



Los Angeles Times
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Breakdown

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In a desperate attempt to exorcise MacGoon I finally succumbed to the public prints and reviewed one of his three current best sellers in a weekly New York book review. The remarks, in part, went more or less as follows:

The downhill speed of American poetry in the last decade has been breathtaking for those who watch the sport. Poetry plunged out of the classics, out of the modern masters, out of all standards and plopped into the playpen.

There we are entertained with the fecal-buccal carnival of the naughties and the uglies, who have their own magazines and publishing houses and (the love-torn alienates, nihilists, disaffiliates who croon or "rock" their way into the legitimate publishing establishment. MacGoon falls into the latter category.

What children's message have we here? Is the Beatification of American poetry becoming a reality? Are the negative qualities on the rise in poetry also? Will the bilge work its way up to the library and the graduate school and to the art of writing itself? The answer to all these questions is a dismal groan.

Publishers, even those who formerly prided themselves on the quality of their publications, are now in the midst of a dismal swamp of the adolescent revolution. They seem to drool at the sight of a rock festival, which attracts a quarter to a half million of the new humanoids. They cannot resist the temptation. They seek out MacGoon—and pay their overhead.

The aftermath of my critique was typical. There were letters and phone calls and a dressing-down from a reporter in Los Angeles who called to ask me to explain myself. He had been assigned to interview MacGoon, who, it seems, had also read my diatribe. When asked what he thought of it, he answered: Who cares what he thinks? And the weekly book review dropped me.

Times drawing by Ed Crager

The New Poetry--a Literary Breakdown

KARL SHAPIRO

~~There are~~ in creative writing programs for 40 years, virtually from the beginning of the kind of teaching. These programs have corroded steadily and today have reached the point of futility.

Students in such program today according to my experience all over the United States, can no longer spell, can no longer construct a simple English sentence—much less a paragraph—and cannot speak.

We have the most inarticulate generation of college students in our history and this may well account for their mass outbreaks of violence. They have no more intelligent way to express themselves.

But what is really distressing is that this generation cannot and does not read. I am speaking of university students in what are supposed to be our best universities. Their illiteracy is staggering.

But of course they claim to read. They may slam the professor's anthology on the floor but they will go to the bookshop and buy the innumerable paperback best sellers of their generation, which are almost always trashy rewrites of current sociological or philosophical fads.

The kitsch-camp-op-pop-absurdist-revolutionary sweepings of the evil with which they fill their wordless minds are what they bring to class.

They do not want to read; they want to "experience." They do not want to learn; they want to "feel." They have become almost impossible to teach.

As far as I can tell, the high school has now reached the level of the grade school; the college is at high school level; the graduate school at college level; and whatever reading and writing is being done is being done by professors.

It appears that the modern student enters the university with a contempt for the university, a contempt for society, a contempt for literature, and a contempt for himself. Where did he learn this? Not from his own school; not from the library. I don't think so.

Karl Shapiro, former editor of Poetry magazine, has won the Pulitzer and Bollingen prizes for his poetry and now teaches at UC Davis. This article, excerpted from one that appeared in Library Journal, was distributed by the Chicago Daily News.

He learned it from what the new illiterates call the media: TV, radio, newspaper, phonograph, rock festival, magazine and paperback bookstore. He learned it from what the new illiterates call their counterculture; he learned it from his contemporaries and the exploiters of cults.

For the first time in history the illiterate have a literature of their own: op-pop-camp-kitsch-existential-occult-nihilist sweepings and swill. Armed to the teeth with this quasi-literature it is little wonder that they slam the textbook on the floor (and stomp) out to their cars, barefooted.

I will now introduce the hero, or antihero, if you like. He is a real person and all the information I am going to give you is true and accurate, except for his name. I have changed his name not for any legalistic reason but because I feel humiliated to have to bring up his name at all. Here then is Dylan MacGoon.

(I first heard of Dylan MacGoon as I was checking out of a hotel in Milwaukee. The girl behind the desk who must have seen in the local paper that I was lecturing on poetry, asked me what I thought of the poetry of Dylan MacGoon. Who?

That was just about a year ago but in the ensuing months the name began to come at me from all directions. In one university where I gave a poetry reading I was challenged by a student from the audience who wanted to know what I thought of MacGoon. I had seen some of his verses by then and answered that I didn't think anything of them; they were not even trash.

I now began to see headlines about MacGoon's three new books, one of

which had been commissioned, no less, by one of the largest and most respected publishing houses in New York. What bothered me was that the publisher was my publisher, a company that had printed Robinson Jeffers, all the works of W. H. Auden, Spender, myself and many others.

How could this be? I tried to put it out of my head. MacGoon, however, would not go away.

One day I saw him interviewed by one of the top news commentators, the kind of reporter who is assigned only to prime ministers and field marshals. Mr. MacGoon, said the commentator in tones of authentic awe, you are the foremost best-selling poet in the United States (he

may have said world), and then proceeded to ask about his creative regimen.

MacGoon tried to answer as best he could (language is not his strong point) and succeeded, between the awe of the commentator and his own honest dissimulations, in presenting the image of the poet. His millions of readers and listeners, all under 19, I hope, must have been gladdened.

I went to the little public library in the little town I live in, hoping against hope that there would be no MacGoon. There was. Still, I said to myself, the library is next door to a high school and MacGoon is better for the kids than marijuana. Then again, maybe he isn't.

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E DEADLOCK
Conflict: Rumors

Edward Crankshaw is on the staff of the London Observer.

team. It is doing nothing of the kind. It never has.

Quite apart from inevitable conflicts arising from personal rivalries—conflicts of the kind that as long ago as 1965 ended in the defeat of Shelepin's first formidable challenge to Brezhnev—the Presidium has been divided, the alignments constantly shifting, on a host of major