

Happiness

Finally, the university has found the type of symposium that pleases everyone.

Last week the UNL Institute for International Studies and the Embassy of the Argentine Republic cosponsored a conference on Argentine-U.S. Relation in the 60s. It is not likely that it will draw much criticism.

First of all, the promoters should be pleased. Roberto Esquenazi-Mayo, director of the Institute and coordinator of the symposium, should be praised for his efforts in putting the program together. Promotion for the conference was good and, with the exception of a few speakers who were unable to attend, the symposium seemed to run smoothly.

Secondly, university alumni, the Board of Regents, the Lincoln community and the parents of university students should be pleased.

There were no obscene films, no dirty language, no call to arms to overthrow the U.S. government.

Lastly, and most importantly, the students should be pleased. Unless they are experts in international politics, there would be so little at the conference of interest to them, it would not even be necessary for them to attend. Therefore, they would be free to do nothing, certainly pleasing to many.

This is not meant to say that the Argentine symposium was entirely

uninteresting or a waste of time. Students could hardly ask for a more timely program, unless they would like a conference on American intervention in Chile. With the recent election of Juan Peron as president of Argentina, the future of Argentina has started on a new road. It would seem that a symposium on this country would be interesting.

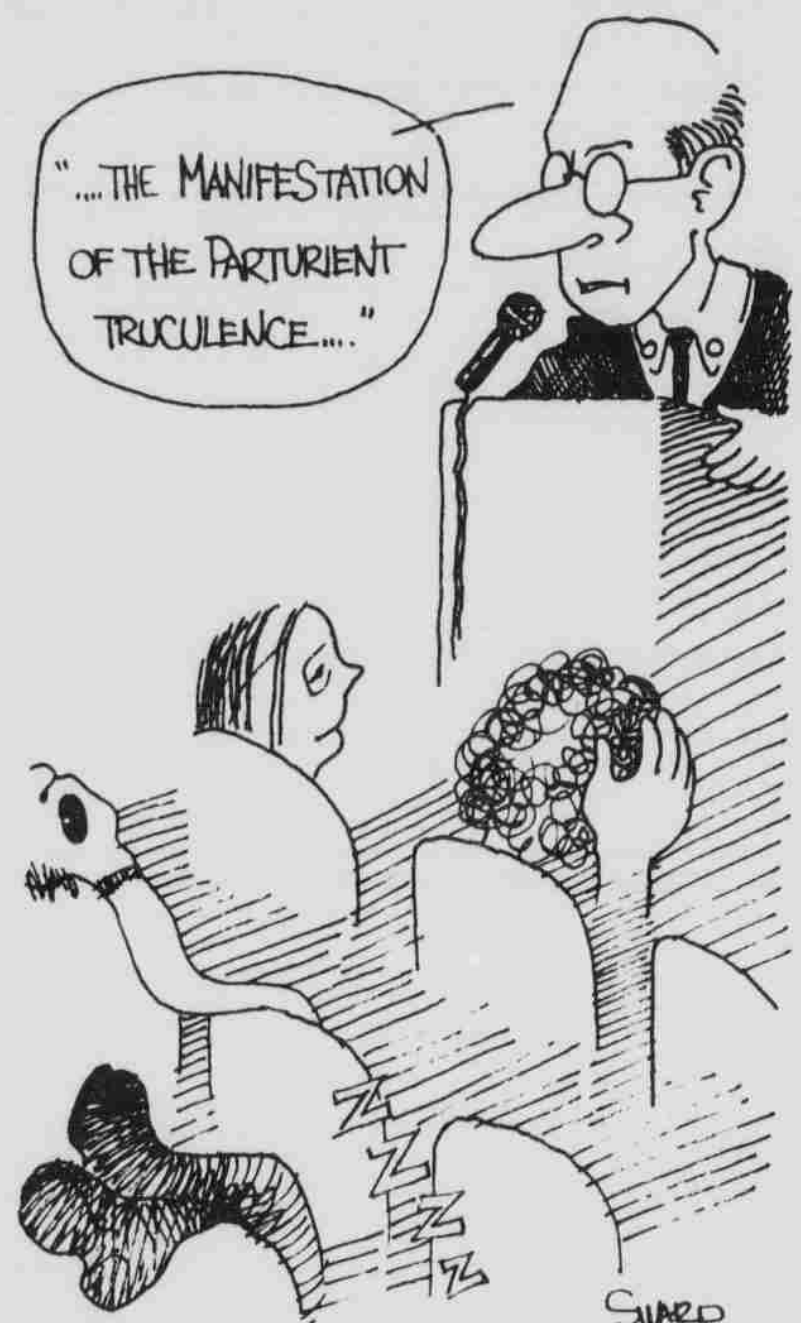
Yet, how many students thought the Argentine conference, or any recent conference for that matter, was interesting? It doesn't seem like many.

