

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Publishers and Wall Street

I AM NOT SURE I understand all the reasons why "Wall Street's recent whirlwind romance with Publishers' Row is waning," as William Jovanovich asserts in his article "When Publishers Go Public" [SR, May 16], but I am happy to read that it's finally happening.

Those of us who remember the old days when both books and magazines were piloted by men and women with a deep, unshakable pride in their craft do not like to see publishing firms taken over by the wheeler-dealers, infatuated with their corporation complex and enchanted with the sounds made by the analyst, the consultant, the pollster, and the lawyer.

The clutter of undistinguished and indistinguishable magazines now on the stands provides stark evidence of the fact that editor, writer, and reader alike suffer when the smart operators try to stamp their cold, impersonal, production-line imprint on the publishing scene. But I often wonder if the publishers themselves are not to blame for turning their houses into an economic red-light district where anything goes if the price is right.

BILL BENNETT.

Muskegon, Mich.

Sweet Shapes of Success

CHEERS TO KATHARINE KUH and her SR cohorts for the May 23 issue on design, the cult of mediocrity, etc.—and especially for exposing Robert Moses and his corporate kind at the World's Fair. I was given enough of a tour of the premises before formal opening to realize that many causes and concerns that so many of us share and do battle for were to catch it full in the chest again. The trouble is that each recovery seems to take longer than the last, and more and more victims settle for the fact of things as they are, rather than for things as they ultimately must be for the salvation of us all.

RUAL ASKEW,
Art Critic,
Dallas Morning News.

Dallas, Tex.

WALTER DORWIN TEAGUE points out, rightly, that good design is prevalent in sports items, and his trained eye gives him a natural bias toward them. He leaves me dumbfounded, though, when he gives a completely irrelevant reason for the affinity between sporting goods and design excellence.

If we can avoid semantic difficulties over the term "talent," I would like to suggest that the amount of talent applied to a design problem is unrelated to the chances for achieving beauty. I'm sure that the design staff for the Karmann Ghia would have been lost in any of the Detroit plants that were cranking out the worst of the tailfins when this little beauty was born.

Sporting goods reflect good design be-



Through History with J. Wesley Smith

"Tell Mr. Carnegie that I'm here from the library to get an overdue book and collect a fine of \$1.27."

cause their competitive purpose permits nothing else. Sporting goods evolve toward beauty because the design effort is directed toward perfecting their performance. Line or mass that does not fit the function is eliminated. The beauty of competition equipment reflects the balance, rhythm, and dynamics of the sport for which it was made. This is the same design principle found in nature. A thing looks as it does in nature because it performs its function best with that shape, and the more perfectly it performs its function, the more beautiful it appears.

I can think of no piece of sporting equipment designed for competition that is not a thing of beauty.

HARVEY C. PAIGE.

Alexandria, Va.

I CAN'T BEGIN TO TELL how thrilled I was to find my Carlsberg beer bottle design included by Mr. Teague in his article on "The 20 Best Industrial Designs Since World War II." This project was one of my first design assignments and represents something about which I had felt strongly for a long time. What's fun is to see that other people now are sharing my own enthusiasm for the approach. I appreciate the honor.

RICHARD C. RUNYON.

Los Angeles, Calif.

Philippine Progress

IN THE EDITORIAL "Education on Their Minds" [SR, May 23], N.C. has shown an understanding and appreciation of the educational aspirations of the Filipino. These people have always shown a thirst for

knowledge and a keen desire for a better understanding of the English language.

As far back as thirty years ago, I vividly remember passing a small schoolhouse in a Luzon Barrio, which had a large sign in front of it: "Speak English and Talk to the World." It would be most difficult for the Filipino to set aside the English language.

Many Americans are surprised to learn that from the southern Zamboanga to the northernmost Laoag, an American can freely converse in English with Filipinos.

LOUIS I. WITKOFF.
New York, N.Y.

The Malady Lingers On

PRIDE OF OWNERSHIP is surely the most worthy of human sentiments. Therefore it is quite appropriate that Messrs. Rosen, Seton & Sarbin ensure through your letters column [SR, May 16] that the shining contributions to poetry currently being disseminated by the Beatles be reflected also in the more muted glints of adoration falling upon Northern Songs, Ltd., now revealed as the anointed copyright proprietors.

