

freethought criticism and satire

The Realist



the magazine
of irreverence

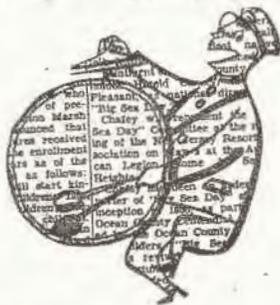
October 1960

35 Cents

No. 20

a fable for our time: The Second Coming

That unsung stagehand who erases the blackboard between challengers on *What's My Line?* had quietly done his duty; the members of the panel had skillfully adjusted their blindfolds; news analyst John Daly artfully announced, "Will tonight's Mystery Guest sign in, please!"; the camera panned to the supraliminal Kellogg's legend above the blackboard; now there was a close-up of a severely-scarred hand signing its owner's



name in chalk; the studio audience gasped, then broke into a standing ovation; and producers Goodson-&-Todman rejoiced in the knowledge that they had finally scored the TV-First to beat all TV-Firsts.

Because the bearded Mystery Guest was by definition a celebrity, the thorny problem of whether or not he worked for a profit-making organization was automatically eliminated.

(Continued on page 2)

We're a Little Late, Folks . . .

Due to time taken up in the court case referred to elsewhere, plus a two-week term of jury service, this issue has been dated October instead of September. As subscriptions are figured by number rather than by month, subscribers will not be affected by this publishing hiccup, for which we apologize.

an impolite interview with: Jean Shepherd



(Continued on page 9)

(Continued from Cover)

Q. How would you describe what you do on radio?

A. Well, I try to say—you know, it would be very easy to make a profound statement, a real high-sounding statement: "I try to plumb the inner resources of my soul and put it into a malleable form so that I can communicate with the public"—but I really don't know. I can only say that I think a person who listens to what I do would be in a better position to say than I am. It would be easy for me to say: "Well, on one hand I try to amuse people, and on the other hand I try to say things which I believe to be true"—but this is true of anybody who writes.

I think a guy who writes a novel also wants people to be intrigued enough to read it. I'm sure you can take widely disparate writers—take somebody like Dante—he probably wanted people to read him, and he also was no doubt intrigued by some of the things he himself said and wanted other people to be intrigued too. What is in the ego of a person that makes him want to do anything to communicate with other people? How can you describe that? I guess I work the way a writer would work—looking at the world and all the people he sees—and I do it through the medium, however, of the voice.

I feel that writing is a substitute for the voice, that all writing is, that writing came about when it became evident that a guy could not talk to somebody 400 yards away, or 5 miles away, so he scratched out things that stood for his real speech, that speech is the original form of communication, and that writing is a secondary substitute for it.

The thing I also do is to play all the characters. I play the characters of the people I see because it's better to be them than to describe them. So, for example, you take a writer like Salinger—when Salinger's characters speak, the way they speak often is more important than what they say, and for that reason the description of the character is less effective than his dialogue.

And when I try to play a character on the air—like the guy—I did a thing where there was a man telling me that my life needs focusing, and that what I need is a good presentation, that obviously I should be a lot further along than I am, and he talked the way a presentation type does.

[Editor's note: At this point, there was a phone call for Mr. Shepherd from a sad, lonely woman who said that he's "like a mother and a father to me."]

Q. You sometimes seem to imply that what you do is more courageous than, say, what Mort Sahl does in night clubs?

A. Well, I don't like to give that impression. Let's put it this way. I resent the idea that it's courageous to speak to a group of people who know what you're going to say, and have already come to hear you say it, and are paying to hear you say it. It would be courageous for Mort Sahl to do what he does where there were no Mort Sahl fans.

Q. Isn't your listenership mostly Jean Shepherd fans?

A. No. Remember, I'm on that radio there, and you can't say "listenership." Anybody who's got a radio tunes across that dial. Listeners and non-listeners alike.

Shepherd fans and non-Shepherd fans alike. And the radio is looked upon in a much different way than the night club. It's a free thing. Everybody is here.

In short, a guy, for example, who hates comics wouldn't come in to see Mort Sahl, would he? I mean he wouldn't pay his way in. He might not like what Sahl says when he gets in there, but an anti-comic man would not go in. But a guy who is anti-talk hears me because I'm *there*, you know? He's looking for WPAT and I'm in between WPAT, and, let's say, WRCA's wall-to-wall music, and suddenly he tunes in on me.

Q. But he can turn you off—he hasn't paid.

A. Oh, but now just a minute. No—people don't look upon their radios that way. You ought to sit here some Saturday or Sunday afternoon after I do my show. People call in and say, "What right does he have to say that through my radio?" They do not say, "I have a right a turn him off." No. I have no right to say that on their radio. It really is a different thing.

And I'm not trying to say that it takes courage on my part. I'm merely saying that what I'm doing is open to far more darts and arrows and slings than

Correction

Issue #2 of the Realist credited Jean Shepherd with the fantasy of a research biologist suddenly shouting, "Eureka! I have it!"—calling a press conference—and announcing, "Gentlemen, at long last, I've discovered the missing link between the ape and civilized man. It's us!" This was actually said, however, in 1956, by Dr. Konrad Lorenz, a zoologist.

what, say, a guy's doing in a night club down on the lower east side, or over on Madison Avenue, with 55 people who—there's a big sign out in front that says: "Fred Rubottom, angry comic, lashes out at the world every night at 9"—well, they know what they're getting, and they pay for that, they want it. They come to it, in other words.

But can you imagine if they went in to hear Fred Rubottom, angry comic, and they got Montovani? That would be courageous, for Montovani to do that.

Q. Would you describe what happened when you compared Eisenhower and Khrushchev to traveling salesmen?

A. That incident happened when Ike and Khrushchev were traveling around the world. Ike was in South America and Khrushchev was in India, and they were both giving these speeches. And I read one day—there was a series of Ike's speeches in Venezuela or someplace, and a series of Khrushchev's speeches in New Delhi—and there they were, both standing up there grinning, Ike had a garland of roses they gave him, the children of Venezuela, and there was Khrushchev with a garland of roses from kids in India—and I was looking at this thing, and it suddenly occurred to me that these men were not talking ideologies.

When you really read what they said, Khrushchev was not explaining Marxism to the people of India at all, nor was Ike explaining democracy to the people of Venezuela. They were just explaining how had the other guy's stuff was, and how nice we are, and vice versa—they were both saying it, you see—and it occurred to me that this is exactly what a salesman does,

that a salesman does not really explain *why*, for example, a Chevrolet is a magnificent piece of machinery. He very definitely skirts the issue and points out the inadequacies of other people's products.

