

THE PENGUIN
NEW WRITING



EDITED BY
JOHN LEHMANN



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* Specially written for this issue of Penguin New Writing
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About the new contributors

NIGEL HESELTINE is the son of 'Peter Warlock,' the composer. He is 29, and is now studying medicine. A volume of his short stories, *Tales of the Squirearchy*, was published in June. He has already published a travel book about Albania, two volumes of poetry, and one of translations from the Welsh. He has also had two plays performed, and a translation of Buchner's *Wozzek*.

OLIVER WALKER was born in 1906, and brought up in Cardiff. In 1926, he signed on as second steward of a trampship and visited America. He returned in 1929 to Bristol, and worked there as a journalist until 1938. Since becoming a South African citizen, he has written a Natal operetta, half a dozen radio plays and many talks, and he has a satirical novel in preparation.

PATRIC DICKINSON was born in 1914. He has published two volumes of verse, *The Seven Days of Jericho* and *Theseus and the Minotaur* (1946), and has edited a recent anthology, *Soldiers' Verse*. He is at present working as Poetry Editor for the B.B.C. Home Service.

DENYS L. JONES is 29 years old. He was educated at Exeter School. He went to sea before the mast, but during the war he served six years in the Army. He has contributed short stories and articles to various papers. His home is in Devonshire.

CLIFFORD HORNBY is 39. He left the London Stock Exchange during the slump of 1929 and worked for several years with Gaumont British, making feature films, and published a book about his experience, *Shooting Without Stars*. During the war he made documentaries in the Middle East and in the Pacific. In 1944 he published a book about country life in England, *Rural Amateur*. His first novel, *Blind Falcon*, will be published this autumn by Collins.

DENNY MACINTOSH is a ring-net fisherman. He has been fishing with the Carradale fleet since he was fourteen. He is also very fond of singing and poaching.

FOREWORD

It is now a year or more since World War II came to an official end, and it is pleasant to reflect that the great majority of the young men and women who for six years had lived on dreams of devoting their time and energies to writing, one day when the battledress was off and Post D was abandoned, can now seriously consider turning those dreams into reality.

I would take a bet that most of them have the notes for a war book or an escape book in their pockets. And I hope they have the luck to finish and find an enthusiastic publisher for them before the public refuses to read anything more about what the world was like between 1938 and 1945; or better still, the wisdom to let their experiences form the compost for poetry and novels of a wider and more generally valid scope. But the war book once out of the way, as idea or as fact, what are they going to write about?

This may seem a slightly absurd question to those fortunate authors who have always understood their job and will allow nothing to deflect them from it. Nevertheless, many young writers of talent are confused by the dust-storms of false and foolish theories that are apt suddenly to blow up about their paths, particularly in these highly political days, and often imagine that they must write about this or that subject in a particular way to avoid scorn and neglect. To take one example that has come my way recently. In the course of a not very edifying controversy about modern literature which took place in a Russian paper, and in which I happened to be involved, an English newspaper correspondent, who ought to have known better, complained that during a visit he had made at the end of the war to his own country 'he was often told that the main problems occupying people's minds to-day are those connected with fears of future unemployment, and those which

have arisen as the result of prolonged separation of husbands and wives. When, however, he searched for books dealing with these problems, he could find nothing.' This correspondent then roundly attacked English authors for not reflecting the Labour vote of our recent elections in their work. The only point he did forget to deal with was the number of readers who would be ready to make their literary meal out of plain suet pudding when far more appetizing stuff had not been officially struck off the menu—and all the economic consequences that flow therefrom.

May every author who stands now at the beginning of his career sweep such pernicious nonsense from his mind. Great poets and great novelists have indeed, on occasion, dealt with the immediate problems of their age, and 'waged contention with their time's decay' in the narrower sense of the words as well as in the more sublime; America, to take one famous example, had only to read Herman Melville's *White Jacket* to decide to abolish the barbarous punishments then in use in the Navy. But Shakespeare did not write *King Lear* because he had the wrongs of royal parents, who trust their daughters too much, at heart; it is not Balzac's astonishing knowledge of business intrigue and crookedness among his provincial contemporaries that makes *Les Illusions Perdues* one of the great and enduring books of modern literature; and *Bleak House*, by general consent one of Dickens's most powerful novels, would be of interest only to the curious student if the unmasking of the spider web of Victorian Chancery law were its only aim and achievement.

