POETRY has saved my life—with a check in time when all the rest of the world was unresponsive, and with a fine poem when all the rest of the world was dull.

From a young poet's letter

Vol. XIV No. III

POETRY for JUNE, 1919

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HENRY MURRAY, father of Eleanor Murray,
Willing to tell the coroner, Merival,
All things about himself, about his wife,
All things as well about his daughter, touching
Her growth and home life—if the coroner
Would hear him privately—(except those things
Strictly relating to the inquest), went
To Coroner Merival’s office, and thus spoke:

I was born here some sixty years ago,
Was nurtured in these common schools, too poor
To satisfy my longing for a college.
Felt myself gifted with some gifts of mind,
Some fineness of perception, thought; began

* See Note on page 174.
By twenty years to gather books and read
Some history, philosophy and science.
Had vague ambitions, analyzed perhaps,
To learn, be wise.

Now if you study me,
Look at my face, you'll see some trace of her:
My brow is hers; my mouth is hers; my eyes,
Of lighter color, are yet hers; this way
I have of laughing, as I saw inside
The matter deeper cause for laughter, hers;
And my jaw hers, betokening a will;
Hers too, the chin that mitigates the will
Shading to softness as hers did.

Our minds
Had something too in common: first, this will
Which tempted fate to bend it, break it too—
I know not why in her case or in mine.
But when my will is bent I grow morose,
And when its's broken I become a scourge
To all around me. Yes, I've visited
A life-time's wrath upon my wife. This daughter,
When finding will subdued, did not give up,
But took the will for something else—went on
By ways more prosperous; but, as for myself,
I hold on when defeated, and lie down
Where I am beaten—lie and ruminate
Upon my failure, think of nothing else.
But truth to tell, while we two were opposed,

[118]
This daughter and myself, while our temperaments
Kept us at swords' points, while I saw in her
Traits of myself I liked not, also traits
Of the child's mother which I loathe because
They have undone me—helped to—yet no less
I saw this child as better than myself,
And better than her mother, so admired.
Yet I could never trust her: as a child
She would rush in relating lying wonders;
She feigned emotions, purposes and moods;
She was a little actress from the first,
And all her high resolves from first to last
Seemed but a robe with flowing sleeves, in which
Her hands could hide some theft, some secret spoil.
When she was fourteen I could see in her
The passionate nature of her mother—well,
You know a father's feelings when he sees
His daughter sensed by youths and lusty men
As one of the kind for capture. It's a theme
A father cannot talk of with his daughter.
He may say, "Have a care," or, "I forbid
Your strolling, riding with these boys at night."
But if the daughter stands and eyes the father
As she did me with flaming eyes, then goes
Her way in secret, lies about her ways,
The father can but wonder, watch or brood,
Or switch her maybe—for I switched her once,
And found it did no good. I needed then
POETRY: A Magazine of Verse

Her mother's aid; but no, her mother saw
Herself in the girl, and said she knew the girl,
That I was too suspicious, out of touch
With a young girl's life, desire for happiness.
But when this Alma Bell affair came up,
And the school principal took pains to say
My daughter was too reckless of her name
In strolling and in riding, then my wife
Howled at me like a tigress: "Whip that man!"
And as my daughter cried, and my wife screeched,
And called me coward if I let him go,
I rushed out to the street and, finding him,
Beat up his face, though almost dropping dead
From my exertion. Well, the aftermath
Was worse for me, not only by the talk,
But in my mind who saw no gratitude
In daughter or in mother for my deed.
The daughter from that day took up a course
More secret from my eyes, more variant
From any wish I had. We stood apart
And grew apart thereafter. And from that day
My wife grew worse in temper, worse in nerves.
And though the people say she is my slave,
That I alone of all who live have conquered
Her spirit, still what despotism works
Free of reprisals, or of breakings-forth
When hands are here, not there?

But to return:

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One takes up something for a livelihood
And dreams he'll leave it later, when in time
His plans mature; and as he earns and lives,
With some time for his plans, hopes for the day
When he may step forth from his olden life
Into a new life made thus gradually.
I hoped to be a lawyer; but to live
I started as a drug clerk. Look, to-day
I own that little drug-store—here I am
With drugs my years through, drugged myself at last.
And as a clerk I met my wife, went mad
About her—and I see in Eleanor
Her mother's gift for making fools of men.
Why—I can scarce explain it—it's the flesh,
But then it's spirit too; such flaming up
As came from flames like ours, but more of hers
Burned in the children. Yet it might be well
For theorists in heredity to think
About the matter.

Well, but how about
The flames that make the children? For this woman
Too surely ruined me and sapped my life.
You hear much of the vampire, but what wife
Has not more chance for eating up a man?
She has him daily, has him fast for years.
A man can shake a vampire off, but how
To shake a wife off, when the children come,
And you must leave your place, your livelihood,
To shake her off? And if you shake her off
Where do you go, what do you do, and how?
You see 'twas love that caught me, yet even so
I had resisted love had I not seen
A chance to rise through marriage. It was this:
You know, of course, my wife was Eleanor Fouche,
Daughter of Arthur, thought to be so rich.
And I had hopes to patch my fortunes up
In this alliance, and become a lawyer.
What happened? Why, they helped me not at all;
The children came, and I was chained to work
To clothe and feed a family. All the while
My soul contested with this aspiration,
And my good nature went to ashes, dampened
By secret tears which filtered through as lye.
Then finally, when my wife's father died
After our marriage twenty years or so,
His fortune came to nothing; all she got
Went to that little house we live in now—
It needs paint now, the porch has rotten boards—
And I was forced to see these children learn
What public schools could teach; and even as I
Left school half-taught and never went to college,
So did these children, saving Eleanor,
Who saw two years of college, earned herself
By teaching.

I choke up, just wait a minute!
What depths of failure may a man come to
As father, who can think of this and be
Quiet about his heart? His heart will hurt,
Move, as it were, as a worm does with its pain.
And these days now, when trembling hands and head
Foretell decline or worse, and make one think,
As face to face with God, most earnestly,
Most eager for the truth, I wonder much
If I misjudged this daughter, canvass her
Myself to see if I had power to do
A better part by her. That is the way
This daughter has got in my soul. At first
She incubates in me as force unknown,
A spirit strange, yet kindred, in my life;
And we are hostile and yet drawn together.
But when we're drawn together see and feel
These oppositions. Next she's in my life—
The second stage of the fever—as dislike,
Repugnance, and I wish her out of sight,
Out of my life. Then come these ugly things,
Like Alma Bell, and rumors from away
Where she is teaching, and I put her out
Of life and thought the more, and wonder why
I fathered such a nature, whence it came.
Well, then the fever goes and I am weak—
Repentant it may be; delirious visions
That haunted me in fever plague me yet,
Even while I think them visions, nothing else.
So I grow pitiful and blame myself
For any part I had in her mistakes,
Sorrows and struggles, and I curse myself
That I was powerless to help her more.
Thus is she like a fever in my life.

Well, then the child grows up. But as a child
She dances, laughs and sings; at three years springs
For minutes and for minutes on her toes—
Like skipping rope, clapping her hands the while,
Her blue eyes twinkling, and her milk-white teeth
Glistening as she gurgles, shouts and laughs—
There never was such vital strength! I give
The pictures as my memory took them. Next
I see her looking side-ways at me, as if
She studied me, avoided me. The child
Is now ten years of age; and now I know
She smelled the rats that made the family hearth
A place for scampering—the horrors of our home.
She thought I brought the rats and kept them there—
These rats of bickering, anger, strife at home.
I knew she blamed me for her mother's moods,
Who dragged about the kitchen day by day
Sad-faced and silent. So the up-shot was
I had two enemies in the house, where once
I had but one, her mother. This made worse
The state for both, and worse the state for me.
And so it goes. Then next there's Alma Bell.
The following year my daughter finishes
The High School; and we sit—my wife and I—
To see the exercises. And that summer Eleanor, 
Now eighteen and a woman, goes about—
I don't know what she does; sometimes I see
Some young man with her walking. But at home,
When I come in, the mother and the daughter
Put pedals on their talk, or change the theme—
I am shut out.

