

TRACE

A CHRONICLE OF LIVING LITERATURE

**PERIODICAL GUIDE
TO
MODERN WRITING**

featuring
**ANNUAL PRESSES DIRECTORY
MORE GROUCHO THAN KARL
ROY MacGREGOR-HASTIE**

29

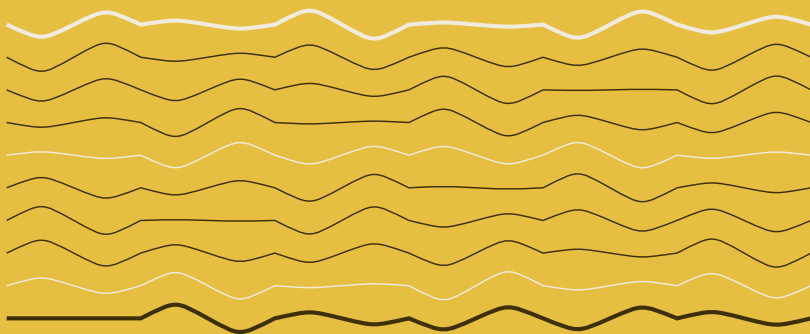
ISSUE

October 1958

2/-

40c

JAMES BOYER MAY / EDITOR



TRACE

No. 29

Living Literature

Essays & Articles · Poetry · Reviews

OCTOBER 1958

Edited by James Boyer May

A READING EDITION

ABOUT THIS EDITION

This reading edition preserves the issue's poetry, fiction, essays, correspondence, reviews, and other literary writing in their printed order. Advertising, subscription matter, mastheads, the magazine's own contents pages, annual indexes, address lists, and the running trade directory are omitted as reference apparatus.

The text was checked against newly rendered source pages. Poetry lineation, stanza spacing, shaped indents, and hanging continuations for long lines are retained; prose continuations are joined without false paragraph indents. Conjectural readings are enclosed in square brackets, while original spelling and punctuation are otherwise kept.

CONTENTS

More Groucho Than Karl	4
Towards Print	14
Editors Write	17
Posterity Is Kinder Than the Critics	21
The Unavoidable Awkwardness	25
Some Items Received	28
The Supreme Fatuity	29
Addenda	31

ISSUE P. 1 · SCAN P. 3

MORE GROUCHO THAN KARL

by Roy MacGregor-Hastie

WHEN I was very young,
it seemed a reasonable
enough thing to do to divide
the world into two human
parts—my immediate family
and the rest; my family,
though numerically smaller
than the 3,000 million odd out-
side, was so important to me
at the age of four that I was
willing to admit a third cate-
gory into my world classifica-
tion—those who were con-
nected, and obviously so, with
my father, mother, sisters, and
aunts, an ill-assorted third
category including my nanny,
the gardener, the butcher, a
shearer with a long nose who
was wooing my nanny at the
time, the man who kept the
newspaper shop in town (there
were about 500 townspeople,
but I recognised only one), and
a pedlar who had us on
his sucker list.

When I got older, say five,
I went to school and imme-
diately knew the error of my
first judgment. The world
was, in fact, divided into two
and a half, but I had got the
categories wrong; first came
my school, then every other
school, lastly my family.
I passed through a dozen or
so reorientations between ten

**THE REAL INSIDE HOW POETS FARE AMONGST
THE SATELLITARIANS AND TWENTY. SEX CAME
INTO IT: WHEN THE WORLD HELD ONLY MY GIRL,
AN INDIFFERENT FEELINGLESS MASS, AND MYSELF.**

**THERE WAS A TIME WHEN THE THREE
CATEGORIES SHRANK TO TWO, MY FELLOW
GRADUATES AND THE ILLITERATE UNWASHED
MASSES — THERE WAS EVEN A TIME, AN
EXISTENTIALIST INTERLUDE, WHEN THERE WAS
ONLY ONE EASILY IDENTIFIABLE IDEA IN THE
WORLD, ME.**

Now I am older and wiser and I know there are three categories to take notice of — the Communists, the Nice People Like Ourselves, and the Not Yet Committed Either to Good or Evil.

Curiosity is something of which I have my share, and, armed with the all-round knowledge of my ethical soundness, I persuaded a Broadcasting Authority, which shall be nameless, to send me to the Soviet Union (the H.Q. Evil); Roumania (the only Fallen Latin Group), and Poland (where The Iron Curtain was Corroding); I was interested only in the Arts, in poetry, painting, music and the dance, architecture, and sculpture. I was told to exploit this interest on tape to the full, and bring back an Awful Report. I had the first TR visa, and I spoke Russian. With these unnatural advantages, I was told, there should be an ear-opening story to tell when I got back.

The first thing to open my ear was the voice of Mischa Lukonin, at a dinner they gave me at the Writers' Club in Vorovski'ul, Moscow. We had been weighing into the food and drink (vodka and vittles are sold and served by the gram in the USSR, so not only do you know how much an outing has cost you, you can work out how much heavier you are than when you started). I threw out at Mischa the question:

‘How does a poet pay for such a splendid supper?’ I really did want to know, having been dogged for years by an inability to pay my own bills; and Mischa, I knew, made only a nominal appearance at the offices of Novy Mir, of which he is, equally nominally, Assistant Editor, and writes only poetry and a little criticism. He told me that life was an expensive thing to have in the Soviet Union, if you used it to the full. This did not surprise me. What did surprise me was his supplementary answer: ‘About the only people who can afford to do this often are artists.’

It was then that I realised that another Basic Belief of mine—that poets only prosper when acceptable to the world at large, i.e. when famous and dead—had been held in error. In the Soviet Union, the poet is a member of the apex of the economic pyramid. The Soviet attitude to the perpetual solvency of the artist is cold, hard, and reasonable: ‘When the last sputnik is marooned on the moon and the last bank fails to open its doors, the really durable things, the Arts, will still be with us. What do we know of Homer’s plumbing, Milton’s horse, Spencer’s roadway, or Shelley’s tailor?’

This seemed to me to be an extraordinary state of affairs. Number Two in the hierarchy, after the artist, comes the Worker of the Plan—whatever the Plan happens to be at the moment determining who will be the Worker. If there is a big drive on coal, the Miner joins the Sculptor in prosperity; the Plan changes to Scientific Experiment, and hey presto down goes the Miner, up comes the Scientist and standards of living interchange.

