

## Water from a Bucket: A Diary 1948-1957

**Charles Henri Ford**

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This author is one of those literary figures who is most often encountered as a minor figure in the biographies of better known artists with whom he was friends, such as Tennessee Williams, Gertrude Stein, Max Ernst, and William Carlos Williams. This is unfortunate, not only because it underestimates Ford's contributions to shaping modern literature through the literary and art magazines that he founded and edited (*Blues and View*), but also because it virtually ignores his own considerable talent as a poet and novelist.

Readers hoping to gain insight into Ford's creative process will likely be dissatisfied with his diary, *Water from a Bucket*. Rather than ruminating on the progress of his latest artistic project, Ford is more likely to record entries about his masturbation habits (a near obsession). Anyone squeamish about sexuality or Ford's attraction to teenage boys should avoid this book.

The diary covers a nine-year period, and varies from several longish entries per month to almost a year with no entries. If there is a central theme that unites the book it is Ford's longtime relationship with Pavlik Tchelitchev. Their love was at once vicious and tender. Ford records their spats ("I sometimes think of Pavlik as a monster of egotism," he writes in 1953), and their habit of questioning each other's love, and yet throughout it all, the entries reveal the depth of their true emotion for one another, even when insecurities threaten to rip them apart. The diary ends, appropriately, with Tchelitchev's death, and a final line that is surely one of the most touching departing words ever recorded.

Due in part to its deathbed conclusion, the diary reads more like a novel than a journal, having a discernible structure that is unexpected in a diary. Some entries show that even while composing it, Ford believed that his diary would eventually be published and read by others. In one entry, he vows to cease keeping his diary after a certain date. "It's a secret vice," he writes. "Vices should be public." By making this particular vice public, Ford has provided readers with further evidence of just how talented and underrated a writer he is.

ERIK BLEDSOE (July / August 2001)

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