And in the fall I learn
From some outsider that she's teaching school,
And later people laugh and talk to me
About her feat of conquering certain Czechs
Who broke her discipline in school.

Well then,

Two years go on that have no memory,
Just like sick days in bed when you lie there
And wake and sleep and wait. But finally
Her mother says, "To-night our Eleanor
Leaves for Los Angeles." And then the mother,
To hide a sob, coughs nervously and leaves
The room where I am for the kitchen. I
Sit with the evening paper, let it fall,
Then hold it up to read again and try
To tell myself, "All right, what if she goes?"
The evening meal goes hard, for Eleanor
Shines forth in kindness for me, talks and laughs—
I choke again . . . . She says to me, if God
Had meant her for a better youth, then God
Had given her a better youth; she thanks me
For making High School possible to her,
And says all will be well—she will earn money
To go to college, and she will gain strength
By helping self. Just think, my friend, to hear
Such words, which in their kindness proved my failure,
When I had hoped, aspired, when I had given
My very soul, whether I liked this daughter
Or liked her not, out of a generous hand,
Large-hearted in its carelessness, to give
A daughter of such mind a place in life,
And schooling for the place.

The meal was over.

We stood there silent; then her face grew wet
With tears, as wet as blossoms soaked with rain.
She took my hand and took her mother’s hand
And put our hands together: then she said,
“Be friends, be friends!” and hurried from the room,
Her mother following. I stepped out-doors,
And stood what seemed a minute, entered again,
Walked to the front room, from the window saw
Eleanor and her mother in the street.
The girl was gone! How could I follow them?—
They had not asked me. So I stood and saw
The canvas telescope her mother carried.
They disappeared. I went back to my store,
Came home at nine o’clock, lighted a match,
And saw my wife in bed, cloths on her eyes.
She turned her face to the wall, and didn’t speak.
Next morning at the breakfast-table she,
Complaining of a stiff arm, said: “That satchel
Was weighted down with books, my arm is stiff—
Eleanor took French books to study French;
When she can pay a teacher, she will learn
How to pronounce the words, but by herself
She'll learn the grammar, how to read.” She knew
How words like that would hurt!

I merely said,
“A happy home is better than knowing French,”
And went off to my store.

But, Coroner,
Search for the men in her life. When she came
Back from the West after three years, I knew
By look of her eyes that some one filled her life,
Had taken her life and body. What if I
Had failed as father in the way I failed?
And what if our home was not home to her?
She could have married—why not? If a girl
Can fascinate the men—I know she could—
She can have marriage if she wants to marry;
Unless she runs to men already married—
And if she does so, don’t you make her out
As loose and bad?

Well, what is more to tell?
She learned French, seemed to know the ways of the world,
Knew books, knew how to dress, gave evidence
Of contact with refinements. Letters came,
When she was here at intervals, inscribed
In writing of élite ones, gifted maybe.
And she was filial and kind to me,
Most kind toward her mother, gave us things
At Christmas time. But still her way was such
That I as well had been familiar with her
As with some formal lady visiting.
She came back here before she went to France,
Stayed two days with us. Once upon the porch
She turned to me and said: "I wish to honor
Mother and you by serving in the war.
You must rejoice that I can serve—you must!
But most I wish to honor America,
This land of promise, of fulfilment too,
Which proves to all the world that men and women
Are born alike of God—at least the rich,
And classes formed in pride, have neither hearts
Nor minds above the souls of those who work.
This land that reared me is my dearest love—
I go to serve the country."

Pardon me—
A man of my age in an hour like this
Must cry a little. Wait till I can say
The last words that she said to me.

She put
Her arms about me, then she said to me:
"I am so glad my life, and place in life,
Were such that I was forced to rise or sink,
To strive or fail. God has been good to me, 
Who gifted me with spirit to aspire.”

I go back to my store now. In these days—
Last days, of course—I try to be a husband,
Try to be kinder to the mother of Eleanor.
Life is too deep—we break at last, we say,
“O Will, whatever you are, we bow to you;
We must submit.”

AT FAIRBANKS

Bill, look here! Here’s the *Times*—you see this picture?
Read if you like a little later. You never
Heard how I came to Fairbanks, chanced to stay.
It’s eight years now. You see in nineteen-eleven
I lived in Hammond, Indiana, thought
I’d take a trip, see mountains, see Alaska,
Perhaps find fortune or a woman—well,
You know from your experience how it is.
It was July and from the train I saw
The Canadian Rockies, stopped at Banff a day,
At Lake Louise, and so forth. At Vancouver
Found travelers feasting, Englishmen in drink,
Flirtations budding, coming into flower,
And eager spirits waiting for the boat.
Up to this time I hadn’t made a friend,
Stalked silently about along the streets,
Drank Scotch like all the rest, and much besides.

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Well, then we took the steamship Princess Alice
And started up the Inland Channel—great!
Got on our cheeks the breezes from the crystal
Cradles of the North, and so began at once
To find the mystery, silence, see clear stars,
The whites and blacks and greens along the shore.
And still I had no friend, was quite alone.
Just as I came on deck I saw a face—
Looked, stared perhaps. Her eyes went over me,
Would not look at me. At the dinner-table
She sat far down from me. I could not see her,
But made a point to rise when she arose,
Did all I could to catch her eye—no use.
So things went and I gave up—still I wondered
Why she had no companion. Was she married?—
Was husband waiting her at Skagway maybe?
I fancied something of the sort at last,
And, as I said, gave up.

But on a morning
I rose to see the sun rise, all the sky
First as a giant pansy, petals flung
In violet toward the zenith streaked with fire;
The silver of the snows changed under light
Mottled with shadows of the mountain tops—
Like leaves that shadow, flutter on a lawn.
At last the topaz splendors shoot to heaven,
The sun just peeks, and gilds the porcelain
Of snow with purest gold; and in the valleys
Darkness remains—Orician ebony
Is not more black. You’ve seen this too, I know,
And recognize my picture. There I stood,
Believed I was alone; then heard a voice,
“Is it not beautiful!” and looked around,
And saw my girl, who had avoided me,
Would not make friends before. This is her picture,
Name, Eleanor Murray. So the matter started.
I had my seat at table changed, and sat
Next to my girl to talk with her. We walked
The deck together. Then she said to me
Her home was in Chicago—so it is
Travelers abroad discover they are neighbors
When they’re at home. She had been teaching school
And saved her money for this trip—had planned
To go as far as Fairbanks. As for me,
I thought I’d stop with Skagway. Oh, this life!
Your hat blows off, you chase it, bump a woman;
Then beg her pardon, laugh and get acquainted,
And marry later.

As we steamed along
She was the happiest spirit on the deck.
The Wrangel Narrows almost drove her wild,
There where the mountains are like circus-tents—
Big show, menagerie, and all the rest—
But white as cotton with perennial snow.
We swam past aisles of pine-trees, where a stream
Rushed down in terraces of hoary foam.

[131]
The nights were glorious—we drank and ate,
And danced when there was dancing.

Well, at first

She seemed a little school-ma’am—quaint, demure,
Meticulous and puritanical.

And then she seemed a school-ma’am out to have
A time—so far away, where none would know;
And like a woman who had heard of life,
And had a teasing interest in its wonder,
Too long caged up. At last my vision blurred—
I did not know her, lost my first impressions
Amid succeeding phases which she showed.

But when we came to Skagway, then I saw
Another Eleanor Murray. How she danced
And tripped from place to place—such energy!
She almost wore me out with seeing sights.
And now, behold, the White Pass she must see
Upon the principle of missing nothing!
But oh, the grave of Soapy Smith, the outlaw,
The gambler and the heeler—that for her!
We went four miles and found the cemetery,
The grave of Soapy Smith; came back to town
Where she would see the buildings where they played
Stud poker, keno, in the riotous days.

