


*Saturday Review*

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## The Book Burners and Sweet Sixteen

**T**HE *Chicago Review* is a literary quarterly published by the University of Chicago. Last fall, as the editors were preparing their winter issue, a columnist on one of the Chicago newspapers attacked the fall issue as "filthy." The charge called forth a prompt reaction from Chancellor Lawrence A. Kimpton. In a memorable blow for academic freedom, Chancellor Kimpton summoned then Editor-in-Chief Rosenthal and announced that the material submitted for the winter issue was definitely not to be published. The issue, as Rosenthal reports the Chancellor's instructions, was to be completely "innocuous and noncontroversial" and it must contain "nothing which [sic] would offend a sixteen-year-old girl."

When has the true role of the American university been more profoundly enunciated? Its intellectual content is to be harmless and innocuous; its final test of moral values is to reside in the sensibilities of a sixteen-year-old girl. The petty-minded may insist that there is still some question as to exactly which sixteen-year-old girl Chancellor Kimpton may have had in mind, but in general, all men of learning and good will must certainly be grateful to Chancellor Kimpton for the depth and courage of his intellectual leadership.

The student editors of the *Review*, however, showed no sign of gratitude, and six out of seven of them promptly resigned over so trivial a matter as intellectual freedom. Some of the six thereupon managed to raise private funds, and founded a new magazine called *Big Table*, the first issue of which published intact the material

suppressed by Chancellor Kimpton.

Now, as if to confirm Chancellor Kimpton's standing in the company of men of taste and learning, the scholar-inspectors of the Post Office Department have entered the picture by seizing 400 copies of *Big Table* #1. A hearing scheduled for early June will already have been held by the time this issue reaches the newsstands, and the charge will in all probability have been that there exists obscenity in two of the works featured in *Big Table* #1, specifically, in "Old Angel Midnight," by Jack Kerouac, and in "Ten Episodes from Naked Lunch," by William S. Burroughs. The third featured author, Edward Dahlberg, will probably not have been charged.

The immediate issue, therefore, is the charge of obscenity brought against two specified works.

There have been many court rulings on obscenity in the last two decades, and the tests are by now clearly established. Obscenity cannot be determined by any isolated word or passage but only by the total intent of a particular work. That total intent cannot be found to be obscene unless there is reasonable likelihood that it will stimulate to lewd and lustful excitement a man of average sexual instincts—*l'homme moyen sensuel*, as Judge Woolsey labeled him in the 1933 decision that cleared Joyce's "Ulysses" of the charge of obscenity.

A further test of obscenity is in the social importance of the work. As Judge Horn ruled in 1957 in clearing Allen Ginsberg's "Howl": "If the material has the slightest redeeming social importance it is not obscene because it is protected by the First and Fourteenth Amendments of the

United States Constitution." Various other tests have been applied by the courts, but the legal ground is substantially covered by these three principles: total intent, *l'homme moyen sensuel*, and "the slightest redeeming social importance."

I am no admirer of Kerouac's assaults on near-prose. But the issue here is legal and not esthetic, and to argue an esthetic disagreement cannot imply in any remotest legal sense that Kerouac's writing is not immensely serious in its conceived intent, and that it is in fact a life-consuming attempt to describe what the writer sees as the place of value in a world fractured by disorder. Nor, in either a legal or an esthetic sense, could one argue that Kerouac is not a writer of substantial gift, however much the gift may be smothered by indiscipline.

The impulse toward censorship can only arise from failure to understand the intent. True, an excessively literal-minded man may easily become suspicious of the surfaces of Kerouac's writing. Nor is it hard to imagine that excessive literal-mindedness is a survival characteristic in Post Office bureaucracy. But the test of literature cannot reside in men of such mind, neither in the esthetic nor legal sense.

What Kerouac has written is a series of Joycean improvisations (no less!) on the nature of irreality as created by a slangy and polyglot god once named Old Angel Midnight. What the reader ends up with is thirty-five pages of free association in several languages (of which Kerouac is no certain master) and in gibberish (of which he recognizably is). Add a randomness of bilingual puns. Add four letter words at will. Add even—here and there—a glimpse of orderly perception in the whirling chaos. What one comes out with (minus the four-letter words) runs:

God's asleep dreaming, we've got to wake him up! Then all of a sudden when we're asleep dreaming, he comes and wakes us up—how gentle! How are you Mrs. Jones? Fine Mrs. Smith! Tit within Tat—Eye within Tooth—Bone within Light, like—Drop some little beads of sweetness into the stew (O Phoney Poetry!)—the heart of the onion—That stew's too good for me to eat, you!—

Or:

Sor god denoder pie your pingling lief bring Ida Graymeadow Wolf babe oo brooding in the is-ness seastand graygog magog bedonigle bedart ooo

In fairness one must add, against  
 (Continued on page 30)

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## FAULKNER PUBLICATION

ON PAGE TWENTY-FIVE of the May 30 issue of your magazine appears a letter from a Mr. Gerald H. Strauss of Columbia, Missouri, stating that that first publication of anything written by William Faulkner was the little poem ("L'Apres Midi d'un Faune") which appeared in *The New Republic* in 1919. Mr. Strauss is correct about this and is also correct in what he says about *The Double Dealer* in New Orleans.

