

The Knowledge Bank at The Ohio State University

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THE ENGINEER'S BOOKSHELF

By WILSON R. DUMBLE

Cather De Lux

I have never appreciated to any extent the literary criticisms of one Professor Howard Mumford Jones, late of the Department of English at Ann Arbor, and at present a member of the English staff at Harvard University. When I read his reviews in the various literary magazines, I thought at first that it was I who was in the wrong. Later on, however, I discovered that he and I never agreed on any one book. From his writings I knew that he must be one of those instructors in whose class I should like to sit in the back row, probably to heckle him as he delivered his lectures. He damned Faulkner, made fun of Hemingway, and lightly passed over such writers as Dos Passos and Hervey Allen and few others whose books I always enjoyed reading.

But at long last I discover that Professor Jones and I are sailing in the same boat across the literary sea of criticism in regard to Miss Willa S. Cather. Not that this discovery helps to ease the humidity of the past summer; but I was merely pleased to find one author on which we agreed.

The occasion of my discovery was an article Professor Jones wrote for the August 6th issue of Saturday Review of Literature, and the occasion was the publication of Miss Cather's novels and short stories in what is known as the Autograph Edition. Although I have not seen this special edition I gather from the Jones article that it is designed for carriage trade, sports gilt-edge leaves, and is printed on paper which would not encourage the reader's marginal notes in pencil. But in order to refresh my memory on Miss Cather's works I drew from my own library shelves a couple of her volumes, packed them in my suit case, and took them to the Lake retreat far away from the telephone and the radio.

And what did I find? Well, I was not astonished to discover that in re-reading after fifteen or twenty years, that they retained their original luster, boasted of that same definite technique, not so showy as Faulkner's, but far, far better.

For example, there is "A Lost Lady", a story almost as delicate and fragile as a Sevre vase, a story of marital disintegration following a June-December marriage which is almost too fine to talk about. In its pages Mrs. Forrester actually breathes. You see her, with her long black rippling hair, the gracious hostess of Sweet Water. You see her in the kitchen giving a helping hand to her Bohemian cook, or on the front lawn welcoming her

many guests who were friends of her husband. And you see him too, growing old, and even she, alas! growing older.

Miss Cather is past master in the art of passing over the rougher and harsher parts of a story with a coating of pathos, just as she might knife a delicate icing onto a delicious cake. And that is where her splendor lies, whether she is writing about Mrs. Forrester in "A Lost Lady", or about Myra Henshaw in "My Mortal Enemy", or about Claude Wheeler in "One of Ours". She is able, as Professor Jones says, "to reduce life to its nobler elements". And surely that is not one of the accomplishments of many modern novelists.

I can thoroughly recommend all of Miss Cather's novels; to be sure some are better than others. But the ones mentioned above plus "My Antonia" and "O Pioneers" head the list of her best.

Miss Cather, I have been told, like the late Mrs. Edith Wharton, spends a lot of her time and does most of her writing in France. Let us hope that she will continue to give us more stories of "A Lost Lady" type.

Malice Toward Some

There are two kinds of books that I always pick up to read with misgivings; one is a travel story and the other a so-called book of humor. And when the jacket blurb combines the two I merely pass over the advertising matter with a kind of grunt.

That is why last June I paid no attention to the advertising matter on a volume called "With Malice Toward Some" by Margaret Halsey. Later on, at a summer hotel on the Lake, I picked up the volume that a chance friend had put down for the moment, to discover to my great dismay that it was difficult to return it to the owner unfinished. Still later on I purchased a copy and since then I have read and re-read it. I found it charming, witty and delightful. The author takes the upper middle class Britisher by the tail, swings him around in the air several times, and gently but firmly puts him in his place. Just because I myself have always wanted to do that very thing, I liked the book. And if any of you readers have ever met up with the smug type of our self-sufficient British cousins, I feel sure that you too will enjoy the volume.

Miss Halsey, so the publishers say, is the wife of an Eastern college professor who had an exchangeship with a professor in a small British university. In diary form Miss Halsey relates their departure from New York, their arrival at Plymouth, their greetings from their

newly acquired faculty co-workers, and their quiet life in the hills of Devonshire. The conversations never get beyond the weather, past, present, and future; and the author's account of the tea given for the bishop's wife is nothing short of a classic.

