

BOOKS & COMMENT

Poetry: School of the Pacific Northwest

by Carolyn Kizer

IN the coastal strip of the United States stretching from the border of British Columbia to the southernmost reaches of the Los Angeles city limits there is a distinct culture area: that corner of the coast containing Seattle. Its current artistically creative mood has been energized largely by one man, the artist Mark Tobey, regarded by many as America's most distinguished elder painter. Junior to Tobey, and deeply influenced by him and by an interest in the Orient, which has profoundly affected both painters, is Morris Graves, whose European reputation is somewhat less, and whose domestic recognition is more advanced than that of Tobey. The Oriental influence seen in their work is also increasingly reflected in the architecture, interior decoration and taste of the Seattle area, generally.

In this same rainy, misty area, on which the sun never (or almost never) rises, with a climate tempered by the Japanese current and protecting mountains, with living traces of pioneer and Indian days, with a State University whose recent fame rests on its denial of a platform to J. Robert Oppenheimer and its football scandals, where anything resembling night-club or café life is almost unknown, a new Pacific school of poets has been emerging.

Its existence is quite apparent in recent issues of literary periodicals. For example, every issue of *Poetry* magazine for the first six months of this year (with the exception of one Japan issue) contains poems and reviews by Seattle poets. The current issue of *Botteghe Oscure* (Number XVII) has poems by six Seattle writers. In the forthcoming volume of *New World Writing*, in a section devoted to the best student poetry being produced at American colleges and universities, four of the 20 poets represented are students at the University of Washington.

This poetic activity is closely con-

nected with the presence there for some years, of Theodore Roethke, the Pulitzer Prize-winning poet of two years ago who conducts the Poetry Workshop. During the year just past, Roethke has been a Fulbright professor in Italy, and his work has been carried on by Stanley Kunitz. Undergraduates, graduate students, instructors, professors and neighboring poets share and criticize each other's work in an atmosphere amazingly free of the back-biting, infighting, jealousy and the concomitant secrecy about one's own work usually found when two or more writers gather together. Nor has this busy atmosphere produced a lot of little paste-up Roethkes toddling along in the wake of the master. Except for the occasional outcropping of a strongly stressed trimeter line, heavily end-stopped, which Roethke adapted from Yeats and made his own, these poets are all highly individual in approach and technique. This is all the more remarkable seeing that this is a group which bears down heavily on critical analysis of its own work. In these poems one finds originality of imagery, few hammock-sag lines, and a readily audible, although natural, beat. As Roethke says, with considerable emphasis, "I teach a beat." And the level of aural sensibility is high.

As to program, these poets are united only in what might be called "the feeling area" of their work. This is The Age of the Fear of Feeling, and for some time, while the more prominent younger poets in America have shown a technical proficiency which puts their English counterparts to shame, there has been a great deal of what Roethke calls "cosy" writing: the fear of the display of emotion, the fear of self-exposure, the desire to be emotionally sophisticated even at the cost of a lie. For a number of years, poets like Roethke and Kunitz had to buck the tendency of editors to encourage, and publish,

this kind of writing, a tendency which is still the stock-in-trade of *The New Yorker* and some of the quarterlies. Thanks to the increasing acceptance of Roethke as a truly expressive force in American poetry, resistance seems to be wavering.

Two of the most interesting poets in this group are Carol Hall and David Wagoner. Mrs. Hall is the wife of a University professor, James Hall, who is a skillful poet himself. Mr. Wagoner has lived in Seattle only two years, was a former student of Roethke's at Pennsylvania State. He has published two novels, and a volume of poetry, *Dry Sun, Dry Wind*, and is an assistant professor in the English Department. Somewhat younger, amazingly prolific, and the recent winner in the Yale Series of Younger Poets competition, is James Wright. Wright has almost completed his Ph.D. at the University, was previously a student with John Crowe Ransom at Kenyon College.

There are poets like Richard Hugo, who works for the Boeing Aircraft Company, and myself, who have no official connection with the University at present, but whose social and literary activities center around this group. There are younger workshop students of promise. Carol Christopher Drake, a young poet majoring in Greek, who has not yet graduated, but has already been published in *Botteghe Oscure* is an easterner. Jean Clower, a graduate student from Texas, is here because the last Poet-in-Residence with whom she studied told her that Roethke could help her with "that crazy stuff"—her highly original poetry. Robert Krieger is a teaching fellow from Portland, Oregon, whose work has appeared in *Poetry* and *The New Yorker*. A gifted young Canadian, Errol Prichard, only 18 years old, is studying Chinese at the instance of Stanley Kunitz, and is experimenting with translations from the French and the Chinese.