JOHN LEHMANN

NOTE

The cover designs of the present series of *Penguin New Writing* are the work of John Minton. The original tail-pieces in the last number were by John Minton and Michael Ayrton, and in this number are by Keith Vaughan and Robert Medley.

THE PENGUIN NEW WRITING

∞ 28 ∞

NIGEL HESELTINE

BREAK AWAY IF YOU CAN

I am going out to the lettuces and my Mother called after me something vague in words about weeding the little ones and not picking them, or not picking the little ones and letting the big ones grow. What could I do to let or make things grow in that sour winter soil? The wonder was that they were up at all: but I called yes. Mums' head I saw over the wall, and it glided like a bird and swerved at the drive gate like a gull. She dashes on her bike like she can't dash in life.

Our life is the speed of . . . its own speed. Here where you see us live, here are no tumbling valleys or hills where the wind roars like a trumpet, but low hills, and worn hills, and choked drains in the fields where the Haran runs like the rain returns to the sea.

I trod through torn puddles, through the bronze muck standing down the yard, and I hummed under the arch: but the echo was the drip among the ferns and mosses was the music of the day. In Trallwm Mums is to buy rice and candles, so that we don't sit in darkness to-night; so the days follow smaller days, smaller outings for smaller things we buy, till the days are low and in a piece like the piece since I was eighteen.

Over the low hills that day, of course, hung the mist that hangs in the shallow Haran valley. There was a tree where nectarines had grown last summer, and round the nails

plaster fell away where the last frost broke into the wall. Every year Mums said to me, Beth the nectarine's dead now; and then it lived through another winter. Another winter.

There were those small lettuces under the straw shelter. I plodded up the garden in my gumboots, and the split had let in water in the yard cold on my foot. Look, you see my stained old skirt, old greasy raincoat, that battered sodden hat.

As I walked the wet earth path I was walking up the wood one morning. A young man came out of the wood to me, he had a fine smile but he was like Colley; only finer. I hummed but my throat caught the thin sound, caught against my cough, and I stopped at the thin sound. Then there was the beginning, as I called it between us, by the lake as we sat looking at the lake between the tennis; and that young ass Thwaite who knocked the ball into the lake, knocked the lemonade out of Colley's mouth and down his neck. I could have kicked him. Then Thwaite pulled a hair out of my leg and Colley kicked him. When we were looking for the ball in the bushes, he grabbed me and I beat at him and turned my ear to him because I wanted . . . I wanted his kisses.

I pulled some lettuce, pale and full of grit, older than it looked too, hearing down in the ruinous yard we have, the cow bellowing after her calf we had had taken away. I am little and father takes my little hand to look at the pigeons: up into the loft we come at the pigeons from behind through their smell: and father opened little doors to look at them sitting so quiet on their eggs. Father! Cold leaves cold lettuce damp round my fingers: I never clean my hands out of the dirty cracks in them. Because I've not time? They say how men like soft woman's hands, a gentle mother's hands. Why did I not look in the glass this morning? There was no light: I'd no time.

If a man came down out of the wood, what sort of a

sight should I be for him? In the dark mornings there's the little green light rising over the hills beyond the river: then I'm creeping out of bed with the dirty sheets dropping on the floor, creeping down on the cold boards, smelling my own smell off my nightdress, I reach to get on my stockings and my knickers before I'm properly awake before the cold strikes. Because Mums does so much and Mums cannot do so much and feed the hens and milk that cow. Mums is getting old, tired, thin.

I staggered with sleep this morning across the yard, my clothes stuck to me because I didn't wash with my hair hanging down my face. What sort of a slut would he find if he came down, smiling down?

The lettuce are like little cold fingers; pull and they should cry. These are the lettuce we were to sell for sixpence in Trallwm, but we do not. They're like hands. In my ears the waters whispered, trickled in the wall, sucked in the soil at my feet. The cow cried like a distant trumpet. After her baby. Her baby soft as little hands. I set down the lettuce where they could wait and I took a step through the door into the wood in the wall.