Quite often they do this—it's a sales gimmick—and I thought, gee, it's just like Ike and Khrushchev are two big traveling salesmen going around the world selling ideologies. Well, I did this on the air, and the next thing I got was a very official letter on engraved stationery from a lawyer who said, "Do you mean to imply, Mr. Shepherd, that the Russian system is better than ours?" I had never said anything *about* systems—that's exactly what my point was—*nobody* was saying anything about systems, you see.

And this lawyer said, "How can you ignore the millions of people who are in Siberian slave labor camps?"—and he goes on and on and on about this, and then he finally signs it and on the bottom I see that I just got the third carbon copy, that the original went to the president of WOR, another one went to the *Herald Tribune*—I'm sure that when Mort Sahl says a gag in the *hungry i*, somebody doesn't send a letter to the president of the Chamber of Commerce of San Francisco, and so on.

What I'm trying to say is that pressures—other than no applause—are put on a man on the radio. Now, the only way you can lash out at a person in a night club is (1) don't go—well, then he never hears from you—or (2) if you do go and you don't like it, you jump up and holler, "Ah, this is nothing"—and walk out. What else can you do?

But I'll tell you what you can do to people on the *radio*. You can have people killed economically and artistically. You take *away* their night club. See, my night club is that microphone. These people want to get you out of there. Hardly anybody goes into a night club and says, "I demand that you never sign up Mort Sahl again here, I'm gonna get all my friends, we're gonna picket, we're gonna sue you." This is never done. They just say, "Aw, I don't like it, it's not funny"—and they walk away.

Anyway, this is what happened to me, and I'll tell you, it was only by the dint—of course, I have to say this; that I've never gotten any comments or complaints from WOR—they'll bring in something like that letter and they'll put it on my desk, and they wrote underneath, "What happened here?" So I went into the boss and I told him what happened, and he says, "Well, why don't you write the guy a letter?"—which I don't often do. I said, "You mean *apologize* for what I said?" "No, of course not. Just write and tell him what you think."

That week, the *New York Times* printed an editorial cartoon in their Sunday world-news-of-the-week thing, and there it was—it showed Ike going in one direction riding a horse, and it showed Khrushchev going in the other direction. And underneath, it said, "Traveling Salesmen." And I sent this to the lawyer, and I never heard from him again. He's waiting for my next boo-boo.

Again, I don't want you to get the idea that I'm saying Shepherd is courageous. For God's sake, don't get that idea. I am merely saying that I have never found—and I have worked night clubs—I have never found economic pressures put on a night club performer—the things that can really kill you.

It doesn't take a great deal of bravery to get up and

take off on the Republicans in front of a group of Democrats. The problem of radio is that most people run into you without *knowing* you, without expecting you, and furthermore, without *wanting* you.

Q. *Most?*

A. No, I'm talking about the people who can hurt you. Now, sure, it is quite true that the people who listen to me regularly listen because they want to hear what I have to say. But you see, I'm available to everybody. I mean I'm right there in the middle of that dial. On one end is Art Ford and on the other end is WQXR, the classical juke box, and in between is this guy saying things that many people would not like.

Not that I *try* to say things people don't like. I just say things that I think. And you know yourself that if you say the things you really believe—and that doesn't necessarily mean that they're the truth; they're the things you *think* are the truth—if you honestly say the things you believe about a lot of things, many people are going to get very angry.

And so if you happen to say this in a night club, you're going to get a lot of laughs because these people have come to hear you do that, but if the guy's tuning for mood music and suddenly he hears somebody say, "Why, Ike and Khrushchev are galloping around the world like traveling salesmen"—he'll say, "What is this idiot *talking* about?"—and be madder than the devil.

I don't mean to imply that I have a corner on courage. I'm just saying that it would be difficult—many of these people who work in night clubs, somehow, it suddenly seems they don't use the same material when they go on, say, *Monitor*, or on television. You notice how their material changes, interestingly enough.

Q. *It's ironic that these carpers who complain about your program take themselves very seriously—because isn't one of the underlying themes of your show the notion that we shouldn't take ourselves too seriously?*

A. Yes, that's true. I find in some cases that the funniest, most ludicrous figure of them all is me, quite often, you know? And I do find that many people today do have a tendency to take themselves very seriously—and I'm not talking about "honor the individual"; that's different from taking yourself seriously—but when you begin to believe that you have super-human insight, look out. Hitler took himself awfully seriously, you know.

Q. *And yet, by suing Henry Morgan for calling you "slightly anti-Semitic"—which obviously you're not—aren't you taking yourself too seriously?*

A. I didn't sue, as a matter of fact; WOR did. No, I laughed when I heard that this had been said about me. I thought it was very funny—that was my first reaction: well, this is a Morgan funny—but then the station called me in, one of the people here, and he said, "Look, we have a record of this thing, and it is not funny at all, this was said in absolute seriousness."

And I listened to the record and I had to agree that Morgau apparently wasn't being funny. And so the station said, "We've already gotten letters from sponsors about this who resent anybody being on the air who represents them, being anti-Semitic. What are we going to do?" And I said, "I don't know."

So the lawyer of WOR said, "There's only one thing

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we can do—we have to stop this kind of talk—we're going to have to sue for libel." Because, you see, there's an interesting thing—when you are working for a radio station, it's not like working for a private paper—remember, we're a public franchise—and when I'm on the air, the things that I say represent the station—they're still liable for it. So the station suffers when something is said that is off kilter.

This was established about 1950 when a man came on the air in Philadelphia, and he was running for office, and he accused another man who was running for the same office—I think he accused him of being a card-carrying Communist and so on. Well, the man who was accused of this had definite proof to the contrary, but the point that he did have in his favor—he sued the station that carried this irresponsible broadcast, and the station had to pay out \$50,000.

Now I think that this kind of irresponsibility—if you do a thing like that for laughs on a public medium—if you do it for, let's say, just to make an effect—because I can't believe that Morgan *feels* that I'm anti-Semitic. I've known Morgan—you know, an interesting thing about it is that up to that point, the only contact I ever had with him was extremely pleasant. I'd been a great admirer of his for years, and still am. I thought that Morgan did some of the best stuff I ever heard on radio.

But he's always been extremely cordial to me, and I was amazed when he said this about me—and then I heard *why* it was said, because I used the name "Manny." I thought, well, this is exactly the same thing that Morgan is complaining about why there's a lack of humor—that any time you actually imply that the person you might be talking about is a real person, immediately there's a pressure group, and you wind up by doing humor that has no contact with reality at all.

