



"I don't even feel the same way about myself as I did when I was twenty-one. How could I feel the same way about you?"

duction, and for oddities like bottle mady, wine headache, and rotten eggs.

At American weddings, of course, it is customary if not obligatory for the toast to be proposed in champagne. This is also the wine of choice at the reception, according to Barbara Wilson, whose **Complete Book of Engagement and Wedding Etiquette** (Hawthorn, 485 pp., \$6.95) answers hundreds of questions. We gather that nowadays it's the groom-to-be who pays for both blood tests, that one reason for an elopement is the money offered by the bride's father as an alternative to a big wedding, that in her honeymoon luggage the bride should include candy bars and cookies in case the groom should get hungry after room service has shut down. Indeed, Mrs. Wilson offers guidance for every step of the path to and from the altar, and for various religious customs. What she leaves out the happy couple will have to seek in a different kind of manual.

And we don't necessarily mean the long-awaited revised and enlarged edition of **Robert's Rules of Order**, by Sarah Corbin Robert (Scott, Foresman, 684 pp., \$5.95), the classic guide to parliamentary procedure, first published nearly a cen-

tury ago. The rules have been completely reorganized, and are explained more fully than before to increase the book's usefulness in the conduct of meetings. Organization officers will find here the forms for making all types of motions. Two important features facilitate quick reference: a forty-eight-page tinted section of charts and tables, bound into the middle of the 4½" x 6½" manual, and highly conspicuous headings in the classified index.

The leading interpreters of the highest law of the land have at last a reference work to themselves: **The Justices of the United States Supreme Court 1789-1969** (Chelsea/Bowker, 4 vols., 3,373 pp., \$110), subtitled "Their Lives and Major Opinions," and edited by Leon Friedman and Fred L. Israel. From John Jay to Warren E. Burger there have been ninety-seven Justices, and most of them are virtually unknown. Regardless of the quality or varied lengths of the essays, the biographical data alone—even though the personal is frequently buried under the legal—entitle the set to a place in the permanent reference canon. The quoted opinions following each essay will at least be of legal interest, and many are historical landmarks. (At the last moment, two pages were added on Judge Haynsworth; there is no extra charge, and you have our permission to delete them in your copy.)

Shall we grant the traditional last word to the ladies? The class will please turn to the **Dictionnaire des Femmes Célèbres**, by A. Jourcin and Ph. van Tieghem (Larousse, 256 pp.; paperback, \$2.75). Having limited themselves to 800 women no longer living, from Eve to Nefertiti to Vivien Leigh, the gallant compilers had some hard choices to make; and, though the selection is international, the proportions are Gallic. Thus Colette gets three times as much space as George Eliot. The miniature biographies are filled out with engaging comments and evaluations of the subjects' accomplishments. Numerous illustrations, while often of tenuous relevance, form a lively supplement.

## "Romantic Quest"

Continued from page 34

rectly observes that "the audience becomes aware, as it has hardly ever been aware before, that modern man tends to interpret experience as a plotless sequence of events." For this reason, and others which he brilliantly expounds, Dr. Driver finds unexpected relationships between the Irish playwright and Chekhov, relationships that, to my knowledge, have not hitherto been explored.

If one were to fault *Romantic Quest and Modern Query*, it would be to say that the work spreads itself too widely, introduces too many plays and playwrights only to dismiss them in a sentence or a paragraph. As a result, the book swings between the brilliant and the pedestrian. The dramatists Driver deals with in depth—Pirandello, Brecht, Genet, in addition to those already mentioned—are masterfully served. The dozens of others only clutter the scene, and we learn little about them we had not known before. Nevertheless, Tom Driver's book is a valuable and most thoughtful addition to the critical assessment of the theater from 1860 to 1960.

Norris Houghton, co-founder of New York's Phoenix Theatre, is at present dean of theatre arts at the State University of New York's new college at Purchase.

