A BEQUEST OF WINGS

by

Donald H. Reiman

Kit-Kat Club
May 16, 1967

"A Bequest of Wings"

In this young nation where, if we are to believe the statisticians and the ad men, almost everyone is young or wants to appear to be young, it is good to find an organization whose roots and traditions stretch back not only before the age of the Pepsi generation but even before the era of the income tax. In addressing such a group, a speaker can take comfort in the knowledge that, however feeble his efforts may be, the welfare of the Kit-Kat Club does not hinge on his individual performance. There is a cumulative effect built up through years of monthly talks by members of the Club and by annual outside speakers.

The story is told of an American visitor to Oxford University who, fresh from his suburban wars against crabgrass, stopped to admire the fine, close-cropped, level carpet of rich grass within the quadrangle of one of the Oxford colleges. Seeing the groundskeeper nearby, the American went over to him and said, in a confidential tone of voice, "Tell me, how could I manage to get my lawn so smooth and even?" "Sir," replied the gardener, "you must roll it every Saturday--for four hundred years." I hope that you will consider my remarks this evening as just one rolling-over among the several hundred that Kit-Kat members have undergone since the Club was founded fifty-six years ago.

There are both values and dangers in traditions. Tevya, the dairyman father in Broadway's FIDDLER ON THE ROOF, discovers this when he attempts to impose traditional marriage customs on his five daughters in the changing world of pre-revolutionary Russia. In the end, he comes to realize that one must sometimes modify traditional folkways in order not

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to inflict unnecessary suffering on those people for whose well-being and protection the traditions originally evolved. It is said that, about the same time that Tevya, the Jewish peasant, was making this discovery, an ambitious young lieutenant newly assigned to the guard of the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg was also questioning tradition. He noticed that guards were posted on either side of one particular bench in the palace gardens. When the young lieutenant asked veteran members of the contingent why this assignment had been made, no one could answer him. Finally, he took the question to a cobwebby little old man, the palace historian.

"Yes," said this venerable individual, "I can tell you. When I first came here fifty-three years ago, I asked that very question. A servant who was then nearly as old as I am now and whose grandfather had been a palace gardener from boyhood was able to satisfy me on the point. It seems that soon after the great Catherine the Second, Empress of all the Russians, came to the throne early in the second half of the eighteenth century, the bench you speak of was repainted. In order to prevent her ladies-in-waiting or gentlemen of the court from inadvertently sitting on it and marring their beautiful clothes, the Empress ordered that a guard stand beside that bench to warn people of the wet paint. The great Empress never rescinded that order, and by the end of her long reign the post of that guard was firmly established."

"But," insisted the young officer, "that explains the presence of only one guard. How does it happen that there are two?"

"Oh," replied the elder, brightening, "I can explain that from my own certain knowledge. A few years ago forces of innovation and change were threatening the holy traditions of Russia, and even our Little Father, the Czar himself, feared for his safety. In that year the

guard of the Winter Palace was doubled, and since then there have been two men posted beside the bench."

Marshall McLuhan, a teacher of English at the University of Toronto, has recently made one of those rare break-throughs from the ivory tower into the popular imagination with his books and lectures on the nature and effects of various media from the spoken word, the phonetic alphabet, and the printing press, to the modern world of instantaneous information through telephone, radio, television, and the computor. His brilliant, aphoristic book UNDERSTANDING MEDIA: THE EXTENSIONS OF MAN has, with the help of those mass media he discusses, made widely current such statements as "the medium is the message" and "goodbye to Gutenburg." The second phrase capsules McLuhan's belief that the "Gutenburg galaxy" of human perspectives made possible and even necessary of man's orientation toward the printed word is fast fading in importance among technologically advanced societies in which television, and other modern media offer alternative sources of information. The day will come—and indeed is in part here, McLuhan declares--when the printed word will no longer be dominant. Much information is already exchanged at national and international professional meetings and conferences made possible by modern air travel. More is transmitted by means of telephone, teletype, and television, through which it can be communicated immediately to many people without the delays of weeks or months that attend the publishing of periodicals and books. Soon data will be programmed and sent into central information centers, to be available at the dial of a telephone. At another point, learning machines will replace factual textbooks and teach the catechisms of names and dates,

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parts of speech and verb tenses, statistics and formulas, more thoroughly (and with infinitely more patience) than is possible for either print or mere flesh and blood.

