

The Dream of Finding Reality

***The Smile on the Face of the Lion*, by P. M. Pasinetti (Random House. 341 pp. \$5.95), zeroing in on Italy's jet set, reveals puppets who talk but do not communicate. Sergio Pacifci, is co-editor of "Homage to Dante."**

By SERGIO PACIFICI

THIS second novel by P. M. Pasinetti is linked to his first—*Venetian Red*, published in 1960—by a world that is basically the same. Here again the writer takes us into a milieu that he knows firsthand and, at the same time, demonstrates his skill in using the latest narrative techniques—even though his work is, structurally speaking, traditional—to define what he regards as the central problems of contemporary existence: the general collapse of human values, the decay of the meaning of personal relationships, and man's loss of the sense of reality. It is not for nothing that time and again we are invited to ask, with his characters: What is relevant in today's confused world?

The hero of this curious tale, Bernardo Partibon, is engaged in a Proustian quest. Despite his magnetic personality, his worldly experience, and

his extraordinary success as an art dealer and interior decorator, Bernardo is far from being a happy man. He is haunted by his past, bewildered by the present, uncertain about the future. He is also a pathetic failure as a human being, as his two marriages and numerous but meaningless love affairs eloquently attest. "You must really be a big mess," comments one of his mistresses. Yet Bernardo is determined to straighten his life out: his trip to Italy will enable him to visit old places, renew contacts with the living and the dead and, hopefully, discover new reasons to go on living by coming to grips with what he is and how he got to be that way.

Bernardo is at once immensely cosmopolitan and incredibly "provincial." The world in which he moves and operates with admirable ease stretches all the way from Santa Monica to mid-Manhattan art galleries, from the snobbish houses of Roman and Venetian

haute society, to the intimacy of his mother's flat in Corniano. Familiar with many countries, at home nowhere, Bernardo is tenaciously anchored to the traditions of his native city, hopelessly caught in his own stories, and in a past he would do better to leave alone. Painfully, with an obstinacy bordering on madness, he tries to piece together a fragmented life—only to find that it is infinitely more sordid and wretched than the one from which he has been desperately trying to escape.

The numerous links connecting all his friends are ultimately irrelevant, for there exists no true bond between them. Superficially original and "free" in their actions, Pasinetti's characters (an Italian version of the "jet set") are ultimately conformists *sui generis*, for they too must obey the conventions and rules that govern any social group or clan. What does emerge out of the confusion that surrounds them all is an absorbing tableau of automatons, of puppets who talk but do not communicate, exist but do not live, make love without loving. The confusion Pasinetti so frequently mentions in his book is, in the last analysis, a confusion of human values and of human relations. And without resolving it, there cannot, alas, be anything but alienation.

Rebels in the War with Life

***A Confederate General from Big Sur*, by Richard Brautigan (Grove. 159 pp. \$3.95), follows a former Meridian, Miss., lad as he drifts along the Monterey coast on a tide of misfits. It is an area well known to William Hogan, book editor of the San Francisco Chronicle.**

By WILLIAM HOGAN

RICHARD BRAUTIGAN's comedy of disaffiliation, *A Confederate General from Big Sur*, is a quaint, if unnecessary, contribution to the California Beat literature. Lurching between North Beach and the Henry Miller stretch of the Monterey coast, it focuses on a place of unwashed Peter Pans and the beautiful nihilism around them. However, more interesting than the main hip stereotypes who dominate this exercise in literary pop art are Brautigan's thrown-away characters—some of whom enter the proceedings for only a line or two. They are Saroyanesque: Thelma, the world's ugliest waitress; an eighty-four-year-old lady who lives on a pension of thirty-five cents

a month; the owner of an abandoned house who is the current Class C ping pong champion of a rustic insane asylum. And the chief character's late great-grandfather, one General Augustus Mellon, CSA, who died the year of Halley's comet, and who may not have been a general at all.

But there is none of Saroyan's Armenian Christianity here to help make Brautigan's characters jell and breathe. The potentially interesting ones dissolve before they are formed. What remains are malformed grotesques who should be amusing creatures (for, as a writer, Brautigan is not without charm and exuberance), but, damn it, they never are.

Lee Mellon, whose adventures we are required to follow here, is a former Meridian, Miss., lad who considers himself to be something of a rebel general in the war with life. A onetime Kansas tractor driver who boned up on Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Kant before he drifted West on a tide of misfits, Mellon has a gift for getting his teeth knocked out and now is content to roll rich queers for a living, if that's the word. He shares the whole nonexperience of Beat life, sex, and the Monterey shore



—Jerry Bauer.

