

TRACE

LIVING LITERATURE

i.e.:

**This Issue:
(15) POETS**

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**EXISTENTIALIST WHERE?
Article by Louis Gallo**

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**NEO-ULTIMATUM
Berne & Zekowski**

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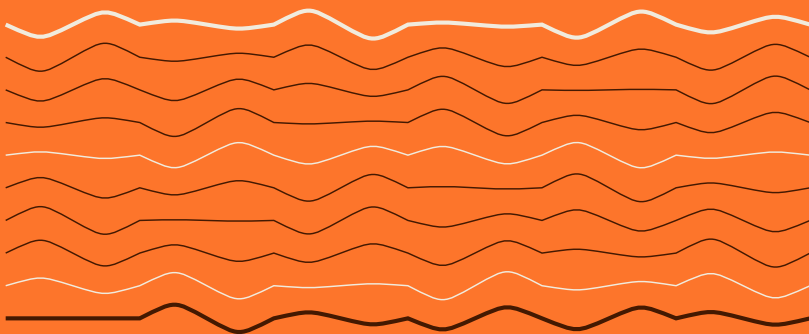
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A READING EDITION

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

Weird	5
That No One Is Watching!	8
The Simile	12
Towards Print	13
<i>(In Search of an Adequate Language)</i>	13
In Round Sums	20
Editors (and others) Write	21
<i>To Conquer Space</i>	21
Projects, Distinguished from Hobbies	23
The Editorial Purgatory	24
Blockbuster Publishing	28
The Supermarket Age	37
The Voice Persisted Until Death	38
My Father's Head	40
Tomorrow Does Not Step Lightly	48
MAN . . . To MAN	48

Small-town Year, 1962	50
Rose	52
Epilogue	63
Today	64
Reciprocity vs. Suicide	65
An Experiment in Creativity	70
Of Some Presences Not Past	81
'The Scent of Magnolias'	102
A German on Germany and the World	105
Entirely Rational	110
To a Professor of Humanities	111
Desert Treasury of Verses Xi	112
To Be Whispered in the Ear of a Potential Catatonic . .	113

WEIRD

A Quixote's Quarrel (Quixotic) With Existentialism by Louis Gallo

LIFE IS WEIRD. LIFE is not weird. Weirdness is a quality of response to life which an individual experiences at moments of suddenly-awakened consciousness. The weirdness is never a quality of the object observed; is an unbalanced state of consciousness in the observer. No observer: no consciousness: no weirdness.

This may be taken as a preliminary statement of the existentialist's view of himself in existence. A sense of life's weirdness is a permanent feature of his response to experience. Yet the weirdness is never a 'truth' about the world he experiences; is a truth only about his own unhappy state of consciousness.

The distinctiveness of the existentialist — that feature of his being which marks him as a creature altogether unique among men, a new phenomenon, the culmination of a process begun in the unnumbered millenia of prehistory and brought to a first horrendous definition a brief century ago in the frenetic writings of Soren Kierkegaard of Copenhagen — is his insistence on the cruciality of the experience which he calls 'consciousness.' More exactly, his insistence on a condition of hyperconsciousness, which transforms all objects around him into a throbbing weirdness. And more exactly again, his insistence on this weirdness out of 'despair' — for only at this ecstatic pitch can he feel that he 'truly' exists, or that existence has 'point.' Less consciousness — less weirdness — and the world becomes for him a pallid inanity, an excruciating pointlessness and boredom.

This is true even when this existentialist lacks the requisite intensity or unbalance of consciousness to allow

him the existentialist's exhilarated sense of a world-gone-weird. Having finished, for example, a most excellent supper; the food digesting most pleasurably; the coffee particularly fine; the company genial; relaxed, even 'contented;' his bent will yet remain toward weirdness. And perhaps not even waiting to establish an appropriate atmosphere for the introduction of his theme, even interrupting perhaps rudely the cheerful chirruping of his hostess (who had invited him not so much for his philosophy as for his weirdness, the weirdness of mixing him with her 'normal' friends, the weirdness of imagining him capable, outside her living room, of every conceivable outrage against decency and established morality): 'Wasn't that weird,' he will say, 'that teen-ager attempting all those rapes—fifty of them, I think he confessed to—before he finally succeeded with the last of his victims, the one he murdered? Isn't it weird, I mean, how he kept on doing it, compulsively, idiotically, hoping perhaps, through all those months, that someone would catch him and force him to stop doing it? But the weirdness is not so much in the dementedness of his behaviour—we have a word to explain his behavior: we call it "psychosis"—as in the thought that his "crime" was not a crime. In a state of nature, there can be no "crime." I wonder if I make my point clear? We speak of the "sociology" of a crime—we blame "society." We speak of the "moral" aspects of the crime—we judge the boy "responsible." But, who speaks of the "truth" of a crime? Ah, but I'm really not saying what I mean: "truth," "crime,"—I use these words out of despair: the words are nonsense. I mean, of course, the "existential truth" of the act — its true weirdness, its "naturalness."

Stopped, momentarily, by a distracting query from the hostess—would he like a drink of something? is it too hot in the room?—the existentialist will not relent. Even the clear fact that no one wants to hear him won't make him 'come

around' and 'behave'—like a nice little dog. What he wants is weirdness, that delirious sensation of portentousness, askewness, that 'despair' he cries against, yet which he so despairingly clings to, requires, in order that he may feel 'at home,' 'safe,' 'in his element.' And once again putting down the inane irrelevancies of his hostess, he will say:

It was done without an audience, don't you see? There was no background music. At the instant when our teen-ager struck his blows there were no violins or trumpets or drums making loud cacophony. In short, there was no "crime." A "crime" began to be committed—if we must use the word—only after the actual murder, when the boy imagined himself observed. That is, to the extent that the boy felt himself to have been observed, a "crime" existed—in his head. But, outside his head, no crime existed—nor could exist.

I think I begin to say more nearly what I mean. "Crime" is a condition exclusively existing in the imagination. The girl's dead body, we accept as fact. The boy's action—his murder of the girl—we pass over without questioning its actuality. But, to squeeze in here a "crime"—to transfer this simple physical act outside the realm of existence into the metaphysical realm of ethics and morality—is weird. That simple deed, by the mere addition of its being "observed," enters a realm altogether outside nature—this is truly weird.

But the overwhelming weirdness of existence is precisely this:

THAT NO ONE IS WATCHING!

Yes! Now I've said it! We exist—the show goes one . . . BUT NO ONE IS WATCHING! Yes! I think we can begin now to make intelligent comments about this “crime”. We have the image clearly before us: NO ONE WATCHING. And yet, what is it that makes of an act a “crime?” BEING OBSERVED!

I wonder if this is clear? An act becomes a crime—even so harmless an act as drinking a glass of water—when the sensation, “I'm being observed,” is added to the act. That sensation, alone, is what begets the crime. But the absurdity of this “crime” must surely be obvious. This is equivalent to putting each of our acts at the mercy of every hostile glance. This is to abdicate our rights to existence. But, these are further considerations—I'm getting away from the point. The point is the weirdness of the act at that instant when one senses one is observed. That instant is the supreme existential experience: only in that instant is “truth” possible. The move one makes at that instant will reveal unmistakably whether one's existence is free or enslaved, authentic or inauthentic.

‘Ah, but I see that my statements are baffling. I express myself poorly. This requires Dostoevsky, an epileptic, to do it—justice. Or a Musil, describing the crime of the half-wit, Moosbrugger. But isn't it remarkable that genius should almost automatically arrive at this intuition of “existential truth?” What is genius, if not precisely this capacity to understand that horror beyond which there can be greater horror? The horror: NO ONE IS WATCHING! We're all participants in a show—WHICH HAS NO AUDIENCE! Ah, but how badly I “give” this horror. This food and coffee, I'm afraid, have robbed me of the better part of my wits. This teen-ager's “crime”—I'm afraid I'm just not up to feeling the full existential weirdness of it right at this moment.’

Right at this moment! by which, the existentialist means: 'normally' he would be able to feel the full force of life's weirdness. Food and drink—'pleasures'—rob him of his capacities. In a state of comfort, he is—'not himself.'

The reader will perhaps have begun to sense a beginning of that 'unbalance' which is the beginning of that ecstasy which, carried through to its inevitable 'climax,' will culminate in the existentialist's awareness of life's irredeemable weirdness. And perhaps, too, it has become clear why 'crime' is so obsessive a subject of investigation among existentialists. The murderer is a 'psychotic'—he is perhaps happily relieved of the burden he bears when he is removed from free circulation among his fellows.

But the 'crime' of drinking a glass of water!—here, truly, is weirdness! And precisely in this appalling consciousness that every act is potentially a 'crime'—and the further horrendous knowledge that 'crime' is not possible in a state of nature (because: NO ONE IS OUT THERE WATCHING! WE'RE ALL PARTICIPANTS IN A SHOW WHICH HAS NO AUDIENCE! AND CRIME IS EXCLUSIVELY THAT SENSATION OF 'SOMEONE WATCHING') — the existentialist achieves his mad joy. And a fearful joy it is—godlike, overwhelming, overweening. In short: weird.

The existentialist—in summary—is distinct from all others who enjoy the sensation of weirdness (and who, at times, doesn't?) in that this sensation has become for the existentialist a ne plus ultra, a Sine qua non, the 'subject'. Perhaps, more exactly: has become the only subject.

At a party, some will enjoy exchanging smutty stories, or passing bright remarks about current affairs; or will enjoy the furtive rub of bodies, the glances, the 'asides,' the elaborate 'play.' Not so, the existentialist. Only the weirdness of these people here at this party—and the weirder, the better—concerns him. Nor is it quite their weirdness which is his 'subject.' Rather, his 'consciousness' of their weirdness defines his area of concern. For, nothing is 'in itself' weird.

So that his aim is to stir in himself and in his surroundings a maximum 'thrill' or 'throb' of 'consciousness.' For, as excitation, titillation, exacerbation, prolongation of the erotic delirium is the aim of the voluptuary in sexuality, excitation, exacerbation, prolongation, an always-increasing heightening of the delirium of 'consciousness' is the aim of the existentialist, a voluptuary in intellection, in cerebration.

Perhaps more pointedly: as a youth addicted to tinkertoy sets will turn to 'Science' as a fit occupation for his adult capabilities, making of the planets and galaxies, the atoms and minerals, merely so many cosmic or miniscule tinkertoy sets (his nostalgia being for tinkertoy sets), so the existentialist, as a boy deliriously conscious of himself as irredeemably weird, as a man of developed sensibilities, will transfer this 'consciousness' to all existence, infusing his dull trite neighbors with qualities of horrendous weirdness, staring at the most ordinary object with a fixed appall, an astonishment at its horrendous 'oddity,' its uncanny 'senselessness,' its astounding 'absurdity'—his nostalgia being for that ecstatic state, his unhappy childhood, that time when the weirdness was at its most excruciating—and most glorious.

To express it more contemporaneously: familiar, to a 'normal' man, will be this man's wife, his job, his tedium, the monotony and boredom and security of his monthly payments on his car, his grass each year growing greener, his belly each year growing fatter, his head each year becoming balder, his sons and daughters presenting him joyfully and tediously with grandchildren, cunning little bundles who will some day stand over his grave and wonder 'who he was' — or IF he was.

On the other hand, familiar to the existentialist will be the weirdness of a teen-ager attempting fifty rapes, the weirdness of this teen-ager's father's saying to the news reporters: 'I HOPE GOD KILLS HIM! HE'S BETTER OFF DEAD!' —

the weirdness of the ‘naturalness’ of the crime (no background music; the boy returning to class after committing the murder, singing in the church choir the Sunday following); the weirdness of no one — No ONE! — caring (and least of all himself, the existentialist); and yet (no one caring) the talk, the gabble, the jabber-jabbering, about ‘crime,’ ‘sex-education,’ ‘psychosis,’ ‘capital punishment,’ ‘materialism,’ ‘shoot the parents.’

While everywhere around him, his fellow creatures have ‘better things to do’ (than to contemplate life’s weirdness), only this — this ecstatic contemplation — to the existentialist is ‘worth doing.’

‘Wasn’t that weird?’ he will say over his coffee, commenting on the marvelous absurdities of this human side-show-without-an-audience.

Weird, indeed!

ISSUE P. 169 · SCAN P. 11

THE SIMILE

by Marvin H. Bell

Book-backed
bound in our underwear
we read about it
as if.
much as
those forms most strict
are all we allow
looseness
Necessarily
nothing is about us
that curls from us
alphabetically
while we
back into our underwear
lest we come out
positively.

TOWARDS PRINT

(IN SEARCH OF AN ADEQUATE LANGUAGE)

by the Editor

A T A RECENT BEVERLY HILLS gathering, an attempt was made to identify the links directly coupling semantical growth and/or deterioration with problems of today's culture. The participants, teaching in one or another of the sciences and arts or involved in major industry, divulged rather bewildered views. To say this, is not to disparage their mentalities; they simply had not been permitted to pause to examine detachedly the many worlds of words in a complex society.

They unanimously agreed that deliberate efforts to reduce a language to limited deployments of exact terms in rigid syntax must lead to sterility. But they also voiced nearly unanimous belief (with differing conceptions of this) in a dichotomy between uses (and abuses) of language in imaginative literature and in expository writings of 'factual' communication. The conceived breadths of division varied, and diverse subjective attitudes toward 'judgment' upon it were expressed.

The most outré of the former were felt represented by displays of 'chance' word-sequences, including explorations of the Unconscious for certain poetries. Extreme examples of the latter were noted in set formulae for which every word is necessary and no word may altogether-correctly be replaced by a near-synonym.

With slight reservations, a majority of these intelligent people appeared to believe that meticulous choices of terms in strict grammatical arrangements for unambiguous interpretation, equates with dessicated dogmatic

collineation, while liberties with words — although essential to a vital civilization — induce communicational chaos.

It was not immediately observed that the same author may, for different purposes, employ both imagination and rational selection — either in disparate writings or interwoven in one composition. And little was said at first about ways in which logicians are aided by fantastic ‘guessers’ or how logical formulations invariably advance and commence to give order to heretofore-‘ungoverned’ styles.

The beginnings of a better recognition of fundamentals rose from the interjection of a remark that the total problem reverts to human sensory impressions, that communication never has been limited to verbalization. Then, by reversal, someone pointed out the fact that vocal/written messages, even of the starkest scientific instruction, evoke the testimonies of the animal senses. And this, at last, led to partial acknowledgment that what is meant to be transmitted may be subjective (even ‘unconscious’) feeling, as well as ‘objective.’ (This last word, now cast in doubt.) The group decided literature utilizes varying proportions of each.

But the nearest complete understanding between man and man requires basic awareness how all communication is predicated upon a corresponding and near-equal RECEPTIVITY. This root matter has been preponderantly ignored, leaving thousands of educated people to talk to their verbal siblings (sometimes, merely to themselves). The areas of such restricted reception range from those for methodical scientists to those for more-diffuse poets.

There’s nothing consequently metaphysical in affirming that receptivity takes shape predeterminedly out of the consubstantial matrices which are everlastingly conditioning every consciousness of being; that there always are parallels of ascension and descension between intended (at least) intercommunicatory attempts of incarnations and patterns of same, organized by virtue of their multiplicities (human

societies, the most complex, by present knowledge). These parallels, in 'effective' actuality, become determinants of all manners and grades of reception.

Question: What is illogical in conceiving this obverse governing side of lingual phenomena (if only for tentative exploration) to be unavoidably equal in importance to that for dissecting the media, the speech and the writing through which men communicate or do-not-communicate? Isn't it incontestably 'true' that purposive receptivity is an essential component of meaningful identification/s of 'real' intention? This applies to transmissions of every sort of reactive description, every kind of sensory message, and every stage of abstraction into 'reasoned' thought. Oddly or not, this approach seems more acceptable to most people when applied to nonsemantical communication — as to music or the graphic or sculptural arts.

Not a few persons are today suggesting in various ways that more adequate language may eventuate from combinations of verbal and nonverbal elements. This may call for a new word for 'language.' As history already has predicated, such combinations are appearing in experimental forms in advance of their new denomination.

In recent months, from scattered sources, suggestions have been received that TRACE might serve, becoming a vitalizing medium toward extensions of written communication betwixt the manifold arts and sciences. Apparently this stems from evidences that the project has influenced English expression. At any rate, it has provided a few 'assists' in propagating differentiations that may help enliven literature, while simultaneously — in part-contradiction or counterbalance — aiding toward uniformity in usage amongst nations where English is native or culturally pre-eminent. This magazine has, besides, printed, from time to time, both articles and working samples bearing on semantical questions and possibilities.

These have pointed in divergent directions: some have stressed what allegedly prognosticates decadence; some have highlighted the 'saving' tendencies obliquing renewals in a language already related to nearly all tongues and with record numbers of historical origins.

Specifically, those making suggestions would incorporate, both at a quasi-literary limited level and at a rather-vague 'universal' level, key-components of communication in mathematics and several physical sciences, along with materials from philosophy and psychology, plus audio- and visio-arts — and these, finally, amalgamated with so-called 'avant' expression in a dozen major languages.

This very large subject predicates chapters of scrutiny. In this short editorial, only a scattering of the ideas can be mentioned fractionally.

The most explicit — and via preliminary demonstrations of a method — has come from David Lyle (see his letter in TRACE No. 45, and his comments with the Susan Wood Statement in this issue). Working in electronics, this applied scientist reveals unique familiarity with to-now scarcely-related subjects: arts, parapsychology, and theoretical physics. Giving account, also, to his acquaintance with formal philosophies and those rendered through serious novels and poetry, Lyle may be one of the forerunners of an as-yet unformulated scientific literary development.

