THE NATION and ITS POETS
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The noisiest episode in THE NATION's long and concerned involvement with poetic values began as the issue dated February 11, 1925, reached its readers. More than a thousand contestants and their well-wishers were eager to know who had won the fifth annual "NATION's Poetry Prize" of $100. The editors themselves were a bit edgy. For the first time they sought to forestall expected criticism. A columns deep editorial offered the "guarantee that nothing beyond their instinctive preference has operated to decide their choice. This year they chose 'Hot Afternoons Have Been in Montana' because it seemed to them the most passionate and interesting poem that came in." Some representative lines:

Montana, thou art, and I say thou art, as once monks said of God,
And thought, too: Thou art.
Thou hast Kansas on thy side;
Kansas is in the newspapers, talked of by men;
Idaho thou hast, and far away, Singapore, Alabama, Brazil.
That bird over this green, under that sun, God, how sweet and graceful it is!

The author, Eli Siegel, aged 22, had been quite unknown. The vigor of THE NATION's influence was demonstrated in an immediate editorial uproar across the country, commenting upon prizes in general and upon the lunacy of this particular award. Much of it assumed the form of raucous parody. Literate columnists—there were some in those days—had a gay time with "Hot Afternoons."

The disturbance reached inward. Maxwell Bodenheim—a poet whose death by shooting in 1954 provided copy for magazines that had done little to keep poets alive—wrote a furious letter. Claiming that THE NATION, in the four years preceding, had printed more of his poems than of anyone else's, he announced that it would never have another chance. His reckoning was not quite right: twelve of his poems had been used in the four-year period, but Ann Hamilton had nosed him out with fourteen. If translations were to be included, both were far outnumbered by Witter Bynner's thirty-one.

Smouldering still from the earlier insult, as he saw it, of a mere honorable mention in the 1923 contest, Bodenheim apparently did not read far enough past the 1925 prize winner itself to observe that he had been sullied again: honorably mentioned a second time. (His rage presently drifted into forgiveness. One of his poems appeared in THE NATION in 1932.)

Ludwig Lewisohn, himself a contributing editor of the magazine, wrote a letter of dissent. This is notable because the award to Siegel helped to dramatize, for a large audience, a transition in the perception of literary values which at this midpoint of the 1920s was already evident, although still arcane. If THE NATION's choice, "Hot Afternoons," is thought of as nothing more than a catalyst, the magazine's willingness to stand up for the unorthodox in poetry was symbolically important. It had not always done so. Siegel published a few more poems in little magazines. Then he vanished for a quarter of a century, until the vastly kind and angry William Carlos Williams was persuaded by a mutual acquaintance to take another look at "Hot Afternoons." Writing in 1951, Williams declared, "Only today do I realize how important that poem is in the history of our development as a cultural entity. . . . I say definitely that that single poem, out of a thousand others . . . secures our place in the cultural world. I make such a statement only after a lifetime of thought and experience, I make it deliberately. . . . On that rock and only on that rock can we in our cultural pattern build."

The declaration from which these lines are taken helped Siegel to a brief renaissance. A number of his poems appeared in good magazines in the early 1950s, and "Hot Afternoons" at last came out in a book in 1957. If Dr. Williams was right (I doubt it), the editors of THE NATION chose, in "Hot Afternoons," something of absolute seminal importance, not merely a first-rate catalyst.

"THE NATION's Poetry Prize" was first announced on Dec. 1, 1920, for bestowal in the ensuing February. It was last awarded in 1927. All of the winners were young—the oldest, Roy Helton, was thirty-
five when he divided the original award with James Rorty, four years younger. No previously eminent poet took first place, although Stephen Vincent Benét, who won the 1923 prize in his twenty-fifth year, was already the veteran author of four books, including two successful novels: *The Beginning of Wisdom* and *Young People's Pride*. Counting split decisions and deducting repeaters among the honorable mentions, we have a total of thirty-five poets called to special notice during the seven years of competition. Ten of these now seem figures of some importance in the history of American poetry: Benét, Babette Deutsch, Thomas Hornsby Ferril, John Gould Fletcher, Alfred Kreymborg, William Ellery Leonard, Siegel, Genevieve Taggard, Allen Tate and Elinar Wylie. In nearly all of these cases, recognition was a forecast of fine accomplishments ahead. The established poets may have been reluctant to compete, even for what was then a substantial award, but the editors seem to have been in favor of youth.

