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Patriotic Shlock: The Endless Summer

What in hell is happening in America? This has been an Endless Summer, an odious, repellent, horrifying orgy of Patriotic Shlock. In all my years I have never seen so many blankety-blank American flags being waved, mindlessly, over and over again.

It started on that rotten last night of the Democratic convention, when the massed delegates were all waving, instead of the usual banners for their nominees, American flags, duly issued to them by the smooth Mondale machine. The culmination was the acceptance speech of Geraldine Ferraro, in which La Ferraro droned on about her immigrant mother, immigrant daughters, and God knows what else, all to the tune of American flags being waved, and, yes, masses of delegates sobbing and hugging each other.

I put it all down to one night's aberration, little realizing what an orgy of mass sobbing and flag-waving we were all in for. The next step, of course, was the infernal Olympics, in which patriotic shlock reached a new all-time low. Again, what in hell is going on? There was nothing at all like this in the last Olympics held in the U. S. — the winter Olympics of 1976. There was no sobbing, no flag-waving, in fact there was a healthy realism by the media focussing on the transportation foulups at Lake Placid. But here, in L.A., in the home of Hollywood shlock, all of a sudden everyone went nuts, the audience, the media, even the athletes. The pattern began with the Opening Ceremonies, a vast exercise in tedium, when the flag-waving, the sobbing, and all the rest began, and never let up. Come on: 84 pianists in blue tuxes, simultaneously faking the playing of *Rhapsody in Blue*! And it wasn't only ABC (see below) that went bonkers; the press was almost as bad, San Francisco's famous voice of the Peepul, Truman Democrat Herb Caen, writing two lengthy columns on the wonders of the Opening Ceremonies, how it "made everyone proud to be an American again," "proud to wave flags again," etc. Yecchh! Also characteristically weighing in to do his muddled bit was philosopher Tibor Machan in *Reason* magazine, taking off on a few facts, all of them wrong, about the Olympics.

ABC was disgustingly chauvinist, much more than in past Olympics. Cameras pointed shamelessly to Americans to the exclusion of virtually anyone else; commentary was American-hype to the nth degree; behind every American athlete pictured was a huge American flag waving in the non-

existent breeze. ABC got so bad that Olympic authorities began to complain.

But it wasn't just ABC or the press. It was the American masses, the audience themselves, that succumbed to the most unsportsmanlike behavior. The mob, bellowing "USA," "USA," the cheers for every U. S. point, the booing when a U. S. gymnast got less than a perfect 10. Probably the low point of the entire Games was when Carl Lewis, upon winning the 100 meters — typically, about 20 meters ahead of everyone else — grabbed a huge American flag, and virtually wrapping himself in the thing, ran around the Stadium. It was the apex of a truly obscene spectacle.

And what ever happened to the old propaganda of the U. S. media that the Olympic Games are not a team, but an individual, sport, so that one shouldn't even count the medals gained by the various countries? That old hype apparently applied only when the Soviet Union and East Germany used to walk off with most of the medals. But now that the East European bloc was safely out of the way, Oh the crowing and oh the gloating about all the medals "we" of the U. S. were racking up! Hey, fantastic, so we beat up on the British Antilles, and all the other one-horse countries that the U. S. paid to show up. As usual, the American mob was ungallant from start to finish, as in the invasion of tiny Grenada, gloating about the huge U.S. stomping on minuscule opposition!

An old friend of mine, a U. S. patriot from many years of being obliged to live in a hated foreign land, upon watching the opening ceremonies, lamented, "It made me ashamed to be an American!"

I tell you: Watching the Olympics made me nostalgic for the good old days of the New Left, and the ranting about "Amerika" or even "Amerikkka." One more day of this horror, one more binge of patriotic sobbing and flag-waving, and I will be ready for the Jeff Hummell Deviation (i.e. opposition to all nationalism, even national liberation against imperial States.) And for the first time in decades I look with favor on old Herbert Hoover, President when the last Summer Olympics were held in the U. S. (Los Angeles in 1932), who didn't bother officiating at the opening ceremonies because "they weren't important." At this point, I am almost ready to forgive Hoover his origination of the New Deal.

Life In "1984"

1. Of All Time.

Recently, one Dan Lurie, publisher of Muscle Training Illustrated magazine, decided to search for someone whom he could dub "the best physically fit President of all time." After an exhaustive search, Lurie came up with, lo and behold!, Ronnie Reagan.

Ronnie Reagan? But how about George Washington, a strapping 6'2" in a world where most male Americans hardly poked up above 5'5"? How about Abe Lincoln? Or Ike Eisenhower? No, he couldn't pick people like that, Lurie explained, because "You can't go back and honor a President who's no longer there." Oh. Well, that takes care of *that*.

