

The Bootblack Stand



Dr. George Washington Plunkitt, our prize-winning political analyst, is celebrating the publication of his new book, which is now available at *avant-garde* bookstores throughout New Jersey. Dr. Plunkitt's book is about the importance of altruism in politics and it is titled *What's in It for Me?* Although Dr. Plunkitt expects to earn ten million dollars from sales of his new book, he has agreed to continue to advise public figures through this column. Address all correspondence to The Bootblack Stand, c/o The Establishment, R.R. 11, Box 360, Bloomington, Indiana 47401, Continental U.S.A.

My Dear Mr. Plunkitt:

Vy iz it zet vemen adore me so? Is it

because of my enormous intellect? Or my power in the verld? Or is it my beauty? My trim asletic figure, my natural grace, my "vith it" personality, my dexterity at the rumba, the cha cha, and the mombo?

Vut efer it is I sink I now understand vut bothers the vemens of vemens liburashen? There is not enuf of me to go around.

Incidentally, is it proper to veer knickers without knicker boots?

Henry Kissinger

Dear Mr. Kissinger:

I shall tell you why women are attracted to you. It is the deepest attraction of all, far deeper than mere love and more searing than the pangs of lust. Women are attracted to you by the deepest feminine impulse of all — the impulse to pity. Nothing has been more pathetic than seeing you flying forlornly off to one foreign city or another. And then your pathetic appearances before the sharks of the Washington press corps are the kind of thing that must bring water to the eyes of the faces on Mount Rushmore. All your braggadocio about Machiavelli and aphrodisiacs of power do nothing to dispel the image. You Henry are a sad sack.

— GWP

Dear Mr. Plunkitt:

As you might know by now I have decided not to use my Senate subcommittee to investigate the Watergate Affair. I have declined the investigation for personal reasons. To begin with my youngest son is dating a bearded girl, and has refused to eat anything but prunes and jelly sandwiches until Mr. Nixon ends his war on crime. We have tried to establish dialogue with him but he refuses to come out of his nest. Furthermore, several weeks ago I found my wife at home allowing a famous Albanian painter to paint her in the nude. When I arrived on the scene he scurried about trying to pull on a terry cloth robe and he knocked my animal crackers all over the floor. Also Tom Wolfe is threatening to write a salacious novel about my Harvard years. What should I do?

Regards,
Edward Kennedy

Dear Senator Kennedy:

You are in a genuine pickle. For the kind of help you need I think you should write Martin Bormann. Send the letter care of Howard Hughes. Incidentally, my wife tells me that the last time you visited our house, you left your rubber duck in the tub. Where can we send it?

—GWP

Book Review

Fields for President

by W. C. Fields
Dodd, Mead, \$5.95

As a serious enterprise, book reviewing in the United States survives in about the same condition as organized religion—though its structures abound throughout the Republic, its substance is but a vestige of yesteryear's glories. All sorts of indignities and perversions are piled on the old art. As a form it puffs and strains under the burden of innumerable idiotic innovations. It is brazenly usufructed by every species of scoundrel and charlatan. And naturally in our age of evangelizing enthusiasms, it has become the tool of the ideologue and the uplifter.

Serious journals which during the 1920s would never have opened their pages to the Babbitts and the wowsers, are today lying spreadeagled before a host of faddish dandies. Serious books are banished to back pages or to outright oblivion for reasons that are pedantically ideological, venal, and ignorant. I take it as illustrative of my observations that the book presently under consideration received not a nod from the major reviewing establishments, though such stuff as *Women and Madness*, *A Bill of No Rights*, *The Coming of Age*, *St. George and the Godfather*, and *A Theory of Rights* have been treated handsomely.

Compared to all of these doodlings, Dr. Fields' work is a towering masterpiece, a political treatise of the first water, a capital achievement in social analysis, the grand tour of a great mind

through the byways and past the arcades of this supermarket republic. What is more, *Fields for President*, unlike the books that set book reviewers to salivating these days, is logical and well-written—though the author's formal education waned around the fourth grade.