An editorial commenting upon the second contest noted that nearly 2,500 poems had been submitted by nearly 1,000 poets; that there was more rhyme than in the first year; that young women excelled; and that most of the poems were either "compact studies of mental states" or "more extended, realistic comments upon current affairs." Benét's "King David" did not fall into either handy category. It provoked some shocked responses because of the lusty tone in which the poet faithfully retold the facts of the Biblical original:

Bathsheba bathed on her vine-decked roof.  
(The Lord God is a mighty God.)
Her body glittered like mail of proof.  
(And the Lord is King above all gods.)
Her body shone, tender and white  
As the flesh of lilies in candlelight.
King David forgot to be old or wise.  
He spied on her bathing with sultry eyes.
A breath of space came into his nose.  
He said, "Her breasts are like two young roes."

One school supervisor retaliated, curiously, by removing the entire back file of *The Nation* from the student library. While it is not clear that the Siegel controversy influenced the work of other poets, Benét's prize-winner probably did. Without referring to "King David," a nation critic perceived, some years after its appearance, a strong resurgence of Biblical themes in contemporary American verse.

During the bestowal of its seven annual prizes the attitude of the magazine toward poetry was being reformed. For a long time its interest had been expressed only in academic criticism of new volumes. One might argue that when creativity itself was in the doldrums, its editors had the good sense to refuse all of the derivative stuff that pretended to be original. Evidence in the back file suggests a more complex condition which raises the old problem of poetry and politics as well as the more recently stressed aesthetic question of the use of poetry. The inspection that follows grows from my own assumption that poetry is the central, the most profound and durable, therefore the most important, activity of the human spirit, rightfully drawing through all perceptions from all circumstances, outer and inner. Every subject is suitable, but each can find for itself only one perfect form, however strict or free. (Go away, Plato. I haven't the room, here, to explain you away.)

The Nation's steady subject, throughout a century, has been, of course, the nation—in all its turbulent complexity. The publication's journalistic device has been unremittingly political: to encourage the people to use government virtually in their own cross-cut interests. If there had been enough poets of an all-embracing perception of circumstance, The Nation's business could best have been done entirely in poetry, at a wonderful saving of space. The fact that there were not, the likelihood that there will never be, enough poets of protean ability, should not be inflated into arguments for the thesis that poetry and politics have no connection. In the great hours, poets have always been as political as they felt like being. It is one of the uses of poetry to focus intensities of insight upon problems leading to political choice; but such problems are made less soluble than ever when the offered means is not poetry, but merely false logic residual in a deft jingle:

Take up the White Man's burden.

Something more to the point was being reached for by the editors who chose Martin Fenzstein's "In Memoriam" as one of the joint prize-winners of 1922. Here is the vernacular ballad's ending:

It took a shrapnel shell,  
Spai from the jaws of hell,  
To bust the color line,  
Till even a fool could tell  
A nigger's a man, and a man's divine.

This raises a miserable question: if the ballad had been written by an able poet—if it had had the skill which was perverted into Kipling's atrocious, unforgettable line—would we have had to argue the same point during most of a second World War? Would The Nation, at the end of its century, still be engaged in a prose monologue, pitched toward Alabama and Mississippi, which repeats the same lucid arguments it sent in the same direction in 1865? This unanswerable question brings us to the beginnings of The Nation's involvement with poetic values.
In its first issue, the mingling of poetry and politics began with Aubrey de Vere’s two strong, conventionally phrased sonnets on “The American Struggle.” A few weeks later, in a facile, over-long poem, “The New Exodus,” Julia Ward Howe admonished Southerners to learn to do honest work. John Greenleaf Whittier followed with a more discerning plea, “To the Thirty-Ninth Congress,” for compassion toward the defeated and for legislation that would make reunion possible:

Cancel all
By one brave, generous action; Trust
Your better instincts, and be just!
Make all men peers before the law,
Take hands from off the Negro’s throat,
Give black and white an equal vote.
Keep all your forfeit lives and lands,
But give the common law’s redress
To Labor’s utter nakedness.