## THE PLAYMAKERS

by Stuart W. Little and Arthur Cantor  
Norton, 320 pp., \$7.95

Reviewed by Stanley Young

■ This is not just a book about playwrights, as the title might at first suggest. Rather, it covers incredibly the whole beehive, with its swarm of workers and drones and their singularly industrious but frantic antics, that comprises the honey and money game of Broadway. Here are candid verbal shots, pleasantly laced with backstage gossip, of producers, directors, actors, playwrights, press agents, theatrical lawyers, and dramatic agents, plus firsthand information on the "infantrymen and combat specialists," as the authors choose to call them: the stagehands, technical crews, stage managers, box-office treasurers, backstage doormen, roundsmen—and, yes, even the wig-fitters.

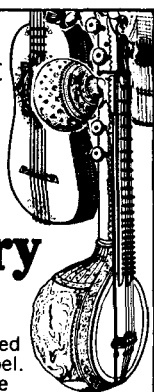
It is a remarkable report, accurate and lively, on Broadway past and present (mostly present), with a cast and

"Basic reference material for the rest of this century."  
—New Republic

## Harvard Dictionary Of Music

■ Second Edition, Revised and Enlarged. ■ Willi Apel. ■ Illustrated. ■ 3rd large printing. ■ \$20.00 at bookstores ■ Belknap Press

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setting often more clamorous than glamorous, yet enduringly if madly fascinating. Authors Stuart Little and Arthur Cantor have spent, or misspent, much time on this theatrical scene—Mr. Little as a highly respected theatrical reporter for the late *New York Herald Tribune*, Mr. Cantor as a former theater press agent, now a distinguished producer. These two career-tempered worthies know whereof they speak.

With almost anthropological thoroughness they lead us to every Broadway watering hole and gin mill between West 41st and 54th streets, and thence east to Sixth Avenue and west to Eighth Avenue, there to spy on the special feeding habits, mores, folkways, sexual forays, rituals, superstitions, fetishes, work routines, and pecking orders of the theatrical tribe. What appears, at first, to be a bewildering neon-lit walk along the capricious and wilder shores of marquee love and hate becomes understandable, definable, and to some degree even scientifically classifiable as these authors write about it. The odd ecology of Broadway, where one ego displaces another, and the often raised question of outsiders as to how plays get on, and off, are explained here with relative clarity and charity.

The theatrical attorney Herman E. Cooper once charged that “a producer is a businessman with artistic pretensions,” only to draw an indignant response from producer Kermit Bloomgarden: “No, a producer is an artist with business pretensions.” What more can be said about the bizarre business side of show business, where both definitions obviously apply, as we follow the rocky destinies of such varied veteran producers as Robert Whitehead, Roger Stevens, David Merrick, Harold Prince, and Saint-Subber? According to the authors, all of them, in order to stay alive, must be innovators, talent scouts, catalysts, and promoters—and, one might add, magicians and psychoanalysts.

When Little and Cantor turn their scrutiny upon that most vulnerable of humans “the naked actor,” the theatrical landscape becomes cloudy with anguish and contradictions. They begin by observing that “everyday, somewhere in the United States, somebody says ‘I want to be an actor,’” and that the rolls of Actors Equity increase by 500 names a year. How the actor fares on Broadway from audition to performance, how he relates to director and playwright, the dramatic schools he attends, his endless search for jobs—all these are summarized with much understanding and insight. When the authors quote Horace’s satire in which he called actors “*mendici, mimae, balatrones, hoc genus omne*”

(beggars, mimics, buffoons, and all that sort), and then go on to quote the contemporary actress Maureen Stapleton: “We are dock rats, the deformed children of the world,” one wonders why actors persist. Yet, as we follow the careers sketched in this book, and see how Katharine Cornell, Fredric March, Jason Robards, Eli Wallach, Montgomery Clift, Burgess Meredith—to name only a few—survived the months and years of lessons, rounds, auditions, rejections, part-time work, bit parts, and incessant waiting for the “miracle,” we are impressed by the indestructible energy and fantasies of theater people.

Similarly, in a practical chapter called “The Odd Couple: Playwright and Director,” we are informed again of the brutal economic and psychological hazards faced by the lonely playwright, and, in detail, how he works with directors and confronts actors and producers.