Then there's Dr. Louis A. Selzer, a bio-sociologist with knowledge of philosophy, Eastern religions, and mathematics. He expands Einstein's formula to state a 'universal law,' and would apply this to communication with special attention to so-called extra-sensory experience, on the side of 'directive nonrandom forces against the accidental random forces of disintegration.' He finds a 'Will' behind speech's evolution, maintaining that man's awareness of the widening purposes of language accompanies discovery of its present inadequacies for transmitting formerly-unknown

phases of being. An advocate of what he calls ‘Spiritual Humanism,’ he hosted the above-described gathering. ‘We are in the continuum of the laws of nature,’ he states — meaning to include what he accedes are wrongly-termed ‘supernatural’ manifestations, until now outside the scope of definable means for one individual to inform another individual of his concepts and perceptions.

Clarence VanVredenburg, who formalizes his approach in a ‘thought-forming’ technique (with mail-courses via ‘Sensitron System’) expresses his views in a letter in this issue. An important premise—for him—starts from acknowledging that ‘most knowledge is fractional.’ In re theories labeled ‘superhuman,’ he writes: ‘What we enjoy most today was quite Unknown and perhaps ridiculous in the past, and our tomorrow . . . to man, appears a monstrous and, indeed, impossible absurdity. But suddenly, at the flip of the calendar, there it is. The fact. The answer.’

Before passing to Mr. Lyle’s devices, reference may be made to clues for advancement in words of Harry Hooton, the late Australian poet-philosopher (Lyle noted them in a TRACE review [No. 44] of Hooton’s first posthumous book). Also, see ideas of the music-composer, John Cage (No. 45): ‘Silence is not silence . . .,’ summarized in A. Fredric Franklyn’s book-review.

And acknowledgement is due scarcely-circulated writings by Glen Coffield in a 1955 number of THE BRIDGE (by title and intention, oriented spanwise): ‘. . . to apply the physical laws of matter to the little-magazine publishing industry . . . requires an arbitrary skeletal form for operations—an approximate composite of astronomical and nuclear formations (his own) . . . the Radial or Four-Link System. The flow is both ways in the radials. The source of energy (both mental and physical) is ideas, interest, authority (critical), artistic creations, financial means, material supplies. Individuals in the process send . . . toward center, where . . .

it is selected and redistributed . . . the best of the individual parts made available to all the other parts and the whole structure strengthened. A difference in potential determines the flow, and the justification of it.' He referred to 'Rational Constructs' as: 'formulae for stimulation of human processes . . . when . . . fed in one place, all other parts of the construct . . . activated, because linked by fundamental working principles.' And: 'There is no limit to the content that may be employed . . . psychology, anthropology, physics, mathematics, dramatisms . . . In relation to each other, Constructs react as physical bodies; hence, can be controlled by physical bodies.' Quoted on the cover of this BRIDGE, is William James: 'One cannot have impression without expression.'

Lyle repeatedly refers to TRACE: parts of BABELOMANIA (No. 43), a review of Sir Herbert Read's FORMS OF THINGS UNKNOWN, a novel-excerpt that chanced to fall opposite (No. 41), etc. He calls these approaches 'conformal representation,' endorses 'Bergsonian concepts of change,' and affirms that 'language-stretching' in this magazine 'programs the very type of coherence' declared unavailable. His interests comprise education; and The Adult Education Ass'n of the U.S.A. seems in accord with his call for better teaching-media.

Scores of quotations might be drawn from Lyle's free brochures of samples employing specialist's terms and signs amalgamated with telegraphic expositions. But his uses of diagrams (with statements, too, arranged typographically to impart visually more than would formal paragraphs), pictures, collage-effects, drawings, contemporary advertisements—are equally stimulating. He is interested in photography, and in cinema and TV as they might be utilized. Affirming: '... Camera vision operates as an intelligence (amplifier) function between the human eyes,' he quotes from UNDER THE SUN (Marvin Bell's No. 40 review):

‘Camera vision is a responsive property of the human mind, pre-historic to the invention of the photographic process.’

Regarding the parallel import of reception, one of Lyle’s branches from a time-study with electroencephalographic multipliers. This was at TMS-NY Systems Workshop, Dec. 8, 1958. It was demonstrated that ‘high barrier, definite boundary persons have a high degree of preparatory alertness and a low %-time alpha’ (quick to grasp new notions), while ‘low barrier, indefinite boundary persons have a low degree of preparatory alertness and a high %-time alpha’ (slow to grasp). He observes that the former types have stronger inclinations toward broad humanitarianism, respect for individualism, and possess practical ability to do things on their own initiative; the latter are inclined to respect individuals little, to be theoretical, and to draw up massive schemes for control by fiat. Thus, the psychologist in him.

Finally, Lyle goes along with the semanticists’ concern about careless usages of simple words. He cites examples of misleading impressions (the receptors again) magnified, distorted, and reversed in what becomes destructive coercion in thousands of intendedly-serious writers.

ISSUE P. 174 · SCAN P. 16

In Round Sums

by A. Fredric Franklyn

LIFE IS MORE EVIDENT OR UNWORTHY
THAN bold of those false HEARTS.
LESS than such pretense must SUFFER.
NOT that the brave believe MEANING
IS only how one does WITHOUT.
HEART OR PAIN ALWAYS IS BEAUTY.

EDITORS (AND OTHERS) WRITE

To CONQUER SPACE

*posted by Susan Wood, 17 years old, 3/22/62, for her
English class in Midland Park, New Jersey*

*("Susan has managed to surround
"Outer/outside," below . . . IBM used pages
112/113 TRACE, 1961 & via Harry Hooton, in
Winter, '62 TRACE. . . Consider Susan's little
Haikuization of all space and time, for
publication?" —David Lyle.)*

The way to conquer space is to understand it. The original roots of the word space, come from spire and point.

A point is the beginning of space, and also that point of attention toward which man is immediately conscious is the basis of his total experience.

Consequently, space and psychology, or, according to Webster, the logic of Psyche, are two halves of the same question:

WHAT IS SPACE?

Now, since we have linked space with the attention of the individual, and since attention cannot be continuously held on any outer point, Space is therefore something successive or serial. This links space to time.

Until man begins to include himself in his calculations referenced to space,

neither space nor any other subject
will be conquered.

This is because man is the measure and unit of all things.

How he is the measure would demand a study of the conditions which underlie his power of observation.

(NOTE: Her English teacher gave Susan a 'C' on this (but) a Project Engineer from Kearfoot observed she had written a specification for a universalized environmental testing . . . (and) a Director of Systems Planning remarked she had condensed all science and knowledge in preparation for a 'general systems programming language.'

(In an extended analogical commentary, Mr. Lyle refers to Nathan Lyons, co-author of *UNDER THE SUN*—reviewed in TRACE No. 40—and Sherwood Taylor, in *CURRENT* (Apr. '62): the former, re 'primary significance of vision;' the latter, re 'through these changes in consciousness, however brought about, some true aspects of the . . . world, normally hidden, are revealed.' In relation to Susan's as 'presentation of the elements of a third culture, fitted to the third, or partitive nervous system.' And calls upon John Dewey: 'The inherent predictive aspect in every perception.' Also: Taylor's use of William Blake's: 'If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear to man . . . as it is, Infinite'—and to many others, including Walt Whitman (*A CHILD WENT FORTH*), Aldous Huxley (in describing what he saw under influence of mescaline in the gardens of St. Johns College, D. H. Lawrence . . . etc.)

PROJECTS, DISTINGUISHED FROM HOBBIES

Clarence VanVredenburg

Dear Editors:

I've spent years on N.Y. TIMES Book Review, and at the reading-time of 100 to 200 reviews to one book, I find the odds all in favor of TRACE as a digest. Other digests, no. Positively No to READER'S DIGEST and to the positive thinking of Norman Vincent Peale. A perfect lady once asked me: 'What would you think of a world without sin?' My reply: 'About the opposite of Peale.' . . . I can sense that something in TRACE bears an imprint of tremendous diligence . . . and at one time, was that not a stage-coach or something very pioneer?

Along with my objections to pap literature and smug isms, I carry a torch, not for, but against hobbies.

So I have a complete correspondence Course on Projects . . . as distinguished from hobbies. There is NO reason why the public cannot participate usefully in research for hundreds of industrial and scientific problems and developments.

GOOD HOUSEKEEPING farms out some of its 'tests' to local families, and the Seal is based on such findings. About 1920, when radio industry was held up by nonreception and other technical problems, and the engineers were stumped because of millions of local interferences, the companies threw the problems to the public — starting the 'hams.'

We need hams today in thousands of areas where mere 'based' research is not discursive enough.

THE EDITORIAL PURGATORY

Dear Editors: No poet is any use as a judge of his own work; the volumes that appear, selected and arranged by the authors, are . . . testimony. Indeed, the confidence of poets in their own work seems inversely proportioned (self-trust, to quality) . . . one of the prime arguments for the existence of editors . . . To deal with a poem properly, an editor must be learned, discriminating and diplomatic, possessed of a knowledge of world literature, have profound business acumen and preferably a private income. Also, he should be endowed with infallibility . . . Usually he isn't; blinkered by his past education and present circumstances, faced with the necessity of earning a living, trying to do a bit of original writing on his own account, he is, as every rejected contributor knows full well, the one thing wrong with whatever magazine he edits. And this opinion is by no means as perverse as it may appear; the deficiencies of an editor's taste are faithfully reflected in his publication.

This is a problem which affects magazines run by a board (such as ENVOI, or POET & CRITIC) less than the autocracies, such as Howard Sergeant's OUTPOSTS or my own SCRIP.* With the first sort, a reader who is delighted with one issue will probably be disgusted by the next; but the fact of never quite knowing what is going to be inside the wrapper when it comes through the letter-box ought to go some way toward preventing arthritis of the brain; with the second, the known preferences of the editor may limit the range of contributions — the magazine ossifies and eventually dies. (. . . only fair to say that OUTPOSTS seems going very strong at Issue 52.) I am not sure of the solution; but hope to invite guest editors to select for the odd issues of SCRIP, to prevent stiffening of the joints.

The answer (for the poet) seems to have been already suggested by Clarence Major, in an earlier TRACE. Find a good and discriminating editor. If you can't, then start a magazine, and be a good and discriminating editor. This is like a drug, however: once you've started, it is very difficult to leave off. It will cost you time, labor, and possibly money; you will feel you are losing your hair, sometimes your reason, and on occasion your temper (when an author sends you reams of mss. with insufficient return-postage — if That One does it again, regardless of ideas about writers' Unions, I will dump his offering in the dustbin, and if he goes on strike, I don't care. . .). But sometimes you will receive something that it is an honor to publish . . . sometimes you will be able to do something to help a first-rate, but little-known, poet — which makes everything worthwhile. And when you at last retire, you will do so in the firm conviction that editors of little poetry magazines, when they die, go straight to heaven; they have done their Purgatory here.

David Holliday

*Advt.

Life? — for the Unsprouting Nubs

Dear Editors:

I'm told, amid the cross-fire that enlivens literary politics, that little-magazine editors are vowed to poverty in our economy of abundance. Moreover, I'm laid upon by sadistic soothsayers who declare: Little magazines are like ideal Romantic poets — they must die young, with their best unrealized.

Why? Tell me. If the world you flip for is not wholly absurd: why?

I hate to see TRACE nobly keep track of the many nubs dying on the vine. I'd like to see little magazines given some healthy treatment with money from big business, or from their foundations. This is a conservative proposal. It is a very

radical conservation. It reaches down to the grass roots of literature. For, if you get a good crop of poets, you need a good-sized audience to sustain them, and you need many places for the fostering of young talent. Also, little magazines should have voices distinct from the crushing thunder of the mass magazines. Let them be heard. Let them live long.

We have been bestowing prizes on individuals for some time. Why not bestow prizes on magazines? Here's a cause for some enlightened big business, or foundation, or academy of poets, or long-view society. I'd suggest prizes given in classes according to circulation: say, from Class I, magazines with circulation under 300, to Class Ultimate, with circulation above 5,000. Well? . . . Yea democracy! Sam Bradley

Questions . . . and a Nomination

Dear Editors:

I question both the ethics and the aesthetics involved in a poet's strategy of bombarding a little-magazine editor with a manuscript a week, week after week after week.

I question the respect involved as well: dirty pages; no return-address on the outer envelope (thus placing the onus of lost mail on the editor, should the envelope never reach him); off-size envelopes for return, often too small to contain the bulk of pages being gratefully returned by the harassed editor. This last is a potential trick, as well: the poet seeks to use the Educational Material privilege for the return. Such envelopes (and I am not sure of the legality anyway) must be mailed open;* I cannot for the life of me understand how they can make the trip across the country without pages falling out—or possibly the whole lump of ms. Another convenient way to blame editors.

Another test of sincerity: if this poet is willing to use Educational Material for return of his mss., why does he not use the same for mailing them out? Why does he not put his return address on the outer envelope? Is it to force the

concerned editor to open the envelope?

I nominate Tracy Thompson, who advocates a poet's union (see TRACE No. 44), as General Secretary of such a union, and suggest he investigate the culprit whose activities I have outlined above.

Felix Stefanile

(Editor, THE SPARROW)

*Editor's note: Such envelopes may be sealed if required printed statement to Postmaster is affixed.

BLOCKBUSTER PUBLISHING

described by Geoffrey Wagner

AMERICAN PUBLISHING HAS become big business. Such was categorically celebrated in the 1961-62 Bowker LITERARY MARKET PLACE which for the first time included a section on 'Book Trade Mergers,' a veritable paean to the things of this world, where we learn of the purchase of most small publishers of interest, such as CRITERION; PANTHEON; MERIDIAN; NOONDAY; DUELL, SLOAN & PEARCE; STUDIO Publications; etc. KNOPF is swallowed by RANDOM, and MACMILLAN merges, though both stoutly maintaining independent editorial discrimination for the time being, of course. As I write, KNOPF's Vintage line is being handled through RANDOM.

The seal is set by PUBLISHERS' WEEKLY, in new gloatings over our publishers' stock-exchange listings (when you hit the big board, the Bowker boys seem in ecstasies, forgetting that the price paid for this materialism is the quick cancelling of a line, directly it proves unremunerative).

All these items are platitudinous to those in the trade, but they do not appear to be so to authors; at any rate, the 1960 panel, run by THE AUTHOR (Britain) to discuss similar trends — and including Rebecca West and Compton Mackenzie — showed writers of this eminence to be almost mystically out-of-touch with the hurly-burly of the market place. If I here try to suggest one or two of the changes that have taken place in publishing over the past decade, I do so with diffidence and a few definite provisos.

First, that criticism is secondary. The critic performs a vital function; but, though he may influence aesthetics, he cannot create literature as literally as the publisher can. The publisher or editor is today increasingly midwife to the

creative act, and therefore of even more concern to the author than his equivalent of a century ago.¹ Second, that a publisher's list is considerably characterized by the imaginative literature it features. Nonfiction is nonfiction; you express yourself more in the evaluation and selection of imaginative works, not open to empirical standards of judgment. We are familiar with the insolence of the publisher of 'inspirational' and self-help trash, rubbishy time-tables and incompetent cookeries, boasting he has Tolstoi on his list. There are fine publishers of nonfiction; but, within our culture, works of imagination are still accorded a degree of pre-eminence. Of such works, one simply has to admit poetry as marginal. My comments here concern the novel. Third, that most of these comments apply to the American scene. Each country has, fortunately, its own publishing idiom; but — outside Communist countries — American publishing is the richest, and it develops techniques which can be watched spreading into publishing elsewhere, notably in England.

¹I tried to study the effect of the new editor-impressario in our midst in NEW WORLD WRITING No. 15, in an article that seems to have made a number of editors want to chew nails, and confirming (via correspondence) my belief that editors are touchier today than authors. There are a number of books on editorial practices of the past: try Royal Gettmann's A VICTORIAN PUBLISHER (C.U.P.).

With these provisos in mind, I would say that the biggest aesthetic change has been that, today, books are published, not authors. The woman who asked for 'Sincerely' by Willis Wayde made her point, and probably got the book. Apart from a small handful, contemporary authors are completely unheard-of. (Especially to publishers who don't even have time, it seems, to read their own lists.) The thing works both ways.

The 'literary' novelist is said to be unknown to the masses, however many volumes he turns out and however

much esteem he piles up; I can think of more than one case of a Pulitzer Prize Winner, or even of a previous Book-of-the-Month, referred to by review-men as 'unknown.' At the same time, one can find several authors who publish entirely in the original paperback field, never get reviewed, and who would be called totally unknown by most editors — although the sales of one such author of my acquaintance now run into the tens of millions. In short: heads, we win; tails, you lose.

The effect is so to reduce the significance of the author that few younger novelists can count on being followed through a number of books in the way not only possible, but probable, a century ago. Even twenty years ago. One or two; but not many.

Turn up the publishing histories. Even including, if you wish, publishing histories of leading 'serious' writers. Dos Passos has published under seven imprints, moving recently from PRENTICE-HALL (MOST LIKELY TO SUCCEED, 1954) to DOUBLEDAY (THE MEN WHO MADE THE NATION, 1957) to SAGAMORE Press (THE GREAT DAYS, 1958) to HOUGHTON MIFFLIN (MIDCENTURY, 1961). Take a scrupulous and dedicated writer like Wright Morris and see how he has flitted from publisher to publisher (KNOPF, SCRIBNER'S, VIKING, HARCOU RT) until he won the National Fiction Book Award with A FIELD OF VISION (HAR-COURT, BRACE). And yet, although his next (LOVE AMONG THE CANNIBALS) got that firm good reprint right and a movie option, the sequel to VISION was issued by ATHENAEUM. Or take Herbert Gold, moving from VIKING to WORLD to LITTLE, BROWN to DIAL in as many books. Even a name as 'newsworthy' as Kerouac's shifts with the speed of some unguided missile from firm to firm.²

I needn't continue. Everyone knows of similar instances and, when you put them to publishers who have sworn themselves interested in the author's future oeuvre, you meet the insultingly-holy response: 'Well, Such-and-such

wasn't a very good book.' As if literary excellence were what they were after.