It is tempting to those of us who have vested interests in the world of books--reading, writing, and collecting them--to meet this threat by doubling the palace guard, by denigrating the new electronic media and trying to give snob appeal to books. We could follow the example of that old lady quoted by Michael Flanders who said, "If God had meant us to fly, he would never have given us the railroad." But perhaps it is wiser to look beyond the unconventional new means of conveying information to the more positive side of the book's future.

I.

In the introduction to the second edition of UNDERSTANDING MEDIA, McLuhan admits--not perhaps, with excessive clarity--that replacing one medium with another does not destroy the old, but elevates it to an art form. What was once done as a pragmatic exercise, necessary if body and psyche were to survive and thrive, becomes an end in itself, something to be pursued for its own intrinsic values.

This evening, for example, we have been enjoying the oldest art form, for gastronomy was probably the first human activity that resulted from the transformation of a purely pragmatic necessity into a source of immediate pleasure. This happened soon after a generous food supply enabled men to eat for reasons beyond the mere need to avoid starvation and malnutrition. Music, in its dim origins, also served pragmatic ends. It invoked the aid of the gods in rituals, united communal efforts in work songs, aroused courage for battles, and

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recounted myths and legends in a memorable form, thereby transmitting the culture to the next generation. Pleasure undoubtedly accompanied the creation and repetition of songs, but this was a by-product, not the end. Only as other media took part of these functions from music could it develop as an art governed by its own internal laws. Function remains integral to much music--sacred choral music, for example--but now how well it performs its function is in part judged by its intrinsic value as music. Cheap, sentimental, sacred music, badly sung or played, destroys rather than contributes to reverence in a sophistocated congregation.

Painting began on the walls of caves as a means of summoning supernatural aid or at least summoning warriors' courage to kill larger or swifter beasts for food. Later it was used to commemorate great achievements and bloody deeds of gods, heroes, and kings. Now, freed by the printed word and the photograph from duties of ritual and record, painting has emerged in autonomy to exploit the possibilities of forms and colors. It is now free to seek meaning rather than mere likeness, even when that meaning displeases some--whether in the portrait of a President or in an abstract expressionist's reaction to society.

Other once-necessary activities have become "sports" rather than "arts." The development of agriculture made a sport of hunting. Wrestling and foot races reached this status among the Greeks when the taming of horses and invention of sword, spear, and bow had limited their utility. The inventions of firearms and the internal combustion engine transformed archery, fencing, and equestrianism into pure sports.

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being scaling ladders with which ambitious men rise through knowledge-become-power, they may become graceful towers on the horizons of our everyday lives, marking points of the farthest advances of the human spirit.

McLuhan points out that the printed word is the creator of human individuality--a means of breaking out of the inclusive communal patterns of tribal and village life. The data of the senses will soon be transmitted wherever one wishes to learn what they have to teach, and to that extent, the entire human race may return to the situation of the small tribe, in which all share the same physical and sensory environment. But what of the interior world of ideas and imagination? This inner world by-passes the senses and grapples with abstractions and generalizations; it links things seen with things unseen, the palpable with the absent, the present with the future and the past. Above all, it creates new possibilities from that which <u>has</u> been seen, heard, smelled, tasted, and touched. The imagination projects from the known to the unknown, from the actual to the possible; it thus takes us out of our tribal sensory environment, whether that encompass a single village or the entire solar system.

What, then, can we expect the future to hold for the book? There are at least three areas in which it will, I believe, retain its value in the electronic future and where that value may even be enhanced when certain of its functions are shifted to other media: <u>first</u>, as a total work of art in its own right; <u>second</u>, as a link with the literate past; and <u>third</u>, as a medium through which the individual will continue to explore the nature and meaning of his own internal world--if you will, his soul.

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II.

