MODERN AMERICAN POETRY

Fearing's Preface to His 1956 *New and Selected Poems*

I.

The revolution that calls itself the Investigation had its rise in the theaters of communication, and now regularly parades its images across them, reiterates its gospel from them, daily and hourly marches through the corridors of every office, files into the living-room of every home.

These avenues of communication are television, radio, picture magazines, motion pictures, magazines of news interpretation, digests of news digests, newspaper chains, syndicated features, the house journals of chain industries.

And books. One is apt to overlook that archaic medium. Theoretically, anyone can still write and print a book. But practically, who can announce, distribute, advertise, and secure reviews quite so effectively as the large, economy-package, mail-order book clubs?

In all these forums the Investigation holds court, reveals yesterday's laws, lists the proscribed, debates the dry guillotine to be used next, unveils the confessions rehearsed in its secret trials, proves that its trials are not trials, renews its desperate struggle with those demons that would possess it, specifies those demons for the coming season, then relaxes and performs the cheerier task of erasing memories, of arranging far better horizons for all of us.

The only acts the Investigation does not perform in public are those intimate financial transactions by which each great and little Investigator reaps the just reward due his superior insight, virtue, and the grave responsibility of exercising so much power. There, the reticence is rarely broken, and then only in moments of awkward, but human, misunderstanding.

Yet that reserve may stem logically enough from a cardinal tenet in the gospel advanced by every tribunal of the Investigation: The need for secrecy is great, and growing.

And here, again, the otherwise bustling and talkative theaters of communication seem to preserve, rather than display, the conduct of those purely private business affairs it might not be in the nation's best interests to know. For the eye can scarcely penetrate beyond the blinding haloes revealed an the electronic screen; the ear catches nothing beneath the repetitions that flow from the loudspeaker; the mind discovers no fresh information between the lines of standard bulletins--all of these in resolute agreement that the circuits of communication defend their freedom and independence of expression, their integrity, against every sinister threat.

So it may well be that there are no financial secrets in the dim, silent region behind the floodlit curtain of public relations, public information, public education, news interpretation, news evaluation, opinion molding, opinion engineering, opinion guidance, fact-finding, and still more public relations.

Surely, if there were a whole industry of chronic largess to conceal--even beneath the haloes--some among these valiant, voluble commentators would ask: Is the richest prize of the Investigation its absolute power to prevent investigation? Is the prolonged public drama of Good v. Evil strictly ersatz, a glittering, noisy substitute for the total darkness, total silence, total secrecy desired?

It is true, such an inquiring reporter would run some risk of personal inconvenience. It might even be suddenly rumored that he has a defect of character, and he might be publicly summoned to a secret examination, or be secretly summoned and put to the question in a public display. Perhaps the Investigation, in its mercy, would return no immediate verdict, at all. Perhaps a subsequent tribunal of the Investigation might reopen the case. Or perhaps not.

In the meantime, though, that reporter could find himself in the limbo of the proscribed.

Still, such an inquisitive and outspoken commentator must exist somewhere, in the giant networks of communication, because so many of its surviving spokesmen, and so many of its free-speech watchmen, tell us so.

But where?

After a decade of victorious inquiries into every agency of communication, conducted in the spotlit arenas of communication, where is the employee who challenges the righteous gospel of the Investigation, slight though its powers may be?

Have you wondered whatever became of the last radio-TV analyst you thought interesting?

"Spies, saboteurs, and traitors" has become a favorite newspaper cliché. In the press of which country is this daily refrain more popular--Russian, or American?

How many societies, legions, councils, and leagues, how many villages and cities, how many

departments of city, state, and Federal authorities, now have lists of tabooed books and forbidden authors? Except for press agents of the Investigation, are there any American authors, living or dead, not on one or all of these lists? If you aren't sure about a name or a title, how and where would you inquire, to find out? Or is it safer not to inquire?

And speaking of books--how many books critical of the new gospel have you seen publicly displayed, lately? How many books skeptical of the Investigators' mandate attract favorable comment from the syndicated commentators, or on the cultural forums of the radio-TV hook-ups?

How many of these have there been, lately?

II.

Now, there is nothing really new in the foregoing; certainly, not to book readers, who recognize this picture from the most casual acquaintance with history. Rather, it all too clearly resembles those familiar relics with which the deepest and oldest graveyards of the past are filled. And it is not my purpose to detail this giant syndrome that has already made its indelible mark, earning the right to that distinctive name it has chosen for itself: The American Investigation.