Should the poet perhaps have addressed himself to the Eighty-Ninth Congress?

There was also a long but curiously effective political poem in Volume I, entitled, “The Street Commissioners to the Cholera. Invocation.” Its anonymous author, impersonating neglectful officials, coaxed the disease to visit New York, where the filth in the streets would give it an ideal environment.

The conclusion:

... the dull wheels of the hearses that creep,
Harnessed to nightmares, trouble the sleep
Of the great city we deck for thy home!
Cholera, cholera, cholera, come!

The remaining six “poems” in the first volume were conventionally sentimental and derivative. One was signed Marah, pseudonym of the woman who later, as Helen Hunt Jackson, wrote compassionate if still sentimental novels in the interest of justice for the Indians. Her verse generally was signed H.H. The Nation, in its first four years, printed fourteen unhappy examples of it, which made H.H. its favorite verse writer at outset. None was as dreadful as “Noli Me Tangere,” C.B.C.’s contribution to Volume 3, which begins:

Luscious and sorrowful, bird o’ the roses... 

If it seems unfair to exhume this lamentable anapest, I do so only in evidence that early political verse in The Nation stands up much better than the consciously literary examples. Perhaps the latter were chosen by the staff writer of an unsigned review, a few issues farther along, of Dana’s Book of Household Poetry. “We... have not as yet been able to detect the omission of a single shorter poem of value which we have ever lighted on and admired elsewhere.”

James Russell Lowell contributed three poems early in 1866. The first indicates that he had been reading the recently published “Rabbi Ben Ezra.” The second was on reconstruction in the South. The third and longest, “Mr. Worsley’s Nightmare,” assumes itself to be a passage from Aristophanes. Philip Stanhope Worsley, a young English translator of part of the Iliad, had dedicated his work to General R. E. Lee “as the best living representative of its hero.” This was too much for the Yankee classicist of “A Fable for Critics”:

**FROGS**

Brekehex! Brekehex! Who goes there?

WORSLEY

Please, your Frogships, Homer’s last translator.

Bacchus and the frogs give Worsley an unsettling time on the bank of the Styx. It turns out that the translator is to be ferried across with a vast crowd of American ghosts. A hearty spook named Smith presents the first three thousand hand-shakers to Hector until the hero cries:

By Jove! I feel like an old town pump.

But Smith has one more request:

That’s to present my friend, Mister Worsley,  
I made his acquaintance on the boat:  
I rather guess it’s likely you know him—
Author of “Homer,” a first class poem.

Hector, to the alarm of Worsley, indeed knows of him:

My staff has been longing, these three months past,  
To measure the back of that dedicator  
Who likened me to the double traitor,  
False to his country, false to his oath,  
Me, who’d have given my life for both!

You insulted my soul without reason,  
Coupling my name with a broken trust,  
Dabbling my fame in the lees of treason.

Worsley presently “awakes in terror, but gradually composes himself by reading a few pages of his translation of Homer.”

This, and others among The Nation’s early examples, suggest that political verse is likeliest to succeed when it is satiric. E. L. Godkin and his associates must, however, had had cumulative misgivings about the aptness, for their purposes, of any sort of verse. In the first year they printed thirty-one varied examples, in the second year eight. The number for the third and fourth years dwindled to five apiece, and in the fifth year to only one. Beginning
in 1870 the evident policy was no verse at all. It was broken on a few occasions for Lowell's mortuary pieces and political epigrams. Half a dozen of the latter enlivened the Presidential campaign of 1876:

DEPRAUDING NATURE
Skilled to pull wires, he baffles nature's scope
Who sure intended him to stretch a rope

These were unsigned, but in the following year Lowell acknowledged four sequential sonnets that began in memoriam, bucolically, and ended with a political thrust. His sprawling comment on "infant industries," written in the last year of his long life and published on May 1, 1890, put an end to "purely original verse" in The Nation for twenty-four years.

