

TRACE

A CHRONICLE OF LIVING LITERATURE

A Blast for Editors
by John Sankey

No. 21

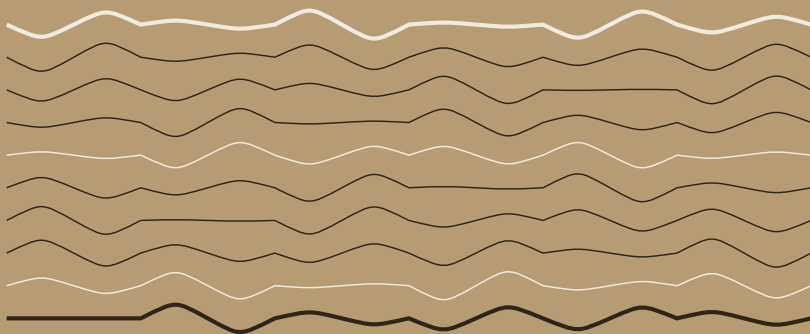
ISSUE

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JAMES BOYER MAY / EDITOR



TRACE

No. 21

Living Literature

Essays & Articles · Poetry · Reviews

April 1957

Edited by James Boyer May

A READING EDITION

ABOUT THIS EDITION

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

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

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POETRY IN THE LITTLE REVIEWS

by John Sankey

About 250 magazines print about 12,000 poems every year; yet few reach either an audience larger than 300 or any critical attention.

As we are considering poetry as an art, we had best first exclude those poems and journals which are of sociological rather than literary interest. A high standard of living and more leisure have led to a vast amateur production of all kinds of art-play, and verse of this kind is not to be taken so seriously as to be judged good or bad.

It is therefore with about 100 magazines that we are concerned; for these are edited with the serious intentions either of helping into print new writers thought of potential quality, or of publishing work considered of merit regardless of the status of the writers.

The present writer's aim is to show that the small audiences and lack of break-through into wider recognition of these more serious magazines is mainly the fault of their editors.

Everyone who writes verse believes it to be very good, reading into it qualities of perception and feeling that were truly present in the author's experience, but most often got lost in the formulation. It is probably no exaggeration to say that three-quarters of those who submit work and one-quarter of those who are published would abandon the practice of verse-writing, if they realised the difficulties they are, or should be, facing. But if writers can't (with few exceptions) discriminate, editors must.

Aside from those poems which are poetic in intention but fail on paper, are those equally numerous which were never poems from their inception. Poetry cannot be defined, but

there has never been a poem the entire purport of which could be conveyed in a prose paraphrase. Every poem conveys or represents more than it explicitly says. Contemporary magazines, however, are half filled with verses that can be reduced to such meanings as 'What a pity we go on having wars—making hydrogen bombs, etc.' with no residue of meaning whatever. Since readers of these magazines can be presumed already to object to war, cruelty, persecution, etc., such verse is pointless. Bitterness about politicians, unless redeemed by wit or satire, is equally futile. All this kind of thing clutters up the magazines so that good poems are often passed by unnoticed.

Another contemporary mannerism that still finds print is the elementary pseudo-philosophical generalisation enlivened by emotionally charged words such as 'blood', 'thrust', and 'whore' (if 'whore' be emotionally charged). These are generally of prose cut arbitrarily into very short lines, with no capitals, sometimes even cut into syllables. They all have the same theme: that the country/world is in a totally irredeemable condition.

The worst fault of all, naturally, is the dull, technically quite competent verse of conventional form. All editors should read every poem they propose to accept at least three times, at intervals of days, and reject all that 'go off' on re-reading.

It should not be necessary, although it is, to say that an editor must be quite inhuman as such. He must risk losing old friendships rather than print sub-standard work. He must also continue to apply as high a standard to the new work of regular contributors as to other mss., even at the risk of those writers deserting to another magazine.

He should never vary his acceptance standard to suit the space available. A 'light' issue can be more attractively spaced out, or extra book reviews added. It may be asserted without qualification that any editor who claims to be

overstocked with poetry has a standard that is too low. He needs to do some serious thinking about his editorial policy, and some re-reading of the best poetry in the language, to re-establish his standards.

Given twenty or so magazines of the standard of THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL, or the atmosphere and spontaneity that comes in various guises from Judson Crews, of Taos, or the catholicity of POETRY (Chicago) under its new editors, or the vitality of the new ARK II MOBY I, the entire foreground of the literary scene could change. With every scope for diversity of view, and comparable only in quality, these magazines would attract the work of the best writers, at present spread too thinly over the less consistent '100 serious' magazines. Readers would subscribe to journals where not one or two, but ten or twenty, poems had validity and meaning for them.

The writer of this article lives in England where, for the past three years or so, the incidence of worth-while poetry has reached its lowest level since probably 1916. The same period, however, has seen a marked creative upsurge in North America, and this gives the editors added opportunities to raise their standards of acceptance. It is a great opportunity and a great responsibility.

TOWARDS PRINT

by the Editor of Trace

Angry myopic resentments out of the most understandable of frustrations, the causes of which may be real and verifiable injustices, make unsatisfactory motors for even the more knowledgeable vehicles of literary protest. Little-magazine editors should give just as much heed to this as they should to refusing to court 'respectable' favour by throwing away their hard-purchased little-magazine freedoms in printing what merely apes the sort of writings big-magazine editors feel they need to print, from economic or academic considerations.

And at the outset — this injunction isn't put forward in any 'holier-than-thou' delusion on the writer's part. No originality is claimed for advancing it, and no claim that this writer never has erred in this respect — either in his own work or in what he's published by others.

