

THIRTY POEMS. By Thomas Merton. (New Directions, Norfolk, Connecticut; \$1.00.).

The Poets of the Year is a series of poetry booklets, finely printed and including such expected names as George Barker, Dylan Thomas, F. T. Prince and Conrad Aiken. Thomas Merton, we are told, is a monk in an American Trappist abbey; 'his education was in a French lycée, an English public school, Cambridge University and at Columbia, where as an undergraduate he took all the literary honours and edited everything in sight.' In view of all this, perhaps one is less tempted to enquire—as no doubt Mr. Agate might—*que va-t-il faire dans cette galère?*

All the same, the authentic poetic accent of the late thirties (*At once the diplomats start up, white as bread; Is the politician any safer in his offices / Than a soldier shot in the eye?*) seems oddly at variance with the undoubted sincerity of this poet's purpose. But now and then (as in *An Argument: Of the Passion of Christ*) we feel that the gap between what is deeply experienced and the (current) expression of it is filled. The result is a religious poem which, to take one etymology of *religio*, is bound tight, true to the inner discipline of the thing experienced, now expressed. I.E.

RONSARD. By D. B. Wyndham Lewis. (Sheed & Ward; 12s. 6d.).

Against a lively background sketch of Renaissance France, Mr. Wyndham Lewis has picked out in clear, striking features the personality of a great poet of that age. The historical facts, sorted out into somewhat startling, often rather doubtfully picturesque anecdotes, provide a useful setting, and, combined with classical and contemporary references, make this study light and entertaining reading even for the unscholarly. Probably we are saved from an overwhelming dose of compressed knowledge in careful prose by the caustic asides and the harmless but pointed and sceptical commentaries of the author himself.

As to the picture of the poet, Mr. Wyndham Lewis has certainly written with a sympathetic understanding which, if he did not feel, he has managed to convey in convincing tones. Imagination has leapt in to fill the blanks or the sundry unimportant details of Ronsard's life, so that the versatile character of the poet, fluctuating from amorous ecstasies to a cold rage, bursting into flippant song, strumming a pastoral ode or penning patriotic couplets, is presented on all sides with equal vigour. The effect is as vivid as if the man had lived in the last decade, and in achieving this Mr. Wyndham Lewis has succeeded in re-kindling interest in a poet too often by-passed with a sidelong glance at the 'Ode to Cassandre.' He is to be congratulated on this and upon the manner in which he has conveyed a sense of the continuity in the evolution of French poetry; We appreciate particularly the link with nineteenth century soloists such as Baudelaire.