

In a similar spirit, "For the Giants of My Generation" performs something of the same function as Donald Davie's well-known "Remembering the Thirties." "Four Poems from the Strontium Age" reimagines a situation more familiar in science-fiction, and (despite a touch of Huxleyish *frisson*) on the whole successfully.

But the most interesting group is the one concerned with the world of sub-topia—small town or suburban street, golf-club or old people's home, the land of hire purchase where "... the rent/Mounts like the tide of leaves on the forest floors." It is not altogether a bad place either: it has room for the vigorous passion of "Love the Dark Continent," as well as for the more sardonic view of sex in "Melons." Mr Johnson's feeling for it perhaps finds its best expression in "Here Together Met," a witty and moving poem which is, in a way, a hymn of praise to the street in which we all live.

—M.K.J.

ROMANTIC LOVE

PASSION AND SOCIETY, by Denis de Rougemont, translated by Montgomery Belgion; a revised and augmented edition; Faber and Faber, English price 30/-.

"HAPPY love has no history," writes de Rougemont, in an introductory chapter of a study peculiarly French. He then proceeds to elucidate the origins and significance of that darker Love which is neither charity nor sensual desire, and whose devotees do not require most one another's presence, but one another's absence. His arguments are psychologically convincing, indeed, formidably so—after reading this book one can scarcely regard romantic adultery as the cosy thing our films and novels have made it. Can one imagine a Madame Tristan, good-humouredly sewing her husband's socks? As de Rougemont amply demonstrates, Iseult is a woman beloved, but she is also more than this: she is the symbol of Love itself. Every boy or girl born into our European culture inherits a deeply-rooted conception of Love, of an ambiguous state of being overtly linked to the normalising effect of courtship and marriage, but tacitly opposed to both. Sex is too gross for the true Romantic lover; and charity is too dull. The author of this brilliant and subtle study deserves our applause for exposing the delusive and demonic character of this passion, though one can hardly hope that one book will seriously obstruct the working of a complex narcissism through which many lives founder daily in divorce, violence or suicide. Only in a monastic community could you or I avoid its influence.

It is not difficult to accept de Rougemont's identification of Romantic love with a mysticism that despises the created world and longs for death; even his detailed and positive assertion of its origin in a cult of Courtly Love practised in the 12th century. But the links in his argument are weakest when he equates the inward passion with outward conscious adherence to the Catharist heresy. His case is a forceful one; but not able to be proved to the hilt. Catharists there were; Romantic lovers are yet amongst us—between the two it takes a cunning man to build a bridge.

—James K. Baxter

STENDHAL'S NAPOLEON

A LIFE OF NAPOLEON, by Stendhal. Rodale Press, English price 17/6.

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(continued on next page)

N.Z. LISTENER, NOVEMBER 15, 1957.



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