

EDITORIAL
(continued from page 4)

"He was a constant participant at protest rallies, and since the end of the Vietnam war he has nodded through a prolonged melancholy. During his last days he rarely called his broker and even ceased to make threatening calls to his estranged wife, Yo Yo, who lives in London with his four-year-old son, Splendid Horizon. John's foul body will be cremated in an outdoor ceremony to be held at Stonehenge. The ceremony will be open to his fans. I hope the rocks fall on them. Good riddance to another loud-mouth from the 1960s."

And how I long to publish this one:

"Retired Harvard professor John Kenneth died last week en route to Gstaad, Switzerland, where the renowned proponent of socialism usually wintered amid herds of movie idols, millionaire playboys, and Arab real estate agents. Professor John Kenneth wrote 21 books, not one of which gave any evidence that he actually read books. His popularity initially derived from his maniac energies and from the fact that he was practically the only American economist who could actually write coherent English, though he seems to have thought in Chinese or Uralic. His sentences were elegant, but his books made no economic sense at all. They never were used by serious economists, though they sold successfully—mainly to readers who admired short titles or who had seen the orotund Professor spin his yarns on late-night television shows. At universities they were chiefly used in introductory American history courses, American historians being known for their economic ignorance.

Professor John Kenneth distinguished himself for being elegantly wrong on practically every issue of the day. Nevertheless, because of the extraordinary velocity of his pronunciamentos, people generally forgot his earlier gaffes. Professor John Kenneth was a superb example of those frenetic know-it-alls whose doctrinaire nostrums contribute so much to the economic and social problems they claim to be solving. John Kenneth was a lifelong botch."

Finally, though I have only sketched one, I should like to write an obituary about that characteristic capitalist genius who makes a huge fortune and then immures himself in a castle somewhere, venturing out solely to make more money, and to act in such a way as to discredit democracy, capitalism, and the human race. Generally he specializes in offending people. He manifests his public-spiritedness by maintaining useless shrines such as extensive formal gardens featuring rare and probably poisonous Ethiopian desert shrubs. He may be interested in some form of art, but he has almost no interest in the anatomy of the political, economic, or social system. In the unlikely event that he does have some understanding of the culture, he will lift not a finger to support it. To the contrary, he is then apt to donate an incredible sum to an organization dedicated to the destruction of the culture, for he suspects any system that has allowed him any room in which to operate. If he has any concern at all for his fellow men it is for the admiration of his enemies. They of course loathe him. When he dies, there remains but a hole where some wealth once was; for, if his family does not immediately squander

his wealth, his family and his foundations drain it into some useless organizations or into groups that are arrantly subversive. He is the best argument I know of for democratic socialism, and before we are stranded in that particular form of government I want to commemorate his achievements.

It is said that the novel is dead. These are the salad days of journalism and of the essay. Yet, considering the frauds and dolts who frolic amongst us, I expect that the obituary is the literary form of the future. This is certain to be the case if, as we are told, art represents the yearning of the cultivated minority; for what cultivated individual can read the daily headlines and not wish that the stars of said headlines were, in a word, *kaput*?

Literary interest in the obituary will of course be a terrific boon to my career, but allow me to suggest that it will represent something more. The literary pre-eminence of the obituary may very well mean the salvation of the American Republic. It strikes me as unlikely in the extreme that, for instance, many American politicians would act as graspingly and loutishly as they do if their obituaries were to become literary sensations, eventually appearing in anthologies of American literature. There would be far more statesmanlike restraint on Capitol Hill if the solons lived with the realization that hours after their departures for the hereafter America's future Faulkners might be pounding them into the stuff of literature.

