

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## UNKNOWN CLIBURN

CAN IRVING KOLODIN ("Van Cliburn and the Moscow Prize," SR May 3) disprove the Shostakovich contention that Cliburn did indeed gain his first *wide* recognition in Moscow? The fact is that Cliburn was almost completely ignored in this country until his Moscow success.

ALFRED H. GREENBERG.

New York, N. Y.

## EVER REMOTER

A GREAT ARTIST, a great piece of music, is an irresistible force in all cultures. If suspicion and mistrust are to predominate in cultural affairs as well as political, then those who are the stoutest advocates of intellectual freedom are no better than their political counterparts. Conciliation between the world's two greatest military powers becomes ever remoter.

HOWARD A. REEMAN.

Bronx, N. Y.

## IK'S HARMONY

EVERYBODY IN THIS country was delighted when Van Cliburn was pronounced First Prizewinner in the Tchaikovsky competition in Moscow. Nobody had expected such an overwhelming recognition of an American artist in Russia. Should we really turn a friendly, though probably well deserved, gesture into an act of aggression, instead of rejoicing over the fact that there are still peaceful contests among otherwise hostile nations that can be settled by fair play? Where is Mr. Kolodin's sense of harmony?

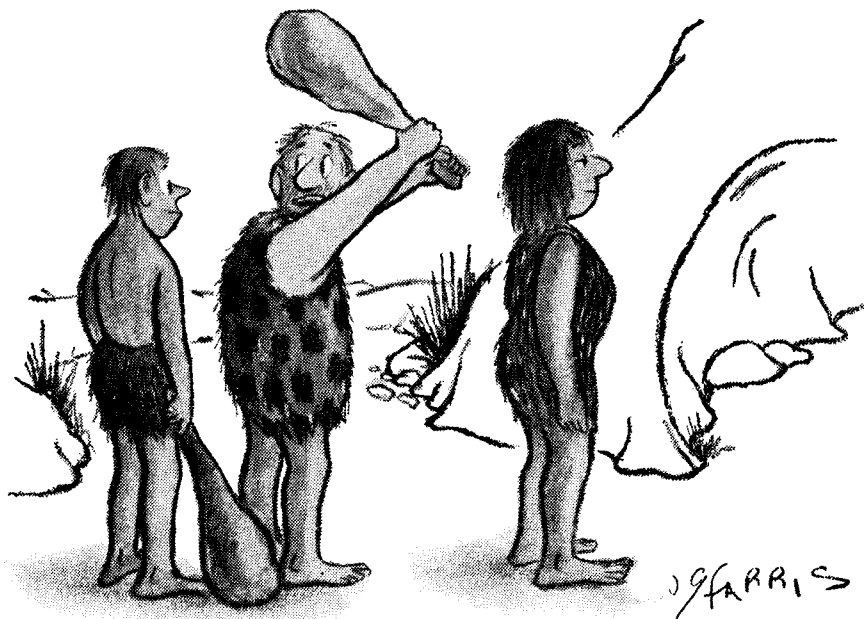
RALPH SANFORD.

Forest Hills, N. Y.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Mr. Kolodin replies: "Which is worse: the Big Lie or the Half Truth?"

## TIME FOR NEUTRALS

"NEUTRALITY IS BY no means always obnoxious," says Dean Gildersleeve ("Obnoxious Neutrality," SR May 10), citing Switzerland as a "model neutral." No one—not even this partisan of the Cold War (and what's wrong with remaining ever alert to the Soviet menace?)—could honestly oppose true neutrality like Switzerland's. What the undersigned—along with what I believe the majority of Americans—cannot abide is pro-Soviet behavior guised as "neutralism," as exemplified by certain "backward" nations never backward in demanding that the U.S. taxpayer foot the bills for their crackpot five-year economic plans. By the nature of her geography, Switzerland has traditionally kept aloof from any alliances—but even in World War II not even the most ardent anti-Hitlerite could ever have accused that nation of being "neutral" against the U.S. It is high time other "neutral" nations, particularly in South-east Asia, wake up to the growing threat



"Notice the interlocking grip. When the club is raised, the left arm remains stiff. The eyes stay fixed on the head at all times . . ."

of the Soviet advance and the need for immediately taking measures to counter that threat.

VICTOR LASKY.

New York, N. Y.

## IT'S "TAR HEEL"

IN AN OTHERWISE excellent article, "Victims of Success" (SR May 3) Henry Steele Commager quotes "Jim Tatum of the North Carolina Tarheels." My loyalty to the Old North State rebels at this. I realize that many compound expressions are and should be written as single words—for instance "Damyantee." But "Tar Heel" should always be written as two words, both capitalized.

CLIFTON L. HALL.

Nashville, Tenn.

## MORE PRESENT

PROF. COMMAGER says that we should give more emphasis to the past in our high-schools, because the present scene impinges too much on the high-school pupil already. I am a high-school teacher, and when I read this statement I laughed. The current scene to the high-school youngster is a blur and a fog and a nuisance and a mess. The past to the youngster is a remote and distant gossamer tale in a stilted textbook. From my experience, what the pupil in the high school needs is great emphasis on the present: more newspaper reading and more magazine reading and more book reading on the present. Also, what we need to do is to throw away the high-school textbooks on history and economics—they are atrocities in make-up and in style. We could teach what is relevant in the past

—relevant to the present—through good books on the past which are not textbooks.

MARTIN WOLFSON.

Brooklyn, N. Y.

