

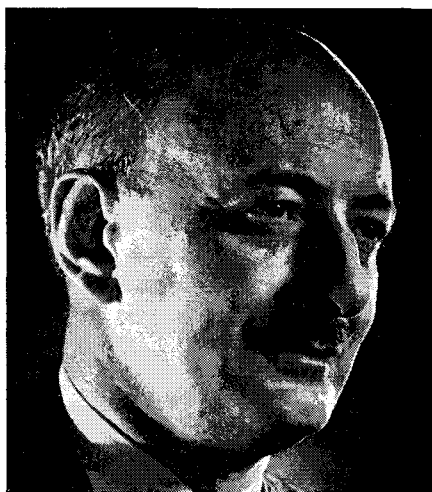
# Escape and Acceptance

BY LOUIS UNTERMAYER

RECENT events have intensified the dichotomy of the creative mind: the double desire to share and avoid the agonies of our times; to participate in the politico-sociological struggles and to reject them for what small inner security may still persist; to accept a disordered world and escape it by any chance, trick, or desperate device. With a few notable exceptions, the poets have tried both extremes. They have attempted the heights of impassioned public speech, and they have sounded the depths of allegories so private and symbols so esoteric that they cease to communicate.

In the escape achieved through fantasy, the reckless image, and the eruptive power of words as words, rather than through the progressive logic of ideas, no recent poet has exercised a greater influence than Hart Crane. In "Poems from the Greenberg Mss."\* James Laughlin, who is responsible for the publication of the best experimental writing and the most provocative *avant-garde* culture in America, reveals one of Crane's sources. Rumors had circulated for some time concerning Crane's use (without credit) of Greenberg's dazzling lines; Philip Horton, Crane's biographer, had suggested the word-drunken quality of Greenberg's inchoate visions; but no portion of Greenberg's semi-mythical work had ever appeared. The history of the fabulous manuscripts begins, as Laughlin says, like a mystery story. Samuel Greenberg, son of impoverished and consumptive parents had died, after spending much of his life in hospitals, before he was twenty. This was in 1917 or 1918. Six years later Hart Crane, wintering in Woodstock, New York, became intimate with William Fisher, who had acquired several of Greenberg's notebooks. Crane heard the curiously uneven rhapsodies, took possession of the manuscripts, typed out several — Crane's "Emblems of Conduct" is a mosaic of five Greenberg poems — and wrote excitedly about his discovery to Gorham Munson: "This poet was a Rimbaud in embryo. . . . No grammar, no spelling, and scarcely any form, but a quality

\*POEMS FROM THE GREENBERG MSS. Edited by James Laughlin. Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions. 1939. 30 pp. 50 cents.



Edward Ames Richards



Sydney King Russell



Reuel Denney

that is unspeakably eerie and the most convincing gusto."

Gusto is the hallmark of Greenberg's loose and almost illiterate writings. Long before surrealism became a movement, Greenberg was hypnotizing himself with words in orgies of supersensibility. He did not live long enough to exploit, or even to explore, the borderlands of the subconscious, but he seemed to dwell in a state between incoherence and eloquence, between sheer hallucination and pure vision. Greenberg was desperately ill, often feverish, and probably mad. But there were a few times — as Laughlin shows in his valuable notes — when Greenberg benefited from his disbalance, when his madness made "divinest sense" and achieved a kind of clairvoyance beyond the disciplined intelligence.

Plowden's Kernan's\* is a more reasoned (and reliable) form of escape. Kernan takes the traditional Grand Tour of poetry, getting Away from it All via witches at crossroads, Delphic dancers, hawthorne-time in Ireland (it's not so far from lilacs), peacocks at the pool, the Lady of the Dew, and languid impressions after hearing Debussy. Every tradition is pursued and prettified; every dead cliché is lovingly embalmed. Time is "ruthless," the fragrant earth is "mystically still," in May it is "glorious to be alive," Yeats is "a mystic Gael" who sings a "lilting endless song," Keats is a "slim dark-haired" boy whose words are "wed to Fancy and wrapped secure in Beauty's timeless hold." Here, in this perfect never-never-land, the actual world is excluded more determinedly than ever.

Mr. Richards and Mr. Russell have made excellent compromises. "Time Strikes"† (Mr. Richards's first volume) and "Proud Universe"§ (Mr. Russell's sixth) analyze the modern world from which they make sporadic excursions only to face it again. Mr. Richards excels in the not too severe

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\*HAWTHORN TIME IN IRELAND. By Plowden Kernan. Los Angeles: Ward Ritchie Press. 1939. 81 pp. \$1.50.

