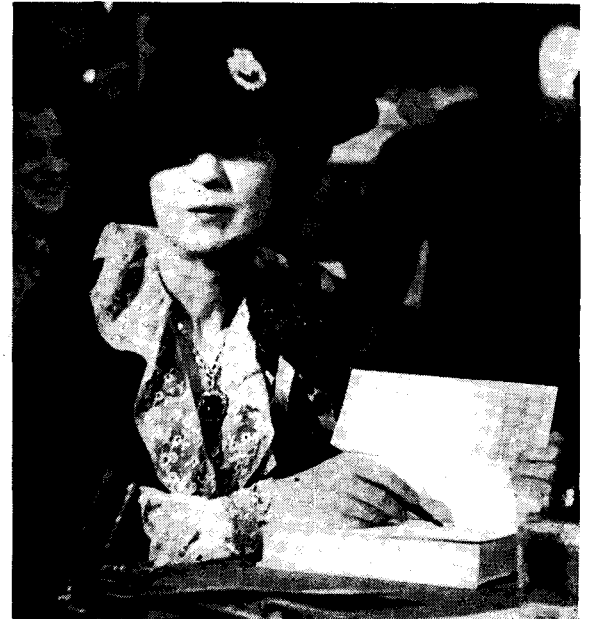


Covering All Fronts

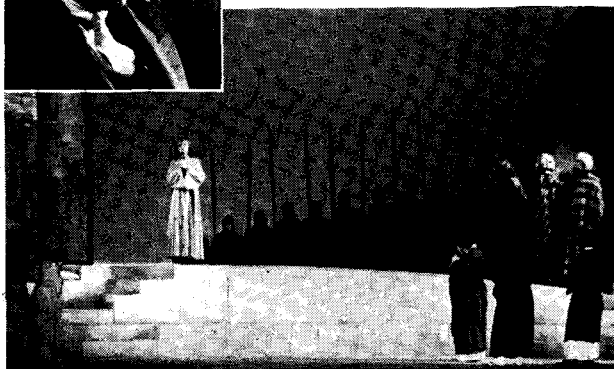
Saturday Review News Pictures of the Month by Robert Disraeli



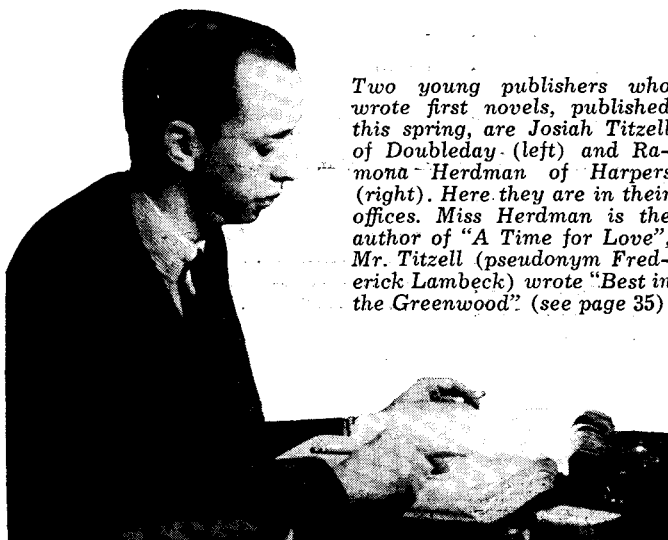
Covering the New York waterfront, Max Miller (above) takes a look at the East River. His latest book is "Fog and Men on Bering Sea." . . . Evalyn Walsh McLean (right) wears the Hope diamond while she autographs copies of "Father Struck It Rich" at Brentano's.



Covering the dramatic front: Robert E. Sherwood (left), author of the current success, "Idiot's Delight," in his N. Y. apartment. . . . Below, a scene from T. S. Eliot's "Murder in the Cathedral," as produced by the Federal Theatre.



Covering the publishing front: Gina Kaus, author of "Catherine: the Portrait of an Empress," talks with her publisher, B. W. Huebsch of the Viking Press. The occasion is a literary tea in honor of Mrs. Kaus's first visit to the United States. She isn't lecturing this trip, but she may go to Hollywood.



Two young publishers who wrote first novels, published this spring, are Josiah Titzell of Doubleday (left) and Ramona Herdman of Harpers (right). Here they are in their offices. Miss Herdman is the author of "A Time for Love"; Mr. Titzell (pseudonym Frederick Lambeck) wrote "Best in the Greenwood" (see page 35).



Baudelaire in English

FLOWERS OF EVIL. From the French of Charles Baudelaire by George Dillon and Edna St. Vincent Millay. New York: Harper & Bros. 1936. \$2.75.

