

CURRENT WISDOM

Chicago Tribune

How *The American Spectator* and *National Review* ruined the reputation of John Updike and set the Feminist Terror upon him, as reported by Ms. Garry Wills:

On the subject of snobbery, I did not object to Rabbit's social standing but to Updike's—that of the reactionary dandy trying to disguise an aesthete's cult of violence by using a working man as his stalking horse.

The snobbishness is Updike's, who resembles William Buckley and Tom Wolfe in the glorification of greed and violence as a form of patriotism. No wonder right-wing journals such as *The American Spectator* and *National Review* called *Rabbit at Rest* Updike's masterpiece.

It will not do to say that Rabbit the wife-beater is just expressing his own misogyny, not Updike's. Even some who praised the novel—in *New York* magazine and *TLS*—admitted the narrative voice is as misogynist as the character being described.

The novelist Mary Gordon faces this issue squarely in a book of essays that will appear next spring, where she says the problem of misogyny must enter into a judgment of Updike as fully as the problem of anti-Semitism enters into one's response to Ezra Pound.

[November 10, 1990]

Nation

A curious outburst from Christabel Hitchens, occasioned by his avid perusal of the greatest presidential memoir in the history of the world:

These pathetic, self-aggrandizing and self-pitying lies, taken at random from *An American Life: The Autobiography*, are no disgrace to the ex-President who "uttered" them. It cannot be helped, with Ronald Wilson Reagan, that every word he says is a lie, including the words "and" and "but." The truly disgraceful paragraph in the book comes not in the main text but in the acknowledgments:

Robert Lindsey, a talented writer, was with me every step of the way. . . . The wonderful and thoroughly professional team at Simon and Schuster, under the able leadership of CEO Dick Snyder, were there day and night. . . . Editor in chief Michael Korda patiently read every word time and time again, dotted every *i* and crossed every *t*—no one could ask for a better editor. Charlie Hayward, Alice Mayhew, and Jack McKeown were also of invaluable assistance. And Mort Janklow, my literary agent. . . .

Yeah, yeah. My question is this: Why are none of the above bringing suit against Reagan for defamation? The book he has "written" is a digest and concoction of easily detectable and contemptible falsehoods. Do the above-named really choose to be implicated? . . . Snyder, Korda, Mayhew and the rest are people of consequence in the publishing industry. None of them, as far as I know, have any difficulty paying the rent or taking a vacation. How can they make themselves accomplices to a fraud?

[November 26, 1990]

New York Times

Beginning with an extraordinarily dubious statement even by her standards, Miss Anna Quindlen, poet, philosopher, professional womanist, and *Times* columnist, indulges the feminist fevers for an entire column unrelieved even by an arf-arf, but quite properly concluded in hate:

My daughter is two years old today. She is something like me, only better. Or at least that is what I like to think. . . .

Little by little, in the 20 years between my eighteenth birthday and her second one, I learned how to live in the world. The fact that women were now making 67 cents for every dollar that a man makes—well it was better than 1970, wasn't it, when we were making only 59 cents? The constant stories about the underrepresentation of women, on the tenure track, in the film industry, in government, everywhere, had become commonplace. The rape cases. The sexual harassment stories. The demeaning comments. Life goes on. Where's your sense of humor? . . .

Maybe someday, years from now, my daughter will come home and say, "Mother, at college my professor acted as if my studies were an amusing hobby and at work the man who runs my department puts his hand on my leg and to compete with the man who's in the running for my promotion who makes more than I do I can't take time to have a relationship but he has a wife and two children and I'm smarter and it doesn't make any difference and some guy tried to jump me after our date last night." . . .

No. Today is her second birthday and she has made me see fresh this two-tiered world, a world that, despite all our nonsense about feminism, continues to offer less respect and less opportunity for women than it does for men. My friends and I have learned to live with it, but my little girl deserves better. She has given me my anger back, and I intend to use it well.

[November 22, 1990]

Orange County Register

One of the world's greatest newspapers captures the essence of Mrs. Carol Fennelly, disheveled femme fatale of the deceased nuisance Mitch Snyder, as Mrs. Fennelly laments the lack of necrophiliacs among her male cohorts:

"Forty-one isn't ancient, realize," she said recently, "but at the same time it's not twenty either. My kids are grown, so I have a degree of freedom. But look at who I am. I'm what they call a strong woman. . . . And so I'm having to deal with the very real possibility that I'll have to live the rest of my life as a single woman. . . . How many men are going to put up with a woman who goes to jail and dies for what she believes in?"

