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Toga-and-buskin Poetry

who crowd to see and hear them that poetry is an art remote and formidable, which has to strut about in toga-and-buskin language. Probably Mr. Alexander's pageants will not tend to correct this error.

We pause over his book because the kind of misconception of the art which it typically represents is at the root of much academic misteaching of it in countless American colleges. No wonder so many wide-awake boys and girls swear off from poetry when they graduate!

H. M.

CAPRICES OF A FAUN

Selected Poems and Ballads of Paul Fort, translated from the French by John Strong Newberry. Duffield & Co.

Francis Jammes still holds to his provincial seclusion; Paul Fort has swung himself into the office of *Prince des Poètes*; and the illusion of the obvious has become the purpose of the French moderns. Men like Blaise Cendrars, Jules Romains, and Apollinaire demonstrate the illusion of the obvious obviously; Jean Cocteau caresses it asininely; and the friends of Tristan Tzara satirize it stupidly. Verhaeren being dead, one goes, for a living poet, to Paul Fort and expects other things.

"The art of a gay, deep-singing Frenchman." I take these words from Carl Sandburg's generous *Appreciation* printed in this volume. There is a hearty greeting in this; a kindly generalization. But being not over-persuaded by the disguise of Fort's rhymed verses written and published

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as prose, and allowing for the breadth of Mr. Sandburg's contemporary enthusiasm, I must force a first point by differing slightly. Paul Fort is indeed a true Frenchman, and he is gay; in the variety of his intoxication, the naiveté of his hurried exultation, in his elfish and child-like excitement over the delicately moody and elemental, and even over the obvious—in all of which manipulation exceeds and overruns the depth—Fort is undeniably a gay singer. Alert and aware, he touches all things and tries to include them in his song. But in justice to his land and his song, and in fairness to his position (that of *Prince des Poètes*), and in further justice to the poets of his land and of ours, he is not a deep singer. Like Rimbaud and Verlaine, but unlike Verhaeren, or his contemporary Francis Jammes, he is not “deep-singing.”

Paul Fort is the old, old incarnation. He is a faun, who plays with realities as though they were illusions, capricious and aware. But he is a modern faun and he is not spiteful. Neither is he robust, or a satyricon of time. Fauns, in French literature, are a little out of date; they have been, in fact, slightly overdone and worn out. And, as becoming to its age, this faun is shedding its hoofs, and its sprightliness is on the verge of relapsing into a tender limp. Thus he has a deep and scattered sympathy, and he is inclined to be afraid. Except for the surface beauty which may flare, of strong things he is fearful, and he says:

Do not believe in death. . . . Through dark oblivion strikes a sudden beam—and death is all a gleam.

Caprices of a Faun

There is something of the evasive mountebank in this ageing faun. He has no vigorous denial, no honest distrust. His acceptance precludes refusal. His method, or his "technic," is an unnecessary one; it is a grave attempt to be original, a conscious excuse for himself. With this he becomes aware of an attitude and employs it profusely. He takes advantage of the acquired attitude as an escape, and he becomes the romping troubadour on a pilgrimage of the great evasion.

Paul Fort, then, is the joyful poet. But it is the joy of a beautiful abandon, a surrender to all things; and not the joy of pure spontaneity while singing the release of a personal force. Yet it is a healthy joy if it is not a vital one; and he is as careless as he is joyful. He mingles stateliness with abandon; he is graceful and ungraceful in the same poem, almost in the same line. This effusion of conscious grace and indifferent facility, together with a certain prolific and convenient efficiency in what is at times the most ordinary poetic phraseology, constitutes, in the main, the acknowledgment and the vogue of Paul Fort. Had these poems a difficulty in approach, had they a probing tenacity which comes from a definite focus, had they some singleness of purpose (they are too scattered), one would be less tempted to deal in disparaging words. On the whole, they are the rope-skipping of a child, a run into the waking spring, irresponsible and away. In this respect they are quite successful; and even important, if one is in the mood to philosophize that this is ultimately

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just as important as being concerned with deliberate things.

These selected translations by John Strong Newberry are, however, well done and well controlled. And, what is ever possible with Fort, and what to a translator must be very tempting, the poems are often improved upon. They are representative of his entire production, and they are adequate proof that were Fort writing in the English of America, were he competing with the contemporary poetic production of this country, his song would need a more intensified pain, something more than the mere enumeration of his delights, in order to gain for him the position which he has received from his own France.

Virgil Geddes

CONCERNING POETS LAUREATE

The Laureateship: A Study of the Office of Poet Laureate in England, with Some Account of the Poets, by Edmund Kemper Broadus. Oxford University Press.

The development of the English laureateship, from the days of the Anglo-Saxon *scop*, court poet of a petty king, to the present day, is interestingly and accurately traced by Professor Broadus. The author knows his facts, and he knows poetry, thus making both his historical data and his critical pronouncements of real value. Never is he blind to the fact that the office, while possessing certain possibilities for accomplishment, "has more frequently magnified its holders than been magnified by them."