In 1935, when Dr. Merrill Moore arrived at Boston City Hospital for his post-graduate training in neurology and psychiatry, he was already the author of 25,000 sonnets. His record, according to the Journal of the American Medical Association, was one hundred in four hours.¹

“[H]e does not compose them, he improvises them,” commented writer/editor Louis Untermeyer. “He dictates them to his wife, jots them down in shorthand between cases, [and] forms them driving home during pauses in traffic while the lights change from red to green.”² Although many of Dr. Moore’s poems were not, strictly speaking, sonnets, they were always fourteen lines.

The young Moore family — wife and two sons (soon to be three sons and a daughter) — bought a house close to the hospital. “I do have many happy memories of our life at 39 East Springfield Street, between 1935 and 1940,” his widow, Ann Leslie Moore, an artist, wrote to me half a century later. She remembered several people on East Springfield Street, some of whom I’d heard about or knew (adults to me, children when she lived there), and told stories about drinking home-made wine with the owners of an Italian market on Washington Street. Merrill Moore had wanted to start a food co-op on East Springfield Street, my former landlady had once told me. Despite the Depression, those were evidently good times in a family-oriented, ethnically mixed South End neighborhood.

“My husband was a lot more gregarious than I am,” wrote Mrs. Moore. Indeed, a Boston Post reporter noted in 1935, “Nobody else of my acquaintance knows as many people as Merrill Moore. He is on terms with perfectly equal friendliness with janitors and college professors, with street sweepers and college presidents. He is one of those extraordinary people who have

continued page 2³⁴⁶
Autobiographical Sonnets, 1938

M: One Thousand

Poem by Moore

I Think That It Is Later Than You Think

It is possibly later than you think,
It is likely later than you think,
It is usually later than you think,
It is somewhat later than you think,
It is considerably later than you think,
It is a whole lot later than you think,
It is a good deal later than you think,
It is always later than you think,
It is by all odds later than you think,
It is frequently later than you think,
It is a good deal later than you think,
It is sometimes later than you think,
It is a whole lot later than you think,
It is considerably later than you think,
It is usually later than you think,
It is likely later than you think,
It is quite later than you think,
It is considerably later than you think,
It is later than you think,
It is later than you think.

Merrill Moore was born in Tennessee in 1903. His father, John Trotwood Moore, was Tennessee’s Poet Laureate. Merrill graduated from Vanderbilt University in 1924 and Vanderbilt Medical School four years later. While an undergraduate, he became a member of the then unknown group of poets called The Fugitives. “Another

Extravaganza King Is the Subject of Her Book

ALISON BARNET is a longtime South Ender and the author of the book Extravaganza King: Robert Barnet and Boston Musical Theater. In her book, Alison discusses the life of her great-grandfather Robert Barnet, a successful Boston sugar merchant who wrote and produced musical theater productions. He became so well known for his musical theater that the First Corps of Cadets hired him to stage productions to raise money to build the armory, known today as the Park Plaza Castle. The lavish productions gained Barnet the nickname “Extravaganza King” and became so popular that many of the shows traveled the country.

member would bring to the meeting his small stint of poetry,” wrote poet/editor John Crowe Ransom, “but Moore would bring twenty, thirty, or fifty brand-new sonnets as his exhibit.”

“Merrill Moore looks the part of both the poet and the earnest physician,” wrote a Boston Post reporter in 1935. “He is 32 years of age, six feet tall, not too thin, with a quiet bearing of the traditional Southern gentleman; sandy hair, inclined to red; a good listener, but with an earnestness of speech which is characteristic.”

Moore’s first books of poetry were collections of poems from The Fugitive magazine: The Noise That Time Makes (1929) and Six Sides to a Man (1935), about which one reviewer wrote, “Merrill Moore’s Six Sides to a Man is the sort of book that touches off impassioned debate of the question, “Yes, but is it poetry?” In 1938, Moore came out with a hefty volume called M, which stood, of course, for one thousand. If this wasn’t enough, Moore admitted it was “part of a larger work, still in progress” of 50,000 sonnets. Some critics later counted 100,000.

