

*Seagulls in their idling squadrons; . . . An old sly close-fisted cockatoo; . . .
The cocks, craned up to crow; . . . Autumnal jackdaws, meal-dusty
polls, . . . Glossed plumage, speedwell eye.*

and all the old man's memories of childhood are strewn with wild flowers on the ground beneath their flight.

The technique of this latest of Mr de la Mare's poems is austere with very little variation of its stanza. An insistence of reiterated rhyme-sounds drum into the reader's consciousness a sometimes terrifying, echo of the wheels of that winged chariot from which the book takes its name. Here and there his familiar magic re-asserts itself in the unrelenting march of its verse. An enchanted page is given to an hour-glass:

A subtler language stirs in whispering sands.

An almost-lyric tells of the long dream that marched through the short moment that did not suffice a candle in which to cool after its flame had been blown out. There is, too, a poignant tale of how a small boy sat through a desperate twilight believing that his mother had forgotten to fetch him home from a neighbour's house; there are sudden isolated images:—

*As seems the moon when clouds in legion be
'Gainst the wild wind to race, till suddenly
Her full effulgence floods a tranquil sky*

The whole poem is a distillation of things seen and remembered and made significant as only Mr de la Mare can make them. Time here is weighed and questioned and, though even this poet cannot reduce it to a definition, he has thrown his dart at him and left our sense of time enlarged.

NAOMI ROYDE SMITH

THE POETRY OF EZRA POUND. By Hugh Kenner. (Faber and Faber; 25s.)

Pound is to Eliot as Aristotle is to Plato; they are not in competition, whatever their partisans may claim. T.S.E.'s champions, given the initial fillip of their poet's own notes to *The Waste Land*, have been so efficient and assiduous in their exposition of his works that, by comparison, what with the apparent difficulties of the texts, and the economics, and the politics, E.P.'s exegetes have been left standing. At last we have, in Dr Kenner of the University of California, a man scholarly enough, clear-sighted enough and young enough, to achieve the prodigious task of bringing the poetry of E.P. into focus. First examining the underlying poetic principles, proceeding to a masterly appreciation of *Homage to Sextus Propertius* and *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, and then to analysis of the *Cantos*—a thing of the past one hopes the

obfuscation, the fanaticism of the lunatic fringe and the humourless distractions of the pseudo-Poundian energumen—Dr Kenner goes for the ‘gists and piths’, illuminates the structure, and lures the reader on to do the rest of the thinking for himself: *ecco miracolo!* how lucid, how easy everything becomes!

Apophthegm: ‘If Mussolini was not altogether the seamless factive intelligence Pound imagined him to be, it was necessary, we may say, for Pound to invent him’. Epithet: ‘that random missile from the Idaho wilderness’. Cartesian angelism, the objective correlative, hylography, reification, and ‘depressurised lyrics of hyperaesthetic stasis’ are made equally enthralling.

A well-produced book; highly commended to the beginner, the baffled and the expert.

ALAN NEAME

A SLEEP OF PRISONERS. By Christopher Fry. (Oxford University Press; 6s.)

There is a popular conception about that Christopher Fry has two moods as a dramatist—a secular and religious mood. To accept this dichotomy is to misunderstand the nature of his art. For Fry, growth of vision means progress, reality. Yet although *Venus Observed* was written for the commercial stage and *A Sleep of Prisoners* for the Society of Religious Drama for presentation in churches, there is no fundamental difference between the plays: what difference there is lies in the plot, not the intention. For in both—as in all the Fry canon—the intention is through the wonder of words to reveal the wonder of the Word. Wake up in bed; reach for the lamp; turn on the light. Then look at your hand: for a moment view it objectively—as one can at such moments. In it you will see the wonder of the Word incarnate, a work of art far greater than *Hamlet*.

In *A Sleep of Prisoners* Fry attempts another variation on this theme. His soldiers—prisoners-of-war—talk endlessly: when they are awake they speak for themselves; when they are asleep in their dreams they speak as at heart they are, not as they believe themselves to be. By this means, Fry is able to relate the past to the present; to re-tell by such devices as sleep-walking-and-talking, the stories of Cain and Abel, David and Absalom, Abraham and Isaac. Murder is seen as both a Biblical and modern problem—the answer to which can only be found if men will grow in vision.

It will be seen that the play is not an easy one of which to provide a synopsis. In church the same problem faces the audience. It is simple to form a main impression and to understand how the biblical and modern time-sequences interlock, but again it is not always easy to follow the underlying and interlocking arguments. There is a break-down of