2. The Shortest Time Period.

It is an old New York quip that the definition of the shortest perceivable interval of time, is the time it takes between the change of the traffic light to green and the moment when the car behind you honks its horn. I offer a new

definition of the shortest period of time: the length of any cease-fire in Lebanon.

3. Unemployment in Grenada.

In the last days of the Marxist Bishop regime, unemployment in Grenada was severe, at 14 percent. The United States invasion — oops, "rescue mission," as Lew Lehrman's Citizens for America managed to have it called — had the effect of more than doubling that unemployment, which is now about 30 percent. Why? Because of the "sudden unemployment," imposed not by wicked capitalists, but by the U.S. military occupation regime: i.e. on former members of the People's Revolutionary Army, former officials in the Bishop government, former members of Bishop's ruling party, the New Jewel Movement, and workers building the famous airport.

Comment by a 19-year old Grenadian who hasn't had a job yet: "They call it a rescue mission, but they haven't *rescued* me yet." To each his own, on Grand Fenwick. ‡

Democrat Convention Notes

The Democratic convention went out drowned in a deluge of odious and maudlin hokum, everyone crying and singing, all sexes and races joined together. The last time I saw all this was at the Democratic gathering of 1976, when Jimmy and Miz Lillian and all the rest of the gang sang "We Shall Overcome." It's getting to be a stale act. The difference, of course, was that Jimmy was nowhere to be seen, having himself bombed out in his pre-keynote address. It looks as if the Great Family of Democrat doctrine, the Family of the dispossessed and the left out, has no room for their old has-been and Former Peerless Leader. It's like the old shaggy-dog jokes; the Party of Inclusion can't include *everybody*.

* * *

And speaking of singing. There were two absolutely rotten and unforgivable aspects of this convention. One was the fact that they robbed us of the best part of a political convention: the suspense, the excitement, by making sure that everyone, even the Veep, was picked way beforehand. That left only the tinsel and the hokum. The media kept quoting grand old H. L. Mencken on the obscene glories of political conventions. But *that* was when conventions really meant something, and the suspense and the excitement were there until the end. Tinsel *by itself* is mere ashes. The second terrible thing was the takeover of the convention by the blankety-blank band. Instead of allowing the conventioners to set the rhythm of events by their own shouting and enthusiasm, the *band* took over at all times, and imposed its overpowering noise on everyone, changing shouting and demonstrations to jiggling and dancing to the band's tunes. The band was everywhere,

ruining the demonstrations. Sometimes it was the 1812 Overture, no less. More often it was repellent rock, and while the convention was a shameless scramble by the Democracy to recapture American Values from the Republicans, they will learn that you cannot do so by the sight of thousands of delegates boogieing down to goddam rock, regardless how many plastic American flags they wave at the same time.

Even five minutes of George M. Cohan and "the Grand Old Flag" won't do it. The Democrats are suffering badly from an adult white male gender gap. They will not recapture that lost vote by playing songs written in 1912. (Hey, bunky, we ain't *that* old!) To quote the great line from "Kids": "Why can't they dance like we did? What's wrong with Sammy Kaye?"

* * *

The high point, the *only* high point, of the convention, was the magnificent keynote by Mario Cuomo. Note the difference between Cuomo's and the other instantly forgettable speeches; the content, in many ways, was superficially the same. But the difference was not simply the "delivery," although it was certainly true, as one journalist wrote, that Cuomo's speech had the "grace, the elegance, the strength" of Joe DiMaggio playing center field. In one of the greatest political speeches I have ever heard, Cuomo fused reason and rhetoric in a masterful demonstration of what oratory is really supposed to be about.

One difference is that Cuomo wrote the speech *himself*, and it was indeed, as speeches are supposed to be, an embodiment of heart and mind. It was the expression of an unusual

politician for the current age. A man of luminous intelligence, articulation, Catholic values, insight, and high wit — in short, an ethnic New Yorker in the best sense of the phrase. He is, as Nora Ephron wrote, perceptively if inelegantly, after the speech: "Adlai Stevenson with balls." Note, too, one of the famed New Yorkers who preceded Cuomo to the podium, his old opponent and fellow-author Ed Koch, the obnoxious clown who spent his entire speech in an unbelievable torrent of fascist hogwash, calling upon the President to mobilize the "Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines" (no less!) to fight the "war on drugs." Koch did everything but call for a return to the draft for that great battle.

But Cuomo's speech was superb. He took Reagan's only known metaphor — the New England Puritan depiction of America as the "shining city on a hill," and, in the great tradition of political conflict as against consensus, declared that America is a "Tale of Two Cities." In doing so, Cuomo harked back to the left-wing tradition best symbolized in the famous line of Dos Passos's *USA*: "all right, we are two nations."

