

Our Dreams Proved Innocent

Book review

Hank Malone

1969

A review of

Jerry Rubin's "Letter to the Movement," New York Review of Books, Feb. 13, 1969, 40 cents.

The Young American Poets, edited by Paul Carroll, Follet Publishing Co., 1968, \$3.95,

Evergreen Review Reader, edited by Barney Rosset, Grove Press, 1969, \$20.00

"From the Bay Area to New York we are suffering the greatest depression in our history...it's a common problem, not an individual one, and people don't talk to one another too much anymore. America proved deaf, and our dreams proved innocent. Scores of our brothers have become inactive and cynical," Jerry Rubin has spoken.

Can you dig it?

In a sense, we have all come down from a fantastic "high" that started in 1957, a HOWL that turned everybody young on and off and out and over.

The new *Evergreen Review Reader* seems like a medical textbook detailing and narrating all the perturbations (that's fun to say, isn't it?) of that "high" that slid into nothing in 1968. A great 10 or 11 year "high," full of poetry and revolutionary politics, optimism and flames. And now we are dead, or desperate.

The San Francisco scene is gone. Nixon is president. Vietnam remains. Racism reigns greater than ever. Corruption rules the planet. And everybody young smokes dope, but enjoys it less.

Kennedy was part of our "high," and Samuel Beckett, and Jack Kerouac, and Charles Olson, and Terry Southern, and Leroi Jones, and William Burroughs, and Norman Mailer, and Allen Ginsberg, (plus hundreds of others) and each of them has his place (except Kennedy) in the gigantic volume Grove Press has assembled.

Perhaps it was the strangest escapade/decade in American history, deadly serious most of the time, bizarre, touched with a real madness about sex, caught in a weird religious fervor of hallucination, optimistic beyond belief, a revolutionary decade-long "high" ending in bumner after bumner.

And now we are left-over to begin 1969.

The Young American Poets, a quietly hysterical anthology of recent poems, tells us very little except that most of the poets represented have found a...private life. They tell us they have shrewdly sidestepped most of the noise and confrontation and passion of The Great High.

They were wise and prudent when we were squandering our minds and bodies in delirium. These poets in Paul Carroll's blah anthology (with few exceptions) tell us the same old thing: the more things change, the more they remain the same. Ah, you were so very wise, young poets. so sensible to have avoided The Great High. And now you have so much sensitivity, while we are bankrupt. And what does it matter, in 1969?

Everyone in The Movement seems to feel that "art" is dead, art in the "old sense," meaning every form of human self-expression except

- (1) killing someone,
- (2) publishing an underground newspaper,
- (3) doing one's music, and

(4) eating at Alvin's Finer Delicatessen.

If this is true (after all, some pigs are more equal than others) then perhaps *The Evergreen Review Reader* and *The Young American Poets* are already (at publication) artifacts of an ancient age, archeological remnants of a defunct bourgeois "art culture."

Perhaps these books shouldn't be reviewed at all. Perhaps we should eliminate book reviews! Perhaps books should be ignored and trampled in favor of the popular Newkultchur of ass-kicking and counter-ass-kicking. How should I know? The world is so fucked up it doesn't seem to matter if you make sense or nonsense about anything anymore.

The trouble with Jerry Rubin saying that "smoking pot is a political act" and every smoker is a revolutionary threat to plasticwasp9-5america [as in FE print original] is that smoking pot is not a political act, it is just another "high" in America's desperation to avoid itself, to ignore art, to kick-ass with an inhuman gut-reaction, to avoid sanity and intelligence at all costs.

So what? Art is also crazy. Maybe it is better to kick-ass, organize massive mobilizations for the Spring, assault the jails with some kind of theatrical crimes, and make it The Year of the Courts. Shoot someone on your birthday.

Jerry Rubin says, "are we creating a New Man, or are we a reflection ourselves of the bullshit we hate so much? Are we a new brotherhood, or are we just a tangle of organizations and competing egos?"

507 pages in the latest anthology of American poets tells us damn little about The Great High and the Great Crack (San Andreas fault) in our national psyche, except that some of our best minds have entered a kind of hopeless, bitchy, murderous exile.

"Bears are in the cabbage again," says poet James Welch. "O please read backwards," says Poet Tyner White. "cool gray enters my throat," says poet Lewis Warsh, and "for here I am coming home," says poet Anne Waldman.

So what? And Where is our Victory & Disaster, except between the lines, in all these poems but a few?

500 poems in this book, and where is there anything but a steady stream of polite nausea about being born an American? You poets, we are sick as Hell.

The Evergreen Review Reader is quite another matter. Scanning the world during the era of The Great High, *Evergreen* has managed to capture in its pages (and in this anthology) most of the best literature of the last ten years, the literature of the psychic revolution that has led to our new glorious age that Jerry Rubin has characterized by the following remarks: "the American economy no longer needs young whites and blacks. We are waste material. We fulfill our destiny in life by rejecting a system which rejects us."

It is all very happy, as you must notice. What's the use?

But what did you want to hear from this review?

All's quiet on the Western Front. For those of you who still read, I recommend reading (but not necessarily owning) *The Evergreen Review Reader*, and hesitantly, *The Young American Poets*. I recommend reading everything and nothing, and kicking some ass, and the Spring Mobilization of Jerry Rubin. Everything. Why not? We are mad, after all.

1969 begins with Inaugural Harangue and the Government Refrigerators. Farewell/Welcome to Literature/Revolution.

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Fifth Estate #73, February 20-March 5, 1969

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