

Poetry. *These long, bright August days many fortunate souls are enjoying the delights of the Maine coast—and many of their city-bound friends are thinking of them with unalloyed envy. Appropriately enough, two of the collections of verse reviewed this week—those of Margaret Janvrin Adams and Harold Vinal—are in large part concerned with celebrating that magic world of rocks, sea, boats, and hardy Yankees. Mrs. Adams sees the coast through the eyes of the city-dweller who comes on frequent pilgrimages, while Mr. Vinal sings of it as a man whose family has lived there for generations... In "Actfive," Archibald MacLeish reveals some of the doubts of a gifted man debating whether to dedicate his talents to personal lyrics or to verse with a social message.*

Twixt Pundit & Poet

ACTFIVE and Other Poems. By Archibald MacLeish. New York: Random House. 1948. 63 pp. \$2.50.

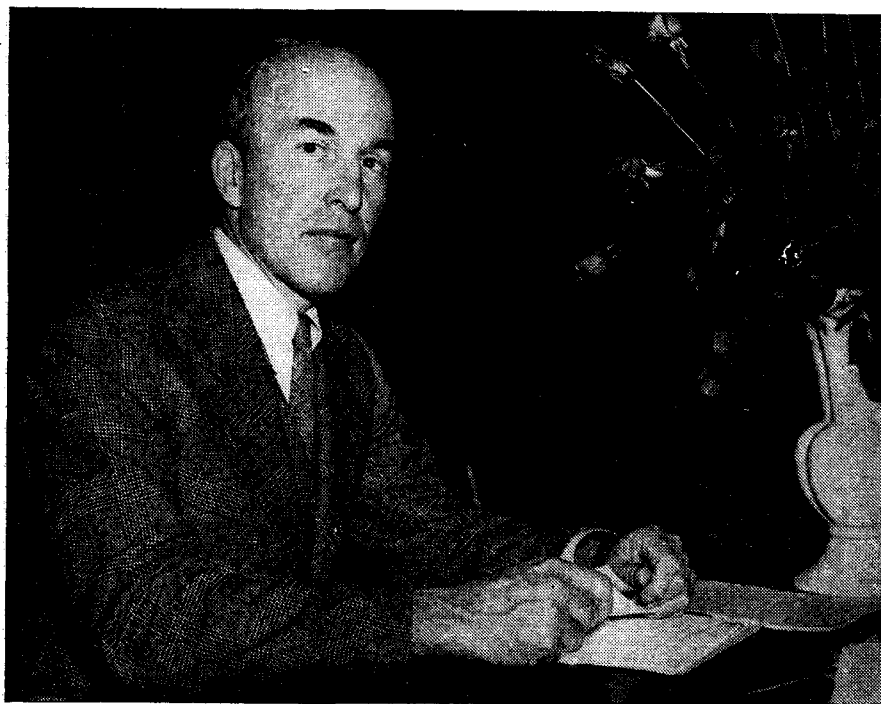
Reviewed by SELDEN RODMAN

THE key poem in the poetical career (and perhaps one should say the life) of Archibald MacLeish is his justly famous "Invocation to the Social Muse." When he wrote it in 1933 in answer to the Marxist critics who wanted him to write propaganda for the "cause" and who probably resented his epigram that "a poem should not mean but be," he came as close to passing the death sentence on the poet he was about to become as any poet ever has:

Does the lady suggest we should
write it out in The Word?
Does Madame recall our responsibilities? We are

Whores Fräulein: poets Fräulein are
persons of
Known vocation following troops;
they must sleep with
Stragglers from either prince and
of both views:
The rules permit them to further
the business of neither:
It is also strictly forbidden to mix
in maneuvers:
Those that infringe are inflated with
praise on the plazas—
Their bones are resultantly after-
wards found under news-
papers . . .

The rising curve, from that moment,
of MacLeish the pamphleteer, the
Loyalist, the anti-Fascist, the New
Dealer, the flayer of "irresponsibles,"
the rhetorician of intervention, the
speechmaker, the wartime librarian
and statesman, can be plotted on the
same graph with the descending curve
of "Public Speech," "Air Raid,"



Archibald MacLeish, pamphleteer, Loyalist, anti-Fascist, New Dealer, flayer of "irresponsibles" . . .

"America Was Promises," and finally the decade of poetic silence that followed the almost inaudibly high-pitched exhortation of the last-named book. The tragedy is not that MacLeish broke faith with the inviolable isolation of The Poet (were Dante, Milton, or Goethe "whores"?) but that he flung himself from one extreme position to the other with reckless disregard of the artistic consequences of imposing a blunt political content on one of the most subjective and volatile of styles.