Throughout its first half-century, the magazine maintained toward poetry, as it did toward the less central subjects of high consequence, an attitude closely critical. If it published very little verse, it evaluated a great deal. For its unsigned reviews it soon developed the virtuous practice of focusing a single critical intelligence consistently upon a particular category of writing. From 1877 to 1903, for example, clustered volumes of new poetry were considered in more than fifty contributions by Thomas Wentworth Higginson, the "Dear Preceptor" who salvaged Emily Dickinson. A year later Oscar W. Firkins assumed the task for a similar period. Both, along the way, wrote more extensive reviews of significant single books. They were men of classical education, far more competent in the task of critic than the genial noddy who, in Volume 3, had copied forty-eight lines to show "how narrowly Mr. Niles can escape doing well" with the comment, "It is senseless stuff, we may as well confess, but who is not pleased with it?"

Higginson and Firkins both knew what it feels like to want to write good poetry. As critics, they were adventurous only to the degree in which the trait occurs among good teachers who try hard to keep their minds pried open. Too much should not be inferred from a narrow sampling, but there is some hint of The Nation's earlier standards in its successive comments upon two differently revolutionary poets who startled the world of letters at about the time of its own origins: Algernon Charles Swinburne and Walt Whitman. A review of Atalanta in Calydon in the magazine's first volume praised the newcomer generously as having "powers which, if wisely employed in the production of poetry of modern style, would secure him a place among the popular poets," but it chided him for not reflecting, in a drama upon such a theme, the orthodox Greek attitude toward the gods. In the following issue a review of Walt Whitman's Drum-Taps began, "It has been a melancholy task to read this book; and it is a still more melancholy one to write about it. . . . It exhibits the effort of an essentially prosaic mind to lift itself into poetry." The long and acidulous piece concluded: "This democratic, liberty-loving American populace, this stern and war-tried people, is a great civilized. It is devoted to refinement. If it has sustained a monstrous war . . . it is not to put up with spurious poetry afterwards. To sing aright our battles and our glories it is not enough . . . to be aggressively careless, inelegant, and ignorant. . . ."

In these unsigned reviews, Swinburne was being welcomed by Charles Eliot Norton, and Whitman by Henry James. When Laus Veneris was published, two years later, the unacknowledged critic—Russell Sturgis—wrote a review that was in many respects remarkable: "It is foolish and useless either to abuse or to ignore this book, for what Mr. Swinburne has written is now a part of English literature. . . . Blasphemous these poems are not; for blasphemy consists not in the mere expression, but in the intent of the words. . . . Insincere books are necessarily immoral . . . but may not a work be at once immoral and sincere?"

Swinburne, more outrageous than Whitman to the Victorian proprieties, was given a serious hearing as an objective artist: it could be inferred that the song was not of himself. Moreover, his style shimmered with elaborations upon the admired archaic orthodoxy; it had nothing of Whitman's strong, plain lunge into the vernacular future. It took the Supreme Court almost a century to catch up with one phrase in the Sturgis review: "The immorality of a book is not, however, to be judged by its effects on any chance reader, but only by its influence on the average moral mind."

Swinburne continued to receive fair treatment in The Nation throughout his lifetime, with an occasional knuckle rap when he probably merited it, but few chances were missed to take a remorseless swing.
at Whitman. A few months after Henry James's surly review, a famous pamphlet entitled *The Good Gray Poet* was noticed. “Mr. W. D. O'Connor asks us to make common cause with him,” in objecting to Whitman's dismissal from his government job. The editors cheerfully sided with the government. In attempting, a few weeks later, to explain the British attitude toward the self-exiled Victor Hugo, they say he was regarded as “the type of the grotesque and abnormal and vicious, a sort of Walt Whitman.” The animosity obtrudes again and again. When Whitman died in 1892, the writing of an obituary was assigned to the usually gentle Higginson. The five or six columns resulting are at points almost frenetic: “... a bad influence—we speak from personal observation—on the lives of young men”; “Those who thus claim to be Nature’s darlings end as Nature’s warnings...paralysis, insanity, premature old age are the retribution for ‘the drench of the passions’ in youth”; “Compare this premature senility of the poet of ‘life coarse and rank’ with the old age of the chaster poets—with Bryant's eighty-four clean and wholesome years....”

After the critical balance had turned strongly in Whitman’s favor, old Henry James, the originator of the long process of rebuke, was given the opportunity to examine his memories of fifty years earlier, when he was a twenty-two-year-old staff member of the New Nation. He did not think to adjust his view of the poet, but instead wrote a maudlin piece about “fairies”—the quotes are his—that presided over the magazine's origins.

