

All Roads Led to Reform

Norman Thomas: A Biography, by Harry Fleischman (Norton. 320 pp. \$6.50), traces the remarkable career of the ex-seminary student who became a political evangelist. Upton Sinclair reflected on his own experiences as writer and reformer in "My Lifetime in Letters."

By UPTON SINCLAIR

I WAS well pleased when I was invited to review this book; for Norman Thomas and I have been friends, and sometimes friendly contestants, for a matter of sixty years—and they have been years of mighty events. I am six years his senior, so I got the start on him; in the year 1905 I launched, from a farmhouse in the hills above Princeton, the Intercollegiate Socialist Society, with the slogan (quoted by Harry Fleischman): "Since the professors will not educate the students, it is up to the students to educate the professors." Norman Thomas, a seminary student, soon came in, and when later the organization changed its name to the League for Industrial Democracy, he joined Harry Laidler as a director.

My pleasure in this biography began with the very first sentences: "You're worse than Gene Debs. If I had my way I'd not only kill your magazine but send you to prison for life." These were the words with which Postmaster General Albert S. Burleson greeted Norman Thomas in the summer of 1916. And less than a year later I too had a run-in with this same all-powerful official. I had started a magazine with the slogan: "For a Clean Peace and the Internation," and Burleson denied it second-class entry, which in effect made it impossibly costly. (I appealed to Senator John Sharp Williams, whom I happened to know, and he took the magazine editorial to Burleson with the remark: "I'll undertake to read it to Woodrow Wilson, and if he doesn't endorse every word of it I'll eat my hat.") So it was that Norman and I could understand each other, even though we disagreed about the war.

And so it has been through many long years; we have agreed about the goal, and disagreed about the road to it. We have exchanged vehement arguments, and then when we met we have

embraced. I wounded him deeply when in 1934 I left the Socialist Party and enrolled as Democratic candidate for governor of my home state of California. I didn't get elected, but I did spread the idea of social justice—and when Norman and I met again we embraced. When I went to New York on a lecture trip last spring we had nothing to argue about and we embraced twice.

So I am happy to comment on this book. It is beautifully got up, and is a wonderful job of research. There may be errors in it, but I did not find them. Whatever may be your ideas about social justice, you will understand better the country and the time in which you live if you read this story of a man who started as a young preacher, and then set out to apply the ideals of Jesus to our period of organized and whole-

sale exploitation. Democracy in government plus autocracy in industry and finance—this is what we have in our sweet land of liberty, and I do not know where you can get more enlightenment on the struggle than from this work.

To me personally it is gratifying beyond words, because I had somehow failed to learn of the ending of my lifelong debate with Norman Thomas. In 1948 he had run against the re-election of Harry Truman and had got only 140,260 votes. As Mr. Fleischman tells the story: "The decision was painful, but Thomas felt that it had to be made. In a pamphlet for circulation only to party members, he called upon the party to stop spending its 'energy on political campaigns which give us only a handful of votes.'" This from the man who had been so bitter over my "EPIC" campaign, to "End Poverty in California," during the dreadful Depression of 1934. So you will understand how it was that, when we met in New York in the spring of 1963, we embraced.

Mr. Fleischman managed two of Norman Thomas's campaigns for the Presidency. He knows his subject intimately, and has produced a labor of love.

New Reasons for an Old Cause

Socialism Re-examined, by Norman Thomas (Norton. 280 pp. \$4), reveals that its author's vigor in the pursuit of social justice remains undiminished. Harvey Swados edited "Years of Conscience: The Muckrakers."

By HARVEY SWADOS

ONE OF the more fascinating phenomena of recent years has been the continuing growth in the stature of Norman Thomas, who is heading toward his eighty-first year wielding more influence than he has ever before exercised in his forty years of active attachment to his cause. As this country's only socialist statesman, six times the candidate of the Socialist Party for the Presidency, it would have been easy for him, during the fifteen years that have elapsed since his last national campaign, to have faded away gracefully—or become a monument, like those other aging heroes solemnly wheeled out on ceremonial occasions, to be heard from again only in their birthday interviews. But Thomas, it gradually becomes clear, means more to more Americans now than he ever did when he was



Norman Thomas—"tribune and mentor."

running for office to little purpose other than the receipt of kindly newspaper editorials patting him on the head for his respectably earnest efforts to popularize doctrines that barely interested his fellow citizens.

Refusing to be merely a symbol, Thomas has plunged into battle in recent years on two fronts far more vital than the electoral: the struggle for

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The Poet's Other Voices, Other Rooms

By ROBERT D. SPECTOR, *assistant professor of English literature, Long Island University.*

IF, AFTER all that has been written on the subject, a shrewd old poet-critic like John Hall Wheelock can still ask *What Is Poetry?* (Scribners, \$3.50), it is time to acknowledge that the question is merely rhetorical, an excuse for a writer to discuss the kind of poetry that appeals to him. In fact, there are as many "poetries" as there are poets, and indeed the quarter's work offers little of that "divine madness" of perception that seems central to Wheelock's definition. Yet, listening to the poets' many voices, each from another room, it would appear useful to have books that show some of the ways in which poems communicate, or that distinguish between obscurity and difficulty, or that differentiate between the old and the new.

