

The Harvard Advocate

Since 1866



President: Steve Harney

Publisher: Peter Gadol

Managing Editor: Rachel Leheny

Editorial

Art Editor: Ralph Vettors

Poetry Editor: Sophie Volpp

Prose Editor: Rich Varney

Non-fiction Editor: Amy Lippman

Administrative

Dionysus: Jim Caudle

Pegasus: Ari Posner

Production Manager: Mark
Csikszentmihalyi

Business Manager: Peter Storment

Circulation Manager: Alex Zabusky

Comp Director: Claudia Kolker

Librarian: Fred Moten

Senior Editors

Andres Reyes, Austin Wilkie, Blaire Craddock, Neena Beeber, Jenny Cox, Janno Lieber, Katherine Clark, Angelo Mariani, Polly Saltonstall, Daniel Max, Andrea Blaugrund, David Longobardi, Andrew Cogan, A. Lorcan O'Neill, Kate Lewis, Debra Rosenblum, Carroll Bogart

Staff

Susan Morgenstein, Cara Wilson, Eric Selinger, Tanyo Ravicz, David Wingrove, Pauls Raudseps, John O'Connor, Tom Reese, John Rudolph, Harry Browne, Eve Schaeien, Amy Mullen, Susan Hegeman, Claire Scovell, Tom Dewey

The Advocate is pleased to welcome the following new members: Becca Abrams, Vickie Neilson, Wendell Lim, Robin Alpert, Mark Murray, David Fairman, Kathy Simon, Cybele Raver, Vivian Wong, Nick Laurence, Richard Haney, Amy Langdenberg, Robert Munroe, Robin Cheslen.

notes from 21 south street

A REVIEW OF *THE FACES OF AMERICANS*

Winner of the 1984 Devin's Award for Poetry, Wesley McNair's *The Face of Americans in 1853* sets ambitious goals and successfully works to realize them. This is his first published book of poetry, a credential which speaks for his eagerness to experiment with different poetic voices. If nothing else, *Faces of Americans* is a tribute to McNair's poetic versatility as he writes in a variety of tones and explores one of poetry's grandest themes, the nature of poetic vision and inspiration.

The book's appeal lies in its exploration of different voices—meditative, descriptive, and humorous. His most successful poems are meditative in quality, though they are far from personal confessions. Instead, poems like "Memory of North Sutton," "Old Trees," and "Fire in Enfield" are about the poet's New Hampshire home and they reveal the world that has influenced his vision. The simplicity of the diction in these poems reflects the sincerity with which McNair writes:

By the road
in the field
they stand, lifting branches

they cannot remember,
rocking shut
in the wind.

(from "Old Trees")

These are honest poems, spare of poetic embellishments, slow in rhythm and tranquil in tone—a combination that makes simple but powerful writing.

The humorous poems, such as "Hair on Television" and "The Bald Spot," are entertaining and well crafted, but are not particularly inspiring. The content is not too meaningful and the poems do not deserve second readings. On the other hand, McNair's more sardonic humor—found especially in "The Faces of Americans in 1853"—is far more successful since it combines unique vision with a hint of social criticism.

Despite the variety of tones, a recurring theme helps unite several of the books' poems. McNair expresses continued interest in the nature of poetic vision, of imagination and of the artist's struggle to transcend the mundane. Most notably, in "Rufus Porter by Himself"—one of the better character sketches—Rufus manages to transport himself to another time and place through the faculty of imagination. Later in the poem, McNair describes the freedom of Rufus' imagination:

There was no company,
there was no blimp, there was, in short,
only me, Rufus Porter, feeling so damned free
in my mind I was on my way to California
already. Thinking of me, imagine that flight

upward, beyond the immovable farms,
beyond whole towns clinging to earth, beyond the
earth.

Imagine me standing up to shout among the clouds
forever.

The same theme is echoed in "Fitz Hugh Lane Goes to the

Mast-Head" as the artist struggles to obtain a unique, revelatory vision of Gloucester Harbor. Rather than intellectualizing this theme, McNair expresses the characters' personal struggles and their frustration in reaching for that elusive vision, that ability to transcend oneself. Even in "The Thugs of Old Comics," the villains despair: "no fun, no dough, / no power to rise out of their bodies."

The breadth and seriousness of this theme—the grandeur and frustration of creative vision and imagination—can compensate for the book's only flaw up to a point. The problem with much of McNair's poetry is the absence of musicality. McNair does not fully explore the sounds of the words he uses. Consequently, much of the diction falls flat. In "Country People" McNair presents

the old man stooping
at his television set,

the fat woman resting
in a flowered chair

by the stove.

