

lishers and movie producers used to insult our intelligence. But here it is again, anno 1942. Says Mr. Prescott: ". . . they had exchanged Gauleiters and the Gestapo for commissars and the GPU" and life now seemed even bleaker for Barbara Padowicz. Life in the Soviet Union, land of her refuge—this was in 1940—seemed grubby compared with "even as poor a capitalist country as Poland." All of which, I submit, is odious, vile, and downright disgusting. To slander at this moment a people whose blood is being spilled for the freedom of mankind is not excusable even in the book review, which seems to have become the last refuge of libelers. I don't see why Orville Prescott, just because he writes for the *Times*, should be exempt from reading the firsthand Moscow dispatches of Ralph Parker that appear in his paper and magnificently refute the Barbara Padowicz's of this world.

Some weeks ago Bennett Cerf, president of Random House, reminded publishers and booksellers of their moral and patriotic responsibility to get rid of these viperous books that spread the Hitler poison against our Soviet ally. And just the other day, Archibald MacLeish urged upon a convention of booksellers their responsibility to evaluate their wares not as counters over the cashbox but as repositories of truth. By and large, there has been a healthy change in the book world since June of last year. I think book reviewers can chip in more than they sometimes do. The Padowicz book reaches relatively few people; but its slurs at our great ally are circulated among hundreds of thousands of readers through Mr. Prescott. The same goes for Mr. Marsh. After all, you don't have to carry a gun to feel yourself a soldier of the United Nations.

Rodgers' *Awake and Other Wartime Poems*. Some of the poems in this volume were written before the war, others more recently. Rodgers is a young Ulsterman better acquainted at this time than any American poet is likely to be with the actual meaning of war itself. The first edition of this book was destroyed in an enemy bombing raid. And Rodgers has the dubious distinction of being hailed as the Rupert Brooke of this later war. He is technically well equipped, better equipped than Brooke ever was. But he has, alas, been educated in poetry by the English intellectual poets—Auden in particular. His real world is distinctly that of the disillusioned middle class. His acceptance of social reform is an intellectual acceptance first and foremost. And consequently there is much in the longer poems in this book which is pure rhetoric (an attempt to convince others) rather than actual vision, imagination, or emotional faith in a better future for mankind.

The rhythms here are often the down-beat rhythms of disillusionment. The imagery is composed rather than felt "ten-league boots on brutality," "oiled eyes," "syrupy event," "sought in cinemas," "trapped intrepid man." Actually this language reminds one of the artificial pseudo-classic language as first employed by the very early romantics in pieces about common man. And the poems which are truly successful here are not those of intellectual message artfully contrived, but such poems as "Beagles," in which the image of the hunted animal becomes the image of hunted man—and because Rodgers has seen and felt this fact emotionally.

As for poems of propaganda, one must honor this poet for trying to convey a message of which intellectually he is convinced:

*And let us like the trapped intrepid man  
Who on the prairie hears the holocaust roar  
And sees his horizons running to meet him  
In mutinous flames, while the still grasses fill  
With rills of refugees, let us calmly  
Stand now to windward, and here at our feet  
Stooping, light fires of foresight that will clean  
And clear the careless ground before us  
Of Privilege. So will that other Fate  
Arriving find no hold within our state,  
And we on our ringed ground its roar will  
wait  
Freely. Awake! before it is too late.*

This is deliberate anti-fascist war poetry, but it is intellectual poetry. And purely intellectual poetry is never very important artistically. It has the further fault of not touching anything but the upper brain cells. It is not emotionally moving. W. R. Rodgers, rid of his contrived imagery, searching the actual world of sight and sound and smell and the language of the people who love freedom, may come through. He is turned in the right direction. But he had better stop talking about the "scathing winds of hate," "lariat intellect," "grass skirt insularity," if he wants to communicate to the English-speaking common people anything at all.

EDA LOU WALTON.

## BOOKS IN REVIEW

### Nothing New Under the Sun

SHAKESPEARE IN HARLEM, by Langston Hughes. Knopf. \$2.50.

BE ANGRY AT THE SUN, by Robinson Jeffers. Random House. \$2.50.

AWAKE AND OTHER WARTIME POEMS, by W. R. Rodgers. Harcourt Brace. \$1.50.

NONE of these three books is really something new under the sun. Both Langston Hughes and Robinson Jeffers, in their totally different ways, are writing as they always have. Mr. Rodgers is younger and this is his first book. But not even this young poet has achieved either a new way of communicating his feeling about the world as it is now or, surely, a new vision of this world. With history moving so rapidly, poets are, of course, having difficulty in writing at all, for poetry is not mere reporting. Any poem must convey an idea made feeling, and through words and rhythms which are sufficiently emotionalized to stir the reader. Poetry, in other words, requires time for gestation.