Only third, come the Directors of the State. Mr K. and his friends could never boast of a higher standard of living than a Top Poet, though Mr K. himself is reported to be unhappy about this and is always very rude to writers at garden parties in the Kremlin. He has only the marginal right to a country house and a car, things accepted as necessary to the painter, in a country where cars are on tap at a Pool when

needed (e.g. by a typist going home late after a bit of unpaid overtime), and houses are allotted according to need and not to fancy.

I found this prosperity very odd. It obviously affects the quality of a great deal of the stuff published in Russian poetry magazines. This is frequently too self-righteous to be bearable. And it undoubtedly affects the sort of poetry published in nearly every other type of journal. Payment is handsome and by the line, and there is a temptation to work that sonnet into an epic, if you want a good holiday this year by the Crimea. But a lot of very fine poetry is published, and disproves the belief of my adolescence, that poetry can only be written on an empty belly in an unfurnished room.

Since the passing of Stalin's friends, the content of Russian poetry (and the best poetry written in the Soviet Union is written by Russians, not by Georgians, Armenians, Ukrainians, or any of the other 140-odd racial groups) has varied from a near-prose adulation of the spanner in the service of Communism, to a high poetry comparable to the best written anywhere in 1958. The 1956 take-over of the control of editing and publishing institutions by the writers themselves (out of the hands of the Party) brought a crop of new and undesirable magazines off the presses. One, designed for use by adolescents, specialised in a sort of hotted-up women's magazine serial and printed most of the mss. rejected under Stalinism on the assumption that what the Party had turned down must be good. And the new-found freedom from Party censorship drove many poets into a private hysteria from which they are just emerging.

There is never any difficulty in getting poetry published in the Soviet Union, either in magazines or in volume form. Every periodical worth more than 3,000-imprint is crying for poetry, which is actually read, and not skimmed over in the stolovaya (beershop cum restaurant); and it is not unusual for a collection of poems to sell 50,000 copies. In

Czechoslovakia before the War, there was always a volume of verse amongst the year's bestsellers; and though things are duller there now, in the USSR poetry is booming. There is none of the publication-day hysteria either. You know that if 40,000 copies are printed every one will be sold. You can calculate your total sales before printing; for a book you are paid so much a line by the number of copies, and \$3,000 would be a fair expectation of income from a book of poems which already have kept you alive and well for four years or so.

Two annual events break up the Poets' Year. One is the Poets' Day in September, when they have to turn up at the bookshops, give readings and sign autographs; the other, Almanack Day, the day of the publication of the annual anthology — which means a bonus, if you are in it, plus at any rate a thorough critical going-over.

Knowing next to nothing about the novel anywhere, I shall simply pass on the opinions of some Russian novelists I met. Diudinsteff is declared by no means typical of contemporary Soviet literature. There are much better novelists who are even more critical of the regime than he — and who seem to be having some effect on the hardened arteries of the Party. I learned too that Diudinsteff is very rude, spends his holidays in Odessa and never answers the phone (Moscow G6-55-55); this may be useful for prosodists in Berkeley, Calif., looking for a bit of plausible local colour to work into a novel about a never-visited USSR.

There are, you see, no little magazines in the USSR for the plain reason that whatever you write gets into print, and paid for, sooner or later. Even if you are a Pasternak. I think this was probably true of literary experiment even in Stalin's day. It was what you wrote, not how you wrote it that was likely to get you packed off to a factory in the Urals to edit a workshop newspaper. A glance at Russian literary history, from 1900 on — Symbolists, Acmeists, Futurists, Peasants,

Nothingists, Expressionists, Cosmists, Poetic Imagists, Mystics, Proletkults, Perevalists, Octoberists, On Guardists, Seriaponists — gives you the idea that they had what an Australian critic described as The Literary Lot.

When I left Moscow for Bucharest I knew only that in Roumania I should find the most attractive women in the world. This was enough to pass the journey away in high spirits, in the company of two Lebanese passing for Syrians on a goodwill tour. When I got to this incredibly beautiful city, I found a few interesting deviations from the Soviet norm. The Roumanian, a Latin leftover from Caesar, resents uniformity and authority instinctively, in whatever human discipline it is applied. In the city, I found the civil population getting in at the 'out' door of trams and getting out at the 'in' door, more or less on principle; and there seemed to be a conspiracy by waiters in my hotel aimed at discrediting the man in authority who drafted the menu.

More seriously, it was this bloody-mindedness which saved Roumanian poetry from almost total eclipse during the worst years of 'Socialist Realism'. When the Party took over the presses in 1946, the only poetry published was Party-line-verse, the sort of doggerel hymns of praise to lathes we read were current in the USSR (in fact were not nearly so current — the satellites took care of the excesses). This might have been bearable if Roumanian poetry had not been both exquisitely lovely and popular. As it was, by 1948, with a score or so of poets who couldn't get their work published and saw no prospect of what they (and we) would call poetry being published as long as JBC (Jevleanu, Boreanu, and Cicerone, a trio of Party poet-critics-editors) were in power, there was a near riot at the Writers' Club in Bucharest, and the group fled the capital. They went as far north as they could go, to the Magyar town of Cluj, where I found them still mutinous, but now quite respectable. When they arrived in Cluj, they commandeered a rickety old press

and started to publish STEAUA, a literary monthly which quickly became the best behind the Iron Curtain and soon made itself so well known that JBC were forced to recognise it, give it a grant, and pardon the offenders.

The average circulation of the poetry publishing magazines in Roumania, with its population of about 18 million, is 80,000 a week (GAZETA LETERARA, CONTEMPORANUL); here, poetry is read and appreciated more widely than prose. I found only one novelist, Petru Dumitriu, who seemed to have anything like a personal following, yet there were half a dozen poets whose works were on every shelf; and one of them, Tudor Arghezi, is held in awe by everybody, with the same 'There-with-the-Help-of-God-Go-I' veneration given to tennis stars in Australia and, I am told, smalltown Jaycee Vice-Presidents in the U.S.A.

Prosperous, and rather better than his Soviet contemporary, the Roumanian poet has a touch of idleness I found endearing. The Writers' Union has taken over three royal palaces and converted them into Writers' Rest Homes; when you have hammered out that treelined, feline verse in the bar of the Ambassador in Bucharest, it is your privilege to go and cool off in the countryside at Sinaia, put your literary feet up on one of Carol's footstools. They seemed to me to be taking full advantage of their Rest Homes when I was there.

Again, a country with no little magazine problem. The only little magazine they ever had (defining it by function rather than by size) caused a minor literary revolution, discredited Stalin's heirs and successors in Bucharest and became a big magazine.