Another informative section on Great White Way gladiators is about theater owners and landlords, their feuds, failures, and triumphs, and how they maintain an image that is often a “legendary mixture of grandeur and penny-pinching.” The authors report equally well what one should know about contracts

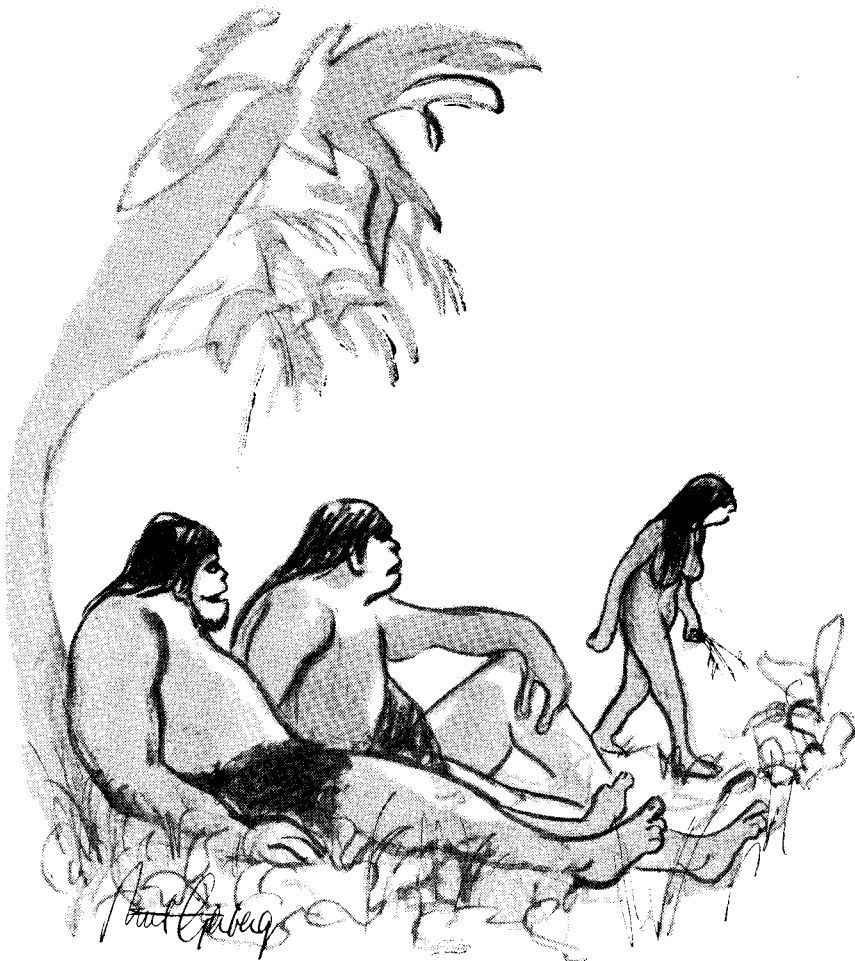
—talent contracts, service contracts, theater contracts, investment contracts—and all the activities of the industry’s middlemen who perform the secretive, indispensable maneuvering having to do with money, that \$60-million average annual Broadway gross.

Other pertinent subjects include the drama critics and current reviewing media, the new sexual ethic of performers, off-Broadway, the black theater, and—in glancing speculations—where the commercial theater will go after 1970.

Actually, *The Playmakers* itself suggests, by its excitement and vigorous reporting, that the Broadway theater is more a fabulous convalescent than an invalid. As Fredric March states in a brief foreword, this book is a “definitive, all-encompassing classic” about the Broadway scene, a book “that doesn’t need to be written again.”

It is all of that, and therefore should be seized upon as the best sourcebook around for the drama student, aspiring actor, theatergoer, and even, perhaps, for the professional who has not outlived surprise.

*Stanley Young, a playwright, is former executive vice president of the American National Theatre and Academy.*

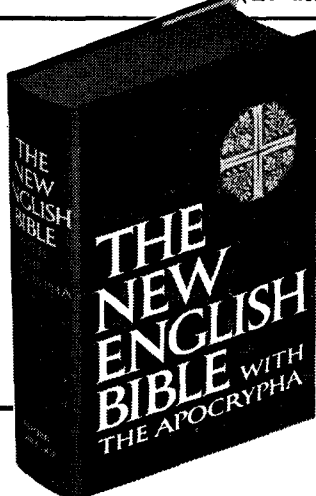


*"I love spring. It sort of brings out the beast in me."*



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## Agnon

*Continued from page 30*

two clauses, and the final word of each clause rhymes. (This and some other rhymes within the story were missed by the translator.)