No one is deceived. Everyone is aware that the responsibility lies with the musical chairs played in publishing itself. No longer is it in the slightest exceptional for an author successfully to resubmit a script to a house whence one editor (fired or departed) has rejected it. Some of the changes listed above may have been due to following an editor: even T. S. Eliot changed publishers here when Bob Giroux left HARCOURT for FARRAR, STRAUS & CUDAHY.

A glance over recent issues of the LITERARY MARKET PLACE will show any interested person the evidence of this constant shifting of individuals from house to house,—that so underscores the insecurity at the fount of the industry. Let me content myself by observing that I have watched with some amusement one Hiram Haydn changing publishers thrice, while—in another, more stable field—remaining at the helm of the admirable AMERICAN SCHOLAR. But there are dozens of such examples among even the best editors; in the area of paperback publishing, they attain the ludicrous.³ Some of these changes may be for aesthetic reasons; however, too many clearly are for those pecuniary profits (viz., more bread) that authors are derided for desiring. How often has one heard: 'Oh, you see, Ted got a damn good deal over at Hawkesworth's?' This lack of stability under an author's feet robs him of

² Here we go: THE TOWN AND THE CITY, HARCOURT, BRACE, 1950; ON THE ROAD, VIKING, 1957; THE DHARMA BUMS, VIKING, 1958; THE SUBTERRANEANS, GROVE, 1958; MEXICO CITY BLUES, GROVE, 1959; DOCTOR SAX, GROVE, 1959; MAGGIE CASSIDY, AVON original, 1959; LONESOME TRAVELLER, MCGRAW HILL, 1960; THE SCRIPTURE of the Golden Eternity, TOTEM Press, 1960; BOOK OF DREAMS, CITY LIGHTS, 1961.

³ Within a couple of years, the following reshuffled seats: Knox Burger (DELL to GOLD MEDAL); Don Preston (GOLD MEDAL

to AVON to PAPER Editions, Inc.); Tom Payne (AVON to PLAYBOY); Charles Byrne (BERKELEY to AVON to HILLMAN); Marc Jaffe (NAL to DELL); Sigrid ROCK (AVON to DELL to BOBBS-MERRILL); Don Fine (POPULAR to DELL). confidence, forces him to be shrill, forces him to produce a book, rather than a body of work. Hence, a whole lot of things — including the excitable search for a subject in current fiction.

This brings me to change of another order, one consonant with that in the more popular media. With the advent of television, there were many who hoped that commercial cinema would improve, provide art-movies, and the like — fare which television couldn't duplicate. In fact, 'Hollywood' has, on balance, only been made more crass by the impact of television, which it has tried to overgo in another direction, largely by making the Biblical blockbuster or Greek, Roman, or Egyptian epic involving colossal casts and expensive spectacles unduplicable on TV.

Bigger is better. Eric Johnston has said as much. That this is the general trend despite the buying of a few 'off-beat' subjects was reiterated by Hans Koningsberger, in reply to a journalist who had mentioned the film-purchase of his *A WALK WITH LOVE AND DEATH* recently, as evidence of the new 'esoteric' Hollywood:

My novel, which is neither 'esoteric' nor 'unlikely,' except to people who move their lips while reading or who consider books a commodity like deodorants or cornflakes, but which is simply a serious novel — not meaning that it is better than others, but only that it was written for no other reason than that I wanted to write this book — is still very much the exception. As such, it is no threat to the triumphant march of American literature toward its own shelf in the supermarket.

It is a direction one would have predicted would be chosen only by idiots; but Hollywood has followed it nonetheless. The trend has incidentally steam-rolled much

potential art out of the whole process, by turning men like Kirk Douglas (Bryna Productions) and Marlon Brando (Pennebaker, Inc.) into executives, and by forcing directors like Kubick and Wyler into gigantic financial collaborations within which they hope not to make a work of art so much as to make a work with a few good moments.

In publishing, the blockbuster technique has lately resulted in astronomical pre-publication deals, movie tie-ins, etc. The size of these can be watched in Paul Nathan's Rights and Permissions column in PUBLISHERS' WEEKLY; and Nathan takes into account the often-exaggerated first figures given in these deals, for the sake of a little friendly publicity. The technique has also parenthetically resulted in what one might call 'world editions' (e.g., simultaneous

In order for us to survive in the shrunken American theatrical market, Johnson was quoted recently by the NEW YORK TIMES, 'we must make bigger pictures of higher quality at higher costs. This is the only way we can get people out to the theatres.' publication in several countries of usually-illustrated books) for the sake of economy. This applies principally to art books at the moment (the lovely HORIZON Renaissance volume was done in over ten countries, as a start), and it's probably a service to the public; but there are signs of the same kind of efficient pre-publication engineering in fiction also (cp. the 10-country Prix Formentor). Of recent 7-figure, or more than million-\$, pre-publication movie deals, one of the most spectacular was certainly Evan Hunter's fantastic contract with Columbia, involving two novels of which he had not then as yet written a word. Thus, the change of publishers by authors of this order (for whom the book is surely an irritating ancillary). Typical: Wouk, from SIMON & SCHUSTER to DOUBLEDAY; Sloan Wilson, from the same firm to HARPER'S; Robert Ruark, shifting three times in three novels — and reasons for which may be purely financial. (Victor Weybright has referred to

hard-cover books as ‘preprints’.)

There is, of course, a reverse twist — or rider — to such changes by what Leslie Fiedler has called the sub-novelist; for I would hazard a guess that desire for prestige, or to eat the cake and have it too, lay behind the shifts of thoroughly commercial, aging authoresses such as Frances Parkinson Keyes (MESSNER to FARRAR, STRAUS) or Rosamond Marshall (PRENTICE-HALL to DOUBLEDAY, before her death).

But blockbuster publishing has become a fact. The killings are much bigger than they used to be, even if they are perhaps fewer and farther between. One of the collocutors in THE AUTHOR panel mentioned that no author could today build himself the sort of palace Thackeray did out of his royalties. Yet, many (like Wouk or O'Connor) have, out of the proceeds from one book alone. Thackeray died worth about what Herman Wouk or Daphne du Maurier would today hope to gross out of the total rights of one fiction. And, because the killings are bigger, the pressure — economic and aesthetic — builds up on the young U.S. writer to produce the ‘great’ second book to follow the ‘great’ first book: Mailer, Jones, Styron . . . By now, the pattern is too tragically familiar.

Moreover, thanks to the economics of blockbuster publishing, the publishers discourage the production of too many novels by the aspiring writer — although, as Granville Hicks has shown, Henry James averaged over two-a-year during his finest period. A friend of mine recently landed one of these blockbuster or mammoth pre-publication deals with a movie company, and perhaps the most vexing clause in his contract came to be that concerning the almost-ubiquitously despised hard-cover ‘rights.’ Eventually, the clause was laddered to include extra payments as and when the book might become a best seller. This term was defined as appearance on THE NEW YORK TIMES Book Review chart. Naturally, the publishers burst their buttons to see that, by

crook if not by hook, the title appeared there. This, of course, is not publishing; it is banking. Nevertheless, it's an increasing feature of the market-place, as everyone knows.

Furthermore, the effect of this is pervasive. It has resulted in that shift of emphasis upon the subject I have hinted at above. There are all sorts of reasons — not excluding the imminent end of the world — why a book should be about something rather than nothing. At the same time, the poetic novel, in which the consciousness of the social setting is more important than the setting itself, can reveal 'moral climates' more vital to our existence than any sociology. Yet sociology — via a subject that strikes and agitates instantly — is tempting to the editor; for, it carries its own built-in advertising. It is of the moment. In other words, although all editors agree that advertising never sells a book, topical sociological content often will. The salesmen will be able to thump their drums over another theme-novel, or what Jacques Barzun has called the 'non-fiction novel.' And once again the change denigrates the creative worker; because — while no one can duplicate the poetic novelist — even an editor can find a subject. In theme-fiction, the author becomes somewhat secondary.

These changes all may seem tending toward the ephemeral, and they may seem exclusively American. To deal with the second presumption first: the nonfiction novel is currently enjoying a strong vogue in England, American purchases of London firms proceed apace, the British career-editors are beginning to shift posts with most proficient rapidity (Roland Gant from FALCON to HEINEMANN to JOSEPH to SECKER, in a very few years). The first presumption — that of ephemerality — also sometimes rebounds. For, if the author is going to be unknown in any case, the genuinely-underground writer stands more chance. And Nabokov hits the jackpot in his sixties. But, he did so via a book, a theme, a subject. INVITATION TO A BEHEADING sold

nothing like *LOLITA*, and the publishers fell over themselves in publicising the new *PALE FIRE*, to try to push it as a subject again.

Anyone can think of dozens of novels that have done remarkably well over the past decade, without any movie tie-ins, full-page ads, banner headlines, ad mats or styrene racks, whatever. It's interesting to recall how small the initial advertising appropriations were for even such commercial novels as *BONJOUR TRISTESSE* and *ON THE ROAD*. Both authors were, to be sure, soon 'news.' Still, the very ephemerality has an element of revenge. The nonentity writing in exile and cunning, the writer with his nose in *TRACE*, can well produce that off-beat, not to say 'esoteric,' subject which the editing impressarios will later congratulate themselves on discovering. Obscurity pays off. In America, the limelight suffocates creative talent often; it congeals self-criticism. Faulkner, O'Hara, and Hemingway all became self-parodic after middle age; even Mailer is playing himself. In this sense, Nabokov was lucky; he was never forced into the position of public performer—he lived with himself, and grew.

Nabokov achieved recognition through a subject, it is true; and a subject can all too easily be forgotten. Thus, when the man in the street thinks of Nabokov, he thinks of *LOLITA*; but he thinks of Durrell (a lesser writer) rather than titles of books. What I am suggesting is that authors still can be important; that it is, in fact, more to the publisher's interest to produce an author rather than a book. Books can only be bought once, usually to be read two or three times at most. Authors are alive. Even financially, it would be saner policy to bet on them than on subjects.

ISSUE P. 195 · SCAN P. 37

THE SUPERMARKET AGE

by Joseph Martinek

Drive-in restaurants, Drive-in banks.

Run-of-the-mill goods, Non-writers producing

Run-of-the-mill men. Non-books.

Run-of-the-ribbon novels, Instant coffee,

Write-in magazines. Instant tea.

Instant poems.

THE VOICE PERSISTED UNTIL DEATH

An Appreciation by Charles Humboldt

KENNETH FEARING WAS born in 1902. He died last year in pain, a 'child of blue skies', who lived through two world-wars, victorious revolutions and defeated uprisings, booms and busts, Hitler, Hiroshima, and the Investigator rampant in his own country. There are many poets today whose work one would not think of relating to a single public event, surely not to the class struggle; but Fearing's poems are almost invariably cries of social protest, the mainspring of his wide-ranging, lyrical irony.

To grasp Fearing's distinct human contribution to the literature of the Thirties, one need only compare his approach to the earlier reactionary satire of Eliot's Sweeney quatrains or to the juxtaposition of past glories and present squalor in *THE WASTE LAND*. Eliot abhorred what was to him the absurd notion that the common people might determine their own destiny:

(The lengthened shadow of a man
Is history, said Emerson
Who had not seen the silhouette
Of Sweeney straddled in the sun)

To prove his point, he transmuted Sweeney into an object, a thing, an animal: orang-outang, Apeneck among the nightingales. The effective impressions from such passages and from the blatant contrasts in *A GAME OF CHESS* and *THE FIRE SERMON* depend upon the reader's sharing, or being shamed into accepting, Eliot's fastidiousness and sexual distaste as spiritual principles. It also depends upon the reader's taking seriously Eliot's nostalgia: 'Where are the eagles and the trumpets?'—without asking who had to carry the standards, build the roads, and fight the battles between

the blowings of the horns.

Fearing was far more perceptively critical of the contemporary scene; but he rejected Eliot's aristocratic condescension. If the fish stank, its rot started from the head, and Fearing refused to lecture the common man for doing what had in effect been done to him. Whomever he kids, he treats as a fellow victim in the great American con game; what he says of his characters is what they might say of themselves in sardonic retrospect from the graves in which they can

(Continued on Page 217)

JOHN TAGLIABUE

**1. THE SICK PEOPLE IN THE EARTHQUAKE HOUSE
WERE BURNING EACH OTHER'S SKIN WHILE SOME
CHARTED STATISTICS AND FEVERS WERE
RECORDED BY THE END OF THE BED. THE
SHEETS WERE FOLDED NEATLY AND THE
BANDAGED DRIFTED. THE FINGERS WERE CRUSHED.
THE WINDOWS WERE LARGE. THE CRUCIFIXES
WERE SMALL, THE BRIGHT SHINY CARS FILED BY.**

**2. SUNDAY MOURNING GREY SLUSHY DAY DIRTY
SNOW MELTING WORLD PEOPLE (HARDLY SEEN)
RIDE BY IN THEIR STEEL CLOTHES TRAILING
SMOKE THE WINDSHIELD WIPER MOVES LIKE A
HAND ACROSS THE EYE THE SNOW LIKE FADING
GREY ISLANDS THE GREEN EYE CHANGES THE
RED EYE CHANGES A CAR TURNS SOMEONE IN
BLACK WALKS ACROSS THE GREY STREET**

an ancient huge tree like the source of Hinduism for me
seems beautiful

ISSUE P. 198 · SCAN P. 40

GEORGE ABBE

MY FATHER'S HEAD

My father's head was off, but he was living normally. And then, as I watched, his head became that of a horse. And, most peculiar, he was praying; his hands were uplifted.

Why did he act that way? Didn't he realize that the gifted, quiet, religious kinds of people had to retain their identity? — and that a horse, after all, wasn't able to clasp his hands together; in fact, it was really questionable whether a horse would even have hands.

(Three-quarters of the creative selections for this TRACE either had their sources in dreams of their authors or bear upon dream-states and/or the Unconscious; but the focal editorial cognizance of this coincidence of gathered materials must be credited to George Abbe whose submissions were accompanied by a letter describing his forthcoming book, mentioned in No. 44. These new Abbe works, of which two are here published, have been chosen because inspired by dreams; for, Dr. Frank Calabria is collaborating in a special manner by endeavoring to discover whether the uses of certain psychological and psychoanalytical techniques might not enrich the meanings of such poems. Calabria's integrated analysis will be featured in the volume.)

GEORGE ABBE

THE GRAVELY INJURED

I found
two wounds in the thin
skin of my forehead. The bent
leaden crook of both arms had a bad
slash deep inside the elbow. Why? I wondered;
and wandering
in the spring-green streets
was seized and searched and taken
to jail by the police. They gazed at me, my wounds;
they threw cynical glances at each other, rejected
my request
for a lawyer. They thought
I mocked them; the wounds could not be
real, they felt; and so they had me stand
unattended, but slyly observed, until I fainted.

SEYMOUR GRESSER

QUIET FORGE

Who make dreams
to share the honeyhung
scent of tube roses
break the stem and taste
a powerful venom
Who share dreams
weave of white flowers
miracles of vision
and later remember the fragrance
drifting as a hazy loop of green
down the flesh of the sea
a city hung in mist;
senses claiming kingdoms
share no more than grass roots
feed the hearts of flowers.
Who is vision
brittle as obsidian gods

and black as the deep bite of pain
near the knowledge of heart
its loss and gain
its fattening beat and thinning voice
as faces drift beyond hearing
and a raindrop strikes unnoticed.
There will be floods erupting color
cold as glacier until
no holocaust of sound
awakens the deep body of love
and the tube rose blooms and sprays
the eternal lifting air
without your fragrant shadow
braced in steel inverted vows.

DAVID CORNEL DEJONG

MAKING THE SUN SET

A sway-backed horse
watches me in
the febrile evening
and whinnies.
Put on your brakes,
and drop me off,
I say to the woman
who smells of lozenges,
and who would take
from the watching firs
their trance of evening.
Then I and the old horse
stand at the fence
and blink at the formal
sun kneeling toward night
where the woman rumbles
away like a remnant
drenched in the smell
of menthol lozenge,

leaving everything
dead and ocre as in Spain,
with no dream for tomorrow.

DAVID CORNEL DEJONG

WALKING THROUGH THE PARK ONE DAY

Snakes did not bother me
as wistfully I ambled in
the municipal park, but saw
fanged butterflies assail
the merry canoes in which
I myself, because of hearty
corpulence with dreaming,
could never be.
I then hobbled rubber soled
to the monster of museum,
an ample den of pipes, old
punishment and funeral habits,
where from a corniced window
I let fly denunciations
here-to-fore in cages, now
generously freed.
A significant avowal like
mine had to be signaled from
that casement, but passengers
below me wave, recoil
and wave, until snow
begins to fall and all
canoes freeze on the lake
and butterflies die.

KELLY LANE

ALCIDES

(Irving Layton)

I slew the Centaur Nessus
Whose spattered blood
smears my shirt
O wife what have you done?
this tunic burns into my flesh
blood like acid eats my skin
by heavens! I'll break your forests
uproot resinous pines
pile them high on great pyre
standing aloft
on skin of Nemean Lion
club in hand
amid flames I'll await my reward
blow winds and roar
by torchlight my spirit
ascends to palaces of gods

CHARLES SHAW

NOW THE TIME

When the sky fell sideways
and the landscape grabbed the room
I decided it was now the time
and the trees turned loud
as sunset
and clocks went green with joy
and the rustle of paper skeletons
made music
in dark corners
just as a butterfly
no one had seen
began reciting Virgil.

