

The Saturday Review of Literature

Editor

NORMAN COUSINS

Chairman, Editorial Board

HENRY SEIDEL CANBY

Chairman, Board of Directors

E. DEGOLYER

Associate Editors

AMY LOVEMAN WILLIAM ROSE BENET
HARRISON SKITH JOHN MASON BROWN

Contributing Editors

BENNETT CERF JOHN T. WINTERICH
MARY GOULD DAVIS IRVING KOLODIN
JAMES THRALL SOBY

Published by The Saturday Review
Associates, Inc., 25 West 45th Street, New
York 19, N. Y. Harrison Smith, President;
J. R. Cominsky, Executive Vice President
and Treasurer; Amy Loveman, Secretary.



Contents Copyrighted, 1949, by
The Saturday Review Associates, Inc.

A Letter from the Librarian of Congress

EDITOR'S NOTE: Realizing that no discussion of the 1948 Library of Congress-Bollingen Award to Ezra Pound for "The Pisan Cantos" would be complete without a statement of the position of the Library of Congress in the matter, SRL is grateful to Luther H. Evans, Librarian of Congress, for the following letter in reply to Robert Hillyer's articles "Treason's Strange Fruit" and "Poetry's New Priesthood" (SRL June 11, 18) and SRL's editorial "Ezra Pound and the Bollingen Award" (June 11). In order to give the point of view of the Library equal prominence with SRL's attacks on the award, this week we devote our editorial pages to Mr. Evans's answer, together with a rejoinder from the editors of SRL.

SIR: I am writing you in regard to the article by Mr. Robert Hillyer and the editorial by yourself and Mr. Smith in the June 11 number of *The Saturday Review of Literature*.

Mr. Hillyer said early in his article that he was unable to discover who appoints the Fellows in American Letters. Mr. Verner W. Clapp of the Library of Congress wrote Mr. Hillyer on April 22: "The Fellows are appointed by the Librarian of Congress."

The Fellows in American Letters were first appointed in 1944 by my predecessor, Archibald MacLeish, to perform assignments of importance to the Library of Congress, and in his opinion and in the opinion of the distinguished workers in the field of American letters who could devote

the necessary time to such onerous tasks, useful to scholarship and the advancement of literature. They accepted the tasks of advising the Library concerning the strengthening of its collections and the promotion of bibliographical and publication projects in American literary material. They also advised the Librarian on the choice of the annual incumbent of the Chair of Poetry in English. After almost four years of successful endeavor the Fellows, in addition to their other work, which now included assisting in carrying forward a project to issue albums of contemporary poetry read by the poets themselves, hit upon the idea (in January 1948) of an award for the outstanding publication each year in American poetry. After I approved the proposal an approach was made to secure the funds, with the success which has been noted.

The implications in Mr. Hillyer's article that the Bollingen Foundation had a part in the award to Ezra Pound, or in some way influenced it, are particularly annoying to the Library of Congress, and if in your editorial column you intended to vouch for the validity of such implications, I am sure you were not acquainted with the facts.

So far as my own knowledge and belief go, neither the Bollingen Foundation nor any of its trustees, officers, or representatives had the slightest connection with the choice of "The Pisan Cantos" for the award. When, at the request of myself and the Library's Fellows, the Foundation agreed to make a grant to the Library, its purpose was to enable that agency of the Federal Government to grant a prize in recognition of outstanding achievement in American poetry. My idea in requesting the grant, and the sole purpose of the Foundation's trustees in approving it, was to encourage serious endeavors in this field of American letters.

It was the Foundation's definite understanding from the beginning that the award would be solely that of the Library of Congress, made on the basis of the choice of a panel made up of the Library's Fellows in American Letters. It should also be emphasized that the Foundation had no connection with the selection of these Fellows nor any of their activities. They were appointed by the Librarian of Congress, and their selection is the responsibility of that officer of the Federal Government. So far as concerns T. S. Eliot, he had not served as a member of the panel at any meeting when the gift to the Library from the Foundation was made. He was appointed by me on my own responsibility, without any consultation with, or the knowledge of, the Foun-

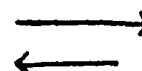
dation. In short, from the beginning every step was taken to insure that the prize, when awarded, would in fact be that of the Library of Congress, made on its responsibility, uninfluenced in any way by the Foundation. While the prize bears the name of the Foundation, this was a courtesy which the Library of Congress wished to extend in appreciation of the donor's generosity.