In Poland, as most people I think are aware, literature is not something you keep between covers for use at set times of the day—like bacon-and-egg pie or lamb chops. The only poet to start a successful revolution in a long time, Adam Wazyk, lives there. I was sorry to find him under a cloud,

and his uniqueness not appreciated; but there were still signs in Warsaw of the emotional upset his POEM FOR ADULTS caused when it precipitated the downfall of Stalinism.

The impression I felt most strongly wherever I went behind the Curtain was that poetry was not only valuable in an airy-fairy way, but useful too. Prose, in the West, has always had an influence on the thinking minority who have in their turn done things for the betterment of the unthinking majority (I found a book, in Poland, purporting to be a History of the Cemetery in Warsaw, which during the nineteenth century occupations had kept a knowledge of Polish history alive at a time when no books of record were allowed), but poetry has become, for us, at best a conventional necessity for a small minority. And though we jabber and talk and hold rallies and protest meetings, even read in parks, it does not seem likely that we shall make much impact on our contemporaries—though our grandchildren may.

We can work wherever there is a belief that poetry is necessary. And here—if I have by now convinced you that my Basic Beliefs before I went to the USSR, Roumania, and Poland were haywire—we can do something. In Poland, where the Gumulka regime, hemmed in by the USSR, East Germany, and Czechoslovakia, the two most ironclad satellites, is moving backwards to a sort of mind-oppression again, we can save some of Adam Wazyk's work and help the young writers to keep up with ideas current abroad, feel part of an effort to convince people that our values are more reasonably constructed than those of the professional politician.

PRO PROSTU was a very bad newspaper, which is no loss to anybody, but there is an unsung monthly, published by a group of young writers in Warsaw who convinced me that it is worthwhile helping them to keep in touch. The magazine is WSPOLCZESNOSC, published from Ludna 40 m 9, and is edited

by Leszek Szymanski. At the moment it is solvent, independent, interested only in the best poetry and the best criticism. It is fed money by the Writers' Union and affection by the literate in Poland who see it as the last free magazine to stay above the surface in a country about which suppression is closing in.

The whole of life behind the Iron Curtain is faintly amusing to the visitor from the West (more Groucho than Karl), though he is impressed by the importance the man in the street attaches to literature. The least we can do is realise the tragedy which could succeed the tragi-comedy, if a governing clique could ration ideas. Why not feed a few ideas of ours to WSPOLCZESNOSC?

TOWARDS PRINT

by the - Editor

WITH the ninth year of this feature (begun in *MATRIX*, in 1950) and the last appearance of *ABOUT PRINT WHICH MATTERS* in the suspending *MISCELLANEOUS MAN*, a reappraisal of purposes already had been planned; and now, an overdue storm has broken over the tents of the pioneers in the literary outposts of America. A storm at least centred in this hemisphere, though the sides long had been chosen throughout the English literary world.

Much needs clarification. First, that personalities, except where these have become prominently identified with what distinguishes a general movement, aren't subjects for discussion. Neutrality is not pretended; yet, names are used only with literary relevance, and where they clarify meanings. This is utterly different from remarks about characters or motives of writers as people, interestingly vital (and perhaps not inapopite either) though such considerations sometimes prove.

A few contemporaries develop anopsia when their own conceptions are assailed. Unable to see the above distinction, they would have it that any who refuse to acknowledge 'greatness' in their writings or infallibility in their judgments—or even those who take exception to their abstract theories—are therefore personal enemies.

Superfluous to note that poets are emotional and often carried away in their defenses of principles or perhaps their own loved works, and that exaggerated violent assertions in vulgar language blast out in private correspondence. There's nothing novel in this. It adds spice to literary history and makes for lively biographies. But, in any given contemporary setting, the issues are important—not the mental aberrations

of the protagonists, as such.

This is true, in spite of the admitted primary role of motivations; because it's really impossible to penetrate those motivations—contradictory in every writer. Confining literary discussion to literature is not to deny the primacy of motives; for, those motives relevant to the text, so to speak, will be revealed without need for alleging that authors are selfseeking, egocentric, or psychotic. And for that matter, admirable works have been produced by neurotic selfish artists; only insincerity in the work itself should be analysed—and comprehending well enough that honesty, without talent, does not ensure great or even passing-mediocre writing.

Immediate concern should have little to do with guessing who has genius or who holds true creative fire. Contemporary assessments, by whichever 'standards' chance to be in current favour, are as often wrong as right. Sometimes the judges aren't honest, either; in fact, we each have more fingers than needed to count the critics who invariably express their real opinions. However—besides that it should not be overlooked that all writings are, if not perhaps directly socio-political, always saying something (if only inferentially through style) with some moral or immoral or amoral message—everything that's published with larger than hack intentions falls into one of two categories: what is aimed at the always-intolerant perpetuation of some rigid ideology, or what is set down in the endeavour (at any rate) to explore extended meanings in life. The last word of the preceding sentence keys the difference. The former writings comprise attempts to retreat from life experience, and to seal the mandates for—death.

Everyone understands how academists (on or off a campus) perform as genteel undertakers in this respect; but some elements of revolt against dainty scholars are on death's side also. At this juncture, the current term 'fascistic'

handily covers their ugly description. And many of the writings against which the Editor has declared war are not-unexpectedly characterised by the same adjectives that rise with thoughts about stormtroopers : crude brutal, pornographic, sadistic, cruel, and downright bestial. We are not out for converts to sweetness and light ; grim realism ('nasty' language and all, where it fits) has an invaluable function. But, if realisation of maximum satisfaction from existence is desirable, then writers with positive liberal philosophies are needed. While it's urgently vital to name and try to diagnose the ills of the world, the persons to do this are not the sick, themselves. Surely, not the incurably sick (by their works) who wretchedly seek to infect all humanity.

EDITORS WRITE

D. V. Smith (olivant)

Against such disorder one usually finds in the booksellers across the nation, it would be well to call the attention of readers and booksellers to the potential happiness if the bookseller would set up in his store a section for the contemporary literature.

When the independent, or rather little-presses books seldom do get inside the booksellers, they are usually in some dark and obscure place of improvidence; it is as if the booksellers are literally ashamed to sell the books and magazines, and handle these just on some sort of “honorary” basis. And when the potential sales from these independent presses is greater—and if but through having a more constant and devoted reading public, perhaps than any other publications. It is as though the lot of booksellers, like some certain readers who hide these publications in their homes, were afraid to commit their tastes.

