

least to an uncertain terminus, the natural thing to do is to pursue the other kind of realism, the kind which I believe to be far more realistic. This second half of the century will see how far that pursuit can go. I may—I hope I haven't but I may have given you the idea that I am proposing a theatre cloudy with insubstantial symbols and spiritual sea-wrack. If I have, let me quickly disabuse you. The facts of reality are the same in the theatre of poetry as they are in the theatre of prose. What is different is their implication. What I am trying to say is what I have said elsewhere, that a spade is never so merely a spade as the word spade would imply. I am asking for the sudden dramatic appearance of a Spade in time and space—now I come to think of it—I am asking for both kinds of realism at once.

This isn't at all a startling request; it's a very old one; but in our lifetime we've got out of the way of making it, and perhaps we shall take a little time to learn to listen to the answer, when the answer comes to be made.

We may notice the spade digging, but not what is dug. And I do want to make it clear to you that I'm not only interested in this possible change in the theatre because a change is due, or even because change is necessary to the theatre's vitality. If a theatre is alive it is alive because it belongs to the life outside its doors, and the life outside its doors isn't such, at the moment, that a change of viewpoint can do any harm. We know what the world looks like, and what the action of men looks like in everyday newspaper terms. The knowledge makes for dismay and a suffocation of the spirit. If the theatre can help us to see ourselves and the world freshly, as though we had just rounded the corner into life, it will be what entertainment should be, a holiday, which sets us up to continue living at the top of our bent, and worth, I think, any amount of admonition and prophesy or the photographic likeness of how we appear by custom. This change of viewpoint would be no escapism or fantasy. Nothing could be so wildly, perilously, incomprehensibly fantastic as reality itself, and we may as well dare to look at it, and like it.

It's a tall order for the theatre to supply, and we still have got no further than looking in the right direction; but the audiences are alert, and so the theatre-managers are alert, to what will come, if we, the playwrights, can bring it in. The temperature of the theatre has been noticeably rising over the past many years

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Eliot and Pound—"whom, first, they would destroy."

## The Kings Are Dead

W. T. SCOTT

ANY defense of twentieth-century English-American poetry must begin by defending those dominating powers, Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot. In ages to come, judgment on the poetry of our era may not feel thus obligated at all; that is anyone's guess; but certainly it is true now. And if we hadn't proof of this from the defenders, we should have even surer proof from the attackers; it is Pound and Eliot whom, first, they would destroy. To R. P. Blackmur, whose brilliant essays on modern poetry have at last been collected in one stout volume,\* these two names are, with Yeats, the prime names of our poetic era; and to James Devaney, who has written a little and useless book\*\* in the same field, the Pound-Eliot camp and campfollowers are the heretics of true poetry.

The quality of these very different books does not necessarily confirm the "rightness" of one side or the other. It is simply that the difference is—unfortunately for the self-styled "traditionalists" in poetry—that Mr. Blackmur knows what he is talking about.

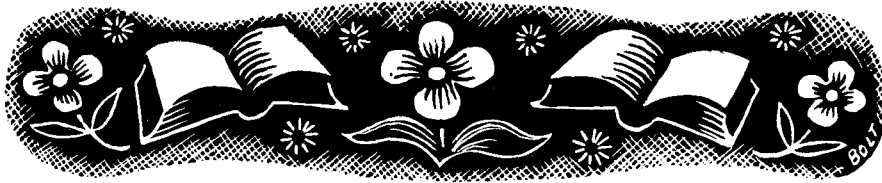
As a matter of fact, Blackmur is only most incidentally a defender. I

\*LANGUAGE AS GESTURE. By R. P. Blackmur. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 440 pp. \$5.75.

\*\*POETRY IN OUR TIME. By James Devaney. New York: Cambridge University Press. 114 pp. \$1.75.

have momentarily cast him in the role because of the coincidence in my assignment of Devaney's book. Blackmur is an elucidator, an examiner, an explicator of texts: he is a botanist of the stanza, verse, phrase, even of the single word. From such minute study—using typicalities of this poet and that—he moves to implications of the poet's whole work, and to comprehension of it. There are a lot of critics employing this method, but almost none who avoid the gobbledegook of what they fancy a "scientific method" of criticism; almost none, indeed, who achieve readable English. Blackmur is the rare and rewarding exception. In part it must be that, a poet himself, he never forgets the act of poetry is a greater thing than the act of criticism. In any case, though his criticism has density and asks much of its reader, his carefulness has such intelligence that it insures clarity; he deals in revelation.

Blackmur makes a quotation from I. A. Richards and a comment upon it which together place his essays. Richards: "To recall that poetry is the supreme use of language, man's chief co-ordinating instrument, in the service of the most integral purpose of life; and to explore, with thoroughness, the intricacies of the modes of language as working modes of the mind." To which Blackmur adds: "But I want this criticism, engaged in



this task, constantly to be confronted with examples of poetry, and I want it so for the very practical purpose of assisting in pretty immediate appreciation of the use, meaning, and value of the language in that particular poetry."