Nevertheless this tome has been segregated from those other works of comedy which pass for political analysis today, and its sales have suffered. Despite its prevenient analysis of American society, it is not considered relevant to contemporary American problems. Unlike works by Norman Mailer, Eldridge Cleaver, and other such buffoons, this book does not appear on any of the syllabi or bibliographies of those vulgarized college courses that are the rule rather than the exception during this booming age of higher education. *The New York Times Book Review* gave it the old heave-ho without even pausing to sprinkle it in the ritual of confetti and banality so often reserved for the senile effusions of Justice Douglas. Naturally *The New York Review of Books*, *The Nation*, and other such renowned forums of the book reviewing art passed it by. But their concerns are really religious rather than intellectual, and no one who matters takes them seriously anyway.

Now the *Times* is another matter. It should be the Nation's showcase of intellectual tastes. Perhaps it is. If this is so, it does not speak well for the Republic.

The message of *The New York Times*

Book Review is chaos. In recent years it has taken on a kind of carnival atmosphere where geeks and fat women disport with contortionists of every ideological fashion. Serious books are handed to ideological cheerleaders from one trendy cause or another. Unserious books are given to reputable scholars. And when cranks are not molesting serious books, or serious scholars are not being misused for the purposes of rendering significance to high-toned persiflage, the pages of *The Review* are turned over to ignoramuses.

After reading *The New York Times Book Review* regularly, one gets a view of the American intellectual preserve that is a vision of ghastliness and chaos. When *The Review* is not morbid it is idiotic, and when it is neither of these it is dull. A typical issue will unveil reviews of books explicating the mysteries of anal intercourse, suicide amongst women, or mercy killing. Then there will be tony reviews of the year's best books on African dance or yogurt making or Japanese gardening. And interspersed amongst all these curiosities, the editor, a Mr. John Leonard, will publish a special kind of review which someone has convinced him marks the *creme de la creme* of intellectuality. It is a genre that he reserves for those individuals beheld by him to be personages of enduring worth, say Gore Vidal or Norman Mailer. It is a delusory essay delivered from a soap box, albeit a discreetly camouflaged soap box. Now not only are these reviews misleading, but they are written by writers who invariably harbor bizarre little prejudices which they relentlessly and disingenuously advance on unsuspecting readers in such a way as either to hook the poor sucker (by convincing him that he, in his obtuseness, has missed a point here and

there) or to persuade him that the reviewer is insane.

So *The Review* is a carnival. But it is a strictly patrolled carnival. Certain acts are never allowed in the tent. Others are kept in the shadows.

Consider Irving Kristol's *On The Democratic Idea in America*. It has been out for eleven months, and it is considered essential reading by members of the Nixon Administration. It has yet to be reviewed. Milton Friedman's new collection of essays is not likely to be hospitably treated, if it is acknowledged at all. And one of the most important studies of urban problems to appear in years, Edward Banfield's *The Unheavenly City*, was ignored for months before it was finally turned over to a member of the tv intelligentsia.

Still one would have thought that Mr. Leonard would have found space for Dr. Fields. But no, he snubbed the great

man's bequest to the world of letters and social science as though it bore a pox. Perhaps he never saw the book. Perhaps on the day the masterpiece arrived in his office he was exercising his arm down at a favored saloon. More probably he took one glance at its contents, locked his office doors, and furtively put it to the torch, confident that he had preserved the Nation's virtue. Of course, how could he ever leave it with one of his faddists? Garry Wills would not understand it. George Stade might find it convincing. So there was nothing else to do but to pretend that W. C. Fields had never published a scholarly study of the American system.

