

(continued from previous page)

more than a hint of their idea, was "Spectre: A Book of Poetic Experiments," by "Anne Knish" and "Emanuel Morgan," published in 1916. Two well-known American poets, Arthur Darison Fiske and Witter Bynner being scornful of the Imagist and Vorticist trends, decided to embarrass the poetic faddists. For a fortnight they wrote frantically opus after opus until they had enough for 66 pages.

Their publisher alone was taken into the secret. Preparing the way, Knish (Ficke) and Morgan (Bynner) wrote a panegyric "The Spectric School of Poetry," published in *Forum*, June, 1916. The poems were then published with a preface explaining the principles of the new school. Readers and



"... About a dozen people applied to go on the next voyage"

the critics were enthusiastic and amateurs hastened to join the spectrists, who held solemnly that the theme of a poem is to be regarded as "a prism, upon which the colourless white light of infinite existence falls, and is broken up into glowing, beautiful and intelligible hues," and that the "Spectrum" idea in its second sense "relates to the reflex vibrations of physical sense and suggests the luminous appearance which is seen after the exposure of the eye to intense light."

"Anne Knish" and "Emanuel Morgan" were deluged with fan letters, and had to resort to all kinds of subterfuge to avoid personal appearances. Eventually, when a Pulitzer prize-winning poet wrote "Whereas the Imagists merely prick at the surface, you probe to the core," the two poets tossed dice to decide who should keep the priceless letter, and the winner had it certified as genuine by a notary public.

Literary papers were flooded with Spectrist contributions and criticisms. One literary historian, Lloyd Morris, dismissed Ficke and Bynner in a few lines, but devoted pages to Knish and Morgan.

The Psycho Boys

Had the Great War not intervened, the two poets were going to invite Edna St. Vincent Millay, Edgar Lee Masters and others to join the Spectrist school. However, after Ficke went to France, Bynner exposed the whole hoax in a public lecture. Those who had sponsored the "school" were hard put to retire gracefully. Some kept discreetly silent. The most delightful attempt to save face came in an article by Arthur J. Eddy, called "Bynner, Ficke and Freud," which said "both Bynner and Ficke simple 'broke loose' in their burlesque, and for the first time in their lives abandoned their literary pose

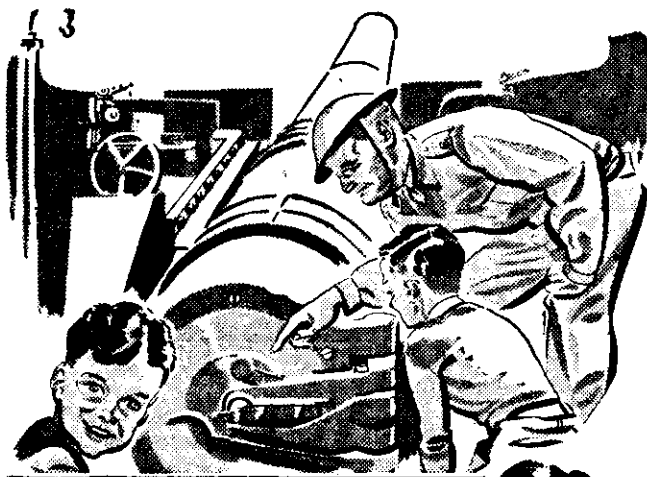
under the cover of pseudonyms." This "explanation" perhaps better than anything Ficke and Bynner wrote, illustrates not only the colossal egotism of some of the modern "schools," and the almost complete absence of a sense of humour on the part of their adherents, but also C. E. M. Joad's contention that "psycho-analytical" criticism means the abandonment of reason and common sense.



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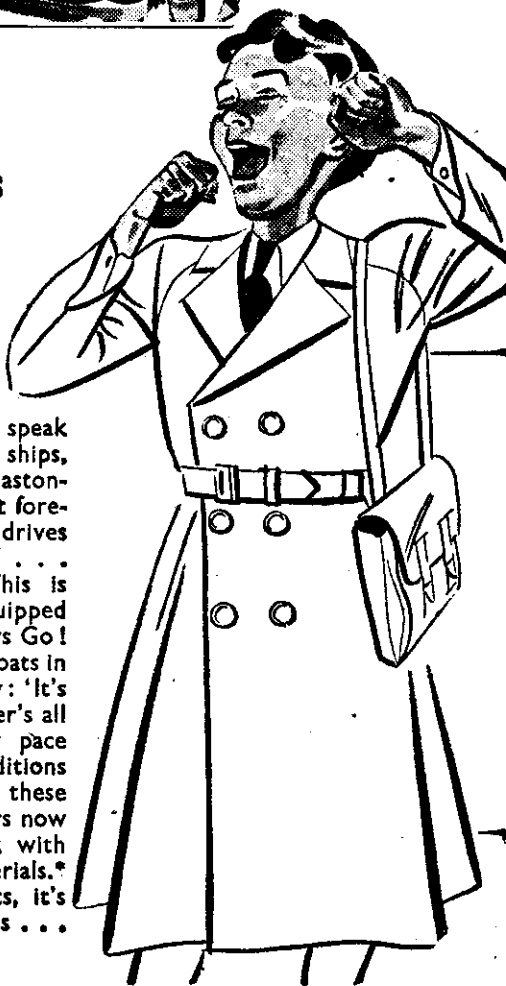
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