If you remember, Morgan has said this—and he had a thing—that if you say something nasty about doughnuts all the doughnut-makers are on you; if you say something nasty about eagles, all the eagle-lovers are on you. Well, I didn't even say anything nasty. I mean if I had used the name Fred, I suppose that would have been anti-Fred.

Q. And if Fred is a Protestant name—

A. Then is this an anti-Protestant remark or what? The name Manny seemed to be a very funny name to use in connection with this man—the character that I was playing—and he seemed to be pretty much a composite of a lot of guys I'd known—and I merely used the composite name. I was talking about *film directors*, not about a race or nationality. There's a big difference there.

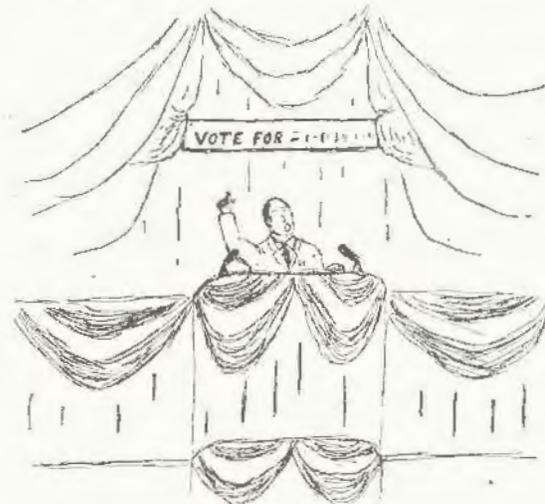
Morgan used to do things like—I remember on the air he used to do these riotous take-offs on German professors. Well, is he anti-German? Or is he anti-professor? Or is he anti-learning? No, I thought he was just very funny. And in many cases, quite right onto the mark. So now let's have these pots stop calling these kettles, you know?

But I didn't sue him, it was WOR. As far as I'm concerned, it's a forgotten issue. The reason the station sued—they were giving notice to WNTA—not Morgan—that they thought this was irresponsible broadcasting. And WNTA *immediately* called back and said that it was inexcusable; I got a call from the head of WNTA who said that he thought this was one

of the lowest blows, and he said: "I'm Jewish; I've listened to you for years; I think this was one of the most ridiculous things that's ever been said about you. Now all I can do is apologize." And we forgot the whole issue.

Apparently, Morgan is still mad at me about something, but I'm not mad at him—and I'm the one who was called anti-Semitic. If I would've taken it seriously, the first thing that would've happened—you know, you can be called homosexual—in fact, many guys make a business of being homosexual—you can be called pro-Communist—this is a good deal, too, because many guys—the blacklist, you know, works in reverse—everybody feels brave by hiring a guy on the blacklist. Many blacklisted guys weren't working for years because they were bad *performers*, and now suddenly they're working like mad because everybody feels the guilt thing, and they're hiring blacklisted guys like crazy.

But there's one thing, you can't be called — you cannot be called anti-Semitic, and I can understand



why you can't, because I think this is one of the most heinous outgrowths of the 20th century, this tremendous rampant anti-Semitism. And then to be called this—it's like turning around and calling Mort Sahl a Republican.

Q. Morgan also said [*impolite interview, issue #19*] that you've talked about your youth in such detail that he suspects it lasted for about 40 years. Why do you talk so much about how it was when you were a kid?

A. Because I—if you realize—I'm really making a comment about how it is *now*. I am not talking about how it was when I was a kid; I am not dealing in nostalgia, either. Incidentally, one of my wonderful childhood memories is hearing Henry Morgan. It's one thing to talk about when you were a kid, and another thing to live in the past, and I'm afraid that many performers do.

But, about when I was a kid, most of those things are done as a parable. Literally as a parable. It is not true, let's say, that my mother stood near the sink all of her life. This is a parable. You can say the same thing about Prenst—that the guy was hung up on how it used to be—but he was making a comment on the way of life, on the way it is in life.

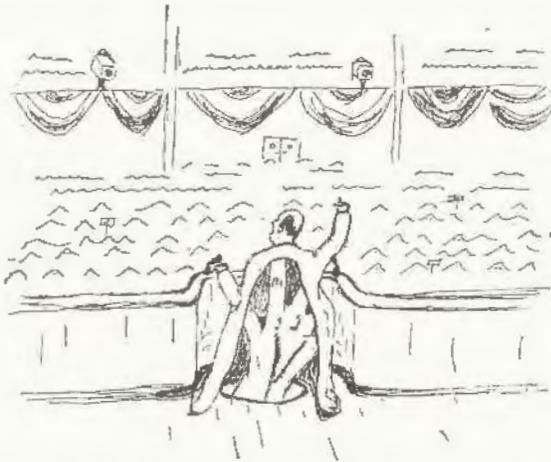
So it's not that I'm hung up on the old days—I'm

not Sam Levenson who sits around and says, "Yeah, when I was a kid in Brooklyn, and penny candy, and all that jazz"—that isn't at all what I'm doing, and I'm sorry that Mr. Morgan rejects his childhood.

Q. Since your work can be compared in a sense to an edited-for-radio self-psychoanalysis, do you think it's pertinent as to whether or not you've actually undergone analysis?

A. Boy, that's a *Realist* question. I'll answer it in a parabolic way. I got a call here a couple of weeks ago from a doctor who is a well-known psychiatrist in town and is a lecturer at one of the universities here. And he said, "You know, I've been listening to you for 3 years, Shepherd, and it might be of some interest to you to know that I feel that you're the most completely analyzed man I've ever met." Apparently, this is a great compliment from an analysis man.

And then I got to thinking about it, and I thought—well, you see, what I do on the show, I guess, makes



people wonder about me—the psychological problems involved. I am always looking for my own motives within me, trying to *extend* those motives to find out why other things happen, why *other* people do things. Freud, for example, when he came up with his most important work in the late 19th century, it was by looking at himself—not other people, but himself—and then looking at other people.

I don't think it's pertinent to my work as to whether I've been analyzed or not, but I will say this in all truthfulness: that my work is probably as great a purgative as any analysis could ever be, and more, because you can be really truthful when you're talking into a faceless microphone instead of a living individual, an analyst.

Q. What's your attitude toward people continually getting hung up on trivia?

A. Oh, you mean details? I think it's a very natural tendency that people all have. Most of the problems that we face in our lives—everybody's lives—are so immense in the ultimate sense—like life after death, for example, or the meaning of being alive—this is a pretty difficult problem that most people do not even want to discuss, and those that do, generally bring out a book and say, "Here, it's all written out here," and throw it down, and that's the end of that.