### III

The issue of March 12, 1914, presented thirteen “Features to be Introduced” under Oswald Garrison Villard’s new editorial policy, Those included:

5. **POETRY.** Greater attention than heretofore to contemporary verse. “The Nation,” which first published many of the works of Lowell, Whittier, and other eminent poets, is peculiarly fitted to encourage and guide modern aspirants for poetic fame

“A Lay o’ the Day,” by Jefferson B. Fletcher, was chosen as peculiarly fitting to end the year of poetical famine. Other dismaying efforts were interrupted in midsummer by Stuart P. Sherman’s angry polemic, “The White Slave.” Then Europe took to its guns. The ensuing attempts to make political use of poetry failed. Poetasters reached into an ordered past for image and form, missing the needed violent immediacy. “The Victory.” poor busted statue, was pondered by Marion Couthoy Smith up to a last line revealing her as

> The flaming soul—of France!

There was some awareness of a strange orchestra scraping discords. In 1915 Professor Firkins discussed “The New Manner,” pointing out that “oddity, to be respectable, must be necessary. In this point, Mr. Lindsay’s verse is inconclusive.” Later in the year Firkins amiably faced up to his own problem with, “The New Movement in Poetry, the Self-Exposure of a Reactionary Critic of the Imagistes.” He conceded to imagism “its own modest place in a tolerant and balanced commonwealth; its mistake was to unfurl the banner of revolution.”

As the war ended a change was evident. Babette Deutsch, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and Edwin Arlington Robinson made their first contributions in 1918, followed by Edgar Lee Masters. In 1920 The Nation at last did what was indispensable to realize the aim of the Villard manifesto of 1914: it appointed a specific literary editor, Carl Van Doren. He and his successors, chiefly Mark Van Doren from 1924 to 1928, honored the stronger established poets and took well-calculated risks with many newcomers. Criticism kept pace. “The Waste Land” was promptly explored by Gilbert Seldes, who gave prior attention to T. S. Eliot’s prose criticism as “the clue to his poetry. ‘The Waste Land’ is, in a sense, the inversion and complement of ‘Ulysses’...each has expressed something of supreme relevance to our present life.”

Robinson, between 1918 and 1924, contributed several poems including one of his finest, “Mr. Flood’s Party.” His Children of the Night had been cordially reviewed in 1897, first of seventeen of his books to be respectfully criticized. Carl Van Doren noted that The Three Taverns, 1920, “unites the fullest courage of innovation with unhurried wisdom...It is not of course by being topical that Mr. Robinson achieves his immense pertinence to the moment”—a hint of the surest way in which verse, beyond aesthetics, can find its most effective political use. Mark Van Doren also suggested this when he said, of The Man Who Died Twice, “the whole will sing where Mr. Robinson intended that it should sing, in the depths of the brain.”

The crossrips of politics and poetry tumble persistently in The Nation’s consideration of Ezra Pound, first noticed in 1911: “the few bits of really good comment” in The Spirit of Romance “are too rare to be worth hunting for.” When his early cantos were appearing in Poetry and The Dial, the only notices here were of his prose. Gaudier-Brzeska (in 1916) “deserves a better fate than to be maundered about by an unvenerable Imagiste.” Pavannes and Divisions, 1918, was shrugged off. Instigations, 1921, was called by Mark Van Doren “a mess, if an agreeable and often erudite mess.” The complete response
to Pound’s *Poems 1918-1921* was, “Now witty, now pretty, now dull, now absurd.” None of Pound’s verse ever came out in *The Nation*, but it did publish his articles, in 1927 and 1928, on the witlessness of passport officials and the sins of American libraries and musical foundations.

On June 10, 1931, the full phenomenon of Pound was confronted at last in a long review of *A Draft of XXX Cantos* in which Allen Tate called him “probably one of two or three living Americans who will be remembered as poets of the first order.” Three years later Kenneth Burke deftly dissected *The ABC of Reading* in which Pound, perhaps unawares, borrows the sentimental Marxist distortion of the word “science” without the comfortless rigors of the accompanying dialectic. The accumulating cantos were noticed from time to time.