In "A Whole Loaf" Agnon mentions a man who invented a better mouse-trap. No doubt, says the narrator, this "can greatly correct the evil"—the translator's rendering of the Hebrew "*tikkun gadol*." Now *tikkun* in Hebrew can mean a repair or an improvement, but it is also a technical religious term which means correction of worldly imperfections. In other words, there is both a physical and a metaphysical weight to the word, and its glance extends in many directions. The word *tikkun* can be applied to fixing a chair or to moral reformation. The expression may serve as a paradigm for countless other words and phrases which, through centuries of the Hebrew linguistic and literary tradition, have taken on multiple meanings.

Agnon's many allusions to the mainstream of Hebrew writings, however, do not give a conglomerate effect to his prose. To offer a parallel, his writing does not sound like a hodgepodge of Anglo-Saxon, Chaucerian, Elizabethan, and modern English. Since Hebrew was a written language for the nearly 2,000 years since the destruction of the Temple, and was not spoken continuously in the homeland, it did not undergo the radical changes in grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and syntax that have taken place in English. And, since Jews have made the study of their classical literature a religious duty, familiarity is something to be expected rather than wished for. It is this shared emotional and intellectual experience that Agnon uses and converts into art.

Agnon's style has over the years remained constant, although his forms and storytelling modes have changed. His word choice and prose rhythms are basically those of the Mishna and Midrash, stemming from the second to the fifth centuries of the Common Era. He also makes use of the Hebrew of the Hasidic and pietistic texts of the eighteenth-to-nineteenth centuries and some modern Hebrew. Although his allusions, direct quotations, and vocabulary extend to all layers of Hebrew, the basic style is his own version of rabbinic Hebrew, which Agnon has developed into a virtually inimitable linguistic instrument that is both poetic and precise.

There is a musical quality in Agnon's prose that offers the translator another problem: how to convey the sense of classic prose without sound-

ing archaic (a trap which some of his translators fall into), and how to preserve the rhythm and occasional assonance, alliteration, word-play, and even rhyme. But, despite all this, Agnon has been translated into more than a dozen languages, including the major Indo-European tongues, as well as Hungarian, Arabic, and even Japanese. For it is his narrative mastery, his fully realized characters, and his universal themes of man spiritually lost and wrenched from his environment that have made his writing understandable in various cultures.

Fame and critical recognition came early for Agnon, and continued throughout his life. He has been written about more than any other Hebrew author: nearly 600 articles and many books have already appeared. In English, however, we have only recently had our first full-length treatment of Agnon, Arnold Band's comprehensive *Nostalgia and Nightmare* (1967). Now Baruch Hochman has provided us with another, *The Fiction of S. Y. Agnon*, in which he devotes lengthy essays—readable for the most part, despite their occasionally dense, convoluted psychojargon—to Agnon's major works. However, he does not deal with the vast body of published but uncollected material, which should be studied before one can come to a final determination of an artist's place, scope, or quest.

It is to Hochman's credit that he suggests affinity to some European writers (he mentions Broch, Robert Musil, the early Brecht) but he either purposely by-passes or subconsciously neglects Agnon's role as a Hebrew artist and the 4,000-year literary tradition that stands behind him. Although there is frequent mention of "ancestral tradition" and "ancestral modes," Mr. Hochman's angle of vision in facing Agnon is through the glass distantly: with binoculars reversed. He rarely explicates or probes sources or motifs, but focuses mainly on the psychological attitude of the writer vis-à-vis his characters and the protagonist's relationship to others within the work.

In dealing with *Bridal Canopy*, for instance, Hochman carefully scrutinizes the hero, Reb Yudel, and also shows the links between that novel and *Don Quixote*, but he makes no mention at all of the Hebraic parallels or of the book's distinctively Jewish fictive traits. From *The Fiction of S. Y. Agnon* a reader will not learn that Agnon is a writer with attitudes and techniques that can only be found in a Hebrew artist who, like T. S. Eliot, affirms a literary tradition which provides him with stories, images, symbols, and devices in profusion. Without this tradi-

tion Agnon would be just another storyteller; with it, he is a synthesizer of culture, the modern miracle of Hebrew letters.

