

Vol. XX

No. IV

# Poetry

A Magazine of Verse  
Edited by Harriet Monroe

July 1922

Pianissimo (A Dialogue)  
by Alfred Kreyborg  
King Alfred and the  
Peasant Woman  
by Anna Wickham  
In Russia, by Lola Ridge

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How I wish that some English paper had anything like the authentic vitality of  
POETRY!  
*Louis Golding*

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No. IV

POETRY for JULY, 1922

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# oetry

A Magazine of Verse

VOL. XX  
NO. IV

JULY 1922

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PIANISSIMO

*An Intermezzo*

*For Bee Knudsen*

*T*WO elderly gentlemen, in clothes even older than themselves, are just sitting down—with the outward aid of crooked canes and the inward support of sighs—on what is presumably a park bench, shaded by mountain laurels, with a swan-pond for a background. The men also carry the venerable pipes of tradition: in this case, heavily crusted corn-cobs. Their speech, very slow and gentle, gives them the sound of impersonal instruments improvising a harmless duo: prosaic music blown into the air at the end of smoke spirals, the re-lighting of pipes necessarily frequent. The only apparent difference between them, traceable perhaps to the unconscious bias of habitual meditation and perpetual comparison of ideas, has reduced itself to a slight wagging of the head on the part of the one as opposed to a slight nodding on

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*the part of the other. Speech and movement coincide almost as caressingly as the effect produced by lips brushing wood-instruments.*

*Henry:* Nay, but I insist  
that the quick sharp touches the rain  
and slower titillation the sun  
put upon those flowers we saw  
have in them the same heedless passion,  
heedless of all save the self,  
which envelops unconscious adolescence.  
That isn't the type of caress I'm seeking.

*Hodge:* Those flowers were pale indeed  
with a suggestion of pink and beginning of blue!

*Henry:* Early degrees of coloration  
solely indicative of the mood  
of self-interest of rain and of sun;  
alternately shaping something,  
like a left hand and right  
of one and the same conjurer  
reproducing his own vague image:  
the flower somehow a captive,  
clay just as we are,  
subject to the next modulation  
towards the next helpless state of being.  
I've had my share and enough  
of such no longer magical passes.

*Hodge:* Nearer to red and closer to purple!

*Henry:* That is the type of caress  
which has made of what I was  
the droning instrument I am,  
played upon in the one tonality  
of a careless self-love so long  
that the grave itself  
will simply be the final effort  
of the same somebody using me  
to express himself in a minor cadence—  
his little alas but a sigh  
that his composition closed so shabbily.

*Hodge:* And still you cannot recall,  
stubborn lad that you are,  
a single variation, a dissonance, a brève?

*Henry:* Neither can you, Hodge,  
with your eye pointing forward!

*Hodge:* Let us try just once more again—

*Henry:* Folk-song of the hopeful!—

*Hodge:* And perhaps—

*Henry:* *Da capo* of the hopeless!

*Hodge:* Possibly the shade of this laurel,  
itself the design of accident,  
angle of sun and of tree  
meeting, rounding, spreading,  
will quiet your melancholy,  
and some quaint caress have room to stir,  
your memory mislaid?

*Henry:* Memory is a cupboard



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I have gone to myriad times  
and have returned the one time always  
with relics so tedious  
I find them heavier than boulders.  
Since you who persist must try once again,  
pray, take down the future if you can.

*Hodge:* Let us then sit here and wait,  
and the strange, the new, may yet transpire.

*Henry:* You nod your head and I wag mine,  
that is the difference between us:  
you have verticals left in you,  
I am all horizontal.

*Hodge:* But we are breathed into moving  
in accordance with the odd,  
delicately reciprocal nuance  
of our one and the same—

*Henry:* Bassoonist!—

*Hodge:* You dub him lugubriously!—

*Henry:* Accurately!—

*Hodge:* Henry!

*[Henry looks at Hodge. Hodge smiles. They smoke in  
silence. Hodge points with his pipe-stem.]*

*Hodge:* That swan,  
a white interrogation  
embracing the water,  
and being embraced in response—

*Henry:* Their eyes reflecting each other,  
their bodies displacing—

*Hodge:* That swallow cleaving the air,  
trusting his wings to the waves of ether—

*Henry:* And the air trusting him  
with room in her body,  
relinquishing just enough space  
for him to fit himself into—

*Hodge:* Or the worm underground,  
digging cylinder channels—

*Henry:* And the earth undulating  
to the pressure of excavation—

*Hodge:* Caresses like these, simple Henry—

*Henry:* Caresses like those, simpler Hodge,  
have been clapped in my ear  
by your credulous tongue  
with such affectionate fortitude,  
I'm a bell attacked by echoes  
each time the sea moves.

[*Hodge looks at Henry and wags his head. Henry nods and smiles. Hodge turns away.*]

*Henry:* You also remind me of evergreens  
refusing to acknowledge the seasons,  
or unable to distinguish  
between white flowers and snow.  
You're as old and as young as romance.

*Hodge:* It's you who fall redundant,  
you who fondle the rondo—  
why not have done and call me senile?

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*Henry:* Senility is a sling  
invented by cynical youths  
who envy and would rob  
the old of their possessions.

*Hodge:* You admit possessions?—  
you contradict yourself?—

*Henry:* My property  
comprises the realization,  
stripped bare of hope or hypothesis,  
that I own neither things nor persons;  
least of all these, myself.  
Nor am I longer deluded  
with even the thought of touching  
a body that pirate youth would filch,  
who cannot rid his blood of desire.

*Hodge:* Then you must be that youth,  
since you crave—

*Henry:* A type of caress?

*Hodge:* How do you wriggle out of that?

[*Hodge and Henry relight their pipes.*]

*Henry:* The type of caress I crave  
must have in it  
no desire to make of me  
aught of what it would make of itself.  
It must not say to me,  
“I would make of you  
more of me and less of you—”



*Hodge:* Nor must it lure me,  
by virtue of the bounty  
of its body or the beauty  
of its mind, to sigh,  
“I would make of myself  
more of you and less of me—”

*Henry:* I have had enough  
of such juxtaposition—

*Hodge:* The immortal dialogue  
of life and of death—

*Henry:* The recurrent symbol  
of being and reflection—

*Hodge:* Of Narcissus  
in love with himself—

*Henry:* Of God chanting a solo  
to comfort His loneliness,  
like an aged woman  
knitting things for her children to wear  
in her own image,  
singing: “This is I,  
and you are mine;  
so wear my love as I love you.”

[Pause. Henry lowers his head; so does Hodge.]

*Henry:* If it is  
God who fashioned me,  
is it He  
who asks, is He pleased?

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*Hodge:* Does my prayer,  
which is His  
if I'm His,  
move or leave Him unmoved?

*Henry:* It is He  
who lifts these questions,  
or am I  
to blame for thinking?

*Hodge:* If He,  
noticing me  
at last, notices Himself—  
what's wrong with Him?

*Henry:* Really,  
I'm not regretting  
what I am,  
nor begging, make me better.

*Hodge:* If I  
have a sense of the droll,  
surely  
He has one too.

*Henry:* Asking Himself  
to pray to Himself—  
that is,  
if He fashioned me?

[*Pause.*]

*Hodge:* Does it comfort you?

*Henry:* A little—for a moment.

*Hodge:* Farther than last time?

*Henry:* A tiny stretch beyond.

[*They raise their heads.*]

*Hodge:* It's still a wee mad melody—

*Henry:* Innocent blasphemy  
of the inner  
frantic to grow to the outer,  
to the more than itself—  
the molecule a star,  
the instant universal—  
the me a trifle closer  
to the you that gave it life.

*Hodge:* You recall how you composed it  
years before we came to this?

*Henry:* As clearly as a brook,  
and you sitting in its midst  
like a pebble nodding assent  
to the foolish reckless sound—

*Hodge:* Strange that we return to it!

*Henry:* Stranger still, we do naught but return!