A prophetic cartoon of 1936 portrayed the poet “Interrupted in his Daily Devotions” before busts of Mussolini and other idols. In 1939 Louise Bogan epitomized *Guide to Kulchur*: “He likes to fiddle around.” She regretted the lack of “real, as opposed to hysterical, breaking through into new thought.” Perhaps the first of many attempts to wish half of the schizoid anomaly away came in John Peale Bishop’s reminiscence of 1940: “no man can be a consistent admirer of fascism who holds John Adams in admiration.” Then came the reasonable broadcasts and Eliot’s defense of his mentor *The Nation* responded to both Gilbert Highet’s long lampoon, “Homage to Ezra Pound.” Some passages:

> though o’er T.S.E. proclaimed his maestro
> and in such prose, my God
> constipated but dignified like an elderly cat

> So he took to damning his own country, living in
> Rapallo and Rome
> among the black-shirted brown-bottomed yellow
> hearted Heroes

When the question of a condign fate for Pound arose, *The Nation* held to a clear principle in defense of poetry. “It is an unwarranted slur on the poet to maintain that he is less responsible for his actions than other men.”

Four years later Margaret Marshall printed in her column a letter signed by eighty-four writers condemning the way in which a contributor to the *Saturday Review* had used the Bollingen award to Pound as a device for discrediting poetic experiment. A protest rejected by that journal. Again the issue was not the behavior of one man who happened to be a poet, but *The Nation’s* insistence that poetry itself should not be dabbled in the lips of anyone’s treason.

In April, 1956, *The Nation* appointed its first editor exclusively for poetry: M. L. Rosenthal. For his first critical piece he chose Pound’s *Section Rock Drill. Cantos 85-95*, referring to all the cantos as “this great experiment . . . which seeks to extend the spirit of poetic art in an enterprise so daringly complex that it risks losing the main chance in a wilderness of multiplicities” —a careful effort to concentrate upon the poetry apart from the politics.

In the following spring an undergraduate poet, David Rattray, hoping to make a good report, visited Pound in the mental hospital. There he found representatives of a ring of neo-fascist disciples that included John Kasper, the renegade segregationist. Rattray’s disillusioned piece, “Weekend with Ezra Pound,” was secured by Rosenthal for *The Nation*, but he took care to imbibe in the text Ramon Guthrie’s nostalgic tribute, “Ezra Pound in Paris and Elsewhere,” which perceived amid inexorable tragedy the remaining debt of so many writers to the poet’s early generousities

> The frowsy slut
> you would have breathed
> —forsooth—a soul into
> has got
> her teeth snagged in your jugular.

> ‘So few drink of my fountain’
> (although the best did
> and came away changed men)

When old friends at last forced the political question to an issue, a *Nation* editorial, noting that Pound’s “anti-Semitism is one of the running sores of modern letters” recommended the release of the “sick and vicious old man—even if he were not the brilliant poet he is.” Two years later with “The Pleasures of Pound” Rosenthal concluded upon a note of balance: “Pound represents the best and the worst in our civilization.”

IV

After an editorial reorganization in the mid-thirties *The Nation’s* interest in poetry varied. Forty-six poems appeared in 1933, twelve in 1939 The World War II poets were much abler than those of World War I: W. H. Auden, John Berryman, Robert Penn Warren, William Carlos Williams, and others. Noting in 1945 a “New Genre,” F. W. Dupee praised Jean Garrigue, Randall Jarrell, John Frederick Nims, Karl Shapiro, and most of all, the newcomer; Robert Lowell. When John Ciardi edited *Mid-Century American Poets*, 1950, he introduced Lowell’s section with a nine-page reprint of Jarrell’s *Nation* review of Lord Weary’s Castle.

Interest sagged again. Only sixteen poems were printed in 1955, but with Rosenthal’s appointment the number zoomed to the highest level ever: about one hundred a year. The new editor outlined his views
in several witty articles. For example, "experimentation in verse is largely a matter of adjustment between personal motivations and available traditions." He ranged widely, seeking distinctive combinations of motivation and tradition, not content merely to see what the mailman would bring in. The five poets whose work he printed most often are warrants of his adventurousness as well as of his respect for both freedom and strictness when used with skill. He chose twenty-two poems by W. S. Merwin, his successor as poetry editor; twenty-one by Dilya Laiing; thirteen by Howard Nemerov; eleven by Richard Eberhart; ten by Paul Blackburn. Rosenthal's success in swiftly advancing The Nation to the forefront of generally distributed magazines that include poetry was partly the outcome of his willingness to annoy poets by pointing to weak passages, requesting their improvement. Harriet Monroe used to bring poets up to their own best performance, in spite of themselves, in the same manner.