But it has a literature peculiar to it, one that is not merely literature, but also law. This lawgiving literature spells itself out in a maze of communications that is peculiar to our age, a mechanism reaching swiftly into the future. These subjects, at least, may be partly new to the 1956 reader, accustomed chiefly to printed type and the anachronistic page. Certainly, they are of professional interest to the 1956 writer, facing the presentation of his work through a variety of media, both new and old. And facing, of course, the tribunals of the Investigation, whose legions keep sleepless watch upon them all.

By all odds the favorite literary vehicle of the Investigation, a form now undeniably brought close to perfection, is not without its prototypes; strictly speaking, its outward design is fairly simple, one that thirty years ago seemed fully explored, without promise of further development. (I used to write pieces for the trade, myself; but I somehow failed to find the revitalizing clue.)

That hardy perennial is the True Confession Story, flourishing now in the many phases of its amazing renaissance.

The essential ingredients of this narrative form remain about what they have always been--though today's craftsmanship may be somewhat superior, perhaps because the rate of pay is higher and therefore attracts far better talent. (I admit to a certain amount of envy on this point.) Defining the True Confession Story, a famed editorial dictum of thirty years ago set down the law that: "The heroine may fall, but she must *fall upward."*

This fiat may be a little puzzling today; but in its time, it was widely and perfectly understood, especially by the writer who had a True Confession Story in the works. And in contemporary examples,

as we know, the redeemed protagonist must still fall upward--though how much farther upward, today!

The formula for the True Confession Story, old or new, shows these abiding features: (1) The Temptation. ("Little did I dream when the suavely handsome stranger first visited our simple home, and his glib talk about the glittering life of the underworld set my pulses racing, that soon this would lead . . .") ("Little did I dream when my new-found friend, all too aware of my innocence, set my youthful idealism on fire with his roseate picture of a better life for the underprivileged, that soon this would lead . . .")(2) The Fall. In the older True Confession Story, sin was a rather immutable activity, and perhaps for that reason came to seem monotonous. It may be this was where I made my own unfortunate oversight. For while the modern True Confession Story has that frailty, too, it adds others, usually a prolonged adventure in spy work, most often the theft of confidential documents for a foreign power, as for instance the theft of papers that disclose the military secret of garbage. (The reference is literal, in a work that has become a classic.) (3) The Sad Awakening. ("Too late, I realized the cruel deception under that smiling mask, for now the web of trickery I had helped to weave tightened its grip about another victim--myself! Who would believe me, if . . . ?") Such is the melancholy tenor of this turn in the plot-line for both the old and the new type, and it also remains about the same in the conclusion: (4) The Regeneration. ("But come what might, and at whatever cost, I resolved to break with my infamous past and henceforth lead a better life. The break would be irrevocable, and to atone for my past misdeeds I would begin by making a clean breast of everything, I would tell all, including the names. . . .")

Here, of course, there is a sharp divergence between the old, lace-handkerchief type of True Confession Story, and the new, or switchblade type. For the modern variety is strictly utilitarian.

In the past, the literary merits of the True Confession Story, considered as fiction, were dismissed as negligible by those critics most insistent upon the deeper verities of literature. But the contemporary True Confession does not ask to be appraised as fiction. It is presented as fact. And it has the weight of law, with verdict, sentence, and penalty wrapped in one, on the basis that it is fact.

That is the way each succeeding True Confession Story has been acclaimed, as its tale of spies, saboteurs, and traitors emerged from this or that tribunal of the Investigation. As though somehow concerned that their enthusiasm might be doubted, those critics who previously ignored this branch of literature now came to find its revelations not only credible, but possessed of rare insight and literary excellence as well. In radio and television, through daily and hourly reference, each newly sainted author passed at once into the lore of household orthodoxy, while his erstwhile accomplices were accorded a banishment not seen in the centuries since lepers were belled. The popularity of this latter-day True Confession Story, particularly in legal circles, has been immense, while the wages of sin, counting book club royalties and motion picture sales ("at whatever cost"), have been staggering. Indeed, that critic, book reviewer, editor, or commentator silly enough to carp at this literary gold rush has almost deserved the obscurity that suddenly overtook him--provided he did not first experience an honest, but rapid, change of heart.

