# The All-American Poets

"The most poetic period in native literature" is Louis Untermeyer's estimate of the last few decades in these United States, and to prove this point he has gathered into a peculiarly attractive small blue volume examples of *Modern American Poetry* ranging from Emily Dickinson to Stephen Benet. It is a comprehensive and unusually satisfying collection, including almost all of the poems you would have picked out yourself—the test of perfection in any anthology. To any one who doubts the existence of American verse as distinct from British it will be illuminating. It would be a first class book to give to a foreigner sincerely curious to know something of that spirit of America we talk so much about, for the spirit really exists between those two blue covers.

Louis Untermeyer has done another thing which it is harder to understand, to wit *Including Horace* which is, he says, "an effort to suggest, through the veil of parody, how certain other poets would have used Horatian subjects." He presents "Integer vitae" as it might have been written by Robert Browning, Amy Lowell, Irving Berlin and others. It is an amusing performance with an immense deal of skill and labor behind it but it leaves you with the same, well, what of it feeling that you have after watching a man on a tight rope.

If *Modern American Poetry* excites, as it undoubtedly will, a desire for a wider knowledge of the field there are a number of recent volumes which will interest you.

In Edgar Lee Masters' *Starved Rock* there is little music but much food for thought, thought on man and America and hypocrisy and a good many other things worth thinking about even though you do not in the least agree with the poet's point of view.

In Arthur Guiterman's *Ballads of Old New York* a delightful idea is somewhat disappointingly worked out. He has found and dug up and invented legends of old Manhattan in its Dutch, English Colonial and Revolutionary periods and has woven them into ballads with interludes of various form between.

Among the poets whom Mr. Untermeyer might have included in his anthology, and didn't, is Mary Carolyn Davies. Youth is her greatest asset and her greatest joy, her poetry is spilling over with it; but youth does not exclude technique in which she is very skilful. Though she does some elaborate things well she is at her best in simple little eight line verses, like "The Door:"

The littlest door, the inner door,
I swing it wide.
Now in my heart there is no more
To hide.

The farthest door—the latch at last
Is lifted; see.
I kept the little fortress fast.
—Be good to me.

Her poetry is astonishingly intimate, the revelation apparently of the innermost depths of her soul which makes it peculiarly poignant and effective, but also leaves you with a devout thankfulness that you are not her best friend.

A poet as reserved as Mary Carolyn Davies is confiding is George O'Neil, who is also very young. "Always," as Zoe Akins say in her enthusiastic introduction to *The Cobbler in Willow Street*, "his is the composed statement of the artist—never the disconcerted and disconcerting struggle merely of a personality recording itself." Which does not mean for a moment that the writer is unstirred by emotion or that he leaves his reader so. The emotion is quiet but very sweet and tender and there is a fascinating originality in his turns of thought and phrase:

April brings her violets—
Introspective little things that hide in leaves;
And nuns—do you ever think of violets as nuns?

To leap from youth to age we have Marjorie Allen Seiffert boldly labeling her book of poems, *A Woman of Thirty*, and of course, consequently, the poems are sophisticated and a little cynical. She writes free verse naturally, unaffectedly and effectively. It is clear cut verse, most of it, a little hard, wrought in metals, like her "Japanese Vase":

Five harsh, black birds in shining bronze come crying
Into a silver sky.
Piercing and jubilant is the shape of their flying,
Their beaks are pointed with delight,
Curved sharply with desire.
The passionate direction of their flight,
Clear and high,
Stretches their bodies taut like humming wire.

The cold wind blows into angry patterns
the jet-bright
Feathers of their wings,
Their claws curl loosely, safely, about
nothingness.
They clasp no things.

The rest has an unfortunate echo of Keats.

Tertius Van Dyke writes poetry in the manner of his father, but not quite so well. The *Songs of Seeking and Finding* are unfortunately well named; in the midst of a good deal of obvious morality and many poetic commonplaces there are flashing bits of real originality and song.

**Modern American Poetry, by Louis Untermeyer. Harcourt, Brace & Howe. *Including Horace*, by Louis Untermeyer. Harcourt, Brace & Howe. *Starved Rock*, by Edgar Lee Masters. MacMillan Co. *Ballads of Old New York*, by Arthur Guiterman. Harper & Bros. *Youth Riding*, by Mary Carolyn Davies. Macmillan Co. *The Cobbler in Willow Street*, by George O'Neil. Boni & Liveright. *A Woman of Thirty*, by Marjorie Allen Seiffert. Alfred A. Knopf. *Songs of Seeking and Finding*, by Tertius Van Dyke. Charles Scribner's Sons.**