

## EDITORIAL COMMENT

### The cruellest month

T.S. Elliot must have got it wrong - surely it's February, not April, that should have the honour of being designated "the cruellest month." Everyone seems sick this month - either physically, or simply sick of where, what, and who they are.

The weather hasn't helped - cabin-fever infested couples are fighting, people are going to work with coughs and sore throats, and prospects of going out have been thwarted by snow and ice. Add life's little miseries to life's monumental ones - the Gulf War, recent bombings in London, the situation in the Baltics . . . we're talking serious sit at home and vegetate depression.

Another depressing aspect of February is that it follows January, the month when many of us are

feeling high and mighty, having made good - so far - on New Year's Resolution, or at least having ridden on the tide of good intentions. Pursuing personal goals is rather like plotting a curve - February is a low point.

But curves, being curves, will rise again, and those feeling a bit sunken can look forward to that swell of pride and enthusiasm that comes with starting a new improvement scheme. After all, if no-one gave up on diets, started smoking again, became disorganised all over again, or otherwise re-established bad habits,

no-one would have the fun of starting anew. (Save for giving up smoking, which is no fun at all.)

For anyone who promised to keep fit and has only managed to keep fat, a recent study was published verifying that one can, in fact, be allergic to exercise. That ought to sustain couch potatoes until the "okay-I'm-really-going-to-do-it-this-time" urge strikes again in March. Seriously, a clinical professor, at Harvard Medical School no less, has gathered information on 500 people whose blood pressure drops radically and who break into rash several minutes after

they start exercising. This professor, however, advises they inhale sodium cromoglycate (surely you have some in the pantry?), and carry on.

Unfortunately, I have no such good news for anyone excusing themselves for excessive drinking, smoking, or any other of the vices commonly given up on January 1st. They'll simply have to wait until they are sick of their behavior and plunge again into reform. Self-satisfaction, even a little smugness, awaits their success - be it for two weeks or longer.

And speaking of two weeks - there's even less than that left of this dreadful month. February may be the cruellest month, but it shows a little mercy by also being the shortest. **WCW**

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Panto-mania continues: where's good scout Rupert when you need him?

Dear Editor,

In reply to Mr. C. Phole, or was it ffol? (sorry!) - some thoughts about music (and pantomime?)

" . . . it was chaste and modest, but is now played in a variety of manners, and confusedly . . ." (Boethius, c 508)

" . . . it was originally discreet, seemly, simple . . . have not the moderns rendered it lascivious beyond measure?" (Jacob of Liege, 1425)

"They are so enamored of themselves as to think it within their power to corrupt, spoil and ruin the good old rules . . . and produce a confusion of absurdities, an assemblage of imperfections. . ." (G.M. Artusi, 1600)

" . . . incoherent, shrill, muddled!" (August von Kotzebue, 1806)

" . . . deluded spectators can only pick through the slagpile . . ." (H. Pleasants, 1955)

Enough said? Perhaps not enough, too much? At least Messrs Pholic Pill and Beid Raxter are in good company, whatever your discerning readers may have through of Hockety Rickety Dick (poor old Dick . . . too much Gershwin!)

Yours ever,

**Davlock Vidbull, sorry!**  
**XYZ123 Foxtrot Oscar, sorry!**  
**David Bullock**

Dear Editor,

I usually do not make a habit of commenting on criticism concerning plays I have been in, but as Mrs. L. Finch made several dubious comments in her latter about *Hickway Dickway Dock*, I would like to correct them.

Firstly, if Mrs. Finch had actually bought and read the programme, or alternatively, arrived before the beginning of Act 1, she may have realised that the Gulf crisis and subsequent war had not started when the script was written. (Thanks to the LN for pointing that out last week!)

Secondly, I would like to set the record straight! I am not Iraqi. The uniform was that of a Soviet General. My character, The Wicked Wizard, was a reference to all megalomaniacs, fanatics and despots all around the world, of which, I think everyone will agree, Saddam Hussein is but one. (Does anyone remember Pinochet or Khomeini? Has anyone paid attention to the struggle in Rumania or China?)

The most amazing thing about Mrs. Finch's letter, however, was the reference about how "Joke after joke dwelled on the bombings and the taking of hostages". Really? With the script in front of me I cannot find one "joke" about bombings and only one reference to hostages . . . and that had nothing to do with Iraq!

In the next sentence, your correspondent states that many people were in tears. Well, I should hope so. Children are supposed to be scared of the baddie. In fact, they want to be scared and pantomime is designed to do that. Having said that, I would very much like to hear from the hoard of people who left during the interval. I certainly didn't notice anything!

In view of this newspaper's commendable policy of concealing the author's identity, I most sincerely hope that I am actually addressing Mrs. L. Finch.

Yours sincerely,

**Karim Hyatt.**

Dear Madam,

The pseudonymous Mr. Pope-Hill makes some valid points about *Hickway Dickway Dock*. There were too many principals, the plot was hard to follow in the second act and there were not enough laughs for the grown-ups at the points where the children were getting restless (though I gather things improved on the last night).

But Jamie can hardly be blamed for being overtaken by events. Piona's Margaret Thatcher was far too good to leave out, anyway, and the Poll Tax is still a live issue, though less so for us expats who don't have to pay it.

The Gulf War is a bigger problem. With hindsight, I think that those who were going to be offended probably were anyway, by the bombs, bandages and general Oh-What-A-Lovely-War atmosphere; so the Wicked Wizard of No Fixed Abode (formerly of Baghdad) could probably have been given a moustache and a beret and a few Ali Baba jokes without causing a mass walkout.

Moreover, although Karim Hyatt looks slightly Middle-Eastern (and surely, Mrs. Finch, it makes no difference whether he is Iraqi or not) the character had the American accent and was wearing a Russian uniform, thus satirising three targets in one.

And while I agree with Pillichope that some of the characters were superfluous, the mice certainly weren't (children love to watch people dressed as animals), and nor were the three villains. The human baddy (who later joins the goodies), the supernatural Force of Evil and the Monster are three quite distinct types, and my four-year old had no doubts about whom to boo loudest. He also roared with laughter at the custard pies, found Horace hilarious and went home singing the title song, which is surely a tribute to the quality of the panto as a panto.

Your faithfully,

**Henry Wickens**

Dear Editor,

I was intrigued to read Jamie Reid Baxter thundering like John Knox against the use of *noms de plume*. A decade or so ago at Aberdeen University, J.R.B. was plain Jimmy Baxter. Since then the forename has become classier and the surname has become double-barrelled, while the panto programme had the first sighting of a hyphen. Any psychological problems, Jimmy - oops! Jamie? Still, as Burns said: A man's a man for a' that!

Yours aye!

**Elsbeth Mackenzie**

Dear Editor,

I, for probably many, did not see the controversial pantomime so many have written comments about. From what I gather, the tempest is over whether it was good, or whether it was bad, not about anything more important. Give it a rest, I say!

**R. Wainwright**