"Actfive and Other Poems" exemplifies the persistence of this conflict, though a division now seems to be taking place between MacLeish the pundit and MacLeish the poet. It is gratifying to report that in almost a dozen personal lyrics included in this book one hears what MacLeish himself once felicitously said he listened for in poetry, the sound of the ax as it enters the living wood. "The Linden Trees," "Excavation of Troy," "What Must," "Ever Since," "Tricked by Eternity the Heart," "The Learned Men," and "The Two Trees" combine genuine simplicity and subtlety of music to an extent achieved by no other contemporary save Frost:

. . . If mind by God was meant
To grow and gain in girth,
Swelling in sweet content,
I cease I have no worth:

But if it was God's will
That mind, no wish refused,
Should waste by wanting still
By God I am well used!

The three overtly "political" shorter pieces, "The Spanish Lie," "The Young Dead Soldiers," and "Brave New World" have none of this magic. The first is full of those hollow mannerisms pilloried so cruelly by Edmund Wilson in his "Omelet," and is as windily repetitious as "America Was Promises":

The lie will be answered.
Do not believe it.
This will be answered.
This will be answered with
Time
there is time.
The dead have time . . .

"Brave New World" sets forth fairly explicitly what the title poem barely gets around to hinting at in twenty-one verbose pages—that the war the "irresponsibles" tried to delay or spike with peace aims has left nothing behind but

Man . . . murdered and his sweet-
ness blown
With maggots of the intellectual
lies,
His monument the smoke of hate
that stands

(Continued on page 38)

ly a newspaper man who can be completely independent of the social and economic pressures of his community. I have already cited one example of such pressure—the indignation of the theatre-owners over the Lana Turner editorial. Another, if I may draw on the experience of my own paper once more, was what happened when the *Courant* commented on birth control. Connecticut is one of two among the forty-eight states that do not permit physicians to prescribe contraceptives, even when the life of the mother is in danger. Anyone may buy them at any drug store; but medical science is forbidden to advise their use to save health or life.

When a bill to wipe out this anachronism was introduced in the Connecticut General Assembly, the *Courant* resolved to break the long-respected taboo against newspaper mention of the subject. In a three-paragraph editorial it sought to leave to one side all the storms of controversy that beat about the subject, simply explaining

the bill's purpose. Immediately all hell broke loose. The telephone kept ringing in what was obviously an organized campaign of vituperation. The paper was denounced from the pulpit. Church dignitaries ostentatiously canceled their subscriptions. They tried to find out through the back door which individual had written the editorial. And two succeeding editorials, while the bill was before the legislature, brought equal abuse.

NO wonder editorial writers sometimes find it convenient to drop touchy local subjects. All too frequently they concern themselves with topics that are eminently safe or distant. Recently Jenkins Lloyd Jones, editor of the *Tulsa Tribune*, cast a professional eye over the editorial pages of the Middle West. He found a widespread tendency to deplore juvenile delinquency. "But who in hell is in favor of juvenile delinquency?" he asked his fellow editors at the annual meeting of the American Society of News-

paper Editors. Many newspaper editorial writers take refuge in what Mr. Jones calls "Afghanistanism." They can pontificate on what is happening in Afghanistan with perfect safety. "No one knows more than you do about it," said Mr. Jones, "and no one gives a damn."

To write a good editorial requires guts as well as skill. There is a local milk strike—what are you going to say about it? The drivers have many friends—and not only in the union ranks, either. But you also have to live in the same town with the companies. They are less numerous than the drivers, but they too have friends, powerful ones who have no doubts as to where all right-thinking men stand in any quarrel between management and labor, no matter what the facts may be.

But if you know your facts and weigh them honestly, the rewards for coming out into the open with what you know to be right are great. Since I came to the *Courant* four years ago, I have seen the validity of that principle demonstrated a number of times. Consider, for example, the matter of Hartford's government. When I arrived in the city I found considerable agreement that the municipal government was antiquated and inefficient. But there was even wider agreement that—Hartford being Hartford—nothing could be done about it. The community is amazingly ready for technological change. But its zeal for improvement in industrial methods and gadgets is matched by a distrust of anything new in social and political institutions. When it was suggested that the city ought to adopt the council-manager form of government that has proven effective in other American cities, the idea was deprecated as visionary.

JUST the same, editorial columns of the *Courant* and Hartford's other newspaper, the *Times*, vigorously fanned every flicker of hope and systematically demolished the arguments of the opposition. As the crusade gained strength the diehards, and still more the political groups who stood to lose if business-like efficiency replaced overlapping boards and commissions and politics, swung into action. For more than a year the fur flew. But in the end the people of the city endorsed the change, two to one. Hartford got its nonpartisan council and city manager last January. It is generally agreed that the support and leadership of the newspapers was the catalyst that brought success.

