

LIVING LITERATURE

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Mary Graham Lund on a 'Lost' Novel

Mark Van Doren talks to G. V. Stillman

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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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FROM THE JUNGLE FLOOR

by Mary Graham Lund

(A Preview of Strange Species)

In her studies of the unpublished mss. of James Franklin Lewis — who died at age forty-two, in 1945 — Mrs. Lund has concentrated on the poetry; but here is her abridged report on the long novel he wrote thirty years ago. His prophetic sense, demonstrated in many of the works, appears to have restrained him from wasting energies in any efforts to get this book into print during his lifetime; the novel prefigures fiction-trends of the later Forties and the Fifties. And, at the philosophical level, Lewis posed what have come to be key questions of the Sixties. Though he dwelt upon ‘food and sex and hard liquor’ and introduced art, poetry, and music as ‘cloudscapes,’ he simultaneously suggested answers that have not until now been declared essential. The parallel with recent voices is more than a parallel; he used untried materials years in advance of today’s better-knowns. For example, in such settings as speakeasies, cheap boarding houses, hamburger joints, and college frats, he accomplished what Mrs. Lund describes as opening brains for ‘peepshows of sex and horror and self-torture.’

*Lewis proved himself too sincere a rebel to be altered by pseudo-cultural processing; this book was produced immediately after he had achieved his doctorate. And, after extended exposure in the academies, he wrote a devastatingly-sad commentary on the deterioration of American education, a verse novel, *Lem Harris in Illinois* (1939). Mrs. Lund has woven a thoughtful,*

exciting play from the novel and portions of Goat's Milk and Mirrors, using the title of the latter, another major work. The drama is focused on emerging signs of decadence in higher education, with new insights of Lewis's later speculations about causes of what has become the horrifying international dilemma of our 'civilized' Sixties.

Strange Species is the novel of a young man, a disillusioned young man. At twenty-seven, James Franklin Lewis had acquired a Ph.D. in chemistry, solely through his own efforts, without financial assistance, without vacations or holidays. He stood on the summit, but the view showed only barren mountains. He was not content with the narrow limits of scientific knowledge.

In a letter to a friend, he wrote: 'We live on three levels of the mind: below is the minero-biological jungle of sea-floor, colorful, exotic, rococo, sometimes frightening; above is the glistening, beady foam of talk, of music and image, perfume and texture, myriad sensations, enduring for a second, then falling to the jungle floor to build limestone beds that will enrich the future; in between, in the deep waters, ideas wander pathlessly. Man has not yet found the means to trace his thoughts, to guide or control his emotions. The mind is baffled by its own aimlessness, forever reaching for the vague beauty forming and re-forming on the hazy edges of the sea-floor, or trying to catch the phosphorescent rain of thoughts from the surface foam.' This is the theme of his novel.

The 'strange species' are four free-floating specimens of college life, genus homo, masculine gender, and a number of others, male and female, who seem more or less fixed to the jungle floor.

Case Poirier is a fat boy who doesn't like his face in the mirror, but is much in love with the reflection of his mind. He is interested in books, painting, and girls, and by some

strange accident is a member of a fraternity whose co-freres he despises. His two closest friends seem little more than projections of his own personality. Harold Kelvin is physically attractive, witty, often surly, addicted to chess, beer, Schopenhauer, and poetry; he never finishes a poem lest he spoil it, derides love, but has found a solvent for friendship. It is in Kelvin's untidy room that Case feels himself most poignantly himself; here, he comes for easement when his jangled 'nerves creep weeping through his skin;' here, he listens to the 'hum and buzz of heavy trucks of thought;' here, he decides that the only hope of civilization is that 'art can create mysticism faster than science can dissolve it.' Charlie Hearst has worked in the steel mills, has a musical gift he refuses to develop, and various complexes which he humors. Charlie becomes a core of suffering for Case, as he sees the boy who is starved for friendship reacting to Kelvin's cynicism, to Orville Saunders' cruelties, to his own indifference. Charlie's death is a necessity for Case's growth, a lopping off of fuzzy sentiments and optimistic longings.

The other characters — including Saunders, a handsome boy, a brilliant student, who prides himself on his drinking exploits — are nearly static. Tony Pallapos, engineering student, owner of a new Pontiac and a well-stuffed billfold, has profound respect for the erratic talents of Case and Kelvin. Rollin deLong, known as Bozo, is a football star, a woman-chaser, and the friend of publicans and sinners.

Case's girls do not get far from the protecting jungle floor. Mildred, Marjorie, and Madge are three phases of woman. Mildred is the practical woman, the mother, the homekeeper; she will graduate as a nurse in June. Marjorie is Daphne, is Psyche, is Deirdre of the Sorrows, the femme fatale, the Venus Anodyomene, — Aphrodite ever reborn of the ocean foam, love forever fleeing beyond the boundary of imagination. Madge is the Venus of Wagner's Tannhauser,

who lures men with illicit delights into her magic cave.

At the beginning of his senior year, Case had broken his engagement to Mildred, enticed by Marjorie's illusive loveliness; although he cannot, as an artist, explain this or catch it on canvas. She brings him nothing but suffering, self-doubt, and humiliation; when she returns his fraternity pin, he suffers the stinging hurt of wounded vanity. In search of an anodyne, he allows Madge to lure him to her apartment, paid for by a prominent businessman.

Commencement Day is a long-drawn-out agony. Case decides to stay on at the fraternity house through the summer. He will shut himself in his room and paint. Love is a phantasm, and 'happiness a hiatus to be filled with creative work.' It is our evolutionary heritage to be truly happy only 'when the mind is at clutch with difficulties.' But the difficulties of art are not clearly clutchable, and Case is soon discouraged. He is back in Venusberg with Madge, or in Kelvin's hot little room, drinking warm beer amid smoky cloudscapes of talk: 'Life is negative, a series of disorderly retreats, forever exiled from beauty. Beauty is bitter; it is painful; it is an ironic insult, an invidious contrast with self.'

The plot from here on is easier to summarize than to believe. Case is caught in the cogs of Bozo's rum-running machine; Mildred sets a private detective on his trail for his protection, and he is allowed to escape to join Marjorie and Kelvin in Arizona, where Kelvin is dying. In the days of talk that follow, all the virtue in Kelvin seems to pass into Case. He will go back to art. He will blow the dust from his books and through them seek life and truth.

But Marjorie has different ideas; she shocks Case by telling him that she has never loved her husband, that she still loves Case. Again, Case must flee. However, Bozo's men catch up with him; the plot become definitely baroque, with gun-battles and accessories. Mildred's detective arrives on the scene to rescue Case, and she takes charge of the

economic and practical details of his life, to enable him to devote himself to a project which may take forty years.

In spite of the baroque plot, the novel is not the work of a romanticist; the protagonist as artist is not concerned with form, except as it leads to a revelation of the nature of things. Case, often tempted to indulge in a romantic withdrawal into inner experience, never succumbs. The Romantics, Charlie and Kelvin, have died young, victims of the destructive force of their pessimistic spirits as much as of physical disease. Charlie's will to die is emphasized, and hints of asexuality suggest the sterility of his spirit. Kelvin, too, has denied life through his cynicism; and life is denied him in his stillborn son and in his own early death. But the virtue of these men, who were his friends, entered Case Poirier, finding inflorescence in his determined search for truth. It was Tony the Greek who said at Charlie's funeral: "We cannot mourn the fulfillment of our friend's sincerest wish: that a life he knew to be meaningless should early terminate, thereby investing itself with meaning, as its spiritual essence suffuses itself in the consciousness of us who knew him, inspiring to richer life."

It was Case who remembered Charlie's adventures in music and tried to incorporate his ideas in his own project of discovering a world-order. Case had unconsciously absorbed Charlie's ambition, as later he consciously absorbed Kelvin's philosophy, in long days and nights of talk. "It has taken me half a lifetime of wasted idealism to realize that life is what it is," Kelvin says, "and now it is too late to use my wisdom." Then, holding off death by the power of his will, the scientist poured out to his friend the ideas that had crystallized in his brain since he had left the laboratory. "It is my dream of finding laws of laws ... The next fifty years will see a higher symbolism ..."

This is the spirit of classicism, the investigation of the cosmos with the assurance of loving recognition with which a

wanderer comes home. Classicism carries the spirit of adventure. That it contains romanticism is a half-truth. Romanticism implies escape from something to something. Classicism does not flee from life, nor to a dream-world. It follows where events lead, investigates what is; it is an enterprise that would discover truth, would achieve harmony and perfection.

The classic adventure seeks a conviction of the unity of the individual with the life of accepted and established things. It is not an echo, like realism, of what is, but the interpretation of what is; it is a search for the essence of things. As Kelvin says: "It's a rough-and-tumble life along the frontiers of knowledge ... yet a man is not thoroughly contented unless for more than half the time he is baffled, unhappy even ... It takes a strong personality to endure uncertainty ... yet an enjoyment of uncertainty is the ultimate happiness, as change is the ultimate reality."

Classicism is not formal and cold, but the expression of the profoundest passions; the eagerness of the search is for cosmic values as they have found issue through individuals. Case saw at last the untrodden path he must take: 'He would have to invent symbols, to establish a wider synesthesia, a universal bridge. He must organize the symbols of art, arrange them in a hierarchy of categories, ... and then fuse the quantitative and qualitative under one vinculum.'

