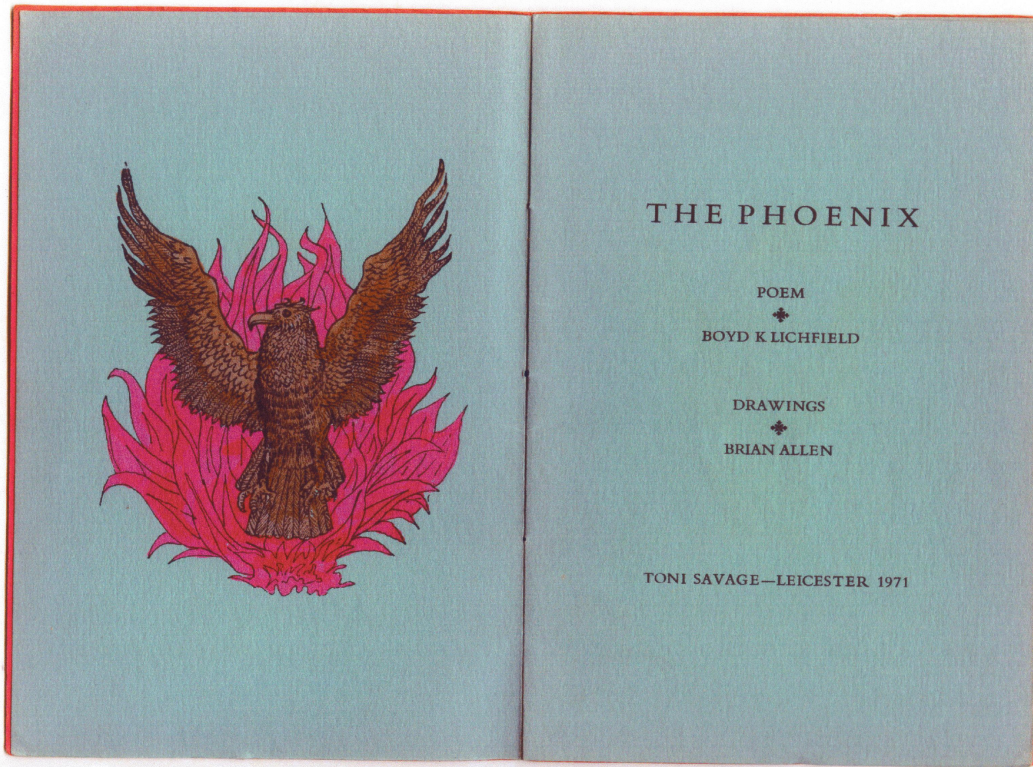


# AMERICAN BOOK COLLECTOR

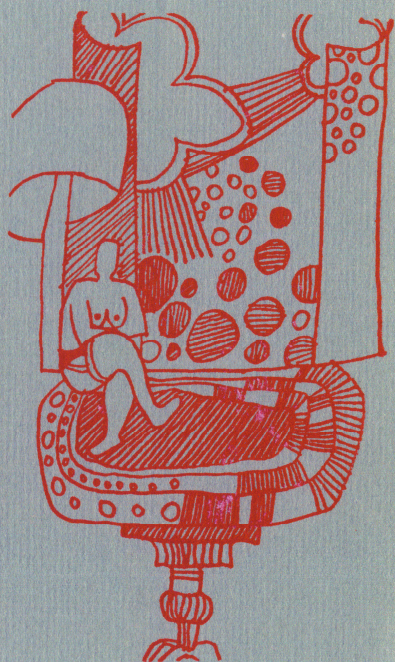
\$1.25



## Transican Books

a fragile experiment — a poet's  
PRIVATE PRINTING PRESS

*by Rigby Graham*



*LAPSUS CALAMI*

by Boyd K. Lichfield

drawings—Franco Colavecchia

The New Broom Press    Leicester



## TRANSCAN BOOKS

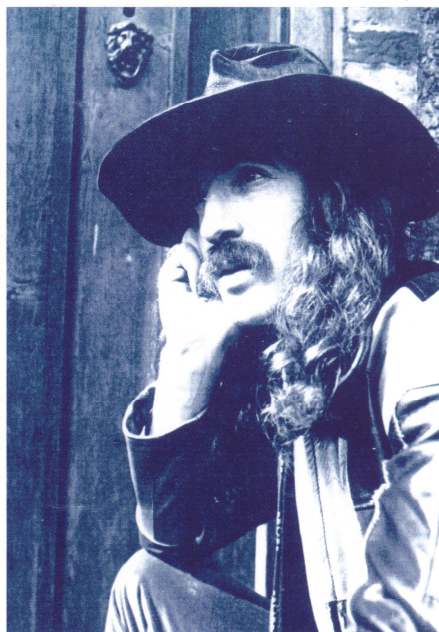
• a Fragile Experiment  
• a Poet's Printing Press

By Rigby Graham

SEVERAL YEARS BACK over dinner at Wroxton Abbey with Loyd Haberley and Roderick Cave I remember very vividly Haberley's argument that the small hand quarto Adana was ideal for anyone setting up a private press. He had heard all the arguments about Columbians and Albions, all the sneering remarks from precious printers, but from his experience as comptroller of Gregynog and his own happier time at his Seven Acres Press at Long Crenndon, he had come to the conclusion that the little versatile hand quarto was the real answer, particularly for someone like a poet, who could print his own verse. The laborious work of hand setting and printing would help his editing and would make him realize the value of economy of words; who knows, his poetry might improve. He could certainly print enough copies for his small circle of readers, and he would not suffer the disappointment, frustration, or expense of going to normal publishers, who understandably are rarely interested in what is, after all, unlikely to be a commercial proposition. Both Cave and I had hand quartos, and so we were delighted by what we heard. I have never forgotten Haberley's enthusiastic and sensible comments, much more succinctly and pertinently put over than I have managed to recall.