Pier Pasinetti—"tableau of automatons."

here"; and yet, for all the uncertainties of human existence, there is one truth: "we are, somehow we are." Whether or not we find satisfaction in Bronk's philosophy, his poetry of statement impresses with its clarity and precision of language; it manages to make metaphysics a subject of human emotion rather than a grand abstraction.

The first volume of poetry by Alvin Feinman comes highly recommended, with comparisons to Wallace Stevens and warnings of difficulty. Both points are well taken. In simple technical craftsmanship, *Preambles and Other Poems* (Oxford University Press, \$3.75) gives no evidence of a "new" or "untried" poet. Its rhythms are appropriate; its images present uncontrived metaphysical associations. Occasionally a word or sentence jars ("The stern/Adequation I required of my eye"), but there are abundant felicities to compensate ("The end of the private mind/was in stone . . ."). Everywhere there is Stevens's passionate quest for order through imagination, and if the subject calls for constant effort and attention, they are well spent.

While, as Lincoln Kirstein says, his *Rhymes of a PFC* (New Directions/Weatherhill, \$3.50)—another first volume—owes something to Robert Service and Kipling, its greater indebtedness is to Browning's *personae* and Kirstein's own ironic point of view. Mainly through *personae*, Kirstein carries his personal narrative of World War II from the routines of training camp to British bases and French and German battlegrounds. Unheroic diction, deliberately awkward meter, and anticlimactic rhyme deflate the grandeur of modern warfare and emphasize the common soldier's concern for "making out" and "making do." In ballads, themselves a descent from Homeric epics, Kirstein finds that narrow area in

which the individual can comprehend through the immediacy of physical and spiritual wounds, the enormity of events otherwise beyond his understanding.

For all the casual language, there is a precision of metaphor; for all the quietness, a moving force, and for all the commonplace experiences, a genuine significance in Vern Rutsala's first book, *The Window* (Wesleyan University Press, paperback, \$1.85). Rutsala is a poet of the very real world, telling what it means to get out early in the morning and carry on the monotonous routine of the day, describing how it feels to settle in a new house, expressing the emotions accompanying birth and love and death. Even his titles—"Gardening," "Late," "Fear," "Illness at Home"—bear the mark of everyday occurrences. But when he talks of "Wallpaper/ [that] has memorized/ the places where/ their pictures hung" or "official portraits taken/ every ten years to falsify appearances," it is not merely authenticity but understanding and wisdom that speak out.

Add to these four books Miller Williams's *A Circle of Stone* (Louisiana University Press, \$3.50), Thomas Whitbread's *Four Infinitives* (Harper & Row, \$3.50), and Claire McAllister's *Arms of Light* (Knopf, \$4)—all respectable first achievements—and Dickey's *Jeremiad* certainly seems excessive.

Had I nothing but this quarter's anthologies to judge by, however, I might indeed share Dickey's gloom. Each, despite the best intentions, fails in its purpose. *Of Poetry and Power* (Basic Books, \$5.95) brings together "Poems Occasioned by the Presidency and by the Death of John F. Kennedy." Thoroughly representative, ranging from the academicians to the street singers, including the British "Movement" and the American *avant-garde*, offering the great names as well as those known only to initiates, its

effect remains inadequate to the occasion, the book no more than a contrivance. No one has the right to demand a "Lycidas," an "In Memoriam"; but in a volume dedicated to a man whose life was poetry how disappointing it is to find no more than a few lines worthy of being called poetic.

Walter Lowenfels's *Poets of Today* (International, \$5) emphasizes the social consciousness of the Left. Academic poets are excluded for their dedication to the Establishment; Beats are represented by uncharacteristic excerpts. For the audience Lowenfels anticipates—the "divine average"—the choice is intentionally didactic. While applauding his decision to give voice to poets rarely or never heard in a large public forum, I cannot agree that they constitute a genuine American *avant-garde*. As in the poems Lowenfels offers from Alvah Bessie and Dalton Trumbo, the sentiments are authentic, the qualities of verse too often inadequate.

EVEN less can be said for *Six American Poets* (Harvard Book Co., \$2), which is more message than poetry. Its interest lies in its attacks on the Establishment, its attempts to liberate man from false values and to find survival in a world that easily prompts despair. Except for occasional Whitmanesque sounds by Roberts Blossom and infrequent epigrammatic pointedness by B. A. Uronovitz, the result is not poetry.

