

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Masquerade Goes On

▶ LIKE THE HONEST clear-thinking child in "The Emperor's New Clothes," Mr. Burman has courageously pointed out the essential nakedness of two literary monarchs of "The Cult of Unintelligibility" who have assuredly caused many an ardent reader to doubt his sanity [SR Nov. 1]. But Mr. Burman does not sufficiently warn us of the dangers of this cult. It still exists and flourishes in most of our better institutions of higher learning, where its disciples masquerade as *modern* and *progressive*; it passes for great art when cloaked in the trappings of theatre. Its effete winds have wafted the seeds of decadence, sterility, and lunacy across the groves of academe and the studios of garrets where the Muses are wont to cocktail.

The hope, then, lies in those like Mr. Burman who can distinguish between incomprehensibility and abstraction, between stream of consciousness and gibberish, between the ignorance of nonsense and the high purpose of poetry. Let them then be heard while their voices are still lusty.

EVA WOLAS.

New York, N. Y.

Rose Is Rose

▶ BEERS AND CHEERS Ben Lucien Burman is right right so right.

ALBERT LEE.

Brooklyn, N. Y.

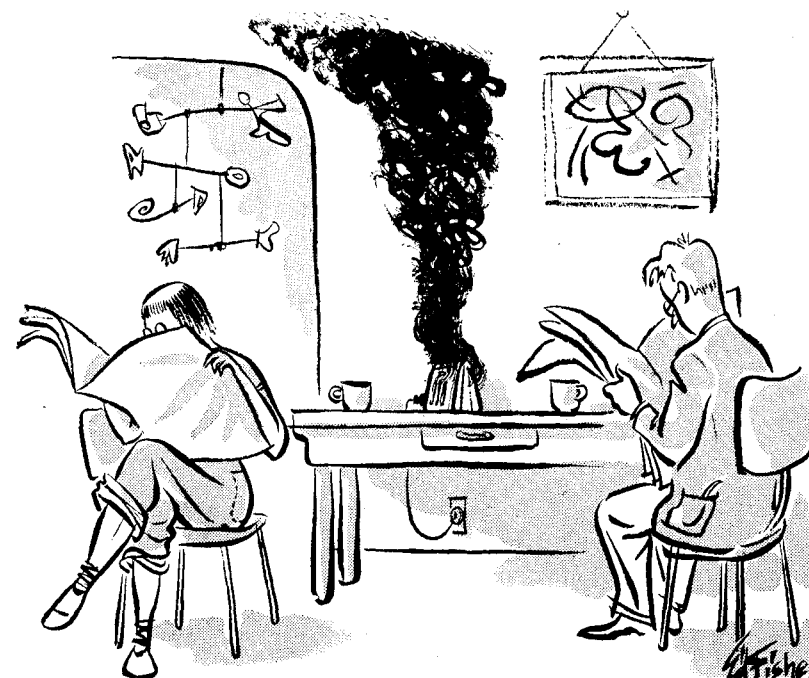
Collective Subconscious

▶ ALTHOUGH I MIGHT be inclined to agree with the ultimate judgment passed by Mr. Burman, I was surprised at his lack of understanding, for he failed to state the premise on which the "unintelligible" operates.

Though utilizing various titles, the writers of this conviction proceeded on the premise of the actuality of the collective subconscious. My appreciation of this concept and the literary forms derived from it is far from scholarly, but there is usually myth and the language of the assumed racial soul—which reads, as Mr. Burman illustrated, like the ravings of a psychotic. One of the believers, Thomas Mann, speaks out of a dictionary and not in an all-language. But the myth, both old and new, plays an important part in his work.

The trick of this all-language is that though it may not speak to consciousness, it does speak to the subconscious. Further, what springs from one subconscious speaks to another, for all consciousness is one. Language becomes universally symbolic and the understanding of it is not dependent on empirical learning.

