10-25-1950

Letter from Linda Grace Hoyer to John Updike, October 25, 1950

Linda Grace Hoyer

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Dear John:

Besides having a full moon, this has been a remarkable day. First of all, I cleaned a half row of Fairfax. After the soup I was to drive into Shillington, leave the Buick on the schoolground, and go to see A Streetcar Named Desire. But there wasn't time for that so I drove into Reading and stalled the motor only once: directly in front of Pomeroy's Sixth Street entrance.

The play? If I weren't too tired I'd check with Wolcott Gibbs on it. Do you remember what he said about it? It struck me as a finely written play poorly presented. Whether the leading actress, the Rajah, or the play itself was to blame for this dissatisfaction, I do not know. The audience was composed almost entirely of middle-aged women and curly-haired young men who seemed to be tickled in the wrong places. One should think that a play in which the central character goes away to an insane asylum would tickle hardly anyone. Yet, in Reading at least, we seem to have returned to those robust times when insanity was funny. I wish you could have been there. The humor was broad and well done. The husband who strongly resembled the aristocrat who married the "respectful prostitute" was perfectly cast and very convincing. The girl who was supposed to be his wife was excellent too. But to portray Blanche convincingly would be very difficult indeed. I had the feeling that Mr. Williams knows only what he has read about women and that the girl who tried to follow his interpretation of Blanche knew even less. She was, you know a sensitive girl who had married a degenerate (who wrote poetry), and after he had shot himself for some reason that was to have been explained in a long soliloquy that didn't quite come across she became a school teacher of English literature nobly trying to maintain one of those white columned mansions (on a teacher's salary). This should have made her a sympathetic character.
But somehow it didn't. It just made her improbable. Perhaps if we had known what a nice person she had been in the beginning instead of the end of the play her insanity wouldn't have been so funny. You see there was really no conflict. Blanche was strange from the start and her goose was cooked from the first line of the play so there was really no story, just a collection of very vivid snapshots and the whole thing was exactly like looking into a family album. These snapshots, however, were remarkably vivid. And I'm glad I saw it.

You copy of Different has, I fear, gone astray. I sent it on the thirteenth from Shillington. We must get one by all means. I wouldn't want you to miss it no how. Since you know Lilith so well, write her a nice long letter and subscribe to the magazine if necessary to get the November number of it.

I'm glad you saw Carl Sandburg and went to church. I don't know when I'll have time to tell you about our night of "witnessing". We had been told not to try to compete with television. But on both visits, the televisions were busy. "You can't beat Milton Berle," the institute leader said. But we tried, with Martha Raye thrown in for the fun of it.

We all read your letters six, or is it sixty, times.

Love,

P.S. Eight weeks from today your holiday vacation starts.