

## The Saturday Review

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## The Americans and the Hungarian Story

... Give me your tired, your poor  
Your huddled masses yearning to  
breathe free.  
The wretched refuse of your  
teeming shore.  
Send these, the homeless, tem-  
pest-tost to me,  
I lift my lamp beside the golden  
door.

A GOOD deal has happened to our attitude toward immigration since those compassionate lines were engraved on the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty. The meaning of this change was placed in rather horrifying focus by author John Steinbeck, who said on this page recently that our current immigration policies make the United States "one of the few countries in the world where the great, the informed, the eminent, and the effective are not welcome." Our new attitude was revealed in our uncertain response to the situation that arose last fall when thousands of Hungarians fled across the Austrian border to escape from Russian repression. The welcome we extended was diminished by vacillation, ambivalence, and unpreparedness all along the line. Here is the way a cross section of the public felt not long ago:

Of course, the main reason for taking Hungarian refugees into this country is to help them out of a tough spot. But what do you think will be the effect on our country? Do you think:  
They may be something of a burden to this country 32%  
They won't affect this country one way or the other 21  
In the long run this country will be better off for hav-

ing these Hungarians 26  
Don't know 21

While there's obviously no agreement on just what impact these refugees will have on our country, a certain amount of apprehension is evident. But it is also apparent that a lot of people just plain don't know what to think on this subject. This, in turn, may very well reflect the confusion and indecisiveness that have surrounded the handling of the refugee program from the beginning. Early in November President Eisenhower ordered a crash program to get swift admission for 5,000 Hungarian refugees. Red tape was to be cut, the Refugee Relief Act to be "bent, if not broken." Toward the end of the month, as the flood of refugees continued, a possible new quota of 10,000 began to be talked about. About this time red-tape delay forced the cancellation of a number of flights carrying refugees to the U.S. After the Vice-President made a quick trip to Austria the figure was upped to 21,500, most of whom would have to enter as "parolees" rather than as regular immigrants. During this period the Hungarian refugees were called "incredibly courageous" (Vice-President Nixon) and "... "with a tremendous spirit of achievement and service" (Louis Schneider of AFSC). A medical adviser sent to Austria called them in good physical and mental health.

Somewhere, as the first wave of sympathy passed, a reaction set in. Some began to worry about their effect on employment; others about their political background. The head of a welfare organization reported

that two-fifths were criminals and adventurers, two-fifths were people simply trying to escape a generally poor life, and only one-fifth actual freedom fighters. Against this background the lack of agreement among our citizens on what to think about these refugees is not exactly surprising. Yet *The New York Times* has reported that these latest refugees are adjusting well and finding jobs relatively easily because of their youth, lack of deterioration from years spent in refugee camps, and their possession of valuable work skills.

Government policy in the last few months has clarified little. At the end of January President Eisenhower asked Congress for legislation that would approximately double our annual immigration quotas. But with Congressional reluctance to make any basic changes in the present laws, or even to settle the status of the Hungarian "parolees" now in the United States, the Administration made no attempt to force the issue and the whole situation has fallen into a kind of stalemate. (In early April it was announced that the whole refugee program was ending. But the next day the "ending" became a "slowdown," apparently a result of a difference of opinion between the Justice Department, which thought Congressional inaction a good reason for stopping the program, and the State Department, which didn't. In Vienna camp officials were on the lookout for additional suicide attempts to add to the forty-two in the three preceding months of the "slowdown.")

ALL in all, it has not been a pretty picture. Maybe most of the confusion up to now has been inevitable. After all, who could have expected that suddenly Hungary's population would rise up and defy the Russians, and when the Russians clamped down that there should be an unprecedented flood of refugees to the West? No wonder we didn't know just how many we should take, and that we still are not sure. We were following the old Anglo-Saxon tradition of "muddling through" an emergency, and at least we got some of the people here. But there can be no excuse if we are forced to "muddle through" another such emergency. If these last months have anything to teach us it is that we are living in a world where such things can happen, at any time, and we must be prepared for them. We cannot let the next refugee tide catch us openmouthed with surprise. We must plan for it, and this means we must make the needed changes in our immigration laws.

—ELMO ROPER.