Aside from self-therapy — the getting things off the chest, plus undoubted personal satisfaction from seeing protest in print — such things are of dubious efficacy. The degrees of distortion have many gradations. Let's consider the general superficial comments bearing on it, found on every hand in current magazines of opinion, literary criticism, and even popular reviews. Many have noted this element, but usually either starting from some trite denomination of the very times as neurotic, or with narrow relation to a specific field. For example — see THE DECLINE OF BOOK REVIEWING, by Geoffrey Wagner, in Winter 1956-57 issue of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR.

Mr Wagner's major thesis is only too correct, and he's more than warranted in his attacks on the foggy double-talkers and downright fog-lost incompetents in

contemporary book-reviewing. Yet, he limited this article, without defining a mental climate responsible for what created his just indignation. He also failed to emphasise that the commercial basis of the culture renders what he criticises incurable, unless through basic reform of the entire society; and at the same time he shows himself, if unwittingly, another who employs an 'angry' tactic, in this same article!

Again to stress essential agreement with him — but Mr Wagner reveals he's pretty sorry for himself and feels misunderstood and demeaned as a 'literary critic' no longer properly distinguishable from a mere book reviewer, not granted proper public respect and forced to find outlets in columns adjacent those with corrupt motivations, if not stupidly unqualified. His attacks on some he however-justifiably feels are in some sense enemies, suffer from waxing almost personal. In less-dignified fashion, many little-mag writers really do become personal in such articles, and are mainly ignored as cranks or soreheads. Where the attacks are not ignored (and presumably Mr Wagner's will not be) the emotional reactions have no bearing on the crux — which is that editors of mass-media underestimate their readers and use a lot of reviews and (non)criticisms of unnecessarily-innocuous conformity.

Now, little-mag editors also (though they haven't the excuses for this that big-mag editors have) often seem to take special care to cushion 'rougher' contributors amongst softgloved ones of insignificant purposes. This is yet more unimaginably senseless, when the sole and hard-won advantage of these magazines is that they need not cater to anybody!

And we agree too with Mr Wagner that criticism should be literature in its own right. But he leaves rather outside the picture the fact that, in addition to criticism's being worthy in itself, all writings upon writings should lead readers to

examine the originals. Nearly every little-mag editor at least professes to hold this view; and this isn't a digression from the matter of anger, because so closely bound with how little magazines often fail in these matters of doing as they say, and fulfilling their true functions and opportunities. Like Mr Wagner, their editors dote on stressing how critical writings may be (how rarely!) creative and original both — and thereupon proceed to evidence that their searches for individuality glean mainly pieces, the liveliness of which is purely argumentative, if not just for the grinding of someone's personal axe.

When editors of larger media print such things, they're just taking what they feel to be practical advantage of a mental climate. They purposively call on reviewers who are either known enemies of the authors involved or have known counter-ideas, or even cranky notions of their own in the subject-matter. These, of course, have 'promotional' hopes from controversy, debase their standards, and ensure that their periodicals will not go down in literary history. But why should a little-mag editor do this? Does he wish to multiply his circulation to the point his magazine, too, becomes a transient endeavour?

So, these editors, who can afford to be independent and are in fact privileged to have small and select readerships, ought to be 'briefed' on what's relevant to effectiveness, before adopting methods of big mags. They should be shown how — when a large review, existing by circulation numbers and advertising, limits its audience and becomes financially unstable by reason perhaps of some oldfashioned editor's shunning of sensationalism — the suspension of this magazine is not an object-lesson for a little mag. And they also ought to remember that the limitation in audience which so many of them keenly regret, is only in the contemporary cross-section of time; and if their choices of worthy materials are good, they'll achieve maybe larger

audiences than the others, in readers of future generations. They do really yearn for this life-after-death, but sometimes they lose sight of the goal.

EDITORS WRITE

James A. Jones (NIMROD): ‘Spender also said when he was here that poetry is a “kind of underground movement.” This is what little mags are like; that’s what makes them fun—and what, I think, generates a great deal of whatever vitality there is to any contemporary literature.... It reminds me of the cell-tapping in DARKNESS AT NOON: the feeling that others are really there, and that something is going on outside the cathedrals at...’ (two of the most prominent university quarterlies named here).

George Huppert (THE BERKELEY REVIEW): ‘B.R. has made a grand entrance. Very gratifying co-operation has been obtained from talented people, both established and “unknown”; and an adequate number of people working with us has helped greatly. Aside from our special projects, such as the St John Perse section in No. 1, and the Pablo Neruda section in No. 2, we publish fiction, short and long, and a good deal of poetry. We have set our criteria high, in all aspects of publication, from idea to typesetting. But that is our only “slant”.’

M. Elath (COMPOSITIONAL CULTURE): ‘Just as a publishing house if it is to last must develop authors along its line, so too we have to develop people along our line. Otherwise the lasting won’t mean much. We seek realization of furthest dimensions in any matter or material submitted to us. We need thorough-going compositional articles by people working in, or close to the makeup of various fields; i.e. the theoretic of their work and the directions to be set for full realization of their fields, attacking if need be, factors and persons hindering the reaching of an optimum level of possibilities in their sector.

‘If the magazine stabilizes fully, there will be an unending progression of decisive writing moving from one area to

another with the same theoretic scope and practical impact as this issue (No. 1) contains.

‘We ask people agreeing with our direction to secure us mailing lists, subscriptions, financial contribution, addresses of bookstores and stands handling little magazines, and to volunteer to act as distribution agents in the areas where they live. ‘Above all, people in New York metropolitan and state area who are free or willing to help at the organizational center, are asked to contact the magazine.’ Charles Angoff (*THE QUARTERLY REVIEW*): ‘We shall limit ourselves entirely to the creative literary arts — poetry, short fiction, essays, one-act plays. Length: in the neighbourhood of 4,000 words. Size: 7½ × 10 — about the size of the *AMERICAN SCHOLAR*. The price will be \$1 a copy, \$4 a year, \$7 for two years. We hope to make it a fine-looking magazine, possibly even a flop-over cover, but this is not certain.’