An order, as opposed to a disorder, applies equally well to all other publications. But the stores should have a section called “The Little Independent Presses Publications”. And in this section should be stands set aside for certain major little presses. Also, there should be a stand for the best reviews.

But, so that the bookstores will have a pleasing uniformity and order, the store might design each stand in the section . . . following through with colours red & black or orange & black or brown & black, here allowing sufficient space per press for approximately five current releases. As is, the booksellers are cluttered beyond any sensible order. It is virtually impossible to find the subject or the author or the press . . .

One reason for the lack of interest in books is precisely this, the fact that nowhere can one find a professional and knowledgeable bookseller who knows his public. He but caters to an anonymous one that lacks any permanence and stability what-ever.

Given the chance, I believe we'd find that the deplorable state of contemporary literature is not nearly so dead as advertized. But the booksellers all over the country wait for the publishers to recommend their own books, to advertise them: in short, there is no local authority, no local initiative, no local control . . . anywhere. It has all been relegated to someone else . . . this particular somebody it is virtually impossible to point out!

Harvey Parker (formerly connected with many projects): 'I am delighted with the latest issue! (No. 28). I'm reminded that I have on file (my own) stuff, printed as far back as 1925, combating the (perceived) encroachment of the "new (alleged) Realism" as a new cult to be both watched and deplored. However . . . the diarrhoea and fever had to run its course. Now, with the really brilliant wielders of the language of sardonic wields the lance, I hope for almost full normalcy in the patient before I go on "the new exploration".

'At long last, we may return to discipline in the school system, tending to the making of thinkers and a background of some depth. Also, a language used for communication, hence with room for growth, but with a reasonable number of words which have retained useful meanings, rather than a dozen suggested overtones apiece, due to "experimental" misuse.'

Lawrence Barth (author of UNIVERSE INSIDE ME): 'As I see it, TRACE No. 28 expresses, in general, a formulation I've tried to keep anchored to myself, through all kinds of experiment, negativism, abstractions, explosions, etc., going on in the literature for the past decade or so; a formulation that says: "No matter what, hold onto a feeling of life, not death;

motion, not stillness; openmindedness, but not blind, uncritical enthusiasm; communication, but not banality; a breathing body, not an armoured one." I think the basic orientation is physical-emotional armouring (in the Reich sense), as against relative physical-emotional unarmouredness or relaxation (with intellectual freedom resulting). This orientation cuts across the boundaries of all literary groups and schools, as it does those of the total social scene. Thus there can be the literary disaffiliate, who looks very radical because he's rightly disgusted with so much of society, but who is as armoured in his own way as the Lions Club businessman, and who shows it in his negativism and inner and outer chaos. It was this spirit I liked in Isaac Rosenfeld's article in the Summer 1957 CHICAGO REVIEW . . . expressed in such parts as: ". . . a wonderful name for this culture, both sides of the line. The expression is 'the formal frigidists'. That is a good and exact characterisation, for on both sides of this line you find the same embarrassment with human subject matter; the same flair for the abstract, the same flair for the 'cool': nothing too immediate, too direct or emotional, because that would be considered 'square' or 'frantic.'" He says this in several ways in several places, and adds: ". . . you know a writer does have a positive commitment, because he is alive."

Frank R. Williams (a reader): 'One critical comment I have is that the articles and general tone of the mag (TRACE) sometimes seem a little ivory-towerish, a little over-arty and out of touch. I personally would like to see more critical articles about specific contemporary writing, writers' problems, analyses of techniques, marketing problems, etc. In addition, you must have many subscribers like myself who are relatively new to modern poetry and would like some help in dealing with it, both from the reading and writing viewpoints. I supposed you may shudder at the very thought of basic articles on poetry "explication", yet many of your

readers would derive immense benefits from such a series, I believe.'

'Books have helped me a great deal to understand and appreciate twentieth century painting and music; I feel no apologies are in order. I abhor the school of thought which implies that a whole man of this era should be able to bring nothing but himself before a work of art and immediately be able to get a full measure of understanding, enjoyment, and inspiration from it. This is as fallacious now as it has ever been.'

'The person who has been attracted to contemporary poetry for various reasons and who wishes to explore and revel in the experiment more and ever more, has nowhere to go. There are excellent books available re painting, music, and literature, but to my knowledge none re poetry. (Except anthologies of poetry and poetry magazines which are most useful only to the experienced reader.)

'About fiction, I think most little-mag editors take a completely unjustified supercilious attitude about the fiction being turned out these days. Because of their narrowminded opinions about writing, they disclaim and decry anything which has had a mass circulation and appreciation. (I suppose their prototypes existed in Shakespeare's time.)

'I, and perhaps some of my fellows, would like to see in your pages articles and essays dealing with the material mentioned above. Such things as the John Masefield article are interesting, informative, and worthwhile, but they are not dynamic and ultimately rewarding. Twenty-four pages is your limitation; why not expand and charge more? I'm sure we'd all like to see a fatter TRACE.'

POSTERITY IS KINDER THAN THE CRITICS

by David Gunston

Many people hold that the real age of literary criticism is dead. Certainly, critics are politer than they used to be, but maybe they are less discriminating as well. At the same time, few great works become classics in the lifetimes of their authors, and the opinion of posterity seldom bears out what contemporaries had to say about books and plays. For that reason it is interesting, in the light of present knowledge, to compare our general opinions today with those whose job it was to comment upon what we now call classics when they first burst upon the world.

Shakespeare has not always held the esteem of playgoers the world over. Samuel Pepys, who might be considered an enlightened, knowledgeable and typically intelligent theatre-goer of the seventeenth century, thought *ROMEO AND JULIET* 'the worst play I ever heard in my life', and he heard a good many. He 'took no pleasure at all' in *TWELFTH NIGHT*. Byron called the Bard 'a damned humbug', and Coleridge wrote of *MEASURE FOR MEASURE*: 'a hateful work, though Shakespearian throughout'. 'I can't read Ben Jonson,' wrote Tennyson, 'especially his comedies. He appears to me to move in a sea of glue.'

Of Milton, Horace Walpole said: 'Who would remember him for his barbarous prose?' And of Boswell's *LIFE OF JOHNSON*, he remarked: 'The story of a mountebank and his zany.' In that work itself, Dr Johnson is reported as saying of Lord Chesterfield's letters: 'They teach the morals of a whore, and the manner of a dancing-master.'