And so the carnival continues. The premier book review in America continues to boom the latest twaddle about homosexuality, the Women's fever, organic foods, the American War Machine, and more. A few stercorous novels, the

product of a jejune society of dwarves, attract ooohs. And there are scattered essays on the life of the mind and other such exaggerations. With book reviewing like this, it is little wonder that nothing but canards and balderdash pour forth from political and social analysts, and no one would know if a sound novel had been published in the last ten years, because there is no reviewer around who is fit to read one. The only solution for *The Times* is to send Mr. Leonard off to some creative writing school in the Catskills and to hire someone capable of doing justice to modern American publishing. The most promising place to begin looking for such a fellow will probably be among the scribes now sweating away over the obituary section. That would be the kind of innovation of which civilized men might approve.

R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr.

Book Review

The Nick Adams Stories

by Ernest Hemingway
preface by Philip Young
Charles Scribner's Sons, \$7.95

In this volume are assembled Ernest Hemingway's twenty-five short stories, sketches, and fragments in which Nick Adams appears. Hemingway buffs will recall Nick Adams as the fictional character whose background and experiences closely parallel those of Hemingway himself. Nick appears in several of Hemingway's finest short stories—which is to say, in several of the finest short stories ever written in English: "The Killers," "In Another Country," "Big Two-Hearted River," "The Battler." These masterpieces have been in print for decades. They have been widely praised and anthologized, and they need no review, here or elsewhere.

What is new about this book is the appearance in print of eight previously unpublished works of fiction. Because the author is Ernest Hemingway, this volume is by definition a significant literary event. The eight pieces are, however, an odd lot.

Two of the works were originally passages from other short stories. The fragment published here as "Three Shots" was originally the opening section of "Indian Camp," the story in which Nick as a boy watches, horrified, as his father delivers a baby by performing a Caesarian section with a jackknife. The "Three Shots" section, when read together with "Indian Camp," offers an interesting study of courage and fear which foreshadows "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber." The boy Nick is afraid of the night, and ashamed of his fear, and he achieves at least a partial understanding of himself and his fear. "On Writing" originally concluded "Big Two-Hearted River." The reader is not surprised to learn that Hemingway cut it from the story before publication;

he is shocked to learn that Hemingway wrote it at all. Dismally inferior to the fishing story as we know it, "On Writing" is an interior monologue in which Nick ramblingly thinks of bullfighting, old friends, and literary acquaintances and reputations. It is all extremely self-conscious and artificial; it bears no relationship to the ritualistic fishing trip which structures the more familiar tale.

"Wedding Day" and "Crossing the Mississippi" appear to be brief, preliminary sketches which were never developed. With his groomsmen, Nick dresses for the marriage ceremony and later rows away across the lake with his bride; Nick crosses the great river on a train as the White Sox win the World Series. The former, especially, seems incomplete and unfinished.

"Night Before Landing" presents Nick on board ship approaching France during World War I. This fragment is the opening passage of a novel which Hemingway abandoned. "The Indians Moved Away" evokes a mood of sadness at the disappearance of the Indians from northern Michigan.

The most significant pieces in the book are "Summer People," a short story in which Nick goes swimming and later makes love to his girlfriend of that summer, and "The Last Good Country," a lengthy fragment which treats Nick's flight with his younger sister from two game wardens who plan to arrest Nick for game violations. Nick and his sister live in the woods, enjoying a psychologically incestuous relationship as Nick, himself, thoroughly alienated from his society, considers how he can survive as a runaway. The plot contains, for Hemingway, a number of surprisingly clumsy shifts.

The "new" Nick Adams material in this book is decidedly inferior to the "old"; once again one feels that Hemingway's editorial judgment was generally sound. But the reader who does not know

the adventures of Nick Adams would do well to dip into this volume. The best of Nick Adams contains much of the best of Hemingway, and this volume is a good introduction to Hemingway's art. The reading public is indebted to Mary Hemingway and to Charles Scribner's Sons for making available the previously unpublished Nick Adams material.

But one final observation on *The Nick Adams Stories*: the dust jacket refers to "the underlying unity in the life of Nick Adams and the dramatic unfolding of this fictional character," and Philip Young speaks of the "meaningful narrative" of Nick Adams' life. Perhaps. But one should remember that there is no evidence that Hemingway himself thought