SOURCE BOOKS OF VIOLENCE

by Albert Fowler Literature holds an ancient and honourable reputation as a carrier of culture and guardian of society, and many look up to the great literary figures of the past as if they belonged to a race apart. Greatness in literature today, however, has several connotations, and the term means different things to different people. It does not necessarily refer to moral or spiritual stature, and often is associated with those who win the Nobel Prize, the Pulitzer Prize, and the general acclaim. Once a writer gains the front rank he exerts a tremendous influence not only on the tastes of his readers but over the minds of a host of budding authors by setting them a style in the choice of subject matter and the means of handling it. He is imitated and paraphrased in the sincerest forms of flattery and, when he achieves popular success and his books make the best-seller list, few critics dare take issue with him. If he celebrates the elements of cruelty and brutality, then reader, writer, and critic find merit in the sadistic and the torturing. If he rejoices over the qualities of kindness and mercy, the others rejoice with him.

There is apt to be a curious blindness to the power of literature among liberals and advocates of peace and goodwill. Their tendency is to overestimate the journalist, to magnify the dispatches of a foreign correspondent, and to slight the enduring work of a literary craftsman which may guide the course of men's thinking for decades. They often do not distinguish between the book which is symptom and the book which is source. They are prone to look everywhere except in the pages of a novel for the causes of war and violence. They search the facts of history, the data of science, the laws of economics, and the dicta of judges for the clues to conflict, but the idea that a storyteller can incite men to battle and coarsen them to endure its horrors is seldom considered.

Within the seven-year span from 1947 to 1953, the highest literary award of Western civilization was presented in turn to a Frenchman, an American, and an Englishman. The Nobel Prize for literature went first to André Gide, whose stories and personal journals are widely read in this country and whose brief political flirtation with the Soviet Union ended in mutual disillusion. He died only a few years after receiving this award, at the ripe age of nearly ninety. In 1953 the prize went to Winston Churchill, to the surprise of many admirers who think of him more as a politician than as a writer — and to his own disappointment, in the light of his preference for the Nobel Prize for peace. Between these two elderly gentlemen came William Faulkner, a middle-aged Mississippian who ventured into international politics only last year in his book, *A FABLE*, which deals with the First World War. All three prize winners have in common an interest in violence — Gide and Faulkner in its personal aspect, and Churchill in its mass aspect.

These noted writers have achieved their position because they possess outstanding talent in the use of words, amazing power to sway men's minds through the printed page. It is a rare occasion in the life of a society when a Faulkner, a Gide, or a Churchill appears, and it is right to recognise him as a man of genius. His genius, however, can be used for good or ill, and it should be the business of readers and critics to help direct its development.

The emergence of such a writer is as extraordinary as the appearance of an atomic scientist like Enrico Fermi, a winner of the Nobel Prize in physics. Each in his own field controls a source of enormous potential for good or ill. There continues to be serious discussion in liberal circles of the danger of applying the explosive atom to destructive purposes; but hardly a murmur is made about the threat of applying the explosive word to human brutality. One wonders whether the peril from the word has been swallowed

up in the peril from the atom.

André Gide's novel, *THE COUNTERFEITERS*, is one of the most popular of his works among English and American readers. It contains the story of a group of boys trading in illicit goods and services and a schoolboy 'thrill' murder, brilliantly interwoven with a family history of seduction and infidelity. Gide is not only a master of intricate construction and flawless style, but he has elaborated a philosophy to defend the studied absence of moral and spiritual judgments in his fiction. His theory holds that the imagination is the sole guide to action and the proper guardian of thought. Follow the whim of the moment, he argues, and let right and wrong take care of themselves. The man freed from the trammels of a moral code is able to think beautiful thoughts and is absolved from responsibility for the social results of his actions. Thus Gide's philosophy amounts to a surrender to aesthetic values. In his journal he declares: 'The most beautiful things are those that madness prompts and reason writes.' He reduces intelligence to a status of subservience to impulsive desire and unconscious purpose. Years ago Gide was accused of corrupting the youth of France with his belief that the writer is accountable only to himself and to his aesthetic standards, but he and his precepts won a relatively easy triumph.

Churchill is a remarkable example of a writer who employed the proceeds of his profession to support the pursuit of a political career. A descendant of the great military strategist, the Duke of Marlborough, Churchill entered the British army as a young man and obtained special leaves to visit the border wars of India's northern frontier and report them to the newspapers back home. He had a nose for trouble and as war correspondent during the Boer War he was captured by the enemy and created something of a sensation from which he reaped handsome dividends.

The books he fashioned out of these adventures and the tours he made barnstorming England and America gave him more than a comfortable income and allowed him to stand for Parliament and serve as First Lord of the Admiralty during the First World War and Chancellor of the Exchequer some years later. The disaster at Gallipoli ended his Admiralty career, and he lacked the confidence of the Tory leaders from the time of the general strike until the Second World War.

Churchill's biography of his ancestor, the Duke of Marlborough, stands out as his literary triumph and shows his talent as a first-rate writer of history. Both as author and as politician his chief preoccupation was war, and his name will forever be associated with the staging of battle and the clash of armies on a world scale. Churchill's call for 'blood, sweat, toil, and tears,' his hand raised in the V-for-Victory salute, typified his fighting spirit, as did his report of his first night after hearing the news of Pearl Harbor. 'Being saturated and satiated with emotion and sensation, I went to bed and slept the sleep of the saved and the thankful.' His desire for military triumph deprived him of the Nobel Prize for peace, which in 1952 had gone to Albert Schweitzer, and which Churchill wanted more than the prize for literature.

