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Reviewed By Lawrence Meynell.

"HELLEBORE THE CLOWN" by Maurice Rowdon (Chatto and Windus, 10s. 6d.).

"HELLEBORE THE CLOWN," by Maurice Rowdon, is a tale as compact as its title.

The action of it is confined to a very short space of time and it is dominated by the one central figure of Hellebore.

This middle-aged man, having built up a European reputation as one of the great clowns, has made no appearances during the years of the first world war.

When war is over he attempts to make a "come-back," but he finds himself affected (even haunted in a strange way) by the death of his son in Flanders; and he is nervous that his own comic inventiveness may no longer have the old magic about it. We see him beset by these fears and doubts preparing for the great first night; and a very close-knit and dramatic tale Mr. Rowdon makes of these preparations and what came of them.

It is pleasant to come across a book with a theme well out of the ordinary, and I recommend "Hellebore the Clown" as an entertaining modern novel well above the average.

Birmingham Post 14.7.53.

Unconscious clowning is easier on the author than serious portrayal of the jester, but though metaphorically speaking *Hellebore the Clown* has rough edges and is at times uncertain in tone, it reveals more than a dash of originality and takes the reader to the heart of an unhackneyed emotional situation. Action is restricted to some 24 hours, when Hellebore is making a come-back in the Paris of 1920. Everyone is nervous, and Hellebore is further upset by a visit from a strange young man who tells him how greatly his son, killed in the war, suffered from his neglect. Tension rises throughout the day, with Hellebore fighting a hang-over, but when he goes on the stage, after an initial failure, he carries through a perfect performance, every movement of which is described in graphic detail.

HELLEBORE THE CLOWN
THE LIVERPOOL DAILY POST & ECHO LTD

From the

LIVERPOOL DAILY POST

- 7 JUL 1953

of

From the Editor

* * *
"Hellebore, the Clown," by Maurice Rowdon (Chatto and Windus, 10s 6d.), is full of people who are not very likeable but the book is an interesting and rather subtle study in personality. The clown is an ageing artist who is about to make a much advertised reappearance. His past ties and affections, his present emotions and fears tangle him up to an almost inextricable point. Out of chaos comes success but, for the reader at any rate, the idol has shown his feet of clay.
* * *

observe.

12.7.53.

THE title—and jacket—of *Hellebore the Clown* threaten the worst in tears, spangles, motley, and melancholy. In fact it is an unsentimental and often original study, written with caution and sureness. Its hero is an internationally famous clown, and its setting is Paris in 1920, where he is making a return to the stage after six years' absence. But its real world is the taut and tangled nerve-centre at the back of the stage, a world not unlike that of Colette's music-hall novels. If not all of the characters are quite convincing, not one is ready-made, and the writer steers past all the obvious pitfalls with a skill which would surely find greater scope, and fewer risks, in another kind of theme.

The Listener

16.7.53.

After these three excellent comedies, it is difficult to work up much enthusiasm for Mr. Rowdon's *Hellebore, the Clown*. The title and publishers' note lead one to suppose it might have affinities with Mr. Twining and the Materassi ladies—laughter and tears. It is the story of a famous clown's 'come-back' after a period of depression caused by his son's death in the war. We are shown the great clown in a series of scenes, with lengthy, rather ponderous dialogue—drunk and mawkish in a night-club; preparing with his grease paint behind the scenes; finally his success, in spite of an evil genius, on the first night. The tale is well told and we are pleased at this success, but it awakes neither laughter nor tears. And what else should one ask of a clown?

ANTHONY RHODES

The Sphere.

25. 7. 53.

The Scotsman.

16. 7. 53.

T. L. S.

10. 7. 53.

Mysteries of Personality

Hellebore the Clown, a first novel, shows considerable talent. Character is subtly observed and conveyed in this story of a clown who, on the eve of his reappearance in a Paris theatre after the First World War, is visited by a strange young man apparently holding him responsible for the death of his son as a soldier. It is a strange book, taut in atmosphere and far from superficial in its implications of the mysteries of personality. The inconclusiveness of the story falls into mood with the deceptive simplicity of its approach.

It is not at first easy to accept Hellebore as the famous artist he is supposed to be, but step by step the reader comes nearer to the full portrait of eccentricity, egotism, childishness, cowardice, and courage. The climax of the first performance is beautifully related, as is the interplay of the emotions of the clown's fellow performers.

That old message, "The Show Must Go On," is somewhat solemnly read by *Hellebore the Clown*; or the Clown must go on, rather, for about the rest of the show there is never any doubt. Hellebore is a famous clown who is making a come-back in a Parisian variety show after some years of absence from the stage. Bedevilled by the feeling that he was responsible for the war-time death of his son (whom he does seem to have treated with peculiar callousness), Hellebore becomes hysterically drunk on the night before the show. The following day sees much perturbation of many spirits; but the show does, of course, go on. Mr. Rowdon writes interestingly when he is dealing directly with the theatre, and particularly well in a long description of Hellebore's act; away from the theatre his manner is often uncommonly portentous.

