

Joseph Parisi

*Between the Lines:
Poets and Protests in the Late Sixties*

*The following article is adapted from *Between the Lines*, the second and concluding volume of a history of Poetry compiled from letters in the magazine's archives by its former longtime editor-in-chief Joseph Parisi and senior editor Stephen Young, forthcoming this summer. The first part of their chronicle, *Dear Editor* (published in 2002), covered Poetry's perilous first fifty years, particularly its central role in promoting free verse, Imagism, and other experiments in the radical New Poetry. Tracking the rise of Modernism with uncensored frankness, the book documents the intense theoretical debates, acid behind-the-scenes rivalries, and personal struggles of scores of classic authors—especially the then obscure Ezra Pound, Robert Frost, H.D., Wallace Stevens, and William Carlos Williams—as revealed in their intimate, sometimes brutally candid, and frequently hilarious correspondence with Poetry's founder Harriet Monroe in the teens and twenties, as well as its later editors.*

Between the Lines picks up the story in 1962 and carries it through 2002, the magazine's ninetieth-anniversary year, and the uproar that ensued after the startling announcement of a bequest of over one hundred million dollars from the heiress and amateur poet Ruth Lilly, the largest donation ever given to a literary organization. The course of American poetry in the last decades has been complex, extremely rich in variety of styles and artistic concepts, and these developments unfold (as in the earlier book) through the first-person testimony of the many chief protagonists represented by letters in the history. In his introductions to individual chapters, Parisi sets the contexts for the correspondence beginning with the second "revolution" in American poetry in the late fifties and sixties, which paralleled the several political and cultural upheavals that transformed society as a whole.

In the following excerpts, his commentary centers on pivotal issues and events of the late sixties, particularly the peace movement and protests provoked by the escalating war in Vietnam. Following the discussion are pointed letters, all previously unpublished, exchanged by Poetry's editors and authors, which detail the story of several poets' reactions to and involvement with events of the day, as well as their reflections on the state of literary and national affairs in general during that turbulent era. A brief coda considers the aftermath.

1. Growing Opposition to the War

Following the assassination of John F. Kennedy on 23 November 1963, Lyndon Johnson inherited several unsettled domestic and foreign policy issues. The new president was highly successful in enacting civil rights and other social legislation. He even got Congress to provide major funding (\$268 million) in 1965 to establish what became known as the National Endowment, which through the leadership of Carolyn Kizer, the first head of the literature section, gave substantial awards to poets, Hayden Carruth, Mona Van Duyn, and Maxine Kumin first among them. (A “News Note” in *Poetry* for October 1966 added that the Endowment was also offering sabbatical grants “to writers who teach for a living.”) But Johnson’s ambitious domestic plans and hopes for what he called The Great Society were overshadowed by increasing dissent over his administration’s policies in Southeast Asia.

By 1965 U.S. involvement in Vietnam had grown exponentially, and with each escalation, resistance grew across the country. From President Kennedy’s initial commitment of 3,200 troops (and \$65 million in military equipment) in 1961, the force was expanded to 16,000 in July 1964. Then, on 4 August, North Vietnamese torpedo boats shelled and slightly damaged a U.S. destroyer doing intelligence work in the Gulf of Tonkin; later that day there was allegedly another assault on the ship. It is still not clear whether the so-called Second Attack actually occurred, but the “incident” served as sufficient pretext for Johnson to order immediate air strikes in retaliation. Meanwhile his advisers drafted the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, which Congress passed on 7 August. It authorized “all necessary measures” to defend U.S. troops and allies in Southeast Asia, and was used to justify the later military activities, including those initiated during the Nixon years.

With help from Russia, and much more later from China, North Vietnam stepped up its attacks, often using the Ho Chi Mihn Trail through Laos to infiltrate guerrillas into the South. Saigon’s own army was inadequate, but the U.S. commander in chief, General William Westmoreland, optimistically predicted that with increased U.S. forces the Communist advance could be contained. By late 1965 there were 180,000 American combat troops in South Vietnam. Hanoi responded by increasing the regular and guerrilla forces of its People’s Liberation Army to perhaps 220,000. By mid-1966 U.S. forces reached 350,000. A year later that figure grew to 486,000.

Antiwar activities started to mount a month after Johnson authorized sending in the first combat units in the spring of 1965. On 17 April, the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) organized the first large antiwar rally in Washington. Some 16,000 people peacefully picketed the White House, then marched to the Capitol singing and carrying signs declaring “No More War.” By the fall of 1965 opposition had grown considerably, and demonstrations were held in forty cities across the country in October. A favorite chant was “Hey, hey, LBJ, how many kids did you kill today?” Certain demoralized soldiers in Vietnam wrote as their motto: “We are the unwilling, led by the unqualified, doing the unnecessary for the ungrateful.”

Between 1961 and 1963, 392 U.S. forces were killed in Vietnam. By the end of 1965, 1,863 more died there. Despite sharp debate and strong misgivings, Congress authorized \$12.8 billion in January 1966 to continue the war. In the summer large race riots broke out in Chicago, Cleveland, Brooklyn, Dayton, San Francisco, Atlanta, and other cities; there were scores more the following year. Meanwhile, the bombing increased in Vietnam and Agent Orange and other chemicals began to be used to defoliate the jungle. Financial costs of the war were now running to \$1.2 billion a month, according to the Treasury Department. Casualties were 970 in September 1966 alone, with 145 killed in one week; the total combat deaths for the year were 6,143. By the end of 1967 another 11,153 U.S. troops had died. In 1968, the highest point for casualties, 16,592 more deaths were added to the toll.

Statistics indicate only part of the larger costs of the war, of course, to the soldiers, their families, and the character of the nation, as well as its international reputation. By war’s end, 58,193 soldiers were killed, more than 150,000 were wounded, and at least 21,000 were permanently disabled. Over the duration, more than three million served in the undeclared war; their average age was nineteen. The Veterans Administration estimates that 830,000 Vietnam vets suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder; 480,000 exhibited symptoms so severe as to classify them as disabled. Several hundred thousand American troops were also exposed to Agent Orange, with untold health consequences years later. Total cost of the war over three administrations was at least \$176 billion. Estimates of the number of Vietnamese who died during the conflict vary greatly and may never be known for certain, but figures released by the Vietnam government in 1995 put the number of combatant deaths at one million and civilians at four million.

IN MAY 1966, Galway Kinnell wrote to Henry Rago at *Poetry* about the series of poetry “read-ins” he and Robert Bly had organized at colleges and community centers across the country. These and many other such programs involved scores of poets of all ages who wrote in widely different styles. They attracted thousands of participants, and like the “teach-ins” and “be-ins,” these protests were almost always peaceful, in keeping with their pacific intentions. As the war dragged on and the mood grew angrier, rallies became far less tranquil.

Of the many antiwar demonstrations during these years, the most dramatic was the March on the Pentagon, 21 October 1967. It was the climax of five days of protests across the country against the draft and U.S. policy organized by the National Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam (a.k.a. “the Mobe”). As many as 100,000 people gathered calmly at the Lincoln Memorial to hear antiwar speeches and to witness the burning of draft cards. Led by the chairman of the committee, David Dellinger, who declared the days of peaceful protest were over, a crowd of more than 50,000, many of them hippies in colorful attire, marched to the Pentagon. Along with the thousands of students and ordinary citizens, many clergy participated, as well as the noted baby doctor Dr. Benjamin Spock and several prominent poets and writers. Besides Spock, the most notable among the speakers were Robert Lowell, who later wrote two sonnets about the March, and Norman Mailer, who reported on events in his “novel as history” *Armies of the Night*, which won the Pulitzer Prize for 1968.

But the theatrical flare and appropriately absurdist Dada gestures were provided by Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin, the leaders of the new Yippie (Youth International Party) “movement.” (In August, Hoffman—who denied the Yippies had leaders or could be “organized”—had disrupted activity at the New York Stock Exchange when he dropped wads of dollar bills onto the trading floor from the visitors’ gallery.) Allen Ginsberg composed a mantra that was chanted to “levitate” the Pentagon, while Rubin and Hoffman, in an Uncle Sam hat, attempted to “exorcize” the evil spirits from the premises.