Thomas Carlyle called Charles Lamb 'not genius, but diluted insanity', while Sydney Smith called Macaulay 'a

book in breeches'. Harriet Martineau thought Bulwer-Lytton 'a woman of genius enclosed in a man's form'.

Such recriminations, although not always mutual, have been common enough for centuries. Samuel Richardson thought *TOM JONES* 'a dissolute book' whose run was over in 1750, and Charles James Fox held that no one could write so much nonsense as Dean Swift did. Coleridge has plenty to say about books in general, and little of it contained praise. Of Gibbon's *DECLINE AND FALL OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE*, he said: 'Gibbon's style is detestable, and his style is not the worst thing about him. His history has proved an effective bar to all real familiarity with the temper and habits of Imperial Rome.' Of *A SENTIMENTAL JOURNEY*, he wrote it was 'poor and sickly stuff'.

John Wesley called David Hume 'the most insolent despiser of truth and virtue that ever appeared in the world'. According to Ralph Waldo Emerson, neither Shelley nor Byron were ever poets, and Dickens 'had no insight into character . . . his eye rests always on surfaces.' Of Emerson himself, Miss Mitford said: 'He would have been a great writer and thinker if Carlyle had not fallen in his way.' Dr John Brown also had a poor opinion of Dickens. 'A child of genius, but only a child . . . he never progresses, never improves', is what he wrote about the great novelist.

According to one nineteenth century critic, Walter Savage Landor never learnt to write simple and lucid English. The epithet 'ass' is not what one would expect to meet even in the more irresponsible quarters of literary abuse; yet, Samuel Butler called Richard Jefferies 'An ass' in a letter, and Stephen McKenna referred to George Russell (A.E.) as a 'bit of an ass'. Melville, as is well known, was never very popular in his own day. 'I am heartily sick of TYPEEEE,' wrote James Russell Lowell in a letter to a friend. Another American, Walt Whitman, was also under heavy fire for his book of poems, *LEAVES OF GRASS*, when it was published. Charles Eliot

Norton wrote of it: 'One cannot leave it about for chance readers, and would be sorry to know that any woman had looked into it past the title page.'

John Ruskin could get quite vehement at times about authors whose work he disliked. 'An utterly shallow wretched segment of a human creature, incapable of understanding anything in the ultimate conditions of it,' was how he described John Stuart Mill. Of George Eliot's *THE MILL ON THE FLOSS*, Ruskin had but one word: 'disgusting'. Of George Eliot herself, Dr John Brown burst out: 'Her views of life, of God, of all that is deepest and truest in man, are low, miserable, hopeless, and she seems always wishing to drag her readers down to her dead level . . . I trust that in fifty years she will be forgotten . . .' That was in 1872!

But some of the women writers of a century or so ago could be pretty peppery themselves. Miss Mitford thought *UNCLE TOM'S CABIN* one-sided, exaggerated, and false, with only cleverness of a disagreeable kind. 'I read about a hundred pages, and found the book so painful, that I put it down, and certainly am not likely to pick it up again.' Charlotte Brontë said of Thackeray, he 'likes to dissect an ulcer or an aneurism, he has pleasure in putting his cruel knife or probe into quivering, living flesh'. She also thought but little of Jane Austen, remarking: 'I should hardly like to live with her ladies and gentlemen, in their elegant but confined houses.' Hannah More felt Gibbon's *DECLINE AND FALL* to be affected and in false taste, and found the notes immodest and profane. Anna Seward thought Milton's pagan allusions in *PARADISE LOST* 'improper in a poem whose subject was of such consecrated sanctity'.

The same sort of thing went on until quite recent times. Henry James called an enthusiasm for the words of Edgar Allan Poe 'the mark of a decidedly primitive stage of reflection'. Matthew Arnold held that Thackeray was not a first-rate artist, and Arnold Bennett said of Kipling: 'He was

never great'. George Moore called Conrad a 'completely worthless writer'; and Gertrude Atherton thought George Moore's face colourless and 'like a codfish crossed by a satyr'. James Russell Lowell regarded Bulwer-Lytton as an imposter, and Charles Eliot Norton called him 'essentially a man of tinsel'.

But, for sheer amusing literary criticism, Thomas Carlyle's comments on Gay's *BEGGAR'S OPERA* are unsurpassed. He called the play: 'A mere pouring of bilge-water and oil of vitriol on the deepest wounds of humanity.'

For a brief moment, we are inclined to sympathise with the fourth Lord Holland, who said: 'How odious all authors are, and how doubly so to each other!' But not for long.

THE UNAVOIDABLE AWKWARDNESS

by Gene Frumkin

MORE good short stories are published today than at any time in the history of this art form. For one thing, there are probably more periodicals publishing stories and, for another, standards of technique are higher. Look at *ESQUIRE*, *MADEMOISELLE*, *THE NEW YORKER*, *PLAYBOY*, and other magazines with a Follies flair — the stories they publish are usually fine examples of the craft of fiction. No bumps, no grinds (in the prose, that is); everything fits properly — with no wrinkles — like a well-tailored suit.

But this fact alone ought to make us suspicious. In the recent *PARIS REVIEW* interview, Hemingway says: 'I might say that what amateurs call a style is usually only the unavoidable awkwardness in first trying to make something that has not heretofore been made. Almost no new classics resemble other previous classics. At first, people can see only the awkwardness.' That is what we miss in today's stories: the unavoidable awkwardness. We miss, in other words, the struggle to observe deeply in a different way, a way representative of our times.

Whether the awkwardnesses — and there are many — in *SOMETHING TO TELL MOTHER** are due to incompetence or to a new seeing and saying is difficult to determine. Or rather, we should say, the incompetence is undeniably there; but is it there because the author can do no better ever or because he is doing something only he is attempting and, therefore, has not got his standards straight yet? That is the difficulty we encounter.

**SOMETHING TO TELL MOTHER, Gil Orlovitz, AMERICAN LETTERS PRESS, 35 pp., 95c.*

Orlovitz's ragged edges appear to be, in part, failures of the self-critical faculty. In the following passage, two characters are discussing the heart-attack death of one Nathan Brodsky:

“Ungemach was serious. “It’s a varning.”

“Uh-huh.” Frank peered at him, anxious.

“It’s a varning ve should all think about, so ve should relax, ant not get up too much shteam. It could have happened to any of us in this business.”

“You’re not kidding,” Frank said. The normal whiteness of his face receded into a further pallor. Then he turned to Peter. “What do you think?”

