

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Where There's Smoke

CONGRATULATIONS ON THE announcement of SR's decision not to accept cigarette advertising. I wish every magazine, newspaper, and TV and radio station would manifest this degree of intellectual moral, and financial courage.

ALVAN G. FORAKER, M.D.

Jacksonville, Fla.

N.C.'s EDITORIAL "The Danger Beyond Smoking" [SR, Jan. 25] argues that a portion of our society has grown callous to the "fragility and preciousness" of life. But smoking indicates not only callousness but also something equally dangerous. It indicates blind conformity—a negation of individual decision in the face of medical fact.

ROBERT LARocca.

Silver Spring, Md.

FAR FROM NOT caring, I believe most people are simply optimistic. It's always the other fellow who will be shot or who will die of lung cancer.

As long as there's a man of ninety who still smokes three packs a day, there will be many men of twenty planning to have the same good fortune.

CLARE MACDONELL.

Syracuse, N.Y.

What Is a Book Worth?

DAVID DEMPSEY's column "The High Cost of Reading" [SR, Jan. 11], while informative, left a number of important questions unanswered. For one, the article failed to differentiate between paperback and hardcover books when discussing increasing costs. As a graduate student in history, I can testify that hardcover books in that field have increased in price considerably more than the 18 per cent indicated by Mr. Dempsey. . . . I can only assume that this figure includes paperback prices, which are themselves appalling today.

The reading public, Mr. Dempsey points out, has increased twofold since 1953. But how much of that increase is due to captive-audience sales to undergraduates assigned compulsory readings in paperbacks? Mr. Dempsey's suggestion that *voluntary* buying has doubled in spite of spiraling prices is open to considerable doubt.

"Who wants to begrudge a publisher his excess profits?" I do. And I'm sure I speak for a great majority of my fellow students.

WALTER J. STEIN.

Oakland, Calif.

DAVID DEMPSEY's lament over the high cost of reading implies that there is something improper about the fact that some books sell for six times their production costs, whereas others may sell for as little as two or three times their production costs. This is like decrying the fact that seats in a theatre are priced without regard to what they cost at the furniture factory.

The holder of a copyright has been given purposefully, and legally, the right to sell his literary property in whatever way he feels will bring him the greatest re-



"There's been an official analysis of your so-called wonder drug and it's been found to contain nothing more than earth, air, fire, and water!"

ward. In most cases, his rewards are small, at best. In some cases, they can be rather large. With a property of the latter kind, the cost of production can be one of the least important factors in pricing policy. The objective of pricing policy is, quite candidly, to maximize net profit and not to minimize it.

The Congress of the United States need not have extended to writers this right to set and control the prices at which their literary property is sold, but it did so, and with the deliberate intent of ensuring to writers as much revenue as possible from their work, thus encouraging writers to produce more work of a kind thought to be of value to the public. . . .

Bewailing the high cost of original editions seems a bit like bewailing the surcharge on jet aircraft fares. If you are in a hurry, you pay a little more. If you have to put economy ahead of convenience, you wait your turn at the public library, or read something else until the appearance of the paperback edition. There must be very few other products on which the alternatives open to the impecunious are anywhere nearly so satisfactory.

In view of the unchallenged right of the author and publisher to price their literary property at the point of highest net return, it is perhaps fortunate that their best interest so often coincides with the best in-

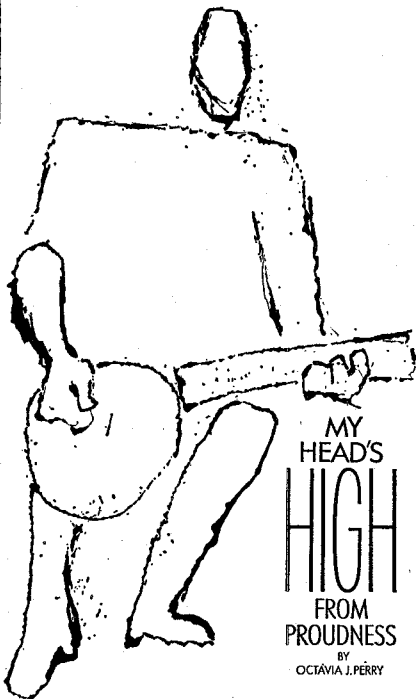
terests of the reading public. Each of a writer's titles is unique. On the other hand, he does have to compete for the time of the reading public. Any reader who thinks a price too high need only defer his reading of that particular title and choose another priced more to his liking.

Surely the "high cost of reading" might, with justice, be retitled "the low cost of reading," because the average cost of the average book has actually dropped since World War II. This, of course, is due to the advent of the paperbound, but is there any reason why the paperbound should be ignored in any analysis of the cost of reading? During 1962 approximately 312 million copies of adult trade books were sold, of which 273 million were in paper. These books sold for an average of 59 cents apiece wholesale.

