

# LETTERS

## Jane Solutions

The solution to the issue described by Richard Gambino ["The Murderous Mind: Insanity vs. the Law," March 18] is more available than he would have us believe.

As a clinical psychologist working in an institution, I am constantly reminded that commitment to a mental institution is usually not a solution to the problem. Hospitals are often not equipped to control the involuntary patient. These people are often discharged just to get rid of the problems they create, and they usually resume their aberrant behavior upon discharge.

Our legal system was created not to "treat" individuals but to monitor them and to influence their own control of their behavior. Therefore, what is needed is that the courts first decide if the defendant committed the act and the legal consequences of that act. Following this, we can determine if the individual needs treatment.

Such a stance involves many adjustments, among them a reconsideration of specific penalties and a serious move toward treatment facilities within the prison system, along with many other desperately needed changes. But if we begin by clearing up the confusion between a person's guilt or innocence and his behavior, we will be on our way to resolving this problem.

Name Withheld  
Tacoma, Wash.

## Princeton Promptings

Regarding Alden Whitman's introduction to his review "Seeing Red" [March 18], I cannot resist offering the following lines:

A Princeton professor nam'd Stone  
By SR's reviewer is shown,  
In truth (we now learn),  
To be one Lawrence Stern—  
Heretofore a fact not widely known.

A. G. Roeber  
Princeton University  
Princeton, N.J.

## Supporting the Public

It was refreshing, if somewhat appalling, to read Karl E. Meyer's comments about television's commercial broadcasters ["The Golden Giveaway," March 18]. For years, the prepackaged variety/sit-com "entertainments" of NBC, CBS, and ABC have been pretty disgusting, and only occasionally is the viewer offered an hour or two of selected programming that will divert, amuse, or actually hold his attention. But now I understand that this is the best they can do—with \$1.25 billion?

In the past several months, a television network in our neighborhood has "gone public," and from the Dick Cavett broadcasts alone, I have been bumped, coaxed, prodded, swayed, and, on occasion, incensed by the likes of Norman Mailer, Gore Vidal, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, and James Dickey.

As you may understand, my preferences are mostly literary. But with the purported 3 percent commercial network franchise tax that would generate about \$240 million per year for use by the public broadcasting system—well, hell. What thirst for honest entertainment could possibly go unquenched?

Sam A. Mackie  
Key West, Fla.

## Reinforcement for Writers

I would like to thank SR for making available to us Robertson Davies's thoughts on the "writer's calling" ["The Writer's Conscience," March 18]. Keeping Cervantes, Goethe, and Davies himself in mind is certainly a comfort and a source of hope for those of us whose special gifts and finest work may yet prove to be products of the second half of our life.

Nan Seitz  
Wayne, N.J.

### Answer to Middleton Double-Crostic No. 146

Helen (Jackson) Lee:  
Nigger in the Window

Eleanor Roosevelt was no orator but her words were genuine. She had proved her sincerity by her deeds. As she spoke about her desire to see an anti-lynching bill pass, shouts of agreement rang out. Some people wept openly.

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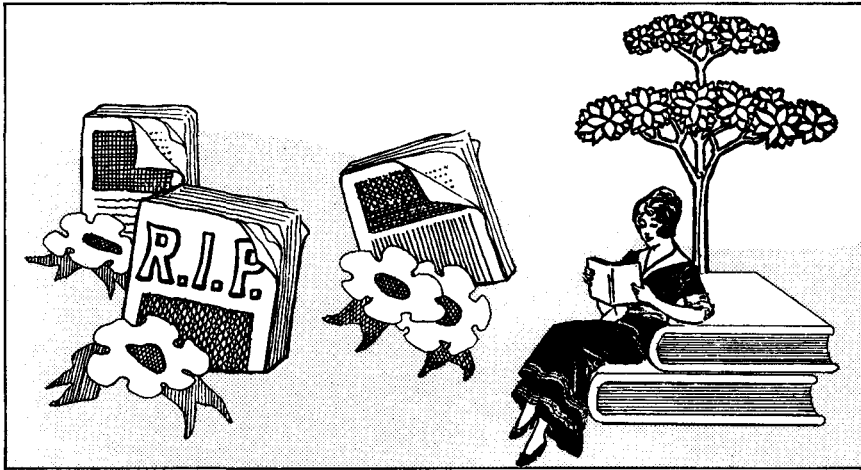
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# FRONT RUNNERS



