Dandy & Fine: Accent to Ascent (1940 - )
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Accent to Ascent
(1940—)

Correspondence
on the Occasions of
Work Published
in Literary Magazines
at the University
of Illinois

Mae Briskin • Daniel Curley • William H. Gass • George Mills • Katherine Anne Porter • Wallace Stevens

E.E. Cummings • Brendan Galvin • Bobbie Ann Mason • Flannery O'Connor • J.F. Powers • Eudora Welty

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
ILLINOIS HISTORICAL SURVEY
DANDY & FINE

Accent to Ascent

(1940— )

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Exhibit arranged by George Hendrick and Robert Steltman.

Department of English.

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Two literary magazines edited by University of Illinois faculty members have received national acclaim because of the high quality of the poetry and fiction that they published—Accent (1940-1960) and Ascent (1975 to the present). Accent, edited by Kerker Quinn and associates, published such established writers as Katherine Anne Porter, Wallace Stevens, E. E. Cummings, and Conrad Aiken, but it was also a journal to which previously unpublished writers turned because of its well-deserved reputation for interest in new writers and careful editorial readings. Flannery O'Connor, J. F. Powers, William H. Gass, Daniel Curley, and many other distinguished poets, novelists, and short-story writers published first in Accent. In many cases, the writers (established or just beginning) formed close working relationships and friendships with the editors, as the text of this catalog will show. Writers of ability had their work read by practical critic-editors who knew how to encourage revisions without destroying the fragile egos of the authors.

Curley was one of the editors of Accent during the last five years of its existence, and when he founded Ascent fifteen years after the demise of Kerker's much-praised journal, he carried on the tradition of informed, sympathetic criticism. Joan Givner, one of the short-story writers he encouraged, who has now published two volumes of stories, has recently written that she submitted all of her early stories to him, for she knew he would give her judicious criticism, whether or not he accepted the story. Curley's encouragement of Mae Briskin, George Mills, and many others is well known in the literary world, and his close work with writers was highly successful. In the past fourteen years Ascent has had a distinguished record: eight stories in either Best American Short Stories or The O. Henry Awards and nineteen awards from the Illinois Arts Council for the best work published by Illinois writers in Illinois magazines.

The first literary magazine published on the University of Illinois campus was The Illinois Magazine (1902-1925). It was a general magazine, and the contributors were students and faculty members. Some distinguished writers published there, and Mark Van Doren, the poet and critic who received a Pulitzer Prize in 1940, was editor during the 1913-1914 academic year. There was, however, no national literary publication at the Urbana-Champaign campus until 1940, when Kerker Quinn and several colleagues founded

The Accent editors in 1940. Left to right: Kerker Quinn, W. R. Moses, Charles Shattuck, and W. McNeal Lowry.
Accent. The history of this influential literary journal began in 1934 when Quinn was an undergraduate at Bradley Polytechnic Institute (now Bradley University) in Peoria. He founded there a journal named Direction, which in its three issues published some of the best writers in America: Stevens, Ezra Pound, Aiken, William Carlos Williams, Marianne Moore, Erskine Caldwell, William Saroyan, and others. Quinn also sought out new writers such as Elizabeth Bishop, whose “first nationally published verse” was printed in the third issue.

Quinn enrolled at the University of Illinois for graduate work in English and was later to become a faculty member in the department. He was eager to restart his journal but was unable to do so for six years. By 1940 the name Direction was in use again, and another title had to be found. “Legend has it,” according to Accent: An Anthology, “that suggestions were tossed into a hat and the title chosen at random. Be that as it may, the choice was certainly fortunate. Not only did the name have the right ring—one charter member was moved to hope that the magazine’s accents would be both grave and acute—but it had the unexpected advantage of placing Accent in eye-catching position in library and bookstore displays and in all magazine lists.”

Literary journals almost always begin with a manifesto, and Accent was no exception: “The editors... hope to build a magazine which discerning readers will welcome as a representative collection of the best creative and critical writing of our time, carefully balancing the work of established authors with that of comparative unknowns. By avoiding a biased viewpoint and rejecting the stereotyped and the trivial and the unintelligible, they will try to make the contents of each issue significant, varied, and readable.” What is exceptional is that Accent was able to carry out this brave (and optimistic) declaration for twenty years.

Quinn was largely responsible for soliciting works from already-established writers. Editors Charles Shattuck, George Scouffas, and Curley joined Quinn in working with beginning writers and those in the early stages of what were to be distinguished careers. Working in Urbana, far from the usual literary centers and with inadequate financing, Accent was a major force in American letters for two decades.
Dear Mr. Quinn: Thank you for your note of the 4th accepting my story, "The Geranium." I enclose a copy of the story, in which I have made several minor changes and corrected the mechanical mistakes, I trust. • Regarding comment on previous publication: there has been no previous publication. I have been writing stories since last summer, and "The Geranium" is the third story I have written. • I am a native Georgian, twenty years old, and am at present doing graduate work in English at the University of Iowa. Before that, I attended Georgia State College for Women in Milledgeville, Georgia, where my home is. • Thank you again for accepting my story. I am happy that my first one will be in Accent and hope that I may have others there in the future.