Reviewed by MARY M. COLUM

FOR some strange reason poets admire themselves more for their feats in translation than for their own original work: Miss Millay has succumbed to this particular illusion and she glows over the performance of herself and Mr. George Dillon in these renderings of "Les Fleurs du Mal." There are some translators of single poems of Baudelaire's who have got as much as fifty, or even fifty-five per cent of him into English verse. For example, there was James Elroy Flecker who did this a couple of times; there is F. P. Sturm who also did it once or twice. I should not be surprised if Arthur Symons had not done it once or twice judging from his early translations of Mallarmé and Verlaine, but I am unfamiliar with his Baudelaire translations which Miss Millay describes as "shockingly inaccurate and misleading." As Arthur Symons used to be a fine French scholar, not only in the language, but what is equally important, in the literature, it is gloomy news to hear that he has become inaccurate. That the intellectual structure of Symons's mind is as alien to Baudelaire's as Miss Millay's is, is probably true. She has some interesting comments on translators: "the poet best fitted technically to translate the work of a foreign poet is the accomplished and disciplined craftsman in his own tongue who possesses also a comprehensive knowledge of the language from which he is translating." But one can have all this technical accomplishment and yet completely misrender the poet.

Now the equipment necessary for the translation of a poet like Baudelaire is a very complex and manifold one. One would be obliged to have, not only the linguistic and technical accomplishment postulated by Miss Millay; one would have to comprehend the emotional and intellectual structure of his mind; one would have to be very familiar with the sound of his poetry—to have a sharp ear for the peculiar Baudelairean music; one would have to know French literature well so as not to stumble over the subtle references in "Les Fleurs du Mal." Then one would have to have a knowledge of Catholic ritual, a knowledge of the Catholic missal and of the litanies (a knowledge of the latter would have saved Miss Millay a lot of puzzlement in translating the Litany to Satan); it would be well even to be a little learned in the philosophy of the Church, for Baudelaire, though he separated morals from religion as Latins often do, was strongly Catholic,

a religious man who made "as one of the eternal rules of my life every morning to pray to God."

To those readers of this review who have not devoted themselves to Baudelaire in the original, I might, to some extent, commend this collection. Miss Millay and Mr. Dillon have translated a larger bulk of Baudelaire into better verse than other Baudelairean translators. If their flight is not as high, and if they get too near the ground, at least they remain longer on the wing. But for those who can read "Les Fleurs du Mal" easily this book is not worth while; the translators have not captured more than about thirty per cent of the original poetry, and the reasons for this are several. Mr. George Dillon grasps a certain amount of the intellectual structure of Baudelaire's



EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY

mind, but he gets almost nothing of the emotional structure; Miss Millay gets something of both. The reason that she does not achieve a closer approach to an acceptable rendering is partly because she is a woman, and Baudelaire's emotions were masculine through and through—masculine in their form, in their weaknesses, in their strength, and in their perversity: a woman can recognize all these qualities in Baudelaire and still be unable to reproduce them herself. A love poem in the sense that Miss Millay has written love poetry Baudelaire never wrote, never even conceived. There was a sharp division in his mind, as there is in many men's minds, between loving and possessing.

To see what Miss Millay can do in a translation let us take one or two of the most familiar poems. Her rendering of "Remords Posthume" is an interesting poem with a good deal of Miss Millay's special merits as a poet. But as a translation of Baudelaire is it misleading. The original is a morbid and sardonic version of the Ronsard Hélène type of sonnet, and a reader can only comprehend it

thoroughly with Ronsard's sonnet to Hélène at the back of his mind:

Lorsque tu dormiras, ma belle ténébreuse,
Au fond d'un monument construit en marbre noir,

* * *

Le tombeau, confident de mon rêve infini,
—Car le tombeau toujours comprendra le poète—

Durant ces longues nuits d'où le somme est banni,

Te dira: "Que vous sert, courtisane imparfaite,

De n'avoir pas connu ce que pleurent les morts?"

—Et le ver rongera ta peau comme un remords.

Now let us read Miss Millay's version of the sestet:

The tomb that knows me well and reads my dream aright,
(What poet but confides his secret to the tomb?)

Will say to you some day during that endless night,

"They fare but ill, vain courtesan, in this cold room,

Who bring here no warm memories of true love to keep!"

—and like remorse the worm will gnaw you in your sleep.

Literally, what Baudelaire said is: "The grave, the confidant of my boundless dream (because the grave will always understand the poet) during those long nights from which sleep is banished, will say to you 'what does it avail you, imperfect courtesan, not to have known for what the dead are weeping!' and the worm will gnaw your skin like a remorse." There is not a word about "warm memories of true love": this is a Millay sentiment, not a Baudelaire one. Through the parallel with the Ronsard poem, it is left to your imagination to picture what the dead are weeping for, or you can gather it through some other poems in "Les Fleurs du Mal." And by omitting to translate "d'où le somme est banni," or by confusing "le somme" with "la somme," (the total) and thus making "endless night" out of the phrase, she fails to convey that characteristic Baudelairean idea that though one can "dormir" in the grave, one does not have any "somme" or "sommeil." Again, it is Baudelaire's habit to evoke an emotion without naming it, but Miss Millay has to name it—the poet and his translator are different kinds of poets.

Readers will doubtless remember the five great lines which Swinburne prefixed to his elegy on Baudelaire:

Nous devrions pourtant lui porter quelques fleurs;

Les morts, les pauvres morts, ont de grandes douleurs,

Et quand Octobre souffle, émondeur des vieux arbres,

Son vent mélancolique à l'entour de leurs marbres,

Certe, ils doivent trouver les vivants bien ingrats.

It is almost terrifying to read what Miss Millay makes of that marvellous line—"les morts, les pauvres morts, ont de