

A LITERARY MAGAZINE OF CALIFORNIA

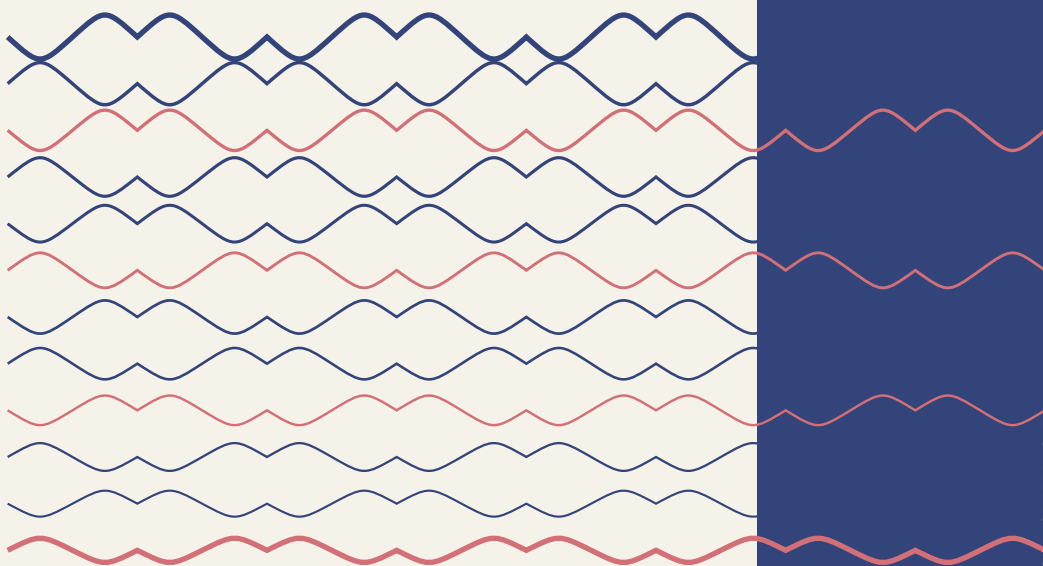
COAST LINES

December 1955

VOLUME I / NUMBER THREE

3

ISSUE



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COASTLINES / DECEMBER 1955

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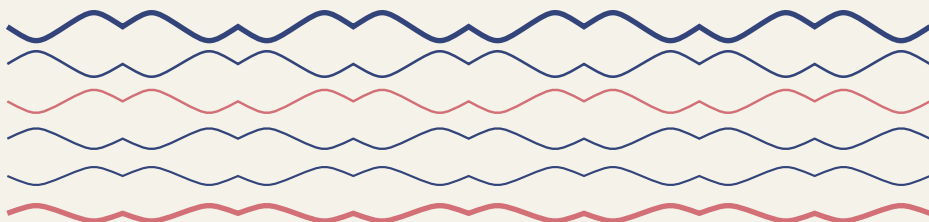
ISSUE 3

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RIGHT FIELDER

By George Abbe

Crouched at the base of glory, glove
enough to snare a jet from hell,
I have the hardest arm, I throw
low and faster than any right fielder.

Meet her solid, brother, drive
a liner here; I love her, take her
straight as whiskey. The writers say
I rate the Hall of Fame. But later.

I brace the right foot, crouch. The batter,
hitter to right, .300 pull-hitter,
thumbs a ride in my direction,
comes to meet my running head-start.

And now it comes: it's always like music:
the crowd sound fades; the clashing hurry,
cymbal-loud, from green grass tilting,
nimble foreshortening of ball
flicked at my face like flute's water;
click in my glove is leader's baton;
all in one motion, take, run, throw,
stroke of a big drum, trumpet's peal
in feel of shoulder shock.

The rock and shudder of violins
swings in the ball speed, stringing it taut,
hot to the home plate, one bounce only,
like bow that bends the string at middle,

stroking once; and glove-thrust catcher
snatches the ball a step in time.
Chime again, big crowd! Sound, mighty horn
that pours the crater horizon down
in sound as big as All-Star game.
Fame, eh? The third out anyway.
Play, orchestra of men and speed.
The green soft grass slides underfoot,
and I trot in easily, tipping my cap.
That was my music. The run was cut off.

ISSUE P. 3

DOCUMENTARY

By Mario Casetta

In this courtyard I set my camera
And fixed a film
Above the tripod, sensitized
With the coating of my brain,
The optics of my eye fine ground,
And recorded the image of pain
Behind each vacant space of window,
Raw-edged, casement cracked and stained.

With the instrument of the ear
I put on wire, tape and disc
The acoustics of hungry children.

From the depth of focus
And from the field of vision
I knew crystal clear they lied
Who said it must be so.

And, superimposed, saw the outlines
Of happy, happy dwellings in the darkroom
On the photographic plate,
Beneath the lamp of glowing red.

I heard, too, children's laughter
In the playback.

ISSUE PP. 4-9

CIRCUS ON THE HILL

By Rita Mosher

“Jesus Christ!” he cried, “talk to me, somebody talk to me,” and he walked up and down the hill, oblivious of his torn clothes and a ragged cut on his cheek.

“Oh God,” he moaned, “what happened?” as he skirted the crowd of policemen and ambulances and the sheet-covered bodies that grew like some incredible fungus to the cement hill.

“Here, you, I’ve got to talk to you,” he clutched at a young girl whose stunned eyes drifted vacantly, wispily over his torn face.

“Stick around, Mac, you gotta tell us what happened,” one of the policemen put a hand on his shoulder.

“Yeah, let me, just let me for Christ’s sweet sake.”

“Sit here till I come back, and calm down, there’s no time for hysterics,” and his voice was absorbed into the hill.

He wasn’t hysterical, he knew what had happened, it wasn’t his idea, none of this had been his idea.

Through the stunned hush of the crowd he saw the girl as she walked incredulously around the debris.

“Miss, Miss,” he ran to her, “were any of these,” he pointed to the sheets, “were any of them yours?”

“No no, I was looking out my window, I was right there, right in that window,” she pointed vaguely, “it’s a studio” she insisted, “I’m learning to be an artist,” she giggled in a high choked voice, “a circus scene, all in pink and orange, and I was looking out my window, there, that window, see it’s right up there, only the pony’s tail wasn’t right, I couldn’t get the pony’s tail, so I was looking out on the hill——” she glanced beyond him as her face tried to encompass the ritual of violence around them.

