

cannot ever really do you in; you are no longer vulnerable, but like breathing, if you *stopped*, you might die! Yes, I *am* intense!"

Shortly thereafter she retreats from this point, explaining that she exercises not because she fears death, but because she fears aging, and that she fears aging because it means the loss of sex—"of femininity, of attraction between me and a man."

Yet to Brown, sex is meaningful precisely because it is the furthest extreme from death. She describes it as power. "Kings and lesser men," she writes, "have been toppled by this power of ours, but you and I don't want to destroy anybody, we just want to enjoy a man's being totally hooked on us." It is this that Helen Brown cannot bear to lose. It is the ebbing away of this most fundamentally reassuring of all capabilities that terrifies her into huffing and puffing, and submitting herself to plastic surgery, and "starving" herself to 105 pounds—all in the name of "staying female."

So desperate is she for the kind of affirmation that sex gives her that

she allows it to override both her reason and her moral sensibilities—no merely sensual need would make such a slave of an otherwise deliberate woman. Her treatment of adultery is here revealing and pathetic. Brown makes it plain that she knows exactly how wrong and destructive extramarital affairs are. In the very course of her advice on the logistics of carrying one out, she indicates her awareness of both the instincts and the arguments that such behavior violates. A few pages later, she eloquently describes how she would feel if she discovered her husband to be cheating on her, and then explains to single women that they should consider married men to be at their disposal. "When you're single," she writes, "it's important to have heterosexual male companionship. You must *connect* with men. . . . You should not go without sex too long. . . . [Married men] are *there* during a drought. You can 'use' them selectively."

She makes no effort to rationalize this staring moral contradiction (in fact, she confronts it almost ostentatiously). She is simply helpless before

the fear of erosion that overtakes her without the constant reinforcement of sex. This is the offensive and disturbing aspect of *Having it All*.

It is disturbing, but not surprising, for this is a woman whose ambition has fixed exclusively on the world of the present. Brown has no children. She herself avows that her work is not enduring; in one anecdote, she explains that *Cosmopolitan's* virtue is in its consistency, rather than in the contribution of memorable writings. Helen Brown, in short, has absolutely no stake in the future. Why shouldn't she fear mortality?

But consider the poignance of her position now. She is 59 years old, and exercise isn't going to do it forever. She's about ready to confront her first full face-lift. In the photos released upon the publication of *Having it All*, she already looks a bit freakish—a no-longer-young woman in girl's clothing. After a lifetime of triumphing over seemingly impossible obstacles—59 years of successfully buying time—she is soon to be confronted with something against

which no discipline in the world will prevail.

Which comes back, perhaps, to the reason for *Having it All*.

Brown devotes her last chapter to broad reflections on life and happiness, and it is a serious effort. Her voice, here, is that of an older woman passing along her accumulated wisdom to a generation of girls for whom she feels affection and concern, and the voice sounds sincere. Helen Brown would have us understand that this book is a thoughtful and generous work, and I believe that it is.

It makes sense, after all, for her to make such an effort now. What else can an intelligent woman in her position do, as the passage of time forces itself upon her awareness? She can't make herself love children, if in fact she does not love children, and she can't make herself trust in the transcendent, if in fact she does not so trust, but she can try to write something real, and that is what she has done. In the end, *Having it All* is a touching piece of work, and deserves to be taken account of, when her life is reckoned up. □



## CLUB AWAY FROM HOME

Where can a civilized man go these days for a drink and a little good talk without exposing himself to the cafe society, to nostalgics *de la boue*, and to the general auditory nuisance known politely as "entertainment"? To his club and nowhere else. Lord help him if he does not have a club.

Detroit, like many decaying Midwestern cities, is full of dinosaurs, among which are its clubs. Max Beerbohm once stood before one of these dinosaurs in Edwardian London as it fell to the wrecking ball. Mourning both the splendid facade and the fraternity it had long protected from the general public, he waxed sentimental. "My heart deplored that they must perish. The falling edifice had not been exactly a home. It had been even more than

*T. John Jamieson is a Richard Weaver Fellow at Northwestern University.*

that. It had been a refuge from many homes. It had been a club." America's clubs may have preserved their facilities intact, but not their character. They stand in ruins insofar as they admit women. I am afraid that they have lapsed to the status of saloons. Of course they have inflated their membership vastly in order to pay the bills. No sane, whole gentleman of parts from the nineteenth century would consider calling one of these establishments a club. What exactly would it be a refuge from?

