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Harry Golden's "Only In America"

THE INTELLECTUALS?
Saul Bellow, the novelist who has twice won the National Book Award for such works as "Herzog," "The Dangling Man," "Henderson," "The Rain King," recently got mad at the intellectuals at a congress for poets, playwrights, essayists and novelists, called PEN for short.

Mr. Bellow said there "are clear signs that intellectuals in what American universities call the Humanities are trying to appropriate literature for themselves, taking it away from writers."

Maybe I am in sympathy with Mr. Bellow, but I am not inclined to agree with him. Writers, I believe, can take care of themselves. Juan Marichal, the thinking man's pitcher, is hardly going to take baseball away from Sandy Koufax, the strikeout king, and the strikeout is still the smartest play in baseball.

I think that Mr. Bellow means what writing there is ABOUT literature is influenced by certain cliques, many of whom are professors or editors, and all of whom only subscribe to their pals' books as living literature. But Americans are not really a nation of book readers and if you're going to read a book after the faculty conference, after launching the catamaran, after a visit to Florence to see the most aggressive lamppost in Italy, why not read a book of your pal's? He may read one of yours.

In short, I disagree with Mr. Bellow's use of the word intellectual. It is a portmanteau word, meaning it is like the old-fashioned hoop-skirt which covers everything but touches nothing. The only self-confessed intellectuals I know are salesmen who were high school dropouts and who would rather read Kafka than watch "Duel at Diablo" at the local Bijou. The last aggressive intellectuals I remember were the Marxists who kept

insisting communism was based on the unalterable scientific laws of economics and that the state would wither away. And a lot of them were spouting this nonsense because they believed free love flourished in the subversive cells.

"Intellectuals" is a word on the sliding scale, I am not by my own reckoning an intellectual. I've read some books, true enough, but I know nothing about modern physics, symbolic logic, or French symbolism.

Yet to the waitresses in Charlotte's Oriental Restaurant I am indeed an intellectual because I work for a newspaper and overtip. There are intellectuals and intellectuals: the first write about other intellectuals and the second write badly. My idea of an intellectual writer is Giacomo Puccini who insisted in all his operas that the baritone and soprano sing a love duet in the second act. There was no reasoning with him.

"The audience won't sit still for my music," he used to insist when his producer wanted him to discard "un Bel Di Bedremo."

Lyndon B. Johnson is my idea of an intellectual. Poverty has a certain emotional effect on nice people with a good income and intellectual Mr. Johnson has to figure how to channel that emotion into direct policy and action. The war in Viet Nam dis-

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tresses many Americans. Mr. Johnson has to give them reasons why such fighting is necessary. A man who writes a book or a piece of criticism or what not is simply an egomaniac.

Who in the world would figure you could do that for a living?

SHORT POEMS
How odd/ Of God/ To choose/ The Jews.

The author is the Londoner, W. N. Ewer and he has supposedly written the shortest poem in the English language. Ewer is always at pains to explain that his poem was made in jest and that it represents his thoughts neither on the subject of theology nor racism. He is also at pains to explain that he is not the late W. N. Ewer. Ewer in fact had asked editors who reprint his poem, which was conceived during the course of a friendly argument, to please accompany the rhyme with Artemus Ward's famous footnote: "Nota bene: This is a goak."

Ewer isn't the only man who has written an eight-word poem. Indeed not. It is true he may be the only one who had written a poem in eight syllables. But I can recite another eight-word poem which is certainly as profound.

As I get closer/ My love

gets grosser. Whether the anonymous part of this couplet was a poet or a football player I don't know, but it seems to me he has captured a less than elusive truth about the nature of a young man's affection.

As a short poem I have always preferred one of Carl Sandburg's earliest which tells as universal and age-old a story as either of the above.

Papa love Mama/ Mama loved men/ Mama's in the graveyard/ Papa's in the pen.

Romantic affections, heroism, the fall of empires claim the epics. The success of the short poem is that we all know the story backwards and forwards, all we need to remind us is the rhyme.

Editor's Note: Mr. Golden overlooked: We/De-/Spise/Flies. Three words, four syllables.

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