



Lessons in Bayoumanship

FILLING the car with gas and ourselves with a dozen oysters each, a friend and I set off out of New Orleans a few weeks ago to explore the land of the bayous. We rode southwest and then turned northwest after a while, and soon we had fetched up on the city limits of New Iberia, Louisiana, which is also known in certain circles as the Queen City of the Teche. We were taken in hand by Mrs. J. Winkle, the patroness of the Holiday Restaurant and Cocktail Lounge, who said that Teche is an Indian name that means snake and it seemed logical to apply it to a bayou that is rather serpentine. There are two main bayous in these parts, the Teche and La Fourche, and steamships came right up the bayous and deposited refugees, most of them Acadians who were run out of Canada by the English. Louisiana seemed a logical place of escape, for it was under the French government, and the bayous seemed a logical place to live since the Acadians were not partial to cities. Many of their descendants, who speak a patois of French, Spanish, and English, don't speak any unseasoned English at all.

Later, other refugees, arrived, Royalists of the French nobility fleeing the revolution and the guillotine—the Durands, Du Champs, Du Cleys, and Oliviers. It is said, at least by Mrs. J. Winkle, that they all lived an aristocratic life dancing the minuet and importing the Paris opera to play in the town of St. Martinville. When a daughter of Charles Durand got married in 1850, the good seigneur had a covey of servants import spiders and spray the webs in the grande allée of oak and pine trees with gold dust. M. Durand, a robust sort, is supposed to have had twelve children before his first wife died. He put up a statue, not to her but to himself, and vowed never to love again. In a year he remarried and is said to have had twelve more, at which point the townspeople tore down his statue. Most of Durand's fine furnishings were lost in the storm of 1927, and then the house burned. The grande allée was badly mauled by hurricanes Hilda and Betsy, and then there was little left of M. Durand except the tall tales.

Mrs. Winkle's establishment hardly looks like a quaint inn in the bayous, for it is largely a spotless nest of formica with a schizoid menu that offers chicken or tuna fish salad sandwiches and all-beef hamburgers on one side and such delicacies of the area as shrimp *étouffée*

à la Tèche and shrimp jambalaya on the other. The *étouffée* proved to be a sort of stew of shrimp cooked in its own juices. We tasted of the broiled stuffed flounder, and for clinical reasons only ordered the dirty rice, which is really clean rice soaked in a brew of chicken giblets cooked with parsley, green onions, and red pepper. Mrs. Winkle insisted, and would have been outraged had we demurred, that we try one stuffed shrimp which had been jammed with crab meat dressing, dipped in corn flour, and fried. It was, in a word, gorgeous.

There are neat and clean motel rooms in back of the Holiday Restaurant, not chintzy, ruffled four-poster rooms, but chrome-and-TV rooms, comfortable but not quaint. Only the Louisiana night separated the shrimp *étouffée* from the *pain perdu* or the hot cakes with open kettle cane syrup on the menu the next morning. *Pain perdu*, or lost bread, is a sort of French toast—bread dipped in egg, sugar, and vanilla and fried in hot fat.

With the waistline *perdu* as well, we set out to pick up Mrs. Joseph Simon Brown, a lady of comely face and soft voice who told us, as we rode through the canebrakes, of the story of Evangeline, who was really a girl called Emeline La Biche, and of her lost lover, who was in fact Louis Arcenaux. Longfellow hearing the story, allegedly from Hawthorne at Harvard, fictionalized the names and wrote his long poem recited by school-children from Punxsutawney to Point Barrow. In real life they were both expelled from Nova Scotia, but Louis arrived in the bayous first and despairing of ever finding Emeline, married someone else. She arrived three years later to find him already taken by another—ah woe!—and so she reported in to the friendly nuns with whom she worked until she died, before her time, of a broken ventricle.



One of the great events of New Iberia and nearby St. Martinville was the filming of the story of Evangeline, which brought a large company from Hollywood headed by Dolores del Rio. Donald Reed was Gabriel and Alec B. Francis was the priest. Mrs. Joseph Simon Brown, then a lovely local maiden, played an extra in the film. She remembers the premiere of the picture with great clarity because she got her engagement ring from Mr. Brown that same June night in 1929, and she was hard put to know what to look at, her new ring or the picture of herself on the screen. A print of the film is owned now by Mary Pickford, and it was recently screened down in the bayous during a commemorative ceremony.

We urged the ladies, and they were pleased to comply, to take us down the pike to see St. Martinville, which lies on the banks of the Teche and calls itself the Little Paris of America. Its first settlers had come directly from France, establishing a military station called the Poste des Attakapas, which they defended against the hostile Attakapas Indians. They maintained indigo plantations, fought Indians, and were eventually joined in 1765 by the first Acadians exiled from Nova Scotia. At the end of the century the settlement was joined by a third force of Frenchmen, the refugees of the Revolution of which Mrs. Winkle had told us over the *étouffées* the prior evening.

