

# John Warner Just Keeps Hanging On

IT'S BEEN LESS THAN A DECADE since John Warner, the decorous Republican senator from Virginia, helped sink the Supreme Court nomination of Judge Robert Bork. Warner's party treason was just the first of several episodes: He refused to support Mike Farris, the 1993 Republican nominee for lieutenant governor of Virginia, and later campaigned against Ollie North, the 1994 nominee for U.S. Senate. Now Warner is seeking the party's help in his own Senate re-election bid. "If we don't stick together," Warner exhorted fellow Republicans as he kicked off his campaign this year, "we'll undoubtedly hang separately."

Warner's uncertain loyalties have made Virginia's conservative activists eager to prove his point—by stringing him up. Two grassroots groups on the right are working for Warner's defeat in the primary, and a pair of Republican county com-

.....  
*WILLIAM SALETAN is writing a book on the politics of abortion for the University of California Press.*

TWO YEARS AGO,  
CONSERVATIVES THOUGHT  
THEY HAD HIM LICKED.  
BUT AS WARNER HEADS  
FOR ALMOST CERTAIN  
RE-ELECTION, THEY'RE  
DISCOVERING, THE HARD  
WAY, HE'S MUCH SHREWER  
THAN THEY ARE.



by William Saletan

mittees have denied him their official support. Christian Coalition Executive Director Ralph Reed has promised that religious conservatives who campaigned for Farris and North will do unto Warner what he did unto them. Farris is campaigning for Warner's Republican challenger, former Reagan Budget Director Jim Miller. "This race is the most important race in the country," Farris says. "Because it's about whether the establishment, country-club portion of the Republican Party can demand loyalty while practicing treachery."

Indeed, probably no member of the Republican Party is a better symbol of the divide between country-club traditionalists and new radicals than the 69-year-old Warner. With his ceremonious carriage and cadence, he is almost a tailored incarnation of Foghorn Leghorn, the prancing, Southern gentleman rooster of Bugs Bunny fame. He reveres the Hill's collegiality and reflexively speaks of himself as "this senator." Unlike the Republican



freshmen in the House of Commons, Warner is not in Washington to do a job and go home. He *is* home.

And as he approaches his third decade in America's House of Lords, Warner's re-election momentum is mounting just when the new radicals seemed sure they were going to oust him for good. Just eighteen months ago, with the grassroots working furiously against him, his approval ratings were down, and challenger Jim Miller was starting to edge him out in head-to-head polls. When the *Hotline*, a campaign news digest, asked seventy political experts to name the most vulnerable Republican senator up for re-election in 1996, Warner's name topped the list. As one GOP district chairman put it, conservatives were going to suppress Warner's fundraising "so John can get the message, get out, and retire." Instead, Warner has whipped Miller at

raising cash and, though still drawing less than 50 percent support from likely voters, has surged ahead in the race, according to an April poll by Mason-Dixon Political/Media Research.

The insurgent Republican radicals would do well to study Warner's comeback as they ponder the future of their stalled revolution. It's not only that they have failed to mount a cohesive challenge to the senator. They have underestimated his personal and financial resilience. Most important of all, they have mustered little more than naive outrage as the pre-revolutionary Washington Republican establishment has rallied to Warner's defense. By failing to count on the reserves of goodwill built up in his long Hill tenure, the insurgents badly misunderstood just how entrenched the Republican old guard really is. The conservatives can survive a failure to teach Warner a lesson this year.

BILL NELSON

But what they cannot survive is a failure to learn the lessons his career success should teach them.

**W**hen Warner first ran for the Senate eighteen years ago, the *Washington Post* dubbed him “the farm boy from Cleveland Park.” Though he called himself a “working farmer” and “cattle rancher,” and claimed to have been “raised on a farm,” in fact he was born in the city of Washington, and grew up in comfort on his father’s surgeon’s income. Until his college days, he spent only summers in Virginia. And while it’s true that he often helped out on his farm, tenant families handled the bulk of the labor. As a rival candidate put it, Warner was “the only farmer in Virginia who [had] a swimming pool in his barn.” Warner sold his farm two years ago, and until moving just across the Potomac in Alexandria last year, he lived in a Watergate apartment.