With the realization that the medium of the printed word is, in itself, a message, more and more people will begin to value fine books for their own intrinsic artistic properties. Such an impulse toward appreciating the art of the book has in the past been stronger in Italy and France, than in England and the United States. To a degree, this impulse has spread even to the mass-market world of the American department store, where books in fine leather bindings take their place along with paintings, prints, maps, decorative vases, and bric-a-brac to add warmth and color to the surfaces of wood, glass, and metal in furniture displays. Fine books are sometimes given a small department of their own. But hitherto only a limited number of people have looked beyond finely-tooled leather bindings and gilt edges to comprehend the artistic properties of the physical book in its entirety, including its paper, design, typography, and the relations of these physical properties to its text. Most people understand that a Strauss waltz played by an all-girl string orchestra is somehow not the best musical choice to accompany a football rally, but how many concern themselves about the relations between the literary content of a book and its physical characteristics? Beyond recognizing that maps and color reproductions of art works appear to better advantage in a large format than in pocket size books, most of us probably have few opinions on the matter. What differences in format, design, typography, and kinds of illustrations should there be, for example, between a book entitled A VICTORIAN PUBLISHER and a selection from THE MEMOIRS OF CHATEAUBRIAND? Or between THE COLLECTED POEMS OF WALLACE STEVENS and THE COLLECTED POEMS OF ROBERT FROST?

II.

One of the reasons that we laymen know so little about book design and have so little interest in it is that very few publishers in this country--and, I would venture, fewer still in Great Britain--either understand or care about quality in all aspects of book production. This limitation is equally apparent in the work of the majority of commercial publishers and of university presses, and the notable exceptions are also divided between academic and commercial firms. Some are simply "manufacturers" of books. Others expend time, effort, money, and--above all--imagination on the various aspects of production: designing the pages of text, title page, binding, and dust jacket, choosing high quality paper and appropriate type faces. These elements do not just happen, and in a well-designed book their relevance and appropriateness can be sensed, if not always articulated, by the reader of developed sensibility. Some publishers, eager to sell books but without genuine interest in book design, lavish all their artistic efforts on the perishable dust jacket, giving it a handsome and appropriate design, while the binding and interior design remain dull and sometimes virtually uniform throughout dozens of books of different sizes on different subjects.

The Clarendon Press of Oxford University Press prides itself on its standard bindings, usually in the rich Oxford blue. Such dignified uniformity is appropriate to some of their publications, but to repeat it indiscriminately is as foolish as to wear a tuxedo--or a college blazer--on all occasions. By the same token, the slight variations in the design of dust jackets, bindings, and title pages that Clarendon does introduce often seem as capricious and meaningless as a child playing with a box of blocks. I mention The Clarendon Press because it is obviously admired and imitated in matters of design. The Cambridge

University Press, on the other hand, exhibits genuine artistic excellence in many of its books. In the United States the acknowledged leader in the field of bookmaking excellence among commercial publishers is the firm of Alfred A. Knopf, now a subsidiary of Random House and hence of the Radio Corporation of America. Both as an independent publisher and as a semi-autonomous prestige publisher within the larger corporation, the husband and wife team of Alfred and Blanche Knopf not only set standards of production excellence to match their editorial skill and discernment, but also tried to educate the reading public about design and typography by printing a short informative comment at the end of each book. The following statement appears as the collophon of volume III of Leslie Marchand's scholarly BYRON: A BIOGRAPHY (1957):

> The text of this book is set in CALEDONIA, a Linotype face designed by W. A. Dwiggins (1880-1956), who was responsible for so much that is good in contemporary book design. Though much of his early work was in advertising, and he was the author of the standard volume LAYOUT IN ADVERTISING, Mr. Dwiggins later devoted his prolific talents to book and type design and worked with great distinction in both fields. In addition to his designs for Caledonia, he created the Metro, Electra, and Eldorado series of type faces, as well as a number of experimental cuttings that have never been issued commercially.
>
> Caledonia belongs to the family of printing types called "modern face" by printers--a term used to mark the change in style of type-letters that occurred at the end of the eighteenth century. It is best evidenced in the letter shapes designed by Baskerville, Martin, Bodoni, and the Didots.

