

parts in those days, male and female, were done by men) to tottering gray-beards, and to switch from one to the other with lightning speed (the Athenians allowed only three speaking actors per play, and these divided all the roles among them; the masks made this possible).

The author portrays Nikeratos and many of his fellow performers as homosexual, very likely an asset for an actor called upon to impersonate Helen or Andromache as often as Menelaus or Hector. Most of the action is laid in Syracuse, the wealthy and powerful capital of Greek Sicily, during a period in its history that held some grimly comic moments. For the better part of the fourth century B.C., despots ruled the city, first the able and ruthless elder Dionysius and then his shrewd but dissolute son, Dionysius the Younger. The latter was induced to invite Plato, whose *Republic* was a blueprint for running an ideal state, to come and try his theories out on Syracuse.

Plato accepted the challenge, and set out to lecture the king and his court on the behavior to be expected from a perfect sovereign. He also put them through a refresher course in mathematics, which he considered the *sine qua non* of mental discipline. It was a tough curriculum with no student options; the number of dropouts swelled daily and eventually included Dionysius, who went back with a sigh of relief to the boudoir and the bottle. Since the city was a political powder keg at the time, and the distinguished visitor's lofty pronouncements were striking dangerous sparks, he was put

(Continued on page 61)

#### FRASER YOUNG LITERARY CRYPT No. 1373

*A cryptogram is writing in cipher. Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle. Answer No. 1373 will be found in the next issue.*

JVSUS XD ZCJ G DXZAWS OUC-  
PSUL XZ MGPCU CM SGUWK  
UXDXZA JVGJ GOOSGWD JC  
JVS VXAVSU ZGJTUS CM IGZ.

—UCLSUJ WKZH

#### Answer to Literary Crypt No. 1372

*So far, evolution has been nothing but staggering from one error to another.*

—IBSEN.

## Book Forum

### Letters from Readers

#### In the Good Old Pagan Days

CONTRARY TO DEWEY HOITENGA's uninformed statement [Book Forum, Nov. 8] that "Jewish and Christian history give more dignity and prominence to women" than do Greek and Roman history, women figure far more largely in ancient pagan than in modern records.

Herodotus, the reporter of the ancient world, fills his histories with the exploits of great women such as Artemisia, Tomyris, Atossa, Candaules, Hiera, etc. Manetho glorifies Netocris and other ancient Egyptian women, as Berosus does for Babylonian and Sumerian women. Plutarch speaks more highly of Aspasia than of Alcibiades or Pericles, and reports that even Socrates sought her advice. Plato reveres Diotima. Pythagoras elevated his pupils Theoclea and Theano above their male counterparts, and idolized his teacher Aristoclea. Strabo praised the valor of Candace, and Tacitus that of Boadicea and Cartismandua, whom the Roman legions considered the most valiant and formidable of their enemies. Tacitus mentions Claudia Quinta as a great heroine and founder of the imperial Claudian family.

In ancient history there are as many female as male "glorious ancestors." It is only when we come to Christian times that we find women deliberately relegated to anonymity. Yet even Geoffrey of Monmouth praises Martia the law-giver and equates her with Alfred the Great. And the English long credited Matilda of Scotland, the "Aetheling," with restoring their ancient rights after the Conquest. Our ancestors did not, as we moderns do, brand as "anomalies" all women of force and character. They admired *audax muliebris*, feminine audacity—a quality which, as Edward Carpenter observed, is considered by the Christians "unbecoming in women and slaves."

The pre-Christian Celts of Europe regarded women as equal and in some respects superior to men, particularly in the fields of law and justice. Caesar reports that the men of Gaul took their orders from a council of women, and Tacitus that the great Roman general Cerealis was forced to plead with Velela to persuade her men to free his flagship on the Rhone. The Celtic treaty with Hannibal specified that the Carthaginians must submit their grievances to the women for arbitration: "If the Carthaginians have any charge to lay against the Celts, it shall be brought before the Celtic women."