The literary disciples of the subconscious are not charlatans. They are, indeed, trying to communicate. Certainly, if the premise is false, the effort is in-



valid; but it can not be called dishonest.

Mr. Burman will be heaped with a great deal of criticism, and justifiably so. Perhaps a great many of the writers blurting the images of their souls are simply exploiting a fashion. It is possible—and probable—that they are not aware of what they are supposed to be doing. But the serious writers of this belief are not merely trying to preserve for themselves and the initiate a realm of superior perception. To assert that they are is extremely unfair. The devil, if you will, must be given his due.

ELIZABETH L. ASHLEY.

Manhasset, N. Y.

In Defense of Joyce & Stein

▶ BEN LUCIEN BURMAN's article echoes much of the critical thunder of the ignorant and unenlightened critics of the late 1930's. Mr. Burman has not lived and grown with the last twenty years. . . .

Since Mr. Burman is intent on using Miss Stein and Mr. Joyce as his examples of "literary charlatans," I will direct my remarks to the works of these writers. I doubt very sincerely if a man of Mr. Joyce's intelligence would spend seventeen years writing "meaningless phrases." A first glimpse of "Finnegans Wake" might lead one to believe the book was filled with "meaningless phrases," but one cannot glimpse at "Finnegans Wake." One must study it as a surgeon must study the human body before he is equipped to use a scalpel. . . .

If Mr. Burman considers Miss Stein's expressions artificial then I suggest he stop by a group of children and listen

carefully to their conversation, or sit in the lobby of a hotel and just listen. Mr. Joyce may seem artificial, but could we have his power of listening to the subconscious with the mind's ear, I believe we would find his phrases and expression close to actuality.

Miss Stein may be accused of "shallowness" when compared with the canyonlike depths of Mr. Joyce, but her "shallowness" is only a reflection of the "shallowness" she found in the world around her. Her small talk is our small talk. And it hurts. To accuse Mr. Joyce of "shallowness" is comparable to a statement that you can count the pebbles on the Atlantic floor ten miles out. . . .

If "the ultimate test of writing is universality," I do not see where Mr. Burman figures Mr. Joyce has fallen short of the requirement. Since the publication of "Finnegans Wake," it is quite evident that there is little, or nothing, that can be contributed to the field of creative literature. Although Mr. Joyce was a Dubliner at heart, Dublin was the telescope through which he studied the world. Life is basically the same no matter where one goes. . . .

Mr. Burman reminds us again and again that we have been influenced by "the practitioners of the incomprehensible," but he also assures us that such influence is "definitely on the wane." I am not aware that Mr. Joyce or Miss Stein have influenced any writer to the extent that it was greatly noticeable. There have been writers, and there will continue to be, who will attempt to imitate, but unless they possess the genius of Mr. Joyce and Miss Stein they will not appear in print. It is true that many



writers have tried to create another Molly Bloom. They have been unsuccessful so far. Ernest Hemingway has employed some of Miss Stein's devices in his work, most memorably in "For Whom the Bell Tolls." But I do not feel that we need be too concerned over a flooded market of imitative "Finnegans Wakes" and "Lucy Church Amiables."

LAWRENCE A. WIGGIN.

Tilton, N. H.

Jig-Saw Puzzle

► "THE CULT OF UNINTELLIGIBILITY" is most timely and penetrating. The same psychopathic conditions have also afflicted the field of painting. To such an extent has this fringe element made itself felt that today the sincere student of rational art sees the rich plums of exhibitional honors and cash sales going almost exclusively to the exponents of "surrealism," "abstractism," and the long list of excuses for honesty in art. Wealthy collectors have shrewdly been induced to believe that only these represent art at its best.

Time was when a trip to an art gallery was a real mental experience, and nearly every picture had a worthwhile story to tell. Today the observer has to put together a jig-saw puzzle with a poorly drawn eye in the upper left-hand corner and a mutilated arm near the bottom, all of which has little if any connection with the title.