“Please listen, you’ve got to listen, he was a usual kind of guy, you know, just like any other truck driver. I was new on the run, he was breaking me in. We come from Denver and his name was Gus, you know Gus, just like any other guy. I wanted to learn about the truck, Christ I asked him where it was, but he said ‘naw, just learn the route, you’ll find the rest out yourself,’ hey Miss, don’t go away, you can’t walk out on this——”

“I have to finish my painting,” her hand pointed as her eyes focused abstractly on the bright blood of his face.

“You know, he was a joker, all the way he kept talking about some great snatch he was going to have when he got to Frisco, and Christ, he knew the road so he just drove and talked. ‘Jim,’ he said to me, ‘you’re a little green yet, but wait till we get to Frisco, that’s where all them gorgeous California babes hide out,’ and I laughed with him and only hoped he wasn’t like everyone else, all talk, and maybe when we’d get to Frisco there’d really be some. Miss listen to me!” he screamed and grabbed her arm, snapping her body so that her eyes focused, finally, on him.

“So we’re driving along, bumping on them bad mountain roads —— he wasn’t a big guy, probably only around five eight or ten, and getting on in years, but he was wiry and I thought maybe he really did know a couple a hot ones and he’d ace me in. Joking, he joked all the time. Teasing me, saying things like when I grew a few pubic hairs I’d be ready for the big leagues. Christ though, he was such a homely son of a bitch I began to think he was just talking——”

“Just talking?” she repeated the words to herself.

“Yeah, just shooting off his mouth,” and releasing her arm he buried his head, rubbing his hand through his blood sticky hair.

“But people don’t just talk,” she pleaded.

“You know how it is with guys like him. More often ‘n not they got a dumpy wife and fifteen hollerin’ kids, and they just dream out loud, only I didn’t know about him ‘cause he didn’t seem that

kind, even though he talked a hell of a lot — but he was nothing unusual. Gus was his name, Gus, just like any guy could be named Gus, any of these,” and he pointed to the sheets that were being lifted heavily into the line of waiting ambulances.

“The ambulances,” she said, “a circus, a carnival of death, only I didn’t start that way. It was pretty, a pretty circus scene, in pink and whites and oranges, with merry-go-rounds and ferris wheels.”

He looked at her uncertainly. “A circus? Oh no lady, listen to me, see we’d just barely started and I asked him would he tell me where things were, a guy likes to know, just in case,” he shuddered, “but he was always joking, clowning around, ‘naw,’ he said, ‘plenty of time for that, just listen to old Gus you green-eared twerp, you’ll learn,’ and I sort of laughed to myself ‘cause I’ve been around some too, and I thought to myself finally, full of bull shit, probably go home to some lamb stew with his fat wife and I’ll never see him again, ‘cause I didn’t think he could teach me anything, see? I thought he was just another guy named Gus, with pin-ups in his wallet, driving the road, glad enough to have my green ears, as he put it, for his spiel.

“And the road was dark coming over the mountains, and not many cars except some broad that drove behind us with her brights on for five miles and was chicken to pass when we signalled. Aside from that it was a good trip, coming through all them mountains the truck was just fine——”

“Who are you,” she asked intently, “your face is cut and bloody, what happened?” and her gesture encircled the quiet compressed fury around them.

“I’m telling you, can’t you listen to me, no one’ll listen to me,” he moaned, and his sobs squeezed through the hands he held tightly over his face.

“Oh please, please don’t cry, I’m listening now, please, I’m listening, tell me——”

He glanced up and down the street, starting at the bottom of the hill with the toy fire engine that played a futile stream on the last small flames, working his way up to the ambulance and the surrounding crowd that muttered and stared in a tight fraternity of the living.

“We’re driving along the road and he keeps yakking, and I was sleepy. It was a long pull and them roads are bumpy and he’s just yakking away. He forgets about the snatch, and calling me green ears and hairless, and starts yakking with his little screwed up face, and he spits a lot when he talks ‘cause he’s chewing gum, chewing as fast as he talks, starts telling me about life. Like I didn’t even want to listen. All these guys, they’re all the same, full of philosophies and crap, just waiting for someone to listen to them, probably sounded off to the truck when no one else was around.”

“Tell me what he talked about.”

“Oh God I wouldn’t even listen after he quit talking about when we’d get to Frisco and everything. I don’t know, something about how it felt to know you were a failure, how everyone starts out full of energy and ends up a failure because that’s all there is to do——”

“He said that? Everyone ends up a failure? No,” she whispered, “that’s not right, it can’t be right——”

“Only then he said you aren’t a failure if you can know you are and keep going anyway; if you know what’s happened to you and what’s going to happen and you keep going anyway. But I didn’t even listen, I didn’t care for his talk about failures and things. You know, I’m young, I’ve been around, but I never thought about it, about being a failure. Driving over them mountains like that it was the last thing in my mind——”

“What did he say then?” she asked quickly. “Tell me what else he said.”

“Then he starts giving me the story of his life, how he was a kid, and then when he was my age, but his name was Gus. It was

anyone's story, the same old shit, I thought, and I hadn't even listened to him."

"When he was our age?" she asked.

He looked hard at her. "Our age? He wanted to be a policeman when he was a kid, then a cowboy, the usual stuff, then he wanted to be a singer, a famous singer, and he took lessons and drove a cab to pay for them and then he started driving a truck — he said it makes you old, yeah I remember, he told me to quit before it made me old, and then he said he was old and a failure but he knew it was the way it had to be, see — so he wasn't really a failure, you understand? He knew he was but because he knew it and went ahead anyway he was bigger than any failure — he wasn't joking then but I laughed 'cause it didn't make much sense to me then, even if I'd listened I'd a known he wasn't like everyone else, but driving over them mountains he was just another Gus speling off——"

"Gus," she said, "yes I know, I know how you felt, believe me I know."

"So I dozed for awhile and he shut up and the moon winked at me like it knew a secret and I fell asleep feeling strong against any secrets the moon had, and when I woke up he'd quit talking about life and things and started talking about all the women he knew in Frisco, laughing and winking again 'cause we were getting closer. D 'you ever ride in a truck?"

"Me? Oh no, I never did."

He scrutinized her anxious young flushed face. "I guess you never did. Well it's different than it looks from the outside; it's worse but not as bad, you understand? Pretty soon we come down over a hill and there was Frisco and we could see the water and the whiteness of the city 'cause it was daylight and the trip was almost over. He had a funny look on his face so I asked him was anything wrong. He looked at me almost like a father or someone and said no, it's alright because we were already there and he'd

have them check it in the city, so I leaned back because there didn't seem anything wrong and I thought for all his big talk he was just a worry wart anyway."

