on its home grounds by writers seemingly most devoted to its progress."

Mr. Rahv's next gesture was a review, pretentious and sneering and rather childish, of a book of short stories by Leane Zugsmith. It was quite inevitable that Miss Marshall should assign him Walter Duranty's *One Life, One Kopeck* and Robert Briffault's *Europa in Limbo,* and equally inevitable that he should seize upon literary weaknesses, not unrecognized by other reviewers, to prosecute his attack on communism and the Soviet Union. To date, however, his most revealing review is that of Ilf and Petrov's *Little Golden America,* which gives the impression—wholly false, it is needless to say—that the Soviet humorists were so impressed by American machines that they failed to say a word in criticism of the capitalist system that controls those machines.

Miss Marshall's reliance upon this particular turncoat, despite his general incompetence as a literary critic and his peculiar unfitness to review books on the Soviet Union, does not promise well for her regime as literary editor. It seems possible, indeed, that, even more fully than Dr. Krutch, she will make the book section of the *Nation* an organ of the Trotskyites. I do not care whether these persons call themselves Trotskyites or not. I know that they are opposed to the Communist Party, to the Soviet Union, and to the people's front, and that they use exactly the same arguments as Trotsky uses. They are united, I suspect, by a common hatred rather than by a positive policy, but that does not alter the role they play.

It appears to me that readers of the *Nation* are being deceived. The NEW MASSES takes a definite position, and its book-review section is edited according to a stated policy. By no means are all the contributors Communists, but it is not our intention to publish reviews by persons who are hostile to the Soviet Union or are unwilling to work in the people's front against fascism. The *Nation* has no such clear-cut policy. In the body of the magazine, as I have said, it tries to be fair. In the book section, however, it discriminates against one point of view and favors another. And this is never stated.

I presume that most readers of the *Nation* are what we call, not very precisely these days, liberals. I suspect that many of them are friendly to the Soviet Union and would not willingly aid its enemies. Almost all, certainly, are opposed to fascism and are eager to find effective ways of fighting it. They know that the people's front is the strongest barrier against fascism and at the same time a positive force for progress. I should like to convince these people that, all questions of sincerity to one side, the Trotskyites do in effect injure the Soviet Union and hamper the fight against fascism. I think that, if they happened to belong to trade unions or other organizations in which Trotskyites were active, they would see this for themselves.

But even if these liberal *Nation* readers do not share my opinions, I wonder if they really like the fare that is being served them. Do they subscribe to the *Nation* to listen to the notions of a little clique of anti-Communists, or do they want the opinions of representative authorities? Have they not the right to demand that, in its book reviews as elsewhere, the *Nation* should follow the principles it avows? And should they not, if necessary, take steps to enforce their demands?

Poetry in 1937

By Horace Gregory

IT WOULD BE possible to view this season's poetry* with a wearied sickly eye, to see failure everywhere. It would be possible to see nothing in E. A. Robinson's *Collected Poems* except an old man writing his "dime novels in verse," and to read in Sara Teasdale nothing but her last retreat in finding wisdom only in utter silence. One could then wish that Mr. Jeffers had not followed his long road downward, declining very like Spengler's *Decline of the West* into melodrama, until he now sees all his men and women as less than human and far inferior to hawks, eagles, certain breeds of horses, and Pacific seascapes. One could regret that Allen Tate's preface to his selected poems is insufferably pretentious and in dubious taste. One could also complain that Mr. Stevens has taken a symbol for his art which is not inevitable and which too often remains a fanciful "blue guitar." One could say that the younger writers in this group should be far better: one could ask far more of everyone here and at the end conclude that in this year, 1937, a quarter century after the accepted date of a "poetic renaissance," American poetry has gone down the drain and the less said of it the better.

