

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Sex, Symbolism & Psychology

SIR: I consider that in fairness to your readers, who will never condescend to look into my little book "Sex Symbolism, and Psychology in Literature" [SRL Jan. 1] after reading Mr. Harry Levin's sadistic review, I should venture a reply.

I trust Mr. Levin's fear—that my book "will prove misleading if, in belaboring various straw men, it spreads the idea its author is a pioneer"—need not trouble any reader who gets beyond page four, where I admitted (too optimistically it seems): "Nor is this a pioneer study in the adaptation of Freudian theory to the interpretation of literature."

For all his study of James Joyce, Mr. Levin is not precisely Irish in wielding a critical shilalah: "... it goes about far enough to span the distance between the hostile layman and the elementary student." But he knows how little David picks off a Philistine with a slingshot: "In an area where speculation has flown perhaps too high, Mr. Basler is a sturdy pedestrian." Is this Icarus speaking?

Whether Mr. Levin flays with Neanderthal hunting knife or stings with Lilliputian blowpipe, I should only ask that he consider his victim—a little book admittedly designed for nine o'clock scholars, who, after a generation of Freudian intelligentsia and coterie upon coterie of critical archangels hymning "introductions," have still found Freudian theory to have no application to literary criticism.

Is it too much to expect that a "chairman of the department of comparative literature at Harvard University" should stoop to consider honestly the stated intent of a book when he reviews it?

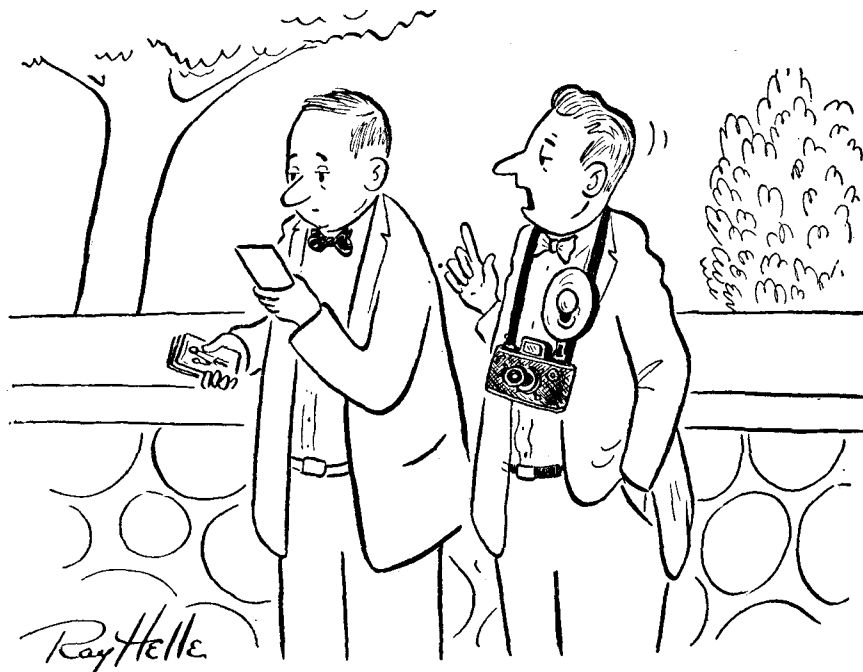
ROY P. BASLER.

Springfield, Ill.

SIR: I am sorry that Mr. Basler considers my review "sadistic," but I fear that this is only another instance of the looseness with which he employs psychological—not to say ethical—terms. By personal allusions and irrelevant metaphors, he obscures the serious question I tried to raise: whether a method which sticks so close to the surface, and operates within so limited an area, can really tell us anything new.

It is true that he does not claim to be a pioneer in the sentence quoted from page four; it is equally true *passim* that his book gives itself the airs of a pioneering effort. On page five, after outlining his approach a little further, he states: "That this is heresy I am fully aware. . . ." Similar statements, emphasizing the novelty of his own views and the obtuseness of previous critics, occur on pages 9, 11, 73, 143, and 207.

Beyond describing "Sex, Symbolism, and Psychology in Literature," and suggesting its relationship to what has been or could be done in its field, my sincere endeavor was to indicate such merit as I found in it. That I could not find enough to satisfy Mr. Basler is regrettable but scarcely decisive. I very much hope that readers of this correspondence will look into his book, and



"I used No. 7 super double X film—shot it at 1/100 of a second with a 5.6 opening. I think he's my wife's cousin. I forget his name."

decide for themselves between the modesty of his claims and the honesty of my criticisms.