[October 24, 1990]

A Speech by Dr. Paula Rothenberg

Delivered at the College of Wooster
The celebrated authoress of *Racism and Sexism: An Integrated Study*, demonstrates why Johnny can't read and is probably better off:

I think it is perfectly legitimate to study the ideas and the experience of privileged white European males. That belongs in college. The problem is when you universalize that experience and treat it as if it were all there were. . . . Contrary to what the right wing would have us believe, race, class, and gender have always been in the curriculum. The problem continues to be that it was one race, one class, one gender. . . .

According to this curriculum, only people of color have a race; only women have a gender; only lesbians and gays have a sexual orientation. Everyone else is a human being. According to this curriculum, neither women nor working people nor peoples of color have ever done anything important. Because by definition what is important was done by privileged white males and what was done by privileged white males was important. And all of them were heterosexual.

This curriculum teaches what I call the Flintstones-Jetsons view of history. According to that view, the white, middle-class, heterosexual, nuclear family with its attendant division of labor according to sexual stereotype has always existed—the Flintstones—and always will exist—the Jetsons.

[October 17, 1990]

New York Review of Books

Whilst reviewing still more facetiae from the mind of Harold Bloom, a Prof. John Barton strikes another blow for the improbable, the fantastic, and the just plain wrong:

I remember my surprise when a student of mine wrote a paper about the book of Job, and referred to the author throughout as "he or she." Perhaps such evenhandedness is now standard in North America, but it certainly isn't in Oxford. But I realized that I had simply assumed the author was male, without examining the reasons. Non-religious feminist critics became angry at the patriarchal attitudes in much of the Bible, while Jewish and Christian feminists often argue that, within the assumptions of an admittedly patriarchal society, the Bible scores quite highly for its treatment of women. But until now, no critic known to me has argued that any substantial part of the Bible had a woman as its author.

Professional scribes in the ancient world were men: so much we know or think we do. But was every book in the Bible written by a professional scribe? Probably not. Were women literate? Some, perhaps. By arguing that a singularly important section of the Hebrew Bible may have been written by a woman, Harold Bloom enlarges our ideas about ancient Hebrew literature.

[November 22, 1990]

New York Times

John Russell, art critic of the neo-Freudian *Times*, makes the case for getting soundly stewed every time one visits the Republic's great art museums:

Every time we pay a call on those permanent collections, we check on the art. But also—and this may be even more important—we check on ourselves. If the art looks just the same as it did the last time round, there's something wrong with us.

[August 31, 1990]

New Yorker

Proof that this venerable magazine of toney prose is not always anti-American, at least not when it is divinely risible:

"You've been there more than anyone else on earth, anyone in history," Peter says, letting his binoculars drop to his chest. "And you've been such a good protector of the birds. When you arrive the albatrosses should line up, rock forward on their feet, and bow." He rocks onto his toes, angles his arms out to his sides, and makes a stooping half bow. Hiroshi, picking up another part of the courting dance, arches his chest out and his arms back. I add yet another element by kissing my left shoulder, then my right, with arms angled out from my sides. I do not know what passersby make of this scene, but fishermen on small volcanic islands in the Pacific are surely used to all sorts of strange birds. And the castaneting and whinnying we three do next probably doesn't surprise them much, either.

[September 24, 1990]

New York Daily News

New Age culture note for those steatopygic TV devotees capable of remembering all the way back to the glorious days of Waltonian Madness:

On the hit TV series "The Waltons," he was the ultimate, all-American grandfather. But in the early years, before he donned those overalls, Grandpa Walton Will Geer was a committed, political leftie who had a homosexual affair with Harry Hay, today considered the granddaddy of gay activists.

It began in 1933 on a Sunset Blvd. stage where Geer, 30, and Hay, 21, did a play together. "Our glances met during that first meeting and held for a moment too long. My throat went dry, and I knew I'd made a connection," recounts Hay in a new biography, *The Trouble With Harry: Founder of the Modern Gay Movement* (Alyson Publications).

Author Stuart Timmons says Geer introduced Hay to Hollywood's political left and the Communist party before their romance faded. Geer later married. However, Hay still managed to snipe at Geer's wife, Herta Ware, when the actor died in 1974. "I had him first," Hay blurted. To that the mother of Geer's three children retorted, "I had him longest."

[November 13, 1990]



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