But to arrive at this conclusion would be contrary to my belief, for I believe this moment affords us time to take stock of what has happened in poetry, what is happening now, and what seems now fairly certain to happen within the next few years. Because the early hopes of 1912 were not sustained in 1930, some critics of both

* COLLECTED POEMS, *by E. A. Robinson. The Macmillan Co.* $3.
COLLECTED POEMS, *by Sara Teasdale. The Macmillan Co.* $2.50.
SUCH COUNSELS YOU GAVE TO ME, *by Robinson Jeffers. Random House.* $2.
SELECTED POEMS, *by Allen Tate. Charles Scribner's Sons.* $2.50.
THE MAN WITH A BLUE GUITAR, *by Wallace Stevens. Alfred A. Knopf.* $2.
POEMS, 1929-1936, *by Dudley Fitts. New Directions.* $2.
NOT ALONE LOST, *by Robert McAlmon. New Directions.* $2.
TWELVE POETS OF THE PACIFIC, *edited by Yvor Winters. New Directions.* $2.50.
TOMORROW'S PHOENIX, *by Ruth Lechlitner. Alcestis Press.* $3.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

left and right persuasion were led to think that the streams of poetry in America had narrowed to a single trail of a sunken river-bed in a once fertile valley. But since that time a group of new names have appeared and the prominence of other names have diminished. The poets of *New Letters in America* and of the NEW MASSES represent the majority of the influences now at work in changing the picture from one of a single "waste-land" generalization to another that promises to be a new phase in American poetry.

The *Collected Poems* of E. A. Robinson offers us the opportunity to say a few words in revaluation of a poet whose figure now seems to fill the empty spaces of the decade before 1912. That figure seems far more secure today than it was ten years ago. The Robinson to be rediscovered by our generation is the poet who looked deeply into the world of his young manhood, a world of insecure prosperity, commanded by "robber barons." At its heart he saw the broken Bewick Finzers, the drunken Eben Floods, and as he wrote of literary heroes, even Shakespeare became the uneasy man of property who had built a house to hide his bones in Stratford. The E. A. Robinson, who in the first decade of the present century foresaw disaster where others read endless perpetuation of American success, had learned the technique of making his verse move with conversational directness. This art, so I suspect, was learned from Crabbe and Hardy and today it seems a Robinsonian irony that his method was once regarded as too obscure and too elliptical for critical understanding. He was most assuredly not using the poetic diction of his fellow poets in America, and because his work was too often praised or rejected for the wrong reasons, as he grew older he delighted in confusing his critics by leading them from one sublimated detective story to the next, and there were times when he deliberately recreated modern men and women in the disguise of Arthurian heroes and heroines.

Sara Teasdale's love songs were the contrasting echoes of another voice to Robinson's. She was, I think, more nearly a transitional poet than many who have earned that title in the present generation. Her verse forms, her diction, her desires to create a "mood" rather than to convey precise emotion stemmed directly from the conventions of lyric poetry of the later nineteenth century. Christina Rosetti was her model, and many of her love songs which were popular twenty years ago seem now to be latter-day versions of "A Daughter of Eve." Yet by speaking her poems in a frankly plaintive or joyous note, she was to anticipate the so-called personal qualities of Miss Millay's lyricism: she had created a minor heroine in verse, a young woman, who, if kissed or unkissed, promptly told the world and made the telling seem to express a new era of nascent feminism. The epigrammatic turn of her short stanzas was sharpened by a touch of urban smartness, as though the heroine thus created knew her own way through a city of men who sat on tops of Fifth Avenue buses or who gazed at her over white linen gleaming from the round surfaces of restaurant tables. The city lights were written of in terms of bright beads or jewels worn at evening. The young woman seemed like a good child released for a short moment from the comforts of a stolid middle-class home. At the hour of Sara Teasdale's death in 1933, the phenomenon of her popularity had passed its meridian: other heroines had arrived who were bolder and who spoke a language influenced by imagism, or the seventeenth-century lyricists, or Emily Dickinson, or Yeats, or Hopkins.

