

the authorities. One of the difficulties is Jancsó's own silence, his directorial refusal to comment. He will not psychologize or explain, showing us only gestures without causes, suffering without tragedy, destiny without hubris. He absents himself from his work. He presents his audience with the materials for a tragedy, for which they must then provide the key. If *Silence and Cry* is a tragedy, it is we who make it so. If it has a precise political meaning, it is we who give it to the film.

We, the audience, are free: the characters on the screen are not. The fluid, well-oiled camera technique contrasts with the primitive, constricted actions of the characters. In this sense we may feel that we share in the guilt of the oppressors, another emotion we are likely to contribute for ourselves and not one which Jancsó asks for. Who is guilty in these films is an interesting question. What seems to happen in *The Round-Up* is that the oppressed characters (I am thinking principally of Gaydor, the first betrayer) begin neutrally and then assume guilt as terror forces them to more humiliating acts of treachery; at the end of the process we may consider that they deserve to die. Within Jancsó's terms of structure and narrative, the guilt of a brutal gendarme is not important, but the guilt of a hopeless, defeated victim is. Perhaps this is the real political message, and the gleam of hope behind that final shot of *Silence and Cry* when the victim turns on his executioner.

Poetry

PETER PORTER

Huts of Words

THE FIRST DECADE by Robert Duncan. (*Fulcrum Press*. 35s.)

DERIVATIONS by Robert Duncan. (*Fulcrum Press*. 35s.)

MAXIMUS POEMS IV, V, VI by Charles Olson, (*Cape Goliard*. 55s. hard covers, 30s. paperback.)

HYMNS TO ST. GERYON and DARK BROWN by Michael McClure. (*Cape Goliard*. 35s. and 16s.)

PENGUIN MODERN POETS NO. 13—Charles Bukowski, Philip Lamantia, Harold Norse. (5s.)

TO MAKE ME GRIEVE by Molly Holden. (*Chatto & Windus*. 18s.)

SELECTED POEMS 1942–1968 by David Campbell. (*Angus & Robertson*. 37s. 6d.)

We are in debt to two publishers—Fulcrum Press and Cape Goliard—who are bringing out some of those poets who for years have been recurring names in the bulletins of English specialists on the American scene but whose work has been hardly obtainable here. Beautiful production is part of the aesthetic of American poetry and fortunately these two publishers care for the appearance of their books. You would have to look far to find more careful typography than Cape Goliard have given to Olson: Duncan's two books

are very handsome also and the prices of all of them are reasonable.

Robert Duncan is now fifty and is a central figure in the resurgence of poetry on the American west coast. *The First Decade* covers poems written between 1940 and 1950 and *Derivations* carries the poet up to 1956, so we have only about half Duncan's career in view. Perhaps Fulcrum or some other publisher will attend to the remainder. From the start of this review, it seems necessary to generalize about the 500 odd pages of verse in Duncan's and Olson's books. Generalizing is not an American fondness, and these poems have a glassy particularity which resists description, let alone criticism. But this is the poetry, along with the rump of the Beats, which fascinates the young poets in Britain today—those under thirty at the universities, or more likely, the art schools. It ranges from the academic avant-garde to the nihilistic, and includes such call signs as Black Mountain, Projective Verse, Minnesotan-Peruvian (to borrow Alvarez's useful term), Zen and Meat-Science and I daresay dozens I haven't heard of. Clearly the field is wide and governs even more extravagance than did the Apocalyptic label in the forties. It is united only in its hostility to academic poetry—traditional academic, that is, since almost all American poets have worked in universities. America has turned the avant-garde itself into an academic concept which is practised on the campus. Their red guards have declared the

