

'Come In, Ezra—How's The Weather Out There?'

The Eye Of The Horse

Roger Will Coe

(THE HORSE was mincing daintily past Bingham Hall, the English Department's new H. Q. We wondered if he had been among the detractors of the English Department of late in *The Daily Tar Heel*.)

"Fur from it, Roger, me lad," The Horse denied. "I have spent pleasant and profitable hours studying Chaucer, Milton, Shakespeare, Joyce, Porter, Mansfield, Huxley, under the kindly, patient and erudite directions of Dr. Harry Russell and Dr. Talbert."

Hah! Combing over dead bones and laboring over ancient tomes? What good was that for, say, Creative Writing?

"A lot of good," The Horse stated. "The best equipment a writer can bring to his scribblings is an ability to criticize his work intelligently. What better way is there to gain critical facility than to con the works of the great masters of our language, or of those acknowledged to have something extra on the ball-point pen?"

Oh? The Horse was going to do a Modern Canterbury Tales, perhaps? Or a nouveau Hamlet? Or a Finnegans Re-a-Wake?

"You miss the point," The Horse yawned, haunching down on a step. "Chaucer painted word descriptions which were at once vivid and brief. Shakespeare brought out character by opposing it to other character. Joyce's facility with words was — well, James Joyce was Mencken with a Brogue. Huxley's chapter-links and his tongue-in-cheek restraint were edifying, and still are."

Okay, okay, why not study modern American authors?

"I might unconsciously attempt to copy them, or even worse, I might succeed in copying them."

Was this a reflection on James Jones, Hair-Chest Hemingway, Saroyan, Sinclair Lewis, others?

"Heck, no," The Horse snorted. "But, I thought we were speaking of Creative Writing, not Imitative Writing. Let me tell you a story of a writer who sedulously memorized Ring Lardner's vocabulary and his studied grammatical quirks until he actually spoke like Lardner's characters and even started to dress like them. And, to be sure, he then proceeded to write like Lardner. Just to make everything nice and even, he scrivined scripts and posted them post-haste to prudent publishers who manufactured magazines containing Lardner lyrics that then sold successfully to rapt readers. Boom, he got them back poster-haste. In high dudgeon, he charged into the editors' offices and ranted that his stuff was just like Lardner's, and he challenged them to deny it."

And did they deny it? "Nope," The Horse shrugged. "They agreed heartily. And they added that when they wanted more of Lardner, they knew where to get in touch with him. 'Go forth, thou author, and be thyself,' they admonished the chagrined chap. 'Write what you know in your style and in your settings. Maybe we will buy your re-creations, but we will not buy from you Lardner's re-creations.'

Did not modern writers count? "At all opportunity, they should study their successes," The Horse said. "But only in so far as the study is to note that originality, daring, deft art, flawless technique and true-to-life situations and dramatic exposition are the keystones of those successes. Further and beyond, maybe James Jones and Truman (Yoo-hoo!) Capote and Walter Saroyan have written deathless prose. There isn't any question that Chaucer and Shakespeare did. And corn me not that corn that they are creations of English departments to further steady employment in English departments."

Maybe, but was this practical? "Ever hear of *Winterset*?" The Horse waved a jeering hoof. "What was that but *Romeo and Juliet Under The Brooklyn Bridge*, with a tetch of *Hamlet* and a gob of who knows what else thrown in for good measure? All it did was to cop a Pulitzer Prize—three hundred and thirty-five years after its original author had copped the then version of the Pulitzer, give or take six years. Good theatre is good theatre, compelling drama is compelling drama, tragedy is tragedy, then and now."

Well, take Mickey Spillane, now. "Mickey created something, and he has a lot of emulating emirs emanating in his emancipated wake," The Horse agreed. "It has been established that whodunits are in such demand that Spillane's spit-and-images have wide sale as swiftly as they can copy Mickey's style and out-gore him in gory happenstance. Me, I regard this as forgery. And once again, we were talking about Creative Writing, no?"