I spent several hours with Warner last year in a vain attempt to extract something resembling a worldview—but like most of the party’s old guard, he has a difficult time describing just what it is that he stands for. Apparently obsessed with principle, he seems unable to define or apply it coherently. Conservatism, as he construed it, seemed to consist loosely of respecting tradition and changing slowly if at all. When I asked him, on the other hand, what he had once meant by calling himself “progressive-thinking,” he lapsed into a Dole-like daze of indifference and perplexity. “I don’t know,” he faltered, his eyes wandering away. “I just don’t view myself as a stick-in-the-mud, and get up each day and figure out what it is you can do to better the life of mankind.”

That loose philosophy has led him instinctively to steer a middle course. As undersecretary and then secretary of the Navy in the early 1970’s, he favored racial integration—but opposed efforts to implement it at what he deemed an overaggressive pace. In 1990, when abortion became the moral issue of the hour, Warner clung to the center, declaring himself “pro-choice with limitations, pro-life with exceptions.” Last year, two days before Newt Gingrich assumed the Speaker’s role at the vanguard of the Republican revolution, Warner scoffed at the House GOP’s “unrestrained enthusiasm.” And then a month later, Warner called the Contract With America impractical and rash, and took issue with House Republicans for seeking tax cuts before solving the country’s welfare and crime problems. “You’re not going to turn this mighty ship of state a hard right,” he warned, “or she’ll roll over.”

Yet if he is no dependable conservative, he is no liberal either. Scorecards issued by a dozen interest groups and news

**Conservatism, as  
Warner construed it,  
seemed to consist  
loosely of respecting  
tradition and  
changing slowly,  
if at all.**

organizations rate his voting record 84 percent conservative or better. The problem is that his dissents have been particularly loud, proud, and costly to the Republican Party. In Virginia, Warner’s refusal to support Mike Farris secured the election of a Democratic lieutenant governor whose tie-breaking votes in the state senate have killed Republican proposals to expand parental rights and accord private citizens the right of initiative and referendum. Chuck Robb remains in the Senate, safeguarding vetoes and filibusters that North would have overridden. Tower lost his confirmation fight. And Anthony Kennedy, the judge who took Bork’s seat on the Supreme Court, cast the deciding vote to preserve *Roe v. Wade* in 1992.

**S**o why isn’t Warner paying for these transgressions? Some of the reasons are mechanical. While the establishment used their well-developed

political instincts to rally around Warner, movement conservatives wasted much of their precious momentum squabbling among themselves. State GOP Chairman Pat McSweeney got into a permanent feud with Republican Governor George Allen; then Jim Miller infuriated Ollie North’s supporters by running against North in the 1994 Republican Senate race, with Warner’s support, and challenging North’s integrity and sanity to boot. As a result, neither Miller nor McSweeney—who don’t even coordinate with each other—has managed to unite conservatives against Warner.

And though Warner is far from loved, several Republican officeholders declined to run against him this year. That left Miller, a doggedly devout but uninspiring former Reagan administration economist who has failed to attract crowds or cash. “Jim has not had success in galvanizing support, as he should, from the conservative side of the party,” McSweeney says. Don Duncan, the party chairman for Virginia’s Sixth Congressional District, notes that Miller is “having trouble raising money, which has translated into trouble in the polls.”

Miller’s principal problem, according to his ally Farris, is that he was “the establishment candidate” against North in 1994. Thus he is having trouble retooling his campaign to tap anti-establishment votes. As a member of Washington’s economic policy advice industry, Miller has the burden of explaining why his think tank, Citizens for a Sound Economy, gave a trophy last year to Warner—whom Miller now calls a “Clinton Republican”—for a perfect voting record on fiscal issues. Like Senator Phil Gramm, with whom he grew up in Georgia and taught economics at Texas A&M University, Miller manages to come off simultaneously as bumpkin and bean counter. Other than a stint in the early 1970’s, he didn’t pay income taxes in Virginia until 1990—and, like Gramm, he didn’t serve in Vietnam (the Air Force

Academy rejected him for color blindness)—weaknesses Warner has gladly exploited in a state that prizes local roots and military honor.

Another technical factor in Warner's favor is his ability, through both personal wealth and the power of incumbency, to buy the support, or at least the silence, of would-be antagonists. Last year, when Miller and McSweeney cried foul over George Bush's appearance at a Warner fundraiser, Warner doused the uproar by allotting half the proceeds to Republican candidates for the legislature.