I leave this to your contemplation and patiently await the day when the culturati recognize the artistic merits of the obituary. When they do I shall be ready. □

David Brudnoy

Brudnoy's Film Index

■ **The Apple Dumpling Gang:** The Latest Disney, this one stars Bill Bixby, Don Knotts, Susan Clark, some oh-so-adorable wee darling kids, Tim Conway, about six stereotypical situations, and an overdose of cutesy-poo. The tale has something to do with a huge gold nugget, some unpleasant robbers and some pleasant robbers, adult love, child affection, and... zzzzzz.

■ **Beyond the Door:** Son of Rosemary's Baby Meets the Exorcist's Nemesis' Disciple, in one of the less haunting of the recent scare-'em-uppers of the silvery screen. This one has no cohesiveness, no motivation, no terror, no acting, no dialogue ever spoken on this continent by this (human) race, no fun, no irony, no thought. It does have Juliet Mills, and

she's hideous. It also has some more of that technicolor vomit, saving the audience from producing its own.

■ **Breakout:** There's this perfectly dreadful jail down Mexico way, and this perfectly innocent chap (Robert Duvall) is rotting in it, courtesy his wicked uncle (John Huston) and, ho hum, and for no apparent reason, the CIA; so his high-strung wife (Jill Ireland) racks her brain for a Way Out. Eureka! Charles Bronson to the rescue—mustache, muscles, sneer, and a helicopter do the trick. *Breakout* breaks down in the second reel, and thereafter it's unintended comedy. Which breaks the spell.

■ **Coonskin:** Ralph Bakshi, perpetrator of *Fritz the Cat* and *Heavy Traffic*, again inflicts his poison-pen caricatures on au-

diences dying to see the Br'er Rabbit tales translated into 1970s "ghetto" parables. CORE has responded with a feverish censorship campaign, completely misunderstanding the film's purpose, which is not to savage Negroes, but to savage the whites who create the Amerikkka the Negroes live in. The animation is splendid, the live acting interspersed with it is O.K., the motivation is surely one of humanitarian concern for the underdog, the realization is squalid and obsessed, but somehow, despite everything working against it, the film is provocative, disturbing, and in some ways it is persuasive.

■ **Farewell, My Lovely:** Robert Mitchum as Philip Marlowe, and Charlotte Rampling as a wicked lady, bring splen-

did acting and appeal to this lovingly constructed evocation of 1930s crime thrillers (Raymond Chandler variety). Two twitchy little plots intertwine neatly in a grand finale that perfectly sums up an older, yet viable, conception of how to make a detective story work. Mitchum again shows his undiminished low-key skills, and Rampling, fresh from her disaster role in *Night Porter*, recoups her losses.

■ **Hennessey:** Guy Fawkes revisited. A bit of nicely contrived stuff about the Northern Ireland troubles, starring Rod Steiger as a chap whose personal losses of wife and daughter unhinge him, such that he flies to London to blow up the Queen—and Parliament. Both the IRA and Scotland Yard are desperate to catch him before he can ignite the bomb that would be heard 'round the world, the IRA for purely tactical motives. Lee Remick does a nice turn as Hennessey's island of safety in London, and Steiger gives a coolly restrained, unusually unmannered performance.

■ **Kamouraska:** A film out of French

Canada starring the exquisite Genevieve Bujold as a nineteenth century chick whose husband is a dolt and whose lover is an expatriate Yankee who'll stop at nothing to have her. Violence subsumes the movie, and yet the characterizations are wonderfully strong and believable. It is a cold barren world this film portrays, at times hauntingly so.

■ **The Land That Time Forgot:** Doug McClure as an American nautical whiz, and a pile of World War I limeys and Germans, plus, natch, a nubile lass, make common cause when, for plot reasons too complicated to withstand brief repeating, they wind up in a—surprise!—land that time forgot. Come dinosaur, come bubbatsoris, come diddho-whatsis, come cave man, come lava flow, come one and all, because it is just the movie your kids will love: full of blood and gore and envy and spite and misdirection and implausibility—all the juvenile virtues.

