to suffering and solitude as means both to esthetic and religious development. Looked at from this point of view, the brazen bull might well appear a spiritual crucible, a symbol perhaps of that arduous discipline indispensable to the
creative act. Such an interpretation, valid certainly within its limitations, will hardly abrogate the more extrapoetic application suggested by the above association of Mammon with the Kierkegaardian bull. Aside from my conviction that many readers will—by a process of natural association—connect the brazen bull with the Cretan bull and possibly with the golden calf, Kierkegaard was expressing, perhaps better than he knew, the importunate problem of the modern artist and his relation to society. It would, I think, not be straining the connotations of Kierkegaard's image too much to suggest that in one sense it symbolizes the existentialist concept of those inexorable, limiting circumstances, that claustrophobic, inhibitory web of fate and fact, which every artist must transcend in order to create both his art and himself. If this interpretation be allowed (and I realize that some readers may attribute it solely to imperfections in my own cracked mirror), then surely Kierkegaard has provided us with a most poignant parable of the modern poet and his myriad tribulations in a world depressingly, yea even defiantly, antipoetic.

With this parable in mind one can, I think, understand more fully the seeming strangeness of subject matter, the apparent idiosyncrasy of form in so much twentieth century poetry. Suffering itself is too emphatically recurring a motif in many of our best modern poems for smug dismissal as morbid poetic self-indulgence. Kierkegaard has elucidated for us not only the significance of this motif but has also given us an important clue to those umbilically related characteristics so often querulously remarked by the puzzled observer of that extraordinary, though vigorous, corpus we call modern poetry. The notable absence of happy lyric spontaneity, the painful, ingrown subjectivity, the narcissistic attempts to create autonomous cosmologies from libidinal imagery or self-sufficient private symbols, the anachronistic efforts to find roots in decaying traditions or declining orthodoxies, the frenetic struggles to assimilate and encompass poetically the amorphous, dissonant meaning of a machine society, the furious wrenching of language and syntax to force the expression of the inexpressible, the morganatic alliances so fervidly espoused with ideologic pseudo theologies, even the romanti-tropic nostalgia currently popular with those who would reaffirm in the face of dour disillusionment the sacramental, ritualistic attitudes of simple loving and living—all originate, I think, from the same matrix, that great mother, Suffering, whom most modern poets, sternly fathered by this
world's implacable image, the brazen bull, will hardly dare disown. And those techniques—which some readers would isolate as pernicious viral attributes of contemporary verse, and others contemptuously diagnose as typographical or verbal hysteria intended to obfuscate "meaning"—are they not clearly the intrinsic formal components of that poetic experience tentatively anatomized above, the inevitable ceremonial expression of a poet's turnings and twistings through life's disjunctive labyrinth? Further substantiated as it is by the standard critical position that form and content are one, that the meaning of a poem cannot be abstracted from its form, this view (which reflects also, I hope, a ray or two of Kierkegaardian effulgence) should be adequate to explain the almost unparalleled interest in technical experiment which has so distinguished modern poetry. Such an interest, moreover, should seem only normal in a world fundamentally concerned with techniques in every field, in a world where technology often seems to have usurped the place of morality and God, leaving the poet to grapple toward his art—homeless, rootless, lonely—to parry with reckless or pathetic veronicas the quotidian lust of the brazen bull.

Considering the difficulties of writing poetry in our time (and I do not think I have overstressed them), one might think it remarkable that any poetry could be written. How much more remarkable, then, must it seem that so much poetry, so much good poetry, has been written. For immense as the challenge has been, it has been met, I think, with commensurate talents. No other period, except the matchless Elizabethan age, seems to me so rich in poetic abundance and versatility. Likewise astonishing seems the number of poets who have achieved for us in our time, whatever their status in future centuries, conspicuous stature. That their eminence, in most instances, is the result of technical brilliance rather than prolific production is surely not only a tribute to their virtuosity but also a confirmation of the extreme difficulty of writing poetry at all under present-day conditions. That this technical resourcefulness, however, was able to make so much headway during the early decades of this century further complicates the problem both for the recent poet and his reviewer. For obviously, I think, an overemphasis on poetic experiment may result in an abortive issue similar to that sometimes remarked in critical analysis. Although it is true that form and content are one, it is also true that concentration on formal expressiveness may result in dilution and perversion of potentially fruitful poetic experience. More-
over, in a context as surcharged with novelty as a Woolworth counter is with synthetic gewgaws, it must become increasingly difficult to create anything with the semblance of newness. Good poets are aware of all these difficulties, though awareness is hardly enough. If the poet try to adapt techniques already current, he must run the risk of echoing too flagrantly other poets. If he revert to the conventions of a less-questionable period, he may find himself coquetting with frivolous anachronisms. If he disclaim all authority and assert his superior originality, he may appear to his contemporaries as merely another poetic hod carrier, scuttling coals to Newcastle. Dismaying as they may seem, the above suppositions do not invalidate either the very real accomplishments of many new poets or the possibility of a climactic burgeoning from this century's richly-mutational poetic experiment. Nevertheless, it seems apparent to me that most mid-century poets are still writing under the lengthened shadows of colossal whose grotesquely Gargantuan postures symbolically uphold the aegis and portent of all modern poetry.