It is extremely unfortunate from the viewpoint of future aid to the cultural activities of the Library of Congress that a public benefactor, such as Bollingen Foundation, seeking only to promote the welfare of the Library by a generous gift, should be subjected, because of the Library's application of that gift, to the unfavorable reflections appearing in Mr. Hillyer's article, which are apparently vouched for in your publication's editorial accompanying the article. Furthermore, you will understand that this is highly embarrassing to me and to the Library.

That Mr. Paul Mellon has through some diabolical and perverted motivation tried to influence the decision of the Fellows, is an insinuation which I believe has no foundation whatever. I doubt seriously that Mr. Mellon knows personally a single member of the group of Fellows. All the public can see how generously he has given to worthy causes, without going beyond the press headlines of the past week. Why cannot the traducing of persons of high personal character and integrity be reserved for officers of Government, who must by virtue of the nature of the democratic process put up with it anyhow?

The attack on the legality and the propriety of appointing persons to the staff of the Library of Congress for the purposes served by the Fellows in American Letters ignores the clear statutory authorizations under which the Library of Congress operates (U. S. Code, Title II), and constitutes

Atomic Age Fables



JS

XIII. Progress

"OUR laws are our autobiographies," said the first philosopher. "Man loves and hates, and wins and loses. When will we ever face the truth?"

"And forget progress?" asked the second.
—J. S.

The Saturday Review

a challenge to a broad program of the Library for promoting the arts in America. Under the auspices of the Coolidge Foundation the Library has for decades commissioned the writing of music, has awarded medals for outstanding accomplishments in musicianship, and has provided concerts of high quality.

Surely, it is no service to American culture to make an ill-founded attack upon the effort made by this great institution to enrich the life of the people by such means. With the specific approval of Congress also, the Library prepares a publication known as *The United States Quarterly Book List*. This book list has as its purpose the review under the editorship of a regular Government employee of selected books which make a contribution to knowledge. The operation involves the editing by Government employees of evaluations of books made by the individual scholarly reviewers who contribute their services for this purpose. The editor has authority to rewrite reviews and to change the evaluations made of the books reviewed. The signatures of the reviewers do not appear.

The Congress has also during the past decade or more authorized a large appropriation to the Library of Congress, currently in the amount of approximately one million dollars, for the provision of books for the adult blind readers of the United States. The selection of books to be put in this program is entrusted entirely to the Librarian of Congress and his staff. The operation involves the choice of a few books from the multitude from which the choice is made for the instructional and recreational reading of blind persons. The responsibility is a heavy one and it amounts in effect to calling some books bad and other books good.

I should like to observe that the question of propriety in a project of the type I have been discussing is intimately related to the Governmental arrangements for making the scholarly or artistic decisions involved. It would obviously be improper and an abuse of authority for decisions to be made as to what is truthful or what is beautiful or what is good as the arbitrary acts of an individual not especially qualified to make them. By this I mean, for instance, that I as the head of the Library of Congress would be acting arbitrarily were I to pass judgment on what is good music, assuming that I am not an expert in the field, or selecting books for the *Quarterly Book List* in fields where I do not have expert capacity or in picking a book of poetry for an award when I am not a qualified critic of poetry. The



"Hang the expense! I want the entire Un-American Activities Committee to play the posse in my new Western!"

only way to insure that choices of this kind are legitimate and acceptable when made by a Government institution is to conduct affairs in such a way that persons who make the esthetic or the scholarly judgments are persons chosen for their competence in such work and divorced from general responsibilities for the management of the institution itself. This principle I have striven to observe, and I have, I believe, observed it in the present case.

The Fellows in American Letters are in all cases, I believe, persons of attainment and a high sense of responsibility for promoting and strengthening what is good in American culture. No such serious charge as yours, as far as I know, has hitherto been made against them of being politically motivated members of a clique or a school or a particular esthetic group, or of being under the domination of any individual. Now that your charge has been made I shall, of course, inquire into the situation with a view to the possibility if it should prove desirable of strengthening the representative character of the group. The insinuation which has been made is very damaging to the Fellows and to the Library of Congress, since it amounts to a charge that the Fellows

have not acted, as they were charged to act, as public servants, but rather that they have abused the authority entrusted to them for evil ends. I think evidence should be produced, rather than pure supposition, to sustain such an insinuation. You and Mr. Hillyer are under a public duty to produce the evidence.