■ **Night Moves:** The invariably estimable Gene Hackman stars in an awkwardly pointless thriller by the usually

skillful Arthur Penn. Enough mixups and false leads and plots within plots for three movies; too much for one. Hackman's performance is like a cat chasing its tail: there's dynamism and motion and grace, but no purpose. It misses by inches, and in this genre a miss is as sad as a mile.

■ **A Pain in the A--:** Jacques Brel not, alas, singing, is the pain in the a-- (the dashes are in the title, as translated for mah fellow Merkins, courtesy the distributor), whose well-meant gaucheries upset a rifle-toting hit man something fierce. The film alternates drear with the giggle. Everyone but Brel falls a bit flat, but (here it comes) Brel is alive and well and showing a nice turn at slapstick.

■ **Undercovers Hero:** Peter Sellers as Hitler, an octogenarian French general, a Gestapo fanatic, a Nipponese prince, the President of France, and a British spy, re-writing history in a witless story of why the Nazis didn't burn Paris. It is the essence of prurience, and it shows that even a master comedian like Sellers is the prisoner of his material. □

The Bootblack Stand



by George
Washington
Plunkitt

Dear Dr. Plunkitt:

I recently began a campaign to raise the intellectual level of debate in the U.S. Senate by delivering a series of speeches outlining my current philosophical position. For years I have been loosely referred to as a liberal but in light of an intellectual metamorphosis that began for me in early 1972 when a Professor Donald Segretti sent me a packet in the mail urging me to read it and use it in my speeches, I think it is more proper to describe my thought as radically humane. That is to say, I am a direct philosophical descendant of Felix, the poet of yore, whose work Dr. Segretti sent me and who summed up his philosophy for all time in the insightful epithet: "Nothing human could ever leave a rash like that." Some of his other statements were: "If it secretes there's more to it than meets the eye," "Hell hath no fire like a woman squirmed," and "I never met a man I didn't like."

Felix's corpus commends itself to the modern condition (in 235 B.C., on April 12, he prophesied that "A great nation will rise up just south of Canada and be worsened by a man with a ski-jump nose"), so I have been using his quotes in my speeches. Unfortunately the level of

intellect on Capitol Hill is so low that many Senators just laugh rudely and throw spitballs. Even Senator Kennedy just looks at me and shakes his head. What can I do to get my colleagues to think more seriously? Is Felix too deep?

—Cordially,

Sen. John Tunney, B.A., LL.B.

Dear Senator Tunney:

Come now. I find it difficult to believe that you cannot attract any support in our redoubtable Senate. There are some remarkable minds in that body. May I suggest you pay a visit to Senator Gravel, Senator Montoya, and that Senator from Virginia who keeps forgetting his name. Incidentally, the poet's name is not Felix but Phelix.

—GWP

Dear Dr. Plunkitt:

On September 21 I released a report adducing evidence that only about six percent of the Navy's five hundred ships are fully combat-prepared. This evidence has been amassed since 1966. The press construed this as a criticism of Navy laxity. It was meant as nothing of the kind. My point was that if from 1966

America has survived with only six percent of the Navy's ships combat-prepared, it is obvious that the remaining ninety-four percent of the Navy's ships are superfluous and an unnecessary governmental expenditure.

The press is trying to make me out to appear as some sort of congressional grumbler. I am trying to make a serious point. If we were to cut our Navy by ninety-four percent there would be a lot more money to spend on what I call people needs and a lot more room in the ocean for whales.

—Sincerely,

Les (No Pun Intended) Aspin, M.C.

Dear Congressman Aspin:

Frankly I see no need for any navy whatsoever. No do I see the need for an army or air force. After all we have not had a truly big war for years, yet we keep building up this enormous military force. If we had some guarantee that we really were going to have a war I could see the purpose in this military expenditure, but it is unlikely we will have a war—not while there's an energy crisis. Thanks for your nice note. I look forward to seeing you the next time I visit the sanitarium.

—GWP