More power to Mr. Burman, and may the day be speeded when literary sanity returns and a trip to an art gallery may be something more than a hideous, unrewarding nightmare.

HARRY S. TILLOTSON.

Upper Darby, Pa.

Alphabet Soup

► THANK GOODNESS someone is at last exposing the Joyce-Stein cult of writing for what it is: the alphabet lost in a bowl of tepid soup.

FRANKIE LANE.

Lufkin, Tex.

Experimenters

► WELL HERE, I SEE, we go again. Last spring your magazine gave space to the remarks of Mr. Van Wyck Brooks, and now the attack is resumed, this time against Joyce and Gertrude Stein.

Mr. Burman fails to see that both Joyce and Gertrude Stein were experimenting. To put them down as literary charlatans, as he does, is the apex of naïvete. For surely he is aware that they both wrote in a style he could understand. "Three Lives" and "Dubliners" are manifest

evidence for that. Then why does Mr. Burman think they chose to change their methods of writing? Does he think they wrote in what he calls an unintelligible style simply to make their writing unintelligible? That is hardly a way to make yourself popular and widely read. Both Joyce and Gertrude Stein could have carried on as they began, but they felt that the English language was susceptible to experiment and change. If Mr. Burman would care to read some of the then popular fiction, he would see that a change was needed. Badly. The world had changed tremendously, and these two people wanted to express themselves in terms of this new world, not in terms of Thackeray.

And so they were experimenters. Any jackass knows that an experiment is not always successful. The experimenter makes blunders, and the more daring he is, the wider he will occasionally miss the mark. But now and again he will make a bull's eye. While the selections from Gertrude Stein that are quoted in Mr. Burman's article don't make "sense," here is one that does, provided, of course, you have a modicum of imagination.

A METHOD OF A CLOAK.

A single climb to a line, a straight exchange to a cane, a desperate adventure and courage and a clock, all this which is a system, which has feeling, which has resignation and success, all makes an attractive black silver.

That is from "Tender Buttons."

I suppose *The Saturday Review* will carry on as usual, however. It is well to remember that the popular press thought Beethoven and Browning and Whitman and Poe all wild, crazy men.

FRANK S. MACSHANE.

New College, Oxford, England.

"Billy The Kid"

► L. L. FOREMAN, who commented [LETTERS, SR Nov. 8] on my "Billy the Kid" article [SR Oct. 11] must be omniscient. Since the accounts of Billy's death vary greatly, and since presumably Foreman wasn't on hand for the shooting, only omniscience would allow him to speak so dogmatically.

Granting that he is better informed than I on the details of Billy's downfall (and probably he is), it seems a shame that he has missed my whole point: people settle on what they want to believe about a hero, and not on what actually happened.

Naturally, then, he thinks little of the "hifalutin Faustian nonsense and the dash of Sir Galahad." Such analogies, if

overextended, at least attempt to deal with the forest. Foreman sees only trees.

MARSHALL FISHWICK.

Lexington, Va.

Lincoln a Friend

► BIOGRAPHERS OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN [SR Nov. 8] seem to be unaware of a very potent fact which clouds their understanding of him. Lincoln was a Quaker. He wrote a short autobiography for Jesse Fell, a Quaker, who staged the Lincoln-Douglas debates, in which he stated that he came from Quaker stock, that his people came from England to where Reading, Pennsylvania, is now, and then moved to Virginia and from there to Kentucky. Daniel Boone's people, who were also Quakers, intermarried with the Lincolns.

HOWARD BOURNE.

Portland, Indiana.