revolution in permanent session and their wall-writings are among the most combative of the age. It is as if the troops of Pound, Williams and Olson are confronting those of Stevens and Eliot. The old Paleface/Redskin breakdown is not sufficient any more. There are so many shades of disagreement in this spectrum and so much subsidized dissent. Donald Hall's Penguin anthology *Contemporary American Poetry* throws a flimsy bridge over the gap but the difference between the new American poets, with their non-negotiable theories, and Lowell, Berryman, Hecht and Co. is very wide. All this quotation from the poetic stock exchange may only mean that American poetry is widely based and full of vitality. Certainly, any British poet setting out to criticize American verse had better begin by acknowledging that Americans write more audaciously and more commandingly than we do, even if he's sick of being told so by the Americans themselves. Nevertheless, I find it easy to resist the work of the five Americans poets under review, although I see much to admire and a great number of individual lines to enjoy. This American poetry seems too aesthetic by far, too lacking in the taste of life and prone to attitudinizing. It's extraordinary how often the sacred names of artists appear, almost liturgically, in the poems, even in McClure's. So do the admired absolutes—Beauty, Truth, Time, Love etc., proud of their capitals. Early Duncan traverses the several Ro-

mance provinces in the steps of Petrarch, Cavalcanti and Ezra. If you can take your poems worked in gold leaf, some of those in *The First Decade* are finely achieved. 'The Mirror', from *Medieval Scenes*, for instance, does as much with worn symbols as can be done—it is a deep-drowned, slow-motion poem, but Duncan's ear is expert enough to turn the cadences in time and make it live.

She stands like an unknowing Eve,
radiant with evil, and waits. He holds
the nipple like a blood-red cherry there
between his curious extended fingers.

The daughters of Danaus lead their naked
husbands,
each her naked husband to the naked bed.
There is a carnal burning in the air.

Duncan is the sort of poet whose poems are often about someone called 'the poet'. To such a man the world provides instances of dreamy, symbolic life, and then the construction of the poem will come from affinities of images or complementary shades of words. Duncan's diction, early on, is like Edith Sitwell's, though more original—jewelled, romantic, over-ripe. America breaks in but only to be aestheticized in its turn and join the other crystallized properties in the poet's magic shop. This is quite different from Wallace Stevens's use of poetry as its own subject. Stevens has a philosophic mind; he has remarkable experiences of life while hunting down shades of aesthetic meaning. Experimenting improved Duncan's style considerably and the poems in

Derivations are better than his earlier ones. His two sequences of 'Imitations of Gertrude Stein' catch that tone of commonsense raised to the power of 'n' which is her characteristic. Art often does well to imitate art and Duncan has refined pages of Stein in his own imagination to produce these affecting dry quibbles.

The world was as wide as around.
Fame was all we could find for home.
Everything else was too expensive.
The boys at home said
show them your buttons.

Hand in hand with Stein, he examines the semantics of poetry and comes back with a pile of contradictory aphorisms. 'What was it I imagined the language to be?' he asks. 'Not a derangement of the senses, . . . not mythy . . . not visionary . . . but a hut of words primitive to our nature. The language in its natural disarray.' One cannot take too much of this but it is undoubtedly attractive. There are still plenty of questions left: Duncan puts one of them—'Did Stein do right the way she did write?' *Derivations* is well worth buying as there are so many aspects of language to be confronted in it. I dislike a lot of Duncan's preoccupations in the book, his American whoring after the famous and the transcendent, the litanies of sacred names—Magritte, Schönberg, Blake, Zukofsky, Eluard etc. Duncan's imagination went to the best classes. But for anyone concerned with turning words

into poetry, these experiments with language are rewarding to read and return to.

How does one criticize Charles Olson—the author of *Call Me Ishmael*, the prophet of Projective Verse, the Rector of Black Mountain and luminary of the Democratic Party? By going straight to the point, I suppose, and saying that *Maximus Poems IV, V, VI* is an astonishing stew which sometimes catches the light in very beautiful colours. I've not read any other Maximus or come across exegesis of the poem by experts or illuminati. The reviews I've seen have been cagey; they just want you to know they recognize significance when they see it. My own clue comes from Pt. VI, the proem (a prose poem, or another of those Greek words the Americans are resuscitating?). Olson has been writing about the history of the Massachusetts port of Gloucester—he ends with these words

—this is a precis
of land I am shod in,
my father's shoes

To give some idea of the hedges which divide the poem up, I'll quote the contents of the two immediately following pages. It doesn't take much space, there's a lot of clean cream paper in this book.

not the intaglio method or skating
on the luxurious indoor rink
but Saint Sophia herself our
lady of bon voyage

(Friday, November 23

6)

mother-spirit to fuck at noumenon, Vierge
ouvrante

(A Prayer to Our Lady of Good
Voyage
Sunday, November 25
1962)

