

WORD BUSINESS

BY HOLGER LUNDBERGH

I'M GRATEFUL for the little I know of this word business.
It's the only game really worth a damn.
To take the same letters I use when I say
"Give me a package of Lucky Strikes,"
"What time does the Congressional Limited leave for Wilmington, Del.?"
"Scallops and bacon for me and filet of sole for the young lady,"
—these same letters, shaken about, changed around,
put into long and short words,
meaning twilight drowsiness,
and your hair webbed against the fire light,
Autumn leaves crackling on a white, hushed road,
and children playing.
Words telling the fulness of my heart,
the hungry emptiness of it.
Words dancing on the slanting bars of sun in the Spring;
words brushing your lips and the black feathers of your eyelashes.
Words with the sea in them, salt and sails and shells.
Words baying at the moon in agony,
smiling with the first sweet peas,
riding on the flurry of January's snow.
Maybe there's still too much
"I want you to meet Mr. Stevenson,"
"Let me call a taxi,"
"Bet you ten dollars"
for me to unlearn.
Maybe I haven't stirred the letters enough,
not put them together well enough again.
Maybe.
All the same, I say it's the only game worth while,
this word business.
For sometimes I can shape clouds and roses and larks' wings,
shy daring dreams of youth, longing and wondering and ache,
out of turnstiles and Frankfurters and overshoes,
and asphalt and garbage, Blue Plate dinners and suspenders.
I can make leaves nod and have you walk, white and erect and beautiful,
along a foam-crowned ocean,
tempt your smile and your sad young voice, and quick slim hands
from stuff like that.
Shouldn't I be grateful for what I know of this jig-saw puzzle,
this grand game of words?

THE DILEMMA OF THE NEGRO AUTHOR

BY JAMES WELDON JOHNSON

THE Negro author—the creative author—has arrived. He is here. He appears in the lists of the best publishers. He even breaks into the lists of the best-sellers. To the general American public he is a novelty, a strange phenomenon, a miracle straight out of the skies. Well, he *is* a novelty, but he is by no means a new thing.

The line of American Negro authors runs back for a hundred and fifty years, back to Phillis Wheatley, the poet. Since Phillis Wheatley there have been several hundred Negro authors who have written books of many kinds. But in all these generations down to within the past six years only seven or eight of the hundreds have ever been heard of by the general American public or even by the specialists in American literature. As many Negro writers have gained recognition by both in the past six years as in all the generations gone before. What has happened is that efforts which have been going on for more than a century are being noticed and appreciated at last, and that this appreciation has served as a stimulus to greater effort and output. America is aware today that there are such things as Negro authors. Several converging forces have been at work to produce this state of mind. Had these forces been at work three decades ago, it is possible that we then should have had a condition similar to the one which now exists.

Now that the Negro author has come into the range of vision of the American public eye, it seems to me only fair to point out some of the difficulties he finds in his way. But I wish to state emphati-

cally that I have no intention of making an apology or asking any special allowances for him; such a plea would at once disqualify him and void the very recognition he has gained. But the Negro writer does face peculiar difficulties that ought to be taken into account when passing judgment upon him.

It is unnecessary to say that he faces every one of the difficulties common to all that crowd of demon-driven individuals who feel that they must write. But the Aframerican author faces a special problem which the plain American author knows nothing about—the problem of the double audience. It is more than a double audience; it is a divided audience, an audience made up of two elements with differing and often opposite and antagonistic points of view. His audience is always both white America and black America. The moment a Negro writer takes up his pen or sits down to his typewriter he is immediately called upon to solve, consciously or unconsciously, this problem of the double audience. To whom shall he address himself, to his own black group or to white America? Many a Negro writer has fallen down, as it were, between these two stools.

It may be asked why he doesn't just go ahead and write and not bother himself about audiences. That is easier said than done. It is doubtful if anything with meaning can be written unless the writer has some definite audience in mind. His audience may be as far away as the angelic host or the rulers of darkness, but an audience he must have in mind. As soon as he selects his audience he immediately