

The Strong School of Women Novelists

BY OSBERT SITWELL

PRELIMINARY CHARGE

MONSTROUS Regiment,
 You have hung up your harps of gold,
 With unenviable magic
 Have transformed them
 To singing avenues of tin typewriters!
 No longer, as of old,
 You squat upon rectangular cubes
 Of governess-green canvas
 Amid iron dustiness and screeching bustle
 Of foreign stations,
 To write those endless letters to a friend;
 Girlish descriptions of Mt. Blanc,
 Swiss rhapsodies of edelweiss, cuckoo and cowbell.
 No: you have mechanized yourselves
 Until,
 Just as the flashing waterfalls of which you wrote
 Have since been harnessed to produce illumination,
 So you have tapped your energy.
 Your drumming fingers rap
 Interminable novels of Life in the Raw; abominations
 (Tip-tap, Tip-tap, Tip-tap,
 O tippety-tap!)

PLEA

O most monstrous regiment
 Of women-novelists,
 Show mercy!
 Remove your faces from the covers.
 Quit querulous explanation
 Of why your heroines take lovers,
 Abandon bone-thin chatter
 Of psychological reaction,
 And the stark chasing of a recalci-
 trant complex



Through half-a-million words,
 Renounce your daily reading of D. H. Lawrence
 And announcements of what he means to you
 (But what would he have said to you, I wonder?
 What would he not have said?)
 Cease your drinking of dank
 —O so dank—tea
 And all parade of fondness for your dog
 —Intolerable extension
 Of an already intolerable personality—
 And listen—WILL you listen—to me!

INTERROGATION

Do you never think, monsters,
 After, thank heaven, that the party is over,
 After the last botulistic sandwich
 Has poisoned the last publisher,
 And the charwoman has reserved the tea-leaves
 For a further cleaning of floors,
 Do you never think, even then,
 Of an empty cradle
 And an empty kitchen?
 Do you really consider
 That the boastful yelping and yapping
 Of your pink-eyed, white chrysanthemum-like Sealyham
 Does duty for the questions of a child,
 That companionship consists
 In the bittern-boom of Bloomsbury,
 And that as good things
 Come out of the tin
 As go into it;
 Do you; do you?

OUT TO LUNCHEON

Consider again, then! Reflect upon your days. . . .
 All through the morning
 Between the rounds of aspirin and tea
 You beat your hard tattoo of words;
 Dark, meaningful words
 That yet will fall, soft rain
 To dampen the sprouting, cellar hearts
 Of literary agents,
 Weaving perpetually frustrated webs
 Within the yellow glass towers of the fog.



Illustrations by Whitney Darrow, Jr.



Now strikes the hour
 For luncheon with a publisher.
 Toss your head, comb matted hair,
 Fit gloves on skeleton-thin fingers,
 Give a final titillating tug
 To your sombrero.
 Snap goes your handbag
 —Repository of powerful germs—;
 Click down the latch, stump out
 and clamp
 A smile of rustless steel upon your face
 Remember, when you enter the assembly
 To adopt a touch of farm-hand grace,
 So ill at ease, you know, in cities:
 But let the camera,
 In its eternal moment of magnesium,
 Surprise you looking strong.

LEAVING EARLY

Time to go; already time to go.
 "What a delightful luncheon, Mr. Whimple,
 Thank you; goodbye.
 Goodbye, Mr. Smather (*dear Mr. Smather*), goodbye.
 I loved your last book, Mr. Scrabble,
 Goodbye, goodbye.
 O, Mr. Smither, that review!
 Entrancing, like all your work, so . . .
 —well you know. . . .

Goodbye.
 Goodbye, Mr. Whimple, again
 And again.
 What? . . . Recommended, did you say, by your society?
 And you never told me until now?
 (Goodbye, goodbye, goodbye!)
 And over there do I see Mrs. Whimple;
 Can it really be,
 And never a word with her?
 Goodbye.
 (Promise to come and see my chickens at the farm)
 Goodbye, goodbye, goodbye:
 And again, Thank You."

AFTERNOON



Rush home. You have no time to
 thank
 The boy who lifts you in a com-
 munal cage
 Up to your floor. Insert the key,
 Call drearily for tea, more tea.
 Then drop your smile
 Upon a shelf nearby
 (It may be wanted in a while)
 With hard, metallic rattle,
 And type again
 —For as the sea-slug, much esteemed in China,
 Shoots out, when moved by anger or by fear,
 Its entrails, so must you
 Release these living words
 To die within a sea of print—
 Until the time comes round
 For book-tea or book-talk,
 Committee-meeting and a Pen-Club dinner.

