

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Smoking Debate (Contd.)

TODAY I READ YOUR very excellent editorial "The Danger Beyond Smoking" [SR, Jan. 25] to my three senior writing classes and asked them to write their reactions to it. Perhaps you will be interested to know of some typical responses among high school students. The following are excerpts from their papers, written in class immediately after hearing the editorial read:

- "Indifference does seem to be the American norm as evidenced in poor voting turnouts, dwindling school spirit, as well as unconcern about the tragic problems of so many minority groups, and even health and safety hazards for oneself."

- "This is the type article I like to read. I don't enjoy its content because many of the ideas are in opposition to what I would like to believe. Just the same, I like to read an article that makes me think!"

- "With today's devices for longevity so great, we should plan for a long life or true happiness and fulfillment, and then be willing to work to reach those goals. We can never experience the full wonder of life no matter how great its duration."

- "The fact that we are ungodly people, in spite of more churches and more church attendance than most countries have, is revealed in the fact that at heart we live on the premise, 'Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.'"

- "If our America is made up of people who don't care if they live or die, what kind of fight could we give to save our country from such forces as crime, disease, and especially Communism?"

- "My reaction to this editorial is not one of great surprise. The world is in such bad shape that if society did not frown upon suicide, there would be many more than there are now when suicide rates are at a peak. Not enough people take a stand against gradual suicide."

- "I have been thinking about these very ideas and wondering when I would see an article in print that presented this point of view. It seems to me that this type of writing will encourage more people to stop smoking than articles which merely document the dangers of smoking from the health standpoint."

- "It is not the evil of smoking itself which disturbs me, but the way in which thousands of Americans disregard the warning, almost impudently defying their mortality. I wish that every person in our country could read this editorial and give it serious thought."

GERTRUDE NYSTROM,
Wheaton High School.

Wheaton, Ill.

INSTEAD OF indifference, the danger beyond smoking may be that man's preoccupation with the importance of life and with prolonging his own life is more dangerous

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"If the bomb is dropped, does the market drop with it?"

than either smoking or insensitivity to the principles of human plasticity, perfectibility, and growth.

As an ex-pipe smoker who stopped because of the expense, the time spent, the smoke in my eyes, and the offensiveness of stale tobacco to my non-smoking wife, I am almost tempted to start again (this time with cigarettes) in order to testify to an acceptance of the imperfectibility of man.

Let us be cautious in identifying indifference with violence. On the contrary, it is often the arrogance that comes from self-esteem that allows and encourages a man to do violence to other men. The resignation to death, on the other hand, makes it unnecessary to manipulate others to maintain one's own life or even one's own way. If smoking is a symbol of our willingness to die, then let us light up.

WILLIAM HENRY YOUNG.

Auberry, Calif.

Bouquets and Bourbon

AS AN ENSIGN in World War I, may I be permitted to violate Naval regulations by saluting T/Sgt. J. Ciardi, 11069345 (ex), for his challenging rebuttal in MANNER OF SPEAKING [SR, Jan. 18]. Make mine bourbon on the rocks, 100 proof.

DAVID F. SIBLEY.

Boston, Mass.

Cleaning Up

I WAS SURPRISED, when reading Kay Haugaard's "Plea for the Preservation of the Anglo-Saxon Four-letter Word" [PHOENIX NEST, Jan. 18], to see the name of *Fanny Hill* included in a list of books that, she claims, have caused said four-letter words to become common, and consequently less powerful, in our culture. Obviously Miss

Haugaard has not read *Fanny Hill*. Although it consists of "Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure," there is not one "four-letter word" in the whole unabridged text. To quote Peter Quennell's introduction to the book, "Fanny Hill would have shuddered at *Lady Chatterley*. . . the roughness and coarseness of the dialogue she would have found unspeakably offensive."

MARY WARDLOW.

Champaign, Ill.

Bristling with Facts

WITH INTEREST I NOTE in the PHOENIX NEST [SR, Feb. 8] the encyclopedic article on the camel. The author should have included with his "everybody knows" paragraph that "camel's hair is good for paintbrushes." It isn't. So-called camel's hair artist brushes, to make it confusing, are made of *squirrel* hair, the best of which used to come from Siberia: Kazan, red and reddish gray; Sakkamina, "blue"; and Talahutky, gray with a dark stripe.

"Camel hair" (squirrel) was never used for paintbrushes; it was widely used before the introduction of spray coating for the application of Japan colors, thin lacquers (not the present synthetic types), and light-bodied varnishes. It is still used for water-color, artist, lettering, and striping brushes.