With unforgettable ease, you must follow the couple into London, through the Shakespeare country, on a brief sojourn through Norway and Sweden before the opening of classes, and to a Christmas party in Paris. You will never forget this book; you will always remember the Princeton man with the twenty-two pieces of luggage; they met him on a canal boat in Sweden. Nor can you fail to recall the twelve ladies from California who get gingerly aboard the craft and peacefully settle down to the tasks of knitting, taking aspirin, and talking obstetrical folk lore.

I know of no recent volume that so accurately tells subjectively the definite difference between the British and the French, the British who are always thirty minutes too late and the French who always are two hours ahead of schedule. The former sit glumly in their pubs consuming quantities of ale and depart at ten o'clock when the sidewalks of the town "are taken in for the night". In contrast, the French people will loaf away the evening hours in a restaurant atmosphere of warmth and laughter and kindness and good cheer.

This Book Department puts the stamp of unqualified approval on Miss Halsey's "With Malice Toward Some". It affords more than an entertaining evening; you will remember it and talk about it for weeks to come.

The Nazi Primer

At this very minute as these lines are forming on my trusty typewriter Mr. Chamberlain is winging his way to Munich to talk with Herr Hitler about the war situation in Europe; and I am going to do something that earlier in the summer I swore to myself I would not do. I mentally promised myself that I would not include in these columns an account of "The Nazi Primer" which I read early in June when it had first been published in this country. But because of the acuteness of the times, the thought of this volume pops into my mind so sharply that I must get the "Primer" off my chest.

"The Nazi Primer" is the official handbook used in the German schools for schooling the Hitler youth. It describes in language suited to boys between the ages of 14 and 18 years the system of a Greater Germany set up in 1933. The English translation was made by Professor Harwood L. Childs of Princeton University, and if, after reading the book, you still believe in the Hitlerian form of rule, you should have a brain specialist look into your head.

From the chapter headings the reader can gain a splendid idea of the contents of the book: Race Formation; Heredity and Race Fostering; Population Policy; Territory and Population; Soil as a Source of Food Sup-

ply; Soil as a Support for Industry. These are only a few, but the remainder are of the same nature to instruct the Youth about all the advantages of Germany and of being German-born.

Let me list, also, a few of their Ten Commandments for Youth, ages 14-18 years:

1. The Leader is always right.
2. Never violate discipline.
3. Be proud but not arrogant.
4. In battle be steadfast and discreet.
5. Courage is not recklessness.
6. Whatever serves the interest of the Movement, and through it Germany and the German people, is right.

Of course No. 6 is the crux of the situation, and for that reason, today, Mr. Chamberlain is winging his way to Munich. The outcome? Who knows.

Voices in the Square

"Voices in the Square" by George Abbe is a first novel and it gives remarkable promise of more and better books to come. It is the story of a small New England town in general, and an account of two brothers in particular. Chuck and Biff are of high school age when the reader first meets them, and he sees them humanly drinking "cokes" at Polt's Drug Store, loafing in front of the A. & P. store, meeting the girls at the public library at night, and plaguing the old maid school teachers by day.

When reading it one knows immediately that Mr. Abbe's years have been spent in a small town. He has done a good job of recording such a life, and even more than recording. For after all, there were voices in the square that Chuck and Biff heard and heeded.

About That 200 Inch Telescope

Work on the California Institute of Technology's 200-inch telescope, which is to be finished in 1940, is progressing nicely. One hundred tons of parts have been shipped from South Philadelphia to Mt. Palomar. Eighty of this hundred tons was in two parts, one part weighing 45 tons, the other weighing 35.

The 45-ton piece is the largest and heaviest single part of the telescope. It is the south end cross member, and will support the 44-foot barrel of the telescope. This cross member is 46 feet long, 10 feet wide, and 12 feet high. The 35-ton part, when the telescope is finished, will support a load of 325 tons. It is the bearing box girder, and is 21 feet long, 8 feet wide, and 11 feet high.

These parts are being shipped from South Philadelphia to Eddystone, New York by rail, and from there by ship to San Diego via the Panama Canal. They will be loaded on special trailer trucks in San Diego for their sixty-mile journey to the top of Mt. Palomar. There the 1,000,000-pound telescope built to 1/10,000 inch specifications will be assembled.

A Short Story Collection With a Critical Plan

By L. E. SNYDER

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Theme and Variation in The Short Story. Selected and Edited by De Lancey Ferguson, Western Reserve University; Harold A. Blaine, Western Reserve University; Wilson R. Dumble, the Ohio State University. 550 pp. New York: The Cordon Company.

