

In the end, of course, Tower ran into problems not only because of his personal life. There was also the matter of his consulting with defense contractors on arms control matters right after he had served as an arms control negotiator. Sam Nunn, writing in the *Washington Post*, admitted there was "no evidence that Sen. Tower provided his clients with classified information." But so much for that: "This situation,"

said Nunn, "created the *appearance* of using public office for private gain." Those are Nunn's italics, designed to shore up a weak case that could produce "no evidence" of any wrongdoing.

Like Nunn and many of his colleagues, Washington journalism has been intoxicated (if I may use the word) with appearances and perceptions and the like. But these terms take us into a

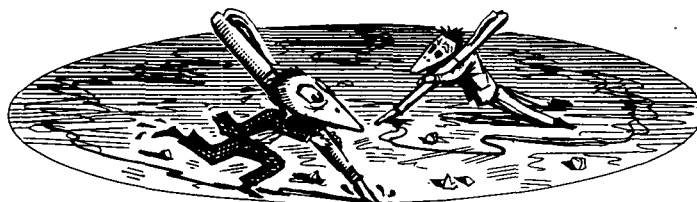
messy, subjective area. Who's to say what appears which way? Whose perception counts? Are all perceptions created equal?

Columnist Richard Cohen wrote a March 5 piece in the *Post's* Outlook section in which he did a mischievous thing—he applied the appearance standard to journalism! Noting that the press would have trouble living up to this "most elastic of standards," Cohen

then asked his profession to consider "whether the standards it has set for others are unreasonable."

A good question. Unless journalism—and Sam Nunn and his colleagues—starts insisting on a more objective standard than mere "appearance" provides, few people in any line of work will be in a position to avoid being charged with unethical behavior. □

## AMONG THE INTELLECTUALOIDS



### A TIME TO STAND

by Joe Queenan

There is a time to run and a time to stand, a time to flee and a time to fight, a time to bleat and a time to roar. There is a time to hedge one's bets, a time to play it safe, a time to hide one's bushel beneath one's bushel basket. But there is also a time to reap and a time to sow, and yes, a time in the affairs of men which leads on to fortune. Or was that a tide? Whatever the case, the time has come when I can no longer remain silent on the subject of Salman Rushdie. The time has come for me to lay bare my soul and speak my piece, knowing full well the immense personal danger I risk in doing so. Here, now, I will say what I have to say—and if this be folly, then let the devil take the hindermost!

I admit that I have been slow to respond to the crisis. I am, in fact, the 234,567th American writer to express his views on *l'Affaire Rushdie*, meaning that only a couple of copy editors from *Field and Stream* and the guy who writes "The Phantom Passenger" for the *Philadelphia Daily News* remain to be heard from. I do not take pride in this dilatory moral pace. But there have been extenuating circumstances, and in the following paragraphs, I would like to discuss them.

1. *I was out of town.* When the news of the Ayatollah's death threat against Salman Rushdie broke, I was visiting the Jack Nicklaus Academy of Golf in Orlando, Florida, trying to straighten out my swing. I had already committed myself to four days of complete and utter relaxation, so not once during my visit did I read a newspaper. True, I did

see a few reports about the riots in Pakistan and Iran on the local TV broadcasts, but Florida State had just lost a heartbreaker to Louisville a couple of nights before, and I was sure that the local media were hyping the Rushdie death threat to take Floridians' minds off another disappointing Seminoles' season. Not until I returned to my home in New York and saw the horrible news covered in big-time, professional, Gannett newspapers, did I realize how badly I had misjudged the situation.

2. *I thought we were supposed to speak out in declining order of fame.* It was my wholehearted conviction that the game plan was: First, novelists would have their say; then newspaper columnists; then the editors of major newsweeklies; then contributing editors to prominent intellectual digests; then poets; then all editors emerituses; and only then financial writers like me. Were it not for the sake of protocol, I would have spoken up a whole lot sooner. Honest.

3. *I thought we were going in alphabetical order.* By the time I realized what was going on, E. L. Doctorow had spoken his mind, Nat Hentoff had spoken his mind, Christopher Hitchens had spoken his mind, and Norman Mailer had spoken his mind. I figured I should wait until Joyce Carol Oates and Marty Peretz and John Podhoretz had expressed their views before expressing my own.

4. *I couldn't get the book.* Rajiv Gandhi banned the book without ever having read it. Ayatollah Khomeini put out a contract on Rushdie without ever having read it. George Bush said the book was deeply offensive without ever

having read it. I'd be damned if I was going to join this rush to judgment without having at least read the book that had caused all this fuss. But Waldenbooks had taken it off its shelves, so I couldn't get a copy.

5. *Even when I finally did get the book, I had other commitments.*

One day I got a call from an editor at *The American Spectator*.

"You usually have a lot to say for yourself, so how about writing something about Rushdie for us?"

"Fine," I said, "but I don't have the book."

"We'll send you a copy."

"Fine," I said, "but the mail service in this town is really bad, so if it gets lost, don't blame me."

"We'll Federal-Express it."

"Fine," I said, "but if the delivery man leaves it on the porch when I'm not here, don't blame me if some teenage punk steals it and I never get back to you."

"We'll understand," he said.

"Fine," I said, "but I should point out that I'm changing jobs and I have lots of deadlines to meet, and my sister just had an operation. Also, you guys pay peanuts. So it could take me a while to write the story."

"Fine," he said.

He sent the book, but the kids hid it, and I only just found it under the bed.

6. *My wife threw a fit.*

"You're really incredible, you know that, Joe?" she exploded when she found out that I was prepared to go public with my thoughts on Salman Rushdie. "Last year you wrote a story about the Mafia. Then you wrote a story about the guy who tried to kill

Ivan Boesky. And then you wrote a story about international arms dealers."

