

# TIME

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# A letter from the PUBLISHER

James R. Shepley

"It is difficult for painters in this day to do heroic portraits," says Artist Sidney Nolan. "But it is easier to do them of poets and artists than of statesmen." He attempted to make his cover portrait of Poet Robert Lowell heroic by crowning the sorrowful head with a triumphant wreath of laurels. Nolan is a close friend of Lowell's, but he says that his picture is of the poet, not the friend. "I could do another aspect of him for the back cover of the magazine, like the other side of a coin. It would be just as real."

Painter Nolan did his portrait in crayon and watercolor on paper (he has been known to use layers of paint burnished with one of his wife's nylons). Nolan also did a series of paintings inspired by Lowell's new play, *Prometheus Bound*, four of which appear with the story. His startling, highly imaginative visions bring to mind what Poet Stephen Spender once said of his work: "Conscious though he is of mystery, Nolan is not a mystifier. On the contrary, he is an explainer, and his figures, however bizarre, are self-explanatory."

Robert Lowell, too, is an explainer—and a celebrator—of mystery. A poet's work is best and finally explained in his own verse, but to help capture Lowell's world, TIME's Boston bureau chief, Chris Cory, interviewed him, spoke to his friends and visited the Maine village where Lowell spends his summers. "He is a nice fellow," said one elderly man there, "but I don't understand anything about his poetry except that he is unhappy."

A deeper understanding, we hope, was provided by Alwyn Lee, who wrote the cover story (Lee also happens to be a friend of Nolan's, a fellow Australian), and by Editor Jesse Birnbaum and Researcher Martha McDowell. To find out what

young people these days think of poetry in general, we queried many TIME bureaus and campus correspondents. One of our stringers got into the spirit of things to the point of rewriting our query in verse form ("Poetry in an age of prose, who knows how it survives?/Who can tell us why/it has so many lives?"). We appreciated the effort, but feel that it leaves Lowell's laurels securely in place.

FOUR years ago, TIME ran a story about Miles College, a small but proud Negro institution near Birmingham, Ala., that was in financial difficulties. Partly as a result of the article, contributions came in from all over the world, helping Miles to recover. The reporter on that story was the late Harry Johnston, TIME's Atlanta bureau chief. When Harry died at 48 four months ago, his many friends at Miles discussed what sort of tribute to pay him. "Harry was not the kind of guy you sent flowers to," recalls Trustee Mrs. David Roberts III. "So I said, 'Let's fix up the bell tower and name it for him instead.' Harry always kidded us about how bad it looks."

To raise money for the renovation project, which will include a new flower garden, Miles staged a choir concert. At the same occasion, Johnston's successor as Atlanta's bureau chief, Roger Williams, accepted a brick salvaged from the rubble of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, which in 1963 was partly destroyed by a bomb blast that killed four Negro children. A similar brick was presented to the New York Times. The inscription commended TIME for its contribution to the "dignity and freedom of man"—praise which we feel belongs particularly to Harry Johnston and his reporting on the South.

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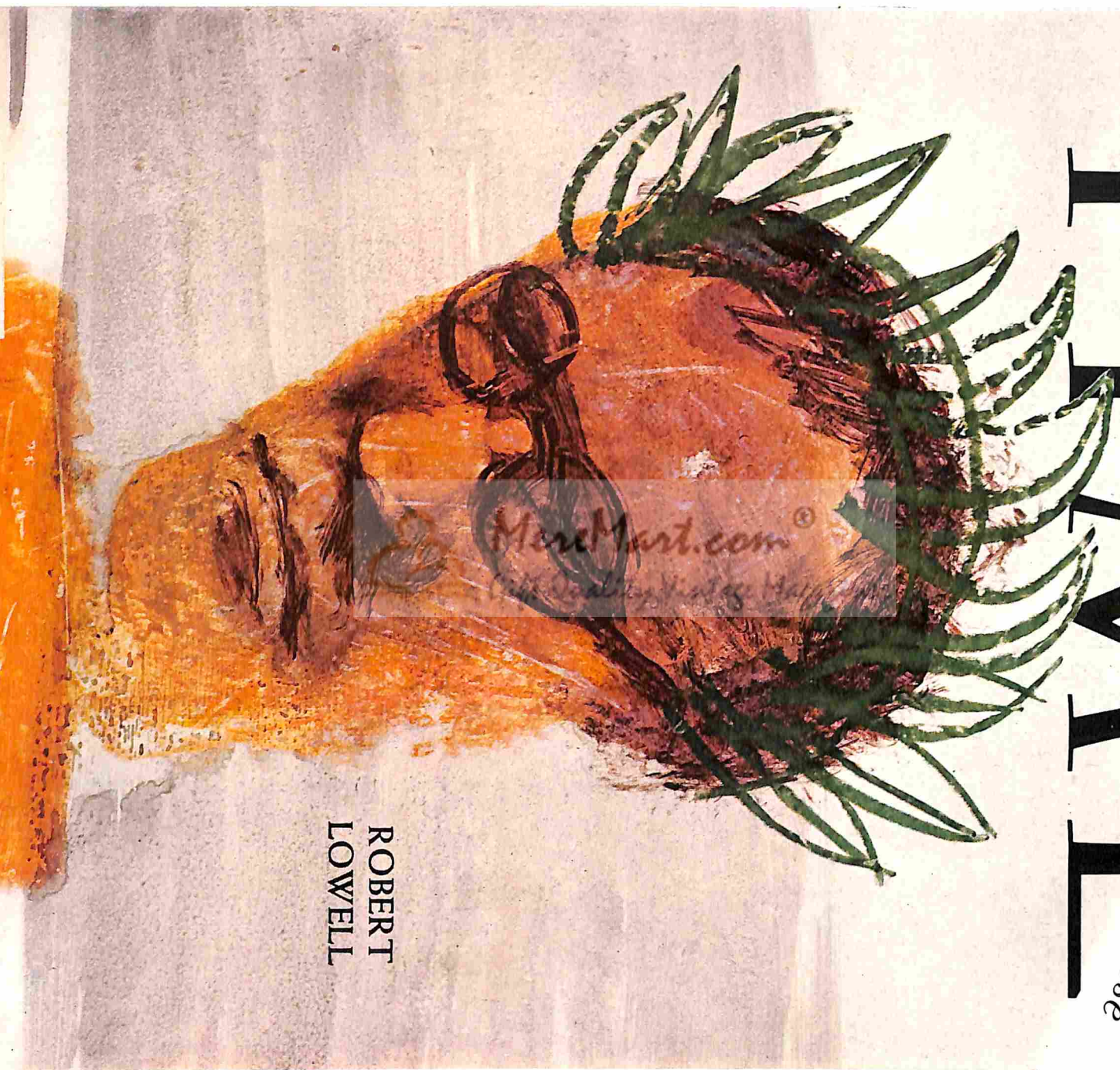
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FIFTY CENTS

JUNE 2, 1967

# TIME

Poetry in an Age of Prose



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LOWELL

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