Time came for her to go. She looked at me
And said, “Come on to Fairbanks.” As for that,
I’d had enough, was ready to return,
Edgar Lee Masters

But sensed an honorarium; so I said,  
"You might induce me," with a pregnant tone.  
That moment we were walking 'cross the street:  
She stopped a moment, shook from head to heels,  
And said, "No man has talked to me that way."  
I dropped the matter. She renewed it—said,  
"Why do you hurry back?—what calls you back?  
Come on to Fairbanks, see the gardens there,  
That tag the blizzards with their rosy hands  
And romp amid the snows." She smiled at me.  
Well then, I thought—why not? And smiled her back,  
And on we went to Fairbanks, where my hat  
Blows off, as I shall tell you.

For a day  
We did the town together, and that night  
I thought to win her. First we dined together,  
Had many drinks, my little school-ma'am drank  
Of everything I ordered, had a place  
For more than I could drink. And truth to tell  
At bed-time I was woozy—ten o'clock.  
We had not registered; and so I said,  
"I'm Mr. Kelly and you're Mrs. Kelly."  
She shook her head. And so, to make an end,  
I could not win her, signed my name in full,  
She did the same, we said good-night and parted.

Next morning when I woke, felt none too good;  
Got up at last and met her down at breakfast;
Tried eggs and toast, could only drink some coffee;  
Got worse; in short, she saw it, put her hand  
Upon my head and said, “Your head is hot,  
You have a fever.” Well, I lolled around  
And tried to fight it off till noon—no good.  
By this time I was sick, lay down to rest;  
By night I could not lift my head—in short,  
I lay there for a month, and all the time  
She cared for me just like a mother would.  
They moved me to a suite, she took the room  
That opened into mine, by night and day  
She nursed me, cheered me, read to me. At last  
When I sat up, was soon to be about,  
She said to me: “I’m going on to Nome,  
St. Michael first. They tell me that you cross  
The Arctic Circle going to St. Michael,  
And I must cross the Arctic Circle—think  
To come this far and miss it!—I must see  
The Indian villages.” And there again  
I saw, but clearer than before, the spirit  
Adventurous and restless, what you call  
The heart American. I said to her,  
“I’m not too well, I’m lonely—yes, and more—  
I’m fond of you, you have been good to me,  
Stay with me here!” She darted in and out  
The room where I was lying, doing things;  
And broke my pleadings just like icicles  
You shoot against a wall.
But here she was
A month in Fairbanks, living at expense;
Said, "I'm short of money—lend me some;
I'll go to Nome, return to you and then
We'll ship together for the States."

You see
I really owed her money for her care,
Her loss in staying; then I loved the girl,
Had played all cards but one—I played it now:
"Come back and marry me." Her eyes looked down,
"I will be fair with you," she said; "I think
Away from you I can make up my mind
If I have love enough to marry you."
I gave her money and she went away;
And for some weeks I had a splendid hell
Of loneliness and longing—you might know,
A stranger in Alaska, here in Fairbanks,
In love besides, and mulling in my mind
Our days and nights upon the Steamer Alice,
Our ramblings in the Northland.

Weeks went by—
No letter and no girl. I found my health
Was vigorous again. One morning, walking,
I kicked a twenty-dollar gold-piece up
Right on the side-walk. Picked it up and said:
"An omen of good luck—a letter soon!
Perhaps this town has something for me!" Well,
I thought I'd get a job to pass the time

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While waiting for my girl. I got the job,
And here I am today. I've flourished here,
Worked to the top in Fairbanks in eight years,
And thus my hat blew off.

What of the girl?
Six weeks or more a letter came from her—
She crossed the Arctic Circle, went to Nome,
Sailed back to 'Frisco where she wrote to me.
Sent all the money back I loaned to her,
And thanked me for the honor I had done her
In asking her in marriage; but had thought
The matter over, could not marry me,
Thought in the circumstance it were not best
To come to Fairbanks, see me, tell me so.

Now, Bill, I'm egotist enough to think
This girl could do no better. Now, it seems,
She's dead, and never married. Why not me?—
Why did she ditch me? So I thought about it,
Was piqued of course, concluded in the end
There was another man. A woman's No
Means she has someone else, or hopes to have,
More suited to her fancy. Then one morning,
As I awoke with thoughts of her as usual,
Right in my mind there plumped an incident
On shipboard, when she asked me if I knew
A certain man in Chicago. At the time
The question passed amid our running talk
And made no memory. But you watch and see
A woman when she asks you if you know
A certain man, the chances are the man
Is something in her life. So now I lay
And thought: there is a man, and that's the man—
His name is stored away, I'll dig it up
Out of the cells subliminal. So I thought,
But could not bring it back.

I found at last
The telephone directory of Chicago,
And searched and searched the names from A to Z.
Some mornings I'd pronounce a name and think,
"That is the name," then throw the name away—
It did not fit the echo in my brain.

But now at last—look here! Eight years are gone,
I'm healed of Eleanor Murray, married too;
I read about her death here in the Times,
And turn the pages over—column five:
"Chicago startled by a suicide—
Gregory Wenner kills himself!" Behold
At last the name she spoke!

GEORGE JOSLIN ON "LA MENKEN"

Here, Coroner Merival, look at this picture!
Whom does it look like? Eyes too crystalline,
A head like Byron's, tender mouth, and neck
Slender and white, a pathos as of smiles
And tears kept back by courage. Yes, you know;
It looks like Eleanor Murray.

Well, you see
I read each day about the inquest—good.
Dig out the truth, begin a system here
Of making family records, let us see
If we can do for people, when we know
How best to do it, what is done for stock;
So build up Illinois, the nation too.
I read about you daily. And last night
When Eleanor Murray's picture in the Times
Looked at me, I began to think, "Good Lord,
Where have I seen that face before?" I thought
Through more than fifty years departed, sent
My mind through Europe and America—
In all my travels, meetings, episodes.
I could not think. At last I opened up
A box of pamphlets, photographs, mementos,
Picked up since 1860; and behold—
I find this pamphlet of "La Belle Menken."
Here is your Eleanor Murray born again;
As here might be your blackbird of this year,
With spots of red upon his wings the same
As last year's blackbird; or a pansy springing
Out of the April of this year, repeating
The color, form of one you saw last year.
Repeating and the same, but not the same.
No two alike, you know—I’ll come to that.

Well, then, La Menken! As a boy in Paris
I saw La Menken—I’ll return to this.
But just as Eleanor Murray has her life
Shadowed and symbolized by our Starved Rock—
And everyone has something in his life
Which takes him, makes him, is the image too
Of fate prefigured—La Menken has Mazeppa,
Her notable first actress part, for emblem
Of spirit, character; and omen too
Of years to come, the thrill of life, the end.

Who is La Menken? Symbol of America,
One phase of spirit! She was venturesome,
Resourceful, daring, hopeful, confident;
And, as she wrote herself, a vagabond,
A dweller in tents, a reveler, and a flame
Aspiring but disruptive, coming up
With leaves that shamed her stalk, could not be shed,
But stuck out heavy-veined and muddy-hued
In time of blossom. There are souls, you know,
Who have shed shapeless immaturities—
Betrayals of the seed before the blossom
Comes to proclaim a beauty, a perfection;
Or risen with their stalk until such leaves
Were hidden in the grass or soil. Not she,
Nor even your Eleanor Murray, as I read her.
POETRY: A Magazine of Verse

But being America and American, these
Bring good and bad together, blossom and leaves,
With prodigal recklessness, in vital health
And unselective taste, and vision mixed
Of beauty and of truth.

Who was La Menken?
She's born in Louisiana in 'thirty-five,
Left fatherless at seven—mother takes her
And puts her in the ballet at New Orleans.
She dances then from Texas clear to Cuba;
Then gives up dancing, studies tragedy,
And plays Bianca! Fourteen years of age,
Weds Menken, who's a Jew—divorced from him;
Then falls in love with Heenan, pugilist—
They quarrel and separate. It's in this pamphlet
Just as I tell you—you can take it, Coroner.
Now something happens—nothing in her birth,
Or place of birth, to prophesy her life
Like Starved Rock to this Eleanor!—but instead,
When she is grown, a hand darts from the curtain
That hangs between to-day, to-morrow, sticks
A symbol on her breast and whispers to her,
"You're this, my woman!" Well, the thing was this:
She played Mazeppa—"Take your dummy off
And lash me to the horse!" They were afraid,
But she prevailed, was nearly killed the first night,
And after that succeeded, was the rage;
And for her years remaining found herself

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Lashed to the wild horse of ungoverned will,
Which ran and wandered till she knew herself
With stronger will than vision, passion stronger
Than spirit to judge—the richness of the world,
Love, beauty, living greater than her power.
And all the time she had the appetite
To eat, devour it all. Grown sick at last,
She diagnosed her case, wrote to a friend:
"The soul and body do not fit each other—
A human spirit in a horse's flesh."
This is your Eleanor Murray in a way.