So, since life—being a human being—is a thing that has great uncertainties—I'm not sure any other

animal in the whole world—including us as part of the animal kingdom—that any other animal in the world knows uncertainty about the future nor consternation about the past. A rabbit does not regret last week.

Q. What about a dog who has been bawled out for soiling the rug—

A. That's fear. That's not consternation. He does not sit and worry about that. He does not say, "Why did I soil the rug? What is there in me that makes me soil rugs?" He will react with *fear*—this is a Pavlovian conditioned-reflex to physical fear where the dog says, "Oh, yes, I soiled the rug, I get hit on the head. Soil rug, hit on the head." That's all.

But consternation is different, you see. That would be if, after he soils the rug, he walks away, and says: "He's right, you know. I am a slob. It's a fantastic thing I've done, and I've done it again. No wonder I'm walking around on four feet like this, and got a thing around my neck. I *deserve* it." Dogs, apparently, don't do this, but man does.

Q. Is that good or bad?

A. It's neither; it's human. I don't think there's any good or bad thing. It's human to dream, and it's human to kill. It's human to love. And to say it's good or bad is ridiculous. That's like trying to say, "Well, let's stop being human. Let's be vases." Vases never get hung up on trivia. Nor do dogs.

See, I'm intrigued when I get hung up on trivia. I'm fascinated—all of a sudden I'll wake up and say, "What am I doing this here for?—for 20 minutes I've been sitting here doing the *New York Times* crossword puzzle, and I should be out being dynamic or something." I'm just amused, that's all.

Q. In what ways are you related and/or unrelated to the beat generation?

A. I'm alive. I mean I presume they're alive. Kerouac is older than I am. Ginsberg's younger than I am.

Q. I didn't mean chronologically; I meant in your attitudes.

A. I don't know, that's hard to say. It seems to me that the beats I've met seem to dig life. And I do. I think that most of them are inarticulate, that even though they claim they say a great deal, they don't. But their *life* says a great deal, the way they live says more than what they say they say in their paintings or in their writings. I think the way, for example, that Kerouac *lives* says more about what he believes than the way he writes.

Q. He lives with his mother—

A. That's right. That's exactly what I mean. I think that the most profound Madison Avenue advocates I've ever known were guys who wrote against Madison Avenue. As I say, you can really tell by the way a man lives much more than by what he says.

Q. Can't you just see a day coming when, in addition to the coffee break at the ad agencies, they'll also have time out for novel-writing?

A. You know, you bring that up—it's interesting to note that one of the boys who's in this recent book, *The Beat Scene*, just two years ago, he wrote the biggest, most wildly right-wing defense of Madison Avenue that's ever appeared in the *Village Voice*, and

he's going around now trying to get the *Voice* never to show that he wrote these things. He was the most Madison Avenue guy I've ever known. Marc Scheifler. Now he's in *The Beat Scene*.

I'm just saying that many things come and go, and it's not a matter of changing your mind. Oftentimes, it's a matter of an interesting kind of—I hate to use the word conformism—but whatever happens to be swinging for you at the time is what you'll do, and often a lot of things swing together, you know. The guy probably did feel that way when he wrote about the Madison Avenue crowd, and now he feels that way about beats. But who knows what he believes in? I don't think he does.

Q. What do you think is the significance of the rent-a-beatnik ad in the *Voice*—where "genuine beatniks" can be rented for fund-raising or private parties, and so on?

A. Well, I thought it was funny. Fred McDarrah did this purely as a joke. He was sitting around the *Voice* one day—he was working for them and they



Photo by Martin Berman
STUDENT APATHY: 1960

didn't even charge him for the ad—and he did it as a gag, and I thought it was a very funny gag. But what made it even funnier was that people called in and said, "Where can I—I'm ready—bring some out"—so then he called in some friends of his and said, "You wanna make \$5—go out to this house—be a beatnik."

To me, it's an interesting thing that has come about, where the whole world is show biz. Rent a philosopher tonight! Rent an angry young man tonight! It's all show biz—where anger becomes a prime quality of certain people in show biz. This is show biz, you know, when you rent a beatnik—they're playing beat just as much as somebody who is doing a bit on TV is playing that part.

Q. What do you think is the relationship between the growing use of show business techniques in government, religion, commerce—and the increasing dehumanization in those same areas?

A. That sounds like the beginning of a *Fortune* editorial. Actually, I think they're getting more human in those areas. I think a guy who got up and said things like Lincoln said was totally inhuman, because

he continued to work on what he said. I think the real human tendency is to cover us with bullshit, and then never do anything about it. That's human.

I think underneath it all, there's a great latent streak of phonyism in every man, you see. And if he could get a reputation of being, let's say, a hard-hitting novelist, without writing a novel, he'd be happier than if he had to write the damn novel. And so, you've got a government that's doing that—it's the most human of all things. I don't think it's increasingly dehuman; I think it's more human.

Q. You do a lot of speaking at various colleges; are there any meaningful trends you've observed?

A. Yes. I hate to be a pundit, but I have seen some things come and go in the last year or two. One of them—last year, I went to several colleges, and I noted, at Princeton particularly—you can only really judge something when you go somewhere several times in succession, and I was at Princeton and a couple of other schools I had been at before—and three years ago, everybody was talking about conformism. That was the big bit in colleges. They were all talking about, "How can I not conform?"—there was a big problem about that.

Well, then the word conformism apparently began to be a kind of shibboleth—it didn't have any real meaning in life—and shortly thereafter, there was a very strange feeling I got, a couple of years ago, where there was a void beginning to settle in, where hardly anybody talked about his own life much, and they didn't really talk about the life in which we are all involved—let's say, America—except to feel a sense of guilt for being an American.

Now I've noticed in colleges recently a kind of—you can get the biggest laughs in America by saying, "Aren't we rotten? We are the rottenest people in the world." Well, no, actually you can't. You can get everybody laughing saying that America is rotten—of course we understand that, us, we're not really the ordinary Americans, but the ordinary American, oh, he's a rotten bum—all of America is terrible.

And you see this in colleges more and more, where there is a gradual retreat from any kind of sense of pride in being what you are. Now, I've been to many countries all over the world in recent years, and the most important thing I've learned is that there are slobs everywhere, not just in America.

