

A NUMBER OF my favorite things don't exist—a film of Nijinsky's *Afternoon of a Faun*, reissues of Marian Anderson's Schubert, an American Bibliothèque de La Pléiade, a first-class Southern restaurant. For most Americans, even young Southerners, "Southern cooking" suggests rough-and-ready deep-frying, heavy hands; and in a thousand city and roadside cafes, that's the product offered. But the product is a contemporary travesty of only one of several classic cuisines of the old South—white-shanty grub (others more desirable were black-cabin and white-big-house). But the cooks of my childhood—east North Carolina pre-1950—were subtle as geishas and as sure to please, though racked thrice daily by perfectionist doubts. Or maybe Zen monks—their purpose was to carry raw goods of prime health and freshness from garden and yard through fire and ice to table, raised to their true native pitch, never sharpened or muffled: chickens baked, broiled, fried; pork barbecued or baked; fish sautéed in butter; Brunswick stews barely simmered for at least two days; eight or 10 green or yellow vegetables; light coarse hoecakes, thin biscuits, yeast rolls; a sideboard of lemon, lime, fruit, and nut pies; a good deal more. In short, a cuisine which for me is the equal of those of France and China (combining as it does many tribal strands—

English, Scottish, west African, Spanish, and French); but unlike its equals, it cannot be found in public.

There are fortunately places where one can find two or three excellently prepared dishes from the big array—barbecue here, chicken or seafood there. Near my home in Orange County, North Carolina, there's the Colonial Inn in Hillsborough where a small but carefully prepared variety is cheerfully and modestly served in the warm surroundings of an 18th-century inn, continuously occupied (Cornwallis stayed there). It's where I always take outlanders for a firm intimation of the qualities I extol—the fried chicken, if ordered half an hour ahead, is not to my knowledge surpassed elsewhere; and the vegetables and fruit cobbles are simply right. Good chopped barbecue can be had at frequent roadside stands, especially those that do their own roasting; but sliced barbecue has nearly vanished. Seafood, as everywhere, is itself only at the coast. The Sanitary Fish Market in Morehead City serves excellent fish and shellfish to summer mobs, and Uncle Henry Kirkum's Oyster Roast in Wilmington serves its namesake *in excelsis*. The whole South, a country larger than western and central Europe, is dotted with such isolated oases, directions to which are often jealously guarded by the locals. Even Manhattan

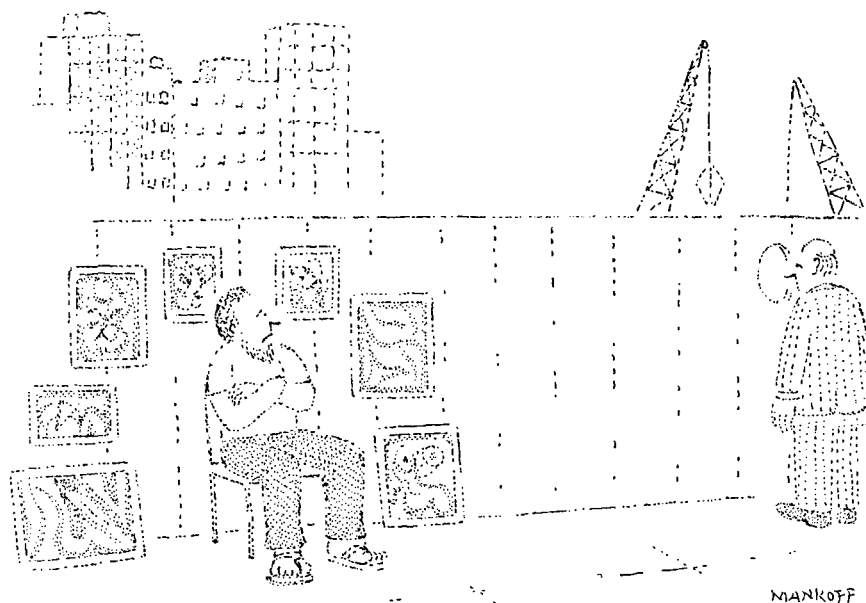
provides a good exhibition of cabin cooking at the Pink Teacup on Bleecker Street.

But now in the late Seventies, when a number of Southern cities besides New Orleans can offer quite presentable French restaurants, why are there no young natives imaginative enough to have achieved a full and splendid showcase for one of the three great contributions of their culture (along with literature and political theory)? The answer no doubt contains three components—the usual American self-effacing snobbery ("in all matters aesthetic, Europe is superior"—*dead-wrong*, for at least 40 years), the usual Southern inferiority complex (still pounded into us by the rest of America), and the aforementioned ignorance in young natives of the depth and range of their own culinary tradition.