"Was it the brakes?" she asked, and now with the cold afternoon wind blowing her hair wildly, her eyes devoured each detail of his face as they watched his lips form the story while the blood began to dry on his cheek.

"We pulled into the city, right into the heart of the traffic, that's when driving a heavy semi is the biggest hassel. We pulled up a hill and I smelled something so I said, 'Gus, I smell something,' and he says, 'yeah, I know kid,' and he looked like he was gonna say something else but he smiled instead and he says, 'good thing we're here,' 'cause we almost were, so we're pulling up this big hill, heading away from Market Street to North Beach, and we make it over the top and then start down, and he's working the brakes all the way down 'cause they aren't going right, but I figured just a little more and we'd be there, and see, he would a pulled over then but the brakes wouldn't a held a heavy truck like this on one of them hills," he gestured, "so there wasn't anything to do but keep going. We pull up hard over the next hill which is even higher and we get to the top and he starts working the brake only it didn't hold, I could feel it give, it didn't hold. Right there at the top it started giving and I looked at him to see what he's gonna do, but he's working so hard he don't notice me and we start going pretty fast so I yelled, 'Gus, Christ, slow it down,' and he says, 'I'm trying, I'm trying,' but he knew, up there near the top he knew, and we start going faster down the hill and faster and he's steering all the time, not even messing with the brakes, just steering and honking his horn, trying to miss the cars, and he yells, 'grab the emergency,' but I didn't know where it was, and he's working so hard he can't reach it and he yells directions at me but I can't find it and I'm down there looking for it. Sweet mother I was looking for it because by now we're going so fast I can't hardly stay in my

seat and he's setting there sweating with that wheel, yelling, 'the emergency! Grab the emergency!' and I cried, 'I can't, let's jump, we gotta get outa here,' and he yells, 'you crazy?! I can't jump, find the brake,' and I can't find it, and then he looked real quick, 'get out kid, he screams, —— get out!'

"And I rolled and rolled, over and over on the cement hill, and while I was rolling I heard all the screams and crashing of hell, and I stood up and looked just in time to see the red crash and explosion. Oh Jesus, like the whole world was blowing up ——"

When, finally and tiredly the policeman sought him out, he found them there on the curb, their arms fast, and gently he pried him loose to leave the girl clutching air on the side of the hill.

ISSUE P. 10

POEM

By Kenneth Rexroth

..... lives in the woods,
Where she languidly enjoys
A dim witted lover, Nature,
Endemtriosis,
Exophthalmia, marasmus,
Too much money. She has moments
She Does Things With Her Hands, Lovely
Things, with an exquisite sense of
Chic. I saw her last at cocktails
In her town studio in
1937. Everybody
Was there, e.g., all the leading
Fairies and/or WPA
Officials. The smell of tweeds,
Blue Boar, and carbon paper
Was overpowering. The din
Of Phi Beta Kappa keys
Was deafening. There were an
Indeterminate number
Of spaniels pissing on their
Masters' Scotch brogans, and on
Other people's shoes. They were
Drinking the boys on the Ebro
Out of the trenches by Christmas.
A novelist who had been
In Spain spoke. Recently I hear
She has been entertaining

The leading male whore of Paris,
France, that pimp with the face of a
Poisoned Irish setter, who has
Been had by all the sexes of
Six continents. They say he has
Converted her to Anarchism,
A fascinating new theory
Which is sweeping England, and
Is the rage with all the really
Rafinée modistes and parfumistes.
Isn't that exciting?
KEEP OFF MY BANDWAGON YOU SOW!

ISSUE P. 11

THE MEETING OF MOUSE AND MIND

By A. Wilber Stevens

I drew friend mouse from his strange cloister
Mousie's time was a hard time
Rancid and vile and full of mankind
His days a sketchy bore
His nights milked with oiled doilies.

We compared the current droppings
Both marketable and discarded
Trade being what God had sanctioned
Man hadn't played the full inning
Meetings were stalemated with sad agreement.

On a wretched Tuesday we sunned ourselves
Talked about the neighborhood squirrel
Being pecked by the militant robin
And unassuaged by the clumsy cans above and about
We hid ourselves and waited for new testimony to
assure us.

It came packed in signals
Like rags and furtive rind
Truly prompt we beckoned with differing cheeses
But it turned toward an indifferent wind
And unentwined our tentative tails.

And thus we lost again.

ISSUE PP. 12–17

MALIBU COVE

By William Norton

“Are you sure Kate Smith comes out here to go swimming?”

The two boys were lying behind a billboard sign on a cliff overlooking a lonely cove of Malibu Beach. The dark haired youth, Sam, brought the borrowed field glasses down from his eyes and handed them to his friend Beezer.

“The guy told me she did and he wouldn’t have no reason to lie.”

“Except habit, maybe,” said Sam. He rolled over and picked clinging bits of foxtail grass off the arm of the faded blue athletic sweater he wore. There were two stripes on the sleeve for football and actually the sweater wasn’t his; it had been his older brother’s before he went to Korea and never came back.

“There’s plenty of guys make a habit out of lying just for practice. He could have told us she went swimming here just for the ducks of it.”

Beezer shook his head, the glasses still at his eyes searching the cove with its beach cottage. “NOBODY would lie about a thing like that. Who would ever believe old Kate Smith swum here nude if it was a lie?”

“Well, WE did. We have been out here two hours and spent another hour to get here on our bikes and we still ain’t seen a sign of old Kate Smith swimming in the raw.”

“In the nude,” Beezer corrected.

“What is the difference. Anyhow, why should she go swimming here every day in the raw OR the nude?”

Beezer was patient. “Like the guy told me, just because she happens to do it and this is a lonely beach and it can’t be seen

from the road. He heard about it from a guy who SEEN.”

Sam was silent for a moment watching a fishing trawler bucking along about a mile off shore. The sunlight was strong overhead and the sea sparkled.

“What if she don’t ever show up?”

Beezer brought the field glasses down with irritation. “She’ll show up all right if you’ll ever quit yapping so much. It’s worth waiting for, ain’t it?” he demanded.

Sam sighed and stretched his fifteen year old frame. “Well, I guess so, but I sure don’t like waiting. Couldn’t she hurry?”

“Hurry? I suppose we should send her a telegram to snap it up a little because we don’t want to wait? You’ll have enough hurry in a couple of years when the army gets you. You’ll wish you WASN’T in so much hurry.”

Sam closed his eyes reflectively and scratched himself slowly. “Oh, I don’t know if they will get me or not.” He drawled it with just enough of an air to make out that he might know something special.

“They’ll get you all right. They don’t miss. I can tell you that, for sure. They got your name down already, just waiting.”