Q. Is it true that the Legion of Decency listed your book—"I, Libertine"—as objectionable, when it didn't even exist?

A. Yes, it was the Catholic Legion of Decency in Boston.

Q. What was the real lesson of that hoax?

A. Oh, I learned several things. I learned one thing—that Americans hardly recognize a real commentary on our system. It was just called a funny prank by *Life* and all that. But in England, for example, one of the papers over there, in 1958, designated this particular thing that developed—the whole business of *I, Libertine*—as one of the most meaningful hoaxes of the 20th century, about the whole rising wave of abstract living and believing in figures and facts and polls and so forth that has been perpetrated. It was never referred to as that in the United States.

It proved a lot of things to me. One of the things it proved to me was that contemporary reports from

newspapers and so forth are rarely accurate, that if somebody were to go to the *New York Times* today and look through the morgue [a newspaper's library of clippings]—now the *Times* is a very official paper—and if he were to go to the *Times* and read this account of all the different things that happened, they would be completely in error as to what really happened; the actual story was completely different from what was reported in the press.

A hundred years from now, this will be history—I'm saying this is trivial, nobody will look at it, but who knows—because it was a really meaningful thing in America at the time. And, I say, even more meaningful in that we completely missed the point of it. The point was to prove that in the end, almost everything that we do is based on something that has been told to us by people who are highly fallible.

For example, a whole program—TV networks have dropped programs at a cost of millions of dollars, that took five years of preparation, because a guy came on Monday morning with a list of people he claimed he called and found out nobody was listening. Now, that's in effect what Nielsen really is. A guy comes over and says, "Well, Mr. So-and-so"—who owns the So-and-so network, and there are 198 billion people who listen to it—"we just took a poll, and it's no go." He'll base his whole decision on that. It's a fascinating psychological problem.

Now, if you could base a decision on how many people actually—take a guy on Broadway, he doesn't have that problem—he can tell whether people are seeing his show merely by looking at the receipts every night. But to believe in a complete abstraction that nobody really secretly believes in—and yet you *do* believe in it—

Q. You believe in it when you get a high rating.

A. Oh, yes. It's like walking under a ladder, and you say to yourself, "Well, I don't believe in superstitions"—there's hardly any guy in the business who'd admit that he believes in polls, but the point is that he doesn't believe in *anything*, and so he's like any native in the jungle. He will take any sign and portent as being meaningful.

When this *I, Libertine* thing grew up, the original thesis of the thing was so quickly lost—nobody reported *why* Shepherd did it—what I learned mostly from it was that I don't believe much that I read in the papers, any more than I believe in polls.

And people keep correcting *me*. I constantly meet people who tell me what *really* happened because they read it in the *Times* or the *Post*. But nobody from those papers had asked *me* about what actually happened. They talked to WOR's promotion man, who wasn't there and never heard of it. They did everything but talk to the man to whom it happened.

Q. All right—now this is "a Realist question"—you said that your hoax proved something about Americans; doesn't this conflict with what you said before—that there are slob in every country?

A. No, it's not slobbism, no—no, no, no—we live in such a world of communication today, we live in a world of television shows, more than most other people. But it's not a matter of snobbism; we have the *machinery* here. Why, a man in Germany, believe me, or a man in England, or a man in France—he would hardly believe it, that there are seven channels on tele-

vision in America, that you could sit here in New York and dial seven channels. Even in a little city like Cincinnati, there are four channels.

That's a lot of television. A guy in England has two channels, and they're very similar. A man in Germany has one. You've just got to concede that we do have more material, technical setups for communication. So the Americans have gotten to the point—and it's not a matter of slobbism, it's a matter of conditioning—to the point where you get life out of these *things*.

You don't live life, you get life out of watching Kim Stanley, or reading about it in *Life*. For example, *Look* has an ad that they've recently been running, it says: "Read about the exciting lives of how people live—read the exciting lives of how people are—the swinging sixties" — and so some poor guy whose life is not swinging nor exciting picks up a copy of *Look* magazine to find out how people *live*.

And if I said to him, "Look, *you're* living, too, you know"—and there he is, he's looking at a picture of a clean-limbed youth skiing in the Sierra Madre, and he says, "Well, no, not really, you see, *they* are," and I'd say, "Well, wait a minute, you haven't seen *this* guy at home." "Well, it doesn't matter."

So real life is lived between the pages of a magazine, or it's lived between the station break commercials on a TV show, or it's lived by reading about Paul Newman in the *Post*, or the exciting life of Harry Belafonte—

Q. And you say this vicariousness is more prevalent in the United States than elsewhere?

A. Oh, I think so. Because it's *around* us more. I think it's getting to be that way in England now, you know—it's wherever people are surrounded by artificial means of looking at life—and if a guy's living in the Alaskan Frontier, you see, it's non-existent.

And furthermore, he can't come into his little cabin and lock up the door and turn on three television sets and watch—do you know that WOR found a guy in Staten Island who comes home—get this—comes home at eight o'clock at night, we'll say, he can't miss the Yankee ball game, he turns on the Yankee ball game, and there's a certain, let's say, TV dramatic show, he turns on the dramatic show, and then he turns on WQXR.

Q. For background music? Next thing you know he'll put WQXR on while he listens to WOR! Do you think the ultimate will ever come—when they'll have background music for war—like in the newsreels?

A. Well, the weirdest thing that I've seen recently—I was working on a movie script for the Duroche-mont Corporation, and it involved a trip on a Navy vessel, and I was in a forward gun turret of this cruiser, and these guys are getting orders, and all the stuff is going—radarscope and everything—and what do you think they've got? They've got a little metal loudspeaker hanging over them and the ship has a record room and it's playing Montovani records.

Well, my God, I never would've believed it, but here these guys are—"Off 40 degrees to the left, 17 degrees starboard"—they're getting ready to fire a missile!—and Montovani is playing *Sleepy Lagoon*. They've got mood music. Dimitri Tiomkin'll be writing original music for cruisers. "Music to Drop a Bomb By."

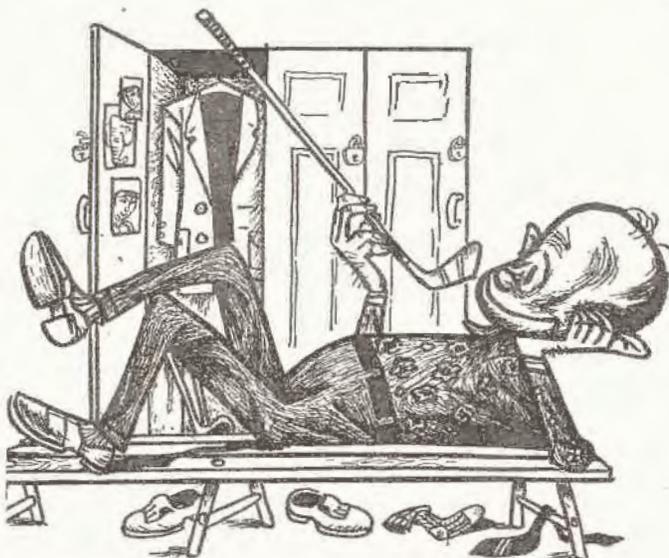
The Realist

Q. How do you differentiate between comedy and humor?

A. Well, comedy is a process whereby you're aiming at making a person laugh, and the end product is the laugh. With humor, however, the laugh happens to be the by-product of what you're doing. Comedy, which does not say anything, is very funny and we laugh at this. But humor, that says something about a specific situation and really makes a point, is highly resented.

