

# The New Criterion

## Features

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### A forgotten poet

by [William Logan](#)

On John Townsend Trowbridge.

John Townsend Trowbridge was born two years after the opening of the Erie Canal and died during the First World War. The friend of Longfellow and Holmes and Whitman (at a time when Longfellow and Holmes refused to meet the author of *Leaves of Grass*), he wrote gouts of poems, a string of popular plays, and at least forty novels, including more than one bestseller. Having started with hack work in New York, with hack work he continued, growing so impoverished in the Grub Street of the day that at one point he took to the business of engraving gold pencil-cases.

The literary odd-job man, who turns his hand to whatever a hand can be turned, has long been nearly extinct (perhaps the sole example remaining, like a last elegant dodo, is John Updike). From such a writer, poems and stories and plays and novels come, now like a freshet, now like a flood—many of them bad, or bad enough, some of them good, or good enou ...

**William Logan's** next book of poetry, *Strange Flesh* (Penguin), is due out in October.

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