

with almost fifty wives—a total which will doubtless shock even the better informed among the Mormons themselves. Nor has she been nonplused by the stand of the Reorganized Church, which has hitherto stood uncontradicted in its claim that Joseph had no children by plural wives (and therefore could have had no plural wives), although from the nature of the facts no absolute determination can be made. And with all these solid merits, the biography has the pace and sweep, the bizarre incidents, and impelling suspense of the most extravagant historical novel, and its violent climax under the walls of Carthage jail has all the power and emotional impact of a personal experience.

Some criticisms suggest themselves. Perhaps the spotlight is too insistently kept on Joseph, and it is questionable whether quite so searchingly sympathetic a viewpoint has operated in the analysis of the lesser persons who figure in the drama. Mrs. Brodie is less inclined to recognize the chiaroscuro of character with these others than with Joseph and Emma Smith. Inadequate attention also may have been given to the developments of those in the church who upon Joseph's death took hold upon power with a firm grasp and "carried off the kingdom" with a strength and decision that could hardly have been foreseen. In the interests of narrative sweep, again, Mrs. Brodie selects her thread of fact without always indicating the complexity of the possibilities; there are more difficult problems about both the selection and the assessment of fact than is always clear from the text. And, finally, it may be said that in summing up the Prophet's life, what he was, what he stood for, what he accomplished, and what his legacy was and is, Mrs. Brodie's judgment may be subject to both a kinder and a far more ranging objective reinterpretation.

When all reservations have been made, however, "No Man Knows My History" stacks up as almost certainly the definitive treatment of its subject. At the very least it is the book that had to be written before a finally authoritative biography could be written. It is not to be expected that members of the Mormon churches will accept the biography as either final or authoritative, striking as it does at the very sources of their faith. But if their feelings are to have any weight outside their own sentiments, they will have to unearth from their archives facts to modify or to contravene Mrs. Brodie's conclusions. Thus her book is going to serve a valuable function as a benchmark and a corrective in Mormon scholarship. "No Man Knows My History," altogether, is an extremely difficult and important job, well done.

The Craft of Poetry

AN ESSAY ON RIME. By Karl Shapiro. New York: Reynal & Hitchcock. 1945. 69 pp. \$2.

Reviewed by THEODORE SPENCER

MR. KARL SHAPIRO is in a difficult position. Various critics or camp-followers of contemporary poetry, in their anxiety to proclaim a distinguished talent and to discover a native Auden, have pushed him rapidly—too rapidly—into the foreground of the American poetic scene; his publishers have capitalized on the distinctions his two previous volumes have, on the whole deservedly, won, and he has now allowed himself to be persuaded to print a work which, in spite of all that may be said in its favor, is not really ripe for publication.

From every point of view it is entirely admirable that an American poet, temporarily a soldier stationed in the Pacific, should spend his time writing about the craft of poetry. Nor, regardless of circumstances, is there anything intrinsically wrong in making the problems of poetry themselves the subject matter of a poem. Horace, Boileau, and Pope all did it, and did it very well. But in doing it they gave to the poet one very important warning: before you publish, they said, "keep your piece nine years."

If Mr. Shapiro had followed this advice (in our time an almost impossibly difficult thing to do) the present engaging but immature volume would be quite different from what it is. Much of its content he would have kept to himself or saved for conversations with his friends or transmuted into a vision of reality. As it is, he may have done himself serious harm by writing around reality instead of creating it; he describes and discourses instead of evoking, and unlike his predecessors in the art of the verse-essay, he employs a technique which is loose, relaxed, unbuttoned, when it should be an illustration, according to the rightly established precedent, of the concise and difficult art which is its subject.

Mr. Shapiro's defenders may say that precision and neatness are out of date; they do not belong to our bewildered generation; the ordered couplets and concise precepts of Boileau and Pope are anachronisms in a society whose John the Baptist is John Dewey and whose Jesus is everyone who listens to the radio. Poetry *should* be discursive, irregular, unformalized.

Of course that is partly true. The literal technique of neo-classicism is today obviously out of place; artful alexandrines and balanced couplets do not belong to a society that calls itself classless. But this does not mean that



Karl Shapiro "has allowed himself to be persuaded to print a work which is not really ripe for publication."

prose is the same thing as poetry, or that poetry has no rules, or that exposition is the same thing as evocation. In fact we are, at the present time, uncommonly aware of the difference between the poetic and the prose use of words, we have standards in these matters (though we may not have standards in versification) that are as strict, and at least as searching, as the standards represented by Boileau and Pope.

In theory Mr. Shapiro recognizes this fact. He tells us that his intention is

To use
Language emotionally and not as
number.

But, particularly in the first section of his poem, he frequently forgets all about this intention. I quote (and I do so in the prose which is its essence) a passage describing the early Imagists:

Constraint was not the principle,
and long before their manifesto laid
the law down, certain purely transi-
tional phases set up as separate
guilds, at least several of which had
serious influence and prestige which
has [sic] not as yet decreased.

Surely no reader, coming across such a passage for the first time, would imagine that it had been originally composed as blank verse.

Mr. Shapiro's essay is a study in confusion, a confusion which he divides into three sections: The Confusion in Prosody, The Confusion in Language, and The Confusion in Belief. If I have so far criticized his work adversely, it is primarily with reference to the first of these sections, where the confusion is not only in the subject matter but in the mind of Mr. Shapiro. Prosody

just is *not* (except in the exemplifying or onomatopoeic sense illustrated by Pope, and occasionally by Mr. Shapiro himself) a subject for poetry. It is a subject for a textbook. But Mr. Shapiro does not think so:

Grammars of rime, describing the inflection
Of English speech, sometimes refer to "rising
Rhythm," a phrase convenient as a clef.
Analyzing the term it comes to mean
Not pitch or quantity or both.

