

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

ACADEMIC ARGUMENT

JOHN CIARDI'S "To the Damnation of Deans" [SR, Mar. 24] is the most perceptive and succinct of the myriad appraisals of higher education available today.

ALAN GARFINKEL,
University of Illinois.

Champaign, Ill.

IT'S GUYS LIKE CIARDI, who have the guts to write candidly about the faculty-administrative dilemma, that make it possible for guys in my position to acquire the guts to effect change.

DON AUSTIN,
Assistant Professor,
Department of English,
University of Redlands.

Redlands, Calif.

HAM AND EGGHEADS

JOSEPH WOOD KRUTCH'S "Challenge to an Unknown Writer" [SR, Mar. 10] really pertains to all the arts, not only to writing. The creative person is not alone to blame for the huge and meaningless blobs that hang in our exhibits, the clinks, rattles, and whining noises that come through the hi-fi set, nor the senseless but titillating phrases which may be a suggestion of writing. It is just possible that publishers, record makers, museum directors, and magazine editors may be an unidentified part of the picture.

When the responsible persons of our society demand a better class of art, they'll get it—and not until. So long as art is a precious little morsel served up to the fence-sitting vultures, it will remain the unsavory dish it is.

It's time for a change of menu.

CHARLES B. RODGERS,
Pacific Palisades, Calif.

CULTURAL CULPRIT

WITHOUT INGRATITUDE to Nicholas Samstag for his entertaining and enthusiastic review of my book "The Hidden Remnant" [SR, Mar. 10], may I disagree when he says that "it never really names an enemy nor indicates that there is a battle-plan behind the blare of the bugles." Actually, the enemy is named in the first line of the table of contents, which reads: "The Certainty of Miseducation."

It is miseducation that I seek to expose in its innumerable disguises. It is miseducation that I attack throughout in the name of a truly enlightened Remnant. And by a Remnant I do *not* mean an elite, as I thought a whole chapter (called "The Remnant Is Not an Elite") and the tone of my entire book had made clear. Perhaps one inevitably seems a snob when one dares to reinstate real, many-sided excellence as the only tenable standard of human behavior.

I regard it, however, as the first step toward humility.

GERALD SYKES.

East Hampton, N.Y.



"How long have you had this obsession to be the prow of a schooner?"

IT WOULD BE a pity indeed if, in his review of "The Hidden Remnant," Mr. Samstag's personal and too clever remarks about the author, Gerald Sykes, were to lead readers to overlook a highly significant book. The "remnant," far from being a haven for the snobbish and the elite, has been a rallying symbol ever since the days of Isaiah for those who chose to stand on the side of the human spirit against the juggernauts of tremendous external pressure, whether of the chariots of Egypt and Nineveh or modern mechanized collectivism. I want to register my judgment that Mr. Sykes's book wrestles with possibly the most critical issue of our time—the preservation of individual human consciousness, which is the basis for freedom of the mind and creativity, in a day when this is threatened as probably never before.

ROLLO MAY.

New York, N.Y.

OUR MAN ON BROADWAY

I DO NOT KNOW the qualifications or background for drama criticism of your Henry Hewes, but, having just been exposed to his column in the March 10 issue, I must express an opinion concerning what appears to this theatregoer as a most extraordinary travesty of the facts and a remarkably myopic reaction to both "A Gift of Time" and "Moon on a Rainbow Shawl."

Mr. Hewes speaks disparagingly of "Gift" and glowingly of "Moon." Yet, as I experienced both plays—and this was evidently concurred in by respective audience reaction—"Moon" turned out to be dull, plodding, badly directed and written, with even worse acting performances, while "Gift" with Henry Fonda excited the audience to "bravos" and six curtains the night I was there.

The reactions by your critic do not stand up as qualified, intelligent dissent or approval, but appear rather as the efforts of someone lacking in even a modicum of sensitivity or understanding where true theatre is concerned. Perhaps—generously—

they could be termed "flights of fancy," having nothing to do with what went on on stage. . . .

As an addendum, your man notes in "Gift" that "the nicest moment" is one in which a friend says goodbye to Charles with "and . . .," to which Charles replies after a pause with "Yeah." This is, however, one of the few moments in a finely acted drama that do *not* come off. . . .

JOSEPH HARROW.

New York, N.Y.

LITERARY CHESSMANSHIP

WOULD GRANVILLE HICKS like to explain what he considers as a *New Yorker* "formula" story [SR, Mar. 17]? It might add zest to my reading of that magazine—and I read it with a good deal of zest now—to keep a mental scoreboard as to which stories contribute to the formula and which surpass it. But if I'm going to be playing that kind of chess with Mr. Hicks, I'd like to start with a clearer notion of the chessboard.

