

# New Zealand Poets

**THE SUNLIT HOUR**, by Ruth Gilbert; George Allen and Unwin, English price 5/-.  
**UNWILLING PILGRIM**, by Paul Henderson; Caxton Press. **SHE WAS MY SPRING**, by J. R. Hervey; Caxton Press.

(Reviewed by J. C. Reid)

**T**HESE three books of New Zealand verse gave me, in different ways, a good deal of pleasure. They all show that technical assurance which marks our serious poetry; each has its own individuality. They do not, however, excite, or cause that heart to sing. Two satisfy rather by a serene sincerity in the treatment of conventional subjects; the third by a keen intellectual resourcefulness.

Ruth Gilbert's quiet tone of voice serves her admirably for pathos, and for the tidy expression of life's sadness. Her verses lack passion, and her diction is sometimes commonplace. But, at her best, the tight, carefully-made lines suggest not absence of feeling, but control of it, giving a moving feminine tenderness to such a piece as "Still-Born."

Her poems make frequent use of religious references; yet I feel that few are really religious poems. She rather

converts the proposition, as in "The Blossom of the Branches," where the imagery of Christ's Nativity serves for an ordinary birth. This is a legitimate poetic process; but the effect here is somewhat as if traditional Christian symbolism is being used to embroider a not very intense vision.

If Miss Gilbert's verse generates little excitement, it has the negative virtues of no straining for effect, no hysteria, no verbal trickery. On the positive side, it shows care in polishing, a delicate sensibility and an awareness of the significance of basic human relations. And, sometimes, as in the epigrammatic "Hoelderlin" and "Sculptress," it provides a stab of poignancy uncommon in our poetry.

Paul Henderson seems fond of the kind of phrase ("feed to the transitory mind illusion of myth"; "place and time . . . have embraced the fearful thrust of a mountain") which has been so over-worked as to cease to be poetic. I do not know how seriously to take a poem which begins "There is always something grave in the thought of islands." Yet there is more than a manner here: there is unmistakable intelligence of the dialectical kind, and a sinewy logic. There is, too, an individual eye for the cold and



RUTH GILBERT  
 "A stab of poignancy . . ."



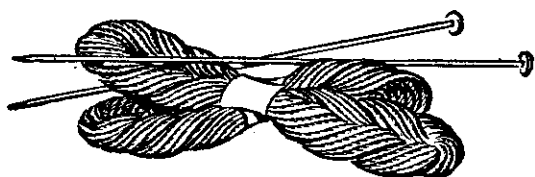
J. R. HERVEY  
 "... a decent modesty"

the austere. Blue and white are his principal colours; porcelain is a favourite image; pools are brown; beaches are grey. He is aware of soil, rock and clay, of the barbs of winter, of weeping trees. His mood is that of a more clinical Wordsworth.

I feel that only occasionally has Mr. Henderson been able to transmute his intellectual apprehensions into poetry.

But, if at present, his ideas outpace his sensibility, this book gives clear evidence that he possesses both.

Mr. Hervey's range is wider than Ruth Gilbert's and his apprehensions more poetically mature than Mr. Henderson's. Sometimes his rhythms, as in "Reader Turned Pilgrim," puzzle the ear; sometimes his imagery and language hardly escape triteness. Yet he shows a master of simple forms; while his grave air



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