

A long white feather slanted back...
Like an innocent evasion.

Except that his metaphoric associations are too often explained ("The old men are my thoughts"), Mr. Bodenheim, in his blending of details and categories, is a kind of unconscious surrealist. He also anticipated, though not alone in his time, the preoccupation of later poets with such apparently unpromising subjects as discarded steel rails, pavements, and garbage heaps.

The last section contains "Poems of Social Message": against war, against class injustice, against race prejudice. With the convictions and attitudes of this work it is impossible not to agree, but one may feel that this sort of "poetry" is hardly distinguishable from fervid journalism, although, compared with the earliest poems, these have the advantage of directness and readability.

Mr. Bodenheim's most successful work falls between the arch and literary poems of his youth and his recent manifesto verse. Written, most of them, in his middle period, these have the impact of his man-with-the-hoe social awareness but are more than bare statements. They have broken free from the juggled metaphors to a cleaner and more unified style, often strong and terse; they are reinforced with wit and an observation firm but sympathetic. His method shows itself to best advantage in such poems as "Steel-Mills: South Chicago," "The Steam Shovel," "Baseball Game," and some of the strongly accented "Jazz Poems."

**FRASER YOUNG'S
LITERARY CRYPT: No. 196**

A cryptogram is writing in cipher. Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle. Answer No. 196 will be found in the next issue.

DVJ JTMVZBJ TIO BOZOITHHM

HVWO LAYOZ'J HOEEOIJ: THH

EDO GVED VS VZ EDO

GAJEJUIVGE. JTVN TSACE

UDTIHOJ HTYS. LVHHVTY

DTPHVEE.

Answer to Literary Crypt No. 195
What is fame? an empty bubble;
Gold? a transient, shining trouble.
—"Solitude."
JAMES GRAINGER.



Poems... by Ralph Hodgson

... Don't forget
That the cowslip, rose and violet
Are Facts of Life as well ...

* * *

"Old World, go when you wish,
We Mod—"

"So you were saying
At Ur and Carcemish
And Nineveh. I'm staying."

* * *

TIME

Spiralwise it spins
And twirls about the Sun,
Both with and withershins
At once, a dual run
Anomalously one;
Its speed is such it gains
Upon itself: outsped,
Outdistanced, it remains
At every point ahead,
No less at all points led,
At none with either strains
Or lapses in the rush
Of its almighty vanes
To mar the poise or hush;
Comparing it for speed:
Lightning is a snail
That pauses on its trail
From bank to underbrush,
Mindful of its need,
With dawn astir, to feed
Before the morning thrush;
Comparing it for poise:
The tops we spun to sleep,
Seemingly so deep
Stockstill, when we were boys,
No more than stumbled round,
Boxwoods though they were,
The best we ever wound
Or whipped of all such toys;
Comparing it for sound:
The wisp of gossamer
Caught in a squirrel's fur,
Groans like a ship aground;
Shadow makes more noise.

* * *

... Such dreams as lay our being bare
And show us what we truly are—

Bliss to wake from,
Even into the prison of care
We sleep to break from.

THE PEACE

And now beware the tearful rogue
Who pities the tapeworm, not the dog.

* * *

Who shall paraphrase a tear!

* * *

"Poetaster!" "Good: I'll twinkle in
the sky!"

QUEER—QUEER

As a face at a bricked up window,
Or the banging of a door in the desert,
This: "Poking your nose in every-
where!"

"Me?" "You—I give you warning!
'F I catch you in my dreams again,
I'll break your neck next morning!"

* * *

Truth, it is feared, will yet prevail.

* * *

There's one thing to be said for sin—
It does give conscience exercise.

* * *

THE HEVER PICNIC*

Shock howled: the merry buzz stopped
dead:

All but Anne went terrified,
As round the bush at a tall man's
stride

Came Luckie Lee,
Queen of the Egyptians.

Anne, cutting her a slice of pound-
cake, said:

"Why d'you stare so—what d'you see!
Staring like a hawk at me,
Good woman?"

"H'm," their guest replied,
"Weddings . . . beddings . . . and . . ."
"And what?"

The lovely Bullen begged

"And that
is all, so far as I can see,"

And—muttering to herself aside:
"Not for both her silver bracelets"—
Round the bush at twice the stride

Went Luckie Lee,
Queen of the Egyptians.

*Hever Castle, in Kent, was the
Boleyns' family seat. There Henry
VIII courted Anne.

Flaccidity and Feathered Navels

XII POEMS. By Francis Coleman Rosenberger. New York: Gotham Book Mart. 1946. Unpagged. \$1.

EROTIC POEMS. By Philip Lamantia. Berkeley, Calif.: Bern Porter. 1946. 42 pp. \$2.

Reviewed by DUDLEY FITTS

SPEAKING of Mr. Lamantia's work in his introduction to "Erotic Poems," Mr. Kenneth Rexroth rather solecistically observes that "it has a great drive and excitement that only comes with the conviction that what one has to say is of great importance and people had ought to listen." How he arrived at this conclusion in the present instance, I do not know; the dismal syntax suggests rather the slapdash compliment than the pondered conviction; but what he says is an excellent measure of the value of poetry, and one which I should like to apply to both books.

