

THE ARCTIC OX, by Marianne Moore; *Faber and Faber*, 16s.
 A ROOF OF TIGER LILIES, by Donald Hall; *Andre Deutsch*, 15s.
 RECOVERIES, by Elizabeth Jennings; *Andre Deutsch*, 12s. 6d.
 BIRTH OF A SHARK, by David Wevill; *Macmillan*, 18s.

Poetry in the English/American language today moves between poles of civilized calm and choking violence, and the most rewarding poems in these four books are those which manage, like our society, to hold both in some kind of balance. Miss Moore is nothing if not civilized, picking over newspapers, libraries and museums with the elegance of well-bred eccentricity. Out of these pickings she constructs poems, syllabically scanned, syntactically elaborate, which delight one with their virtuosity and dismay one with their gloss. *Breeding* tells, the only violence permitted is the schooled violence of dancer, acrobat and polo pony, the mock violence of a baseball game. The latter poem, though, is wholly incomprehensible to an English public and it would have been more sensible to omit it from an English edition.

Donald Hall, like Miss Moore a New Englander, also like Miss Moore uses syllabic metre. When he fails, as in *An American in an Essex Village*, a slack meander he had no need whatever to record, it is because he does not have the pressure of sheer thinking which makes her poems lively. On the occasions when he succeeds, as he does in *The Wives*, *Digging*, *By the Exeter River*, a gruesome little poem in the manner of a folksong without being folksy, it is because he has admitted and controlled something of the dark forces which a too civilized society tends to exclude from its living and writing.

For Miss Jennings, who has been berated in

the past for her metaphysical abstractness and too calm verse-making, pain and fear are almost too much present, the pain which shadows love in personal relationships, the fear which prolongs and enlarges the pain of sickness and death. The calm of the hospital ward is not the serenity of those who have transcended pain but the passivity of those who have been beaten by it:

Violence does not terrify,
 Storms here would be a relief,
 Lightning be a companion to grief.
 It is the helplessness, the way they lie
 Beyond hope, fear, love,
 That makes me afraid

In this poem, from *Sequence in Hospital*, as in the remainder of the sequence, and many others in this collection, a new strength seems to have been given to her verse in the struggle to master such material.

In David Wevill's poems the violence predominates, the violence of death and dissolution, of groundhog, rabbit, donkey and man, the violence of sexuality and the unconscious in man himself. And sometimes, as in *Body of a Rook*, both together. Metrically too, they are often violent (e.g., 'that freed stubble/Mouth jagged as smashed plastic') so that the effect is of a man choking with rage at mortality – but choking with real rage, not spluttering impotently: when Mr Wevill has sorted his words out he speaks powerfully.

Benet Weatherhead, O.P.