

LIVING LITERATURE

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JAMES BOYER MAY

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EDITOR

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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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SELECTED FROM YOU AND MODERN POETRY

by George Abbe

One of the most virulent myths the modernist must struggle with is the belief that poetry should deal only with certain subjects—primarily the honey-bee and toilet-water, V-8 and air-conditioned, penthouse and cellophane varieties. Poetry must invade every province. The essential articulation of what we are, it must breathe the indivisibility of life.

It has not always been so. In past generations, ideas intrinsic to the ethos and mores of the day were the ideas acceptable in poetic expression. As our world has shrunk, we have grown spiritually; and the impact of realism, science, and experimentation upon all the arts has been salutary. True, non-conformity, fierce individuality, rebellion have been almost the traditional marks of the great poet—Wordsworth, Shelley, Whitman—but the manner of presentation was more inoffensive, assimilable. Eloquence, elevation, skill in the manipulation of the familiar sentiments were requisites for honor.

Today, the sordid, blunt, fragmented staccato qualities of poetry—true to the nature of our age—create barriers. The modernist grubs everywhere and interminably to unearth the particular, no matter how stinging or drab. And then, too, the present-day poet, in a far more complex, pressurised, unstable world, has so much more to rebel against. No wonder his ideas are so bristling and resistant. But his chief glory is still the face that he pioneers in ideas—ideas that twist the old truth to the new or flame a fresh and terrifying awareness to mankind, ideas that titillate and shock and bewilder and desecrate. The poet must be the iconoclast, particularly if he is to live up to the axiom that he is ‘the

unacknowledged legislator of the world.'

For change is not wrought by politeness, but by courage and outcry and savagery. It took John Brown and the diabolic madness of that stone round-house at Harper's Ferry to explode a smouldering abolitionism into physical truth and legislation.

It is true that many progressive poets today offer their ideas with a degree of intellectualism, dignity, and declarative directness that smacks of the traditional. For example, let us consider a poem of James Schevill's where idea predominates :

**'RALPH WALDO EMERSON RECEIVES A VISIT
FROM THE SANE MAN AND REJECTS HIM'**

By way of authority he knocks On my door as if there
were no locks. Perhaps he is a joker of my brain This sane
man unwet in the rain. Anonymous as an apple and decreed
To conformity in word and deed, His mind is straight and
never leaning Pressured only in the single meaning. He
knocks at me as the punctual image Who drives the
Industrial Age. How shallow is our doctrine of beauty ! We
have fled the perceptive eye and Drained the dependence of
form on soul. The sane man has become our goal. It is hard
to reject him. He comes In clothes and language of common
homes But I do reject him. I cast Him to the gaffing privateer
that is the past, For I believe in one soul related to the world.
We see this world piece by piece, not hurled From cautious
suns to shine in goods Which cage our spirit's claws with
hawking hoods. Only the fixing of the pieces together Shall
discover the white-bait weather. As sea and earth are one
with sky So mind and heart must unite in the eye And the
lost voice be freed from the terror Of isolation and the sane
man's error Soar into the jagged soul under The nailed cross
and sing in wonder.'

**This, as well as poetry by George Elliott and Kenneth Beaudoin,
is taken from EIGHT AMERICAN POETS, Villiers, 1952.*

The ideas here might well be those of a man in Tennyson's time. But there are elements outside the idea that identify it as a product of the avant garde — the vernacular 'joker of my brain,' the tougher and more elusive quality of the figures of speech — 'shall discover the white-bait weather' — (whereas the effects in older verse were more immediately perceptible) and the roughness, almost jerkiness of meaning, sound, organisation here, to keep the sense closer to the prosaic, the actuality of life.

Nevertheless, this poem could well be characterised in its general approach and tone as akin to the idea-verse of earlier periods — explicit, dignified, discursive, with prose normalcy in sequence and syntax. For example, the three lines commencing: 'As sea and earth . . .' might well be a quote from Frost or Masfield.