There is no record that any of the communications cartels were reluctant to spread the gospel of the True Confession Story, while in some of the most public-relations minded, it was a favorite from the start. In fact, many of the gamier recitals originated within them, sponsored as the timely Confession of a staff member who then, in atonement, submitted to the ordeal of royalties and retirement, with honors tactfully bestowed, or of a recently purified spy, hot from his lurid but underpaid pursuits, employed as an editorial expert to instruct the public, and to aid the tribunals of the Investigation, in these baffling matters.

For the True Confession Story has always had its practical advantages. To the question, "Were you, then, a spy, saboteur, and traitor?" the selected performer gives the acceptable reply, "Yes, often," and follows this with the useful edge of the pending legislation, "And here are the names of the people and organizations that aided my espionage. . . ."

This method of persuasion has been so effective that a staff complement of reformed spies, redeemed saboteurs, regenerate traitors is deemed to be a living guarantee that the combine is trustworthy, as the phrase goes, and doubly astute by reason of former dupedom. Those news services not yet certified with such consultants, on the other hand, seem hesitant to probe behind the official bulletins of self-commendation; it is almost as though they did not desire initiation into the higher probity so certain to follow. And so the sway of the True Confession Story, throughout the mass media that nourished it, is absolute.

In our own time, the True Confession also had its public vogue in Germany and Russia. National pride might urge the boast that the device is unique with the American Investigation; but perhaps we can say ours is more democratic.

But what about book writers, theoretically issuing their creative work outside the mills of authoritative information? Poets, novelists, playwrights, none have as yet been accredited to the high-salaried corps of treason and espionage, not even as proscribed runners-up. This may be because we don't have those giant mills of information at our disposal, or in technical terms, don't have any "apparachik." For us, thus far, there are only the auxiliary legions of the Investigation, the book watchers, and a new order they have created for most writers and readers, called dupedom.

Still, even this citation carries penalties, and no profit. It may explain why so many writers have concerned themselves with marginal topics: bold tales of exploration and adventure, heroic stories about the Civil War, amusing anecdotes about one's intrepid (elder) relatives--with anything, in short, save the terrible drama of the past decade, in which a long phase of our society died.

But to understand what has happened to imaginative writing in book form one must realize what is happening now in the matrix of all communications.

III.

News, common sense, good literature--these are whatever the voices of communication unanimously, and often, say they are. Conversely, distortion, false reason, base and degenerate writing, these, too, are whatever the concerted organs of communication repeatedly denounce as such. Still more conveniently, those topics and views not mentioned in the forums of communication, at all, do not exist; certainly, if some unpleasant subject does win a momentary, unauthorized interest, under the magic eraser of silence it soon dies.

In the 1956 grid for sending messages to the public, the all-pervasive voice (and face) has long been through the electronic media of radio and television. They have that preeminence, and are literally all-pervasive, for they send their messages literally everywhere, send them literally within an instant, and literally permit no rejoinder of either agreement or contradiction.

That the invention of the amplifier means change in every perspective of the writer-audience relationship, far greater and more swiftly than the transformation that followed the invention of movable type, is already too clear to require study. But basic differences between the new and the old media have meaning not generally understood, perhaps because the audience is no more interested in how or why it receives its public messages than it is in what drama, song, or guided tour is on the program of those messages; or perhaps because those who own and direct the printed and the electronic forums see no good reason to dwell upon the differences between them, while there may be many for not doing so.

Some of these differences are plainly lasting, others transient, or recurring. They are:

(1) The direct appeal made to the senses by the electronic media, television particularly, is incomparably more vivid.

(2) The flow of radio-TV presentations is offered essentially free of charge to the audience.

(3) Transmitting apparatus is elaborate and expensive, and a license to broadcast is subject to all the tribunals of the Investigation. There can be no serious invasion by amateurs, here.

(4) The number of transmitters for any given region is further narrowed by today's technological limitations.

(5) Advertising is the business, and the only business, of radio and television. But at its most profitable this goes beyond the simple commercial that extols a product; it offers programs advancing a turn of thought convertible to as much, if not far greater profit. This is propaganda, of course, but in the trade that word has been remodeled to mean a foreign lie, whereas truth, in the trade, is referred to as opinion-molding through public relations. And the basic turn of thought which the juntas of information sell and re-sell is that freedom of expression is the first safeguard of right thinking and right living, a sacred trust of the only (remaining) voices you hear raised, and oddly raised with such identical phrases, in their defense.