Among the changes in public consciousness that had caused Sara Teasdale's world to seem less certain and more trivial was another phenomenon in poetry which appeared in 1926 under the title of *Roan Stallion, Tamar, and Other Poems*. Today that phenomenon seems less important as it reëmerges in Mr. Jeffers's new book which contains one narrative poem and a group of shorter pieces. It now seems unlikely that Mr. Jeffers will ever again approximate the quality of authentic tragic meaning which entered his "Tower Beyond Tragedy," for he has reiterated his familiar story of incest, and on this occasion his study in human pathology opens with sexual madness only to close with homicidal insanity. And here I am convinced that the real reasons why Mr. Jeffers's men and women go insane must be sought out in the poet's rejection of human consciousness. Mr. Jeffers's premise of Wordsworthian pantheism (which was clearly evident in *California*, the book written before *Roan Stallion*) has made it impossible for him to accept man or god, or any mode of conduct here on earth. The political poems in the present volume reiterate his passionate longing for a golden age, a pastoral age, now far behind us: he stands squarely against civilization in all its forms and yet knows well that man cannot live sanely if placed on the same level with animals. The vicious circle he has created closes around him in darkness, saving only for the moment a quality of savage wit in his shorter poems which did not appear in his earlier work.

The distance between Allen Tate and Robinson Jeffers is much shorter than one might at first suppose. Again a defeated passion for a pastoral society plays its role, and Mr. Tate remarks with the curious force of a pathetic fallacy, "We are the eyelids of defeated caves." His present book includes everything that he wishes to save from the three books he has written, and though a few of the poems convey the impression of dignity in the presence of death, the weighted language that Mr. Tate employs more often leaves one feeling that all he says is pretentious rather than deeply felt or realized. Yet Mr. Tate and his work still represent the desire of younger southern writers (who after contact with post-war Europe came home to native soil) to build a cultural movement on the ruins of the old South. Mr. Tate's preoccupation with past glory and its ruins is no less significant in its failure than Mr. Jeffers's concern with the loss of faith in human consciousness.

From these we turn to Wallace Stevens, of whom I once wrote, "He is not merely a connoisseur of fine rhythms and the precise nuances of the lyrical line, but a trained observer who gazes with an intelligent eye upon the decadence that follows the rapid acquisition of power." This was not to say, however, that the poet himself was "left" in sympathy or that his primary intention was to write political poetry. This was to

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

say that Wallace Stevens's sensibilities in writing verse had made it possible for him to view the world about him with singular acuteness. Today his vision has the same qualities of sharpness, but is now dimmed by the effort to explain his "position" in a medium ill-suited to the demands of exposition. His man with the blue guitar—the blue guitar his art, the man the artist—is a symbol that lacks the power of inevitable choice; other instruments or another color could have been chosen, and it would seem that Mr. Stevens by his choice confuses the functions of fancy and imagination. His defense is a defense of the artist in a world where the things he looks at seem to be intractable materials for his art and are therefore less real than his "blue guitar." Throughout the first half of his book, its title poem, in thirty-three sections, weaves its way and is convincing only when Mr. Stevens recreates what he would call the "anti-poetic" image in such lines as

> Through Oxidia, banal suburb,
> One-half of all its installments paid

And it is only when his real ability in writing satire appears, as in "The Mechanical Optimist," a portrait of a lady at the radio, that his present work equals the quality of his earlier verse. Yet, in contrast to Mr. Tate's irony, Mr. Stevens's satire is far more felicitous whenever it finds a target; and unlike Mr. Tate's verse, the images within it never fail to flow, one from the other, in emotional progression.

