

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## "Children of Their Time"

SIR: Having seen more than a score of my novels and other books published, I have long ago ceased to get excited about bad reviews. I even enjoy, to a certain degree, the whims of reviewers who are out to "kill" a book of mine *cum ira et studio*, provided that they display some competence and knowledge.

Mr. Lehrman, into whose hands my novel "Children of Their Time" has fallen [SRL Sept. 25], unfortunately possesses neither of the above mentioned qualities. Still, I would not have written this letter, had I not seen in your last issue Dr. Mathiessen's complaint about Mr. Lehrman's review of his book "From the Heart of Europe" [Oct. 16]. That complaint and Mr. Lehrman's reply, together with a reading of the book and review concerned, convinced me that Mr. Lehrman's inaccuracy and unscrupulousness are methodical and should, therefore, be nailed down.

Every conscientious critic who wants to review a novel clearly marked as sequel of a previous one would undoubtedly read that one too. Mr. Lehrman has not done so, and this accounts for some of his grotesque misstatements about my characters, their social background and so on. And in writing about the volume he seems to have read, he distorts the most simple literary facts, i. e., when he informs the reader that my characters are doing almost nothing but mailing "interminable letters to one another." Now there are exactly six modestly sized letters in the whole book, taking up about twenty of more than 250 pages. I could go on quoting similar examples but I shall limit myself to only one more in order to show that Mr. Lehrman's handling of historical facts is on the same level as his mistreatment of literary facts. In writing about the alleged *leit motiv* of my novel, he confounds the Russian February revolution with that of November, to which latter he seems to be so allergic that he forgets the reviewer's primary function (namely to report what an author actually wrote, displeased as he might be by it) and runs amok instead.

F. C. WEISKOPF.

New York, N. Y.

## Materialism vs. Romance

SIR: Denis de Rougemont has described the failure of modern marriage brilliantly [SRL Nov. 13]. The merely literary tradition he assigns as its cause, however, seems far too polite and superficial an explanation. A man's attitude toward love is not, after all, purely the result of what he has been taught about love; it is part and parcel of his basic attitude toward the whole of life. If we see in our marriages only a source of thrills-without-responsibility, it is not Tristan's fault nor even the fault of movies and magazines, which, though they aggravate our disease, are essentially only its symptoms. It is the fault of a materialist philosophy

## Christmas Story

Last night, John Elzey, watchman at the Grand Eagle Department Store, while making his rounds of the bargain basement, found the body of a man lying under a counter. He was thin to the point of emaciation, apparently in his middle thirties, and was shabbily dressed. His pockets were empty and there were no marks of identification upon his person. Store officials believe that he was trampled in the Christmas rush and crawled under the counter for shelter. But they are unable to account for what appear to be nail wounds in his hands. The police are investigating.

which sees nothing else in the universe.

So the materialist—and, whether nominally Christian or not, a large majority of Americans are materialists—must translate the pursuit of happiness into the pursuit of pleasure.

More gadgets, more liquor, more women, more thrills. In the end, of course, he not only fails to find happiness but destroys even his capacity for pleasure—which is why we are a country of sick minds, broken homes, and dyspeptic stomachs.

JOY DAVIDMAN.

Staatsburg, N. Y.

SIR: Denis de Rougemont believes that marriage based on romance couldn't possibly last. We, the people of the Western Hemisphere, do not agree with him. We believe that romance comes first. If a young couple have romance and a true love for each other they can in many and most cases make a success of their marriage. With love for each other little difficulties can be overlooked such as lack of money, not the best place in town to live, etc. With true love the material things in life are not the most important.

Marriage for social standing, age, outlook of future, religion, as advocated by Mr. De Rougemont may work in Europe but in the United States it is definitely looked down upon. It is a selfish person, one who thinks only of his or her desires and wants, that marries for one of the above reasons.

First and foremost must come love and romance. If a couple have romance chances are ten to one that they will make a go of their marriage. It is the interference of families, and unpredicted things, which cause divorces and unsuccessful marriage.

EMILY CAMPBELL.

Freshman, Christian College  
Columbia, Mo.



THROUGH HISTORY WITH J. WESLEY SMITH

"I should be most honored to be your official taster, O great one, but it so happens that fish doesn't agree with me."

# Seeing Things

HARRISON REX

"MAY the King come in?," asks a servant at one of the many moments that Henry VIII appears in "Anne of the Thousand Days."\* Enter, of course, he does. Not because he has a sovereign's rights or because Henry in the flesh was a monarch beyond stopping; but because, in Maxwell Anderson's most recent excursion into history, Rex Harrison takes Tudor possession of the stage.

