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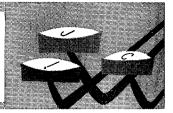
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Manner of Speaking



The Monster Den: I see now that I started something when I wrote a column for Benn's birthday [SR, Dec. 14], and I was not long in hearing about it from Myra and Jonnel (he is really John Lyle Pritchett, which became John L. to keep his John distinguished from mine, which became Jon'l, which became Jonnel).

All those two (by which I mean a bit more than all two of almost anything else) immediately took positions for pattern bombing, and I had no sooner felt my first eardrum shatter than I realized my mistake and surrendered. entering a formal agreement to write a column for Myra's birthday in March and one for Jonnel's in May. At that point, however, Benn joined in, insisting that I had to do one for Mummy's birthday. Mummy's birthday happens to be February 22, and I tried to point out first that George Washington has a prior claim to it, and second that I have no journalistic sentiments about Mummy, and, foolishly, I decided to resist, even though there were now three of them in formation (which is at least twice as much as just two).

Loud is only the rustle of beginning at my house, and a roar punctuated by a shriek here and a thud there is only the warmup. In a few minutes you can't hear the lynxes for the hyenas and you can't hear either for the elephant stampede. Then, by the time you get all that on tape along with a sound track from the Battle of Leyte Gulf, all you have to do is send in a squadron of banshees for fighter cover, play it all inside a sealed boiler, and that's home sweet home.

How it ever gets from there to lights out, when I stop by to find them in bed and ready to be kissed in an actual ho-hum silence that might do to inclose actual children, is a mystery a man would be a fool to tamper with. Sufficient unto bedtime is the stillness thereafter.

I tucked Benn in and told him I saw no reason he couldn't try to be an astronaut if he would first do better in arithmetic. I kissed Myra goodnight and was informed that her Christmas wardrobe was keen, neat, and cool-est, the last being a pure and protracted spondee. And as I was working Jonnel and his bedclothes into some sort of self-conforming snarl, I promised again that, yes, I would write a column for his birthday and for Myra's. Then he

wanted to know why I wouldn't do one for Mummy's birthday, and I told him what I really ought to do was a letter of sympathy from the Ciardi Monster Den, of which she seems to have been appointed den mother without prior consultation.

Then for the more-or-less thousandth time he wanted to drag out the goodnight business by wanting to know how I had met her, and by the time I had sidestepped that one and had managed to snarl him into place with the lights out, it was late enough for any man's mortal thoughts to start flowing, and this is what came (which I hope my monsters will accept as some sort of answer to Jonnel's question, and which I hope Mummy will accept as some sort of birthday sympathy from a co-conspirator, and with love, or with at least as much love as can make itself heard over the den-din of these caves we all come to):

THE MONSTER DEN

I met your Mummy long ago.
She said, "How do you do?" I said, "Hello!"

And we talked a little about a lot.

And as we talked we sat and thought

A lot or a little. And then, I guess, I asked a question, and she said, "Yes."

And what I asked was-let me

It must have been, "Will you marry me?"

For that's what she did. And I married her,

With a dress and a ring and a cake.

Well, sir,

We left our friends when the cake was gone.

We kept the ring (she has it on). And she changed her dress and we took a train

To somewhere, I guess. And then a plane

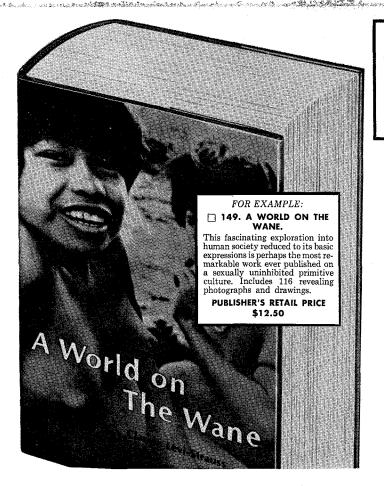
To somewhere else.

We thought we were Living happily ever after, sir, As the stories say. We didn't know then

We were only starting a Monster Den.

But that's what we did.