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

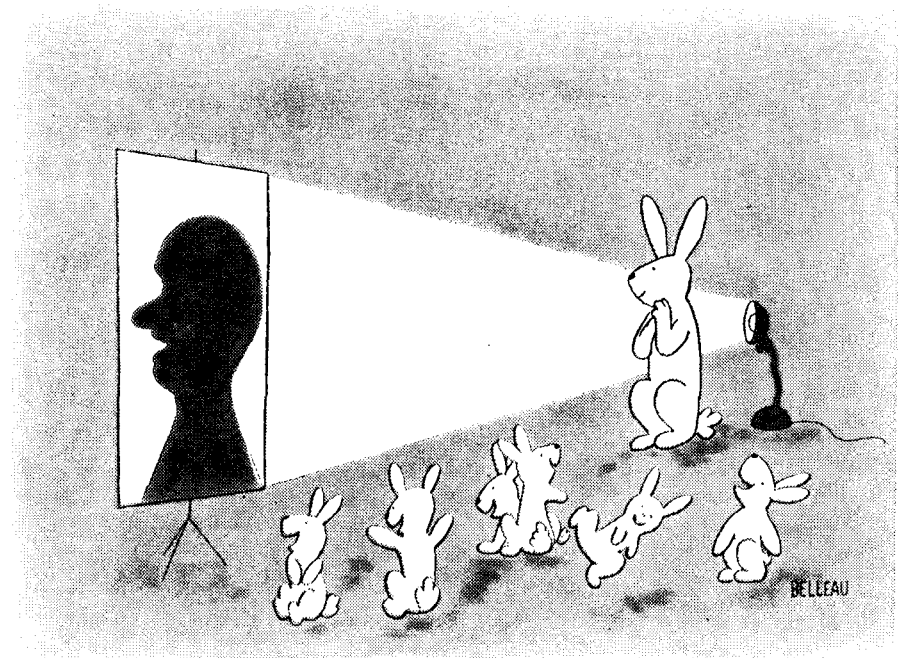
## POETS' WORST ENEMY

I ALWAYS thought that a poet's worst enemy was his own bad work, but John Ciardi (SR Mar. 30) finds enemies of poetry under every hedge and bush. I'm not quite sure what relevance his backhanded slap against the *Times* had to his main argument, but it seems that the *Times* is helping to lower the moral climate in which poets flourish by publishing poetry of "heavy-footed mediocrity." "Real poets," says Mr. Ciardi, "refuse to submit their work to those pages." The following is a list of some of the poets whose works have appeared on the editorial page of the *Times*: Joseph Auslander, Ben Belitt, William Rose Benet, Padraic Colum, Walter de la Mare, Norma Farber, Richard Eberhart, John Gould Fletcher, Lloyd Frankenberg, Oliver St. John Gogarty, John Holmes, Robert Hillyer, Robinson Jeffers, Rudyard Kipling, E. L. Mayo, Edgar Lee Masters, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Kenneth Patchen, Robert Graves, Theodore Roethke, Marshall Schacht, James Stephens, Wallace Stevens, John Hall Wheelock, Marya Zaturenska.

I also add a list of poets, among many others, whose work has appeared regularly in the *Times*: George Abbe, Robert P. T. Coffin, Carleton Drewry, Hannah Kahn, Louise Townsend Nichol, David Morton, Gustav Davidson, Louis Ginsberg, Elias Lieberman, Leslie Nelson Jennings, Sara Henderson Hay, and Harold Vinal. These poets have also appeared regularly in *The Saturday Review*. Is it possible that when they appeared in *The Saturday Review* these poets were dazzlingly original, but that they reserved their heavy-footed mediocrity for the *Times* alone? I notice, also, that two of the poets I have listed have been published in book form by the publishing firm of which Mr. Ciardi is himself the editorial adviser. And some of the foregoing poets even turned up in "Mid-Century American Poets," edited by Mr. Ciardi.

The heart of the matter, however, is not the list of poets who have appeared in the *Times*, but a realization of the kind of medium the *Times* is. It is not a university quarterly, a "little" magazine, or an avant-garde pamphlet printed in black-and-mustard. It is not even a literary weekly. The *Times* is a newspaper. It is not geared to an exclusively literary audience. The man who reads the poem in the *Times* will read it somewhere between Katonah and Grand Central, the young lady between Coney Island and Times Square. To print a dense, difficult poem that will please those professionally interested in poetry would be folly. The *Times* therefore limits itself to short lyric poems in traditional forms and prints what it believes to be the best of the poems submitted to it.

THOMAS LASK, *Poetry Editor*,  
The New York Times.  
New York, N. Y.



## MR. CIARDI REPLIES

MR. LASK'S LIST of poets published on *The New York Times* editorial page is an impressive one. I suggest it might have been more useful as evidence had he told us how far back he reached for his compilation. Were one to find that many good poets in the daily *Times* in any given year (and let us assume that all of the names Mr. Lask offers are honored ones) that would be as much as one good poem a week, allowing for some repetition of names. If, as I suspect on limited evidence, his is a thirty-year listing, and if some of the most impressive of his names are represented by only a single appearance, then the concentration of excellence would obviously be less impressive than the list itself.

I happily accept a correction from Mr. Lask and I will change "real poets" to "many poets." That reading is certainly closer to what I intended. In fairness, Mr. Lask will acknowledge my opening and important qualifications.

I noted in the paragraph from which he quotes that my acquaintance with newspaper poetry features was far from total and that my impressions of the *Times* daily poem were based on "some years of sampling" them. Within that sampling, I said, I had yet to find one that rose above heavy-footed mediocrity. I submit that there is no air of edict in setting down an impression so qualified.

Who knows better than an editor how wrong an editor can be? I have made many mistakes I have had to blush for too late, some of them, in my view, serious. I ask Mr. Lask to believe that I

have never thought in terms of "friends" or "enemies," but in opinion, possibly fallible and there to be disagreed with, but principled in intention.

I agree entirely with Mr. Lask's identification of "the heart of the matter," and it is just there that our principles are most clearly opposed. My charge against the *Times*'s daily poem was that it offered—under the prestige of the *Times* banner—a poetic substitute that many readers would be persuaded was the real thing. Mr. Lask replies that *Times* poetry must, in the nature of things, be geared to the commuter psyche of a young man "between Katonah and Grand Central" and of a "young lady between Coney Island and Times Square." Mr. Lask's terms are different from mine, but I submit that they support my charge by repeating it, though in a more engaging way. I cannot see that "dense, difficult" have anything to do with it, and such terms were no part of the original discussion. Poetry is either an experience, large or small, but truly shaped from the life-bound planet, or it is an exercise between zero and mediocrity. I respectfully submit to Mr. Lask that if the nature of the *Times* as a mass medium requires it to publish as poetry only such notes from world and time as the running commuter can absorb, then there is at least a ponderable basis for the argument that it would be a better service not to try to publish "poetry" at all.

I think our real difference is here, and I think the topic is a valuable one for general discussion. My thanks to Mr. Lask for raising the issue and my best wishes to him.

JOHN CIARDI.  
Rome, Italy.