“A guy could lie about his age or claim he was a girl,” Sam speculated.

“OH yes. You could just keep on saying you was about seventeen years old until you had gray hair and was forty. I guess that would fool ‘em all right. And you could tell ‘em you was a girl and when they got to examining, they wouldn’t notice anything. Oh NO, not a thing. No more than they notice what’s on that baboon with the red fanny they got over at Griffith Park.”

Sam rolled over and took the glasses from Beezer. “Anyhow, I think I’ll go in secret service or something with more action to it.”

“OH! I got a big fat picture of that.”

“Well, anyhow I think they ought to get horses and cavalry back. I might as well tell ‘em that. I got it all figured out.” He put

the glasses down, excited by the idea. "They couldn't get you for REFUSING to fight because you wouldn't be."

"What do you mean?" asked Beezer, puzzled.

"I'll just tell 'em I want to do all my army fighting on horseback like in the old days and I won't have it no other way. Simple. What can they do? Either start up a cavalry or turn me loose."

"You're a fat head."

The two were silent then, Beezer taking the glasses back to scan the cove and Sam listening with his eyes closed to the cars passing on the highway across the field behind them. He tried to imagine what kind of a car it was by the sound and tested himself several times by looking, after first deciding it was a Ford or something. The older cars were slow and trucks made more noise. Outside of that it was hard to tell anything. It was drowsy in the warm sun and he almost fell asleep.

Beezer watched sea gulls on the rocks for a while and then in turn grew impatient. "I wish that crazy dame would hurry up for her swimming," he muttered.

Sam sat up suddenly. "Now YOU'RE in a rush. Can't you wait a minute?"

"I'm not in a hurry about waiting," Beezer defended. "I'm just anxious to SEE."

"Well, hurrying is bad." Sam nodded his head sadly. "You can get in a lot of trouble trying to hurry." He stretched out again. "You have to play it cool, like me. No hurry. Cool!"

"When she comes, I'll take a long cool look with the glasses, just long and cool. Then we'll see how cool you are."

"It don't pay to hurry. I had an uncle that almost got a rupture from hurrying all the time."

When Beezer didn't reply he elaborated on it. "The pain come on him all of a sudden one day when he had been hurrying himself at work. The pains hit him real sharp all of a sudden. Right here." Sam indicated the spot on himself.

Without taking the glasses from his eyes, Beezer asked, "Was he lifting something heavy?"

"No, but the pain hit him so sharp he doubled right over and couldn't stand up. He knew right then he never should have hurried around so much."

Beezer took the glasses down. "Was it bad? I mean, could he get himself operated on for it?"

"Bad?" Sam repeated. "What do you mean bad?" "I mean was it a bad rupture, a hernia?"

Sam waited a minute, studying Beezer closely before he answered. "Naw, it wasn't a rupture. It was a safety pin he had holdin' up his jock strap that come loose and stuck him."

Beezer laughed in spite of himself, even though he was the victim of the trap. Sam rolled over laughing and slapped the ground.

"Oh, if you could've SEEN the look on your face, worrying about my ruptured uncle! Oh, you was sympathetic!"

Sam was still laughing when Beezer jerked around and brought the glasses to his eyes. His voice was low. "Hey quiet! Here she comes!"

Sam's laugh ended abruptly and he sat upright. "Where?" He tried to grab the glasses but Beezer slapped his hand away. "Is she nude already?"

"Keep quiet, can't you? You want everybody to HEAR?"

"Hey, I see her, walking down from the house." He paused a minute and then said accusingly, "And she ain't nude!"

"Can't you WAIT a minute," Beezer demanded. "Everything can't happen at ONCE."

Sam rapped him sharply in the stomach and when Beezer's hands came down he wrested the glasses away.

"You didn't have to do that," Beezer complained. "I was going to give you a turn in just a minute."

Sam already had the glasses at his eyes. "I wouldn't have troubled you but I knew your eyes was getting sore from the strain."

With the glasses he watched the figure of the woman descending leisurely from the beach house and advancing across the narrow strip of beach. It was a woman, all right, possibly 20 years younger than Kate Smith and wearing a white beach robe. He screwed the adjusting knob on the glasses and brought them into clear focus. His voice was puzzled.

"She sure looks YOUNG for Kate Smith."

"Don't complain about that, just give me a turn."

"Aw wait a minute." Sam's hand pushed Beezer away. "She's putting the basket down now and walking around. OH! She's taking off the robe!" Sam's voice almost strangled with excitement and then rose to a high pitch of wounded indignation.

"She's got a BATHING suit on!"

Beezer's voice was shocked as he grabbed the glasses from the unresisting Sam. "She AIN'T! She CAN'T be!"

After a minute of silence he put the glasses down and turned away. Even without the glasses it was easy enough to see the unknown woman splash into the surf, run around for a few minutes and then stretch out on the beach robe to sun herself . . . all the while covered with a trim blue bathing suit.

"We was gypped!" Sam moaned. "She ain't no more nude than anything and she AIN'T Kate Smith."

He turned accusingly to Beezer. "How you ever fell for a dumb story like that is a wonder. And all the way over here on our bikes!"

"Oh yes, make it out all MY fault. You wasn't fooled. No, not a bit. You didn't want to come, I DRUG you here."

Beezer wearily got to his feet and hung the field glasses around his neck by the strap. He didn't even bother to take a last look at the woman on the beach.

The boys trudged across the field, too disgusted even to argue any more. At the edge of the field they crawled through the sagging double-strand barbed wire and picked up their bicycles. Without a word they turned the bikes to head south on the coast highway toward home. As they started, a convoy of Army trucks swept down on them and past in a swirl of sound headed for Palos Verdes on the far side of the bay area and then around Portugese Bend to Point Fermin and San Pedro. The faces of the soldiers in the back of the trucks turned to look at them curiously in the instant of passing and in the last truck one man waved.

Beezer waved back excitedly. "Hey! I bet them guys are going to Ft. MacArthur. Look at 'em roll!" He turned to Sam who stood silent beside him.

"Wanna bet that's where they're going? Ft. MacArthur?"

Sam was watching after the disappearing trucks but he didn't answer. Beezer was excited by the sudden rush of the trucks passing so near to them. He punched Sam lightly on the arm.

"Hey! That's where your brother went, wasn't it?"

Sam mounted his bike without answering and had started down the road as Beezer called after him.

"Wasn't that where he went, Sam? Wasn't it Ft. MacArthur?"