If a poet needs a history, a culture, something implicit and of some duration to communicate, the Negro poet has this. His problem is old, his cause just. The culture out of which he writes is more or less homogeneous. The symbols of race suffering and oppression are well understood.

This new collection of Langston Hughes' "blues songs" is not unlike his earlier collections. These are the known lonely songs and rhythms of his people, their love songs too. Back of the simple rhythms lies suffering. The poems are close to folk song. It may be said, however, that they probably had been in preparation for some time. They indicate no awareness of the changed war world, they are not even profoundly class or race-conscious. I think on the whole they are a little too easily composed. Folk poetry is always the picture of a people. But a poet like Langston

Hughes should have something more to say than is said in these strummed out "blues songs" which can too easily be listened to and do not call forth enough thought.

Robinson Jeffers is entirely consistent. All of his long poems have expressed the anarchistic individualist's annoyance with the modern world. Long ago Jeffers said flatly that he was more impressed by Nietzsche than by Christ, by Freud than by Marx or Lenin. He understood, he said, the guns and the airplanes better than any of the economic theories for "Utopia."

Jeffers is a clear example of the poet who remains a romantic and anarchistic individualist in times which turn to other forms of thinking. He is as disillusioned about this culture as Eliot, but he thinks man should return to the primitive and solitary. Nor does he retreat in this last volume which was, undoubtedly, composed before Pearl Harbor. His position is isolationist, anti-Roosevelt. He has a vague admiration for Churchill aroused and England aroused. He understands (or thinks he does) Hitler, the madman and dreamer. He sees his generation after this war as wandering between the "dogs" of Europe and the "policemen" of America. His sons are war age and he hates the war for that reason. But he has long held that our civilization was crashing, must crash, and has believed in Spengler and the cyclic theory of the rise and fall of cultures, races, etc. So much for his ideas. As for his poetry it is prosaic, looser than usual in structure, flat-footed and weary. And this book will feed emotionally only those who can look toward a god of violence and enjoy the fury of storm because they desire the nervous exhaustion and oblivion which follow. Fortunately these are not many. Jeffers has been over-rated. He is communicating only to such as, being sick, would have sensation at any price, even the price of death.

The best book in this group is W. R.

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**Lorca as Playwright**

FROM LORCA'S THEATER. *Five Plays of Federico Garcia Lorca. Translated by Richard L. O'Connell and James Graham. Charles Scribner's Sons. \$2.50.*

AFTER reading these plays I think of some beautiful and vigorous South American dancers I have seen, who at first seemed overhung with gaudy and foolish ornament. With the graceful and firm lines of their bodies broken or blurred by ribbon and tassel, they seemed the victims of a wild and infantile taste. Then they danced, and the ribbons streamed like flames and the ornaments became like visible currents and cross currents.

At first Lorca's plays are as gaudy with mannerisms, symbols, and rhetoric. On any single page the ornaments with which the writing seems overhung are like the dancer's painted wicker, glass, and ribbons, until the dancing sets them in motion. Eccentricity and excess seems to mark this overrich language, this lavish rhetoric, these characters so symbol-laden and so ceremonially formalized.

But as the drama proceeds, the vigor and life and excitement grows; and one is delighted with Lorca's inventive energy. What had seemed an obscuring overlay of rhetoric takes on a special function, to impart an added and, as it were, counterpointed motion. For Lorca's imagery appears to have functions not ordinarily allotted even in poetry. Instead of a limited function, such as decorating or heightening the detail at which it is applied, it continues and sustains symbols which have a symbiotic life with the characters, about whom they entwine, like tropic vines bearing brilliant flowers, around the trunks of jungle trees. The symbols have organic life and growth equally with the characters.

Therefore, though any page one turns to, seems to be overburdened with some extravagance, with violations of the sense of reality, yet, as soon as one is swung into the movement of the drama, the action becomes vibrant with reality.

Of the five plays given here, four, *The Shoemaker's Prodigious Wife*, *The Love of Don Perlimplin*, *If Five Years Pass*, and *Yerma*, deal with what one might call the sentimental obsession of the first generation of our century. This sentimental obsession, in which men figure as beings of tortured delicacy whose sensitiveness makes them insufficient to their direct and earthy women, may be a reaction to the equal and opposite sentimental obsession of the Victorian era. And it may be the rationalized and prettified expression of male shock over one of the chief phenomena of our century, the emergence of woman into work and the world. Its gravest statement has been that of D. H. Lawrence; its most spectacular, perhaps, that of the sculptor Gaston Lachaise.

The Victorian sentimentality was the presentation of the man-woman relationship as the crude male invasion upon the sensitive female. Thereby a male world that restricted women's activities, forbade her equal economic oppor-



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