

THE POEMS OF THE MONTH

Selected by Babette Deutsch

FOR the most part the verse in the May magazines seems to fall between the two stools of technical competence and emotional content. It sits firmly on neither. The poet who significantly achieves both values is Winifred Welles, a young woman whose work is distinguished by its rare blend of austerity and richness. Here is her "Moors", appearing in "The New Republic":

MOORS

Thin landlord of a scattering estate,
The sea's soil is the one I understand.
There is in me no steamy loam of land,
Compacted for one purpose, love or hate.
But particles that will not integrate,
That slip, minute Saharas, from the hand,
Grained to disperse — in such uneasy sand
My mind confronts its own most colorless trait.

Few are the vagabonds whose gray shoes
bless
My blurred roads leading nowhere — save
the sea —
Yet, in my weedy shade, those few will stay
Whole summers long, and take deep breaths
of me,
As if to drink my thirst, and carry away
Sweet-smelling armfuls of my dreariness.

Winifred Welles
—The New Republic

The same periodical indulges in two other quotable poems, both, like Miss Welles's "Moors", concerning themselves with the natural world of which man is the mere casual observer. This choice of theme is expected of Robert Frost, and one expects of him, perhaps, a stricter terseness than he has achieved in his still charming "Our Singing Strength".

OUR SINGING STRENGTH

It snowed in spring on earth so dry and warm
The flakes could find no landing place to
form.
Hordes spent themselves to make it wet and
cold,
And still they failed of any lasting hold.
They made no white impression on the black.
They disappeared as if earth sent them back.
Not till from separate flakes they changed at
night
To almost strips and tapes of ragged white
Did grass and garden round confess it
snowed,
And all go back to winter but the road.
Next day the scene was piled and puffed and
dead.
The grass lay flattened under one great
tread.
Borne down until the end almost took root,
The rangey bough anticipated fruit
With snow-balls cupped in every opening
bud.
The road alone maintained itself in mud,
Whatever its secret was of greater heat
From inward fires or brush of passing feet.

In spring more mortal singers than belong
To any one place cover us with song.
Thrush, bluebird, blackbird, sparrow and
robin throng;
Some to go further north to Hudson's Bay,
Some that have come too far north back
away,
Really a very few to build and stay.
Now was seen how these liked belated snow.
The fields had nowhere left for them to go;
They'd soon exhausted all there was in
flying;
The trees they'd had enough of with once
trying
And setting off their heavy powder load.
They could find nothing open but the road.
So there they let their lives be narrowed in
By thousands the bad weather made akin.
The road became a channel running flocks
Of glossy birds like ripples over rocks.
I drove them underfoot in bits of flight
That kept the ground, almost disputing right
Of way with me from apathy of wing,
A talking twitter all they had to sing.
A few I must have driven to despair
Made quick asides, but having done in air

A whirl among white branches great and small
 As in some too much carven marble hall
 Where one false wing beat would have
 brought down all,
 Came tamely back in front of me the Drover
 To suffer the same driven nightmare over.
 One such storm in a lifetime couldn't teach
 them
 That back behind pursuit it couldn't reach
 them;
 None flew behind me to be let alone.

Well, something for a snowstorm to have
 shown
 The country's singing strength thus brought
 together,
 That though repressed and moody with the
 weather,
 Was none the less there ready to be freed
 And sing the wild flowers up from root and
 seed.

Robert Frost
 —*The New Republic*

Joseph Auslander uses a free rhythm
 for his "In Envy of Cows", a poem
 which exhibits his wonted awareness
 of the tone-color of words.

IN ENVY OF COWS

The cow swings her head in a deep drowsy
 half-circle to and over
 Flank and shoulder, lunging
 At flies; then fragrantly plunging
 Down at the web-washed grass and the golden
 clover,
 Wrenching sideways to get the full tingle;
 with one warm nudge,
 One somnolent wide smudge
 Sacred to kine,
 Crushing a murmurous afternoon of late
 lush August to wine!

The sky is even water-tone behind suave
 poplar trees —
 Color of glass; the cows
 Occasionally arouse
 That color, disturb the pellucid cool poplar
 frieze
 With beauty of motion slow and succinct like
 some grave privilege
 Fulfilled. They taste the edge
 Of August, they need
 No more; they have rose vapors, flushed
 silence, pulpy milkweed.

Joseph Auslander
 —*The New Republic*

This month brings two interesting
 things by Miss Millay. "The Concert",
 appearing in "Poetry", expresses the

mood of a music lover who happens to
 be a lover as well, and catches the mo-
 ment of conflict in a net of beautifully
 woven words. I quote "To a Dying
 Man" ("Vanity Fair") instead, not
 because it is the better poem, but be-
 cause its sestet is so admirably and
 memorably done.

TO A DYING MAN

Your face is like a chamber where a king
 Dies of his wounds, untended and alone,
 Stifling with courteous gesture the crude
 moan
 That speaks too loud of mortal perishing,
 Rising on elbow in the dark to sing
 Some rhyme now out of season but well
 known
 In days when banners in his face were blown
 And every woman had a rose to fling.

I know that through your eyes which look
 on me
 Who stand regarding you with pitiful breath,
 You see beyond the moment's pause, you see
 The sunny sky, the skimming bird beneath,
 And, fronting on your windows hopelessly,
 Black in the noon, the broad estates of Death.

Edna St. Vincent Millay
 —*Vanity Fair*

And finally, I should quote, had it
 not appeared in *THE BOOKMAN*, "The
 Bully", one of Robert J. Roe's neat bits
 of impressionism called "The Lettish
 Sailor Speaks".

There are several things among
 the May poems which are less provoca-
 tive than those quoted, but yet have
 points of excellence. Genevieve Tag-
 gard's "Outer Circle" in "The Lyric
 West", for example, so employs an old
 image as to make it seem strikingly
 fresh. "The Measure" relieves an ex-
 ceptionally poor issue with a neat son-
 net by Frank Ernest Hill, "Midnight
 Tenement", and a slight if charming
 piece by Jeanne d'Orge, called "A
 Child Much Loved of Poets"; and
 lastly, "The Dial" publishes an ob-
 scure sonnet, "Festoons of Fishes",
 written by that exquisitely humorous
 troubadour, Alfred Kreymborg.