It may be said at once that "XII Poems" comes closer to measuring up to it than does "Erotic Poems," yet even "XII Poems" is notably flaccid, lacking in "drive and excitement." Eight of the poems are either nerveless exercises ("Museum Piece," "The Settlement of Virginia," "Notes for a Portrait") which never seem to get under way, or windy commonplaces ("Jefferson at Monticello"). "The Settlement of Virginia," for instance, is a monochromatic statement of colonial migration: the "contrivers and intriguants" sail from England, cross the ocean "Above the unlighted cities of shell [Rimbaud?], leaving / The gull's arc to windward" (MacLeish?), move onward to the new world; and finally, after five short strophes of undistinguished motion, the last line informs us that they "Settled Virginia." And so they did. But since there is no especial particularity of image, and since metric and diction are alike shopworn and inert, one finds it difficult to account for the poem at all. A different kind of deadness concludes an otherwise fair sonnet, "Jefferson at Monticello": after a cataloguing of the great man's achievements, culminating in the founding of the college—"The academic village in a field"—it is the reversal of "drive and excitement" to conclude:

Where master and his scholar alike
may find
The unleashed freedom of the human
mind.

For this is simply lazy; it is cliché-mouthing which comes as close as intelligibility will allow to automatic writing.

That Mr. Rosenberger can be better than this is proved by "Manet in Merkers," a decent, controlled, moderately intense poem on the Nazi looting of art objects: "Fat Hermann and quick Heinrich as the connoisseurs / Of tooth fillings, / Judges of the quality of gold in wedding rings, / Testers of spectacle rims, / Masters of the new Exhibition of the Rejected, / The grotesque burglary of a continent." And so on. This has force, and the fifth of the lines which I have quoted approaches something very like true wit. Or again, "Inscription for a Memorial"—another celebration of Jefferson—is prevented only by the flaccidity of its cadences from achieving the lashing strength of a Catullan or Yeatsian political epigram; nevertheless the excitement is there.

Yet I prefer Mr. Rosenberger to Mr. Lamantia, for I suspect that the latter, in spite of all his crepitation, is even more sterile than the former's *longueurs*. Mr. Lamantia may be described as a Reformed Surrealist; he has decided, that is to say, that the school of the Exquisite Corpse is no longer valid. His vision of Love, as one pieces it together from the occasional poems which allow penetration, seems to be respectable enough, and may even be important. Unfortunately, his reformation is not yet complete. In order to come to grips with even the best of the poems—I should instance "Night Vision" and "Hermetic Bird"—one is forced to attend to so much *décor* of the old kind: inflammable women, bodies opened with keys, feathers in navels, and the like. He seems to me to be doing precisely what Mr. Rexroth in his introduction, says he is *not* doing,—writing "fishy, passionless stuff" that is "unmotivated, and is contrived." Every so often, as in "Scenario," he manages a tight hard rhythm: "Dressed in velvet, / Happy and bitten, / She waits for the noise and crowds / Of the next night," which I admire for "Happy and bitten," a neat enough comment on a nightclub whore. But there are too many arrows in the eyes! feathers in the navel! hair on the mouth! spider-webs in the ears! bullets in the bed! There is too much odd domesticity ("Quietly the mothers are killing their sons; quietly the fathers are raping their daughters"); too much hypertension.

O the flock of sheep
breaking their flesh open
with bones sucked
from the brothels!

O the grave of bats
sailing through shops
with the violent hands!

I should like to convince myself that this is more than noise, but I cannot do so. And the noise has not even the promise of *praeterea nihil*: rather it is *praeterea* more noise.

But it is not my word, nor Mr. Rexroth's, that crowns this opus. Mr. Lamantia himself, in "A Civil World" says all that need be said:

After the street has recaptured
its loneliness, a precious stone casts
its light on the perambulator which
I am to enter. One perambulator
in the center of a world. A poet—
far away in the mountains—can be
heard chanting like an ape. I wonder
when he will stop?

Tough War Verse

SOLDIER WORDS. By Hargis Westerfield. Boston: Bruce Humphries, Inc. 1946. 128 pp. \$2.

Reviewed by I. L. SALOMON

S"OLDIER WORDS" by Hargis Westerfield is a straightforward, hardhitting, unsophisticated book of poems by a soldier-poet, a wearer of the Purple Heart and a veteran of five beachheads in the Pacific. It took an Ernie Pyle to cover the war so that folks at home felt the immediacy of what was going on, as it took a John Hersey to uncover the deep wound at Hiroshima, no less than the shame in men's hearts. And now in these war poems, dedicated to combat infantrymen, the soldier tells his story.

It is a simple one, told directly, in free verse. The transformation of the raw recruit into a soldier, the hard days of basic training, the long trip west, the homesickness, the first kill, and the lean weary nights when men remember are terrible catalysts in shaping man's nature. The rough, tough stuff of poetry is here, unrefined by intellectuality and unadorned by poetic conceit, for Westerfield understands what breeds war and man's strong moral fibre that succumbs to it.

Sad it is that a bugle and a flag
Are strong with a strength a church
does not have

from "Religious Ceremony" and

You did your duty
No man did better; damn the arrogant
Son of the Ronin who lied to you, led
you southward,
Unlucky but admirable gutty little
Nipponese sniper

from "Sniper" and

Because I am an American
Any slave in the whole world
Makes me a slave

from "American, Mystical," are lines typical of the tone of this book.