In classicism, the individual is united with his time, his tradition, or with nature, or whatever is the object. Case would need to explore all history and science and literature, to consider all referents, if he would reach the peace of faith, which is beyond knowledge, yet based on knowledge. The age of industry would merge into the age of art. Case plunged into the cleansing waters of love — love of Truth — with that powerful detergent of unhappiness, work.

Strange Species is a planned novel, the novel of a poet's planning, asking the poet's question: 'What is the meaning of

life?’ Lewis dredged up a half-dozen specimens of College Everyman of the Twenties and exposed them in an aquarium with a reasonable facsimile of the sea-jungle life of food and sex and hard liquor, with cloudscares of art and poetry and music. He staged realistic dramas of love and murder and suicide, death by cancer and tuberculosis, gangster quarrels and broken friendships in queer little theaters like the hamburger-joint known as ‘The Hole in the Wall,’ the speakeasy known as ‘Omar’s,’ a fraternity parlor, a squalid bedroom in a boarding house. He opened brains and gave us peepshows of sex and horror and self-torture more terrible in their impressionistic settings than the starkest realism. All the scenes are deviously sequential. The characters float through the more or less clear medium with seeming aimlessness, yet all the lines converge upon Case’s purpose to solve a philosophical problem.

Case’s seemingly-needless suffering has furnished the fulcrum for the trajectory, the artistic impulse that would never cease till death. The curve was leveling off, but the progression would be constant. Once, he had been frustrated at the peak of each unit of accomplishment; now, he realized that, just as in music, each peak would start a new curve. The sine wave of learning would be continuous for him.

Although often improbable, the experiences presented are vivid, extensive, and rich, ultimately unified through symbolism, which acts as a magnet to draw to a center the wildly diverse details. Feeling, in an art form, must become organic, or plastic, or incarnate. The materials must be controlled by the artist’s objective. It seems to have been Lewis’s objective to show that the artist must strip for the race. The feelings of the protagonist are given organic form through his friends, his loves, his enemies, his many adventures, even the trivialities of conversation and the unrealities of dreams. There is often an area of indeterminacy; but, in the end, the feeling-connections are

made. Case Poirier, in spite of the bizarreries of his conduct, his indirections, his occasional lapses from common sense, is a product of his age who has drawn into himself so great a diversity of aims that the total fusion becomes the essence of the artist. Lewis did not solve the problems, but he painted a significant portrait of the young man of the early Twentieth Century in search of a world-view.

ISSUE P. 70 · SCAN P. 8

TOWARDS PRINT

by the Editor

This issue of Trace exhibits writings (pp. 97-112) of a genre confusing to many readers and critics. They mainly lie in border-zones between spontaneous poetics and conceptual prose. Portions of some are just within boundaries of abstraction-from-the-unconscious, barely overlapping regions of reasoned manipulation. Other portions are well outside those boundaries and seem to have been composed deliberately, though they carry nodules from the 'dream side.' Still others must have occurred entirely without forethought. More and more of such variegated writings are published.

Admixtures of creative poetizings in prose and — vice versa — genuine poetry, broken by prose statements and explications, ought not be adversely judged simply because they are hybrids. Especially not, when individuated forms have been evolved for communications of more than mere personal stylistic flavors. Whether or not they may open new paths for aesthetic perception, they deserve consideration for uniquenesses of translatable, integrated expression. Besides immediate applications in the socio-cultural flux, they may promise significance for future retrospective influences (new traditions).

It easily can be demonstrated that in the past fifty years, many writers exerting pervasive influences on art-forms — and thought, as well — have not been rewarded by wide readerships and remain unidentified to the public at large. Sweeping applications of so-called scientific attitudes have led to a mania for classification. Invading the arts, this has hampered essential freedom for exploration beyond contemporary rationalizations. In rather superficial illustration — during the Thirties and in the Forties, just after War II, most critics defined poetry either by traditional

standards or by taking cognizance of 'free verse' (a misnomer). The best of James Franklin Lewis (one strong individualist) actually went unpublished; editors would print his obviously patterned pieces, but would reject his other efforts on grounds that they were neither 'free' (à la Whitman, Sandburg, etc.) nor orthodox (with line- and stanza-arrangements emulative of then-acknowledged predecessors). They were annoyed by what they saw as haphazard metrical structures, mixed metaphors, and evocations of the sentimental past, scrambled with disturbing (also misnamed) realisms. Their preconceptions blocked awareness of the poet's individual frame. Some 'unacceptable' Lewis work appeared for the first time in Trace No. 40.

If critics and editors have been poor readers, small wonder that others still fail to appraise such writings understandingly. Obtusely-positive views have been nurtured in the schools, where students have been offered sealed pellets of alleged 'reason.' Having swallowed the indicated categorized aids to criticism, graduates have been deemed ready to proceed via rational deduction and induction through pre-defined direct observation, with little need to try to think for themselves and even less need to use their imaginations, which might break and distort the established categories. This cramping of mental functions is called empirical — which it precisely is not. When these trained people examine original creations, they usually affect mock-tolerance of what they call 'experimentation;' but their conditioning prevents their perceiving the primary creative stuffs, and they actually cannot receive what may emerge from a writer's identification with his individuated self. Instead of being stirred by the aesthetic elements, as really offered, they effectually refuse them recognition, applying preconceptions from the capsules they have ingested, drawing their own abstractions of 'meaning.'

Border-zone sections of the Trace contributions supply ideal media for clarification of today's questions about poetry-proper (and / or improper). None of it is nearly so 'difficult' as popularly tagged. Some of the writings here must have been formed in relatively self-conscious periods when the authors mulled consciously-conceptual ideas. And the spontaneous portions would have been more or less deliberately organized afterward, though in intimately-characterized patterns; and their authors then would have been fairly aware of what underlay these results. Such products set up lower barriers than what might or might not be 'higher' poesy, and with more obvious interpretations; while the resulting forms, in themselves, should communicate to receptive relaxed readers.

Intermingled ideas and images can be helpful rather than confusing to nonprofessional readers who are unlikely to start puzzling themselves in advance and obstructing nonconceptual impacts. Many may even discover — without need for definitions — the half-lost truth that the concepts provoked by a poem are no more the poem than the moods evoked by tonal sequence are the music. The same can be observed of moods-and-music as, say, of ideas-and-poems: their combinations within listeners-readers are not really 'new.' And after a time, the most unusual variations and juxtapositions, in their intellectualized aspects, become banal. The imperishable original component is integral to composition as thing-in-itself (whether of words or of sounds), never embodied out of connections set up by readers or listeners. Yet, how often those who strive hardest to 'appreciate' art fail to realize this!

To be sure, there are other reasons for today's lost audience for poetry. There's the current stress on aesthetics as a diversion rather than as an ultra-reasonable avenue toward broadened comprehension of the nature of being. Books could be, have been, written about these things. We

wish only to indicate what sparked the publication of these particular writings, with the hope that they may be seen as the individuated works they are.

PATCHEN'S LOVE POEMS. — ED.

ISSUE P. 77 · SCAN P. 15

EDITORS (AND OTHERS) WRITE

THE CO-CREATED LIGHT

Alfred Dorn

A lecturer propounding the Poetry-in-the-Round idea, New York poet Alfred Dorn submits this miniature essay / definition, titled The Co-Created Light, to clarify his position.

A real poem is infinitely more than the sum of its ideas. It is not simply a communication of thoughts from poet to reader, but the transmission of a total experience in which ideas play an essential, but not exclusive, role. A poem is a unity of idea, image, and word-music — each of these elements being equally vital to the act of poetic communion.

A poem justifies its existence to the degree that it transmits more intense feeling and insight than can be expressed in prose. Word-music and images are not decorative in function, but are as central to the total meaning of the poem as the ideas themselves. A poem is not a roundabout way of saying something that could be said more simply in prose; it is the only way of communicating an inner event which could not be communicated in any other language or medium.

Poetry requires not only a creative writer but also a creative reader. The poem on the page is not an end but a beginning, not a finished thing but the triggering of a process in the reader's psyche. The appreciation of a poem is an active fusion of the reader's mind with that of the poet; the reader becomes a co-creator of the poem.

A poem is a burst of light that forms a new universe in the reader's mind. It is something alive, growing, centrifugal. It asks the reader to widen his imagination, to expand his inner world toward horizons without walls.

FROM THE MODERN SCENE

James Colvin

Portions of this Trace deal with contemporary overemphasis on so-called rational material and underemphasis on the effects of less-definable elements of existence on (chiefly) cultural aspects of daily life. This makes a series of communications from James Colvin appropriate; he contributed some telling paragraphs in Blast (Trace No. 37) delineating his feelings, as a worker, toward dehumanizing factors in civilized 'progress.' His letters suggested a regular department:

With our country / world moving at jet-speed amid explosion and debris of old concepts, the writer's task should be to maintain some kind of continuity and balance, to preserve some kind of proportion and perspective, unity-in-variety and vice versa, so that the high-speed blur doesn't make us any dizzier than we already are (speaking for myself) from existing in trembling anxiety as we wheel along our freeways on a steady diet of murder and mayhem, of TV mysteries and adult westerns.

In which vein, I offer the pocket essay From the Modern Scene. I suggest that this become a regular Trace feature, open to contributions from all who are interested, as befits its nature and fulfills its name. 'To follow the pattern of the past in order to trace the meaning of the future.'