The Celts of the first century, according to Tacitus, offered their brides wedding gifts of caparisoned horses and embossed swords, and the marriage vow "was designed to reassure the bride that she would forfeit none of her independence in the married state." She was required to swear "to share with him

and dare with him in peace and in war"—not to "obey" him as in the slavish Christian rite.

Plato wrote in the *Republic* that their sex need not bar women from intellectual pursuits or the holding of public office, for the only difference between the sexes was that "women bear and men beget children."

The historian Carcopino writes, "One of the fairest examples of human greatness was the woman of Imperial Rome"; and Juvenal speaks for all women in his lines: "*Clames licet et mare caelo confundas! Homo sum!*" Which, freely translated, means "You men may raise all the hell you want to about it. I too am a human being!"

ELIZABETH GOULD DAVIS,  
Sarasota, Fla.

#### Whitman's Alleluya

IN HIS ARTICLE on Alan Paton [SR, Nov. 8] Edward Callan says, "English literature has no notable form for rejoicing at funerals—and certainly none that solve the problem of how to say 'alleluya,' and mean it, in the presence of death."

Has he never read Whitman? His works abound in the celebration of death. Try "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed."

SANFORD CARLISLE,  
Los Angeles, Calif.

#### Custer Was Clipped

REGARDING WARREN PAYNE'S LETTER [SR, Nov. 1] questioning my assertion that General Custer was without his famous long hair at the Battle of the Little Big Horn: See Colonel W. A. Graham's preface to *The Custer Myth*, compiled by that eminent authority on the battle and author of the classic *The Story of the Little Big Horn*. Colonel Graham declares: "His yellow locks had been closely shorn with clippers before he left Ft. Lincoln on the 17th of May." See also the frontispiece to *The Custer Myth*, a reproduction of the figure of Custer on his last day, by the artist Dwight Franklin. Colonel Graham continues: "Such was Custer on June 25, 1876, and thus Dwight Franklin has depicted him: hair short, face covered with stubbly auburn beard..."

JOHN K. HUTCHENS,  
Rye, N.Y.

#### Unfortunate Platform

DAVID SCHOENBRUN'S VIEWS on Vietnam are well known. So is his love for the glories of France. It is unfortunate that he used an otherwise competent book review of William Shirer's book [SR, Nov. 8] as a platform for continuing his criticism of our Vietnam policy.

ROBERT C. OELHAF,  
Takoma Park, Md.

# Perspective

J. H. Plumb

**London swings.** No foreigner seems to doubt it. This summer the youth of the world flowed into London. They roosted as thick as starlings under Eros in Piccadilly: droves of them, as aimless as sheep, wandered from Trafalgar Square to the steps of the National Gallery and back again. They were very quiet; occasionally they sang softly, at times listened to whispered poetry. They looked hungry, dirty, purposeless—a generation that sits waiting for Godot who never comes. For the mature voyeur, however, the scene was brighter—particularly in the theater, which offered *Boys in the Band*, *Hair*, and a most remarkable tour de force, *Aubrey's Brief Lives*, with its wonderful baroque, slightly obscene seventeenth-century prose, spoken in an incredible solo performance by Roy Dotrice. For the rich young executive it was a far livelier town still: girls galore in extravagant dress or undress, fast cars, new fashions, new clubs, new restaurants, everything new and consumable. They turned Chelsea and Fulham into an adman's carnival. And, of course, Soho set the pace for the chicks and the crumbles; there were deafening discothèques and Carnaby Street for the burgeoning fourteen-year-olds and a warren of striptease joints and "book" shops for the waning middle-aged male. It was rather as if someone had sprinkled London with a handful of slightly faded tinsel.

Yet London does not swing as New York does: by comparison it is still a quiet, relatively clean, well-ordered, peaceful city. Even the theater is sedate by New York standards—no *Geese* here and no *Calcutta*. The Soho pornography shops would scarcely raise the eyebrow of a New York adolescent. What is missing in London is the undercurrent of social hatred, the absence of that ferocity against society which seems to infuse even the bookstores along 42nd Street, where the exposed male and female organs seem to be yelling obscenities at the world that wants to hide them. London is still essentially middle-class and cosy: the oddities that are going on there are largely ignored except by the press and the tourist agencies. In New York, however, one can feel the dissidence and hostility that express themselves in wild clothes or wilder obscenities. Even the New York hippies look different—yours weird, crazy, beyond society, ours like hired film extras. Nor does the raucous aspect of New York seem like a decoration on a solid and

stolid middle-class core. Swinging London gently titillates, whereas New York makes one dizzy and slightly sick—and much more thoughtful. The hippies and the yippies should preoccupy us, for outcasts of society can deepen one's insights into society itself.