Six thousand U.S. marshals and troops were called up to protect the building. Hippies, in an expression of Flower Power, placed blossoms into the bayoneted rifle barrels; but when a large splinter group (some said the SDS) stormed the line and tried to enter the Pentagon, the federal forces started clubbing demonstrators and tear gas was released. Chaos ensued and rioting continued into the night, during which time 681 people

were arrested, including Mailer and Hoffman. Although the rally ended in a rout, many historians consider the massive demonstration a major factor in Johnson's decision not to run for re-election. By the end of 1967, public approval of the war dropped to 35 percent.

Even more depressing news on several fronts followed in 1968, one of the most tumultuous years globally since World War II. The North Vietnamese observed their New Year by launching the Tet Offensive on 31 January. Some 84,000 Viet Cong guerrillas and regular troops attacked hundreds of South Vietnamese cities and villages, and twelve American bases, then entered Saigon where they took over the U.S. Embassy for six hours—the siege was filmed by American television and broadcast on the nightly news—before a major allied push forced them into retreat. During the conflict, the U.S. lost over a thousand soldiers, the South Vietnamese suffered 4,000 casualties, and perhaps 400,000 people were left homeless. The wide and rapid success of the assault belied the rosy prognoses for “success” the Pentagon had been putting out, revealing how military advisors had misled their commander in chief as well as the country. Tet marked the decisive turning point in public opinion about U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Polls taken shortly afterward indicated President Johnson's approval rating on his conduct of the war had now slipped to 26 percent.

2. *Annus Horribilis*: 1968

Newspaper headlines and capsule comments may serve to highlight the continually surprising and often tragic events during the following months of 1968:

In February, Illinois Governor Otto Kerner issues his report on the 1967 race riots, rejecting conspiracy theories and naming racism and police brutality as the cause. Kerner warns that the country is moving toward two “separate and unequal societies.”

On March 12th, Senator Eugene McCarthy, Democrat of Minnesota, has a surprisingly strong showing in the New Hampshire primary on an antiwar platform; expected to get only 20 percent, he wins 41.9 percent of the vote. That day the *New York Times* reveals that General Westmoreland has requested an additional 206,000 troops. Encouraged by McCarthy's success, Robert Kennedy announces his own candidacy for president on March 16th. (On the same day, the My Lai massacre occurs; the killing of three hundred Vietnamese civilians by American

troops is concealed for a year.) On March 31st President Johnson makes his dramatic announcement on television that he will not run again, and says he intends to stop the bombing in North Vietnam. North Vietnam says it will meet with U.S. representatives.

On April 4th, Martin Luther King Jr. is assassinated in Memphis. Riots break out in Washington, D.C., New York, Chicago, Detroit, and a hundred other cities; the National Guard is called out. On April 10th, Congress approves the Civil Rights Bill of 1968, which prohibits racial discrimination in housing, schools, and voting. On April 28, a thousand students barricade themselves for three days in five buildings at Columbia University, protesting university involvement in studies for the Pentagon. Police eject them and arrest 700. (Meanwhile, on April 29th, the musical *Hair* opens on Broadway, breaking long-standing taboos on nudity and vulgar language in the theater.) On May 10th, university students riot in Paris. A shanty town is set up by blacks, Mexicans, and Native Americans on the Washington Mall on May 11th.

On May 13th the U.S. and North Vietnam begin peace talks in Paris; negotiations will stop and restart repeatedly over the next five years. On May 17th nine anti-war demonstrators seize Selective Service draft records in Catonsville, Maryland. The poet, activist, and Jesuit priest Daniel Berrigan and his brother Philip are arrested. (Dan disappears, continues to aid the antiwar movement, and is not apprehended until 1970; he serves time in Danbury Federal Penitentiary.)

On June 5th Robert Kennedy wins the California primary; immediately after his acceptance speech he is assassinated by Sirhan Sirhan and dies the following day, at age forty-two. On June 19th the Poor People's March is held in Washington. On July 1st the nuclear non-proliferation treaty is signed; France and China are not parties to it. On July 23rd Palestinian terrorists hijack an Israeli airliner and fly it to Algeria; it is the first such act for political purposes.

On August 8th Richard Nixon wins the Republican nomination for president on the first ballot in Miami Beach, defeating New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller and California Governor Ronald Reagan. Nixon promises "an honorable end to the war in Vietnam." August 20-31, Czechoslovakia, which only six months earlier celebrated a "Prague Spring" of liberation, is invaded by the Soviet Union and 200,000 troops from Warsaw Pact nations; reformist Communist leader Alexander Dubcek protests and is demoted.

On August 28th the Democrats meet in Chicago for their

convention, amid oppressive heat and bus, taxi, and telephone strikes. About 20,000 antiwar demonstrators hold a “festival of life” with dancing and poetry readings in Grant and Lincoln Parks, although Mayor Richard J. Daley refuses to grant permission to parade or to sleep in parks. He also requests 5,000 National Guardsmen and 7,000 federal troops to buttress the city police force. At the boisterous convention, Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey wins the nomination. Followers of Senator McCarthy and Senator George McGovern (who tries to rally Robert Kennedy’s supporters) attempt but are unable to modify the pro-war party platform.

Militants, including Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin, Black Panther leader Bobby Seale, and Tom Hayden of SDS, gather their followers in the park in front of the Hilton Hotel, Democrat Party headquarters. With several TV cameras recording live, some 5,000 angry protestors shout “The whole world is watching”—then tear gas is released and police and troops charge using nightsticks, clubbing all in sight, including sixty-three newsmen, and drag people off and pack them into paddy wagons. About 1,000 demonstrators are injured, 101 hospitalized; 192 police are hurt, 49 hospitalized. Eventually, in March 1969, Hoffman, Rubin, Hayden, Seale, Dellinger, and three others are indicted for conspiracy and inciting a riot, and become known as The Chicago Eight—then Seven, after Seale creates an uproar at trial by calling Judge Julius Hoffman a “fascist pig,” among other things, is gagged and tied to his chair, and finally severed from the case.

In other news during the summer and early fall of 1968, in September Arthur Ashe becomes the first black player to win U.S. open amateur tennis championship. Nixon appears on the Number 1 TV program, *Laugh-In*, to ask: “Sock it to *me*?” Jacqueline Kennedy marries Aristotle Onassis on the isle of Skorpios. And at the Olympic games in Mexico City in October, black sprinters bow their heads during the U.S. Anthem and raise clenched fists in a black-power salute, are suspended, and then thrown out of the Olympic Village.

On November 5th, Nixon wins the presidential election by just 500,000 votes, or 2.3 million fewer than he drew in his loss to Kennedy in 1960. Republicans and Democrats narrowly split the popular vote, but third-party candidate Governor George Wallace of Alabama takes 13.5 percent, and 45 electoral votes, enough to hurt Humphrey in industrial states.

By December 12th U.S. combat casualties in Vietnam have reached 30,057—9,557 deaths in the first six months of the year and more than

in all of 1967. Troop levels finally plateau at 540,000 for the war, which has become the longest in American history.

3. *Annus Mirabilis*: 1968

Despite political and social upheaval, or perhaps because of it, the intellectual and cultural ferment in the country during this period remains extraordinarily impressive forty years on. Amid so much depressing news in unhappily eventful 1968, one still marvels at the unusually large number of memorable achievements, along with the needful diversions, produced by artists and entertainers that year. Besides *Hair*, other hits on Broadway are *Boys in the Band*, *The Great White Hope*, and *Promises, Promises*. (And Luciano Pavarotti makes his debut at the Metropolitan Opera in *La Bohème*.) Hit movies of 1968 include *The Graduate*, *Funny Girl*, *Rosemary's Baby*, *Planet of the Apes*, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, The Beatles' *The Yellow Submarine*, *The Lion in Winter*, *The Odd Couple*, *The Producers*, and *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*. Academy Awards in various categories go to *In the Heat of the Night*, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, *Cool Hand Luke*, and *Bonnie and Clyde*.

Among the top hit singles of 1968 are numbered "Hey Jude" (The Beatles), "I Heard It Through the Grapevine" (Marvin Gaye), "People Got to be Free" (The Rascals), "Mrs. Robinson" (Simon & Garfunkel's theme song for *The Graduate*), "Hello, Goodbye" (The Beatles), "Hello, I Love You" (The Doors), and "Born to be Wild" (Steppenwolf). In November The Beatles also release their groundbreaking *White Album*.

