

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

LOGIC, NOT INTUITION

JOHN CIARDI is right ("A Debate on Modern Poetry," SR Oct. 9). It is refreshing to see logic, rather than intuition, regarded as the proper method for dissecting critical views.

CALVERT SHENK.

Osage City, Kan.

WASPISH HECKLING?

CIARDI'S REBUTTAL contains a measure of truth, but it discredits itself because the tone is unforgivable. If Ciardi's methods are likewise those of *The Saturday Review*—and, obviously, they must pass official muster—one wonders, what is the underlying motive? Why was Lord Dunsany hauled into battle in the first place? Was it only to be set up as a target for waspish heckling?

HERBERT E. MOULTON.

Lisle, Ill.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Lord Dunsany died on October 25 at the age of seventy-nine. He was a good friend of, and to, The Saturday Review for three decades. The editors have the highest respect for him and his work. His article was accepted—not as a peg for Mr. Ciardi's rebuttal—but as a strong presentation of the case for poetry in the classical tradition. The article was submitted by Lord Dunsany's agent, and accepted with the understanding that it would run as part of a debate.

REFUGEE "CARO NOME"

I THOUGHT SR knew "Caro Nome" belongs in an opera named "Rigoletto," not "Tra-viata." I doubt if Ciardi's so smart.

ELOISE SNYDER.

Fort Worth, Tex.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Mr. Ciardi doubts it, too.

THAT IS THAT

ALL I CAN SAY is this. I like what Ciardi says and writes and even though I'll never be able to write it as it should be written, I will say that he writes it and says it the way it should be said and written.

SARGE STERLING.

Philadelphia, Pa.

UNINTELLIGIBILITY

CIARDI ERRS in not admitting that quite a bit of modern verse seems to have no meaning to fairly intelligent and literate people, and is of unintelligibility all compact. I have occasionally come across an issue of *Poetry* magazine in which I could not extract meaning from even a single poem, and I have been reading "modern" poetry for something like forty years or more.

ARTHUR KRAMER.

Evansville, Wis.

LIMITS OF PATIENCE

PLEASE DO NOT devote page after page of your otherwise delightful magazine to



THROUGH HISTORY WITH J. WESLEY SMITH

"It's called money. The government either gives it to you or takes it away."

your self-styled "ultimate-poetry-authority's" opinions on obscurantist verse. The human patience has its limits, after all.

MRS. JOHN R. MENDIUS.

Farmington, N. M.

LOWEST DENOMINATOR

WHEN I FINISHED reading Ciardi I literally sat and applauded. In these times it is all too seldom that someone will stand up for intelligence. The common and deplorable trend today consists of trying to lower everyone to the lowest common denominator rather than to give intelligence and education its due as something to strive for and to be lauded when increased.

PRESTON W. KELLY.

Iowa City, Iowa.

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GREGORY WALTER.

Bywood, Pa.

CRITICAL HONESTY

CIARDI'S PIECE is one of the best arguments for critical honesty and tough-mindedness I have seen in print.

SHELDON GREBSTEIN.

Lexington, Ky.

LAUREL TO DUNSANY

I HAVE JUST finished reading and re-reading the Dunsany-Ciardi articles and un-

hesitatingly award the laurel to Dunsany. His viewpoint is buttressed by the traditions of 3,000 years.

LABAN LACY RICE.

Orlando, Fla.

FOREVER UNDAUNTED

I LIKE JOHN CIARDI, his youthful ardor, his bludgeoning vigor, his cocksureness undamped by uncertainties that come with age. I hope he remains forever young and undaunted, for his is a calling that can afford him such luxury without doing him harm.

FRED N. KERWIN.

Grand Rapids, Mich.

HEART OF THE MATTER

LORD DUNSANY has reached the heart of the matter when he says "a poet should write for all people."

MARY CHERNOFF CORO.

Los Angeles, Calif.

