

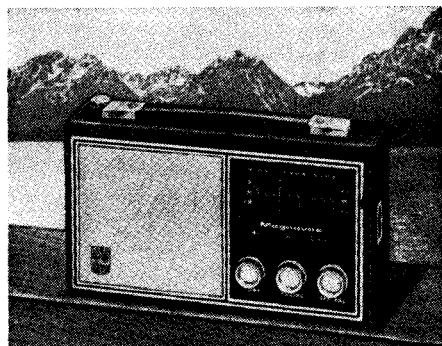
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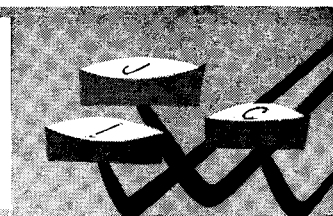
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Manner of Speaking



Mailbag; Thanks: I must thank poet Robert Necker for a clipping from the January 17, 1966, edition of an otherwise unidentified New Jersey newspaper concerning an easily identified New Jersey view of the arts.

Jersey City, it seems, has something called a museum, and has even gone so far as to exhibit within the museum's walls an exhibition of genuine oil paintings under the sponsorship of the Modern Artists Guild. Among the paintings so exhibited to Jersey Cityzens were three by Mrs. Mia LeComte of Closter, New Jersey. I am sorry to say I have not seen the paintings in question, but Mr. August W. Heckman, president of the Jersey City Museum Association, saw them before the show opened, and took instant action in defense of whatever there is to defend over there.

One of Mrs. LeComte's paintings for the show seems to have been based on an earlier painting titled *The Mistress of Fontainebleau*, in which the mistress of Henry IV of France is shown in the bathtub with her sister. Mrs. LeComte's painting, I gather, follows the same theme and uses the same title but lets the water out of the bathtub whereby the ladies are painted both from the waist up and from the waist down.

Mr. Heckman, it seems, objected up and down, insisted that the painting could not be offered to the smog-shrouded eyes of the good people of Jersey City, and had it chucked out of the show. At that point Mr. LeComte, rising in defense of his wife, accused Mr. Heckman of "provincialism," and Mr. Heckman, in a fair and righteous sample of mind at work in Jersey City, announced that as far as he was concerned "We'll stay provincial in Jersey City."

As this report shows, Mr. Heckman is no man for halfway measures:

"It is, frankly, not a picture that I think school children should be allowed to view," Heckman, the father of five youngsters, added.

Asked if the painting had any artistic merit in itself, regardless of whether or not it is "objectionable" from a moral standpoint, Heckman replied:

"In my opinion any picture that would be considered objectionable can have no artistic merit." He added that the picture was "way out—something that would be more at home on the left bank of the Seine in Paris."

"With so many fine and beautiful

things for artists to portray, I don't see why we should have this sort of painting," he concluded.

I just wonder if the dense and populated good people of Jersey City know how lucky they are to have all their fine and beautiful things so carefully guarded. But of course they do, I tell myself, and it must certainly be a comfort to all right-thinking people, or to what Jersey City has in place of people, to know that no one there is going to be allowed to look at any painting school children should not be allowed to look at. I might as well confess that I am not sure what it is that school children should be allowed to look at and what it is they shouldn't be allowed to. But I do have to feel that Mr. Heckman puts things on the right level: keep it fit for the kindergarten.

Yes, there will always be scoffers. Even in Jersey City, I suppose, there must be some ingrate un-American radicals who want to go around having their own opinions about things. Some of them may even go so far as to belittle Mr. Heckman. But if there is any such doubt in anyone's mind, I want him to know that I have been on that there left bank of that there Seine River in Paris, France, and take my word for it, nobody in the Jersey City kindergarten (or in the city government, if that is a step up from kindergarten) could begin to imagine some of the stuff that goes on there. Why, some of those artists paint people the way they *are*—and there's nothing fine and beautiful about that. Not, at least, in Jersey City. That Jean-Paul Sartre everyone is talking about over there isn't even married to that Simone de Beauvoir he is always discussing things with. And when those people write, or paint, or sculpt, well, believe me—you had just better keep the youngsters away from that stuff or the first thing you know they'll start getting civilized.

And once that happens to any considerable extent, what's left for Jersey City?

Mailbag; No Thanks:

Dear Mr. Ciardi:

I am writing to ask if you will answer an inquiry I have on the subject of poetry.

At the present, I am a student at College in Philadelphia and am cur-

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SR/April 23, 1966

rently engaged in the preparation of a term paper entitled, "A Better Understanding of Poetry."

