

Life & Letters Today

Brussels

RAPID RABBIT: A British member of the European Parliament, reaching recently for a metaphor to describe the perils of facing EEC governments, likened them to "the crew of a canoe shooting the rapids." Some minutes later his French colleagues were still trying to puzzle out why anyone should want to go "shooting rabbits" on a river. Another example, presumably, of the inscrutable British sense of humour.

THE TIMES

London

TEDDY BEARS: *The teddy bears had a real picnic at the Commons yesterday.*

A loudspeaker played the picnic song, and MPs clutched their favourite teddies.

It was all in a good cause. Tory MP Mr David Gilroy Bevan, who runs a branch of the charity, Good Bears of the World, was launching a fund-raising branch at Westminster.

The purpose of the charity is to provide teddies for children in hospital who have no toys of their own.

DAILY MAIL

[Ed. Note: Readers may like to be assured that the story by William Trevor in this month's issue was written *before* the above social occasion was announced. Fiction sometimes precedes fact. . . .]

Nashville, Tennessee

OUT THERE: Louis L'Amour's *Western* and frontier novels are more popular than girlie magazines or roadmaps among America's truck drivers. It is thought by his publisher, Bantam Books, that the drivers are the biggest buyers of his books and the racks at truck stops across the United States are crammed with his titles. But his appeal is not limited to the modern-day, high plains drifters riding 18-wheelers.

Of 76 books, almost all in soft-cover, 65 have sold more than a million copies. In 1979, Bantam shipped out 7.8 million copies of his books.

He predicted that within five years each new book that he wrote—and he writes three a year—would begin with printings of five million. "There are at least 25 million people out there that I've never touched at all and I want them", he said. "I want every damned one of them."

L'Amour said he wrote tales of "strong men in a rough, hard world."

INTERNATIONAL HERALD TRIBUNE

London

NEO-PIDGIN: Papua New Guinea can fairly be described as a tropical paradise inhabited by unsophisticated blameless villagers who haven't

eaten anyone. In a country already possessed of 700 different languages for example (not to mention Australian and Pidgin), they must now wrestle with a new one. Under the influence of the large British Army contingent everyone referred to reports as "Sitreps," Young Explorers became "Y Es" (or, less flatteringly, "Ducklings"), and expedition leaders "D S" ("Directing Staff"). In self-defence, I and a colleague from the Press Association hurriedly transformed ourselves into PMWPOs (Printed Media Word Processing Officers).

SUNDAY TELEGRAPH

London

POST-PRISON PATTERN: *There was a time when men of spectacularly evil character would try to fool the authorities by saying that they had repented of their sins and were following the way of the Lord. And precious little good it usually did them! By contrast, a most eloquent document has appeared in The Times and The Guardian, evidently from Charles Richardson, who recently strolled out of a more than usually open "open" prison.*

It is a beautiful and touching affair strong on "value systems", "sub-cultures." Under the influence of his O- and A-level tutors and new "concepts and perspectives", Richardson has come, he says, "to seriously question the value of my parochial mores." His prolonged term in prison makes him doubt if he will be "capable of satisfactorily fulfilling . . . familial and employment roles." He was not always so coy nor so indirect in his arguments. It is worth recalling little details like the pliers used on the teeth of one man, the cigar burns, the electric fire, the lump of metal on the head, and the private electric generator used by Richardson or his infantry in those four-to-one encounter situations in which frank and meaningful dialogue occurred.

Although never convicted of murder Charles Richardson is one of the most cruel, sadistic and vicious men to have gone through the courts. Anyone who supposes that a torturer with an A-level in sociology and a starred first in patter should cease to be punished for his tortures is a great fool.

DAILY TELEGRAPH

Pretoria

CHOICE WORDS: As the violence subsided in Cape Town and other troubled areas, the Minister of Police announced that the official toll during the present unrest was 29 dead and 141 injured up to late last night.

The Minister also explained that the "shoot to kill" statement issued on behalf of the Commissioner of Police yesterday, which produced headlines throughout the world, was a mistake. "It was an unfortunate choice of words and was immediately withdrawn when it came to the notice of the Commissioner of Police", he said.

THE TIMES

What's new from the past?

Two outstanding books
that reveal new aspects of history.

THE REVOLUTION REMEMBERED

*Eyewitness Accounts of the War
for Independence*

Edited by John C. Dann

A magnificent piece of oral history. Seventy-nine accounts (culled from some 80,000 pension applications in the National Archives) of how the Revolution appeared to the ordinary men and women who took part in it. "An extraordinary evocation of what it meant to be alive in those adrenal days.... You can hear their voices."—Robert Kirsch, *Los Angeles Times*. "In a book fairly bursting with feats of daring, perhaps the most spectacular accomplishment of them all is this volume's transformation of its readers into the grandchildren of Revolutionary War soldiers. It sets us upon the knees of feisty old men and at least two spunky women and regales us with their stories.... They afford us a perspective of the war from the bloody ground up."—Elaine F. Weiss, *Christian Science Monitor*

Profusely illustrated with period drawings and woodcuts.

CHRISTIANITY, SOCIAL TOLERANCE, AND HOMOSEXUALITY

*Gay People in Western Europe
from the Beginning of the
Christian Era to the Fourteenth
Century*

John Boswell

One of the most intensive treatments of any single aspect of medieval history, this groundbreaking book shows that Catholic Europe was not unremittently hostile to homosexuality; that there were centuries when the church accepted it and even canonized gay people. "John Boswell restores one's faith in scholarship as the union of erudition, analysis and moral vision. I would not hesitate to call his book revolutionary.... By my count the author is the master of 12 languages...and his book displays the sweep and control that one finds only in the work of a major historian.... He has also mastered one of the rarest of skills; the ability to write about sex with genuine wit. Improbable as it might seem, this work of unrelenting scholarship and high intellectual drama is also thoroughly entertaining."—Paul Robinson, *New York Times Book Review*

Illustrated.



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