CURTIS ZAHN

IN ORDER TO DEFEND MY WAY OF LIFE

Underneath this hoodwinked sky the Pentagon
communicates
By wireless, with the moon's manless slopes;
And thunderheads, punched out by some I.B.M. type
Are melted up for G.E.
To provide isotopes for the multitudes.
And I pause, shielded against falling missiles
By the mad old umbrella my Grandmother used
On curbside drunks.
Now having stopped, I start
Into the forest, among unwinged birds
And greenspun wetness;
Fully covered against any unreality,
Frisked by Geiger-counters
And cleared for the privilege of serving two masters.

A. FREDRIC FRANKLYN

THE DENSE PROCESSIONAL

Oh, de oom bah, Mowbi; rain.
Runny momb, if it demands; and more; whatever
Must have to be. Oh, bawa, bawa, bawa;
They have come to the table . . .
Rain! And then, sun then . . . That light is remembered,
yes!
Tah ah boom; courting, we say; ah boom . . .
And fresh blossoms appear there.
Oh, Mowbi; are we to leave all this?
They are seen later, at the head of that gray advance;
An alien splendor. And Mbonga prays then with hatred .
. .
Strange gods witness his displeasure and shame:
Oh, oh, de oom bah . . . from the lowering sky;
Tah ah boom; boom; ah boom;
These are the unforgiven . . . Yes!
And there is to be blood . . . Boom!
Mowbi; oh, Mowbi; are we to forgive all? Forgetting all?

TRACY THOMPSON

PACIFIC ISLANDS

Around these Pacific islands
We dip our nets, strong in sun,
Father and son. A mild gale
Seems forever blowing. Too cute
The islanders, we feel:
The ladies and the smaller children.
I listen for the music of the flute
And avoid the brassy horns; woodwinds
Are cool, dancing at heel
The maidens come. The wren,
The robin are still heard.
The waves lap on the shore, all day.
We watch a pigeon and a hen
Somewhat strutting, somewhat gay.
We gather fishes' fins.

TRACY THOMPSON

STURGEON OF TERRACES

Ratty as hindsight, the nude in the boudoir
in sturdy as studio grave to a fault
talked sturgeon of terraces, twittered
of typhoons, the ultimate mandarin
said was her suitor, magi of old,
said nickel was nowhere, and lead
was the latest, quoted the market,
rolled up a clean stocking, bred
willows and wombats, Lombard
her Street, we went there in April
with scandalous snows at our feet.

ISSUE P. 209 · SCAN P. 51

PARM MAYER

TOMORROW DOES NOT STEP LIGHTLY

How could I be jaunty when he stood there, like a man opening the seams of a twenty-year sleep; a marked-on man with straws of memory whirling in his head.

Once he was a young man polishing a stone in the sun; now he is an old man trying to give voice to his beard. He no longer seeks a lady with a fan for a face; and is slow to distinguish which strangers are his brothers. When he begins to feel cold he will lie down in the woods and become a mound covered with leaves.

It made me think, and I said: This is too stiff a price to pay for breathing in the dark. No doubt we should seek a less reluctant river; and perhaps cleanse ourselves from our preoccupation with being a near-perfect image.

Who can say which tree is most deeply rooted in wisdom? Or who is best fitted to assume central control of benevolence?

And whose fingers keep pressing my eyelids down?

PARM MAYER

MAN . . . To MAN

I keep telling myself: There is a kingship here, somewhere. It is not lost; it is hiding behind some tree, waiting to be found. But I have given me an ugly picture of myself and stand shrunken inside my skull.

All cannot be plum color, or even Roman red, I insist. And many stones must be carried up a steep hill before a castle-dream is stiff enough to command a valley.

Original paintings of happiness are scarce. And none of us are put together properly — we are temperamentally geared; parts wear out too soon; we're junk before the spring gives out.

The technique of isolating facts is too complicated to engage in here. Consult, instead, hearsay and legend. This will leave you strength to carry on another thousand years of routine tasks.

And if you can, ignore the impulse to sink into long sleep where you are tired from cursing.

ISSUE P. 211 · SCAN P. 53

LAWRENCE BARTH

SMALL-TOWN YEAR, 1962

(Note: The italicised words should not be read, only glanced at)

In summer one widens and widens
then it's too much widens
and there's autumn standing.
Fresh wheels spurt the life syrup
all over again, red leaves snap in the wind,
crisp carcasses race the gutter
in the star cold,
ticking small sound.
ICBM
delinquents strangle
Lola's bust
well adjusted?
Snow is white as bedsheets, soft as love
and suddenly
winter is black boards, and mud on clapboard-building
sides,
old movie posters flapping by the railroad,
Dial-A-Prayer
and the next is not yet, and man has no seeing ahead.
VP jets
Then are hints and then surges,
birdpeep slippery fripperies
blow from a million miles away
to push at buds in the ground,
to vibrate ponytails in the park.
Franco grateful
anti-insanity pill
space race
Warmness is sure, then oversure —
relatives in June
make the tint of bridery

and just in time —
million potheads
blasts punks

ISSUE P. 213 · SCAN P. 55

ROBERT LOWRY

Rose

She wore dark glasses and asked me how she looked. ‘You look very rich,’ I said, ‘if you really want to know.’ My wife and I boarded our plane as Rose and her husband waved us away into the nighttime sky. Years later I remembered my answer to her query about how she looked that night at the airport and suddenly realized that it had been an unfair answer, although true. Unfair because it is always unfair to suggest great wealth to a girl who was born and raised and married on an Island in the Atlantic and who had never, perhaps, until then, thought of life in terms of great wealth all suddenly hers. The rich, it is true, came to her island in grand boats and on big planes in the summertime and even maintained mansions on Nantucket through the winter months too. But these were the phantoms of her childhood and even her adult world. Daughter of fishing folk, wedded to a service station superintendent, mother of almost a half-a-dozen children, beautiful under and beyond and around all her years, rich with relatives but hardly wealth, Rose waved her dark glasses at us, at the airport, on Nantucket Island, as our plane boarded the sky that summer night in 1958. And ever since I’ve heard, in the streets and in rooms and in the still of the night, hands shaking handfuls of silver like tambourines, like castanets — and can it be that Rose of Nantucket Island has supernatural powers and has awakened the wealth that, as an answer and on a whim and with a smile and never believing for a moment, really, that I could be literally right — the wealth, I say, that I told her she looked like she had? For everytime I hear a nickel drop, a dime roll down the neck of a machine or a sales manager shake the change he’s taken in that day in the store, I think, quite suddenly, of Rose. It’s funny.

WILLIAM RIVERA

EYE TO EYE

We wore the evening like a roar around us,
having just met. Then talk that traipsed
turned inside. Night, outside, composed;
chaos settled into shape.

Both egos
came (bodies have a quiet tact) to terms.
We touched, we twined, interlocked. We
traded promises, but separately, before
embraced, agreed to break.

At dawn
our eyes saw nothing now the same: not even
evening, or our change. Get up! Chaos
jerks at us again. We're free to go; we're
free to go,—so peacefully exchanged.

DOROTHY ELLIN FLAX

THE DENIED

David Kalugin

The hearths are bleeding still
ashground with sacrifice to gods disowned —
oblate oracles traducing truth —
from deep below exhaling
the fetid sweet decay
of pitiful birdbones, the denied unborn,
and legions more in pollen-prime —
the congregations hymning:
‘Our Father which art in heaven . . .’
even as they replevin
their brother and his birthright
as Jacob did to Esau
(possession is still the law)
and still the vultures feed
on the chained Titan’s heart
in Capetown and New Orleans,
Algiers, and Leopoldville.
And where tomorrow?
Sweat and blood boil to an ominous flood —
the phoenix, Hate, consumes itself to flare again . . .
Millennial mouthings underscore the roar.

**IS MY COUNTRY ‘TIS OF THEE BECOMING MORE
OR LESS FREE?**

I suppose
It churches our vanity to pray purely for
The goodness it brings to the rest of the world,
For surely
The right to say GOD Is On Our Side
Prides us over the Christmas holidays, al-
beit time ranges from the ridiculous to the sub-
lime hanging holly in
A fallout
Shelter, for
My Country ‘tis of Thee changes one to the next day
Never knowing whether

Time is a yuletide fit of love, or
A New Year's fit to kill, since
The voice of the turtle appears to have
A choice of its own
An eye for an eye probes a sky for the weak spot
In the human
Willy nilly, Nature while
Black robes in the shadows of a Christmas tree give
 birth to
Some still life illusions of a peace on earth, it
Quirks the Spirit to the quick denying
Fits to love or
Fits to kill are
All the same
Differences,
I suppose.

(Continued from Page 196)

no longer dream of fortunes and conquests. His humor is neither sentimental nor cruel. The judgment implicit in it is not suspended because the 'defendant' can plead that he was lied to, that he had a hard life, that others acted worse than he. On the other hand, it is not rendered as though in this society men were free to do what they pleased or to avoid the multiple traps baited for them. Fearing looked into the breast of the deceived and found the deceiver ensconced; he watched continually the net of the system that drew in upon them both.

In this respect, he was very close in spirit, and often in imagery, to the Bertolt Brecht of the HAUSPOSTILLE poems, though it is unlikely that he had read them. Throughout his life, as in his first book (ANGEL ARMS — 1929), he was haunted by the 'confused but implacable' wants of millions. He saw how, in a society organized for profit, these desires could be debased, their strength misled to distort man's relation to his fellow man, forcing one to choose between

open warfare and escape into fantasy, or to adopt indifference. All that the speakers in NOW ask is to be left alone in their protective wisdom. Now that they know life in their own way:

THE WORLD IS QUIET AND GREEN —

As it is where bubbles rise in the waters of swamps;
Where bubbles of gas rise and break among the reeds;
And the reeds are green;
And the frogs are loud, the water is warm where the
 bubbles rise;
The reeds are still;
The reeds are green, the water is warm, the sky is blue.

Here they defend themselves with pleasant voices against the world they know but do not understand; or, understanding, cannot face. Until—or so it was to happen in history—suddenly (perhaps gradually, depending on whether the observer is keen or indolent) the swamp is not a marsh at all, but the LaBrea Tar-pits in their prime.

Fortunately for his poetry, Fearing recognized that estrangement is not just a middle-class speciality, or a malaise peculiar to intellectuals. He studied its ravages on every city face; in the gaiety of the lonely; in fun and games; at the pleasant dinner ‘with the windows lit by gunfire;’ in the Sunday-morning sermon and Sunday-afternoon comics, the shouts of landlords and foremen, the judge’s upright rage; in the jobless worker’s eye, staring with hatred at his tools. His finest effects are gotten when he sets up a mounting tension by interweaving the metaphors and rhythms of daily talk with the lingo of advertising and public relations. Through this witty synthesis of living and still-born languages — a kind of wry hymn to the art of counterfeiting—he shows us the degree of involvement of all classes in the American tragedy. The force of the merciless DIRGE derives from its urban parody of the traditional elegiac form. Its jazzy

delivery of hard-as-nails truth is never relaxed until the forgotten man lies crumpled and torn up like a discontinued bus-transfer: With who the hell are you at the corner of the casket, and where the hell're we going on the right-hand silver knob, and who the hell cares walking second from the end with an American Beauty wreath from why the hell not . . . But there are other times when the voice of lament is direct and unchecked, as floodlike as Whitman's mourning for Lincoln. Or fiercer still, as in *DENOUEMENT*, when Fearing remembers those who battled and died without illusions: Where there is no life, no breath, no sound, no touch, no warmth, no light but the lamp that shines on a trooper's drawn and ready bayonet. *DENOUEMENT*, like *DIRGE*, is a poem of the Thirties, when you did not need a clear day to see the class-struggle. It is fashionable now for literary historians swaddled in research grants to sigh over the Left writers of that decade who are supposed to have shed their talent in defense of a losing cause; but, if a writer have no cause at all, how will he be a man of feeling? And if not a man of feeling, how a poet? In the Thirties, Fearing came very close to being a revolutionary poet. He ranged from raw agit-prop (e.g., *THE PROGRAM* and *AD in Dead Reckoning*) to confidence of ultimate victory joined with an almost-pastoral vision of the future: And we build, upon that day, another hope (because these cities are young and strong), And we will raise another dream (because these hills and field are rich and green), And we will fight for all of this again, and if need be again, And on that day, and in that place, we will try again, and this time we shall win. (*PACT*) These instances are rare, however. For one thing, Fearing's temperament stood in the way of his speaking at the top of the human voice or thinking of himself as an engineer of the human soul. For another, he was not geared to disciplined action, organization, meetings of any kind. No matter how strong his conviction, his life and words were 'keyed to other moods.' He could write because . .

. 'I felt that way. Never, though, merely because I thought that way.' (Since these are such kneeling times, let the record state that Fearing never surrendered his thoughts to any Committee.) Bits of his heart gave way at the Fascist conquest of Spain, the successes of Hitler, and the realization that the working class would not be able to prevent the approaching war. Yet, neither then nor during the rout of demoralized liberal politicians, trade-union leaders, and intellectuals in the post-war Forties and Fifties, did he allow the general corrosion of conscience to devour him. Resigned to the fluctuations of a protracted fight, the outcome of which he knew he would not see, he began once again to exploit one of his major technical achievements: his transfiguring use of banality. Whereas poets like Eliot and Pound had employed platitudes and bunk as signs of the general sterility of modern life, Fearing gave them extraordinary overtones and extension, discovering the unspoiled human kernel in the most corrupt transaction. And his medium in READINGS, FORECASTS, PERSONAL GUIDANCE shares certain professional secrets with Mme. Sosotris who 'had a bad cold, nevertheless/Is known to be the wisest woman in Europe/With a wicked pack of cards.' But though that lady's Tarot pack led us to connotations since masticated by a thousand critics, she herself remained spurious and shallow, a prop pointing to another part of the wilderness. Fearing's prophet is a dramatic figure who wrestles with an insoluble problem he conspired to create.

He confesses his doubts at once by denying them. 'It is not,' he swears by every fiery omen, 'that my belief in the true and mystic science is shaken . . .' 'No,' he says coyly, 'I know still whose science fits the promise to the inquirer's need, invariably, for a change': Mine.' There follows a spiel in the cant of fortune-tellers which ends with the naming of the fee for horoscopes. Then abruptly the remorse which this byplay has kept in leash is cut loose, and the characteristic

long lines advance heavily like breakers on a stormy shore:
... still these people know, as I do not, that what
has never been on earth before may still well come to
pass
That always, always there are new and brighter things
beneath
the sun,
That surely, in bargain basements or in walk-up flats, it
must
be so that still from time to time they hear wild angel
voices speak.

The speaker is the jailer of his clients' elemental feelings. He imprisons them in clichés, but he is haunted by their confessions and fantasies, knowing that in the depths of each dream there is a valid desire that must one day be satisfied. He has tried, and will still try, to put off that day with his cheap interpretations, adjusting men to unacceptable fates, manufacturing wants that will distract them from their rational goals. Yet he can tell by small signs that his customers know there are better answers than his, not yet revealed to them. Tormented by their blindness—he tied the handkerchief over their eyes—he craves that they end his servitude by finding their answers in the material world.

Why can they not realize, he asks, that none but they can free themselves? Because until they do, 'a man must eat', the lies must be told ad nauseam and be proposed as a way of life. In this truly-dialectical soliloquy, the character, caught in the noose of his own healing words and promises, steps out of his skin, becomes his own accuser, and gives the advice that could destroy him. But, since his moment of truth—'let them consult someone else'—is merely a private complaint intended to arouse no one, he resumes his faker's role.

The occupations and professions symbolized by this figure are unmistakable, though his awareness and pangs are unusual rather than typical. When the poem was written, Fearing had learned at first hand how the control of the avenues of communication, from TV all the way to book publishing, had become a science of planned perversion. The introduction to *NEW AND SELECTED POEMS* (1960) is devoted almost entirely to a survey of political oppression, ruled by fear, and the regimentation of ideas in the U.S. He relates how he went to a story conference shortly before 1940. Here 'two or three executives, probably with my help, beat every shred of plausibility out of one of those moving true-to-life sagas.' He dramatized this experience in *YES, THE AGENCY CAN HANDLE THAT*.

From the mid-Forties on, he became obsessed with the more sinister implications of this self-contained, yet all-pervasive element, in American life. He made it the subject of a group of four angrily satirical poems which were included in the *NEW AND SELECTED POEMS*. It is the place d'armes of his seven novels, to which only a descriptive word or two can be given here.

The novels are, for the most part, entertainments, thrillers with sufficient inhuman interest to keep the reader from caring whether or not their deadly gadgets and double crosses really work. This makes it easy to dismiss them as potboilers; even the Left cultural magazine, *MAINSTREAM*, so referred to them in its introduction to a memorial selection of poems which had been printed in the *NEW MASSES*.

Though the description is fair up to a point, it does not take into consideration that the thriller, like science fiction, had become a refuge for forbidden thoughts, as well as the progressive writer's one open corridor to a mass audience. It also ignores the critical comment that is not merely peripheral to the novels, but is inseparable from their intrigues and violence.