One seldom finds a volume of short stories as satisfying as *Theme and Variation in The Short Story*. Here is a list of picked stories that make readers look with more respect upon all anthologies.

But that's only the opening paragraph in this brief tale about a book. It's even more satisfying to discover that one of the editors of the volume is Wilson R. Dumble, the Mr. Dumble of "The Engineer's Bookshelf," the Mr. Dumble of the Department of English, Ohio State University . . . the Mr. Dumble about whom another author wrote, on the flyleaf of his novel: "You have looked into the Grecian Urn."

The ever increasing popularity of the short story may be reason enough for a new collection in the field. The editors of *Theme and Variation in The Short Story* furnish, however, another justification. "Our defense is," they say, "that we have built our whole collection on a critical plan which we believe is intelligible and hope is entertaining."

In their critical plan the editors illustrate the three major shifts that have occurred in the narrative technique of the past century. Claiming that there is no such thing as a new story, they select themes which have kept on recurring and—under each main heading of Adventure, Psychology, History, Humor, Detection, Country, City, War, Social Consciousness, and Reportage—employ three stories to distinguish these basic themes that show through the fabric of literary form. To quote from the Introduction: "Up to about 1890, the prevalent short story form in America and England was the simple tale of the Hawthorne-Poe-Bret Hart type. For the twenty years after 1890 the terse, tightly plotted narrative of the Maupassant-Kipling-O. Henry school almost monopolized the field. Since O. Henry's death in 1910 the emphasis has been increasingly on the psychological or slice-of-life story of the Chekov-Katharine Mansfield-Hemingway sort."

The reader who sits down for an hour with *Theme and Variation In The Short Story* is soon convinced that the volume lives up to the claim of its editors. Furthermore, the reader finds out that it is not only a collection with a critical plan; it is also a vital contribution to the ever-growing bookshelf of the short story.

For in this volume not too many of the old standbys are used. It is a pleasant relief to find such stories as "Clay-Shuttered Doors," "The Maysville Minstrel," and "Man on a Road." For the best authors of today are writing about themes and problems that are close

to them, are reflecting the life of what is happening in the big city, the small town, and the open country. In fact, most of the stories in the collection take hold of us in one way or another, call it what you will. What's more most of them are interesting; many of them unusual. But best of all, most of the stories make us think . . . and that's what really matters.

Engineering the Sportsman Ice

A capacity throng testified to the successful opening of the new "Royal Ice Palace" at Moore Park in Sidney. Thousands are nightly enjoying the 20,000 square feet of flawless ice, both as participants and spectators of musical reviews, hockey matches, races, and exhibitions. This opening on schedule marked another American engineering triumph, because under this ice an American company had installed the huge refrigeration machine necessary to keep the rink frozen summer and winter. Very few of our sport fans realize the amount of work necessary to place such a large expanse of skating surface open to the use of the public through the four seasons. In this connection it is interesting to note that although an ice surface is smooth as glass, it may not give the highest degree of satisfaction. Sportsmen have been fully aware of this although scientific reasons were never fully understood. Therefore, the spotlight of research was turned on the subject of ice for skating.

As a result of this work the following facts were discovered:

"Ice frozen on concrete or terrazzo floors should be $\frac{1}{2}$ inch thick for hockey matches and $\frac{3}{4}$ inch for public skating. When ice is used for public skating it must not score, accumulate snow or become soft or slushy. Best ice melts momentarily under skate pressure and then refreezes. Considered in relation to skate pressure, minimum resistance and maximum pleasure, the high limit of ice surface temperature is 28-30 degrees fahrenheit. Ice that is too cold cuts and makes snow. Ice for hockey matches must be hard, smooth and colder than ice for public use.

"Brine temperature to give the best ice surface is not always the same, but is related to floor construction, conduction losses, sensible and latent heat loads on the surface and to ice thickness. Best ice is formed on the floor in successive thin laminations. The fact that correct design of skating rinks is affected by climatic conditions at the place of installation has only recently fully been recognized." The rink itself has a concrete floor which was guaranteed within 1/32 inch level by the consulting engineer. Upon it was laid 2-inch piping on 4-inch centers, piping being delivered to the job in 20-foot lengths and welded into 200-foot sections. Fourteen hundred gallons of chilled brine is circulated continuously through the piping with refrigeration being supplied by a centrifugal machine, located below floor level. Other equipment includes an air washer-type cooling tower adjoining the refrigerating machine and a 350 horse power main driving motor.