

that he is unable to ascertain the true origin of the name *canto flamenco*. Stern Hispanists frown on the art it denotes as something alien to the spirit of the Peninsula; but Professor Starkie seems to suggest that its sources may be Andalusian.

'The Romanichals, with their imitative powers, once they had absorbed the Andalusian style, began to transform it in accordance with their own temperament. There was, moreover, in their singing, playing or dancing a barbaric strength and intensity of expression which their audiences missed in their own race.'

Speculation and history are constantly mingled with personal narrative and the medley procession of characters who pass through these pages leaves one breathless. Personal experiences are not by any means confined to encounters with the sons of Romany and at one stage the author recalls his difficulties when he was sent to a hostile country as Britain's cultural ambassador at the most critical moment of the war. In fact, the work is an exhilarating mixture of autobiography, anthropology, musicology, dramatic presentation, short story and impressionist travel writing. With such varied ingredients, it is all the more admirable that the author never descends to the slipshod or the inaccurate.

C. M. GIRDLESTONE

PLEASURE OF RUINS. By Rose Macaulay. (Weidenfeld and Nicolson; 25s.)

This book has the most extraordinary and, I may say, tantalizing fascination. One would scarcely have supposed that four hundred and fifty pages about nothing but ruins would hold one enthralled from beginning to end, with curiosity, astonishment, but chiefly an incessant excited questioning, for there are as many avenues to speculation here as there are colonnades of broken columns presented to us from all over the world. Even at the hand of Miss Rose Macaulay this seems a considerable feat. 'To explore the various kinds of pleasure given to various people at various epochs by the spectacle of ruined buildings' is her expressed aim; she adds a little later, 'I fear this may seem to many a perverse book'. In pursuit of that pleasure and perversity, Miss Macaulay invites us, preserving meantime her own delightful civilized detachment, to contemplate ruin after ruin, without monotony, providing us with the comments of earlier visitors of different periods, intoxicated, mournful, complacent, banal, holding the whole thing together with her fine and witty prose, and supplying the reader by way of illustration with the charm of eighteenth and early nineteenth century engravings of ruins.

It appears uniformly cultured and sober, and perhaps it is just perversity to complain of this; but I am reminded of the Old Person of

Philae (not entirely impertinently, I hope, for you will come upon Philae here), and would almost call the writer 'scroobious and wily'. It is all very well for her to take her place up a palm when the weather is calm and survey all the ruins of Philae, or Timgad, or Babylon, Xanadu, Troy, Baalbek, Ninfa, Persepolis, a *kyrielle* sufficient to set even a moderately sober head ringing. 'A bad case of ruins to the head', she would say drily as one is seized with a powerful spell, and so the reader has to keep trying to account for the enthusiasm felt while Miss Macaulay leads him on from one field of ruin to another, strewn with heaven knows what inchoate lumps of masonry and recumbent columns, while from this she conjures up visions which the modern mind can scarcely assimilate: oh, the roofs of silver and cedarwood, the bright marble pillars, the gold at the gates, the floors of mosaic, the pools and lemon groves and statuary! But Miss Macaulay's eye is upon one. One must try to justify oneself.

As she herself points out, it is partly the duality which is so striking, the past splendour and the present destruction. Not very often, I suppose, does the mind have the chance to wallow simultaneously in the *Apollinische* and the *Dionysische*. 'Wallow' is the right word, too, for this is the perfect book for reading in bed before sleep, whether one speculates intellectually on the Pre-Romanticism that comes out so clearly in the cerebral eighteenth century's passion for ruins, or gluts one's innate lust for iconoclasm by considering what modern buildings one would love to ruin, or—most obscurely and perversely, though the author drops hints of such a thing—begins to see oneself in every ruin everywhere, the very image of the mortal state, of the theologian's 'wounded splendour' or the Shakespearean 'O ruined piece of nature!', and so feel oneself voluptuously and elegantly mouldering into those fragments of foundered porphyry and alabaster, those marble columns fallen, a limb here and a limb there in the dissolution of impending sleep, the broken architrave of the mind ruined in the disorder of dreams, while slumber and oblivion wait for one's own inspired architecture, briefly or for ever.

It seems impossible to keep the rhapsodical out. Confess the perversity then, but enjoy the pleasure, for the book is well named: it is pleasure all the way through.

ELIZABETH SEWELL

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