Or there is the modern idea which superficially may resemble the work of former times because of its recognisable romantic sentiment. Here is George P. Elliott's THE GIFT :

THE GIFT

I dreamed I held you in my arms
Bowered in greenest secrecy.
Wisdom fell off like clothes among the hours,
And owl sang love all night
In his mildest key.
My arms know who it was they held
But not whose wild and special stir.
How could they know, for all the lapping light,
You were not only who
You seemed to be?

NAKED IN THE GREEN NIGHT I LAY

George Elliott

And owl sang from his highest bough.
Some goddess in your flesh gave gift of power,
Who, I shall never know.

Nor who you are.'

And yet, here too there is an abruptness of manner, a
shift and range and breaking off in rhythm or
diction, an undertone of the intransigent and acrid
that sets it in the midst of new trends, in the very
first stanza.

But this does deal with idea essentially as its
forerunners did: it uses the same romantic
equipment: 'And owl,' the 'green night,' 'Some
goddess,' the 'lapping light,' the 'highest bough.'

There is, however, the modern poem which, at the level
of idea, cannot be mistaken for any older relation.
Note, for instance, *TO A BIRD OUTSIDE THE WINDOW*
by the same George Elliott :

‘Little bird, I do not know
What you are called or why you sing ;
I do not know, when winter comes,
What you will fear or where you’ll go.
I rarely see the world you’re in
And ill at ease I see you now ;
For you like money call to mind
A world where I have never been.’

This poem breaks wide open in the second line from the end. How startling the word ‘money’! The exaltation and propriety, the romantic gentleness of the preceding might well belong to the Nineteenth Century—and then the crassness of ‘money’ explodes the whole poem sky-high. Of course, there is that lurking, half-wistful humor in the final announcement; but its action upon us is a delayed one; the immediate and overwhelming effect is the incongruity of cold, bald economic consideration in juxtaposition to the airy and lambent thoughts

preceding — it is the contrast of idea which ignites the experience for us and hurls us out from the center. Who, in a more conventional realm of poetry, would think of comparing a dear, sweet little bird, affectionately introduced, to cold cash?

This is a common device of the new poet: to create effect by shock in idea (as well as in other things); to throw different weights and values into ironic contrast by deft use of juxtaposition. This kind of rugged treatment was not accorded the reader of more tender eras. Today, like the celluloid toy on a lead base that rocks back to upright when smacked down to the floor, the reader must become accustomed to violent abuse. But how much more exciting the experience of poetry becomes when we are thus handled: irritation inflames, the zephyr stultifies; the unexpected reveals, the long-known deludes.

In the most truly modern poem, simple, unadorned vitality of thought can thrive — the idea emerging out of the heat-cloud of present-day language and customs as cleanly as a jet out of a thunderhead. As, for example, in Kenneth Beaudoin's PASTORAL POEM:

‘upon a beach towel (dyes by Dupont) beneath a parasol (sears and roebuck 2.98) upon a cocacola bottle picnic napkin paper cup cigarette butt strewn beach the mother nurses child pulling the primordic sacrament into the present from the earth ancient past as easily as buttons switch on lights, motors move wheels.’

Here there is one idea, one comparison, the emphasis is upon that, and all the means can bear upon it more effectively. because they are all contemporaneous and unitary — rhythm, imagery, succinctness, casual sophistication.

The modernist triumphs because he can reveal or celebrate things precisely as they are, in the private limbo and the public arena, and he need bring no dogma or prejudgment to the exercise of his art. He is emancipated ; like a child he wallows in the being of things for their own sake. He can be tumultuous and brutal with the concreteness of experience, in the naked display of his perceptive powers, he can be insurgent beyond all boundaries, advocate of his own existentialism. Far more than his forerunners, he can shake us with revolt against fact by the sheer frontal weight of fact-presentation — as in THE DEATH OF THE BALL TURRET GUNNER* by Randall Jarrell :

From my mother's sleep I fell into the State,

And I hunched in its belly till my wet fur froze.

