

as Welsh religion does to English Nonconformism. Owen Dudley Edwards sets the prevailing temperament within its historical context: 'That Jansenism and Gallicanism may have played their part in shaping the harshness and isolation of Irish Catholicism today is a reasonable thesis; but both qualities had been present in Irish Catholicism for a thousand years before Jansenism and Gallicanism existed.'

This will be a valuable text-book for the converted and the student, and may serve also as a manifesto to those whose minds are open to conviction. Criticisms which may be made are that an index would have been a great help, and that Owen Dudley Edwards and Hugh MacDiarmid might usefully, like the Welsh writers, have appended a short book list.

RUTH MCQUILLAN.

**SELECTED POEMS**, by Yves Bonnefoy, translated by Anthony Rudolf. *Jonathan Cape*, London, 1969. 127 pp. 21s. and 7s. 6d.

There are philosophers who take death seriously. Heidegger is one of the most striking, Heidegger, for whom we exist towards death, we are Being-towards-Death: our life-curve is an elaborate high-dive with somersaults into death. Death watches us, waits, ultimate condition by which all our works are judged.

But there are philosophers who observe a thousand different kinds of mental and spiritual death around them every day of their lives. For them, death is not so much something towards which we are tending as something in which we are already sunk. Such a philosopher is the poet Yves Bonnefoy, whose *Selected Poems* add their sombre weight to the enterprising collection of small brightly-coloured editions from Jonathan Cape. Beautifully and sensitively translated by Anthony Rudolf, who won for this translation a special Scott-Moncrieff citation, these poems operate within technical bounds so limited as to be austere. The poems build up a dead, a still and silent world, a world of stone. This world is the poet's, he who experiences the world as death and as various kinds of immobility.

Indeed, the opposition of immobility and movement is so important to Bonnefoy that he incorporates it into the title of the volume of poems with which he made his poetical debut in 1953, *Du mouvement et de l'immobilité de Douve*. Versed in existentialist lore, a disciple both of Hegel and of Kierkegaard, a student of the dialectic of the spiritual life in its alternate phases of experience and comprehension, Bonnefoy takes as his problem the problem which absorbed the ancient Greeks, the problem of the flux which moves so fast that it appears to be motionless.

Bonnefoy regards all as dead in this flux which moves faster than sight or intuition can follow it. All the poet can do is to open up for us the sense of the presence of death within life, of death's moulding and creative power. Indeed, a citation from Hegel at the beginning

of the volume shows us how earnest is his belief.

Who, then, is Douve? A beautiful and evocative name. Amongst other things, Douve (one dare not suggest a sex) is *le verbe*, the Word. Bonnefoy's concern, like Eliot's, is with 'the dialect of the tribe', and he too meets 'a compound and familiar ghost' in Douve. Douve is the possibility of getting something said, of *naming*:

Douve, I speak in you; and I embrace you

In the act of knowing and of naming. (p. 25.)

Very often it seems as if Douve is failing him, has failed him, will fail him again (*Douve speaks* III, p. 28). What poet has not complained about the crude technical means of language and rhyme open to him? Yet *naming* is something that Douve can do well. One thinks of those beautiful lines from Rilke's ninth *Duino Elegy*:

. . . Are we, perhaps, *here* just for saying: House,  
Bridge, Fountain, Gate, Jug, Fruit tree,  
Window,—

Possibly: Pillar, Tower? . . . but for *saying*,  
remember,

oh, for such saying as never the things themselves

Hoped so intensely to be.

This *saying* seems to be the central concern of Bonnefoy's naming too. Douve names: desert, absence, night, nothingness and war in *True Name* (p. 22). It is clearly evident in this contrast of the two poets how much Rilke's naming has to do with images of life, how much Bonnefoy's naming is a dialectical appreciation of death in life: but the *lived* experience of death as a reality in the spirit. It is no empty abstraction.

The words *mort*, *morts* resonate through section V of *Threats of the Witness* like a southing wind, like a Dantesque soul in limbo (p. 46). This poem illustrates Bonnefoy's extraordinary technical ability to work with one *rimeriche* throughout four stanzas, giving a more emphatic return to each use. This austerity of

means gives an impression of actual immobility to the poems. They do not move. The reader is held in a silent and immobile world of repetition and insistence, a world of written stone, *Pierre écrite*. It is as if Bonnefoy is saying: 'Did I say it right? Let me say it again. And again. And again.'

Slowly the reader learns to trust this poet. A precious understanding grows up. The poet reassures the reader that he will not trip him up, make a fool of him. Once the reader lets himself enter this world of rich immobile subjectivity, he finds his reward in this deliberately impoverished immobility of reflection. And gaunt and rigid as they are, these beautifully fashioned stanzas do eventually offer a kind of oscillation in the infinite.

The poems in the last collection, *Pierre écrite* (1965), offer a warm transmutation of the previous doubts into rich new knowledge. And I wonder now why all this time was needed,

And all this trouble. For the fruits  
Reigned already in the tree. (p. 110.)

One thinks (one is forced to think) of Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Spirit* to which Bonnefoy makes such repeated, if implicit, reference, and of Hegel's claim in the *Preface* that only with long years of work, patience and love will any understanding be forthcoming.

Je comprends  
Cette faute, la mort. (p. 112.)  
And a little later in the same poem  
Mais oui, prends.

The simplicity of giving is no longer strained through thought, but has reached pure gift.

We no longer need  
Agonizing images in order to love.  
That tree over there suffices us. (p. 114.)

It is a rare poet, sincere and rich as well as austere and demanding. To translate such poems it would seem to be necessary to enter into a kind of lesson in Zen from the master, and that is what Anthony Rudolf has done with amazing fidelity. What is re-created here is an act of thought, a spiritual journey. Never do the translations intrude, they are always helpful and tactful. When Bonnefoy's assonances and rhyme-schemes become too baroque for any imitation in English to be possible, the translator adopts an unrhyming stanza scheme (for instance in section V of *Threats of the Witness* or section II of *The Watchers*) which, given the fiendish technical assurance of the original, achieves the right effect unflinching. And in *The Dialogue of Anguish and Desire*, which brings the collection to a close, Rudolf's translations leave behind the achieved sphere of the competent to become poetry themselves.

ROGER POOLE

## Aelred of Rievaulx

**Aelred Squire, O.P.—42s**

This study of the life, work, and writings of St Aelred is more than a history or biography: it uses Aelred's own writings to reveal his inner person and spiritual development. The result is a sensitive appreciation of a man more than ordinarily talented and devoted, whose influence was enormous.

## The Faith of Dante Alighieri

**Geoffrey F. Nuttall—10s**

*The Divine Comedy* is one of the superb achievements of the human heart and mind. It is understood only when the faith of Dante is also understood. Dr Nuttall writes both for the Dante scholar and the many who, having been touched by Dante, want to understand him better.

**S. P. G. K.**