ISSUE P. 18

CONCERTO OF THE BIRDS

By Peter Yates

Sunlight splits the tan husks
of the magnolia blossoms
My clerestory warms the ceiling
and I lie listening to a concerto of the birds

One took it up, a mocker
with a dialectic of trills
quicker than the flute, cleverer
than the clarinet

Teases up the impromptu, perfunctory
and another responds to him
there is no theme
an ancestral fertility of embellishment

And now between this cheerfulness and the silence
all the small metallic
instrumentally varied choristers increase
mosaic an inhuman concord

And through the orchestra striking a strict beat
the most brassy soloist
an articulate recurring twang
imposes order and reason within license

How could they have been conducted
to this vitality of accident
between five-fifteen and five-thirty of an April morning
while I lay wakening in despondence

So hands pass and part
the time-striker falls away
the orchestra declines to chirrup
and the two soloists reply each at a farther distance

ISSUE PP. 19–20

LITANY

By Peter Yates

Excuses, oh good Lord, excuses!
These are enough to sicken any man that eats bread.
Live in the head and wear well all abuses.
Let me know and forgive.
Known and forgiven, the good sense of what
Is pride should sicken in a man that wins bread.
He says he is moderate and should be forgiven
The excess he has not. It runs in the head
That he should be and so will be forgiven.
Excuses, oh good Lord, excuses!
Hell is outside, and what is here is heaven
In a good man, I think, or so the good man said.
It is enough to sicken any man that earns bread,
Living in wealth and wearing all abuses,
Clothed in nonsense and well fed,
Ludicrous in the esteem of love and
Unctuously dead. A feather to the conscience.
Lord, excuses, oh good Lord, excuses!
Tweeds in the pulpit and well served bonne chance
Over a pew growing weeds in hats.
Blessing's a choice salad. There are hates
Discriminating; these are in good taste.
Oh Lord, excuses! Calling animates
The soul with its improvements.
Lord, I blush at these,
When I try to tell myself that every good
Is in not being these. You will freeze

Me in your hell of the rejection.
Slips I have made, powers I have not
Used, as I am an act of God and deserve,
Good Lord, excuses! Would honor any diplomat.
Oh, it is all confused and . . . Oh good Lord, excuses!

ISSUE P. 20

ESCAPE

By Thomas McGrath

Hunting in the dark my father found me,
My mother claimed me, and led me into light
From my nine-month winter. In the herds of Right,
Branded and bawling, the christeners bound me.
God given, church shriven, hell washed away,
Adam purged, heaven urged, the dog would have his day.

Hell all about me with its infantry
Storming the fortress of my crying years
Could not get my notice. They had stopped my ears
With chrism of love in my infancy.
World poor, world pure, I kept my head level,
Unproud, but uncowed, shaming the devil.

And thus betrayed I fell into a world
Where love lives only in another name.
At eleven or twelve, when the kidnappers came,
I took the poisoned candy and off we whirled.
Innocence, nonsense, the seven priestly lies
Surrounded me, when, hands bound, I opened my eyes

Onto the bloody barnyard of my youth
Where the stuck pig wetly squealed against the wall,
And fell on the stone crop. False, rich, tall,
The elders judged me. The stone edge of truth,
Flint-sharp, heartless, stabbed my begging knee—
Harmed me but armed me: I cut my hands free.

ISSUE PP. 21-22

THE EXILES

By Don Gordon

Every man is enclosed as in a cage
Of vertical and the lateral bones,
Bound speechless in the soundproof tissue,
Wound with a white mile of nerves.
Nonetheless he taps on the wall,
Is answered on the great occasions:
Someone goes free, or the warden dies,
Or an execution in the yard.

He lives in his exile by the clock
Of communiques from the others:
The flash of intelligence
Breaking the silence of the bars,
The common word of alarm
Crossing the semantic border,
The music of the human voice
Penetrating the ego's even scream.

The total exile walks the streets
Of nonexistence: he is the man
Unable to swim downstream;
He wants a church without a spire
Or a spire without a church;
He sees us die of sleep
In all conforming tides
Endorsed by the joyful police.

The cage ironic within a cage
We keep for one who still dissents
In the strangling water hands
As we begin to drown.
We may never emerge
From the bone, or hear
Through the tissue clearly,
Or unwind the mile of nerves:
Yet the first shadow of peace
May be cast on the ground,
Or reconciliation, or remorse,
When the last exile has come home.

ISSUE P. 22

RAIN

By Helen Nonam

and the clear plastic hose
dreams on the pavement.
Splash fifty and splash fifty-thousand
disturb the smooth curve.
Subtle plantings faint with roses
lost and single in the wide arrangement
whisper of pink
and wet is held as perpetual mist
shaking the sky.

When will summer eat the rain
bare one leaf, distinguish dirt?
I want a hot flare of zinnias and blackberry beds.

ISSUE PP. 23–24

THREE POEMS

By Bert Meyers

SONNET TO R

We smile, and sit down far apart;
we, who once had a single heart.
And you, married now, look at me
as if looking were adultery—
fearing this new love's only true
if all that other love is through.
Memory might dull the polished plans
Of matrimony's pots and pans.
But dear, what could one give, or be;
except a piece of property
with such a love? Now, if instead,
you can bring to your board and bed
all of the love that's filled your life,
couldn't you love me, and be his wife?

MARY, MARY

Mary, Mary, quite contrary,
how does your loving grow?
I spread my legs, they come.
When I show my heart they go.

Mary, Mary, quite contrary,
what have you done?
Cut my hair and swaggered round
to be my father's son.

Mary, Mary, quite contrary,
why do you go to school?
There's a worm inside my blood
that hates a pretty fool.

Mary, Mary, quite contrary,
when will you wed?
When a cold wind blows between my thighs
and the earth takes me to bed.

SHE SPOKE OF LOVE

So, she spoke of love
as if no man gave
more than a senseless shove.
And, although it's true
men often turn aside
when their urgent, stiff
desire's been satisfied—
leaving the woman then
they also feel unfed
on that desolate
and unfriendly bed,
who secretly despise
what teaches them to swagger
and strive upon the thighs.
And yet, the world has men
as rare and passionate
as all their blinding words—
who, after that wild ride
inside the sensual cloud,
will sing like sombre birds.

ISSUE PP. 25-35

SCIENCE-FICTION

*from escape to freedom**By Mel Weisburd*

During the pre-war years, science-fiction was either ignored or dismissed as, at best, one of the more esoteric forms of pulp escape. Certainly, at that time, science-fiction was but an indistinguishable trickle in a flood of pulp. The writing in general, although made superficially distinctive by the label "science-fiction," was for the most part horse opera or monotonous fantasy speciously clothed with the jargon of science. This was not a literature which could be seriously read without childishly escaping from the social and political problems of the time. The willing suspension of belief for most of serious contemporary literature could operate only in the more convincing illusion of naturalism.