(Miss) Flannery O'Connor

After Flannery O'Connor graduated from Georgia State College for Women, she attended the University of Iowa, where she received the master of fine arts degree in 1947. She submitted the title story of her thesis, "The Geranium," to Accent on February 7, 1946, and it appeared in the Summer 1946 issue. (The manuscript for The Geranium, as well as O'Connor's letter to Quinn, is in the University Archives.) She was not paid for the first story she ever published, and in 1955 she rewrote it with a new title, "An Exile in the East." She informed her agent on January 13, 1955: "I don't want to go to the penitentiary for selling a story twice (but if I do I would like to get a good price for the story)." This revision was not sold, but late in her life she rewrote the story again and "Judgement Day" is the concluding story in Everything That Rises Must Converge. After her death from lupus, Thomas Merton compared her with Sophocles: "I write her name with honor, for all the truth and all the craft with which she shows man's fall and his dishonor."

THE GERANIUM

OLD DUDLEY FOLDED into the chair he was gradually molding to his own shape and looked out the window fifteen feet away into another window framed by blackened red brick. He was waiting on the geranium. They put it out every morning about ten and they took it in at five-thirty. Mrs. Carson back home had a geranium in her window.
Dear Mr. Quinn: October 7, 1941

I should love to do Miss Moore's book, if it were possible, but I have promised to do something else before the end of October and want all my spare time for that job. Isn't there some psychologist, keen for and about poetry, sagacious enough to recognize in Miss Moore another extraordinarily sagacious creature to whom you could turn? I should like to know so much more then I do now about her animals, and then she has such an exquisitely warm character, not to speak of her intelligence. But, for my own part, I just don't have a moment's time. Sorry. Very truly yours,

[Signature]

"Since the deaths of Yeats and Eliot," Richard Ellmann and Robert O'Clair wrote in The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry, "it has become clear that a third great imaginative force in the first part of this century was Wallace Stevens." He seldom moved in literary circles and spent a significant part of his life as an executive of an insurance company. This imaginative poet told his wife, "I believe that with a bucket of sand and a wishing lamp I could create a world in half a second that would make this one look like a hunk of mud." One creation worthy of such a world was "The Bed of Old John Zeller," which appeared in Accent in the Autumn 1941 issue.

The University Archives contain the manuscripts of 6 of Stevens's poems and 24 letters to Kerker Quinn.

Collected Poems

The Palm at the End of the Mind

Letters of Wallace Stevens

The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and the Imagination
e. e. cummings, as he styled himself, was one of the most innovative of modern American poets. kerker quinn made many overtures inviting Cummings to contribute to Accent, and Cummings did send along several of his unusual poems. Cummings’s letters, too, displayed many of the same typographical eccentricities—and the playfulness—that characterize his poetry. As Richard Ellmann and Robert O’Clair noted in The Norton Anthology of Poetry, “It became clear that the arrangement of a poem on a page reflected the way it was to be read aloud, roused tensions and effective resolutions, offered an intriguing puzzle, and gave vent to Cummings’s iconoclasm.”

—laughing to find anyone’s blind (like me like you) except in snow—
a whom we make (of grin for smile whose head’s his face with stones for eyes for mind with none) boy after girl each brings a world to build our clown

—shouting to see what no mind knows a mindless he begins to guess

what no tongue tells (such as ourselves) begins to sing an only grin—

dancing to feel
nots are their why
stones become eyes
locks open keys

haven’t is have
doubt and believe
(like me like you)
vanish in so

—laughing to find a moone’s more
by far than you’re alive or i’m—

crying to lose
(as down someone
who’s we ungrows)
a dream in the rain
May 25 1943
Silver Lake
New Hampshire

Dear Mr Quinn—
dandy & fine
—sincerely

November 10 1954

Dear Mr Quinn—
your kind letter was welcome: let me only add that our nonhero will gladly send you a poem if you'll cheerfully send his proof after proof until he okays one, and can guarantee publication not later than six months after my contribution is received

in time of daffodils (who know the goal of living is to grow) forgetting why, remember how

in time of lilacs who proclaim the aim of waking is to dream, remember so (forgetting seem)

in time of roses (who amaze our now and here with paradise) forgetting if, remember yes

in time of all sweet things beyond whatever mind may comprehend, remember seek (forgetting find)

and in a mystery to be (when time from time shall set us free) forgetting me, remember me
J. F. Powers published his first stories in Accent and dedicated his first collection, *Prince of Darkness and Other Stories*, to Charles Shattuck and Kerker Quinn "in gratitude." In October 1913, Quinn wrote that Accent had published Powers's first story, "He Don't Plant Cotton," and that his "Lions, Harts, Leaping Does" is the longest and one of the best pieces of fiction we have been privileged to print. The editors of Accent: An Anthology, 1940-1960 wrote that they saw problems with "Lions, Harts, Leaping Does": "After a magnificent development it ended all too abruptly with a too easy symbolic death scene. The editors turned to outsiders for counsel, among them Katherine Anne Porter, who had already advised and befriended them in other ways. Miss Porter's response was to the effect that this piece was so superbly written that it must be printed, whether the ending pleased or not. Back to the author went the manuscript, with Miss Porter's opinion attached, and with such incentive the author went at it again. Within a few weeks he had developed what is now the final, climactic, and best section of one of the masterpiece short stories of our time...."