The book was composed, printed, and bound by Kingsport Press, Inc., Kingsport, Tennesses. The paper was manufactured by P.H. Glatfelter Co., Spring Grove, Pa. The typography and binding were designed by Rudolph Ruzicka.

This statement embodies the elements that have helped to raise the quality of Knopf designs consistently above those of any other major commercial press during the past quarter century. It shows, especially, an interest in the tradition of typography and book design, and a willingness to give recognition to the creative book designer, and to the craftsmen who produce the books, just as one recognizes the contributions of author, translator, illustrator, and the publisher himself. The knowledge that one's contribution would be recognized in a Knopf book undoubtedly spurred the production staffs at all levels to excel. As I have suggested, such a detailed note on design and production helps to educate the public simply by calling attention to various aspects of a book. If I were to suggest one step whereby the quality of book design and production might be enhanced, I would say that associations of book publishers representing both university presses and commercial presses ought to require, or at least encourage, their members to give appropriate credit to the designer, the printer, the mapmaker, the company that reproduces the illustrations, whether by collotype or photolithography, and, when appropriate, the papermaker and bindery.

Crediting binding presents, of course, a problem when the printed sheets are not all bound at one time. In the passage of years between the publication date and binding of the final stock of sheets, the original binder may have gone out of business or not wish to handle the residue; or, the publisher who is forced to sell the remainder of his stock at a

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reduced price may economize by having what was in its first issue a sumptuously bound book put into a cheap "remainder binding." Perhaps the first thousand or ten thousand copies of a work--those that will be bound at the time of publication--could be represented on the copyright page as "First Thousand" or "First Ten Thousand" and the binder's name be listed only on these first copies.

This problem, like others, is soluble, and only the general lack of interest by the reading public has thus far left books at their generally low level of aesthetic interest. If you would spend time, as I have recently, browsing in bookshops and looking beneath the dust jackets at the bindings, title pages, page layouts, typography, and paper, you will be astonished at the shoddy workmanship going into books. A volume on the Seven Arts, issued by a major New York publisher, tells us how to appreciate the aesthetic elements of our culture; it is printed on bad paper, in unreadable print, and produced without, apparently, a thought to its aesthetic qualities. One might do worse than adopt the following policy with regard to purchasing books: If one is uncertain whether he wishes to buy a book, he might make his decision on the basis of its effective presentation as a book. Other volumes that one may wish to read could be borrowed from the public library. When a volume seemed either especially well-done or badly done, the reader could pass on his opinion verbally to the manager of the bookshop or in a brief letter to the publisher. A few thousand alert and vocal readers--especially habitual bookbuyers--could exert a very salutary effect on standards of publishing simply by expressing an interest, for as Douglas McMurtrie wrote in 1927 in THE GOLDEN BOOK: " . . . present-day standards of bookmaking are with few exceptions lamentably low. This is

probably accounted for by the general lack of appreciation of fine bookmaking, for when a demand exists for good work in any field, that demand is inevitably supplied" (p. 3).

In the future that Marshall McLuhan envisions, when various electronic media will offer information and entertainment more easily and inexpensively than books do, those publishers who manufacture ugly black boxes filled with information or entertainment should fail, while those who create beauty to transmit beauty will prosper.

III.

One corollary to McLuhan's picture of media in the future is that, as technologically advanced men return to an oral culture approximating tribal life, they begin to lose touch with their literate past. Things that were important to their grandfathers no longer seem so to them. In a high-definition medium like the printed word, distinctions in doctrines led to religious and political wars of dogma: when printing was new, men killed and died over questions of transsubstantiation as opposed to co-substantiation, as more recently they have quibbled in blood about definitions of freedom and aggression. During the era of Gutenburg, the pen--or rather the type-case--was indeed mightier than the sword, for it wielded the sword, and cannon, and eventually tanks, planes, bombs, and rockets. Age-old struggles for power, nationalistic hatreds, class differences, as well as enlightened tolerance, were nourished by theologians and philosophers. The Reign of Terror was carried out in the name of the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and