Money has often greased Warner's way into jobs and out of jams. He became a millionaire in 1957 by marrying the daughter of industrialist Paul Mellon, who helped finance Richard Nixon's career and, according to former Nixon aide John Ehrlichman, successfully demanded that Nixon put Warner in charge of the Navy (thus earning the young man the derisive nickname, "Warnermellon"). When the marriage collapsed, Mellon bestowed a reported \$7 million on his former son-in-law. With that money, and the money that Warner's glamorous second wife, Liz Taylor, attracted to his fundraising events, Warner injected half a million dollars into his 1978 campaign for the Senate, an outrageous sum just to court delegates at the state GOP convention.

Warner, a Gerald Ford man, lost the nomination to state party chairman Dick Obenshain, a Reaganite. But the mighty dollar revived him again. He mended fences by writing a check to Obenshain's campaign and raising funds for him. After Obenshain died in a plane crash two months later, conservatives who still distrusted Warner tried to recruit other candidates to carry the Republican banner. But they soon discovered that no one but Warner could pay off Obenshain's campaign debt and, in the three months remaining, invest and raise enough additional capital to finance a credible campaign. So Warner got the nod, and, with help from conservative activists who disliked him, won the election.

**I**t would be a mistake, however, to credit Warner's survival purely to political mechanics. In his days as a fox hunter, Warner reputedly insisted on riding a white horse; he still largely sees himself that way, theatrically framing his dissents as acts of conscience. As he launched his campaign earlier this year, he declared, "My campaign will answer this question: Can an elected leader vote his conscience, put his principle before politics, and win?" He concluded: "It's not popular to put principle ahead of party, to put the interest of your country and your state ahead of politics. But ladies and gentlemen, that's the way I do business, and I make no apology to anyone."

**Through personal  
wealth and the power  
of incumbency, he's  
been able to buy the  
support, or at least  
the silence, of would-  
be antagonists.**

At times, Warner's moral vanity makes him look pompous and silly. In 1982, after he gave an address at a segregationist private school, unaware of its racial policy, he refused to admit his gaffe. Instead he summoned the press to his office and declaimed that "I could have made a safe political choice" by refusing the school's invitation. "That would have been the easy thing to do. But I had the courage to consider it my duty [to speak at the school] so that I could establish a bridge between the principles to which I adhere and this remaining pocket of sentiment in Virginia." This year, Warner struck a similar pose of selfless valor when a federal court granted his request to run for renomination in a primary rather than at a party convention, thereby sharply boosting his chances of re-election. "This is another victory in a hard-fought battle for the rights of voters of Virginia," opined the senator.

Notions of manhood and courage suffuse even the most trivial of Warner's deliberations. He routinely calls issues and decisions "tough" in Senate debates, and it seems that, for him, everything's a moral dilemma or a struggle. In a tortured soliloquy on the Senate floor in 1992, he reflected that "the question is not what is best for me, but how can I best repay this debt?...To make a fair and objective choice between these two opportunities has indeed been one of the most challenging decisions that has ever confronted me.... I will not, in any way, step aside from the responsibility of making this tough decision." And what was the decision? Whether to remain in the Senate or run for governor. "There's a great desire to leave this institution now," Warner told the press bravely, "but some of us have to stay."

Perhaps the most naked display of Warner's aspirations to sainthood appeared in a 1993 essay in the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, in which the senator defended his refusal to support his fellow Republican Farris. "My support is anchored on a trust in my diverse experience, judgment, and credibility," he wrote. "Bottom line: I am honest with myself, honest with my constituents....I work hard, quietly, in my own way....Political expediency may be your old-fashioned idea, but it is not mine....My conscience is clear." Once again, instead of apologizing Warner depicted himself as the undeserving yet forgiving victim of Farris's angry reproofs. As he wrote: "'Turn the other cheek,' I quietly said to myself!"

At other times, however, Warner's knightly attitude earns him widespread admiration. Many Virginia Republicans, including former Marines, still respect him for standing up to Ollie North in 1994. "No one in the history of the United States Senate," Warner insisted at the time, "has ever sat in this chamber" after being "convicted of a felony."

When North's nomination seemed unstoppable, Warner defiantly vowed, "Do you remember Tiananmen Square? Somebody's going to stand up in front of that tank." Later, under pressure to surrender to North's nomination, Warner shot back, "Nuts! I do not now nor will I ever run up my white flag and surrender my fight for what I believe is in the best interest of my country, my state, and my party."

Warner has always loved the smell of battle. He joined the Navy at 17 during World War II and went to Korea with the Marines six years later before serving as undersecretary and then secretary of the Navy during the Vietnam war. His Capitol Hill office is a gallery of martial glory, decorated with mementos of ancestors in arms, a brass disk blown off a battleship at Pearl Harbor, a sculpture from the rubble of Manuel Noriega's Panama headquarters, and a bit of Scud missile from the Persian Gulf War.

