



## Camels Are Easy, Comedy's Hard

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CAMELS ARE EASY, COMEDY'S HARD's sixty-three articles are taken from nearly twenty years of Roy Blount's writing, so it's no surprise that the book's contents vary widely. Travelogues and local-color pieces are lumped together with poems, crossword puzzles, and top-of-the-head essays to make up a collection that is generally entertaining and occasionally hilarious, but inevitably somewhat unfocused.

In several early 1970's SPORTS ILLUSTRATED articles, Blount is a sort of sportswriting Charles Kuralt, wandering America's backroads in search of the athletically offbeat. These and a few other feature-length pieces are more or less standard magazine journalism, well crafted but not terribly memorable. Such articles serve as ballast for the book's lighter and shorter material, but it's otherwise somewhat puzzling why Blount, who has published ten other books, would include them in a collection now.

Also perhaps too generously represented are the cryptic crossword puzzles, in the convoluted British style, that Blount contributed to SPY magazine in the 1980's. (A sample clue: "Pleasantries confront it backward, each the same way"; the solver is supposed to deduce that the answer is "facetiae" by reasoning that "to confront is to 'face.' Plus 'it' backward and 'ea,' also backward.") Although Blount repeatedly insists that the only thing needed to solve the puzzles is "the will to try them," it seems likely that few readers will rise to the challenge. (What's really necessary, one suspects, is to be Roy Blount.) Of course, the clues and their explanations are often amusing, and each puzzle is introduced by a short essay, so it's not necessary to work the puzzles to enjoy them; even so, devoting seventy-five pages—a quarter of the book's length—to the puzzles seems excessive.

By far the best parts of CAMELS ARE EASY, COMEDY'S HARD are the many short comic bits, both prose and poetry, collected from such diverse publications as THE NEW YORK TIMES, ESQUIRE, VOGUE, NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC, and FOOD AND WINE. Blount's sly excoriations of moronic flag-wavers, greedy CEO's and other phenomena of the Reagan-Bush years are worth the price of the book. More of such recent work and less from Blount's archives might have made this good collection even better.

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