William Faulkner may not be as familiar to his own countrymen as the wartime prime minister of England, but he enjoys a wide popularity. Five of his novels are available in Modern Library editions, and he is second only to Shakespeare and Proust on that publisher's list. His most popular novel, *SANCTUARY*, is advertised on the jacket of its Modern Library edition as 'a tense and impassioned narration of a horrific aspect of life that only the vigorous and the healthy-minded can bear without wincing'; a story that 'arouses the most extreme enthusiasm or revulsion.' It is made up of murder, lynching, abduction, rape, and the miscarriage of justice in their most sensational dress. When

it first appeared, the SATURDAY REVIEW OF LITERATURE expressed the opinion that in SANCTUARY sadism reached its American peak. Perhaps because Faulkner elaborated no theory to defend his literary practice, but let his stories speak for themselves, he has not had to face the charge of corrupting his fellow citizens.

It has been argued that books like SANCTUARY are written as anguished appeals to society to repent and reform, but this suggests that writers like Faulkner neither know what they are doing nor realise the effect their stories have on the reader. Instead of presenting his tales of horror as examples of a state of affairs which should be ended as quickly as possible, Faulkner has traded on the terror and rehearsed his typical tortures in volume after volume. If these stories are written simply to mirror contemporary conditions without comment, they fail to carry out this purpose. The comment is implicit in the aspect of life picked up by the reflecting glass, and the choice of material in Faulkner's novels has been highly profitable.

Many liberals look on fiction as too frivolous for consideration when the stricken and starving are crying for help. Stilling the ache of thought and the pain of unsolved problems with the anodyne of good works allows the storyteller to pander to the emotions of the natural man without criticism from these intelligent and sensitive people. He is permitted to stir men's animal brutality to the point where gas chambers and atom bombs are accepted and tolerated in the imagination of less critical readers. To allow the novelist to employ high literary talent in a celebration of the cruel and the savage with the tacit consent of perceptive religious people who are otherwise occupied is to heed the symptom of evil and overlook the source.

There is considerable soul-searching over the violence in children's comic books but very little over the violence in the literature for adults. The lesser horrors of a Mickey Spillane

mystery attract more criticism than the monumental horrors of Faulkner's *SANCTUARY*. The modern conscience is concerned with the symptoms of mental illness, but shows scant awareness of the way a precariously balanced mind may be influenced by the pointless crimes depicted by the novels of Faulkner and Gide. The details of actual and overt terror and violence, whether in battle, asylum or pocket line, constantly overshadow the stories that celebrate the violent and the terrible. Actions speak louder than words, but words are often the source of action.

When a William Faulkner is raised to the first rank and his writings are crowned by the Nobel Prize, he attains a prestige that is difficult to counter. His books are quoted and praised and imitated, and his ideas with them. Rash is the teacher or the student who risks position and standing by criticising so famous a body of work.

Faulkner's introduction to the Modern Library edition of *SANCTUARY*, always the most popular of his novels, is a startling revelation of the modern temper. 'To me,' he says, '[the book] is a cheap idea, because it was deliberately conceived to make money . . . I began to think of books in terms of possible money, I decided I might just as well make some of it myself. I took a little time out, and speculated what a person in Mississippi would believe to be current trends, chose what I thought was the right answer and invented the most horrific tale I could imagine and wrote it in about three weeks and sent it to Smith, who had done *THE SOUND AND THE FURY* and who wrote me immediately, "Good God, I can't publish this. We'd both be in jail."

The urge to turn his words into coin is still upon Faulkner when he concludes his introduction to Modern Library readers: 'I hope you will buy it and tell your friends and I hope they will buy it too.'

SANCTUARY was hailed by the critics in much the same manner as *THE SOUND AND THE FURY*, a great book, insane

and monstrous and terrible but no worse than the life it mirrors. They were wonderstruck at Faulkner's power to suggest a hundred horrors behind the immediate horror, his ability to tell of human evil working out its strange and inevitable destiny without respect of persons. The critics bowed politely to the hesitant, saying with Clifton Fadiman that it was not hard to understand the viewpoint of the sweetness-and-lighters who were dismayed by Faulkner's sadism and morbidity.

If it is the privilege of the writer to invent 'the most horrific tale he can imagine' and have its murder, abduction, rape and lynching upheld by the critics as ingenious symbols for the wrong in modern society, then good and evil as realities are losing their meaning for the individual and are beginning to exist only as abstractions for man in the mass.

It is important — though obviously out of fashion — to base part of one's judgment of an author's worth on the way he handles this problem of good and evil. Despite all the torture and cruelty in *KING LEAR*, there is not much doubt how Shakespeare felt about the human values involved. Crime and injustice cry aloud for redress, and the heart is moved to pity and sympathy for the victims. But in *SANCTUARY*, torture and cruelty seem to exist in and for themselves — senseless, stupid and bestial, divorced from any human value which might give them meaning. The title of an earlier book, *THE SOUND AND THE FURY*, is evidence of the author's intent. Much of the life Faulkner describes is truly a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing beyond the interplay of natural forces. Shakespeare uses his fools to puncture the pretensions of the high and mighty, but Faulkner's drooling idiots serve only to show how loathsome a creature man becomes without the cortical function.

It is an entire attitude toward life that is the core of the problem — an attitude that has been developing since the

time of the French Revolution. Nietzsche and other apostles of this point of view welcome a world where God is dead, where morality and virtue no longer exist, and the daring individual stands alone beyond good and evil. This viewpoint pervades an influential segment of readers, critics, and authors, and through them has established the taste for writers like Faulkner.