But the reason I am writing this letter is because I think that the entire incident may amuse you.

Mr. Faulkner had been writing and writing for several years at this time (1919) and I had been having the things typed and had been mailing them off. They all came back post-haste. So when *The New Republic* accepted this little poem and paid fifteen whole dollars for it, we felt like the lucky country boy at his first crap game: How long has this been going on?

So we sent off some more poems, and more poems to *The New Republic*. When none of them was accepted we decided that no more would be accepted and that we at least might have some fun.

So, without title and without Mr. Faulkner signing the poem, we copied John Clare's poem about the asylum in which he was then confined, Northampton as I remember now. It is in the Oxford Book of English Verse but very few people seem to know it. Our plan was to have *The New Republic* accept it and publish it and then secretly notify *The New York Times* of the fact and let the dull *Times* rib the smarty *New Republic*. I always wonder whether or not anybody placed it or whether it was sent back simply because they didn't think Bill could write that good a poem. Anyway, it came back with no reply by letter.

Then we copied off Coleridge's "Kubla Khan." It was returned to us with the very accurate criticism: "We like your poem, Mr. Coleridge, but we don't think it gets anywhere much."

PHIL STONE.

Oxford, Miss.

## WRONG LADY

IN "LADIES WITH THE LAST WORD," (SR May 30) an error occurs in the paragraph about Napoleon on page 9. The illustration said to represent Madame de Chevreuse is actually Marie de Rohan-Montbazon, Duchesse de Chevreuse, who died almost a century before the birth of Napoleon Bonaparte (ninety years before, to be exact), and it has always been my understanding that it was this lady (and not some Madame de Chevreuse) who made the remark about diamonds and that she made it to one of the Louis kings (probably Louis XIII). With regard to the other "woman who had met Napoleon when he was in exile in Eng-



THROUGH HISTORY WITH J. WESLEY SMITH

"And while I'm not actively seeking leadership of the tribe, I would take it if offered."

land," I am sure you will agree that it is nonsense as written inasmuch as Napoleon Bonaparte was never in exile in England. Surely this must refer to Napoleon III, who endured a lengthy exile in England before he seized power and another exile in England after the fiasco of the Franco-Prussian War.

JASON LINDSEY.

Hollywood, Calif.

EDITOR'S NOTE: *The author of the article and SR got their de Chevreuses crossed.*

## GALBRAITH'S THESIS

NOT ENOUGH PEOPLE recognize even dimly the appalling gap between America's wealth in privately produced goods—such as automobiles, cosmetics, appliances, glamorous clothes—and America's wretched poverty in public production—such as public libraries, hospitals, schools, police protection, traffic control.

The article by Elmo Roper on John Kenneth Galbraith's "The Affluent Society" (SR June 6) should serve to re-emphasize the importance of Galbraith's thesis that we are today overdoing the production of private goods and under-doing the production of public services.

With an unprecedentedly high Gross National Product, we are supporting at a bare subsistence level, or below, local public services that promote the health, safety, intelligence, the creative and spiritual capacity of the individual man.

Our publicly supported institutions are starving in the midst of plenty.

EMILY SANDERS.

Charleston, S.C.

## A LOADED SOCIETY

I FIND ELMO ROPER's "research" on opinion held by economists and "businessmen-trustees" about Mr. Galbraith's "Affluent Society" more misleading than enlightening.

Both samples are biased to begin with. The original choice of every fiftieth member of the American Economics Association is distorted by the addition of "unusually prominent economists," who would naturally be older and with greater vested interests in traditional concepts. No clue is given as to how the "businessmen-trustees" were chosen except that they also serve as trustees of colleges, universities, and foundations (men whose names give prestige and whose incomes permit large donations). That Mr. Roper considers the judgment of this group more important than that of economists in judging Mr. Galbraith is itself an expression of bias.

Turning to the twelve specific questions, the first five are based on a contrast which hardly appears in and certainly is not important in Mr. Galbraith's book—the contrast between *material* goods and *nonmaterial* services. Mr. Galbraith's contrast is between *public* and *private* sectors of the economy, each of which includes both material and nonmaterial aspects.

It would seem that Mr. Roper should report this startling fact:

A small minority of American economists express a large measure of agreement with what Mr. Roper calls Galbraith's iconoclastic work.

SAMUEL H. LEGER.

Los Angeles, Calif.