In definition of his title, and again of his approach, Blackmur says "Gesture, in language, is the outward and dramatic play of inward and imaged meaning. It is that play of meaningfulness among words which cannot be defined in the formulas of the dictionary, but which is defined in their use together; gesture is that meaningfulness which is moving, in every sense of that word: what moves the words and what moves us." "Gestures," he says further on, "are the first steps toward the making of symbols . . ."

Even if a reviewer had that unlikely merit, a critical mind as keen as Mr. Blackmur's, he could not comment upon, disagree with, and admire the total conclusions of "Language as Gesture" without engaging in a project excessively beyond the scope of a review.

His twenty-one essays bear dates ranging over the past twenty years. I think the only essay which should have been revised in the light of additional information is that on Emily Dickinson. At least, a little progress has been made in the proper editing of the Dickinson work; and had Blackmur checked Mabel Bingham's "Ancestors' Brocades" he would have found evidence (though perhaps not even there completely understood) of the misprinting of the poem "I got so I could hear his name" which Blackmur thinks goes to pieces at the end.

His essay on Emily Dickinson and that on the shorter poems of Thomas Hardy are his farthest reachings-back. He inclines to summarize Emily, faults and successes together, as a natural. For instance, he seems to think Emily rhymed "badly" because she didn't know any better (which I doubt: she rhymed conventionally enough, at times—though never, I think, in her best poems). And he sounds contradictory when he concludes that "three

saving accidents" (cultural crisis, aptitude for language, self-to-objective expression) account for Emily, and then remarks—as to Hardy—that "The theory of accidents in poetry like that of idiopathy in medicine is only a cloak for inadequate observation and explains nothing." In any case—as to Hardy—Blackmur's basic point, is that Hardy "violated his sensibility with ideas" (which is what, you may recall, Eliot said Henry James did *not* do): that is, that when Hardy's poems fail they generally fail because of an application of formula, call it mechanized plotting. Most importantly, Blackmur recognizes the continual vitality of the best Dickinson and Hardy poems, and one wishes he had illustrated this more and the flaws less; though, it is true, a critic often functions most helpfully in analysis of failure (as, indeed, in a much smaller way, I am picking at Mr. Blackmur not in spite of my admiration for his essays but because of it).

Many of us who give to Yeats's poetry the very great admiration it deserves have, nonetheless, felt a specialization which limits it; we have not defined this—we have merely felt it. Blackmur at least begins that work of definition. Yeats's "system," he says, worked for the poet about half the time, left him "ad-libbing" the rest. "Yeats commonly hovered between myth and philosophy, except for transcending flashes, which is why he is not one of the greatest poets. His ambition was too difficult for accomplishment; or his gift too small to content him. His curse was not that he rebelled against the mind of his age, which was an advantage for poetry, considering that mind, but that he could not create, except in fragments, the actuality of his age . . ."

As becomes his sort of critic, Blackmur is a lover of language per se. He admires the elegant use of it in Wallace Stevens, the objective use of it in Marianne Moore, the—as he sees it—sentimentally deficient use of it in E. E. Cummings; though, in an essay later than these individual studies, he inclines to write down Miss Moore and Stevens and to succumb (I think more sensibly than in his earlier strictures) to the charm of Cummings.

Perhaps, after all, it depends on what kind of ideas you are being violated by. Eliot, to whom Blackmur gives supreme place in twentieth cen-

tury poetry, interests him precisely because of the struggle of ideas; and Pound is "neither a great poet nor a great thinker" because "he is all surface and articulation"—and Pound is given a high place chiefly as a free-wheeling translator possessed of an incomparable ear.

I shan't argue to what extent Blackmur seems to me "wrong" or "right" in his judgments. I suspect his canon as too fashionable, and that some contemporaries whom he ignores or dismisses—Frost, Jeffers, Robinson, for examples—are not going to be found as inferior as Blackmur supposes. I think, too, that Blackmur, like all explicators of text, tends to forget—if not so frequently nor humorlessly as most—a remark of Yeats's which Blackmur himself quotes: "When I come to write poetry I seem—I suppose because it is all instinct with me—completely ignorant." That is, the veterinarian of letters may assemble all the parts of a horse and still not really have The Horse.

But Blackmur is the least of sinners in this. He knows The Horse, all right, and his close, tight, neat examination affords us dozens of informative perceptions and makes his book the archetype in its field. Compared to it, such a treatise as James Devaney's "Poetry in Our Time" is a futile gesture of non-language (as, I trust Mr. Blackmur would agree, Mr. Cummings might understandably put it).

Devaney, an Australian poet, begs his whole question by assuming there is a particular way of poetry which is poetry—he instances Milton, Keats, Francis Thompson—and that "modernist" poets do not write it and, therefore, do not write poetry. It's the old instinct to elevate a matter of taste as an absolute. But, quite beyond this, his book is filled with misinformation, misrepresentation, and (for argument) repetitiousness. He reaches back to claim that "Pope . . . knew nothing of rhythm" and in the next breath says "even the smoothest heroic couplet" has rhythm. He comes forward to assail Eliot as "impersonal" and then concludes Eliot is not impersonal at all. He attacks contemporary poetic techniques and then observes that in poetry it is "the thing said," and not the way, which matters. He supposes all "modernist" poets deem all older poetry dead and gone. And so on, and so on.