The idea itself was approved; but Trace editors at first rejected his 'opener.' Here is Mr. Colvin's rebuttal, convincing us that perhaps, in this department, values could be extra-literary:

'Funny, but what I felt to be the significance here has been interpreted as insignificant — the 'echoes.' But, the critic is the bell, tolling with his own heartbeat.

The split-in-time-awareness is the essential meaning wrapped in the physical dimension — experiencing life on many levels simultaneously — on the job or off.

Most people are now citified, their lives totally organized, preconceived, and routine. Living becomes vicious. Becomes enveloped in a suction-vacuum — mind and nerves still functioning, but frustrated — must strike back, for health, being "stoned" by perpetual mass-communications (what-to-do — caught-in-the-machine), and to top it off, deliberate and rigid thought-control by all institutions.

Finding it impossible to listen to the inner voice, out of fear they suppress or ignore and scorn and condemn people who try to understand and express experience.

For us common people, it is the sociopolieconomic barrier we need to break through, in order to be free to live and explore experience. . .'

*So, if others supply brevities to carry forward,
From the Modern Scene will be continued. Here is
James Colvin's:*

Going to work at the Roundhouse, early Monday morning, after two days off, and putting some letters in the outside main-office mailbox, the buildings appear to have existed in a period long past; they are ghostlike in their drabness, and the lamppost light, shining on them in the smog-mingled fog, gives them the effect of worn props and stage-settings for a play long since abandoned in the attic of forgotten time. It all harks back to man's utilitarian age, when — in his fear of, and hatred for, nature — he was mad and fanatical: if he

couldn't destroy her, he would mutilate her beyond recognition. The cobweb-coloring of those men's minds that constructed these memorials to their destruction, must have come from a haunted house of spiders and clinging dust. All this, intensified by the engines clanking periods and steaming hisses of man's conception of hell.

I never heard a bird sing in these surroundings, nor do I even have the memory of one, — Lo! these many years.

ISSUE P. 79 · SCAN P. 17

MOST FOOLISH THING YOU EVER WROTE!

Sam Bradley

Once — the Once we know best — there was a Contemporary. He lived good, an expendable, built-in depreciation life. According to government statistics, he had the right amount of crowd motivation to succeed in the caste-about setup. Any advertising Counter could easily get his number and give you, for your profit, his rate of decrement. His aggressions were not greater than his gullibility, and he made the usual defensive, and defensible, noises.

But, over the rough Contemporary hung a dark cloud of Blunder, and gradually he grew afraid of it. He began to make statements. Now, this was not too outlandish a performance, and had been anticipated by the fathers of the Founding Platform. A man could talk like crazy — particularly if he intended to amend. There were some House-broken fellows who were particular. But usually, so long as the talk was private, not much overheard, nobody much bothered.

At odd times, a Spoiler waved a wet blanket, bellowed: 'A prophet! and no honor! and without a country! Outsider! Hale, ha, and farewell!' — then crawled back into scholastic

sacula, cock-a-snook.

Now, it would be a happy ending to say that marked Contemporary was not swaddled in lightning. Unfortunately, there's no happy ending. Something got through to him, something through the inscrutable Social Sky under which he had spraddled so insensately. And instead of just talking, he wanted to get through, too. Charged, he wanted to hit home, he wanted, alas, to be understood.

If I had been on the Board of Official Un-Inoculte Inquisition, I could tell you the inroads he 'X-ed' himself on, his insidious insignificance, his insipid general devaluings punctuated with outbursts of drunken words. Indeed, I could give you the exact location of his Bo Tree. Some insouciant oversight had not thundered him into Zen, so I must unromantically admit it was not a Ho-Bo Tree.

He had been happily married. But the day came when he, out of happy days of come-again-ever-inoffensively, was inspired to show her the message he'd craked out of Blunder. With a sudden Carlist inorganic look, she exclaimed: 'Most foolish thing you ever wrote!' While the baggage was packed, he tried to think what had predisposed her to fury. What had he scorned? Never the newspapers, with their big yell. Nor the economy, with its ingenuous, if inglorious, persuasions. Nor the great system of push-them-through-unthinking education, which piled medievalism and space pads across the land. Never the sweet teat, the Supermarket, the kitchen Summits, the across-the-fence bargaining — not even the dogma of the infallibility of the dictionary.

His young Pip passed him, snarling. At such a time, facing the facelessness of his nearest and dearest, he was not likely to think clearly. He wanted to take back what he had said, baptize himself in his own spittle and approbrium. He tried to cry out after the flesh of his bliss, bone of his bearing: 'I am guilty and ashamed. I am no worthy champion

against Blunder. I deserve your contempt.' But his tongue was plexed. He could not call back.

Vaguely, he remembered an Anniversary Dinner when Old Opsonic had pointed to his perfect mating. 'They're inside each other's skins more than any comparable Ophiolaters I've met.' A philosophic old catchall, Old Opsonic had affectionately called his wife 'Lamia.' He'd felt that she was his treasure, his key to the world, his magic center of Society.

An empty plastic clothes bag stared into his strickenness. Magic spell.

In contrast, he began to recall a 'Generation of Vipers' speech Old Opsonic had made on May Day, after the poling, at an exclusive seminary for aristocratic young maidens. Old stuff, about lives of quiet desperation, the indefensibility and degradation of ignorance, Luther's tract on 'the freedom of the Christian man,' Tolstoy's anti-state doctrine, 'the lemmings as a parable of the revolt of the masses,' salt that lost its savor and the missing safety-catch on the statesman that wasn't loaded. He patted, affectionately, the sleek horsiness of his body, wondering what mortifications of necessity he could endure. Mortifications rising from hostility to Blunder, arising from the circumstances in which he was placed, including those imposed by the State.

He heard Pip, who had nestled down in accustomed exotic narcissism, turn the television on loud. 'Tonight at 8:30, tonight at the Colosseum — don't miss Spartacus. Exclusive family showing. Excellent — special merit award from Parent's Magazine. Price for children under twelve will be . . .'

He staggered, and sat down on the bed where he had known so little insomnia, so few nightmares. 'Consciousness, consciousness,' he repeated inanely, poking the pillow as with a vorpal sword.

When, much later, he wrote me, my friendly Contemporary vowed that he had not wanted to side with Nothingness. He tried to argue that to struggle with life was not to tug away from life. But he confessed, blunderingly: 'The power that pulled me from life seemed stronger, fuller, more universal than my former attachment to life.' He was patching together various scraps of his life, threading it together with a fever.

Perhaps, like a tailor re-tailored, he will be outlandish enough to be toyed with, or at least tolerated on the land. The cloud is dark. There are tornado warnings. I wrote him a note of encouragement, citing stinking Philoctetes. I wonder if he can amount to anything, profitably, that is.

ISSUE P. 82 · SCAN P. 20

THE PLIGHT OF THE EDUCATED READER

by Lawrence Spingarn

At one time, families like mine — fleeing the reaction in Central Europe to the events of 1848 — could be said to have settled America with books and musical instruments in their hands. I recall a certain house in Milwaukee, at least, where the rosewood piano in the living room, made in Vienna, had been ferried across the Atlantic and carried overland to Wisconsin, a symbol of one migration that truly enriched the United States. But these German-speaking merchants and professional men, unlike the penniless Mediterranean horde, had an admirable culture from which their impact on our civilization drew its strength.

They faced, of course, the immediate problem of an alien language. My grandfather, for example, solved the problem in Liverpool, by learning English from Shakespeare and the King James Bible. For the rest of his long life, he spoke with a clear intonation and exact phrasing that caused people to ponder about his background. Coming to this country with a firm belief in education, he sent two daughters through college in the Eighties when few women even considered higher learning. As an immigrant before the Civil War, he had found a model for his children to emulate in the educated reader, who has since tended to disappear from the scene.

If the educated reader has dwindled in numbers, the writer and the book have suffered accordingly. For, during the past hundred years, American life has been adulterated and vulgarized by advocates of educational and cultural equality. In my opinion — and it is not a humble opinion — the reader as the shaper of good literature can never be

mass-produced. He is not the offspring of book clubs and university-sponsored discussion groups, those hotbeds of intellectual anarchy and organized nonsense. He must exist as a privileged class within the general population, a member of the elite whose allegiance to the finest fruits of the past will counteract a present full of confused educational theories that mainly favor mediocrity, — and of which we have had more than enough. In a period of crass consumerism, the ordinary reader is only another type of consumer; but the educated reader, knowing what the past can teach him, should function as an active partisan for sounder values.

The present is haunted by good books no longer read. In our zeal for taxing the best things out of existence, we have left little shelf space in the average home for the classics that were eventually consigned to the attic of the house in Milwaukee. Yes, the children of the educated settlers I have described carted off the sets of Balzac and Goethe to the second-hand dealer. And their children, if they honor the past at all, prefer to invest in vintage automobiles or dubious antiques. In general, we of the New World have enfranchised ignorance. We have courted the unripe mind and encouraged it, not only to form third-rate opinions, but to express these opinions with loud vehemence. In one generation, the servant has become his own master.

