

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

NOSTALGIA IN PRINT

THE LITERARY STRATEGIES devised by "nostalgics" like Yeats, Joyce, and Eliot to meet the almost insuperable difficulties with which their particular *Zeitgeist* confronted them may be useless as catalysts to the young writers emerging in England today. In that sense, Stephen Spender is right in saying that the literary movement which gave birth to "Ulysses" and "The Waste Land" is "past history" ["What Modern Writers Forget," SR, Jan. 20].

It is unfortunate, however, that in making this point, Mr. Spender should have given the impression that these earlier writers of the twentieth century are only more eloquent Miniver Cheevys hankering after the "medieval grace of iron clothing."

The total concept of "the tradition" to be found in the prose and verse of T. S. Eliot, Mr. Spender's chief "nostalgic," is much closer to that presented by Walter Lippmann in "The Public Philosophy" and by Barbara Ward in "A Direction for the West" [SR, Jan. 27], than it is to the precious and exclusive literary tradition which Mr. Spender attributes to Eliot. Miss Ward's concluding statement that "The Western citizen of today, if he is to face the world's crisis of freedom, cannot ignore the deepest ideals of his own free tradition" might stand as an epitome of Eliot's basic theme throughout all his works. Some evidence for this broader concept of "the tradition" is furnished by Mr. Kennedy's dramatic use of lines from one of the choruses in Eliot's "The Rock": "... here were a decent godless people: / Their only monument the asphalt road/ And a thousand lost golf balls."

It may be true "that we have nothing more to learn from nostalgia"—as Mr. Spender defines that somewhat slanted term—but it assuredly is untrue to imply that we have exhausted the meaning of "the tradition" as it is set forth in the "objective correlatives" of Eliot's poetic art, and in his "The Idea of a Christian Society."

JOHN A. STUART,
Lycoming College.

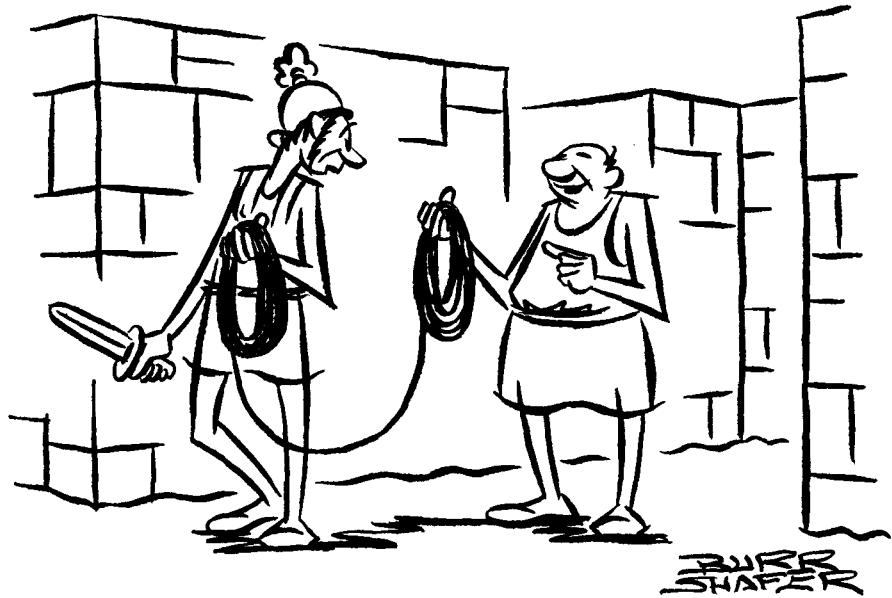
Williamsport, Pa.

I THINK Stephen Spender slights James Joyce's "Ulysses."

"No one rejoices because circumstances have made it possible to share the revelation of 'Ulysses' or 'The Waste Land,' or the Cantos," Mr. Spender writes. "All these works employ a modern idiom not as a great possibility but simply to express its squalor and destructiveness."

I do rejoice in sharing the revelation of "Ulysses": the continuity and monumental indestructibility of man's common (squalid, if you like) experience. Joyce saw life's ugly details as Eliot and Pound did, but he accepted them as they did not and built from them by means of art an expression of their beauty: their essential contribution to a great whole.

Mr. Spender implies that "Ulysses" is



THROUGH HISTORY WITH J. WESLEY SMITH

"I guess this string belongs to you, Theseus. I've been following it all through the labyrinth."

an aloof, critical, and negative book; but Joyce, like Molly Bloom, says "Yes!"