We had it in mind SR/February 22. 1964



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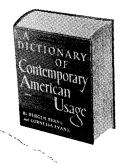
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And looked like a girl, with a button nose,

And giggly eyes, and a crookedy smile.

So we called her Myra-for a while.

And then what happened? She grew and grew,

And after a while there was no one but you

Where our baby had been.

As for Monster Two, He looked like a boy, so we called him John.

How could we guess what was going on?

He looked like a boy, and a fine one, too.

So we took him home. And he grew and grew.

But he hadn't grown much before we knew

What looked like a boy was really you!

Mummy cried and hung her head. "Someone is monstering us!" she said.

"Our house is becoming a Monster Den!"

-But we didn't give up. We tried again.

And that time what we got was Benn!

Yes, you!—And were we happy then?

Well, all I shall say is, that made three.

And I looked at Mummy, and she looked at me.

And we looked again at what we had got.

And we thought a little about a lot. And I sighed for Mummy, and she sighed for me,

As we took it home. For-do you see?—

We had finally guessed it. We knew right then

It isn't really a Monster Den

Until you have at least one Benn!

Well, we watched him grow. And the more he grew

The more we knew, and what we knew

Was-just as I say-no Monster Den

Is complete without at least one Benn!

So there we were with our Monsters Three

Breathing out fire at Mummy and me.

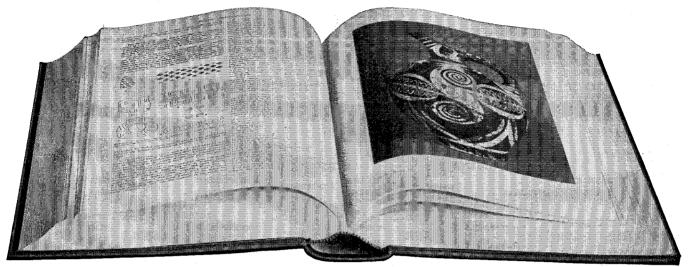
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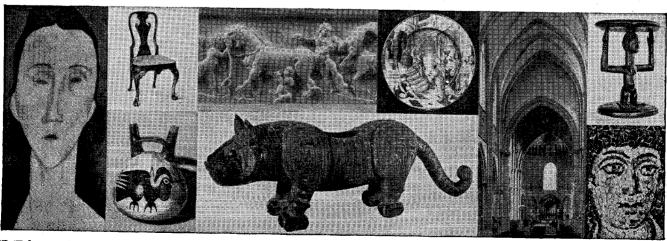
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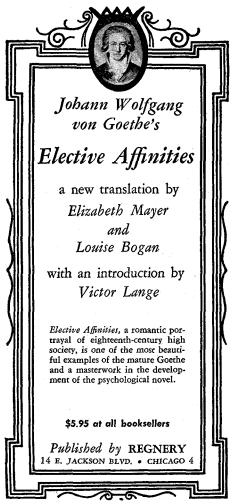
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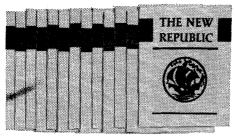
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SEVEN PLAYS. Volume II. By Michel de Ghelderode. Hill & Wang. Hardbound, \$4.95. Paperback, \$1.95.

THE TESTAMENT OF SAMUEL BECKETT: By Josephine Jacobsen and William R. Mueller. Hill & Wang. Hardbound, \$3.95. Paperback, \$1.65.

Two Plays: Tchin Tchin and Chez Torpe. By François Billetdoux. Hill & Wang. Hardbound, \$3.50. Paperback, \$1.50.

Travel

Complete Guide to Washington, D. C. By Andrew Hepburn. Doubleday. \$1.95.

—Compiled by Ruth Brown.

Phoenix Nest

Continued from page 8

to have one thing in your hand than to wait for two."

I really felt sorry for the poor man with whom I talked at the Italian Embassy. He had to compete with a pneumatic drill in the background, as he tried with members of his staff to get to the bottom of the Italian version of the proverb. First, there were two voices in excited Italian discussion, then three voices, then four. Just about the time I was ready to give up, he returned to the phone and shouted in triumph: "Better an egg today than a chicken tomorrow."