To this lifelong soldier, politics is just another opportunity to earn glory in battle. At last year's Virginia GOP retreat, Warner's enemies mocked him by staging a "Unity Breakfast" and serving "Principled Coffee." Warner strode into the gathering, drank a cup of the coffee, shook Mike Farris's hand, and took home a "Dump Warner" button to pin up in his office. This year, at a Republican county convention in northern Virginia, Warner slogged through boos and heckling to announce his 1996 campaign motto, "Character counts."

Conservative critics scorn Warner's talent for projecting virtue. "He's got that Bill Clinton ability," scoffs Don Huffman, a former state GOP chairman. Yet there's something genuinely attractive, admirable, and quite un-Clinton-like in Warner's instinctive sense of tradition, grandeur, and military patriotism—and something quintessentially American in his moral certitude and his distrust of ideology. One cannot help but marvel at a man who honors his country by giving Liz Taylor an engagement ring adorned with red, white, and blue gemstones; and who, years later, bucks the line of his political party with the non-apology, "That's why they elected me—to be a leader, not a follower."

If Warner is sometimes deficient in practicing loyalty, he is certainly capable of inspiring it. By persuading many Republican voters to stick with him rather than with their party, Warner has succeeded in holding the party hostage. For the past two years, he has held out the possibility of bolting the GOP and seeking re-election as an independent if the party chose its nominee in a convention of party activists, as it did in 1993 and 1994, rather than a primary. A poll last year showed that Warner could back up his threat by easily winning the general election as an independent candidate.

**One cannot help but  
marvel at a man who  
gave Liz Taylor an  
engagement ring  
adorned with red,  
white, and blue  
gemstones.**

Having secured a primary by means of this threat, Warner can now exploit the advantages of incumbency and moderation that come with membership in the Republican establishment of Nelson Rockefeller, Gerald Ford, George Bush, and Bob Dole. As an entrenched senior senator, Warner has attracted nearly \$800,000 in PAC money and has tapped deep pockets in Virginia by tending assiduously to local industrial interests. "Business people put their immediate business interests before ideological interests," laments Huffman. "They go with the incumbent."

Moderation, too, is a Warner asset. Virginia law allows independent and Democratic voters to cast ballots in the Republican primary, and Warner stands to collect their votes, thereby offsetting the ballots of angry conservatives. Many Virginians share Warner's patriotic, steady-as-she-goes brand of conser-

vatism. And recognizing this, Republicans who think ahead are inclined to vote for Warner on the grounds that he stands a better chance of keeping his seat in Republican hands than does a conservative hard-liner.

The reflexive solidarity with which Dole, Bush, and other luminaries of the old GOP have closed ranks behind Warner in his battle against the right has caught movement conservatives off guard. Two years ago, when Ollie North was nominated, Warner was traveling abroad with Dole. In deference to Warner, Dole refused to endorse North and held out the alternative possibility of supporting an independent candidate backed by Warner. It took days of angry phone calls from conservatives to bring Dole around.

Then, last year, as Warner was gearing up for his own primary fight, Dole endorsed him at a PAC fundraiser organized for Warner by the National Republican Senatorial Committee. George Bush's endorsement a month later made it plain that support for Warner was more than just senatorial courtesy. By headlining a Warner fundraiser, Bush helped boost him to a decisive financial advantage over the opposition. Warner also draws on wide support throughout the GOP's bigwigs. Bush's son Marvin belongs to Warner's campaign steering committee, as do former Bush White House aides Ron Kaufman and Sheila Tate. Other establishment icons in the Warner camp include Henry Kissinger, Al Haig, and Colin Powell. Even Dan Quayle, who as Bush's deputy was supposed to represent the right, showed up at a Warner campaign rally this year to endorse the senator.

This red-carpet treatment has left Virginia's party activists furious. Two years ago, when Dole shunned North, his party's senatorial nominee, state GOP chairman Pat McSweeney prophesied warfare within the party "between insiders and

outsiders." Last year, McSweeney called Bush's appearance at Warner's fundraiser "a kick in the teeth" and told the former president in a letter, "Your decision is a slap at a grass-roots party that supported you faithfully in 1992." Miller fired off a separate epistle to Bush, demanding to know why he would side with Warner against the Republican rank-and-file "who campaigned their hearts out for you."

