

AESCHYLUS, THE ORESTEIAN TRILOGY. Translated by Philip Vellacott. (Penguin Books; 2s. 6d.)

This is the translation commissioned by the B.B.C. and more than once broadcast. While the dialogue and speeches lack the massiveness that qualifies even the least of Aeschylean utterances, the choric passages are often notably successful in suggesting the mood and sometimes the rhythms of the original, e.g. at the close of the first chorus of the *Choephoroi*. Given its greater dramatic interest than the *Eumenides*, and its higher proportion of chorus than the *Agamemnon*, this play comes out a good best.

IVO THOMAS, O.P.

THE BURNING TREE: Poems from the first thousand years of Welsh verse. Selected and translated by Gwyn Williams. (Faber; 25s.)

Reading translations from an unknown tongue which are offered for literary enjoyment needs an act of faith in the translator's judgment, competence and sensibility. After Professor Gwyn Williams's *Introduction to Welsh Poetry*, which covers the same period, one comes to his anthology with excellent dispositions. It is a personal choice, as he admits in the Foreword; and this may explain why he includes all the extant verse of Hywel ab Owain Gwynedd and omits entirely, for example, Sion Tudur, by his own account an outstanding poet with a wide range: but it seems a mistake to use Thomas Prys's 'Poems to show the trouble that befell him when he was at sea', for surely half the effect of this poem is the co-ordination of Welsh and English in the Welsh schemes of metre and rhyme, and this is lost when the whole is in one language.

It is certainly useful to have the Welsh of each poem opposite, but only on condition that one has tried to pick up something of the pronunciation, an enjoyment in itself and not quite so throat-throttling as the Saxon usually supposes, and on condition that one has learnt enough about *cynganedd*, the extravagantly intricate system of internal assonance and alliteration which is *de rigueur* for serious verse, at least to pick it out with the eye. This enables one to see that lines apparently rather flat and ungainly such as these—

'Indignantly I bear your poem,
I've been ill-treated, give me a kiss!
Your counsel against urgent wrath
will be good, and your consent, my Gwen.'

are, in the original, as intricately ear-catching and graceful as the following—

'Shall I have the girl I love?
Shall I have the grove of light,

with her silken, starry hair
 in golden columns from her head,
 dragon fire lighting up a door,
 three chains like the Milky Way?’

Both examples are from Dafydd ab Edmwnd, the supreme technician.

Granted then that one must do without the basic sound of the poetry, or with the best approximation one can manage, what remains? A very great deal. In general, a real eye-opening, sense-awakening glimpse of a Celtic culture and its poetry in the broad sense; of what one might call a collective imagination as bright as noonday; a continual sharp delight in actions of war and love, and a corresponding keenness of sorrow; an apprehension and use of the Welsh scene that makes English nature poetry seem tired, stodgy or artificial. Pagan? Only to the narrow-minded.

BENET WEATHERHEAD, O.P.

LORD BYRON'S MARRIAGE. By G. Wilson Knight. (Routledge and Kegan Paul; 30s.)

No one has satisfactorily explained Byron's separation from his wife and in spite of all the material now available it seems that no one ever will because one vital document, his own private memoirs, has been destroyed. The fact that his wife saw to their destruction suggests that she had something to hide; on the other hand Byron's own great sense of guilt and frequent statement of it suggests that he was equally at fault. The facts of the story are common knowledge: after one year of marriage that appeared extremely happy, and the birth of a child, Lady Byron, for no apparent reason, returned home to her parents and refused ever to see Byron again. She would give no reason for her behaviour but dropped many dark hints. After about a year Byron left this country never to return, and his wife took the opportunity to allow and encourage the rumour that he had committed incest with Augusta Leigh, his half-sister. Throughout his life and after his death she continued her campaign to blacken her husband's character. Byron's own conduct and his 'confessions' did nothing to refute her charges. However, scholars have for some time now set aside the charge of incest as false and so Professor Wilson Knight sets out to find another cause of the separation. He bases his findings ultimately on the *Don Leon* poems by Byron's friend, George Coleman. From youth Byron had been a homosexual; more accurately he was bi-sexual and had indulged his homosexual tendencies (though it is not at all certain that this indulgence was great). After the birth of their first child he persuaded his wife to 'enact the Ganymede', without perhaps much difficulty as she too was probably bi-sexual. When she realized or thought she realized