I personally regard the choice of "The Pisan Cantos" for the Bollingen prize as an unfortunate choice. I do not feel called upon to go into all of my reasons for feeling this. I think it is sufficient to say that from my poetically ignorant point of view Mr. Pound's book is hardly poetry at all. I believe now, as I believed at the time of announcing the award, that I would be engaging in an improper interference with free scholarship if I were to substitute my own decision in this matter for the decision of the Fellows. I think that for me to interfere with the work of scholars would be far worse than to award the prize for a book which did not deserve it. After all, a cure is available in scholarly terms for scholarly errors, but I know of no cure for the bureaucratic error of overriding scholarly judgment in cases of this kind. I feel that I would have been striking a blow against the cause of liberty by over-

riding scholarly judgment, and I do not feel that the blow for unrighteousness which the award may represent, is nearly as grave.

You and Mr. Hillyer have treated Mr. Pound as though he had been proved guilty of treason. To me, this is not the case. To me also it is irrelevant to the making of the award, since we did not say in the conditions of the award that a person had to be one who had not been convicted by courts or found guilty by the public of some crime or other. I should also like to observe that Mr. Pound is a citizen no matter whether it may be desirable in the judgment of *The Saturday Review of Literature* that he should continue to be such. The matter of citizenship is one of law and not one of politics or poetry.

The Fellows in American Letters do not have to be citizens. Therefore, the criticism of Mr. Eliot's membership of the group on this ground is irrelevant. Persons are chosen for outstanding accomplishment in the field of American letters, either as creative writers or as scholars in the field. Mr. Eliot meets this test, and I have no intention of asking him to resign. Indeed, I should be very sorry if such a distinguished writer were to cease to be a member of the group.

As to whether a person who is insane can write distinguished poetry, that is something I would prefer to leave to the literati to wrangle over, rather than try to make a decision myself.

I am deeply disturbed by one point of view which you and Mr. Hillyer seem to share, and that is that poetic quality must somehow pass a political test. In my many years of study and teaching in the field of political science I came to regard a political test for art and poetry as a sign of dictatorial, illiberal, undemocratic approach to matters of the mind. The alternative attitude is not necessarily the separation of art from life, or of form from substance. I think you really ought to admit that the principal charge you wish to bring against Mr. Pound's poetry is not that it is

form divorced from substance or art divorced from life, but that it is a kind of substance and preaches a view of life which you do not like. I do not like them either. But the question of whether Pound's poetry is art, whether it is *good* poetry, is a different question. As to that question, my answer is also negative, but as I have said already, I do not feel that it would be proper for me to override the judgment of persons in whose competence I have confidence, and who were charged with responsibility to make the judgment.

—LUTHER H. EVANS,
Librarian of Congress.

Washington, D. C.

A Reply to Mr. Evans

WE were well aware that we were heading into a storm when we published Robert Hillyer's two articles and our supporting editorial on the U. S. Library of Congress-Bollingen Award to Ezra Pound for "The Pisan Cantos" as the highest achievement of American poetry in 1948. Our objections were centered on the form and content of the poetry itself, as well as on the fact that Ezra Pound had been under indictment for treason and had been declared insane. More specifically, we objected to the name of the American Government, through the Library of Congress, being attached to an award which was as much an insult to good taste as it was to the basic values of a democratic people.

There are major and minor issues involved in Mr. Evans's reply for the Library of Congress. Perhaps the most important issue of all involves the familiar argument that art must be kept separate from politics. It is made to appear that SRL has ignored this most sacred of all critical canons in opposing the award to Pound. Indeed, Pound's defenders hold their ground on the art-for-art's sake principle. Such being the case, SRL is anxious to meet this particular issue head-on. Certainly, we do not believe that candidates for poetry awards must "somehow pass a political test," to use Mr. Evans's phrase. But while one must divorce politics from art, it is quite another matter to use the word "politics" as a substitute for values. We do not believe, in short, that art has nothing to do with values. We do not believe that what a poet says is necessarily of lesser importance than the way he says it. We do not believe that a poet can shatter ethics and values and still be a good poet. We do not believe that poetry can convert words into maggots that eat at human dignity and still be good poetry. We

do not believe that the highest function of art is to deny and corrupt the values which make art possible.

