

The Founding of a University Press

By TAYLOR CULBERT, *dean of the Graduate College and president of the Ohio University Press.*

TO CREATE and develop a press on a campus that has no publishing tradition, no inherited acceptance of the role of a press, requires a director who possesses a Renaissance versatility. He must be, in fact, a true man of letters who can teach both faculty and administration about books and their publication.

Relatively few of the present members of the Association of American University Presses have gone through the process of birth and development within the last several years. It is, however, among newcomers, such as Ohio University Press, that the diverse functions of the director can be perceived most clearly. And for such a demanding position, no press could have found a more talented editor than Cecil Hemley, director of the Ohio University Press from its inception in 1963 to his death three months ago.

The most obvious quality, the *sine qua non* indeed, of a director is competence in professional matters. He must know a great deal about book publication—about editing, for example, and design and printing and promotion and distribution. He must know how to write a contract with an author, what commissions to give salesmen, what sort of arrangements should be made with a publisher in England or Canada to buy or sell sheets, or even finished books, so that each party may bring out the book under its own imprint. To such technical aspects of publishing, Cecil Hemley brought years of experience as editor-in-chief of Noonday Press and as editor at Farrar, Straus & Cudahy.

No rule or formula, only intuition based upon experience, told him how many copies of a book to print. Should he order 500 copies of a book of poetry? Twenty-five hundred copies of a scholarly and definitive study of some aspect of a second-level nineteenth-century poet? How many copies of a book on arctic exploration should he print? To print too many meant unnecessary expenses and storage problems; to print too few meant a second printing, inconvenience, and disservice to the author.

The final product of Cecil Hemley's work as a director, of course, was the array of books on his desk comprising this spring's or last fall's publishing list.



—Elaine Gottlieb.

Cecil Hemley (1914-1966)
—“a true man of letters.”

Although some good manuscripts came over the transom, many had to be consciously recruited. Cecil Hemley knew many people who wrote good books, had friends in other universities, knew literary agents who steered books to him. In the end, the lists reflected his personality. His interest in philosophy, for instance, appears in books by Schelling and Shestov, while his concern for the literature of other languages takes the form of translations of Malaparte and De Queiroz. In a real sense, the publications of the Ohio University Press were Cecil Hemley.

Hemley faced the educational task—perhaps the cynic would call it a public relations assignment—of creating and maintaining cooperative, even enthusiastic attitudes on the part of Ohio University's administrators, especially those who have budgetary influence. This he did supremely well.

Purchasing agents, treasurers, and controllers, among other officials, were taught about the differences between the financial operations of a press, which is in essence an ongoing business with both expenses and income, and the other elements of the university, which simply expend funds over a twelve-month period, have their pocketbooks refilled, and then repeat the cycle.

A more subtle and sophisticated edu-

cational effort was directed towards the faculty, particularly towards the faculty members comprising the Board of the Ohio University Press, who had to be brought to a full understanding of what the press was, how it worked, and what it could do for the university. Cecil Hemley spoke about the press at official and social gatherings, formally and informally, using a hard sell on some occasions and a soft sell on others. Chemists and psychologists had to be convinced that it was important to publish a book of poetry. Engineers had to learn why there were few engineering books on the fall and spring lists.

EFFECTIVENESS in explaining the role of a university press depends to a large extent upon the personal position of the director in the eyes of the faculty. Before coming to Ohio University, Cecil Hemley had taught for several years at New York University as a part-time teacher of creative writing, had served as president of the Poetry Society of America from 1960 to 1962, and had been a Fellow of the MacDowell Colony in 1956. At Ohio University he taught one class each semester in the creative writing program. With the help of this background, he achieved recognition as a teacher among the faculty.

He needed, moreover, appropriate credentials as an authority on books. Cecil Hemley had written and published four books of poetry, including *Porphyry's Journey* and *In the Midnight Wood*, and two novels, *The Experience* and *Young Crankshaw*. He had published verse, plays, and short stories in more than twenty magazines, including *Poetry*, *Saturday Review*, and *Hudson Review*. He frequently reviewed books and wrote criticism about the current literary scene for *SR* and other publications. He won additional acclaim as co-translator with the author of Isaac Bashevis Singer's *The Slave* and several of Singer's short stories.

Hemley's extensive and varied experience in literary endeavor gave him visibility and authority on the campus; he was in the position of the man who had been there, who had done it himself. Technical knowledge, personal contacts, discriminating literary taste, and teaching ability—these are the attributes Cecil Hemley brought with him to the campus of Ohio University and to the press. He had the tact and humanity to exercise them in precisely the right manner. Thus he won affection as well as admiration, gained friends while he convinced colleagues. The visible proof of the estate he achieved, of his total success as a director, was not merely an established press with exciting fall and spring lists but, beyond this, the hundreds of mourners at his funeral who filled the University Chapel beyond capacity.

Dramatic Monologue by Mail

Learned Lady: Letters from Robert Browning to Mrs. Thomas FitzGerald 1876-1889, edited by Edward C. McAleer (Harvard, 232 pp. \$5.50), illuminates the final fourteen years of the poet's life. Bernard Grebanier is the author of many volumes on English literature.

