

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## Market for Books

SIR: As an interested neutral, neither bookseller nor publisher, I find Harry Scherman's defense of the book clubs [SRL Dec. 8] full of flaws.

His two principal theses: one, that there is a vast untapped group of "intending" book readers who never buy, and two, that there are far too few "establishments predominantly occupied in distributing books," seem to me to be mutually contradictory. I assume that the law of supply and demand operates for books as for everything else; if the demand were present there would be more than enough distributors eager to supply it. Far more people, I am convinced, dream of running a little book store than of, say, a meat market.

I am an "intending" driver of a Cadillac. The reason my intention so far remains unfulfilled is, I think, the same reason that keeps Mr. Scherman's intending readers from buying books: the price is too high. I know it's the reason that keeps me from buying more books than I now do.

No, at three to six dollars per book, the demand is small, and diminishing to the extent that prices are rising; and the cream of that demand is being skimmed off by the clubs with their discounts, high pressure, and saturation advertising. There is, I'm sure, a huge potential market for books, not "intending" but potential. Offer this potential market more and better new books in cheap editions priced under a dollar, and you might discover a new, solid, cashable demand—not the nebulous one dreamed up by Mr. Scherman—and don't worry about there not being enough booksellers to meet it.

JAMES REACH.

New York, N. Y.

SIR: N.C.'s exposition of the plights of the book business ["How to Kill a Book," SRL Nov. 24] was brought to my attention by a magazine editor, a man with broad literary interests, who was smart enough to have left book publishing some years ago. Congratulations; and may I join the chorus?

As for the industry's basic sickness, though you do not plop your fingers right down, the great difficulty just beneath your digit is the underlying assumption on the part of publishers that an orderly retail trade not only is not essential to them, but may not even be particularly desirable. Once this is appreciated the components of the publishing picture fall into place. I have observed publishing practices based on this assumption for twenty-five years.

If one desires a literary exercise, the assumption of the retailer's unimportance may be analyzed at some length. Does it express an unconscious instinct, or does it denote a basic policy? If the former is true (and it surely is in part), may we please throw some elementary economics in the balance? To whatever extent the latter is true (and it apparently is in part)



"We're on our way to Miami. Hubert wants to write a poignant novel of the deep South."

our thinking and writing about the book industry must be modified.

NORMAN A. HALL.

Newton Centre, Mass.

## Bernard Shaw Correspondence

SIR: With the authority of the Public Trustee as Administrator of the Estate of Bernard Shaw, and as the publishers of Shaw's works in the United States, we are planning to publish some time during the next four or five years a definitive selection of the Letters of Bernard Shaw.

Constable and Company, Mr. Shaw's publishers in London, will be cooperating with us and will issue this selection in one or more volumes in their Standard Edition of Shaw.

Since Mr. Shaw was an exceedingly prolific correspondent, our editorial department is commencing immediately to assemble information and is anxious to hear from librarians, private collectors, booksellers, dealers, and owners about any letters they may know of. Arrangements will subsequently be made for photostating or copying, and appropriate credit will be given in each instance to the holder of the original letter.

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## Errata

SIR: In Cleveland Rodgers's review of "Incredible New York" [SRL Dec. 8] he includes among the "crusaders

and sin hunters" of the Nineties, "Dr. Pankhurst." This, of course, may be a typographical error but, curiously enough, the name Pankhurst rightfully belongs to a different kind of crusader of the period, Mrs. Pankhurst, a militant English battler for "women's rights." Dr. Charles Parkhurst, to whom Mr. Rodgers undoubtedly refers, was a New York clergyman who gained considerable fame by his attacks on New York's organized vice.

Incidentally, the reproduction of the jacket of the book is titled, "Opening of Brooklyn Bridge, 1863." If this is correct, my supposed age will need some revision, since I crossed the structure with my father the day after its opening in 1883.

HARRY S. TILLOTSON.

Upper Darby, Pa.

## Real Compliment

SIR: Writing Letters to Editors is not in my code. Renewal of subscription I believe to be the most patent endorsement and the fairest vehicle for expressing an agreement to disagree. However, *The Saturday Review* is becoming better and better each year and I just have to express appreciation for the increasing frequency of the occasions when you stimulate me by an intelligent disagreement or inspire with applause and confirmation. . . . Coming from an "unreconstructed" Maine Republican, you'll agree that a real compliment is intended!