Though helpful for setting mood, the simplicity of diction makes the reading of a few of the poems an incomplete experience. McNair needs to charge his language with musical vitality to confirm his attachment to poetry's essence, words themselves.

But the problem of apparently simple diction is a minor flaw in light of the book's exciting exploration of poetic voice and its struggle with the issue of imagination. As a result of this most ambitious project, McNair has written several poems which will be remembered long after one sets the book down.

THE RADCLIFFE POTTERY STUDIO

The Radcliffe Pottery Studio, one of the many programs in creative and performing arts under the direction of Myra A. Mayman and the Office for the Arts at Harvard-Radcliffe, rests on a unique, spirited foundation of cooperative concern. Not only are the facilities, staff, equipment and special workshops first rate, but the supportive, informal, yet exuberant nature of the studio provides a singular setting in which everyone, ranging from beginning potter to professional, is able to work together and to explore artistic and creative options in a non-competitive, cooperative manner. This unique atmosphere is due, largely, to the synthesis of what one might encounter, separately, in a technical pottery or art school, a university, an adult education program, or a private studio.

Matina Horner, in 1969-70, turned over an old Radcliffe warehouse, located at 245 Concord Avenue, for conversion into the present pottery studio. In what is now a large, well-equipped workshop (with twelve electric and four kick wheels, among other notable features), beginning, intermediate, advanced, and independent classes are offered, providing students with an opportunity to master necessary, basic technical skills as well as to explore their own individual goals. In addition, valuable studio space is given to professional potters in partial exchange for a teaching salary, which, in turn, serves as an inspiration to students who may perhaps be looking for new means to explore the medium of clay. The combination of professionals and beginners helps

maintain the inspirational, yet non-competitive spirit of this community by continually bringing individuals with diverse uses of the medium into contact with one another.

Each semester, special workshops on raku firing, glaze calculation, sodium vapor, and other ceramic techniques are offered to the approximately ninety members of the Radcliffe Studio. In addition, the four top-notch instructors at the studio, with such varied educational backgrounds as a Japanese degree in technical pottery and ceramic chemistry to an undergraduate degree in Fine Arts from Wellesley College to graduate degrees in the studio arts from The Museum School, offer slide lectures and museum trips, and around the clock guidance seven days per week.

The flexibility of the program and the diversity of the participants, who range from college freshmen to a group of regulars in their sixties and seventies, provides, at a limited cost to members of the Harvard-Radcliffe community, a unique opportunity to become acquainted with or more skilled in ceramic arts. The Radcliffe Pottery Studio's unpretentious, pleasant working environment can be molded to fit anyone's interests, and the relaxed, supportive atmosphere and educational milieu cannot be topped in the Harvard-Radcliffe community or the greater Boston area.

—R.D.T.A.

A NOTE FROM THE ART BOARD

The head of the Harvard photography program is Jane Tuckerman. Though still quite young, Tuckerman is already a noted photographer. Her work has appeared in such publications as *American Photographer*, *Aperture*, *Time-Life Books*, and *Art News*, she has received an NEA grant and a grant from the Massachusetts artist foundation and has worldwide exhibitions. How did she come to teach at Harvard? And what are her concerns as a photographer?

While she says that there was no dramatic moment when she realized that photography was to be her life, by the age of ten she knew that she wanted to be an artist. She began to paint, first on her own and then taking courses, and continued with painting sporadically for ten years. Her major difficulty at this time was lack of encouragement. Her family was uncertain how to respond to an "artist" daughter and her instructor's reaction to her work at art school in Boston was "you're either very good or very bad."

Her first real exposure to photography came when she was nineteen. At this time she met her ex-husband who was attending Harvard and who was very interested in photography. He taught her dark room techniques and sparked her interest in the medium. Furthermore, he knew Minor White who was then taking students on photographing retreats and Tuckerman began to go along. Here she began to get some encouragement, but she felt that she lacked the aggressiveness to promote her art so she decided to go to graduate school so that she could gain further training and be better prepared to teach. She went to the Rhode Island School of Design and studied photography under Harry Callahan and Aaron Siskind. From them she at last received a positive response to her work and began to feel more confident about her art.

But upon graduating in 1975 she was still uncertain about how to find a job in photography, and so she worked in a camera store in Boston. She had a lucky break though when a friend of hers who was teaching photography at Wellesley