Nearly all are shot through with historical and topical relevance. One sequence in *THE HOSPITAL* (1939) recalls the McKesson and Robbins investment scandal. *DAGGER OF THE MIND* (1941), a rather inconsequential hack job about a pathological murderer, is peppered with light, malicious sketches of the guests of a well-known institutionalized artists' and writers' colony in upper New York State. *CLARK GIFFORD'S BODY* (1942) is a contemporary fantasy version of John Brown's raid on the arsenal at Harper's Ferry, for which a radio station is substituted. This is a curious and interesting work, in which the revolutionary potential of the Thirties, however it may then have been overestimated, is set in a perspective of impending political struggle. It also expresses Fearing's concern with the outcome of War II and his dread of a Fascist-inspired civil conflict. In *THE BIG CLOCK* (1946), a crime of passion, with homosexual overtones, shares the stage with a cut-throat struggle for control of a huge magazine syndicate, into whose operations we are given a teasing glimpse. A fight to the death between father and son is related to stock-juggling and wire-tapping in *LONELIEST GIRL IN THE WORLD* (1951). *THE GENEROUS HEART* (1954) as an exposé, raised some degrees to a pitch of horror, of interlocking interests and rivalries in the fund-raising field. In *THE CROZART STORY* (1960), we are shown the connections between private business, public relations, the mass media, and the agencies of an incipient police state. The Jarrett-Fennister frame-up affair is more than an allusion to the story of Whittaker Chambers and Alger Hiss, just as the professional witness, Wirtz, is a reconstruction of the renegade-informer, Howard Rushmore.

Clark Gifford represents Fearing's one effort to depict an heroic, liberating figure in action in the arena of capitalist society. After his martyrdom, we enter the time of the toad and tiger. (These animal comparisons are only partly applicable to the combats described in the last four novels.

Except for a few 'outsiders' in whom the juice of life still runs, Fearing's warring creatures are more like vicious computers, programmed to mutual annihilation.) The peripheral characters are passive and helpless; they trust to luck to put an end to their troubles, or to them. The central ones, the 'big-shot' predators, have the illusion of absolute self-determination. Irony is built into the fortunes of these inflated individualists; just as one thinks he has everything under control, another fastens on his throat and drains him dry. In such an environment, survival requires, not a development of the senses, but their attrition in behalf of a compulsive, paranoid intelligence to which everything human is alien.

Fearing's invariable first-person narrative, while somewhat monotonous, is at its best when it invokes the image of society as a biological tenement, housing the devoured and the devourers. Each inhabitant speaks for himself, then passes the buck to his friend or enemy. The story gets itself told by a succession of organisms, members of a collective sickness in the body politic. As with most metaphors extended to the dimensions of fiction, there is inevitably a diminution of the human element, a mechanical shifting of masses, flatness without warmth. The fantasy critical of estrangement is itself strange. On the other hand, isn't it presumptuous to ask that a work out of certain mold do more than its form requires? Particularly when, as in Fearing, the alien implies its opposite and the yearning for a better world is imbedded in the hard dark of the present like a seed in rock?

EPILOGUE

Following the publication of the COLLECTED POEMS in 1940, AFTERNOON OF A PAWNBROKER appeared in 1943. A later volume, STRANGER AT CONEY ISLAND, consisted of poems written between '44 and '48. My not quoting from these is not meant to suggest a decline in quality. CONFESSION OVERHEARD IN A SUBWAY and END OF THE SEERS' CONVENTION are as good as anything in the earlier work. Looked at in the aggregate, however, the poems seem repetitive; their locations are shifted, but the landscape is the same. Only a little darker. Perhaps that is because, as the seers dispersed: A sprinkling of rain, or dragon's blood, Or a handful of cinders fell on the small black umbrellas they raised against the sky.

TODAY

The headlines rain bombs to frighten man out of reason and make him buy a billion newspapers. My rosebush bloomed again more beautiful than last season. by Gustave Keyser

RECIPROCITY VS. SUICIDE

by Sam Bradley

—Bill, you wrote for many years before TALISMAN Press brought out your first book, WEST OF YOUR CITY. How did it feel to get it off your chest—or perhaps I should say, your conscience?

W.S.: It was all a muffled, confused, delayed feeling. My sensitivity to either approval or disapproval from general readers was not acute; what strikes me now is how objective I feel about it. —I know you are putting another book together, for HARPER'S. I wonder how much of what you've written gets published.

W.S.: The answer that occurs to me is this: I write in an attempt to liberate many kinds of opportunities in the language—as those opportunities occur to me. A reader looking at my work, or the work of any poet, I think, should remember that only a small, selected portion of the work ever appears. Besides, the selection has usually been made by someone other than the poet. For myself, at least seven-eighths of the iceberg stays submerged, where, for all I know, it belongs. —Can you discern several themes in your work?*

W.S.: Yes: our daily lives, feelings, thoughts, friendships, actions, impulses, unanalyzed impressions of holiness, and whatever.

And these are our guides for whichever religion, principle, world-policy, and whatever, that we hold. These things, as I say in the poem, OUR PEOPLE, are 'clenched in their own lived story.'

—Do you think that this looking for themes may give a wrong impression about the writings?

W.S.: I surely value as much as anyone a kind of playfulness and readiness to follow impulse in writing. But I do believe in my own impressions about my themes, and do not shy away from entangling myself with all the paraphrasable content possible. In my notebook, I've jotted down what may amount to an apology for this content-emphasis: 'Maybe content helps by reminding us,

as we work, of a quality we are trying to do.’ —You mention a notebook. Do you write much besides poems?

**TRACE’s Editor personally experienced a reversal of this %, before founding the magazine in 1952; and reports of scores of others (poets particularly) would indicate that Mr. Stafford’s experience is untypical. This too-easily achieved print (and outlets tripled in last ten years) does seem for the worse—a major cause for the lowered quality-average in literary magazines, and a disservice to most poets (of whom, Mr. Stafford, then, is not one).*

W.S.: I’ve written a number of short stories, with little success, the editors tell me. I’ve published a number of articles. I write prose and poetry all the time in what I guess could be called my journal—some writing almost every day. I’m not strongly aware of any audience when I write. From the journal, I take certain interesting things and make poems of them—or just take them out, already poems. I don’t aim a poem, consciously.

—Yet, you expect the poems to be meaningful to other people, don’t you?

W.S.: I suppose . . . that my poems are like considered bits of conversation directed at people around me. No, I’d have to modify this a little. Some of my poems are like tricks on the people around me; for I’m conscious of writing things sometimes which would be ambiguous and troublesome to anyone who is not engaged in certain topics.

—I take it that you think you may talk over the heads of some.

W.S.: Or over their shoulders. But I do address some receptive, sophisticated, kindred spirit (who perhaps relishes little jokes) who sympathizes with my formulations of the experience of living in our time.

—I know that you find the community hospitable, but do you think that you get through to very many people?

W.S.: Oh, the people around me voice regard for art, writing, and so on. But I confess: they like poetry and poets

in terms which seem to me not valid. I do not have the qualities, motives, purposes, hopes that they seem to think poets have. In short, I do—as a poet, that is—feel alien. Yes. Very much so. As I say in one of my poems: ‘We live in an occupied country, misunderstood; justice will take us millions of intricate moves . . .’ The people I know who are really from my country, the poet’s country, are very few. Almost all writing poets are from this country, and I meet about four or five of those every year. And there are some others—religious people, often. Pilgrims of various kinds.

—but isn’t it because you love your community or country so much that you are willing to oppose it at times?

W.S.: I make my policy: ‘When in Rome do as the Romans do, as long as you can stand it.’ As you know, in World War II, I was a thorough conscientious objector, and worked with the Brethren Service Committee, representing one of the three peace churches. Sometimes I have wondered whether my apparent nonconformity can harmonize with my feeling of being one of the ‘quiet of the land,’ even somewhat conservative.

—Do you agree with Robert Lowell that ‘sovereign nations, despite their feverish last-minute existence, are really obsolete?’

W.S.: I value national allegiance — feel it with almost coercive emotional force. Further, I believe it is part of the natural and congenial impulse of a person. But other nations are near, now; new considerations demand attention. In short, about Lowell’s statement — yes.

—David Reisman says that the cold war distracts man from serious thoughts about his condition on this earth. Poets and writers therefore tend to become private-concerned, leaving political concerns to men who are seldom speculative, contemplative, or compassionate. Do you think this is true of modern poetry, and how do you judge that it can come to grips with our crisis times?

W.S.: Let me continue a moment with the previous question. Sovereign anything which presumes to require of individuals what they should not give is truly destructive of life.

I believe that people, in their best selves, are social and mutually helpful. Any other policy is a kind of suicide. And to project into world affairs, which are human affairs, a long-term cold war or cold anything is to foster among us a paralysis of those qualities on which we commonly and ultimately have to rely.

—Do you mean for this to apply to people other than poets and writers?

W.S.: Yes. One of the worst effects of the cold war is that it freezes most people — writers, politicians, and all — into an attitude which stultifies human impulses and even clear thought. Believe me, we cannot as human beings sustain for long a politically dictated anti-human attitude . . . not without distorting our minds and characters. Now, there's a counterpart to this paralyzed stance. It is the orthodox 'revolutionist's' stance, which also causes a subjection to political considerations. That also is destructive to the good life and to sustained clear thinking.

If we are wise, we — writers, politicians, and all — will steer clear of the dangerous cold-war commitment, the dead-end effect, that the simple-minded succumb to. We can come to grips with our crisis times by cooperating with others to escape the trap of coldness and enmity. And to find new ways of cooperation. Allies are all around us and all around the world — wise writers, wise politicians, many wise men whom I here neglect. Indeed, we may find that wise legislators (deeply committed) are the unacknowledged poets of the world.

—While I think a tradition is something not to rut in, but to move out of, nevertheless I've paid poetic tribute to past poets. I've even some poems on Robert Frost appearing in

SHENAN-DOAH. So now I ask you, with whom do you feel an affinity?

W.S.: Frost is all right — he's currently over-exploited though; he's a lucky man and a lucky writer. But that wisdom-angle is overdone. Most of the greats, I do sincerely like. I can read with great gusto the kind of literature some people think lasts only by tradition: Scott, Austen, Matthew Arnold, George Eliot. *BEOWULF* sends shivers of delight down my spine. St. Augustine is awesome and wonderful. Yeats sends me, though I can't find real sympathy in me for him (Hardy is mine, both his novels and his poems). Tolstoi is for me! I realize that I've wandered from poets. Maybe that is significant. Among contemporaries I've liked: Philip Larkin, R. P. Warren, Robinson Jeffers —

—I see you're not going to give me just the most popular enthusiasms. I guess you believe, as I do, that literature does not always appear in the most touted places.

W.S.: Little magazines are about the only ones I read, except now and then in the barber shop. Many little magazines pursue aims that I understand and sympathize with: they publish literary work, writings that grow out of local, actual engagements with experiences validated by individuals. Other magazines are puzzling to me. They are some kind of foreign phenomena.

—One last question: have you ever thought of collecting your religious poems in a book?

W.S.: It's a project I'm keeping in mind.

AN EXPERIMENT IN CREATIVITY

by Jean Burden

FOR SEVERAL YEARS I had been editing a poetry page in a regional magazine. In the course of reviewing hundreds of poems each month, I had seen many a promising but not yet successful poem through painstaking revisions, and had experienced with a poet the thrill of satisfaction when it finally came off. For other poet-friends, I had served often as literary midwife. The rewards were almost as great as those of actual creation. Then, in 1960, I was invited by a local college to teach an evening Poetry Workshop in Adult Education.

Could this most difficult of arts be taught at all?

Of course, versification could be taught; but this did not interest me. Courses in 'Verse for Publication' had already bloomed and died for lack of support. Neither a university education nor twenty years of writing had ever exposed me to a Poetry Workshop or a class in 'creative writing.' Few professional writers of either prose or poetry, in my acquaintance, had ever attended such a class. They had learned, as I had, through the lonely, often-agonizing effort of self-teaching and experiment.

But, perhaps something could be — not taught — but released. I decided to give it a try. Creativity could not be given to anyone, but it could be fostered. One could at least put reflector-lights around even a small gleam.

The first thing I did was inquire of other teachers of poetry what helpful ideas they might have for one so inexperienced as I. All of them emphasized technique. 'They've got to learn craft. Drill them on forms.' I listened respectfully, but in the end decided to do just the opposite. Oriented as I was in psychology and philosophy, it was

simply not my way. I knew full well that if I were put into a class where the rhyme-scheme of the villanelle or the metrics of the ballad were made of primary importance, I would never be able to write a line. With naive courage I decided to trust that knowledge. (Later, Hildegard Flanner quoted Witter Bynner's advice to his class: 'Get a book on forms if you want to — of course it won't do you a damn bit of good!' And I felt better.)

What then was primary? It seemed to me that before anyone could learn to write poetry, he must first know how to tap his own creative source. Writing poetry was a journey from the unconscious to the conscious; from the unknown to the known, from inspiration to manipulation, from vision to revision. The first problem was how to begin the journey — how to reach one's own unconscious.

The second — and equally important — part of the job, was of course what to do with the raw material once it was brought to light. This transfer from feeling to thinking must not be done solely on the basis of form. Form (in its narrower sense) was only one of the many aspects to be taken into consideration. Even more important were imagery, cadence, tone, the complexities of language, sound. To establish standards of taste in this regard, constant exposure to the best that had been written, especially of contemporary poetry, must be provided. We would experience poetry as well as study it.

In the third place, I believed strongly that this course could not be taught as an isolated art form. Poetry was not cut off from life. It was life. Music, painting, sculpture — above all, certain articles on the human predicament, even short stories, plays, novels — could illuminate the whole field, and must not be disregarded.

These three tenets clarified, I spent the next four months putting together eighteen class programs for the fall semester. The results were these: The two-and-a-half hour

session was divided roughly in half, with a ten-minute break. I began each class with an 'aperitif.' Sometimes it was music — a Mozart sonata played on the Siena pianoforte, or Trappist monks singing Gregorian chants, or the lusty medieval songs of CARMINA BURANA. Other times it was an excerpt from one of my favorite books: Thurber's FABLES; James Agee's lyrical and tender A DEATH IN THE FAMILY; THE LITTLE PRINCE of Exupéry; Rilke's LETTERS TO A YOUNG POET. Once I spent ten minutes telling the group of my encounter with a poet from Ghana; and before a session on Haiku, I brought examples of sumi painting and Japanese koto music. We listened to Alan Watts tell a Chinese parable (on tape). We followed James Joyce's lilting Irish voice through the intricacies of ANNA LIVIA PLURABELLE, and were spellbound by Howard Thurman reading the 139th Psalm as he had recorded it in my home.

This 'aperitif' (fulfilling tenet No. 3) proved to be one of the most happy features. It served several purposes beyond the obvious exposure of the group to other kinds of excellence. It also provided a bridge from the busyness of their daily world to the more meditative and timeless world of art. It changed keys for us. Or, as one member put it, it was 'the decorator's screen to close out the work area.'

For the next forty or fifty minutes, I talked informally about the problems of creativity and craftsmanship as they applied to poetry. These were carefully organized according to a sequence based as much on psychology as on literature. And it is here, I am told, that the structure of this class differed radically from others. I have no way of knowing if this is true; I presented the material as I would have wanted it presented to me. The results were sometimes startling.

After an introductory lecture on 'The Nature of Poetry' (the difference between poetry and prose, poetry and verse), and rambling through comments by Wallace Stevens, T. S. Eliot, Emily Dickinson, A. E. Housman, Ezra Pound, Marianne

Moore, and many others, I launched into a brief but thorough discussion of 'The Unconscious.' My point of view was Jungian rather than Freudian, and I remember writing on the blackboard, that first semester, the quotation from MODERN MAN IN SEARCH OF A SOUL: 'Any reaction to stimulus may be causally explained but the creative act, which is the absolute antithesis of mere reaction, will forever elude the human understanding.'

In an hour, I tried to cover for this attentive if slightly-bewildered audience of fifty (I had asked for a maximum of twenty-five, and twice that many had turned out) Jung's ideas of dreams, symbols, fantasies and myth as they related to writing poetry. Basic to all these were his theories of the collective unconscious and archetypal images: 'Whatever the structure of the unconscious may be, one thing is certain: it contains an indefinite number of motifs or patterns of an archaic character, in principle identical with the root ideas of mythology and similar thought forms.'

We talked about the fact that the poet had made great use of this theory, that the collective unconscious meant for him a storehouse of common experiences to which he would go. The inner world, if he could just reach it, had images and symbols which linked all men together, no matter what their national or racial origin.

What were some of the commonest archetypal images? We discussed them: house, sea, rock, angel, goddess, tree-devil, serpent, hero, horses, sun, fire, etc. Later on, these were brought up again and again, not only in the class poems, but in the example of contemporary poetry read aloud. (Dylan Thomas' FERN HILL, for instance.) For many of the class, these were initially new (and sometimes irritating) concepts; later, they proved stimulating and productive to an unusual degree.

With this orientation, I asked the class to undertake an experiment. If it was true that we wrote out of our

unconscious, how did we tap this mysterious well? Dorothea Brande had devised a method for prose.¹ I, myself, had followed it faithfully for a month, years before, and knew its worth for poetry. In fact, I believed it held more value for the writing of poetry than anything else. One had to have this initial impulse or no amount of ‘fashioning’ later would be of any use. Brände believed (and so did I) that the writer was half artist and half artisan — a split personality. The artist was emotional and childlike; the artisan was critical, discriminating. The difficult task was to get both sides of his nature into an integrated team. The first step was to split them further apart. Brände’s way, as I explained to the class, was via early-morning, before-breakfast writing: ‘While you are still only half-awake (and your intellect temporarily in torpor), reach for a pencil and paper and write. Have no thought of content, only of quantity. Write for a stated length of time, say, twenty minutes or half an hour. Put the material away and do not refer to it. The next morning, try to increase your output. If you wrote a page the first morning, try to do two the second, three the next. If you can’t think of anything to write, describe in detail your frustration. Set down your dreams of the night before, or your plans for the day ahead. Write anything you like, uncritically. No one is going to read it but you. At the end of the week (and only then), gather up the material and read it.’