Hayden Carruth in *Contemporary Novelists* observed of Powers's "He Don't Plant Cotton": "Without resorting to violence in either speech or event, he conveyed the real violence of feeling that dominates the black community's response to its predicament in America...." Carruth noted also that the theme of Catholic life in America can best be seen in "Lions, Harts, Leaping Does," for Powers contrasts "spiritual finicality with the real crassness and brutishness of modern commercial civilization, showing the true value of spiritual discipline even in its own weakest condition." He calls these two stories "among the best short stories written in America during the years of mid-century." Powers also published "Prince of Darkness," "The Valiant Woman," "The Presence of Grace," "Blue Island," and the review "William Everson: War Elegies and Waldport Poems" in Accent.

The University Archives contain 126 letters of Powers to Shattuck and Quinn, and 3 manuscripts.

Lions, Harts, Leaping Does

"Thirty-ninth pope. Anastasius, a Roman, appointed that while the Gospel was reading they should stand and not sit. He exempted from the ministry those that were lame, impotent, or diseased persons, and slept with his forefathers in peace, being a confessor." "Anno?" "Anno 404." They sat there in the late afternoon, the two old men
St Joseph's Hospital  November 3, 1944  St Paul, Minnesota

Dear Mr Shattuck:—this will be a note, no more, to let you know I am out in the world again. I was paroled to this hospital November 1, All Saints Day. You wouldn't think the government had such a feel for the liturgy. I am in my room in an adjoining building known as The Boys' Dormitory. So far the majority of the Boys are still in the throes of having solemnized Pay Day. That's the way, one nun explained it to me. They are maintenance men and so forth and like the Middle Ages, the strange, maimed flock that always attaches itself to Catholic institutions. Civil Service wd never stand for them. When they find out I am a conscientious objector they will either canonize or slaughter me. As yet I haven't taken time to straighten out my room. Stacks of unread magazines, sent from home, plus stationery, books and correspondence clutter up the place. I have everything I need, but no towels, blankets, or much light, of which there was plenty at Sandstone, and I guess I'm happy to be here. I have the Summer Accent here, but haven't ventured inside it as yet. The cover colors are, I think, the best you've whipped up (I suppose Kerker is responsible for that). I saw the Foley book in a store here (my folks have my copy) and have the O. Henry here (sent to me via Volkening). I can't get past page 8 in Shaw's story and, off hand, wd say it stinks. I'm tired of his kind of people. After Marquand and J. Donald Adams as judges—what? Had to move a still sweatty stiff, fat too, around in the autopsy room yesterday. Wish T. S. Eliot might have been there. I will probably settle down to work in the operating rooms and orderly. Today I worked from seven to three, which leaves a good hunk of the day to me. Marred today by necessity to resort to Police (as I'm one convicted of a felony) and it's funny to see them trying to take the questions and fingerprinting and photography seriously, all the rigamarole designed to keep society safe. It pleases them to drop the spirit, of this law (kidnappers brought it on) in such cases as mine. Commonweal took 'The Trouble' and that's where it can do some good; it should be out next week or so. Will send you something if I can write something. I may have ossified under censorship and indolence. Regards to Kerker, Mrs S, Lancelot, and, incidentally, change my address to the above for coming Accents.

Prince of Darkness and Other Stories  •  The Presence of Grace  •  Morte d'Urban  •  Look How the Fish Live

grown grey in the brown robes of the Order. Angular winter daylight forsook the small room, almost a cell in the primitive sense, and passed through the window into the outside world. The distant horizon, which it sought to join, was still bright and strong against approaching night. The old Franciscans, one priest, one brother, were left among the shadows in the room.
Ida M'Toy — For one human being to point out another as "unforgettable" seems a trifle condescending, and in the ideal world we would all keep well aware of each other, but there are nevertheless a few persons one meets who are as inescapable of notice as skyrockets, it may be because they are radiant with their own substance and shower it about regardlessly. Ida M'Toy, an old negro woman, for a long time a midwife in my little Mississippi town and for another long time a dealer in second-hand clothes in the same place, has been a skyrocket as far back as most people remember. Or, rather, she is a kind of meteor (for she is not ephemeral, only sudden and startling). Her ways seem on a path of their own without regard to any course of ours and of a somewhat wider circuit: she will probably leave a glow behind and return in the far future on some other lap of her careening through all our diller and steadier bodies. She herself deals with the rest of us in this mighty and spacious way, calling in allegories and the elements, so it is owing to her nature that I may speak a little grandly.

"Bird watchers, pearl divers, mushroom hunters, and rhyming poets." Charles Shattuck, George Seuffas, and Dan Curley wrote in the Foreword to Ida M'Toy published in a special edition by the University of Illinois Press in 1979, "all know what it is to wait for the longed-for perfect creature or object or word to leap out of nowhere and crown the long waiting with fulfillment.... When the late Kerker Quinn and the rest of us published Acrent in 1910, we did not expect the perfect poem or story to arrive in every day’s mail. But we waited. And one day in the spring of 1912 there came tumbling out of an envelope from Jackson, Mississippi, the very rare bird we had unconsciously been waiting for. It was entitled simply 'Ida M'Toy.' It came from Endora Welty. With absolutely unprofessional haste we accepted it." "Ida M'Toy" appeared in the Summer 1912 issue, much to the delight of its subject, a black woman from Jackson, Mississippi, whom Welty knew well. Ida M'Toy herself wrote to Shattuck; her complete letter and other letters of Welty to Shattuck are reproduced in the University of Illinois Press edition of Ida M'Toy. Endora Welty wrote Charles Shattuck on September 14, 1912:

"I doubt if any magazine ever pleased anyone so by printing this—Ida refers to you all as 'those precious people up near Chicago that has my life.'"
Sept. 21, 1942

Jackson

Miss,

Mr. Shattuck, many thanks for you going to the trouble to print and me these lovely books. I do think they are as nice the money that I sold the book for. I told Miss Welty to let her

Yours sincerely,

Eudora Welty

Dear Mr. Shattuck:

Do not be surprised at what follows. The other morning at 4 o'clock of dawn Ida L'Too telephoned me to for God's sake come straight out there, as she had read the book on her life. When I got there she greeted me with three fingers stuck up in the air--as I had three things wrong. First, I had said her watch was silver, when it was gold--how could I have done a thing like that to her? And she took it out of its hiding place and put it under my eyes. Second, I had left out Sudie, who had helped her in the store for six years and Sudie felt so bad about it--"Sudie, Sudie! Come stand here and let Miss Wealthy see how bad you feel--that's right--that's all. Sudie, get on back." Third, why did I think that one copy of her life was going to be enough for her and all her friends? Two hundred would be more like it. I then apologized for 1 and 2, and said it was unlikely that I could get 200 copies and besides the price of each was 30c. "Thirty cents! My God, there are people would be glad to pay thirty cents cash on the barrel head to have a copy right at their hand of Ida's life," In the end I said I would write and see if there were about ten copies you could send me. I'd of course pay you, and let Ida do the grand distribution, I think she wants to take orders and force it on her customers. She says she wants a copy in Camp Shelby for sure, to teach those soldiers to live right. She had pride in the article, but was dismayed that I had come without a recall, for she assured that immediately on finishing and printing that much up, I would go on and write up all that was left out. "It wrote what it could remember," she said conversationally, "there just so much." She calls this copy of ACCOUNT "The Book of Ida" so you can see I would hate to deprive her of spreading it to her world. When you have time, do let me know if you can spare ten or twelve copies, and thanks a lot. Ida is really beside herself and has guaranteed that you and I both will go to heaven and see the angels.

Yours sincerely,

Eudora Welty

The University Archives contain 19 letters from Welty to Accent editors and 1 manuscript.
William H. Gass
(1924 - )

Accent received many "over the transom" submissions, including a big packet with three stories and a critical article from William H. Gass, member of the philosophy department at Purdue University. Charles Shattuck told this story in Accent: An Anthology, 1940-1960: "I started through the package at home on a Saturday morning, and the first story I read was so good that I drove to the office and put it in the 'Yes' box immediately. Back home, I found the second one just as good. Before the morning was out, I'd made four separate trips." The Winter 1958 issue of the magazine was a Gass issue: two long stories - "Mrs. Mean" and "The Triumph of Israbelis Tott" - and an essay on Henry James, "The High Brutality of Good Intentions." In the Autumn 1958 issue Gass published "Gertrude Stein: Her Escape from Protective Language," followed in the Spring 1960 issue by his story "The Love and Sorrow of Henry Pincher." Gass's phenomenal career was launched. Gass's works were quite unlike the usual prose published in Accent. Gass has commented: "My fictions are, by and large, experimental constructions; that is, I try to make things out of words, the way a sculptor might make a statue out of stone. Readers will therefore find very little in the way of character or story in my stories. Working in the tradition of the Symbolist poets, I regard the techniques of fiction (for the contemporary artist) as in no way distinct from the strategies of the long poem."

Mrs. Mean

I call her Mrs. Mean. I see her, and I see her husband and each of her four children, from my porch, or sometimes when I look up from my window curtain, I can only surmise what her life is like inside her little house; but on quiet Sunday afternoons, while I try my porches for breezes, I see her babbling on her careful lawn in the hot sun, stick in hand to hunt her scattered children, and I wonder a lot about it.
Dear Kerk,

19 January

I had scarcely unzipped your letter when, smell of
smells, what was it?

Vap-o-rub!

Kind to gentle skin and nose

It'll not stain your underclothes

Memories of years gone by, my dear mother's face bending
over my slippery hot chest, Vickzed to the eyes (not
mother); all this filled me. Mary Pat sniffs. I le.

What's this, she says. It's Vicks, I say, you know.

Nothing stops colds' sneaky tricks

Like thirty coats of furry vicks.

No. Obnoxious woman. She says. No it's not. It's

Men-tho-lat-um!

Sheep and goats, let's separate them

Which one uses mentholatum.

I am filled with memories of my childhood, she says, of

mother wrapping my nose in outing flannel.

So it was we knew at once you had the flu. Hope you are

better but the odor boded ill still.

I don't think poor Panda should be out to the task. Her

stuffing might come out. If the bloody things were lost

I could probably put it all back by shuffling work sheets

and original together. I keep these in mulch baskets. It

would be a mess, of course, but loss is unlikely, and if

anyone is punished it ought to be me, since the foolishness

is mine.

It would be nice indeed if you could come over betwixt
times. I really wish we could issue invites on our own,

but there's no place to sleep but at one end of Susan's

orb. I don't know how the Haymans do it. Magic I think.

I don't see how the marginal notations you mention could
refer to spelling and so on. I don't recall having mis-

snelled a word in my life (and I have perfect recall) and

my typing famously exact. Jell nihil obstat imprimatur.

The University Archives contain 26 letters by Gass to Accent editors and 2 manuscripts.
Katherine Anne Porter has long been recognized as one of our best writers of short fiction. Kerker Quinn was a great admirer of Porter and her work and went to great lengths to get her to submit contributions to *recent*. She did send him two sections of her never-completed study of Cotton Mather, "Affectation of Prachinminencies," which were published in the Spring and Summer 1912 issues, and her story "The Source" was published in the Spring 1911 issue. She also published a section from her novel-in-progress *Ship of Fools* in the Summer 1916 issue. Porter had financial problems during the long years she worked on *Ship of Fools* and often accepted appointments as writer-in-residence at universities. Throughout, she corresponded with Quinn about her work.

*The University Archives contain* 44 letters from Porter to Quinn.

Dear Mr. Quinn: Yaddo, Saratoga Springs New York January 15, 1942

So much of the material for C.W.'s infancy I found for myself in the cold cold cellars of the Essex Institute among mildewed old books published around 1750 to 1795 and never published again, apparently never read again, either... Long rows of the first volumes of the *Massachusetts Historical Society*, with everything just thrown in helter-skelter, in no chronological order, and no index and sometimes not even a table of contents. So I shivered and read,搜索ed and aneexed, through a long winter, and even now these pages almost give me a chill. But there are details I have never seen anywhere else, and they were copious words on word out of those old books.Except for the grace of God, I might have spent my time, in shell rimmed specs and woolen stockings, reading my life away among dusty books in library cellars, perfectly happy... I had such a good time looking for my story I simply do not want ever to give it up... It will never be finished, I am afraid, for even in Europe--in France, precisely, I found more original records of the whole Puritan movement than any where else, and I burrowed in, deeper and deeper...... There is no reaching an end, I simply had at last to cut it short and say I would not add another note to my book... Sometime towards the end of this year I hope to begin winding it up once for all for the printer...

Yes by all means when you do arrive at a vacation, try to come here and I will make you very welcome at South Hill. The country is lovely.

Sincerely yours, Katherine A. Porter

Hopwood Room, Angell Hall, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

*Michigan* 7 February 1942

I like this University, and there are some fine people on the faculty, but truth is, I've been so bowled down under two advanced classes in writing, and one great general mob in my *American literature*, (first seminar, contemporary poetry, next, American Prose) I have only spirit left to take a nibbler of bourbon, eat my supper, and go to bed. Social life, which seems to go on nicely, is not for me. I have not met your friends, but I may, any minute. At first, I tried to keep up, and went to a few occasions, all pleasant, but now I just do the work, and Oh God, the way every kind of organization wants me to come and "just talk or read for an hour," which for me is like handing over a pint of my life-fluid to the blood bank... but without the reviving beefsteak in form of a check! No, this is supposed just to be social. Just the same, never think I was not happy to have this job, for my financial difficulties were just beyond control, and I could no longer work anyway. I go out to lecture to get enough money to carry me on another paragraph of the novel and come back so exhausted I can do nothing for weeks... So it didn't work, and this way, I just gave up the whole notion of writing, and settled in to save a little and then dig in and work until the money gives out... I wish I knew a Fund to dip into! I had a int from a friend about one, but I haven't done anything about it yet; I will though, when I get to it.
Katherine Anne Porter wrote to Kerker Quinn on April 29, 1956: “Thank you for the Spring number of Accent. I have never seen a number that didn’t have something beautiful to read in it, and a lot of it! But it’s always a big day when I find a story by Daniel Curley, and this one, ‘The Score Keeps Changing,’ is one of the best, I think, and it delights me perfectly as his stories always do!”  • Curley taught at Syracuse and at Plattsburgh State Teachers College before coming to the University of Illinois in 1955, where he was one of the editors of Accent. Charles Shattuck was his editor. As was his custom, Shattuck provided detailed comments and suggestions on Curley’s stories.  • Curley published these stories in Accent: “The Ship” (his first story), “Saccomanzetti,” “The Man Who Was Drafted,” “The Great Day,” “The Night of the Two Wakes,” and “The Score Keeps Changing.”

Dear Mr. Shattuck,

The triviality of the changes I have made will, I am sure, not give anything like an indication of the amount of time I have put in on this. The fact is painfully clear to me that I am much too tired this spring to do anything like justice to the demands made of me. Of your five major points I have acted decisively on only one; the episode of the college kids on pages 2 and three of the first version has been entirely eliminated to the decided benefit of the whole. As for the other things I have indeed worked on them although it may not appear.

Let me say this; the story is as good as I can make it now. Perhaps during the summer I can do better. And I will try again if you think it desirable. I want to do well by you, believe me, but as I say I am so exhausted by my job and the horrible task of finding a place to live that I have no strength to do well. Since January I have been working at finding a house or finding money to buy or build—my wife has really been doing the work while I try to hold my job together so that we will be able to pay for whatever we find. Between classes I duck out so that we can look at houses. Today for example we followed up an add in the paper for a house to rent. I tell you we followed it right back into the hills for fifteen miles and found a place with neither lights nor running water. Although the house had no central heating there was a large woodburning stove in the living room and a small build-in hird man who milked the cows the master farmer kept on the place. You turned off an unnumber black top onto a practice black top onto a good dirt road onto a bad dirt road onto a cart path ad in about a mile there you were on top of a steep hill with a simply stupendous panorama over Lake Champlain and the Vermont mountains. If the hird man had been a little cleaner—if say he had smelled like a clean horse—if he had had hair instead of just holes in his head I might have been tempted for the sake of the view even if he had turned out (as he well might) to be Satan sitting there with the kingdoms of the world spread out for anyone to see. (All nonsense of course. I am just recording a few details so that they will stay fresh in my mind. It wasn’t like that actually but will be perhaps or different in a story some time.)
Dan Curley wrote this note on the interregnum and the founding of a new journal: "At a regular meeting of the Accent staff in the fall of 1960, Kerker Quinn announced that the issue we were working on, Volume 20, Number 1, would be the last issue. It was the end of Accent. We were all stupefied. But the magazine was Kerker's magazine. He was tired after twenty years of work and that was that.

'We talked among ourselves about trying to keep the magazine alive. But the magazine was Kerker's magazine, and if there were another magazine it most emphatically would not be called Accent. Several times I thought of trying to establish something new, and once I even approached Dean Robert W. Rogers, appealing to the tradition of publishing on campus. Like a proper administrator, the Dean set me perilous labors and impossible quests, one of which was to get statements from substantial figures in the literary world as to the significance of Accent in its time. I remember Kerker's own comment in another context: 'As administrators went to national meetings, they talked with people who had never heard of the Fighting Illini who knew Illinois because of Accent.' I got together a sheaf of statements, but broke down on the fifth labor and the third quest. The project died for the time being.

'And then, quite by chance, Roger Ebert introduced me to a certain rich man. 'Accent,' he said when the name came up in talk, 'what is an Accent' (His own was Greek.) 'I'll back your Accent. Pay for everything. I'll even have all the details taken care of at my press.'

'This was exactly what I had wanted— a magazine that didn't require me to take care of all the business details that wore Kerker out. However, that was not to be. The splendid backer disappeared, and I was left with a magazine ready to go to press and no money.

'I got some money from the Illinois Arts Council and some from the Dean. In a fit of economy, I took a felt tip pen and with a stroke changed one of the 's in Accent to an s, and Ascent was born with a legacy of envelopes and writing paper to last a year at least. I used up a number of pens in that year, and I took care of all those details I had sworn never to undertake.

'We were on our way. Auspiciously, the story on page one of the first issue was chosen to appear in Best American Short Stories, 1976, and a new chapter in the University's publishing history was begun.'

Ascent carried no manifesto, but its aims were similar to those of Accent: to publish the best writing of our time. Curley made a few important changes: unlike Quinn, he did not solicit contributions from established writers; instead he was interested in previously unknown writers and in those just beginning to publish or in mid-career. He had originally planned to include critical essays, as Accent did, but then decided to publish only short fiction and poetry. The Ascent papers have been donated to the University Archives, but have not yet been cataloged.
Dan Curley wrote: "When I first looked into Mae Briskin's 'The Boy Who Was Astrid's Mother,' I knew two things at once: This is a story I have to have, and this story is not ready yet. Perhaps to say I knew these things is misleading. I did know the story needed work, but I did not know how marvelous the story was going to be. I felt rather than knew. I felt the excitement of a real discovery, such as we had felt at Accent when William Gass's first stories came in. After discovery hard work began. The manuscript went back and forth between Urbana and Palo Alto time after time. Here at the very beginning of Accent I was getting into the real work of editing, and I was paying off an old debt to Charles Shattuck, who forty years ago wrote me long insightful letters about my own submissions to Accent. These letters became the ideal with which I undertook the beginning of a new magazine modeled very frankly on Accent. "Mae Briskin was an ideal writer to work with. She took advice well but knew when to hold her ground. She was anxious to publish her first story but was willing to slave at making it all it could be. I think what first attracted me to the story was that it seemed to have a moral center, so very different from the slick affectless exercises I was seeing at that time—and still see. The story was posing hard questions and offering hard answers but was not at all a sermon or a tract. The writing was not all it should be but the weaknesses were those a writer can learn to overcome. The story presented exactly the opportunities that writer and editor could work on together, and when it appeared on page 1 of the first issue of Accent, it magnificently repaid all our efforts: it was chosen for inclusion in the Best American Short Stories of its year, that is, it was recognized as one of the dozen best stories published by American magazines of all sorts, great and small, a truly auspicious beginning for a new magazine." A variation of the story's title became the title of a collection of Briskin's stories, A Boy Like Astrid's Mother.

In a box headed "advertisement" on page four of the newspaper, was a small photograph of a smiling young girl. Below it was the message, "Astrid, I miss you. Please contact me. Mother." Pictures of Astrid's mother formed in my mind, changing as I imagined varied chains of events leading to Astrid's departure. Through all the many changes, however, the face of Astrid's mother was always a face of sorrow. Repeatedly, the next few days, I thought about her. Then I
Dear Dan, Enclosed is a longish poem of mine, "Snakebit," which I hope might interest you for ASCENT. Also, enclosed are six by a retired anthropology prof who was in my seminar on Martha's Vineyard last July. He's been writing for 5 or 6 years, and I think he's good. He's been shy of sending stuff out, so I told him I'd try to get some poems around for him. If you're interested, you can let him know. If not, please send them back to me. Not much new here. Conn Public TV is doing a 'poetry video' of one of my poems this week, and will use it as filler for those 50 minute programs they have. This should send the first stone crashing through a window here soon. A poetry video? Ellen sends her best, as do I. We hope Audrey is feeling better, and that you're well. All best,

November 11, 1986
Dear Brendan

Poet Brendan Galvin has successfully melded a variety of styles, influences, and interests. Impossible to categorize, Galvin has engaged a wide range of subject matters: life in New England (especially his first two collections, The Narrow Land and The Salt Farm); nature studies (especially the powerful Atlantic Flyway, in which Galvin focuses on the birds indigenous to his homeland); the complications of time and change in a modern urbanized society; the dangers awaiting today's youth. His mature work shows influences ranging from Robert Frost and Robert Lowell to Theodore Roethke; more important, Galvin's unique realistic vision, coupled with an engaging sense of humor, allows him to transcend these sources. Galvin has published extensively in Ascent. His contributions include "Snakebit," "The Freeloater," "Shoveling Out," "Just in Case You're Wondering Who You Are," "A Few Words from the Weeds," "Edge," "August," and "Finbacks." In addition to his poetry and various well-received and influential critical pieces, Galvin has dedicated a good deal of his life energy to encouraging other poets, young and old.

Poem:

Snakebit

(1767)

Six feet of mangled orange, tawny, and black,
its underside lighter, with the marks
Black velvet spot, upon the head,
A rattle snake kept for study
In an empty mug, thinking the vague
Lay in wait under that cover when I came
With a hand-pumping, green poison
My hand, pumping, green poison

I laid out learned snake, root evers,
Beside a chicken in the yard, breaking her neck,
With a quick upward jerk, and with
The cleft same knife as I had bashed
My mother's old potatoes, which yet called
And worked up into its open head,
I slit the hay's bell, and plunged
The insides hand into the still working
Jelly and hot lights, whereon I wore
The thing's feathers, wailed and began
Dropping away.

That serpent kicked
Piece by piece to the heartstrings, and soon
Brendan Galvin’s contributions went beyond his own work, for it was Galvin who brought the work of George Mills to Dan Curley’s attention. The secondhand introduction proved to be fruitful for both Mills and Ascent. Mills won the Ascent poetry prize for 1988 for “Empery” and “Quite a Guy.” He wrote the accompanying letter sometime in 1988 after learning of the award. Mills read from his poetry at the awards ceremonies in October of 1988 and wrote to Dan and Audrey Curley on October 13: “You did such a great job of lionizing, who knows, I may have developed a taste for it.”

Dear Dan,

I haven’t forgotten.

I remember reading Thanatopsis at an early age & being carried away. I had to share it with someone, so I read it aloud to my father, a businessman & musician. I majored in English Lit. at Dartmouth but got the impression that literature was to be studied, not written. Couldn’t imagine how the things I studied ever got turned out. Still have trouble with some of them.

Graduated into WW II which put off deciding on a career. When further postponement became impossible, I thought that graduate work in literature would leave me no choice but teachings & not wanting to do that, I went into cultural anthropology instead—& ended up teaching. I was such a good teacher I talked myself out of anthropology, left academia & did physical labor of one sort or another until I retired. Helped ink & water a printing press, worked for a pipe organ builder, dug tree holes etc. for a landscaper. Retirement gave me the time to do something about my need to write. Or write regularly. Or write seriously. I have always been filling up notebooks but didn’t begin to like the results until six or so years ago. I published my first poem many years ago in the Colorado Quarterly. It rhymed & I made the mistake of trying to impress by making singular nouns plural. I’ve had spurts of sending things around since. As you know, Brendan Galvin tried to kick me in the ass. With his prodding, I have appeared in Calliope, Post Lore, Poultry. I also have stuff in Stone-Country & a publication called Island. I find that I’d rather write than keep books.

Besides, I have faith in a poem’s ability to find its own way in the world.

Hope this is of some use.

See you soon.

Empery

The Queen’s horse, when it poops,
opens like a timelapse rose.

On almost any day her African sunlight upends itself & pours out honks.

She has a house snake for thinking thoughts beyond the human mind.

Or take her pet ostrich: its eyeballs weigh more than its brain.

Its gizzard is full of uncut diamonds.

That goat circling the expensive vase is half man—

Yes, & royal admiration notes the longevity of the erection.

And then one day—most precious of all—

The Queen’s puppy comes out from under her skirt,

Sits whimpering between her body & her severed head.
Dear Dan,

Thank you very much for accepting GRAVEYARD DAY for your magazine. I am really pleased.

I think you should consider getting it into print in the earliest possible issue (next fall or spring anyway), so that it can go into my collection of stories, with a credit to Ascent.

I'd like to know about any editing changes you want to make. And do you send author's proofs? I might be able to get a hold of some with those reference to Colonel Sanders, since he died some time ago.

I haven't seen Harry Walsh yet, but when I do I'll give him your messages. I finally met Tom Rickman in Kentucky last month and we had a great time comparing notes.

Thanks again, and let me know when you think you will schedule the story.

Yours,

Bobbie Ann Mason

June 1, 1981

“Bobbie Ann Mason has a voice like no one else’s,” Rosellen Brown wrote, “wide-eyed and knowing in the same moment. Her characters live just past the crossroads of then and now where the farms leave off and the condos and mobile homes begin, and Mason—writing from old memory and sharp fresh insight—is amused and always sympathetic.”

Early in her career, Dan Curley wrote to Mason: “...I cannot resist ‘Graveyard Day.’ Please do not ask then why it took so long to get around to accepting it. I’m feeling very sorry for myself, overworked and all that, and might burst into tears if you asked a hard question. While I recover, please send some biographical information, although God knows when I’ll get around to publishing this story. Suddenly I seem to have this thing called a backlog.”

Holly, swinging her legs from the kitchen stool, lectures her mother on natural foods.

Holly is ten. Waldeen says, “I’ll have to give your teacher a talking-to. She’s put notions in your head. You’ve got to have meat to grow.” Waldeen is tenderizing liver, beating it with the edge of a saucer. Her daughter insists that she is a vegetarian.

If Holly had said Rosicrucian, it would have sounded just as strange to Waldeen. Holly wants to eat peanuts, soyburgers, and yogurt. Waldeen is sure this new fixation has something to do with Holly’s father, Joe Murdock, although Holly rarely mentions him.

After Waldeen and Joe were divorced last September, Joe moved to Arizona and got a construction job. Joe sends Holly letters occasionally, but Holly won’t let Waldeen see...
Dan Curley died December 30, 1988, in Tallahassee, Florida, after being struck by a car. He was an editor of *Accent* from 1955 to 1960, and he founded *Accent* and edited it from 1975 to 1988. His short-story collection, *In the Hands of Our Enemies*, was a Council on the Arts Selection in 1971, and his *Living With Snakes* (1985) received the Flannery O'Connor Award for Short Fiction. His widow, Audrey Curley, and the members of the *Accent* editorial board hope and plan for the magazine to continue.

- The eighty or so boxes of *Accent* papers in the University Archives also contain important materials on prose writers R. V. Cassill, Walter Van Tilburg Clark, Stanley Elkin, John Hawkes, Josephine Herbst, M. M. Liberman, and Grace Paley; on poets Conrad Aiken, A. R. Ammons, John Malcolm Brinnin, Horace Gregory, Ted Hughes, W. S. Merwin, Josephine Miles, Howard Moss, Howard Nemerov, John Frederick Nims, Sylvia Plath, Ruth Stone, Dylan Thomas, T. Weiss, and William Carlos Williams; and by critics R. P. Blackmur, Kenneth Burke, Sherman Paul, John Crowe Ransom, and Vernon Young. There are also important translations of European works. Lack of space in this catalog has meant that many accomplished writers and critics who made important contributions to *Accent* could not be included.

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