Best-sellers and critically claimed books of 1968 include Carlos Castaneda's *Teachings of Don Juan*, Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice*, Arthur Hailey's *Airport*, Peter Maas's, *The Valachi Papers*, Desmond Morris's *The Naked Ape*, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *The Cancer Ward*, Gore Vidal's *Myra Breckenridge*, and New Journalism founder Tom Wolfe's *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*.

In 1968 the first *Whole Earth Catalogue* is published, and indicates the hippie movement is also attracting many people beyond the counterculture. In fashion news, Calvin Klein and Ralph Lauren start their clothing lines. At the same time, antique clothes and second-hand "granny" dresses become the rage with hippies. As the drug culture spreads, so does Eastern philosophy, and along with it the wearing of sandals, embroidered caftans, Afghan coats. "In" styles for both men and women feature bell bottom pants, long hair and Afros, headbands,

jangling bracelets. Meanwhile, members of the women's liberation movement protest the Miss America pageant and throw girdles, curlers, and *Cosmo* into "Freedom Trash Cans" in several cities.

And in other news, early in 1968 Christiaan Barnard of South Africa performs the first heart transplant. On Christmas Eve the Apollo 8 astronauts circle the moon for the first time.

4. Correspondence 1966-1968

Hardly surprising, the war in Vietnam and the growing opposition to it were frequent topics in correspondence to *Poetry* in 1966 and 1967, and several poets reflected on the conflict at home as well as abroad. Galway Kinnell appended to his letters long lists of participating poets and colleges for the "read-ins" he and Robert Bly organized from Oregon to Illinois and Ohio to the Eastern seaboard; Rago published the names in the June and July issues. Allen Ginsberg, another prominent peace activist, wrote from San Francisco and Omaha during his many cross-country trips. The noted critic Kenneth Burke enclosed satiric verses about the policies of the Johnson administration. Denise Levertov sent greetings on the eve of her husband's trial in Boston, where he, Dr. Benjamin Spock, Yale chaplain William Sloane Coffin, and others were charged with conspiracy for burning draft cards and helping eligible men avoid induction.

For his Contributor's Note in the December 1968 issue, Robert Chatain, a young soldier whose work was accepted for *Poetry* while he was on active duty, wrote from Vietnam: "In fourteen days I get out of here, and out of the Army at the same exquisite time. If I had the resources I would print this information on formal announcements and mail it, at government expense, to everyone I know. . . . My wife and I don't have the faintest idea where we're bound for. The series of poems, sixty-seven of them, is almost finished; I am calling them 'united / states' . . ."

Robert Bly to Henry Rago [Madison, MN], 24 March 1966
Dear Henry,

I'm enclosing a copy of a *Times* clipping. You may be able to use it



Galway Kinnell



Robert Bly



James Dickey

for a news note. The “read-in” is a sort of unhappy name donated by the newspapers, but the idea is just to have not a group of political people on stage but a group of poets who testify by the presence of their bodies on stage that they are opposed to the course of the war in Vietnam.

I have wanted for a long time to thank you very much for sending the Sixties [Press] books out for review consistently! That is encouraging. I think all the reviews have been very fair as well—I was pleased with all of them. . . . Reviewers often refuse to give an opinion! . . .

With all good wishes! / Robert

Allen Ginsberg to Henry Rago **New York City, 19 April 1966**
Dear Mr Rago:

Enclosed find the first part of a long poem I wrote on recent Midwest trip. A longer larger section being mantric Unilateral Declaration of End of Vietnam War will be in *Village Voice* in a few weeks.

I’ve regarded your invitation to submit poetry to *Poetry* highly enough to withhold from doing so till I had a poem I feel would be equal to the occasion as a debut piece for historic *Poetry*—in my judgement [sic] the enclosed would be appropriate so I commend it to your attention.

It was written on UHER Tapemachine as part of a series of experiments in composition aloud. Bob Dylan the young minnesinger had given me the gift of enough money for a precision instrument which was portable. So the poem’s written, in a car.

Best wishes— / Allen Ginsberg

[*In left margin:*] I would appreciate an early reply as I have promised mss. to many places and wish to keep my promises.

Rago accepted the poem on 9 May, with a query: “on page 1 the typescript has Melleville. Do you mean it this way—it could be a triple pun—or would you like to make it simply Melville?”

Allen Ginsberg to Henry Rago **New York City, 18 May 1966**
Dear Mr Rago:

I am really very happy that you accepted the Wichita poem for

Poetry. I like it as a poem and statement. Thank you for your kindness. Melville should be spelt properly Melville, it's my sloppiness here. I know you are crowded up with earlier mss. but I hope there won't be too long a delay in printing the poem: I've waited so long to publish a text in Poetry that now I am eager to see one in place. But I know you have a large backlog so I'll tarry in patience. . . .

Thank you again for your courtesy to the poem of my own that I sent you.

As ever, / Allen Ginsberg

Galway Kinnell to Henry Rago **New York City, 12 May 1966**

Dear Henry,

As you know there have been a number of "Read-ins" protesting the war in Vietnam. It is astonishing how the poets have risen to the occasion, far more than the novelists or other writers. I'm sending you a list of all those poets who participated, hoping you can print the list in your "News Notes," for I think it's extraordinarily impressive. I know you aren't able to be at Minneapolis, but may we add your name as having sent a message? I have put it in on the enclosed list feeling sure you will agree.

With warm regards, / Galway

Kinnell enclosed a list of eighty-nine poets who participated in readings protesting the war, and eight others who could not attend but sent poems to be read. The list of locations of "read-ins" included twenty-two campuses from Portland, Oregon, to St. Cloud, Minnesota, to New York City. Kinnell sent a list of eighteen additional readers in May. Rago ran the lists in the June issue and printed an additional one in August. In September 1966 *Poetry* printed Bly's "March in Washington Against the Vietnam War." The first antiwar march on Washington had taken place 17 March 1965.

Marvin Bell to Henry Rago **Iowa City, IA, 28 May 1966**

Dear Henry:

I'm sick at heart over my lengthy delay in reviewing for you the four anthologies. . . . I seem to receive "fan" letters whenever you print something by me in *Poetry*, and the last review you published drew admiration I respected and welcomed. . . .

Although May is nearly over, I am enclosing twenty poems for your consideration. I have been accumulating these for you during the past thirteen months. . . .

The reference to "Henry" in "The Membership" is an allusion to the

“selves” in Berryman’s *Dream Songs*. Do you think it requires a footnote? (One of the pleasures related to participating in a number of the recent read-ins was visit to Berryman, while in Minneapolis at Bly’s invitation for a set of them, and listening to Berryman separate “Henry” from himself.)

Sincerely, / Marvin Bell

Robert Duncan to Henry Rago [San Francisco, CA], 1 June 1966

Dear Henry/

. . . POETRY is beginning to reflect quite a bit of the poetic activity of San Francisco—it was always San Francisco’s neglect of POETRY that made it otherwise, and I am glad that the ice is beginning to break.

Perhaps having taken on too many commitments to do Prefaces (two to new books forthcoming of mine; and then one for the *Alchemical Papers* of Thomas Vaughan), I am in an almost stagnant period. You will have first serve, when I have some poems again.

Yours, / Robert Duncan

Allen Ginsberg to Henry Rago

[n.p.], 3 June 1966

Dear Mr. Rago:

Alas the poem I sent you [“Wichita Vortex Sutra (I)”], I had left a copy with students at Nebraska University & I hear rumor that they mimeographed it for sale cheap to benefit local student poesy/pacifist magazine. I’m not sure & have written to check up. I think that must constitute “publication” maybe & thus make poem ineligible for Poetry Magazine publication, which I regret. I’ll let you know for sure when I hear, in a week or so. I don’t mind but I am disappointed not to have that poem in Poetry especially after you’d been generous enough to accept it.

I’ll write you when I’m surer as to status of the poem. But I thought best send you this note in time.