[*They continue smoking, Henry wagging, Hodge nodding.*]

*Hodge:* Did you feel something stir?

*Henry:* Only another breeze—

*Hodge:* But didn't you see that cloud alter?—

*Henry:* The cause of the breeze—



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*Hodge:* Caressing us?—

*Henry:* Leaving me colder—

*Hodge:* Me warmer.

*Henry:* When the temperature in a room  
is higher or lower than normal,  
it is needful to open  
or to shut a window—

*Hodge:* Which?

*Henry:* A west wind  
urges me to shut a west window,  
an east an east—that is all.  
And I have known the same touch  
to thrill and leave me cold,  
and this monotonous heart of mine  
to open and close in childish acquiescence—

*Hodge:* Button your coat about you—

*Henry:* We have no business  
gadding around in the spring—  
it was you who suggested it,  
you with your nodding.

*Hodge:* It was the look of the world outdoors—  
let us try another place,  
or wander back home again.

*Henry:* And try just once more?

*Hodge:* Perhaps, providing—

*Henry:* We are like twin philosophers,  
phrase-practitioners  
who argue with slender

tapering sensitive beards  
which each lays persuasive hold of,  
pulling first the one the other  
and the other the one in turn,  
till their heads collide and rebound  
back to the starting-point,  
with *if* or *suppose* or *providing* or *but*—

*Hodge:* But you have more wisdom?—

*Henry:* And you more happiness!  
And thus the moon pursues the sun!

[*Hodge touches Henry.*]

*Hodge:* Are you angry?

*Henry:* Angry with you?

[*They eye each other, smile faintly, and turn away.*]

*Henry:* Your talk comes to me from afar,  
though you are only an elbow away;  
like rain making an arid soil  
intimate with better things.  
They, perhaps, are what are left me.

*Hodge:* If I say, I love thee,  
in some guise or other—  
this is more than talk?

*Henry:* The gesture of a lonely spirit  
reaching out to a lonelier.

[*They methodically shake out their pipes and stuff them*

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*away. Hodge nudges Henry ever so gently. Henry tries to rise. Hodge has to aid him. They move away haltingly, Hodge's stick tapping a little in advance of Henry's, and Hodge's arm through Henry's. Henry tries to shake off Hodge, but the latter persists. They move slightly faster.]*

*Henry: Was it yesterday I said—*

*Hodge: What, Henry?*

*Henry: I love thee?*

*Hodge: In actual words, nay—  
but the day before—*

*Henry: Then let them have been said  
yesterday as well,  
for if words ever fail me—*

*Hodge: They never fail you.*

*Henry: Nor you, Hodge.*

*[They nod together.]*

*Henry: Let us go silently  
the next pace or two—*

*Hodge: As you will—*

*Henry: And let other things speak—*

*Hodge: For us?*

*Henry: For themselves.*

*[They disappear, Hodge's stick still sounding in advance of Henry's.]*

*Alfred Kreyborg*

## IN THE DARK CITY

There is a harper plays  
Through the long watches of the lonely night  
When, like a cemetery,  
Sleeps the dark city, with her millions laid each in his tomb.

I feel it in my dream; but when I wake,  
Suddenly, like some secret thing not to be overheard,  
It ceases—  
And the gray night grows dumb.

Only in memory  
Linger those veiled adagios, fading, fading . . .  
Till, with the morning, they are lost.

What door was opened then?  
What worlds undreamed of lie around us in our sleep,  
That yet we may not know?  
Where is it one sat playing  
Over and over, with such high and dreadful peace,  
The passion and sorrow of the eternal doom?

*John Hall Wheelock*



NOTES OF TRAVEL

ON THE TRAIN

I

The lady in front of me in the car,  
With little red coils close over her ears,  
Is talking with her friend;  
And the circle of ostrich foam around her hat,  
Curving over like a wave,  
Trembles with her little windy words.  
What is she saying, I wonder,  
That her feathers should tremble  
And the soft fur of her coat should slip down over her  
shoulders?  
Has her string of pearls been stolen,  
Or maybe her husband?

II

He is drunk, that man—  
Drunk as a lord, a lord of the bibulous past.  
He shouts wittily from his end of the car to the man in the  
corner;  
He bows to me with chivalrous apologies.  
He philosophizes, plays with the wisdom of the ages,  
Flings off his rags,  
Displays his naked soul—  
Athletic, beautiful, grotesque.

In the good time coming,  
When men drink no more,  
Shall we never see a nude soul dancing  
Stript and free  
In the temple of his god?

III

She comes smiling into the car  
With iridescent bubbles of children.  
She blooms in the close plush seats  
Like a narcissus in a bowl of stones.  
She croons to a baby in her lap—  
The trees come swinging by to listen,  
And the electric lights in the ceiling are stars.

AT O'NEILL'S POINT

*Grand Canyon of Arizona*

Cardeñas, I salute you!  
You, marauding buccaneering Spaniard!  
You, ragged and sworded lordling, slashing through to the  
Seven Cities of Cibola;  
You, athirst in the desert, seeking to drink from the great  
river—  
The mother of western seas, dear to your Hopi guides!  
You, Cardeñas the Spaniard, three centuries before the  
next first white man,

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You with your handful of starvelings stood on this Rim  
of the Canyon,  
And looked down at flecks of water in the deeps,  
Like yellow petals fallen.  
You scrambled a few hundred feet down the sheer rock  
wall,  
And knew you would never drink of that tawny torrent.  
You gave it up, and thirsted, and cursed your guides.

And your leader, Coronado the adventurer,  
Thought you mad when you told your story—  
Mad of thirst in the desert,  
Dreaming of loud deep rivers  
In demon-haunted caverns.

But I believe you.  
Here where I stand you stood—  
On the rim of the world.  
You saw these sky-wrapt towers,  
These terraced purple temples august and terrible.  
And over them—over—  
You gazed at the Celestial City,  
And counted the steps of gods on its ramparts,  
And saw the Great White Throne, all pearl and moonstone,  
Beyond, through the turquoise gates.

IN THE YELLOWSTONE

Little pin-prick geysers, spitting and sputtering;  
Little foaming geysers, that spatter and cough;  
Bubbling geysers, that gurgle out of the calyx of morning-  
glory pools;  
Laughing geysers, that dance in the sun, and spread their  
robes like lace over the rocks;  
Raging geysers, that rush out of hell with a great noise,  
and blurt out vast dragon-gulps of steam, and,  
finishing, sink back wearily into darkness;  
Glad geysers, nymphs of the sun, that rise, slim and nude,  
out of the hot dark earth, and stand poised in  
beauty a moment, veiling their brows and breasts  
in mist;  
Winged geysers, spirits of fire, that rise tall and straight  
like a sequoia, and plume the sky with foam:  
O wild choral fountains, forever singing and seething,  
forever boiling in deep places and leaping forth for  
bright moments into the air,  
How do you like it up here? Why must you go back to  
the spirits of darkness? What do you tell them  
down there about your little glorious life in the sun?

UTAH

It was a queer country your harsh Lord gave you,  
Great Brigham, whom I see coated and curled

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In bronze before me in the public square!  
It was a scraped and shining skeleton,  
Gnawed to the bone long since at God's first breakfast  
And thrown away to bleach out in the sun.  
Yet here He led you—  
The Lord and his vicegerent Joseph Smith—  
He ordered you  
To take the dead earth from His niggard hand  
And set His Throne up by the salty sea—  
The little bucketful of ocean, poured  
Over the desert's feet between the hills.

And so you starved and prayed,  
Thirsted and starved and prayed through the lean years,  
Keeping the faith, digging your little ditches,  
Making the desert blossom as the rose.  
You married many wives,  
And got you many children to fulfil  
The special order whispered in the night  
To His apostle by the Lord Himself—  
The God of Abraham, of Saul and David,  
Of Solomon and other lustful kings.