May I close then by imploring the numbers of youngsters who have joined the general new national interest in good food and who have the energy and anchorite-dedication to open and maintain a restaurant—consider home ground. If you don't have great Southern cooking in your bones, search for teachers; they're there. Find preferably a light-handed black male or female cook of the old cabin-bighouse school (*black* because blacks invented more than half the dishes and executed them all); then listen and watch. Read the one easily available cookbook I know that offers nearly the whole range, and purely, unmuddled by shortcuts—Eugene Walter's *American Cooking: Southern Style* in the Time-Life series—and avoid the local Junior League manuals that drift on a bog of marshmallow whip and mushroom soup. Then start. Find the food—still there for the finding—cook and serve it correctly in quiet surroundings (no music, no pictures of dogwood or cardinals, no overhead light); avoid both sterile "graciousness" and the odd combination of cringing and over-familiarity that afflicts so many young American waiters; and please do not dress as George or Martha Washington, Butterfly McQueen, Vivien Leigh, or Leslie Howard. You'll be serving mankind as surely as surgeons, novelists, saints. I'll be there to thank you; so will thousands.

—Reynolds Price

Mr. Price is James B. Duke Professor at Duke University.



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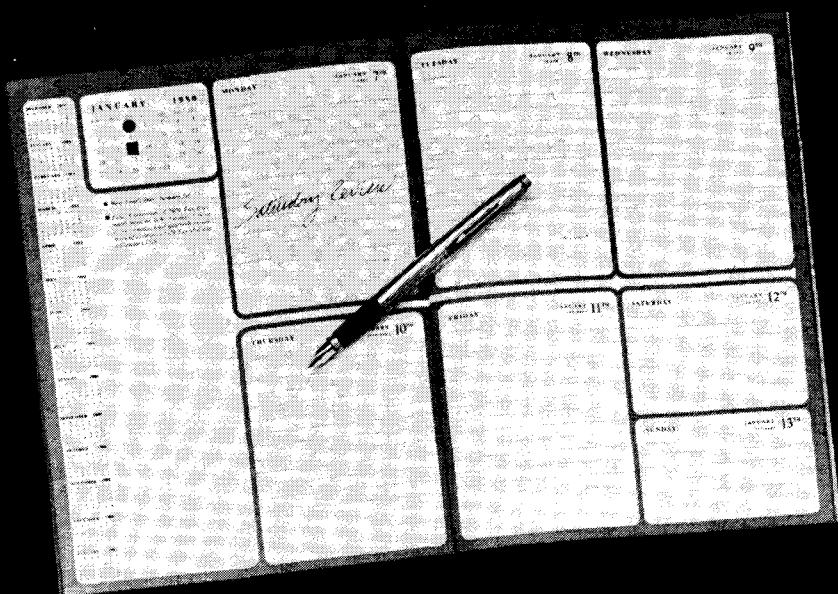
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9/29/79

## PUZZLES

### Literary Crypt No. 139

NOSY PI CRUXING: PIXCRPA  
TEX TRIANSLCG, ZIN XCSX  
RU QRZO DRXCIEX XCOING.

YRUNSOQR

### Wit Twister No. 151

Edited by Arthur Swan

*The object of the game is to complete the poem by thinking of one word whose letters, when rearranged, will yield the appropriate word for each series of blanks. Each dash with a blank corresponds to a letter of the word.*

"Thou \_\_\_\_\_ not for me," the actress moans.  
Her audience \_\_\_\_\_ with boos and groans.  
The hack, who \_\_\_\_\_ to the public's taste,  
Forced to \_\_\_\_\_ his drama, works with haste.  
He makes a desk of \_\_\_\_\_ and soon has stripped  
All \_\_\_\_\_ of rank bathos from his script,  
While \_\_\_\_\_ show where added jokes will fit:  
Stale spices from the \_\_\_\_\_ of his wit.

A.S.

Answers next issue

## SEPTEMBER 15 ANSWERS

### Literary Crypt No. 138

... I do not give lectures or a little charity; when I give I give myself.

Walt Whitman

### Wit Twister No. 150

treatise, iterates, treaties

### Middleton Double-Croctic No. 179

DONNA WOOLFOLK CROSS:  
WORD ABUSE

The worst example of a sucker headline ever recorded was in a fan magazine: "WHY TONY CURTIS WILL NEVER MARRY." The answer, you found after you paid the quarter, is that there is no Tony Curtis, since his real name is Bernard Schwartz!