The hair from the camel is unsuited to brushes—at least by Western standards—because it is kinky and coarse. I do not profess to know if it is used in textiles, but having spent some thirty-five years in the brush industry and having written a booklet, "All About Brushes," I am surer of my ground there. . . .

KENT D. CURRIE.

Haymarket, Va.

A moving plea to subscribers on the move

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SR GOES TO THE MOVIES

Screwball Stuff

HOWARD HAWKS, a director who is highly esteemed by professionals and by some fervent and knowledgeable film coteries here and abroad, recently said that he was very much afraid of a picture that was well liked by critics. In the past I have liked and taken pleasure from such films of his as *Red River*, *Bringing Up Baby*, *To Have and Have Not*, and *The Big Sky*. Although I don't remember any noticeable harm coming to any of them, Mr. Hawks may want to feel reassured that this critic, at least, does not like his latest movie, *Man's Favorite Sport*. In fact, I haven't liked any of his more recent movies either, including *Land of the Pharaohs*, *Rio Bravo*, and *Hatari!*, a statement which will probably get me excommunicated from all avant-garde film societies.

"The Hawksian hero," I read somewhere, "is upheld by an instinctive professionalism." Mr. Hawks may have read this, too, and thereby gained the idea for *Man's Favorite Sport*. This film deals with a man (Rock Hudson) who is supposed to be a professional fly-caster, but who has actually never snagged with a fishhook anything more noteworthy than a hat. A salesman for Abercrombie and Fitch (San Francisco branch), he is entered in a fly-casting competition in which, in great fear and trembling and while doing everything wrong, he lands several gigantic fish and wins. A simple enough idea, but one which, in the capable hands of Mr. Hawks, could be expected to generate a lot of laughs. It doesn't, although the picture abounds with sight gags.

We see Rock Hudson trying to put up one of those newfangled tents, wearing pneumatic, drownproof waders that inflate on him and turn him head down into the water; we see him backing into a bear and running on top of the water to get away; we see him catching a trout by snagging his line on a tree branch, causing the hungry fish to leap out of the water to take the dangling bait. This might have been funnier than it turns out to be if one weren't aware of the directorial engineering required to get these effects. But a larger trouble, I suspect, is that Mr. Hawks and his writers haven't made people out of the players. Rock Hudson seems to have no identifiable personality or background. He is simply there, and less a fact of life than a fact of the movies. He looks pleasant, he smiles, he frowns, but his natural bodily essences appear to be missing.

Mr. Hawks has surrounded him with

three pretty girls. One of these is Paula Prentiss, who does have a personality, but seems lost as to what to do with it in the movie. "You love Rock in this picture," someone probably told her, and dutifully she tries to love Rock, but she doesn't put any feeling into it; on the other hand, he summons up no passion when called upon (by the director) to return her love. Another girl, Maria Perschy, is billed as a "discovery" of Hawks's. She has no function in the story, although now and then a sight gag is invented in which she participates. A third girl, Charlene Holt, tries to act jealous and is said to be his fiancée, but she seems relieved to be trundled off the set and out of the picture. The impression given is that all of these people have been dredged up out of memories of other movies.

Out of one of the very groups that has enshrined Howard Hawks in a pantheon of great directors comes a new director, Adolfo Mekas, whose film, *Hallelujah the Hills*, was one of the few American entries at the Lincoln Center Film Festival and is about to go into national distribution. The story concocted by Mr. Mekas is less absurd than nonsensical and seems designed to allow two young actors to cavort for an hour and a half in front of a camera, making fun of not anything in particular, but simply having fun. There's a girl they both love, and she has been won by "the horrible Gideon," an inside joke. They work out their frustration in a Vermont landscape by parodying outdoor situations in countless movies they have presumably seen. Some of the parodies are funny, and Mr. Mekas shows his own knowledgeability by running through several of the old-time screen fades, wipes, and dissolves. But Mekas, a member of the self-proclaimed film avant-garde, shares the same fault as Hawks of the Hollywood old guard. He has not called upon life, emotion, feeling, or imagination for his film. The world he seems to live in is a world of the movies, and in the case of both Mekas and Hawks it's a curiously sterile world. I would think it also something of an unhealthy one, representing as it does a state of mind divorced from reality.

—HOLLIS ALPERT.

Just for the Fun of It

MEL SHAVELSON, one of Hollywood's more literate wits, was talking the other day about the troubles he had encountered in preparing his latest script, *The Greatest Job in*