S. E. ABERCROMBIE, JR.

Atlanta, Ga.

ART IN PHILADELPHIA

MY THANKS TO Katharine Kuh for her tribute to the art to be found in our city [SR, Jan. 27], so often regarded as a quasi-suburb of New York City with little to engage the quest for culture. I daresay that the lack of "the art of our own immediate times" will long appear relatively awkward, though the Philadelphia Art Alliance, another oasis in Philadelphia, to some extent attends to this matter. But if we always remain a generation behind, this is more than compensated for by the pleasant and relaxed atmosphere to be found in each of the museums mentioned, in marked contrast to the frenetic environment of the museums in New York. I sense an appreciation of this particular advantage in the article although it is not specifically described.

ALFRED M. BONGIOVANNI, M.D.
Philadelphia, Pa.

OUT ON A LIMB?

RE NICCOLO TUCCI's last paragraph in his January 6 OFFHAND column, in which he criticizes the waste of Christmas trees:

As a tree farmer I'm qualified to say that Mr. Tucci has his facts all wrong. He seems confused about Christmas trees, as well as misinformed. The tree is not the object of worship at Christmas, merely a cheerful reminder at the celebration of the winter solstice that all nature is not as dead as it seems.

The cutting of Christmas trees does not

deplete our forests, and if it fills any bank accounts they are not the tree farmers'.

Christmas trees are for the most part planted, not wild; those harvested in 1961 were set out back around 1950. So if Mr. Tucci plans a campaign against Christmas trees, it would be only fair to announce this to the growers ten years in advance. Usually, a tree farmer sets out a new stand of trees close enough together that the young trees shade out weeds and weed trees of no value. Christmas trees are harvested at a time when the stand is about to become overcrowded; if the farmer is lucky he may make enough from their sale to pay the taxes on the land during the years he's waited for a crop. Since the tree farmer must carry on a continual program of thinning, weeding, and pruning as necessary parts of his business, let's not shed too many tears over the fraction of his thinnings he's about to put on the market. If he couldn't sell them, he'd still have to cut them down and they'd lie and rot. . . .

FRANCES D. YATSEVITCH,
Windsor, Vt.

THE PRIVATE VS. THE ARMY

JOHN CIARDI's concern for Private Robert H. Sorge's affairs [SR, Jan. 13] is not well based. There are many things for which a person may well fight for principle but Sorge has none of these. His refusal to take immunization shots is based more on ignorance or stupidity, or solely on cowardice, rather than on principle. Ignorance of the aims and methods of modern medical science is poor excuse for "standing on principle."

R. G. SCHIFF,
Carbondale, Ill.



Rhodes's Salome, Nilsson's Tosca—Igor Oistrakh

WITH most performers of Salome, career expectations relate to vocal condition—how long they can continue to sing Strauss's difficult score. With Jane Rhodes, the Frenchwoman who lately added her name to the Metropolitan's performers of the part, job security has more to do with inches and pounds, for it is the presently interesting relation of them that does most to make her an eye-filling if ear-trying embodiment of history's most loathsome egocentric.

In her youthful bearing, bright red wig, and peremptory pout, Miss Rhodes conveys valid suggestions of a teenager, if Parisian cinematic rather than Judean historic. She sustains this characterization well in the first half of the performance, which is reasonably restrained, becoming more calculating and mentally purposeful as the prophet's rebuke stings deeper. She makes clear that Salome has an evil design on Jochanaan well before Herod asks her to dance (she anticipates the script by wearing the veils under her wrap from the start), choosing the moment when he has offered her an unconditional reward to agree. And the dance itself was more graceful, at the start, than the average; but Miss Rhodes moves best when she moves least, and grace departed as she took one whirling step and then another.

If she was vocally unimpressive before the dance, Miss Rhodes was totally inadequate for a theatre of the Metropolitan's size after it. Her debate with Herod about the oath he had sworn (in her mangled German "eid" had more the sound of "aid") was petulant, not menacing, his capitulation hardly inevitable. As well as being small in size, her voice is limited in color: when she finally curled up with the head cradled in her arms, the voluptuous curve of Strauss's vocal line was thin and pinched, the compulsion of the scene not expressed by any new revelation of ardor, but by more of the old revelations of pseudo-nudity which most Salomes reserve for Herod. Miss Rhodes offered it, as an encore, in the blatant illumination of a spotlight.