Mario Praz in his book, *THE ROMANTIC AGONY*, has documented the hatred of God and the love of torture in a long line of literary figures from the Marquis de Sade to Baudelaire; and Edmund Wilson claims this dark side of Romanticism is essential to an understanding of the present situation. Albert Camus in *THE REBEL* traces the roots of modern methods of terrorist dictatorship back to the revolt of many of these same writers against God and morality.

The tight bundle of good and evil that was vital to the Christian conception of life has split into its two constituent parts with the loosening of religious and moral discipline during the past hundred and fifty years. It is the fashion of many writers to portray evil as a separate element, a ruling principle that dominates whole areas of human existence. This has taken on cosmic proportions in the work of Faulkner and Kafka, and if to escape its dominion, the reader seeks an equally separate and cosmic good, he evades reality, which is composed of good and evil bound together.

In this age of mechanisation, it is the reader's taste that is catered to, because, without his purchasing power, books cannot be published. As a book-buyer, he is subject to the same high pressures of salesmanship he meets when he buys a can of cherries, and it is as important for him to know what he is feeding his soul as to know what he is feeding his body.

(From FELLOWSHIP, Journal of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, Nyack, N.Y.)

REPORTS ON PRESSES BY GUY DANIELS

There is evident a marked trend toward more 'little' presses, no doubt attributable to the fact that the world's population stubbornly goes on growing despite the cuts in the big publishers' lists. Unfortunately for the 'new-directional' writer, the spirit of adventure evinced by some of these newcomers does not carry them beyond Adventures in Typography. Apparently hopeful exceptions include FALCON'S WING PRESS, Indian Hills, Colorado, which has already published 'quite a number of volumes' of poetry, and is bringing out in 1957 an anthology of American and foreign poets. Another is NORDIC PRESS, Robert Beum, owner and editor; P.O. Box 3127, Columbus 10, Ohio. 'Query essential before submission.' Also VOYAGES, Clark Mills, editor, 35 West 75th St., New York 3, devoted to 'poetry, prose, and foreign works in translation.' There is promise here of some genuinely needed English versions of new foreign poets, rather than further rehashes of the much-martyred Baudelaire.

Other new and/or hitherto-unlisted presses: AMERICAN WEAVE PRESS (vide the Ellen Edelman article in this issue) . . . DAWN PRESS, Kenneth J. Krueger and Robert J. Fritz, owners; K. K. Krueger, editor; 140 Harrison St., Buffalo 10, N.Y.; general publ., all types; usually about half the cost to be met by author; Jack Woodford, as editorial adviser . . . OUTPOSTS PUBLICATIONS, 209 E. Dulwich Grove, Dulwich Village, London, S.E.22; poetry booklets; Howard Sergeant, the well-known critic and editor of OUTPOSTS Magazine, in charge here. . . . PEJEPSCOT PRESS, Sheldon Christian, owner and editor; 10 Mason St., Brunswick, Maine; private and limited editions to order; formerly published THE WINGED WORD. . . . PRIVATE PRESS OF THE INDIANA KID, James Lamas

Weygand, owner and editor, 207 N. Main St., Napanee, Ind. . . . TROVILLION PRIVATE PRESS, Hal W. Trovillion, proprietor, P.O. Box 180, Herrin, Ill. . . . ZEBRA, Derek Maggs, owner and editor, BM/ZDM, London, W.C.1; 'in temporary abeyance, but hope to resume publication of prose and poetry pamphlets in due course.' Also the following on which more information is awaited: CONTEMPORARY PRESS, 36 Penton St., London, N.1 . . . NEW RENASCENCE, 20 Rutland Gate, London, S.W.7 . . . UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON PRESS, Thomson Hall, Seattle 5, Wash. . . . WINGED MOUSE PRESS, Harold Chumbly, editor, 2267 Filbert St., San Francisco 23, Calif. (No performance data available, since the mouse has not yet stretched out its cutaneous membranes in a test flight.) . . . From Japan comes word that D. Vincent Smith, editor of OLIVANT, and Yu Suwa, editor of KAST and ATTACK, are collaborating on the publishing of a series of poetry booklets, the first two of which are due soon. Submission for later numbers cannot be read until Mr Smith's return to the U.S. in March.

Following is additional information on previous listings: DOLMEN PRESS announces opening of a 'permanent office and showroom on Upper Mount St., Dublin, where occasional exhibits by illustrators, calligraphers, and bookbinders are also shown.' . . . henny penny press is undertaking a promotional campaign aimed at bringing avant-garde work to wide audiences. . . . A Hindu existentialist policy of *littérature engagée* is announced by Jivangi D. Desai, manager of NAVAJIVAN TRUST (directory-listed as PRESS), Ahmedabad 14, India, who states his press is 'dedicated to propagating views of Mahatma Gandhi, with object of service only.' Material is in English, Hindustani, Gujarati, and Marathi. NAVAJIVAN also publishes the Gujarati journals SHIKSHAN ANE SAHITYA and LOJIVAN. . . . Carroll Coleman, the well-known printer and proprietor of PRAIRIE PRESS, desiderates 'books of higher literary merit, with special

attention to typography.' . . . SIGN OF THE THREE CANDLES handles books of Irish and general interest; also booklets. Directors Colin O. Lochlann and A. O. Lochlann are publishers for the Cultural Relations Committee of Ireland. . . . SOUTHLAND PRESS (new address: 1130 19th St., Gulfport, Miss.), Humphrey A. Olsen,

THE PREEMIES

by Lillian Kay (U.S.A.)

Once Rilke gave some advice to a young poet. 'You ask whether your verses are good. You ask me. You have asked others before. You send them to magazines. You compare them with other poems, and you are disturbed when certain editors reject your efforts. Now (since you have allowed me to advise you) I beg you to give up all that. You are looking outward, and that above all you should not now do. Nobody can counsel and help you, nobody. There is only one single way. Go into yourself. Investigate the reason that bids you write . . .'