It is impossible to conceive of "The Pisan Cantos" as the winner of this Congressional award without being concerned with the writer and his beliefs. Great art owns principles that are ordered and founded on some form of mental integrity based on truths that have been a part of the human consciousness since man began to record his thoughts and state his beliefs in the relationship between man and nature. We cannot accept Pound's totalitarian ravings as evidence of his genius. The occasional flashes of inspiration in "The Pisan Cantos" from Mr. Pound's past, the few stanzas that were intelligible did not give to this volume the right to be called the finest contribution to American poetry of last year. If pressed for our own nominations there are at least three poets whose books in 1948 seem to us worthy of the Bollingen Prize: Mark Van Doren, Peter Viereck, and Archibald MacLeish.

To be sure, insanity and inhuman ideas are not unknown in poetry; but we do not agree that they are inherently a part of it. That Mr. Pound is insane and that he has been a traitor to the United States does not add luster to his verse. Nor is incomprehensibility, on which poetry's new priesthood depends for its claims to omniscience, a virtue in itself. We believe that the average established critic of poetry, the vast majority of our poets, and the readers who once found relief and joy in poetry will agree with Robert Hillyer's pronouncement that "The Pisan Cantos" are so disordered as to make the award seem like a hoax. We also believe that the award seems to make fools out of the American people who love poetry, and out of the Library of Congress, which appeared to be placed by its Fellows in American Letters in the position of having to disagree with an award made in its name.

Mr. Evans says that he personally regards the choice of "The Pisan Cantos" as "unfortunate," and offers his own view that it was "hardly poetry at all." He believes, however, that it was hardly his function as Librarian of Congress to impose his own views on the Fellows of the Library of Congress who made the selection. We agree. We did not suggest that Mr. Evans should have substituted his own judgment for that of the Fellows. Once the Fellows made their selection, the fat was in the fire. We insist however that once the name of the Library of Congress was attached to the award it could not avoid responsibility



ity. If the award was to have been an independent one, having nothing to do with a Government agency, then care should have been taken to dissociate the agency both from the committee making the award and from the award itself. But the U. S. Library of Congress cannot sponsor such an award as an integral part of its activities and then abruptly disclaim responsibility at the first sign of a fight.

Mr. Evans is a gifted and valuable administrator of what is perhaps the greatest library in the world. He is universally liked by his associates. It is no disparagement of Mr. Evans to suggest that he may not have been aware at the time that the Fellows were landing the Library on top of a powder keg. Complicated problems of modern art and its attendant criticism were involved, apart from Pound's treasonable activities, his insanity, the character of the jury, or the award itself, or any of the other issues that have been brought up in retaliation. They concern, as Mr. Evans has said, art and politics, and beyond that the control of poetry and the other arts by small groups of the elite who now have the power to pronounce judgment, to confound our intelligence, and to give the nation's highest cultural awards.

One of the sentences in Mr. Evans's letter reads: "It is of no service to American culture to make an ill-founded attack upon the effort made by this great institution [The Library of Congress] to enrich the life of the people." Our answer is that when a committee of the Library not only does not enrich the life of the people, but actually damages cultural values, we have the right of protest.

—H. S.
—N. C.

TWO STATEMENTS

SINCE the publication of "Treason's Strange Fruit," by Robert Hillyer (SRL June 11) the editors have received a request for correction and clarification from the Bollingen Foundation:

Readers of Mr. Hillyer's article might come away with the impression that the Foundation was responsible, in part at least, for the selection of Ezra Pound's "The Pisan Cantos" as winner of the Bollingen-Library of Congress Award in poetry. While Bollingen Foundation spokesmen acknowledge that no such specific statement is made by Mr. Hillyer, it is important that no doubt be left in the minds of SRL readers concerning the fact that the relationship between the Bollingen Foundation and the Bollingen-Library of Congress poetry awards was confined to the original endowment for the

prize, which, through courtesy, bears the name of the Foundation. But the Foundation was in no way responsible for the choice of the Fellows in American Letters of the Library of Congress who make the awards, or for the awards themselves. With the donation of the funds, the Foundation's connection with the matter ended. The Foundation did not know that Pound was being considered for the prize until the jury announced its choice. The Foundation had neither the right of selection nor of veto.

The Saturday Review accepts the foregoing as a correct and complete statement of the facts.