That is about as absurd a question as could have been asked. What could Peter think about Nathan Brodsky’s death or about its being a warning to all of them? The question was put because the author was either too lazy to devise a better way of keeping the conversation going and/or because he did not fully recognise how inappropriate the question was.

Unfortunately, other lapses of this nature occur; when the author runs into a dead spot, he often takes the easy way out. Moreover, verbiage and excesses of description may also be cited against the story, plus such grotesqueries as ‘And then her eyelids stumbled over the fattening tears that heaved up’ and some corny jokes (intended to be so, it’s true) that are not obvious enough to be as corny as they should be.

Yet, this longish story, which is just a day in the life of the Schneider Mercantile Corporation, has a quality of realness that is absent in most of the more carefully written pieces that are bought by the moneyed establishments. It is real, not so much through its concentration on detail, but through its portrayal of terribly dull people in the terribly dull environment of a small business concern. It would be a depressing tale, but for the framework of humour, of satire,

in which it is written. The naturalism is tempered by a language that depends much on tropes and odd juxtapositions, and is at some remove from the typically naturalistic. Thus, the method achieves a fresh combination which, despite the story's weaknesses, produces a good possible approach to dealing with the subject matter of our society.

So, hail to the awkward, harbinger perhaps of the true contemporaneous style—not necessarily Orlovitz's—that later may come to be honoured as the most vital, most genuine, expression of our age's complexity. Happy would be the day when the big publishers could afford to look ahead. Then the little magazines could peacefully fold their tents, relinquishing their purposes to sturdier pocketbooks.

SOME ITEMS RECEIVED

by the Editors

LACK of space at times has been a factor in limiting comments on books; but such is not the case in this issue. With full measure of admiration for the publishers of what recent weeks have brought—for underwriting a philosophy we endorse, by giving print to many different kinds of writers—almost none of these books and pamphlets has inspired the only truly justifiable reviews, those to induce the readers to buy.

Still, two—amongst those deserving circulation—emphatically add brightness to the brightening skies of contemporary poetry, if chiefly because they are from universities and contain works of young people. One, in fact, displays undergraduate poetry exclusively. The value in this one (UNIVERSITIES POETRY 1, University College of N. Staffordshire, Keele—3/6) is less from the success of specific contributors than from its general reflection of intelligent and lively young interest in poetry as such; and it sharply indicates which influences are more potent at this juncture. In view of the varied editorial tastes, and that the selections are from twenty-two schools, these signs do have decided significance. Despite much outward formalism, the main trends stem from the Romantic revival. The other (OUT ON THE EDGE, Leeds—also available at Charing Cross Road—2/6) contains freer and more original poetry, from those averaging somewhat older. This booklet is distilled from the original AUDIENCE, of which other mentions appear in this issue. Continued development along lines manifest here should be most gratifying in promised future publications in these projects.

THE SUPREME FATUITY

We have before us two pamphlets issued by PENDLE HILL, a publishing font at Wallingford, Pa., sustained by the American Society of Friends. One is JOHN WOOLMAN AND THE 20TH CENTURY, by Reginald Reynolds (No. 96, 35c.); the other, THE HUMAN WAY OUT, by Lewis Mumford (No. 97). The expressed Pendle Hill Idea is the promotion of pamphlets representing the possible illumination of the crucial contemporary dilemmas of man and his milieu. The Idea is not calculated to repel divergencies of view; on the contrary, they are welcomed, popular or no. Candid gratitude is due the existence of such a Press, of which there are struggling few in a time of universal mass media, dedicated as they are to an antibiotic assault on the individual, on the ground that he is a sort of egococci infection of the Advertized Group.

The special and positive infection of the mass by individuals reassessing their monolithically biased attitudes of racial prejudices, with which Reynolds is essentially concerned, and the radical group re-examination of its insentient acceptance of United States and Soviet leaderships, which decries on the one hand the slow lurch toward nuclear warfare, but which seduces itself on the other hand with a self-styled virtuous pragmatism that can only have both nations finally interlock in rapt and annihilating hydrogen fusion, with which Mumford is centrally gripped—constitute the authors' responses. The motivating condition of the individual must be, as Mumford would have it, 'a great collective illumination', in Reynolds' case paralleling the major concepts of the nineteenth century American Quaker prophet, John Woolman, to operate by word and deed in the state of Christ's love for oneself and for one's fellow man.

The fact that the position, found in both pieces, derives from the religious experience should not make cause for dismissal—however one may judge the historical behavior of church and churchmen. The pertinent matter is this: both writers pose and grapple the brutal fundamental of our day. Which is: when human survival is at stake, can human love, confronted by missile murder, alter the murderer?

On the face of it, the question seems disingenuously naive. But the very horror of the matter is that society has manipulated itself vis-à-vis life and death by prospective nuclear warfare, into the crass nakedness of having to pose the question at all. The tit-for-tat of *soigné* realists that politics is the art of the possible, that men are inexorably aggressive and that the world is what it is and must be embraced as such — is a rapping of alleged empirical poltergeists at the chancelleries' green tables. Because, obviously, for the first time in the history of mankind, the discriminating use of the H-bomb can declare the glory of the world as it is not.

It is, then, an act of the bile of indifference and the sensuality of suicide to fob off, contemptuously or otherwise, the formulations of the dissenting religious humanists. Capitalist, communist, and ecclesiastic materialists have converged us to a point where the trace of even a semantic sneer at the definition of spirit may smudge off into the supreme fatuity of the non-definable.

ADDENDA . . .

THOUGH loss of college sponsorship joyfully may be declared a boon—the magazine becoming unquestionable non-academic and as free as the editors permit—the recent story of THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL is shocking. That the trustees of a liberal school should have decreed punishment, in effect, for the ‘crime’ of violating what then must have been a hidden censorship, constituted an alarming recurrence of an American disease about which a good deal has been written. And scant heed can have been taken that the college support of this periodical, which has been recognised as an outstanding one in this field, has reflected measureless benefit to the school’s international reputation. In time, beyond influences exercised by its teachers and through its curricula, this may prove to have been this college’s chief contribution. Yet, the magazine was summarily disinherited, because of one iconoclastic issue presenting typical contemporary poetry of the Underground in the U.S. and the New Movement in Britain! That the Editor of TRACE supplied the Foreword to the American section is not a consideration; for he had no part in the selections, none of his own poetry appeared, and he attempted no evaluations. Whose works were used, or what they said, is beside the point. The shocking event is that a wealthy leading educational institution deprived an important periodical of small financial aid, arbitrarily and on grounds which in a state school would have violated constitutional rights of free expression.

