

# The New Poetry

SARA HENDERSON HAY

OF the six poets\* reviewed in this article, two are newcomers. Norman Rosten's book, "Return Again, Traveller," is the latest of the Yale University Series of Younger Poets. It is a long poem whose subject is, in the large, the excitement and drama of growing America. It is really a series of more or less unconnected units; kaleidoscopic and very much on the surface impressions of a young man who has apparently just discovered the materials of American history. In 1937, so Stephen Vincent Benét's Introduction to the book tells us, the author hitchhiked from New York to Salt Lake City and back again, and thus was born the inspiration for his first published volume. The trouble with Mr. Rosten's work is that he adds very little to the material. He is like a man who has read Whitman for the first time and goes around on fire with his discovery, quoting great lines and ringing phrases to which he brings nothings but his enormous appreciation.

The book is full of a fine and gusty enthusiasm, and that is a good thing. But the materials per se are the properties of drama, and Mr. Rosten does hardly more than state them objectively. For instance:

Who remembers Ethan Allen, coming down from the Green Mountains at night with 250 farmers armed with rifles, pounding the gates of Ticonderoga, smashing the iron hinges "Open in the name of the Great Jehovah and the Continental Congress!"

What this country needs is a good poet with both enthusiasm and discrimination. This requires more than the ability to make an outline, however stirring, of the sources of his enthusiasm. Mr. Rosten has not yet assimilated his material. I should not say, as the Introduction does, that here is a revaluation of certain American things by a young affirmative mind. There is definite talent here, and vigor and personal excitement, but no

revaluation at all, so far as I can see. There is more to America than railroad building, skyscraper erecting, labor exploiting, and subway advertising; more than the rip-snorting violence and adolescence which Mr. Rosten makes so much of. His panorama is too sketchy, too much just the skeleton of an emotional reaction. It will be interesting, however, too see what he does when he has thought about things a little longer.

Belle Turnbull's book, "Goldboat," is



Edna St. Vincent Millay



Robert Hillyer



Jean Starr Untermeyer

Vaskerville

a narrative in free verse; the story of John Dorn, a young engineer who comes to a village in the Rockies with a twofold ambition—to make a success of the gold dredging operations of his employer's company, and to make a life for himself and his future wife, the employer's daughter. It is the story of a man's idealism and honesty in conflict with the chicanery of big business. The hero is disillusioned both by the company's machinations and by the pettiness of Alicia, the boss's daughter. Dorn finally realizes that he loves a girl of the mountains, who knows that "two can work a saw."

In outline this is an excessively trite plot, relieved somewhat by Miss Turnbull's really good writing. But the exigencies of verse form, however free, make for so much condensation and impressionism that the thread of the story is at times rather difficult to follow. It is the reviewer's opinion that the medium of poetry detracts rather than adds to the force of the work. Miss Turnbull's ability as a story teller is so good, and her style so vivid, that as prose this would still have retained a poetic quality. As it is, it falls between two stools, and there is too much the flavor of experiment about it. The author could, I believe, do credit to herself in both fields, whereas a combination of prose and poetry lacks the best qualities of either.

There is a touch of irony in the title to Edna St. Vincent Millay's "Make Bright the Arrows." They are neither glittering nor sharp. Here is, in fact, a most disappointing performance by one who has been hailed, and rightly so, as America's leading woman poet. Miss Millay's 1940 Notebook would have been better if she had let the ink dry on the poems. Mere sincerity and great concern are not enough for poetry. It is difficult to understand why the poet thinks that an inferior expression of a powerful emotion will carry its message by its theme alone. The pen is still as mighty as the sword, in the long run, but much of its effectiveness depends on the manner in which it is wielded. For one whose earlier poetry was perfected and made both

strong and beautiful, this shoddy and clichéd expression, however impassioned and earnest, is a singularly disheartening job. "Of him to whom much was given, much is required."

The first poem in the book is a lyric which could have been written by any one of a dozen women poets writing for our best women's magazines. The "Ballad of Lost Cities" descends to doggerel in its concluding lines:

President, why the lack of zest?  
Washington's safe. Who'd dare assay  
Boston, New York, the Middle West?  
But where are the towns of yesterday?

In the sonnets only, now and then, there comes through an echo of the Edna Millay who could, by magical juxtaposition of simple, scrupulous words, achieve a tremendous emotional impact. But for the most this book sounds like someone trying to write like Edna St. Vincent Millay. It is regrettable that the author did not work over these poems. One perfect, hardhitting lyric could have done so much more than this volume full of honest but incoherent passion and concern.

Robert Hillyer's sonnets and lyrics in his "Pattern of a Day" are very gentlemanly poems; suave, educated, quiet spoken, extremely well tailored. There is nothing ungracious or petty in either

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\*RETURN AGAIN, TRAVELLER. By Norman Rosten. New Haven: Yale University Press. 1940. 88 pp. \$2.

