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It's like pushing buttons

It is like pushing buttons — and such fun! First there is criticism of Roy Meachum to which he cannot respond, and then there is another of his pontifications about journalism in which he seeks to associate himself with the great ones and in which he pretends he is patiently tolerant of us yokels and bumpkins, and that we simply do not understand. In his sophomoric mishmash of immature generalities and his typical departures from fact, "On reading columnists," he does, for once, admit to "a certain murkiness in my mind." Without his so intending, this column does prove him right on that murkiness of mind.

Forget about those straw men for his own sick ego and small clique ("Only the most self-deluded columnists write with the hope their view will prevail; I know some, former Washington colleagues, who brook no questioning." And, columnists, reads Meachum, "form the future hope of this Republic.") How mature is Meachum, gray beard and all?

"Lethargy poses the greatest threat to the democratic process." Did your in-house genius never hear of Hitler, Stalin, Pinochet and all the world's many other tyrants?

Possibly visualizing himself in that exalted company he pronounces that "their very lack of any pretense of objectivity gives columnists their reason for being." All flaunt his lack of objectivity? Like Walter Lippman, perhaps? And their "reason for being" has nothing to do with informing people?

According to his eminence, today's "readers are usually rewarded with stories better written than in my youth, and always (sic) longer." In all of this latest display of Meachum's shallowness and his generalities about the press he somehow manages never to use the word, "reporting." Only "stories" and expressions of opinion exist in his journalism. One of his four daily papers is the *Washington Post*. Its longer stories are reserved for its more numerous entertainment sections, like Show and Style, and its hard news reporting is now "better written" than in Meachum's youth and it most assuredly is not "always longer." Has he seen the *Baltimore Sun* lately? Its main news stories not only are not "always longer," they are always fewer. And almost always shorter.

Unless Meachum's youth is more recent than his gray beard indicates, he ought to remember, among columnists, Lippman, Heywood Brown, Damon Runyan and O.O. MacIntire, among many others, and among many great reporters the likes of Ernie Pyle and a full range to the Paul Y. Andersons. (Anderson broke the Teapot Dome scandal.) Who, Meachum, writes better today?

I don't really, believe that Meachum is the intellec-

tual pygmy his columns portray. Rather is it, I think, that sick and soaring ego which drives him to so much output he does not take time for thinking. This, of course, does not address his opinions, like that virulent racism he indulges. But even the truly great among real columnists were careful not to average three a week. And most of them had superb intellects and infinitely more maturity and wisdom.

Meachum captioned this silliness "on reading columnists." He really meant, "on reading Meachum."

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