Russia must be accounted for, so I called the Soviet Embassy and put it to them straight: Is there anything behind the Iron Curtain to equal "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush"? Consternation threaded its way through the wires. Did they consider this just one more U.S. achievement to top? And I could just imagine my entire conversation being properly recorded, translated, computed, and rushed to the decoding room.

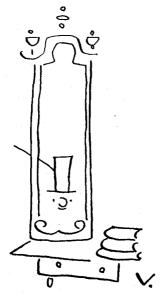
An eternity later, the clerk came back to ask me, "How you say cuckoo in English?"

Finally, she returned again with the information that "The cuckoo in hand is worth more than the crane in the sky." She seemed relieved that she'd been able to come up with an answer for me.

I am still puzzled by the Turkish Embassy. I talked with three different people there, ending with a gentleman who said, "Yes, we do have such a proverb!" There followed alternate periods of silence and hilarity before he choked out, "I can't think of it!"

And thus a day of neighborly relations came to an end.

-ELAINE HART MESSMER.



SR/February 22, 1964

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THE AMERICAN THEATRE '64

Its Problems and Promise

The following special section offers a survey of the American theatre's vast scope, from Broadway to theatre on campus. Its central theme inevitably is change, for at no time has there been as much ferment in the theatre as today. And its central question is: Where is the theatre going? Is it, as some observers argue, improving; and if it is, is it improving fast enough? The debate, consisting of eighteen pages, begins below.

By HENRY HEWES

NHERE are those who claim that in 1964 the American theatre is filled with hopeful signs. Hello, Dolly! is a smash hit. After a nine-year absence. Arthur Miller has returned to the fold with the most talked-about play in town to get the Lincoln Center Repertory Theatre off to a popular start in its exciting new temporary theatre (see Edward F. Kook's article on page 30). Circle-in-the-Square has a stunning production of The Trojan Women. Joseph Papp is getting more backing than ever from the city for his New York Shakespeare Festival. In April Lincoln Center will add a shiny new theatre to its complex (see Irving Kolodin's article on page 31). And the state Attorney General's inquiry into the New York theatre revealed no obvious irregularities in sixteen of the forty producers' financial statements that were examined.

Outside New York so many resident professional theatres are springing up that it now seems considerably more reasonable than it used to for theatre artists to hope for a first-class career in other cities (see Herbert Blau's article on page 32). ANTA is sponsoring an American Playwrights' Theatre plan that will create more opportunities for some of our established playwrights (see Stanley Young's article on page 33). And the Rockefeller Foundation is exploring possibilities of a closer rapport with university drama departments and the Actors Studio so that these training organizations may better serve the entire professional theatre.

Certainly a much-needed change is taking place. But it is difficult to describe exactly the true nature of the change. As a first step toward finding out where the American theatre stands in 1964, and where it may be heading, Saturday Review has sought from key people in every branch of our theatre their frank appraisals of their own problems. This brief supplement may therefore present information that hopefully will lead to a better understanding of a highly complex situation.

1. Broadway

THE center of the American theatre is, for better or worse, Broadway. Lately it has become a nasty word, synonymous with corruption and compromise. Yet Broadway is not one thing, but an inextricable mixture of show biz and performing art. The show biz attitude includes showmanship in the Barnum tradition, the get-rich-quick gam-

ble, the slick operator, the hot ticket, the skilful inflation of fragile elements into what Tennessee Williams calls "a Broadway blockbuster" that overpowers and impresses gullible audiences, and the assumption that idealism, honesty, and fair play should not be expected in a world where money talks. The Attorney General's current revelations about "ice" (a term derived from politics where graft payments were entered on the books as Incidental Campaign Expenses; here, it means the illegal profits on tickets pocketed by some box-office treasurers, some general managers, and some producers) and other shady Broadway practices is a con-comitant of the show biz attitude. Because it is, many an honest as well as a dishonest producer will publicly inveigh against these practices but privately accept them as an inevitable



From Hello, Dolly!—a heyday ahead for musicals.

SR/February 22, 1964