

In her preface Miss Foley writes that there has been a coming of age of the American short story in this year and that the average quality has been unusually high. Since 1946 has already been labeled, with sufficient evidence, as "the most arid year" in American literature since its renaissance thirty years ago, it would be

extraordinary if this were so. That these thirty stories are admirable is true, though last year's volume contained in our opinion as good or better a crop. But in them you will search vainly for a new rare talent or flash of power that years ago first revealed a young Hemingway or a Steinbeck.

driven to suicide, seduced, deserted by their mistresses and lovers, beaten into insensibility, and left naked. The reader has taken quite a beating, too. But unpleasantness is the current fashion: composers offer us a series of unrelated dissonances, painters a jumble of meaningless blotches of color, and poets a jumble of letters and symbols that look like the result of a monkey playing with a linotype machine. These trends are of course reactions from the sweetness and light of the earlier romantic schools. After a diet of syrup, we are expected to relish unadulterated vinegar. But biological evolution is slow, and it will take some time for our stomachs to acquire the requisite copper linings. Although liberated Rome was a tough spot, Mr. Hayes must have encountered some decent Americans and Italians while he was there. Let us hope that he will use his undoubted talent to write about them.

## Ave Roma Immoralis!

*ALL THY CONQUESTS.* By Alfred Hayes. New York: Howell, Soskin. 1946. 295 pp. \$2.75.

Reviewed by LAWRENCE GRANT WHITE

**T**HIS book fulfills the basic requirement of a novel: it is good reading from cover to cover. The scene is laid in liberated Rome, about which the author is well qualified to write, as he served in Italy with the American army. But he has a much more important qualification: he knows how to write.

There is some question as to whether Rome was an open city in the military sense. But in other respects, the lid was off, and the bewildered natives soon learned that the major objectives of their liberators were signorine and cognac. Mr. Hayes has chosen the method—now made so familiar by "Hiroshima"—of reciting the case histories of half a dozen characters. He is most successful with the Americans, for he was one of them, and with a sure touch he vividly describes their thoughts and actions. They speak authentic broken Italian. The Italian characters, including an ex-barman, a young girl, and a thoroughly unscrupulous marquis, are also brilliantly drawn; but unfortunately they, also, speak broken Italian. Why are even the best authors so careless in the use of foreign words? This failing is universal; whenever the French use an English word, it is almost sure to be the wrong one. Although most of Mr. Hayes's readers will take his Italian for granted, anyone familiar with Rome will be exasperated by references to the Via "Sestina," the "Ponto" Milvio, the "palazzetta," the "scotoli," not to mention the gratuitous sprinkling of spurious accents, as in "terriblé." Some of these errors may be due to careless proofreading, such as the transposition of whole lines at the foot of page 257; but those which recur consistently must be ascribed to wilful negligence. Under such conditions the local color, for which the Italian words are presumably used, fades rapidly.

These are only superficial faults in a first-class piece of reportage. Perhaps pieces would be more accurate,

for a more serious defect is the lack of continuity. The book has no plot; it is a series of brilliant episodes, each written in a style admirably suited to the characters involved. They are like cuttings of different kinds of cloth—sweaty khaki for the soldiers, and rotting brocade for the marquis. It is only in the second part of the book that these pieces are lightly basted



together into a patchwork quilt; and stitched on at the end, as a border, is the dramatic description of the trial of a fascist official. By such abrupt changes the tenuous thread of continuity is stretched to the breaking-point. The author appears in so many disguises that he nearly loses his identity, so that the book is like an anthology of short stories by authors ranging from Hardy to Hemingway. However, the episodes have one common factor: their characters are preoccupied with sex, underlined in language that would have started the late Anthony Comstock off on a crusade. But he has been dead a long, long time.

Even in these more enlightened days one might wish for a little sweetness and light to relieve the sustained bitterness and frustration. The only faintly sympathetic character is the girl Francesca, who appears briefly at the outset, and unfortunately cannot be found again. The only person who gets what he wants is the marquis—and his objectives are dubious, to say the least. The other protagonists are torn to pieces by the mob,

## Literary Sampler

*THE LEACOCK ROUNDABOUT.* By Stephen Leacock. New York: Dodd, Mead & Co. 1946. 422 pp. \$3.50.

Reviewed by ARTHUR C. FIELDS

**C**RANBERRY sauce and mince pie, roast chestnuts and candied sweet potatoes, green peas and frosty cider are all the side dishes; turkey is the main attraction at holiday time. There have been "Thurber Carnivals," there have been editions of "What Cheer!," there have been "Collected Poems" and "Practical Cogitators," there have been anthologies and anthologies, but "A Treasury of the Best Works of Stephen Leacock" is the gravy, a prize offering for the season.

Professor Leacock's contribution is humor, and humor is welcome in these disunified times. Yet, as Professor Leacock points out, "in its larger aspect, humor is blended with pathos till the two are one, and represent, as they have in every age, the mingled heritage of tears and laughter that is our lot on earth." Thus, all of the writings in this anthology do not lie exclusively in the realm of humor. "Eddie the Bartender" is exemplary of Leacock's simple, sympathetic treatment of the expansive bartender who is unconsciously heading toward a bucolic life through the advent of prohibition. The author's ironical treatment of life's contradictory episodes is also well illustrated in the inclusion of "Simple Stories of Success." The anthology would not be complete, however, without one of Leacock's plays, and the choice of "Cast Up by the Sea" is excellent.