Yet when protesting their share of glory before a literate audience, their new contribution to exact scholarship could have extended to an acknowledgment of sources. For the most lucrative of the Beatle numbers may boast among its precedents one of the most famous and best-loved of operatic classics. But perhaps no one your correspondent knew could inform him that the aria from Mozart's *Don Giovanni* "La ci darem la mano" becomes, by sufficiently brutal yet correct translation, "I Want to Hold Your Hand."

NORMAN CAZDEN.
Lexington, Mass.

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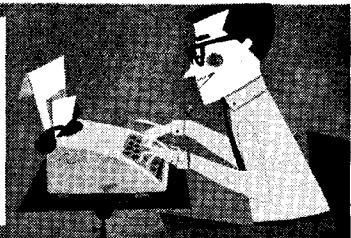
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Top of My Head



Laugh! I Thought They'd Never Start

THE heading of this column is a joke I made up a long time ago when I was writing the Milton Berle show. And down through my years of writing comedy for radio and television it's come back to haunt me.

The dictionary offers no help at all when it defines a humorist as "one who has a well-developed sense of humor." The problem is that, a sense of humor being such a personal thing, what may seem well-developed to one may seem to be a disaster area to another. A TV reviewer for a New York paper asked an interesting question the other day about a program being reviewed: "Do the one, two, or sometimes three genuinely funny lines the show comes up with each week justify its existence?"

A related question is, of course, "To whom is the line supposed to be genuinely funny?" In that same New York paper appears a joke set in a box as a daily chuckle. I've made a masochistic hobby of clipping these daily jokes and I offer two or three as samples:

OFFICER (at gun practice): Ready! Aim! Fire at will!"

ROOKIE: Which one is Will?"

CUSTOMER: Waiter, this food is terrible. I want to talk to the owner of this restaurant.

WAITER: You can't. He's out to lunch.

SUE: Sally, is your refrigerator running?

SALLY: Yes.

SUE: Well you better go catch it.

These are a few of the better samples. And that writer has only one joke a day to come up with. Of course he doesn't have the problem of wondering whether his audience laughs or not. In the manufacture of a *bon mot* for the mass media of television the problem is the studio audience. Will it laugh? Or in writers' lingo, "Will the joke work?" Of course most television writers who provide humor for filmed shows don't have that problem any more. Thanks to the almighty electronic invention of the laugh machine, which gives bite to the trite and makes the soporific sound terrific, comedy writers are reaping a harvest from this taped tedium of titters, but they are losing the challenge of

moving a live audience to laughter and thus slowly but surely lowering the level of their comedic output.

But back to humor. A couple of years ago I was hired to write an hour comedy special on which the TV Guide Awards would be presented. The show starred Judy Holliday, Art Carney, and Dave Garroway. Pretty good talent. And I thought the script matched.

Then the reviews came out. Someone generously and unkindly sent me fifty reviews from across the country. Generously because half the reviews referred to the show as the best comedy of the year. Unkindly because the other



half called it the lowest. Among the half that didn't like it, most of the critics said even the great Judy Holliday couldn't rise above that material. From Miss Holliday herself came a note saying it was the best material she had ever had on any television program. This is what makes writing for television exciting and fun and rewarding and ulcers.

People—everyday people as opposed to professional humorists—love to tell funny stories. They all have the same beginning: "Did you hear the one about—?" Following which usually comes an elongated version of a short, antiquated joke. They are the usually the three-way joke. That is, the first visit to the doctor, then the next visit, and then the final payoff when the doctor says whatever funny thing it is the doctors say. After the joke is told there is always hilarious laughter. From the teller. You begin to wonder for whom you're writing on television.

The other day in a high-rent, good-address hotel, I was in a crowded elevator. As it descended, it stopped at a floor where a nice little old lady was about to enter. She noticed the crowd and said to all present, "Is there enough room for me to squeeze in here?" One of the jovial gentlemen in the elevator replied: "It's all right if you don't squeeze too hard!"

The elevator seemed to come apart at the seams with the laugh that followed this. Go write for that crowd!

—GOODMAN ACE.