Why did he keep repeating that? "Some people appear to lose sight of this," The Horse pointed out. "There just is not any way a character can walk into a classroom called Creative Writing and by some process like the ceiling falling atop him, come out a Creative Writer. Market information can be dispensed. The wracks of *Formula* that magazine stretch writers on can be learned. Fast starts, ept flashbacks—"

"More graceful than inept," The Horse supplied, "can be demonstrated. The art of the double-twist at the end can be detailed. This is no more than polishing and preening for the market. The basic stuff of a story must be there, first. Even what a story is can be transmitted, explained, elaborated on. But the real gripe is, as Mrs. O'Horne once pointed out to me, something as entertaining as it is tragic."

And that was? "You go to an opera," The Horse expounded. "You like the opera. Do you rush home and try to write an opera? Or, you attend a symphony. Do you say, 'Hey, now, I'll write myself one!' Or you see the *George Washington Bridge*. Do you sit down and start to draw plans for a similar, or better bridge?" That was silly!

"So is deciding you can write a book silly, just because you have read one," The Horse said. "People break down into three types: those who can originate; those who can copy what has been originated; and those who can do neither. Now, you take me."

"Wump!" said Mr. Wump, from a nearby bush.

John D's Big 4

There's a syndicated column or radio event—we can't remember which—featuring as its title, "Words to Live By." Recently we read some words of John D. Rockefeller III which seem to us words to live by. Mr. Rockefeller asks us to:

1. Refrain from a tendency to impose our ideas or way of life on other peoples.
2. Evince as much willingness to learn from them as help them.
3. Acquire a knowledge of their needs, aspirations and accomplishments.
4. Recognize that the success or failure of one people increasingly affects all and is the responsibility of all.

The Four Fundamentals, Mr. Rockefeller calls them. We don't know of a better four-some.

From The New York Times

Neither Snow Nor Hard Words

Ervin F. Spratt, postmaster at Elkhart, Iowa, not far from Des Moines, does not make rounds, but if he did we trust that neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night would stay him from their swift completion.

Mr. Spratt was appointed postmaster at Elkhart (pop. 249) in 1944. He maintains the post office in what our dispatch describes as his "sundry shop." His wife assists him. Mr. Spratt, who does not claim the protection of the Fifth Amendment when asked whether or not he is a Democrat, has a modestly good thing in his postmastership.

But Mr. Spratt is a man of moral courage. In spite of the gathering mass of evidence that it is far better for a man in public employment to do practically no thinking and to talk about nothing at all except the weather, Mr. Spratt is said to have expressed doubts as to the ability of the Postmaster General. He is also accused of not liking President Eisenhower as much as the Post Office Department assumed that he would.

A postal inspector charges that he called the President a "blank, blank, blank, blank," and threatens to see that he (Mr. Spratt) is removed.

Mr. Spratt denies that he called President Eisenhower or Mr. Summerfield a "blank, blank, blank, blank." He refuses to resign.

We think that President Eisenhower and Postmaster General Summerfield might well ask not what Mr. Spratt's personal opinion of them is but whether or not Mr. Spratt is delivering letters or causing them to be delivered in the Elkhart neighborhood in spite of weather conditions or the time of day or night.

Membership in the Democratic party ought not to affect the fate of fourth-class postmasters, such as we assume Mr. Spratt to be. We hope that his and Mrs. Spratt's public employment will continue, that the mail of Elkhart, Iowa, will continue to be swiftly delivered, and that the Spratts will long be able to buy all the fat and all the lean that their respective appetites require.

The Monkey

Ted Rosenthal

Certainly *The Monkey in the Moon*, the Playmakers' premiere production of Tom Patterson's comedy, cannot be called an unqualified success.

Set in a small southern town, its plot is a reworking of a pretty worn motif—Sam and Lucy Leeson, middle-aged, comfortable but bored, are contrasted to their yard-boy, Willie, who though shiftless and imprudent, living day to day, seems to enjoy himself.

A crisis arises because of Lucy's desire to visit uninvited the Leeson's recently-married son, and Sam's refusal to dismiss Willie, whom she doesn't like. In anger she leaves, and during her absence an obvious and rather unnecessary sub-plot carries Sam to the point of adultery with an attractive widow—Myra, a business client of his. At the last moment, a chance phone call from his son brings them to realize their intention is purposeless, and with a hackneyed "no, its not good" sort of speech from Myra, they part—she returning ostensibly to a "fine man" in New Hampshire. Eventually Lucy comes back; the Leeson's marital difficulties are resolved and things again rosy.