History explains how this decay of standards came about. It was a national calamity, a misfortune of far-reaching significance, that the American government, between 1880 and 1920, put so few barriers in the way of unrestricted immigration. By 'unrestricted,' I mean the acceptance of groups and races that could not easily be assimilated, that had no culture to contribute to a society that was to be commanded and directed by the educated, well-to-do citizen. But, even where there was a foreign group-culture worthy of the name, the theory of assimilation worked toward levelling

and mongrelizing the foreign-born. In a nation rapidly becoming urban and industrial, all foreigners were regarded with suspicion.

To understand this process, we should take another look at some of our sacred documents and the beliefs that stem from them. The Declaration of Independence would have been less hypocritical had it kept the original wording: 'Life, liberty, and the pursuit of property.' The emphasis on property has certainly accounted for much that is detrimental in our environment. On the other hand, the pursuit of happiness, which includes the acquisition of property, supported neither good manners nor the ability to choose the good life. Let us deal with historical facts: the Founding Fathers never intended that the Negro, the Sicilian, or the Slav should rise very far from the pool of cheap labor for which they were brought to these shores.

Indeed, the American Revolution was in essence no more than a family quarrel in which a few disgruntled bankrupts enlisted the aid of farmers and artisans. In the eyes of its leaders, who were soon to be terrified by the excesses of the Parisian mob, the voting privilege should have been limited forever by educational and property qualifications. It was their belief that only a voter with property to protect and education to enlighten him should select the rulers of the republic. A very sensible idea, when one considers how New York City in the Tweed era was controlled through the voting privilege held by ignorant elements; their descendants, with the help of the ordained and of the unordained ward bosses, brought the same venal government to Boston, Kansas City, and many other metropolitan centers. Today, our politicians are still trying to please newer elements of the population at the expense of the home-owning, tax-paying, and book-buying upper middle class. For those who are robbed to underwrite bread and circuses instead of schools and libraries, a return to the earlier theory and practice of

government is of prime importance; the liberals who advocate a centralized, bureaucratic system prefer the masses to the classes that should rule and at the same time dispense cultural benefits.

The poll tax and the literacy test, now being attacked as undemocratic, have been admirable safeguards against ignorance under a constitution which stipulates that the states should determine who is eligible to vote. It is apparent, to be sure, that the Southern states have employed these measures solely to keep the Negro in his place; but, is the North any kinder to its minorities? In the Northern states, I contend, the worst elements have been elevated above those who, by virtue of their concern for better standards in all fields, should dominate national policies, and this elevation of the masses has merely increased materialism and discontent. The South should not be dismissed as a backward region. When one listens to educated Southern speakers, one becomes aware of their brilliant rhetoric and phraseology; it is no accident that the Southern writer has won the attention and esteem of the reading public. Fed by the Scriptures and the frontier tale, the Southern novelist has superseded the New England moralist in our literary vanguard.

We must ask ourselves a crucial question. Is democracy, as it is understood to day, responsible for the barbarians in our midst? When we examine recent fiction, verse, painting, sculpture, and music, or balk at what passes for entertainment, we should be aware that our cultural debasement comes out of the polling booth and the classroom. Education, in particular, has severed many traditional ties for the sake of expediency. The dominance of numbers has reduced the teacher through automation to an operator of audio-visual machines. The educator has been compromised and pressured downward; he has too much patience with the commonplace mentality and its

manifestations.

Living in an age of retrenchment and paralysis, we seem to enjoy scraping the bottom of the barrel. With our dollar-sized outlook, we continue to decay from within as we abandon fine workmanship and private honor. While more and more people have leisure for cultural pursuits, the general level of accomplishment sinks lower; the educated reader is confused and disheartened by the book he is asked to consume. The proliferation of inexpensive paperbacks does not mean a new American renaissance. It is true that many of these titles are reprints or translations of classics; yet, where is the connection between a classic and the blurred facets of contemporary life? The task of the educated reader is to find and clarify these connections. He will not be helped by his neighbor; his neighbor acts out a pitiful charade at the race track and the corner barroom. The simple paradox is this: a work of art exists in each perceptive mind before it can be written or painted or reduced to other symbols by one man.

The inflationary spiral is built into our society. If all must be educated to read and write, it follows that the printed word will be inflated and cheapened as a medium of exchange. In our colleges and finishing schools, there is great emphasis upon the creative act, but the artist seldom has been conditioned by courses in writing or music-appreciation.

The literature of the moment is compounded of dangerous excitement, tinsel trappings, and disrespect for personal standards. As the educated reader looks at recent best-sellers packaged and promoted for a mass audience, he is afraid to condemn them as obscene or trivial or meretricious, because — as his congressman is likely to say — ‘the public has spoken.’ A consumer himself, the educated reader is intimidated by the weight of other consumers. Thus, education for the masses, far from stimulating the

gifted person, has only stifled and arrested the would-be dissenter who sees that the king is naked and the golden bowl is flawed.

Mere literacy is simply a prerequisite for the exercise of discrimination. Education, as I have tried to define the term, has always been a lonely process nourished by elbow grease and midnight oil. But, today, we have writers who pride themselves on never blotting a line; they cannot afford to wait until inspiration cools off and discipline takes hold. The educated reader, of course, will soon recognize why the Ginsburgs howl and the Kerouacs pound their chests. In the end, he is obliged to ignore *The Saturday Review* and become his own literary critic. He is neither a democrat nor an egalitarian liberal; he is only the individual who hopes to recognize an unimpaired humanity in the novel, the poem, and the essay that glorifies his life.

CONTRASTING PARADOXICAL JUXTAPOSITION

by James H. Bowden

Whitman and Dickinson Seen from a Slightly Different Point of View

(In submitting this pastiche / essay, Mr. Bowden — as a graduate English student — gave us a few bits of personal information we at once decided were vitally pertinent, though he asked that what he called his apologie be omitted. The writing occurred as the result of an assignment, which as he states, ‘covers, if somewhat facetiously, points of comparison on both Dickinson and Whitman;’ and his intention, ‘being sick of pseudo-scientific German Ph.D.-descended, explorative expositional essays,’ was ‘to try a more or less imaginative one.’ Contending that all writing is creative anyway, and noting the vagueness of the dictionary definition of ‘essay,’ he called upon the memory of Charles Lamb: ‘Then, scanning Whitman’s works, I read, in Native Moments, the line: “I will play a part no longer, why should I exile myself from my companions?” Indeed, said my stomach (I have no soul): “Do you dare to eat a peach?” I dared.’ And whereupon, Mr. Bowden discarded said apologie. And also dared to write this as he wished. Paraphrasing Cummings, he declared: ‘Sometimes I feel that there is some nit I will not pick. This is not the right attitude, I realize. Therefore I think I am in the wrong field, or at best must take a break.’ ... And one more point from these notes — Mr. Bowden asked that we not be misled by his essay — that he does ‘not look upon art (or intellection) as sublimated or

frustrated sex;’ and that he would rather ‘choose to turn the barrel at the cocktail-science smugs and say sex is but frustrated art and intellection.’ This Editor would simply eliminate the adjective, to assert unequivocally that the exercise of sexual function indeed is both an aesthetic and rational procedure. ... But, we turn to the essay, which assuredly needs no introduction — at least, not for those who have loitered long in the academy halls.)

Young Doctor Read, not very late of England, but late enough to retain a profitable pukka accent, gazed at the bottom of the gibson he had just drained. His friend, also young, and a rather successful analyst, sat next to him.

‘Why,’ asked his friend, ‘did you ask for two onions?’ ‘I did not; they were given to me. And anyway, you’ve got — or had — a daiquiri and you’ve got two you-know-whats in the bottom of yours.’

His friend was silenced. After a pause: ‘Had a rough day?’ ‘Nothing much: couple of the usual sort. Confirmed, but harmless. Dreamers, ineffectual. Both have adjusted, so I just recommended keeping on with it. Try to change them at their age, and they just get more fouled up.’

‘Oh? What sort, specifically?’ ‘Female exurbanite, local beat — both middle-aged.’ ‘Tell it.’ ‘Nothing to tell. Right out of the books. The woman was, at first, pretty defensive, — one of those sticklers for grammar, you know. She didn’t punctuate her exploratory letter to me worth a damn, but she turned three colors of green when I used a transitive instead of intransitive when I told her to mount the bench. Insisted on a screen between us, and kept her copy of Spectorisky on her lap all the time.’

‘Sounds good. The usual?’ ‘The usual: a dream. Usual symbols: snakes, worms, strings.’

‘Clear-cut case.’ ‘Obviously. Wasn’t too sure at first — snakes can mean general fear too, you know, as well as fear

of you-know-what.'

'I am aware of that.' 'But strings don't.' 'Could mean security,' his friend said, 'or lack of it.' 'In this case, they mean about the same as the snake. Her embellishments proved that. She told it backwards, but by inverting her story, I got it straight. Here it is in my notes.' He gave his friend his notes, and told him to read them end forward.

'This was a dream ... I sat me down' — and on and on ah ha! "Both eyes his way that time I flew. Projected him ..."

'Good, isn't it?' His friend read on: '... patterns swim secreted in his form' — well, that's clear enough, I should think. What's this — dialogue? "To a rhythm slim he fathomed me, 'Afraid,' he hissed, 'of me?' — Propitiation's claw. 'How fair you are!'" Why this sounds like Faust exclaiming over his moment of contentment.'

'Yes, the repressions seem to have been quite strong in her. Read on.'