To come to more immediate terms with the books listed in the slightly overwhelming bibliography below, a cursory glance will reveal the representation of almost every generation, cult, and trend of modern poetry. And after more than a cursory glance at the pages of these same books, one may safely add, I think, that here are specific exemplifications of all the virtues, weaknesses, problems, and eccentricities indicated in the preceding paragraphs.

Heading the list of those books which, for diverse reasons, demand more careful consideration is, I think, the Selected Poems of Ezra Pound. Now I am aware that Mr. Pound has received a great deal of attention during the past year or so; unfortunately that attention has been too often directed toward personal peculiarities rather than toward his poetry. With some of those peculiarities I have no sympathy, though I think I can understand them. Are they not the symptoms of trauma, the misdirected response of a wounded and sensitive person to a callous and indifferent society? And is not anti-poeticism, against which Pound has struggled so gallantly, finally as serious an error as anti-Semitism? Although I am sorry that Pound did not feel, as I do, that in a truly poetic world (for the benefit of the scoffers I concede that poetic world may be a kind of heaven) anti-Semitism could not exist, I cannot for this reason reject his poetry. For Pound seems to
me the very prototype of the modern poet—exiled, proud, and lonely—barricading himself against Philistinism with a wall so elegantly beautiful that we who view his work can only

Weave a circle round him thrice, . . .
For he on honey-dew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise.

The extraordinary thing is that with all the confusion and error of his life Pound should have been able to write so much extraordinary poetry. I am not concerned here with whether Pound was the schoolmaster of Yeats, Eliot, and the imagists, or with explication of the more erudite and allusive passages in his work. Such questions have been and will be treated by more competent persons. I only wish to point out that in the Selected Poems I find so many poems which give me pleasure, poems which I think will yield to anyone with an ear for the profound sound and meaning of words that kind of magic primi-

tively associated with the very name of poet. Moreover, I find this delight not only in memorable lines from the more ambitious cantos but also in the less-regarded earlier poems. “The Coming of War: Actaeon,” “The Return,” “Tenzone,” “The Lake Isle,” “Alba,” “Envoi (1919),” “A Ballad of the Mulberry Road,” all exemplify for me that debonair artifice, that vigorous grace so typical, I believe, of Pound’s work. Take almost any passage,

And when men going by look on Rafu
They set down their burdens,
They stand and twirl their mustaches.

or

And the loose fragrant cavendish
and the shag.
And the bright Virginia
loose under the bright glass cases,
And a pair of scales not too greasy,
And the whores dropping in for a word or two in passing,
For a flip word, and to tidy their hair a bit.

or

When our two dusts with Waller’s shall be laid,
Siftings on siftings in oblivion,
Till change hath broken down
All things save Beauty alone.
Rudely uprooted from their context as they are, do not these lines still retain something of the exotic beauty, the seminal energy of a flower tautly stamened in the sun? And even these plucked lines reveal, I think, Pound's ability to recapture in tonal, living mosaic the glorious shards of the past. Although one may not recognize the allusion or the original of the paraphrase or translation, no one, I believe, can read Pound's poetry without sensing the palpable reality he has given to man's great heritage. For this alone he would deserve our gratitude. Yet one cannot forget Pound the innovator, the great experimenter. Setting aside the question of who schooled whom, one still must recognize in Pound's work a fertile source of techniques which have proved and should continue to prove helpful to other poets. Outright imitation may be deplorable, if not impossible. Adaptation of the more sensational innovations would probably be equally undesirable. A careful reading of Pound's poetry, however, will reward the poet-student with subtler techniques which should function germinally in any kind of poetry. To be more specific; I believe that even the most doctrinaire disciple of Yvor Winters could learn from Pound technical means of imbuing his work with power and variety without violating too seriously the dogmas of his own master. How then can we deny that Ezra Pound, "il miglior fabbro," is one of the true colossi, the great inseminators of modern poetry?