Nevertheless it is in Detroit that a piece of the nineteenth century has survived in the form of the club. It does not admit women (except for the Valentine's Day party) and it has not inflated its membership to pay the bills. It is a clandestine elite of curmudgeons in the manner of Cleveland Amory's fictional "Fortnightly";\* in Burke's phrase it is "the little platoon we belong to in society." It is called the Prismatic

Club, and it meets every Saturday night in a Victorian house lined with oil portraits of its past presidents. A member reads a paper on a subject of his choosing as the other members nod off in rocking chairs; then everybody rushes into the dining room to pour himself a drink from the great array of bottles on the Round Table, which really is round. Yes, if you want to converse with well-established establishmentarians, brilliant amateurs, and genuine eccentrics, you can pour your own damned drink. This is the Last of the Clubs . . . and the first, in fact, for it was founded by transcendentalist refugees from New England in 1866.

Yet the original constitution of that year stipulates that "water shall be the only beverage served." One imagines that this rule lasted no

\*See Amory's *The Trouble with Nowadays: A Curmudgeon Strikes Back* (Arbor House, 1979).

longer than the state of grace of our progenetrix Eve. Perhaps it took the transcendentalists some time to adjust to the manly freedom of the Midwest. Now when Levi Barbour, lawyer and butterfly collector, directed in his will that there should always be space in this house for the Prismatic Club, its portraits, and its safe, it was 1926—and from 1919 to 1933 there was only one reason for any organization that was not a bank to own a safe. An annual dinner program from the Twenties shows a particularly degenerate-looking Prism (i.e., Prismatic member) sharing libations with a goatish devil: the cartoon's caption reads, "Making the World Safe for Hypocrisy."

Scotch mostly prevails; Irish, bourbon, and lesser breeds of whiskey are tolerated. The honorary consul of San Marino will occasionally share the latest vintage of "my uncle the Duke," a very respectable Chianti. Some genuine and quite

illegal absinthe appeared on the night of a discussion of Oscar Wilde.

The effect of alcohol on the club's ability to function has been formulated: "the blackball is mightier than the highball." Unfortunately, the membership committee is trying to water the blackballs. I am beginning to sympathize with one of the curmudgeons from long before my time, a president of the American Philosophical Society, who nearly killed the club by blackballing everybody they put up. Somebody has to do it, he must have thought. But he induced a constitutional crisis resulting in an increase from one to two blackballs to blast the hopes of a would-be member. This is where the watering process began. By the way, this is supposed to be a secret ballot; but since the blackballs are actually cubes (to assist the bumbling in keeping things straight) you can tell when one goes into the box because it thuds. Just as well—we all know from experience that secret ballots encourage irresponsibility.

If you are wondering about the

name, "prismatic" has to do with bright colors and facets. Among the facets are an Episcopal priest, a relaxed traditionalist who in a former life was a jazz pianist; a urologist who will tell you by sight how many cc's per minute a sticky bottle is pouring and also why fifteen of the first seventeen American Presidents had no children; an octogenarian Buckminster Fuller type who builds electric cars in his garage; a haiku-spewing surgeon; an ear doctor who claims that Caesar suffered not from epilepsy but from Meniere's disease; an Italian diplomat who quotes d'Annunzio. Alas, a pediatrician named Dr. Johnston, who specialized in martinis and Dr. Johnson, has just died; he was an index to the literary taste of a couple of generations ago—Chesterton, Edwin Arlington Robinson, Willa Cather, and Bernard de Voto were among his favorite writers. The lawyers and librarians specialize in local history, and could well collaborate in an authoritative account of nineteenth-century Detroit brothels. This all makes for interesting conversation, but the Prisms did not set out to be

"interesting." They are naturally obsessed.

Just as conversation has its ups and downs, the quality of the papers varies too, and this has always been the case. At the turn of the century, Levi Barbour and his cohorts were literally traveling the world over to research their talks; on the other hand, nineteenth-century papers survive in the archives with titles like "Bridget: A Revery" and "The Girls I Left Behind." One old Prism was an amateur mad-scientist who spoke on his theory that the solar system really revolved the other way and on his very early experiments in manufacturing diamonds. Old Dr. Whitaker was one for blood and guts—he would show early color films of his own pioneering surgical techniques that made the Prisms bend over and reach for the Pewabic pottery spittoons.

