

Letters to the Editor: *Cliché of the Mystery Writers*

Making Sense

SIR:—I wonder if there is a Guild of Detective Story Writers, which imposes as a condition of membership that each writer shall use a certain form of words at least once in a story; if missing, the story is to be banned and the guilty author suspended.

This sine qua non consists of the words: "It doesn't make sense."

I admit I have read a few stories in which this expression was not used, but I believe it is found in three out of four—or nearer nine out of ten. I realize that your space is limited, but I wish to quote enough examples to prove the high class of the authors, and the respectable period of time covered:

"The Nine Tailors," by Dorothy L. Sayers (1934):

p. 209—"but none of them seemed to make sense."

p. 282—"The thing makes no sense."

"Death on the Nile," by Agatha Christie (1938):

p. 176—"Was the murder committed to divert attention from the robbery? No, that does not make sense."

p. 177—"But she was shot while she slept." "So that too does not make sense."

p. 190—"But it does not make sense," he cried.

"Death from a Top Hat," by Clayton Rawson (1938):

p. 125—"It's the queerest damn setup I ever—it doesn't make any sense at all."

p. 171—"No, that doesn't make sense at all."

"Fast Company," by Marco Page (1938):

p. 7—"it doesn't make sense."

"The Gracie Allen Murder Case," by S. S. Van Dine (1938):

p. 97—"None of it makes sense, sir; and I don't like anything that doesn't make sense."

"Murder on Safari," by Elspeth Huxley (1938):

p. 125—"It doesn't make sense either way," Vachell said.

"Mystery Week-end," by Percival Wilde (1938):

p. 105—"and the whole thing didn't make sense."

"The Platinum Cat," by Miles Burton (1938):

p. 17—"I don't say anything about that blinking cat, for I don't see any sense in it."

"Then There Were Three," by Geoffrey Homes (1938):

p. 25—"it doesn't make sense," said the girl.

p. 152—"But that part doesn't make sense."

p. 260—"That doesn't make sense."

"Warrant for X," by Philip McDonald (1938):



"Are these recipes fresh?"

p. 247—"I thought of dates, but they didn't make sense."

"The Wall," by Mary Robert Rinehart (1938):

Saturday Evening Post, May 28, 1938, page 6, column 3—"Maybe it will make sense to you. It doesn't to me."

"The Case of the Substitute Face," by Erle Stanley Gardner (1938):

p. 80—"You know, Hungerford, this thing just doesn't make sense."

p. 134—"Wait a minute, Paul; that doesn't make sense."

"The Case of the Perjured Parrot," by Erle Stanley Gardner (1939):

p. 92—"You know, Miss Monteith, this thing just doesn't make sense."

"The Corpse with the Blistered Hand," by R. A. Walling (1939):

p. 75—"No one could make sense of that."

p. 225—"But—it doesn't make sense," Pye protested.

"He Wouldn't Stay Dead," by Frederick C. Davis (1939):

p. 154—"What—what do you mean?" "It doesn't make sense."

p. 216—"It doesn't make sense."

CHARLES F. McELROY.

Chicago, Ill.

Hetty Green

SIR:—I am writing a biography of Hetty Green and her son, Col. E. H. R. Green, in collaboration with Walter H. Marshall, long private secretary to both.

Among a mass of pertinent material I find the repeatedly published state-

ment that Sigmund Lubin of Philadelphia made some of his early movie thrillers on Hetty Green's railroad, the Texas Midland. Extensive research, in Texas, New York, and elsewhere, has failed to verify this. If any of your readers can throw light on that problem we would appreciate it.

JOHN NICHOLAS BEFFEL

Adrian, Mich.

Howells Material

SIR:—I have in progress a biographical study of William Dean Howells. If persons who possess material relating to Howells's life will send it to me, I will copy it and return it promptly, with promise of future acknowledgment.

JOE HORRELL,

Department of English.

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The Florida Flea

SIR:—Your name is given with the hope that you can locate for me a poem—"The Florida Flea." Humorous. The last few lines read:—

*"Were I an Indian
Or a Chimpanzee,
What a feast I'd have
On the Florida Flea."*

It was given in a program by some Salem, Ore. people some ten years ago, so it is nothing recent or current.

LOWELL MASON KNAPP.

Academy Press,
Lodi, Cal.

THE GALLUP POLL OF AUTHORS

In collaboration with the American Institute of Public Opinion, *The Saturday Review* recently sent selected current questions from the Gallup poll to a list of approximately four hundred American writers. Over two hundred returned the questionnaire, many of them giving permission to use their names in the tabulation of the results. *The Saturday Review* made this survey in the belief that writers are in the forefront of those who influence public opinion, and that the record of their views on leading issues is valuable. The results of the authors' questionnaire are printed below, and in parallel columns are recorded the results of national surveys on the same questions conducted by the American Institute of Public Opinion. All the results, both of the national surveys and of the special authors' poll, were tabulated by the Institute.

QUESTION	NATIONAL RESULTS BASED ON AIPO SURVEYS		RESULTS OF AUTHORS' POLL	
	<i>*Go In</i>	<i>Stay Out</i>	<i>*Go In</i>	<i>Stay Out</i>
Do you think the United States will go into the war in Europe or do you think we will stay out of the war? (AIPO Survey published October 25.)	46%	54%	31%	69%
	* (No opinion 13%)		* (No opinion 24%)	
Do you think the United States should declare war on Germany and send our army and navy abroad to fight? (AIPO Survey published December 8.)	<i>Yes</i> 3.5%	<i>No</i> 96.5%	<i>Yes</i> 6%	<i>No</i> 94%
	(No opinion 4%)		(No opinion 10%)	
What party would you like to see win the presidential election next year? (AIPO Survey published November 19.)	<i>Want Dems. to win</i> 54%	<i>Want Reps. to win</i> 46%	<i>Want Dems. to win</i> 70%	<i>Want Reps. to win</i> 30%
	(No opinion 19%)		(No opinion 22%)	
In general, do you approve or disapprove today of Roosevelt as President? (AIPO Survey published November 22.)	<i>App.</i> 63%	<i>Disapp.</i> 37%	<i>App.</i> 69%	<i>Disapp.</i> 31%
	(No opinion 10%)		(No opinion 7%)	
If President Roosevelt runs for a third term will you vote for him? (AIPO Survey published October 1.)	<i>Yes</i> 43%	<i>No</i> 57%	<i>Yes</i> 53%	<i>No</i> 47%
	(No opinion 9%)		(No opinion 13%)	
Do you think Congress should provide money to continue the Dies Committee another year? (AIPO Survey published December 15.)	<i>Yes</i> 75%	<i>No</i> 25%	<i>Yes</i> 43%	<i>No</i> 57%
	(No opinion 28%)		(No opinion 5%)	
Do you think the Wagner Labor Act should be revised, repealed or left unchanged?	Not yet published.		<i>Rev.</i> 57%	<i>Rep.</i> 9%
			<i>Left Unch.</i> 34%	
			(No opinion 16%)	
Which country or countries do you consider responsible for causing the present war? (AIPO Survey published September 8.)	Germany82% England and France.. 3 Poland 1 Versailles Treaty 3 All Others 5 No Answer 6 100%		Germany54% England and France.. 3 Versailles Treaty 5 Both Sides19 All Countries 8 All Others 8 No Answer 3 100%	

*Answers tabulated as percentage of those replies which express opinions. Those expressing no opinions tabulated as percentage of total replying to questionnaire.

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