¹ See *BECOMING A WRITER*, by Dorothea Brande — HARCOURT, BRACE, 1934.

What I promised them — and what they discovered for themselves — was, first of all, astonishing self-revelation. One sees one’s own naked face, and while ‘Know thyself’ has always seemed to me basic to art as well as to religion, it is often a harrowing experience. But, as Tao Te Ching said: ‘He who knows others is wise. He who knows himself is enlightened.’

At the next session, each member told what the week's experiment had meant. For some, it had proved immediately rewarding. Not only had they discovered new things about themselves, but they had uncovered dozens of ideas for poems.

For others, the experiment had lasted only two or three mornings.

It had proved too disturbing to continue; and yet, they admitted, it

had not been time wasted. (Two years later, one of this group brought

me a poem she had just written out of this early-morning material.

She had not been able to use it then, but two years later it flowered.)

For still others, their previous conditioning made the idea too antithetical to be helpful. I remember one woman who angrily asserted that there was no such thing as the unconscious, that 'all consciousness is one,' and that she could not be bothered with all this nonsense. She stomped out, never to return; not only hostile, but obviously frightened.

In large measure, however, this proved to be the single most constructive idea of the semester. It proved in a literary sense what psychologists have known a long time: that the unconscious is both archaic and new; that it rebels against the secondhand and the stereotyped. We all share archetypal images, but we have our own individual life experiences as well. It is, of course, the derivative, the cliché that every teacher of poetry fights. The point is made early and forcibly.

Then, against a background of lectures on Form, Imagery and Metaphor, Symbolism, Language, Sound, Dramatic Structure, Rhyme, Metrics, Rhythm, Why Poems Fail, How to Revise, The Audience and The Broader Implications of Art and Living, they learned what it means to fashion a poem;

that art is not only born but made. ('God gives you the first line,' said Valery, 'but you have to work like Hell for the second!') Poetry is not just an intellectual game; but it is that, too.

They learned, sometimes painfully, that a poem is not an essay on life, but the re-creation of an experience. They were prodded out of their fondness for windy abstractions and lofty sentiments by the constant reminder that 'for a poet his ideas are things, and his things, ideas;' and by an experiment that produced interesting results: I brought to class a piece of jade found on a California beach and passed it around the class, not only to see but to feel. The next week, they brought in lists of images relative to the stone and its origins. The following week, they brought their poems. Some were extraordinary.

In the three lectures on Language, I went back into the history of the contemporary revolution in poetic language, tracing the development from French Symbolists through Pound and Eliot.

The talks on Rhythm, Rhyme, Cadence, and Metre didn't occur until the semester was more than half over. By this time, discussion of iambs, trochees, pentameter, dactyl, and caesura did not frighten them. While most of the class preferred writing free verse, its disciplines and difficulties were never minimized.

The sessions on revision were especially lively, because by this time they were able to throw back to me my own precepts. We had been analyzing so many worksheets that, when I wrote on the board Yeats' remark: 'It is not inspiration that exhausts one, it is art,' they already knew firsthand what it meant.

For the lecture on The Audience, or Whom Do We Write For? — I brought to class about seventy-five of the current magazines together with a listing of markets divided into Top Drawer, Excellent, Good, Fair-to-Middling. (Usually Less

than Inspiring), and Ugh. Women's magazines and the 'slicks' were not even included. Incidentally, the only outside reading I recommended during the course was POETRY (Chicago).

The second half of the session was sometimes a literary and critical free-for-all. As long as they didn't all talk at once, I never interfered with expressions of opinion. The climate was, at the least, relaxed and easy. As many poems as possible were put on the blackboard. I read each poem aloud to give it the best presentation possible. No poem was ever submitted for class criticism that did not have some merit.

Because of the size of the class, each member was allowed to hand in one poem, plus as many revisions as he liked. I gave back written critiques on each poem (as detailed as possible, and always honest). If the poem was revisable, I put a small R beside it. I kept the actual poem in the member's folder, along with a carbon-copy of my critique. In this way, I was always able to relate what a student was doing to what he had previously accomplished. This proved to be a very practical idea. At the end of the semester, I handed back the whole file. I urged each student to keep working papers on every poem he wrote, and it was always one of the high spots of an evening when I could share with the class the various stages of a poem—from mediocre beginning to triumphant final form.

These sessions of hard, concentrated, often exhausting application of whatever they had learned from the lectures, brought into sharp focus the points I had tried to make. The arguments were often heated. There were also many laughs. The teacher's job was not only to referee, but to hold her ground without emotion when she felt she was right. In other words, high standards, but no rigidity. One learns early how to dismiss gently the inept comment, or how to translate for a group of such widely-different backgrounds an intellectually-abstract statement from one of the better-read

students. As one of them remarked: 'The only common denominator of this group is respect for each other's work—and it is all we need!'

They went a long way, too, toward learning one of the most important things in any art—how to separate oneself from one's work. At first, criticism of a poem tended also to be a personal attack. Gradually they were able to put distance between themselves and the poems, and with the new detachment came greater freedom to use their skills.

Each session closed with the reading of some example of good contemporary poetry, to send them away with the best ringing in their ears. During the course of a year, we managed to cover a range that included Emily Dickinson, Stephen Crane, Isabella Gardner, Abbe Huston Evans, Richard Wilbur, Robert Lowell, Theodore Roethke, Karl Shapiro, W. S. Merwin, James Dickey, and many, many others. Dylan Thomas and T. S. Eliot spoke to us on records; and others like Kenneth Rexroth, Eric Barker, and John Crowe Ransom read by means of the anthology tape I had made over a period of years. We were following the admonition that Thornton Wilder had given me at the University of Chicago: 'Don't waste your superlatives on the almost-great and the near-beautiful — otherwise you'll have nothing left when you hear the Bach B Minor Mass!' Incidentally, I never read from my own work. Some teachers, I know, use this type of class as a platform for trying out their own poems. In my opinion, this is a mistake for many reasons, chief among which is the danger of putting before the class an image of how you personally have dealt with poetry, thus inviting imitation. I was rewarded when one member exclaimed: 'Now I know why this class is so wonderful. You don't teach us to write like you; you teach us to write like ourselves!' The 'proof of the pudding,' was, first of all, literary. Did the students actually write better at the end of the year than when they began? The question has

been asked of me often. The answer, of course, is that some did and some did not. The method did not take with everyone. I can truthfully say, however, that the percentage of improvement was high, and some results striking. At the end of the year, we made a tape-recording of the best poem of each student. It is a highly creditable, if uneven, anthology, even by my critical standards. Many of them had started out feebly, but ended successfully. These were the real triumphs. I remember in particular a man who worked as a janitor in a large office building. His first submissions were incredibly bad, exhibiting every fault of content and form. They were sentimental effusions of the birdie-with-the-yellow-bill school. Of all the students, I would have placed him at the bottom of the list. His enthusiasm, however, remained undimmed through weeks of blunt but patient criticism. Suddenly one evening, he turned in a poem that was fresh, imaginative, controlled. I could hardly believe my eyes. 'What happened to you?' I asked. He twinkled, then whispered: 'You happened to me.' Another member, a girl who taught physiotherapy by day, had been fond of turning in a kind of beatnik verse, full of far-out imagery and of eccentric structure. After weeks of this kind of experimentation that communicated almost nothing beyond her own confusion, she submitted a poem that rang with original simplicity. The class cheered. A man who had written nothing but immature imitations of HOWL finally turned to his own rich background and wrote a moving, but unsentimental, evocation of his Jewish mother. 'You taught me how to stop shouting,' he admitted later.

While no emphasis was placed on marketing, several members did sell poems during that year to such publications as THE ATLANTIC, THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR, THE GALLEY SAIL, COASTLINES, VOICES, and GEORGIA REVIEW.

The other proofs were nonliterary, and surprising. The ramifications of this kind of experiment in creativity penetrated into many other areas than poetry. The early-morning writing was, I am sure, responsible in part. In my effort to keep the field as wide as possible, I inadvertently unlocked more doors than I had anticipated. ('Have you ever thought of taking up group-therapy?' one of the students asked with a grin.) At the end of the first semester, each member wrote out his critical evaluation of the class, and the reports (many unsigned) were both candid and moving:

'I've lost my intellectual snobbishness.'

'I'm not nearly so shy.'

'This class stretched my mind in dozens of ways, and I never dreamed it had this much elasticity.'

'I'm still not ready to call the world a friend, but now I can admit that she does smile once in a while . . . and it is a lovely sight.'

'You won't believe it — but even my relationship to my daughter is better!'

'Now I have everything....'

Perhaps May Sarton was right when she said teaching was also caring for souls. But, the teacher's role is principally that most difficult one of all — that of catalyst. As one of the class remarked:

'It's not just you, Mrs. Burden, it's the class!'

Author's note: My sources for the informal talks quoted were many. I drew on John Ciardi's excellent *HOW DOES A POEM MEAN* (HOUGHTON MIFFLIN, 1959) and Elizabeth Drews' fine *POETRY, A MODERN GUIDE TO ITS UNDERSTANDING AND ENJOYMENT* (DELL, 1959). Supplementing these, some forty-six assorted books and articles, collected over the years, plus a four-drawer file of related material: everything from Zen to semantics to porcelains of the T'ang Dynasty . . .

OF SOME PRESENCES NOT PAST

A PROTEST THAT THE ENSUING new (or newly issued) works are preposterously discussed in one article, would at first seem justified. They are widely divergent in presentations of utterly differing subject matters reviewed through apparently-unrelated thematic spectra converging from far-separated periods of time.

Of course, any coincidences of expression in one place may be surveyed to predicate affiliations. But these three books and one pamphlet (a volume of variegated Nineteenth Century magazine articles; an abstruse analysis of a Seventeenth Century poet; a condensed Eighteenth Century biography; and philosophical fictions hung upon belief in reincarnation) are more than tenuously connected.

They are: *THE FEDERALIST LITERARY MIND*, edited by Lewis P. Simpson (LOUISIANA STATE University Press — \$6); *MILTON'S GOD*, by William Empson (NEW DIRECTIONS — \$5); *BENJAMIN FRANKLIN*, by Theodore Hornberger (UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA Press — 65c); *LABYRINTHS*, by Jorge Luis Borges (NEW DIRECTIONS — \$5.50).

The appearance of each, in the U.S.A., in 1962, is attributable to the same pair of commonly-posed basic questions. These have, in part, evoked perhaps two-thirds of today's serious writings. One question involves search for belief, or identification of meaningful being, in an often-miscalled 'religious' sense; the other concerns selection of modes for controlling individual enactments of life in society. Besides from their broad applicabilities, it may be demurred that these questions always are being asked. However, the special phases of their Twentieth Century scrutinies have singularly caused publications of the four items to meet requisite particularities for readability: Now.

Topical relevancies to demagogic American governmental trends, and to recent deviations in aesthetic judgments, as well, predominate in casting contemporary significance on the potpourri of idealistic articles by New England literati of 1803-11. And they are doubly indicative, because issued by a Southern university. Though pondering verities, Empson bares this time's ethical problems, in probing the mind of a great poetical religionist. The Pennsylvania professor's inquiry into the moral motivations of Franklin via his writings equates with what citizens are trying to divine about modern statesmen. The translations of the Argentine's staggeringly-complex fantasies range through history (and invented history) to bring both the practical and the metaphysical propositions into present kaleidoscopic contexts.

All four meet current hungers of the same intellectual audience. Some readers will find more to satisfy them in eliminative pairings of the first with the third; others, the second with the third; still others, the second with the fourth. But, a few will uncover linkages amongst them all and gain heightened insights of the unique confusions of 1962 America.

Before proceeding—not an apology—a statement to clarify that these materials were not deliberately selected for this Editor's thematic elaborations. In first instances, the four were chosen from forty-odd simply because they registered individual significances. Only after their complete perusals and rereadings of notes for their intended-separate reviews, were their key elements found to spring from sources giving mutual salience to their gaining print in the same year.

To obviate generalized repetitions with each, these writers may at once be said to be linked by the common dual preoccupation of essayists who mingle facts and circumstances (whether biographical, historical, or merely textual) with abstract commentary and reasoned suggestion.

On the one hand, their deference toward transient proprieties mottles their objectivities in descanting upon the nature of Existence. On the other hand, they seek to render subjective asseverations in a 'timeless' dimension, despite individual preconceptions. Instances of the former are sharpest in their efforts to reconcile connoted, conflicting *faits accomplis* with radically-ideal notions how men might improve acknowledgeable rules for living. The latter rise where plainer directions are mapped to search from wherever they are, for broader perceptions and understandings (distinguished from specific search for empirical knowledge).

In the summary of his Introduction, Lewis Simpson observes how the conservative liberals he anthologizes seemed chiefly dubious over young America's literary prospects from their fears of 'a new (holy?) barbarism.' The book shows Joseph Stevens Buckminster to have been more influential in determining policies than were William Emerson or John Quincy Adams. The group's positive purpose was to encourage emulation of European learning; yet, their often-negative disquisitions deal with 'another kind of progress' dangerous to an Augustan ideal—a dreadful alliance of material ambition and sensual greed.

Taken all together, these expressions of 160 years ago join hopes for an urbane culture and conquest of crassness with a kind of feudal revival. Since ours was to be a 'republick,' not a monarchy with guidance emanating from an aristocratic court, the arts and sciences would fare better with strong and numerous local centres of power. The participants were fairly united in declaring that democracy on a national scale could mean rule by ignorance; they sharply differentiated from this, a 'republick' wherein the better minds would administer inside the states and exercise their own judgments in limited national aspects. If nowhere stated in these phrases these men saw no golden future for letters or government if unfiltered majorities of readerships

and electorates were to pass upon the nation's books and laws.

Theodore Dehon wrote of retrogression into a 'democracy of letters.' Forebodings of dollar-worship are frequent; and — again from the Introduction — Fisher Ames is noted as having foretold a 'progress of licentiousness.' In *THE MIRE OF DEMOCRACY*, Ames declares a republic 'differs more widely from a democracy than a democracy from a despotism.' Early prognostications of Fascism? — as well as of best-seller depravities? One of many confirmations of majority group-opposition to universalized higher education is in Benjamin Wells' *POLITICAL METHODISM*: 'What can be more absurd than . . . diffusion of Dilworth learning to clowns, who ought to be brightening their plowshares . . .?' Buckminster, however, is less open to charges of snobbishness when he condemns, rather, the superficialities of undisciplined popular education and a curriculum 'shortened in favour of the impatience or necessities of candidates' — as he refers to 'a pernicious notion of equality.' Further, from Buckminster:

. . . the young man, who is to live by his talents, and to make the most of the name of a scholar, is tempted to turn his literary credit to the quickest account by early making himself of consequence to the people, or rather to some of their factions. . . . His leisure is wasted on the profligate productions of demagogues. . . . It is, perhaps, one of the incurable evils of our . . . society that this ambition of immediate notoriety and rapid success is too early excited .

Superficial reading of Simpson's selections might lead to hasty inference that, while not often specifically dogmatic, these New Englanders were merely neo-classicists; but their debates amongst themselves, and within themselves, follow a romantic vein. Most of them were social individualists;

Simpson, in his second Preface finds: 'These selections all emphasize a growing romantic bias.'

It wasn't so much on behalf of traditionalism as out of fear of deterioration from catering to public taste that William Tudor, Jr. wrote: ' . . . owing mainly to some glaring faults in our scheme of widespread superficial education . . . we are harassed with a class of authors (elsewhere dubbed 'worthless seeds') . . . who are incomparably more numerous here, in proportion, than in any other country.' Again, an attack on universal education is qualified by distinction of a wrong kind of education. Related to the foregoing are remarks upon the 'duties of reviewers' (an anonymous brevity: THE REVIEWER AS EXECUTIONER) and the shortage of good critics. THE POLITY OF LETTERS, by Buckminster, opens:

So little have the writers of our country been accustomed to the rigour of a critical tribunal that to secure a comfortable seat in some of the out-houses belonging to the temple of fame nothing has been hitherto necessary but the resolution to write, and the folly to publish.

How accurately this strikes at publishing today! And further:

. . . to point out the faults of a living author, instead of making him grateful, only makes him mad.

Finally, in closing the preceding 'anonymous' article:

. . . in the literary commonwealth there is no hospital for the reception of mendicant vagabonds, no Bedlam for insanity and frenzy, no Magdalen for impunity and defilement, and no Lazaretto for lame and hobbling authors.

A recognized authority in semantics, William Empson discloses in his work upon Milton an augmented distrust of English as a medium for accurate and comprehensible communication. He does not do so explicitly; the impression is conveyed by his boresome extension of his habitual hashing and rehashing of tentative observations, before he gets around to plain declamations from long-since

well-grounded deductions. During these preambles, and while painstakingly strangling alternatives, he better reveals his own intimate psychological unsureness — in this very language.

Though Empson's God (should he entertain one) obviously must be an opposite number to the chameleon One he verifies in Milton (his early seeming-advocacies of Satanism being sotto voce), he might lead an unconditioned reader to guess that he's arguing with himself when he begins suggesting better working concepts of purpose-in-the-universe, out of dismayed reactions to Milton.

His commencing 'debates' with Milton patently are staged (in both aspects). This is not to charge him with inferior or specious motives, but to bring perspective to the split between the master-quibbler in him and the near-ingenuous, perplexed personality he also is, though he employs one of the most developed minds of the day. It's regrettable that he uses three-fourths of his pages before he feels assured (apparently) that his premises are verbalized.