No, dear readers, I have not flipped my wig, and joined the Cuomo crusade. For indeed it was a socialist-organicist speech, embodied in the premise that the nation-state is a Great Family. Given that deeply fallacious axiom, however, the rest follows. Libertarians, it must be added, *also* believe that we are two nations, or two "cities." The division, of course, is quite different: for left-liberals or socialist-organicists, it is the rich vs. the poor, or, nowadays, it is an inconsistent jumble of rich-adult-white-male vs. poor-everyone else (fuzzing over what one does with rich women or blacks.) But libertarians have our own two-nation model: the State apparatus and its allies who constitute the ruling class, and the rest-of-us, who constitute the ruled. This division, of course, has a very different fault-line. *Our* two nations is the old class distinction set forth by Representative "Sockless Jerry" Simpson of Iowa: "there are two classes in America — the robbers and the robbed." Or, as James Mill (*not* his wimpo son, John Stuart) put it: there are two classes in society, "the first class, those who plunder, are the small number. They are the ruling Few. The second class, those who are plundered, are the great number. They are the subject Many."

The solutions, too, are different. The Cuomo, or socialist-organicist, solution is of course vague and fuzzy; but in some way it involves bringing about one organic city-family by compulsory egalitarianism. The libertarian goal is to bring about "one nation," a society of free people rather than a Giant Family, by abolishing exploitation by the "first nation." And *they* call us "Utopians!" The libertarian goal is simple, non-Utopian, and achievable if only enough of us have the will. The goal of achieving a Family of 200 millions or 6 billions is absurd, quixotic, and impossible.

Still and all, Cuomo's speech was a great event, and it towered over the other speakers at the convention as a giant over a motley crew of pygmies. The *Lib. Forum* is happy to note that we were among the first to spot Cuomo as a rising star in his debates with Lew Lehrman for the New York governorship in 1982 — where Cuomo sliced Lehrman to ribbons with sallies of high wit that left the *serioso* Lehrman gasping. If Cuomo really makes it to a major national

nomination in 1988, the campaign is going to be a treat.

And *some* of Cuomo's content was unexceptionable: such as his denunciation of Reagan for the killing of 279 Marines in Lebanon, his attack on U. S. aid to "governments that murder nuns," and his call for "privacy for people, openness in government," which capsulizes the libertarian position on the secrecy-publicity question.

Cuomo's keynote stress on the family and on his immigrant roots set the tone and the theme for the rest of the convention. But they were pygmies following a giant, and so they botched it by drawing the theme out and working it over until tedium reigned supreme. It was like the difference between a great movie and a Grade Z shlock. For example, Cuomo spent only about half a minute on his "little immigrant father who worked 16 hours a day, 'sometimes bleeding from the feet,'" and went on to other concerns. The other speakers worked the whole hard work-immigrant theme into the ground and six feet under. In particular, La Ferraro, the *other* Queens Democrat. It seemed that her entire damn speech was focussed on her sainted mother, her daughters, on immigrants, on the generations, until one longed desperately for escape. Hey, we're not supposed to vote for someone simply *because* he/she is a child of Italian immigrants! Give us a break! To make matters worse, the networks, particularly NBC, interspersed Ferraro's speech with endless shots of women delegates crying. Are we to be spared nothing?

And then there is all the insufferable cant about Ferraro-Zaccaro's "working-class" *persona* from an "Archie Bunker district" in Queens. Her mother may have indeed been sainted and poor, but Ferraro-Zaccaro is a millionairess who lives in a Tudor mansion in Forest Hill Gardens, a highly posh pocket within the Archie Bunker district. She and her husband own three houses, their palatial estates including Long Island and the Virgin Islands. John Zaccaro may, for all I know, be "supportive" and "in touch with his feelings," but he is also a member of one of the most hated classes in New York City life, "millionaire slumlord." His houses have received 100 citations for housing violations. (Note: I have nothing against "slumlords," but, if the Republicans are smart, they can do effective work exposing all this among urban ethnics, also thereby ripping off the Democratic veil of phony populism).

Note: if the canons of the New Feminism require that Ferraro be treated androgynously by one and all, then *why* is it that Mondale and Ferraro must never, under any circumstances, be seen to clasp hands overhead or put an arm around each other, in public? *Male* candidates do it. So why *isn't* sauce for the gander also sauce for the goose?

Problem I'm Not Going to Give Even a Fleeting Worry About: Whether Mondale should precede, or follow, Ferraro down the aisle, or out of a car; or the precise gavotte of how

Mrs. Mondale and Ferraro should act, or where they should stand.