As ever / Allen Ginsberg

**Allen Ginsberg to Henry Rago /City Light Books, San Francisco, CA
14 June 1966**

Dear Mr Rago:

I’ve found that students at Lincoln, Neb. mimeographed the poem, and that was picked up by a mimeographed 500 copy magazine DO IT in Omaha. So I guess that excludes the text from *Poetry*. Please let me know. I’m sorry to have confused matters so by my looseness with mss.

But it hadn't occurred to me in practical terms what wd happen, as I gave them a copy of the poem the day after it was written. Send me a card here please—

As ever, / Allen Ginsberg

H.R. replied 20 June that the poem's appearance even in a mimeographed magazine constituted prior publication, according to *Poetry's* longstanding policy. He thanked Ginsberg for his thoughtfulness in informing him as soon as possible, adding: "I couldn't be more sorry. Let us hope that you will have POETRY in mind for the next thing you do that would make for an auspicious 'presentation' in our pages."

Hayden Carruth to Henry Rago Johnson, VT, 28 August 1966
Dear Henry,

I'd been typing these things up—a big job!—for several days when the news of the government grant [from the NEA] came yesterday; somewhat prematurely, but you know how these things are. It threw me into a loop, frankly. I had been feeling unsure of myself anyhow, and now this added pressure: can the poems support it? Won't they just seem insignificant and terribly inadequate to the people who have been so kind to me? Etc., etc.

However, first things first, and in this case first is thanks. So much. The Harriet Monroe Award, the Brandeis Award, all those *Poetry* prizes, the recommendations for fellowships, and now this—you have done a tremendous amount for me. I don't know really how to say what I feel. I am sensible of all of it, deeply sensible. And I think you know that in my case all these helps have served much more than their ostensible literary purpose, because they have enabled me to remake my life in the way it seriously needed remaking. Without them I simply could not have done it. I just hope my writing has been intelligent enough, useful enough to have earned at least a little of all this munificence.

As for the poems, it would be inexcusable to send any editor such a large batch, and all I can do is plead the non-professional and supra-professional nature of our relationship. . . . For long periods I haven't written anything at all, and have just slumped, feeling extremely unpoetic. Most of these poems have been done for or after particular occasions, usually very rapidly—some are fragmentary. I honestly can't judge them or tell much about them. . . .

If you haven't time or strength to read all this stuff, I'll understand.
Meanwhile many, many thanks again. From all of us. And do let us

know how your summer went, and your other news.

Love to all, / Hayden

John Ashbery to Henry Rago

Art News, New York City

21 October 1966

Dear Mr. Rago,

I can't tell you how pleased and honored I feel at receiving the Union League Civic and Arts Foundation Prize from *Poetry*. This was a wonderful piece of news. I am writing to Mr. Martin to express my appreciation. And thank you.

Although I hate to ask you for a favor in the same breath as thanking you for one, I had been meaning to write you to ask if you would be kind enough to recommend me again for a Guggenheim. You did once several years ago, but last year I neglected to re-apply in time and must go through the whole process again. If you could find time to do this I would certainly appreciate it.

I am very glad you like my two pieces on Frank O'Hara. I would have been very happy to write one for *Poetry*, but did not think of suggesting it since I could not remember reading any articles of that kind there. I don't think I could do another one, and in fact declined doing one for *Art and Literature* since not only is it painful but it is very difficult to express one's sense of loss in different words several times. Perhaps Kenneth Koch would like to write one, however. . . .

Sincerely, / John Ashbery

O'Hara was struck by a Jeep dune buggy as he stood on a Fire Island beach late at night and died of multiple injuries on 25 July 1966, a few months after his fortieth birthday.

Leonard Nathan to Henry Rago

New Delhi, India

24 December 1966

Dear Henry Rago:

Some more from India, though not, I guess, Indian. This place is incredible, not the least for its literary life. Ginsberg left quite a trail, but there is an Indian twist to it. For Beats, they have their "anti-poets" writing, obviously "anti-poetry." I am to address these people soon, mostly young. In Calcutta a group of free-wheelers—I guess of the Beat variety—began a monthly magazine for verse. It soon became a weekly, then a daily, then—so help me God—an hourly; they printed, so I hear, seven in one day. I guess the poets lined up in front of their door, with

poems hot off the pan, or finishing them up right there.

Though many Indian poets seem a bit bewildered by their own relation to their tradition and to what's going on in the west now, things seem lively enough. Like the local politics, Indian poetry seems going every which way, but, unlike the politics, some of the poets seem to be getting somewhere. What chiefly they lack—so far as I can tell—is a good practical criticism, a thing we may have too much of. And then politics gets in the way, not just poetic politics. The tendency is for the manifesto to substitute for thinking hard about individual poems and poems in general. But nobody is curling up in silence and that means, if nothing else, there is plenty of life. And out of the collision of east and west—it is no less than that—something may come that is larger than either. If it doesn't, there will have been a lot of joy on the way.

Best wishes for the new year.

Cordially, / Leonard

Ted Berrigan to Henry Rago

[n.p.], 27 January 1967

Dear Mr. Rago:

Earlier this evening I was telling Ron Padgett how, when you returned my last batch of poems, you included a note on the poems, saying they were rather "mild." Ron said that your note was wildly hilarious, or rather we both said it at once—it was so inspiring that we decided to send you some more poems which, I hope, are not so mild as the previous ones.

Now, don't you go Aram Saroyanesque on us by inverting the "m" in your next reply.

Yours in good humor,

Ted Berrigan

David McReynolds to Robert Mueller

New York City

31 January 1967

Dear Robert Mueller,

I think you might be interested in the two items that I have enclosed. The first is a sheet of ads ready to run by publications using a photo offset process. It may be that you would want to help us reach men of draft age with information on their legal rights to apply for the classification of conscientious objector and might be willing to run one of these three ads in your magazine. We have a small budget that we are using to place these ads in those publications that insist on money and I am turning to you

in the hope of charity, as our ad budget is now exhausted.

Second, a copy of “Up Tight With the Draft?” is enclosed—you might want to give it a plug.

Certainly we would be grateful for whatever you can do and send you our best wishes for the success of *Poetry*.

David McReynolds

The pamphlet did not receive a plug, although Rago did mention various antiwar activities in “News Notes.” Robert Mueller, the managing editor, had been called up for active duty in the navy in 1965; after more than a dozen years on the *Poetry* staff, beginning as assistant editor, he resigned his position in 1966.

Robert Bly to Henry Rago **Madison, MN, 21 February 1967**

Dear Henry,

We are doing a reprint of the booklet called A POETRY READING AGAINST THE VIETNAM WAR, and I’m currently choosing a few substitutes for the empty spaces representing the absence of Cummings! I thought I would put in [Robert] Duncan’s “Uprising,” and that wonderful poem of Denise’s [Levertov] you published, called “Life At War” [June 1966]. I have Denise’s permission, and I would be pleased then to have the permission of *Poetry*. We will acknowledge your prior publication in our acknowledgements page. . . .

I don’t know what to think of this new development involving the creation of a third organization of literary magazines, CCLM [Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines]! I would have preferred that subsidies come from foundations, rather than from the government. However, I suppose ALMA [Association of Literary Magazines of America] should be grateful that it wasn’t subsidized by the CIA. . . . [sic]

Warm wishes, / Robert

A January 1967 “News Note” announced the publication of the anthology, which was gathered by Bly and David Ray and put out by American Writers Against the Vietnam War; the collection was distributed by Bly’s The Sixties Press (Madison, MN) and priced at \$1.00. In 1990 CCLM was renamed the Council of Literary Magazines and Presses (CLMP).

Louis Ginsberg to Henry Rago **Paterson, NJ, 23 February 1967**

Dear Mr. Henry Rago:

Greetings! As the Southern delta gentleman said, “How’s bayou?”

Am enclosing five poems in hopes you might like some enough to smuggle them into your magazine.

As you might know, I have two sons also writing and publishing poetry: one Eugene Brooks, a lawyer; and the redoubtable Allen.

No doubt, poets are born, not paid; they may not get cash though sometimes they get cachet.

Almost a year ago, Allen and I gave a joint reading at the *Poetry Society of America* in NY. Since then, we have received many offers from colleges. We have been booked for joint readings . . . I am enclosing a clipping about the Poetry Society reading from the N.Y. TIMES.

