

# the village VOICE

a weekly newspaper designed to be read  
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## letters to the editor

### Unworthy

Dear Sir:  
William Murray's arrogant reply of November 21 to reader Thomas Barbour re the "Bus Stop" review is a non sequitur. The fact remains that Mr. Murray blames Inge's text for the "barrenness of the dialogue, the total absence of creative intellect" in Josh Logan's production of it. Mr. Barbour says that Logan used only one of Inge's three interlocking stories and a jumbled-up, watered-down selection from the dialogue, and respectfully suggests that the reviewer read the text to see if this is not true. Murray's retort that "... movies are not meant primarily to be read... Enough!" is not worthy of The Village Voice. One wonders whether even Mr. Logan read the script.  
—Raymond Schildknecht  
West 12th Street

... must have been a bit struck by such paintings as those by Levine, Casabier, Thon, Ben Stahn, because there were a half dozen or so pretty good paintings. Like you're missing half a critic. Capsule for "Tea and Sympathy": Fine movie filmed on the campus of Normal College. You can't say All Normal—that might be giving away a secret.  
Also I think the VV might make a stand on "Private's Progress." It isn't a comedy. It's the most shatteringly ironical indictment, keenly written, acted, and directed movie, that I've seen for a long time. One emerges from seeing it with a feeling of what my wife once described as being violated.  
Finally, that article on Dylan Thomas a while back: that was a real low. Nu?  
—George Hastings  
West 3rd Street

### For Ivy and Levi?

Dear Sir:  
Aside from sympathizing with VV politics, I've been irked with the grand effete anemia of a few past issues. Cleverness can easily degenerate into vulgarization, irony into dilletante's sarcasm. I'd be sincerely sorry to see the VV turn into a cute digest for an ivy uptown and levi downtown.  
That was a "nice pleasant" review of the Whitney exhibit, one that I'm sure no one will find fault with. But why print only the first half of it? I'm sure the reviewer, wading through the wash

and was terribly pleased. I think this paper is making its mark, setting new styles and standards. Its reporting is literate without being pompous and pedantic, the reviews of Elizabeth Goodman are the only sensible art reviewing I've seen in ages—I can't honestly remember when I've read anything as good. Mary Ellen Hecht is terrific, and so is Corinne Grad. And Jerry Tallmer's stuff on Strindberg and Robert Thom is so good that all I can say is I wish I'd done it myself.  
—B. N. J.  
Riverside Drive

### New Standards

Dear Sir:  
I read through the November 21 issue of The Voice last night

# The Night People

## Veni, Vidi, Vidiocy

by JEAN SHEPHERD

IT'S REALLY TOO BAD that Bob Benchley didn't live to see some of the things that pass for entertainment on TV today. We won't even discuss radio, since all pretense has been dropped in that medium and it has been converted into a giant electronic billboard. Not so giant at that, come to think of it.  
Anyway, Benchley would have had a ball lampooning the Life-Size Screen. He also probably would have made a fortune in it as a performer. I can see in my mind at least two dozen formats that would be great with the original Nebbisch in the starring role.

### Everything Under Control

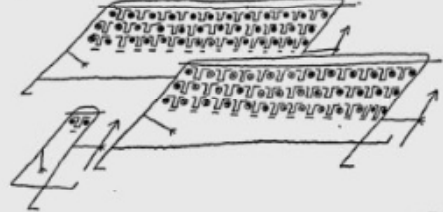
He had a quality that all of us feel we have, but rarely if ever actually do. This was the slight effect of continually melting and almost visible erosion. He really appeared to dissolve when his situation became untenable. This was quite often, but no oftener truly than for most of us. The difference was that Benchley realized when the quicksand was closing in, while most of us don't. Even though the ship was burning, and the water lapping at the decks, old Bob maintained a sort of silly dignity and always went through the motions of having everything under control.

