hips, to the erotic and ominous syncopation of the carnival music. It was an episode of extraordinary intensity when they fell silent with great suddenness after their cries of “God has arisen”. The tension of the Christians in the room, waiting for the risen Christ the Syrian has promised them, and the tension of the Dionysiac ritual awaited release in the same climax. To the sound of a mounting heartbeat percussion, the Christ of Calvary, in his white mask, made his way through the audience, into the room. We, the audience, like the actors, had seen him crucified, an added element in the palpable tension and shock of the moment when the Greek stretches out his hand to touch the phantom (as he believes it), and feels the heartbeat. His shriek, “The heart of a phantom is beating!” expressed a terror the performance had made completely real for the audience.

In its achievement of so much feeling through such intense stylisation, the double bill proved itself a great gift from director and company both to lovers of Yeats and to those who hardly know the plays. It is to be hoped that Raymond Yeates and the Abbey Theatre will give us many more opportunities for tasting these pleasures.


**Reviewed by Hugh Witemeyer**

This book revises the account of Anglo-American Modernist poetry presented in C. K. Stead’s *The New Poetic* (1964). Stead still regards Modernism as “the principal tidal movement of poetry in English in the twentieth century”, with strong “roots in Romanticism” and momentous implications for contemporary writing (pp. 4–5, 75). Stead’s definition of Modernism has changed, though, and with it his pantheon of poets. He now views Modernism in terms of an ideology of open forms. He therefore demotes from a central position in the movement all poets who write in closed forms and traditional metres. “Modernism . . . (as I now see it) included Pound and Eliot but not Yeats” and not Hardy or Auden either (p. 3). In Stead’s hands this restrictive argument takes a moralistic turn that may antagonise more readers than it wins over.

Stead correctly emphasises “the continuity of Romantic, Symbolist and Modernist modes” in poetry (p. 122). But his oversimplified view of Romanticism produces an impoverished account of that continuity. Romanticism for Stead originates in an existential confrontation of the self with the world and in a revolt against an Augustan tradition of discursive statement, closure, and logical limitations of meaning. “Discourse can give us a gloss on experience,” but only poetry “can give us the experience itself,” Stead naively declares (p. 339). “Thinking” is “more effectivelycommunicated in prose, while poetry reserves for itself those elusive reaches of fact and feeling prior to thought and beyond it” (p. 150). “The whole movement of literary history since the
Romantics" has been toward a poetry of experience rather than ideas and of organic rather than mechanical forms (p. 340). This teleology leads toward a poetry “not fixed in meaning” or “closed off by hard and fast readings” (p. 310).

The well-made poem, the formal artefact with a beginning[,] a middle and an end, its final rhyme clanging shut like a gate on the reader’s imagination, was replaced by the open-ended piece in which a nicely judged incompleteness might invite the reader into participation in the linguistic action. (p. 327)

Only open forms can “follow the natural organic movement of the poetic imagination” and “preserve a close sense of the actuality of experience by not allowing established stanza and metrical patterns to appropriate the subject or occasion of the poem” (pp. 96, 158).

By defining Modernism in prescriptive terms of open forms, Stead reduces the history of twentieth-century poetry in English to a war between good neo-Romantics and bad neo-Augustans. The former include Pound, early Eliot, William Carlos Williams, the Imagists, “the Beat poets (Ginsberg, Ferlinghetti, Corso), the Black Mountain Group (Olson, Creeley, Dorn), the San Francisco poets (Duncan, Snyder, Spicer), the New York school (O’Hara, Ashberry [sic], Koch)” and others (p. 327). The latter include Hardy, middle and later Yeats, Eliot after 1930, Wilfred Owen and the other war poets, the Georgian realists, the entire Auden generation, and The Movement. The politicised and idea-governed poetry of the 1930s is a retreat from Modernism and thus “from poetry itself” (p. 353). Moreover, a refusal to write in open forms indicates either a constitutional flaw or a moral failure in the modern poet. For example, it is “a failure of the heart in Hardy that keeps him always laced up inside his metrical forms” (p. 146). And this weakness in Hardy has “produced meanness, modesty and limitation in his heirs” (p. 349).

Yeats, too, exhibits both stylistic and human limitations. “Hag-ridden by formal metrics,” he “would not understand or be able to work in open forms” (pp. 22, 24). Although Pound helped him to modernise his diction, he “could not go all the way with Pound” to free-verse forms (p. 30). Adhering to “the well-made poem, the isolated self-enclosed unit,” Yeats “thinks his poems out as statements and as rhetorical structures, until there is no room for form to discover and to create meaning – only to contain it” (pp. 21, 82). Thus Yeats “seems often the most Augustan and artificial of modern poets” rather than the last Romantic he claimed to be (p. 154). Like neo-classical personifications, his symbols are often “mere abstractions in fancy dress, a form of decorative writing” (p. 154).

These “bad rhetorical habits” reflect Yeats’s “very large and aspiring ego,” according to Stead (pp. 145, 142). The poet’s attitude toward nature is appropriative and histrionic: “‘Another emblem there!’ Yeats cries as a swan flies over, and this absurdity, the symbolist as game-hunter, becomes a touchstone for authorial egotism” (p. 342). This grotesque caricature of Yeats teeters uncertainly upon a slender base of specific analysis; the best-known of the