And here, tithe upon tithe, stone upon stone,  
Your saints built up His throne unto the Lord  
From plans the angel taught your hand to draw:  
His new Solomon's Temple, heaven-remembered,  
To rise again here at the western gate,  
And prove His glory in these latter days!



Great Brigham, sleeping now under the desert  
With all your wives,  
What summary vengeance have you meted out  
To that ironic angel?

*He alone builds  
Who builds for beauty, shrining his little truth  
In stones that make it fair.*

IN HIGH PLACES

My mountains, God has company in heaven—  
Crowned saints who sing to him the sun-long day.  
He has no need of speech with you—with you,  
Dust of his foot-stool! No, but I have need.  
Oh, speak to me, for you are mine as well—  
Drift of my soul. I built you long ago;  
I reared your granite masonry to make  
My house of peace, and spread your flowered carpets,  
And set your blue-tiled roof, and in your courts  
Made musical fountains play. Ah, give me now  
Shelter and sustenance and liberty,  
That I may mount your sky-assailing towers  
And hear the winds communing, and give heed  
To the large march of stars, and enter in  
The spirit-crowded courts of solitude.

*Harriet Monroe*

THE WHITE MOTH

Every night  
At my windy, when  
I quench the light  
Between nine an' ten,  
A White Moth  
Soars through the trees,  
Light as the froth  
Blown off of the seas.  
At the same time  
It flutters, white  
In the scented lime—  
Every night.  
Seems-like it is,  
When I draw the blind,  
As if the hair riz  
Straight off me mind.  
For, how do it come  
Just to the minute?—  
As if it heard some  
Clock strikin' in it.  
Seems like the spell  
Of some Mighty One,  
Come for to tell  
Of some thing I done!

*Rosamond Langbridge*

Seems like a sign  
I done him some hurt,  
When I whipped from his line  
Quilty's white shirt.

Me heart wouldn't crack—  
But the spell would break  
If I took it back  
As a little mistake.

Still . . . I'm no debtor  
To a bit of light froth:  
Maybe 'twould be better  
To crush the White Moth!

THE GENTLE HOUSEWIFE

There's the first white butterfly dancing abroad!  
There are wild wind-flowers dotting the sward;  
There are wild green breakers combing the bay;  
There's a red ferret darting over the way!

But I am chiding the children for being so wild;  
I am chiding the nurse for chiding the child;  
I am careful to lay down tea-leaves in the hall;  
I am gazing at that spot of mildew on the wall—  
And my heart is breaking, breaking,  
With the hatred of it all!

*Rosamond Langbridge*

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FULL OF LAUGHTER

Very full of laughter is the old man.  
The air is full of wings  
Of the little birds of laughter,  
Which the old man flings  
From his mouth up to the rafter  
In the white-washed ceiling  
That vibrates with his laughter  
And quivers and sings;  
Till the little birds come stealing  
To the lips whence they came,  
And you only hear the laughter  
In the shaking of the flame,  
In the tapping of the leaves,  
And you only hear the laughter  
Very faintly if at all;  
Until, as you drowse, suddenly, once more,  
He awakes with a roar,  
And the laughter goes flapping from the ceiling to the wall.  
Very full of laughter is the old man.

Very full of laughter is the old man? . . .  
I know not what I say,  
I mistrust what I hear.  
There's an evil tongue licking where the log-fires play,  
The round cat heaves with a laughter and a fear.  
There are wells lying deeper

*Louis Golding*

Than the laughter in his eyes,  
There are glooms lying deeper  
Than the lost lands of the sleeper,  
There are sounds behind the laughter  
Which I dare not follow after,  
There's a choked heart tolling and a dumb child cries.  
There's an old mouth full of laughter,  
But a dumb heart cries.

*Louis Golding*

### SYNCRASY

I am a reed  
Wind-throated and rain-tuned.  
You are the player,  
Wise as the world.

What will you blow through me, Softmouth?  
What sorrows must I echo  
From your honied lips  
To learn the sweetness of pain?  
What lachrymations must I silver  
To learn the bitterness of love?

I am a reed  
Waiting and silent.  
You are the player,  
Searching your heart.

*A. A. Rosenthal*



KING ALFRED AND THE PEASANT WOMAN

Throw me from the house—did he?  
Well, to new chivalry that is no great thing!  
I am my father's daughter, lady!  
And *he's* a pretty figure in the ring.

But my man, my master, there he sat a-dreaming  
While all the house might burn and he'd not sorrow;  
Nor had I any warrant that his scheming  
Would bring us any victory on the morrow.

And I spoke to him! Oh, I informed him!  
He'd be a dead man if he were not stung;  
Could any man keep hands down, and me lashing?  
Friend, you insult my tongue!

I'd rather he fought *me* than missed his combats,  
Though I'm not built for blows upon the heart.  
Give me a breast-plate, and I'll at 'em,  
Though that's fool-woman's part!

I love him; and when he comes back with honor  
After the fight I drove him to is won,  
He'll find his woman with her glory on her.  
Please God, the child's a son!

*Anna Wickham*

A POET ADVISES A CHANGE OF CLOTHES

Why wears my lady a trailing gown,  
And the spurious gleam of a stage queen's crown?  
Let her leap to a horse, and be off to the down!  
Astride, let her ride  
For the sake of my pride,  
That she is more ancient than Diana—  
Ancient as that she-ape who, lurking among trees,  
Dropt on a grazing zebra, gript him with her knees  
And was off across the breadths of the savannah;  
Barking her primal merry deviltry,  
Barking in forecast of her son's sovereignty.  
My timeless lady is as old as she,  
And she is moderner moreover  
Than Broadway, or an airship, or than Paris lingerie.

O my eternal dominating dear,  
How much less dated thou than Guinevere!  
Then for your living lover  
Change your gown,  
And don your queenship when you doff your crown.

*Anna Wickham*

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PREDICTION

In some inimical starry night  
When the worthies are abed,  
Suddenly will come a flight  
Of baleful things about your head.  
These will not be simply bats  
(These, imponderable as leaves),  
These will not be timid gnats—  
These will be audacious thieves:

Devils of the midnight's action,  
Wrong ones of the twisted spheres,  
A fluttering unholy faction  
Of Port Havoc mutineers.

In your spirit's corridors  
There will, that night, be strange things:  
What were dances will be wars,  
There will be vain imaginings—  
Slaughter and knavery and laughter,  
Sights to make a man afraid,  
Boozing, cajoling, boasts, and after  
(I need not say) you'll be betrayed. . . .

Since the story is so bitter  
The quaint world will find its proofs—  
What is left of you will flitter  
Like a grey cat on the roofs.

*Morris Gilbert*

## IN RUSSIA

### THE SPILLING OF THE WINE

The soldiers lie upon the snow,  
That no longer gyrates under the spinning lights  
Night juggles in her fat black hands.  
They will not babble any more secrets to loose-mouthed  
    nights  
Expanding in golden auras,  
While sleigh-bells jingle like new coins the darkness  
    shuffles . . .  
They will not drink any more wine—  
Wine of the Romanoffs,  
Jewelled wine  
The secret years worked slowly at  
Till it was wrought to fire,  
As stones are faceted  
Until they give out light.  
The soldiers lie very still.  
Their shadows have shrunk up close  
As toads shrink under a stone;  
And night and silence,  
The ancient cronies,  
Foregather above them.

But still over the snow, that is white as a ram's fleece,  
Arms swing like scythes . . .

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And shadows in austere lines  
Sway in a monstrous and mysterious ritual—  
Shadows of the Kronstad sailors  
Pouring blood and wine. . .  
Wine  
Spurting out of flacons in a spray of amethyst and gold,  
Creeping in purple sluices;  
Wine  
And blood in thin bright streams  
Besprinkling the immaculate snow;  
Blood, high-powered with the heat of old vineyards,  
Boring . . . into the cool snow . . .  
Blood and wine  
Mingling in bright pools  
That suck at the lights of Petrograd  
As dying eyes  
Suck in their last sunset.

