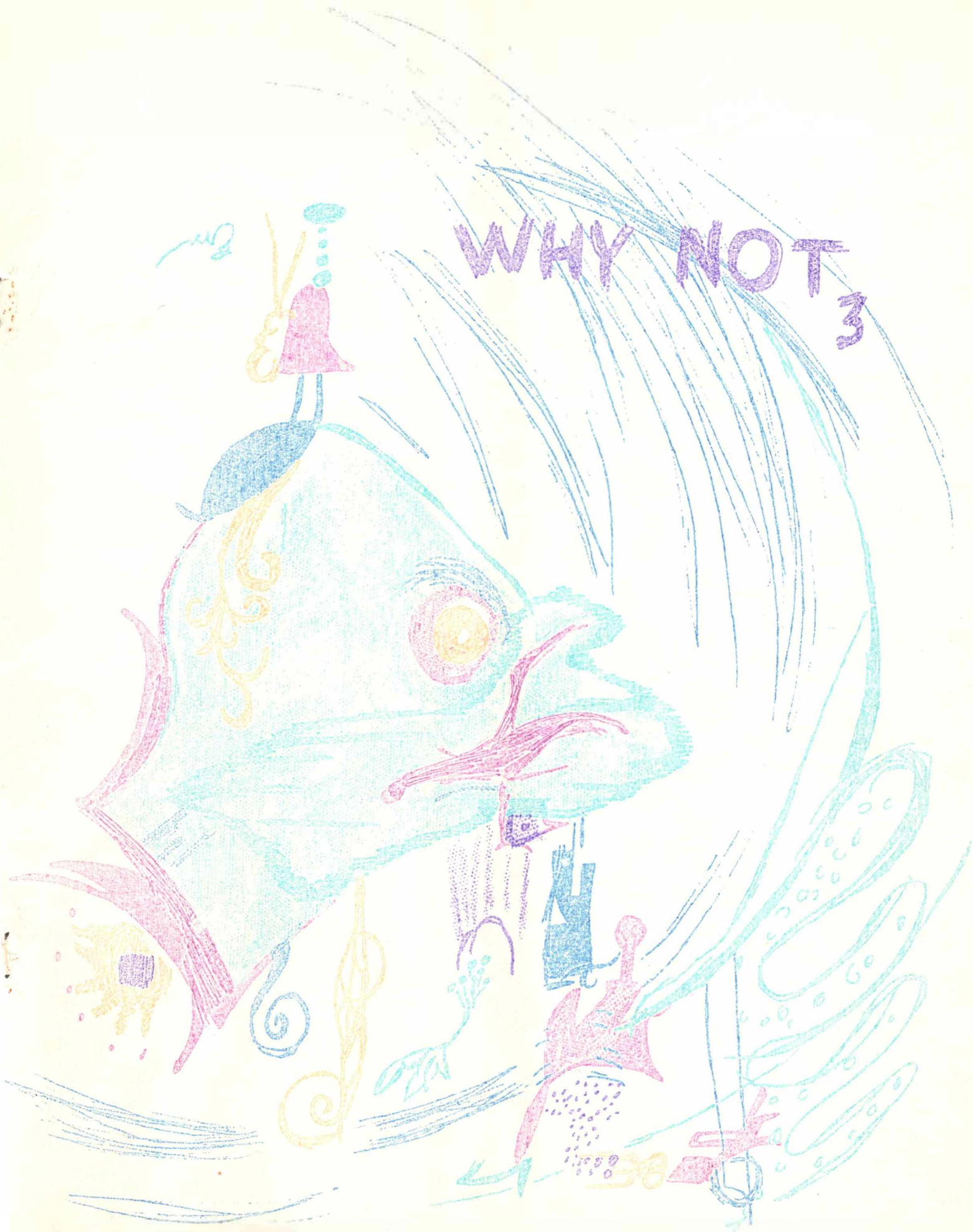


WHY NOT

3







WHY NOT # 3, published by Al Lewis, 706 San Lorenzo St., Santa Monica, California, for the June 1961 mailing of the Neffer Amateur Press Alliance.

TNEFF arrived in the morning mail carrying my name on the contents page as the Directorate Representative to N'APA, and reminding that today was also the deadline for the mailing and further prodding my conscience. It did seem unreasonable that the Directorate Representative should miss three mailings in a row.

So here we are. I don't guarantee to have a full ~~six~~ pages in as I'm pressed for time at the moment. However, I do have some material on hand which will go into a postmailing just as soon as school is out. Providing I can find it! I filed it, you see, and at the moment the living room floor is cluttered by a mass of uncorrected schoolpapers, unanswered letters, and unacknowledged fanzines, not to mention unwashed laundry, an unreturned drawing, some unused postage stamps and a couple of unread books. It is also unorganized.

