

Portraits in Acid

OFF WITH THEIR HEADS! By Peggy Bacon. A Book of Forty Caricatures. New York: Robert W. McBride & Co. \$3.

MISS BACON draws caricatures with a jovial brutality. In this serene mood she offers her opinions of President Roosevelt, Dorothy Parker, Sinclair Lewis, Mayor La Guardia, Carl Sandburg, Lillian Gish, Heywood Broun, herself, and enough others to add up to forty. And like Punch, which never trusts you to see that a fat vicar is talking to a nursemaid in a cartoon without adding in print, beneath: "*Fat Vicar, to Nursemaid,*" Miss Bacon includes with each drawing a few lines of strychnine-flavored characterization. For example: Peggy Bacon has a "pin-head, parsimoniously covered with thin dark hair, on a short, dumpy body." George Gershwin has "flat cheeks, ironed out, sweeping aggressively into bulging lip and chin." General Johnson has "eyes smothered in stout scallops of pulp." And so on. Many of these premature obituaries are written with a fine, Benhechtian flair for epithet.

The book has the full value of a Tibetan prayer-wheel. Turn the pages and the simple mechanical process will relieve you of some of your own sins of uncharitableness toward your neighbors. Let Peggy Bacon call other people names in your place. If you don't admire Rexford Guy Tugwell, she'll say for you that he "probably smells of violette-de-parme." Of Diego Rivera, that he is "full of high-minded cunning and crafty sagacity." Of Edmund Wilson, "Manner hurried, muddled, helpless, harassed with a sense of futility." And a lot more in that manner. If you do admire the characters on her dissecting-easel, you may react valorously in their defense. But in any case, whether you keep it yourself or buy it to give away as a lively Christmas present, you won't find that looking at "*Off With Their Heads!*" is much duller than dynamite.

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