SHAM ATLAS



O most monstrous regiment
 Of prating, slate-like women,
 Will it never be time
 —I will not say for bed
 But time—
 For sleep?
 Sham female Atlas,
 Will you never let the willing world
 Fall from your shoulders?
 Abhorrent is your strength,
 Faked muscles of stage strong-men
 Fitted upon thin arms.
 Will you never forego
 The tinkle of the tea-spoon and the talk
 And cure your cold?

FEMALE ESAU

Most abominable regiment,
 How often, how sincerely,
 Have I wished you back in your empty kitchen
 Away from this wearying chatter of net-sales.
 How often have I wished
 That the tending of living things
 Could soften your hardness—
 And harden your softness, too—
 That you would knit socks,
 Less woolly than your writings
 And more strong,
 Cease telling stories of your dogs,
 And, when conversation fails,
 Read Fanny Burney and Jane Austen
 Until you comprehend, not without grief,
 The immense and delicate birthright
 You have sold for an aspirin tablet
 And a tea-leaf.

Young Barbarians

O. HENRY MEMORIAL AWARD PRIZE
 STORIES OF 1934. Edited by Harry
 Hansen. New York: Doubleday, Doran
 & Co. 1934. \$2.50.

Reviewed by J. B. PRIESTLEY

FROM Mr. Harry Hansen's very in-
 telligent introduction to this vol-
 ume, I gather that the stories in it
 have been carefully chosen, and that those
 stories that have been awarded prizes
 have fully deserved prizes. Thus we may
 assume that these nineteen short stories
 are the pick of the year's bunch. And let
 me add at once that they make up a read-
 able book, well worth the money charged
 for it. Some of the authors—notably Pearl
 S. Buck, William Faulkner, T. S. Stribling,
 and Thomas Wolfe—are well known, but
 most of the contributors are young writ-
 ers whose work is not known to the pres-
 ent reviewer. And it is these young stran-
 gers who have carried off the prizes.

It is pleasant to record that these young
 writers appear to have stopped imitating
 either D. H. Lawrence, on the one hand,
 or Ernest Hemingway on the other. Both
 these men of genius have been shockingly
 bad influences, if only because both of
 them possess a certain inimitable quality
 along with several tiresome tricks only
 too easily copied. It would be better, if
 you must imitate somebody, to dish up
 O. Henry himself as your chance for the
 O. Henry Memorial Prize. Actually, the
 influence of O. Henry is not to be found
 among these contemporary stories, which
 are not interested in his neat artificiality,
 his deliberate humor, his smiling accep-
 tance of the social kaleidoscope. And if
 there is any brand-new influence at work,
 it is too new to be spotted by at least
 one reader.

Most of these stories, however, have
 certain things in common. The first is a
 taste for violence. Outside cheap sensa-
 tional fiction, there can never have been
 more fighting and more murders than
 there are in this volume. These young
 highbrows have the nose of crime report-
 ers for spilt blood. They seem to live in a
 world of senseless slaughter. Consider the
 story here that gained the first prize: "No
 More Trouble for Jedwick," by Louis
 Paul. Jedwick is a negro who has escaped
 from a chain-gang. We see him have his
 way with a frightened woman, and then
 kill two men who try to stop his progress
 north. To do Mr. Paul justice, he takes no
 side and merely indicates the kind of ter-
 rible world we live in. But though there
 may be some sort of civilized protest be-
 hind the story, it is difficult not to feel that
 though the tale is well done, it is itself
 nearly as barbaric as the life it describes.
 And much the same may be said of some
 of the other stories. They are well ob-
 served, not badly written, but are gloomy,
 violent, barbarous, and do not reflect a
 civilized temper.

They mark the distance the serious
 young writers seem to have removed
 themselves from the organized society
 which provides them with publishers, edi-
 tors, printers, booksellers, grocery stores,
 and transportation. There was a time when
 American writers were the mouthpieces of
 American civic ideals. There was a time
 —more recent—when the more important
 American writers were all in rebellion
 against those ideals—or at least what had
 come to pass as those ideals. But now we
 have these newcomers who hardly seem
 aware of the social scene, in the larger
 sense, who are not citizens (whether com-
 placent or rebellious) writing for other
 citizens, who are neither for New Deals
 nor against them but seem to live in a
 dark, violent, underground world. If this
 is significant, then they are significant.
 But it seems to one reader—who is not an
 American and has never regarded the
 short story as a very important form—
 that this is their only significance. They
 are readable and have talent, but they
 have not carried the art of the short story
 any further than their elders, and, what
 is perhaps more important just now, they
 are not helping American society to un-
 derstand itself. And unfortunately we are
 living in a time when American society—
 like any other society—must either under-
 stand itself or risk annihilation.