Rosenthal also employed the device of calling a specific poet strongly to attention by publishing several poems, not in a single gust, but in a quick sequence. In this way he recalled Ramon Guthrie from his long reticence, publishing four of Guthrie's poems in separate issues between October 26 and November 30, 1957, and two others a bit later. These were the nucleus for Guthrie's Graffiti, which justified Rosenthal's judgment by becoming much the most successful volume in the new paperback Macmillan Poets series, begun in 1959.

The remarkable policy established for The Nation by Rosenthal was continued by a series of interim editors: Merwin, Blackburn, David Ignatow, A. R. Ammons, until the appointment in October, 1963 of the present poetry editor, Denise Levertov. The measure of her editorial acumen cannot yet be taken, partly because she stresses so generously The Nation's now traditional welcome to newcomers. Unless the new criticism has freed all poems from their creators, as it has tried to do for the poems of Pound, the scores of new names in the magazine, introduced by Miss Levertov, will have to be attached to more poems before we can know whether she has been as successful as Mark Van Doren and M. L. Rosenthal in fixing upon consistently able new talents. A year or so ago, when she was conversing with a group of undergraduate poets, I asked her to describe her principles of selection. Her reply, as I recall it, was simply, "I choose the poems I like." Those with formulated justifications of their liking probably do the same.

Rosenthal's imaginative care in securing a Guthrie poem to publish in counterpoint with Rattray's article on Pound has been the pattern for some of Miss Levertov's editorial arrangements. Adrienne Rich's long review of John Berryman's 77 Dream Songs was confronted by a full page given to three additional dream songs written after the printing of the volume. With this and a number of other full pages she has succeeded in returning the magazine to its earlier laudable practice: one more warrant that poetry is thought of as something more than a convenient spatter of type to fill out a column after the prose is all used up.

Is there any way of characterizing poetry that has appeared recently in The Nation, by comparison with the general nature of contemporary American verse? To get some idea I have scanned Ciardi's anthology of fifteen Mid-Century American Poets who "came to prominence" in the nineteen-forties; the Donald Hall-Pack-Simpson collection of thirty-six poets under the age of forty in 1957; Donald Allen's The New American Poetry 1945-1960, with forty-four contributors aged up to fifty-one years; and the Beatitude Anthology. ages not given, forty-two poets, "edited on a kick or miss basis by a few hardy types" in 1960. Only Lowell and Richard Wilbur, from the Ciardi volume, survive into the Hall-Pack-Simpson. No poet in either of the earlier two volumes appears in either of the later two, and these have only seven in common. Here then are 128 poets selected by editors varying between the mildly conservative and the distinctly radical.

Under Miss Levertov's editing, 20% of the poets in the first anthology, 17% of those in the second, 23% of those in the third, and one poet from the fourth, have appeared in The Nation. Since the lonely one from the Beatitude Anthology also appears in Allen's, The Nation's interest in the phenomenon of the beats has come to the vanishing point, replaced by another kind of newness that perhaps will prove less transient. If I had to choose one poet to represent this kind of newness, he would probably be Miss Levertov's own favorite in the number of poems printed—Wendell Berry, who appears in none of the above anthologies. To characterize his poem "My Great Grandfather's Slaves" and another in the same recent issue, "Nuns at the Dali Exhibit. . ." by Beth Bentley, I find scribbled in my copy's margin, "hopeful signs of a new poetry combining classic straightforwardness with modern idiom, insight, problems." The same statement will do for most of the poems that I myself like, among Miss Levertov's choices.

Politics? Still present, but unobtrusive, as in some of Berry's poems. They already sing, a little, in the depths of the brain. Another aspect is the terse discipline of many of the newcomers, who seem to be recovering an awareness that it is always the poet's task to reverse the expanding universe, to compact experience into its significant essentials: into a form which will expand again, of itself, creating new experience in the reader.