That door must be pushed because of the weight of rotting leaves against it, a door that was made for to step out into the pleasure of the wood! It's like a meal sack. I walked in the wood up the steep slope, and at each step I was so tired, and I'd have sunk in a chair with my mind wandering sadly from a faded magazine. But there is so much to do.

In the morning in the house I couldn't sit down, if Mums was there doing so much. Mums is out. There's no fire in the drawing-room, but twigs dropped by jackdaws down behind the painted screen where a blonde woman floats down a painted stream in summer.

Here at this spot the boys caught a jackdaw in their hidden trap, here at my feet: and the horrible bird hopped round the stairs and pecked my legs. The boys. I climbed the wire down into the slanting lane. Where am I

going? At each step the fatigue mounted up my back. I looked into a bush seeing nothing.

Behind the bush there was a man squatting, there was his head and the smoke going up from his pipe. I couldn't go by and have him see me: nor go back and let him see me walking away. With my back to him I turned to the bank and pulled at orange fungi on a twig. The man made no sound. In my mind I saw the man's head and the smoke of his pipe, but on the rest of him squatting there was a mist. I stared at the orange cups of the fungi and did not think of what he was doing. He stood and I turned, but I saw him pull up his trousers and tuck in a grey shirt. He walked away, and I bent down and my heart beat because he might turn and see me see him.

He went through the gap and now I saw horses steaming and standing there all the time. He shouted, they moved. At the jingle of the harness I came out into the field.

I moved on the edge, but the man stopped his horses. Now he was another old man, and the man squatting in the bush was only a head and a pipe. He had an old tin cap on his pipe and a sack over his shoulders against the damp.

What is she doing walking the fields?

I wish he was the far side and I'd not have to speak.

He said about the gulls pecking behind the harrow: 'Stormy weather at sea,' he said.

And I looked at Evans who had stoked his way to Buenos Aires, charged with a bayonet in France like my brother. And came back to his wife. Had he killed a man? Killed? At sea. There was a noise in the distance.

'Hounds,' said Evans and grinned.

I said: 'They met at Glan-haran.'

He grinned and said: 'You never saw them kill in this country, not this side.'

They cried over the hills, no nearer, rising and falling.

'I was in the Feggy,' Evans said, 'in Cae Issa.'

'I was fifteen and they come. Those was hounds, Miss.'

'Old Mr. Johns hunting,' I said. 'The old things were better I suppose, Evans.'

He went on: 'They come right down the gap: I hitch old Brown out . . . flying over the hedges like a bird!'

I didn't believe a cart-horse could do that, but these people exaggerate.

'And when I come back, there's my Dad waiting with a thick stick!' His voice went up in a screech, broke in a laugh.

My Dad . . . Father is coming at me across the hall with the riding-whip: there's the broken tobacco-jar on the floor and I near it: he's so tall and terribly angry: I'm crying and crying, then there is a blank.

'No horses round about now,' Evans said. 'And I remember the Colonel, and you couldn't hold him as a lad.'

I thought no one held Father now as far as I knew.

'You hop on a bike now,' Evans said. 'Cut across by the Madoc; you'm catch them down the Dingle they're coming.'

Mums has the bike: or there's the old one, would it carry me down past the Madoc: up the Dingle: beyond the Sarn: by the Bwlch: left, and up the grassy drive to Colley's? But that's fifteen miles, woman. And is Colley there? Where was he last? Driving through Trallwm top speed. Where is he now?

I stood back on my heels to move away from Evans and the field and the horse and the mist. I walked off and the gulls flew up off the earth and lighted, to be further from me. Evans's back moved away from me under the sack, with his horses into the mist, and continuously the bellowing of the wretched cow came up to me.

When Evans was young he galloped on one of those steaming horses and nothing could stop him. Not his Father. I saw the sort of young man Evans was, with all his teeth and black hair: like in a mist I saw the sort of muscles that kind of man has under a thin skin where the weather doesn't reach it. But this youth was on a horse

without a bridle or saddle, with a sort of sheet round him and bare legs clinging to the side of the horse. At the end was a beating from Father. There are no such young men now.

Sixteen years ago I was young, so young that I panted in a white dress when a boy took my arm to dance, and the touch of his hand pierced my stomach. I never jumped on a horse and galloped after the hounds, because there wasn't a horse and the boys were there and Father.