"Where was Bob Dole when John Warner was doing what he did to me?" asks Farris. "He was the Senate Republican Leader!" Morton Blackwell, Virginia's Republican National Committeeman, is disgusted and baffled by Bush's meddling in the primary. "I've given up trying to explain why George Bush does many things," he sighs. About Quayle's endorsement, McSweeney shrugs, "I'm mystified."

But if the revolutionaries truly intend to overturn the establishment, they'll have to stop gaping at its contradictions and start respecting and responding to its consistencies. Its most obvious animating force is an aversion to movements, including Reaganite conservatism. As if to underscore the bond between Warner and Bush, Warner's aides have publicly attributed Bush's assistance in the senator's 1996 campaign to a friendship that dates back to Warner's support for Bush in his 1980 presidential race against Reagan. Bush reaffirmed their bond at last year's fundraiser by exalting Warner as a "sensible" conservative, as though to distinguish him from the radical type.

Dole, of course, belongs to this brotherhood, too. His ideological position in his 1996 nomination contest has precisely mirrored Warner's. In Virginia, Jim Miller, who served as an adviser to Gramm's campaign in the state, represents Gramm's views on spending and Steve Forbes's views on taxes. Mike Farris, a national co-chair of Pat Buchanan's campaign, speaks for the cultural right. In the middle stands Warner, a crusty, vision-impaired Washington insider who hedges on term limits, opposes a flat tax, runs on his legislative and military experience, parlays his accumulated connections into a prohibitive financial advantage, and faults his Republican rivals for moral and supply-side extremism. Conservatives who doubt that this strategy can win the Republican nomination for Warner seem to forget that it has done just that for Dole.

Apart from ideology, of course, simple friendship also defines, unites, and motivates the establishment. The sheer intimacy of official Washington fosters more respect for personal loyalty than for party solidarity. Bush has specifically cited his debt to Warner for rallying the Senate in support of the Persian Gulf War, and the two men have long admired each other. Both are plodding and circumspect; both are steeped in

gentility but fond of dabbling in pork-rind populism; both tend to wander off-point and lapse into sentence fragments. (Sample Warner dialogue: "Saw George Bush over the weekend. Marvelous human being, he and his wife.") Dole lacks their aristocratic bearing, but shares many of their mannerisms, as well as the reflexive patriotism of their World War II military generation.

Quayle's relationship with Warner is typical of how establishment bonds cross ideological and generational boundaries. In his book, *Standing Firm*, Quayle faulted Warner for undermining his party during the Tower debate. But this year, Quayle not only endorsed Warner; he extolled the senator's "family values." Mike Farris is amazed. "I could get no help from Dan Quayle in the [1993] general election," sputters Farris. "And here he is, coming in and supporting John Warner after he's committed treachery.... For him to say John Warner is pro-family—that is an absolute sellout on Dan Quayle's part."

Why did Quayle do it? "They were colleagues together on the Armed Services Committee," explains Warner's spokesman, Eric Peterson. "And going back to Quayle's early days in the Senate, the senator and Quayle had a joint fundraising program.... Part of the money would go to support the senator's re-election, and part of it would go to support Quayle's re-election, and a portion would go to the Senatorial Campaign Committee to support their overall re-election efforts of various Republican senators." "It's the club," scoffs Don Huffman, the former Virginia GOP chairman. "There's a hundred people in it. They're called U.S. senators. And most of 'em are millionaires." (Both Quayle and Warner qualify financially.) Bill Kling, a former Warner aide who now works for Jim Miller, calls it "the Old Bull network of the Republican cloakroom." Bush, Dole, and Quayle "have worked closely with Warner through the years," says Kling. "He's nodded his head for them at the right times."

This time the heads are nodding back. When a campaigning Phil Gramm came to Virginia (and dismissed Dole as a moderate), he refused to take sides in the race between Warner and Miller, his boyhood friend. No Republican on the Hill supports Miller openly, although Morton Blackwell claims a number of conservative senators are secretly rooting for Warner's defeat. "I personally know senators who are publicly on the record as saying, 'Warner is my friend and he should be renominated,' [but who] tell me quietly, 'Do everything you can to get that guy defeated,'" he says. But the difference between winning and losing often comes down to a choice between standing by your friends and standing on principle—something John Warner would be happy to tell you. ❀

**In *Standing Firm*,  
Quayle faulted  
Warner for oppos-  
ing Tower. This  
year he's endorsed  
Warner and extolled  
his "family values."**



# Mad Cows and Englishmen

A big-time beefeater reports from London.