"String ... string" — and, what's this — "ringed with power?" Dionysian power, I suppose. And she goes on: "... the worm before surveyed my chamber, a snake, with mottles rare." Suppose that refers to the desired coition itself. Any mention of excitement or climax?

'None. And I didn't dare ask her.' 'I guess not. "... creeping blood" — of course, of course — "a thing occurred a trifle afterward ... secured him by a string ... worms presume ... he was a worm, pink, lank and warm." Not at all subtle, is she? Sure she didn't make it up?'

'I think not. Clearly imaginative, but lacks guts.'

"In winter, in my room." Well, I get the "room" part — same as chamber — but, why winter? Middle-aged, did you say?'

'Yes. There was something about a preacher, but that was some time ago. Nothing since then, apparently, and very little then. She ran out at the point you've just got to.'

‘Extraordinary. What happened then?’ ‘Well, I’d have pursued her, but this bum stumbles in — Thought he was the janitor; but the janitor at least takes off his hat. Then I saw the look in his eye. He’s a real one.’

‘You mustn’t take that attitude.’ ‘It was the contrast: I had to have a screen separating me from the woman, and even then she didn’t want to lie down. He wanted to lie with his head in my lap.’

‘Did you let him?’ ‘Settled for holding hands. Even then he wheezed a lot.’ ‘Tough.’ ‘Had to write lefthanded. Sometimes wonder why I didn’t try gyn or internal.’

‘Got his notes?’ ‘They’re rather disjointed. Here, help yourself.’ ‘My God, there’re volumes!’ ‘Skip those — mostly mother-fixation. Here, let me — ah, here it is — how’s this for voyeuriste?’

“... I hear convulsive sobs from young men at anguish with themselves, remorseful after deeds done ... I see the wife misused by her husband, I see the treacherous seducer of young women ... ranklings of jealousy and unrequited love ...” What was this fellow — an interviewer for Kinsey? What? — oh, no! “... observe a famine at sea ... sailors casting lots who shall be kill’d to preserve the lives of the rest ...” Great future for him in playwriting. He claim to dream this?’

‘He said, and I quote: “Yes, but I never dream while I sleep.”’

‘Coy of him — well, we all have these things. Any other —’

‘Fantasies? Claims six kids, one by a mulatto. Not married.’

‘I’ll bet. What more is there? “... all the meanness and agony without end I sitting look out upon, see, hear, and am silent.” Cat Schitz — afraid to take action — might make a mistake.’

‘My prognosis exactly.’ ‘Well, there are worse things than looking-on. Not dangerous, you say?’

‘Fortunately, not. Here, let me have those — later on, he turns necromanic — enough is enough.’

‘Think he’ll come back?’ ‘I said I thought further work would be largely useless since he seems to get on all right. Can’t tell about these bo-ho’s, though — called me Camarado when he swished out — hate to see one that big.’

‘Called you what?’ ‘Means buddy in Spanish or something. Bit of a poseur — drops foreign words.’

‘Oh, well, it’s a living.’ ‘Certainly is. Having another before you leave?’ ‘No, got to be off. Tomorrow, Read.’ ‘Tomorrow, old boy.’ Having watched his friend until he had departed, Dr. Read asked the bartender for another gibson. ‘And, bartender — would you, er, put two onions in it, please?’

‘Certainly, sir.’

THE BASIC WRITINGS OF SIGMUND FREUD (DR. A. A. BRILL, EDITOR AND translator), *New York, 1938 — Random House. Dreams, Havelock Ellis. New York, 1920. — ED.*

OXFORD ANTHOLOGY OF AMERICAN VERSE (F. O. MATTHIESSEN, editor), *New York, 1950. — ED.*

TRUE STORY OF A LITTLE MAGAZINE'S BIRTH, LIFE & DEATH

by T. J. Roberts

As was proper, GSE: The Graduate Student of English was born in a campus drugstore. John Fraser and Don Jobes, then graduate students at the University of Minnesota, learned that each of them had become increasingly discouraged by what they had been reading in the little magazines (especially, the big little magazines — Partisan, Hudson, Sewanee, and Kenyon) and had developed secret ambitions. A situation like that normally produces unrealistic enthusiasm and confidence; within an hour or so, they were trying to sell their idea to a friend, George Levine. George, a bit calmer about things, suggested that three were hardly enough: enter, myself and Al Boersch.

Perhaps it was an odd group for a magazine to come out of: we came from widely-different backgrounds, and Don was the only editor who knew every one of the other editors. Yet, within a couple of weeks, we had begun — with increasing excitement — to shape a conception of the magazine. Within a month, that conception had taken control of us. It dominated us for three and a half years.

Those years were among the most strenuous, intellectually, that we ever experienced. Twelve times — once every three months — we laboriously handcrafted an issue and mailed it out into the void. Always, we needed contributors; always, we needed money. We had to find some way to support it, some way merely to justify its existence to our own sense of its unsuccess. We became highly sensitive to criticism. We were always keenly aware that it wasn't so good as we wished it to be; six months after an issue had appeared, we would suddenly discover that it was much,

much better than we had thought; but I don't think any of us was ever pleased with a current issue. We made costly errors so simple and silly that we find it painful even today to talk about them. Perhaps it all sounds overdramatic — I suppose that, to anyone who never has edited a little magazine without financial or official support, it is bound to seem overdone — but any who have had to keep a small magazine going for more than a few issues (any group of graduate students has one good issue in them — but twelve?) will recognize that it requires energies one simply never knew one had.

We went into it carefully enough, in our ignorance. We spent the first three or four months in secret planning of every aspect. We investigated costs, potential writers, the potential readership (no one knows how many graduate students in English there are, incidentally — the best estimate we could come up with was a shaky 10,000). We planned half-a-dozen issues ahead, we wrote an elaborate prospectus, we talked.

We had one thing in common, our commitment to the magazine. Beyond that — though this was not so clear as it was to become a year or so later — we differed drastically. It was not so much that we disagreed with one another as that each had a unique focus, an accent, that each was sure the magazine would realize. For John, an admirer of the Scrutiny group, the magazine would show a new critical responsibility and sanity. George shared his concern with this, but showed a perhaps-greater interest in our having especially good articles on teaching, the kinds of teaching that graduate students were likely to receive and give. Don did not disagree as to the validity of these aims, but felt with special acuteness the heavy fog of cant that we all moved through — his GSE was to be significantly irreverent. Al was almost disturbed, I think, by the air of unreality in which graduate students lived, about the graduate student as a

future professional — professional teacher, professional scholar. And while applauding all this, I knew that GSE was going to offer an unique opportunity for the relativist to raise his question about all of the nonsense that is printed about literature. The important point, I repeat, is that no one disagreed with anyone else.

The result, of course, was what we were delighted to discover as something nearly unique — an academic little magazine. Through John, it was heavily influenced by Scrutiny; certainly, it didn't look like any other single American magazine. It wasn't College English, it wasn't the Partisan Review, it wasn't the A.A.U.P. Bulletin — it was GSE, probably the only magazine which sought to be a combination of all three, and at the same time different and better than any of them. We still think there were times when it was.

Yet — as I have already suggested — even if it was that good, there were moments when it didn't seem worth the agony. It certainly delayed John's getting his degree, and perhaps it delayed Don and Al too. I doubt very much that it has helped our 'careers' any, or that it ever will. It cost us more of our part-time salaries than we could easily afford. It cost us friends among our graduate-school colleagues (they formed themselves into two groups: (a) those who were less angry about things than we were, and thought we were childish; (b) those who were more angry than we were, and thought us dull). Worst of all, the tensions produced among the editors became so fierce at times that the strains still show; and a group of men with a very great deal in common initially (in degree of dissatisfaction, at least) and with a good deal of mutual affection, has become splintered.

And then, after all that, the magazine did fail, though we weren't wholly to blame. It was painful watching it fail, but we feel also that to some degree its failure verified our original hypothesis: that graduate study in English (and

literary criticism generally) has lost sense of purpose and has become wholly cynical, propped up from without by the simple accident that American colleges need large English departments so every student can receive training in Composition. Our GSE goal was to dramatize this situation, to show that a calm, diligent, informed examination of the behavior of English teachers and English departments in the United States, and of the critical journals we all read, made this view inescapable. We knew we were not alone in this opinion — everyone we talked to, professor or student, agreed — but we felt that the public criticism had come from people who usually knew very little about the Realpolitik of the teaching of English, who struck even us as being more passionate than accurate, and whose criticisms had always been easily brushed aside by those in power as the whinings of men who couldn't make the grade or were still trying to get even with their fathers. We felt that we were different in that we were all very much committed to the complex of activities that the English teacher by custom assumes. We believed in the study and teaching of English literature, in advanced training, in scholarship and in criticism; our angers arose from our feelings that there had been times and men (and that there still are a few men) who gave significance to it all. And that, increasingly, these men seemed to be disregarded and the once-fresh currents of thought (German scholarly method in the late Nineteenth Century, the new-humanist movement in the early Twentieth Century, the new-critical movement of the Thirties, the Scrutiny group) seemed to be dying out. We thought we could point to this in an especially telling fashion. We thought, also, that we might do something about it.