In a way, as in the case of most true clowns, Benchley gave everyone a chance to laugh at his own weaknesses while not actually laughing at himself. He was the great Well-Meaning Phony. The guy who was supposed to get up before the club and explain the year's fiscal operations while he himself couldn't add up his own check-book balance. Everyone could spot his phoniness imme-

diately and roar as Benchley squirmed on the spit, trying to save what little he could out of the debacle. The phony in each one of us felt for the moment not alone.

### The Lacking Element

The point of all this is that the quality Benchley had is precisely



—Hagan

the element most lacking in TV today. He had a quality of civilized self-appraisal that could pinpoint the ludicrousness and senselessness of so many of our cherished things. He hated and feared birds. Really didn't care for dogs. And this in the face of a nation that is rapidly placing its dogs before its children in affection. A nation that really believes a man's best friend is a dog. A sentiment which, incidentally, shows what man really thinks of mankind.

The rich lode of comedy material that is the whole of TV would have kept Benchley in business for years just analyzing the output of a single evening. Can you imagine Benchley doing a take-off on a newscaster wearing a jazzy tie, castration in buttonhole, being billed solemnly as a "commentator," but who never comments on the news, only describing it loudly? Or picture what he could do with the sight of grown people night after night playing parlor games while a large percentage of the population of the richest nation on earth sits watching with breathless enjoyment. That one element itself is one of the most fascinating developments of recent years. It is also the final triumph of spectatorism.

Time was when the only thing a person would be a spectator at were things that he himself could not do. Such things as required talent or imagination. But today the events on TV that pick up the largest week-in-and-week-out audiences are things that were originally created for diversion of the non-talented in the privacy of the home. Something he could take part in. He had to drop out whenever the singing got good or the dancing became technical, but in the old parlor games he could shine. Such idiocies as Truth or Consequences or Twenty Questions were his meat. But no longer. Even that tiny corner of self-expression has been taken over by the pros, and the pure

slob of a viewer has relinquished it with a sigh of relief.

### Hot Turkey History

Think what Benchley could do with the spectacle of a distinguished historian being called upon to enact a charade depicting a turkey with a hot foot, as occurred recently on one program. Or the almost ritualistic signing-in of the "Mystery Guest" who almost always is someone from the entertainment biz. Can you hear the wild cheers of the studio audience as Arnold Toynbee scratches his signature on the blackboard? Or Reinhold Niebuhr?

I'm sure Benchley would find the suspenseful TV drama an inexhaustible source of really good stuff from which to spin the cloth of comedy. There is hardly a drama that slips by on TV today that can't be predicted by the lowliest viewer within five minutes of the opening credits. Anyone who has had a TV set for over six months can outline a half-dozen TV dramatic plots on the spur of the moment and be sure he'll see at least two or more of them on his screen on any given evening.

### The Sad Part

And the sad part of all this is that even the people who perpetrate it take it seriously. They are really convinced that they are doing good things, even when they know under the surface that the plot-line is right out of dime fiction. This is the area that would require the best work of Benchley. It would be a joy to see him portray the role of a fearful TV exec reading over a script and making comments and suggestions for improvement. I would love to see Benchley doing a version of the self-consciously "cultured" air of the people who do the class TV shows such as "Omnibus" or others of the ilk. And then solemnly showing a poorly exposed film of the mating methods of the newt. All of this to the muffled roars of applause.

Yeah, it's too bad Benchley isn't around to see Groucho dispensing carefully prepared ad libs with the inevitable contestants that seem to be so much a part of our national scene. Maybe it's just as well, on second thought, that he isn't around for that spectacle. He might not find it funny.



by Jules Feiffer

ALLRIGHT! IS IT A CRIME?  
IT'S JUST SO HARD TO BELIEVE.  
IT'S NOT LIKE I DID SOMETHING WRONG IS IT?  
IT'S JUST SO HARD TO BELIEVE.  
YOU WANTED ME TO CONFIDE IN YOU, ARE YOU SORRY NOW?  
NO, IT'S JUST THAT IT'S SO HARD TO BELIEVE.  
TELL ME AGAIN.  
I'VE NEVER BEEN TO EUROPE.