The BOWLING GREEN

Old Loopy

(A Love Letter for Chicago)

PASSING the big rack in Times Square which offers the newspapers of many different cities I had a sudden surprised impulse. I bought a copy of a Chicago paper. Here, in my own supreme home town. I had a yen for Old Loopy.

Most fantastic and folksy of great cities, I wanted to know what was going on at Marshall Field's, Carson Pirie's, Mandel's, or at the little Casa de Alex, where the lady sings *Chagrin d'Amour*. How is Violet, the Welsh chambermaid at the Congress Hotel? I wanted to read those Society Notes, the most deliciously unconscious betrayals known to sociology. Or at any rate (next after the Personals of our own *Saturday Review*) the most perilously intimate index-number of our anxious age. Against the ruddy volcanic glow of the economic crater I see tiny dark figures dancing in silhouette. Even if I quote (at random) you'll scarcely believe me:—

Society seems to have a special set of folkways, to be used only at the hockey matches. There, with unremitting din of cheers ringing out, the accepted method of addressing companions is by shouting. Cheering itself, the box circle munches gum, almost unanimously, between its volleys of advice to players or referee. Orchids brighten as many costumes as they do at tea parties, but they bloom against tweeds instead of satins.

While the organ boomed, "Little Man, You've Had a Busy Day," Mr. and Mrs. — — — greeted people and bade them good-by in the same sentence. They are just back from their honeymoon.

Members of the Alliance Française met for luncheon Saturday. . . . Among the guests chattering French in brittle phrases were. . . . Mrs. — — departed from the general uniform of black and pearls by wearing a claret colored velvet suit. She dashed out afterward, on her way home, and on to William Beebe's lecture that evening.

Mrs. — —, in olive green and beaver, calmly lifted a lighted taper from the candelabra to light her cigarette.

The conjunction of orchids and chewing gum, in the first quote, is a paradox worthy of the Elizabethan age. And then just as I am about to feel scandalized I remember the beautiful white wedding-cake of the Wrigley Building seen at night beyond the black profile of Michigan Avenue. Surely the first requisite of the sociologist is not to be scandalized at anything. Chicago "departs from the general uniform of black and pearls." So much the better.

But it is not my wish nor ability to offer a philosophic essay on Chicago. I simply want to tell her I love her. She is one of the few big-towns that can be loved as an integer; a subtle unity holds her together, makes her apprehensible. It is partly her essentially provincial spirit; the deep inferiority complex which is so valuable to the artist, goading him to excess, both achievement and despair; and it is partly some underlying vein of rank vitality. The wild onion for which she was named (most Chicagoans have forgotten this) is an accurate symbol. An exquisite garlic of paradox is still discernible in her doings. Garlic is a magnificent savor if leniently used. She appeals to something untamed, young and central in the romantic heart. Most sentimental of towns, she weeps over her defaulting financiers and loads the coffins of gunmen with tons of flowers. She plunders the shrines of the world to adorn the Gothic office building of a newspaper: stones from Westminster Abbey, the Taj Mahal, the Great Wall of China, Notre Dame and "Hamlet's Castle at Elsinore" are plumed into the fabric of the beautiful *Tribune* pile. Is that childish. or is it noble? It's both; it's Chicago. The comic old Water Tower is flooded at night with a pink tawny glow, to remind one of the burning flicker that shone

round it in 1871. When she opened her Century of Progress she did it with a beam of light from Arcturus. There was a photograph of three electrical magi, in charge of that cosmic hook-up, saluting Arcturus with a friendly wave of thanks.

Those who have never correctly tuned in to her extraordinary wave-length may not like her; may be puzzled or alarmed. She was nearly ruined, intellectually, when Henry Mencken (solemnly, naively, not intending any joke) insisted that she was the Literary Capital of America. Absurd, of course, for literature has no capitals; it happens in the mind. But Chicago took him seriously. This was the annunciation so long awaited; and Schlogl's Restaurant was its manger (or *salle à manger*). That quiet unassuming place, and the worthy fellows who frequented it, were swamped in the rush of spectators eager to see Literature being born. London, Paris, New York, even Dublin, Manchester and San Francisco, have been told the same thing at various times without causing a ripple

in their established self-certainty. But for the hysteria in Chicago's temperament this announcement of primacy was toxic. A lot of violently unripe books were written. The muse of literature, a creature shy and tender as Horace's *hinnuleo*, was plucked up every Wednesday and Saturday to see how she was growing. Schlogl's was compared to the Cheshire Cheese; the lions in front of the Art Institute looked more like Lord Palmerston than ever. This deafening and grotesque clamor did much harm. I used to wish someone would do a cartoon of Peter Dunne, sitting calmly here at the Café Lafayette, being told that Chicago had become the Literary Capital. In the days of Mr. Dooley, of Gene Field and of Stone and Kimball, no one had to be told that.