Happily, just the same, Empson's valuable insights never have relied upon abstract contemplation of any sort. Sometimes by intentional ruse — again, accidentally, when exploring alternative views of God and brilliantly describing their effects — he spears forth pungent ethical hypotheses. Even should a reader's impatience stop him before he finds the excellent later chapters, contemporary questions of belief are illuminated to provide leads to society's moral reinvigoration. Among many tie-ins with these other works, his choice of quotation from Milton's *READY AND EASY WAY TO ESTABLISH A FREE COMMONWEALTH*: Split up the country under local rule again, by counties or city states; then the King will find he has nothing to take over. This 'King' is the surrogate of the God Empson says Milton depicts less favorably than the Devil. And Empson before pointed out that the 'answer is

political, not mathematical,' in setting forth a major thesis that the 'moral collapse' of his lifetime had resulted 'because so many of our present literary mentors not only accept it (Pascal's brief that religious tenets are incontrovertible because of averred mathematical probabilities) but talk as if that was a moral thing to do.' Then: If you have reduced your morality to keeping taboos imposed by an infinite malignity, you have no sense either of personal honour or of public good. The degree to which the detestable God which Empson found in Milton remains less diabolic than the Deity of world-Christianity is primary of course to Empson's intention to outline the ambiguities of neo-Christianity and to show how the term 'Christianity' itself has so many definitions that it cannot be applied without doctrinal explication. More, to be sure, is involved; because Empson clarifies his own anti-orthodox determination toward the book's close, depicting the horrors implicit in a paradox of sacrifice rooted in pagan tortures and sanctified public murders. Here are several tie-ins with Borges (that noted above having relationship chiefly to the New Englanders' advocacies of individualism-vs.-government and to the Hornberger study of Franklin). The Argentine writer is similarly concerned over Pascal, makes use of the same inhumane histories mentioned by Empson, and delves into Nazi concentration-camp tortures (as does Empson). He produces an ironic 'moral justification' for Hitlerism by showing the correspondences with the rationales of masochistic religions of which Hitler tried to purge 'corrupted humanity.' Going beyond this, Empson suggests dangers of reversion to Dark Age miseries from opposing Communism solely with even an amorphous Christianity. He recalls that mayhem (and brain-washing too) was an instrument for enforcing religious dogmas hundreds of years before Karl Marx. Empson by no means stays deadpan-serious in pages shot through with humor not

always of his typical supercilious, intellectual variety. There are hearty laughs in the asides: Satan 'talking in a high Roman manner' . . . guesses about the sex-lives of angels and those of our Biblical parents . . . references to the half-dozen Miltonic speculations on space-travel and life on other planets . . . an interpretation of a remark by Eve to mean that she longs to project herself into the void 'like the modest angels, whom she habitually hears singing.'

In his devious way, Empson debunks Milton as a 'moral' poet, while he also defends him, praising sections of *PARADISE LOST*, *PARADISE REGAINED*, and—in a contrapositive manner—*SAMPSON AGONISTES*, for elements it's debatable that Milton consciously introduced. The entire book is compounded in a Princess-or-Tiger? fashion, leaving readers to their private putations. Would Milton be horrified, or would he smile knowingly over this Twentieth Century unmasking? Yet, Empson is not altogether assumptive; he frequently quotes from Milton's prose to verify that unfamiliar arguments are not purely suppositional.

Hornberger's brief statesman-author study nevertheless does not omit generous quotations from Franklin. As in the other works, his analysis is shaded by opposition to orthodoxies of anti-humanistic persuasion and bias toward Benthamism and secular humanism,—and the same disposition pervades the New England collection, despite strains of authoritarianism. Hornberger rather takes for granted—and attributes this attitude to Franklin—that the greatest 'good' of the greatest number is the desirable goal.

Even Franklin's opportunistic side and the somewhat less than ideally-admirable means he used for certain effects in his publications (and in his actual conduct), he finds to have been submerged in the total current of lifelong beneficent intentions. Franklin's concern over superficial reputation is interpreted through deductions out of the writings, that he deeply misunderstood himself. And besides observing that

his selfish bent did contribute to the enablement of real services to the nation and the world, Hornberger stresses the Platonic contradictions within this practical man's nature. He quotes as more truly revealing of Franklin than anything in the AUTOBIOGRAPHY, a statement of the philosopher-fly in THE EPHEMERA:

For me, after all my eager pursuits, no solid pleasures now remain, but the reflection of a long life spent in meaning well, the sensible conversations of a few good lady ephemerae, and now and then a kind smile and a tune from the ever amiable Brillante.

To avoid misinforming those who may read this article in a 'review-frame,' it should be remarked that BENJAMIN FRANKLIN concentrates almost entirely upon the subject's prose styles, and follows his life principally through his own writings.

Rare mazes of thought, multitudes of remote references, unbelievably-detailed condensations of unexpected admixtures of booklore with minutiae both of outward observation and the inner mind, compressed with simile and metaphor—such tours de force make these selected Borges translations almost post-contemporary. They account for the very publication of his work, here and now; yet, at the same time their presentations are such difficult reading that one asks: How did this author gain print in the first place?

Borges himself seems to be the erudite exemplar of that 'vernacular and rustic Zarathustra' who is nicknamed as one of the stories is titled, FUNES THE MEMORIOUS. A head-injury gifts and curses Funes with total recall, not just of his current life, but of all his past lives; reconstructions of myriad days keep forming in his consciousness. Obviously he cannot commit to paper (the time factor) even the 'present past,' and his super-senses keep layering new experiences. He attempts the also-impossible mental reconstructions, by retiring to solitary darkness. Thomas Wolfe—a hundred

times maximized—is conjured.

Sensory and cerebral overexcitation is the real problem of today's developed intellects. The remarkable Argentine is one of them; and so he has been unable to develop a full-scale novel from scores upon scores of settings and action-lines, unable to produce one comprehensive tome from countless philosophical theories. He presents himself as frustrated to the nth, the extremest victim of the schizophrenia infecting every thinker of this period. His searches for existential identification and for solution of social dilemma intensify to unprecedented confusion in our world-labyrinth, although each depiction is abbreviated. He may be saying that we are in the process of universalizing belief—which soon will jet out of our sphere to become part of some inconceivable stellar One.

But—to return this look at Borges to literary aspects—he can be declared to have fulfilled more diversely than anyone a pronouncement of William Empson:

. . . the central function of imaginative literature is to make you realize that other people act on moral convictions different from your own.

One cruel example already has been mentioned (in comparison with Empson): Borges' inside-picture of a Nazi in *DEUTSCHES REQUIEM*.

Then, another of his tales, *AVERROES' SEARCH* realizes a triply-complicated Franz Kafka journey toward hopelessly-anticipated frustration and defeat. In an after-word to this story, Borge's specifically verifies that his writings are telegraphic transcriptions of his own memoried constructs of being: ... my narration was a symbol of the man I was as I wrote it and ... in order to compose that narration, I had to be that man, and, in order to be that man, I had to compose that narration, and so on to infinity.

The same, in his essays where dealing with multiplex ethical systems (see *A NEW REFUTATION OF TIME*): he sees each

and every variation implicit in each and every other one. The endlessly-contradictory consequences are limned in *THE MIRROR OF ENIGMAS*, where he compounds the Scriptures with mysticism to find that 'the hieroglyphical world' so postulated must be the one most befitting 'the theologian's intellectual God.' The crux of present-tense antilogy is packed into this easy phrase. How be theological and logical, too?

J.B.M.

Food of the Seed and Chaff

THE VARIETIES EXHIBITED in Kenneth Rexroth's second volume of essays, titled *ASSAYS (NEW DIRECTIONS, \$4.50 & paperb., \$2.25)* are singular enough to suggest that the author's investigation and authority are encyclopedic.

Largely written or published during the last three or four years, these articles range over an interestingly-eclectic assortment of topics (Chinese history, Hebrew mythology, contemporary letters, the poetry of many lands and epochs, painting, etc.); an arresting array of 'names' appears in the contents (Confucius, Lawrence Durrell, Karl Marx, Ezra Pound, Mary Baker Eddy, Aubrey Beardsley, Robinson Jeffers, Remy De Gourmont, Mort Sahl, Maxwell Boden-heim, John Coltrane, Carl Jung, Vachel Lindsay, etc.); and a great portion of the sum of mankind's achievements are stirred at least momentarily (*en passant*) for the reader's enlightenment (religion, anthropology, history, literature, art, music, psychology, ethnology, pottery, politics, economics, etc.) as he makes his way, symbiotically, through the feathers of this *rara avis*.

It is difficult to state explicitly why the material constantly affords the impression of an esoteric pose. With all its detail and variety, the *ASSAYS* persistently remind one of the stage-managing that distracts our attention from inferior theatre. And that is perhaps the most singular effect of this tour de force: the atmosphere it lends, in a dramaturgic

sense, of a performance.

The book is also dismayingly filled with contradictions, questionable value-judgments, and conceits. The repeated examples of its author's personal spites contribute measurably to this dominant tone of showmanship, rather than the obviously-desired impression of scholarship and wisdom.

A depressing attack upon Robinson Jeffers' poetry, in a portion of one article (POETS, OLD AND NEW), loses a considerable amount of its force because of the extremes to which it resorts. (Rexroth states that, in the entire body of Jeffers' published work, there isn't a quotable line!) Jeffers was not the most impressive American poet of this epoch; but it seems extraordinary to except him for such a singularly venomous criticism, particularly when inarguably inferior 'poets of anthology rank' (the author's expression) such as Carl Sandburg and Brother Antoninus, are passed over with comparatively benevolent judgments.

Rexroth refers to an article about Jeffers' poetry, written some years ago by a writer he does not name (probably Yvor Winters), but whom he describes as Jeffers' 'only serious rival' as California's leading poet, at the time. He asserts that the publication of this article ('one of the most devastating attacks in modern criticism') so seriously discredited Jeffers' work that the latter's 'reputation, then at its height, never recovered, but entered a slow decline.'

Jeffers himself seemed unaware he had been so absolutely disposed of! But the point is that this reference to somebody else's 'devastating criticism' is not, itself, responsible literary criticism. It is an attempt to impose an authority on the reader in lieu of convincing hypothesis and demonstration. And worse, the attempt does not trouble even to name its 'authority'.

There are individuals of some literary stature, such as T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, whose names are apparently

anathema to the author of *ASSAYS*. They reappear continually throughout, in vindictive and often confused and unrelated asides. It is as though the voice that refers with such remarkable constancy to their sounds suffered from some undefined competitive itch that can be scratched only by the repetition of these appellatives in unflattering context. Pound's name is a particularly unfortunate mark for this random shooting. And he is singled out otherwise. . . .

In his notes on Yuan Mei, Rexroth eulogizes Arthur Waley's Chinese and Japanese translations. '(He) opened up for me the whole wonderful world of Far Eastern poetry.' Ezra Pound, Witter Bynner, and Amy Lowell are mentioned as mere imitators. No mention at all, incidentally, is made of Lafcadio Hearn in this connection, or elsewhere, in these journalistic 'assays!'

There is much by way of thinly-masked and insufficiently-supported opinion to quarrel with in these scholastic flights of culture in their uncultured newspaper-English: Mr. Rexroth's views on 'The New Poetry,' his opinions on contemporary painting, or earlier periods and schools; his frequently-cursory summations of the body of some author's work; above all, the unnoted contradictions in his own prose and arguments — 'and the wine-dark sea, very bright and white that day' or 'As far as his verse is concerned, Brother Antoninus is more or less a disciple of Robinson Jeffers'!! (One wonders if it isn't only 'as far as' the comparative rarity of his monasticism 'is concerned,' that Brother Antoninus has fallen under the author's eclectic regard at all . . .) — and the book's penchant for emphatic misstatement, notably the explanatory aside, in the Robert Duncan criticism, of the relationship and division of power today between the extreme camps of action and academic poetry. According to Rexroth, the academicians are fighting a losing, rear-guard action against the triumphantly advancing, socially-conscious beats! Oh, well . . .

More serious than such numerous contradictions, inconsistencies and pettifoggery, is the overall impression the collection manifests of insincerity. The scholastic posture and the studied attitude of authority seem more in evidence here than the scholar or his scholarship.

George Abbe is a New England poet, with the attitudes and values founded in the same bedrock stability that has characterized others of the breed (Robert Frost, E. A. Robinson, etc.). Even his nature poems are not localized; given the seasons, they are true anywhere on the planet. And this is a rare attribute.

There probably are no 'great' moments in Abbe's COLLECTED POEMS (RICHARD R. SMITH Co., Inc.—\$3.50, paperb., \$1.65). But there are also no really bad ones. Generally, the variety ranges from a few poor poems (such as THE DYE WORKS: LIBERATION) all the way to a few first-rate ones (such as CERTAINTY).

The collection is arranged in three parts. The first section, THE YEAST OF SUMMER, contains the more recent work. The second and third portions, LEAP THE MEASURED ARC and THE THAWING FIRE, contain the earlier works, in reverse order of creation, so that the last selections are the oldest.

Embarrassingly enough, the earliest poem, the last in sequence in the volume (CERTAINTY, mentioned supra), is one of the finest. This article will refer to it again.

The confusion is that the earlier poems are not greatly different from the later ones. While it is perhaps the best thing that can be said of the early work, it suggests, also, that there has been too little separation or progression, either in form or in style, in the poet's growth.

It is a large collection; and, inevitably, an uneven one. THE DYE WORKS: LIBERATION, a quasi-political poem, offers an extravagant contrast to THE ICEHOUSE, a poem simply and passionately about man. In the former, lines like: 'The flesh dyed in the vat/ clothes truthful man;/ color of labor shines/

town-bright, as yours, as mine;/mortal divine'—contrast poorly with lines like these in the latter: 'Oh ice! O clothed in particles of wood/bled out of time,/ your timeless is my mood,/your familiar all my recognition and companionship.'

Most of the poems, in all three sections, deal with certain recurrent themes (the noble image; dreams; erotica; man; nature; etc.). The most interesting of these categories, because it has afforded the poet an opportunity to contribute something original, is Abbe's dream-poems, or nightmares. Two of these: *THE FIRST DREAM: THE GARAGE* ; and *THE EXPIATION* — are especially arresting. Neither is a quotable poem, in any lyrical sense; each depends on the slow development and exploitation of a mood (an inexplicable and growing frustration culminating in horror), and creating a total effect which persists beyond concluding lines. The rapid progression of vivid and unusually-recognizable images lends force to this Gestalt construction of mood.

There is another type of poem, which takes advantage of readily-suggestive characteristics in a person, place, or thing (exemplified especially by *THE BARBER*), that, even when cleverly executed, never achieves more than an obvious moral with a rhyme-scheme. Such vignettes considerably weaken Mr. Abbe's customarily more vital product.

But the chief defect of this product is a limited mechanical and structural originality and variety. The portion of his craft Abbe utilizes is sound, but it is insufficient. There is little real experimentation. The absence of this quality, a hallmark of some of the most original and forceful poets, is keenly felt in the book.

To a redeeming extent, Abbe's vitality makes up for this. His is not the uncritical vitality of action poetry; these are ideas of substance expressed with precision and controlled emotion.

In the aggregate, the collection reveals a surprisingly-consistent perspective, which includes an

The sonnet that closes the collection (CERTAINTY) is haunting:

John William Corrington is one of many (less or more) promising contemporaries with a limited craft and source. In his first published collection, *WHERE WE ARE* (CHARIOTEER PRESS, \$2.75 — paperb., \$1.75), Corrington's paucity of thematic material generally, and metre and imagery specifically, characterizes the work throughout, with few exceptions.

Some of the material has been considerably revised for its second appearance in print. The opening poem, AN EXEMPLARY FICTION, is a case in point. In its original May,

1958 publication in *PROSIDIA*, the poem employed an upper-case letter at the head of each line. This obtains now only where the letter and line begin a sentence. Many of the lines have been reworked, so that individual phrasing within stanzas is more natural. Some deletions tighten a line or a phrase here and there. The most important single change occurs in the last line. Formerly reading: 'Isn't that priceless?' — it now concludes: 'Isn't that the end?' This sort of editing has improved the work; but superficially. It is in need of more astute recapitulation than these hopeful trimmings.

Prominent illustrations of the collection's thematic inconsequence are *MIDDLEMAN* (the fate of a Quisling); *PASTORAL* (atom doom); *POLICE REPORT* (the remorse a serious traffic accident might occasion); *INTERVIEW* (politics); *THE DIPLOMATS* (politics and atom doom); *THE ORIENT HOTEL* (a trivial personal recollection, in the manner of Henry Miller); *THE FIFTH HORSEMAN* (pro-war!); *VARIATIONS ON A THEME FROM ISAAH* (the patriotic fervor of immigration). These are the ideas which comprise the basic content of eight of the book's eighteen poems. Explicitly, they suffer from a want of roots. There is no vital connection, or only a surface one here, with the mainstream. A bad traffic accident, to take an instance, is certainly ugly and frightening. To the individuals involved, it is even horrifying. And Corrington's poem conveys the impact of such horror vividly. But, as a theme, it is less than universal. Most people do not die in automobile accidents. Yet, the anguish and the disintegration that occur inside a human being, for example, when the dispassionate and impersonal forces of life have demonstrated an inhuman indifference to his little wants, are something that happens, in some degree, to all men. It is the kind of personal tragedy with which all human beings, in their weakness and humanity, are associated in any age. It is universal because it is a commonplace of life. It is timeless because the

function of anguish need not have a particular causal connection with history (such as the special circumstance of being born within the era of the internal combustion engine and automobile highways). It is this substance, with its elements unmistakably and universally associated with the human condition, which solicits audience empathy and creates enduring themes.