* * *

On the speeches, I unfortunately missed the Jackson speech, but from the snippets I saw I would nothave been impressed. I am not a fan of sweaty, oratory. Being sincere or impassioned is scarcely enough; there must be reason, thought, and elegance of delivery. Also, for me Jacksonian metaphor breaks the mood and is too reminiscent of a Woody Allen sendup: "If mah grape turned into a raisin" indeed!

Gary Hart's speech simply didn't make it. Teddy Kennedy's was a good solid stem-winder. And, as far as I'm concerned, both acceptance speeches were washouts. Ferraro told far more about her lovable Italian family, redolent of American Values, than any of us shall ever want to know. And Fritz the Pits strained manfully not to be boring, but simply didn't make it. Also, the note of apologia to the Reagan voter for not being American Family enough in the past, was weak and absurd. Fritz the Pits did, however,

perform an American First: the definite promise to the American voter that he will raise taxes next year. Well, *there's* a kick-in-the-head! And after *this*, we're all supposed to sing and cry and L-O-V-E that ticket! It *is* true, of course, as Fritz said, that Reagan will *also* raise taxes next year (after all, he already did so, in 1982, 1983, and 1984), except that he won't admit it. Well, what are we supposed to do, Fritz, admire your "courage" or at least concede the good sense of Reagan's handlers in not courting our vote by hitting us openly over the head?

* * *

God what a choice! The Pits vs. The Great Cretin. The Bore vs. the Idiot Smiler. Socialist-organicism and maudlin cant vs. militarist-collectivism and a pack of lies.

Mr. and Ms. America: work, vote for, support the only ticket of liberty and principle, the only way that your vote will not be "wasted" on collectivism and drivel. Vote for Bergland and Lewis, Libertarians!

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Arts and Movies

By Mr. First Nighter

Red Dawn, dir. by John Milius.

It's not only the Supreme Court that follows the election returns. Hollywood, too, does its bit, and movie theatres have been increasingly filled with right-wing patriotism, like the rest of the media this endless summer. I went to see *Red Dawn* expecting a bout of anti-Soviet warmongering, but instead was pleasantly surprised. This is hardly a great picture, and is indeed flawed. But *Red Dawn* is an enjoyable teen-age saga, and, apart from right-wing pro-NATO credits at the beginning of the film, it is not so much pro-war as it is anti-State. The warfare it celebrates is not interstate strife, but guerrilla conflict that the great radical libertarian military analyst, General Charles Lee, labelled "people's war" two centuries before Mao and Che.

The beginning of the picture is exciting, if idiotic. Cuban, Nicaraguan, Mexican and other Commie Hispanic troops, headed by Soviet advisors, parachute into and successfully conquer the entire prairie MidWest, from the Rockies to the Mississippi. In the opening sequence, the Red paratroops swiftly invade and, for some reason, annihilate a high school in the mythical town of "Culver City," Colorado, presumably somewhere in the East Slope foothills of the Rockies. In a neat touch, gun control has made it easy for the Commie occupiers to round up all the registered guns in the area. But a half-dozen high school kids escape and set up a guerrilla camp in the Rockies. Jed, the older leader and a former school quarter-back, whips the other reluctant lads into shape, and soon the tiny guerilla band, using light arms, mobile tactics, and superior knowledge of the terrain, strike terror into the Red occupying forces while brandishing the rallying name of "Wolverines." There are some revoltingly *macho* touches at the beginning, especially when one of the young lads receives

his mystical baptism into the guerrilla rites by drinking the blood of his first kill — fortunately a deer rather than a Commie. These touches subside after a while, although they are hardly softened by the appearance of two young lady guerrillas who are fierce and androgynous enough to pose for a Viet Cong or Algerian guerrilla poster.

One of the best parts of the picture is the graphic portrayal of how the Red response to the Wolverines runs the gamut of the U. S. counter-revolutionary responses to the Vietnamese. That is, at first the Russian commander decides to hole up in the cities and military bases, into the "safe zones," whereupon the Wolverines boldly demonstrate that in guerrilla war there are no safe zones, and that the "front is everywhere." At that point, another crackerjack Russian commander takes over, and replicates the "search and destroy" counter-guerrilla response of the Green Berets. This is more punishing, but still does not succeed.

One big problem with the picture is that there is no sense that successful guerrilla war feeds on itself; in real life the ranks of the guerrillas would start to swell, and this would defeat the search-and-destroy concept. In *Red Dawn*, on the other hand, there are only the same half-dozen teenagers, and the inevitable attrition makes the struggle seem hopeless when it need not be.