A real humorist—say, somebody like Bertrand Russell, Mencken, Stephen Leacock—it wasn't until these guys were in their late forties that they began to develop what I would call humor. Real humor. Humor is never a product of youth. I'm not talking chronologically, but about experience.

This is why I think Sahl is a comic and not a humorist—if you want to make a point it's often not funny,



To Ike: A Farewell, You Might Say, Tribute

"With an interest in some form of work and a reasonable appreciation of what is going on in the world, old age can be a joy."

—Grandma Moses on her 100th birthday

but on the way, the examples you use to make your point are funny; now if you stop before that point is finally made—most of these guys would be terrified of going on for five minutes without anybody laughing; that's why it's like this (*snap, snap, snap*)—one-liners.

The problem is, a humorist cannot stop—when he has something to say, he wants to say what he has to say—and if the laugh comes up, it's a by-product of what he's saying. It's his attitude that makes people laugh, often, but not his end point. Like Henry Morgan said to you, Lenny Bruce doesn't make him laugh.

A humorist often doesn't make you laugh—out loud—and again, I don't want to be accused: "Well, who does Shepherd think he is, a humorist?" All I can say is that I did not realize for years that I was dealing in humor until I started to get letters from recognized humorists who said, "You know, you're very funny."

Q. You didn't think you were being completely serious, did you?

A. Entertaining, maybe. I was very serious about—and, incidentally, this is another thing about a humorist—he's very serious about what he says. Invariably. You don't think Bertrand Russell's kidding around? You don't think that Mencken wasn't serious about what he said?

But America is comedy-oriented, because we've seen so much of it. Humor is self-conscious—you're conscious of yourself—and this is the one thing that many people in America don't seem to want to be. They don't want to look at themselves at all.

Q. Aren't you now contradicting a point that you've made on your show—that we are getting self-conscious?

A. Could be. Could be—that's why Sahl and these guys are making it now—but they're not going far enough. You see, they're making people conscious of slobs in America—but when you start making the individual conscious of himself in the night club, then you've carried it into humor. I think they're skirting on the edges of humor. I don't think that they carry all the way.

I have often had to say, on the air, "Now, look, stop laughing"—I say to the guys in the control room—"I'm being serious about this." Because laughing often throws a guy when he wants to get to a point.

Q. Do you know I get letters saying, "Please label whether or not the articles in the Realist are serious"—

A. Why do you think that *Playboy* has a little thing above that says "satire"; then they'll have one that will say "funny piece"; then they'll have one, "serious piece." And of course, that's what most of the comics do on their records—do you notice they put *laughs* on them?

The idea of putting laughs on a record—now I know of one comic who made a very big name for himself on the basis of a record—the record was not recorded in a night club, the record was recorded in a studio, and the laughter was dubbed in—to tell people when to laugh.

[Editor's note: The record, *Jean Shepherd and Other Foibles*, is guaranteed to contain absolutely no laughter whatsoever.]

Q. I think a good example of this serio-humorous approach to stuff is a thing you did on the air about the moral implications of the Hiroshima Day protest march—

A. Well, the point I was trying to make there was that—first of all, I'm certainly not for nuclear bombs, I'm very much aware of the nuclear fission problem—the idea that we parade on Hiroshima Day with big signs is interesting, but it would seem to me that Hiroshima Day would be no better a day to do it than, let's say, Pearl Harbor Day. I feel that Hiroshima wouldn't have occurred had there not been a Pearl Harbor.

I'm also saying that a bomb would not be created unless man basically hates other men, that the parade against the bomb is a hopeless parade.

Q. Was it really against the bomb, or against the men who created and used it?

A. "Men" didn't—all of mankind did.

Q. Are you saying that all mankind is responsible?

A. Let's put it on this basis. You've got 5,000 pular

bears. Now polar bears are dangerous creatures. They are, really. But yet, on the other hand, probably many polar bears have never attacked, destroyed, or killed a man. Maybe the provocation hasn't been there. Maybe the man wasn't there at the right time. And so on. I'm saying—it's a problem of guilt—we like to assume that there is an ineffable *they* that creates the atom bombs.

Q. Don't you think that we live in an oligarchy?

A. What is an oligarchy?

Q. Power in the hands of a few.

A. No. Why is it, then, the power's always been in the hands of bad people? Mankind has always had a version of the nuclear bomb in any given time. I'd like to ask you a question. Do you think that if the Japanese had the bomb on December 7th, they would've refrained from using it?

Q. I don't think so. I don't suppose they would've—refrained from using it, that is.

A. Do you think for a minute that if Hitler had had the A-bomb, that he would've refrained from using it on England?

Q. No question about it. I mean I assume he would've.

A. All right. Doesn't this say a great deal about people? You're talking about all of mankind, you know. You've just held that about—how many million people?—would've used it. Look at the difference between us using it and Japan using it. Japan would've used it—we weren't even at war with Japan, there was nothing going on—and you admitted that there's a very good possibility they would've.

In short, why should Americans feel a terrible guilt about the A-bomb? Do the Japanese feel guilt about Pearl Harbor? Are you trying to say that one bomb is less moral than others?

Q. Not at all. Just that some people are. As far as I'm concerned—and this was in the very first issue of the Realist—when the first caveman hit another caveman with a rock—well, it's just a matter of degree from there—even if it was a "clean" rock.