Six miles from earth, loosed from its dream of life,

I woke to black flak and the nightmare fighters.

When I died they washed me out of the turret with a hose.

But is all this enough? I believe the higher criticisms of today's poetry world tend to think too much about the way a

thing is said rather than about what is being said. The contemporary poet is likely to be so absorbed in the mere play and excitement of palpable experience, that the reflective aftermath, the idea-principle escape him entirely. He does not want to indoctrinate, he is afraid equally of being didactic and sentimental (ah, lost age when a man could feel publicly about fundamental matters, and still be respected !), and he is wary of the inherited, the consistent, or the common denominator (and often rightly so). The result is that he is not concerned with reaching people with idea.

The result is that he deals primarily with the measurable, sensuous world and leaves ideas to inference, sententiousness, or random harvest. He abhors idea, for it might brand him as a

*Taken from MID-CENTURY AMERICAN POETS, Twayne Publishers, 1950. propagandist, or, as one of my fellow-artists brands me, as a 'committed poet,' because I have openly declared myself for things like academic freedom and Christ, and against things like MacCarthy and the Smith Act. That weakens me in the eyes of my writer-companions : I am, poor wretch, 'committed' — and if I cannot approach every sensuous moment — which is the one important act, essence, and criterion, at the center of which rules ego — if I cannot come to a given fortuitous instant without faith, without consistent conviction, without dependence at all upon the past, its judgments, wisdom, or sanctity — then I am damned.

But I protest that ideas should assume a more conscious and responsible role. I do not think we should write with the deliberate aim of proselytising ; but I think a more disciplined awareness of and concern for realities, in off-work moments, should flow forth in new, unselfconscious power in the hours of creativity.

In the coteries of modern poetry, the raw depiction of evil in every form is perfectly acceptable. Recall Jarrell's line :

‘When I died . . .’ And I go along with such honesty, all the way. But why should the poet be ashamed of expressing ideas of amelioration, altruism, or nobility — if they are artistically, not pedantically, handled? I believe we drive the public away because we fail to give them, at their level of experience, the ideas that are meat and drink to them — and I do not mean we must cater to the clamor for obviousness. We can retain all our virtuosity and yet mean things in our words that millions of people mean, blindly, in their hearts. We can cultivate the faculty of beholding, not only our cute little non-social, private worlds of pleasure, but also the regions of thought, half-obscure and trite though they may be, where the workaday mortal fumbles for his slim hopes and comforts and those profounder truths — mere amulets to the scientist ; to the aesthete, banal — but terribly vital to the reading citizen.

The growth of the poet’s powers should parallel the rise in moral and perceptive faculties of the more sensitive human being. In childhood, we are primarily sensuous beings : thus, poetry which appeals exclusively to the senses is on a less advanced, less complete level, because it makes fewer demands upon our total nature. For we are more than sensuous ; we are intellectual, moral, and religious as well, and the most mature is he who lives religiously, and by religion I do not mean the creedal or orthodox, but personal relationship to universal law ; moral underpinning ; the concern felt by the One Creator for each fragment and filament of life, each personality, whether human, animal, vegetable, or even material.

And the modern poet can deal with these broader concerns — gracefully, originally, and powerfully, and by means of his most distinctive technique — indirection.

TOWARDS PRINT

by the Editor of Trace

This is an anniversary—the sixth, and the twentieth TOWARDS PRINT—opening the seventh year for this feature, started in MATRIX MAGAZINE. An appropriate time for a background piece. Thirty years ago this spring, briefly having interrupted what in those deluded prosperity years still could be called a journalistic career, to return to college, the Editor spent an Easter vacation on a prose piece, the fate of which undoubtedly had extended effects.