Another problem is that there is no character development through action, so that, except for the leader, all the high school kids seem indistinguishable. As a result, there is no impulse to mourn as each one falls by the wayside.

But whatever flaws the movie has are redeemed by one glorious — and profoundly libertarian — moment. The Nicaraguan-Cuban insurgent leader is increasingly unhappy acting as a State occupying force. He tells the implacable Russian commander: "Once I was an insurgent. Now I'm a

policeman" — the last word spoken with profound contempt. He writes his wife: "What am I doing in this cold and lonely spot, so far away from home?" So that, in the climax of the film, as one people's war guerrilla to another, he saves the hero, Jed, and allows him to slip out of the Russian net. Ideology, left and right, gets swallowed up in hands-across-the-sea of people's guerrillas against their respective States.

In all war pictures there is the annoying pacifist *nudge*, griping about "how do we differ from *them*," since both are shooting and killing (The LeFevre-Smith *motif*.) Jed's answer is satisfactory enough, even though lacking profound argumentation: "Because *we* live here!"

Another fine touch is that the evil informer who almost does the Wolverines in is, naturally, the son of the town Mayor, who is identified by friend and foe alike as "the politician." The Mayor, who directs the betrayal, cringes fawningly if despairingly in carrying out the orders of the occupation force.

All in all worth seeing — exciting as well as libertarian.

In books or in movies, my favorite form of fiction is—for want of a better word—"tough-guy," especially tough-guy espionage. The three prime subdivisions of tough-guy fiction as (a) detective, the major form, invented by Dashiell Hammett in the late 1920's, (b) spy, and (c) the Western movie genre. Tough-guy detective fiction is my least favorite form, largely because the genre is generally grubby and gritty, and more so because it has become corrupted by the cynicism and implicit psychobabble of Raymond Chandler and his numerous followers, including Ross McDonald and his California variant (the Lew Archer series). The sort of tough-guy fiction I am interested in is the defender-of-justice theme, in which a tough, smart, decisive, laconic hero defends right and justice against villainy and evil. In the Western genre, this theme was dominant all during the movies of the 1930's and 40's, all the marvelous films featuring the Coopers and the Waynes. On a juvenile level there was the *Lone Ranger* motif. In tough-guy detective or tough-guy urban movies, the leaders have of course been Clint Eastwood in the *Dirty Harry* series and Charles Bronson in the *Death Wish* vengeance movies.

Because of the great importance of its theme as against the grubby minutiae of detective fiction (e.g. atomic secrets as against some Mafia rub-out), spy fiction is inherently exciting, even when it is not tough-guy. Indeed, there are differences of only nuance and degree between non-tough-guy spy novels, such as those of the Pre-World War II originals: John Buchan and Eric Ambler, or the faster-paced post-war Helen MacInnes, and the modern tough-guy genre (e.g. Ian Fleming, Donald Hamilton or Robert Ludlum.) The poisonous equivalent of the Chandlers and the Ross McDonalds is the grubby, cynical both (or all)-sides-are-bad guy novels, exemplified by Graham Green, (in *Confidential Agent*) in the 1930's, and John LeCarre in the modern epoch. The main problem with the Greene-LeCarre works is that they become deadly boring, since if the spies on all sides are bored time-servers and *they* don't care about the outcome of the plot, why in hell should *we*? Sometimes, as in *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*, LeCarre can rise to the level of good spy fiction, but usually there is not much to hope for.

The question now is: if the hero is to be a tough, smart defender of justice, where do women fit into this heroic picture? Usually, they don't, and it is easy to see why. It simply will not *do* to have a tough hero slugging it out with bad guys, only to return at night to a home-cooked meal by the Little Woman. That's why in Western movies, from the *Lone Ranger* to Eastwood in *High Plains Drifter*, the hero is a rover, moving mythically onward across the plains, with women dropping out altogether. Either women play no role whatever in the life of the tough-guy hero, or he screws them with abandon, as in most tough-guy spy fiction (e.g. Ian Fleming's James Bond). But *marriage* won't do, and so Bond's new bride gets killed with lightning speed, or a John Wayne or another Western hero sets out to avenge the murder of his wife and children at the very beginning of the movie.

