

self is wholly mastered by the lusts of possession, and Malory by hatred. All four are driven to wreck, and the suggestion is everywhere strong that they had not at any time any choice of the roads they travelled. Beyond all this, as though for an ultimate horror, both Malory and Nightingale are compelled by the *Zeitgeist* to make their individual passions and purposes turn the wheels of "social service". Nightingale's great house by the sea and his selfishly won fortune are willed to the public for the founding of a hospital, and in this hospital Malory is to be the chief slave.

Confronted by such dreariness, one looks for some significance in the poem as a whole which may justify a poet of Mr. Robinson's powers in making such an effort. There is no difficulty in finding this parabolic meaning. To phrase it crudely, Mr. Robinson seems to say that in our time the purposes and even the strongest passions of the individual are compelled into channels of no individual's choosing. In order to show this with the greatest possible emphasis he has brought before us two men, one possessed by bitterest hatred and the other coldly selfish in every thought and deed, both of whom are forced to serve not their own ends but those of the public. Pious worshippers of the new god Service may quote "There's a divinity that shapes our ends", but nothing resembling a religious joy is seen in Malory or Nightingale—or, for that matter, in Mr. Robinson's account of them. This conquest of the individual by mere numbers is not a thing for an artist to rejoice in—partly because, so far as we can see in the dim light thrown from the past, it must mean the extinction, among other things, of art. "Those tumbling and unceasing little waves" at which Malory gazed through Nightingale's great window—

. . . They were not his waves,
Yet surely they were flashing with a language
That was important and inevitable;
There were too many of them to be dismissed

By one whose life was only a little more
Of time than one of theirs. . . .
In clouds that came and went, there was at least
A sort of promise, for they came and went;
But here there was a promise of nothing else
Than waves and waves, and then waves, and
more waves,
That went and came.

Number, meaningless numerosity, and the blank stare of the sea—of all the gospels ever preached probably the dreariest is this gospel of Service. For of course it is the human multitudes that Malory and Robinson are thinking of, multitudes engulfing all distinction and individuality. So Malory saw them, and saw his future life:

. . . There was no escape
From the long sentence of his usefulness.
He was a slave now in a city of pain,
A pullulating place that was all places,
And soon or late the last abode of man
Till his departure.

It may be, then that Mr. Robinson more or less consciously intended this strange and forbidding narrative poem as a prophecy of years coming on into which neither he nor any other sensible man would care to live. But the poem is not altogether a prophecy; in some respects it is painfully like a description of what we now see about us.

ODELL SHEPARD

RED DRUMMING IN THE SUN *by* May
Lewis (KNOFF. \$2.00)

MAY LEWIS in her first book of lyrics shows talent: although the emotions stressed herein are somewhat usual and limited in their intensity, although the figures into which these emotions are cast are rather ordinary, there is a precision of phrase, an avoidance of triteness, a hint of an ever-present thinking mind which is the essential core of every song. All of these traits indicate that Miss Lewis is aware of the duty of the poet to observe his physical world exactly and to interpret the emotions felt with individuality.

The result is that although there are included in this little volume a number of poems which do not come off and would-be satirical observations that are not important, there are also included a handful of very good poems indeed. This, the last stanza of the title-poem, is an example:

That day I heard red drumming in the sun,
And then the throbbing of a grey dove's heart;
At last, that pause when the curved waves
count one,
Swing to the beach, sweep outward, and depart.

Other successful lyrics are *Snow Change*, *The Book*, *How Delicately the Tree*.

One might say, briefly, that Miss Lewis has a real gift for the exactly turned phrase, a pleasant control of rhythm, and a mind which is self-critical enough to prevent any excursion into sentimentality. Her reactions to life are the usual feminine reactions, but she is more analytical, less falsely pretentious, and considerably more intelligent than many of our lyric singers. For that reason she has much more possibility of growth both in technique and in penetration.

EDA LOU WALTON

EPISTLE TO PROMETHEUS by *Babette Deutsch* (CAPE & SMITH. \$2.00)

It is clear that Miss Deutsch's imagination has been moved, as a poet's ought, by the wrongs and degradations of human life and by the contrasting vision of what the human spirit might become, what perhaps the mythological fire-bringer would have had it become. But the poetic achievement of the book is not commensurate with this vision. It is a

slight performance for so ambitious a plan. We are given glimpses of the Promethean spirit, its continual defeat and rebirth, in such figures as Christ, Voltaire, Lenin, and Gandhi. But there is a great lack of definiteness in these glimpses. If Christ and Voltaire were embodiments of the same spirit, that spirit must obviously remain somewhat nebulous. Moreover, there is a want of sustained flight in the poem for which a number of graceful passages and lines of considerable force do not compensate. None of the cantos, printed with any degree of solidity, would run to more than a few pages, yet two or three different measures are often employed even in so brief a scope. The divisions are prefixed by quotations which serve to show that Miss Deutsch is a bluestocking as well as a poet. One canto is a single sonnet; at another point a ballade is introduced. But the characteristic measure is a succession of unrhymed or loosely rhymed lines, largely very short, which have a general movement approximating blank verse and might better have been written as such. The device of writing a letter to Prometheus is not a happy one. It suggests those Protestant "long prayers" which used to be ostensibly addressed to God but were really sermons to the congregation. Miss Deutsch is actually apostrophizing Prometheus, but discontented for some reason with this rhetorical device, she turns it into the pseudo-literal device of a letter, which in this case is neither natural nor inherently poetic. Thus, despite fundamental sincerity in her design, Miss Deutsch has not been able to avoid affectations and self-consciousness in the form of her poem.

THEODORE MORRISON