By BERNARD GREBANIER

THESE last years the run-of-the-mill of what has passed in academic circles as "scholarship"—drudgery performed without conviction or love by college teachers to maintain jobs or better them—has been under fire, by no one more persistently than me. Such publications leave out literature, its creators, and its readers alike. When, therefore, a Professor Edward McAleer comes along, it is an occasion for sending up sky-rockets; this book is an event.

Not only do these sixty-six letters take their place firmly beside the love letters and the later correspondence edited by Hood (1933), De Vane and Knickerbocker (1950), and by McAleer earlier (*Dearest Isa*, 1951) in enriching Browning biography; their editor has also exceeded the others in his elaborate care to make the book at every turn as valuable to the lover of Browning as to the specialist. To quote an example: in 1878 Browning wrote from the continent, "What horrors fill the *Times* . . . ! I don't remember such a generally disastrous year as the present." Professor McAleer appends this note:

It took two days for London papers to reach Splügen, and, therefore, Browning had just finished reading the *Times* for September 12 when he wrote this letter. That issue reported a collision in the Thames of the *Princess Alice Saloon Steamer* (476 persons drowned); the worst colliery explosion in the history of South Wales (280 men dead); a railway collision at Sittingbourne, and a fatal fire in Birmingham. Abroad, eighty persons died of yellow fever in one day in New Orleans; 115 in Memphis. In Catania, a high wind blew the campanile down upon a dormitory for females. At Verkinondensk, 175 houses were burnt, the charred remains of thirty-five persons found in the ruins. At Pesth, Mohammedans beheaded the Chevalier Perrod; the Mafia was especially active in Sicily, and the Russians were rearming.

At this late date no one could expect a new Browning to emerge. Rarely has anyone been more consistently himself than Browning in everything he wrote and did. And what a heartening and endearing man he always was! Mrs. FitzGerald was a close friend in those last years, and without self-consciousness he reveals his breezy yet thoughtful character in every letter. Almost to the very end he walked for hours before and after breakfast, up and down mountain roads and through the streets of towns, even the tortuous ones of Venice. There, in November, he records: "The roses and other flowers are still in bloom, and butterflies abound in the Public Gardens: this morning, for the first time, we kept home instead of taking our usual two hours' walk [he was sixty-one]—and already the sun has been out, and we shall presently follow his example."

The letters abound in wonderful touches: "The most charming adornment of my room [in London] is undoubtedly the creeper which literally embowers the window, just as if it had a purpose—as it may have. . . . I will not let curtains be put up there as long as a leaf remains which they may injure." Professor McAleer's note explains that Mrs. FitzGerald "sent Browning a cutting of the small-leaved Virginia creeper that grew on the south wall of the Shalstone manorhouse. A shoot of this creeper made its way through a crevice in the poet's study window, round the inside of which he had the creeper trained. Browning refers to this creeper in the prologue to *Pacchiaretto* and elsewhere."

There are many estimates of contemporaries which do as much honor to Browning as to them. Swinburne: "A generous nature . . . A noble heart, I am sure, spite of some early eccentricities." Carlyle: "He is silent now, unless spoken to—but when he does speak all the old soul is in the little he says." Kingsley: "The strong fresh man who jumped up a hillock to pluck barberries for my wife, and, when we inspected the ruins of an abbey . . . , lay down in the stone coffin embedded still in the earth there."

But Browning, ever clear-headed, was, with all his enthusiasms, no sentimental voyager. The Swiss peasant "absorbed in his money-grubbing, 'with a clown's (not even) broad back turned (the reverse of) broadly to the glory of the stars' repels me." In Venice, "our second gondolier, Domenico, disappeared at



—Bettmann Archive.

Robert Browning—"endearing."

dinner in consequence of his wife's indisposition, and returned the richer (?) by three boys at a birth." This event had a sequel described in a letter to another correspondent: "Poor Don Carlos [the claimant to the throne of Spain] went, out of curiosity and good-nature to see—and fee—the mother—and at once got credited with the paternity; and the mother herself was said to have been all but slain by the scent of his pocket-handkerchief."

These letters run over with comments on persons, places, life, art, and literature; but nothing is more recurrent than references to his son Pen. Even before Pen was a day old Browning had said, "I feel as if I could give my life for him already." His son remained his chief care until the end of his days. When he rushed to be at the side of his own dying father, Browning wrote Pen: "Let me have the comfort of knowing, dearest, that you do your work well—and act like a man in my absence." It is truly pathetic in these new letters to see how the poet strove to convince himself that Pen was an important painter and that his successes—due entirely to his being the son of the parents he had—would be continuing. Alas! No one speaks of Pen Browning's ambitious paintings any more, and museums that own them seem to prefer keeping them rolled up. Certainly the son's ineffectualness was owing to no neglect or lack of love on the part of his father.

It should be remarked that to complete one's satisfaction with this fine book, Marcelle Thiébaux has added an Appendix of Bibliographical Descriptions of each of these letters (which are now in the Pforzheimer Library), for the purpose, as Professor McAleer says, of making it "possible for future editors to date . . . some of the letters Browning left undated." Nothing, in short, has been overlooked.