The Pound-Eliot era is already dead. But it will not be buried and memorialized until a new poetry as pervasive arises, and then from the temporary vantage of that new poetry judgment of its predecessors may be made; not in sentimental ranting, but a judgment as disciplined as that which Blackmur brings to the job.

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## Across a Pair of Centuries

**HÖLDERLIN.** *A Study of His Life, Vision, and Poetry.* By L. S. Salzberger. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press. 64 pp. \$2.50.

**HÖLDERLIN POEMS.** *Translated by Michael Hamburger.* New York: Pantheon Books. 275 pp. \$3.50.

**LORCA:** *An Appreciation of His Poetry.* By Roy Campbell. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press. 79 pp. \$2.50.

By WALLACE FOWLIE

**A**LTHOUGH Friedrich Hölderlin wrote most of his mature poetry between 1800 and 1805, not until more than a century later did his work appear in a reliable edition and receive something of the attention it deserved. The influence of his poetry on Stefan George and on Rilke marked the first important discovery of Hölderlin, and since that time his place among the significant "moderns" in poetry has been consistently affirmed and strengthened. The particular kind of poetic experience he went through, and his insanity or partial insanity during the last thirty-six years of his life, have associated his "case" with Nerval, Baudelaire, Laforgue, Nietzsche.

Mr. Salzberger, whose new essay on Hölderlin appears in a series of critical reevaluations, "Studies in Modern European Literature and Thought," published in England and by Yale in this country, is lecturer in German at Cambridge University. Because of the uniform demands of this series, his essay is short and contains very few selections of Hölder-

lin's poetry. Particularly valuable are the pages interpreting Hölderlin's prophetic mission of the poet, the relationship between theology and poetry, and the history of this doctrine. Mr. Hamburger's critical study of Hölderlin in his edition of the poems, is more detailed and more analytical of specific poems. This volume contains translations of all of the important poems of Hölderlin, with the German text as well.

The two volumes would serve as useful introduction to Hölderlin, who conceived the poet and hero as super-human figures, as semi-mystics and titans. His poetry reveals a fusion of classical and Christian traditions. The subject of love in Hölderlin carries both platonic and pietist connotations. His very complex attitude toward Christ appears only in the later poetry, where, in keeping with a medieval tradition, he establishes a parallel between Christ and Hercules.

Both critics call attention to the poem "Patmos," which is probably Hölderlin's most brilliant achievement. It narrates the poet's voyage to Patmos, where St. John had his revelation. But Christ is absent from the island and the disciples (and the poet as well) feel terror before this divine absence. The two opening lines state the dual experience which is reflected throughout much of Hölderlin's work: the presence of the divine and man's difficulty in understanding it.

Nah ist  
und schwer zu fassen der Gott

(Near is  
The God, and hard to grasp)

Both Salzberger and Hamburger avoid interpreting Hölderlin's poetry in terms of the pathological. They would seem to subscribe to the theory of Karl Jaspers, in his book on Strindberg and Van Gogh, that "the schizophrenic processes can allow unique spiritual works to be formed."

Mr. Campbell's essay on the Spanish poet Federico García Lorca appears in the same series as Salzberger's book on Hölderlin. It is slightly longer and contains many translated extracts from the poems and in some instances the complete poem. The original Spanish is not included. Roy Campbell is a well-known poet in his own right and has already published translations of St. John of the Cross and Baudelaire. He has lived in Spain, where he was a bullfighter and a breaker of horses. In his book, he demonstrates a very real understanding of Spain and the



—Painting by V. Baur.

Hölderlin—"classical and Christian."

Spanish temperament, and a poet's kinship with Lorca.

The study is more a sympathetic explanation of Lorca's background, both regional and literary, and of the principal themes of the poems and plays, than a critical assessment. Mr. Campbell starts with the premise that Lorca is one of the major poets of our age and that his work has by now transcended all political involvements. Lorca illustrates an important principle in art, by which the particular leads to the universal. By being deeply a poet of his native Andalusia, Lorca grew into a poet of universal meaning. His poems were known by recitation long before they were published. His fellow students recited them, almost in the tradition of the pedlars of ballads, of the jongleurs and troubadours. In this respect, Mr. Campbell very justly compares Lorca to the Welsh poet Dylan Thomas. Both are musicians in poetry who stress the evocative force of sound in words. The tonal effects are stronger and more thunderous in Thomas and more fluid and subtle in the Spanish poet.

A second renaissance in Spanish poetry has been brought about by such poets as Lorca, Machado, Jiménez, Salinas, and Guillén. Lorca is best characterized by the fusion in his writing of erudite, Gongorine elements with the popular ballad tradition. Under the seeming simplicity of a lullaby, he can suggest tragedy and dire foreboding (as in the poem

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Lorca—"musician in poetry."

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