I was disappointed to have his review of John Updike's "Pigeon Feathers" touch so lightly upon the title story, which seems to me to be one of the finest short stories I've ever read. (Evidently Mr. Updike likes it too, since he gave it the post of honor in the new volume.)

ELVA McALLASTER,
Professor of English,
Greenville College.

Greenville, Ill.

OUT OF LINE

THE MARCH 10 issue carried a fine poem by Jeannette Nichols, from which the last line was inadvertently dropped. We offer our apologies to Miss Nichols. The poem as it should have been printed appears on page 53.

JOHN CIARDI,
Poetry Editor,
Saturday Review.

New York, N.Y.

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SR GOES TO THE MOVIES

Kicking a Habit

A FEW weeks ago in, of all unlikely places, a small theatre in the suburbs of Phoenix, Arizona, the controversial film version of Jack Gelber's "The Connection" had its American premiere. Perhaps insufficient time has elapsed to assess accurately the moral decline in this relatively well-to-do and respectable community, but the picture had a very successful run, and played without incident. Pending an appeal from a New York court decision, which found the film's language objectionable, "The Connection" will probably now begin to open slowly around the country, in cities and states free of censor boards and repressive courts. And I say more power to it.

I say this not merely because I found it fascinating as an exhibit of bravura film making, which it is; but more especially because its director and co-producer, Shirley Clarke, has dared to venture into territory specifically forbidden to motion pictures. For a number of fairly obvious reasons, the commercial movie works in a horrifyingly constricted area, bounded on one side by the regulations of the Production Code, and on the other by strictures of "good taste" that are supposed to cover all other contingencies.

Unfortunately, there are some areas of life where "good taste" simply does not exist—particularly if that "good taste" is the taste of another, earlier era. Our playwrights and novelists have long since discovered that these polite shackles had to be abandoned if they were to write meaningfully of a world they never made. Whether "angry" or "beat," they drew their strength from their willingness (and wish) to fly in the face of convention. Movies, on the other hand, if only because they are so terribly expensive, find it safer to observe, and conserve, the conventions, to be no more daring than can profitably be exploited.

"The Connection" ignores all this. Gelber, writing his own screenplay, has made no attempt either to sweeten or sanitize his original play (although, mercifully, he has shortened it). Leach's pad, as designed by Richard Sylbert, is every bit as scabrous and claustrophobic as it was on the stage—perhaps even more so, since the camera permits us to see the cockroaches, and forces us to look at the peeling paint and cracking plaster. Most important of all, Shirley Clarke, directing her first feature film, has approached her material

honestly and seriously. "The Connection" does not compromise or sensationalize. It makes no effort to be popular (as the Los Angeles version did) by spicing up the proceedings with four-letter words. The words are there when they have to be there, when the characters would use them naturally. Similarly, there is considerable humor in the film—the hard-bitten humor of confirmed junkies. But it is a humor without jokes, a corroded wit that chills as much as it amuses. Few pictures have made so little effort to meet their audience more than halfway.

On the other hand, Mrs. Clarke has done an extraordinary job of cinematizing the original material. Holding to the single setting of the play, her picture becomes a documentary-like investigation of the flat and its inhabitants. (Not for nothing does one of them carry about a copy of Kracauer's "Theory of Film"!) As in Antonioni's films, the camera insists that we look, darting across the room for a close-up, moving from fingers on a keyboard to the rapt, gone expression of a listener, revealing the throbbing veins of the forearm prepared for a "fix," the

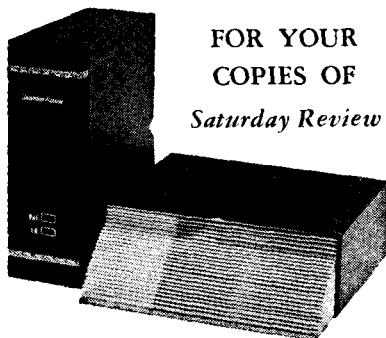


agonies of a junkie beyond fixing. Through sheer virtuosity, the director transforms what is admittedly a distasteful subject into an absorbing experience.

Many will find "The Connection" disturbing, even shocking. I regard this as the mark of its director's integrity. A study of drug addiction that is anything less than disturbing must of necessity be something less than honest. What is to me most impressive about this picture—even beyond its technical skill—is its sense of truth, its willingness to look without flinching, and to reveal without preaching. With it, Shirley Clarke has taken a bold step into new and unfamiliar territory for American movies, the motion picture (Continued on page 54)

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