Go into yourself. Investigate . . . Rilke's suggestion was two-fold. One—stop offering to the public the products of an immature imagination and an unskilled hand. Two—be aware of your own inner compulsion. Integrate your inner necessity to create with your outer necessity to express.

In short, one must have a credo, a poetic ideal, and then one must work toward it secretly, intimately, without senselessly revealing the devious, circuitous growth patterns that lead to one's own artistic culmination.

But few young artists today have such a code. Nor do they conceive of one as vital. Young poets, playwrights, novelists are not at all reluctant to reveal their artistically adolescent attempts, if any buyer is available for them. Irrepressible and uninhibited, they tend to regard each product as a thing immediately ready for the literary market place.

There is nowhere self-restraint, nor shame at giving birth to an imperfect creation. At worst, these eager exploiters regard their offerings as developmental marks, points they can progress away from.

Yet a careful scrutiny of the lives of truly great artists will reveal that only the best was paraded before the public eye. As a rule, when a man had an intimation of his own immortality he was most particular of what got into print and what did not. Kafka, to name just one, begged from his death-bed that certain unpublished works be destroyed rather than appear posthumously without interpretation.

What were such men afraid of? Why didn't they want their half-finished, imperfect works made known to the world? Certainly, having been recognised as great ones, as established authors, they did not withhold from fear of critical attention.

No, the answer to such artistic selectivity lies elsewhere. Its root is in the notion of the creative ideal. A true artist will set himself a goal and will admit the value of nothing else. The idea of creating something of worth takes a hold on his being and fires his imagination. Like a knight, he pledges allegiance to his particular muse. And in return for loyalty, he is rewarded with inspiration.

This loyalty is the kind now flippantly spit upon whenever a man says, 'I'll be glad to prostitute my art for a check instead of a rejection slip, for appearing in print instead of remaining in manuscript.' The rise of the vanity publisher seems to prove that among currently writing amateurs, especially poets, the basic urge is to get printed at any cost. In short, if no one will pay me for my efforts, I will work to pay someone.

And so today instead of being primarily concerned with his own inner development, with the spiritual replenishing of his creative source, the young artist works hardest at selling his wares or trying to finance their debut. In the very definition of his own status he regards himself as amateur, by calling 'professional' those who receive money.

I venture to say that this is all wrong. A professional writer should not be regarded as someone who has been

paid. Rather the professional should be considered as one who has arrived at a clear concept of his artistic ideal and who continually labours to achieve it.

The notion of an ideal being inherent to the professional, the dedicated artist is, of course not new. It is most Platonic in its consideration of the abstract perfection. Yet the concept of a credo, a personal belief, becomes most concrete where it is the most individualised projection of hope, desire, necessity, and will. It is the concept of perfection, the very ideation and genesis of which mark the beginning of existence for its creator.

That is to say, when a man gets to the point in his artistic endeavours where he can give form to a notion of perfection of his own making, his life as an artist has just begun. Nor is this simply a play on Cartesian logic. He has in reality begun to live a true, a genuine artistic life when he can accept or reject his imaginative, creative products, depending on how they measure themselves against his own uncompromising personal rule of perfection.

No longer is he smothered in his own fecundity, greeting every sibling as worthy heir to the birthright of his name. Instead, strengthened by an ideal forged of self and spirit's best moments, he can blue-pencil mercilessly. But most of all he has the courage to retain what is not finished, to keep locked in the drawer those idiot children who simply could not do credit to their creator.

For there is, after all, something to be said for purposeful direction.

SOME ITEMS RECEIVED by the Editor

UNIVERSE INSIDE ME, by Lawrence Barth (Privately : P.O. Box 99, Village Stat., New York City, U.S.A. — \$2), while it shows high poetic talent, should be read as a major work by a philosopher-psychologist. This is to take exception to Millen Brand's cover-blurb, which refers to Walt Whitman. The reference is obvious and superficial. Mr Barth is a direct

descendant from Gustav Fechner, and a contemporary proponent (in several aspects a modern explicator) of the basic tenets of Goethe. On the psychological side, he leaves nothing to speculation, since he specifically names Wilhelm Reich.

A work of this kind should be compared, not with other poetry, even of the 'freest' type, but with contemporary prose by writers of like approach. Taking one of established reputation, interesting parallels may be drawn with Osbert Sitwell. Notably, *THE MAN WHO LOST HIMSELF*; and of course much in the autobiographical trilogy of which the middle title, *THE SCARLET TREE*, outrightly suggests the consanguinity of approach. Barth's book patently is about himself, though concentrated on the history of his mind rather than on events in his life. Events are utilised vividly, but with sparing choice of those crucial to the forming of his remarkable thought-pattern and maturing world view. No calendared survey is made; still, sensitive readers will discover that they know Mr Barth's experiences better than those of dearest friends.

The use of the human body and parts is not for means of setting forth arguments (few arguments are expressly stated), but for figures. No parts of the body are treated as instruments or tools of mind, but as portions of an indivisible being whose consciousness comprises, and is comprised within, all limbs and organs. Here's the story of a mind in process of discerning the inevitable desirability of realising integrative organic wholeness of life in every universal form—and that this commences with understanding the (mystical, if you wish) wholeness of oneself.