**T**he Spanish Armada couldn't manage it. Neither could Napoleon, or Hitler. But where they failed to bring Great Britain to its knees, a cabal of McDonald's, Burger King, and Wimpy's has reduced Little Englanders—this once happy few, this previously legendary band of brothers—to a bunch of mendicants. Conspiring in tandem, a triad of hamburger chains (not to mention the vengeful wogs across the Channel) has banned U.K. beef, the pride of this off-shore island's cuisine, and called for the burning of twelve million cattle. We may soon witness the largest backyard barbecue known to mankind... to which nobody will come.

Desperate Tory politicians, running a consistent 30 points behind nearly-new Labour in the polls, have been shuttling to and fro between London and Brussels, denouncing the intrusive EU bureaucracy at home, while pleading with it on the road for baksheesh of many billions of pounds. During the last bovine scare, at least, the traditional British sense of humor prevailed. There was the High Street butcher who posted a sign in his window that read "The Only Mad Cow Here Is My Wife." But now it is the spirit of free-market enterprise that is most evident in post-Thatcher Britain. Goodfellow Rebecca Ingrams, a City wholesale broker, has come up with a policy dubbed Human Mad Cow Insurance Protection.

MORDECAI RICHLER is the author of *Oh Canada! Oh Quebec!* *Requiem for a Divided Country*, *This Year in Jerusalem*, and many novels, including *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, *Joshua Then and Now*, and *Solomon Gursky Was Here*.

For an annual premium of a mere £10 it offers £25,000 worth of coverage against Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (CJD), and the maximum protection available is £250,000, payable once the disease is diagnosed.

In this continuing crisis, bewildered Tories tend to float increasingly dotty solutions, my favorite the suggestion that the cattle should be ground up and their minced remains dumped at sea, eventually infecting the fish stocks as well, no doubt. Mad salmon. Loonybins Dover sole. The mind boggles.

The pity is that the optimum solution is readily available, courtesy of the former jewel in Queen Victoria's crown. Leaders of the World Council of Hindus have approached Health Secretary Stephen Durrell, offering sanctuary in India for all those cows due to be "executed." Hasmuth Shah, spokesman for the British branch of the council, which has the support of the Bharatiya Janata Party, India's main opposition, has promised to provide loving care for twelve million cattle. "It is immoral to slaughter these cows," he said. "Compassion is the rule of the day and the cows should be allowed to lead natural lives."

Rubbing it in, I fear, the council's parent group, Vishwa Hindu Parishad, has pronounced the BSE crisis a manifestation of "divine displeasure" at the slaughter of cows for beef. In a daredevil mood, and eager to prove undying loyalty to Queen and country, although a mere colonial myself, the next day I went to lunch with a toilet-trained native, and we both ordered Angus sirloin steaks. Furthermore, clicking glasses, we resolved to continue kissing

girls who used the indigenous foundation cream, never mind that it possibly contained deadly beef extract. But then Canadians always did have the right stuff. The last time Great Britain stood alone, during the darkest days of the Second World War, my aunts knitted ferociously for Bundles for Britain, and to this day I shudder at the thought of all those khaki sweaters unraveling in the foxholes.

It has been estimated that the slaying of the entire herd would cost a total of £20 billion, but the benevolent Hindus would take them off the United Kingdom's hands for £1 billion transportation costs. If only they would accept Fergie, a.k.a. The Duchess of Yuk, as part of the deal. A recent *Daily Mail* headline asked, reasonably enough, "Fergie: Has She Got Mad Cow?" But possibly what really ails the Duchess, no longer Her Royal Highness since her divorce, is her speed-like diet of fenfluramine and phentermine pills that she has been prescribed by a New York doctor. Certainly she is the most vulgar and avaricious of a generation of incredibly dim royals. Most recently the ridiculous 37-year-old duchess twice changed her flight plans in horny pursuit of Thomas Muster, an Austrian tennis star nine years her junior, whom she has followed from Melbourne to Florida.

Not so long ago tabloid readers feasted on unflattering topless photographs of Fergie having her toes sucked by her financial adviser, which is rather more, come to think of it, than my bank manager has ever done for me. That attentive adviser, one John Bryan, is now suing her for a third of her purported multi-million dollar contract for a projected series of *Budgie the Helicopter* books for kids, an idea which some cynics insist was pilfered from the earlier *Hector the Helicopter* juvenile, which was written by a mere commoner.