

liefs, their accomplishments? For obvious reasons, the answer is not easy, and even if it were, a firm evaluation would be all but impossible. Perhaps one might say, as has been said of philosophers, that they should not begin to write before the age of forty. If they do, then certainly their best work will come later. Yet they *have* written, and there is material to be reviewed and examined. One value, at least, which might come from such an examination would be, not only to trace dependencies, but to determine whether new directions are being taken and to discover if possible what they are.

I ASSUME that there is no doubt about the tremendous influence wielded upon our younger writers by the so-called "New Criticism." This is clear, I think, through the pages of the literary quarterlies, where most of such writing has appeared initially during the past fifteen years. *Partisan Review*, *Kenyon Review*, *Sewanee Review*, *Hudson Review*, *Poetry*, *Accent*, and *Western Review* are the inheritors of editorial aims first proposed in such magazines as *Blast*, *Criterion*, *The Little Review*, *Hound & Horn*, *The Fugitive*, *The Dial*, and *The Southern Review*, which first published the old New Critics. The resemblance may be no more than that of grandson to grandsire, but the genealogy is clear. The authors who appear today on the publishers' lists with volumes of criticism appeared almost without exception first in the pages of the literary quarterlies, and all show in one way or another a respect for the attitudes which these periodicals represent. I am thinking of such authors as Harry Levin, Alfred Kazin, Richard Chase, Delmore Schwartz, Albert Guerard, Jr., Randall Jarrell, William Van O'Connor, Frederick J. Hoffman, Stanley Edgar Hyman, Irving Howe, Hugh Kenner, Leslie Fiedler, Hannah Arendt, Mary McCarthy, H. H. Watts, Hyatt Howe Waggoner, Elizabeth Hardwick, John Berryman, Robie Macauley, Joseph Frank, William Barrett, Brom Weber, John Aldridge, R. W. Stallman, Richard Ellman, W. K. Wimsatt, Philip Young, and Charles Neider.

This is not to say that the quarterlies are all alike. But they are as similar as the generation of young writers who contribute to them. The magazines may vary from the urban intellectualism of *Partisan Review* to the pseudo-regionalism of *Sewanee Review*, but almost any of these authors is likely to appear at any time in any one of the current periodicals without arousing comment or surprise.

This is not to say, either, that such
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3. Poetry

Horace Gregory

IN 1953 American poets are in another season than the one they inhabited twenty or even ten years ago. Young poets have discovered that war as a literal subject for verse is soon exhausted; in journalistic verse the journey from Marx to MacArthur did not succeed. Literal politics are not the concern of poetry. Something more profound was demanded and sought; the myth in capital letters was invoked, and then religion. The poet as the sentimental professional rebel vanished; in his place was the young instructor of English in privately endowed colleges wearing a Brooks Brothers uniform. Books of new poems and poets were less read and anthologies thrived, and then from overseas came Edith and Osbert Sitwell and Dylan Thomas, whose dramatic performances in reading their own verse delighted those who feared that Romantic charm had completely disappeared from poetry. The revival of hearing poetry read aloud and read extremely well is still felt and still enjoyed; and younger poets within the next ten years are likely to rediscover traditional relationships which have always existed between music and poetry.

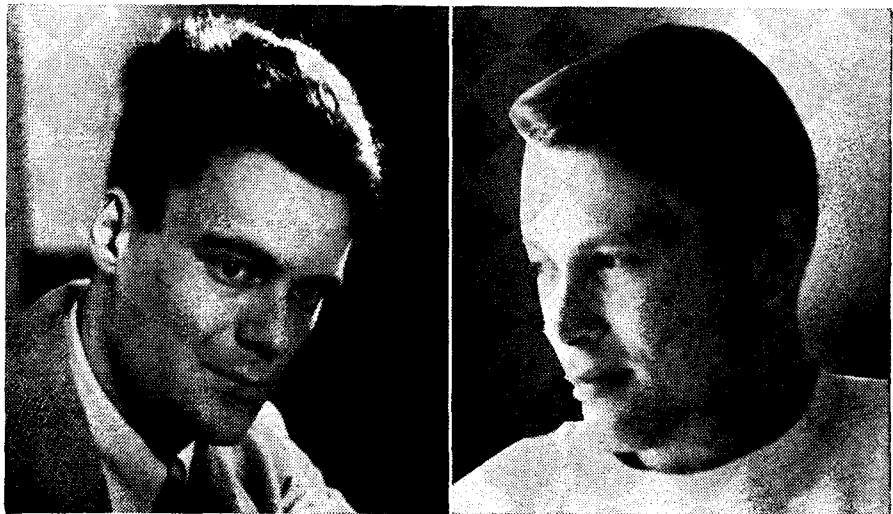
More than half of the observations I have listed above describe the fashions of the day which can be discerned among the new books I have read. Among other things that come to light is the hint that the poetry of Wallace Stevens is more closely read by his younger contemporaries than it was ten years ago; this is, I think, a tribute to an elder poet, and in all probability he holds a position not