Is that poetry? Or is the dangling participle grammar?

There is similar confusion in much of the content of this first section, even on the textbook level. For example, Mr. Shapiro makes a sharp distinction between scansion by "count of eye" and scansion by "count of ear." To him "Paradise Lost" is the great illustration of scansion by count of eye; ballads and the songs of Shakespeare, even Shakespeare's blank verse, illustrate the count of ear, as do the choruses of "Samson Agonistes." But this is a very artificial distinction; who has ever been able to scan the first line of "Paradise Lost" by count of eye? And what real use is this eye-ear dichotomy to a poet? It is largely academic, and Mr. Shapiro, throughout this first section, is almost touchingly reverent to the academic prosodists—Lanier, Bridges, and Saintsbury—who have awed him into taking them too seriously. He knows better himself, if he'd trust his own judgment:

in five hundred years of noble rime
Not one large work of prosody appears
Or is considered requisite to the art.

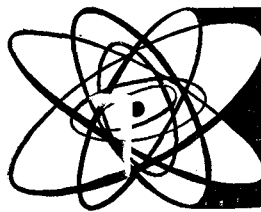
But instead of recognizing the implication of this fact, as even the prose prosodists often do, Mr. Shapiro worries about prosodic theories as if he were not a poet at all.

When Mr. Shapiro (I am still referring to the first section of his poem) discusses individual poets, he is frequently perceptive and illuminating, sometimes entertainingly epigrammatic. But even here there is confusion. He is concerned with the apparent breakdown of the distinction between poetry and prose, and in discussing this point he writes at length, and eloquently, about Joyce's "Ulysses": to him it is

a force
As great as any in rime's present course.

That it is so (a debatable point, for Joyce is an inspiration to *any* writer) seems to him to illustrate one of the main dilemmas of the modern poet. But his attitude towards this breakdown is ambiguous. At one moment he seems

(Continued on page 34)



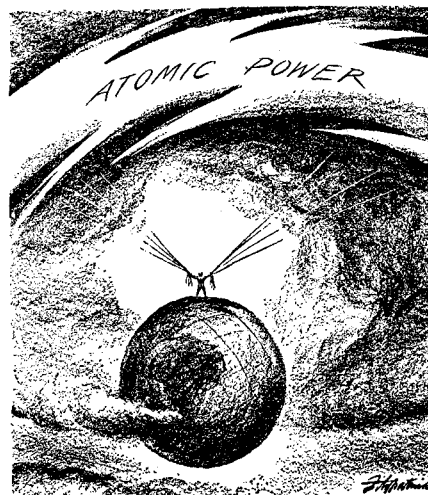
The Atomic Age

ATOMIC WEAPONS AND THE CRISIS IN SCIENCE

Dr. J. Robert Oppenheimer, the author of the following article, is a member of the faculty of California Institute of Technology and the University of California. He headed the Los Alamos group of scientists who developed the atomic bomb.

WHAT you have good reason to wish me to write about, what circumstances have perhaps qualified me to discuss with you on the basis of experience, is how to make atomic weapons. It is true, as we have so often and so earnestly said, that in the scientific studies which we had to carry out at Los Alamos, in the practical arts there developed, there was little of fundamental discovery, there was no great new insight into the nature of the physical world. But we had many surprises; we learned a good many things about atomic nuclei, and many more about the behavior of matter under extreme and unfamiliar conditions; and not too few of the undertakings were in their quality and style worthy of the best traditions of physical science. It would not be a dull story; it is being recorded in a handbook of fifteen volumes, much of which we think will be of interest to scientists, even if they are not by profession makers of atomic bombs. It would be a pleasure to tell you a little about it. It would be a pleasure to help you to share our pride in the adequacy and the soundness of the physical science, of our common heritage, that went into this weapon, that proved itself last summer in the New Mexico desert.

That would not be a dull story, but



—Fitzgerald in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch
Little Man, Where To?

it is not one that I can tell today. It would be too dangerous to tell that story. That is what the President, on behalf of the people of the United States, has told us. That is what many of us, were we forced ourselves to make the decision, might well conclude. What has come upon us, that the insight, the knowledge, the power of physical science, to the cultivation of which, to the learning and teaching of which we are dedicated, has become too dangerous to be written of, even in these pages? It is that question that faces us now, that goes to the root of what science is and what its value is; it is to that question to which tentatively, partially, and with a profound sense of its difficulty and my own inadequacy, I must try to write today.

It is not a familiar question to us in these late days. It is not a familiar situation. If it seems to bear analogy to that raised by other weapons—to the need for a certain secrecy, let us say, in the discussion of howitzers or torpedoes—that analogy will mislead us. There are some accidents in this situation, some things that may in the large light of history seem contingent. Atomic weapons are based on things that are in the very frontier of physics; their development is inextricably entangled with the growth of physics, as in all probability with that of the biological sciences, and with many practical arts. Atomic weapons were actually made by scientists—even, some of you may think, by scientists normally committed to the exploration of rather recondite things. The speed of the development, the active and essential participation of men of science in the development, have no doubt contributed greatly to our awareness of the crisis that faces us, even to our sense of responsibility for its resolution.

But these are contingent things. What is not contingent is that we have made a thing, a most terrible weapon, that has altered abruptly and profoundly the nature of the world. We have made a thing that by all the standards of the world we grew up in is an evil thing. And by so doing, by our participation in making it possible to make these things, we have raised again the question of whether science is good for man, of whether it is good to learn about the world,