

written with great sympathy about these brave women's heroic efforts to keep self-respect in the face of so much humiliation and stupidity. Although her acquaintance with South Africa has necessarily been superficial, she has a good ear for the country's laments.

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SEAMARKS, by St-John Perse; Bilingual edition, translation by Wallace Fowlie; Harper Torchbooks; \$1.45.

Alexis St Léger Léger, alias St-John Perse, was born in 1887 in a small island near Guadeloupe. He went to school in France, entered the diplomatic service, and, like Claudel earlier, was sent to China. He was there during the First World War, travelling extensively and even visiting the islands of Polynesia. He brought back one of his best epics, *Anabasis*. In the twenties, he met Briand in Washington, became his secretary and a director at the French Foreign Ministry, of which he finished as Secretary General immediately after the Second World War. In the meantime he spent the war years in Washington where, it is believed, he has now retired. In 1960, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, being the second French poet to be thus distinguished. The first was Sully Prudhomme, whose intimate as well as scientific poetry has long since fallen into oblivion.

St-John Perse is enthralled by the power and beauty of wild nature, as it struck him in his native island and in the Far East. This he renders into storms of words, sometimes learned and far-fetched, sometimes trite or vaguely abstract. Although his thought is not properly obscure, it is often difficult to follow its elusive trend. Yet these somewhat rhetorical poems sparkle with unexpected and vigorous images.

After *Eloges*, *Anabasis*, *Exile*, *Winds*, this new poem carries further, perhaps concludes, the poet's quest for the mythical origins of life. In the original French it was published in 1957 under the mysterious and attractive title *Amers*. Conceived as a long and irregular ode in blank verse, in which the hexameter too often recurs, it also is an 'éloge', a hierophantic poem in praise of the Sea, universal mother and wife, etc., a not altogether surprising symbol of origins. When the poet evokes 'la Mer gluante au glissement de plèvre . . .' (transl.: the slimy Sea with the gliding of a pleura . . . came towards us on its coils of a black python'), the present reviewer is reminded of a chapter of *The Toilers of the Sea* in which Hugo compares the sea with a 'large green diaphragm', a wave with a lung, and shows 'dans cette diaphanéité aurorale des tronçons d'arcs-en-ciel noyés'.

From this example it can be seen that the translation offered a difficult task. It is far too literal, one fears, to convey much of the meaning, if any, and, at all events, of the magic of this irritatingly religious hymn in honour of a world, neither pagan nor Christian, from which the very notion or mention of God is absent.

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