The mutation of science itself during the emergencies of the Second World War, however, quickly began to give the amateur prophet an accidental validity. Actually, the mysteries of contemporary science were no more credible than those of science-fiction. The theoretical assumptions underlying atomic power, when examined in the light of common sense, seemed in themselves a product of fancy. As versions of the V-2 rocket and the WAC Corporal probed higher into the thin regions of the atmosphere, and as jet propulsion developed, science-fiction became a prophetic reality to the popular imagination. Thus, a whole host of spectacular accomplishments concerning space travel began to offer even more combinations of fact and fantasy. Science-fiction, indeed, could become more systematized

than ever before.

Not only could further technical developments be authentically predicted, even down to the finest technical detail involving a flight to the moon, but the sociological and psychological characteristics of the atomic age could be visualized as well. A series of social and psychological stories and novels were consequently written which, when anthologized, sometimes appeared to be a kind of premature chronicle of the future. Mutations and extra brains, telepathy and extra-sensory perception, hypnosis and doublethink, space travel and galactic wars, voluminously amplified what was originally a handful of overworked formulae. Even children with preternatural powers were drawn from the current interest in infantile aggression.

“The coming of age of science-fiction,” as the dust jackets have it, has not been due to any hoaxes, or panaceas, or even to the pure desire for escape. Its commercial success—and it has been eminently successful—must be seen in terms of the shift in cultural emphasis in our time. For one thing, the post-war boom in purchasing power created a more technically minded people. The property and automobile owner were now part of a technological culture, and many who were even superficially conscious of the evolution of current manufactured wonders, could not but help to be curious about the outcome of life on this planet. Much science-fiction, as a result, was concerned with the solution of some engineering problem, or technical error, by which the earthmen, the race or the nation might be saved in time of distress. Many of these stories were ingenious to readers discovering for themselves a new kind of heroic inventiveness in a machine age.

The real success of science-fiction, however, does not lie within its popularization, or the shift in cultural emphasis for that matter. Readers and writers have with time become used to or disillusioned with their gadgets. The change that has taken place

in science-fiction sprang from the insight that followed a traumatic social discovery: that the human race could destroy itself through its own drive for technological perfection and that, at the same time, the earth is but a dot in a universe of hostile possibilities. Consequently, science-fiction, while happily tinkering with the toys of the age, could only become a joke in the face of the possibilities of mass genocide and could not be taken seriously until it attempted to define by analogy or allegory the life of our times. It also came about that while a new era in thought control was approaching, writers who could not freely express their social and political ideas elsewhere were drawn to this promising medium to deal with the problems of our time. The vision of the post-war science-fiction writer with literary pretensions was now to become characterized more by the poetry of the mystic envisioning profound social changes, and less by the “hot rod” genius of a class of technocrats.

This arousal of social consciousness actually led to the spontaneous recreation of a whole group of American literary traditions—Thoreau’s individualism, Poe’s tales of ratiocination, the weird, the beautiful, the single effect, and Whitman’s social creativity. Writers like Bradbury, for instance, have fertilized this originally immature medium with new values of taste, philosophy and reason, grounding their vision of the future with a pungent immediacy. It is refreshing, indeed, to see a writer like Bradbury discovering man as if for the first time. And regardless of what we may think of his thick nostalgia, his sentimentality, he is looking at man from a fresh point of view. We have had all too much of comparing man with the past in which our picture of him becomes clouded with a complexity of neo-movements.

This development of seriousness in science-fiction has its sources in literature, and the contemporary movement probably begins with *Brave New World*. Nevertheless, it is important to make certain distinctions here. Writers like Huxley, Orwell, W. H.

Mallock, G. K. Chesterton, and Charles Williams are not science-fiction writers, and their works of fantasy are not determined by science-fiction standards (1). The use of science-fiction devices in their work are determined by artistic selection, of finding for a particular work an appropriate vehicle to express certain ideas. The prophetic situation in 1984, for instance, involves issues with which Orwell was deeply concerned and to which he adds the experience of a comparatively mature life. “Newspeak,” “Proles,” “Big Brother,” “Hateweek,” “Doublethink” etc. are obviously derived from his political experiences beginning with the Spanish Civil War (Homage To Catalonia). Huxley is sometimes called a “pseudo-novelist” who writes tracts—usually against materialism. These writers, then, are working in a much broader literature and are linked more directly with Bellamy, Voltaire, Anatole France, Swift, than with what might be called the “grass roots” phenomenon of American science-fiction.

American science-fiction, however, stems directly from a medley of pulp media. In this regard the influences of the popular adventure, western and detective stories are apparent. Some of the anthologies of science-fiction, such as those by Everett F. Bleiler and T. E. Dikty, present a variety of types of stories which at times have less in common with science-fiction than with their adventure, detective, or western prototypes. Although the use of love, adventure, the horror of war, and ambition reveal high levels of irony and paradox, the predominant themes appear in the variations of man against nature, the Crusoe stories of the only survivors, the individual fighting the hordes of mutated ants or rats, or alien, sometimes cannibalistic creatures pilfering the

(1) Although other reviewers divide the literature between the science-fictional, the utopic, and the fantastic, I am not following these distinctions closely here since all “science-fiction” is fantasy, the validity of the science being a relative matter. In estimating the significance of science-fiction, the influences, and not the classifications, are important.

oxygen or carbon dioxide from our atmosphere.

The influence of the detective-mystery story is inescapable at least in the science-fiction novels which must rely not only on suspenseful, episodic structures, but on the skillful use of induction and deduction. A typical theme in these stories is the search for the hero's identity against a background of international or intergalactic intrigue. Sometimes the hero has been knocked into a different or similar universe as in Frederic Brown's *What Mad Universe*, or sometimes he is an amnesic as in A. E. Van Vogt's *World of Null-A*. This search for identity in an unknown world may be compared with Graham Greene's *Ministry of Fear*, for instance.

While drawing upon these sources science-fiction, in turn, added a few rules to its own craft. Science-fiction, for instance, is not concerned with character or emotion, nor is it concerned with a hero in the sense that its heroic characteristics can be identified or sympathized with. Basically, science-fiction is concerned with plot and science, and the hero is but a choice representative of a certain logical system based on the premise of the need to survive. If he has feelings it is because they are logically allowed for. The tragic flaw or any other kind of predetermining neuroses would obscure the plot.