"A press for a poet." How apt a description this is when applied to Transcan Books, the name adopted by Boyd Lichfield for his private press which operated from his home, a tiny stone cottage with a steep thatched roof, on the edge of Charnwood Forest in Leicestershire. It is here, with his small handpress and a few trays of assorted type, that Lichfield now prints his thin volumes of poetry. His press operates not half a mile from Bradgate Park, a beautiful and historic spot, for in the park stand the ruins of Bradgate House, once the home of young Lady Jane Grey, nine days Queen of England who at the tender age of sixteen was beheaded in the Tower for political reasons far beyond her grasp or knowing.

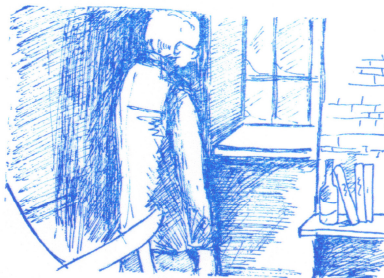
Lichfield, Essex born, once in the RAF, is a twenty-nine-year-old poet who taught himself the rudiments of printing when a few years ago he set up a press in an old house in Kimberley Road in the city of



Boyd Lichfield - photograph by Mel Howley.

Leicester. After a while he moved a few miles north into the country where his press is now situated. His output is limited, his editions are very small, and for these he uses rare and beautiful handmade papers—Japanese mulberry and hosho papers specially imported and English handmade papers from O'Casey's little Sheepstor Mill in Devon. He has had his own verse broadcast on the BBC, they have appeared on Toni Savage's Phoenix Broadsheets (see *American Book Collector* 23, no. 3, Jan.-Feb. 1973) and in little magazines such as *Converse*, *Poetry Workshop*, and *Ripple*. The New Broom Press published *Lapsus Calami* (1969), a small collection of his poems, and two years later commissioned a poem *The Phoenix*.

*OLD MAN IN A GARRET*  
*Boyd K. Lichfield*



published by  
*Transcan Books*  
Leicester

**THE  
DISSOLVING  
CUCKOO**

**Boyd K. Lichfield**





Nevertheless, he had always wanted to produce his own work—exactly as he wanted—and so he started printing. He printed *The Dissolving Cuckoo*, poems in an edition of 120 copies on a purple grey mold-made paper with venetian red wraparound endpaper and golden-yellow card cover. This quickly went out of print. In 1970 he printed *Old Man in a Garret* in an edition of only 23 copies which are now understandably unobtainable. This was a poem which explored an octogenarian's life, a man whose "faculties are still sensitive to the world about him." They reflect Lichfield's views on "marriage, throw-away philosophies, indignation and despair"—evident in the case of the *Old Man in a Garret* in what one "assumes old age to be and yet the poem, with a combination of skill and humor avoids the pitfall of making old age seem a depressing aspect of life." The 23 copies were quickly dispersed, and recently this volume has been re-issued in a larger edition, printed this time at the Gartree Press, illustrated by Marlene Croucher and published by Transican Books at 75 pages.

In addition to producing illustrated broadsheets, Lichfield also printed and published *Walking Out*, the early poems of Brian Patten, illustrated by Pamlar Kindred. This, the first edition, was limited to 100 copies each signed by Brian Patten. The text was printed in black and purple and the illustrations in purple, alizarin, and black (one of which was hand colored in red and yellow). The volume was case-

bound in black leather and offered for sale at seven guineas. Copies were quickly bought up by London dealers like Bertram Rota, Bernard Stone, and others and soon went out of print.

At the time of writing other volumes are planned, including an illustrated volume of Lichfield's verse and an illustrated volume of poems by Edward Lucie-Smith. These are to be printed on handmade Sheepstor paper and each volume limited to 80 numbered copies. They are to be bound in morocco, and the Brewhouse Press of Wymondham has already prepared specimen bindings for these two Transican volumes.

What of the future? Will Transican go from strength to strength and grow into a flourishing and successful private press? It might, but somehow I very much doubt it. It has really little in common with many private presses. It is without financial backing of any sort, and few enough can support themselves let alone a wife and a private press as well. Publishing, even on a scale as small as this, can be a very tough business. Transican makes few or no concessions to anything. It is, as a press, wayward and unbusinesslike and rarely answers letters, and its productions are ethereal and odd. It is not unlikely that it will cease as quietly as it began, and its productions will eventually feature in some bibliographical note as a Leicestershire oddity which produced strange little books of poems by Brian Patten, Boyd, Lichfield, and Edward Lucie-Smith. I hope I am mistaken.