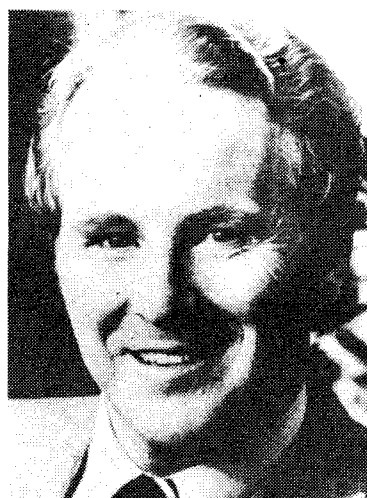
On the Friday night closest to the anniversary of the Battle of New Orleans, the Prisms take themselves out to dinner at the Detroit Club in black tie and toast Andrew Jackson, who is, quite mysteriously to them, their patron. Before inaugurating a

new president, they unveil a portrait of the outgoing one and hand him a broom, since he becomes the new janitor. The cult of Andrew Jackson goes back to the nineteenth century too, when the club was a haven for reform politicians and *Free Press* editors; today there are more Tories in the club than Democrats. This tradition has been maintained for the sake of maintaining tradition; yet a minority in the club would chuck Jackson gladly and give one of the Adamses a turn. Not that Jackson has been treated with that much respect—one year, in the confusion, his portrait nearly fell out of the window, and sustained a nasty gash in the throat. Portraits are good for showing symbolic respect or disrespect, like icons. I confess that I was once part of a conspiracy to rehang Walt Whitman (an object of devotion to the founders) in the bathroom.

If you would like to become a member of the Prismatic, I suggest that you perform a noble deed likely to commend you to the club's notice, such as discovering legal evidence that will send the present mayor of Detroit to prison. Why I cannot say, but the Prismatic's first honorary member was Brigham Young. The archives contain his reply to our invitation, in which he makes his excuse for not attending the annual dinner: he has married a wife. Historians infer that it was his twenty-seventh.

In this august and distinguished journal's previous incarnation, *The Spectator* of Joseph Addison and Richard Steele (1711-1714), Addison wrote of a club of dram-drinkers dating back to the Civil Wars that had been continuously in session since then, by means of a circle of presidents for each of the twenty-four hours—with a brief hiatus during the Great Fire of London—so that if a member "be disposed to take a whet, a nooning, an evening draught, or a bottle after midnight, he goes to the club, and finds a knot of friends to his mind." This was the Everlasting Club, which, "toward the close of 1700 . . . had under consideration whether they should break up or continue their session; but after many speeches and debates, it was at length agreed to sit out the other century."

Though the Prismatic meets only on a Saturday night, it has already survived riots, muggings, leaky roofs, and falling plaster, and will probably sit out this century in hope of a better. Because it would rather die than change, it will probably live. □



Former Congressman Robert Dornan [R., Calif.] is one of the participants in the Politics Program at Christendom. Solidly trained, he bases his political activity squarely on the natural law.

**Do you want to see limitations  
on "Big Government"?**

**YOU CAN LEARN TO MAKE  
IT HAPPEN IN  
THE POLITICS PROGRAM  
CHRISTENDOM COLLEGE**

Christendom College is a four-year, co-ed, solidly Catholic liberal arts college located in Northern Virginia, with a 74-acre campus on the Shenandoah River.

**Call or Write  
Director of Admissions  
Christendom College  
Route 3, Box 87  
Front Royal, VA 22630  
703-636-2908**

- ❑ Internships with P.A.C.'s and congressmen provide first-hand political experience in Washington
- ❑ On-campus Practica with nationally known political leaders
- ❑ Classical and Catholic courses in Politics and Economics
- ❑ A Major Program, leading to the B.A.





THE TALKIES

## BAD BOYS INSIDE OUT

by Martha Bayles

Written by a 16-year-old girl named S.E. Hinton, the youth novel *The Outsiders* became a minor classic in the late 1960s—especially in junior high school English classes, where it was frequently used to spur discussions of how poverty leads to crime. Faithfully re-created in a new film by Francis Ford Coppola, *The Outsiders* is the story of two teenage gangs in Tulsa, Oklahoma: the middle-class “Socs” and the lower-class “Greasers.” Needless to say, the heroes are Greasers: Ponyboy, an orphan who lives with his older brothers; Dallas, a drifter who has been wrongly jailed; and Johnny, an unwanted child whose parents beat him whenever the Socs aren’t doing so.

In a way which seems unlikely in Tulsa, or indeed anywhere else in America, this conflict is without ethnic or cultural dimension. It is pure class oppression: a textbook case of the affluent taunting the poor simply for being poor. And as befits the sensibility of 16-year-old novelists—and apparently Coppola as well—the poor respond to this taunting with noble sadness, noble resentment, and noble defiance. When the Socs try to drown Ponyboy for talking to a Soc girl, Johnny kills one of them. Then Ponyboy and Johnny have to skip town, since nobody would take their word against the Socs’. The only other crime in the story comes later, after Johnny dies of burns suffered trying to save a group of small children from a fire. Mad with grief and class resentment, Dallas robs a store and allows himself to be shot, somewhat gratuitously, by the police.