This abbreviated explanation why TP has been written, and for that matter why TRACE, itself, has been edited, will be regarded by a few stuffed shirts as demanding an apology. Characteristically, none will be offered. In the first place, the Editor, as a human among humans, considers his own personal story anyhow as significant as are the personal stories of other such beings ; and in the second place, having passed the half-century mark, he no longer suffers embarrassment on offering self-revealing data to scrutiny.

The Editor had, for several years prior to 1926, written poetry and been published — but not the poetry which said the things he wished to say. Believing prose might be easier to get before a large audience, he concentrated on that — to succeed only in publication in a small newspaper column. No-doubt-uninformed efforts to get this material syndicated or into the metropolitan press failed. That Easter vacation then, he packed social comment into the piece called a short story in order to enter it in a national undergraduate contest. Not only did it fail to make the selection of the college, but the English professor even refused to certify it for 'lone-wolf' forwarding. The philosophy professor, however, kindly lent his who's-who name. Failure in the contest inevitably

ensued, and the piece went the rounds of magazines, not to reach print until twenty-one years later at the opening of a book of stories, after belated appearances of considerable work in the little magazines which had become objects of study during the great depression and prolonged reverses.

Study of these and contributions to them (to date covering eighteen years) beyond question literally preserved him, by counteracting effects of labours in vain through millions of words in countless attempts. So that finally, when he returned to poetry and found approval, and then went on to make public a special knowledge of little magazines, he did after all gain international hearing for ideas he'd tried to convey in many forms. And TRACE has enabled him to extend to others the assistance he did not himself receive.

And thus TRACE isn't merely an index, nor just an informational periodical, but a soundingboard for views, with pages open to those not always in accord with the Editor, who considers that publishing disagreements is integral to his own beliefs. The intention is to assist practically all types of sincere writers to get hearings somewhere and to speak to at least some audiences.

This is the explanation of the entire endeavour; and should also answer those who have indicated skepticism of what has appeared a gratuitous act, if not perhaps a scheme to get rich.

EDITORS WRITE

Ann Carll Reid: 'ONE is not so limited in scope as some would suppose—even though devoted primarily to the homosexual. Its purpose presents a challenge to the free thinking and imaginative writer; to anyone interested in the problem of civil rights and equality for all peoples and minorities. The magazine has been in existence since 1953 and though we've insisted on content, the technique is not confined to any given style. Restrictions and taboos are met for obvious reasons of course. ONE is not pornography. It's a serious magazine devoted to the subject of homosexuality from the scientific, historical, and critical points of view. ONE is not a medium for the amateur. We want honest, hard-hitting writers—any style is permissible if it is in good taste. Science-fiction—mystery—experimental stories are welcome; articles (philosophical, research, scientific); book reviews, poetry, art; as long as they pertain to our dominant theme.'

Mel Weisburd (COASTLINES): 'Our future is assured if only—and here is the catch—the quality and frequency of the contributions increase. The only difficulty we experience in appearing on fixed dates is that we do not get enough acceptable material in time.... Another great difficulty with our magazine is the lack of an adequate functioning staff—we need people to fill some very specific posts on the mag. We are severely handicapped by the lack of a business manager. There are not too many literary-minded people interested in the practical considerations.... I sometimes feel that a kind of intellectual cowardice actually prevents many people interested in writing from testing their ideas by actually facing the public. I strongly feel that every beginning writer should have the experience of working on a magazine to actually feel the contents of contemporary thinking.'

S. D. Flaherty-Hall (PAPURI): 'Wd prefer to publish things with Purpose. Pamphlet style included (Ref. to FANTASMA Press). Poetry HAS been good propaganda.... Vanity publishing? Depends on how it is defined. But actually can't at present publish at my own risk.... Why shouldn't Lord Vere de Vere publish his poems, if not too bad? May keep him from worse. But it is a fact that a big list cd be made up of people who had their first efforts refused by publishers—published themselves or found a small publisher (who wanted their money), and thus bloomed out as Great Writers. Those who say NEVER PUBLISH AT YOUR OWN COST are often commercial interests who don't want little publishers getting into their racket, and who don't care if all the prospective Great Writers boil themselves.... Vanity publishing CAN be a nasty fraud. I do my best; I explain the situation carefully to the writers. I demand good standard of writing—as I estimate it. I have never made any profit by it.'