(6) The audience does not buy the writers electronic work. As noted, that is given away free. The work itself is not even offered to the public for sale.

(7) The writer is paid (and very well paid) by the sponsoring corporation, while he himself has become a corporation writer, one member of a large team that includes an account executive, a station program executive, a network public relations executive, the sponsor's public relations executive, a producer and his human package which includes a director, the starring actor, and two or three other corporation writers who might be called rewrite executives. Several sharp executive heads are better than one, always, and the script that results when all of these free spirits get through subtracting questionable notions from it must be better than just one script written by just one writer, who may know how to spell, but never knows the most important points to be omitted.

(8) The writer has a private name, probably, and he probably has a distinct personality. But his divorce from the transmitted material is complete. That program is the expert salesmanship of another product, not the literary work. And this is a curious reversal of custom that once prevailed in print, and where, even today, there is sometimes a close connection between what a noncorporation writer thinks, and what he writes.

(9) The presentation by air can reach its public instantly, with no time lag unavoidably imposed, as there is in the slower stages of assembling and distributing material in print.

(10) The electronic program is presented but once. Only singing commercials, and favorite texts from official True Confession stories, are authentic classics of our age, apparently, and merit so many repeat performances, such frequent references.

(11) Once transmitted, the electronic message is gone forever, and for most of its audience, gone beyond recall.

(12) Nor does the message leave a public record of itself. The tape and film of its most dramatic hours, its most casual--or critical--months and years cannot be found in any public library. They may exist, briefly, in private files. But there is nowhere a catalogue (nor even an effective method for cataloguing) clues to identify the nature of the electronic past. In these media, today's message is always authentic; it is permanently the very latest word, of course, but it is more. Because it can never be confronted with a previous message that might contain material to contradict it, it is also the first word, and the only word. And the same message, daily repeated, always a self-declared corroboration of itself, can also be slightly altered from day to day, be given a steadily changing perspective, can remain forever the same message, and yet not be remotely the same at all.

The swarming of the Investigators coincided exactly, in time, with the swift development of television.

In all media of communication the larger syndicates welcomed and helped formulate the structure, the menacing techniques of the Investigation, though resistance flickered briefly in isolated pockets of the

press. But that separate enclosure in the world of communications, television, quickly joined by radio, has never had a station, or even a spokesman, independent of the opinionmolders who, since they also mold the law, are in effect our official bureaus of information. The governors of electronics do not talk much about the kinds of power inherent in the form, save skimpily as "a force for public service;" they do not even openly analyze foreign use of electronic control; the study could not fail to suggest parallels. But it seems most probable that, in spite of the usual bizarre and ambitious plans that have certainly been laid, no unified program exists. The medium is really new, and in electronic communication, the year is once more 1450.

Yet it is today the determinant in all other circuits of communication, on policies of acceptable and inacceptable thought. Repetition, with no standard for comparison, is the basic and invincible logic of the screen, the loudspeaker; with timely repetition, their spokesmen gild and regild the lily. Sentimental souls who attach mystic powers to the printed word have not yet reflected that among the new recruits of today's generation, one of them will read, to a hundred who become auditors, only, and that tomorrow the ratio will be one to a thousand.

Inside the electronic world, the screening and control of public messages occurs at the many checkpoints previously noted, and there is little need for the blunt intervention of archaic censorship (though no doubt it is sometimes exercised, without any audience learning, or much caring, that it has taken place). But most of the control is automatic. Instead of blue-penciling passages suspect of sinister intent it is easier to cancel the commentator or executive sub-editor who tends to be careless about the by-laws governing free speech. New and younger editors invariably function better; they have no illegal information, no haunting memories to forget.

And in those cartels of communication outside of electronics, opposition or even a strongly divergent vogue, runs the risk of the familiar, devious contest it cannot win. For the airborne legions can be marshaled instantly and concentrated anywhere, unleashed in any degree of the expert ferocity we have so often seen in the past decade--always as a public service, with the classic seal of divine authority, as well.

But even the suggestion of discord between the electronic world and the satellite press seems monstrous. All time and all space in every medium is merchandise, so expensive and so profitable in the great treasure hunt of the day that not a moment, not a line can be wasted on matters irrelevant to communications as a flourishing commerce. What other, better kind of freespeech can there possibly be than news and opinion that pays such dividends?

IV.