Neither as exciting nor as various in technical range as the poems of Pound, the Selected Poems of William Carlos Williams offer nevertheless very real satisfaction. Part of that satisfaction for me derives from the fact that I have developed a taste for Williams' kind of poetry rather recently. For years, though I recognized Williams as one of the masters of modern American prose, I remained blind and deaf to the quality and significance of his poetry. Only after careful re-reading—and here I must acknowledge a debt to two poet-critics, Yvor Winters and Edwin Honig—did I begin to understand what Williams was trying to do. Since that initiation, I find Williams occupying an increasingly important place in my private hierarchy of poets. Most readers, I think, will appreciate the present volume not only for the excellent selection of Williams' poems but also for the illuminating introduction by Randall Jarrell. I like Jarrell's warmth and enthusiasm, his lucidity and honesty of praise and blame—qualities which seem particularly appropriate in evaluating a man so stubbornly possessed of those same qualities. Essentially in agreement with Jar-
rell's rating of Williams' better poems, I should like to single out another to illustrate Williams' method. This poem, "The Bull," though slighter than certain other poems which penetrate more nearly man's personal and social tragedy, possesses the notable precision of observation and clear integrity of expression always found in Williams' better poems. Since Williams' poems seem to suffer more malformation from piecemeal treatment than almost any other poems I know, I shall quote the poem in its entirety.

It is in captivity—
ringed, haltered, chained
to a drag
the bull is godlike

Unlike the cows
he lives alone, nozzles
the sweet grass gingerly
to pass the time away

He kneels, lies down
and stretching out
a foreleg licks himself
about the hoof

then stays
with half-closed eyes,

Olympian commentary on
the bright passage of days.
—The round sun
smoothes his lacquer
through
the glossy pinetrees

his substance hard
as ivory or glass—
through which the wind
plays—

Milkless

he nods
the hair between his horns
and eyes matted
with hyacinthine curls

The visual pattern itself seems peculiarly appropriate here—clean, economical, perceptually fitting for the hard, concise, pragmatic observation so unpretentiously, easily, and rightly set in the great emotional continuum of myth. Notice the fine contrapuntal effect of the first and fourth lines of the stanza, a counterpoint which threads through the whole poem and which is made more emphatic by the metrical skill and visual exactness of detail. Notice the sure use of assonance and consonance and the unexpectedly, though functionally, placed rhymes. Notice the way an ordinary expression, "to pass the time away," is lifted out of the ordinary both by the concrete accuracy of the preceding "nozzles" and "gingerly" and by echo and extension in the later lines "Olympian commentary on the bright passage of days." Notice, too, how in the fifth and sixth stanzas "lacquer," "glossy," and "hard/as ivory or glass" evoke through physically correct impressions that fusion of reality and myth which reaches its climax.
in the final line, "with hyacinthine curls." Nor can one dismiss this poem without commenting on its power to connote even through such forthright, empathic description a further symbolic meaning—the bull as Nature, once awesome and august, now, though still majestic, subject to the Faustian dominance of man and his mundane daemon, the brazen bull of Kierkegaard. Inadequately as I have undoubtedly dealt with this poem, I surmise that some readers may think I have done it sufficient injustice, that my fragmentary comments are, after all, but grotesque reflections in a cracked mirror, examples of the excess I myself have objected to in other critics. And perhaps it would be better to let the poem stand alone, a candid and beautiful tribute to the genius of its creator.

The most popular target for recent critical attacks would seem to be that British school of poets which attained considerable eminence during the 1930's. Changes in taste from decade to decade should always be expected. Yet surely it is possible to admire (as I do) the poetry of Dylan Thomas, David Gascoigne, Kenneth Patchen, and Theodore Roethke without throwing into the ashcan Auden, Spender, Lewis, et alii. Auden, who is not represented in this review, seems to me still the most important poet of his group, both because of his amazing versatility and his ability to transcend his own most obnoxious mannerisms in his best poems. Spender, though not so versatile or prolific as Auden, has produced, I think, equally good poems. That these better poems may not be found in The Edge of Being is hardly an occasion for reproachful keening of a poet's demise. Few poets can sustain steadfast development over a comparable span of years. Nor should one forget that the past decade with its chronicle of war and war's bitter aftermath has exacted probably an additional toll in poetic energy and expression. That this destructive context of war has been shared by most modern poets does not obviate its relevance to the work of any particular poet. As for Spender, his profoundly manifest concern with the hopes and betrayals of a war-shattered world seems sufficient to vindicate that relevance. It is true that certain poems in The Edge of Being reflect a more personal, romantic note, much deplored by some critics. It is also true that the better poems of Spender have always been tinged with romanticism, that even these newer poems, though sometimes approaching too tremendously the perfervid O's of Shelley's abstract, ecstatic flight, are lyrically effective, affording pleasant relief from the dissonant density of much modern poetry. Thematic limitation is more marked, I think,
in the Poems 1943-1947 of C. Day Lewis. Such nostalgic sheltering before the embers of heart's crumbling hearth should not surprise the reader who has observed Lewis' troubled progress round the purgatorial slopes of that magnetic mountain where so many idealistic poets with marxist divining rods have probed for fool's gold. If there is any real surprise for the reader in these new poems, it is for that careful reader whose ear will detect the decorous restraint of style which, though degenerating occasionally to flatulent monotony, will appear at its best as the authentic, formal concomitant of more subdued subject matter. Both thematically and formally, there is less divergence from his earlier work in Louis MacNeice's Holes in the Sky. Yet, somewhat paradoxically, I consider this volume the most disappointing of the three from this particular British school of poets. Too many of these poems seem too clever, too self-consciously inlaid with irritating Audenesque mannerisms, too cerebrally ostentatious at the expense of emotion. Especially objectionable, I think, is the opening poem, "The Streets of Laredo," a sophisticated, urbanized adaptation of "The Cowboy's Lament."