Let me not end on a sad note in a quarter that has had much to offer. Two critical studies and one translation make a happy conclusion. Joan Bennett's perceptive introduction to the metaphysical poets has not been diminished by the years since its appearance in 1934. Available now with an additional chapter on Andrew Marvell, properly placed at the culmination of the tradition, *Five Metaphysical Poets* (Cambridge University Press, hardbound, \$3.75; paperback, \$1.45) provides a reliable guide to a poetry that has come to be recognized as a major achievement in English literature. Containing sympathetic general articles and more detailed consideration of specific poems, *Auden: A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by Monroe K. Spears (Prentice-Hall, \$3.95), attempts to rescue the poet's reputation from attacks by Marxists, Leavisites, and secular liberals. For me it does not succeed, but it is a good try.

The translation is J. B. Leishman's bilingual edition of Rilke's *New Poems* (New Directions, \$6.75). In 1907-8, under the Parisian influences of Rodin and Cézanne, Rilke turned from romanticism to a poetry that combined "outwardness and . . . inwardness," "objectivity and subjectivity," "realism and symbolism." The result was one of the great events in modern poetry.



"Say, maybe we could book it as a kind of anti-lung-cancer act."

tors. To what was lost, the sense of "first things and the power/and the ignorance that go to the receiver/of first things only," he finds an approach through the sweet and pain that inform the memory; and yet he discovers some satisfaction in being the first of his kind, speaking more than one language, speaking his own "in a way courts wouldn't laugh at." Ciardi can assess old friends like John Holmes, not ignoring their weaknesses while he expresses elegiac praise. With irony he can appraise the ciphers of the world—the filing clerk, the "girl in/no body worth wanting"—so that pathos overcomes ridicule. What it comes to, I guess, is that the poetry is the honest and effective expression of a man.

Although the personality of Robert Duncan that comes through in his poetry fails to arouse my admiration, I do appreciate his great poetic gifts. In *Roots and Branches* (Scribners, paperback, \$1.95) he displays his vast talent, extending from disciplined academic poetry to the free-swinging, far-ranging methods of the San Francisco renaissance. Whatever his obligations to a literary past, he has developed away from the traditional, arranged it to new sounds, as in "Shelley's *Arethusa* Set to New Measures" or "Variations on Two Dicta of William Blake." At the same time, personal experience provides poetic awareness that informs such poetry as the sequence addressed to H.D. If I have more than personal qualifications in my praise of Duncan, it is only because he sometimes stands too clearly between his work and the reader.

Unlike Duncan, Samuel Yellen belongs wholly to the academic world. Let me choose one poem, "The Wooden Tiger," to illustrate the allusive quality, the irony and wit, the controlled verse form that characterize his *New and Selected Poems* (Indiana University Press, \$3.50). Here Blake is reworked to comment on the beast whose "fearful symmetry" "Some mortal hand [had] framed" a century ago. In contrasting the mortality of that artist whose "hand .../Has long since disappeared" with the greater permanence of his creation "prankishly left behind," Yellen plays upon Shelley's *Ozymandias*. And yet, like the figures on Keats's urn, the wooden tiger, able to continue its pursuit, can never attain its quest, "But it prowls forever powerless, cut off from its jungle." The result, a clever pastiche, intellectually amusing, conveying a meaningful point of view, never takes an altogether unfettered poetic flight.

It is some distance from Yellen's academic groves to David Ignatow's uncloistered world. Ignatow is a nature poet who writes about the jungle of the city where rape and murder are the flora and fauna. Violence strikes at street corners and in narrow, dark alleys. Instead

of peasants prancing on the grass winos and hop-heads roll on pavements; the atmosphere is redolent of their urinary release in moments of escape from a world that is too much with them. For Ignatow metaphor cuts through to reality, and, indeed, the knife is the chief symbol of his dramatic gestures. The old poems in *Figures of the Human* (Wesleyan University Press, hardbound, \$4, paperback, \$1.85) have fleeting touches of sympathy; the new ones are almost invariably savage in tone.

The late Oscar Williams shared Ignatow's view of contemporary life. Images of personal and spiritual loneliness in the Machine Age dominate his *Selected Poems* (October House, \$4.50). It is a chromium age of false emotions in which



"Whatever we die of, we shall never die of compassion..." Before we do die (Williams chants, like a modern Thoreau) let us at least be sure we have lived; let us "walk out with naked feet" or "run naked down miles of disapproval." His poetry is romantic protest against the debilitating effects of a materialistic civilization. Honest in statement, interesting if not novel in imagery, it lacks the radical departure from conventional forms necessary to achieve poetic distinction.