Since four of the editors had had extended training in philosophy, the magazine was especially concerned with the inadequate theoretical background of most critics publishing articles and books on literature. We wanted to raise the naive

questions that everyone else seemed too sophisticated to talk about: Is any book better than any other book? Is there such a thing as aesthetic form? Why shouldn't a book be judged on extra-literary bases? What is the critic's responsibility to the writer? — to the reader (and which reader)? — to his fellow critics? — to himself? On none of these questions could all five of us agree; but all of us did agree that the questions were worth raising now. We tried to raise them in various ways: by dealing with them directly; by praising critics and books we liked, and damning those we thought pernicious; by giving our own analyses of books in the style we thought most promising; by printing critical paradoxes; by satire.

We tried, too, to help ourselves and other graduate students get better educated in ways the graduate schools denied us. That is, we printed brief introductory bibliographies on the film, art history, the post-1917 Russian novel, philosophy, linguistics, etc. (This was our most successful feature. The bibliographies garnered most of what little praise we heard of the magazine.) And we tried in other ways to freshen the air in literary studies, as we knew them. We tried bringing literary techniques to bear upon nonliterary materials — the comic-strips and Descartes' writings, for instance. We tried bringing other disciplines and their techniques to bear upon literary materials — for instance, by approaching Pater's *Marius* from Philosophy.

And we printed a fair number of articles on the teaching of composition and introductory literature courses, on certain courses all graduate students must take, on the problems of finding decent jobs, and on a variety of small, but vexing and rarely-discussed, problems any graduate student in English faces.

We weren't wholly noble. We also wanted to become Famous, we wanted to be Editors of a Successful Magazine,

we wanted to start a GSE-school, we wanted Recognition. We never talked much about this aspect of the magazine; but we could smell it in our early meetings, an aroma that hung somewhat heavily over all our discussions of what was needed and what could be done. We wanted In.

But I think I can say this in our own defense, while granting that our failure to admit this in our discussions was symptomatic of the special kind of hypocrisy we damned in others, while granting that we were even a little glad that things were in such bad state because it gave us a chance to become successful through pointing it out, while granting that the anger we publicly expressed was not quite the total picture of our feelings: We still did mean everything we said. We were not merely glad to have found faults in the study and criticism of literature; we were profoundly depressed and profoundly angry about them. We did increasingly feel that GSE stood for things and did things that in some ways were more important to us than our reputations. And then, the simple fact that we felt committed to keeping GSE alive even after it became obvious it wasn't going to be a smashing success, indicated that our hunger for power did not wholly determine our behavior. I don't suppose the smell of ambition ever completely disappeared, but it had become pretty faint by the time the fourth issue was being prepared. When the crisis presented itself — when every one of us had uncompleted theses hanging from our necks — we did stick by our principles, after all. By the time we had started our second year, we had all found ourselves convinced that it had to keep going simply because no other magazine did what GSE was doing.

By the end of the first year, the situation was verging on the desperate. Of the original five editors, only two (John Fraser and George Levine) remained to handle the really-frustrating, time-consuming, disagreeable tasks that plague little-magazine editors: finding typists, finding

cheaper and better paper, finding mss., revising them, proofreading them, dickering with the letter houses (we never made it from multilith to print), proof-reading the plates from which the pages were printed, collating, stapling, stuffing the envelopes, addressing the envelopes, etc. . . . Anyone would enjoy editing on a policy level — planning issues, reading submitted mss., rejecting, accepting, writing and rewriting one's own articles. But, who likes the leg-work? John and George were stuck with all that, beginning with the fifth issue.

Al Boersch had taken a job teaching even before the first issue appeared — reducing his contribution. With a new job, a new baby, and a difficult thesis, he still managed to turn out what may be the best appraisal of the graduate student's dilemma ever printed. He was to make other important contributions, — but, fewer and fewer, as burdens increased. At the end of the first year, Don Jobes and I took jobs that put us on the policy level; almost immediately, Don discovered that the thesis-writing, in conjunction with an unbelievably-unpleasant job, made it impossible for him to give further help. I had managed to complete my thesis, and at least did not have that worry; but, of course, I could not help with leg-work.

Meanwhile, the disruptive tensions that eventually splintered the group had already started to reveal their effects. By the end of the second year, we were accusing one another of irresponsibility and arrogance and incompetence.

During that year, John and George found the going so difficult that they asked Dick Cody to join them as an Associate Editor. Perhaps if he had not joined, GSE would not have endured through the third year, for George Levine had to leave for a new job, after the eighth issue, and the burden became too heavy for one man to carry while also teaching and writing a thesis. Since Dick respected the magazine, had distinct notions of his own as to what it

should do (and thus added a mind — not merely a pair of legs), and since he was of proven value as a writer and at least as willing as the rest of us in the routine chores department, his decision brought new hope.

But it shortly became apparent that even with his help, the magazine was in trouble. We began to write one another seriously about the advisability of continuing. If we had felt we had a public, the agonies would have been worth it. But our subscriptions decreased from 325 to 225. We wanted people to buy and read GSE; but fewer and fewer individuals renewed. The slack was partly taken up by libraries, whose interest slowly had begun to develop; however, ours never was the kind of magazine to be carefully filed away back in the stacks for future students tracing down a bibliographical citation. It seemed unlikely, anyway, that we were being read by any who would cite us; when we thundered, we rarely heard even the faintest echo. If GSE wasn't being read, what was the point of allowing the nightmare to continue?

Yet, we would have continued, despite our skimpy subscription-list, had we felt that certain kinds of writers were becoming interested in GSE as a place worth appearing for a small, but important, readership. We had come to respect the few readers we did have; and had we felt some assurance that a steady trickle of good copy was forthcoming to ease the pressure on us, as writers, this also would have kept us going.

Those pressures were intense. When I said that we wanted the magazine to be better in terms of readability, relevance, intelligence, and accuracy than any of the magazines that today dominate criticism and scholarship, I meant just that. Our contributors sometimes complained about our demands for revisions; but they didn't go through anything like what each of us did. I recall working three months simply polishing one article; hardly a piece of our own appeared that hadn't been completely rewritten four or

five times. (Sometimes, naturally, our prose went astray because of all this revising, but usually the magazine was highly readable and we certainly always knew what we were saying, what it implied, and how it related to everything else we thought.) If enough writers had slowly begun to join us, we would have continued for the sake of those who did read us and occasionally scribbled an appreciative note when they renewed, and for the sake of the writers. As it was, the seven editors (one of our steadiest contributors, Peter Thorslev, joined us as an editor, towards the end) must have written many more than half the 400-odd pages. We just couldn't meet our own highest standards consistently, while working under such pressures.

Or perhaps, if we had received the kind of financial support that would have allowed us to go into print (and thus save the heavier part of the leg-work) or to hire others to do the chores which were sapping the editors' energies, we then would have continued. But we did not get it. The first foundation we tried turned us down: we had had little experience, and probably the project sounded a little too unrealistic and 'do-goodish.' The next foundation we tried might have helped; but we first would have had to establish tax-free status. We couldn't do this, because the powers in government informed us they couldn't understand what the magazine was undertaking. (Meanwhile, a couple of little magazines we thought not nearly so good as our own seemed moving from one cheery grant to the next.) After a while, we began to tell ourselves that this gave us independence; we even began to talk as though we had deliberately neglected getting financial aid to retain that independence. But we would have traded all our talk for \$500 or so each year.

Why not have passed the project on to other graduate students? A new group would have had fresh energies, to add a new tone. Besides, all seven of us had gone so far in graduate school by this time (three had finished) and had

been graduate students for so long that we no longer could get excited about issues which graduate students should get excited about. Supposing that the magazine, into which we had put so much, should have been changed radically, — such an outlet, for graduate students planning to become teachers, critics, scholars, nevertheless ought to have been continued. A new group — at Minnesota or elsewhere — should have been able to take over an established journal, their tasks considerably eased by the information (all that we had done wrong) we could have passed on to them.

But, no one anywhere seemed interested, and no one knew anyone who would be interested. Indeed, for three years, we had been inquiring for people who might wish to work with us in some regular — but less-demanding (and, to be fair, less-glorious) — capacity. Two of our pre-GSE friends, Dick and Pete, wrote steadily and helped with advice and articulate disagreement, and later became editors. No one else. We had wanted a magazine that was something more than an outlet for a cozy little in-group; but that's what we ended with, in spite of all our efforts to get writers and editors.

This probably is the most depressing single aspect of this history: that no graduate students (nor any single one of them) appeared willing to take up the magazine, willing to put forth effort to change the situation they all understand so well, and about which they all are so cynical. Perhaps one should expect future academic politicians to keep away from a magazine with so unassuming a title and so un-magazine-like an appearance? And should one expect those in utter despair to do more than conserve their energies? Yet, shouldn't one believe there might be a few idiots around, ready to take a long chance on changing the situation everyone says they don't like?

At any rate, the editors met again, in June and July, 1960, to discuss the future. John Fraser was bone-tired: for

three years he had carried heavier burdens than any of us, had written more articles, had answered and initiated almost all the correspondence, and had carried more than his due share of the multitudes of chores. He already had delayed his thesis one year, and could not afford further postponement. Dick couldn't carry the whole thing by himself; and each of the rest of us was en route to some new job in an unfamiliar situation, or had extra-pedagogical commitments allowing him little free time. True, we had, in those three years, received some encouragement; but the active support had been missing. There seemed little hope for the future.

So, we carefully — lovingly — edited the twelfth issue of GSE; and with that issue, GSE died.

