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BOOK REVIEWS

Denis Glover's Poetry

SINGS HARRY and Other Poems, by Denis Glover; The Caxton Press; 15/-.

(Reviewed by James K. Baxter)

AN adequate evaluation of the poetry of Denis Glover has yet to be made. In the space of a brief review of his latest and finest volume, it cannot be attempted; but certain comments are worth making. Glover in New Zealand, like Louis Macneice in England, has been underestimated as a serious poet because of his propensity for satire and a subtle self-depreciation ("These songs will not stand..." etc.); also on account of the apparently casual simplicity of his style. In fact his purely satirical poems are rare and of comparative unimportance; and his lucid style is the product of prolonged and intense processes of composition, the word fitting the experience like a glove. He has assimilated to his own use the techniques of Georgian verse, of the Scots ballads, perhaps also of Greek and Anglo-Saxon verse—and in this volume, it seems, of the later songs of Keats.

In the repetition and exploration of certain themes, however, lies the measure of his success beyond all other New Zealand poets. Where others have seen New Zealand in anthropological, historical, even geological terms, Glover has seen her through the wrong end of a telescope, a world of experience intensified and crystallised in a few lyrics. The first eleven poems of this volume, apart from their superlative technical brilliance, embody what is perhaps the only successful myth yet created by a New Zealand poet.

That was a good place to be camping in, sings Harry.
Where we unsaddled and hobbled the horses,
Heading over Honeycomb Pass and Mount Thin
For sheep and heat and dust and a hundred watercourses.

Harry is Ishmael the Wandering Jew, the Fool who is also prophet and oracle. His comment, that is Glover's comment, on human society is invariably destructive—men are sick automata engaged in ruining each other. Outside human society, however, exists the Sea, image of oblivion and renewal, and the *temenos* of the Land where reconciliation is possible with fellow beings and with the rich presences which haunt childhood experience. Though Nature also can mirror the desolation of individual man ("Drift," "The Ware"), in general the natural world is for Glover a source of spiritual refreshment. Notably in one poem, "Dunedin Revisited," he has fused completely the vision and the fact.

A long sunset spills
On those returning
And the manuka hills
Know the slow smoke of burning.

The love poetry, satire and the film commentary included in this volume have not been mentioned. They alone would make it valuable; but the "Sings Harry" lyrics and certain similar poems



DENIS GLOVER
"New Zealand through the wrong end of a telescope"

are very likely the most intense, evocative and formally perfect work ever produced in this country.

THE MAN WHO KNEW

HITLER'S STRATEGY, by F. H. Hinsley; Cambridge University Press. English price, 18/-.

THERE is a naval bias about this book that is easy to explain but not as easy to forget when trying to estimate its value. Hinsley is a naval historian; his chief sources are the German naval archives captured complete at the end of the war; and the only German service chiefs whose views receive detailed attention are Admiral Raeder, Commander-in-Chief of the German Navy, and Doenitz, his successor. Hinsley is aware of this, and he anticipates criticism by arguing that this naval evidence is more relevant than any other because of the importance of British sea power and its dominant effect on Hitler's strategy. But Hitler's victories and defeats were land campaigns; his navy was not ready for a major war at sea in September 1939, and (except for his U-boats) played an unimportant part in it and was disbanded by Hitler in February 1943. Raeder regretted in September 1939 that the war had come five years too soon, and even Mussolini advised Hitler that it would be better to wait another two or three years because of the condition of the German fleet.

What an astonishing man Hitler was! Opposition to his plans served only to strengthen his conviction that they were right, and made him more determined than ever to carry them out. Raeder found him difficult to handle. If his suggestions conflicted with Hitler's plans (or if Hitler thought they did) they fell on deaf ears or were neglected out of hand. It is an interesting exercise to discover, now that it is all over, how many times Raeder was right and Hitler wrong.

This book is concerned with Hitler's strategy and not with his share in the conduct of operations. Hinsley's examination of his directives and the minutes of his conferences with his commanders-in-chief brings to light so many contradictions in Hitler's aims and calculations that at times it is difficult to sort out just exactly what he hoped to attain.

N.Z. LISTENER, MARCH 28, 1952.