



TRIBUNE

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THE BOURNEMOUTH PARADE

THE Bournemouth Victory Parade has, to this mid-week date of writing, passed off without a hitch. Office has enhanced the stature of Labour's leaders; their record of achievement is immense; one after another, with becoming grace, they took the salute from an enthusiastic and uncritical audience. Even the firework display in the Foreign Policy debate, which some had forecast, provided no real surprises; at least, there were no casualties. At the end of it all, Ernest Bevin retained his formidable place in the Labour Movement as surely as Big Ben was unaffected by the cascades of water from the River Thames.

Not that the Conference could be described as dull. The speeches from the platform maintained a high level. The Prime Minister was at the top of his form, which means that he was forthright, incisive, and inspiring in the spirit of comradeship which he conveyed to the delegates. Jim Griffiths gave us a taste of true eloquence. Shinwell was skillfully argumentative and effective about the realities of administration. Edith Summerskill scored a notable success. Ernest Bevin achieved the customary by the manipulation of his bulldozer. These and all the others impressed their hearers with the competence and assurance of Labour's chosen team, and the total effects are certain to be good, for every Party member who

attended will return fresh and invigorated to his constituency.

Altogether, it was magnificent; but it was not a Party Conference. For a Party Conference, as opposed to a Victory Parade, requires opposition. A brilliantly witty, but unsupported typical speech from Ian Mikardo; a few demagogic gestures from Will Lawther easily brushed aside by Shinwell; mild defeats for the Executive on comparatively minor issues, some uncoordinated protests on foreign policy; excellent speeches on Spain and Palestine (the best of the Conference from the floor, notably by Dick Crossman) such a combination does not constitute an opposition. Delegates waited eagerly for the pill, only to be left dazed and wondering at the end whether they had swallowed it without knowing. They had not; it was pure, unrationed sweetness, and Arthur Greenwood in reply, who had obviously been expecting a dose of strychnine, was unable to discover how he had mistaken the label on the bottle.

Perhaps Sidney Silverman was right. Clearly, the delegates had assembled with the firm intention of praising Caesar and the whole Senate. They had not got the heart to bury anyone. Moreover, no one would question the fact that the leaders deserved their rounds of applause. They face giant tasks, and the encouragement from Bournemouth

will fortify them in the anxious months ahead. No virtue in politics is so important as timing, and a fierce opposition would have been dismissed as ungenerous and ungracious.

But the problem for the future remains. It will be a bad thing for the Party, bad for Socialism, bad for all the hopes and aspirations which enthused the assembled delegates, if the Bournemouth procedure is accepted as a precedent. Democracy within the Party must find its true outlet at Conference, or the results will be severe for us all. Unhappily, the Executive has not seized this opportunity to make a proper overhaul of the Party constitution. We should prepare for that attempt now. We should prepare, after this first natural celebration, for real conferences in the future. Aneurin Bevan's election at the head of the Constituency Parties Executive list is proof that strict orthodoxy is not regarded as the paramount quality for leadership, and that there are critical faculties which must be expressed if the movement is to stay healthy.

In brief, one Bournemouth was justifiable; a second Bournemouth would breed complacency. Any who fear it should now prepare to avoid it; for, having filled their lungs with these luscious breezes, the Executive by itself will not organise a conference, as opposed to a celebration.

BOOKS

Thunder on the Right

by Alan Hodge

Talking Bronco: Roy Campbell. *Faber and Faber*. 7/6.

A Map of Verona: Henry Reed. *Cape*. 3/6.

The Garden: V. Sackville-West. *Michael Joseph*. 8/6.

ROY CAMPBELL is a ferocious nonconformist among poets. Not long after bursting upon London from South Africa he flayed the English literary scene in *The Georgiad*. Later, when Socialism was stirring the poets, and few were unmoved by the cause of Republican Spain, Mr. Campbell rejoiced in being a lone defender of Franco and a hater of Reds and Jews.

In *Talking Bronco* he is the same bull-fighting bard, but he has found a new victim to shoot his couplets at. With all his brilliant satirical might he attacks a prosperous Left-wing poet, mythically named MacSpaunday, who spent the war snugly in Government Departments and A.R.P. while urging others to fight. This theme, mixed with mementoes of Mr. Campbell's own active campaigning in Africa, runs through most of the thirty poems in this book. It gets its longest run in the title-poem, *Talking Bronco*—an epithet, Mr. Campbell explains, used to describe him by a leading poet of the Rear; and here the Bronco brays magnificent pieces of invective:—

While joint MacSpaunday shuns the very strife
He barked for loudest, when mere words were
rife,

When to proclaim his proletarian loyalties
Paid well, was safe, raked in the heavy royalties,
And made the Mealy Mouth and Bulging Purse
The hallmark of contemporary verse. . . .