"You mustn't forget that controversial story I wrote about outrageous 12b-1 fees on no-load mutual funds," I reminded her.

"Right. Well, I've had it up to here, buster. If you get assassinated, that means I'll have to watch Pee-Wee every Saturday morning with the kids. I'm getting sick of this stuff, Joe."

For the sake of domestic tranquility, I finally agreed to refrain from offering aid and comfort to the embattled author. I stood by in silence throughout Salman Rushdie's lonely ordeal as thousands and thousands of other more courageous, more principled, better-dressed writers flocked to his cause. Susan Sontag. Norman Mailer. Tom and Dicky Smothers.

But now the time has come when my silence must end. The time for temporizing, for weighing one's options, for playing it safe, is past. The time has come to speak boldly and forthrightly, to join with my brothers and sisters in arms and say what I have to say about Salman Rushdie, his book, and the abyss he will gaze into every day for the rest of his life.

And what I have to say is this: There has to be a better way. Things simply can't go on like this. We must love one another or die. *Oi vey*. Let he who is without sin cast the first stone. It takes one to know one. *El condor pasa*. If you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem. *Eli, eli, lamasa-batanna*.

Next month, I will share my thoughts on Joe Stalin. □

Joe Queenan is a senior editor at Forbes.

# THE TALKIES



## TALES FROM THE CITY

by Bruce Bawer

*New York Stories* sounded like a good idea. Imagine—a trilogy of short films directed by Martin Scorsese, Francis Coppola, and Woody Allen, set in a city which all three directors have captured memorably on celluloid but which scores of their inferiors have, in recent years, reduced to a collection of visual clichés and caricatures. What a wonderful opportunity, one thought, to rescue this subject matter from the Hollywood hacks and to offer three striking visions of *real* metropolitan life. And what richer trove of material could there be? As they used to say on “Naked City,” there are eight million stories here, and a considerable percentage are downright fascinating.

Why, then, is *New York Stories* so bad? Mainly because its directors have chosen not to look beyond the aforementioned clichés. In “Life Lessons,” Scorsese—whose taut, ironic *After Hours* represented for many of us the last word on SoHo and its art scene—goes over to the enemy, as it were, with a flaccid, flabbergastingly earnest rendering of the ultimate SoHo cliché. Written by the ever-vulgar Richard Price, “Life Lessons” depicts the frantic attempts of Lionel Dobie (Nick Nolte), a successful middle-aged abstract expressionist, to keep his beloved young protégée, Jean Paulette (Rosanna Arquette), from returning to her white-bread family somewhere beyond the Hudson. There’s not a fresh touch in either character: Dobie is your standard possessive, misogynistic, tempestuous, egocentric painter-in-a-movie, and Jean Paulette is a one-dimensional version of, say, Zelda Fitzgerald or *Reds’* Louise Bryant, the jealous, neurotic female appendage who takes her lack of artistic talent out on the gifted man who loves her.

Jean Paulette’s character is completely summed up in such lines as “Just tell me if you think I have any talent or if you think I’m just wasting my time!” And: “Am I good? Will I ever be good?” It’s hard to say which is more

annoying: Arquette’s endless nagging to this effect (she really doesn’t have anything else to say or do in the film) or Nolte’s interminable slopping of paint onto a wall-sized canvas while his boom-box blares out hyperloud, and *very* abrasive, rock music. It must be said, though, that while Arquette—a whiny, irritating actress of extremely limited range—does absolutely nothing for the picture (no, Rosanna, you never *will* be any good), Nolte at least invests Dobie with a degree of energy, humor, and pathos. As for Scorsese, Congress should pass a law making it a federal crime for him ever again to take a movie camera into a loft.

From Scorsese’s SoHo, we move to Coppola’s Upper East Side—though his segment, “Life Without Zoe,” might just as easily be set in Rome or Paris or Mexico City. It is an indication of his lack of seriousness about this assignment that Mr. C wrote the script with his teenaged daughter Sofia. It’s loosely based on *Eloise* (and loose it most assuredly is), the main difference being that the twelve-ish, poor-little-rich-girl heroine of this piece (Heather McComb) lives not at the Plaza Hotel but at the Sherry-Netherland across the street. The daughter of a famous flautist (Giancarlo Giannini) and a celebrated photographer (Talia Shire), both of whom are usually out of town, Zoe is your typical precocious movie kid, whose daily digestion of *Women’s Wear Daily* and inability to catch the school bus on time (she always ends up taking a cab) we’re supposed to find charming.

Needless to say, we don’t. This segment is worse than Scorsese’s—not only thin but drastically uneven, clumsily told, and overflowing with a thoroughly fake cuteness. It requires a special kind of talent to make a satisfactory movie of this sort—a talent for taking your story and characters seriously while maintaining a light touch. (George Roy Hill, for one, carried it off nicely in *The World of Henry Orient*.) The man who directed *The Godfather*, *The Conversation*, and *Apocalypse Now*, however, has yet to

demonstrate that he knows the meaning of the phrase “light touch”; he plainly looked upon this project not as a challenge to expand his directorial range but as a chance to “have fun,” to be glib and self-indulgent, while varying little from his usual heavy style (and, one might add, allowing cameraman Vittorio Storaro to employ a rich, golden-yellow palette more appropriate to a film version of Puccini). In this age of synthetic New York films, “Life

Without Zoe” is as phony as they come.

After these two strikeouts, Woody Allen’s bunt single looks almost like a home run. “Oedipus Wrecks”—the director’s first comedy in years—is a genuinely funny *jeu d’esprit* about Sheldon Mills (Woody Allen), a partner in a big midtown law firm whose tiny, tirelessly kvetching Jewish mother (Mae Questel) is the bane of his existence. Rather than give away the plot, I’ll simply say that Allen’s is

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