## Quid Pro Quo

Are low-priced paperbacks going to drive hard-cover publishers out of business? Not by the look of things: Hard-cover sales are holding up fine, and fewer paperbacks were sold in 1977 than in 1976. Why this dip in sales volume? Because, in part, customers are becoming more selective, buying paperbacks one at a time instead of sweeping them up by the armful. Also, customers are returning paperbacks to bookstores more than they used to. Paperback profits—as opposed to number of volumes sold—have held steady at 13

percent, however, because the price charged per individual volume has gone up sharply.

Finally, the number of paperbacks sold is being cut into sharply by the emergence of the barter system: At one Manhattan book-barter house, you get a credit of 25 percent of the sales price on any paperback you bring in. The book exchange then sells the paperback to another customer for only 50 percent of its original cover price. This roaringly successful system is, of course, just fine for the omnivorous reader, but publishers and authors are following its growing popularity with a dour eye.

## The Torrents of Spring

With China's new "Hundred Flowers" campaign well under way, hitherto forbidden books are tumbling from the presses. The bonanza includes, says *Peking Review*, not only Chinese and Marxist classics but also selected Western works: Hugo's *Les Misérables*, Turgenev's *Virgin Soil*, Schwab's *Myths and Epics of Ancient Greece*, selected works by Einstein, and some of Shakespeare's plays. Korean, Japanese, and Pakistani writers, and even early Soviet authors Vladimir Mayakovsky and Maxim Gorki are represented. The new freedom has been made possible, the *Review* explains, by the deposing of the infamous "gang of four."

## The Optimists

A commission set up 23 years ago to create an FDR memorial has so far chewed up \$500,000 but has come up dry. True, it's held two competitions to find a design for the memorial, but the government's Fine Arts Commission—which has the final say—has turned down both winning designs. Even if Fine Arts does approve a design, it will then have to run a gauntlet of eight other agencies—including HEW, which checks out such building proposals from the standpoint of facilities provided for the handicapped. However, the memorial commission, now well into its twenty-fourth year and second half-million, is optimistically pressing ahead with its quest for an acceptable design.

## My Son, My Son

It's still a man's world, so far as American mothers are concerned. Lolagene C. Coombs, a scholar at the University of Michigan's Population Studies Center, has developed a new measuring technique to probe the underlying preferences of women regarding the sex of their children. Using data from the U.S. National Survey of Family Growth, she discovered that 49 percent of married American women of childbearing age prefer to have sons; 32 percent prefer to have daughters; and only 19 percent prefer to have "balanced" families—at least one child of each sex. Results were based on a weighted sample of 6,897 women aged fifteen to forty-four.

Coombs says it had been generally believed that in the United States a preference for sons had been replaced by a preference for balanced families. However, she found one exception to the American preference for sons: Among women with Spanish cultural backgrounds 40 percent prefer daughters, a slightly higher proportion than those who prefer sons.

The new measuring technique has been tried in at least seven other countries. In Bangladesh, South Korea, Taiwan, and Malaysia, says Coombs, the preference is overwhelmingly for sons. The son preference is almost as strong in Hungary. But in the Philippines and Colombia—both nations with strong Spanish backgrounds—married women prefer to have daughters.

## Like It Is

Your turn-of-the-century French aristocracy was not the least bit awed by social climbing literary lions—even when the lion was Marcel Proust. In *On Becoming American* (Houghton Mifflin, \$10.95), Ted Morgan—who was formerly a French count named Sanche de Gramont—tells how when Proust bent to sign the guest register at the home of Morgan's great-uncle, that nobleman huffed, "Just your name, Mr. Proust. No thoughts."