unlike that of T. S. Eliot's twenty years ago. Most of these signs are cheerful enough and should not be alarming, yet darker shadows are behind the door.

One reason for a hint of darkness is the lack of an *avant-garde* movement in America; fewer little magazines exist; fewer books of poems are published. In America, if poets are sufficiently unknown, they remain young poets until they reach the benign or embittered age of sixty-five. The pages of the now ancient *avant-garde* annual "New Directions" is still open to them: age cannot wither them there. Its swinging doors have the hospitality, half light, half dark, of McSorley's Saloon. Although little enough seems to happen inside, one would hate to see it boarded up and closed.

In this connection *Poetry* of Chicago still exists, and through the valor of Karl Shapiro, its present editor, its policy of representing all schools and kinds of poetry is sustained. Shapiro has not published a book of poems for several years; I assume that his task is a difficult one for any poet and one that means the sacrifice of time for writing poems.

I have described, sufficiently I hope, the general climate in which new books of poems are written and a very few are published. Of those I have read written by poets under forty, Robert Lowell's two books, "Lord Weary's Castle" and "The Mills of the Kavanaughs," has the greatest reward for those who reread poems. Praise of his highly charged, compressed lines of verse is, of course, gratuitous. His poems imply a tragic sense of life behind them and they offer no facile solutions for those who enter, as Lowell has done, the Roman Catholic Church. His accomplishment has been no less difficult than that of Gerard Manley Hopkins, whom he has not imitated;



Robert Lowell and Richard Wilbur—"literal politics are not the concern of poetry."

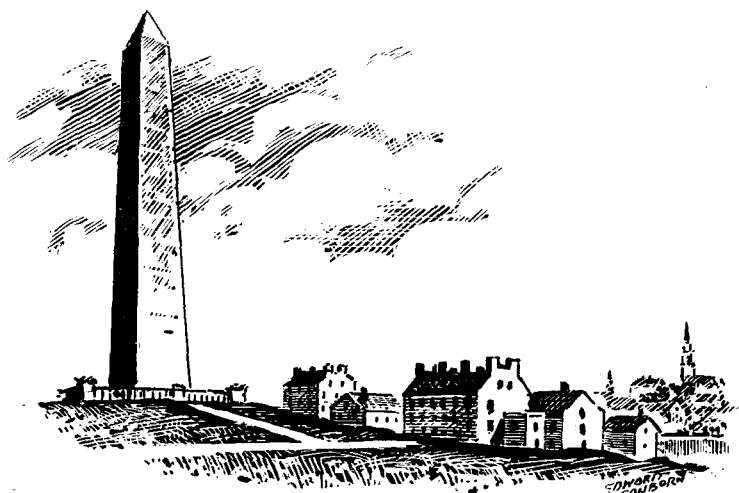
the pleasure of reading either of his books is that he has found his own way of writing poetry. He is still an unfinished poet: he leaves the impression of having more to say, and, incidentally, his scenes of the New England coast line are as memorable as the poets of the elder New England tradition who wrote when Boston was the little Athens of America.