But to return to pansies, run your hand
Over a bed of pansies: here's a pansy
With petals stunted, here's another one
All perfect but one petal, here's another
Too streaked or mottled—all are pansies though!—
And here is one full-petaled, strikes the eye
With perfect color-markings. Eleanor Murray
Has something of the color and the form
Of this La Menken, but is less a pansy;
And Sappho, Rachel, Bernhardt, are the flowers
La Menken strove to be, and could not be—
Ended with being only of their kind.
And now there's pity for this Eleanor Murray,
And people wept when poor La Menken died!
Both lived and had their way—I hate this pity!
It makes you overlook there are two hours:
The hour of joy; the hour of finding out
Your joy was all mistake, or led to pain.
We who inspect these lives behold the pain,
And see the error; do not keep in mind
The hour of rapture, and the pride indeed
With which your Eleanor Murrays and La Menkens
Have lived that hour—elation, pride, and scorn
For any other way. “This is the life,”
I hear them say.

Well, now I go along.
La Menken fills her purse with gold—she sends
Her pugilist away, tries once again,
And weds a humorist, an Orpheus Kerr;
And plays before the miners out in Frisco
And Sacramento, gathers in the eagles.
She goes to Europe then—with husband? No!—
James Barkley is her fellow on the voyage.
She lands in London, takes a gorgeous suite
In London’s grandest hostelry, entertains
Charles Dickens, Prince Baerto and Charles Reade,
The Duke of Wellington and Swinburne, Sand
And Jenny Lind; and has a liveried coachman,
And for a crest a horse’s head surmounting
Four aces, if you please; and plays Mazeppa,
And piles the money up.

The next is Paris.
And there I saw her, 1866,
When Louis Napoleon, the King of Greece,
The Prince Imperial were in a box.  
She wandered to Vienna, there was ill,  
Came back to Paris, died. A stranger’s grave  
In Père Lachaise was given; afterwards  
Exhumed; was buried in Montparnasse, and got  
A little stone with these words carved upon it:  
“Thou Knowest”—meaning God knew, while herself  
Knew nothing of herself.

But when in Paris  
They sold her picture, taken with her arms  
Around Dumas—gay photographs made up,  
In postures ludicrous, obscene as well,  
Of her and great Dumas (I have them home,  
Can show you sometime—well, she loved Dumas,  
Inscribed a book of poems to Charles Dickens  
By his permission, mark you!) Don’t you see  
Your Eleanor Murray here?—this Eleanor Murray  
A miniature imperfect of La Menken?  
She loved sensation, all her senses thrilled her—  
A delicate soul too weighted by the flesh;  
A coquette, quick of wit, intuitive,  
Kind, generous, unaffected, mystical,  
Teased by the divine in life, and melancholy,  
Of deep emotion sometimes. One has said  
She had a nature spiritual, religious,  
Which warred upon the flesh and fell in battle—  
Just as your Eleanor Murray joined the church  
And did not keep the faith, if truth be told.

[143]
Of splendors, freedoms, happiness, success;
Though I am seventy-six, cannot do much,
But talk, as I am talking now—bring forth
Proofs, revelations from the years I’ve lived.
I care not how you view the lives of people—
As pansy-beds or what not—lift your faith
So high above the pansy-bed it sees
The streaked and stunted pansies filling in
The pattern that the perfect pansies outline.
Therefore be smiling, even indifferent,
To this poor pansy dying at the last
Because it could not be the flower it wished.
My heart to Eleanor Murray and La Menken
Goes out in sorrow, even while I know
They shook their leaves in April, laughed and thrilled,
And either did not know, or did not care,
The growing time was precious, and if wasted
Could never be regained. Look at La Menken—
At seven years put in the ballet corps;
And look at Eleanor Murray getting smut
Out of experience that made her wise.

What shall we do about it?—let it go,
And say there is no help? or say a republic,
Set up a hundred years ago, which raised to power
Of rulership as president a list
Of men more able than the emperors,
Kings, rulers of the world! and statesmen too
Look now, here is a letter in this pamphlet
La Menken writes a poet—for she hunts
For seers and for poets, lofty souls.
And who does that?—a woman wholly bad?
Why no, a woman to be given life—
Life for her spirit in another realm
By God who will take notice, I believe.
Now listen if you will: "I know your soul;
It has met mine somewhere in starry space,
And you must often meet me—vagabond
Of fancy without aim, a dweller in tents,
Disreputable before the just. Just think!—
I am a linguist; write some poems too,
Can paint a little, model clay as well;
And yet for all these gropings of my soul
I am a vagabond, of little use.
My body and my soul are in a scramble
And do not fit each other—let them carve
Those words upon my stone; but also these—
'Thou Knowest,' for God knows me, knows I love
Whatever is good and beautiful in life,
And that my soul has sought them without rest.
Farewell, my friend—my spirit is with you.
Vienna is too horrible, but know Paris—
Then die content."

Now, Coroner Merival,
You're not the only man who wants to see,
Will work to make, America a republic
Edgar Lee Masters

Of your La Menkens, Eleanor Murrays—youths
Who feel such vigor in their restless wings
They tumble out of crowded nests and fly,
To fall in thickets, dash themselves against
Walls, trees?

I have a vision, Coroner,
Of a new Republic, brighter than the sun,
A new race, loftier faith—this land of ours
Made over for its people, boys and girls
Conserved like forests, water-power or mines;
Watched, tested, put to best use; keen economies
Practiced on spirits; waste of human life,
Hope, aspiration, talent, virtues, powers
Avoided by a science, science of life,
Of spirit, what you will. Enough of war,
And billions for the flag—all well enough!
Some billions now to make democracy
Democracy in truth with us, and life
Not helter-skelter, hitting as it may,
And missing much as this La Menken did!
I'm not convinced we must have stunted pansies,
That have no use but just to piece the pattern.
Let's try, and if we try and fail, why then
Our human duty ends—the God in us
Will have it just this way, no other way;
And then we may accept so poor a world,
A republic so unfinished!

Edgar Lee Masters
The equal of the greatest; money makers,
And domineers of finance and economics,
Phenomenal in time! Say, I repeat,
A country like this one must let its children
Waste as they wasted in the darker years
Of Europe? Shall we let these trivial minds,
Who see salvation in the soul's restraint,
Pre-empt the field of moulding human life?
Or shall we take a hand, and put our minds
Upon the task, as recently we built
An army for the war, equipped and fed it,
An army better than all other armies,
More powerful, more apt of hand and brain—
Of thin tall youths, who did not stop but said,
Like poor La Menken, "Strap me to the horse—
I'll do it if I die!"—so giving to peace
The skill and genius which we use in war,
Though it cost twenty billions? And why not!—
Why every dollar, every drop of blood,
For war like this to guard democracy,
And not so much, or more, to build the land,
Improve our blood, make individual
America and her race? First to destroy
Poverty and disease, give youth its chance
And therapeutic guidance! Soldier boys
Have huts for recreation, chaplains too.
And is it less worth while to furnish hands
Intimate, hearts intimate, for the use
COMMENT

STEPHEN CRANE

We have all heard the persistent utterance of this name, the persistent assertion that this fiery spirit of the nineties forestalled and outdid the vers-librists of these days. The inquiry therefore becomes pertinent—how far was Stephen Crane a pioneer? Does he belong among the new poets? and, if so, what place should be given him in their ranks? May we not try to dissociate his work from the glamour of his gallant youth and early death, and judge it, as he would have wished, impersonally, candidly?