It's adversely critical of neither the author nor the book to assert that Mr Barth hasn't quite 'made' it yet. But who has? And even those coming this close are most rare. The widest gap results quite naturally from the marked intensity of his

reactions to distinct places, times, and multitudinous textures, colours, sights, and sounds, all of which enhance his sense of contrast, by reason of the confluent heightening of individual effects (subjectivity). The brilliance of these means of viewing (his own however-balanced selfhood) becomes in a sense a grave obstacle to the end of full identification. This leaves Mr Barth vulnerable perhaps even to re-enacting some ghastly parallel in life with THE MAN WHO LOST HIMSELF! Yet, the book is filled with signs that he'll one day obtain another perspective of the limitations of personal memory and comprehend that Christ's injunction to 'be' as a child (here so wonderfully obeyed) was not a counsel to a final perception. To stop there is rather like climbing a stile and, on delighted discovery of the new scene, refusing to go down again on the other side, really to experience how the illusion of separate self is the last and key deception. Vernon Scannell is indubitably identified by his new collection, A MORTAL PITCH (VILLIERS, 7/6 or \$1.50) as one of the more accomplished and talented contemporary worldly poets. 'Worldly' is here used comprehensively of all its definitions, and likewise intended to be applicable both to his intention and pessimistic identification with milieu, and to his apparently re-worked presentations of what were at first true flashes of analogical insights. Although he sometimes becomes morbid, his humour survives even in the macabre; and his ironies seldom fall into the imageless lines characteristic of less-endowed observers of the sorry passing scene. To go into speculations whether some less-worked versions of some of these poems wouldn't maybe be found more effective, whether afterthoughts and later contrivances may not have dulled some of Mr Scannell's inspiration, would be pretty ungrateful. This is substantial fare, re-readable with delight. There's concededly nothing original in observing that those whose developments enable the need to speculate (or really to think, distinguished from

less-organised mental reactions coping with immediacy) spend profounder lives in searches for real identity. But the psychological complexities of the title poem of John Hoffmann's *THE SEARCH* (THE GUILD PRESS, 3/6) are handled with such simple direct assumptions, that many readers, sated from the overblown abstractions and easy images of pseudo-poets, may miss much that he says. What perhaps seems a too-expository assertion of rather trite sentiment at the opening, expands in two ensuing poetic-prose sections into glowing original image-percepts and concludes with a line which succinctly, by a kind of subcontrariety, conveys what otherwise might require an entire volume to clarify. Other pieces here, and in other small volumes by Mr Hoffmann, exhibit a prescient struggle to reconcile a considerable talent with a powerful and even violent mystical conviction. His basic dichotomy may or may not be resolved ; but, in any case, he's already produced some poems and parts of poems (less 'central' and so less-disturbed) of perceptive restraint, and has put down some exceptionally-moving vital statements (though of occasionally diminished poetic quality). If he should, one day, gain control and fuse ideas, emotions, and perceptions on a continuous high poetic level, he might become an important bearer of the inspired religious tradition.

Felix Stefanile and Harold Witt, amongst poets represented in the attractive *NEW ORLEANS POETRY JOURNAL* series, have for several years been regarded by this reviewer as well worth watching. Witt seems more prolific than Stefanile ; and so it's unsurprising to note that his *SUPERMAN UNBOUND* (uniform, \$1 soft covered, \$2 in hard cover) indicates more advanced bright play in objective imagery, while Felix Stefanile's *RIVER FULL OF CRAFT* seems to indicate a bit more contemplative development. Externally, Witt always has been less concentrated and restrained ; and if Stefanile now commences to rouse forebodings that he is

psychologically limiting himself, one can't feel too great confidence, either, that Witt is not commenting to expand over-rapidly for his forethoughts. Which leads to the chief question careful readers are likely to ask both these fine moderns — whether a good deal of their published work (at least) is not less than central to their developing personalities? Are they maybe somewhat avoiders-of-themselves? Are they afraid to appear as fully earnest as they might about their innermost convictions? And we surely hope that they are not so far influenced by what may be called critics-of-circumstance that they are no longer being profoundly candid with themselves (as all good poets must) and even are flirting with the idea of gliding gently away from their first and more-involved intentions. Which is by no means to suggest that either of these collections is composed, in substantial minority, of mere casual pieces. But that the progress from the work known to this reviewer as older, to what is newer, seems in both to be in their increased (and quite admirable) facility, rather than in that solider development of thought, which quite possibly these poets are mistakenly submerging.

On reconsideration, it is not in the least perhaps amazing that a country with the population of the U.S.A., offering no matter (almost) what manners of exposure to literacy to so many millions, should evolve record numbers of young candidates for literary distinction ; and yet, both the experimental diversities and the indubitable soundnesses of many new writers continue to startle us. One of these, who had previously escaped this reviewer's attention, is Robert Beloof (*THE ONE-EYED GUNNER* and other poems, VILLIERS, 10/- and \$2). This book deserves an extended review which space regrettably does not permit — and it seems best just to affirm that the jacketblurbs are NOT exaggerations, and that Mr Beloof does have 'originality', 'vitality', and 'wit'. He is without 'pretentiousness', and his book is truly as '

evocative, stimulating, and entertaining ' as his publisher alleges.

An international anthology of a special flavour which will be familiar only to the readers of that traveled literary periodical, *ZERO*, issued from the press of that name in late January (\$3.50). It's recommended not only for readability, but because it carries several ' musts ' for all who would claim exhaustive acquaintance with contemporary writing — and beyond which, the actual examination is essential, in order to know the aforesaid ' exotic-shock ' flavour of a certain segment of current writing which assuredly cannot be ignored. Paul Bowles is here (inevitably), and so are Gore Vidal, Sartre, Lorca and Samuel Beckett — plus, astonishingly, Marianne Moore and Kenneth Patchen, and yet more astonishingly, Colin Wilson, whose return-to-religion adjurations seem out of place in this pessimisticallysophisticated company. There are more Names ; and the several newer writers pretty much follow upon the editorial taste for the maleficent aberration and unpleasant doom, and which — come to think on it — does after all then explain the presence of young Mr Wilson, who really sees no hope of a satisfactory new religion.

