

AESCHYLUS, THE ORESTEIAN TRILOGY. Translated by Philip Vellacott. (Penguin Books; 2s. 6d.)

This is the translation commissioned by the B.B.C. and more than once broadcast. While the dialogue and speeches lack the massiveness that qualifies even the least of Aeschylean utterances, the choric passages are often notably successful in suggesting the mood and sometimes the rhythms of the original, e.g. at the close of the first chorus of the *Choephoroi*. Given its greater dramatic interest than the *Eumenides*, and its higher proportion of chorus than the *Agamemnon*, this play comes out a good best.

IVO THOMAS, O.P.

THE BURNING TREE: Poems from the first thousand years of Welsh verse. Selected and translated by Gwyn Williams. (Faber; 25s.)

Reading translations from an unknown tongue which are offered for literary enjoyment needs an act of faith in the translator's judgment, competence and sensibility. After Professor Gwyn Williams's *Introduction to Welsh Poetry*, which covers the same period, one comes to his anthology with excellent dispositions. It is a personal choice, as he admits in the Foreword; and this may explain why he includes all the extant verse of Hywel ab Owain Gwynedd and omits entirely, for example, Sion Tudur, by his own account an outstanding poet with a wide range: but it seems a mistake to use Thomas Prys's 'Poems to show the trouble that befell him when he was at sea', for surely half the effect of this poem is the co-ordination of Welsh and English in the Welsh schemes of metre and rhyme, and this is lost when the whole is in one language.

It is certainly useful to have the Welsh of each poem opposite, but only on condition that one has tried to pick up something of the pronunciation, an enjoyment in itself and not quite so throat-throttling as the Saxon usually supposes, and on condition that one has learnt enough about *cynganedd*, the extravagantly intricate system of internal assonance and alliteration which is *de rigueur* for serious verse, at least to pick it out with the eye. This enables one to see that lines apparently rather flat and ungainly such as these—

'Indignantly I bear your poem,
I've been ill-treated, give me a kiss!
Your counsel against urgent wrath
will be good, and your consent, my Gwen.'

are, in the original, as intricately ear-catching and graceful as the following—

'Shall I have the girl I love?
Shall I have the grove of light,