To be sure, in this age of criticism—marked by difficult critical books on even more difficult critics (e.g., William H. Rueckert, *Kenneth Burke and the Drama of Human Relations*, Univ. of Minnesota Press, \$6)—the abundance of helpful material requires a guide. For example, what sort of reader will find the programmed instruction of *Poetry: A Closer Look*, by James M. Reid, John Ciardi, and Laurence Perrine (Harcourt, Brace & World, \$3.50), appropriate? One would have to be most inexperienced to discover value in the preliminary section's rudimentary questions; and yet, in subsequent lessons, he can surely learn by this method the mechanics of rhyme and meter, and at least make an approach to the complex ways of metaphor and symbolism.

For such a reader, however, more subtle discussions, like William Van O'Connor's *Sense and Sensibility in Modern Poetry* (Barnes & Noble, paperback, \$1.75) on the particularities of modern poetry, will certainly prove as complicated as the poetry itself. O'Connor's probable audience is that knowledgeable group for whom studies of specific poets are intended: readers who can appreciate Christopher Logue's vigorous and remarkable new version of the sixteenth book of the *Iliad* (*The Patrocleia of Homer*, Univ. of Michigan Press, \$4), along with D. S. Carne-Ross's well-reasoned accompanying arguments for such "structural transla-

tions" in the style of Pope and Dryden. But not even the most knowing are likely to scorn the aid of a book like *Yeats's "Vision" and the Later Plays* (Harvard Univ. Press, \$6), in which Helen H. Vendler's explication of the poet's complicated "system" and its esthetic implications illuminates not only his dramas but also a large body of his poetry.

By reason at least of their curiosity these readers will welcome, too, a collection of Ezra Pound's nine letters to Louis Untermeyer, revealing his ego, intensity, and dedication (*EP to LU*, edited by J. A. Robbins, Indiana Univ. Press, \$3), or one of critical essays on *Emily Dickinson* (edited by Richard B. Sewall, Prentice-Hall, hardbound, \$3.95, paperback, \$1.95), probing her mysterious world for its inspirations, values, humor, and mysticism. And, although Allen Tate's work poses relatively fewer problems, none will deny it has been in need of that intelligent evaluation of fundamental esthetic concepts and stylistic characteristics provided by R. K. Meiners's *The Last Alternatives* (Alan Swallow, \$4.50).

Whether anthologies, too, may be classified among instructional tools depends largely on the particular collection. When, as in John Malcolm Brinnin and Bill Read's *The Modern Poets* (McGraw-Hill, hardbound, \$6.75, paperback, \$3.95), they pretend to be something they are not, the effect is altogether misleading. No matter how interesting are Brinnin and Read's representative if limited selections from Eliot, Pound, Auden, and Stevens, among others, they surely cannot be equated with *modern poetry*. To present only "self-contained and self-explanatory" poems, the editors have jammed out the voices of Charles Olson, John Ashbery, and Jonathan Williams; but to silence these—as well as

the deliberately raucous and defiant tones of Ginsberg, Ferlinghetti, and Corso—is to distort the sound of the poetry of our time.

A similar falsity marks *A Western Sampler* (Talisman, \$5). Eight of its nine poets have contributed to *Talisman* magazine, and all are Westerners; but that is the extent of their relationship. Without any distinction of local color, their poetry is generally bland, ranging from mechanical versification to acceptable mediocrity, sometimes pleasant but never achieving the boasted "poetic excellence."

Something of what can be contributed by an anthologist is revealed in two other collections. Philip L. Miller's *The Ring of Words: An Anthology of Song Texts* (Doubleday, \$4.95) illustrates the close interplay between poetry and music. His literal translations and judicious annotations, which accompany original song texts in seven languages, serve not only as a guide to a "standard song repertoire" but also as a reminder of the fundamental character of lyric verse.

In Donald Carroll's *New Poets of Ireland* (Alan Swallow, hardbound, \$3.50, paperback, \$1.65), an attempt is made to characterize the effect of that country's tradition on "the most skilful poetry of the younger generation." Carroll offers a broader range than that of Robin Skelton's recent *Six Irish Poets*; but the best work in both collections is that of Thomas Kinsella and Richard Murphy, poets whose craftsmanship universalizes traditional Irish mythological and nationalistic interests. While Kinsella is familiar to Americans, Murphy is relatively unknown; but these poems, plus his new *Sailing to an Island* (Chilmark, \$2.95), with their vigorous language and natural imagery, demonstrate his superiority among Ireland's new breed of bards.

Yet, whatever the advantages of available critical aids, the serious reader cannot confront a quarter-year's work without being awed by poetry's infinite variety. If only to gain some semblance of order, he tries to give it arbitrary grouping, knowing full well that relationships are often more in his mind than in the matter.

Some poets, of course, can be handled easily because one has previously made up his mind about them and their proper place in literature. To recite, for