Students complained about the "expert jive" used by some of the speakers. It seems many times that experts in a field like to fence themselves off from the laymen by using a vocabulary known only to them and a handful of their associates.

Others complained about the trouble understanding speakers with strong foreign accents. This is not much of an excuse, since a person who speaks English as his second language undoubtedly is going to have an accent, yet it still was a reason some students didn't attend.

Once again, the Argentine symposium was good, academically. But if program organizers would quit bringing programs that they think students should be interested in, and start bringing programs that students actually are interested in, they might once again draw the large and enthusiastic crowds this university has seen in the past.

Tim Anderson



Life of poet, 60, revolves around polka, beer

Weston, a quiet town of 280 people, is about 30 miles north of Lincoln. Its sole claim to fame lies in a tavern and ballroom which sponsors weekend polka bands. Students from Lincoln have been contributing to its business for well over a decade, so, this past weekend, a group of friends and I set out to experience the joys of the polka.

The evening in Weston was memorable. In addition to the usual festivities, a wedding had adjourned to the tavern for an unscheduled wedding dance. So among sundry students, old ladies and an occasional drunk, danced the new Mr. and Mrs. John Keeler, and

john michael o'shea distant thunder

their tuxedoed entourage. Quite a picture.

Yet the most intriguing aspect of this particular evening was an elderly gentleman who had shyly ambled his

way to our table. He told us his name was Joe, and asked if he could sit with us.

As the evening progressed we became more friendly. He introduced us to a fellow named Machobec who claimed to be the best shimmy dancer in the Midwest and who promptly gave us a demonstration to that effect.

Joe also began dancing, giving each girl her turn. During one of the band's beer breaks, Joe opened a little black notebook and began reciting poems to us. They were neither complex nor technical poems, but were rather of the type a fourth grade rural school teacher might make one memorize. He recited his poems loudly and with pride. They were spoken with a heavy Czech accent, while his clear blue eyes betrayed few of the 60-years of hard life.

"Last Call" at Weston came much too soon for my tastes. As I left I found myself with pitifully few notes on the polka, but intrigued by this elderly poet.

That next day I traveled to Touhy, Neb., Joe's home, to record some of his poetry. The poem he was proudest of was titled *Pretty Looking Sugar Plum*.

"Hi, ya pretty looking sugar plum,
How about going out with me and
have some fun?
Everything will be just fine and
dandy
And you will be so handy
You don't have to eat any candy
And you don't have to drink
any brandy.
I'll take along some good wine
Boy that will make you feel fine."

During my stay, I recorded much more than poetry. There were jokes, proverbs, and the tale of a hard life, which, now in its twilight, is being spent alone. He told of growing up in a

small town, and of growing old with only his mother and sister. It was a tale of suffering: of a three-year struggle against cancer, and then losses that leave one so completely alone. He said he had lived in that same house, never having left Touhy for more than a year since his mother's death.

But one day he bought a car, deciding he must still try and live. It was then that he first began going out evenings to polka, and began writing poetry. Only after this explanation did I truly understand the significance of his poems. The poems were more than a creative impulse, they were an emotional outlet, a sort of bridge that enabled him to rejoin the world and sweep away the long years of suffering and loneliness.

Joe now goes dancing just about every weekend, and keeps writing poetry. He told me that a year ago he sent some of his work off to three Hollywood music companies. Each of the companies responded, "Thank you for submitting your song to us. We like it very much and feel that your material has potential." The letters then explain fees, incidental expenses, and company percentages if the song makes it big.

Joe showed me each of the letters proudly but said he wasn't able to afford having the songs published. "I'm sure they would be big hits though," he told me. I saw no reason to tell him differently.

Joe is a simple man. His life revolves around dancing and innocent romantic poetry. There are many things in this complex world that he wouldn't understand, but then he doesn't need to.

There are others who have lived long, hard lives like Joe's. They, too, are old and don't quite understand, but they have little to fall back on. I have seen them in rest homes and at the City Mission. And when I think of them it reminds me of how tenuously each of our lives is balanced. One man is kept going by being able to participate in life, while others, for lack of this, wait out a kind of life in death.

When I left, he asked if I, or some of the others he had met in Weston would write him. I said I would. And that is a promise I intend to keep.



THE WRITING ON THE WALL IN THE OLD FOLKS HOME