Of the three books of poems issued by New Directions, of Norfolk, Conn., Dudley Fitts's *Poems, 1929-1936* is by far the most impressive. All three books have one characteristic in common, for Robert McAlmon's book as well as Mr. Fitts's and Yvor Winters's collection of *Twelve Poets of the Pacific* represent the influences and styles of verse written since 1925. It would be easy to dismiss Mr. Fitts's book as a mere reflection in technique of Pound, Eliot, Cummings, and MacLeish: these immediate influences are so obvious that one meets them squarely on each page, and among them familiar attitudes of rejection, prayer, blasphemy, and irony are reintroduced within the formal patterns so well established by their originators. Yet Mr. Fitts's verse has a quality of gayety and wit that is quite its own. If he may be regarded as a transitional poet between the period from which he has borrowed his attitudes and the present date, he appears as the forerunner of a kind of wit that is beginning to take form in the work of younger poets.

Robert McAlmon is far less fortunate than Mr. Fitts in his application of the techniques which were developed during tht last ten years. Each poem in his collection has little means of guiding a brilliant opening to its conclusion; quite like the verse with which Amy Lowell once experimented, it remains "free" and a sharp image is frequently clouded by an uncertain or merely descriptive close. Of the poems in this book, only the bull-fight scenes in Spain convey something of the physical reality which seems to lie behind their imagery.

Mr. Winters's twelve poets, himself included, are in immediate reaction against the schools of verse represented by Mr. Fitts and Mr. McAlmon. And of these twelve Janet Lewis alone seems to have converted her reaction into a positive virtue. The chief difficulty that Mr. Winters and his group of poets have encountered is in their naïve conception of a rigid verse form. Mr. Winters's seriousness of intention has long been his single virtue. And as he states his program of "clarity" and of "feeling in terms of the motive," there is every reason to agree with him. But the results of this statement, if verse can ever be called the result of any critical commentary, echo the sententious quality of Mr. Tate's verse to which are added the horrors of Victorian platitude in word and texture. I quote one stanza of a poem which sounds very like a translation from the German as it might have been written by a young woman in an English seminary at the close of the last century:

> How could I praise thee
> Loved I not wisdom much?
> How could I love thee
> Were I not praising such?

Contrast the mechanical uses of "form" in this quotation with the genuine clarity of Miss Lewis's

> Mild and slow and young,
> She moves about the room,
> And stirs the summer dust
> With her wide broom.

But Miss Lewis's poems in the collection are all too few and her good work is placed among such college classroom curiosities as "To Miss Evelyn C. Johnson on Her Examination for the Doctorate in English," which closes with the discovery:

> For you have learned, not what to say,
> But how the saying must be said.

Miss Lechlitner's first book *Tomorrow's Phoenix* is in distinct contrast to *Twelve Poets of the Pacific:* there is here far greater variety of texture and feeling and more frequent attempts to master the complex forms of contemporary verse. The book errs on the side of attempting to move in too many directions at once, yet the intention behind it (if I read it rightly) shows an active, if at times too hasty, appreciation of the color and movement in contemporary life. In that sense Miss Lechlitner's work exhibits many signs of promise and in contrast to other books in the selection I have made (Mr. Fitts excepted), it has greater speed and little repetition. Yet her political verse which shows an awareness of events today is less controlled and less effective than her "Song of Starlings" which is far removed from the other poems in the book. And as I read her book, I thought of the essay on political poetry published in No. 9 of *International Literature,* which brings me to a generalization concerning American poetry in 1937.

The essay in *International Literature* reminded its readers that political poetry as such cannot be divorced from other kinds of poetry, no more than we here in