The night has a rare savor.  
Out of the snow-piles—altar-high and colored as by a  
rosy sacrifice—  
Scented vapor  
Ascends in a pale incense . . .  
Faint astringent perfume  
Of blood and wine.



SNOW DANCE FOR THE DEAD

Dance, little children . . . it is holy twilight . . .  
Have you hung paper flowers about the necks of the ikons?  
Dance soft . . . but very gaily . . . on tip-toes like the  
snow.

Spread your little pinafores  
And courtesy as the snow does . . .  
The snow that bends this way and that  
In silent salutation.  
Do not wait to warm your hands about the fires.  
Do not mind the rough licking of the wind.  
Dance forth into the shaggy night that shakes itself upon  
you.

Dance beneath the Kremlin towers—golden  
In the royal  
Purple of the sky—  
But not there where the light is strongest . . .  
Bright hair is dazzling in the light.  
Dance in the dim violet places  
Where the snow throws out a faint lustre  
Like the lustre of dead faces . . .  
Snow downier than wild-geese feathers . . .  
Enough filling for five hundred pillows . . .  
By the long deep trench of the dead.

Bend, little children,  
To the rhythm of the snow

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That undulates this way and that  
In silver spirals.  
Cup your hands like tiny chalices . . .  
Let the flakes fill up the rosy  
Hollows of your palms  
And alight upon your hair,  
Like kisses that cling softly  
A moment and let go . . .  
Like many kisses falling altogether . . .  
Quick . . . cool kisses.

THE WHITE BIRD

Man of the flame-eyes  
And mouth with the bitter twist of in-grown laughter,  
And little bald man . . . whose seeming stillness  
Is akin to the velocity of a spinning star  
Holding its perfect poise—  
You two yea-sayers  
Beetling over the little deniers,  
Two great levelers, building from the earth up, among  
    puttiers and pluggers of rotten piles—  
You of the rich life, running in ample measure, amidst  
    life deleted of its old raw fire as earth is deleted  
    of its coal and iron—  
You be mighty hunters and keepers,  
Trotsky and Lenine—

*Lola Ridge*

Yet can you hold . . . the unconstrainable One  
Of the slow and flaming deaths  
And multiple resurrections?

Hands, reaching in hundreds of millions,  
Backs, straightening under the keeling floor of the world,  
Can you hold the great white bird?—  
She that sweeps low over the chain-gangs  
When they glance up from their stone-breaking  
Into morning's burning gold;  
She that goes down into underground cells,  
Sending the cool wind of her wings  
Through unsevering stone . . .  
And departs, unbeknown, from those who announce her,  
Saying: "Lo, she is ours!"

Ah, what a mighty destiny shall be yours,  
Should you persuade her—  
The Unconstrainable One  
Who has slid out of the arms of so many lovers,  
Leaving not a feather in their hands!

*Lola Ridge*

## COMMENT

SHELLEY

IN these days of revolutionary changes it is appropriate to be reminded of Shelley by the centenary of his death; and the reminder may well lead us to a deeper study of the man and his work than a casual reading of *The Cloud* and *The Skylark*. For of all the ranking English poets, Shelley was preëminently the poet with a message—a type somewhat decried by modern esthetic theorists, who would not permit the muse to stiffen her lips with didactic emphasis. Even Milton, the Puritan partisan of Cromwell, pleader for free speech, free thought, free divorce and other heresies, was a conservative conformist beside Shelley, whose stark idealism accepted no compromise, whose ardor for a complete revolution in human society would have been, like Lenin's, "the same in act as in desire" if he also could have faced the tragic ironies of fate by achieving political power.

Of course we have only the beginning of Shelley's thinking, for he was under thirty, and young for his age, when he died. Yet there is a kind of finality about it, for he seems youth incarnate, youth immortal, and perhaps, as with the great mystics among whom Mr. Yeats classes him, old age with him would have been but a diviner childhood. Aflame with reformatory zeal, he theorized with complete conviction; and his theoretic picture of a perfect world was as untroubled by common sense as a

cubistic painting, and as unaffected by the humane perspectives of humor. He had youth's singlemindedness, single-sightedness; perceiving a vivid truth, he struck out toward it through all obstacles, no matter how many conventions, laws, or even human hearts were broken on the way; only to be deflected from the immediate goal by the more flaming ardor of a newer revelation.

His creed was essentially Godwin touched by emotion, eighteenth-century radicalism transfigured by a poet's dreams. Freedom, sacrosanct and glorified, was its cardinal principle: evil is an accident; could man always have been free he would never have wandered from virtue—"government is but the badge of his degradation." Lift from his past history the incubus of the law, with its consequences of obedience, "fear, faith and slavery"; grant him through all his course freedom of thought, of action and of love, and man's career would have been one long millennium of universal justice. And now this long-delayed peace on earth must be invoked on the instant by chosen souls. Live out your life, fulfil all natural impulses so long as your heart is pure, restrain neither thought nor deed, and "neither change nor falter nor repent"—such was the counsel of perfection which his impulsive "practicalness" urged upon his puny neighbors and flaunted brightly in the face of the canting world. He had no time to wait or think. If his intellect built too slowly, his imagination lightly overleapt logic and perched upon cloudy ramparts for a sunrise song.



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The lyrics by which he is chiefly remembered were mere tangents from the rounding circle of his message—he would rather have destroyed them, probably, than let his fame rest upon such slight sparks of personal emotion, such flashes of joy or love or despair, thrown off casually while, from *Queen Mab* to *The Triumph of Life*, he was summoning to action the hosts of a happier world. The language of his summons was clear. In *The Masque of Anarchy* and certain more directly political poems of anathema his faith in the power of the human soul utters a command to the proletariat of his time:

Rise, like lions after slumber,  
In unvanquishable number!  
Shake your chains to earth like dew  
Which in sleep had fallen on you.  
Ye are many—they are few.

In *Prometheus Unbound* this faith becomes an assertion of man's ultimate supremacy, when "the painted veil . . . called life . . . is torn aside":

The man remains—  
Sceptreless, free, uncircumscribed, but man:  
Equal, unclassed, tribeless and nationless;  
Exempt from awe, worship, degree; the king  
Over himself; just, gentle, wise—but man.  
Passionless?—no; yet free from guilt or pain,  
Which were, for his will made or suffered them;  
Nor yet exempt, though ruling them like slaves,  
From chance and death and mutability—  
The clogs of that which yet might oversoar  
The loftiest star of unascended heaven,  
Pinnacled dim in the intense inane.

With a zealot's precision Shelley demanded the absolute. His was a religious spirit, always fascinated by the supernatural, seeking communion with an impalpable divine essence. Therefore, in spite of the buffetings of fate, he stands for the revelation to men of ineffable spiritual realities beyond the reach of sensuous experience. His soul flamed upward like Blake's, though with less detachment. He explored the empyrean, he touched the intangible; his poetry brought down to earth the vision of supernal beauty which had eluded even the blind eyes of Milton. Through him the vitality of mystical abstractions, the power and sweep of subtle unseen forces, the loveliness of secret beauty, the glory of naked truth, and the upward reach of the human mind toward the infinite splendor, are given the fiery proof of song. On earth he was ill at ease; in the highest heaven of imagination his poise was perfect. He never wavered in his flight, never stooped to catch the popular ear, never degraded for the sake of transient rewards a mission which seemed to him the holiest of all confided to mortal man. For poetry he held to be the noblest and most universal of the arts by which truth is made manifest to men, language being "as a mirror which reflects," and the materials of other arts "as a cloud which enfeebles, the light of which both are mediums."