While doing research, I read many outstanding articles written by you on various aspects of poetry. In connection with my paper, I would like to ask if you would let me have the benefit of your thoughts as to what you consider to be the most important element of a poem and why.

Thank you for your consideration. Whatever comment or opinion you may give will be most helpful.

A stamped addressed envelope is enclosed for your convenience in replying.

Sincerely yours,
S.E.M.

Philadelphia, Pa.

Dear S.E.M.:

To ask a question that cannot be answered is only injudicious. To ask me to do your homework for you is indecently presumptuous. If you really have read all those reputedly outstanding articles, you should, in any case, be able to guess what I would be likely to say, were I to put a week or two at your disposal.

Yours sincerely,

Dear Dr. Ciardi:

In your article "Poets and Prizes," *College English*, XII (December 1950), you are stating that there is no committee that would choose a poet for an award on an objective basis. [I most certainly did not.] When a committee is "... voting for A as the best, one must *ipso facto* vote against all others."

What then is the best way to choose a person for an award and not to vote against others?

Sincerely yours,
M.K.

Philadelphia, Pa.

Dear Mr. K.:

Nothing could be simpler. Boil all the candidates into a mush. Homogenize and fortify the stuff. Divide into identical portions untouched by human hands. Wrap in easy-to-open individual servings, and pass those out to the class.

The process is called democratic education.

Yours sincerely,

Dear John Ciardi:

I read your poems about the Medici's and the Borgia's [SR, Jan. 29]. I suppose they are all very clever and very intellectual but when will you modern poets return to writing about simple things that appeal to the heart?

Yours sadly,
Mrs. E.G.J.

Alexandria, Va.

Dear Mrs. J.:
Whose heart?

Yours sincerely,
—JOHN CIARDI.

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Five Years with the Peace Corps

The first Director of the Peace Corps, on leaving for fulltime administration of the War on Poverty, recalls the challenges and rewards of his service.

By SARGENT SHRIVER

THROUGH MOST of March 1961, everything about the brand-new Peace Corps was front-page news throughout the country, including this, which appeared in the *New York Times*: "Mr. Shriver said that members would be paid no salary, but would get allowances. . . ."

That day's *Times* had barely been tossed from the trucks when I got a call from the White House. "What is this about no salary?" President Kennedy wanted to know. "What are you talking about?" I hastily explained that I had been referring only to the Volunteers and not to the Peace Corps staff.

On the previous November 2 in San Francisco's Cow Palace, presidential candidate John F. Kennedy had publicly proposed that America send "volunteers" of a "Peace Corps" to the developing

nations of the world. I had since given a lot of thought to what was involved in the concept of "volunteers." It seemed fundamental to me that "volunteers" should *not* be paid salaries.

Now, five years later, the words "Peace Corps Volunteer" sound as natural as a three-note chord. They go together, describing something which has won a rightful, almost revered, place in American life.

From the start, I found that each of these words—considered separately—expressed concepts that had the profoundest significance for me. This significance was underscored during the weeks in which I had to battle to keep the name "Peace Corps." Many experts said: "You can't use the word 'peace.' You'll sound corny—or Communist. The Russians have taken over that word and even corrupted it in the eyes of the world. And as for 'corps'—what does that bring to

mind? Rommel's tanks rumbling over the sands of Libya. Both words are wrong and together they are a calamity."

Those were hectic and exciting days, February and March of 1961. They were the months when the Peace Corps was first hammered together in all-night discussion sessions. I would remember them with nostalgia if the Office of Economic Opportunity left me any time for nostalgia. The pressure was intense. I was convinced that we had no time to lose, that we had to get the Peace Corps organized, get it going, bring our first Volunteers into training that very summer—or we could very likely forget the whole thing. If we had missed that first deadline, the summer of 1961, we would have been delayed a full year until another summer left campuses free for large-scale training. A year's delay might well have proved fatal to a baby whose birth was being celebrated with hoots of derision.

President Kennedy, too, was sharply aware of the need for action. He had summoned me to Washington with a telephone call, asking me to get the Peace Corps into a condition in which he could pronounce it alive. I worked at it with a lot of very dedicated and brilliant assistance. I don't want to exaggerate the difficulties we faced except to point out that while the Peace Corps had some precedents—in missionary work and various kinds of voluntary assistance overseas—it was still fundamentally new. It was fundamentally new that government should be doing such a thing and on the scale that we were going to attempt it. With the help we were able to attract to the cause, men with experience in other international programs, we started charting an unknown terrain. Many of the solutions we found to our problems now seem obvious. They weren't at all obvious when we started.

For instance, I used to wake up in
(Continued on page 18)



—Paul Conklin.

Sargent Shriver talks to school children in Turkey during overseas tour.