Loyalty Oaths

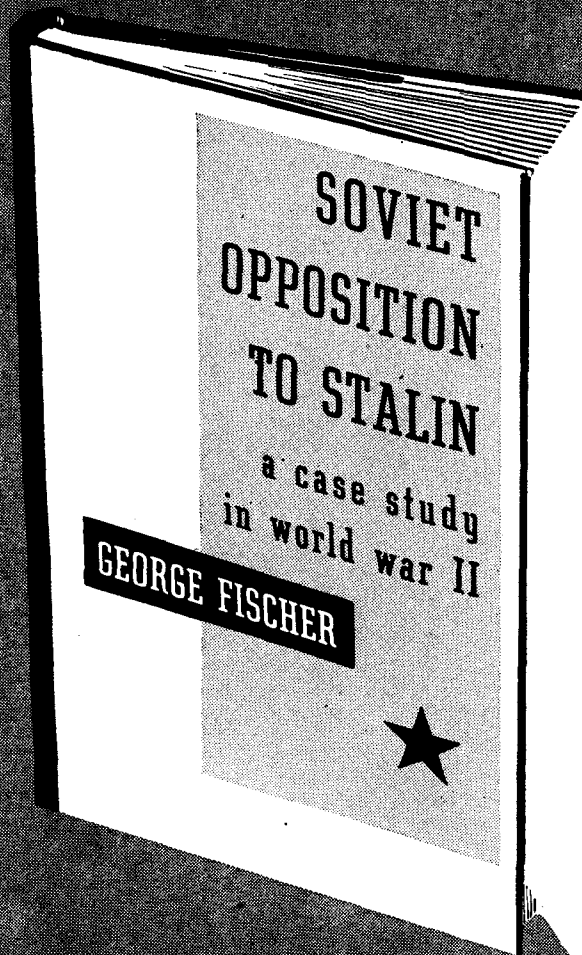
► IN HIS EDITORIAL "The Equilibrium of Freedoms" [SR Oct. 25] Harrison Smith is guilty, if not of factual inaccuracy, of misinterpretation so great that it distorts the facts. He states that the loyalty oath in the University of California was "stopped dead in its tracks" by a court decision against it. The decision came two years too late. Can the legal vindication of their stand now help those high-principled faculty members who uprooted themselves and their families and left the University rather than sign the oath? It is too late for them to return now. In most cases their lives have been completely rearranged, and even should they care to return, they would not find things as they left them. For what of those who submitted to administrative and community pressure and signed the oath rather than face dismissal? The decision, the moral cowardice involved in such a decision, was not an easy one to make, nor can the mental and emotional strain which was occasioned by the necessity for making the decision be erased by the courts. The courts cannot repeal the atmosphere of fear and tension which prevailed on the campus.

Pretending that McCarthyism does not exist, or minimizing its dangers, will not cure it. And as every thinking faculty member on the campus of a state college knows, the threat of loyalty oaths is still with us, and community pressure against liberals is very real. May I take this opportunity to remind Mr. Smith of recent events at Ohio State, Washington State College, and the University of Washington?

FLORENCE KUOLL.

Eugene, Ore.

The great unknown in the Western defense equation



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known story of the Vlasov movement, the large body of Soviet soldiers and civilians who fought on the side of the Germans after capture by Hitler's armies. George Fischer tells the tragic history of the movement, its aims and aspirations, the fate of these collaborators after the war when they were repatriated to Russia with American consent! In the second part of the book the author speculates as to potential cracks in the Iron Curtain. His thoughtful analysis raises these questions for the West: Are there Vlasovs living in Russia today? Who are they? How can the democracies reach them? \$4.00

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Broadway Postscript

WITCH GIRL

A FREQUENT illusion among benevolent theatregoers and stage-struck adolescents is that an actress's moment of triumph comes when she opens in "the big part" and is suddenly transformed from a struggling bit player into an exciting new star.

Penelope Munday, whose cat-whisker smile and foal-like walk have been delighting audiences at the Martin Beck Theatre, seems a case in point. As Olivia, the fourteen-year-old child in Moss Hart's "The Climate of Eden," the British actress has established herself as a name that may soon be spoken in the same breath with Audrey Hepburn and Julie Harris, both of whom have used portrayals of strange adolescent children as springboards to stardom. Yet a visit with Miss Munday at her cubicle in an inelegant hotel in New York's West Fifties revealed a mysteriously sad young lady with a nervous dread of anything resembling triumph.