The barons and earls brought a new air of aristocracy and grand manner to the backwater bayous. They gave *fêtes champêtres*, imported a French opera company, and eventually hocked their jewels to pay the bills. After the Louisiana Territory was sold to the United States and Louisiana was admitted to the Union as a state, Poste des Attakapas became St. Martinville. Its citizens fished, trapped, grew cane, and smuggled with the British along a secret bayou route that led to the gulf. If the fare was somewhat different than Paris, the adoration of the good life was not lost. They didn't coo over the potage St. Germain, they worried about the gumbo. The condition of the autumn grape had been important in France, but here it was the spring arrival of the crawfish. The delicate taste of the *pâté-de-foie-gras* Strasbourg was part of the good life in the old country; the proper taste of a crab boiling in a pot was important here.

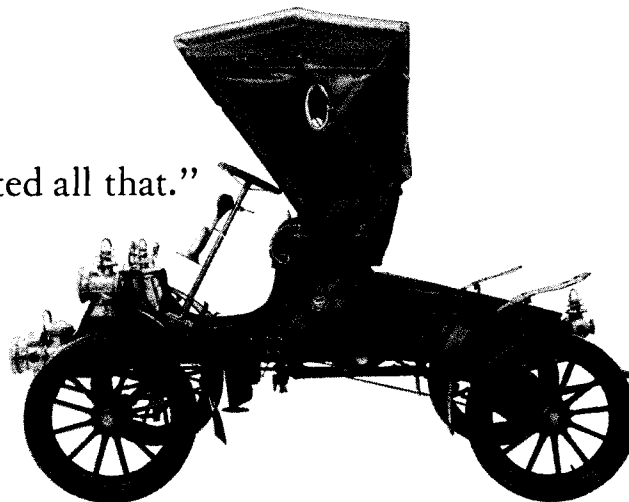
Nor has St. Martinville really changed. The Dodge and Plymouth dealer advertises that here one speaks French. The telephone company hangs a sign that says "La Compagnie de Téléphone-Télégraphe Bell du Sud." Fournet runs a drugstore and Oubré a bakery. Olivier deals in lumber, Hébert sells jewels, and

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Wilmer Bienvenu has the Rexall Store. The original town is laid out around the square where the Reverend Jean François, a Capuchin priest, established the first church in 1765. Sunday sermons are still delivered in French. Its masterpiece inside is the replica of Lourdes done in mud and plaster to resemble the grotto where so many of the ill and afflicted have realized miraculous cures. It was done by Paul Martinez, an octoroon who was inspired by a Lourdes postcard sent from France. The church has two celebrated gifts, one indoors, one out, both of which evoke curiosity. The indoor treasure is the baptismal font, donated by Louis XVI (who lost his head before his gift arrived in St. Martinsville). In the churchyard a dour model of Evangeline, a statue donated by Dolores del Rio and the rest of the movie company as a gift to the town when the filming of the tale of the sad lovers was finished has been placed above the grave of Emmeline Labiche. Says a booklet on the town, in a disarming aside, "The people of St. Martinsville and Lake Catahoula thoroughly enjoyed the visit of the movie company with its attendant glamour and exciting activities. They still speak of the friendliness and beauty of Miss del Rio and her fondness for fig preserves."

Down at the end of the street, on the shores of the bayou—or *by-ya*, as they pronounce it here—spreads the huge umbrella of the Evangeline Oak. It was in its shade that Louis Arcenaux waited for Emmeline to arrive, and here that he had to tell her that he had married another. None of the hurricanes have bothered the Evangeline Oak, even though a recent storm felled a huge tree that grew alongside.

The Old Castillo Hotel, where the French opera troupe stayed, stands just across from the Bayou Teche and the Evangeline Oak, a sturdy brick building that houses the Convent of Mercy School. It has been owned by the Sisters of Mercy since 1896, but the old halls echoed with the music of the grand balls staged by the Royalists trying to recreate the glories of Paris in the bayous of Louisiana.

St. Martinsville's Courthouse is celebrated for its simple and traditional austerity. It was built by slave labor, but the records in its vaults go all the way back to the founding of Poste des Atakapas in 1760. One of the presiding judges was Edward Simon, who at Harvard told the tale of Emmeline and Louis to Nathaniel Hawthorne, who told it to Longfellow. Three generations of Simons have since presided from the bench in the same court.

The original estate of a noble family named d'Hauterive, which emigrated from France in 1763, is now the Long-

fellow Evangeline State Park. The main house has become the Acadian House Museum, standing among the oak trees dripping with moss. The Acadian Craft House nearby is a reproduction of the simple quarters built by the refugees from Nova Scotia. The outside stairs lead to the *garconnière*, the quarters traditionally set aside for the young men in all Acadian families. The Park Lodge serves a potluck dish every day (black-eyed peas, rice, and steak the day I looked in), but its menu also gives notice of such examples of local delicacy as chicken jumbalaya, gumbo, stuffed crab, and fried catfish, all served on a brick terrace set at the edge of a running creek.