Moore was always in good intellectual company. Distinguished poets Louis Untermeyer, John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, and William Carlos Williams wrote introductions and epilogues for his books; famous artists Rockwell Kent and Edward Gorey illustrated them.

Moore’s subjects ranged from eels to afternoon naps to baths (“Water, what is water? What is soap?”) but didn’t seem to include the South End. It’s unlikely he meant the Washington Street El in “Streets in Dislocation, Stolid Snow…” but maybe he did.

On the snow—piles in the gutters of Streets the Elevated ran above
And shook to their foundations momently [sic]
As if they quaked to fall apart and die.

By the late 1930s, Moore was an assistant visiting neurologist and psychiatrist at City Hospital and a way of being always at the center of events. If an accident happens on the street, fate will have it that Moore should be passing.”

Merrill Moore was in good intellectual company. Distinguished poets Louis Untermeyer, John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, and William Carlos Williams wrote introductions and epilogues for his books; famous artists Rockwell Kent and Edward Gorey illustrated them.

Moore’s subjects ranged from eels to afternoon naps to baths (“Water, what is water? What is soap?”) but didn’t seem to include the South End. It’s unlikely he meant the Washington Street El in “Streets in Dislocation, Stolid Snow…” but maybe he did.

Extravaganza King is the Subject of Her Book

Robert Barnet and Boston Musical Theater

ANNE ALISON BARNET

A

Park Plaza Castle, Boston

extravaganza

regularly

South Ender

meetings. Thank you all again.

you this year at our functions, programs, and events. We appreciate that you have volunteered your time to our committees and projects. However, we must remain vigilant. While our continued presence at South End Landmarks Commission meetings has helped to preserve the rich fabric of the South End and has helped teach those around us about its economic and aesthetic value, the uncertainty of these times continues to create pressure to circumvent or ignore historically appropriate and sensitive solutions. We need to ask even more of your generosity.

I look forward to meeting with more of you this year at our functions, programs, and meetings. Thank you all again.

Michael Leabman, President
Upcoming Events

Join us on February 17 at 6:30 p.m. at 532 Massachusetts Avenue for "The Legacy of the Merchant Princes of Boston: The Philanthropy of the Nineteenth-Century Boston Brahmins," a presentation by Christopher Donohue. A light reception will follow. RSVP required. Please RSVP by calling (617) 536-4445 or emailing admin@southendhistoricalsociety.org.

42nd Annual House Tour Is a Tremendous Success

Thank you to everyone who supported our 42nd Annual House Tour. We exceeded our goal and could not have done it without your participation. Please visit our sponsors, listed on our website at www.southendhistoricalsociety.org/programs. A special thank you to Shambalai Plantscapes for making our front garden look beautiful for the tour. They can be reached at (781)894-1183, email: Shambalai.plantscapes@verizon.net. Making our front stoop for the tour. They can be reached at (617) 795-7077.

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Donahue. A light reception will follow. RSVP required. Please RSVP by calling (617) 536-4445 or emailing admin@southendhistoricalsociety.org.

Membership Renewal

Please send your membership renewals for the year January 1, 2011 — December 31, 2011. Yearly single memberships are $25 and family/dual memberships are $40. Additional opportunities to support the society are also available at the $100 Supporting, $250 Patron, and $250 Benefactor levels. Please send cash or check to The South End Historical Society, 532 Massachusetts Avenue, Boston, MA 02118.

Cast Iron Questions?

In need of help restoring, repairing, or replacing your cast iron fence? The South End Historical Society can help. Please call or email the SEHS office at (617) 536-4445 or admin@southendhistoricalsociety.org for more information.

2012 Prints Now Available

Pictures from the South End Historical Society’s 1972 survey of all extant buildings are available for purchase. The images are digitized and available in JPEG format at 300 dpi. If you are interested in purchasing an image or if you require another format or resolution, please contact us at (617) 536-4445 or email us at admin@southendhistoricalsociety.org.
Footnotes

5. Andrew F. Donnell, “Man is Fact and Woman is Guess, Boston Post, February 10, 1935 (in Six Sides to a Man, 1935).
7. Streets in Dislocation, Stolid Snow ..., M., p. 532.
9. Ibid., pp. 182, 299.
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