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# Seeing Things

## A QUEEN'S STORY

THE suggestion was Roger Furse's. Advanced as a joke, it has proved to be an inspiration. Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh were anxious to find a play which they could present in London in time for the Festival of Britain. But they were both tired after a term in Hollywood and their cupboard of ideas was bare. "What-about 'Caesar and Cleopatra'?"\* someone asked. Remembering the indifferent film version in which she had appeared, Miss Leigh was against it. No one can blame her. It was then that Roger Furse, the designer, spoke up. "Let's do the two Cleopatras," he said smilingly, "the Shaw and the Shakespeare. We could save money with a single billing." Although the Oliviers dismissed the notion as impractical and thought Mr. Furse was being funny, fortunately for all of us, as the days passed and they were still without plans, they came to take him seriously with results that have made stage history.

Only Plutarch, with his mastery of

antithesis, could do justice to the dissimilarities separating "Caesar and Cleopatra" from "Antony and Cleopatra." The two dramas are as unlike as Shaw and Shakespeare. The one is a comedy, the work of a rationalist; the other, a tragedy, the outpouring of an emotionalist. The first recognizes no passion except moral passion; the second has no morals in it and is all passion. The modern play is written in prose as eloquent as only Shaw could make it; the Elizabethan in poetry as glorious as Shakespeare alone, and at his most magnificent, could produce it.

"Caesar and Cleopatra" is concerned with the wise use of greatness and power, "Antony and Cleopatra" with their wanton squandering and abuse. The subject of the one is wisdom; of the other, lust. Julius Caesar is a conqueror in control of himself no less than of kingdoms; Mark Antony, a conqueror so conquered by his desires that he has kissed kingdoms away. Shaw, the Puritan, feeling only revulsion at sexual infatuation when treated as a tragic theme, chose to present his Cleopatra as a young girl, unsure of herself, frightened at first, and sorely in need of the lessons in how to rule given her by the mighty Julius. Shakespeare, burningly aware of the pains and ecstasies, the ardors and costs of sexual infatuation, elected to present

his Cleopatra as a mature woman, capricious and wayward and flaming with passion. Where the one Cleopatra is a kitten growing up to be a queen, the other is a tigress so much the slave of her emotions that she has almost forgotten her duties as a queen. The result of Shaw's approach is a play witty, wise, and absorbing; the result of Shakespeare's is a drama soaring, sublime in its beauties, and turbulent in its excitements.

Drastic as are the differences which separate them, "Caesar and Cleopatra" and "Antony and Cleopatra" do complement each other, and to a surprising degree. The differences do not keep them from fitting together as neatly as if they were instalments in a serial. No wonder the title by which they are known on Broadway is "Two on the Nile." Since for the first time they can be seen on successive nights as given by the same company, wise theatre-goers will see them both and in their proper sequence. Furthermore, judgment should be withheld until both have been seen. Then, and then only, can the unexpected unity of the two plays be realized, the strategy of the performances understood, and the magnitude of the whole brave, dazzling undertaking appreciated.

The links uniting the plays do not stop with the obvious ones. There is more to the connection between them than the fact that they deal with earlier and later incidents in Cleopatra's life and hence have the continuity of episodes in a biography. Both are as involved with the sweep of Rome's imperial power on its highest levels as they are with individuals greatly placed. An unmistakable bridge is supplied, too, by Shaw. His Cleopatra has already met Mark Antony and is

\*CAESAR AND CLEOPATRA, by Bernard Shaw, and ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA, by William Shakespeare, acted on alternate nights. Directed by Michael Benthall. Settings by Roger Furse. Costumes by Audrey Crudas. Music by Herbert Menges. Presented by Gilbert Miller by arrangement with Laurence Olivier Productions, Ltd. With a cast including Laurence Olivier, Vivien Leigh, Robert Helpmann, Wilfrid Hyde White, Harry Andrews, Niall MacGinnis, Pat Nye, Harold Kasket, Dan Cunningham, etc. At the Ziegfeld Theatre, New York City. Opened December 19, 1951.



—Angus McBean.

The Oliviers in "Caesar and Cleopatra" (left) and "Antony and Cleopatra"—"fine performances in stirring productions."