'We'll throw you off the roof,' they said. 'Or down the lavatory.'

Colley was such a fool, then he kissed me. He made up jokes and shouted and tripped up people for fun.

My father, snarling over the cold meat and potatoes, snarled: 'Why doesn't he join the Territorials?'

I knew that it was because he was quite different from Father and the boys, but I said nothing.

Father went off and must shoot grouse and pheasants with Lord this and General that, and play the gallant Colonel. I think it was better he stayed away, though so quiet; but Mums was sad though she said nothing.

He plays this sort of make-believe wherever he is, but Mums and I get up at seven. We said we must keep the place decent for when the boys came home: but they stay where they are and don't come.

At twenty I looked east across those same hills to everything in the world and it was all open to me: all the love and the riches and the joy I read about, was for me. But I never crossed over. Then the Haran was a stream I'd leap over: now it's a river and the hills are the same hills. I'm here to keep things going with Mums, because she does so much. Where did I read about those other things? I suppose in some magazine. There are girls of sixteen who were born when I went to my first dance; and I cried afterwards because it was over, because I was so happy, or because I was a failure and said nothing like a fool to my partners.

I came down into the yard and that cow was knocking against the stable-door, but I pumped that wretched bike while the music of the hounds died away. I'd hurry after them because they were running towards Colley's: I will ride up the drive and there he comes down the steps and takes my hands. I'll go. Mums must eat by herself. The chintzes can wait. I was on the bike, rattling down under the dripping trees. How can I get back those years? Where is the I in that white dress, and my beating heart?

I went down past the Madoc, left up the Dingle, up the hill. Yes, they'd checked. I heard the horn. Is this a golden day then? I began to run down to the Sarn where the road joined the Trallwm road, and I saw the horsemen in file against the skyline. I'd found them! Hounds were moving up over the Rallt, and I could turn off the main road over the Rallt; beyond was so few miles, and my heart would beat again. I'd be panting in my white dress.

There was a little person slowly pushing a bike up the hill to me, but I had my eye on the Rallt skyline. It was Mums coming back. I couldn't fly past her when she had all the groceries piled on her bike. I told her I was following the hounds.

'You must have got finished very quickly.'

I said nothing because nothing was finished, beds, kitchen, dinner started: nothing. Mums didn't stop, so I turned my bike and wheeled after her, and at every step the weariness climbed up my back, and my stomach hung like lead.

'Did you scald the pans, Beth?' Mums asked without looking round.

'No.'

'Everything'll go sour, Beth.'

'When I got up I was so tired all morning.'

'Not if you went flying after hounds on your bike, in that dirty old mac, and your hair.'

'I must stop at every step, I must stop because the

hounds were going away: I must hurry over those miles: or it would be too late.

But I knew what my hair was like, like dirty string: what sort of a smile would he smile at me in a filthy coat and wispy grey hair: and my face? Oh why hadn't I done the thing properly? Put on another coat, washed my face, gone slowly over to Colley's. But you know there must be a reason to go over there or I'd never dare pass the drive-gate. Suppose he asked me: 'Well Beth, what brings you over?'

'Beth, I've got all these parcels.'

'Give them to me.'

'We can't stop now as you're so behind. And the chintzes must be done to-day too.'

I asked couldn't they wait. Mums said Mrs. Price was coming on Friday and the drawing-room was so awful: and perhaps the chintzes wouldn't stand another wash. I knew those chintzes, they tore if you laid a finger on them, so we'd be all day mending them. Of course I would be glad to help Mrs. Price with her sale of work next week. How long since Colley kissed me that first time? Nine years last August. Then he was abroad: then he had the big party for the Balls, and I couldn't go because Mums fell and hurt her back.

We came down the Dingle, up under the dripping trees. Evans was taking a short cut home down the drive.

He said: 'You didn't get far.'

'No,' I said, and tried to smile. 'Not far.'

When we were past, Mums said: 'Mrs. Evans owes me for pullets since last August.'

August, for me nine years last August.

The cow had broken down the door and was ranging round the yard bellowing misery: we got her back into the old loose-box. I had meant to clean the dairy while Mums was out, but there the churn was in pieces since yesterday, unscalded, all the lids off the crocks. As we went in, a yellow cat flew out past our feet.