IN contrast to the poems of Lowell there is Richard Wilbur's book "Ceremony," which is poetry of understatement and lyrical poise. It has its own quiet felicities and charm; its deepest danger is that too many poems are afflicted by what Pound called "the magazine touch," by being the kind of verse that falls too inoffensively into the blank spaces below an article on "Where is the World Going?" In reading a poet of Wilbur's sensibility, it is well to remember that Rilke's early lyrical poems lacked distinction; nor should Wilbur suffer too much unthinking patronage; at the moment it is enough to say that he stands at measurable distance from his contemporaries; he is not quite like them.

Through a likeness in title, "Celebration at Dark," William Jay Smith's poems have a superficial resemblance to the poems in "Ceremony." Smith's lyric gift has a wider range than Wilbur's; it is more adventurous and has a brighter surface. The promise they offer is of a different kind; for the past few years Smith has been translating the poems of Jules Laforgue, the Symbolist poet, who left his mark upon the early poems of T. S. Eliot. Smith's translation is among the superlative translations of French verse into English; it is firm and yet light and brilliant; Smith's promise is in the direction of emulating, not imitating, Laforgue.

Of younger poets who have published widely perhaps the most neglected figure is Delmore Schwartz; this is said not to heap coals of pity on Schwartz's poems, but to say that in his latest book, "Vaudeville for a Princess," the quality of his wit still lacks appreciation. It is easy to see why the book had less notice than it deserved; its passages of prose, printed between the poems, diverted and bewildered readers and reviewers; nor was it fortunate that the plan of the book identified its author with Danny Kaye, and to this was added the mistaken idea that the Princess, now Queen Elizabeth of England, admired Danny Kaye. It was the Princess Margaret who praised the
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Horace Gregory is a well-known American poet, critic, and anthologist.



4. American History

John D. Hicks

I REMEMBER being greatly impressed as a young graduate student in history when my chief mentor pointed out that the really great writers of American history were all still alive. He exaggerated a little, but there was much truth in what he had to say. John Bach McMaster and Henry Adams, James Ford Rhodes and Edward Channing, John T. Morse Jr. and Albert Bushnell Hart were all still actively at work. The two last mentioned were editors as well as writers. Morse in his "American Statesmen" and Hart in his "American Nation" drew into these cooperative series nearly everybody who was anybody among the current writers of American history. One of Hart's greatest triumphs, he always claimed, was to get Frederick Jackson Turner to write his "Rise of the New West." Turner was a queer one—there is one such, rarely more, in each generation. He could write a terrific essay, and did; his "Significance of the Frontier in American History" was more influential than most books. But he just couldn't settle down to the customary eight- or ten-volume sort of thing then expected of the truly great.

Well, that was one generation. Along about the time of World War I its day was done, and a new generation took over. The men of this period were tremendously influenced by the war itself, and by the decade of unlimited expansion that followed the war. They revolted a bit from the earlier emphasis on political history, and sought economic explanations even for political developments. I suppose that in a way Charles A. Beard was the outstanding leader in this generation,

but there were many other names of consequence: Vernon L. Parrington, who sought historical motivations in American literature; Herbert E. Bolton, who emphasized the almost forgotten unity of the Americas; Carl Becker, who brought together eighteenth-century developments on both sides of the Atlantic; Albert J. Beveridge; Frederic L. Paxson; William E. Dodd; Samuel Eliot Morison; James Truslow Adams; Douglas Southall Freeman; Claude Bowers; and a host of others. This, like its predecessor, was a great generation in American history and biography. It sought to understand and to explain, in the light of the past, the newly arrived United States, to show how it had achieved the status it held, to find out, historically speaking, what made it tick.

But again the scene is shifting and again a new generation is taking over. The newcomers, like their predecessors, have been conditioned in part by cataclysmic events—in their case, the Great Depression and World War II. The young men now arriving, or recently arrived, at the age of forty have never known placid times as adults. They were just finishing high school when the panic of 1929 broke; they were in college and graduate school, if they could manage it, during the bleak years of the Depression; they were barely getting started on their own when World War II hit them. Some went into service, others did not, but in either event their lives were deeply affected by the raging conflict that surrounded them. Even the postwar years have been full of abnormalities. I remember well the remark of one of my colleagues during a dark period of the war: "It could

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