From England come two books widely disparate in technique and merit. Perhaps the most interesting thing about B. S. Johnson's *Poems* (Chilmark, \$3.50) is its use of syllabic rather than stress meters. Johnson employs it to "help him to use colloquial speech patterns," which itself seems no virtue in his already understated, unpoetic verse. Typically, his poems depend on inversions of expected conclusions; but the method is lost in the unexciting quality of his verse, so that his twists are diminished into neat little turns around tidy and uninspiring corners.

Like the other British "Movement" poets, Philip Larkin writes a kind of muted verse, but its effectiveness contrasts sharply with Johnson's failure.

Larkin's quiet tones express the anti-heroic sentiments most natural to the modern temperament. It is a poetry of realism, earnest in its search for truth, blunt or ironic in its assessment of life, and more literal than metaphorical in its statements. The *Whitsun Weddings* (Random House, \$4), with its attacks on the Establishment, its concern for the ordinary experience, including common materials of work and labor, constantly recalls Wordsworth—not the poet but the literary prophet. In a way that Wordsworth preached but never truly practiced, Larkin is committed to portraying life in the language of the people, presenting the ordinary in an unusual way. Success, then, must come not in the number of quotable lines but in the full texture of the poem, in its ability not merely to convey convincingly the feeling of marriage à la middle-class mode but to comment significantly upon the emptiness of the ceremonial. Resembling such colleagues as Robert Conquest and Donald Davie, Larkin has his own special quality, what he himself calls "vivacious melancholy," a haunting sense of time and death drawn out of the most trivial subjects. It is a quality of soul that marks him as a poet.

Three other books from England require only brief comment: *Man Does, Woman Is* (Doubleday, \$3.95), new poems by Robert Graves, provides material that will no doubt be sifted out in the next edition of his continually changing *Collected Poems*; Elizabeth Jennings's *Recoveries* (Dufour, \$3.50) deserves note for an interesting sequence of prose-poems, and Thomas Blackburn's *A Breathing Space* (Dufour, \$3.50) for its honest although somewhat clumsy attempt at self-analysis.

Larkin's book, however, recalled Dickey to my mind. Since I share his opinion that Larkin is the best of the "Movement" poets, I worried that Dickey might be right after all about the present state of the art. I approached four first volumes of poetry with renewed caution, only to emerge again with greater optimism.

More than most collections of poetry, William Bronk's *The World, the Worldless* (New Directions/San Francisco Review, \$3) possesses an unbroken thematic unity. Existential anguish links poem to poem, so that lines from one might easily be coupled with those of another. It is not, however, a poetry of despair, for it begins with an acceptance of the fact that "We are here. We are here," and it recognizes our need "to make/a world for survival. . . ." since "One is nothing with no world." But Bronk will not settle for man's comfortable, conventional falsities and pretenses. For religious orthodoxy and promises of salvation he holds no hope: "Nothing is coming but what is already

of information on our aid to the Allies. Morgenthau was all over the place, but mostly in the forefront since his department had to deal with British and French financing and was the legal locus too of some of the instruments of economic warfare. The President also gave Morgenthau added powers over procurement. The Secretary of the Treasury tried to do what he thought was right, what Roosevelt asked him to do, and what he thought Roosevelt would want him to do had the latter been ready to face certain issues more directly. In the process Secretary Morgenthau stirred up a good bit of trouble in Washington. Right or wrong, he made things move.

While there is undoubtedly little to be said in rebuttal to his criticisms of the War Department under Woodring, the State Department presumably had better reasons for some of its action (or inaction) than the explanations Morgenthau cites. Nevertheless, there can be no real doubt about the importance of his contribution to the national interest and to the ultimate Allied victory. Morgenthau's influence was altogether in the right direction, and he was well in advance of anyone of comparable rank. In the interplay of forces that determined government policy his was a goad we can all be thankful for.

THE issues were complex. It was often hard to aid Britain or France without violating the neutrality laws. Even those who favored assistance usually wanted to be sure it would help the United States stay out of war. To prove that the British were broke might make it illegal to let them place more orders. To paint the Allied cause too black would convince some that the supplies had best be kept at home because they might be desperately needed; moreover, the sale of a few planes could set an American training program back by months. General Marshall pushed himself to the limits of his conscience to declare weapons "surplus." Yet, to an extraordinary degree it was British and French armament orders that enabled U.S. military production to expand before Congress was ready to appropriate adequate funds.