†TIME STRIKES. By Edward Ames Richards. New York: Columbia University Press. 1939. 109 pp. \$1.25.

§PROUD UNIVERSE. By Sydney King Russell. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1940. 112 pp. \$2.00.

# Where Authors Become Writers

*How Actors Are Broken and Writers Made*

BY GEORGE ARLISS

ONE who writes a novel is called an author, just as one who writes a play is spoken of as the author of that play. But when the same author is engaged by Hollywood to write for the films, he or she becomes a "writer." I have never heard anyone who writes for the films called an "author." He who is going through the stage of development from author to writer cannot be said to be gaining glory or inspiration—not at all like the chrysalis that develops beautiful wings; quite the contrary; he used his wings to fly to Hollywood; let him be satisfied. No writer is allowed to have wings.

The difference between an author and a writer is by no means a subtle one. While you are an author you are writing the thing that emanates from your own brain; you are free to follow the dictates of your own imagination. But when you are turned into a writer you have to do as you're told, and—as the Americans say—"and like it." That is why so many authors of distinction have failed dismally in Hollywood. If you have been used to freedom you can't accept imprisonment—and like it.

At the same time, it is a mistake to think that Hollywood is altogether to blame. The author of a good play can be unbelievably stupid in his attempts to prepare his work for the movies. It is surprising how unintelligent a great artist can be when he ventures outside his own medium. My experience of the novelist has been that however dramatic his stories may be, he has little or no sense of the theater. If I were compelled to give an opinion, which I am not, I should say that the mistake Hollywood makes is in ever engaging a literary giant at all; I should say that it is cheaper for Hollywood to allow him to continue to be an author and then to enter the competitive field and buy his published work.

Those writers who have grown up in the studios frequently find me irritating; what they see as effective

scenes I am likely to regard as interruptions. I am intolerant of any scene that does not bear directly on the story. There are many, apart from the writers, who disagree with me and who believe that the movies should be divorced or at any rate separated from the theater as far as possible: that in spite of movies having become talkies it is still more important to satisfy the eye than the ear.

I always spend several weeks on the manuscript before beginning rehearsals of any picture, in an effort to make it more like a play and less like a picture. This will explain at once why I am not popular with writers, either in London or in Hollywood. I spend too much time interfering in other people's business. But I contend that writers, and even authors, should be very patient and forbearing with the actor who has to carry the play or story on his shoulders. (Chorus: "We are.") It is one thing to write words and quite another thing to speak them.

I try to convince writers that I do not alter their manuscripts necessarily because I think my changes are better, but because I think they are better for me; and if they are better for me, they are likely to be better for the picture. (Cries of "Oh! Oh!") The star on the stage or screen becomes the responsible person in the mind of the audience, just as soon as he walks on. Under all conditions he has to bear the blame. If he is really bad in the part, the audience knows it and registers accordingly. If it is a bad story, the audience says, "He ought to have known better than to appear in a thing like this." If it's a half-bad story, they say, "He's not as good in this as he was in the last thing we saw him play." If the language is stilted and unreal, they say, "He doesn't seem easy somehow; not like himself at all."

An actor may not have constructive ability but his contact with audiences is likely to make him a good judge of



**"I should like to give a dinner for the writers, but would they come?"**

how a situation should be led up to, and how a point can be most effectively phrased in order to "put it over." Most actors who have become popular favorites have obvious limitations. The man who can do everything well lacks, as a rule, what is called personality—the something that makes the audience like him, remember him, recognize him when they see him again, and eventually take him to their bosom. It is precisely because of his limitations that the opinion of the actor, who has made an intensive study of a part, should be listened to by writers and directors with great respect. (Voice: I suppose you mean "Patience.") Sometimes the actor will be wrong. He may have failed to catch the author's idea, and his suggestions may prove destructive. (Chorus: "Hear, Hear!") But in such cases it is seldom that he is not open to correction.

Although I do not attempt to disguise the fact that I am on the side of the actor, I am also in full sympathy with the writer. I do not blame a writer for regarding me with anger and contempt, or for eventually chucking up the job in despair. But he has never been an actor. He doesn't understand that when one faces an audience, it is necessary not merely to repeat the author's lines, but to believe in them. Therefore if the man that the actor has to portray suddenly speaks or behaves in a way that is unbelievable in the character already established, the actor, who is responsible for the portrayal of that character, must in self-defense make some protest.

Sometimes we see an actor on the screen play a scene in a temperament that is entirely out of key with what we suppose his state of mind would be, judging by what has just previ-