Nevertheless, *The Fiction of S. Y. Agnon* comes as a necessary antidote to an almost universal adulation. Surely no writer is flawless, and it is certainly an act of courage to take a sharply critical stance. But, even in so doing, Hochman equivocates, seemingly unable to firmly fault so formidable a writer. In describing Agnon's *shtetl* tales at the beginning of the book, Hochman states: "That sequence of stories, fables, and novellas [including *The Bridal Canopy*] is remarkable for its vivid evocation of the past and for its immediate empathy with its people and their modes of being within it." Yet at the end of his work Hochman asserts:

The pleasures the work affords compensate for many limitations: the terrible muting of his peoples' passions, whether they be of love or of rage; the chilling lack of sympathy with ordinary human aspiration; the tamping of dramatic urgencies; and the cloying indulgence of sheer verbal effect.

Even if one does not agree with the narrow focus and the psychologizing about Agnon's quest, one must admit that Hochman's study, read in conjunction with the fiction, provides another necessary viewpoint on one of the world's great writers.

Although Agnon's fame is secure abroad, his reputation among the younger writers in Israel is somewhat problematic. When he began to write, Hebrew literature was still relatively young; when he died, many sabras were already so secure in their native roots that they were scorning their own literary tradition and looking for others. This can in part be ascribed to ignorance of traditional Hebrew materials, and also to the more comprehensive rejection of many values and attitudes of the older generation. But Agnon stands at the forefront of Hebrew literature precisely because he made use of the interplay between Western and Jewish themes, modes, and stories. Hence his writings have a polychromatic luster that is lacking in much of the fiction of the younger generation. Some, however, have recognized Agnon's modernity, and in these writers the public pose of rejection has mellowed into private adoration and receptivity of influence.

What is modern, then, about Agnon if he writes a mannered Hebrew that is easy enough to read but has a faint patina of yesteryear to it, and if the tradition he describes is now only a nostalgic memory for some Jews, and

foreign or exotic to non-Jews? His modernity lies in his ambiguity and irony: he questions the traditional social, moral, and spiritual conceptions; he dwells on despairing isolation; his protagonists grapple with existential problems. In sum, he probes man's spiritual journey through a problem-laden twentieth century.

Long thought to be a naïve folk artist, Agnon was shown midway in his career to be a complex, sentient artist. For those who have not read most of his works, the best comparison in English might be Nabokov or Faulkner—

the former for his complexity, authorial control, linguistic brilliance, and humor, the latter for the entirety of his world. The little jokes, puns, and private myths (such as beginning all the characters names in "Edo and Enam" with the letter "G," prompting critics to build castles in the sand when all along Agnon is having a joke at their expense) merely show the playful mastery of his authorial world. Like Nabokov, too, he uses various recurring symbols and characters that are mentioned or reappear in several works. (The hero of the Zionist novel *In Days*

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*Gone By* is the great-grandson of Reb Yudel; Rechnitz, hero of "Betrothed," is mentioned in "Edo and Enam"; the narrator of *A Guest for the Night* mentions several characters from Agnon's fiction.)

When Agnon received word in October 1966 that he had been awarded the Nobel Prize (for which he had been mentioned as early as 1935), he stated: "If God will grant me long life, they [the Nobel Committee] will yet see that they did not err in choosing me." That remark was perhaps the least modest of his public utterances. Despite his fame, he lived unostentatiously; despite his complexity, he had personal contact with people all over the world, from all walks of life. An indication of the character of the man might be the note found in his desk after his death, requesting that he be buried on the Mount of Olives next to a humble schoolteacher. Like Sholom Aleichem, who asked to be buried among the poor, Agnon did not wish to lie in a section reserved for the élite. This attitude is perhaps a fitting fusion of Sholom Aleichem and S. Y. Agnon, both culture heroes in Jewry, the two towering figures in twentieth-century Jewish literature.