It was inevitable, however, that in a period of experiment this rule would be broken, especially when the science of the plot became psychology. In these stories the simple instinct for survival found in the more "pure" science-fiction stories may be complicated by drives for sex and power in the individual. These stories are always in danger of being neither fish nor fowl, for the attempt to more completely (and more lyrically) describe human behavior may become so real, that the fantasy or science element makes but a superfluous metallic noise. Bradbury, however, has effectively resolved this conflict by using science as a *deus ex machina*, as an irresistible state of affairs, and by dramatizing a

few selected human reactions to the mechanical world. It is this singleness of effect that has lead critics to compare him with Poe. The de-emphasis of the demagoguery of science, transformed science-fiction into myth, from adventure-escape to intellectual freedom.

An interesting attempt at combining science-fiction with human sympathy, may be found in the short story *Bettyann* by Kris Neville. Neville relates the history of the childhood and adolescence of an adopted girl whose parents were killed in an automobile accident. Because of a feeling of vagueness about her origin, and a stunted arm apparently resulting from the automobile accident, the girl feels a definite difference between herself and other children—a difference which might readily be interpreted in terms of feelings of rejection. Although given to daydreaming and a restless search for knowledge, the girl adapts herself completely to the circumstances of her life and to the love of her foster parents. Her perceptions are lyrical and penetrating—much that of a gifted child. The story so far makes absolutely no break with reality and with the sentiment found in many similar non-science-fiction stories.

However, while in college, she is contacted by some strangers, who, it is felt, have some relationship to her real parents. From them she discovers that she is not really human, that she came originally from another star system, that she can change into any form she desires, and that as a member of a different race of beings, she must leave earth with the strangers.

A conflict develops between her new powers and her previous attachments which is resolved finally in favor of her human form. The sentimentality is refreshing in this situation, for it clothes not just her personal involvements, but a nostalgia for the whole human race. When she decides in favor of her human form when the moment for departure from earth arrives, she flies north as a bird. There is probably no better symbol for homesickness.

The importance of such a story is two-fold. For one thing, it would not have been successful without the science-fiction element, for without it the story would have been too lush. For another, if the same story were told in the usual science-fiction manner, it could not help but be rather silly. At least a conscious attempt at good writing is necessary since science-fiction cannot sustain emotion well. Although the science-fiction could easily have been left out and replaced with some handy sentimental device, it actually serves as a means of justifying the mystical and poetic powers of the imagination. The work, thus, shows a definite relationship with the symbolists, and with the mythologies of metamorphoses.

Outside of stories like *Bettyann*, the hero-less story serves well science-fiction which have political, social or economic themes. Here ideas form the persona. The more sophisticated of these works do not attempt to oversimplify in the name of propaganda. Indeed, if we project our present conflicts between capitalism and communism, both of which can be broken down into a number of internecine struggles, factions and splinter groups, into corresponding solar and galactic divisions, we may see only an endless succession of wars for the future, unless some kind of "federalist" movement succeeds to unify the far-flung ramparts of the human race. In such a story as *In A Good Cause* by Isaac Asimov, we may see the present international situation transformed on a cosmic level. Where the western nations are urged to settle their disputes for the sake of unity in the fight against a common enemy, the communists, so may the human race end its economic wars to fight a distinctly alien race, the *Diaboli*. The *Diaboli*, however, may form coalitions with the more radical human-occupied planets, forming a number of opportunistic, Machiavellian alliances.

The use of propaganda as an all powerful political device, involve groups rather than individuals in much science-fiction. The

Space Merchants, by Kornbluth and Pohl, for instance, shows a society whose political parties represent conflicts in trade wars waged through advertising media. The advertisers are the only producers, while the rest of the people are united politically only as consumers. Lobbyists in the nation's capital have become the lawful legislators delegated from the trustified sectors of the economy rather than from the people. Space Merchants thus attempts to remove the democratic disguise of present capitalistic practices by actually giving the various economic interests the powers they pursue. Space Merchants is perhaps one of the sharpest anti-capitalistic satires written in science-fiction.

Quite often where technocracy is not directly predicted, many of the Utopias of the future are visualized within a framework of socialism. The peoples in these societies are "integrated," selfish motives having been devolved out of them. Basic motivations now involve matters of individual and social survival. In an emergency the people organize with the effectiveness of ants and are often policeless, although robots may sometimes function as police. (The encroachment of robot-police power over human rights is another favorite theme.) It seems that the vision of the future is always against some background of Utopia, even though it might be a reaction from it (2).

Much of the post-war disillusionment with the struggle to end wars has been sensitively projected in the future where "there will always be wars." Sometimes the wars involve mass annihilation with advanced weapons against the unarmed, or peoples fighting each other against mechanized but self-defeating armies, or sometimes machines themselves dispose of warfare commanded

- (2) In *A Ticket To Tranai* by Robert Scheckly (Galaxy, October 1955), a space traveler finally discovers a utopia on the edge of the milky way. Finding a content and prosperous society which has apparently solved all of the problems of production and distribution, he discovers to his amazement that the society depends upon a concept of technical disimprovement and that the government, governing as lightly as possible, must paranoically collect its taxes through actual thievery and beggary.

only by opposing commanders of calculators, much as if in a kind of logistic chess game. But the public protest made against war itself in some of science-fiction is some of the most moving of the war stories. *Limbo*, by Bernard Wolf, for instance, portrays a society in which the people protesting against the war-minded government cut off their arms and legs. The protest, however, is defeated through the advancement of the science of prosthetics which provides more powerful artificial limbs for the people to wage war.

The more pure science-fiction tends to be divided into two groups—that which projects present technological tendencies into the foreseeable future where the societies are advancements of the present one, or those societies which have evolved beyond the foreseeable future, those which are qualitatively different in philosophy, culture, science, and ethics. The latter, of course, become a mystique based on the implications of modern philosophy. Thus, probability, the infinity and finiteness of the universe, co-existing universes, telepathy, teleportation, time travel, fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh dimensions, field theories etc. serve to dramatize essays which attempt to show the consummation of natural possibilities. It is in this latter area that the vestiges of the battles between spiritualism and materialism are being fought. Religion, like sex, is normally taboo and must be sublimated through the author's thesis. Nevertheless, the belief in immortality hinted at through the devices of teleportation, precognition, telepathy, similarity, co-existing universes, imply the faculty of material creation and recreation through psychic powers. These are phenomena outside of the present consciousness of time and space. The metaphysics of these systems describe man developing his extra-sensory powers in competition with the intelligence of machinery. The possibilities of man mutating in this direction in a future where less and less physical energy and more and more mental energy is expended, may well

be left to the imagination.