Lately, in my mementopause, I have been invaded by a affliction of puns. So, when Spring comes, a young man's fancy, but a young woman's much fancier. Then the boys are gallant and the gays are buoyant.

Be that as it may, I hope that some of my poems may please you.

Yours for an o-pun mind,

Louis Ginsberg

Louis Ginsberg was then teaching at Rutgers; besides the clipping from the *Times* of 1 April 1966, he enclosed a complete bibliography.

James Schuyler to Henry Rago Southampton, NY, 7 April 1967

Dear Mr Rago,

I enclose a poem, "Seeking," for your consideration. Also a book, which I had thought John Myers had sent you, though I gather I was wrong.

The way in which you memorialized Frank O'Hara was most beautiful and moving, I thought. More would have said less.

Yours sincerely, / James Schuyler

In October, as an obituary notice Rago ran the lines: "Wind, you'll have a terrible time / smothering my clarity . . ." Schuyler's *May 24th or So* was printed in a limited edition by John Bernard Myers in 1966; a director of the Tibor de Nagy Gallery, Myers first affixed the name "New York School" to Schuyler, Ashbery, O'Hara, and Koch, to associate them with the New York painters. A News Note for April 1968 reported that MoMA published a memorial volume of poems by O'Hara, *In Memory of My Feelings*, edited by Bill Berkson, with 60 drawings by 30 artists, including de Kooning, Motherwell, Rivers, Frankenthaler, Johns, Oldenburg, Marisol, Lichtenstein, Freilicher, and Rauschenberg: "Each artist was given a poem or, in some cases, more than one poem to realize in his own medium as he saw fit."

James Dickey to Henry Rago

Leesburg, VA, 2 June 1967

Dear Henry:

I have been meaning to write you for some time, simply to let you know I haven't forgotten about *Poetry*, and that I regret very much the fact that I haven't published anything with you since "The Firebombing," three or four years ago. Now that I have the big *Poems 1957-1967* finished, finally, I can turn to some new things, and I'll be able to let you look 'em over in maybe two or three months, if all goes well. But do know that I have *Poetry* in mind, and will give you whatever I think is good enough.

May I make one small request about the new book's reviewing situation in *Poetry*? I ask only that you not turn it over to anyone of the Bly faction (though Jim Wright would be OK, though he's already reviewed one book of mine for you). . . . The last fellow that reviewed me in *Poetry*—at least insofar as I know—was Wendell Berry, who had just prior to that published an open letter in the *Sewanee [Review]* denouncing me for my views in an article I did that included some harsh words on his friend Robert Hazel. Yet, though he had some reservations (this was *Helmets*, as I remember), he still was very fair indeed, and as a consequence he and I have become good friends. . . .

. . . Also, do you have Lisel Mueller's address? I'd like to get in touch with her about a personal matter. Also, I admire what of hers I've read.

Let me hear from you on these matters whenever you can. I'd appreciate it.

All yours, / Jim Dickey

Later in June, Rago asked Dickey to read at Poetry Day, along with William Alfred, whose play *Hogan's Goat* was the surprise hit of the 1965-66 season in New York. He also invited Basil Bunting, who declined, since (Bunting explained) he did not like to share the stage with others; he was replaced by James Merrill.

Lisel Mueller to Henry Rago

[Lake Forest, IL], 27 June 1967

Dear Henry,

Recently I saw some mention of an "Artists Against the War in Vietnam" festival being planned in Chicago, and I got the impression that poetry was to be included among the arts. I don't know the planners of the demonstration, and I thought that perhaps you might, and that you might be kind enough to put me in touch with the proper person. I'd like to offer my help in some capacity or other. My outrage against this

war is matched only by my frustration over not being able to take any action against it—a frustration which I know I share with a great many people, but which I augmented by the totally uninvolved nature of the area in which we live, as well as by the fact that, being neither an academic person nor a church member, I have no “group” through which to work. So if you know whom I might contact, I’d be grateful if you’d like me know.

My best wishes for a beautiful summer,
Lisel

H.R. note, bottom of page: “I think she should also write a note to Mr. Harry Bouras, saying she does so at my suggestion . . . she can reach him c/o WFMT [the FM station where he was the art critic for many years]. Mr. Bouras is helping to organize a protest of artists from the Chicago area (painters, writers, etc.) to take place sometime in the fall.” Paul Sills, the theater director, was also one of the main organizers.

James Merrill to Helen Lothrop **Stonington, CT, 31 July 1967**

Dear Miss Lothrop,

Thank you for your letter. I’m awfully glad I decided to say yes [to Rago’s invitation to read at Poetry Day]. I will be at the above address surely through Labor Day. . . . After that I expect I shall go to Athens anywhere from 3 to 8 weeks. . . .

Don’t worry, I’ll be there on the 16th [of November] by early afternoon. I may be staying with Daryl Hine if he still has room. He is one of your contributors. He has no evening clothes, but might he be invited to the Thursday reception? . . .

All best, / James Merrill

H.R. wrote 14 August, on his return to Chicago, assuring J.M. that Hine would be invited to the reception. Merrill did not mind sharing the stage with William Alfred and James Dickey.

Kenneth Burke to Henry Rago **Andover, NJ, 3 March 1968**

Dear Henry,

Finally digging out after our return to NJ, I find thy welcome note of Jan. 23rd.

. . .

Incidentally, in some of my more morbid moments, I have been doing little jingles of hate anent The Administration’s stupidities. (Brutal as the outfit is, I believe it is less brutal than stupid. Imagine squandering

27 billion a year to tear apart little Vietnam, and all in the name of “cost effectiveness”!) I thought that, gossipwise, you might be interested in this one, which I quixotically sent to [anti-war presidential candidate Senator Eugene] McCarthy, hoping that it might prove usable by his speech-writers (it’s a reference to Johnson):

He got us tangled in a situation
 though would defy the best of us,
 through having access to misinformation
 that was denied the rest of us.

...

Here’s one among several I peddled (though they have not yet been published): “the while the war drags on / reports of experts vary / how much we pay Saigon / to be its mercenary.”

Wadda would!

Polygraphically thine, / K.B.

McCarthy was himself a published poet, but not noted for his ability as a public speaker.

Allen Ginsberg to Henry Rago New York City, 12 March 1968

Dear Mr Rago:

Enclosed find an unpublished recent poem. An early draft w/holograph (early draft i.e. original composition half this length will be privately published in a month or 2 in England Cape-Golliard): & this version is the last poem in a book *Planet News Poems 1961-67* I sent last week to Ferlinghetti; he says the book won’t be ready from City Lights till June–July.

I dont know if under these circumstance the poem can find place in *Poetry*, i.e. whether publication of first draft holograph earlier forbids & summer publication w/City Lights gives you too short a time.

I have been doing the best I can to keep things straight, have wanted to send you a ms long time, but waited till I had something worthy.

If circumstances and time (or quality of poem) preclude swift printing in *Poetry* I’ll try again later with something else.

OK—

as ever / Allen Ginsberg

There was not enough time to get the poem into print in *Poetry* before the book came out. The collection included “The Pentagon Exorcism.”

Robert Chatain to Henry Rago Long Binh, Vietnam, 19 April 1968

Dear Mr. Rago,

Thanks for your letter, and for your estimation of the poems. I am honored.

Here are the corrected copies of the fourteen poems you chose, revised (I hope) not too extensively. I'm also enclosing the original copies which you picked out, so you can examine any changes I have made. . . .

You might be wondering how I, warrior, can get my hands on an electric typewriter. We Americans go to war with all our toys. Somehow I enjoy the thought that, in the heart of the jungle we are defoliating, in the land we have turned into a new moonscape, there is a peasant dressed in black who lives for the minute he may bury his machete in the bowels of my sleek Remington. . . .

Bob Chatain

Chatain's poems appeared in the December 1968 issue; he was discharged from the army shortly afterward.

Denise Levertov to Henry Rago Cambridge, MA, 17 May 1968

Dear Henry,

Some Resistance Kids at U of Chicago want to include "An Interim" (that poem of mine you have accepted) in a sort of collection of documents they are mimeographing (or photo-copying from typescripts) to distribute at the "Workshops on Alternatives" being held for U.C. students and their parents at the "Vietnam Commencement" June 6th. If this is not a regular printed publication, would it be OK with you? Or would it preclude the subsequent publication of the poem in *Poetry*? I would like *very much* to be included in what they are doing—but of course I don't want to get in the way of *Poetry*. If there is some urgency about it, I am enclosing 2 yes or not p.c.'s, one to me, one to David Worstell, the boy who is gathering this material, the rest of which will consist of statements by draft-refusers & C.O.'s [conscientious objectors] mainly.