One is tempted to quote whole pages of his magnificent *Defence of Poetry* in this connection, an essay which makes a royal progress through the universe, and shows that the

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spirit of poetry is the manifestation of the eternal order and harmony, the vitalizing and regenerating principle, the exemplar of wisdom and the revealer of love, the soul of aspiration, "the echo of the eternal music"; the destroyer, too, of wrong—a "sword of lightning, ever unsheathed, which consumes the scabbard that would contain it." As an art, "poetry redeems from decay the visitations of the divinity in man," being "the record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds." He defends these happiest and best minds, who "make immortal all that is best and most beautiful in the world," from the charges the world has brought against their lives; insisting that their frailties are merely the rebound of what is animal and passionate in their nature from a spiritual exaltation they experience and express but do not understand.

Poets are the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration; the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present; . . . the trumpets which sing to battle and feel not what they inspire; the influence which is moved not, but moves. Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.

He at least would be true to his high office. He would illumine a path for men's hopes to travel even though they mocked him. The glorious vision of an exalted destiny for his race was before him, and in the fit disclosure of that vision he felt secure of immortal influence, even though the world rejected him in life. And the world did reject him. He threw down the gauntlet and his country took

it up. His name was the synonym for unspeakable crimes, his poems were a target for the wrath and ridicule of reviewers, their small editions lay unsold with his publisher, and his sympathetic readers could be counted on the fingers of one hand. It was long after his death that the song of "the nightingale who sat in darkness" began to penetrate to men's ears.

For in form, as well as in feeling, Shelley was a revolutionist, and therefore unwelcome. English poetry was but newly awake from its eighteenth-century trance. Coleridge, Burns and the quiet Wordsworth had brushed away forever those reams of rhymed eloquence with which Pope and his kind had smothered the goddess; but the world was as yet scarcely aware of it, preferring the old heroics. Though Byron was forcing down its throat his modern message, Shelley and Keats were still exotics—outlandish birds singing a wild strain. Perhaps Shelley himself scarcely realized how different his style was from all that had been so long in vogue. Like every true poet, he had an instinct for form; and it was probably by instinct, rather than deliberate intention, that he followed Coleridge in breaking the long reign of the iambic measure, that he played with anapaests and trochees, and surpassed in delicate complexity of rhythm even the gay Elizabethans. For the expression of modern subtleties he added more strings to their instrument, and passed it on to us enriched with new notes and capable of a broader range.



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Beauty, love and freedom are the triune chord at the basis of Shelley's song. We hear it again and again, like the Holy Grail motive in *Parsifal*. *Prometheus Unbound* is the spirit of freedom, braving omnipotent tyranny for love of the human race, who still declares, after aeons of agony:

I would fain  
Be what it is my destiny to be,  
The savior and the strength of suffering man,  
Or sink into the original gulf of things—

and at whose release and reunion with Nature, when Eternity has conquered the evil principle of Power, all earth and her children rejoice in the ecstasy of inextinguishable love and holiness and peace. Shelley is at home in the heaven of heavens; the *Prometheus* soars like livid flame, and its choruses reach a celestial height of lyric exaltation. Whether spirits or echoes or furies speak, they speak with eternity behind and before them, reveal to us birthless and deathless minds.

*Prometheus* and *Adonais* and the lyrics are the best of Shelley; for in most of the longer poems, as even occasionally in these, he does not escape grandiloquence. With Coleridge and Burns and Keats he restored the lost Elizabethan tradition, resumed the grand manner, even though his one deliberately Elizabethan experiment was a failure. It is curious that this radical could not carry his radicalism into the theatre. *The Cenci* is an imitative dramatic essay rather than a drama, an experiment in the Elizabethan manner modified by classic austerities. It

out-Websters Webster in horrors, but misses Webster's vitality; its characters are premeditated types rather than suffering men and women.

Shelley met the world of men and women with the solemn, unquestioning belief of some flower or child, and when things proved not what they seemed he thought they must be the exact reverse. The strength of the recoil was the natural result of the violent eagerness of the attack, and it was all a part of his passionate youthfulness. For not only the glories of youth but its weaknesses were his—its irreverence, its fiery impatience, its haughty intolerance of the work-a-day world, its reckless daring in the first onset flagging under prolonged effort. Thus it is by his upward reach more than his capacity for sustained flight that Shelley wins his place among the masters. For this reason his lyrics are the most typical expression of his genius. These are the record of his ardent emotionalism; each one comes fresh from a burning mood. There is no time for inconstancy, for the dulling of the fine edge of inspiration, such as makes even the *Prometheus* strongest in its first act, a thing which can not be said of a faultless work of art.

If he had lived to be old the record might be different. But as yet his thinking had not passed through youth's sense of dissonance and unreality. When he died he was still aloof from life: "As to real flesh and blood," he said, "you know I do not deal in those articles;" and he called himself "the knight of the shield of shadow and the lance



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of gossamere." Humanity disappointed him, and even the momentary joy of dreams brought despair in its wake. It was because of the very ardor of his ecstasies that life was for Shelley a series of disillusionments. One after another the raptures of his youth went out, and his path grew darker and more lonely to the end. He died at a crucial point in his development, when everything seemed to be falling away from him, when the struggle with despondency was tempting him to suicide, "that golden key to the chamber of perpetual rest." If he had lived longer he must either have withdrawn more and more from actualities or have emerged into a more mature and humane wisdom.

But we need not quarrel with his fate, or lament that his eager, restless, baffled spirit found swift repose in death. Life could scarcely have satisfied him—in the very exaltation of his purpose lay its doom. As it is, we may recognize in him the spirit of immortal youth, who had scarcely time to cry, "Then what is life?" before fate sealed his lips. In *Adonais* he prophetically praises death as if for his own burial, but in that last moment of the storm on the Gulf of Spezia he might have sung a still grander song. For he was glad to die. He was one of

. . . the sacred few who could not tame  
Their spirits to the conqueror, but as soon  
As they had touched the world with living flame  
Fled back like eagles to their native noon.

H. M.

## *A New Pulitzer Prize*

### A NEW PULITZER PRIZE

The award of a Pulitzer Prize of one thousand dollars to the *Collected Poems* of Edwin Arlington Robinson is a most agreeable surprise, as this is the first Pulitzer Prize ever granted to a poet.

Four years ago, when the Poetry Society of America gave its first annual five hundred dollars to Sara Teasdale's *Love Songs*, the award, being made in conjunction with the Pulitzer prizes, was falsely attributed to the same origin. An editorial in *POETRY* for August, 1918, called attention, as follows, to the omission of poetry from the will:

Mr. Pulitzer's will, creating a school of journalism at Columbia University, with annual thousand-dollar prizes for a novel, an editorial, a book of science, etc., omitted poetry. Probably he never thought of it—nobody was thinking of poetry during the period when his will was drawn. Of course the omission of poetry from any prize-list which included at least two literary products, the novel and the play, was preposterous; and we may hope that the present donor, or other donors, may permanently atone for the slight with an annual prize as large as the other prizes.

The poem of each year—or book of poems—must be, we submit, at least as prize-worthy as the editorial of the year. It may be, of course, of a value immeasurably greater, for, by the favor of the gods, it may be a masterpiece, an enduring work of genius—a distinction which could scarcely be claimed for any editorial.

When this year's awards were announced, with Mr. Robinson's book among them, the editor wrote to Columbia University a letter inquiring about the improved status of poets; and received the following answer:

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*To the Editor:* In reply to your letter of May 24th I beg to say that the poetry prize to which you refer was established by the Advisory Board of the School of Journalism at their meeting in May, 1921, at which meeting it was on motion unanimously

"Resolved, That a prize of One thousand dollars be established for the best volume of verse published during the year by an American author."

The Board at the same time discontinued another prize for which there had been no competition, which action set free sufficient funds to establish the poetry prize. *Frank D. Fackenthal*

The initial award is of course worthy of all praise, though the committee may have regretted that they could not honor also Miss Millay's *Second April*. Indeed, the year 1921, presenting two such books, was singularly rich. The three members of the poetry jury were Wilbur L. Cross, Richard Burton and Ferris Greenslet. Though we cannot criticize the verdict in this case, we must repeat once more our plea that all juries should be strictly professional, and that poets alone have the right and the authority to award honors in their art. *H. M.*

### REVIEWS

#### CARLOS WILLIAMS' NEW BOOK

*Sour Grapes*, by William Carlos Williams. Four Seas Co.

