Janus Revisited

After having lost something over nine hundred dollars, all of which came from the Student Senate's funds, and having brought the disgrace of public censure by the Student Senate on its editor, Janus, Rice's fifth literary magazine, subsided.

The Senate, apparently frustrated at finding itself burdened with an inherited responsibility, placed the bulk of the blame on the editor's "mismanagement." The editor in turn blamed the lack of dedication of his staff and the tight-fistedness of the magazine's patrons and the student body, traditionally neutral, placed the blame on the mysterious, inexorable workings of fate. And, of course, all of these accusations could be partly true.

However, underneath all of these charges lie a more substantial — although less malleable — reason for Janus' failure: the real paucity of quality undergraduate fiction and poetry, and the apathy of the student body toward undergraduate literary effort.

Janus' editor tried to circumvent these difficulties by printing the work of established writers and poets in addition to the work of Rice undergraduates, and by launching a kind of public relations man's assault on the student body.

In this sense, Janus was a success. It not only sold over five hundred copies, winning the enthusiasm of the student body as no vehicle for strictly undergraduate writings could have done, but it attracted international interest, both among the hopeful, but perennially unpublished, and among the giants of the avant-garde.

But Janus' financial losses — the measure of success here in the oil patch — can also be blamed on these very same policies, for while the publication of Grover Lewis and Vassar Miller stirred the interest of the student body, it lost Janus' editor the support of his student staff who soon realized that Janus was not, as they had hoped, a refuge for their own scribblings, and the support of patrons who would have contributed toward publishing a vehicle for undergraduate writings but could not care less about e. e. cummings or T. S. Elliot.

This is not, of course, what one generally thinks of as mismanagement. This policy was Janus' editor's attempt to deal as intelligently and skillfully as he could with the problems any Rice literary magazine must face. That he lost is a sterner reflection on his university than on himself.

Be that as it may, we have learned from his experience: A literary magazine at Rice must first serve the interests of undergraduate contributors and

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(Continued from Page 2) potential contributors, for only in that way can it survive, and only in that way can it truly serve as a rallying point for students with genuine literary interest and ability, which is, of course, its only justification for existing.

On the other hand, the few weeks of widespread campus interest in Janus should not be, and need not be sacrificed. But the physical quality which attracts and sustains this kind of interest requires more than artistic dedication: it requires financial support. Last year's Student Senate realized this when it took on financial responsibility for Janus. But it is unreasonable to expect the Senate to provide this support single-handedly. The literary societies, which to the present have been literary only in name, could surely contribute fifty dollars each toward Janus' support. And if this is not enough, perhaps it is not unreasonable to hope that a portion of the blanket tax could be given for Janus support, just as it is given to the Campanile, and to the Thresher.

Rice needs a literary magazine, as a symbol of her maturing and diversifying interests if for no other reason. Last year's Janus, despite its shaky finances, was a successful start. It should be continued.

—D. A.