Although the machinery of time travel cannot be taken seriously in itself, time travel has been effectively used to compare the possible with the actual, one world against its outcome or to show universality or timelessness. In our more respectable literature “time travel” has been used as a kind of poetic license in fiction and poetry to portray cultural simultaneity outside of calendar time—in Virginia Wolf’s *Orlando* and Eliot’s *Wasteland* and *Four Quartets*, for instance. Since, in these works the universal is implied directly from historical fact, no justification for time travel is needed. The important difference, of course, between the timelessness of “poetic license” and the time machine of science-fiction is that the latter contrasts the hypothetical future against the reality of the present, while the former alludes to the known past. Through its use to contrast, time travel has been an effective medium for the social message and satire. In the *Fox In The Forest* by Ray Bradbury, travelers escaping from the regimentation of the future travel back to the Mexico of 1938 where they are caught by the thought police of their own century. Here the state with its awful power to invade privacy, may thoroughly block any possible escape individuals may find. *Dark Interlude*, by Mack Reynolds and Frederic Brown, uses the time travel device effectively to illustrate an incident of racial prejudice. An intelligent and sensitive student of the 30th century arrives at the present time in Georgia where he at once falls in love with a native girl. It is learned by the brother of the girl, however, that he is a product of centuries of inter-racial marriage and is thus about one fourth negro. Incited by this knowledge and the fact that the traveler is sleeping with his sister, the brother of the girl promptly shoots him. The act is justified by the local police authorities.

Although science-fiction is a fashion which has probably passed its height, its many virtues are revealed when compared with the rest of current literature. We have in science-fiction none of the

case history, the writer's preoccupation with himself, none of the overblown naturalism, literary allusion, the writer dealing with writing. And when compared with the run-of-the-mill pulp and slick stories we discover a high degree of skill, and a respect for the competently resolved story. Although still limited by pulpish episodic structures, at least in the novels, science-fiction is a flexible medium of social criticism, one which permits of a wide range of subtelties, ironies, paradoxes, poetry, tragedy and comedy.

The real importance of science-fiction is that it has performed a yoeman's service by giving the imagination an occupation in the literary void of the forties and fifties. Nothing more could, or should be expected from the limited and often artless machinery of science-fiction. Many of the devices wear out with use, and most of science-fiction cannot be reread with satisfaction. Nevertheless, the limits of quality have been maximized as shown by the emphasis on taste and value on the part of science-fiction audiences and the increasing allusiveness of science-fiction reviewers.

It is significant to note that social awareness and criticism in writing, without which the novel would never have been originally successful, have been taken up by a form of popular writing that has long been regarded as trash. And that those writers who might have dealt directly with these themes in all of the qualifications of present day reality have either justified the book burners, retreated into a somnambulism of formulism, quit writing, or were refused publication. A literature of silence and decay, then, has permitted a transfusion of many new and vital ideas.

It is perhaps a little sad that this period of science-fiction may be over, and that a return to scientificism is now imminent. But somewhere within the many stories and novels, the truth has been told, and it has fought for the individual, and it has made it easier for all writers to return to their normal occupations.

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NEW SCHOOL OF ART

Coastlines extends a cordial welcome to the NEW SCHOOL in its new location at 1716 S. Robertson. We believe that the instruction and exhibition of painting creates a better climate for art in general, and we strongly urge that full advantage be taken of the facilities offered by the NEW SCHOOL.

ISSUE P. 37

COASTLINES

Coastlines is truly an independent literary magazine supported by the audience in the community in which it is published.

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ISSUE PP. 38-39

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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HELEN NONAM her first publication . . .

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PETER YATES A resident of Los Angeles, he is a regular contributor to *Arts and Architecture*.

• • •

ISSUE PP. 39-40

EDITORIAL

By MW

With much laughter at ourselves,
Enough ignorance to pretend a reality
Of our choice; with much fear and fever,
We have assembled here to argue art's illusion.
“But why?” you ask. “The risk is not worth it.
There is too much to lose, giving up the art
Yourself, for instance. There is not much
To be gained from waylaying honesty;
Honesty, after all, is dirt cheap. If you must,
Interpret for us, or give us a summary,
Or a handy index. There is nothing,
Nothing new under the sun.”
Well, we feel that because there is nothing
New under the sun, much has been written into a kind
Of darkness. Fortunately, imitation
And advertising perpetually cancel that
Darkness, just as the corporation of ideas
Is self-liquidating, expendable, or bankrupt.
Waste paper, indeed, has given rise to a
Tremendous rubbish industry. Nevertheless,
The sun, we note, is still on fire,
And much creation is yet to be done.
We know that even poetry has an economics,
And Time is money. And since poetry is poverty,
We have no 8 page signature, coated stock,
Bulmer, Baskerville, or Bodini types—we have here

Only the rich but unemployed aesthetic of free speech.
The truth is our hands are perpetually unemployed,
And since we have nothing better to do, and
Since there is not much better to be done,
Be calm and a little curious, reader; pretend
That we are the angry or loving relations
We really are. Consider a little our
Crudeness, and be amused or shocked
As you will at our attempt to sing the
First song again.

NOTE ON THIS EDITION

This is a reading edition of *Coastlines*, Volume I, Number 3 (December 1955), reset from a clean transcription of the original mimeographed magazine. Where the earlier transcription followed the magazine page for page, this edition reflows the text to read continuously. The magazine's own page numbers are preserved as faint inline markers, so any passage can still be traced to the page on which it first appeared, and the running order of the issue—fiction, verse, the article, and the back-matter notices and advertisement—is kept exactly as printed.

Original spelling, punctuation, capitalization and verse lineation are retained. A number of the magazine's own spellings look like slips but are reproduced deliberately: "hassel" and "Portugese" in the fiction; "irresistable," "yoeman's," "subtelties" and "scientificism" in the science-fiction essay, together with "Scheckly" for the writer Robert Sheckley and "Wolf" for both Virginia Woolf and Bernard Wolfe; "Endemetriososis" and "Rafinée" in Rexroth's poem; and "Bodini" for the Bodoni typeface in the editorial. The typewriter emphasis of "Malibu Cove"—words the author set in full capitals—is kept as capitals rather than converted to italics. Straight quotation marks have been curled, and the magazine's section breaks are rendered as a small ornament. The cover illustration is artwork rather than text and is not reproduced here.

In this reading edition the byline of each poem, story, article and the editorial is placed at the head of the piece, beneath the title, rather than at the foot.