This is, I believe, the fourth book that Dr. Williams has published. *The Tempers*, which came first, was a bit thin, but contained two fine poems of their sort. Next came *Al Que Quiere*, a hard-bitten book that attempted to create poetry out of urban modernity. *Sour Grapes*

develops, more or less, the manner of *Al Que Quiere*, and probably contains a greater number of successful poems. In between these two came *Kora in Hell*, a mass of prose fragments of Flaubertian precision, that as a whole got nowhere.

Dr. Williams has a considerable leaning toward the "conceit," and some of his finest poems are examples of it, although at other times he drags this structure in by the heels. By "conceit" I mean an intellectual relationship between two objects physically unrelated, one of which fuses with the sound and takes on an image existence. For example, the poem called *To Waken an Old Lady*:

Old age is  
a flight of small  
cheeping birds  
skimming  
bare trees  
above a snow glaze.  
Gaining and failing,  
they are buffeted  
by a dark wind.  
But what?  
On harsh weedstalks  
the flock has rested,  
the snow  
is covered with broken  
seedhusks,  
and the wind tempered  
by a shrill  
piping of plenty.

Such poems as this and *The Nightingales*, as the *Love*

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*Song* in *Al Que Quiere* beginning "Sweep the house clean," are as perfect and as final as Herrick; they make a reviewer feel ridiculous. But in *A Celebration* the method is worked to death—perhaps because it was a bit tired before it got under way and then had a long way to go; and in *Primrose* the conceit is superfluous. If we had been given the images without the explanatory yellow, they would have hit harder.

In such poems as *The Widow's Lament in Springtime*, however, one finds the simple physical image—the image without ulterior "meaning" or even metaphor—used with great power:

Today my son told me  
that in the meadows,  
at the edge of the heavy woods  
in the distance, he saw  
trees of white flowers.  
I feel that I would like  
to go there  
and fall into those flowers  
and sink into the marsh near them.

Dr. Williams concerns himself with certain phases of American life, which he seems to feel acutely; and up to date he is not the dupe of his material. That is, he knows that stenographic reports of snowbirds or hawthorns do not suffice, even when smeared with pretty language. He looks for relations and the sharpest way to get them down.

Despite all Dr. Williams' passion to the contrary, he is greatly influenced by his contemporaries and predecessors



—by which I do not mean to condemn him, but simply to indicate that he, like any good writer, is inextricably caught in Mr. Eliot's "tradition." His prose is obviously of the school of Flaubert, and his verse has gone through various influences. The poems in this book have, for the most part, worked away from the earlier jagged bitterness, into a certain serenity of manner that one associates with Mr. Pound's Chinese translations—a manner that Mr. Pound (among others) has used consciously and successfully. How conscious Dr. Williams' use of it may be, I do not know; but if it is used unconsciously, it may be dangerous—the poet may cease to be able to see his material through the sticky haze of his manner. Anyway one has a right to wonder, when so many of Dr. Williams' trivialities (*Spring*, *Epitaph*, etc.) have become sweet instead of censorable. His grapes are not so sour as they once were, although this may be no great matter.

There are more fine poems in the book than one can mention in a short review, among the most extraordinary being *Romance Moderne*, despite a few low spots. Occasionally a good poem is marred by some unnecessary triteness, as *Overture to a Dance of Locomotives* by its title and last line. Several fine poems have been omitted, among them *Wild Orchard* and *A Coronet*. I choose to end by quoting one poem without comment—*The Nightingale*:

My shoes, as I lean  
unlacing them,  
stand out upon



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flat worsted flowers  
under my feet.  
Nimbly the shadows  
of my fingers play  
unlacing  
over shoes and flowers.

*Yoor Winters*

A SUNLIT CLEARING

*Dreams Out of Darkness*, by Jean Starr Untermeyer. B.  
W. Huebsch.

Jean Starr Untermeyer is so completely a mistress of form, that, though at times her content is weak, one still admires. To have pinned down form in these days of wavering outline! *Lake Song* realizes the lake suggestion, the rush forward and the sudden restraint, through toning down, becoming almost prose but subtly avoiding prose. The rhythm grows upon one, but since the matter is slight and inapt, grows upon one as a pattern woven of air, such an intangible pattern as the wind might have woven above her lake. In *Sinfonia Domestica* and many other of the "woman" poems the poet is fundamental. These poems, when they do fail, fail for lack of *le mot juste*; they are always psychologically poignant. Mastery of form is one achievement; of spirit, another; of diction, word and image, still another. Although I can understand how one might call *Sinfonia Domestica* a fine poem for its theme and passion, for me, although I grant the theme and passion and call them fundamental, it is a "beating

about the bush": there are many words but few clear-cut images, so many words that the essential motive is almost submerged. For me the two lines in the poem are:

And bank my flame to a low hearth-fire, believing  
You'll come for warmth and life to its tempered glow.

*From the Road in November* is a good example of poetic paradox: expressing a thought in such a fashion as to create an atmosphere belying it. The first stanza is *The Road in November*, no questioning that; the second and third stanzas are comfortable pictures having nothing to do with either November or death, so completely departing from the keynote that the last two lines of the third stanza, in which the primary mood recurs, are rendered impotent.

But then the last line of *Little Dirge*—

My youth is slipping through the door—

is so complete and so profound that it might be one of Yvor Winters' *Musterbook* poems, and stand alone.

In *Berkshire Twilight*, again paradox. The first stanza is inconsequential; I quote the second:

Evening drops over their peaks  
And chars their flame.  
Their color sifts into grayness.  
With me it is the same.

A preponderance of *r*'s, voluptuous sound that nullifies the negativity of even such a word as *chars*. There are certain words that, in spite of their accepted definition,

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one may not use in writing in certain contexts. *Flame* and *color* here outweigh not only *grayness* and *sift*, but the three dulling periods. The poem has the effect of a double negative. Impressionism understands the art of juxtaposition of word as of sound and of color. I am put in mind of two lines of an autumn poem by Janet Lewis:

The deer, the deer, among the withered asters.  
The spider making tight his web.

*On Temples*, though propagandistic, is apt. *Eve Before the Tree* I should call a brave failure. The story scarcely lends itself to psychological treatment. It has in fact been told perfectly in the third chapter of Genesis. Consciousness is the anathema of this generation. Let us pray that our children will not be introspective. Eve analyzes, digs up motives; she is more the Eve of after the eating than before it. Not to mention such anachronisms as:

If there was life before  
I have forgotten it, nor can remember  
Father nor mother, sister, nurse, nor friend.

*Dreams Out of Darkness* is in truth uneven in texture. Throughout one finds an abundant womanly sympathy, the power of nice observation, and a deftness in the employment of metrics. The rhythms are plastic and comfortable. If one objects to the paucity of idea in, say, *Mist*, one finds oneself instantly refuted by the authenticity of *Anti-erotic* and *Little Dirge*. Throughout one finds vacillation between the naturalistic method and

*A Sunlit Clearing*

the conventionally poetic. The tone is muted, always in a low key. There are no new words, no significant digressions, no discoveries. But one has a sense of having gone into a woman's heart, found it lovely and understandable, and come out satisfied with womankind. The tiptoe of rapture, however, is not there. *Two and a Child* is perhaps representative:

Does the spring night call little boys  
As it calls their wild young mothers?  
But what can a child know of us—or others?  
He has different joys.

A tree that bends and almost smothers  
Two in the road who clasp and quiver,  
To him is only a swing by the river—  
One of his outdoor toys.

Put him to bed and let us flee  
Out in the night with other lovers.  
It will not be long till he discovers  
What's known to you and me.  
And then when a destined maiden hovers  
Near for what only he can give her . . .  
No! Close the door. What makes me shiver?  
I will stay here. Let me be.

