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exile, and those who are not usually offer the stance of an internal emigré. The vicious official censorship system prevents publication of the fiercest oppositional verse by exiles, but there is still a strong sense of self-mutilation, as if the poets are scrutinizing the shackles which link them to the exigencies of dictatorship. As the much-censored Garton Sandifolo puts it, 'Should I, perhaps, sew my lips/ With wires and tie my legs with chains?' The Haunting Wind shows effectively, and often movingly, that it is still possible to be in exile while remaining physically at home.

HERBERT LOMAS

Old Soldiers

Collected Poems by Henry Reed (O.U.P. $f_{2}(20)$)

A Time for Fires by Vernon Scannell (Robson Books. £10.95)

The Man with the Night Sweats by Thom Gunn (Faber. £5.99 & £11.99)

I wish I liked Reed's poems more than I do. During World War II I rejoiced like everyone at 'Naming of Parts' – that diagram of the tedium of soldiering. I loved the impersonation of Eliot in 'Chard Whitlow', and later the toxic apotheosis of Elizabeth Lutyens as a difficult Tablet to swallow in the radio plays.

This fun stands up. In his 'Introduction', however, Stallworthy attempts to compare Reed at his solemn best to 'Little Gidding'. The argument is sometimes persuasive enough to make me ready to reconsider my 1946 impression that *A Map of Verona* was boringly written. But no: Reed is simply not interesting enough linguistically.

E. M. Forster was inspired to write to Reed after hearing his Christmas Eve poem, 'The Return', on the BBC in 1944. He saw in the poem 'the idea that the only reality in human civilization is the unbroken sequence of people caring for one another'. The sentiment must have made him overlook the clichés and doggerel:

We have been off on a long voyage, have we not? Have done and seen much in that time, but

have done and seen much in that time, but have got

Little that you will prize, who are dancing now

In the silent town whose lights gleam back from our prow.

Reed simply and surprisingly doesn't write well. Every noun must have its adjective, sometimes two, and the adjectives and adverbs are not even interesting. In passages chosen for praise we find 'the reluctant leaden air', 'a mature unsullied grace', 'dim in the dusk and high, / His mansion is proudly set', or 'the sun and the shadows bestow / Vestments of purple and gold'. Sub-Auden these are, perhaps, but they'd be unacceptable even in prose: no sentiments can redeem such defunctness. At his best, Reed writes like this:

And surely (and almost now) it will happen, and tell me

That now I must rise and with firm footsteps
tread
Across the enormous flagstones, reach, find
and know
My own and veritable door;
I shall open it, enter, and learn
That in all this hungry time I have never
wanted,
But have, elsewhere, on honey and milk been
fed,
Have in green pastures somewhere lain, and
in the mornings,
Somewhere beside still waters have
Mysteriously, ecstatically, been led.

In spite of 'firm footsteps', 'veritable door', the inversion (for the sake of the rhyme) of 'on honey and milk been fed' and the excessive reliance on the twenty-third psalm, Reed has a plangent cadence, syntactical rhythms, a climactic long trail, and there is potential sublimity in the notion.

A poem like 'The Changeling' has a careful structure, and the trimeters are neatly handled, if too reminiscent of Auden. Again the adjectives proliferate - 'sudden bloom', 'darkening room', 'bright sky', and so on; but the poem moves from a reading child, feeling he is a changeling - 'I am I, / And was never born for you' - through lifelessness as lover and soldier - to the Great Good Place 'where his sweet young wife / Waits in his ancient bed'. Characteristically - for this is Reed's major theme when he gets there he says, and more memorably: 'All this is false. And I / Am an interloper here'.

This is one of the best poems of sad exile: in living Reed used a Sitwellian impersonation to disguise -a surprise to me -h is working-class background, and

the middle-class togs have got into his verse: homosexual at a bad time, extremely intelligent and gifted, no doubt charming, he was nevertheless, in spite of his delicate metre, unable to discover often enough the indispensable memorable words, except when being funny - and, therefore, perhaps, more 'himself', more in touch with his plebeian roots. If only some outspoken friend had jerked him out of his 'sensi-tivity' and encouraged him to deploy his native humour and wit in the 'serious' poems ...? He'd look better in a tiny selection from his small output, but no doubt many people will overlook, probably even take to, the dim language.