Every actor playing Henry VIII is Holbein-haunted. Few canvases have so dictated the make-up, costume, and stance of performers as those made by the younger Hans when, as Henry's "servant" with £30 a year for wages, he was commanded "to take" the "physiognomy" of his royal patron. Did Sir Joshua, when painting "The Tragic Muse," print his name at the edge of Mrs. Siddons's skirt because of his gallant resolve to go down to posterity on the hem of her garment? Well, Henry VIII has come down to us on the tip of Holbein's crayons and brushes. The King's skirmishes with Rome are not unremembered, nor are the number and fate of his wives forgotten. But the Henry we see when his name is mentioned, and the Henry we expect to see on stage and screen, is the Henry Holbein saw and drew.

The fringe of feathers on the rakish hat which is all upturned rim. The balancing fringe of downturned whiskers, hiding the jowls and veiling the sizable chin at the bottom of that square-rigged head. The thin eyebrows, almost plucked or penciled, arching upward. The decisive puffs above those cruel, imperious, and naked eyes. That long, thin, arrogant nose, which even Hazlitt would have had to salute as a proper "rudder" for such a face. The strongly marked, passionate indentation above those tightly pursed, cynical lips, and the mandarin-like mustaches which frame them. The mingled power, amusement, and haughtiness of that gross, wilful

face. The great broad shoulders, made the broader because of the paths of ermine edging the cape. The magnificently bejeweled sleeves. The doublet, also jewel-studded, stretched across that solid body. The fleshy, ringed fingers; the right arm akimbo, the left hand resting on a sword. The long, muscular legs. And the slipped feet, widely spread, with the toes turned out for balance. All these Holbein details create for us the visual image of Henry VIII which we expect every actor to recreate.

Mr. Harrison does not disappoint us. His Henry is younger by some fifteen years than the monarch Holbein immortalized. He is more dapper, less portly. Even so, he is Holbein's Henry made flesh. But—and this is the notable merit of his notable performance—he does more than look and dress and stand like Holbein's king. Most actors who have mastered their make-up boxes can, with a costumer's aid, suggest that Henry. To capture his spirit as Holbein caught it and as history has recorded it is, however, another matter. At this Mr. Harrison succeeds more completely than any player who on a stage or before a camera has undertaken to impersonate the king within our time.

Until Mr. Harrison turned Tudor, the most widely remembered contemporary performance of Henry was

Charles Laughton's. Although acted with skill, Mr. Laughton's Henry was deliberately a coarse fellow. He was a leering, lecherous, greasy man. He was proud, fat, bumptious, and evil. In Falstaff's fashion he was a "great tub of guts." In his lack of amiability, however, he more closely resembled Captain Bligh than Falstaff. If he dressed like a Holbein portrait, he behaved like a Hogarth caricature. His table manners were those of a hog. He had authority, but it was not a king's. The crown seemed as foreign to him as a napkin or a fingerbowl.

It is a relief to turn from such a gross interpretation to Mr. Harrison's. His king has all the faults with which history cursed Henry and he cursed history. As a monarch able to mistake his earthly lust for his divine right, he is cruel, remorseless, and headstrong. He is selfish too, and gruff and commanding. He is to the palace born. The hot blood in his veins is royal. Haughty though he is, his eyes are lighted by wit. Formidable when he is crossed, he is charming when having his way.

Mr. Harrison manages to suggest weight without being fat himself or resorting to undue padding. He also succeeds in suggesting the physical changes which overtake Henry in the ten years' span of Mr. Anderson's drama. He does this in such subtle ways as stance or gesture. But, most of all, he manages to capture the fatal vitality of the sovereign he is playing.

Mr. Harrison's mind is as much a part of his performance as his appearance. If the verse he reads were Shakespeare's, he could not take greater pains to preserve the music of what he has to say. He speaks with wonderful clarity, creating the illusion of significance in line after line by Mr. Anderson in which, unfortunately, the significance like the music is often no more than an illusion.

Joyce Redman brings the same resonance and intelligence to her reading of the fiery Anne, who, in Thomas Wyatt's phrase, was "wylde for to hold." Her redhead is a termagant with a will to match Henry's own. She humanizes Anne, giving her both dignity and fire, even if she is somewhat monotonous, a little shrill, and if at moments she acts Anne with that shadowy indirectness with which the Player Queen in "Hamlet" is always acted.

Mr. Anderson has many reasons for being grateful to Miss Redman and to Mr. Harrison. Chief among these is the simple fact that the two of them are blessed with voices capable of making rhythmic prose, however meager in its profundity or melody,



—John Swope.

Joyce Redman and Rex Harrison—"blessed with voices capable of making rhythmic prose, however meager, sound like poetry."

\*ANNE OF THE THOUSAND DAYS, by Maxwell Anderson. Directed by H. C. Potter. Setting and lighting by Jo Mielzner. Costumes by Motley. Music by Lehman Engel. Presented by the Playwrights' Company and Leland Hayward. With a cast including Rex Harrison, Joyce Redman, Percy Waram, John Williams, Viola Keats, Charles Francis, Robert Duke, Louise Platt, Margaret Garland, Monica Lang, Russell Gaige, Wendell K. Phillips, Harry Irvine, George Collier, etc. At the Shubert. Opened December 8, 1948.