HARRY LEVIN.

Cambridge, Mass.

... Where Credit Is Due

SIR: I don't like to be a scold, but I must protest the omission of the name of the artist from your reproduction of an illustration from Langston Hughes's book of poetry "One-Way Ticket" [SRL Jan. 22].

Six illustrations were done for this book by the young American painter Jacob Lawrence, whose work has appeared extensively in national magazines, and whose paintings are in the collections of the Metropolitan, the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum, and the Phillips Memorial Gallery in Washington. A representative group of his paintings may be seen at the Downtown Gallery in New York.

WILLIAM COLE.

New York, N. Y.

EDITOR'S NOTE: For makeup reasons it has never been SRL style to name the artist when the illustrations were credited to the book in which they appear. We are, however, happy to give Mr. Lawrence full honors for his excellent art work in "One-Way Ticket."

With Words & Music

SIR: I read with great interest Arnold Schoenberg's letter regarding Thomas Mann's use in his novel "Doctor Faustus" of facts from Schoenberg's life [SRL Jan. 1]. I also read with equal interest Schoenberg's recent let-

ter to Olin Downes, music critic of *The New York Times*, regarding Mr. Downes's sneering comment on Mahler's Seventh Symphony.

It seems to me that Schoenberg and other important composers are eloquent and practised masters of the art of *saying things with music*—whereas Thomas Mann and Olin Downes, in their respective fields, (and other critics and writers) are eloquent and practised masters of the art of *saying things with words*. Therefore when Schoenberg stands up in public and expresses his deep and sincere feelings regarding the music of Gustav Mahler, and regarding the method of composing with twelve tones which he himself originated, it becomes a simple matter for Mr. Downes and Mr. Mann to make public answer which seems to "win the argument." But we are not all convinced merely by verbal eloquence.

In the long run, the reputation and stature of Mahler and Schoenberg will rest securely on their music, and not on the word of the professional critic or novelist who demolishes their "letters to the editor" or endeavors to dismiss their art with expertly chosen words.

JOHN C. W. BIRD.

Asbury Park, N. J.

Two "Dynamite Johnnies"?

SIR: In reading through a recently published book, "God's Loaded Dice," written by Henry F. Woods in collaboration with Edward E. P. Morgan, a reference in it has greatly mystified me. The Woods-Morgan book is an account of Morgan's varied adventures during thirty-three years as mining prospector, musher, and seaman in

Alaska. In the course of the entertaining narrative mention is made of one "Dynamite Johnny" O'Brien, a famous skipper in Alaskan waters, and this is the cause of my mystification.

Back in my years as a member of the staff of the old *New York Evening World*, during which I spent a considerable period as Ship News reporter, I knew "Dynamite Johnny" O'Brien well, and to my knowledge he had never navigated Pacific waters and, as I relate in my book "Hell's Bells!" now in manuscript for publication, his cognomen was gained because of his gun-running operations for Cuban revolutionists.

Now the question in my mind is: "Were there two 'Dynamiting Johnny' O'Briens, and if so which was the original?"

ROSS DUFF WHYTOCK.

Glendale, Calif.

"Hobson's Choice"

SIR: This is to add a loud "Me too!" to Laura Z. Hobson's plea [SRL Jan. 22] that the DC's should not be printed on the shiny inside back cover.

JOSEPH B. MACLEAN.

Yarmouthport, Mass.

SIR: Not being one of those gifted persons who can sit on an island in the South Pacific and work a puzzle in thirty minutes flat without the aid of a dictionary or other reference book, I do make mistakes and have to erase. . . . When I have completed the puzzle it is a mess. . . . I add my plea to that of Laura Z. Hobson. . . .

LOUIS CARTLIDGE.

Redlands, Calif. .

SIR: . . . Can you come to our help?

ANNE M. PIERCE.

Bluefield, W. Va.

SIR: Laura Z. Hobson's plea finds a supporter who agrees with all her forceful arguments and has an even weightier objection: Since the SRL is now mailed sans wrapper it sometimes arrives sans cover. SRL without its Double-Croctic is maimed indeed.

CATHERINE CAMPBELL.

Ann Arbor, Mich.

SIR: I heartily second the suggestion. . . .

MARIAN N. McAVOY.

New York, N. Y.

SIR: Amen!

H. L. C. BUCHNER.

Baltimore, Md.

