

# The PHOENIX NEST

By WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

## ROUND ABOUT PARNASSUS THE AMERICAN MUSE

I SHALL probably be accused of favoritism in reviewing a notable new book of poetry by a young American, Paul Engle, inasmuch as the back of its jacket bears a recommendation by my brother. But the actual facts are that I have met Mr. Engle, and quite casually, but twice; that my brother and I preserve our individual tastes and friends, and, although most sympathetic with each other's views in certain respects, do not often, these days, discuss modern poetry together. That is no more than the truth.

I will say at the outset, that though I approve of what Mr. Engle is trying to do I do not altogether approve of the manner in which he is doing it. I think his versification could be closer-knit and more salient. I read this book with an unusual interest, awakened by the nature of its material; but I found at the end that far too few phrases had bitten deeply into my mind. This I found particularly true in one of the poems not concerned with America, "Fire at Viareggio." Having had the honor at one time to be the husband of a great poet who from her childhood up immersed herself in Shelley, I am rather more familiar with his character and story than the average person, and I seized upon Mr. Engle's poem with avidity; for Shelley, to me, is always inspiring "material," if that be not too flat and vulgar a word—as it is—to use in connection with him. But despite some fine lines I found Mr. Engle's poem by far too nebular an hypothesis to suit me. I think he does better with concrete things; I think he does less well with matters in the nature of an exordium. Despite this, I think his book of poetry one of the most inspiring that has come to us for some time from a younger American.

In the first place, he is one of the few contemporary poets who write about America—that is, these United States—as though they really had lived in the country! We have had plenty of poetry about New York, and some about Chicago. But that is poetry within quite a narrow compass. We have had some truly faithful New England poetry from Robert Frost, and now from the unrelated Frances Frost. But even the revolutionary poets whose knowledge of America—both its past development and its possible future—should be as profound as their certainty that they have just the proper panacea for all its ills—seem to have little grasp or none at all of its multifold spirit.

Mr. Engle, to steal the title of one of his own poems, writes a "Letter to an Elder Generation" in this book of his about America. There is a fresh high wind blowing through it, and suddenly we know that this is the eternal inspiration of our country. We can trace it to our own youth, before mere money-grubbing under a rickety social system replaced the short space of large visions.

*O wood thrush crying in Kentucky hills,  
O grey gull poisoning over Puget Sound,  
Sing down our hands from cursing at the sky,  
Give them again the feel of friendly ground.*

And that is just what Mr. Engle's book does. He gives us the feel of the various soils of America. He knows a lot about it. He can perceive the subtle irony of "wretched murals in small-town banks, the ancient Greek acanthus framing the Utah trail, the dignity of Cornstalk, Pontiac, American Horse immortalized in the ads of automobiles." And in the next breath he can speak of looping a lariat across the land that shall settle across "the lifted, crashing defiant horns of the wild American spirit. And with a twist around the saddle-horn Drop it to earth." His verse is sometimes exceptionally vigorous, as when he writes of a young girl swimmer as having a

*body supple as a diving otter's  
Churning a wake of pale foam in the torn  
And tideless estuaries of my mind.*

Yet I should not misdirect you as to the content of Mr. Engle's poetry. He is no mere local bard, even though the locality be so vast a region as the whole United States. He is a young man coming rapidly to mental maturity with a proper appreciation of "the lone spirit's mad magnificence," to quote him again. He has called his book "American Song," which has led

the publishers into stamping its jacket with various dies from our coinage—the American buffalo, the Indian head, the head of Liberty in her Phrygian cap, and so on. Perhaps this is a good sales policy, but it makes the book look as though it were brimming with patriotic verse of the most eagle-screaming type, which is about as far from the truth as could well be. It is brimmed with sensitive verse that often has a clear title to the name of poetry. It is full of thought and emotion not of an obvious kind.

And so, in the short space allotted to me I have tried to convey a hint, at least, that here is one of our younger poets really worth reading; a poet neither ashamed of the country in which he was born nor afraid to look it in the face; a poet who can range from stubble field to glowing planet with his own new interpretations; and a young poet possessing that exhilarating energy of youth that is not recaptured once you have come to forty year. I think he will go far along the trail!

## Trade Winds

By P. E. G. QUERCUS

Are there any movie fans in the audience? If so, they have an opportunity to try for one of the hundred and fifty-seven prizes in the *Anthony Adverse* casting contest. Sponsored by Farrar & Rinehart, *Photoplay Magazine*, Postal Telegraph, and Warner Brothers (who will make the movie of *Anthony*) the Contest offers prizes ranging from a new Ford to a Pre-Vue Day-Night mirror, with amber and blue faces, enabling ladies to make up properly for artificial or natural light.

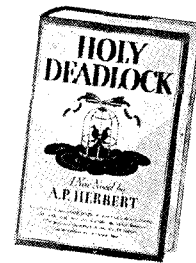
The dope is this. You get a ballot at any bookstore or Postal Telegraph office, or clip it out of *Photoplay*, and vote for twelve movie actors to take the parts of the twelve principal characters of *Anthony Adverse*, listed on the ballot. Winners will be rated in accordance with the similarity of their nominations to the actual cast chosen. You also have to explain within fifty words, your choice for the role of Anthony; and we are informed that neatness will be taken into consideration. You file your ballot at a bookstore or Postal Telegraph office (without charge) or mail it to *Photoplay*. The contest closes September 15.

Quercus gathers from the list of prizes that the majority of winners are expected to be women. Except for the five Fords, the ten trips to the Chicago Fair, and the cash prizes which are offered, the inducements are feminine in character and appeal: a Tecla pearl necklace, six dresses, twenty prizes each consisting of forty pairs of silk stockings, and the aforementioned Day-Night mirrors, of which there are to be a hundred awarded. We are somehow greatly cheered by this contest, which brings back to the book business the long lost flavor of superlatives. As a promotion stunt, it has, in the publishers' phrase, started off with a bang. Ten million ballots have been printed. There are displays in two thousand Postal Telegraph offices. These offices and bookstores are distributing circulars giving all the details of the contest. The Warner Brothers theatres are showing contest trailers.

Not the least remarkable achievement has been the condensation of *Anthony Adverse* into a three page synopsis, appearing in the August *Photoplay*. Tip: while contestants may vote for any movie actor or actress, and "all players suggested will be duly considered," the circular points out that the availability of players not under contract to Warners will depend on their commitments elsewhere.

Joe Consolino, New England sales representative of various publishers and of this journal, reports in a recent letter that business seems better; he sold 60% more books in a week than a year ago on the same trip. Ellis K. Baker's order for fifty copies a week of the *Review* to be sent to the May Company, Los Angeles, came as a much needed stimulant on one of the Quercuses' most humid days last week. It is surprising to see such musicianly publishers as Simon & Schuster letting this typographical error get in Virginia Faulkner's amusing *Friends and Romans*: Beethoven's Opus III, for Opus 111. The indefatigable Walter Pitkin, who never reads second-class mail, is now going to produce some, as editor of a new magazine, *The New York Woman*.

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