For a while (in the early twenties) the literary situation was not unlike that of the whiskey trade at the present time: when every new distillery advertises its usquebaugh as the inheritor of old renown, the genteel toddy of the cavaliers. But then someone discovered that the Literary Capital was Down South; the herd of critics went slogging across the Potomac, and Chicago was saved. The Depression completed the job. Like Mrs. O'Leary's cow, Mr. Insull kicked over the lamp and the milkpail. In universal smoke and cinders literature was left to shift for itself.

Hence Chicago's present humility and grace in these matters. She is wisely content to enjoy what comes along, not insisting that it be her own. She is by instinct the patron of music, painting, and sculpture, rather than letters. Perhaps she has too vivid a craving for life in the audible, visible, tangible, to dote on the remoter figments of print. So she will never be sad or blasé. The Society Notes which I find so enthralling suggest a young race that has freshly discovered, with bewildered ecstasy, the pleasures of clothes, jewels, sports, picnics, parties. Her curiosity is enormous, but it is social rather than intellectual. It was keenly aroused lately about Gertrude Stein, but mainly in regard to her clothes. Only a small up-and-

down slice of the sophisticated were affected: like Vertical Parking, that astonishing elevator-device on Monroe Street which houses scores of automobiles one above the other on a rotating scaffold.

At any rate she has learned, as all civilizations must, that the arts cannot be whipped into action like a top. That thought and the finer emotions are not susceptible to ballyhoo. She has almost given up comparing the University of Chicago to Oxford. Mass production as a way of creating culture got a gruesome jolt in the new Civic Opera House.

Fascinated in thinking about her, I have fallen into a sort of sombre Mathew Arnold mood. My intention was quite other. This is my love letter to her, whether or not she recognizes it as such. In her bewildering charm intellect plays little part. The first thing I always see is a big building on Michigan Avenue, I forget which, crowned by an enormous bee-hive. That I find symbolic. She has bees in her bonnet and they secrete a most pungent honey; she is the cupola of the freakish and unexpected. These generalities are what our Society Reporter would call "brittle phrases," and I admit it. I can only speak of her effect on me. Whether on the wide barren plazas of Grant Park or in the dark greasy streets of the Loop she fills me with amazement not unmixed with terror. I can still remember my strong prejudice against her

before we met. Perhaps the convert is always the greatest zealot: at any rate there has always been "some strangeness in the proportion." The first time I heard a gale blowing over the Lake, the howl of the wind on Lake Shore Drive and crash of fresh-water surf, I knew she was fey. Carl Sandburg sang ballads with a guitar, and the fire, sprinkled with chemicals, flew green and silver up the chimney. . . . I think she has less hypocrisy, less

prudential qualms than some of her Eastern neighbors. She admits more freely the impulses of love, laughter, lunacy,—even of anger, greed and fear—which make up life. I've spoken before of the queer, double note of the police whistles. At first it seems a mocking, impudent, ribald call; the defiant razzing of some spirit of mischief, thumbing his nose at death. Then, as the ear follows this elvish strain more closely, disentangling it from the roar of the street, it has a foreboding, lurking, pagan cry. Perhaps in the corner of your gaze you see a sturdy policeman commanding the crossing. His leather puttees seem for an instant the goat legs of Pan.

She gives one a marvellous sense of space. It's the wideness of the Lake that does it: every New Yorker must look with envy and admiration at that great expanse of parked water-front, so that the whole city is open on one side. Even the Lake seems strangely empty of shipping: what you think at first sturdy oncoming vessels remain fixed; they are pumping stations. She has another thing we have lost in New York, nice old railroad stations, with locomotives available. The joy of the steam-engine, breathing deep with accomplishment, is gone from Manhattan forever. Long life, I say, to the old depots of Chicago, the Northwestern, the La Salle Street, the Illinois Central. The new Union Station is very fine, in the Harveyized manner, but it gives me no picturesque thrill. The old Northwestern is joined to the *Daily News* building by a bridge, and the Northwestern dining room is now the Tabard Inn or Cheshire Cheese for jour-

nalists. There, with a tinge of deep pleasure, I first met Sherwood Anderson. I remember that the Three Hours for Lunch Club used to travel by ferry over to Jersey City and Hoboken to have the pleasure of eating in a genuine railroad station.