Daily Despatch. (Manduska) 11.7.53.

True to life

HELLEBORE THE CLOWN is a novel, one of the truest novels I have ever read. We first come across him as he attempts to make a come-back in Paris after four years of semi-retirement. His producer, who had invested in this show more money than he had ever risked before on a single performer, is worried that Hellebore may have lost his touch.

His worry is deepened when he discovers that Hellebore intends to devote no more than one morning to the rehearsal of his act. But worse is to follow.

A chance acquaintance takes the ageing clown to a night-club fills him up with champagne and returns him to his hotel in a desperate state at 5 a.m. on the day of the first performance. Everything seems desperate, Hellebore cannot rehearse.

The producer's worst fears seem justified when the curtain goes up and Hellebore collapses across the footlights before a horrified audience. Recovering himself, he gives the performance of his career.

Chaplin way

THIS is the bare outline of an exquisite story. It is written in a style which excludes all comment and in a few terse sentences creates impressions which will long linger in my mind.

How well all of us know the atmosphere of tension which is created in an audience which suddenly senses that the performer has lost his nerve, and does not know whether to take his fumbling antics as tragedy or comedy.

The scene in which Hellebore gradually recovers himself, and by a mixture of the Chaplin technique and the older custard-pie slap-stick, regains the audience's affection and confidence, is one of the best bits of writing I have read for some time.

NIGEL NICOLSON

Daily Telegraph.

17. 7. 52

"HELLEBORE THE CLOWN," by Maurice Rowdon, has the virtue of suspense which cannot be said to be one of the qualities of either Mr. Lodwick or Mr. Heppenstall. It is the story of an English clown who is about to make his come-back in

Paris, after years of absence from the stage. The time is just after the war. We deal only with the few days before the performance, the private family sorrow of Hellebore himself and the professional jealousy of a German wild-animal tamer, the other big name in the programme. Almost to the last page, one is wondering whether Hellebore will fail or succeed. But Mr. Rowdon writes in a rather arid style. I feel he understands the theory of the novel. Now let him take up writing more interesting—not necessarily affected—English.

The Spectator.

10. 7. 53.

Hellebore, the Clown is a somewhat mysterious novel about a paragon of his art, combining as it were the perfection of virtuosity of Grimaldi and Grock, who staged a come-back in a Paris theatre after the First World War. All but bleakly ingenuous in style, the author affects a subtlety of mind that appears to resolve itself only in a flow of wildly arbitrary small incident. The subtlety, in fact, is not there, though Hellebore's fellow "artistes" are an enticingly odd and mystifying lot and one catches towards the end an indubitable whiff of grease-paint.

R. D. CHARQUES.

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Reviewed by MORCHARD BISHOP

Issue dated July 10

Hellebore The Clown, by Maurice Rowdon (Chatto and Windus, 10s. 6d.), is a first novel and, as such, a remarkably assured performance, particularly in its early stages. The time is 1920, and the eponymous hero is a great clown making his come-back, in middle-age, in Paris, after the interval of the war.

The scene is set with great authority, and all the backstage stuff—the impresario, the fellow-artistes—is very well done. Then enters an existentialist kind of young man whose faith in life has been broken by the war, and he proceeds to do his level best to wreck the clown's First Night. The tale so far is taut and powerful, and much resembles in form Barnaby Conrad's *Death of a Matador*, which I had the pleasure of praising last year.

But suddenly, when all is set for a fine book, first-novel nerves or inexperience seize Mr. Rowdon, and his story peters out hurriedly with an interesting report of the clown's "act" and a general shuffling-up of the original complications. The débâcle is complete, but luckily by this time Mr. Rowdon has done more than enough to convince us that he is a real story-teller who is certain to do better. Here is a fresh, vigorous and altogether unusual talent.

With compliments
H. L. Harris

Is your dog trying to tell you something?

THE next time your dog starts tapping the ground with its front paw, pay attention.

It could be trying to complain about the food or to lay the groundwork for a philosophical discussion.

In Bavaria in southern Germany a poodle called Elke and a saluki called Belam have been talking to their mistress since 1973, using their paws to signal an alphabet of taps.

Silly

The conversations, which began with words like man and ball, now include subjects like the afterlife and the existence of God.

Talking animals have been around for a long time.

A tapping horse mentioned in Love's Labours Lost who could do "strange and wonderful things by the arts of magicke" was later burned at the stake with his master "as one witch", while in the 1900s Clever Hans a stallion who could count, spell, add, subtract and read clocks and maps, became world famous.

By and large, however, talking dogs and the rest have had a bad press as a regular feature of the silly season, along with

by Dan
Lees

the Loch Ness Monster and pavement fried eggs.

But now, with scientists making serious efforts to communicate with apes and dolphins, Elke and Belam could stand a chance of getting through to us, especially as they seem to have a great deal more to say than most of the others.