# Magazine of Ideas

**THE PARTISAN READER.** An Anthology. Edited by William Phillips and Philip Rahv. New York: The Dial Press. 1946. 688 pp. \$3.75.

Reviewed by BEN RAY REDMAN

NO regular reader of *Partisan Review* will be surprised by the excellence of the anthology which represents the contents of this periodical during the first ten years of its existence. From its tentative beginnings in the winter of 1933-34, as official organ of the John Reed Club of New York, it has grown into the most stimulating and satisfying magazine of ideas and literary expression now being published in the United States. The editors' realization, crystallized by the Moscow trials, that "Stalinism was not the agent but the enemy of democratic socialism," resulted in the *Review's* temporary suspension (1936-37) and its reorganization along editorial lines calculated to effect a "rapprochement between the radical tradition on the one hand and the tradition of modern literature on the other." How successfully those lines have been followed is proved by the present volume, and by the full file of the *Review* from which it has been made.

The content of the "Reader" falls into four categories — "A Group of Stories," "Selected Poems," "Interpretations," "Variety"—and practically all the work so labeled in first-rate of its kind.

Turning to the fiction, we find no familiar formulas, and this is a notable fact, for it is not only the slicks and pulps that go in for formulas, but also many of the little and *avant-garde* magazines; the stock patterns of the second class becoming, after short acquaintance, as tiresome as those of the first. The formula-writer of short stories merely fills a ready-made form; the writer who is also an artist creates a form during the creative process of shaping and phrasing what he has to tell. We see this process at work, producing memorable fiction, in such stories as Mary McCarthy's "The Man in the Brooks Brothers Shirt," H. J. Kaplan's "The Mohammedans," and Lionel Trilling's "Of This Time, of That Place." All three are studies of character, but the techniques of analysis and revelation are as widely various as they are successful. Miss McCarthy's intellectual, radical, but Bovaryste heroine; Mr. Kaplan's white man and black man, each partially ludicrous and partially pathetic, each alienated from his environment; Mr. Trilling's professor

and two students, one of the latter a hopeless misfit, the other so made as to fit only too well, and the teacher ineffectual between them—these are characters which have been given individual rather than typical existence.

Delmore Schwartz's "America! America!" is ostensibly the story of a family, but even more significantly it is that of a young musician, returned to New York from Paris, who listens to this story in a mood of contempt which he finally realizes is self-contempt; and realizes, too, that he can never escape his roots. James T. Farrell puts one affirmative sentence after another to relate, with effective irony, the history of a Greek shepherd lad who comes to the United States, where he makes good as a marathon dancer—at a price. In "The Facts of Life," by Paul Goodman, a little girl learns of the existence of Jews and Gentiles, and thereupon makes inquiries that provoke several of her elders to self-revelation. Eleanor Clark's "Hurry, Hurry" slides deftly, within the setting of "a beautiful June day," from reality into what may be called surreality for want of a better word. Written with a perverse precision in the matter of detail, it is at once fascinating, amusing, and bewildering. Elizabeth Bishop's "In Prison" is a meditation on a theme rather than a story, while James Agee's "Knoxville: Summer of 1915" is a reminiscent sketch. Charles Jackson spins out an anecdote in "Rachel's Summer," and Isaac Rosenfeld makes a self-conscious young man strip himself by means of a series of letters. "In the Penal Colony" is one of Franz Kafka's most interesting, suggestive, haunting, and tantalizing shorter compositions.

Of the poems, T. S. Eliot's "The Dry Salvages" is well known, even famous. Stephen Spender's "Rejoice in the Abyss," fine in both conception and execution, is the product of a poet's fire-watching duties during the London blitz; and Karl J. Shapiro's "The Synagogue" is an admirable example of surface sobriety, with intellect and emotion pulsing just

beneath the surface. In "Several Voices Out of a Cloud," Louise Bogan speaks for Villon and others in words that sting. Wallace Stevens is characteristically represented, as is Marianne Moore. Louis MacNeice meets the human predicament "breast forward," while John Wheelwright has expert fun with a famous Bostonian by adoption, many of whose doings survive in private gossip, while her palazzo survives publicly. But it is satire, savage or subtle, which predominates in the poetry section: vide, among others, Cummings, Patchen, Delmore Schwartz, Randall Jarrell, Philip Horton, Allen Tate, William Carlos Williams. These writers use satire as an offensive and defensive weapon, and by the violence of the verbal thrusts the sensitivity of the speaker may be measured.

Coming to the prose that is not fiction, we come to a rich mass of material. The contributors to this mass are writing some of the best literary criticism (to use a blanket term which covers much territory) that is being written today; and they are writing social and political criticism as well. Philip Rahv's study of Dostoevsky's political ideas, and Edmund Wilson's study of Flaubert's, are excellent examples of the profits to be earned by acute reconsiderations of familiar material. Max Braunschweig's article is a useful preface to the reading of Marx. Sidney Hook analyzes the nature of the Thomist offensive being led by Maritain, who represents a position which "may be found congenial by those who, having surrendered one or another specific variety of totalitarianism, have not yet repudiated its generic form." John Dewey, with a logic that requires no raising of his voice, blasts the factitious alliance of theological and non-theological anti-naturalists; and Ernest Nagel companions him by bringing guns to bear on those who assume "that there is a superior and more direct way of grasping the secrets of the universe than the painfully slow road of science."

Eliot's essay on "The Music of Poetry" is all good, the best passage perhaps being that which explains how Shakespeare did two poets' work