## VARIOUS "TRUE LAWS"

WHILE IT WAS AN unexpected pleasure to find an SR editorial which dealt with law, it was extremely disturbing to find that you would give currency to such a theory as "True Law" (SR Apr. 26). The idea of a Higher Law is an appealing one—to lawyers in time of need and to laymen in time of doubt—but it is about as logically defensible as the theory that the earth is flat. I hope no one begins an agitation for international peace based on Natural Law, as it is usually called, for such law exists only in the mind of the person writing or talking about it, and I rather imagine natural legal concepts vary considerably. At least anthropological studies indicate they do, if you are inclined to believe them, and we can be certain concepts which we have and which we consider our natural rights are completely unknown in, for example, Russia.

RAY D. HENSON.

Chicago, Ill.

## LAW NOT ENOUGH

THOUGH JUDGE ROBERT WILKIN advocates "True Law," the "true law" has been exploited by tyranny almost as frequently as it has been explored by the forces for freedom. It is the nature of man that must change, not the nature of his law.

JOE M. TOCKMAN.

Colorado Springs, Colo.



## Tragedy Without Tears

**T**he Visit" is one of the most extraordinary theatrical works of our time. It is very possible that, with it, the thirty-seven-year-old Swiss playwright Duerrenmatt has arrived at a new dramatic form for modern tragedy.

The play begins casually, with a comedic tone. Some rather ordinary people in the impoverished town of Gullen are awaiting the visit of Claire Zachanassian, who left the place a teen-aged nobody but who has now through a series of fortunate marriages snowballed herself into one of the world's wealthiest women. The townspeople hope she will give them some money to help restore prosperity. And to act as persuader they pick their popular and affable grocer, Anton Schill. Anton, someone vaguely remembers, had been Claire's lover before he married a local merchant's daughter, but this is thought to be more in his favor than not.

What holds our interest through the first act is not so much the story as the theatrical cameos director Peter Brook and designer Teo Otto have fashioned with the aid of an expert cast headed by Lynn Fontanne and Alfred Lunt. We hear imaginary express trains roar across the front of the stage as a bored stationmaster routinely salutes the conductor from the platform: Life as usual in a dead town. Then occurs the slight variance in routine which is to set Gullen off on a course of action that will try its citizens' souls. *The Flying Dutchman* makes an unscheduled stop. Mme. Zachanassian has, instead of taking the tiresome local, merely pulled the emergency cord aboard the express. A sophisticated audience sees nothing too startling in this event. A brilliantly devised entrance for the play's star. No more. And even after Claire's dramatic arrival there are only a few lightly played hints of something ominous to come.

We are further disarmed by a light and charming scene in which Anton takes Claire walking in the woods that witnessed their earlier trysts. It seems only a humorous fancy that Claire remembers the by-gone events with great clarity, whereas Anton recalls them not as they were but as he would like them to have been.

Not until the end of Act I does the play's first complication arise. Claire offers the town 1 billion marks



Duerrenmatt—"a new form."

to be divided equally amongst its citizens with one proviso, but before the townspeople bother to hear the proviso they start up dancing with joy. However, it turns out that Mme. Zachanassian is an extremist. She is extremely generous, but she also wants extreme justice. Anton Schill, it is revealed, had bribed witnesses to discredit her when she had accused him of being the father of her unborn child forty years back. She demands that the town take Anton's life.

The town's immediate outward reaction to her proposal is a self-righteous rejection. The laws of society and the laws of the jungle are not the same. Claire is not disturbed. With omniscient calm she announces that she will wait.

**A**CT II begins with Anton jolly because of this show of support from his fellow men. But as he serves customers in his store he notices people who heretofore have been very thrifty in their purchases now spending beyond their means. When he seeks reassurance from the Burgomaster he finds the Town Hall being refurbished with a new typewriter. And in the midst of receiving religious solace from the pastor, he hears the ringing of the church's new bell. Paranoiacally, he feels that this spending means the town has already tacitly accepted Claire's proposal. He sees the townspeople as trapping and hunting him down. And when he tries to leave town there is a beau-

tifully-staged scene at the railway station in which the men of the town seem to be lined up as a phalanx between him and the train. Anton becomes immobilized like some fear-crazed animal. Yet for most of this act the play still preserves a fundamentally comedic and casual tone.

It is the third act in which the play's large issues are allowed to erupt. A schoolteacher passionately begs Claire to be merciful and not to push the town into this immoral act. Her answer is, "The town made me into a whore. I will make the town into a brothel." Then we watch the painful process of a mass tragedy coming to a boil. But this mass tragedy is theatrically relieved in several ways. It is relieved by a love scene between Anton, who is now resigned to his death, and Claire, who feels that she is reclaiming her boyhood sweetheart. She says, "The dreams of youth are sacred, don't you think?"

Later, the agony of Anton's death sentence is made remote when the newsreel cameraman requests that it be done over again for the film. Thus, instead of identifying ourselves with Anton, we tend to see the author's view of a world in which society's institutions, and laws, have debased rather than ennobled the individual. We move away from personal emotional involvement to a more Olympian view.

**A**T FIRST glance, this removal appears to have made "The Visit" colder and less moving. And it must be admitted that Mr. Duerrenmatt's play never rolls for very long on the inner fuel of its own interacting ingredients. The story of "The Visit" is one of inevitable tragedy, but its details often seem author-imposed and humorous.

On the other hand, this seeming fault may be "The Visit's" greatest virtue. It is "Camino Real" without belief in Romanticism, and "The Threepenny Opera" without belief in Marxism. It is "Our Town" without belief in an after-life, and "The Entertainer" without belief in the present one. All by itself it succeeds in being a convincing tragedy in a godless and ignoble world.

There may be those who will argue that "The Visit" is not a tragedy at all, and certainly it does not meet the classical definitions. Yet it accomplishes so many of the things we expect of tragedy, without giving in to any of the presumptions that make classical tragedy unsatisfactory to moderns, that we realize our whole concept of the subject must be re-examined.

In Claire Zachanassian, "The Visit" has an individual whose money and