Michel E. Quhillalt (sapien):

'We now definitely are printing poetry, and line sketches (pen and ink). We plan a series of satirical poems and serious political cartoons. We should like contributors from overseas (especially France, Mexico, Japan, and England) for forthcoming spring.... We should like to politely discourage literary essays. Book reviews, and literary (not psycho-analytical) criticisms are welcomed.'

*Tillman L. Martin (Route 1, c/o W. W. Martin, Jr., Holcomb,
Miss., U.S.A.):*

I note in TRACE that you say not one English language newspaper, except the LONDON TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT, gives anything like regular mention to the small reviews and poetry journals. If you can give brief mention to my idea in next TRACE, I'd like to have the publishers each send me a sample copy of their magazines (and later, of course, to exchange with us when we start publication of SLANT). And I'll try a series of features in a number of newspapers, including a long and detailed article for one of the national magazines, in an effort to start something new once more.'

SOME ITEMS RECEIVED BY THE EDITOR

Markedly diverse books and pamphlets—even to variations in the handlings of language, sufficient to justify perhaps the word polyglot—are here commented upon, because they were not selected on what would have been the unifying basis of the writer's interests, but for their probable value to numbers of readers.

One of several like-published books attaining unusual circulation, for poetry, is Lawrence Lipton's RAINBOW AT MIDNIGHT (GOLDEN QUILL PRESS, a BOOK CLUB FOR POETRY selection, \$2). This is the long-cogitated summation of over half-a-lifetime's study by a man of vast learning and many literary achievements, and who likewise is possessed of that sensitivity marking every poet. Beyond this, more than personal (which it likewise inescapably must be), the book wrestles the overwhelming problems of today's world.

Another of major thematic significance is JOURNEY TO THE FUTURE, by Lillian Everts (FARRAR, STRAUS & CUDAHY, 101 5th Ave., New York City, 3, U.S.A., \$3), who also has waited years before putting hers between covers. Too-hasty glances into this are likely to turn away those whose careful reading would discover striking insights conveyed in a vital style only outwardly artificial; and even her rhyming and perhaps contrived manners become integral on examination, while the very contrasts between statements and their contents often accentuate brilliant ironies of a really profound mind.

Another smaller and quite different world view is Lawrence Ferlinghetti's PICTURES OF THE GONE WORLD (CITY LIGHTS POCKET BOOKSHOP, 65c.), first of THE POCKET BOOKS SERIES. A younger man, and many influences are manifest in pieces more casual than penetrative, more

accidentally-descriptive than revealing. Besides echoes of several French moderns (he has been a translator), there's more than a dash of William Carlos Williams curiously admixed with Pound-Eliot phrases; and besides flavours of Kenneth Rexroth, these are (most contradictorily!) laced with lines, which could have been by Kenneth Beaudoin. However, still stimulating readings.

Which brings us to Mr Beaudoin himself, and *POEMS* 1955 (privately printed, from the author, 1298 Jefferson Ave., Memphis, Tenn., \$1.50), a representative collection from a nostalgic earnest philosopher. Extreme honesty maybe has proven the chief obstacle to his adequate recognition—nowhere better demonstrated than here. Just when one thinks he's about to become innocuously romantic, he invariably douses one with a cold dipper of realism: . . . lovers, so sweetly justifying morning, and then the 'clear-eyed military woman' waking 'quite alone' and loveless . . . 'The little Swiss music box / plays with false cheer . . .'

