

1968

## Preface

George Arms

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### Recommended Citation

Arms, George. "Preface." *New Mexico Quarterly* 38, 4 (1968). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmq/vol38/iss4/2>

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## P R E F A C E

This final number of the *New Mexico Quarterly* strikes me as extraordinarily fine. Its special editor, Gene Frumkin, poet and teacher of creative writing at the University, has brought together a group of poems, stories, and critical essays that happily climax the long career of the magazine. Appropriately entitled "The Contemporary American Imagination," the issue presents both experimental and traditional writing as various examples of what today's writers are doing. As in issues of the past, some of the authors have established reputations, some have growing reputations, and some appear for the first time. Though as I suppose every editor has said when one of his issues was criticized, "Yes, it is uneven," that very lack of a too slick evenness may be regarded as the hallmark of the *Quarterly* and even as its glory. Shakespeare had his unevenness too; and while we can claim no Shakespeare among past or present contributors, many have achieved literary recognition—often beginning with contributions to this magazine.

From its beginning in 1931 the *Quarterly* has been a regional magazine, yet except perhaps at the very start a magazine that broadly interpreted the region in terms of the nation and the world. As the authors of *The Little Magazine: A History and Bibliography* wrote in 1946: "The great virtue of the *New Mexico Quarterly* is its intelligent compromise between regionalism and universalism in its attitudes and contents." Yet the words "compromise between" fall a little short of accuracy. Rather I should suggest "recognition of"—sometimes uneasy, sometimes despairing, but mostly happy and creative. Perhaps half the present number contains works that are regional in the sense that they have the Southwest as their scene or that their authors live or once lived in the Southwest. But the Southwest is a microcosm, though to newcomers and old settlers and natives with a very special flavor of its own, and authors move. So such poems as "Its Hour Come Round at Last . . ." by Robert Chetkin (a graduate student at the University) can make use of that Irish "regionalist" Yeats ("Only then will Yeats, forgotten, / Have at last earned / His prophetic, / Decomposing / Grim"); and in "The New Style Western" Anselm Hollo (a Finn by

birth) can sardonically write of "the two horsemen / on opposite banks of the Rio Grande . . . they would be back / but not in this movie." Both poems belong to the *New Mexico Quarterly* because both have excellence; and all the poems and stories that appear here exhibit "The Contemporary American Imagination" on regional, national, and worldwide levels.

The way I came to know the *Quarterly* may deserve relating as typical of readers of my generation. Sometime in the late 1930's friends in the East were talking about it as the magazine in the Southwest that one ought to read. Few if any of us had visited New Mexico or even seen it from the windows of the Santa Fe trains. But it meant something to us as the home of artists and writers, and the magazine meant more to us by presenting them and meant even more by offering a sense of the vigorous culture of the region. Not many of us subscribed, I am ashamed to say, but we made a point of keeping up with it in libraries. In those days T. M. Pearce was editor as he had been since 1932. He was a contributor too, and I must have gone back to an earlier issue to read his humorous "On a Certain Condescension in the Metropolitan Mind" (May, 1936), in which he took to task the *New York Times* reviewer who named Albuquerque as an example of "theatrically barren communities." Today I have picked up a number (May, 1938) at random from among those I had currently read and find in it a hitherto unpublished poem "O! Americans!" by D. H. Lawrence, another essay by Professor Pearce in which he ably answered the then widespread charge that folklore accompanied fascism, and an amusing sketch on "Santa Fe and the Tourist." It was worth going back to.

Dudley Wynn succeeded Matt Pearce as editor in 1940 and remained editor until 1947. I have also re-read one of his numbers (Summer, 1945) that appeared soon after I came to the University. It moves unselfconsciously from a symposium on "Problems of the Rio Grande Watershed" to "The Place of Literature in a Liberal Education." Its stories include one by Jessamyn West, whose earliest published writing in this magazine appeared in 1940. Again I find an enjoyment not only of nostalgic return but of contemporary meaning. In his editorial in this issue Professor Wynn could hardly have proposed a view of education more pertinent to today's academic world when he wrote: "The necessity of keeping commitment open to change is part of the commitment we have to make—and that is a strenuous enough paradox to

please the most scholastic-minded, a practical enough difficulty to keep us from lapsing into any easy Utopianism."

Except for Roland Dickey, who served as editor (1956-1966) concurrently with his directorship of the University of New Mexico Press, Professors Pearce and Wynn had the longest tenure as editors. I cannot help thinking that under them the magazine had its finest years; they gave it a continuity, a momentum, an impact that the shorter editorships did not achieve or that the divided duties of Mr. Dickey did not allow. But the other editors produced a magazine that anticipated or followed the pattern that they established: Paul A. F. Walter, Jr. (1931-1932), Charles Allen (1947-1948), Joaquin Ortega (1948-1951), myself (1951), Kenneth Lash (1951-1955), Paul M. Sears (1955-1956), Mary Adams and Gus Blaisdell (1967), Mary Adams (1968), and Joseph Frank (1969). At the same time each made the magazine his own, and I wish that I could describe in detail their individual experiments and accomplishments. But this preface serves only as a reminder and not a history. I hope that the magazine will have its historian soon, for I believe that the *New Mexico Quarterly* deserves a book that will show in detail its significance as a literary and cultural force during its thirty-eight years of publication.

—G. A.