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THROUGH MANY STRINGS

Sidney Shapiro

Through many strings while trembling mothers watched I walked low with my hands dangling fingering nude babies in the soft light, and smiled my quiet pleasure. Nobody touched me. There was I noticed a changing light reflected on the strings which made the shadows intense. I shifted subtly, handling the babies now more gently, moving away fast but yet not running, shifting away with an almost imperceptible acceleration. I thought I saw a shadow falling. In the full silence the particled light that had filled the air was now flat and dull. Its source seemed far away. I knew the strings were not charged but my hand against a taut line recoiled in shock. A shadow fell across my arm. Something whispered. I couldn't hear it, but I could feel the brief rush of air over me. Leave us: leave us . . . The room was very high, the walls were far out of sight. I may not have heard it at all. The shadows stopped. There was no hand on the back of my neck. The babies' pulsing mouths were gone. I was up high, pulling my way, hand-to-hand, from string to string. The air is cold. The light steady and more even. There are no shadows that I can see. The strings seem far apart. No one has touched me. I am almost [...]

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KANGAROO COURT

Helmer O. Oleson

*Old Adam, in the World Jail, discovers that you
cannot behead an angleworm.
'John Price, Hangman for the City of London in
1714-1715, was hanged for murder. His
successor, William Marvel, a hangman from 1715
to 1717, was transported for the theft of a few
handkerchiefs. John Thrift, executioner from 1735
to 1752, was found guilty of murder.' — Nathaniel*

F. Canter, Crime and Society

This I propose to prove:

the case of the People vs. the People
right ventricle vs. the left ventricle
the right hand vs. the left
unknowingly.

This is the abstract of the indictment

This is the original offense:

the crime of being born
the escape from the womb
into a padlocked world!

Our host . . . the Commandant . . . is reading his
devotional

Under a lampshade

made of human skin.

Our host . . . the Commandant
is saying:

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I live with tonsured Adam & remember how grandstand
seats were sold gayly

for 2s 6d during the execution of Lally.

I remember how models of the guillotine
were sold for gold
to the boys of Paris
for toys.

I remember how handkerchiefs were dipped
into the red pool on the sidewalk
where Dillinger was shot . . .
& citizens gazed with relish
at the felon on his slab
with a name tag
around the big toe.

Our host . . . the Commandant . . . has a parakeet mind
Feeding prodigiously
on the seed of crime
and the egg of evil.

Our host . . . the Commandant . . . remarks how rape ‘
was a diversion of old warriors ’

And adds

with a sidelong glance at the crocodile pond:
hunter & hunted & hare & hound
tormentor & tormented . . . these are all the same!
evil from good & water from ice & noon from
sun are inseparable . . .

leg irons & handcuffs
cannot contain the skeletons
deeply buried
at Dauchau . . . Buchenwald . . .
Belsen.

You cannot slip a hangman’s noose
around the ashes
from a crematorium.

Our good host . . . the Commandant . . . dissolves our
various

identities

In nux vomica & locoweed & mayapple.

He mentions casually how things are all listed

In the city directory

and refers briefly

to Old Horrid & Martin Kallikak,

Bluebeard's brain,

hapless Hauptmann,

Cleopatra's asp & the Black Dahlia,

padded expense accounts,

writing on bathroom walls,

& chiseling on the income tax.

We have all been treed by bloodhounds

Have banqueted on chokecherries

Given Hemlock to Socrates

& owe a debt to Asculapius

All under due process

taking a rathole view of Saturnalia

remembering how Vercingetorex

was killed by his own tribesmen.

As of old

hundred-headed Satan is a thousand-legged . .

.

his segments squirm in murk & cannot be

beheaded.

He has dominion over foreclosure & genocide &

war.

& there is utmost confusion

inside the underworld

over

what is right?

what is wrong?

You cannot guillotine an angleworm.
The tail of a decapitated snake
wiggles until sundown!

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LITERATURE

Louis Gallo

— ten cents a whole lot!)

L i t e r a t u r e — which, by his definition, was lies —
achieved truth (as he defined truth) only as a reflection
of

those instants which, remembered — the memories
themselves lies (by definition: evoked by lies, by
literature) —

evoked the response:

‘yes! that’s how it was!’

Literature — by his definition — was the attempt, by
skillful

lying, to evoke the sensation:

of life as having,

of life as once-having-had,

of one’s own life as

possibly-once-more-having-again

Truth.

Literature was the attempt — by his definition — which
succeeded. Less-than-literature was every other
attempt —

by his definition. And — by his definition — literature or
not,

it was all lies.

.

If he should crawl up a ladder to the roof of
the sky, how could he find his way through?

He’d be up there, upside-down, suspended,

spider-like — how long could he be

expected to hold on?

He’d drop from a parachute.

He’d fall, safe, to the ground.

Or lose his grip. Someone would push him
off. He'd fall without a parachute: thump — a tiny
bump in an endless ocean: two no trump: he'd
disappear
and no one would care.
Thump! His jawbone was aching.

.....

For the purpose of creating, of bald fact, truth — a truth
never (by his definition) dwelling in the fact: because in the
fact no truth (by his definition) could in fact dwell: because
truth (by his definition) dwelled, could dwell, only in the
evocation of a sensation itself not truth, itself, rather, a lie:
evocation of a sensation, that is, felt, primordially, as fact, as
itself, felt, then, evoked, a second time, a third, a tenth, an
nth time, as the sensation: ' yes! that's how it was! ' — he
would have to, he knew, lie.

.....

If he should tell a lie, What would be the drip, drop, the
fall from the sky — Marry a virgin and somehow get by? —
how get by?

.....

He kept them in folders, in envelopes, in boxes, in his
closets and drawers. Were they literature? They were lies.
But could he do with these lies what he knew it was possible
for a man, skilled in the art, mad with a need to achieve
truth, to do? It was all a boy's world, unremitting,
unmitigable. And that, too, those words, unremitting,
unmitigable: what did they mean? why did they stick so
stubbornly on his brain? The camp, seven amphibian tractor
battalions, unmitigable, was situated, unremitting, on the
shoreline side of a volcano. The volcano, grown into, at a
corner of the island, prominence — a promontory,
protuberant (what did that mean?) — overshadowed a bay. In
a tent, unremitting, on a cot, unmitigable, he sat,
protuberant, on the volcano's . . . The volcano was dead.

.

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By definition — his own — that moment was truth which, remembered, evoked vigor, new life, joy. Evoked the sensation, inside one's skin: ' the sun is shining! ' Evoked the sensation, inside one's skin: ' I want it back! ' But that moment was truth, too — by definition, his — which evoked, at the same time, pain. Which evoked the sensation: ' no! I can't stand it! I don't want it back! ' Truth — by his definition — was a trick exclusively of the imagination. Resided — by his definition — nowhere, outside one's skin, in Nature.

.

If he should tell a lie, What would be the drip, drop, the fall from the sky — Marry a virgin and somehow get by? — how get by?

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The naked sun looked down upon a mountainslope
grown thick with tents.

Looked out, serene, across a tranquil bay.

Gazed hot upon irrupted hills,
hurled

— like monstrous turds, far and wide —

Over the countryside.

Then plunged, beneath the waves.

Glimmering,

crashed,

bobbed,

and rolled ashore.

And played along the beach.

Wallowed, lush, in the marshes.
In the palm trees, clapped hands.
Then,
 curled,
 swirling,
 a burning ball,
Leaped from the earth.
Caromed, soared, through endless skies
Poured through endless seas.

Then froze:
hung there.

The sun. Hot. Naked in the sky.
Afternoon.
Sunday.
Hawaii.

.

By his definition — which in no way could find
corroboration
(by his definition) in the fact or facts of his life — his life
was
dedicated to the pursuit of truth.
No definition of truth except his own was his own
definition
of truth — by definition.
And, by definition — his own — only inside himself
could he
find at last — if ever he were to find — his truth.

.

Outside lay the outside world, an
island.

If, from his cot, he should throw
out his hand,
into his fist would fall no great
matter.

Metaphysically, God could touch
him. Metaphysically, he
could never touch God.

His spirit, metaphysically, was inviolable. And physically?
— LET HIM GO, GOD!

.

He began with the premise: that one lies unceasingly —
aloud to one's friends and acquaintances (and enemies),
silently to oneself. Heroism he defined as the effort to
overcome in oneself this despicable habit and to arrive at last
at a state of truth. In that drive toward truth — and truth, by
his definition, was a trick exclusively of the imagination
(could be found, in Nature, nowhere outside one's own skin)
— one became conscious of one's worthlessness, one's
absurdity, the pointlessness of one's own and of all existence
— one approached that end deranged state of final supreme
consciousness and existence, the screaming meemies.

Below: volcanoes. Frozen in their earlier leaps: solid, grimy heaps, brooding.

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By his definition, the screaming meemies were an intolerable state. One regressed quickly from it to one's normal state: one fell comfortably back into one's habit of unceasingly lying. Literature, then, was the heroic attempt — by his definition heroic — in every instance ending in failure, to express (without lying) that experience of supreme truth, the screaming meemies. The screaming meemies. Which was to say: the ineffable, the unspeakable, the unbearable, the unutterable. These, by his definition, were the truth which literature — lies, by his definition — attempted to speak, to utter, to bear, to face.

