

The Case Of the Orange Orange

MARYA MANNES

FOR DECADES, the citrus growers down in Florida have been dyeing oranges orange so that people would buy them. And for quite a while the Pure Food and Drug Administration has been thinking of making them stop it. There is, they say, some poison in the dye.

Just the other day there was another flare-up on this question which ended with the PFD people telling the citrus growers that they could go on dyeing their oranges a little longer, or until sufficient tests were made to determine just how poisonous the dye was.

This postponement made the citrus people very happy. "No matter how much you tell the customer that an orange is ripe even if it's greenish outside, they won't buy it. We tried selling 'em ripe greenish oranges and they just didn't move at all. Besides, the dye's only on the peel, and who eats the peel except people at bars?"

BEAR WITH ME if I project this rather limited problem of the orange orange into other fields. I was talking shop with a fiction writer recently who had just sold a short story to a Canadian publication after the American mass weekly that normally bought her work had reluctantly turned it down. "It was quite a happy story," she said, "but there was a mention of death in it, and the editors said that their policy was not to present death to their readers in any form." And she added, "They paid me handsomely for it anyway, and told me I could sell it somewhere else, so I did."

Young Lovers Only

This started us off quite naturally on taboos, the "hidden censorship" that we agreed existed to a fantastic degree in the mass-circulation media of the country. I told her of the short story I had almost sold to a women's magazine. The editors

praised it highly, but wondered if I would make a few changes. In the story a man of thirty-five and a woman of twenty-nine were in love. Would I change their ages to, say, thirty for the man and twenty-four for the woman, as readers were not interested in love over thirty.

Secondly, the hero of my story was a Czech refugee who was teaching his particular branch of science in a Midwestern university. The editors would like me to make him a Midwestern American instead—possibly a doctor; they preferred not to have the romantic interest foreign. They also found that their readers might resent the idea of a foreigner taking over a job that an American might have. They said if I would do these things the story would be just right for them. . . .

THERE WERE other, more obvious taboos. Disparity in the ages of a couple in love was wholly undesirable. You might just conceivably mate a man of forty with a girl of twenty-five, but you'd have to think up some compellingly virtuous reasons. You could never, but never, write of a woman of forty in a happy relationship with a man of thirty-five. We agreed that *any* happy relationship, even in a short-short, had one resolution only: marriage. There was no such thing as a satisfying or rewarding "affair." As for divorced people, only a Big Name writer could make them palatable. And it was axiomatic that readers would not be interested in "stale" marriages, in marriages of affection without romantic love, or in unions of purely physical passion.

Another writer, a man, reminded us that in a mass-circulation magazine a girl could be attractive only in currently acceptable ways. You could make her nose short but not long; you could not make her teeth irregular; you certainly could not make her plump, however delight-

ful she might be in other ways. You could not at any time question certain artificialities resulting from cosmetic means, or, on the other hand, praise a girl who dispensed with them.

The writer spoke of a story in which he had made an American husband married to a flawlessly groomed and narcissistic wife remember with urgent nostalgia the Italian girl he loved during the war in Rome—a girl described as animal, tousle-haired, warm and generous with herself. All references to her lack of grooming were removed, and the husband (in the end) was made to feel ashamed of his passion for her.

WE AGREED, from the pooling of our fictional experiences, that you could never speak ill of a doctor or a banker, although you could make a scientist, a writer, or a musician unsympathetic. If a woman had a career, she could not be happy in it, and would ultimately sacrifice it for split-level security. No mother could express relief at the absence of her children. No characters, in any story, could discuss abstract ideas or important current matters, with the exception of floods and hurricanes. The strongest taboo of all, we concurred, was against satire in any form. To be oblique was wholly impermissible.

"How can you keep on writing for the big magazines with all these gags and ties?" I asked the woman writer. "How do you, an honest person, manage to fit life into such patterns?"

She smiled. "Well, of course, I like the money. And then, really, I'm rather a romantic anyway. I like things to turn out well."

The man said, "I gave the big mags up. Or rather, they gave me up. The only uncensored fields left are the novel and the theater. I'll stick to those until editors stop processing life for the consumer."

A Ton of Rind

"About this dye," said the citrus growers. "You'd have to eat about a ton of peel to have any effect from the poison."

How many issues of how many magazines are read by how many people every day?

'The Most Dejected And Reluctant Convert'

GOVERNEUR PAULDING

**SURPRISED BY JOY: THE SHAPE OF MY
EARLY LIFE**, by C. S. Lewis. *Harcourt,
Brace*. \$3.50.

Remembering the enormously self-assured *Screwtape Letters*, some people may fear that this account of how Mr. Lewis reached his Christian certainties will also be written with overcertainty. Such is not the case. This is not one of those unendurable conversion stories in which everyone is a fool—the author for taking so long to reach his “truth,” all others for rejecting it. Mr. Lewis liked all his “wrong” thoughts and admired the men who shared them. When in his thirty-first year he came to admit the objective existence of God, fell on his knees and prayed, he was “perhaps, that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England.”

LEWIS, a North of Ireland boy, a Belfast boy, was not a black Protestant. The family was Church of Ireland, rather “High” at that, and so of course there are those who will think that his Oxford conversion, with the spires and the Gothic, was a return to the womb. Mr. Lewis disagrees. While still a schoolboy, he welcomed disbelief with an immense feeling of liberation, not from belief but from flagrant hypocrisy. There was never any nostalgia; there could be no return. When he was compelled to believe in God it was for the first time.

What happened to him after all? He had a fantastic education. First he was shipped off to England, where he felt intensely North of Ireland and alien. At a boarding school on its last legs—it had an insane

headmaster and a dozen pupils—he was beaten, half starved, taught geometry and nothing else. Later he was sent to Wyvern, which is not the real name of a great English public school. Wyvern was supposed to turn him into a Normal Boy and it is not just the capital letters in Mr. Lewis's account that lend irony to Wyvern's aim. Coldly, he explains just what were the “bloods” who made up the school's leading class, the “punts” who were the school's pariahs, and the “tarts” who were precisely what their name implies. Games were compulsory since the bloods required an audience; “gal-lantry,” not in the military sense but as referring to the prominent role played by the tarts, was the main subject of conversation. Also there was fagging. “For a reason which all English readers will understand . . . I am humiliated and embarrassed at having to record that as time went on I came to dislike the fagging system.”

Happily the school failed to make Mr. Lewis into a Normal Boy. He says it made him an intellectual snob, and he piously hopes that in the years since he left it the school

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