It was a time when honest men, men of good will, were troubled, confused; and some of their reasoning looks bizarre to us now. They were involved, too, in subterfuge and prevarication on a scale that most of us have forgotten. It was a fault of our society that they had to be, and a blessing that they were. Professor John Morton Blum has employed the Morgenthau materials skillfully to remind us of a whole era, and to give us a sharp closeup of certain facets of it as seen by one of the principal participants.

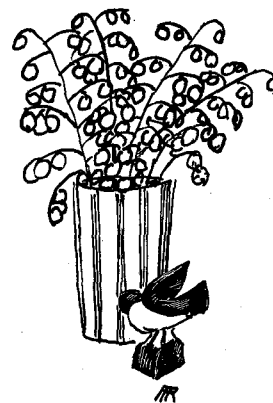
A Way to Say What a Man Can See

By ROBERT D. SPECTOR, *associate professor of English at Long Island University in New York.*

ALARMED by James Dickey's *The Suspect in Poetry* (The Sixties Press, \$2), I turned cautiously to this quarter's books. Dickey warns that poetry at all times "brings into being a truly remarkable amount of utter humbug, absolutely and uselessly farfetched and complex manipulation of language." What then could I expect to find in the genre, now further dulled by Yvor Winters's "academic homilies," isolated from the real world by Van Wyck Brooks's and Robert Penn Warren's remoteness, and debased by the Beats' artlessness? Which poets could be trusted after exposure to the pernicious influences of Wallace Stevens's "mannered artificiality" and William Carlos Williams's "prosininess"? The Lamont Prize, the Yale Series of Younger Poets—what do they mean? "Infallible badge[s] of mediocrity." Nothing there but "dismal" poetry, written to be judged rather than experienced.

Well, it proved to be not so bad as all that. My first selection restored my confidence, for, despite Dickey's contempt for Robert Lowell's later work, to me Lowell seems America's best poet, and constantly improving. And *For the Union Dead* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, \$3.95) contains some of his best poetry. Maintaining that intense scrutiny of life which characterized his earliest writing, he has developed as well a craftsmanship that turns seemingly casual expression into profound comment. Nothing is wasted, nothing extraneous. The rhetorical flourishes—fine enough in themselves in "The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket"—have now yielded to a sharper irony and understatement as he evokes a sense of the lost past in poems like "For the Union Dead," "The Old Flame," and "Florence." Through simple descriptions of apparent trivialities—water beating against rocks or a couple walking in a public garden—Lowell implies personal tragedy, particularly failures in human relationships. Correspondences between past and present, between places and people, between nature and man, become the poet's means of trying to understand himself, to universalize his own experience.

After Lowell I dropped Dickey from my mind to concentrate instead on the



quarter's poetry. Whatever support it might offer to Dickey's suspicions, it included as well a proper share of work to be admired.

Everybody has a favorite poet, one without greatness but one who somehow sings naturally to him in a shared key. For me it is Winfield Townley Scott, born in Haverhill, Mass., now living in Santa Fe. The names, themselves like a poem, tell a great deal about his poetry, strong in a New England way, yet not parochial or regional but, rather, common to the American grain. In *Change of Weather* (Doubleday, \$2.95) Scott continually seeks to discover that true self to which he must be faithful. Addressing his literary ancestors, he declares, "If we are worthy to follow you we should seem/Strange and annoying to you..." Rereading the works of William Carlos Williams and seeking "Ways to be/More casual in the poem," he realizes that it must not be imitation, "Not... a way to write," for style is a personal thing. The obligation of the poet, Scott says, is "to see better and/So to write it better. Most of all to stay alive," and to be oneself. His is a good self, yielding convincing portraits of American types, properly juxtaposing the lofty and ordinary, using lyric forms to narrate a lifetime's experiences and relationships.

John Ciardi is another poet who stirs me personally, perhaps beyond the objective merits of his work. In *Person to Person* (Rutgers University Press, \$3.50) virility joins with gentle sensitivity in a way that I particularly admire. Tough-minded and realistic, Ciardi knows who and what he is, what he likes and feels, and he is not afraid to express his emotions and opinions. Trimming the branches of a tree, he can measure the distance between his intellectualized existence and the manual life of his ances-