## THE EVE OF SAINT VENUS

by Anthony Burgess

Norton, 138 pp., \$4.95

Reviewed by Robert K. Morris

■ By now it is apparent that Anthony Burgess need only flex his literary muscles to come up with one tour de force or another. *The Eve of Saint Venus*, written in 1950 and first published in England fourteen years later, is a comparatively light-weight addition to the substantial Burgess canon, yet it records as something more than an exercise for the left hand. A fable for our time, this romp through a rural English manor and its ritualistic mannerisms is a glittering entertainment, a grab-bag of allusions, images, and rhetorical gems that Burgess (an opulent king of the Queen's English) profligately casts away like mere baubles.

Superficially, *The Eve of Saint Venus* embroiders on a vignette that found its way 300 years ago into Robert Burton's quaint and quirky *Anatomy of Melancholy*. On the eve of his wedding a young man places a ring on the finger of a statue of Venus, receives divine visitations from the goddess, and, exhausted by her energetic pursuit, finally renders unto Venus that which is Venus's. Burgess updates what was even then an urbane joke by setting it in the modern milieu of the Welfare State (his pet *bête noire*) and providing a cast of traditional, "unkillable" comic characters who still flourished until only recently in stage farce: "the bone-headed goldhearted country squire in plus-fours, the pert and resourceful servant, the grim but reliable châtelaine, the sweet, guileless young lovers, the comic Anglican clergyman."

Burgess's verbal and dramatic alchemy turns the dross of caricature into pure gold. The baronet, Sir Benjamin Drayton, a member of "that perpetually expanding club he calls the past," is a nostalgic Tory given to Falstaffian excesses of wine-bibbing, gourmandizing, and word-mongering. His wife has become a level-headed and sympathetic grand dame, the vicar an amiably wacky pedant, dabbling in sin and the arcana of exorcism, who gets caught up in the spell of the goddess and madly tries to unfrock himself while intoning the illicit delights of the flesh. There are also an MP with a fund of epigrams, a lesbian journalist, and a lusty nanny who hovers about the garden trying the ring trick on the squinting statue of a well-endowed Jupiter.

Venus, disembodied, remains Venus Preserved. The divine succubus is everywhere attended by odors of fish, ozone, and the sea; the magic of love and

beauty, fresh from the foam, penetrates barriers of brocades and morals and transforms the venerable estate into a kind of Venusberg. As in Burton, Venus first claims her rights by "pre-empting the marriage bed," but in the end proves the responsible goddess of the pantheon. The saintly and sexless Ambrose Rutterkin, a structural engineer unmindful of his equipment below the waist, is reunited with the chaste, eager Diana Drayton, who is very much mindful but at a loss how to get it. At the comic climax of the novel, the U-types are momentarily changed by the powers of Venus into budding fauns, nymphs, and satyrs, dancing a cinquepace and reciting Burgess's own lush translation of Lucretius's hymn to the goddess, *Pervigilium Veneris*.

The theme of all this—with Venus providing the crucial link—is twofold. Just as the past continually feeds on the present, so earthly and heavenly love are manifestations of the same divine thing. Recognizing the ambivalence of history allows us to partially fathom its "breathhtaking, growing, moving, widening, unifying pattern" and mutes the voices of doom who "prophecy anarchy and the end of the world" one minute or "threaten Utopia" the next. Sexual love is not the yardstick of our well-being or illness, but it could still turn out the healthy antidote to our collective anesthesia.

If Venus, the mythic force who never once materializes, is the novel's heroine, then Burgess's language, wondrously omnipresent on every page, is its hero. An image may burst upon one as sound and light together; a sentence may soar or plunge, tease or infuriate; a paragraph may serve up a semantic banquet (yet remain readable and funny), shape itself into a fugue of motifs, or suddenly turn into a poem. The only predictable thing about Burgess is surprise. In *The Eve of Saint Venus* he loots the Elizabethan literary guild for echoes from Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, and Michael Drayton, ransacks Peacock's extravagances in *Crotchet Castle*, and plunders the techniques of Eliot's and Fry's verse drama; but the word-hoard is all his—and inexhaustible.

In the last analysis the novel is one of finesse and brilliance rather than depth: a finely crafted frieze of poetry and allusion inscribed on the pedestal of an engaging fable. Sensuous, irrelevant, erudite, it should be taken as a moderately profane hymn to the "importance of physical love," but even more as an epithalamium to the sacred, happy marriage of language and literature.

Robert K. Morris, who teaches English at CCNY, is presently at work on a study of Anthony Burgess.

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