Vernon Scannell is not only intelligent, 'different' (not the man next door) but also a trained and accomplished writer. His ploys are traditional, Hardyesque in theme and discomfort, but cannot be called old-fashioned, for fashion has come round. In a compassionate elegy to incompetence, 'Escapologist', remembered from 1930 when Scannell must have been nine, the lines are of uneven length but subtly iambic, with no plonking; and the halfrhymes – 'stones . . . rain . . . drawn . . . one' - seem casual but must be calculated preparations for the full rhyme at the end. The words in this tale of action and reaction are good enough to create anxiety for the escape-artist: they relax and intensify as in oral narrative, and when adjectives breed, they're, for instance, a convincing mix of remote and familiar, and they sound off against another trio of verbs:

I read

the language of imprisonment and fear

As that stained, capitate, long parcel Jerked and bucked and squirmed In dirt on obdurate stone.

Scannell must remember his own imprisonment and fear, and hell and heaven seem to underline his description of a chip shop in 'Frying Tonight', but the strategy of juxtaposition – the wit – is not unlike that of 'Naming of Parts':

... Those silver vats behind, they all contain Hot lakes of oil: when fresh peeled chips are drowned

They spit and sizzle like a thousand cats.

In front a patient congregation stands; These serious communicants who long To feel warm parcels solid in their hands.

Later, at home, replete, they may spread out Stained paper cerements, read about old scores, Dead scandals, weddings, unimportant wars.

Scannell typically finds poignancy in the unromantic, and one poem is theology in false whiskers. I suspect he has a greater interest in God than he'd admit in a pub. Sometimes I long for Rilke's 'Praising, that's it . . . Only in the country of Praise can Lamentation succeed'; but these necrologies and dramatic monologues - shots of empty, immature, ruined and wasted lives contrive to be inspiriting through the precision, and at times they're close to praise. Their feeling and compassion is unblurred: the little girl's words are caught exactly: 'It was a dark day and it smelled of Monday.' A pun can sting the imagination: 'Trout practise their scales in the waterfall pool.' He's not without the shamanistic touch, can feel the gratitude of flowers.

Thom Gunn was picked out, while still a student at Cambridge, as a potential major poet, with defects he could be hoped to grow out of. There have been attempts since to dub him major but, though the defects have changed their persona, they haven't gone away, and the writing has declined: the grace simply hasn't been good enough to compensate for the immaturities. Even the bully overdog side of him, not-playing-with-Stephen-Spender, was not well-enough done. Now, at 62 and on the point of turning elderly, emptiness is still at the centre, and the middle-class-English iambic reports on somewhat American unmiddle-class postures are not wellenough written to be pardoned:

It was your birthday, we had drunk and dined

Half of the night with our old friend Who'd showed us in the end To a bed I reached in one drunk stride.

This is a poem about a sexless sleeping hug between two men 'locking me to you As if we were still 22 When our grand passion had not yet Become familial'. It is cosy, but probably needs a gay man to enjoy it as, say, 'Lay your sleeping head, my love' does not'. There's nothing inherently offensive in an older man finding a younger one attractive, and there's certainly more spunk in the love poems, but the lipsmacking sleazy relish and ogling — 'Your blond hair bouncing like a corner boy's' and 'So when you gnawed my armpits' – sit oddly with the would-be Yeatsian, metaphysical, but dingy pretension of feebly-translated Cavalcanti:

Love takes its shape within that part of me (A poet says) where memories reside. And just as light marks out the boundary Of some glass outline men can see inside So love is formed by a dark ray's invasion From Mars, its dwelling in the mind to make.