Here, finally, at "Ich habe deinen Mund geküsst, Jochanaan," conductor Joseph Rosenstock gave Strauss his due and Miss Rhodes could not be heard at all (were he accused of drowning her out, he might have replied as Beecham once did on a similar occasion: "I did so in the public interest"). Previously

he had shown her more than merited consideration, for one with his thorough knowledge of the score could have conveyed more of its fury and heat were he not, clearly, holding back. It was, otherwise, a familiar kind of Metropolitan "Salome" in the remnants of Donald Oenslager's quarter-century-old scenery, and with wear also evident in the voices which Ramon Vinay had to offer as Herod and Blanche Thebom as Herodias. Walter Cassel's range is short for the rolling richness required for the incistered prophet which left William Olvis, as Narraboth, doing the best singing. Ralph Herbert's staging was well devised. As a full evening's entertainment, however, this "Salome" is shabby value at Metropolitan prices.

The values of the Rhodes Salome were reversed in Birgit Nilsson's first Tosca, which had abundant vocal power but little dramatic illusion. As a variant from her last "Götterdämmerung" Brünnhilde of but a few days before, Miss Nilsson's Tosca earns accolades for vocal versatility, but it was hardly Puccini's Tosca at all—vocally awkward, thick and oversized in sonority, without the nuance or flexibility to make the conversational line of the first act meaningful. Her power counted for more in the second act, but for such music Miss Nilsson's sound is overpowering and undermodulated. Franco Corelli's Cavaradossi and Anselmo Colzani's Scarpia were much as before, only louder—a condition which "conductor" Kurt Adler was powerless to influence, let alone control.

FOR this season's Rossini, the opera enthusiast had to seek out the Philharmonic in Carnegie Hall, where Thomas Schippers devoted half a program to the first act of "Le Comte Ory." Rossini wrote no comic operas after this one, though he had forty years of life in which to do what he wished. Apparently what he wished most was not to deal further with plots about a count disguised as a hermit who seeks the hospitality of a countess whose husband is off to the Crusades, but he made his valedictory a triumph of ingenuity as well as high spirits. This first act contains any number of artful new turns for patter phrases, extensions of melodic formulae into new equations of meaning, and everything else that adds to musical pleasure if moral turpitude.

The pleasures were marshaled purposefully by Schippers's baton, the style

being one for which his aptitude was evident in his Metropolitan "Don Pasquale" of half a dozen seasons back. Among a young, mostly American group of singers, the pliant bass of Norman Treigle made the best effect in the unscholarly music of the count's tutor. Each of the others—Judith Raskin as the light-voiced countess (cousin of Rosina), Shirley Verrett-Carter as the amorous page, and Frank Porretta as his/her adventuring employer—performed well when not being required to pierce the vocal stratosphere which was a natural habitat for the exceptional singers of Rossini's time.

The indications from David Diamond's Seventh Symphony as heard in its introductory performance here by the Philadelphia Orchestra under the direction of Eugene Ormandy are that this composer's craftsmanship continues to accumulate as his discrimination sharpens. The bonding together of sonorous layers which make up the tough texture of his first movement is accomplished with the certainty of a master painter laying a texture on canvas, the achievement of a climax no less persuasive for being a dying fall rather than a rising shout. The slow movement is equally single-minded in its atmospheric intent, the ostinato finale suitably summarizing. It is, in short, what "a symphony" suggests—a musical discourse of a length to suit its materials.

The evening also returned Rudolf Serkin to the local concert scene after his season-long sabbatical in great, perhaps too great, spirit for the Beethoven No. 4 following a warmly phrased, beautifully integrated B flat Mozart (K. 595) Concerto. Clearly Serkin saw these works as complementary to each other (the last of the Mozart concertos, and the last of the Mozartian concertos) but he was a shade strenuous in some of the quieter moments of Beethoven. Bartók's "Portraits," with the solo violin well performed by Anshel Brusilow, completed an absorbing evening of music.

Also absorbing was Igor Oistrakh's introduction as soloist in the Beethoven violin concerto with the Symphony of the Air knowingly directed by Alfred Wallenstein. He is, altogether, his own man as a violinist, however much he may be his father's son as a musician. Suavity, sonority, a lustrous command of color and nuance are the outward marks of a violinistic gift not only rare but soundly disciplined. He retrieved one memory slip of his own (in the first movement) and a failure by the horns (in the larghetto) without sacrificing mood or jeopardizing command. Nor could any soloist, however eminent, ask more in collaboration than Wallenstein provided.

—IRVING KOLODIN.