This is the week before school is out, and before tomorrow night I am going to have to pile through about seventy notebooks and try to arrive at grades for all my happy little schoolkiddies. As the last week of school draws on, they get happier, and I tend to get more bitter. It is the usual June Freeze, and after thirty-nine weeks of sitting on kids and correcting essays and answering stupid questions, one becomes just a bit weary, and tends to lose one's sense of humor. Also, this is the fooforaw time; father-son picnics, awards assemblies, graduation rehearsals, school parties, PTA teas, all when one is trying to also catch up and cram in everything that one failed to put across during the earlier part of the term. And, of course, this is the week without textbooks; they all went back to the bookroom Friday, we've had our final exams and the kids know it, so now one is thrown back on ingenious games that will maintain order and still have some value as education. Of course next fall I'll bounce back eager and full of plans for doing everything right this time around that were all wrong last time.

I also happen to be just a little bit bugged at the moment by the "pass everybody" philosophy. Sometime back the California Legislature passed a law that every Junior High Pupil must pass a test each semester in his three American History courses: A7, B8, and A8. The L.A. City Bd. of Education concocted a test to comply with the requirements, and it is a ridiculously simple sort of basic-basic thing. Sample question:

True or False: The Winter at Valley Forge is remembered for the courage and suffering faced by Washington's army.

Multiple Choice: At the Boston Tea Party, (a) Colonists dressed as Indians threw the tea into Boston harbor; (b) the Governor served English Tea; (c) the shipowners threw the tea overboard; (d) the Indians attacked and burned Boston.

And just to make sure that nobody fails, a teacher is permitted to give the test over and over again until a student passes. For IQ 80, fine; they'll never know anything no matter how many times they

repeat the course, but for the average or better mentality? Of course, one is not required to allow the test to be repeated; but one is generally given to know that that is what is expected. I ain't; I failed three kids on the test and I am failing them in the course and the students think I am being quite mean and unfair because "Other teachers are letting their students repeat." They are and I am; but if a student does not have a basic minimum of knowledge (and it is a very minimum minimum) they simply have failed to grasp any of the course concepts, in which case why bother with it in the first place.

It is true that social studies is the only course in the school where this applies, and the legislature that passed this law was more concerned with Americanism than with scholastic attainment, but that does not excuse an anything goes attitude. Just to make things a little more difficult, in our school no one is permitted to send home a notice of failure without first having a conference with a vice-principal; one is given to understand that if a student can be passed, he should be, and the principal gets up in front of the teacher's meeting and compliments the faculty on how few students they failed the preceding semester. I wonder why.

Now that Shepherd has stayed up for four minutes against Yuri Gagarin's eighty-nine in orbit, the Gallup Poll reports a whopping 65% of the public are convinced that the United States is ahead in the missile race. Last week our first (first mind you!) "operational" missile blew up in its hole at Vandenberg AFB. God DAMN it all to hell!

Wednesday night I finished a final in a course I am taking at UCLA night school on the History of the English Novel; I took it because my knowledge of modern fiction ranges from atrocious to non-existent. Most of my recreational reading is either science fiction and historical novels, or non-fiction. Eighteen novels, one a week, ranging from Wuthering Heights, Dickens, Vanity Fair, down to Joyce and Lawrence, proved a fairly stiff reading dose, especially in the earlier part of the course, with these 600-page Victorian discursions. Interestingly enough, I much preferred the 19th century novels to the 20th; I seem to have a penchant for long books. Short stories I find uninteresting, and I seem to enjoy something almost in direct ratio to its length. I tend to go through the S-F mags when they come out, read the serial installments and the novelets, and ignore the shorts completely, unless they are by an author of whom I am particularly fond.

I suspect one of the reasons for this is that I get a kick out of world-building: to me, half the fun of a science fiction story is to see how completely the author has realized his world. This is probably one the reasons I get such a bang out of the Lensmen stories and L. Sprague de Camp. (Another reason, of course, is that those two authors have such fun writing their material that the reader can't help falling into the spirit.) This is also why I consider Mary Renault's The King Must Die as being in every sense except the technical one of being the best fantasy-adventure story to be written in years, Tolkien excepted.

Last weekend I went to see a pair of films. One of them was the movie version of SONS and Lovers, the last book in this novel course. It was a first-rate film, tightening and simplifying Lawrence's arguments, without losing their cogency. Aside from a couple of character manipulations (the book kills brother William and carries off brother Arthur; the film does it vice-versa) the story was quite faithfully carried out. The theme was subtly altered; the film softens the