SIR: Unlikely as the adoption of Laura Z. Hobson's admirable suggestion appears, perhaps my own solution may help. A fountain pen with not too fine a point has been my habit for years. . . . Granted, ink will not exactly erase. . . . but "by and large" the results are good.

HAROLD F. SMITH.

Kalispell, Mont.

SIR: . . . One hearty seconding of the motion—give us squashy pulp!

MARY BARBARA KANE.

New York, N. Y.

SIR: I have always felt that nothing could make me enjoy Double Crostics more. . . . However, there is one thing. . . .

HARRIET E. GREENHUT.

Jackson Heights, N. Y.

SIR: . . . I heartily concur. . . . Perhaps most SRL readers are so mentally alert that they can start boldly with a fountain pen. I must admit that the eraser is quite as important as the pencil. . . .

NORRIS WEST.

Philadelphia, Pa.

SIR: Please chalk me up on the side of Laura Z. Hobson. . . .

MABEL C. DAGGETT.

Brooklyn, N. Y.

SIR: . . . May I offer a suggestion? . . . By placing the DC over a hard surface and using an ordinary lead pencil eraser a slightly dampened finger tip, the writing will disappear and the surface be immediately ready to be used again.

JESSIE P. WEDLAKE.

Devon, Conn.

SIR: I join in howling violently for putting the DC's on soft paper.

MRS. J. D. HUNTER.

Clearwater, Fla.

SIR: I wish to join Laura Z. Hobson in her "howl." . . . My copy of the SRL arrives in the mail so bedraggled that the front and last pages are torn and in the last few weeks twice missing—and I have had to go without both the DC and TRADE WINDS and,



I ask you, what is the SRL without those?

HERBERT F. PRESTON.

New Ipswich, N. H.

SIR: Laura Z. Hobson's letter so exactly expresses my feeling that I thought I had written it myself until I saw her signature.

LILLIAN A. McALLISTER.

Westminster, Mass.

SIR: I submit my

Gentlewoman's Agreement

She again takes up the cudgel,
Aims another telling blow;
She wields her magic pencil
And decries our common woe.

We have suffered long in silence,
Now we rally to her voice;
There swells forth a mighty chorus—
"Give ye heed to Hobson's choice."

DORCAS STANTON WRIGHT.

Williamsville, N. Y.

SIR: May I join Miss Hobson in her plea. . . .

W. REEDER.

New York, N. Y.

SIR: I wish to add my voice. . . .

FRANKLIN DAY.

New York, N. Y.

SIR: Not interested in "Hobson's Choice." . . . Slick stuff of the inside cover takes ink readily.

L. F.

SIR: I can only hope that the howls reach a deafening pitch and volume. . . . Cheers for Laura Z. Hobson—howls for you.

MARY E. LINDSAY.

Richboro, Pa.

SIR: . . . If there is any technical reason why these puzzles cannot be printed on another page which will take the imprint of a lead pencil why don't you say so? . . .

G. W. COTTIS.

St. Cloud, Fla.

SIR: I wish to cast my ballot with Laura Z. Hobson. . . . [The shiny paper has] given me eye trouble, too.

ESTHER POSKANZER.

San Francisco, Calif.

SIR: . . . Do take pity on the DC fans!

A. S. H.

Ambler, Pa.

SIR: I subscribe 100 per cent, possibly more. . . .

MARCIA DALPHIN.

Rye, N. Y.

SIR: . . . I, too, have suffered long and silently.

NINA MORGAN BUCKINGHAM.

Belmont, Mass.

FEBRUARY 12, 1949

How to Write for Children

ALICE DALGLIESH

IN a German town, a century and a half ago, the Brothers Grimm had finished the first volume of one of the "best sellers" of all time, their collection of folk tales. "Kinder-und-Haus Maerchen" they called it, explaining that they had used the phrase "House Stories" because "these stories are an inheritance in the house."

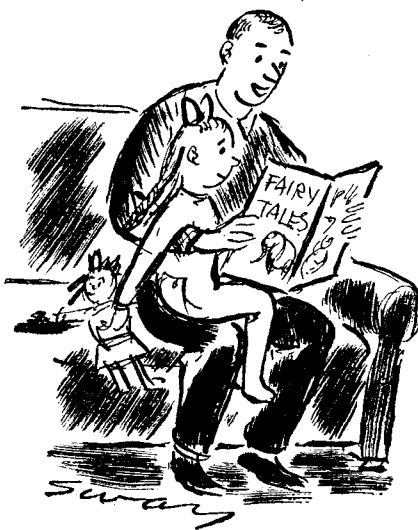
An inheritance in the house! What more could any author wish for his books? Few attain it even in the long-lived field of children's stories—Hans Christian Andersen, Kenneth Grahame, Lewis Carroll, A. A. Milne—a handful of names. Most of us can hope only to have our books live for a decade or a little longer. I must confess that nothing has delighted me more than having the mother of a five-year-old say to me: "I grew up on your Sandy Cove stories and I can hardly wait to read them to Elaine." At least in twenty-five years of writing I have become a literary grandmother!