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the Russian Revolution in the name of Karl Marx. Those who think that the war for American independence was inevitable apart from legalistic political traditions of John Locke and his eighteenth-century followers need only look to Canada, where the French majority had not been stirred up by the same books. The influence of books and pamphlets completely reversed the British social order between 1792 and 1920. Beyond these pragmatic realities, and probably underlying them, was the creation of a literary tradition that shaped the self-image of man as an individual and embodied some of the highest expressions of the human spirit. Shakespeare, one may argue, was working in an oral as well as a written tradition, but it was an oral culture enriched by the spread of knowledge through books, an oral language enriched by such literate achievements as the Book of Common Prayer and the English Bibles that preceded the Authorized Version of 1611. Deeper into the age of print, readers of Shakespeare's plays even forgot that they were oral as well as literary. Charles Lamb, much as he loved the theater, coveted Shakespeare for the private world of his own imagination, believing that his mind could produce the desired effects better than any stage manager in England. With Milton and Donne, Dryden and Pope, Wordsworth and Shelley, there is no question but that poetry had turned the corner. From being primarily an oral, communal art it became a literate and personal one. With the novel there emerged an entirely new form, free of any ties with oral culture. The private worlds created for readers of Fielding and Richardson, Jane Austen and Thomas Love Peacock, Dickens and Dostoyevski, can never successfully be transferred to any other medium. TOM JONES was a successful movie chiefly because it left out all the things that individualize Fielding as a novelist and created or expanded ideas merely

suggested by Fielding into major theatrical scenes. The excellent movie of a few years back entitled PRIDE AND PREJUDICE inevitably lost Jane Austen's precise irony of description. Those modern critics of the novel who assert that fiction is better when it "shows" a scene through dialogue than when it "tells" through the author's voice are simply stating their preference for oral, dramatic media--plays, television dramas, movies--rather than exploring intelligently the artistic possibilities inherent in the medium of fiction. The most important dialogue in fiction is, as Wayne Booth has argued, between the best self of the novelist and that of the reader, each exploring the moral implications of a group of characters involved in a series of events. Such dialogue is impossible between the director of a film and his audience, for in a medium like motion pictures, the viewer may miss seeing things that have been carefully put into a scene, and even if he sees them, there is no assurance that he will attribute to them the intended significance. Those who have seen Frederico Fellini's brilliant film JULIET OF THE SPIRITS can read the published scenario and dialogue to see how different one's experience of seeing the movie was from that which the director and actors articulated.

What I have been trying to emphasize is, of course, that the only way for future generations not to lose the meaning of human thought from the fifteenth through the first half of the twentieth century, will be for men to continue to read the works written during those years--PARADISE LOST and THE ANATOMY OF MELANCHOLY; AN ESSAY ON MAN, CLARISSA, and WEALTH OF NATIONS; THE RIGHTS OF MAN, THE PRELUDE, and DAVID COPPERFIELD; THE AMBASSADORS, THE WASTE LAND, and UNDERSTANDING MEDIA. For this period in human history the printed word was king; even artists

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who expressed themselves in sculpture or painting or music, wrote poetry--as Michelangelo did--or memoirs (as Cellini) to interpret themselves to their contemporaries or to future generations; some artists expended their best creative efforts in illustrating literary works, as did Hogarth, Blake, and Delacroix, or in writing music programmed to a literary theme, whether in oratorio, opera, or symphonic poem--Vivaldi's THE SEASONS, Mozart's DON GIOVANNI, Berlioz's DAMNATION OF FAUST, or Wagner's TRISTRAN UND ISOLDE.

For that era, then, Milton's saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance: "A good book is the precious life-blood of a master-spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life." To ignore those good books, or to rely on absorbing their message through another medium would impoverish our culture as much as the age of print was impoverished by unconsciously obliterating much of the oral culture that preceded it. To treat THE ILIAD or Sophoclean drama as merely literary texts, as Lamb later wished to do with KING LEAR, was to bind and confine products of oral, communal experiences within the linear, individualistic limits of the book. But to splash the book out onto a movie screen is to wrench it out of itself into something equally irrelevant to its origins.