Where she has done what somebody told her, or what she thought was the right thing, Chicago has been grievously timid. The paltry lions in front of the Art Institute, for instance; or the footmen in white breeches and cockaded hats on Lake Shore Drive. No club should be allowed to look as much like a club as the Union League does. Where she acted on the impulse of her own wild heart—turning a river backwards, pushing a lake away to make park space, building the stately old Auditorium, twirling her dazzling beacon on the Palmolive Tower, she has always shown genius. Orchids and chewing gum . . . perhaps the social paragraph had meaning. Only a block behind the dazzling façade of Michigan Avenue you come to the dense and gloomy regions of the Loop. Sometimes in its darker shadows, under the L trestles and where the trolley tracks are set in pink stone chosen for skidding surface, the word Loop seems hardly constricted enough. It might almost be Noose. Chicago there seems older than any part of New York—more like London. And on a cold November morning, when Communists and unemployed marched in orderly but significant parade on Michigan Avenue, there spoke the oldest voice of all: the cry of human suffering. From high up in the hotel I heard shouting, and supposed at first it was a crowd of football enthusiasts; it was the day of some big local game. I opened the window and heard the rhythmic cry, "Don't starve—Fight!"

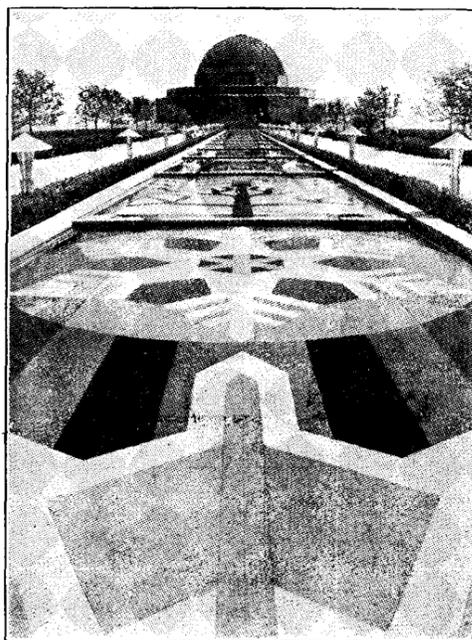
She is unruly at heart; more than a little goofy; she will be one of the last to be tamed by the slow frost of correctness. The persecutions of cruel climate and economic zigzag are likely to keep her temperament at extremes. I don't recognize the descriptions sometimes given of her: "the hog-butcher of the world, the city of big shoulders." In my chance glimpses she has always seemed completely feminine: wilful, witty, stung with a myriad nerves. It's odd that a female city should make telephoning so difficult: you have to use a special slug, with a different pattern for each pay-station; and the phones are almost always in the basement. So many memories come to mind: the aphrodisiac perfume of the dim overstuffed Congress lobby, and a gust of music from the Balloon Room down the corridor; the seagulls on the breakwater (who have never been told that that isn't the sea); the crowd outside the Old Globe Theatre the last night of the Fair. Everything about her has always contradicted the foretold and expected. She spikes the small beer of living with the pure alcohol of the impossible.

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY.

A Delightful Fantasy

MARY POPPINS. By P. L. Travers. New York: Reynal & Hitchcock. 1934. \$1.50.

THIS book will appeal both to children and to grown-ups. A Nannie is a nurse in England. At the opening of the book the Banks family needs a Nannie. The new nurse arrives, and is Mary Poppins, who makes an unusual start by sliding up the banisters. In other words, there is something magical about Mary Poppins, and something magical about her fiancé, Bert. There was Mary Poppins's uncle also who *didn't* "roll and bob," though he certainly floated up next the ceiling, and Miss Lark's dog Andrew who picked up a friend named Willoughby, and whose language of barking Mary Poppins well understood, and many different magics, as how Admiral Boom got into a cage at the zoo and how Maia climbed up the sky. In fact, this is one of the freshest and most delightful fantasies we have read for a long time. The marvellous Mary Poppins stays with the Bankses, with Jane and Michael particularly, until the wind changes, and then she blows away. But in the meantime she has proved such a nurse as all children would sigh for, cry for, and run away for. We'll bet the shade of Jean Ingelow wishes she had thought of Mary Poppins!



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