The critical acclaim accorded the Collected Poems of William Empson arouses at least a twinge of doubt of my own more negative appraisal. Although I appreciate Empson's scrupulous craftsmanship, reading his poetry is often for me merely a mole-like tunneling through a subterranean chaos of roots without ever sensing the branching green or perfumed bloom above. In some ways one could compare him, I suppose, with Gerard Manly Hopkins, another poet of limited, but commensurately careful production. But Hopkins uses technique to convey the tremendous excitement and intensity of his relationship with God and God's world. With Empson, who is attuned to a godless and callous world, an entirely different effect is intended, I am sure, though sometimes I fear it may be dispersed somewhere among the annotations. In this small volume Empson has provided twenty-seven pages of notes for the eighty-four of poetry. Rather perversely perhaps, I prefer the unannotated "Villanelle" which begins

It is the pain, it is the pain, endures.
Your chemic beauty burned my muscles through.
Poise of my hands reminded me of yours.

Here Empson has aptly adapted the conventional artificiality of form to his own learned artifice without sacrifice of that immediate emo-
tional impact so important in good poetry. It is almost as though
dowson had been poured into a new bottle with a metaphysical label,
a dowson whose vague fin de siècle sorrows have been intellectualized
and refined in the holocaust of a later century.

It would hardly be polite to omit the sitwells in any survey, how-
ever brief, of modern British poetry. of miss sitwell's the song of
the cold, I can only say that I am wholly in sympathy with her them-
amic seriousness but I am not convinced that these poems represent
any improvement over her earlier frankly baroque poetry—poetry
which, at its best, suggests a luxurious tapestry woven by a great lady
to celebrate her high estate and her imaginative delight in that es-
tate. In all fairness, though, to the song of the cold, I suspect that
even the thought of attempting "three poems of the atomic age"
would be enough to throw most poets off their stance into a welter
of unassimilated verbiage and rage. Unconcerned with the atomic
age, sir osbert sitwell’s four songs of the italian earth seem sturdily
patterned in a timeless fabric of idyllic verse. there is, of course, a
contrast between the quiet sophistication of style and the simple,
seasonal life portrayed, but that has been true of many poems in many
times.

Equally concerned with man's guilt and man's fate, robinson je-
fers and archibald macleish, both poets of recognized importance in
america, assume quite antithetical vantage points in their poetry.
robinson jeffers, viewing the world with an eagle's arrogant, im-
personal eye, seems able to see only flagrant pustules of human evil stark-
ly delineated against the rock-ribbed, sea-bathed beauty of enduring
nature. macleish, whose lachrymose lament betrays the disillusioned
idealist, stumbles uncertainly among the ashes of ruined ideologies
after that illusory phoenix of humanitarian love and hope.