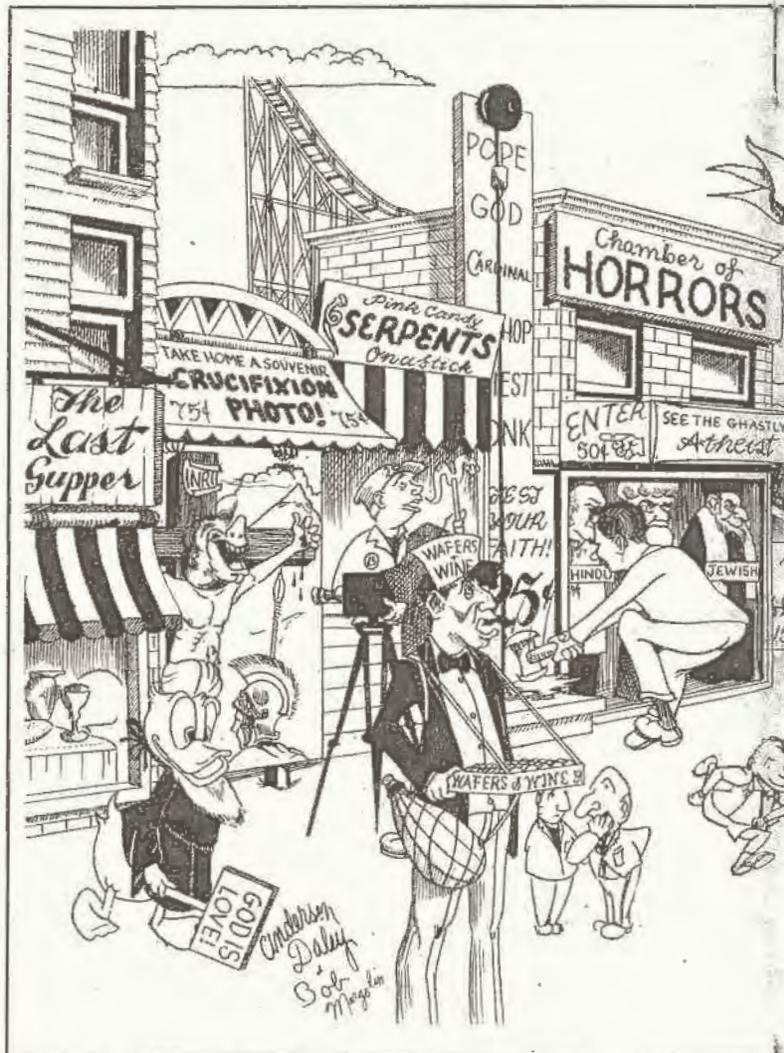
A. That's what I'm trying to say. We seem to make the nuclear bomb a moral issue, but we don't seem to really worry about other bombs. The Japanese dropped bombs like mad. Do you know that they also dropped bombs on civilians in Honolulu? Well, now, the point that I'm making here is that—if 178,000 people is a gigantic thing—if those bombs had been able to kill 178,000 people, they would've been looked upon as even more successful by the Japanese.

Are you aware of what the Japanese did in Nanking during the Chinese-Japanese war? These happen to be things that *people* did. You can't separate war from human activity. And what the Japanese did in Nanking was—I mean you could make a lot of moral issues one way or the other to say whether or not what we did to Hiroshima was wrong, I don't know.

You see, I think the real morality here is the problem of *attacking* in the first place, but nobody talks about that. I don't see how dropping one bomb on a street in Pearl Harbor is any less moral or immoral than dropping a *gigantic* bomb on a street in Hiroshima. And it becomes even more immoral when you remember who attacked whom. Suddenly there are

people who are feeling great guilt problems for the Japanese. I don't think the Japanese felt much guilt about the Chinese they killed by the millions during the '30s.

It's like the Chessman syndrome—when you catch a thief, then you feel, oh, terrible, I mean, "I've got this guy now here"—it's like catching a mouse. You're anti-mice when they're running around and they're spreading disease, and you put a trap out and suddenly you catch one, and then you feel rotten. Then, after a while, you sit down and write a thesis about how wonderful mice are, and how terrible *you* are, for what you've done to these mice.



Q. Especially if it happens to be a creative mouse.

O. Oh, yes. And if it's a cute one, and they have dances. All I have to say is, remember who did what to whom. Keep that in mind when you hear these things, and say, "Fine, we agree that the A-bomb is terrible," but ask somebody, "What did you think of *this*?" I mean I don't care whether they do great paintings or whether they have wonderful Kabuki dances. The point is, what happened to Nanking? Manchuria? And a lot of terrible things that the Japanese did in the '30s?

And I'm not saying that they're any worse than anybody else. It just happened to be their time to be

now. It's not retrospect with a 16-year-old kid when he talks about his father and mother, you know. It's now.

I have had *amazing* conversations with kids who will say, "Well, my father says that he's very mad about segregation, that these people down in the South are doing this sort of thing, he's very angry about that—but on the other hand, he made very sure when we moved into Westchester, that our property rights were going to be secured, and that there wouldn't be any problem with this"—and she says, "Now, when I ask him, he'll say, 'Well, there's no connection between the two, why, some of my best friends down at the office'"—and so on—so the kid sees this, but the man really doesn't. He doesn't see the gulf between what he does and what he says.

People do not see—when you get to be an adult—chronologically—quite often, they don't see that there's a difference between sending a letter to South America, we'll say, by the President of the United States, saying, "We are going to increase friendship, we're going to increase understanding, and health, and all these wonderful things between the two of us"—and all the while, outside of the president's palace in this country, people are marching because they've got nothing to eat, you know? There's a difference between what you do and what you say, and a kid seems to see that today.

I'd say that the significant thing I've seen among kids is that the kids are *much* more aware than they ever were. I'm very much interested in what this generation—and I don't mean the beat generation—you should see the insights I get about the beat generation from 14-year-old kids who write me—better stuff than you ever read in the *Evergreen Review*—because they're *involved* in it. Boy, it's wild.

One kid wrote me, and he says, "You know, every Sunday night, I have to come up to my room, I have to hide under the covers to listen to you, because they think I'm foolish that I'm not downstairs with the crowd. Then they'll turn right around and say, 'Well, look, we want you to be yourself—why do you have to conform?'" And he sees this fantastic contradiction.

Q. Why do you think that at this point in time, that kids are more aware of this dichotomy than before?

A. During the time when you were a kid—I mean I'm not that much older than you are—first of all, people did not deliberately *aim* things at us. There were not such things as gigantic teenage magazines; there was *Open Road for Boys*, which was a Boy Scout magazine, and that was about the extent of it. They didn't have a billion-dollar industry based on kids. *Seventeen* magazine—

Q. Have you seen their pitch to advertisers—get these kids now—"It's easier to make a habit than it is to break one"—

A. Exactly. So kids are now—today, in effect, they're adults. They're being treated as adults. They're a market. And they have things beamed at them.

It's interesting, too, to see kids being taken to see *Tea and Sympathy*. Can you imagine a 15-year-old kid—I've seen them—I can see the day now when a high school will put on *A Streetcar Named Desire* as its senior play. Can't you just see some little chick playing Blanche Du Bois?