C. Thomas Howell as Ponyboy, Ralph Macchio as Johnny, and Matt Dillon as Dallas seem talented enough. But the film lavishes too much attention on their physical appearance, expressed through stylized, overly choreographed posturing and horseplay; and not enough on their minds. The role of pure victim is just not that interesting, and

Martha Bayles is film critic for *The American Spectator*.

these young actors’ efforts to convey innocent suffering through Brylcreem, ripped T-shirts, and tight jeans end up making them look vacant but sensual, like Jordache ads or gay pornography. There is no tension and very little drama, because although they are “branded by society,” we know that none of these adorable angels is capable of doing anything wrong.

The other juvenile delinquent film of the season, *Bad Boys*, directed by Rick Rosenthal, actually begins on a similar note: a succession of snapshots of the main characters as infants, toddlers, preadolescents. Like the taken-at-school photographs which sometimes appear in newspapers alongside reports of teenage crime, these pictures show only the juvenile—not the delinquent. The mark of criminality has yet to appear, although we know from the title that it will. Evil will creep in. The question is, from where?

Having seen *The Outsiders*, and any number of other j.d. movies going back to *Rebel Without a Cause*, we expect the same old answer every time. Evil creeps, trickles, and frequently gushes in from the environment—parents, peers, society—to do its corrupting work on the unsullied clay of youth. Rare indeed is the j.d. movie which suggests a different answer: that evil might originate within the clay itself; or that juvenile delinquents might be made out of that peculiar clay—humanity—which possesses the freedom to accept or reject evil on its own, without being totally conditioned by its surroundings.

One look at Sean Penn, who plays Mick O’Brien in *Bad Boys*, and we see immediately what is missing in *The Outsiders*. Our first glimpse of Mick is through the smashed glass of a car window, as he reaches in to snatch a lady’s purse. Then he roughs up a man who tries to chase him, buys a gun, and proceeds with a plan to rip off some black and

Hispanic drug dealers. At one point he comes home and finds his mother in the bathtub with a strange man; but unlike the Greasers, he doesn’t go all wide-eyed and hurt like a moppet in a child-abuse poster. Not Mick O’Brien. He narrows his eyes, lights a joint, and begins to play with his gun. And later, when his mother somewhat guiltily asks him to turn down the stereo, he turns it up.

Small gestures, but brought off by Penn, they place *Bad Boys* on a completely different footing from *The Outsiders*. Mick’s mother may be promiscuous, and he may come from the wrong side of the El, but these facts don’t make his choices for him. Of course no actor can convey the abstract concept of free will, but there are degrees to which actors can appear to be the conscious authors of their own fates. And in stories about crime, it is a lot more dramatic, not to say accurate, to assume that the criminal is, on some level, a morally responsible being.

Mick’s girlfriend, whom he loves, tells him he is foolish and reckless, and he knows she is right. He also knows what he’s doing is wrong, but out of willfulness and perversity, he does it anyway. Similarly, Paco, the Hispanic pusher, deliberately ignores his affectionate, worrying mother. It is true neither boy has a father, but their world is not without positive influences. Nonetheless they are too cocky and selfish to resist the temptation of fast, easy money. Paco sets up the drug deal, which Mick tries to ambush. Before they know it, they are in a shootout, and as Mick drives away, he runs over Paco’s 8-year-old brother. Arrested and convicted, Mick goes to the state reformatory, while Paco swears blood revenge.

Perhaps in Coppola’s and Hinton’s imagination, a state reformatory would be full of sorrowful angels. Not this one. Mick and another new arrival face a gauntlet of clapping, chanting, spitting abuse just to walk to their cells. And the place is dominated by a pair of sadistic trustees who murder the other new-

comer after he objects to being raped. There is a false note, a rather serious one, in the person of Mick’s Jewish-comedian cellmate, played by Eric Gurry. The kid belongs in a living room, entertaining doting aunts and uncles, not building bombs in his science lab of a cell. He is meant to provide comic relief, but his style is so out of context it almost destroys the film.

The plot is heavy-handed: Mick vanquishes the evil trustees and gets their job, appearing to rehabilitate himself just a little. His girlfriend is raped by Paco, and Mick escapes to flee to her side, only to be picked up by the world-weary social worker who’s been trying to talk sense into him. Shortly thereafter, Paco arrives at the reformatory, primed for a battle royal before being transferred to another facility. It’s all quite melodramatic, especially as the tension mounts toward the final confrontation—the inmates placing bets, the audience presumably on the edge of their seats.

But throughout it all, Sean Penn’s performance remains the opposite of

**The information specialists at Phillips Petroleum will help you. Call us.**

Bill Adams	(918) 661-5224
Dan Harrison	(918) 661-5204
Jere Smith	(918) 661-4982
Susan Stoffle	(918) 661-4974
Dave Dryden	(918) 661-4987
Bill Flesher	(918) 661-6760
Research & Development	
Jerry Regan	(918) 661-8727



BARTLESVILLE, OKLAHOMA 74004