Former personnel consultant Dorothy Meyer and her friend Frau Heilmaier began by teaching the dogs to count and then to do simple sums.

When they could divide and multiply they were introduced to the letter tapping code: One tap for F, two for O, three taps for R and so on up to 25 taps for X.

After weeks of patient work the dogs' vocabulary included words like gut for good, dummm for stupid, katze for cat, and wurst for sausage, with Belam lagging behind Elke.

But even Elke was only tapping out words suggested to her or written up on the blackboard.

Then Dorothy began asking her pupils questions like "do you remember the name of this sign?" which demanded a definite answer and provided for a controllable response.

After nine months of lessons Belam, asked what he had seen in the wood, replied raven, confirmed that he meant a bird, and added that it had pecked him.

Another great breakthrough was to teach the dogs personal pronouns proving that the animals had a sense of identity.

By 1975 the dogs were spelling out words that they had overheard rather than been taught and giving their thoughts on the after life as "a soft dark mist with eternal genuine lustre".

Conclusions

In *The Talking Dogs* (Macmillan, £5.95)

Maurice Rowdon, who spent some time in Germany with the dogs and their teachers, tells the story of their achievements in such painstaking detail that only two conclusions are possible.

Either the two German ladies and their pets have made the sort of breakthrough that warrants an immediate investigation by the most highly qualified scientists available.

Or they are consummate liars and confidence tricksters with Mr Rowdon as their dupe or their accomplice.

Meanwhile I shall be careful about what I say in front of our cat.

You never know whom she might repeat it to.



The talking dogs: A howler, or a sc
advance? Hic

QUESTION: 'WOULD YOU LIKE TO SHOW THE WORLD

Elke tapped out 'YES' and our lessons began

AT THE beginning, teaching Elke was almost impossible.

Her lessons started in March, 1974, when she was hardly a year old. For the first few sessions she just wanted to have fun, offering both paws together and either giving too many or none at all.

It was six weeks before she learned to tap properly. She would lie on her back and roll her eyes at Dorothy, dabbing at her with uplifted paws. All she knew was how to tap YES and NO.

When counting exercises began, she took school a little more seriously. She learned to tap from 1 to 10 using both paws, though over-excitement often made her tap more than the number asked.

When this stage was securely passed, she learned to distinguish left paw from right, and to reserve the left for multiples of 10 and the right for units.

She hated this new discipline and for weeks staged a mute rebellion. She preferred to think of school as playtime, a wonderful chance to have Dorothy alone, all to herself.

Dorothy began to use the abacus to teach her first addition and subtractions,

and then simple multiplication: 1x2, 1x3 etc, up to 20.

She was still unable to sit quietly for long, and at times would lose interest again. Nor could she control her moods. The sound of running paws would throw her into wild excitement and the lesson would have to stop.

Thought

In May 1974 Dorothy put a carpet down to mark the school area. "This is your schoolroom," she explained to her, patting the carpet.

The tea-trolley appeared with the educational equipment: abacus, cards and pencils. "This is for you, and only for you!"

Elke sniffed at it, curious and expectant, wagging her tail.

It was clearly time for Frau Heilmaier to explain the meaning of dog education to Elke. So "Mami" made a special visit to "school" and sat Elke down in front of her.

"Do you know there have been dogs who could count and read and write, and tell human beings what they thought? Would you too like

to show the world what animals can think and have feelings just like us?"

"You must decide for yourself. You may stop your lessons right away if you wish; no one is going to force you. You may tap yes or no. Do you want to go on with the lessons?"

Elke tapped YES. But later, when Dorothy started to teach her the alphabet, she tapped NO. Though still willing to oblige Dorothy by coming to lessons, she seemed tired of the whole project.

A holiday period at Frau Heilmaier's cottage followed, during which there were no lessons at all.

Was this all the rest she needed? On her return to Berchtesgaden she ran to her place on the carpet as if no longer able to wait, almost throwing herself into Dorothy's arms.

She now learned to count up to 50. Dorothy divided the beads on the abacus into 4 rows of 10, 5, 7, and 3 beads each, and began demonstrating simple adding and dividing problems. She arranged 35 beads in rows of 5 each and asked her how many

rows there were: the answer came unhesitantly — 7.

"And how much is 7 x 5, that is all the beads together?"

Elke tapped 35.

"How many beads does each row have?"

She tapped 5. It seemed as easy as barking for her. Now came division problems: 4 divided by 2, 8 divided by 2 and so on. But how to get the concept of division into a dog's head?

Frau Heilmaier suggested showing Elke 4 rows of 5 beads each. Elke would recognise 20 easily as the total number of beads. Then she would be told: "But you see this 20 is divided into 4 parts!"

It worked. Elke began answering division problems with a smoothness that astonished Dorothy. Multiplication and division problems continued over several days, with progressively bigger numbers as the lessons went on.

It was at this point that Belam joined the class, at first only as an observer. Dorothy tried to coax him into the tapping position and

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14.

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