Not unrelated to the foregoing is a matter pointed out by Karl Shapiro, in a letter in the August POETRY, decrying the practice of libraries which solicit original mss., notes, etc., from poets, without offers of payment. He calls upon poets to refuse to make such donations. A reply from David C.

Mearns of the Library of Congress sets up the usual defense of inadequate budgets, buttressed by the old humbug about 'recognition' bestowed. Obviously, Mr Mearns' thinking is perverse; for, libraries (and schools too) would not even exist in their present significance, except there had existed those creative talents to produce their monuments and guides.

It's past time all writers realised that themselves, and themselves alone, determine their own recognitions or anonymities, their enduring values or evanescences . . . that no schools or libraries can 'elevate' them, and that if they earn their fame (and libraries concede the likelihood by soliciting them), theirs is the recognition of the libraries, not vice versa. And especially in this time of disproportionate pay for cultural contributions, compared even with admittedly-low salaries of those library experts (whose services Mr Mearns also feels are compensatory) Karl Shapiro's plea should be unanimously heeded.

No extensive research is required to demonstrate that graver concern should be evidenced about the lack of rewards for the makers of culture (NB : while supporting its magazine, Beloit College provided not one penny for the contributors without whom no amount of money could have produced THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL), than about inadequacies of institutional appropriations. Even now, the gist of much current discussion is that education is deteriorating from over-emphasis on grounds, buildings, and equipment. Why not provide less shrubbery, marble, and streamlined furniture — and a bit more cash for underfed genius?

The international ORIOLE groups have suffered the loss by death of a founder, Dr Leigh Henry, who regularly attended the London meetings. These had been social gatherings in private homes, not largely attended, and where chiefly original traditional verse was read ; but there are many evidences of efforts to revive such meetings in broadened

scope. Of current relevance — that Dr Henry was particularly interested in the affinities of music with words. He was author of a comprehensive edition of British historical music, had lived in Italy before the first War, with Marinette, d'Annunzio, and others, and also had been in close association with Nicholas Beauduin, in Paris. Details about ORIOLE may be obtained from Miss Jean Symons, 11 Gloucester Gate, Regents Park, London, N.W.1.

The CONTEMPORARY POETRY AND MUSIC CIRCLE again announces a reading series, for second Mondays from October to May (at Stanton Coit House, 13 Prince of Wales Terr., Kensington High St., W.8). This is under auspices of the Progressive League and PLAN—q.v.—though separately managed. Queries should go to Ashton Burall, 2 Antrim House, Antrim Rd., N.W.3. Visiting American poets are especially welcome to read, and urged to make early advance contacts.

... And details of new readings under BARROW POETS auspices may be obtained through ORE over in Teddington, Middlesex, the only 'going' English poetry magazine carrying forward in a distinctive romantic tradition. ... Of growing significance are activities of the founders of the de Leon Drama School, now at the PARK LANE THEATRE, 45 Park Lane, W.1 (patrons: Kenneth Tynan, Peter Brook, Adrienne Allen, Moira Lister, E. Martin Browne). Besides verse plays, talks and readings by well-known poets are featured. Enquiries should go to Miss Jean de Leon, 254b Kew Rd., Richmond, Surrey.

While on the subject of Americans reading abroad—Kenneth Patchen is the only poet invited to appear on the Performing Arts Program in the AMERICAN THEATRE at the World Fair in Brussels. As this TRACE was prepared, he was to read poems with jazz 'combo' to round out the ANTA features. He had just done a show with THE CHAMBER JAZZ SEXTET on the ABC-TV network's 'Stars of Jazz' series. This

poet has evolved techniques for fusing the two arts in a new type of entertainment, examples of which are available on LP records (CADENCE).

Returning to the U.S.A.—WORLD PACIFIC RECORDS (8255 Sunset Blvd., Hollywood 46, Calif.) last month released JAZZ CANTOS: Vol. I, In the Mainstream of Poetry and Music, with work by Walt Whitman, William Carlos Williams, Langston Hughes, Dylan Thomas, Lawrence Lipton, Philip Whalen, and Lawrence Ferlinghetti. Readings are in varied styles—Rhythm, chant and part-song, by John Carradine, Hoagy Carmichael, Bob Dorough, Ben Wright, and Roy Glenn ... drawing upon talents of jazz musicians Fred Katz, Jack Montrose, Gerry Mulligan, Buddy Colette, Chico Hamilton, Ralph Pena, Paul Horn, Bob Hardaway, and others. Offered as ‘an effort to restore poetry to its function as a word-and-music art form in the modern idiom’, it is the opinion of this writer that the valid assessment of this should be left to the music men, since most of the poetry already has been well evaluated. In other words, what remains for dissection is the accompaniment; and it is high time that music critics get to this.

Meanwhile, new recordings without musical accompaniments also are in preparation. One comprises a comprehensive presentation of the poetry of Gil Orlovitz, another in THE SPOKEN WORD series (10 E. 39th St., New York 16, \$5.95). And talks about poetry have been increasingly popular — among these, some under sponsorship of The Society for Aesthetic Realism at the TERRAIN GALLERY (20 W. 16th St., New York 11). More is also being done in exhibitions of printed works — as in a recent tour of the ARTS CONCERT, originating in Boston, and largely in this phase through participation of Robert L. Peters and John Fury. . . . Further on poetry and jazz — an entire series of varied programmes have been staged at the ASH GROVE Concert-Cabaret in Los Angeles, where the way for such had

been paved by shows at the original CABARET CONCERT and the COSMO ALLEY, where leading poets have read to jazz.

Yet another 'spot' near to the TRACE Editor is THE UNICORN, one of several 'coffee shops' with contingent book shops earning favour — and catering to coffee-shop patrons, has been announced. Philosophical discussion groups also have been formed at such centres.

The prior reference to Boston brought to mind the AUDIENCE controversy (two magazines of same name) some while ago, and that the Editor recently was startled to receive a file of POETRY AND AUDIENCE (see Directory), confirming that the original from which the large new American AUDIENCE originated, remains active! In fact, both bear the same Vol. and No. on last issues seen!