*Pearl Andelson*

TARNISHED GOLD

*Paul Verlaine*, by Harold Nicolson. Houghton Mifflin Co.

This book is a dispassionate appraisal of the life and work of the greatest French symbolist poet. The reader who delights in a good biography should follow step by step through his dark byways of struggle this poet of the

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“shifty Mongolian eyes,” should apprehend his pitiful weaknesses and failures. He was like other boys constitutionally, although perhaps handicapped by the fact that he was the only child of parents who were already middle-aged when he was born. It is interesting to read of his days of schooling, of how at eighteen he obtained his degree at the Sorbonne, “like other ordinary French schoolboys, with no brilliance, but quite creditably.” Mr. Nicolson tells us that in general Verlaine’s childhood had little effect upon his future development. The great factor in his life was alcohol, and this had not menaced him before the age of eighteen.

Verlaine’s life is the story of hopes and disappointments not unknown to other poets. But in his case the green of absinthe spread its taint over everything. He made great efforts at reform, notably once when for a year the influence of his young wife kept him sober. But the evil days returned invariably, and he became an habitual inebriate. It is hard to believe that in spite of the devils which were dragging him down his literary output did not seem to suffer, and that some of his most beautiful poems were born of these times.

And yet many of those which he wrote before this period have touched the human heart more poignantly than those of his maturer years; indeed in the last few years of his life his work sometimes showed Symbolism gone wrong—it was so steeped in intimate details as to be banal. But Verlaine at his best can throw us into an



atmosphere: if he writes about a mist, the hair feels wet with mist; if he writes of a garden we actually inhale the warm perfume, so subtly does he use intimacy, suggestion, association—the fundamentals of Symbolism. Other poetry has had these qualities, from the Greeks down; but, as Mr. Nicholson points out: "The Symbolists were the first to raise what had been an accidental virtue in others to the level of a doctrine for themselves." And he says also: "Verlaine did not invent Symbolism—he certainly did not direct its future development; but he was able at the psychological moment to catch and reflect the floating aspiration, and to give to it a definite cadence and a form."

A comparatively large portion of the book is devoted to the life of Arthur Rimbaud, and after reading these chapters we realize that to have given less space to the subject would have been to omit what is a valuable contribution to a true understanding of Verlaine's character. Mr. Nicholson has scant liking for Rimbaud, and his picture of this writer is not attractive. A large, red-fisted boy, with filthy hair that hung down lank between his shoulders, a snub nose and a damp fleshy mouth. He regards his entrance into the life of Verlaine as the greatest influence for evil that ever came near it. He tells us how Rimbaud forced himself upon Verlaine, how Verlaine forced Rimbaud upon his literary intimates in Paris—a very tactless performance, and how he dragged him to gatherings where he behaved like the boor he was and



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from which he was promptly excluded. He became linked with all his friend's doings: he drank with him, helped him to spend his poor mother's capital, left him when there were no resources, and reappeared when he found it to his profit to do so; and he enticed him on the fateful and ever to be regretted trip to London.

Yet the most enthusiastic followers of Rimbaud cannot accuse Mr. Nicolson of having failed to estimate his work at its true value. In speaking of the *Bateau Ivre* he calls it an astounding production:

That is should be the work of a boy of sixteen is well-nigh incredible. In the glare of its inspiration the glib architecture of the Parnassians, the cadence of Verlaine's own poetry, assume but a paltry complexion. No wonder that the generation of today looks for stimulus to Rimbaud rather than to Verlaine or even Mallarmé—to Rimbaud, who at nineteen was forever to fling literature behind him.

He designates *Saison en Enfer* as an acid human document, and speaks at length of *Les Illuminations*, which, after the former, is most typical of Rimbaud's "unpleasing genius." *Aube*, in this collection, he considers to be as fine a prose poem as exists in any language.

Mr. Nicolson explains that he had hoped at first to give in an appendix a translation of the poems quoted in the text. We are glad that he abandoned the plan. Doubtless he, if anyone, could express Verlaine's poetry in English. But attempts by others to render into our language even French poets more easily translated are almost sure to be disappointing, few of the results rising above libretto English. Mr. Nicolson has decided wisely,

and it is a pleasure to find that he has given us almost all of the poems which are the most exquisite or the most characteristic in the tongue in which they were meant to exist. The author says: "Verlaine of all poets is too elusive to admit of translation, and above all of a literal translation into English prose." This is what I have maintained whenever I have spoken of Verlaine's work in other articles in this magazine. The peculiar music is purely an emanation of his own atmosphere—perhaps more so than in the case of any other foreign poet. His syncopation is of the sort to be found in no other language than his own. To omit it, or to try to approach its like, could hardly fail to be a distortion.

This whole book is carried through with a subtle, yet firm and often audacious touch. Scholarly it certainly is, but not in the sense of that word which restricts the pedagogic mind. There are a few inaccuracies—the American reader will be surprised to learn that Stuart Merrill is an Englishman!—and there are occasional phrases which startle; but these are slight flaws.

The author bares Verlaine's weaknesses and gives his mitigating characteristics, without a hint as to his own opinions regarding them. He lays the facts before you, and it is for you to conclude. He tells us, incidentally, in the Rimbaud chapters, that Verlaine had no spark of jealousy or personal ambition, and that he flung himself with real generosity into the task of helping other poets. Those who derive from this poet's work only an aroma of

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the wine-shop, who picture him first of all as a vulgar sot, will have a change of heart after reading this biography. Paul Verlaine had noble traits, he had lovable traits; and these went into his poetry. *Agnes Lee Freer*

SLAVIC POETRY

*Modern Russian Poetry*, selected and translated by Babette Deutsch and Avrahm Yarmolinsky. Harcourt, Brace & Co.

*Anthology of Modern Slavonic Literature*, translated by P. Selver. E. P. Dutton & Co.

*Modern Czech Poetry*, translated by P. Selver. E. P. Dutton & Co.

*An Anthology of Yugoslav Poetry*. Edited by Dr. B. S. Stanoyevich. Richard G. Badger.

The vigor and elegantly tutored violence of the Russian ballet, the drastic investigations and discoveries of Russian fiction, the naive splendor of Russian painting, and Russian music with its delicate French soul in a rioting body, may lead you to expect, in Russian poetry, something equally vivid and fresh, a balancing surprise. You may be prepared, as I was, to add to the French and English—the only modern literatures, so far as I can discover, that have a life and character of their own and enjoy the distinction of possessing masterpieces—a Russian literature embodying that figment of the European imagination, the Slavic Soul.

*Modern Russian Poetry*, if approached with such expectations, will bring a somewhat chilly disillusion. For until the last pages there are no particularly arresting poems. And the last poems, while they deal with events that may be localized, have fortunately no local flavor. They are written in the tone and from the attitude of the modern man everywhere in the world; in the same idiom and with the same ratiocination.

In many ways the haunting anachronism of Russia's political machine has stalked and parried its poems. One feels not only confusion, but even evasion, of realities. Russian poets have been led to sentimentalize their attitude to the land, to life, to the peasantry, to the misery of Russia. Patriotism and Revolution trespass continually, and are unpleasantly immobilized in figures of speech. And too often the poets' exaltation is the rapid breath of running away; their simplicity, the content of hasty refuge.

Russian life is too tentative, too provisional. *If* stands stark in the thinking; the hurdle of every decision. To my mind, it has been the reason for much of the mysticism. Much of the pessimism and despair is also traceable to this ghastly warning. To be faced continually with this lean and quick-legged and always outstripping *If* is finally to lose hope.

Alexander Blok in his wonderful *Scythians* repeats it. Russia is undecided, wavering. She is between East and West, between a beloved betrayer and his foe ambushed



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by her elbow. Magnificent and challenging is the poem; a clue to the instability of Russian life.

As this anthology reveals it, we have the poetry of a troubled minor literature, exceedingly rich in promise. Unless it is a mere activity of sick nerves, the intensity of life in Russia today should bring great poetry—is bringing a hint of it in the poetry of the minute.