So a kid today is in a completely different world than you and I were in. I mean at the age of 16, most of us were pretty much involved in activities—even

such ridiculous things as playing baseball—you don't find this among the 16-year-olds today. Why, do you know, I hardly ever listened to *radio* when I was a teenager. I listened to it when I was a little kid, and I listened to it when I got older, and started to understand Fred Allen.

Q. In addition to kids, you also have a lot of adults in your audience—including some highly successful comedians; is there any actual plagiarism that has taken place, as you've been intimating lately?

A. Yes. I can specifically say that there is one bit on a Shelley Berman record that I did a full year before it appeared on his record.

Q. Does this necessarily imply plagiarism on his part?

A. Well, it was quite a coincidence that you would have an agent talking to Albert Schweitzer—these are two pretty disparate things—and I could not say that it was definite plagiarism. All I can say is it's what the *New Yorker* would call "the amazing coincidence department."

Q. Do you know whether Shelley Berman listens to your show?

A. Yes, I do know. He told me once on the phone that he did. And Jack Paar was quoted in *Time* with a thing that I did during the newspaper strike.

Q. Why do you insist that you're never going to "make it"?

A. I don't *insist* that. Let's say I have intimations that I'll never make it—because I'm on radio. If I were doing what I'm doing now in night clubs, I think I would. If I were doing it on The Ed Sullivan Show, I think I would. But radio—no. I'm saying that I'm backed into a strange corner here—that if I can make 400 people laugh on radio, that's not much, it's not official—but that if I came out of Pocatello, Idaho with a record of having filled a night club three straight nights, I would get a real good hearing at the *Blue Angel*.

Q. Does that mean—the fact that you're going to be in "New Faces" on Broadway—that you've sold out?

A. A man has sold out only when you take a look at what he says and see if it's changed. Wait and see what I say. Would you say that you've sold out if suddenly the *Realist* is being read by 160,000,000 people? I don't think a guy sells out merely because he's successful. I think a lot of people have been successful and have said plenty. For example, Voltaire was an uproariously successful author during his day, but he never sold out, as far as I know.

Q. Well, are you saying that if Voltaire were on radio now—

A. I'm saying that if Fred Allen were on radio now, people would call him a disc jockey. And they would say, "What's this disc jockey talking about!" Do you know that I got a call from the NBC network the other day, and the guy says to me: "We'd like to have you come on our show [*I've Got a Secret*] as a guest. Now, would you mind if we introduce you as a disc jockey without records?" I said, "What the hell is this? Why don't we call Mort Sahl 'a musical emcee without a band?' I mean it doesn't make sense."

Now do you get an insight into what I'm talking about? I'm merely pointing out to you that if you're

on the radio and you do not do one of three things—disc jockey, newscast, interview—you are going to be put into that area. If Mort Sahl was on the radio—you'd never seen him in a night club—he'd be called a disc jockey. Believe me. Lenny Bruce would be called a disc jockey.

Q. How do you reconcile your belief in equality of the sexes with your fear that the sexes are becoming more equal?

A. I don't say they're becoming more equal. I say they're becoming the same. That's different from equality. Boy. I'm saying that if you look around, you'll find that definitely the hero of today is a woman—and I say "hero" in the dramatic sense.

If you look on the Broadway stage and the Hollywood screen, it just seems to me that the strong people are the women, the weak people are the men, that it's Geraldine Paige who saves Ben Gazzara or Paul Newman, it's Kim Stanley who rescues Eli Wallach in the end. And this is a very interesting attitude. It's not that she saves him by being a good woman; she saves him by being stronger. She is stronger.

Q. Would you say this is true of Deborah Kerr in "Tea and Sympathy?"

A. Oh, yes—this is a perfect example—that you take the 16-year-old kid and as a woman you go to bed with him to prove to him that he's a man. This is a grotesque thought, you know.

Q. Would you say it's an immoral message?

A. Oh, totally. First of all, you had to justify—of course, never implying that she wanted to go to bed with the kid—it was for the purest of motives—which makes sex totally immoral. If you involve yourself in sex for a purpose that has nothing to do with sex, I think this is a complete immorality. I think that is really immoral. If you're using sex as an antidote or as a dosage, then it's not even being used for itself.

It's interesting to note that in the play, she had to have a non-comprehending, bad husband to make that a beautiful act. If she'd had a wonderful, swell guy as a husband, people would've gone out of that theatre madder than hell. Well, what does that have to do with the act itself?

Q. Suppose it were a young girl who was afraid she was a lesbian—

A. Yes, turn it around. Here, we'll do this play—

here's a young biology teacher, see, and he has this little fat girl who has problems—she thinks she's a lesbian, and everybody's saying she's a lesbian, you see, and the guy has this fantastically sbrewish wife, and so one day he takes this kid down to the boathouse, and he says, "I'm doing this to prove to you that you're a real woman."

It's a fantastic play. Here again, it's the women who rescue men—she was rescuing a guy there—a man can't rescue a woman. He is only a selfish rotten thing when he does something with her; a woman is always grandiose—she does these things only because she is a woman, and hence is a plane higher than man.

And it's a very fascinating development—this play, to me, says a lot about the mores of our time, where not one person—I wonder how many people were sitting there in the theatre, wondering, "Jesus, I wonder if my 16-year-old son is swinging with his Art teacher down at school." But they go out of the theatre, saying, "Oh, what a wonderful thing she does." I thought it was a terrible thing. I thought it was one of the worst plays I've ever seen.

You know, the interesting thing to do is ask: "Well, what would you do if your wife did that this afternoon?" You can say to her: "Well, Madge, you know, I heard what you did with Jimmy this afternoon in the boathouse down there. By God, Madge, tears came to my eyes when I heard about it, and I didn't realize what a wonderful person you are until this happened."

And somehow, that also says a great deal about our attitude toward sex—the belief that if a guy goes to bed once with a woman, that he has proved for all time that he's a man. That's intriguing.

It's weird—one of the sickest—that's a true existentialist play, by the way, that goes even further than did *Waiting for Godot*, you know, in many ways. It just seemed—I mean if you're going to look at it from the basic standpoint of a framework: searching for what? What is he searching for, now? What have they found?

Q. One of the basic threads that runs through your show is the concept that everybody's waiting for something; what are you waiting for?

A. I don't think anybody is waiting seriously for anything concrete. I think everybody's waiting for something—and I say that in capital letters—SOMETHING—it's what Beckett was saying in *Godot*. I don't know what I'm waiting for. I don't think you know what you're waiting for.

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