What makes a book for children live, even in this modest way? To begin with, the author must have a real desire to write, a story to tell. I can truthfully say that most of my books were written because I simply *had* to write them. When a plot or a set of characters comes into your mind, nagging, insisting, when you think of it as you wake in the night and can scarcely wait to start writing, then you may have a book. Enjoyment is essential to good writing, but so is hard work. There is no way of avoiding this hard work, no short cut, no detour.

The writing of children's books is not a casual or hit-or-miss affair: it is a serious and honorable profession to be approached and held to with respect. A few months ago, I saw in a writer's handbook the misleading statement: "Anyone who can write English can write a children's book." Judging by the manuscripts I see as an editor, far too many people think this is true. In one way it is; anyone can *write* a children's book, but writing is one thing and getting it published is another; having it sell more than a few copies during the first year is another thing. There is a difference between hack work, and a (far too much) true craftsman's work. A published

novelist may not be successful when writing for younger readers. Children's books have a long, profitable, rewarding life *if children like them*. This is a *must*, for the books owe their continued existence to library replacements and they must be worn out by eager, seeking hands. It pleases me when I see my books on library shelves looking worn and ready to fall apart.

What background should one have to become a successful writer of children's books? To have had a full and rich childhood, its patterns and its



colors, its joys and its sorrows, etched indelibly on the mind, to be able to interpret it with understanding, is the best of preparations for writing. Nostalgic remembrance, however, does not take the place of a study of present-day children and their ways. My own preparation for writing was an exotic and colorful childhood, much reading, and a father who read aloud, not once in a while, but every day. It also includes much experience with children and with people of all ages. I am sure I could not have written a teen-age book had I not been foster-mother to a teen-age cousin during the war. I learned much from Elizabeth!

An important preparation for the writer is knowing something about children's interests at various ages. This does not mean "writing down." There are those who say there is no such thing as "writing for children"; it is the same as writing for adults. This is not strictly true. Certain techniques may be the same, quality

should be, but the story itself cannot fail to be conditioned by the age and emotional maturity of its prospective reader. Of course, one does not self-consciously write "to an age." But there are age differences and there is a definite progression, beginning with the simple (but not easy to write) form of the picture book, where one is a miser of words and each word must count, must fit into the pattern as a fragment of mosaic fits into the whole. There one selects consciously and sets in place bright fragments that will please the small child who is in a period of sensory delight and experimentation. With very little children rhythm is important. They love the lilt of words, the repetition of a phrase. They demand a direct approach and a beginning must be as direct as in an old folk tale that sets its scene in the first sentence: "Once upon a time there was—"

Two to four is the age of the "here and now," when the everyday things of the world are touched with magic and with wonder. I have not written stories for these first listeners; it is a specialized field of which I stand in awe. I leave it to Lucy Sprague Mitchell, to Lois Lenski, to Marjorie Flack, to Margaret Wise Brown, who know how to pattern (and sometimes over-pattern) their stories so that a very little child will ask for them to be read a hundred times. Even these simple stories have their above-average phrases, for "writing simply" does not mean writing baby-talk or the stilted phrases of a primer. In Mrs. Mitchell's "The Tickly Spider" the spider lives "deep in the grass about three buttercups away" from the little boy lying in the grass on his stomach. Margaret Wise Brown excels in the use of *sound* so important to this age. Her "Noisy" books are two- and three-year-old classics. For the above-average three-year-old there are more mind-stretching possibilities, but he will return time and again to the very simply told story.

THE four-to-seven group retains the love for rhythmic phrases, words still are magic balls to be juggled, pattern is a joy, though not an essential. How often, as I have told a folk tale, I have watched children carried along on the recurring waves of it, drifting with the sheer delight of repetitive sound! And those of us who attempt to write for this age, must realize that we compete with the perfect form of the folk tale. A story for this age group should be planned for story-telling; the author should always read it aloud. If it is carefully wrought it will be read countless

(Continued on page 45)

The Saturday Review