The book may be regarded also as a fine contribution to English literature. Never is one conscious that the work is a translation. For the approximately one hundred and twenty Russian poems which have been rendered, parallel English poems have been created.

The notes are perhaps too copious. They make of the book almost a guide to Russian literature, with excerpts for illustration. The method betrays itself most keenly when, in the case of Baratynsky, a closely printed paragraph of two hundred words introduces a verselet of six puny lines whose banality too impudently satirizes the expectations raised by the fattening preface.

To realize that nationalism has made a great master of Pushkin is to appreciate the unhappy effects of this virtuoso emotion, proud of the iridescence of stagnation. Reports come that young poets are harking back to Pushkin—it is pitiful, with so many powerful men about them.

To me the book's area of interest begins with Valery Brusov, although stray poems before him paint the desert. Ivanov, Blok, Byely, Kluyev, Yesenin, Oreshin, and Marienhof—these shouting, a bit strident, a bit knowing,

but independent and conscious young poets are the poets of Russia. The buzzing Pushkin, the crooning Lermontov, the ballyhooing Konstantin Balmont, are the bad starts of Russian poetry.

These young men write as original poets are writing in England, France and America. Marienhof might almost be a Russian visit of Ezra Pound:

Jesus is on the Cross again, and Barrabas  
We escort, mealy-mouthed, down the Tverskoi Prospekt. . .  
Who will interrupt, who? The gallop of Scythian horses?  
Violins bowing the Marseillaise?

.....  
Pile rubbish, all the rubbish in a heap;  
And like Savonarola, to the sound of hymns,  
Into the fire with it. . . Whom should we fear?—  
When the mundiculi of puny souls have become—worlds.

A quatrain from Yesenin contains an image that has obsessed me:

From empty straths, a slender arch ascending:  
Fog curls upon the air and, moss-wise, grows;  
And evening, low above the wan streams bending,  
In their white waters washes his blue toes.

These whispers will not give any suggestion of the full-throated singing of the two poets quoted. For these, and their splendid company in the last half of the book, redeem the whole book; make it about as valuable as any book of poetry recently issued in America.

Mr. Selver's *Anthology of Slavonic Literature* attempts too much, and therefore the results are negligible. The job might as well not have been done. To represent



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adequately the prose of Russia, Poland, Bohemia, Jugoslavia, etc., in one ordinary volume, and pack in the poetry of these peoples as well, is so obviously futile that it is a wonder to me that so accomplished an editor and critic tried to do it.

Mr. Selver's book of Czech verse is admirable, however. The translation flavor is sometimes on these verses, but it gives an exotic aroma which makes one pleasantly aware of tasting something foreign. One feels that the pre-contemporary Czech poets were stronger and more robust than their brothers in Russia. This little book will serve as a companion to *Modern Russian Poetry*, although different in spirit and manner, and even in format. The original texts are included.

Space is lacking for extracts, which indeed would give scarcely a hint of the quality of some of the poetry in this book; but I wish to call attention to a remarkable nationalist, whose utterance has the stark obsessive simplicity of frenzy, and is extraordinarily effective: Pietr Bezruc, whose poems are too long and continuous for quotation. They are written somewhat in the sweeping manner of Whitman, who has strongly influenced Czech poetry.

The Stanoyevich anthology is mentioned last because it has so little affinity with the others. Its title is anomalous, for all the poetry given is folk-song. The specimens given are melodious, charming, but a bit one-stringed and monotonous.

*Isidor Schneider*

## NOTES

Mr. Alfred Kreymborg, author of *Mushrooms*, *Blood of Things*, *Plays for Poem-mimes*, *Plays for Merry-Andrews*, founder of *Others* of happy memory, has often appeared in POETRY. Since his retirement from the editorship of the international monthly *Broom*, Mr. and Mrs. Kreymborg have left Rome and at last accounts were sojourning at Rapallo. *Pianissimo* will be included in a book to be published this autumn—by which of his numerous publishers the author does not state.

Miss Lola Ridge, now once more in New York, has recently become the American editor of *Broom*, with an office at 3 East Ninth Street. Her books, *The Ghetto* and *Sun-up*, are published by B. W. Huebsch.

Mr. John Hall Wheelock, of New York, author of *Dust and Light* and earlier books of verse, will publish, through Charles Scribner's Sons, a new book this autumn.

Mr. Morris Gilbert is now once more in New York, after his naval service in the war and later experiences in the Near East and elsewhere. His first volume, *A Book of Verse*, was issued privately in 1917.

Mr. A. A. Rosenthal is now living in Birmingham, Ala.

Of the three English poets represented this month, two have appeared before in POETRY:

Mrs. Anna Wickham's first book, *The Contemplative Quarry*, was first published in London, by the Poetry Book Shop, in 1915, when Padraic Colum reviewed it in our pages. Last year Harcourt Brace & Co. issued a larger volume under a double title, *The Contemplative Quarry and The Man with a Hammer*, with an appreciative introduction by Louis Untermeyer. A new volume will appear this autumn.

Mr. Louis Golding is the author of *Sorrows of War* (E. P. Dutton & Co.) and *Shepherd Singing Ragtime*. Mr. Golding, usually in London, is now sojourning in the Austrian Tyrol.

Miss Rosamond Langbridge, a resident of Hambrook, Hampshire, England, is the only poet of the month who is new to our readers.

Mr. E. K. Broadus requests the correction of an error in the *Notes* of our May number. He is of the faculty of the University of Alberta, Canada, not the University of Manitoba.

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### BOOKS RECEIVED

#### ORIGINAL VERSE:

- All Around Brunswick*, by Annie O'Connor. Glover Bros., Brunswick, Ga.  
*The Soul's Voice*, by Elizabeth Voss. Richard G. Badger.  
*Song and Dream*, by D. W. Newsom. Stratford Co., Boston.  
*Singing Rivers*, by Dorothy Una Ratcliffe. Bodley Head, London.  
*Moonlight and Common Day*, by Louise Morey Bowman. Macmillan Co. of Canada, Toronto.  
*Satire and Romance*, by Noah F. Whitaker. Pri. ptd., Springfield, O.  
*Heavenly Mansions*, by C. C. Walsh. Pri. ptd., San Angelo, Tex.  
*Point de Mire*, by Celine Arnauld. Jaques Povolosky & Co., Paris.  
*Sonnets from Tuscany and Other Poems*, by Lucia. Basil Blackwell, Oxford, Eng.  
*A Gate of Cedar*, by Katharine Morse. Macmillan Co.  
*Blue Lakes to Golden Gates*, by Saxe Churchill Stimson. Pri. ptd., Milwaukee, Wis.  
*Slabs of the Sunburnt West*, by Carl Sandburg. Harcourt, Brace & Co.

#### ANTHOLOGIES AND TRANSLATIONS:

- Prosas Profanas*, by Ruben Dario. Translated by Charles B. McMichael. Nicholas L. Brown, New York.  
*Old English Poetry—Translations into Alliterative Verse*, by J. Duncan Spaeth. University Press, Princeton, N. J.  
*Companions—an Anthology*. Samuel A. Jacobs, New York.  
*Poems from Punch, 1909-1920*, edited by W. B. Drayton Henderson. Macmillan & Co., London.

#### PROSE:

- The Laureateship: A Study of the Office of Poet Laureate, with Some Account of the Poets*, by Edmund Kemper Broadus. Clarendon Press, Oxford, Eng.  
*Creative Unity*, by Sir Rabindranath Tagore. Macmillan Co.  
*Four Doses*, by Igie Pulliam Wetterdorf. Stratford Co.  
*The New Poetry—A Study Outline*, prepared by Mary Prescott Parsons. H. W. Wilson Co., New York.  
*On English Poetry*, by Robert Graves. Alfred A. Knopf.  
*The So-called Human Race*, by Bert Leston Taylor. Alfred A. Knopf.

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