Thus approached, Crane would seem to strike higher as a novelist than a poet. For stern uncompromising realism, presenting without sentimentality the heart-breaking pathos of a poor little beaten and broken life, his brief novel Maggie is a masterpiece, surely not to be forgotten in our literary annals. It is a grim story straightly told, never swerving from the immediate tragic drama, and presenting that drama of darkness with a sombre vividness worthy of the great Russians.

And The Red Badge of Courage has the same vividness of realistic detail artistically concentrated upon the presentation of a character and a situation. Following a single young soldier through his first day in action, never swerving from his personal experience and conquest of "the red sickness of battle," it reminds one of Conrad's Typhoon in penetrating descriptive power, presenting intensively a single
cataclysmic experience of a human soul struggling against sublime obstacles.

In passing from Crane's brief novels to his books of free verse, one is conscious of a strain. His attack upon the new art was less simple and direct; he was more tempted to orate, to become cosmic and important, to utter large truths in chanting tones with the official robes of the vates on, so to speak—caught to a certain degree, even this radical, by the Victorian fashion. And, although his touch is surer in his second book than his first, the attitude is not justified by either an impassioned originality in his message or an instructive and personal poetic rhythm. The following much-quoted poem, typical of most in *The Black Riders*, illustrates these points:

```
Supposing that I should have the courage
To let a red sword of virtue
Plunge into my heart,
Letting to the weeds of the ground
My sinful blood,
What can you offer me?
A gardened castle?
A flowery kingdom?

What?—a hope?
Then hence with your red sword of virtue.
```

Now is not this poem, in the last analysis, a bit sententious and platitudinous? And while its free-verse rhythmic movement is doubtless as good as that of many poets whose work passes current today, has it that special and personal magic which would compel us to give its author pride of place as a pioneer in the modern procession?—such a position as one readily accords to Emily Dickinson, who, through
decades of the later nineteenth century was confiding to her private journals poems of intensely personal emotion which achieved, without much respect for the accepted prosodic rules, a closely woven form of subtle rhythmic beauty.

The Black Riders is full of the wisdom of yester-year, startling utterances which somehow cease to startle after twenty years—so swiftly do the radicalisms of today become the commonplaces of tomorrow. The Red Sword above quoted, which is perhaps the best poem in the book, is one example of such high-sounding easy wisdom; numbers IX to XIII, XVIII to XXIII, and many others might also be quoted, including this one, XXXIV:

I stood upon a highway,
And, behold, there came
Many strange peddlers.
To me each one made gestures,
Holding forth little images, saying,
"This is my pattern of God;
Now this is the God I prefer."

But I said, "Hence!
Leave me with mine own,
And take you yours away.
I can't buy of your patterns of God,
The little gods you may rightly prefer."

Somehow this sort of thing seems as old-fashioned as Bob Ingersoll's fiery denunciations of idols powerful in his time but now, thanks partly to his energy, dethroned and shattered. Crane's lessons have been learned—the truths with which he jarred his world.

There is perhaps less of the cosmic in War is Kind. In this later book of free verse the ironies are less platitudinous
and more of the poems record simple personal experiences. The first irony, of course, is expressed in the title, which has often been taken too literally at its face value. The grim poem which ends the book is perhaps the best Crane ever wrote, so we quote it entire:

WAR IS KIND

Do not weep, maiden, for war is kind.
Because your lover threw wild hands toward the sky
And the affrighted steed ran on alone,
Do not weep.
War is kind.

Hoarse, booming drums of the regiment,
Little souls who thirst for fight,
These men were born to drill and die.
The unexplained glory flies above them,
Great is the battle-god, great, and his kingdom—
A field where a thousand corpses lie.

Do not weep, babe, for war is kind.
Because your father tumbled in the yellow trenches,
Raged at his breast, gulped and died,
Do not weep.
War is kind.

Swift blazing flag of the regiment,
Eagle with crest of red and gold,
These men were born to drill and die.
Point for them the virtue of slaughter,
Make plain to them the excellence of killing,
And a field where a thousand corpses lie.

Mother whose heart hung humble as a button
On the bright splendid shroud of your son,
Do not weep.
War is kind.

Other poems in this book deserve quotation, especially two details of love on pages 81 and 89. But perhaps we
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may better quote this detail of death—in deep regret that so fine a spirit should have passed so swiftly:

Thou art my love,
And thou art death—
Aye, thou art death
Black and yet black.
But I love thee,
I love thee—
Woe, welcome woe, to me!

Of course Crane was something of an innovator in his poetic experiments. His free verse was different from Whitman's; his use of the short line especially was a presage, and it may have influenced some of the poets—the Imagists, for example—who are now trying out its tunes. Ezra Pound, indeed, has somewhere spoken of him appreciatively. But if he rebelled against the older verse forms and took up a new instrument, he never quite became a master at it. He struck a few slight strains, and then passed it on. And it is for his work in prose that he will be longest remembered.

*H. M.*

**REVIEWS**

**COUNTERPOINT AND IMPLICATION**

*The Charnel Rose*, by Conrad Aiken. *Four Seas Co.*

By inviting me to review my own book for *POETRY*, Miss Monroe puts me in an awkward position. I suspect that a part of her reason for doing this is that she fancies the author can be severer with himself—or shall I say, more accurately severe?—than anyone else can be. She puts me,
in a sense, on my honor to defeat myself. But one tires of shadow-boxing: there is no joy in it, for one’s antagonist cannot retaliate. So I am going to be, for once, my own apologist. I do not mean by this that I am going to praise myself; any more, at least, than the artist who paints a self-portrait praises himself—which he does, in some degree, by the serious act of self-portraiture. What I do mean is that since, apart from any question of accomplishment, my aims in the writing of poetry interest me extraordinarily, and since I would like (naturally!) to see them more generally espoused, I shall discuss them naively and with candor.

Suppose I begin with one statement with which everyone will agree: that it is the aim of every work of art to evoke, or to suggest. There is no quarrel here. What artists will disagree on is as to how this shall be done. Some think it should be accomplished by methods mainly denotative—or realistic: they argue that the best way to imply is (in the correct degree) to state. Others believe the method should be mainly connotative: they argue that the best way to state is (in the correct degree) to imply. Both elements, of course, enter into every work of art, and the only real difference at the bottom is quantitative; yet it is sufficient to account for such wide areas as lie between the work of Masters, let us say, on the one hand, and that of Bodenheim on the other. The one is solid, the other diaphanous; and the difference in tactile quality may be followed even into the choice of language itself; for we see Masters pre-
ferring the precise, and as it were the square, and Bodenheim preferring the tenuous and the abstract; Masters employing the object or thing, and Bodenheim the quality of the thing. This is simple enough. But the affair becomes more complex when we observe that any individual artist is not to be confined to one region in this regard, but continually wanders up and down this gamut, striking now at the denotative and now at the connotative chords, never perfectly certain, in fact, which method is the more truly effective; and, of course, obeying not merely a theory but, quite as often, the dictates of compulsions more unconscious. It is going only a step further to note that the larger the medium in which a poet works, the wider and more frequent will be his rangings of this gamut.

It was to make more possible this delicious (and somewhat irresponsible?) ranging of the gamut that I evolved the symphonic form used in *The Jig of Forslin*, *The Charnel Rose*, and *Senlin*. I will not pretend that this was at the outset entirely conscious or clear. Theory always comes second in these cases. It was partly a natural enough ambition for more room, partly the working of some complex which has always given me a strong bias towards an architectural structure in poetry analogous to that of music. In the three parts of *Earth Triumphant*, anyone who cares to wade through fifteen hundred more or less impeccable octosyllabic couplets will find already a groping towards symphonic arrangement, though it is exceedingly rudimentary. In *Disenchantment*, which was given the sub-title
A Tone Poem, the idea of variation of form was developed, though not far. In The Charnel Rose it was first consciously elaborated, though with errors in proportion. And finally in Forslin and Senlin it achieved something like a logical outcome.

What I had from the outset been somewhat doubtfully hankering for was some way of getting contrapuntal effects in poetry—the effects of contrasting and conflicting tones and themes, a kind of underlying simultaneity in dissimilarity. It seemed to me that by using a large medium, dividing it into several main parts, and subdividing these parts into short movements in various veins and forms, this was rendered possible. I do not wish to press the musical analogies too closely. I am aware that the word symphony, as a musical term, has a very definite meaning, and I am aware that it is only with considerable license that I use the term for such poems as Senlin or Forslin, which have three and five parts respectively, and do not in any orthodox way develop their themes. But the effect obtained is, very roughly speaking, that of the symphony, or symphonic poem. Granted that one has chosen a theme—or been chosen by a theme!—which will permit rapid changes of tone, which will not insist on a tone too static, it will be seen that there is no limit to the variety of effects obtainable: for not only can one use all the simpler poetic tones (let us for convenience represent any five such simple poetic tones, each composing one separate movement to be used in a symphony, as \( a, b, c, d, e \) ); but, since one is using them as parts of a
larger design, one can also obtain novel effects by placing them in juxtaposition as consecutive movements: such as \( ab, ac, cae \). For \( a \), it is clear, if it is preceded by \( c \) and followed by \( e \), is not quite the same as \( a \) standing alone. Something has happened to it. A peculiar light has been cast across it, which throws certain parts of it into stronger relief than others; and \( a \) itself reacts on \( c \) (retrospectively) and, a moment later, on \( e \). In a sense, therefore, we have created a new poetic unit, \( cae \), a unit of which the characteristic pleasure it affords us is really contrapuntal, since it works upon us through our sense of contrast. Each added movement further complicates the tone-effect, adds color to the hover of reverberations, creates a new composite unit. And we get finally a whole major section of the symphony so constructed of contrasts and harmonies; which in turn, if we are careful, will differ clearly in general tone from the next major part. And here the same principles apply. \( \text{Part } II \), for example, following \( \text{Part } I \), and preceding \( \text{Part } III \), is by no means the same affair from the point of view of tone-effect, as \( \text{Part } II \) transferred so as to be \( \text{Part } IV \). Thus \( \text{Part } IV \) of \( \text{The Jig of Forslin} \) (which deals with Forslin's religious debauch) owes much of its effect to its position following \( \text{Part } III \), which deals with his caprices among lamias and vampires: an effect which originally, as \( \text{Part } II \), it did not obtain. It was transferred for that reason.

All this, I must emphasize, is no less a matter of emotional tone than of form; the two things cannot well be
Counterpoint and Implication

separated. For such symphonic effects one employs what one might term emotion-mass with just as deliberate a regard for its position in the total design as one would employ a variation of form. One should regard this or that emotional theme as a musical unit having such-and-such a tone quality, and use it only when that particular tone-quality is wanted. Here I flatly give myself away as being in reality in quest of a sort of absolute poetry, a poetry in which the intention is not so much to arouse an emotion merely, or to persuade of a reality, as to employ such emotion or sense of reality (tangentially struck) with the same cool detachment with which a composer employs notes or chords. Not content to present emotions or things or sensations for their own sakes—as is the case with most poetry—this method takes only the most delicately evocative aspects of them, makes of them a keyboard, and plays upon them a music of which the chief characteristic is its elusiveness, its fleetingness, and its richness in the shimmering overtones of hint and suggestion. Such a poetry, in other words, will not so much present an idea as use its resonance. It is the apotheosis of the poetic method which we have called implication. It is a prestidigitation in which the juggler's bottles or balls are a little too apt, unfortunately, to be altogether invisible.

I have left myself little space for comment on The Charnel Rose, of which this paper is supposed to be a review. In the title poem the reader may observe, if he wishes, this method in process of ghostly evolution: it is, for example,
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working much more efficiently and consistently in the third and fourth parts than in the first and second, which seem indeed, by contrast, a trifle mawkish and archaic. Even so, the variation of tone has not been carried far enough: a little more statement and a little less implication would have been a good thing, for it verges on the invertebrate. If the poem is objected to for its decadence, however, it should be recalled that the decadence is, as it happens, implied in the conception, and that the conception has merely been permitted, and in my opinion rightly, to divulge itself. I should object to being called a decadent (as one or two have already called me) merely because of this poem, or because of a few passages in *Forslin*, equally compelled by the thesis. In *Senlin*, the other long poem in the volume, the conception is not decadent, and neither, therefore, is the treatment. The tone is acid, humorous, ironic. In general, too, I think the artistic problem has been a good deal better solved. It lacks here and there the opulence and gleam of parts of *The Charnel Rose*, but it makes up for it in precision, sharpness, and economy. (One always praises economy when one is running out of funds.) The theme is the problem of personal identity, the struggle of the individual for an awareness of what it is that constitutes his consciousness; an attempt to place himself, to relate himself to the world of which he feels himself to be at once an observer and an integral part. Reports that *Senlin* is—or was—a real person are erroneous. *Variations*, the remaining series of lyrics, was an experiment in modula-
tion of emotion-tone. I do not feel that it was particularly successful. A theory should not be practiced in cold blood, and I am afraid that in this case the compulsion was not for all items sufficiently strong.

It remains, finally, to point out the profound danger of the method I have been outlining: the danger, I mean, that one's use of implication will go too far, and that one will cheat the natural human appetite for something solid and palpable. One cannot, truly, dine—at least every evening—on, as Eliot would remark, "smells of steaks in passageways." One must provide for one's symphony a sufficiently powerful and pervasive underlying idea—and, above all, make it sufficiently apparent. Whether the time will come when we shall be satisfied with implication for its own sake, no one, of course, can guess. In the meantime, one must compromise to the extent that one hopes for success. By which I'm not sure that I mean I compromise.

Conrad Aiken

ON "THE MOVEMENT"

The New Movement in poetry is more than a name or a hope. It has definitely arrived, if one may judge by the
number of books of criticism on the subject beginning to be published. Miss Lowell's *Tendencies in Modern American Poetry* was the first; and now, in addition to the three noted above, we have two which will be reviewed soon—John Livingston Lowe's *Convention and Revolt in Poetry*, quite the best general criticism on the subject that has appeared, and Marguerite Wilkinson's *The New Voices, a Critical Anthology*, momently expected from the press, making six in all.

Of course these books, like most criticisms, are after the fact; they do not mark the beginning of the new movement, and it may be hoped that they do not mark the end; although it is significant that by the time criticism had caught up with the Irish literary movement, that movement was practically dead, or had considerably subsided. One may note in passing, however, that nothing so good as Thomas MacDonagh's *Literature in Ireland* has yet been written of contemporary American poetry. Perhaps the movement has not yet crystallized sufficiently, or lacks a common aim.

Of the three books noted above, we may begin with the least important, Mr. Cook's *Our Poets of Today*. This is little more than a bibliography of sixty-eight poets with a brief commentary on each, of small critical value. Mr. MacKaye contributes an introduction, written, one may say, in blind faith, for when he wrote it he had seen only the list of the poets represented—one wonders if he had any misgivings after he saw the rest of the volume!—and
On “The Movement”

in this introduction he develops once more his well-known hobby of civic drama and community poetry, that abstract will-o’-the-wisp which has so led him astray as a poet! For there is not and never has been any such thing as community poetry. Whistler was right about it in his Ten O’Clock. Art and poetry are individualistic. It is only in a secondary and non-creative sense that they become communal.

With so grandiloquent a title as The Advance of English Poetry in the Twentieth Century one should expect much from Mr Phelps’ book, but unfortunately the title marches better than the rest of it, and the book might much more appropriately have been called Pot-shots at the Poets!

“It should be apparent,” Mr. Phelps says, “that I am not a sectarian in art, but am thankful for poetry wherever I find it.” But one would like to know where he found it, or who made the odd assortment for him; for the poets are thrown together hodge-podge, and of any but the most accidental arrangement there is no evidence whatever. Sectarian Mr. Phelps certainly is not, but he has many blind-spots, and he shies like a near-sighted horse when certain poets come within his range of vision. At other times he positively refuses to take the ditch, as in the cases of Lascelles Abercrombie and T. S. Eliot, poets dissimilar enough to make one wonder at his complacent rejection of both. As criticism the book is non-existent. It is a banal, garrulous, gossipy poetic scrap-book; and if one cares for that sort of an introduction to modern poetry, this is the place to find it. But for those of us who know something of the
subject, it is impossible to take the book seriously. Whether Mr. Phelps’ sins of commission are worse than of omission, it would be hard to say; but the list of important poets whom he has left out is a serious indictment against the book. I have made one, but I am not going to publish it, since it might furnish Mr. Phelps the material for another book, from which Heaven defend us!

In Mr. Untermeyer’s volume the body of the book fails to substantiate the premises of his introduction. Whether or not one agrees with him when he says of the New England group that “not one of its exponents burned with a keen and racy originality, the quality which, of all American writers, Walt Whitman alone possesses,” certain it is that his attempt to make Whitman inclusively responsible for the new poetic impulse does not hold water in the face of the evidence. And the link by which he seeks to tie Robert Frost, among others, to Whitman is pretty slight. It is, he says, “the poetic feeling for ordinary life which is the bond that unites most of the younger poets of today.” But the poetic feeling for ordinary life did not come in with Whitman, even in America; nor is it indeed uniformly characteristic of our poets, half of whom are Hellenists, or romanticists, or troubadours of quite another sort. One may question if Robert Frost is not more akin to the bed-rock Whittier, or even Bryant, stock than to Whitman; and I am not sure but that the New England poets, though less original, were as racial in quality as Whitman! Nor is it possible to say that “the retreat to the ivory tower is
On "The Movement"

blocked on every side" (Mr. Untermeyer should have stopped to count the "ivory towers" in his book!), for the poet is as free today as he always has been to create his ivory tower; and he is still creating it and living in it, since poetry is always the illusion of experience rather than experience itself, and the illusion may be of Chicago streets or Manhattan Ferry quite as well as of the streets of Avalon or Troy.

The trouble is that Mr. Untermeyer writes as a journalist rather than as a critic; and his large generalities, which seem to mean much in connection with a single poet, are thus often flatly contradicted by what he says of the next. What he praises one poet for omitting, he praises the next for committing. In practice and in precept the poets belie his words continually. In James Oppenheim, for instance, moralizing and preaching are a virtue; in others an artistic sin. Virtuosity in Amy Lowell is an accomplishment; in Masters it is an offense; and so on. What one looks for is not a less catholic taste in Mr. Untermeyer, but a more certain poetic one. At one time his standard is poetic; at the next one finds it social or topical or something else. Topical it very often is to an irritating degree. Mr. Untermeyer is always talking as if the poet's "job" were to express something outside himself: the streets, or the countryside, or the social ferment, rather than the man himself, to whom these things are accidents of experience.

The fault of the book is therefore a shifting point of view, augmented by the lack of any clear analysis, or even group-

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ing, of the various poetic tendencies, into which it would not be impossible to divide roughly the contemporary poetic movement. His grouping, not quite so accidental as Mr. Phelps', is nevertheless quite as insignificant and inconsequential. To include poets so distinctive as Adelaide Crapsey or T. S. Eliot in the Others group merely because they were represented in the Others anthology, is to imply a bond where there is none. The best method would have been to seek out the natural bonds. Mr. Untermeyer has "not tried to rate our contemporary poets in what might be considered the order of their importance, but so as to bring out most effectively their contrasting qualities." But this is far from being an illuminating procedure. A chronological arrangement would have been far better, and this precisely is what the volume needs; chronological, that is, in the order of publication. For even in the short space of ten or twenty years, or even a year or two, for that matter, it is important to know which poets have established precedents, which poets have been the true innovators, and which the followers. And by the order of publication I do not necessarily mean book publication. It is important, for instance, to know that Miss Lowell is not so much the innovator as the adapter of others' innovations; that Robinson furnished models for Robert Frost and other younger men; that Pound preceded Eliot, as Eliot preceded Aiken. Mr. Untermeyer has indicated some of these things, but not sufficiently. And these things are interesting, not as showing anything so petty as mere derivations, but as illustrat-
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ing what we may call the growth of the poetic complex of the period: the ebb and flow, the borrowings and accretions, the contemporary impulse viewed as an inter-active play of individuals and forces, and not as a string of isolated and unrelated instances. In a word, what a book like this needs is perspective; and this precisely is what Mr. Untermeyer has not given it. And he was not unqualified to give it, since his interest in contemporary verse has been steady and constant, and not sporadic or spasmodic as one suspects Mr. Phelps' of being. In no place is Mr. Untermeyer's violation of the historic sense more evident than in his treatment of Imagism, where he ignores the first statement of the Imagists, with its precise definition of the Image—so far removed from the current conception of the image as essentially allied to the visual, or, what is worse, pictorial, sense—and quotes instead the introduction to the 1915 Imagist anthology, which is far more propaganda than credo, and not worth the time spent upon its discussion. Knowing the facts as he does, Mr. Untermeyer either wilfully suppresses them, or he lacks the critical discernment to distinguish between what is "hard and clear" and what is "blurred and indefinite" in an artistic creed.

But leaving aside the question of larger issues and final values, the chapters devoted to single poets are interesting; and, for those not already familiar with the subject, instructive and informative. His chapter on Robert Frost is by far the best; it is the least journalistic and the most discriminating in a poetic sense. None of the others ap-
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approaches it. Those on Sandburg, Lindsay, and Ezra Pound, and most of the others, are adequate, although they do not go deep enough into the poetic medium to be as illuminating as the one on Frost. When it comes to the chapter on Masters, one feels that Mr. Untermeyer has enjoyed “landing on” his later work with perhaps more passion than judgment. Masters’ later work has had no just appraisal. His faults are obvious, but the lyric beauty of much of his later work has been obscured by these faults and by the overshadowing prestige of Spoon River. If he had never written Spoon River, he would yet stand high as an artist by virtue of the best that is in his three later books. Masters, perhaps more than any other contemporary poet, deserves, and has not yet received, adequate criticism of his work as a whole.

On the other hand, when it comes to the chapter on Amy Lowell, Mr. Untermeyer deserts criticism for exposition. Here he is completely the showman, pulling aside the velvet curtains, commenting on the frame, the fine brush-work, the tactile values, the virtuosity of the artist—never on the spiritual poverty, the manufactured stage-passion, the continuous external glitter with no depth beneath, the monotony of style, the free-verse bombast, the lack of real humor, or the endless emphasis on a form external to that true form which develops from within! I don’t know how Miss Lowell does it, but she obviously paralyzes the critical faculty—or nerve! And the absence of it in this chapter by Mr. Untermeyer is the more disconcert-
ing because in chapters like those on Ezra Pound, or Vachel Lindsay or John Hall Wheelock, he is quite capable of balancing faults and virtues—he is not blind to either. But unfortunately it is just this inequality in Mr. Untermeyer's criticism that invalidates it. Now he seems to see, and now he doesn't. Now he is writing in one mood, and now another—as the notion strikes him. I remember that he once wrote a review of Mrs. Livesay's translations of Ukrainian folk-songs in which he found fault with the songs because they furnished no solution to the Ukrainian political problem!

But in spite of all this, Mr. Untermeyer's book is interesting and provocative, even if it too fails to furnish us with a solution of the present poetical situation! It is wider in scope than Miss Lowell's *Tendencies in Modern American Poetry*, devoting separate chapters to about a dozen poets (in place of her half-dozen) and giving extended comment on at least as many more, with more cursory mention of many others; and so far it is the best book that has been written on the subject, although it lacks the interesting biographical material which was the best feature of Miss Lowell's book. However, as I have said, neither furnishes us with any sense of perspective; this will have to be supplied by the completely competent critic of the new poetry—when he arrives.  

*A. C. H.*
RILKE'S POEMS

Poems by Rainer Maria Rilke, translated by Jessie Lamont, with an Introduction by H. T. Tobias A. Wright.

Rainer Maria Rilke is the second of a Viennese group of poets whose work has been presented in English within the last few months; for quite lately Professor Stork published through the Yale University Press The Lyrical Poems of Hugo Von Hofmannsthal. Von Hofmannsthal, Rilke and Stefan George formed a group in Austria whose work in its remote imaginativeness stood as a protest against the realism and the externality of German literature as represented by the plays of Suderman and the poems of Liliencron. These three made it their creed that "The poet, in order to depict life as life really is, must take no part in it." Rilke is what Von Hofmannsthal has been accounted, but hardly is—a mystic poet. Rilke is more abundant and more emotional, more of a visionary and more of a human creature, than Von Hofmannsthal shows himself to be in his lyrical poems. And he has been surprisingly well translated into English. I have not read Rilke in the original, but I have read other translations of certain poems given in this volume, and I can judge that the meaning of these particular poems has been rendered with a spontaneity so surprising that we lose the sense of translation:

The bleak fields are asleep,
My heart alone wakes;
The evening in the harbor
Down his red sails takes.

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Night, guardian of dreams,
Now wanders through the land;
The moon, a lily white,
Blossoms within her hand.

Rilke was born in the Bohemian capital, and H. T., in his eloquent introduction, suggests the influence this ancient haunted city had upon his early poems. But the Prague of his description can hardly be glimpsed in the poems given in this volume. We feel the influences of another mid-European capital, of that Vienna which Professor Stork speaks about in his introduction to Von Hofmannsthall's poems—the Vienna wherein "beautiful gardens, Romanesque churches, palaces contemporary with Versailles, galleries rich in Italian masterpieces, were the elements that surrounded the lives of young men... There was perhaps no city twenty-five years ago where a young man of means and birth could live a life more detached from that of his modern fellow-men." This detachment and this closeness to art are to be remembered when considering Rilke's poems.

They are the poems of a recluse; Rilke walks lonely amid the crowd. He contemplates an archaic statue, a blind beggar at the Pont du Carrousel, maidens at confirmation, a panther behind his bars, with the same intensity. But he does not look on them as the poet of the decadence looked upon such things—merely for their line and color. All these things are to him glimpses of a mysterious reality.

Sections of the poems are named The Book of a Monk's Life, The Book of Poverty and Death. But if he is the
poet of lonely contemplation he is also the poet of lonely exultation, as in *Presaging, The Boy, Moonlight Night*.

One might quote with the certainty of awakening interest almost any of the poems. The one that most appeals to me is *Autumn*. In it the poet by the use of a few common images makes vivid the thought of the mystic of all time:

The leaves fall, fall as from far,
Like distant gardens withered in the heavens;
They fall with slow and lingering descent.

And in the nights the heavy Earth, too, falls
From out the stars into the Solitude.

Thus all doth fall. This hand of mine must fall;
And lo, the other one!—it is the law.
But there is One who holds this falling
Infinitely softly in His hands.

If Rilke is a mystic he is a mystic who has chosen to be concrete and colored. One of his volumes is named *The Book of Pictures*. And how accomplished, merely as pictures, are his *Kings in Legends*, his *Spanish Dancer*, his *Panther*!  

CORRESPONDENCE

A REPLY TO A. C. H.

Editor of POETRY: The article of A. C. H., entitled *Mannerisms of Free Verse*, contains so many inaccuracies and blindly sweeping generalities that one hardly knows where to commence in pointing them out. I have chosen to select
the most salient and typical sentences of her article and to answer them in numbered rotation.

First: “However much it may be claimed that free verse is closer to natural speech, to the natural breath-cadence and pause, than metrical poetry, the reverse is actually true of the majority of examples published today. . . . Nor does the pattern, even so, resolve itself into music, into any organic rhythm of any sort.”

Are the majority of examples of any art-form existing today, from cubism in painting to free verse in poetry, worthy of the inherent possibilities which that art-form contains? Doesn’t the situation always shape itself into a few men rising above the level of insincerity and inability? And if so, why single out free verse as the lone target in a general situation which has always obtained throughout the history of art and literature?

The rhythmical pattern of most free verse written today lacks cohesion and fluidity, just as the greater part of present day rhymed verse is devoid of escaping freshness and vitality, and possesses an arbitrary musical flow which lures the emotions and thoughts of the poet into restricted areas of decorous triteness. But why continually shout the obvious in an attempt to belittle any general form of expression? Free verse of the last ten years has produced men of seeming largeness and permanence, such as Carl Sandburg, Edgar Lee Masters, William Carlos Williams, Wallace Stevens, H. D., Richard Aldington, John Gould Fletcher, Amy Lowell, and one or two others. Compare the old-school
poets of the present day with these above-mentioned people and decide whether free verse has not justified its birth and scope.

Second: "Formerly we used to think that something was supposed to happen in a poem; but in these poems, full as they are of movement and as restless as a jumping-jack, nothing really ever happens at all. The Jack jumps up and down on the stick, but beyond Jack and the stick there is nothing. Yet it is hardly the nothingness of the mystic!"

The above quotation refers to poems written by Lola Ridge, although the writer unfairly omitted any mention of her connection. Lola Ridge’s poetry has the sudden and incisive movement of a locomotive piston-rod. It does jerk at times, to be sure, but it jerks with a purpose and its cruel strength should not be attacked because it often lacks graceful balance. Critics of poetry never seem to be able to keep things in their place, and always demand that a locomotive contain the qualities of a flower-garden, or vice versa. They rarely ever judge a thing merely on the ground of whether it has achieved that which it obviously set out to achieve. They allow their prejudices to insist that a thing is inevitably inferior if it doesn’t contain elements which they personally care most for.

A. C. H. claims that there is nothing behind the poetry of Lola Ridge. But what is she looking for—the pointing out of a moral; some philosophical intent; an emotional bias enticing the scene into false capers; some mention of the obvious undercurrents which swept the scene into place and
form? Lola Ridge's poetry contains none of these elements to any great extent, although some of her lines fit into the above-mentioned categories. She merely attempts to reproduce the essence of the scene's reality, to compress this essence into a terse suggestiveness and to hint at, rather than emphasize, the forces in control of her picture. She prefers to speak of "livid faces spilling out of the black pockets of alleys" rather than to describe the eyes and clothes of these face-possessors or the tiny errands which drive them forth. In this way she reproduces the sordid mysteries and sly harshness of the scene far better than if she had used a long and detailed style. She leaves something to the imagination of her reader and does not insult his intelligence. Unpardonable crime!

Third: "Mediocrity in free verse, like mediocrity in metrical verse, will pass and be forgotten."

If the above quotation is true, why waste so much time and attention upon this futile mediocrity? If one really believes that something is negligible and digging its own grave one becomes genuinely indifferent toward it. Elaborate sarcasm and much attention are not apt to be symbols of indifferent disgust. In this connection it is worthy of note that those who belabor mediocrity in free verse have only a passing mention for the triteness and futility of average rhymed and metrical poetry. Why is all the emphasis placed upon one side of the question? Maxwell Bodenheim
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NOTE

Domesday Book, by Edgar Lee Masters, which the Macmillan Co. will publish early in the autumn, is an extended work of poetical fiction. Its general motive is the life, and the seemingly violent death, of the girl Eleanor Murray, whose body has been found in a wood. An investigating coroner starts a more or less informal inquiry and summons numerous witnesses.

The monologues which we present are three non-consecutive chapters from this book.

BOOKS RECEIVED

ORIGINAL VERSE:
Banners, by Babette Deutsch. Geo. H. Doran Co.
Songs from the Granite Hills, by Clark B. Cochrane. Gorham Press.
The Earth Turns South, by Clement Wood. E. P. Dutton & Co.
The Bend of the Road, by Joseph B. Hingeley. Privately printed, Chicago.
A Tribute to Shelley, by David C. Nimmo. Privately printed.
Rhythms II, by Charles Reznikoff. Privately printed, Brooklyn, N. Y.
War Verses—O Sunny Land of France and The Shining Sword of the Hun, by Laura Bell Everett and Elizabeth Abbey Everett. Privately printed, Berkeley, Cal.
Adventure, by Mary Weik. Gorham Press.
Types of Pan, by Keith Preston (Pan). Houghton Mifflin Co.
The Funston Double Track and Other Verses, by Willard Wattles. N. A. Crawford, Manhattan, Kansas.

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