Approved rhetoric in 1956 seems an innocent recital of endless prosperity, occasionally interspersed with grim but imperative demonstrations against super-demons that endanger this idyl. There is very little in the flow of simplified bulletins that would move anyone to second, longer thoughts. The artless messages are uniform. There can be no surprises in them, for they use the language of subtraction, from

which every discordant thought and detail has been skillfully pared and removed.

But the recital seems less innocent, when the prolonged hammering and grinding by which it has been processed is reviewed. What has been removed (not counting a few human heads) to produce this loss-proof package, and what ersatz filler has been added to replace the subtracted matter? And then, this industry is not merely one more among many; it is the central nervous system that actuates, or paralyzes, a whole society. There can be nothing artless about the control of a mechanism so powerful; a simplified ideological jargon cannot be the practical key to the source and disposition of a wealth so vast. We know, too well the log cabins and covered wagons processed by the opinion-molding settlements of Madison and Pennsylvania Avenues, and we are equally familiar with the host of spies, saboteurs, and traitors besieging them; but we do not hear, save inferentially, about the loot, pillage, and plunder inseparable from absolute power exercised in, and through the networks of communication, captive and menaced as they all are.

The character and volume of this under-the-counter commerce today, in terms of cash rather than the exalted international and supernatural labels exhibited, can only be surmised, and then only by comparison with the last, similarly prosperous, similarly secretive epoch in our history for which there is even a partially established record. That was the age dedicated, outwardly, to Prohibition; more privately, it marked this society's first, universal introduction to the uses of Protection, blazing trails to new careers, founding new dynasties, pioneering an entire continent for the code and practice of the rackets. The press of that age was not thoroughly homogenized, and some sense of the splendid business opportunities offered in the link between Prohibition and Protection eventually became public knowledge. There is no evidence that these silent transactions have at any time been seriously inconvenienced since that wholesale prelude.

Today, little issues from the public address system of communications other than sponsored salesmanship, filled with the easier types of true thoughts, but wholly pruned of thoughts everyone knows are false; and of course, the verdicts of the Security courts, maintaining freedom. A visiting de Tocqueville might marvel that so much of the national wealth is channeled into social and military insurance against the stern needs of the future, at the same time supporting such visible prosperity in the present; that foreign visitor might be entranced at the way these riches are administered with a log-cabin virtue questioned by absolutely none. But not many of us are innocents from abroad. The signs, the classic situations, the covering language designed for an adult kindergarten are too familiar; this looks like a society necrobiotic with the rackets.

It would be pointless, and certainly thankless, to speculate which has been imposed on the other, the native rackets, or the common Twentieth-century plague. Perhaps these are identical, and always have been. It is a world that does not really need a scale of values; money is better. But a rudimentary cover-up can be a help, and the grandiose pitch for it is summed up in the True Confession Story. An orderly inversion of reason is the operative principle, and with this key the outcome of impending trials and issues can be foreseen in their earliest notices. Thus, race murder in a backward area is officially declared a mirage (it didn't happen) perpetrated (on a nameless stranger, to create false sympathy) by the victim's accomplices, who are spies, saboteurs, traitors, dupes, and this decree must pass with no

question from the public message carriers, since it is the grotesque essence of the True Confession Story the communications circuits enforce everywhere. And so, too, the strategists of the Investigation are forever "losing" in the unequal contest to save us from dire peril, enfeebled and helpless as they have been since their earliest triumphs. Now, whenever that forlorn cry is raised it constitutes the sole announcement that another social domain has been invaded and sacked. Courage, similarly, is an attribute that has undergone a curious change in the scale of this new regime. It is now the valor of a freshly persuaded witness before the Investigation, recklessly defying the demons of spydom, protected only by all the organized forces of a once powerful nation that emerged victorious--before the rise of the Investigation--from a global war.

It should be apparent that creative writers, those not primarily moved to produce commercially acceptable copy, will find it paralyzing to work within the purposeful, voracious, medieval terms of the official code. (Though the television networks, as everyone knows, produce dramas that daily surpass themselves; they say so.) And it should also be apparent that there is no province of communication immune to the blackdamp of these authorized values. The proprietors of the new order intend to obliterate avenues of the imagination they cannot sanctify, including further plans for the world of books.

V.