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

America can ask a poet to be political one moment and non-political the next. If his convictions are secure and contrary to ours, we may deplore the fact, but if his work is mature and centered in our culture, we, as critics, should be able to interpret from it the character of the society in which the poet lives. I for one would rather study certain warnings of disaster in American middle-class society through the early poetry of E. A. Robinson than in the work of many of his contemporaries in prose. Mr. Jeffers's inability to adjust his sense of loss to any sane solution is a warning of another kind, less important than E. A. Robinson's in proportion to his ability as a poet. Some few poems by Mr. Tate are visible proof of the inadequate nature of his longing to recreate a kind of aristocracy in the South, which no longer exists but whose irony has been far more brilliantly revealed by John Crowe Ransom. Even Mr. Stevens's desire to restate his relationship to a "blue guitar" throws light upon matters of concern to writers in existing society. and the books published by the New Directions press as well as Miss Lechlitner's first book show the complex of literary influence at work upon the latest generation of American poets. If confusion or serious conflict between word and intention exists among younger writers, we may be fairly certain of two things: one, a lack of organic meaning in the poetry they write, which may be traced to the conflicts in their environment; and two, a failure to master the techniques they have chosen for their medium.

Meanwhile it is evident that whatever failures may be recorded against this season's poetry in America there is adequate proof that much of it is neither stagnant nor dull. If the reputations of the period between 1928 and the present seem less secure than they appeared to be as recently as 1933, I think we can be well assured that no single destructive influence will long prevail in contemporary verse. The desert, which seemed impassable in 1930 because some critics saw Robinson Jeffers alone within it, has now given way to another prospect of the future in American poetry. Whatever that future may be, it will contain within it younger poets who are more aware of conflict than defeat, and the sources of their work, as in the past, will be the contrasting influences which have given American poetry its singular ability to surmount its many failures.

Literary Fascism in Brazil

By Samuel Putnam

THE STORY of what fascism does to literature is an old one by this time. It would be pointless to relate once again the burning of the books. We now know that this is a characteristic occurrence; and we are not surprised to learn that Franco, upon entering the city of Tolosa, ordered a bonfire of "Marxist" works like the one that was kindled in front of the Berlin Opera House. As Ilya Ehrenbourg has remarked, when Herr Doktor Goebbels—whatever his local name and habitation—sets foot in a library, he instinctively reaches for a match box. There is, frequently, an element of personal literary frustration involved, as in Goebbels's own case, with a resulting intense hatred of decent writing and writers; for the triumph of fascism is at once followed by an upward surge of tenth-raters of the Hans Heinz Ewers brand. This, too, is a fairly constant phenomenon. Accordingly, when we hear that the Brazilian Integralistas have banned *Tom Sawyer* as being a "Red" and "subversive" production, it merely strikes us as being the height of something or other.

Which is to say, literary fascism in Brazil is in general following the stupid line laid down by the Nazi "regenerators," with, naturally, certain variations due to nationality, race, traditions, geographic situation, and the like. It is these more or less distinctive variations that interest us chiefly. The period of the cultural transition to fascism has not been properly studied in connection with either Italy or Germany; and by this time many of the first sharp vivid edges have been glossed over for the outside world. In Brazil, the process is not as yet completed; there is still left at least the remnant of an intelligent opposition, and what is happening at the moment is exciting to watch. Exciting and instructive; since it is from the study of such a period that we in North America, with the signs of an incipient cultural fascism all about us, have most to learn.

Nowhere, for one thing, is fascism's quick stifling of creative effort more startlingly brought out than by a contrast of Brazilian writing for the year 1935 with that of 1936, the year in which the Vargas régime came into power. It is part of the present writer's job, as editor of the Brazilian literature section of the *Handbook of Latin American Studies* (Harvard University Press), to inspect every item that comes from the presses of Brazil in the course of the year which may possibly be of literary significance. In 1934, this writer had observed the rise of a literature possessed of true social depth and consciousness, and often with a revolutionary-proletarian orientation. This, for example, was the year that saw the publication of Jorge Amado's *Cacáu* (Cocoa), a novel by one who had been a worker on the great cocoa plantations, and the same author's *Suór* (Sweat), the story of a Bahian tenement. In 1935, Brazilian letters appeared to have achieved a promise which had been maturing for a number of years past. There was a baker's dozen of first-rate novels, and among them at least one masterpiece in Erico Verissimo's *Caminhos Cruzados* (Crossroads), which was

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED