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ALAN SWALLOW: 1915-1966

Turned in on his own night, his eyes were unafraid

A RED-BRICK GARAGE stands behind the Swallow house. There, the Chandler Price 10 x 15 at his back, on the floor beside his worktable the little Kelsey 5 x 8 handpress with which he started publishing, Alan would gather, wrap, and ship books. It was also here that he set and printed The Jew Poetry Series, Poets in Swallow Paperbooks, The Swallow Pamphlets—the type clicking as he set it deftly in the stick. Or he would be working at the Chandler & Price, the press breathing poems into his quick hand like a metal gill. It was when he was printing that a remark he once made to me always became charged anew with meaning: “You make another commitment and you breathe another air.”

As he worked in the garage, distributing type or shipping or printing, the radio playing on the windowsill, Alan might discuss in detail the works of his favorite authors—Cunningham, Winters, Bowers, Loomis, Stephens, McGrath, Manfred, Waters; he might talk about some experimental work that he had seen in the little magazines he devoured; or about the road tests and specifications on a sports car or motorcycle; in spring and summer, now the ponies were running that year at Centennial. Alan ate like he hunted, standing up, and he drank mediocre whiskey; but when you drank with him the presence of the man warmed that whiskey and made it good, better and more memorable than any other drink you could recall; warmed with booze, Alan talked about writers, writing, and publishing like a man in love talks about his beloved.

Alan's one luxury was an XKE Jaguar the off-white color of his gray eyes and white hair. Earlier there had been motorcycles, but Alan had gone down, his leg torn and broken badly, and the ensuing infection (staphylococcus of the bone), coupled with his congenitally damaged heart, had forced him to put motorcycles aside. Pain was as intimate and familiar to Alan as his skin, and his last years were spent on crutches. But here was the XKE. Alan drove fast and well; the tachometer seldom wobbled as he moved the gears delicately, smoothly, swiftly, quickly into place; and, with the acceleration pushing like a fist in the pit of your stomach, you would glance over and notice that Alan was smiling wistfully, determined and controlled: he had become rapturous. The violence that he held in check somewhere in the center of himself had been transferred to the explosive rhythms of the engine, in much the same way that a poet transforms his energies in the formal structure of a poem. As you rode

with him, Alan's freedom and control, just this side of recklessness and abandon, could be unnerving in their intensity.

Alan was a man who built himself a castle only to discover, too late that a man needs help in maintaining a castle. The castle killed him. Besides, he never had luck with holidays: on Christmas 1962 he suffered coronary occlusion; on Thanksgiving 1966 he was dead of a heart attack at his typewriter. As always he was working, at the time of his death on listing for his *Index to Little Magazines*. He was 51. Yet as long as it had to do with books, literature, publishing—shipping, royalty and commission reports, contracts, production, agenting, editing, design, distribution, billing, taxes, bookkeeping—if it was publishing in any phase, Alan was happy. This was his commitment; this was the air he breathed.

Many titles can be appended to Alan's name but the one that obviously filled him with the most pride was the one he stamped and printed on the spines, title pages, and dust jackets of his books, on his letterheads, envelopes, shipping labels, and billing forms: ALAN SWALLOW, Publisher.

Alan could have been many things: anything he put his hand to he did exceptionally well. He was a maverick, one of the great ones. As always, in the end it was Alan who said it best:

*And I, who read and printed words,
Worked warm within the marvelous air.*

—GUS BLAISDEL