Lovely to see you & Juliet—I think I already wrote that . . . We're here for the trial, which begins Monday. . . .

Love, / Denise

Levertov's husband, Mitchell Goodman, was tried with Dr. Benjamin Spock, the Reverend William Sloan Coffin Jr., chaplain at Yale, and Professor Michael Ferber in federal court in Boston; the four peace activists in the "Spock case" were convicted in

July of conspiracy to aid and abet young men in avoiding conscription. (A fifth defendant, Marcus Raskin, was acquitted.) Rago made an exception and agreed to the request.

Hugh Kenner to Henry Rago

Santa Barbara, Calif.

8 September 1968

Dear Henry:

Just back from Europe, where EP was observed looking more ghostlike than ever, though capable of muttering "I've seen worse" to the lady at the Venice Biennale who wanted to know what he thought of the pop sculptures. This encounter seen and heard by me. His mind would have been occupied with the ghost of Gaudier. . . .

Ever, / Hugh

Pound's friend the sculptor Henri Gaudier-Brzeska was killed in World War I, at age 22.

5. The War Issue

With no end in sight and ever present in the news, the costly conflict abroad continued to trouble the national conscience and roil the body politic. Despite his promise as the 1968 Republican candidate to bring "an honorable end to the war in Vietnam," Richard Nixon as president demonstrated this pledge had no more validity than his campaign slogan that he would "Bring us together." Nixon had further claimed to have a "secret plan" for ending the war. In fact he escalated it, significantly, with secret bombings in March and then the invasion (styled an "incursion") of Cambodia in April of 1970. Protests against the Cambodian operations erupted, and on May 4th, the fourth day of large demonstrations at Kent State University in Ohio, four students were killed and nine wounded by inexperienced National Guard troops called in to maintain order. A widely distributed photograph of a girl kneeling beside the dead body of a student became an indelible image that further reinforced popular sentiment against the war.

Peace negotiations in Paris, which had been unsatisfactory and intermittent, finally ended in stalemate in 1971. Thus the conflict was prolonged during Nixon's first term, and during the four years an additional 20,000 U.S. soldiers were killed. Anger and frustration over the protracted war continued to seethe at home and abroad. Matters came to a boil once more following the so-called Easter Offensive, which began

30 March 1972, when large contingents of Communist forces swept across the demilitarized zone and deep into South Vietnam, in an attempt to take Saigon and bring down the U.S.-supported government. The armies from the North were ultimately unsuccessful, but the attacks and counterattacks wrought huge damage from bombing and inflicted enormous casualties on both sides.

In a dramatic television broadcast on May 8th, Nixon announced to the nation that he had ordered the blockade of shipping to North Vietnam through the mining of Haiphong harbor and other North Vietnamese ports. A few days later, as a gesture, however futile, of disgust with the latest carnage and disapproval toward the new “strategy,” Daryl Hine, who had succeeded Henry Rago as editor in 1969, started to prepare a special issue of *Poetry*, “Against the War,” scheduled for September 1972. On May 11th Hine mailed out a form letter to two hundred poets soliciting contributions “protesting the acceleration of the undeclared Indo-Chinese War.” “I am not an American citizen,” he wrote, “but this is not an American issue. It is of global importance.” In closing, he asserted: “Poetry is a matter of life and death.”

With its striking cover—black type impressed on solid black paper—the issue aroused much commentary. From the large number of responses to his letter, Hine chose twenty-seven submissions for the special edition, including poems by Richard Hugo, David Ignatow, William Stafford, Philip Levine, James Schuyler, Geoffrey Hartman, Maxine Kumin, Geoffrey Grigson, Denise Levertov, Alan Dugan, Josephine Jacobsen, May Swenson, C. K. Williams, and Charles Wright. In the prose section Hine also printed messages from several poets who regretted that they had nothing to offer for the issue or had received word too late to write a piece. Babette Deutsch’s note read: “Unhappily, the magnitude of what one poet calls the obscenity strikes me dumb.” Michael Hamburger said he had tried to write something, but had “come to feel that protest poems as such are such a dubious or questionable medium—because they aren’t even read by the people whom one wants to affect.”

Of the many other letters that Hine chose not to print, a few of the more pointed are presented below. Of particular interest is the response from the Australian poet James McAuley to his involuntary inclusion in the issue (part of which Hine published in *Poetry* later, following his complaint), as well as the tart missive from a Canadian reader, Robert Beum.

Alan Dugan to Daryl Hine**New York City, 11 May 1972**

Dear Daryl Hine:

I support your action although I'm doubtful about its political usefulness: I've spent too much time reading & writing poems against the unconstitutional genocidal U.S. intervention in Southeast Asia to be anything else than cynical about an action such as yours. Nevertheless, I guess, one should go on, so I send you a manuscript poem ["Stentor and Mourning"] which I recited at Goddard College on Armed Forces Day. Some of the revisions were suggested by the students. I'm sorry I'm not being more professional: see my first sentence above. I'm glad you're doing it.

Best regards, / Alan Dugan

Richard Hugo to Daryl Hine**Missoula, MT, [n.d., 1972]**

Dear Daryl Hine:

Thanks for your letter. As you know I haven't written much in the "public arena," not that I've anything against it. Just that every time I tried the poems came out so awful. But I've been writing somewhat differently lately and so am sending this along. It may not be quite what you want, and there's an even better chance it isn't good enough. After 100 years of writing, rejections means little.

Regardless of this poem ["On Hearing a New Escalation"] and its fate, I wish you and *Poetry* and your special anti-war issue all success.

Regards, / Dick Hugo

Charles Wright to Daryl Hine**Irvine, CA, 23 May 1972**

Dear Mr Hine—

I hope you are still going forward with the Special Issue on the War. And I hope you will like this small, but deeply-felt, poem on the subject well enough to include it. I wish I had more, but after so many years one can hardly bear to think about the subject any longer and remain even faintly rational. I'm glad you're doing an issue on the thing.

Best, / Charles Wright

Wright's "Victory Garden" was printed as the last poem in the issue.

C. K. Williams to Daryl Hine**Philadelphia, PA, 24 May 1972**

Dear Daryl Hine,

Unfortunately, all of the war poems I have (and there are, Lord knows, a lot of them) just came out in my new book [*I Am the Bitter*

Name, published in February].

All I can offer right now are these versions from the Sanskrit, from Mayura—they're free version; this war is what I had in mind.

I'm really glad you're doing a war issue. Everyone seems to be so used-up about it. Conned. The feeling that it can't go on, can't go on, but it does. I've been reading all spring all over the place: even the kids don't seem to want to know about it anymore.

Good luck, / Charlie

Williams's five-line translation from the Sanskrit, "Claws," was included in the issue.

W. D. Ehrhart to Daryl Hine

Perkasie, PA, 2 June 1972

Dear Mr. Hine,

It has been brought to my attention by Mr. Daniel Hoffman that you are planning to do an issue dealing with the Vietnam travesty. Acting on his suggestion and with apologies for my unsolicited contribution, I submit for your perusal this small collection of war poetry which comes out of my experiences in that war. I served there with the U.S. Marine Corps from February 1967 to March 1968 (Sergeant; Purple Heart, Navy Combat Action Ribbon). While a few of my war poems were printed in *Winning Hearts and Minds* (1st Casualty Press, 1972), all of these enclosed are yet unpublished. I shall be pleased if you find any of them acceptable for your purposes. . . .

Sincerely yours, / William D. Ehrhart

The poems were not accepted. Besides poems, Ehrhart published several memoirs, including *Vietnam-Perkasie: A Combat Marine Memoir* and *Busted: A Vietnam Veteran in Nixon's America*; a collection of essays, *The Madness of It All*; and *Ordinary Lives: Platoon 1005 and the Vietnam War*.