Reading is one form of education, but writing seems to have educational by-products and after-effects that come in all forms. Some of these experiences that at least feel the most broadening are not, of course, deliberately invited. A zest for knowledge and self-improvement did not loom very large as a motive in my first subscription to the literary life, I imagine; what I had in mind, I'm sure, was some fascinating way to be of public service, particularly one that avoided too much humdrum routine in an office cluttered with, well, books.

There can be a unique exhilaration in creative writing, and it can offer the surprise of final discovery. These qualities exist in life (sometimes), and if they are not to be found in a verbal presentation of it, then the reader (or audience) has been cheated and the writer has been killing everyone's time. This excitement and surprise must be real, not counterfeit, and have in it the breath of those crises upon which most people feel their lives are poised, sometimes crossing into them, in fact, and then rarely with routine behavior, seldom with standardized results. A writer cannot do much to transmit an excitement he does not feel, and the only surprises are those that find themselves, as the work grows. None of these essentials that fuse hard uncertainty, tension, choice, and action into a sense of reality are possible, working inside the cartels of communication. The technique of subtraction, which means such rich dividends to a public relations firm, is also total bankruptcy to the creative imagination. These limitations have always held, of course, in the largest media; they are not established by the new mechanical devices for presentation, which have dazzling possibilities; they arise from the purposes for which they are controlled, and the flowering of the rackets merely added virulence to the original stagnation. Since that flowering, all literary work has grown steadily safer, risk-proofed against steadily multiplying taboos.

As an escape from routine, therefore, my choice of an activity related to communications would seem to be about the worst possible. But the margin by which inventive writing is separated from the Executive Story Conference imitation of it has not always been a desolate no man's land patrolled by reformed spies, saboteurs, traitors, monitored by converted Russian Intelligence officers and cultured plantation owners, booby-trapped with amendments to the Constitution. Before the eclipse, there was some barter, and human communication was quite possible without character references from these new literary arbiters. Commercial scripts must always be exactly the same, but different, and in their feverish search for a totally different sameness, story executives chronically send for another, far better, far more sensible imaginative writer, and he, in turn, needs money.

These collisions have been educational, and sometimes they have even been fun. They have been a direct source of material, too. I see that I attended a story conference in 1940, or a little before, and in the course of it we faithfully performed all the steps of subtraction necessary to make some heartbreak series exactly the same as the cycle that preceded it. The poem "Yes, the Agency Can Handle That" attempts to dramatize the process of the story conference in which, I suppose, two or three executives, probably with my help, beat every last shred of plausibility out of one of those moving, true-to-life sagas. I was rather gloomily fascinated by the skill and care taken to weed out every possible sales deterrent, and so I wrote about it. Then a few years later, I drew on a segment of communications for the setting of a novel, *The Big Clock*. The rigor mortis overtaking that mythical nerve center was a little too educational; "Anything but the News" was some character's facetious description of its published output; but the cream of the joke was far more grisly, for soon the ersatz issued by all such gazettes would fill with spy recitals, as the great treasure hunt gathered momentum; it was the eve of the first *coups* staged by the Americaneers in and with a world of communications already moribund.

To write about the people and events of this time and this place, through imaginary characters and transposed circumstances, all of it coming in the end to an expression of the changing relationships between people in varied crises--this has not always been an unmixed pleasure, of course. Some of the evidence has been too conclusive and too appalling, even for me. And it has been a privilege (though I can think of safer ones) to learn something of the nature of the eclipse, and to know people better in the way they met it, chiefly through the discipline enforced by writing about them in the margin of whatever fight remained.

But there are other forms of crisis on everyone's private, crowded calendar, apart from the central tragedy; other moods, other people, or the same people in different circumstances. Technically speaking, the mood in which a work is presented is probably the largest factor in the effect it makes; it's invisible, since it can't be pointed out, but it's there; essentially, its the relationship established between the author and the reader, during the course of a conversation in which the author does all the talking. In poetry, the tone establishes the rhythm, which is literally the sound of that conversation, and carries just about all the meaning of the poem.

These poems were written in a variety of moods, not intentionally so, with a view to filling prescriptions, but because at one time or another I felt that way. Never, though, merely because I thought that way. And in this collection, only a small fraction of the poems relate directly to the corrosion

outlined in preceding sections of this foreword. If I had already covered that subject, there would have been no urge to work with the same gruesome material again. Most of these poems are keyed to other moods, and while I never made an absolute requirement of this, it has always been a thought that each poem was in a different vein from all the others.

KENNETH FEARING

New York City, April, 1956

Return to Kenneth Fearing