

Unhappy Happening in Park

The Mary Poppins statue proposed for Central Park is atrociously bad art, as New York City's esthetically sophisticated Parks Commissioner must know. It is also an unjustifiable encroachment on park land, of which Commissioner Hoving, with his newly laid and loudly publicized policies of nonencroachment, must be equally well aware.

This addition cannot be rationalized by the fact that two other very bad statues already exist nearby. Three wrongs do not make a right. Alice in Wonderland is not only a dangerous metallic plaything but an insensitive perversion of José de Creeft's talents in direct stone-cutting. The banal Hans Christian Andersen statue is stolidly gouged out of another side of the pond with equal brutality to the landscape. It would be quite possible to keep on until the pond is completely encircled with a bronze nursery version of Mme. Tussaud.

The time is long overdue for examination of the whole sticky question of gifts to the parks. If there has been any policy at all, it has expressed itself—with only the rarest of exceptions—by acceptance of every gift that has come in with a check and good intentions. Where major installations are involved, such as the Children's Farm currently being given to Prospect Park by a private donor, matching, or usually more than matching, funds must be added by the city, which then takes on permanent maintenance costs. In the case of the farm, the city will pay \$100,000 toward construction and an endless \$100,000 a year, less only the income from admissions, for upkeep. Inevitably, these expenses drain limited funds and manpower from existing landscaping and landmarks. In these instances the city could take a lesson from the National Trust for Historic Preservation, which exercises simple logic when it accepts no property without an endowment for its maintenance.

Is a gift for planting or preservation too anonymous for New York's philanthropists? Our parks are, or were, among the finest in the world in design and horticultural terms; they need more sympathetic care, more understanding rehabilitation, rather than an overlay of gratuitous new features and questionable statues. Here are legitimate fields for philanthropic investment, and a legitimate yardstick for park gifts. Mr. Hoving might halt his happenings long enough to show the way.