A few clues to the poem's make-up come from this. Olson fixes his poem on Gloucester (where Kipling's Captains Courageous hailed from) and especially on its early history which he quotes prodigiously in original documents. Several stories recur, especially one of a woman who copulated with a snake in a swamp. On this grid he puts a bewildering number of references to almost everything under the sun, especially to the ancient world, the Greeks, the Phoenicians and the original distribution of the earth's land mass. Modern Gloucester and Olson's own life are woven in and out of the history, the theory and the documents. The poem is well named, this is the method of *maximal* art. Its attraction and its fault seem to lie in the same thing—despite great achievements, poetry is a modest art, it cannot rival the novel or the play in complexity or scope. Even a work of art such as *Hamlet* is limited and cannot sum up Shakespeare's mind. Modern poets in America are impatient with the process of limitation which poetry imposes, and certainly some British poets are so selective their poems hardly begin to exist. These Americans, and Olson is one, try to make a poetical art which embraces even the weight and mass of life, its time spans and contradictions. Theirs is a poetry which is an extension of being alive. To me,

this seems doomed to failure—it leads, all too often, to a sort of democratic nihilism. In the end, all-inclusive and all-exclusive come to the same thing. Olson reminds me of Charles Ives, whose music is an omnium gatherum of the popular sounds of New England, stiffened by as much traditional method as the composer feels like applying. Just as in Ives, there are many conventional beauties in Olson's poetry; it is the framework which they occur in which is bizarre. Olson's mind is pedagogic and prophetic; he described Black Mountain as 'the first breakthrough in curriculum since the Middle Ages.' *Maximus* has a self-conscious teaching tone, a pointing-out to Americans of their roots, not only in the early colonies but back through European history, the Mediterranean experience and ultimately to some sort of abiding earth spirit. I intend to keep opening my copy of *Maximus* to read bits from time to time (I doubt that I shall ever be moved by the great plan)—passages like this from Part IV for instance (the pages are unnumbered, so readers will have to find them for themselves)

cod via	& ladies
racks	in boots
in a field	who wear
like snow	coifs to keep
fences or tables	the sun from burning
at a lawn	their necks
party	

In the interleaved Almanacks for 1646 and 1647 of Danforth

1646, August 1. The great pears ripe.
3. The long apples ripe.

	12. Blackston's apples gathered
	15. Tankerd apples gathered
	18. Kreton pippins, } gathered
	Longred apples, }
1647, July	5. We began to cut the peas in the field.
	14. We began to shear rye.
Aug.	2. We mowed barley
	The same week we shear summer wheat.
	7. The great pears gathered.
Sept.	15. The Russetins gathered and Pearmines.
1648, May	26. Sown peck of peas, the moon in the full. Observe how they prove.
July	28. Summer apples gathered.
	(as in footnote in <i>Winthrop's Journal</i>)

And now to McClure!

HOLY CAPITALIZATION! IMMACULATE IMPERATIVES! O BEHEMOTH OF BREATH AND BRUISES! O PHALLIC PINDAR! Enough is enough very quickly, especially in parody. There is very little in either *Hymns to St. Geryon* or *Dark Brown* of the subtle ping-pong which made *The Beard* such a randy work of art. McClure's poems are in the worst American oratorical tradition: they haven't even a quarter of the power of Thomas Gray's Pindaricks, and they are undoubtedly Odes. What are these lines of poetry in caps doing? Surely a better way of organizing poems can be found than the stringing together of sentences in the imperative or the ejaculative. Most of the poetry is what McClure would call tribal thoughts. I am tempted to quote some of the more ludicrous of his capitalized injunctions this but would not be fair to the poetry, as McClure's use of

exaggeration and obscenity is the most original thing about him and his laboured epithets are to be read in their contexts. No poet has ever thrown so much weight on the emotive noun—one poem begins OH CHRIST LOVE GOD SHIT PAIN. It's all for our ultimate good, of course—McClure is au fond a Blakean healer. One of his huge Glorias ends !A SWEEP-STRIKE TO NEVER-BEFORE-SEEN BEAUTY! NEVER-HEARD-OF-LOVE! *Fuck Ode* and *A Garland* will be read for their celebration of all-in sex. They are orthodox and couldn't offend a mainline heterosexual, but they are not effective as poetry. The cock-crammed writing tries to express the inexpressible. I once read some ecstatic letters in a divorce case from an illiterate woman to her lover—they had the same overwhelming sense of frustration at trying to make words perform what only flesh can do.