Many of the recipes of the bayou country are said to have been descended from those evolved by the great chefs of France, who came to America with the refugee royalists whom they served. *Oreilles de cochon*, hogs ears, were a favorite—dough dropped in frying oil and twisted, then later dipped in boiled syrup. *Oreilles de cochon* and *croquignoles*, a tea cake, were always on the breakfast tray, especially when the favorite sons returned home. Breakfasts ordinarily featured (and still do) *couche couche et caillé* or *cush cush* and *café brûlé*. In either case, it involves cornmeal mixed with baking powder and cooked in a covered iron pot. *Café brûlé* is



boiled milk mixed with caramel syrup.

Almost all Cajun or Acadian cooking begins with a *roux*, flour mixed into heated shortening and browned, then seasoned with onions. A local cookbook here is called *First You Make a Roux*. The *roux* is the beginning of such famous dishes as *courtbouillon* and gumbo. Gumbos can be made with chicken or seafood, but in the Cajun version no tomatoes are used. The manufacture of gumbo begins with the *roux* and ends with a heavy sprinkling of gumbo filé, a powdered sassafras. *Courtbouillon*, called by the cookbook *Recettes de Petit Paris* the most complicated of all French recipes, involves boiling a large fish in gallons of water that has been seasoned with a *roux* to which garlic, tomatoes, bay leaves, and thyme have been added. A local guidebook that incorporates a few traditional recipes bothers with no such scary preambles about *courtbouillon*. It merely advises the reader that ice-cold lemonade or beer should be served at regular intervals to the cook.

—HORACE SUTTON.

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Unsubmissive Performance

JOHN OSBORNE'S new play, *Inadmissible Evidence* (see SR, Dec. 18), has a unique form that fascinates and challenges both the audience and the actor who plays the part of Bill Maitland. For one thing, the prologue begins with the end of the story. And twenty-eight-year-old Nicol Williamson, whose nightly task it is to start at a point normally arrived at only through a long progression of emotionally escalating experiences, prefers to regard it as "the overture." Indeed, he turns its long monologue into a masterfully executed aria catching the essence of modern man's desperation and confusion with intricately designed emotional surges and retreats. For instance, in one breath he must positively maintain that he has spent his life "in the service of the law" and in the next reverse the motor and negatively add, "If you can call being a solicitor 'in the service of the law.'"

Should "the overture" be placed at the beginning like this? In opera, the themes established in the overture emerge again during the performance that follows. Here we never again see the protagonist at such an extreme of irrationality and uncontrol. Certainly it might be more effective and easier for the actor if it had been put at the end where it chronologically and emotionally belongs. And yet, as the play flashes back to the more rational series of episodes that lead up to the overture's hallucinated hell, we begin to realize how much we needed having witnessed in advance the protagonist's nightmare. For it is the real antagonist of the drama.

As Mr. Williamson puts it, "This isn't a play about a man going down the drain. It's about a man slipping down the drain and desperately fighting against doing so." From this assessment the actor has built the performance which London critics voted the best of the year (ahead of Sir Laurence Olivier's highly acclaimed *Othello*) and which is here rivaled only by Christopher Plummer's Pizarro in *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*.

After the overture, the play becomes a deliberately relentless process of putting the protagonist through a series of confrontations that are there solely for the purpose of revealing himself to himself. Thus, many who have seen the play here in a version a half-hour shorter than the London one feel that it is still too long. Mr. Williamson shrewdly explains, "It is not the length that bothers them, it's the relentlessness."

The actor feels the relentlessness, too, and wishes that he were performing the

play in repertory where he would only have to do it a couple of times a week. At the same time, he finds that he is more exhausted facing the start of each performance than he is at the end when, strangely enough, he emerges exhilarated. Because the form of the play is to use the other characters as a means of revealing what is inadmissible to the main character, Mr. Williamson has welcomed the various cast changes which, since the play first opened in London sixteen months ago, have given him the unplanned opportunity to be stimulated by from three to five actors in each of the other roles. While some were better than others, he says, each made him discover something fresh in himself.

This form of self-discovery through confrontation and projection allows infinite complexity, as attested to by the fact that the play was originally planned to include two additional scenes, one between Maitland and his father, and the other between Maitland and his first wife. And one gets the feeling that in Nicol Williamson, the playwright found one of the few actors alive with the capacity and willingness to go as deep into Bill Maitland's alienation as Mr. Osborne cared to probe.

This alienation is also demonstrated by another device, the casting of the same actress as three different women who come to discuss their divorce with Maitland. Thus we see that the protagonist is breaking down into that condition wherein he begins to see everybody as the same. And in the interview with the client who fights to avoid admitting to himself that he is homosexual, we see Maitland lose contact completely as he recognizes that he and his client are similar in their compulsion to avoid the issue.

How much similarity is there between Osborne, Maitland and Williamson? The actor feels that while he is younger than the other two, and glad of it, he and Maitland are less sophisticated than Osborne. However, he believes that all three share the same kind of edgy humor, detest the possessive "egg complex" of most women, and are happier outside the new generation's "with-it brigade." Furthermore, he finds they all tend to be potently sharp, biting and cruel about what they have to say. He quickly adds that this does not mean they do not violently detest violence, particularly in its most insidious forms. "The giveaway to my nature," concludes the Scottish-born actor, "is that my favorite composers are Handel, Bach, and Mozart."
—HENRY HEWES.