Wearing no make-up, but smoking at a furious rate, and with a sophistication that immediately did away with any preconception of sweetness and light that might have been arrived at through watching her performance, she spoke with mixed emotions of "The Climate of Eden."

"I took the part with grave misgivings. You see I have a low voice, I'm not flat-chested, and I've had all my training and experience in classical or period roles."

To achieve the illusion of little-girl-



Penelope Munday today . . .

ishness Miss Munday adopted a high-pitched voice, which by opening night had her on the verge of laryngitis. As a result there was a rhythmic squeak in her delivery, which (like the cracking of the lichee nuts in "Once in a Lifetime") was interpreted by some as a remarkable representation of the voice-changing period of adolescence.

In addition, she worked out a costume consisting of a loose shirt and tight-fitting trousers, which not only gave her a tomboy figure, but also fitted in with what a girl living up the river in British Guiana would wear, that is if she would wear anything at all in the unique utopia which the author has hypothesized.

"The third hurdle was the most difficult," says the Old-Vic-schooled actress. "I tried to be an exaggeration of what I remember myself as at fourteen. I saw Olivia as a sort of witch child, innocent for her age in that she hadn't been exposed to the evils of the outside world, and wise for her years in that she was supersensitive to the things of the spirit. I also attempted a gangling walk, but I don't know how well it comes across."

In this writer's opinion it comes across magnificently, perhaps because Miss Munday has, through her long experience of working in difficult costumes, acquired a facility of movement that permits her to be awkward gracefully.

"That helped," she admits, "that and the fact that we all wear practically no make-up, which allows us to feel much more relaxed than if we had to fuss a lot before going on."

The out-of-town tryout was particularly harrowing in the case of "The Climate of Eden," because there were so many changes made from one performance to the next.

"We gave no performances. We just rehearsed in public every night. I suspect that over here everything is so expensive the producers must keep doing things to a play in the hope of suddenly and magically adding just the right touch to make it a hit. The last scene of the play, where my father makes a long speech about the passing of my childhood, was done every way humanly imaginable. There was even one version in which I spoke it as a soliloquy while I sat at the harmonium. Ugh!" Miss Munday, who has a particular aversion to corn, indicated her unmitigated disapproval.

The upshot of all this constant



. . . and as she was at fourteen.

changing was a completely exhausted opening-night cast, who were amazed to find they had received favorable notices the next morning.

"A few hours before the opening night curtain, I decided to go to the movies. I had heard somewhere that Gielgud found it a helpful thing to do," recounts the actress. "I went to see my favorite actor, Charlie Chaplin, in 'Limelight.' The dialogue was naive, but it didn't matter because he was so wonderfully sad. I came out feeling like 'Penelope of the Sorrows,' and the mood, I'm afraid, stayed with me during the whole opening-night performance. Gielgud or no Gielgud, I don't think I'll try that again."

Miss Munday's sadness did no apparent harm, perhaps because of the idyllic nature of Moss Hart's play. However, she is a spirited actress who yearns to play the stronger and more violent passions, and wishes that convention had permitted the enactment of some of the more savage emotions and events that were in "Shadows Move Among Them," the Edgar Mitchell book from which the play was taken. "Jane White is a terrific actress, and I would have loved to have seen the antagonism between us really developed," says the intense young actress, who admits that practically all of contemporary theatre disappoints her in one way or another, and states that, if she continues on the stage, she wants to play Chekhov and Strindberg.

At this point the telephone rang, and someone on the other end of the line reminded her of an appointment with a man at M-G-M. "Ah!" she said, breaking into that mischievous smile that goes three-quarters of the way across her face, "the steel trap."

—HENRY HEWES.