This was brought home to me forcefully by a new series that Delacorte is publishing called "Pageant of History," a rather banal and meaningless title for what promises to be a fascinating shelf of books. So far four volumes have come my way—*The Saints*, by Edith Simon; *Gladiators*, by Michael Grant; *Highwaymen*, by Christopher Hibbert; *Nihilists*, by Ronald Hingley (\$3.95 each). All are readable and fascinating, but there may be even better to come, and I look forward eagerly to Eric Hobsbawm's *Bandits*.

Although superficially these sets of men and women—saints, bandits, etc.—seem to have little or nothing in common, in essentials they belong to the same family. In the milieus that gave them birth they were highly specialized groups, small in number but with immense repercussions. All maintained a romantic hold on the imagination of their time. The societies in which they flourished seemed to need their image—often, indeed, a romanticized one, largely created by those who wrote or talked about them. None of these groups was firmly integrated into the prevailing social structure: they belonged to but were distinct from it.

Many of the early saints who practiced lunatic austerities—living on platforms in the desert, bricking themselves up in walls, encouraging filth and disease to ravage their bodies—were obviously very near to total derangement, yet society fed upon and willfully exaggerated their excesses, attributing to them miraculous powers and a refined spirituality. The saints obviously plucked a deep social chord: for their own times they became a desperate necessity. Few could see them as they truly were, rather than as the masses wanted them to be.

There was a similar quality about highwaymen, who batted on eighteenth-century English society like flies

on a putrescent carcass. Everyone who made a journey expected to be robbed. Even in Hyde Park aristocrats and statesmen were held up. Most of these robbers were thugs, but to the ballad-makers and to the writers of cheap books they were "gentlemen of the road" who robbed with courtesy and showed the utmost respect for ladies. Within their own short lifetime highwaymen like Dick Turpin became the subjects of legend; society took them to its heart, glossed their violence and turned them into folk heroes. In literature, if not in life, highwaymen were as generous to the poor and the unlucky as they were courtly to women. The fantasy of robbery that seemed to redress social injustice was one which gripped the imagination of those who lived on the edge of economic disaster. How right, many felt, that the rich should be robbed in a world of violent contrast between riches and poverty. As people of the Dark Ages needed the image of intense spirituality, of unimaginable triumphs over the flesh, to help them through a world of visible decay, corruption and barbarism, so the eighteenth century needed its heroic robbers. Nor is it surprising that nihilists caught the imagination of many oppressed by absolutism or hounded by secret police. Again society could vicariously redress injustice and speak of the valor of the mavericks. Such groups often provide an emotional safety valve.

Unfortunately, except for Mr. Grant, whose book *Gladiators* is excellent, the authors of the Delacorte series are far more concerned with the colorful nature of their subject than the reasons for their existence. This makes for immensely entertaining reading but occasionally I would have liked a chapter of analysis that gave meaning and depth to these strange manifestations. Rightly read, as all good histories should be, these books make us think more carefully, even more warily about our own times and circumstances. We should not dismiss too easily the swarm of gentle adolescents—casual, dirty, amoral, deliberately penniless—who infest our cities in summertime. Their seemingly flagrant anti-materialism may provide a soothing fantasy for ourselves; or their immorality, obscenities, drugs and filth may serve as focus for hatred that might be better directed towards slums, poverty and hypocrisy. In either case they feed the fallacy that the ills or aspirations of a society are to be found in nonconformity. Yet all that such aberration reflects is the deeper crisis of a people, and any society that ignores its most extravagant manifestations, or fails to question its own reactions to them, is heading for disaster.