Even more important than price is the vast increase in the number of different titles available at paperback prices. A pessimist might take note of the fact that paperback prices themselves have been rising, but the rest of us can surely rejoice in the fact that there are now 25,000 titles available in paper editions that formerly were available only in cloth, or perhaps not available at all.

DANIEL MELCHER, President,
R. R. Bowker Company.

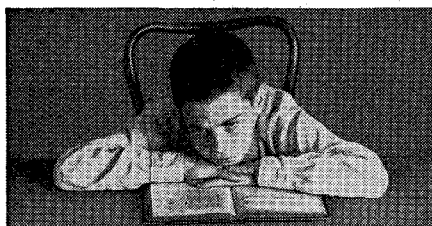
New York, N.Y.



MY HEAD'S
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BROADWAY POSTSCRIPT

Hello and Goodbye

ONE OF the zingiest musicals in some time is *Hello, Dolly!*, and its instant success represents a triumph of staging over a book, lyrics, and music that are not in themselves extraordinary. What Michael Stewart's new musical appears to do is to find places in the plot of Thornton Wilder's *The Matchmaker* where lively production numbers can be inserted. For instance, the invitation to the pretty milliner and her assistant to go dancing erupts for several minutes into a swirling, sweeping abstraction of the joy a neophyte might feel at suddenly encountering terpsichorean release. And Dolly's entrance at Harmonia Gardens is built up to outdo the warmest reception ever accorded a visiting celebrity. While these two vital numbers may not be very pertinent to the plot, they are justified because in spirit *Hello, Dolly!* has very much to do with the victory of gregarious pleasure and human feeling over tight-fisted, barren existence.

These two numbers also represent Jerry Herman at his melodic best. As for Mr. Herman's lyrics, these seem most amusing when the miserly merchant of Yonkers sings about how he longs for a wife "all powdered and pink, to clean out the drains and the sink." In the role of Dolly, Carol Channing manages to be outrageously aggressive and at the same time so constantly aglow with her own optimistic radiance that we can scarcely believe her when she describes herself as a dried-up oak leaf. Indeed, throughout the action Miss Channing is forever enjoying such warm personal contacts with everyone that her marriage to a rich old man seems a minor objective. Conversely, David Burns is so hilariously the essence of obdurate greed that we don't want to believe in his eventual reform. As the merchant's errant clerks, Charles Nelson Reilly and Jerry Dodge make a colorful, energetic pair, as do Eileen Brennan and Sondra Lee, who play their quarry.

Oliver Smith's scenery (which includes the happy notion of using old lithographs as backdrops), Jean Rosenthal's warm lighting, and Freddy Witkop's extravagant costumes all contribute to this gay spectacle. But it is to Gower Champion, whose choreography and direction so dominate the evening, that the major credit must go. Although *Hello, Dolly!* may not be totally engrossing, Mr. Champion has shaken up the ingredients so that they fizz.

Why is it that the mere spectacle of a dissolute poet merrily refusing to go

gentle into "that good night" holds our interest so fascinatingly over an entire evening as it does in *Dylan*? One can take or leave the final contention of the play Sidney Michaels has pieced together from two biographies, which infers that the late Dylan Thomas was convinced that he had lost his talent and therefore deliberately created a colorful legend of his self-destruction in order to enhance his posthumous literary reputation. Then, too, the suspense of whether or not Dylan will show up for his lecture dates may have been agonizing in real life, but it becomes pretty tame stuff in the theatre.

No, the attraction of this play comes almost entirely from the melancholy tenacity with which Sir Alec Guinness portrays the poet. There is, to be sure, one eloquent moment in which Dylan explains why "Baa, baa, black sheep" is the story of his life, but there is little else with enough dramatic shape or focus to move us. And Dylan's blasphemous responses to what he found stifling in America are really no more than an anthology of quotes and disorderly incidents. Yet Guinness, who has adopted the look and the sound of Thomas, brings his own brand of sophisticated one-upmanship to the role. One suspects that when, in answer to a newspaperman's complaint that he doesn't understand his poems, the actor drolly replies, "Then read Robert Frost," he may have been much more cutting than was the less sanguine Thomas. It is this inner dialectic between actor and character that is so much more absorbing than the biographical details.

As Thomas's Irish-born wife, Kate Reid adds a dash of shrewish pepper. The rest of the cast have been given very little of consequence to do, so that, with the exception of one strip-tease dancer, the American complement not only seems pale but also seems to justify Thomas's professed dread of returning to America for another tour.

Oliver Smith's revolving turret of platforms and steps is workable, even though it loses purity when it is supplemented by other scenic illusions. Peter Glenville's understating direction avoids the danger of pretentiousness that is almost always present in plays about great writers. If it does not ever put a play in gear, it does at least sustain an atmosphere in which the personalities of Guinness and Thomas can meet and agree to thumb their noses at a number of unsatisfactory aspects of modern existence.

—HENRY HEWES.

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