Literature, finally, which, by his definition, was lies, by his definition, was truth. But only those lies, finally, which were literature, by his definition, were truth.

.

And someday he (who?), too (what? snot!

Would leap like a baby volcano:

Would crash through the crust:

Would sizzle with fire:

Would do what he must:

Would empty his passion:

Would cry with delight:

Would leap-loop,

moan-groan,

he-haw,

high-low,

— AND MAKE GOD LET HIM GO!

ISSUE P. 106 · SCAN P. 44

SOMEWHERE, GRINDING

Marvin Bell

Somewhere, grinding
man-the-unholy
animal
will not
appearing
see seemly
apparitions of non-
referential gold
or ghosts of assorted
sounds
(will not)
his friction
fictionalized
man the sound
and son
of man
can hope to
rub off
on moons and fishes
and stray blades
gravely imprinting
the death of a debt
and the passing by fire
of an ash.

ISSUE P. 107 · SCAN P. 45

FAMILY COLLAGE

Curtis Zahn

Wan, white and softly thin the husband
In his ballooning shorts
Tries his size at exercise
On the hot, free, exciting sand and
Despite his fragile height
Is no mental giant among the primitive, forgotten surges
of the sea's sex.

On a day off, on
The shore to be sandstung and sun-reminded
That fine physical mothers who attended school
in Oldsmobiles
So often avoid Tarzan
For the man among men among typewriters
In the huge bottomsquashing buttontwirling
establishments
Where enormous to-do is masterfully devoted
Unto the creative manufacture
Of practically nothing.

A man among men among women
So splendidly destined for fathership
Among boys, and benevolently ruled
By his wifely motherly wife
Who knows, throws the balls
Of Dedicated family procedure
And has learned him where they lay, like
The eligible retriever
Returns the golden egg
And picks up his boy duties wherever they fall
While his masculinity balances his manmade boy
On her lithe, tan, dualpurposed knee, he
Is fine, kind, strictly U.S.A. with an ass

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twice the size of the stronger sex
And is vain for his five-o'clock shadow.

Where have men failed
That they become as obedient boys for
The mothers they married?
As the oldest son has been assreared
To fill a departed father's shoes
The little, little woman
Giving him free hand enough
For his night baseballgames or golf
Or the vicarious athletics?
But his daylight hours bought and sold
Over his greying head

As the mother had it out with teacher
What better, bolder fuller, odder life
Was there? She built the adequate lunch
And remembered the clock
And on tingling occasions flashed him a smile
Leftover from her child's momentary disinterest
And voluntarily held his hand.

Sometimes his boyhood ran away from his father
Self and these anguished nights
Were drummed away with guilty fingers
Engendered of sex squirmed for the maturity
He had exchanged for maternity
And the foot kicked out silently at a
Cheap old table
And a letter he wrote
Was crudely, crazily crumpled
And mailed to the wastebasket
And a thousand unmarried bosoms broke
For the misfortune some women bring
To the voluntarily emasculated male.

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Observe, then, the mothers
Their brown bodies bouncing in the surf
So surely sublimely non-ridiculous
In the consecrated consideration
Of provoking screams, laughs
From the neo-idiotic body in their lithe arms
Unaware of the hundreds of sandcrabs
And their sandcrab children
Pounded to nothingness beneath their firm feet
Or the milkgiving males whose destiny
Fell asleep on the one-way ticket
To social conformity.
Women who, if not you
Pulled the trigger which fired the dart
Which pierced the conscience of mere men
Fumbling and afraid
Not to catch the 7 : 15?

They have grown soft and tall and
Softer still in their spinal hearts
The men; must read Male Action Stories
And flail their failing muscles
Against the batted volleyballs
Of a demanding culture; must hope
That their glorious height can carry
The balls of male authority . . .

Forgiven their inadequate
Beachfailures among unmarried, ineligible Muscleboys
For, understandingly loved
By mothers who understandingly love boys
Marry them; have them; rule them
And spit official milk to quench the first
That smoulder and die
For the more durable males they hate.

ISSUE P. 110 · SCAN P. 48

WRITING IN PROCESS

James Boyer May

four one — seven three

Old man, old man — where is your horn? Whose blast of purposes is heard on hills of your last morning? The gorge of your passage has deepened . . . and dwelling on heights, staring at lowered skies, has not prepared for changeless decline into valleys.

And, fortitude? Well — what of that? Though young man's fortitude be bendable — and yours, you say, has toughened under wear (dried out and steadfast-weathered) — defiance may be opportunely scored, to sound full-deep this passage?

There was the sage who owned a telescope. Remember? He peered through his telescope for days and weeks and months and years. . . . But, this sage had a neighbor who listened to years and months and weeks and days and hours and minutes, even to split-off bits of bent mis-nomered seconds, of longingly time-bled soundtape. And all the while the sage peered through his telescope, he heard the playback from that ever-instant, bleeding tape. And his eyes watered . . . and what he viewed through the telescope lost focus. His thoughts got blurred and oozed backward to where the lost dimension of the present-past kept playing in his tethered ears. . . . Still — he did see other people staring too from there beside him, in such doubting, doubtful harmonies.

They had your horn . . . HAVE your horn . . . BLAST your fractured purposes on hills not gone by morning, evening, or by any other wrong conceit of hills. . . . And sky. The sky, of course, surrounds and whirls beneath you . . . and your fortitude is, was, and shall be splintered through infinity (which does such tricks with dried-out, unomniscient parts of living God). Way back where your ears mistook the sound of past, is present — blowing, blowing, never silent, blurredly

seen with never-whole of timeless knowing. Only age
gets
lost; not an old man's horn, to herald soundlessly the
GRAND ARRIVAL.

Enough is enough:
Aeternitas is nothing (ness, to terrestrials)
. . . thus, nothing is eternal (here) . . .
is not enough,
too little least . . .

too little least: enough too much.

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The god of this time in earth-history was the most conscientiously-preoccupied god of record. That is, of any record accessible to the beings developed here, and who saw fit to call themselves men. There would be countless other records — of uncountable degrees of inaccessibility — which these beings would be altogether unconditioned to read. So — in whatever human frame — one might observe that this god had put himself under extensive treatment with occupational therapy. Here, perhaps, could be evidence that GOD IS HOPEFULLY SICK — maybe to bolster the doctrine of necessary evil? Without evil, how could there be good? Without strife, how could there be peace?

This being's added meaning (falsely-now, outside the envelope of earth) must be enforced 'before' the happenings . . . by dreams of gates. Peter-simplified like the levered rock, in voiceless new (nothing IS eternity) vocabularies, oldest Sesame won't open. Now, the stone is cast beyond the farthest timedly-pool

of wordly pools . . . beyond a throated world.

Inner phases are not inner. Not from any views of meaning in the knower. Rather, they are outer. The farthest IN is OUTER: universal. While this did, in one sense, explain everything — in another sense, it was misleading. To hold

that universals lay within, one first assumed outside ‘existence.’ Unthinkable! A Universe had to be inclusive . . . and thoughts of it, redundant. Yet, leaving then this thought’s denial for the final proof? One definitude, defining . . . the sacrificial fullness, unfulfilled?

Why must men self-consciously set down their thoughts? Always self-consciously experiencing formed habit? Through habit, boredom? Every habit asking for disaster — AS A CURE? . . . Deep in him, the linkage, with sense of repetition many times before, there quickening — his god LESS HOPEFULLY WAS SICK. Less sick — and dangerous . . . in primitive denial.

Unbusied by diversion, he’d already moved — that thought moving him. He and God were back at first things now. With urge — to dance.

ISSUE P. 112 · SCAN P. 50

Holy — how unholy! No coupling dances, now, to evermore shall be . . . in the end as in beginning. . . . Torments of the platitudes: Seek ye death in life. Impatience of desire — torchlighted steps explode organic answers, burst the clocks of falsely-creeping finitude, and prove an aged deceit. . . .

To have won the wonderful by shares, is wonderless. Wonders cease with horseless wagers in a parimutuel. Which takers share alike, percentagewise to stakes? Such would then negate the prophecy. Not the winning, but the knowing that no time’s accountant can respect the Being. . . . With echoes adding time-dimensioned fear of repetition. . . .

Such are thoughts in man who does not know himself. Who is not One, but sees all men as bodies (unaware . . . encysted in their smaller egos). . . . Difference is unsameness, jointured, stating levies . . . taking final levies of return. The genes of never-duplicates, in bonds of blood (of which the types are four . . . affirming, perhaps, quaternity of

Fludd against the trinity of Kepler's heliocentric mathematics rendering obeisance to his faith). And Archetypes hold a fourth of time's addition, including purpose, all-directioned. No laws of chance evolve a universe, select-though-unselected, all-successive though each man can be blindly born insisting every cause does ordinate from places he can see. . . . He lately strives to stop — to shrink deduced induction through his senses — not yet guessing timelessness of blazing Fourth.

Numbers shape the flight of speech . . . and music's from the numbers:

FIRE SOUL

MAGIC

&

THE TRINITY.

Between: the two of conflict;

(five, the hand);

and six, for mid-contingency.

Eight brings wonder; nine, completion . . .

while the multiplier —

never there, and everywhere — is

the all-comprising, absent while of ZERO.

'SUBSTANCE' is subjective . . . makes all dreams of substance,

stuff, less-bared to plunder

than the bogus-blooded figments in 'reality.'