ADDENDA

Although the supplementary listings and other data in this TRACE need no underlinings to emphasise the evidences of sturdy new independent literary developments, it should be indicated that, except for the intended naming of all projects, no complete coverage is pretended either of subsidiary enterprises or specific books and pamphlets. Those compressed here were just the earlier notices. In other words, this is no more than indicative of vastly-detailed activities in the field.

Some small presses are seeking better commercial distribution through arrangements with larger houses which will sideline their books. Others are tentatively entering on combined advertising and sales projects; and 'middleman' projects also are setting up sales-agencies devoted to serving presses unable to carry on their own promotions. Several new books are available through such channels—one late announcement concerns *THE WHIP*, etc., 1950-55, by Robert Creeley, 5/- or \$1 through *MIGRANT BOOKS*, c/o National Provincial Bank, Worcester, Engl., a new outlet handling chiefly publications of *CONTACT*, *ORIGIN*, and *JONATHAN WILLIAMS*, who is making a personal U.S.A. tour to publicize and sell items ranging from those of *NEW DIRECTIONS* and *GROVE PRESS* to *CITY LIGHTS POCKET POETS* and Kenneth Patchen's private hand-painted products.

One project at close-hand is henny penny press, undertaking national advertising (U.S.A.) of British and other books, as well as promoting several magazines, of which TRACE, itself, is one. Co-operating is *INFERNO PRESS*, San Francisco. While on the selfish subject, a free offer of her *A STRANGER IN OUR TOWN* is made by Jean Arsenault (with *NEW ATHENAEUM PRESS*) to all Canadian subscribers or those renewing for TRACE. This little book will be sent the next

dozen persons ordering from that country.

The earth has been shaken, the past winter, by PRECIOUS RUBBISH (a paperback, 35c. from Stuart Art Gallery, Boston, Mass., U.S.A.), an all-out attack on positivist critics. Despite that few seem 100 percent in accord with Mr Shaw, even those almost-completely out of accord with him suggest this is perhaps the most important book of the sort in the last ten years.

This writer is reviewing at length (elsewhere than in TRACE) two recent ZERO PRESS releases: A THIRSTY EVIL, Gore Vidal (\$3) and BROTHERS AND SISTERS, Ivy Compton-Burnett (\$3.75). Other NEW ORLEANS POETRY JOURNAL books (available same as those reviewed) are ADAM'S FOOTPRINT, Vassar Miller, and STONES AND THE SEA, R. G. Lowrey. Just being released is NEW SELECTED POEMS, by Adam Mickiewicz (VOYAGES, \$2.50), another series of translations by leading poets. As yet unpriced is Clark Mills' translation of Mallarmé's HERODIAS, from the same . . . with an introduction by George Reavey and Gauguin's portrait of the famous Frenchman.

Besides the one herein reviewed, new books by John Hoffman (GUILD PRESS) are: THANKSGIVING (3/6) and THE JOURNEY, with both autobiographical fragments and poetry (7/6). Other books: THE INCANDESCENT BEAST, by George Abbe (BOOKMAN ASSOCIATES, 43 Broadway, New York City, \$3); SELECTED POEMS, Raymond Kresensky (GOLDEN QUILL, \$2.50); THE MANCHILD FROM SUNDAY CREEK, Edsel Ford (KALEIDOGRA PH, \$2). Not yet arrived, is an announced new BRIDGE ANTHOLOGY (GLEN COFFIELD); and arriving belatedly has been THE GOLDEN QUILL ANTHOLOGY (\$4), containing work by Book Club for Poetry members.

Especially recommended, though outside the area usually covered here, is THE SHADOWS OF DESIRE, a collection of quotations from those garnered over a period of years by Edward Pratt Dickson (BIG MOUNTAIN PRESS, \$1.50 — and from both ALAN SWALLOW and the author, himself, at Box

252, Berkeley, Calif., U.S.A.) Besides for browsing fun and for reference value, the book is commendable because it covers the sort of varied reading range which ensures everyone will be led to at least some books and authors they never perhaps otherwise would have examined. And the usefulness of this as a 'starter' for creative ideas need not be detailed.

Finally, drawing attention to SEMINA (see Directory Supplement). This has been launched in what may be called (on the literary side) the 'pure' little-mag tradition — for Editor Wallace Berman's intentions here are comprised wholly in a serious-amateur frame. He is a graphic artist and sculptor, pretending no wide knowledge of modern literature, but with decided tastes and actuated solely by the desire to provide a medium for publications of what meets his personal aesthetic preferences. He offers no attempted theoretical rationalisations, as do so many. Neither does he publish hypotheses in relation to the photography and drawings, fields in which he qualifies as a professional. In its neat folder-format, this may become as much a collector's item as is the first LITTLE MAN presentation of nearly a generation ago.

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THE ONE-EYED GUNNER AND OTHER POEMS

Robert Beloof

Demy 8vo 10/- (\$2.00)

This is the first collection of one of the most interesting contemporary poets. The poems, of a high technical standard, are evocative, witty and stimulating.

ISSUE P. 31 · SCAN P. 31

A MORTAL PITCH

Vernon Scannell

Crown 8vo 7/6 (\$1.50)

This is the second selection of poems by this author, who has also published two novels.

VILLIERS PUBLICATIONS

COMPOSITIONAL CULTURE

As mentioned in Editors Write of this issue, COMPOSITIONAL CULTURE is a theoretical journal of creation. It gives the reader a wide range of creative work in many fields, works completed and works in progress. In forthcoming issues there will be movie reviews, translations, poetry, theory, short story. The magazine is characterized by a well-printed makeup and efficient format, and is printed on the grade of paper both excellent to the touch and convenient for pockets. This is a magazine you can carry around and show to your friends.

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