Of course, in the corrupt versions of the spy genre, women play a perverse role. It is typical of the elderly, tired, filled with self-disgust, George Smiley (LeCarre) that he is married, but that he is a brooding cuckold. In non-tough guy detective fiction, such as in Gregory McDonald's Inspector Flynn, he can of course have a sprawling family at home; McDonald's other hero, Fletch, is a wise-cracking hippie, so he can have a long-term, if wise-cracking relationship. In a few fascinating cases, authors get around the female problem by having the protagonist be a *heroine*. A non-tough-guy spy heroine, with a new lover in each book, is featured in the recent and excellent series by Evelyn Anthony. The only tough-guy heroines I can think of are in two marvelous series: Peter O'Donnell's Modesty Blaise novels, in which Modesty is a James-Bond-type heroine; and Walter Wager's *Blue* trilogy, featuring a smart, tough-guy, jazz-loving heroine. Where do *men* fit in? Essentially it's James Bond-in-reverse, but with more sentiment. Wager's tough-guy heroine, who sleeps with one new man per book, is mourning her long-dead lost love. O'Donnell solves the problem in a fascinating way: Modesty Blaise has a series of nice-guy, but confused and a bit wimpy lovers (again, one per book—in contrast with several for Bond *et al.*) But at the same time she has a constant male disciple, boon companion and assistant, tough, heroic Willie Garvin. Modesty and Willie love each other dearly, magnificently, and romantically, but there is never, ever any sex between them, since this would spoil Willie's pedestal image of someone who is essentially his mentor and superior. (If you are worried about Willie's sex life, don't because *he* has a series of lovers too.)

Of course, one way to bring in females, as is done in TV-detective series (e.g. *Mannix*, *Perry Mason*), is to have a loyal female aide and assistant. But in the nature of things, the focus is on the male hero, and furthermore there is never anything between him and his rather shadowy aid.

In the solid, prolific Sam Durell series (by Edward S. Aarons, and lately by Will Aarons), the CIA agent-hero has a true love and fellow agent, Dierdre Padgett, but either they quarrel or she appears in only a few books, in some of which Sam rescues Dierdre from the bad guys.

But the most interesting, bittersweet, way of tackling the female problem in tough-guy fiction is to have a tough-guy female (often a fellow CIA or whatever agent) romantically attached to the hero, but the female is proverbially *not tough enough*, and so has to be discarded at the end of the book. The *locus classicus* of this theme is the marvelous Matt Helm

series, by Donald Hamilton (please: forget the execrable Dean Martin movies). Especially in the first seven or eight of the twenty-book series so far, Helm finds a succession of worthy, tough-guy heroines, but they always buckle at the last, whining that Matt is just *too* darn tough. Matt is indeed the toughest of them all; toughness, by the way, is not to be confused with drawn-out violence and gore, as in so many current horror and science-fiction movies. Toughness is a matter of expertise and attitude of spirit, essential to the genuine hero. For example, a typical plot: Matt is assigned to kill a bad guy; he has a female assistant who also understands why the bad guy is bad and must be killed post-haste. But, at the climax, the female turns wimpy; Matt, for example, shoots him in the back, instead of fulfilling the heroine's romantic notion of a "fair" duel. Another whiner and loser in Matt's quest for a mate and help meet as tough as himself. (There is a key lesson which we all have learned, by the way, from Hamilton/Helm: if a bad guy is holding a gun either on yourself or on another good guy, shoot him right away and shoot to kill. None of this nonsense about "drop your gun or I'll shoot," or shooting him in the hand, à la the Lone Ranger: *no one* can shoot that accurately with any certainty. All else is namby-pamby liberalism.)

After the first eight or so Helm novels, there was a dropping off of some of the excitement of the earlier works, and in ringing the changes on the female-toughness theme. In his last novels, however, Hamilton is back in full-stride. Number 19, *The Revengers*, is a rather sweet work, a retrospective, in which Helms links up with several of his old girl friends in turn, each whom get rubbed out until he seems to have found his true love at last at the end of the novel. In Number 20, his most recent work (*The Annihilators*), however, she is killed at the beginning of the novel, and Matt is off in the pursuit of vengeance.

The woman as not-tough-enough theme appears also in *Death Wish II*, where Bronson, in love with a liberal lawyer, after wiping out the rapist and killers of his daughter and housekeeper, is abandoned by this namby-pamby female for being too tough. In *Sudden Impact*, we have an interesting

twist: the great Inspector Harry Callahan ("Dirty Harry") finds that the female lead has been murdering a series of people, but that she has done it in heroic vengeance against those who raped her and her young sister years ago. At the end, cleaving to the higher law of justice, Dirty Harry lets her go and walks off into the Bay Area night.

Sometimes, rarely, the untough female can find redemption by becoming tough. The major theme of the classic Western *High Noon* was the fact that Sheriff Gary Cooper's young bride, Grace Kelly, infected by Quaker pacifism, bitterly opposed Cooper's coming shootout with the bad guys. To the point of leaving him. But Kelly comes through in the end by overcoming her pacifism and killing one of the bad guys to save Coop's life.