IV.

In the electronic age to come, our descendents will value good books not only as works of art and not only because they will provide the most meaningful link with the age of Gutenburg, but also because books, both old books and newly written ones, will be the most adequate medium through which the individual can explore and extend the range of his inner being.

who expressed themselves in sculpture or painting or music, wrote poetry--as Michelangelo did--or memoirs (as Goethe) to interpret themselves to their contemporaries or to future generations; some artists expended their best creative efforts in illustrating literary works, as did Hogarth, Blake, and Delacroix, or in writing music programmed to a literary theme, whether in oratorio, opera, or symphonic poem--Vivaldi's THE SEASONS, Mozart's DON GIOVANNI, Berlioz's DAMNATION OF FAUST, or Wagner's TRISTRAN UND ISOLDE.

For that era, then, Milton's saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance: "A good book is the precious life-blood of a master-spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life." To ignore those good books, or to rely on absorbing their message through another medium would impoverish our culture as much as the age of print was impoverished by unconsciously obliterating much of the oral culture that preceded it. To treat THE ILIAD or Sophoclean drama as merely literary texts, as Lamb later wished to do with KING LEAR, was to bind and confine products of oral, communal experiences within the linear, individualistic limits of the book. But to splash the book out onto a movie screen is to wrench it out of itself into something equally irrelevant to its origins.

IV.

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Though it may seem strange to those of us who have always lived in a literate culture, especially since we learned to read almost as soon as we learned to reason, it is extremely difficult to maintain the same kind of dialogue between the inner and outer man, between thought and action, in the absence of the written word. Many of us have had the experience of being unable to define or articulate our deepest feelings until we sat down with pen or typewriter. The illiterate man's feelings are as real and vital, his experience may be as profound, and his piety may be more intense than that of literate man, but his means of expression are often limited to traditional formulas and he frequently requires the aid of action, whether effective or symbolic. Fasts and pilgrimages (to Jerusalem, Mecca, or the Ganges), public festivals, ceremonies of baptism or circumcision--these and other actions have been provided and encouraged in pre-literate or semi-literate cultures as a means of grace. All the world's great religions, by the necessities of the ages in which they were founded, emphasize such external activity. In Christian sects arising among literate people during the age of print, such as the Society of Friends, one sees a shift of emphasis from outward display to the inner light and to a tradition in which keeping a daily diary becomes a recognized spiritual experience. Of the early printed books, the one acknowledged classic among those that first circulated in print rather than in manuscript was Thomas a Kempis's IMITATION OF CHRIST. Down to the present day, in such recent masterpieces as THE DIARY OF ANNE FRANK, Dag Hammarskjöld's MARKINGS, and the DIARY OF POPE JOHN XXIII, the written word has revealed depths of an inner life never suspected or but dimly visible through the media of action, ritual, or public life. No

movie showing scenes of the Vatican or the United Nations, with excerpts from Pope John or Hammarskjold intoned by an actor, can transmit the feeling of the lonely, introspective moments in which those words were written. As Shakespeare's art can never be fully appreciated apart from the sound, color, and action of the living stage and the jostling of a theater audience, so Henry David Thoreau and Wallace Stevens remain unavailable to the man without a private, inward, literate existence.

George Orwell and Aldous Huxley imagined, in the future, totalitarian states which controlled all thought by manipulating the mass media and by emphasizing those that put a premium on participation of all the senses--the "feelies"--while distorting language so that private, consecutive reasoning became all but impossible. That this state now looms as a practical possibility argues for the retention of an alternative form of communication that takes place in the private theater of the individual imagination.