John F. Nims to Daryl Hine

Lake Bluff, IL, 1 July 1972

Dear Daryl,

I think your first-appearance retrospective [October 1972, the 60th Anniversary] sounds great. And am pleased and flattered to be included ["Parting: 1940"]. 1940 that was? Of course, I was only six at the time, but even so . . . [sic] How can I tell people I had a poem published 32 years ago? "What have you done since?" they'll say, coldly. I really think the issue is a good idea, though, and will probably be a "collector's item." Should be interesting for what it shows about changing tastes, etc.

I'm sorry I didn't write about your invitation to offer something for the Indo-China War issue. Another very good idea. I didn't answer, and

probably can't have a submission in time, because I'm trapped in my own microcosm, or mini-cosm. I think I told you I'm doing a sort of introduction to poetry [*Western Wind*], which was due over a year ago, and then due in Jan., and then in March, and then promised for May—but still not finished. . . . I should finish a first version in two or three weeks, and if the fire from heaven should strike, and a great voice bid me take quill in hand and smite the oppressor—well, I'll let you know. . . .

Did Rutgers ever send you a copy of *Sappho to Valéry*? I mean you personally, not just a review copy (because you told me you got that). I still have a few, and would be glad to send you one, if you want a large heavy book. I'm afraid it's been a disaster; expect Rutgers to declare bankruptcy any day now. The perfect example of The Book Nobody Wants. And I can see why—wouldn't buy it myself. A nice book to write, but I'd never want to read it. . . .

All the best, / John

May Swenson to Daryl Hine

Sea Cliff, NY, 6 July 1972

Dear Daryl:

I'm sorry my reply is so late, but thanks for your May 11th letter inviting poems for your anti-war issue.

The enclosed ["July 4th"] just got written, and while it's about watching fireworks on Independence Day it's also about America's imperialist greed, our blind appetite for power, our delight in violence.

I think your idea for a special issue is great.

Best, / May

James McAuley to Daryl Hine

[n.p.] 13 September 1972

Dear Mr Hine,

I was somewhat disconcerted to find that my poem "Winter Drive" ended up in an issue called "Poetry Against the War." I am not in the least "against the war" in any relevant sense; and the dismay the poem expresses is partly caused by the culturally, socially and politically irrational and destructive activities of anti-war energumens [people possessed by evil spirits] in recent years.

I don't want to embarrass you by demanding you publish the above paragraph; but I wish you'd told me that you were putting my poem to a political use.

Yours sincerely, / James McAuley

The letter was printed, without the second paragraph, in the December 1972 issue.

Philip Levine to Daryl Hine

Fresno, CA, 2 October 1972

Dear Daryl,

Thank you so much for your note. And of course for the award [the Frank O'Hara Prize], which I accept with real pride. And for the money, which is nice because it's time, as you know. Of all the *Poetry* awards it's the best to me because O'Hara was such a fine poet at his best.

I thought the War issue was fine. Some of those letters were really something: "Let's not dirty the fine old name of poesy with all this life & death stuff . . ." Beautiful Richard Hugo poem ["On Hearing a New Escalation"].

Thanks again, yours, / Phil

Levine mocks a remark from Eleanor Ross Taylor printed in the "Correspondence" section, in which she states that "any 'poem' on the subject of de-escalation in Vietnam or elsewhere descends to journalism from the lofty tone I would wish for *Poetry* magazine."

Robert Beum to Daryl Hine

Charlottetown, P.E.I., Canada,

13 October 1972

Dear Mr. Hine:

The September issue of *Poetry* contains exactly one readable original poem: James McAuley's "Winter Drive." The rest of the original poems are just what one would expect from so naive an enterprise as the soliciting of occasional poems on the subject of the Indo-China War: the clichés of liberal and leftist anti-war posturings and hysterias. Will the Left never learn that humanitarian feelings, no matter how fervent, just can't be made to do the work of logic and prudence?

Some readers of *Poetry* who pride themselves on "awareness" may not be aware of certain paradoxes inherent in this particular manifestation of humanitarian folly. One of them is that in all this alluvium of general righteousness a particular right has been washed away: the good poem by McAuley, which I was privileged to read before it was published in *Poetry*, has been placed in a context which makes it seem like one more contribution to the anti-war spate. The effect is to mislead readers and distort McAuley's intention: the poem becomes a narrower and more ephemeral thing than it is. The Australian master's subject is the (more and more) fallen world, not Indo-China 1972. By implication, also, the inclusion of the poem in the September issue creates the impression that McAuley is aligned sociopolitically with the

crowd of shrill “humanitarians” à *gauche*. The truth is that McAuley has the courage of independence and has written devastating critiques of such folks. In the name of peace and justice, *Poetry* has been a little unjust and declared war against a bit of truth.

Other ironies abound. The people who write and approve such strident moralizings as fill the September *Poetry* are very often the same people who object (not always pacifically) to poets like Herbert, Bridges, and Patmore—and McAuley!—on the ground of “didacticism.” And the paradox deepens: characteristically, these voluble anti-war militants are philosophical relativists. Truth, for them, is epiphenomenal and subjective; yet the forces of Saigon and Washington are absolutely corrupt and are to be pursued with absolute wrath. For that matter, history may well see a curiosity in the ostentatious self-righteousness of these people who in verifiable fact supported the overthrow of [South Vietnam President Ngo Dinh] Diem and other actions (under a Democratic administration in Washington, by the way) that committed us to continuing involvement in Indo-China.

To some extent, singling out the war plays up to fashion and on that account alone is a morally dubious exercise. Worse, singling it out seems to tell us what we never expected to hear from the muses: that physical and political security, the mere preservation of life and a semblance of order, is a lofty, or even the highest, good. In the broadest sense, poetry—which includes truth and innocence—is what makes life worth living; and is worth dying for. Aeschylus and Shakespeare believed that, and Rilke and Pasternak and Solzhenitsyn have believed it.

Suffering, in any case, goes on, terrible suffering: families and hearts and careers are riven in (and by) affluent and technological peace as well as in war; and the long Pax Romana meant long slavery and separation for millions. And in a society as cold and spoiled and fragmented as ours, it seems delusive and diversionary to play up the war so much. In the modern context, can peace—or rather “peace”—be so promising?

No man of good will delights in this war or in the human suffering of any war. But political peace has never been with us for very long and in any case is less dependable than true personal peace—without which political peace is certain to be both fraudulent and temporary. The peace we need to rediscover and reaffirm isn’t the peace of the United Nations or the protest mobs, but the peace illuminated for us by Confucius, Christ, and the Buddha. Through its humbling and refining discipline of careful perception and craftsmanship, and through its achievement of

imaginative unity and harmonized statement and aesthetic experience, poetry—genuine poetry—has something to contribute here. In fact, real poetic vision is the opposite of, and a chief bulwark against, that politicization of all experience which has been our ruin in this century. I, for one, regret in my heart, not just in my politics, *Poetry's* descent from poetic to political vision.

I hope you will print this letter if only for the sake of my dear friend James McAuley, who may well be too much of a gentle man to protest *Poetry's* disservice to him.

Sincerely, / Robert Beum

Beum's letter was not printed. When Diem and his regime became increasingly repressive, many Buddhist monks demonstrated. In June 1963 one monk set himself on fire in protest and burned to death; six others later followed his example. Hundreds of monks were then arrested and several were killed in raids on pagodas. After students demonstrated at Saigon University in August, some 4,000 were jailed and the school was closed. The Kennedy administration did not approve, and permitted a military coup in November, during which Diem and Ngo Dinh Nhu, his brother and chief adviser, were assassinated. General Duong Van Minh then took over the South Vietnam government.

Anne Winters to Daryl Hine

Charlottesville, VA

29 October 1972

Dear Daryl,

I'm sending you my three most recent efforts, with hopes that you may like them for *Poetry*. . . .

I want to say that I liked the issue against the war. It gave me a surprising sense of—easement of some kind, to see it in its black cover & even just hold it. I'm working for [anti-war presidential candidate Senator George] McGovern, but can't say I get any hopeful feelings from that—it's rather discouraging, telephone voting surveys in this remote county, as you can imagine. All our best, and we hope things are going well with you.

Anne

Associate editor Rob Allen sent McGovern a copy of the special issue.