And here is a characteristic selection by an outstanding individualistic younger poet—Seymour Gresser's *THE STONE ELEGIES* (H. G. WALTERS Ltd., 3/6—75c. in U.S.A. from INT'L LIT. AND ART CO.). The title points up that he's also (if not primarily) a sculptor, strongly conveying the use (as in all of his art) of depictions of animal, plant, and mineral growth, as Henry Birnbaum emphasises in an introduction.

Thus, to Mr Birnbaum's own *THE SIMON PASSION* (OLIVANT HOUSE, 50c.) and another young poet, who, without manifesting influences in the usual sense, has a good deal in common with Lawrence Lipton, returning to the ancient books (in this, the Old Testament) for possible contemporary cures. His style is utterly different — so different that to Mr Lipton, who pays close attention to metrical patterns, the loose and 'rolling' (Birnbaum's word for what he prefers in poetry vehicles) 'flow' of his work has seemed more poetic

prose than poetry.

Considerable Biblical interest is found also in the first of the NEW AMERICAN POETS Series, by Eugene Haun (see, 50c.), whose work however is more traditional and far less free, experimental only in quite deliberative aspects of alternating thought or form.

In sharp contrast is the representative complex and intricate experimentation of Kenneth H. Ford in *THE CLEAN DYING* (VILLIERS, 8/-, or \$2 from Lilith Lorraine, U.S.A.). And here writes the moralist without solace of ancient wisdom. Yet, more than mere sophisticated commentaries on modern folly — altogether a book of deep sadness coloured with irony.

From standpoint of cash prizes, the big world anthology of any year of course is BORESTONE MOUNTAIN POETRY AWARDS (STANFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, \$3), and for 1955 more imposing than ever, with new policy of also reprinting 'names' not in actual competition. Though (unastonishingly) not that of the two tied winners, there's good poetry — and by not-entirely rigid standards — in the volume. However, the only experimentations are those ensuing upon what were not in past instances selected for anthologies such as this in preceding years; and realistic comments of close relevance to the social scene are not unexpectedly absent.

An out-of-the-ordinary anthology, fitting neither the common category of the heterogeneous pay-to-enter sorts nor that of academy-approved pre-judged kinds, is *THIS SHALL ENDURE*, a 1955 Avalon Anthology under Lilith Lorraine, who states her government of contents was limited to seeing that nothing inferior of its kind was included. Since she rejected over 8,000 pieces, to find less than 200, the compendium is well above average. These are shorter previously-unpublished works from poets nearly all of whom are familiar to magazine readers — some with established reputations. Priced \$2.50, the book is reported sold out.

Another not-for-sale item is *FOR WHAT TIME SLAYS* by the Canadian, Raymond Souster. He mimeographed a large group of characteristic direct pieces — but made just 25 copies, for editor-critics he believes will appreciate them! While obviously a few would not be printed by one unprepared to go to court to prove their literary value transcends their obscenities, many are on a par with this modern's best.

ADDENDA

So much of special little-mag interest has transpired around the turn of the year that only brief mentions can be crammed into this space, along with additional data on book publication.

Of the two already-detailed U.S.A. pamphlets series, *THE POCKET POETS* will offer as No. 2 Kenneth Rexroth's *THIRTY SPANISH POEMS OF LOVE AND EXILE* (85c.) and ensuing by Kenneth Patchen, Allen Ginsberg, Marie Ponsot, William Carlos Williams, and Denise Levertov.... Down in New Zealand, a similar series is issuing from *THE HAND-CRAFT PRESS* (2/- each): James K. Baxter, Robert Thompson, Louis Johnson, Kendryck Smithyman, W. Hart-Smith, and Gloria Rawlinson.... Much less formal have been special *BRIDGE* issues (10c.) by GLEN COFFIELD, including some first-ever reproductions of Japanese prints by duplicator!....

And two other notable magazine developments have been the No. 2 Australian *21st CENTURY*, an issue centred on architecture, and the expansion of the Canadian *FIDDLEHEAD*, with a reader canvass determining both size and nature of contents.