I BELIEVE that Robert Graves once said that the amount of available talent does not vary from generation to generation, that what matters is whether this body of talent is stimulated to produce. Talent is in Seattle largely because Roethke is here; and he and the Workshop are here partly because of the wise, genial and sympathetic administration of Robert J. Heilman, Chair-

man of the Department of English. The surrounding social environment, with its American emphasis on home entertaining rather than café life, offers as a bistro only such places as The Blue Moon Tavern, a grubby oasis just outside the University's one-mile-limit Sahara. Here the juke-box roars, Audrey the waitress slaps down schooners of beer, and poets, pedants, painters and other assorted wild-life make overtures to each other. They tell me the men's room walls bear quotations from Dante, in Italian, and a graffetto to the effect that "There is no God but Milton, and Arnold is his prophet." "Arnold" is Arnold Stein, the Milton scholar, who also published poetry, and is one of the

critics to whom Roethke listens with especial care.

Roethke, when he is at home, occupies the magnificent house in the woods north of Seattle which Morris Graves built for himself, while Graves continues to paint in Ireland. The latest form of amusement hereabouts has been the writing of Japanese link-poems, in concert, and lonely grappings with the *Haiku* and *Tanka* forms. Someone just wrote a series of Tanka-type verses which describe Roethke's pastoral life at the home of Graves: the Japanese wall-paintings, the geese on the great green lawn, and the poet muttering to himself in the courtyard as he works.

tended the flame that burned in this extraordinary family.

Mr. Winslow tells the story with vividness and grace. He does not neglect Edwin, the middle brother, who went into journalism instead of medicine. Mr. Winslow punctuates his story with illuminating comments that light up the history of modern psychiatry, and, to some extent, general medicine too.

The Menningers pioneered in many ways. Their Southard School was a different kind of school for different children. Dr. Karl's first book, *The Human Mind* was, perhaps, the first understandable discussion of everyday psychiatric problems that was ever offered to the literate public. Many imitations have appeared since. The Menninger Sanitarium was an integral part of the community around it; it was also a research center, a teaching facility and an unrelentingly active treatment facility. All four of these characteristics are taken for granted in good mental hospitals today. While there were a few good places in the pre-Menninger era too, what the three medical Menningers did was to fashion a yardstick by which the others could be measured. In general the major component of the Menningers' service has been pace-making, not original discovery.

They wove together like a workable unit, the training of—and the utilization of—psychiatrists, clergymen, psychologists, nurses and social workers. They did not do all this in an international center of academic learning or clinical practice. They did it in a little city in the middle of the great plains. But their mouse trap was a better one: the psychiatric world has certainly beaten a path to Topeka.

More than any other single man, Dr. Will built modern military psychiatry. He had a lot of help, of course; but it was Dr. Will who spear-headed the program that brought about gratifying reductions in psychiatric casualty rates in the latter half of World War II. His program proved itself again in Korea.

WHAT has come out of Topeka is not any dramatic psychiatric discovery or brand new treatment technic. What has come out is a spirit of teamwork, a unique combination of training, research, and service to the patient. All the life savings of the three Doctors

Experiment in Topeka

by Henry A. Davidson

SUCCESS STORIES always fascinate us. See what humble beginnings this now-vast enterprise had! Note how this once inconspicuous person has vaulted into *Who's Who*! Through what formula has this magic been accomplished?

The Menninger foundation with its affiliated hospitals, schools, clinics and

The Menninger Story, by Walker Winslow (Doubleday; \$5).

research facilities is the number one success story in American psychiatry. The skill and devotion of Dr. Karl and Dr. Will are only part of the story. Before the brothers, there was the father: Dr. Charles Frederick Menninger. From his modest Menninger Diagnostic Clinic, the sons developed the present enterprise. The jump from the Diagnostic Clinic to the Menninger Foundation was an easier step than the one from nothing to the Diagnostic Clinic. And it was Charles Frederick Menninger, not Dr. Karl or Dr. Will, who made that great leap.

In C. F. Menninger's early days, the typical practitioner hoarded to himself his hard-earned knowledge. Each tried to master every branch of medicine. Referrals to specialists were rare—and considered confessions of inadequacy. The patient got the best his physician

had to offer, but not the best that the community's profession had to offer. C. F. saw that there was only one way to bring well-rounded medicine to the patient: the team. Against considerable resistance, he put over this idea of a team clinic, and the Menninger Diagnostic Clinic was born. It was the germ of the Foundation. Unlike most psychiatric agencies and hospitals, the Menninger Sanitarium was firmly rooted in a general medical installation.

C. F. Menninger made pioneer studies of metabolic disorders when other practitioners were leaving this to the physiologist. C. F. was one of the first doctors in the United States to use insulin. His medical curiosity covered every facet of medicine, from learning the principles of plumbing so that he could supervise water cleanliness, to learning the botanical details of the plants from which drugs were made. He developed medical libraries, organized journal clubs for the exchange of ideas culled from medical journals, and established Topeka's first Boy Scout troop. His wife organized a network of unique (and still functioning) Bible classes, reared three boys, and furnished C. F. with a practical dynamism which the scholarly idealist might otherwise have lacked. She knew nothing of medicine or psychiatry, nothing of clinic administration or hospital operations. But Flo Menninger