When Avarice reconquers fear once more
To wait the Prophet to his native shore,
Only returning when the blitz is over
To bum fat sinecures, and bask in clover:
Or, when Conscriptio time is due to jump,
Get posted to some rural Fireman's Pump,
To tend wet cabbages from catching fire
And guard the vicar cycling round the shire,
And advertise the fact on blurb and board
For public recognition and reward.

No English poet now living writes satire with such enthusiastic energy, nor turns out line after line with so regular a brazen clangour. Mr. Campbell's peers in these arts are Byron in "Don Juan" and Dryden in "Absalom and Achitophel."

The *Talking Bronco*, however, cannot justly be compared with his literary ancestors outside the realm of technique, for Mr. Campbell pretends to no wide range of mind or sympathy. He is proud of being a rip-roaring colonial, untouched by thoughts beyond the bronco-world. This incorruptible heartiness is his strength; but it also makes him blind. For he cannot judge whether he is writing satire with real moral power or whether merely indulging in ill-tempered and untruthful gibes. Nor do his anti-Semitic sallies add anything but a lunatic tinge to his verse.

There are other fine things, however, in *Talking Bronco*. Some smart epigrams, including one on the army base at Nairobi ridden with brass-hats; an impressive translation from Saint John of the Cross; two good sonnets in

since modestly acclaiming Camoes whom Mr. Campbell sees as his poetic master; and a poem called *Washing Day*, which begins delightfully thus:—

Amongst the rooftop chimneys where the breezes

Their dizzy choreography design,
Pyjamas, combinations and chemises
Inflate themselves and dance upon the line
Drilled by a loose disorder and abandon,
They belly and explode, revolve and swing,
As fearless of the precipice they stand on
As if there were religion in the string.

When Mr. Campbell can bring himself to stop firing couplets at MacSpaunday's ghost, perhaps he will write some more straight lines as good as these.

One merit is shared with Mr. Campbell by the other poets under review, and that is an entirely wholesome freedom from apocalyptic slop. Few books could be more thoroughly different from *Talking Bronco* than Henry Reed's *A Map of Verona*, but the authors of both have in common a rare respect for the literal meanings of words. It is a welcome thing in these times of knotted and confused imagery to read a first book of poems that move clearly and easily and that make sense.

Mr. Reed's world is one of reflective emotions; his book is full of brooding about journeys and quests, with seas, ships, ports, rocks and deserts as the properties of his soliloquies. Because he lacks a turn for the biting and epigrammatic phrase, his poems are difficult to quote: they build up an atmosphere slowly in slack rhythms out of lines which taken separately look blunted and un compelling. Here are the beginning and end of *Judging Distances*, a moving poem about an incident in army instruction which the publishers fatuously describe as comic:—

Not only how far away, but the way that you say it

Is very important. Perhaps you may never get
The knack of judging a distance, but at least
you know

How to report on a landscape. . . .

(The instructor then supposes that two lovers have been observed):—

. . . Which is, perhaps, only to say
That there is a row of houses to the left of
the arc,

And that under some poplars a pair of what
appear to be humans
Appear to be loving.

Well that, for answer, is what we might rightly
call

Moderately satisfactory only, the reason being,
Is that two things have been omitted, and those
are important.

The human beings, now: in what direction are
they,
And how far away, would you say? And do
not forget

There may be dead ground in between.

There may be dead ground in between; and I
may not have got

The knack of judging a distance; I will only
venture

A guess that between me and the apparent
lovers,

(Who, incidentally, appear by now to have
finished),

At seven o'clock from the houses, is roughly a
distance

Of about one year and a half.

There is much dry charm as well as quiet wit in this sketch of the soldier cut off from civilian pleasures. But it is half-way to being a short story in prose. Mr. Reed's poetic weaknesses are evident; he is diffuse and not sufficiently accomplished to be able to make a success of rhythmically loose lines with run-on endings. Nor does his skill improve in the later poems of this book. More ambitious in subject—Tristram and Iseult, Philoctetes—they diffuse a delicately romantic twilight, but the lines flag and droop as if written for one of the more mournful-voiced poetry-readers of the B.B.C. And I see no sign of Mr. Reed's acquiring a rhythm of truly distinctive stamp, for never far away are echoes of Mr. Eliot's Quartets.

Nineteen years ago Miss Sackville-West won the Hawthornden Prize for a genteelly rural poem called *The Land*. Those who enjoyed it will also like *The Garden*. It consists of 3,000 unpretending lines about the country-house gardener's tasks and thoughts in the four seasons of the year. Arch absurdities and earnest advices abound ("Those reckless buds, those ill-advised shoots! 'A tie so soon prevents their doom,' they say"). Miss Sackville-West can seldom go far without prosaic intrusions, but readers who have leisure, patience and not too nice an ear may find in *The Garden* something resembling the pleasant tedium of Michael Drayton's rambling topographical verse.



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