The female lead can, of course, be very tough, but in a sense *too* tough; that is, she can turn out to be the major villain herself. In that case, of course, the tough-guy hero, pursuing right and justice to the very end, overcomes his emotions and gives her the works. In that superb movie *The Maltese Falcon*, Bogart gives the delectable Mary Astor the business by turning her into the cops. And in the first, blockbuster novel of the toughest-guy detective (as opposed to *spy*) of them all, Mike Hammer (Mickey Spillane) ends *I, the Jury* by shooting his true-turned-false love in the belly.

Well gee, I might hear it asked, can't the female problem be resolved by having two equal partners, male *and* female, slugging it out together for right and justice? Ideologically si, dramatically no. I can't see it working in the tough-guy genre. There were no movies more delightful than the Nick and Nora Charles *Thin Man* series (with William Powell and Myrna Loy), but these were films of frothy and high-style wit rather than tough-guy action. The closest this parity came to working was the great *The Avengers* TV series (during the Diana Rigg period), when Mrs. Emma Peel (Rigg) and Steed (Patrick Macnee) swatted the bad guys on behalf of British intelligence. But there Diana Rigg really outshone Macnee to take the central role, and the series was so swathed in outre effects and high-style elegance that one may question its "tough-guy" credentials. ‡

The Miss America Caper

The fascinating thing about the Vanessa Williams — Miss America caper — apart from the fact, of course, that S-E-X is involved — is that there are so many sides to the issue. There are the legal sides involved: of Ms. Williams, of the Miss America Pageant, and of *Penthouse* Magazine, and many more moral sides, including the above three, the left-feminist position of Susan Brownmiller, and many others.

Let us say, in the first place, that the least tenable position is that of La Williams herself. All the bilge about being "only 21" (what happened to the slogan, old enough to vote, and fight, at 18?), it happening *months* ago before she was mature, that she didn't know what she was doing, what she was signing, and all the rest! Pah! She clearly broke her contractual arrangement with the Pageant, and, therefore,

precisely got her comeuppance. And all that guff she slung around about being a "role model" for her race!

Giving Ms. Williams a tough race for last place in these moral sweepstakes is Susan Brownmiller and the Left Feminist movement. Left Feminism, which is a sort of Through-the-Looking-Glass reversion to Ultra-Right Puritanism, claims that Ms. Williams was an innocent victim of male-capitalist exploitation, but that the Pageant, though evil itself for its own quasi-pornography, was right in demanding that she relinquish the crown because of the contractual problem. But, to Ms. Brownmiller, the worst villains of the piece were Bob Guccione and *Penthouse*, who set out deliberately to oppress and destroy Ms. Williams, because oppression and destruction of females is precisely what pornography is all about.

The pornography as destruction and as "violence against women" argument is pure bilge. First, of course, the women and men who participate in pornography are doing so voluntarily, and usually with enthusiasm, considering the money involved. Secondly, only a small proportion of porno involves violence (unless, of course, as I suspect left-feminism does, one equates all heterosex with violence by definition!), and probably most of *that* involves female violence against men! How does the porno-as-violence-against-women theme apply in those cases? and how about male homosexual porn? Where is the violence-against-women *there*? Unfortunately, Brownmiller and other WAPs (Women Against Pornography) are having some success in having porno outlawed on this absurd "violation of civil rights of women" motif.

On the other hand, it is hard to take seriously the smarmy moral justifications of Robert Guccione and his aide, Ms. Keeton: that they are bringing liberation to all women, and specifically helping and advancing the career of Ms. Williams. Presumably, Ms. Williams has no need for such "help" done ver much against her wishes. We can also be spared all the claptrap about Guccione's "moral obligation to the *Penthouse* readers 'right to know'." Let's clear the air by getting one thing straight: *Penthouse* published the famous pictures of Ms. Williams, *not* to further some long-standing campaign to crush American womanhood, *nor* to liberate it; neither did it give a damn about its "moral obligation" to its readers. *Penthouse* published those pictures to make big bucks, and there is *nothing* particularly wrong with *that*. *Penthouse* served

the consumers in order to make heavy profits, and, while this "marketplace morality" may not be heroic morality, it should be sufficient to carry the day. And that, plus the voluntary participation in both the pictures and in signing the consent form by Ms. Williams, is enough to say that, in the outcome of this case, justice triumphed. Guccione had the perfect right to publish the pictures and to sell the issue, and the Miss America Pageant had both the right and the obligation to get the crown off Ms. Williams' head.