The title poem has some rhythm and feeling in it but is not verbally adroit - 'world of wonders', 'my flesh reduced and wrecked', 'I cannot but be sorry', and so on - and the only images are a running one of a shield, of all things, and a final mention of an equally unfocussed avalanche. But 'Seesaw', modelled on a Blake song, could almost be by Blake:

Days are bright, Nights are dark, We play seesaw In the park.

And 'An Invitation' – to his brother – has the pleasant easyspeak of a chatty epistle by Auden.

'A Sketch of the Great Dejection', too, is surprising in its dignity, for here the poet is facing his own 'inner and outer famine' without subterfuge. Even here the poet is 'without potent words, inert', as the protagonist admits: phrases like 'marshes of privation', 'the uneven lands were without definition'. But the speaker recognizes in this graveyard, sterile both emotionally, imaginatively, and verbally, the only place of healing:

I fared on and, though the landscape did not change,

it came to seem after a while like a place of recuperation.

I found the close looks at animals, plants and down-and-outs potentially to my taste, but it puzzled me how someone who could track so precisely and concretely, in 'Yellow Pitcher Plant', a fly's ingestion and digestion by an insectivorous plant, could write so leadenly elsewhere, as in the clichés and abstractions mined for this mocking bird:

... And almost mounting to Fulfilment, thus to give Such muscular vigour to a note so strong, Fulfilment that does not destroy The original, still-unspent Longings that led it where it went But links them in a bird's inhuman joy Lifted upon the wing Of that patched body, that insistence Which fills the gardens up with headlong song.

A bar reverie like 'In Time of Plague' is not only prose but dull prose; and the most emphatic rhythms often seem recollections of well-known poems one can't quite place:

The blank was flesh now, running on its nerve, This fair-topped organism dense with charm, Its braided muscle grabbing what would serve, His countering pull, his own devoted arm. Is this the dampening influence of Yvor Winters, or the American environment's easy acceptance of portentous verbosity? Or is it that Gunn is not really interested in his subjects, merely goingthrough the motions?

Distinctly more life returns with the elegies for dead friends, and these are the best poems in the book. 'Lament' for a friend, evidently one of many dying of AIDS, acquires a patient strength through attentiveness and convincing concern. An Elizabethan lilt gets into the trochees of 'Words for Some Ash'. Many of the elegies are reports rather than poems, but, as such reports can do, they waken fellow-feeling and commiseration; and, when Gunn is more deeply engaged, the few best of these threnodies justify the book and are reminders that Gunn is an outstanding talent.

Selected Books

ALAN SEYMOUR

Gossip

Almost a Gentleman by John Osborne (Faber. £14.99)

My John Osborne has always seemed to be different from most people's John Osborne, and that is entirely to do with an Australian upbringing. All societies have their hierarchies; Australia, like the U.S., tends to grade people according to the status consonant with their

type of work and/or money. That some have more clout than others is undeniable, but age-old divisions according to class and caste don't - for historical reasons, can't - exist to the still observable extent that they do in Britain, especially England. In the mid-'50s we'd read about Britain's 'Angry Young Men' (one crusty old critic referred to them as 'Petulant Boys') and when, as an up-and-coming local writer, I was invited by the Sydney Morning Herald to write a feature article on the phenomenon, I tried to do justice to it from my readings of the British press. Look Back in Anger was performed in Sydney within, I think, a year of its Royal Court premiere, but produced no controversy. Jimmy Porter was saying nothing we hadn't said a thousand times – except that out protest was directed at the moribund Menzies political Establishment and Cold War conformity. The energy of the rhetoric was exhilarating, but some of Jimmy's protest we thought superficial and vulgar. 'No more great causes?' At a time when millions were deeply anxious of the possibility of terminal wipe-out by nuclear war?

Only when I came to London in the early '60s and observed with a 'certain shocked fascination the depth and extent of class divisions and the adroitness with which they were maintained (the working classes apparently happy to connive at the convention), to say nothing of the limitless range of petty snobberies, did I begin to comprehend why Osborne's play had had such an effect. Then, sharing a literary-discussion platform with Iohn and