High interest attached to the broadcast of poetry by Jon Silkin, set to music by Elizabeth Lutyens, on the Third Programme, last November ; and George Hartley's verse programme is proving foreunner to many new presentations. . . . Also in the oral sphere have been readings under auspices of the continuing *POETRY CENTER* of San Francisco

State College at the Telegraph Hill Neighborhood Auditorium (one 'neighborhood' of rather wide renown). . . . Among several poetry contests is the AVALON, with deadline 1st Sept., prizes downward from \$50 and ten winning pieces to appear in a special supplement to FLAME — and Lilith Lorraine, to whom entries should go, announces all poems accompanied by stamped returns will at least return with comments and suggestions for placements. . . . In prose, THE STEP LADDER has the Pearl Riese Mountain Award of \$15 for writer of the best story of 1,250 words, deadline of 1st April. . . . Among new anthologies, an unusual one (for size, contemplating inclusion of 1,000 poets) is that being arranged by Scotti D'Arcy and Robert Criswell (unpublished material with succinct autobiog. to 140 W. 55th St. (6-B), New York City).

Intention has been to describe in detail a project for dramatic stagings of poetry readings by a group headed by Harvey Parker (CLASSICS VOCAL READING CLUB, 3732 Fairsta St., LaCrescenta, Calif.). Space however does not permit, and interested persons should query directly. Successful readings have been produced in Pasadena, and more are preparing.

Several of the ensuing may later be considered in detail: THE RUDIMENT OF AN EYE by W. Price Turner (5/- and \$1, VILLIERS PUBLICATIONS) ; THE HALOED TREE by Fred Cogswell (\$1, THE RYERSON PRESS) ; THE LOST DIVER by G. V. Downes (50c., FIDDLEHEAD Poetry Book No. 2) ; MAKE-BELIEVE by Frona Lane (\$2, DIFFERENT PRESS) ; A BOOK OF VERSE by Mary B. Hall (7/-, THE BROOKSIDE PRESS, or \$2 from the author in U.S.A.) ; GLORY NEVER GUESSES by Kenneth Patchen (illustrated ms., reproduced by silkscreen on handmade Japanese papers, \$10 — privately — address author at 377 Green St., San Fran-

**THE KNOT IN THE WOOD BY
GAEL TURNBULL (2/6 AND 50C.,
REVISION PRESS); TRUE PLACES
BY BURNHAM EATON (\$2.50, GOLDEN
QUILL PRESS); EXPERIMENT IN
ERROR BY BLANAID SALKELD (7/6,
HAND AND FLOWER PRESS);
SOME POEMS BY ERICA MARX
(7/6, THE SAME); MELODIES OF
LOVE BY MYRTLE TITUS STURGEON
(\$2.50, GREENWICH BOOK PUBL.);
ALL THAT IS LOVELY IN MEN BY
ROBERT CREELEY (\$2.50, JARGON
PRESS); MINDSCAPES BY VINCENT
FERRINI (\$1, PETER PAUPER
PRESS); THE PURPLE WHEEL BY
VERA LACLAUSTRA (\$3 FROM THE
AUTHOR, 3765 WEBSTER ST., APT.
1, OAKLAND, CALIF., U.S.A.); THE
MAGIC STONE BY GEOFFREY
JOHNSON (8/6 AND \$1.25, ROBERT
HALE).**

WHAT EDITORS WRITE (THE SMALL MAGS)

by James Hiner (U.S.A.)

What follows is in the nature of a point-thrust (or several of them) not a bludgeoning. No one, consequently, should read into the title punctuation as : What! Editors Write? Of course they do.

In a recent edition of one of the 'small' magazines* fully one-third of the poets represented were also editors, or co-editors, or assistant editors, in their own right.

Then editors write poetry. And being editors, they write rejection slips, and it is of these I would speak.