As for the Miss America pageant itself, it is *shlock* but it is charming *shlock*, and I hope it stays around a long time. It is equally idiotic to say that it constitutes "pornography," or that it ennoble American Womanhood. Its main problem is neither of these; its problem is that it has gotten increasingly dull, probably from taking itself too seriously. First of all, they should toss out the "talent" section, which has grown like Topsy, and inflicts upon the viewers what seem like hours of terrible singing or screeching violin playing. Secondly, the tone has gotten so High in recent years as to become almost unbearable. It was bad enough when the girls all announced their career goals to be a good wife, mother, an owner of a vine-covered cottage. It is much worse nowadays, when every one of them outlines her scholarly future with pinpoint precision: "I am going to be a Master of Communication Arts, and become associate editor of a magazine for design." Please, Miss America Pageant! Cut out the so-called talent, and the pronouncements for World Brotherhood, and the forest of prospective Master's degrees! Get back to basics!

Campaign Notes

What's wrong with the American masses? Since *when*, when in blazes, did they ever vote for a President because he was a "nice guy?" Nobody in his right mind, even the man's most fervent admirers, ever thought Harry Truman a "nice guy." Not "give 'em hell, Harry." Surely no one ever thought Nixon a nice guy. Roosevelt had charisma and was beloved, but nobody considered him "nice." The only authentic nice guy, Gerry Ford, was *defeated*, for Chrissake. Ike? Thought a nice guy, sure, but he was elected, dammit, for his alleged accomplishments, like winning World War II. What has the Great Cretin ever accomplished, except making a slew of bad movies? So what *is* it with this guy?

Optimism? OK, but look at Hubert Humphrey, who proclaimed himself the champion of the "politics of joy," who

was grinning like an ape all the time. *He* was defeated too. So go figure it. Has the country become some sort of Randian nightmare?

There was a brief moment of joy in this campaign, though it disappeared all too quickly. The wonder of seeing the Cretin exposed at long last, stumbling and fumbling his way through the first Great Debate, the Minnesota Whiner nailing him to the wall, smiling all the while. God bless Rich Jaroslavsky of the *Wall Street Journal*, the fearless reporter who, the day after the first debate, thought the unthinkable and said the unsayable. It was euphemistically called the "age factor." Call it rather the Cretin Factor.

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For a few days, the open conspiracy parted, and the media finally let the public in on the hidden truth, the truth that the Great Communicator is really a Great Cretin when he doesn't have a script placed in front of him. So for a while there was hope of a real contest, but then they propped him up, and probably put him to sleep for 24 hours before the Event. They scheduled it early in the evening so it wasn't past his bedtime, and then, though the Cretin stumbled and made little sense, he seemed OK and wasn't visibly addled, and that was enough, God Bless America and America's Cretin Candidate. The rest is history.

So let's join the Great Cretin in his boundless Optimism, and look at the bright side of this most dismal presidential campaign in modern times. My beloved grandma used to say that "everything works out for the best," and let's try to approach the election in that spirit and list the Good Things about this election that we can be Thankful for:

1. Never, ever again will we have to see or listen to the Minnesota Whiner. (Some comic said the other day that he just had a terrible nightmare: that *both* Reagan and Mondale won the election!) Exit Fritz the Pits.
2. Never, ever again will a Presidential candidate make the only clear statement of his campaign (or of *either* campaign this year): "I will raise your taxes." If any wise guy in the Mondale camp thought this a savvy political ploy, one hopes that this election will put that myth to rest.
3. Maybe the Democracy will no longer pander quite so

starkly and so wimpily to the special interests, the unions, the minorities et al. Certainly the allegedly mighty power of NOW and the Sisterhood of left-feminism turns out to be mainly hot air.

4. It is too much to expect that La Ferraro/Zaccaro will fade away, but at least the golden glow is considerably tarnished, now that the sainted immigrant, etc. family seems not at all so saintly.

5. Maybe, just maybe, the Democracy will realize that trying to sound as hawkish as Ronnie, and trying to compete in flag-waving with America's Party, ain't gonna work. So perhaps, at the next Democrat Convention we will *not* have to watch a sea of waving American flags, punctuated by everyone sobbing and hugging each other because Ferraro/Zaccaro achieved the golden breakthrough — and got clobbered.

6. Maybe, too, the Democracy will wise up, and realize that a party consisting of blacks, Jews, Hispanics, elderly union members, and people making under \$5000 a year, is *not going to win*. Hey, fellows, you gotta get some white males, some WASPS and Catholics, too. Can this election be called the Revolt of the WASPS?

So I conclude: maybe, just maybe, the American people aren't so dumb after all. After all, if *you* were a yokel from Boonville, USA, and all you knew about these two candidates is that one guy smiles a lot, and talks about American Standing Tall, while the other guy spends his time whining about the "poor and the elderly" and promising his darndest to raise your taxes, who would *you* vote for? ‡

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