It seems unnecessary to belabor the point that 'atom doom' is hackneyed and, in any case, one of these 'special circumstances;' and politics is not a literary theme, although it may afford the background for one. And while a general indictment of war is timeless, and therefore the substance of a universal, the specific or incidental circumstances of war (just as with politics) may afford the background of a theme, but not the theme itself. It has been said of these little combat vignettes, which appear myriadly and without any special excellence of treatment, that they are a reflection of all the elements of war, so that the reader, apparently, is at liberty to read into them something more universal than the poet's manifested intent. But they are not so grand. Incidental writing is incidental! The poet is obliged, in some fashion, to create his own characters and controversies,—and to evidence them in some specific manner which does not require such extraordinary 'collaboration' from the reader.

Three refreshing examples of poetry with more substantial content in the collection are AN EXEMPLARY FICTION (disenchantment experienced at the level of the perennial status-seeker and [cocktail] party habitue; it is a poem, even more essentially, about futility); AN EXEMPLARY ROMANCE (a delineation of character and human weakness with exceptional insight); and FOOTNOTE (one of the book's several anti-war poems, but executed with a precision and restraint the others lack). Corrington's craft, judging by the selections in this volume, is limited almost to a crippling

extent. He employs very few of poetry's multitudinous forms and devices here. Most of these poems are technically (or untechnically) much alike. A certain diminished lyrical method and a suggestive use of language distinguish them at their best. But a prosy treatment of many lines and an almost journalistic idiom weaken these effects. The largely-arbitrary deficiencies apparent in the collection strongly suggest the stubbornness of an amateur of long (and self-inflicted) standing. The naive lack of even mechanical variety (there is, for instance, rarely any attempt to use metre deliberately), and the absence of any particularly-original experimental reach, arouse a suspicion that this is a poet who has read less than he might of the work of other poets.

The element of surprise and the satisfaction of identification in the unfoldment of good character delineation are the substance of an objective theme (Browning's *MY LAST DUCHESS* and *ANDREA DEL SARTO*). *AN EXEMPLARY ROMANCE* (supra) exploits this type of possibility with entertainment and feeling, because it is original and makes effective use of these elements. *THE MEDUSA* illustrates the theme's misuse. It is weak, its surprise is predictable, and the character-portrait achieved is neither universal nor emphatic. This lack of empathy is such a fundamental blunder that it betrays some naivete; and the loss of its universal quality is such a basic mistake, in the treatment of the theme, that a lack of clarity of purpose is revealed.

For all their defects of form and style and subject, there is a certain (undirected) vitality apparent at intervals in the poems. *THE SECOND COMING* (a Yeats title, too) is reminiscent of the unfocused and clean purpose in Patchen's best poems. The theme here (the idea that it is likely most people, including Christians, don't really want Jesus to reappear) lacks originality, and its treatment by Corrington is cynical. Yet the poet's view is manifested with some of his most

convincing and visual imagery, and the point is made with a clarity and economy of purpose that are compelling.

In such off-moments, this collection too-rarely hints at the raw materials of a better poet than its body has permitted us to see.

Iris Orton's second published collection of poems, *A MAN SINGING* (SCORPION, 15s.), derives its title from the fact that, 'Many of these poems are intended to be recited in collaboration with a musical instrument.' It is not clear whether or not a musician is intended to be utilized to play the instrument. Since, in any case, this has no pragmatic significance for most ordinary readers, the poems will have to be judged on their own merits.

And there is some very good poetry here. Sensitivity rather than overt strength, and a variety of substantial thematic material are the main reasons for this. Miss Orton's language is musical; but it is also prosy. The imagery, not her strongest point, is weakened by an uncritical eye for the exact visual parallel. The work is rarely concrete. And its abstractions often beguile her into the diluting byways of verbosity and prose.

She utilizes arresting metres and metrical transformations, as well as occasional rhyme, to set off some well-founded and sympathetic perspectives and attitudes: Miss Orton respects life; believes in an amoral vitality that transcends precedent and dogma; has a healthy view of the reproductive process; and reveals an earnest (if not always critical) enthusiasm for painting, dancing, theatre, and people.

One of the least effective devices she employs (in such poems as *ON A PORTRAIT-PAINTING BY TAMMO de JONGH*; *FOR THE WITHDRAWN*; and *FOR LOVERS WHEN THEY QUARREL*) is an overemotional use of the refrain: repeating weak lines at intervals to lend the lines, the stanzas, and the poems an emphasis and depth they otherwise lack. This easy art is

from the portmanteau of pathetic gimmicks that are the stock-in-trade of mere versifiers. Miss Orton has better possibilities.

Here is a diffuse craft, in need of some revelation and promotion; but some surprisingly fine poems appear in this uneven collection (THE FAITHFUL; THE SUN CHILD; POEM FOR AN INJURED DANCER; etc.). In contrast, MY WORLD (perhaps the musical instrument would redeem it . . .) and A POEM FOR FRIENDS diminish more than they enhance the book. They are sentimental and hackneyed, without any special technique or conviction, or even passion, to sustain their stereotyped inspirations or to distinguish them from the verse published in business and health magazines.

ENCOUNTER WITH TWO offers some of the most visual and emotional imagery in the volume. Here, too, Miss Orton's musical feeling for language is at its most compelling; but the poem's greatest strength is its subtlety. The largest part of the impact generated is experienced only after the reading concludes. (It seems pointedly unnecessary to refurbish or support a poem of this calibre with the art of another medium.)

One of the characteristics of original creators is a certain natural ambivalence of outlook, a basic personality-division that makes for an inextinguishable anguish; which, in turn, promotes the necessary expanding instinct for futility and absurdity and beauty. SPEECH FOR THE FOOL OF FRANZ HALS is especially indicative of

*this arresting dichotomy in Miss Orton's
perspective, and sufficiently brief to quote in its
entirety :*

*My lords that fear the cold at summer's end,
Am I not better than the solemn grave
To end your pomp and make gold valueless?
Is not this face of clay where Adam laughs
A better clod of earth than that which fills
The silent mouths of princely skeletons?*

*Is not my argument for wise men fit?
Then let pride die and laughter bury it.*

A. Fredric Franklyn

‘THE SCENT OF MAGNOLIAS’

IN A PERIOD MARKED by the proliferation of critical surveys, the TWAYNE PUBLISHER’S new Twayne’s United States Authors Series (\$3.50 ea.) and its sister, Twayne’s English Authors Series, bid fair to make a solid impression. With a tasteful hardback format and a promised paperback printing later, these studies in both major and less-major figures will cover hundreds of writers and be assured of wide sales to libraries, teachers, and interested laymen. It is fitting, perhaps, that the first of the U.S. group should be WILLIAM FAULKNER — our fourth Nobel laureate; Frederick J. Hoffman, who undertook this assessment, deserves much credit for launching the Series. Hoffman’s earlier co-authorship of THE LITTLE MAGAZINE (YALE, 1946) for all its sins of omission, performed a valuable service to collectors, editors, and historians of recent American literature.

Nevertheless, Hoffman on Faulkner gives every sign of weariness, though his is not the exhaustion of Schorer on Sinclair Lewis. The emphasis here is on the major novels — and yet, after fifteen years of teaching Faulkner, Hoffman rests heavily on other commentators. His own opinions sound highly tentative.

Even more apparent in a work of this small compass, is the lack of a guiding angle of vision. Instead of being organic growths from a well-seasoned mind, the chapters are chronological clusters with some deceptive or inappropriate headings (THE TANGLED WEB suggests W. V. O’Connor’s THE TANGLED FIRE of William Faulkner). Toward the end of his book, in the growing darkness of self-awareness, Hoffman succumbs wholly to the temptation to invoke analogies :

There is also a tendency to make assertion stand for truth because it must. This urgent sense of mission rather vaguely resembles the quality of Edwin Arlington Robinson's assertions 'in the face of contrary evidence.' Faulkner's hero is the 'man against the sky,' who wills a triumph over naturalist threats of doom and annihilation (p. 113).

But other weaknesses in the text are still more gross and palpable. In dealing with a rhetorician like Faulkner, A Southerner whose style is compounded from Scripture and myth, critics should quote very little of the unbuttoned prose he writes or speaks during university internships. Hoffman scarcely mentions the Nobel acceptance speech at Stockholm; why does he quote Faulkner in the University or Faulkner interviewed in *ACCENT* (Summer, 1956)? Stripped of its usual trappings, the voice from Oxford, Mississippi, echoes the drawling banalities of a cracker-barrel philosopher. And not only that: the emphasis Hoffman gives him reveals Faulkner as either highly derivative or the victim of critical hindsight, for we are told that the illiterate French corporal and his fellow-mutineers in *A FABLE* are adaptations of Christ and the twelve Apostles. The basic fault in Hoffman, however, is a poor digestive system for facts, coupled with a bad ear. Add to such ailments gaps in connective tissue, doubts, or second guesses, and we have something as flaccid, vague, and confusing as this passage:

The problems and responses within the novel / *THE SOUND AND THE FURY* / are sufficient to the needs thereof. But, of course, they may lead to expansions beyond themselves — at whatever risk such expansions entail (p. 60).

Perhaps the planning and organization of the book were wrong from the start. While the bibliography is good and the notes are up to academic snuff (to be taken sparingly!), in Faulkner's case, surely, Hoffman needed to pay more attention to the considerable body of so-called short stories

that were often prior-sketches for the novels, and to explain that there are two versions of THE BEAR, the shorter of which he ignores. As a spotty, though persistent, reader of Faulkner, I would like to see a book about him that combines thoroughness with insight. As a wooer of rough justice also, I would welcome an explosion of the Manhattan-born rumor that Faulkner was the most important American writer; but, to prepare such an explosion, requires wit and patience of a kind that most busy professor-critics lack.

In short, the Hoffman volume adds little to efforts by earlier critics listed at the end.

Lawrence P. Spingarn

A GERMAN ON GERMANY AND THE World

The 1960 COLLECTION OF Gottfried Benn's writings (PRIMAL VISION, Selected Writings of Gottfried Benn, edited by E. B. Ashton—NEW DIRECTIONS, \$4.75) may best be reviewed by sampling the samplings.* Here is what Benn has to say about the Third Reich: A nation broadly speaking without any definite taste, as a whole untouched by the moral and esthetic refinement of neighboring civilized countries, philosophically embroiled in confused idealistic abstractions, prosaic, inarticulate, and dull, a practical nation with—as its evolution demonstrates—only a biological way to spirituality: i.e., by Romanization or universalization; such a nation elevates an anti-Semitic movement that demagogically conjures up before its eyes the meanest of its ideals: low-income housing developments, with subsidized, tax-favored sex life, home-made rape-oil in the kitchen, self-hatched scrambled eggs, home-grown barley, homespun socks, local flannel, and, for art and the inner life, S.A. songs bellowed in radio style. A nation's mirror of itself. Parallel bars in the garden, and St. John's fires on the hills—there's your pure-bred Teuton. A rifle range and the pewter mug filled with bock, that was his element. And now they gaze questioningly at the civilized nations and wait with childlike naivete for their amazement and admiration. A German Army doctor, Benn wrote the above in 1941, but of course waited until 1946 to publish it. He died in 1956 at a ripe old age. The poetry and prose collected in this book range from 1912 into the decade of Benn's death. Some of the pre-World War I poetry is reminiscent of George Grosz's savage early drawings, with Surrealist and Impressionistic overtones, as in NIGHT CAFE:

824: THE LOVE AND LIFE OF WOMEN.

A. Fredric Franklyn

The 'cello has a quick drink. The flute
belches throughout three beats: oh, lovely sunset.
The drum reads on to the end of the thriller.
Green teeth, pimples in his face,
waves to conjunctivitis.
Grease in his hair
Talks to open mouth with swollen tonsils,
Faith hope and charity around his neck.
Young goiter is sweet on saddle-nose.
He treats her to three beers.
Sycosis buys carnations
to mollify double chin.

**Editor's note: With regrets for the tardy publication of this . . .
and yet, Lowry's brief exceptions and comments hold more than
transitory significance, in a period when the 'label-habit'
obviously threatens to expand into vastly more dangerous, overt
practices.*

B minor: sonata op. 35. A pair of eyes roars out: Don't splash
the blood of Chopin around the place for this crowd to
slouch about in! Hey, Gigi! Stop! —

The door dissolves: a woman.
Desert dried out, Canaanite brown.
Chaste. Full of cases. A scent comes with her.
Hardly scent.
It's only a sweet leaning forward of the air
Against my brain.
A paunched obesity waddles after her.

The above two selections, one prose and one poetry, give a
fair indication of the tone of Benn's Selected Writings, of
their color, their imagery, their bitterness, their
disillusionment, their vigor. 'Winter is coming again, the
color and the stillness of bronze lies over the city, and the
spiders are creeping out,' Benn wrote in 1947; and the

vividness of his phrasing is plain to see. Three years before his death, in *WHAT'S BAD*, Benn wrote:

Worst of all: not to die in summer, when everything is bright, and the earth is easy on the spade.

Robert Lowry

Beat Art B.B. (before Beat)

ON ITS FLYLEAF, *THE* dust jacket of Harold Rosenberg's *ARSHILE GORKY, the Man, the Time, the Idea* (HORIZON illustr., incl. color — \$3.75) refers to the book as a 'model kind of study of an artist,' neatly obviating any appraisal of the work as biography or criticism. And the 'study's' almost sophomoric enthusiasm for its subject certainly limits its biographical choices and views of incident, and suborns almost entirely any prospect of dispassionate criticism.

Gorky was one of the figures in the transitional period of American art in the Thirties and Forties, when the early revolutionaries here, like de Kooning, Hofmann, Rothko, Gottlieb, Tworckow, Vicente, Baziotes, Lassaw, Guston, and Reinhardt (the author's abridgment), were imposing a certain development on art in America. This was notable chiefly for its novel license (and based upon the work of the latest crop of European innovators, Uccello, Ingres, Cezanne, Picasso, Miro, etc.) which was to acquire immense popularity and provide the pretext for an ever-widening circle of brash emulators and artistic nihilism.

But Gorky's notoriety, in his day, was out of proportion to any objective estimate of his position among his contemporaries. His reputation, in fact, was based to a large extent on such extraneous circumstances as his friendships with so many of these leaders in the new forms; his penchant (periods) for copying devotedly the styles of the most controversial experimenters in Europe (especially Picasso); his studied facility in portraying the role of the dedicated and brilliantly-erratic artist for society's upper echilons (even to the provocatively-sad eyes and the

intriguing European accent); and, also, on his shrewd assessment of commercial opportunities, patrons, cliques, and fads.

An important factor was his ruthless disinterest in anyone who came into his acquaintance accidentally and who could not assist his determined climb to reputation and money. There is a story (and Rosenberg naively tells this in praise!) of Gorky's treatment of an individual he met at a party who comes to see the artist a day or so later 'to pass some time.' Gorky tells him, through a crack in the door which he will not open for his visitor: 'You must be out of your mind!'

And perhaps the least of these factors was Gorky's suicide while relatively young . . . because of illness and a hint of unrequited love! Could anything be more faithfully and flamboyantly in the grand tradition?

The naivete of Rosenberg's discourse derives, not from any deliberate attempt to withhold such information, but from his inability to evaluate it with any objectivity. When he speaks of Gorky's imitations, his calculating socializing, his histrionics and poses, any of his myriad shortcomings, Rosenberg does so with unfailing admiration, as though convinced he is revealing each time, for the reader, tidbits (in a how-to vein) of greatness!

This 'model kind of study' suffers from other weaknesses, also; less serious, but not less damaging. Apart from the author's blatant prejudices (particularly his determined ignoring of any creators working outside of abstract forms), he reveals a more serious deficit in his exposition of these narrow views. This is apparent in the recurring asides which serve, often without any relevance, as vehicles for Rosenberg's surprising but unmistakable bitterness toward the nation that accepted Gorky-the-immigrant and permitted him the resolution of his own kind and degree of talent. There are inconsequential references, such as 'the American

void' and 'cowboyishly Wild West' or 'the American Eagle owes more to Vienna doctors than to the Rocky Mountains,' etc. The evident vitriolic substance of such en passant remarks contributes little by way of information and nothing by way of prestige to the author's assessment of Gorky's place in American art.

It seems even a responsible biography ought to contain more objective criticism; or a really ambitious criticism could contain more biography! Neither fish nor fowl, Rosenberg's unfocused and unconvincing 'study' is very far from 'model'.

ISSUE P. 255 · SCAN P. 97

ENTIRELY RATIONAL

by John Baker

The statements of others 'Illusive Marias' Silverfish Sailboats
in a seam of felt The surgeon's fingers on a gyrus of the brain
An entirely rational implement This man is educated The
highest type of salesman — Let him try his hand

ISSUE P. 255 · SCAN P. 97

TO A PROFESSOR OF HUMANITIES

by Morgan Gibson

Do you think that William Blake First consulted the Muses'
Dean Before seducing them to make Issue the righteous call
obscene?

ISSUE P. 256 · SCAN P. 98

DESERT TREASURY OF VERSES XI

by Edith Schneck

Forever eyeless in paradise
Is he, vassalized by desire.
For a pustule of this earth
Is nucellus of life in birth.

PRAY

by Morgan Gibson

Bowing to booming sermons
pray with the lowing herds
that on the day of deafening
we'll be too wise for words.

ISSUE P. 256 · SCAN P. 98

TO BE WHISPERED IN THE EAR OF A POTENTIAL CATATONIC

by Thomas McEvilley, III

Sleep on the gentle ground here, unbearable Barabbas
And the curly caterpillar recline in silence with you.
Eyes clenched, hard-lipped, imagine a furry growth
 upon your body.
Till the sun tears in its final rupture, you may remain
in this brown study.