Throughout the integral, raging course of his explosive poetic
career, kenneth patchen has stood uncompromisingly apart from ap-
peasement and preciosity. whatever his defects (his hysterical cres-
cendos and pounding, merciless anathema are perhaps too much in
evidence in Red Wine and Yellow Hair), patchen is yet a poet of
power and originality and at times, as in certain lyrics of First Will
and Testament, of surprising subtlety and delicacy. Vigorous in a
quiet unpatchen-like manner, peter viereck is the poet favored by
many critics as most likely to succeed. there is no doubt about viere-
ceck's cleverness or the scope of his technical ability, but for me his
poems sometimes degenerate into lively versions of intellectual leger-
demain where word is swifter than eye, more agile than wit, but not incisive or profound enough to alter the pulsation of that emotional bloodstream which nourishes imagination. Although among the most articulate in his opposition to cerebral ingenuity in poetry, Kenneth Rexroth does no particular service either to his fierce espousal of the new romanticism or to his truculent aspersion of heretical contemporaries by publishing his early poems in *The Art of Worldly Wisdom*. Only the knowledge that Rexroth can write and has written much better poetry extenuates the diffuse and plotted monotony of this rather pretentiously titled book. As self-consciously experimental as Rexroth (who affirms his "advanced position" in his personal introduction) and as devoted to her particular cult—Activism, whose governing principle, explicated by W. H. Auden in his magnanimous introduction, predicates an autonomy of connotative values in language and imagery—Rosalie Moore creates in *The Grasshopper's Man and Other Poems* a kind of ectoplasmic poetry which at once titillates the reader with subliminal graces and befuddles with its aura of lingual chicanery.

To turn briefly to poets writing in a more conservative tradition, one is confronted immediately with the name of Elizabeth Daryush. Whether or not she is, as Yvor Winters asserts, "one of the few distinguished poets of our century," there is no doubt, I think, that Mrs. Daryush moves in the lyric form with a metrical and verbal fineness which most good poets will recognize and applaud. Ann Stanford, another poet bearing Winters' crochety stamp of approval, seems to me seldom able to compass within her pleasing restraint of manner those translucent overtones which irradiate great poetry. Comparatively unacclaimed, Pauline Hanson's achievement in *The Fore'er Young* is nonetheless remarkable. "Out of time and into timelessness," these quatrains stand like sculptured guardians of mind against the heart's insidious treachery.

*The while, in my too little love, my own*  
*Lifts in his granite face of grief the stone*  
*Of the forever young who now in my*  
*Forgetting the unknowing and unknown.*

Though no one quatrain in a sequence so closely interlinked can convey the poem's meticulous consummation, these lines should suggest that *The Fore'er Young* is minor poetry of more than minor order.

Among the anthologies of recent poetry one can hardly overlook
the *New British Poets* edited with an introduction by Kenneth Rexroth and the *New Irish Poets* edited by Devin A. Garrity. Of the two, Rexroth's *New British Poets* is, I think, the more important. The pronounced bias Rexroth manifests, both in his introduction and in his selections, toward poetry of romantic, personalist tendencies fortunately precludes neither a fair representation of younger, less familiar British poets, nor the inclusion of individually brilliant poems, nor the value which such an anthology should have for American readers and poets interested in the new direction many British poets are taking. A great anthology of a great poetic period, Norman Ault's edition of *Elizabethan Lyrics* is too well known among poets and scholars to need comment beyond one's appreciation for this beautifully printed and carefully revised American edition.

Admitting regretfully, as I must, the diminished role which poetry plays in the life and times of modern man, I can still imagine no more excited pleasure than the discovery of indubitable poetic genius or surpassing promise. It is entirely possible that I have missed such a discovery both in the books already discussed and in those remaining volumes which must go unmentioned because of spatial limitations. That transcendent fusion of skill, passion, and imagination which constitutes great poetry is difficult to accomplish and sometimes almost as difficult to recognize. Whatever the errors of my critical mirror, I can still discern in mid-century poetry enough of talent, formal dexterity, high seriousness, and beauty to assure the modern poet his place as acolyte in those ancient, nearly forgotten rites which celebrate man's dignity, man's nobility, and man's humanity to man—the only rites through which mankind can hope to thwart the voracious appetites of the brazen bull.

**BOOKS RECEIVED**


DEANE MOWRER

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Cumulative Index --- Back Volumes

Work on the Cumulative Index (Vols. I-XIX, 1931-1949), previously announced, is progressing. We expect to have it ready for distribution some time next Fall. Because of its bulk, the Index will be published separately, but using the same paper and size of the Quarterly, so that it may be bound in. Copies will be mailed free of charge only to subscribers, and on request.

Back issues of the Quarterly are now available except: Vol. II, No. 1 (1932); Vol. III, Nos. 1, 2, 4 (1933); Vol. IV, No. 1 (1934); and Vol. XIII, Nos. 1, 2 and 4 (1943). Single issues: $1.00. In orders of four or more: 75 cents net, each, postpaid, insured. See announcement on the inside back cover in regard to the out-of-print issues. The price of the eight rare issues therein listed will, however, be the same as that given above. The Quarterly is willing to stand a loss on these issues in order to supply them to libraries and collectors.

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