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FOR CONSTIPATION

ERN MALLEY— POET OR HOAX?

ACCORDING to the Sydney correspondent of *The Press* (Christchurch) who quoted a Sydney Sunday newspaper, a literary hoax of grand proportions was perpetrated this year at the expense of an Australian quarterly, by two students now in the Army. The periodical is called *Angry Penguins*, and is published and edited by John Reed and Max Harris. It prints verse by Australians and others, articles on art, and critical writings. The autumn number for 1944, a well-printed, well-arranged paper of 110 pages, contained a large section devoted to "The Australian Poet, Ern Malley," and his complete writings, occupying 27 pages, were printed with an introduction by Max Harris.

But, according to the correspondent, the poems, the author, and the whole story of his work, are a hoax, claimed by two young men to have been carried out as a serious literary experiment "in order to debunk a literary fashion which has become prominent in England and America." The distinctive mark of this

fashion, they are reported to have said, was that it made its devotees insensible of absurdity and incapable of ordinary discrimination.

The two students who now claim to have written "Ern Malley's" poems, invented his life story, and sent his "works" to *Angry Penguins*, are James McAuley, 26, a lieutenant in the A.I.F., and Harold Stewart, 27, a corporal in a military hospital. Their scheme went one step further than they expected it to go. Harry Roskolenko, an American officer and poet, included the poems in an anthology of Australian verse and sent them to New York, where they were published. Here is the story of what had gone before, as *The Press* printed it:

Malice Towards None

McAuley and Stewart decided to use the hoax as "a serious literary experiment," without malice towards the editor of *Angry Penguins* or a desire for publicity. The authors created a poet, "Ern Malley," and wrote his life-work in one afternoon with the aid of an odd assortment of books which happened to be on the desk at the time. The books included the Concise Oxford Dictionary, a complete Shakespeare, and a dictionary of quotations.

They claim that they deliberately misquoted, constructed bad verse, and distorted. The first three lines of one poem entitled "Culture as Exhibit" were lifted straight from an American report on the drainage of breeding-grounds of mosquitoes. McAuley and Stewart then proceeded to invent the life of "Ern Malley," his tragic death at the age of 25, and the discovery of his poems by his sister, who sent them to *Angry Penguins* for an opinion of their quality.

Angry Penguins published the poems, described Ern Malley as "one of the two giants of Contemporary Australian poetry," who possessed "a tremendous power working through a disciplined and restrained kind of statement, into the deepest wells of human experience."

A Brave Ally

A Sydney Sunday newspaper discovered that Ern Malley was fictitious, and the whole story came out. Harry Roskolenko made an effort to deflect some of the ridicule to which the hoax subjected the victims. He stood stoutly by his guns, and declared that if the so-called "Poems of Ern Malley" were a hoax, then the authors had succeeded in hoaxing themselves as well as the publishers. Of the 16 poems by "Ern Malley" sent to him by *Angry Penguins* he had decided that five were excellent poems and two of the five really very good. McAuley and Stewart should feel proud, he said, to have written such poems, even if the merit was subconscious.

The Listener has now seen the issue of *Angry Penguins* in which the alleged hoax appears. It is certainly a carefully perpetrated hoax if hoax it is. Max Harris, in introducing the poems to the world, sees himself compared with Max Brod, who disposed of the writings of Franz Kafka. He speaks of Malley's death at

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