The political consequences of allowing this realm of individual experience to be overrun by a world of mass sensation are not, however, the most serious consequences. Even worse would be the loss of humane and spiritual insights that would occur if creative achievements were to become the sole domain of those capable of winning the ear of millions through the mass media. Even in the era of print some of the most gifted men and women were unable during their lifetimes, whether because of external circumstances or the lonely set of their own temperaments, to reach a public larger than a few friends. Shakespeare and Ben Jonson would have reached the public, as would Congreve and Defoe, Emerson and Longfellow, Tennyson and Dickens. But if BBC officials, or commercial sponsors, or Hollywood producers had been those who held the

keys to creative expression, what would we know of John Bunyan or Thomas Traherne, John Keats, Emily Bronte, or Emily Dickinson, Hart Crane, or Gerard Manley Hopkins. Some giants whose work was early rejected--Wordsworth, Whitman, and Joyce--would have persevered long enough to win the recognition that they deserved, but how much poorer our culture would be for the lack of their earliest, freshest efforts.

Above all, these artists could not have been what they were or meant what they mean apart from the medium in which they worked. The medium is the message, and the message of the written word and the printed word is one of the individual striving after an ideal, uncompromisingly reaching for a perfection beyond his grasp; and--through the power of imagination--more nearly portraying that ideal than is possible through any other medium.

When Percy Bysshe Shelley traveled to Italy, he made a comparative study of the arts. The occasion of an attack on contemporary poetry by his friend Thomas Love Peacock gave him an opportunity to set forth a case for the superiority of literature over the other arts and sciences. Shelley's conclusion that poetry is the highest expression of man's creative powers is one, of course, natural enough for a literary man living in the heart of the Gutenburg Era, but his arguments have never, I believe, been successfully answered by exponents of the other arts. In "A Defence of Poetry" Shelley writes that, although "language, colour, form, and religious and civil habits of action are all the instruments and materials" of the imagination, the purest expression of the imagination consists of "arrangements of language, and especially metrical language. . . . And this springs from the nature itself of language, which is a more direct representation of the actions and passions of our internal

being, and is susceptible of more various and delicate combinations, than colour, form, or motion, and is more plastic and obedient to the control of that faculty of which it is the creation. For language is arbitrarily produced by the Imagination, and has relation to thoughts alone; but all other materials, instruments, and conditions of art, have relations among each other, which limit and interpose between conception and expression."

What Shelley means is simply that the poet, when he lacks a suitable means of expression, can create one, since language is arbitrary, whereas the painter is limited by the nature and relations of colors and the materials through which he works, a musician by the limits of audible sounds and the fixed relations of pitch and duration, the sculptor by the weight, texture, and strength of his material, as well as by the nature of mass. Twentieth-century painters, sculptors, and musicians have been expending great efforts to burst out of these straight jackets, employing new materials, and creating three-dimensional paintings and electronically-powered moving sculptures. But the limits of the physical world--the laws of chemistry and physics--remain unchallenged, and only language can be altered at will to express new inventions and new conceptions. Every new discovery, every new technique is given a name--much more rapidly and with much less effort than it cost the scientist or painter or musician who invented it. Whether combining old words into new meanings--overkill, credibility gap--borrowing from Greek roots or other foreign languages--terramyacin, beatnik--or imposing new meanings and connotations on established phrases--"take a trip"--language remains the unfettered servant of the human imagination. James Joyce stands, perhaps, as the greatest re-creator of the English language during our century but even so staid a part of our social context as TIME MAGAZINE

has molded this plastic medium to its own purposes.

Re-creations of language do not lend themselves to presentation to a mass audience, any more than do revolutionary new ideas. Tribal life is conservative and conventional; individual experience can be far-seeing and seminal for the larger community. And it is through the medium of the printed word that important transformations in basic thought can first reach the select audience they need during their seed-time. Self-selecting communities of individuals will thus continue to recognize new ideas, inventions, and spiritual resources and will help infuse them into the mass-media culture.

Emily Dickinson captured in a few well-chosen words the ultimate value of books, and these have more meaning in the light of her great achievement in the virtual isolation of her retired life in Amherst, Massachusetts. There, thanks to the pliability and aesthetic distance possible through the written language, she was able not only to express herself but to universalize her experience--in this case by the simple expedient of changing the pronoun to the masculine third-person singular:

He ate and drank the precious words,
His spirit grew robust;
He knew no more that he was poor,
Nor that his frame was dust.
He danced along the dingy days,
And this bequest of wings
Was but a book. What liberty
A loosened spirit brings!