6. The Aftermath

On 7 November 1972 Richard Nixon won re-election by one of the largest landslides in American history: 60.7 percent of the popular vote to George McGovern's 38 percent. Nixon carried forty-nine states, while McGovern won only Massachusetts and the District of Columbia. Nixon was sworn in for his second term on 20 January 1973. (In keeping with the new "imperial presidency," the balls and other celebrations for the inauguration were the most expensive to date, costing some \$4 million.) Three days later, Nixon signed a ceasefire agreement and declared "peace with honor" in Vietnam.

Less than nine months later, on 10 October 1973, Spiro Agnew, his bombastic, opposition-baiting vice president, was forced to resign, because of charges of graft and corruption (mainly taking kickbacks from contractors) going back to his days as a Baltimore official and Governor of Maryland. He was accused of receiving illegal payments even while vice president—and accepting cash-filled envelopes in the basement of the White House. (Agnew eventually pleaded no contest to charges of tax fraud, for not reporting the bribes as income to the I.R.S.; he was fined \$10,000 and given three years' probation.) He was replaced by Gerald R. Ford, who became president when Nixon resigned on 9 August 1974, the first president ever to do so. He had little choice, after the House recommended articles of impeachment on charges of corruption, abuse of power, and obstruction of justice in the wake of the Watergate scandal.

After ten years of turmoil, peace or at least cessation of hostilities in Southeast Asia had finally arrived; and in the U.S., relative tranquility returned. But the corrosive effects on the national psyche of the dispiriting decade were not easily repaired, given the extent of the damage: the quagmire of the seemingly unstoppable war and the bitter, polarizing protests, civil disobedience, and violent demonstrations it provoked; two shocking assassinations of charismatic leaders; profound social unrest over inequality culminating in race riots in well over a hundred cities; the obstinate, unpopular, and misguided foreign policy of two Democratic administrations and the deceptions, attempted subversion of state agencies, and gross criminality of the Republican regime that followed. In the face of the debacle of Vietnam, the image of the much-vaunted Pentagon leadership was tarnished; the idea of

U.S. military prowess and invincibility was no longer tenable.

Old notions of Authority in general were seriously, perhaps permanently, undermined, while faith in Tradition and civic institutions was called into question and severely eroded, in some cases permanently. Set in motion amid this national disillusionment were the several social revolutions and liberation movements that brought about the transformations that would characterize the following decades' freer, more fluid, if far more fragmented, American culture. That volatility and diversity became abundantly evident in contemporary poetry, at least superficially. By the late sixties, the long-held authority of the New Criticism in the study and practice of poetry, and literature generally, was crumbling, angrily rejected or simply ignored.

At the beginning of the decade, unorthodox ideas and outbursts of artistic and social rebellion initiated by the Beats and other anti-Establishment types had already spread to larger groups of countercultural artists, students, and social activists. What began as analyses and critiques by small groups of dissident writers and intellectuals—some intoning the mantra of Higher Consciousness—now broadened into an increasingly angry nationwide debate about American society and government policy within the academy and among the larger mainstream population. As the Vietnam War escalated, the political, social, and economic divisions deepened within the country and the issues were no longer merely philosophical, artistic, or academic.

From the strictly aesthetic standpoint, Pound's command to "make it new" was obeyed once more, and with gusto, as the sixties progressed. Increasing numbers of poets rejected the academic dogma they had been brought up on and had come to resent, and returned to methods pioneered by the early Modernists. Thus, a second poetry renaissance was set in motion. Although it is also considered a revolution, what occurred, in stylistic terms, was less original than sometimes assumed. If the literary insurgents provoked a revolution, it was in the primary sense of the term: a circling back to the original principles and radical methods of the early Modernist experimentalists *Poetry* first championed.

By the thirties that first revolution had been tamed in the academy by the New Criticism. In place of the more extreme methods of pioneers like Pound, (early) Eliot, and Stevens—ellipsis, fragmentation, and discontinuity; learned allusions and thick symbolism—emphasis shifted to the other High Modernist ideals of economy, wit, irony, ambiguity, and intellectual control. Form too came back into vogue. Thus the Modernist insurgency was

followed by cautious moderation, its provocative techniques supplanted by precision and polish. The poets coming of age in the fifties were trained to read and write poetry according to New Critical standards, but by the sixties many who had started publishing in the approved formal modes began to move toward less constricting, more individual styles, notably Adrienne Rich, W. S. Merwin, Anne Sexton, and Robert Lowell. Along with free verse and techniques harkening back to early Modernism, they also expressed more personal attitudes toward content, with many so-called Confessional poets speaking openly about private matters in ways unthinkable under Eliot's philosophy and New Critical doctrine.

Younger poets particularly identified with the daring originality, free-spiritedness, and iconoclasm of the old avant-garde. Large numbers were inspired by the example of that great American original, Walt Whitman, and by William Carlos Williams, who was finally out from Eliot's shadow. (In the forties and fifties, Dr. Williams had happily received house calls from admirers and acolytes, including the teenage Allen Ginsberg and the young A. R. Ammons.) Spontaneity, candor, experimentation, unconventionality, distrust of Tradition and challenges to Authority became major motifs again.

Literary innovators of the early Modernist movement had found models in the advanced theories and methods of the visual artists of their time, particularly the Cubists, Surrealists, and Futurists, and adapted their use of collage and other disjunctive techniques to poetry. The aspiring poets of the sixties went back to those originals in painting and poetry, and updated or recycled their methods, and for the same reasons: as effective ways to approach the complexity of modern consciousness and to express the feelings of uncertainty, fragmentation, and alienation in modern American life that were, if anything, even more acute during the cold and hot wars of the Nuclear Age. Many of the postwar generation—and not only the so-called “New York School”—also followed the example of the artists in the contemporary avant-garde, especially the Abstract Expressionists and Action painters, with their self-referential emphasis on process: the work of art, verbal as well as visual, being a record of its own making.

Old-fashioned notions of orthodoxy, arbiters, and a dominant style became unacceptable, in fact irrelevant, to the Now Generation. Growing political, philosophical, and social diversity added to the new vitality and variety in American poetry, reflected in the large number of literary sectarians who separated themselves into ideological-aesthetic subgroups. Subject matter aside, for them the form of a poem (or lack thereof) came to symbolize ideas and values beyond the “merely” artistic. The “free” in free

verse now carried political or moral implications, as the term was facetiously identified with liberty, spiritual and social liberation, or liberality in general. The variety of approaches to poetry began to mirror the larger upheavals in an American culture again in rapid flux.

Among the students of the Baby Boom generation—the largest group of young people ever to attend college—the increased questioning of and antagonism toward academic authority, big business, and “the military-industrial complex” (President Eisenhower, who knew whereof he spoke, coined the phrase), as well as rigid social conventions in general, culminated in the late-sixties campus uprisings. The political activism and civil disobedience of students generated further opposition to the war and gradually helped mobilize ever larger portions of the population as the conflict dragged on and the casualties and costs mounted.

Following upon the manifold disasters of the violent, pivotal year 1968—with its horrific assassinations, urban riots, military escalations, protest marches, and chaotic Democratic national convention—the country began to be transformed by the largest social upheavals since the Great Depression. The civil rights struggles rekindled by the younger generation of militant black leaders were followed, in turn, by the rising women’s, gay, and identity movements among diverse minority and ethnic groups. The rapid succession of the liberation struggles, countercultural clashes, and social causes transforming the country would inevitably change the aesthetic landscape, as well, and the concept of poetry from then on.

Effects of these changes on all levels, from pop culture to secondary and higher education to Congress and the courts, were more profound than even the most optimistic activists could have imagined, and longer lasting. Conservatives in education, religion, and politics were outraged and many never reconciled themselves to the reversals to the status quo or the philosophies behind them. Thus ensued the increasingly acrimonious and intolerant culture wars. It would take decades before conservatives, “religious” or otherwise, and “neo-cons” would be able to reverse the revolution, at least in part, and for the censorious fundamentalists and other puritans to exact retribution. And take their revenge they did, as the erstwhile artistic rebels gradually declined into a new, exceedingly comfortable (and sometimes smug) establishment, seemingly no longer capable of mustering enough energy (or generating sufficiently attractive fresh ideas) to prevail against their passionate but patient adversaries on the radical right who steadily sought control of the political and social agenda.

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