

POETS OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE, edited by W. H. Auden and Norman Holmes Pearson: I, *Langland to Spenser*; II, *Marlowe to Marvell*; III, *Milton to Goldsmith*; IV, *Blake to Poe*; V, *Tennyson to Yeats*. (Eyre and Spottiswoode; 15s. per volume.)

In these five beautifully produced volumes the editors have assembled such an anthology as has never been attempted in our time. Experts, with their own discoveries and private collections available to them, or with access to the great libraries, have little need of such undertakings; but the readers for whom this series is intended will salute the learning and sensibility which it displays, and, above all, its understanding of the needs of the common reader.

The first volume is well devised, beginning with the poetry of the late Middle Ages—the editors have wisely made a level of general comprehensibility to the modern reader their criterion in selecting such poems—and ending with *The Faerie Queen*: the anthology has profited from Mr C. S. Lewis's work both in its introductory remarks and in its selections from Spenser. The *Piers Plowman* excerpts come first, and, little though they can convey of what this work is like or about, they are still to be welcomed, especially the short passage which is here called *A Vision of Nature*, for in it we see the poet's capacity for awe and delight in the contemplation of Creation, part of his character too often forgotten. One can only regret that, in a work which ranks as a history and survey, the Seven Deadly Sins from *Piers Plowman*, familiar as they are, have been omitted altogether.

Part of the policy in selection has been to give as many long, unabridged poems as possible: and at times we may think that the editors are over-generous. In their Chaucer section, the whole of *The Nun's Priest's Tale* is justifiable, as are the entire Book III and the conclusion of Book V from *Troilus and Criseyde*, for here we have Chaucer at his best; but we might have been spared him at his scabrous, repetitive worst, as in *The Wife of Bath's Prologue*. There are some of the *Tales* which are genuinely comic, as well as anti-clerical and lewd, and one of them could have been chosen to replace the Wife's obsessive maunderings. She and her maker suffer badly by comparison with *The Widow Speaks*, from Dunbar's little-known *Book of the Two Married Women and the Widow*: the Widow also is a Mrs Bloom, but she is presented with pungency and great dramatic effect, in the manner of a seventeenth-century 'humour'. One is glad of *The Testament of Cresseid*, Henryson's macabre pendant to Chaucer's story: and altogether the view which we are given of Scottish poetry in the fifteenth century, as of seventeenth and eighteenth-century American poets, should stimulate us to read more for ourselves.

One can understand the editors' choice of *Philip Sparrow* while regretting it. Skelton's satire is very much a connoisseur's piece, and unless

readers are well versed in liturgical and monastic lore, most of its subtleties and its decadent charm will be lost on them. Especially since this work has been included in another recent anthology, it would have been better to leave Skelton represented by shorter pieces, including, certainly, the extract given from *Speak, Parrot*, and to have used this considerable space for other matters. In the first place, one would wish to see the lyrical poetry of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries more justly shown, particularly by some of the hymns of Friar William Herebert and by some of the devotional pieces collected by Bishop Sheppey and John Grimestone. To represent two such centuries' religious lyrics only by the somewhat inferior *Quia Amore Languet* and Rolle's *Love is Life* is altogether inadequate. Nor is this the only class of poetic composition practically forgotten. One could wish for extracts from some of the many lively, popular verse catechisms: few of these are yet available in print, but there is *Handlyng Synne*, which abounds in cautionary tales, written to entertain and still very diverting. And although the moralities are well represented, there are none of the early secular interludes—an important omission in a collection otherwise well contrived to show the many sources on which English and Scottish poets were drawing in the early Renaissance.

One must not forget, in praising Mr Auden and Mr Pearson, to say how well Mr E. Talbot Donaldson has in this volume provided running glosses and interpretations of the Middle English poetry, even though not all his work is of the same standard. His punctuation and glossing of the *Second Shepherds' Play* is in places defective; and since he has rightly undertaken to emend his texts, he might have been more thorough in *I Hauē a Yong Suster*, and have restored the lost rhymes. The rhyme *rind/longyng* is linguists' delight, but this anthology is not the place for such pleasures.

The composition of Volume II must have been almost the most difficult to achieve, yet this volume is not without its surprises, nor without an occasional wry humour in its juxtapositions. One of the most lovely and loved Anglican hymns, *Hierusalem, my happie home*, is followed immediately by the agonised lament for Our Lady's shrine at Walsingham—

Levell, Levell with the ground,  
The towres doe lye,  
Which with their golden glitteringe tops  
Pearsed once to the skye—

which every Catholic should know for its own sake and for the witness it bears. Here and in the succeeding volumes, the editors have maintained an admirable balance between religious and secular, Catholic and Protestant, verse. Occasionally they may be thought a degree partial—Keble has surely a better title to a place in Volume V than Newman—but generally the collection is rich in great Protestant religious poems. As

we read some of it, such as Charles Wesley's wonderful *Wrestling Jacob*, we can only wonder and mourn for the saints who have been lost on earth to the Church.

It has throughout been part of the editors' intention that each volume should give us not merely a range of disconnected splendours but a view of the whole age as it is seen in its poetry. It is fitting that in an era when poets have shown themselves more than usually conscious of their relations or quarrels with society, we should be given a poets' anthology which is acutely aware of the spirit of previous ages. Yet particularly in the last volume a certain disparity of intention is apparent: the selections from some poets are made to reveal the *Zeitgeist*, so that grouped around *The Scholar Gipsy* we have Arnold's important philosophical poems and some of his metrical experiments, but few of the simpler, purely personal works which are one of his great achievements, whereas with others, notably Tennyson and Melville, different principles of selection have been applied. Pruned of many of its moralisings, its reiterations and banalities, *In Memoriam* reappears as a fearful narrative of grief and despair; and we have an extract from *Billy Budd*, but nothing from *Clarel*.

The editors are undoubtedly right to admit the whole of *The Hound of Heaven*, but it is a pity that there was no room for one or two of Francis Thompson's shorter secular verses. Gerard Manley Hopkins is generously served: it is perhaps characteristic of the tastes and interests of the editors that poets such as Skelton, Christopher Smart and Hopkins should enjoy prominence in it. The editors could defend themselves, however, and say that in a story of our literature the curious, the wayward, the experimental must have its place. Altogether, they have most admirably represented that history; and their work will surely promote, abroad as well as in English-speaking countries, the study and the enjoyment of English poetry.

ERIC COLLEDGE

LORCA. By Roy Campbell. (Studies in Modern European Literature and Thought). (Bowes and Bowes, Cambridge; 6s. net.)

At last we have a study of Lorca not bedevilled by politics (though one must note Sr Nadal's essay as an early example of lucidity on this head) nor bemused by fake mystiques of sex and death. As if this were not enough, we have hundreds of lines of his poetry duplicated in our own language in these incomparable translations by Mr Campbell. How right the academic world is to stick to counting commas and to leave the understanding of poetry to those who understand it. Mr Campbell has written a straightforward, not over-laudatory, account of Lorca and a commentary on each of the important works in turn. In doing so,