The rewards for editorial courage can be great. But all too often we editors take an easier way. We become mouthpieces for the opinions of others.

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character insight, and human
understanding."

—THOMAS SUGRUE,
N. Y. Herald Tribune

"An extremely moving and daring love
story." —MILTON MERLIN, *Los Angeles Times*

"An exciting and intensely moving story,
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Even worse, we become the slaves of our own prejudices. It is amusing, and sad, to see an editorial writer whose personal venom as expressed in print has been challenged digging earnestly for arguments to hurl back at the opposition. Too many editorial writers get their opinions first, and then look around for facts to prop them up.

Obviously no newspaper can discharge its duty as a twentieth-century prophet if its editors fall into such myopic ways. All life is change. It is the prophet's business to be sensitive to life, to be able to distinguish the enduring values of the past from mere nostalgia for the old days, and the promised land from the gold brick. There is no substitute for digging up the facts first, before forming opinions. Honest study, a scientist's humility before the facts, no matter how they may fly in the face of cherished beliefs and sacred cows, will reveal the truth. If one does not manipulate the facts with conscious purpose, they have a way of arranging themselves into a pattern that makes the opinion decent men must hold about them perfectly clear.

It is, I think, the failure of editors to make an objective search after truth the basis of each day's writing that accounts for much of the American people's current dissatisfaction with their press. Theoretically, we have in this country a press that is completely free. This notion was born when economic conditions were less rigorous, when anybody and his brother could afford to start a newspaper. Nowadays it takes more than all the millions of Marshall Field to start a successful newspaper. In place of a multiplicity of newspapers, each speaking for its faction, we have only one or two per community. Even New York, Chicago, and Boston boast only a handful each.

While this economic change was occurring, a number of diverse national influences were building up, brick by brick, the tradition that news reporting should be impartial. If any two citizens or groups of citizens are at odds, the press now recognizes its obligation to report fairly what each says. So strong has this still incomplete tradition grown already that we are incensed when a newspaper departs from it by slanting the news. What now needs to be done—and I think is slowly being done—is to establish a comparable tradition for editorial writing.

One not insignificant barrier to objective editorial writing is the habit many newspapers have of attaching themselves to one of the major political parties. This is a hangover from the days when there were many pa-

pers, each speaking for a particular faction. Today, when we have few papers, it is their obligation not to be a Dr. Goebbels for any group, however praiseworthy, but to speak for the whole community.

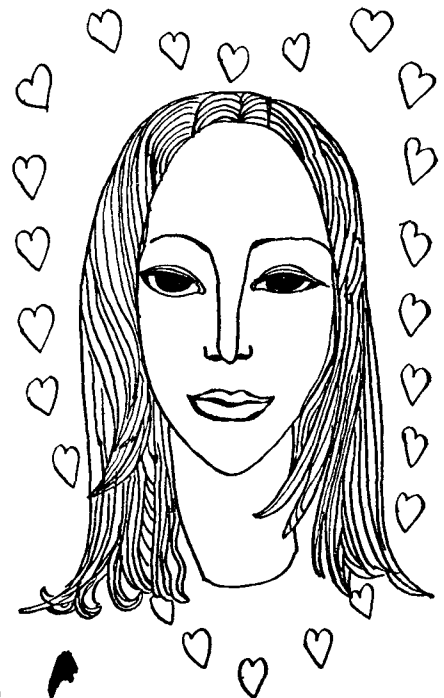
If editorial writers are really to fill their roles as twentieth-century prophets, they must wherever necessary forget allegiances to the party names and shibboleths. They must speak more and more for the whole community, and less and less for any party or class. After all, the number of independent voters is growing. Some of them still proudly belong to a party, from inheritance or from preference. But it is the people whose minds are free who decide elections. They are the ones who keep the country on the high road of its destiny, while the two

parties seek constantly to push it first to one side and then to the other. It is the main stream that counts. And it is the task of the editorial writer to keep us there.

In calling for editorial objectivity, I do not mean that our editorials should be milk-and-water double talk. Our journalistic Jeremiahs must breathe more hellfire and damnation than ever. Only they need to get all the facts, and not just some of them, first.