Probably the weakest part of the play is theme, (it didn't need one), which would seem to be that negroes' easy manner of life can teach the perhaps too—"civilized" whites something about how to be happy. The great flaw if this is the assumption that Willie and Cally (the Leeson's maid), both perfectly believable as individuals, are good generalizations of their entire race, and that Sam and Lucy are typical of all whites. We don't believe that any two people are sufficient evidence for so sweeping an implication.

Although it could use a good deal of tightening—it moved rather slowly, tending to drag—the play was very funny in spots, and succeeded in entertaining much of the time. It's unfortunate that some of the better lines, (judging from the audience reaction up front) were inaudible where we sat, farther back; perhaps this will be improved in the remaining performances.

William Trotman was excellent as Willie—he captured the amalgam of Uncle-Resmusesque and casually lazy, lecherous, and extra admirable elements, which combined in that character. His poise, conception of Willie, and flair for humour were satisfying.

Marion Fitz-Simons as Lucy, Lloyd Borstelmann as Sam, and Martha Hardy as Myra were all more than adequate, although perhaps Mr. Borstelmann was a little too intense in his interpretation of Sam's reactions to a given situation and Miss Fitz-Simons's characterization of Lucy was a little too broadly comic.

Mary Anne Blair may have been awful as Cally—we don't know if her consistent, but consistently exaggerated caricature of the maid was her fault or that of Director Foster Fitz-Simons; in either case the part was badly slap stick.

William Long's set was attractive and convincing, and the technical aspects—costumes by Irene Smart, lighting by Barbara Treat, and sound by Mack Preslar—were well-handled.

It seems to be an axiom of the theatre that the whole may be greater than the sum of its parts. With all its deficiencies, while *The Monkey in the Moon* wasn't hilarious, it was on the whole pretty amusing, and consequently enjoyable.



Letter To A Fraulein

Life Magazine

Dear Fraulein:

Your dilemma was discussed in Lewis Gannett's book column recently in the *New York Herald Tribune*; for the benefit of those who came in late, let's recapitulate it briefly.

A university student in Munich, you met there some Americans associated with the Crusade for Freedom—the organization of our National Committee for a Free Europe to send truth behind the iron curtain. These Americans struck you as selfless and dedicated. But then you read several novels by William Faulkner and John Steinbeck's *Cannery Row* and you were appalled by the pictures they gave you of our country and its citizenry which were so at variance with the types of Americans you had met. What American books, you wanted to know, would explain the thoughts and backgrounds of those dedicated Americans?

Your dilemma, dear Fraulein, though interesting, is by no means unusual. For some while now many American readers have been themselves pretty startled at the pictures of American life drawn by American novelists. It has been pointed out that our good fiction writers have seemed to feel like giving up on their country long before their readers have felt like doing so. This, however, is not a recent development: American fiction of merit started turning pessimistic about 70 years ago.

No doubt your American advisers over there have recommended *Huckleberry Finn* as a truer delineation of the American spirit. Well, it is a great book and you should certainly read it, if you haven't already, but don't let them kid you about its author, Mark Twain, who was probably as pessimistic about American life as all our contemporary fiction writers put together.

It was not until after World War I, though, that pessimism among our major fiction writers really got pumping. We were in an economic boom during the 1920's, and the predominating theme of nearly every good novelist was the futility of it all: nothing really mattered any more, nothing. But when the economic depression came in the 1930's, our fiction writers dropped despair and snatched up literary rocks and brickbats, which they hurled at stuffed dummies labeled Capitalism in a dreary succession of what came to be known as "strike novels," many of them written in avangarde style, too boring or difficult to unsnarl.

Our entry into World War II ended the militant pro-labor trend in our fiction, for it was discovered that even Capitalism might come in handy if democracy was to be preserved. But when the smoke lifted, a number of our fiction writers—especially the younger ones—turned out books arguing that just about every officer in our Armed Forces was a caste-ridden, sadistic beast toward the enlisted men he commanded.



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