MILLION CHEERS

PLEASE ACCEPT a million cheers for Lord Dunsany!

PAULINE M. NEWMAN.

New York, N. Y.

SHOCKED AT LIBERTIES

I WAS QUITE shocked at the liberties Ciardi took in discrediting the intellectual abilities of Lord Dunsany. I assume that SR would not, in the first place, choose to publish a man who is incapable of handling a subject, as Ciardi seems to feel this opponent is.

GARY SHANKO.

San Francisco, Calif.



BROADWAY POSTSCRIPT

Uncompelling

ALTHOUGH it has been staged with precision and wrought-up vitality, Meyer Levin's "*Compulsion*" seems not much more than a trip through a Coney Island tunnel of horrors relieved here and there with bizarre jokes. Only because it really happened, and because it includes a plea to the audience for understanding the events it presents, does it nominally acquire the significance one demands of such a play.

Beginning from a few minutes past Loeb and Leopold's horrendous chisel-murder of a little boy, the play (as touched up by Robert Thom over Mr. Levin's protests) pops short scenes at us in chronological order. By the end of Act I the teen-age murderers have been caught and we've had a whiff of 1924 Chicago where the events took place. In the first half of Act II we watch the defense attorney and his psychiatrists examine the accused to find mitigating conditions for an act which on the surface would seem to have none. And in the second half of Act II we have a trial scene in which Clarence Darrow (in the play called Jonathan Wilk) manages to defeat the vengeful prosecuting attorney with a mixture of cleverness and declamatory compassion. But as in "*Inherit the Wind*," the famous lawyer seems less interested in his clients than in the advancement of scientific enlightenment.

The play does little more than reenact the old newspaper clippings and the psychiatrists' report. The two murderers, here called Judd Steiner and Artie Strauss, suffer from a slave-master fantasy in which Judd is homosexually attached to Artie. The plight of Judd thus can arouse our sympathy, and the play's best moments involve the manifestations of his torment and the sadness of the girl who fell in love with him too late. Artie is far less redeemable. Even when we are shown his breakdown in the arms of his mother, it evokes only an unconvincing and arbitrary pity from us. Likewise, the play's final scenes satisfy us more as courtroom melodrama than as any new awareness of the significance of society's treatment of this case.

In fairness to the producers, it must be admitted that these defects were not completely overcome in Mr. Levin's original script. Yet if the theatre is an art medium, one can only regret that this original version with the

author's point of view was not presented, for better or worse. A reading of that original manuscript reveals that the doctored version being shown on Broadway substantially reduces the integrity of the work. It introduces many pointless jokes, which though they may relieve the tension hardly belong in a sincere and serious consideration of a true story. It also makes obscure such things as Judd's relationship with his girl; Mr. Levin's point that Artie had definite criminal fantasies and that Judd had not; his insistence that part of Judd's motivation had to do with being a Jew so ashamed of his religion that he fell in love with Artie because Artie didn't look Jewish; the five-year-old Artie's sexual relationship with his chauffeur, and the resultant symbolism of the chisel he used for the murder and the sewer-pipe where he hid the corpse. And it makes the psychiatrist used by the prosecution completely foolish.

Perhaps only a minority of "70,000 intellectuals" will blame producer Michael Myerberg for authorizing these and other changes. After all, under Alex Segal's direction some of the actors give stirring performances in the altered material. Dean Stockwell's Judd is cleanly emotional, particularly when he becomes hysterical in his relationship with Artie. Roddy McDowall is magnificent as a compulsive show-off dancing the Charleston or making shocking remarks. Ina Balin is touchingly sad as Judd's girl. Peter Larkin's unit set makes possible continuous action, and his miniatures of Judd's room and a lavatory are particularly effective. Yet, even though this "*Compulsion*" may sell like *True Detective*, the discerning theatregoer must be disappointed that the play neither challenges any preconceived notion nor makes poetic the impression he might have had about the case.

—HENRY HEWES.



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