Herbert Brucker, formerly a member of the faculty of the Columbia School of Journalism, is now editor of the Hartford Courant. This is one of a series of articles SRL is publishing in which writers discuss the problems of their craft.

this
summer
it's



Georgiana
the girl in the novel
by *Maude Hutchins*

\$2.50

A NEW DIRECTIONS BOOK



IDEAS ON FILM

Eyewitnessing the World of the 16 mm. Motion Picture



Beginning with this number, *SRL* will present in its second issue of each month "Ideas on Film," a section devoted to 16 mm. non-theatrical films. This will supplement "The Film Forum." Both "Ideas on Film" and "The Film Forum" deal with films that fulfill the cinema's original purpose—the communication of ideas through moving lights and shadows.

IT was seventy-five years ago that Edward Muybridge conceived the idea of depicting animals in motion by means of a series of photographs taken at regular intervals and afterwards examined in rapid succession. This was the true basis of the motion picture, and with his photographs Muybridge was able to demonstrate in Paris that Meissonier, a famous painter of the day, was correct in his depiction of horses at full gallop. The critics had declared these to be unnatural and impossible; the moving picture proved him to be right. On that day in 1873 the documentary film, the film of fact, was born.

Twenty years later, at the Chicago World's Fair, Edison with his peep-show Kinetoscope gave the movies to the public, and awakened in hundreds of enterprising promoters the realization that the film provided vast opportunities for entertainment. So rapid and tremendous was the development of the theatrical motion-picture that the possibilities of the film for functional uses tended to be overlooked.

What has happened to the non-theatrical or "idea" film since its debut? Because such films are exhibited without benefit of advertising or ballyhoo, it is not generally realized that millions of people gather to see them every week in church halls, club rooms, and civic auditoriums.

Even the men whose business it is to manufacture and distribute non-theatrical films had no clear notion of the extent of their audience until a pilot survey was made recently in Rochester, N. Y. The survey disclosed that in this medium-sized city, more than 1,600 groups make regular use of films—for America characteristically is a nation of joiners, and the functional film is the perfect medium of communication for organized groups. Moreover, in the United States today there are five times as many sound-film projectors outside the theatres as there are installations inside them.

The increase in the number of theatres is now proceeding at snail's pace, while in 1948 alone it is expected that the sale of 16 mm. sound projectors will exceed that of all previous years combined.

The giant strides currently being made in the 16 mm. film industry are creating more and more interest in its products—as *SRL* has discovered during the five months since it began publication of "The Film Forum." "What are the new films?" "Which are worth seeing?" "Where can we buy or borrow them?" "My interest is in bird dogs; what are the best films about them?" So run the letters that have been pouring into *SRL*'s office.

"Ideas on Film" will undertake to answer such questions as these. In a typical number we hope to present articles and editorials discussing latest developments in the 16 mm. field in this country and abroad; critical assessments of current films grouped according to subject; technical data designed to keep our readers informed about new projection apparatus and new methods of getting the best re-

sults out of the equipment they already have. We welcome your suggestions as to how the section may be made more useful. A form is printed on page 34 for your convenience.

Wherever a film has ideas to project, wherever it eyewitnesses the important events of our times, we shall try to throw it into sharper focus and help bridge the gap between film and audience by reporting on it promptly, critically, and informatively. While our primary concern will be the 16 mm. film, we shall not exclude a film merely because it has been seen in the theatres. Any film that carries its audience into the stream of life will be within the province of "Ideas on Film."

Lewis Mumford once pointed out that the film is "the only art which can represent with any degree of concreteness the emergent world view that differentiates our culture from every preceding one." Through "Ideas on Film" *SRL* hopes to make its own contribution to that art.

RAYMOND SPOTTISWOODE,
Co-editor, *SRL* IDEAS ON FILM.

THE EDITORS



RAYMOND SPOTTISWOODE took his MA at Oxford in 1934, then joined the British Government Film Unit and wrote "A Grammar of the Film." He is author, too, of the forthcoming "Basic Film Techniques." During 1947, he produced "Round Trip," the Twentieth Century Fund's foreign trade picture, and "Borrowing in Subtraction," one of the Motion Picture Association's educational pilot pictures. He also co-directed UN's "Searchlight on the Nations." He was technical supervisor for the National Film Board of Canada, is now The World Today's producer-in-charge.



A. BERTRAND CHANNON was born in New York City and educated at Duke. He initiated *SRL*'s FILM FORUM, has written for stage, screen, radio, and television, specializing in 16 mm. scripts. His "Clear Track Ahead" for Pennsylvania RR, seen by over 14,000,000 Americans, will soon have foreign audiences; his film treatment for U.S. Time's archives is canned for posterity. He has been technical aide in NYU's Film Library and audio-visual supervisor at CCNY, whose Business Film Library he founded and directed. A textbook is under way on his New School forum "The Film in Public Relations."