Probably it is these editor-poets who inhabit the largest pie-slice of the first category of 'what editors write'—the invitation to the tea-party. When your first rejection slip from one of the small mags reads : 'Am sending you a sample copy of our magazine so that you can study our requirements,' you are being invited, Alyce. Had you skill enough in copying you might then find your 'blessed retreat,' similar to the one Wyndham Lewis measures for the imitators of Nature . . . 'for those artists whose imagination is mean and feeble, whose vocation and instinct are unrobust . . . they squint their eyes at her professionally, and coo with lazy contentment . . . She does their thinking and seeing for them.'

**Not 'little.' See John W. Aldridge's chapters from AFTER THE LOST GENERATION, Writer's Year Book, 1952, for 'little's' epitaph.*

If you would do your own thinking, scratch 'do not resubmit' after that magazine's name in your notebook.

What? Are you going to argue? Do you believe with one of their tribe 'that the editor reads first for the purposes of the magazine?' Is that a legitimate practice? Well, yes it is. And practised legitimately it does not include . . . 'so that you can

study our requirements.’ Imagine, if you will, their sending such a note to William Carlos Williams, to Eliot, to Pound, to Frost! After, after all, which would you rather be: anthologised in *The Lower Missouri Quarterly*? or William Carlos Williams? (Does this require a carefully guarded answer?)

The second category of editors, what-they-write, requires a yet more diligent defense. There is a subtlety about them. They do not flash their requirements with a calling card. They send you a pleasant, wordy rejection slip, the nicest, probably, you’ve received all week. Your ego is slightly unbalanced when you come to their P.S.: ‘Have you heard the latest Dylan Thomas recordings? They’re shatteringly beautiful.’

The party, you see, has become intimate; you are now invited to eat the wine glasses.

You are being asked to write like Mr Thomas—or like what the editor thinks is Mr Thomas. But whatever you may think of Mr Thomas, and whether or not he was a good, or even a great poet, the question is: Do you want to walk with a Welsh lambkin the rest of your days?

Editors who are ‘helpful,’ those offering unsolicited explanations of your text or mood, in their rejection slips, fall into two distinct categories: the first merely misreads your text; the second misreads your intentions. Of the former, I can only say, maybe they’re right, maybe your wonderful lines were unclear. With their ‘explication’ to guide you, you can re-read your creation: it’s worth a cry.

But for the latter sort, I haven’t abominations lengthy enough.

Whether you’ve been writing earnestly, seriously for ten years or one, it must come as a traumatic surprise to learn that you’re not serious enough, that you’re too flippant, or that the editor prefers ‘less smarty-smartness.’

This editor is naturally unaware that her (or his; but it's mostly the ladies in these mud flats) criticism sins in tune with its perjured object. She (or he) is probably guilty of no more than a vigorous affective fallacy; but the public exposure of this absence of editorial self-knowledge can only drive the reader of such a rejection slip back to his copy of Thomas Hardy...

It amounts to this: a friend laments, 'dammit, it's costing me \$10,000 a year to submit to these little (his lapse) mags!' My friend means that if he weren't struggling to maintain his integrity IN ORDER to submit to the 'little' mags, he'd be a successful peddler of plumbing fixtures at approximately \$10,000 a year.

Now, everybody knows, despite the example of publisher-Eliot, and doctor-Williams, and librarian-MacLeish, that worldly success is too great a burden for integrity to carry. Knowing this, everybody who is at the same time a poet asks only poetic success, and poetic integrity.

It means that a man would occasionally like to see a 'mistake' printed. A glorious, robust mistake, say, like LEAVES OF GRASS or ROAN STALLION.

Well, it may mean that the present crop—as they say—of poets is . . . deficient. Or that the editors of the prevailing small mags are . . . right, and we shall have to write as we read to get printed.

But there we must wail with Denis the Carthusian: 'Who is so feeble-witted that he could not try his hand at it?'