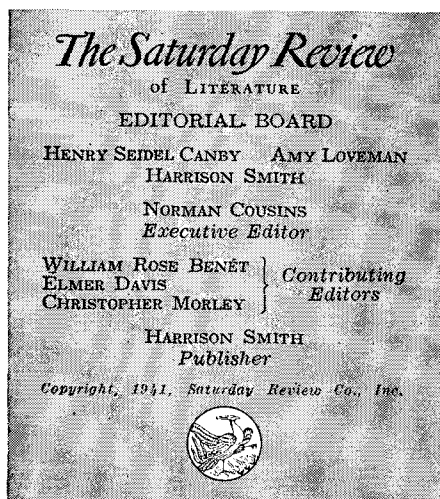
\*GOLDBOAT. By Belle Turnbull. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. 1940. 77 pp. \$2.

\*MAKE BRIGHT THE ARROWS. By Edna St. Vincent Millay. New York: Harper & Bros. 1940. 65 pp. \$1.75.

\*PATTERN OF A DAY. By Robert Hillyer. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. 1940. 81 pp. \$2.

\*THE TOMB OF THOMAS JEFFERSON. By Lawrence Lee. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1940. 45 pp. \$1.50.

\*LOVE AND NEED. Collected Poems by Jean Starr Untermeyer. New York: The Viking Press. 1940. 239 pp., with index. \$2.



## ANISFIELD AWARD

THE \$1,000 John Anisfield Award, given annually under the sponsorship of *The Saturday Review of Literature*, will go this year to Louis Adamic for his "From Many Lands," selected by the judges as the outstanding book on racial relations published during 1940.

Mr. Adamic, editor of the quarterly magazine, *Common Ground*, is the sixth recipient of this award, which was established in 1934 by Mrs. Edith Anisfield Wolf, of Cleveland, in honor of her father. Members of the award committee are Dr. Henry Seidel Canby, of the editorial board of *The Saturday Review*, Professor Donald Young, of the Social Science Research Council, and Professor Henry Pratt Fairchild, of New York University, President of the Town Hall Club of New York.

Mr. Adamic for the last few years has given all his time to the study of the immigrant in America and his attempt to adjust himself to his new environment. "From Many Lands," published by Harpers, is a human, warmly written account of the racial contacts and blendings of America's more recent immigrants. It consists almost entirely of intimate narratives of the lives and careers of a number of representative immigrant individuals, families, and groups. The cases selected by Mr. Adamic are individual ones and are not to be considered as generalizations typical of the larger groups to which each belongs, yet they effectively highlight the essential problems and the solutions to those problems of the stranger in a foreign land. The American of longer standing who reads this book will learn much not only about the newcomer but about himself and his country.

Mr. Adamic's own career is an excellent illustration of the intellectual and esthetic contribution made by our immigrants. His work in racial relations has now broadened into a cam-

paign for mutual understanding, and he may justly be cited as one of those new Americans who made new America articulate. He is a Jugo-Slavian by birth and childhood training. His important book, "The Native's Return" must have made many old Americans conscious for the first time of the movements of thought and custom among the hundreds of thousands of Serbs, Slavonians, and Croatians, long domesticated in the United States, but to the fellow Americans they passed on the streets, actually a racial mystery. The importance of this racial articulation in a national unity is very great. What the regionalists and before them, the local color writers, did to make odd corners of Maine or Louisiana, or

California, or the Appalachians come into the light of interest and sympathy, these new spokesmen for minorities are doing in a different fashion, but to much more important ends. For Americanization must work both ways or produce a battle compound at last.

Mr. Adamic's book, which is a series of case histories, very well told, of what might be called the drama of racial contacts in America, lies close to the area of fiction and dramatic composition. We wish this very useful award for scholarly works in the field of racial relations might be twinned with another offered for creative literary work, such as novels, or plays which deal with or are inspired by the same theme.

## Not by Waving Banners

By Phyllis McGinley

(Reprinted by request)

*English lady will exchange recipe of a really good steak and kidney pudding for excellent recipe of lemon meringue pie or fish chowder.*

PERSONAL in the *Saturday Review of Literature*

O H, not by waving banners,  
By laying cornerstones  
Or saying things at dinners  
In loud, official tones,

I tell you not by fever  
Of bunting or parade  
Shall British hands forever  
In Yankee hands be laid.

Divided by an ocean  
No bigger than a brook,  
Nation has stared at nation  
With supercilious look

And thorny as a thicket  
Nourished their separate pride,  
While one held out for Cricket  
And one for Baseball cried.

Greater and ever greater  
Has grown the mortal rift  
Since one said "Elevator"  
And one kept muttering "Lift."

They've mocked each other's vesture,  
Speech, custom, climate, use;  
Till with a simple gesture  
A lady brought the Truce.

For now to walk like Damon  
With Pythias they begin.  
One touch of grated lemon  
Shall make these rivals kin.

Sing, sing her praises louder  
While knife and fork we ply—  
United by a chowder  
Exchanged for kidney pie.