Neither the review pages nor the Directories in this issue clue the far-ranging publications activities of late. One which deserves more detailed description is the finely printed and historically interesting QUARTERLY BULLETIN of the Irish Georgian Society (8/6 or \$1.50 for the year from DOLMEN PRESS). The Indian P.E.N. has enlarged its international coverage and has moved to 'Theosophy Hall', 40 Marine Lines, Bombay 1, India (single copies, 50 naye paise). In the U.S., THE AMERICAN BOOK COLLECTOR (1822 School St., Chicago 13, Ill.) has commenced using creative fiction and some articles of avant-garde interest (\$1), last month's containing a Jesse Stuart story and the most extensive Stuart bibliography yet produced. Hal Trovillion's THE SIGN OF THE SILVER HORSE has just featured the fiftieth anniversary of the TROVILLION PRIVATE PRESS, the oldest such now functioning in this country—with an article by Paul Jordan-Smith. This press has long been known in Britain for its fine limited editions of old out-of-print English garden books.

The many with justified grievances over difficulties in getting reviews and notices have appreciated a recent OPEN

LETTER TO CRITICASTERS, issued by Jonathan Williams, along with announcements of recent JARGON books listed in TRACE. His ironies anent the 'Official Book World' are more than apropos. . . . Drawing attention again to HEARSE—besides the new chapbook series, E. V. Griffith contemplates a new magazine entirely devoted to eye-poems, without text. . . . A far call from such a project—but not altogether without literary interest is a series of Science-Fiction Fantasy Booklets under joint Canadian and U.S. auspices (R. S. Griggs, 25 McMillan Ave., West Hill, Ont., Can., \$1 for five). . . . A No. 3 OLIVANT had been scheduled for September, Editor D. V. Smith appealing for contributor co-operation in gaining a maximum circulation. . . . Editors of ONE have started publication of a scholarly quarterly, HOMOPHILE STUDIES (\$1), covering scientific and legal as well as cultural and philosophical aspects of these problems. . . . A new Theodore Shaw book (successor to PRECIOUS RUBBISH) is coming, via STUART ART GALLERY, Boston. . . . A special sort of international anthology is in preparation by Dr James A. Butler (1312 Marion St., Tampa, Fla., U.S.A.), titled PATHS IN PHILOSOPHY, to illuminate philosophical trends in poetry, under auspices of the FINE ARTS CRAFTS INSTITUTE of Twentieth Century Studies. Contributions are asked (sonnets or lyrics).

What might be described as an informal amalgamation of actors and writers is reported in Greenwich Village, at the social as well as semi-formal reading levels — the result of experiments, not only with music, but with pictures and tableaux. Returning to 86 Horatio St., the English poet, Allister Reid, is joining in Village life, which recently included new poetry reading at the WHITE HORSE.

Of wide interest is a campaign to put a portrait of Emma Lazarus on a U.S. postage stamp in July, 1960 (her birth month). Few seem aware that hers is the sonnet fragment on the Statue of Liberty; and recommended reading at this time

should be the H. E. Jacob biography, *THE WORLD OF EMMA LAZARUS*. All poets are being asked to write to the Postmaster General at once — for eighteen months is required between time of acceptance of a postage-stamp idea and its realisation.

And attention again is drawn to the *POETRY LOS ANGELES* book appearing in London this fall. The degree of support for this will be important in determining further plans growing out of the 'revival' in this part of the world. That it may be of enduring nature may be substantiated by various more practical developments. Such as, numerous new book shops. One of these, specialising in offbeat material and paperbacks was established last summer by Adrienne and Bob Handy, on Hollywood Blvd. (6679). They have been demonstrating that many items long declared would not sell, do sell quite well, after all.

New publications received (comprising several in the above category) have been: *THE LOOM OF DUSK*, Howard G. Allen (NEW ATHENAEUM PRESS, 50c.) ; *TRUTH FOR ORANGE TREES*, Joan Stanford Bishop (GOLDEN QUILL, \$2.50) ; *THE SLEEPING GYPSY*, George Garrett (U. OF TEXAS PRESS, \$2.50) — already reviewed when appeared in magazine; *IT MAY BE SO*, Rev. Edmund H. Gibson (GREENWICH, \$2.50); *LIGHT VERSION*, Marian Gleason (GOLDEN QUILL, \$2.50); *HYPHENS*, James Russell Grant (PUTNAM, 7/6); *A GOLDEN ARCH*, Hannah Marie Haug (WISCONSIN POETRY MAGAZINE, \$1); *THE POET'S FLOWER*, and other verses, Guy Kendall (THE GUILD PRESS, 3/6 and 60c.); *A LAUGHTER IN THE MIND*, Irving Layton (JARGON—JONATHAN WILLIAMS, \$1.75); *WISCONSIN PIONEERS*, and Other Poems, Alice Phelps Ryder (WISCONSIN POETRY MAGAZINE, \$1); *LA CUPA NOTTE*, Yu Suwa (EDIZIONI CINZIA di FIRENZE, unpriced)—Japanese translated into Italian, accompanied by reproductions of the poet's graphic art; *RISE UP MY SONGS*, George Sylvester Viereck (WISCONSIN POETRY MAGAZINE, \$1); *SONNETS OF LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP*, Maurice

Wilkins (THE GUILD PRESS, 3/6 or 60c.).

A book which would have received detailed consideration, had it been received sooner and had it not been published more than a year ago, is TREBLINKA GRASS, Poetical Translations (of Jewish works), Aaron Schmuller (Privately: 935 Hancock St., Brooklyn 33, N.Y., U.S.A., \$2). Others which may be of special interest, but not yet received, are: WINDS OF UNREASON, George Ellenbogen (McGill Poetry Series, CONTACT, \$2); LANDMARKS, William Plumer Fowler (BRUCE HUMPHRIES, \$2.50); A MAN OF VISION and Other Poems, Geoffrey Johnson (ROBERT HALE, London, 8/6 or \$1.50); AMERICAN TRANSFORMATIONS, Jan Lechon (VOYAGES PRESS, \$2 and \$5 for ltd., edit.); NEW YOUNG GERMAN POETS, a Marianne Moore Sampler (CITY LIGHTS, not yet priced); STEPPING STONES, Edward Morgan (OUTPOSTS, 2/9); JOURNEY INTO TIME, by the late David Morton (PENTELIC PRESS, \$3.50); A BED OF STRAWBERRIES, Mary Phelps (VOYAGES PRESS, \$2, and \$5 for ltd. edit.); OVER HILL OVER DALE, Dorothy Una Ratcliffe (THE BODLEY HEAD, 28 Little Russell St., London, W.C.1, 12/6); PERCHANCE TOWARDS GRACE, A. Ritchie Stewart (OUTPOSTS, 2/9).