ALSO in connection with Mr. Hillyer's article, we received a friendly visit from Kyrill Schabert and Kurt Wolff, the executive officers of Pantheon Books, Inc., who took exception to Mr. Hillyer's statement: "Through the generosity of Paul Mellon, the Bollingen Foundation sup-

ports the Pantheon Press, a publishing house which issues many outpourings of the new estheticism, the literary cult to which T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound are gods."

We learned that Pantheon Books, Inc., is in no manner supported or controlled by Bollingen Foundation. Pantheon Books is an independent corporation and is not subsidized by the Bollingen Foundation. It does, however, manufacture, distribute, and announce in its catalogs the Bollingen Series, published for the Bollingen Foundation, Inc., which is supported by Paul Mellon. Any inference that the Bollingen Series was in any other way related to Pantheon Books, Inc., is incorrect. A careful examination of the list of books published by Pantheon reveals no work of the nature suggested in Mr. Hillyer's article.

Fairness dictates a retraction, which the editors and Mr. Hillyer are glad to make.

—THE EDITORS.

Literally Speaking

By George Cole and David West



Robert Browning: "One Way of Love"

ALL June I bound the rose in sheaves.
Now, rose by rose, I strip the leaves
And strew them where Pauline may pass.
She will not turn aside, Alas!
Let them lie. Suppose they die?
The chance was they might take her eye.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

"Treason's Strange Fruit"

SIR: Never was I prouder of having been a subscriber of and to the *Saturday Review of Literature* since its founding than I was upon receiving and reading the issue of June 11, 1949. Robert Hillyer's article, "Treason's Strange Fruit," and your splendid editorial satisfy my very soul. The Bollingen Committee Award to Ezra Pound amazed and incensed both faculty and students of the Division of Humanities of this college.

EVELYN NEWMAN,
Colorado State College,
Greeley, Colo.

SIR: Wonderful! It is a rare thing when I find myself in complete agreement with almost every word in any given article; and, yet, this is the case with both your editorial and Mr. Hillyer's piece. When Fascism, obscenity, incomprehensibility, and mental droppings are rewarded and praised here, it is high time we hit back.

MYRON EMANUEL.

Brooklyn, N. Y.

SIR: Congratulations on the SRL stand. The Bollingen Award to Pound is a disgrace to American letters.

JEAN FRANKEN.

New York, N. Y.

SIR: I'm just a housewife subscriber to SRL, but this Ezra Pound case has me incensed. I just sent off a letter to Senator Vandenberg to say so.

ADA M. WANTY.

Milan, Mich.

SIR: May the revolution you have begun with your indictment of the poetry cartel that for these long, long years has lorgnetted us into insignificance be gloriously consummated!

Surely, in the arts—especially in poetry—we have a right to request that genius serve mankind in general and that it not be reserved for the delectation of a closed circle of cold-blooded expatriates and men without countries, without race, without humanity. Let us be done with nightmares and viscera.

F. LEIGHTON PETERS,
Cedar Crest College.

Allentown, Pa.

SIR: You have said everything many of us have been thinking for a long

time, and you have said it far better. However, there is one conveyer of this "super-snob" culture which you omitted to mention—the university. Too many sensitive young writers are turned into T. S. Eliot parrots by our universities, mouthing his thoughts, aping his style, applying his decadence as a yardstick to measure life. They acquire this superiority in colleges where English professors have made a fetish of Eliot, Auden, Pound, and complex gibberish in general, as well as fostering a contempt for the triteness of the American dream, American history, honest love of truth, and any adherence to the characteristic of common sense. This I know because I sat four years in classrooms of one of our "superior" private women's colleges and was prevented from being swept off in a wave of Eliot glory only by my own inability to comprehend what he and his contemporary "artful dodgers" had to say.

JEFF LAUNDERS.

Spencer, Iowa.

SIR: Congratulations on your powerful and courageous stand on the Bollingen Prize! It is for me a great day on which a magazine can challenge the forces of obscurity and darkness in high places. As you say very truly, art cannot be separated from life and attain true greatness. It must have meaning from the point of view of living values.

BURTON STONE.

Washington, D. C.

SIR: Robert Hillyer's article re the Ezra Pound award was a masterpiece of logic and argument in protest. The blame for this award ought to rest on the judges, who might have resigned rather than allow Eliot to dominate



"You're not doing a Double-Croctic after I've just straightened out the bookcase?"