Penguin Modern Poets No. 13 is American second division material. Bukowski is the most attractive, a sort of diary-keeper in verse. He doesn't pretend to originality of thought, but he fits out his puzzlings in a bright vernacular which is entertaining and honest. Bukowski is an all-on-the-breath poet working by free association, and the quality of his poems, like the quality of extemporization at the keyboard, depends upon his knack with a subject. He goes in for long titles and generally wastes words ebulliently. This brief passage is from a poem called 'Something for the Touts, the

Nuns, the Grocery Clerks and You. . . .'

we have everything and we have nothing
and some men do it in churches
and some men do it by tearing butterflies
in half
and some men do it in Palm Springs
laying it into butterblondes
with Cadillac souls,
Cadillacs and butterflies
nothing and everything

Lamantia, the blurb tells us, was welcomed by André Breton among the Surrealists. It hasn't done his poems any good. They are made up of opaque visions masquerading as volatile nightmares. It's as if the flatness of the worst Chirico or Dali were reproduced by a computer endlessly—the images are frozen and without significance.

Within closets filled with nebulae
the blood shot eyes
swim upward for the sun
This world of serpents and weeping women
is crushed in the violence
of a swamp large enough to contain
the enormous razorblade of the night.

The last image is a considerable gift but it is buried in the wholesale mess of its poem. Throughout this collection the law of diminishing returns operates to fatal effect. Harold Norse has published in many magazines in Britain. He is a considerable craftsman but is very much the Hemingway expatriate recording received ideas about European places. Norse is for jazz and the European poor and Carlos Williams and pot and the Benidorm coast and Paris etc. I nominate his poem in honour of Williams as the most completely

orthodox compilation of received ideas of the decade.

i want to thank you
for being alive
altho you're dead
& buried where the passaic
runs by the parks
& jersey dumps—our
bailiwick! thanks
for singing used car lots
& the broken brain
that tells 'the truth about us'

The quiet voice of Molly Holden could easily be judged more accomplished than it is. An English nature poet of the twentieth-century urbanized kind, she looks out the window and what she sees tells her about man's twisted nature. She appreciates that the English countryside is man-tamed and therefore, in a sense, moral. A poem called *Pieces of unprofitable land* brings her sympathy down on the side of the wild and the wasteful.

In countryside so arable and fenced
that verges are the only common land
these roughs are memories of former wilds
untouched by foot, unharvested by hand.
Attained by sight alone, because so small,
private, or thorny, stuffed with the years'
seeds,
their failures proof of reclamation,
their vigour justifies all wastes and weeds.

Mrs Holden is crippled and the poems at the end of her book are bitter entries in a diary of endurance. She doesn't see, as Jack Clemo does, a Calvinist pre-ordaining in her suffering. Her protest is muted and polite but it is not forgiving. In *Adjustment*, she describes how the handsome old lady she might have become has been spoiled by 'the

coarse deposit of disease and grief'. The poem ends

Now only I shall ever see
the fine-boned crone I'd thought to be.

To Make Me Grieve is an uneven book and some of the poems in it are clumsy but it has the impact of real poetry.

David Campbell is well-known in Australia as a lyricist and celebrator of the outback. When I lived in Australia, I felt no sympathy for his preoccupation with the material of our national poetry—the swagmen, coolabah trees, shearers, ringers, barmaids and the rest. But his *Selected Poems* shows him to be a much stronger and more original writer than I recognized in my youthful brashness. For British readers, I suggest the comparison with Roy Campbell, but the Australian Campbell avoids entirely the South African's truculence and also his overblown language. David Campbell's versification is proudly conservative; he usually rhymes and he never strains after effects. This stanza is from a poem called *Snow-gums*.

The powdered bloom along the bough
Wavers like a candle's breath;
Where snow falls softly into snow
Iris and rivers have their birth.

Campbell lives near the Australian Alps and his poetry marries the opposites of sun and snow, the gaiety and gloom which alternate so unexpectedly in the character of the Australian people.