

by T. Kenneth Cribb, Jr.



# An American Dissident

Henry Regnery published the conservative revolution.

"Conservatism is enjoyment," as Walter Bagehot once said; not in the vulgar sense of amusement, but in the sense of taking joy in the world as God created it, of finding joy in the apprehension of the truths of that creation. Henry Regnery took joy in his family, his music, and his literary pursuits. And through his life's work he in turn filled our lives with joy—the joy of the word, which is the truth.

Early in his life, Henry Regnery understood that the root cause of civilization's decline was the rejection of the word, of truth as it had been revealed and handed down over the centuries. He determined to labor against the relativistic tides of his century, counter-attacking this most insidious aspect of modernity. The problem was words, so he set out to become a publisher—a "dissident publisher," as he memorably phrased it.

In a 1953 letter Henry declared, "I felt it was time somebody did something to break the almost complete monopoly of book publishing... It is ideas that shape history. If we want to do anything, we must work on the level of ideas." Regnery began to publish the best thinkers: Max Picard, Gabriel Marcel, Wyndham Lewis, Roy Campbell, Ernst Juenger, and Romano Guardini. In the course of his search for quality, he also became the publisher of

T. KENNETH CRIBB, JR. is president of the Intercollegiate Studies Institute. He served as chief of domestic affairs in the Reagan White House. These remarks are adapted from a eulogy delivered in Chicago at Henry Regnery's memorial service on July 18, 1996.

authors central to the post-World War II conservative revival: Buckley, Burnham, Vivas, Meyer, and Weaver.

With Regnery's 1953 publication of Russell Kirk's *The Conservative Mind*, the conservative intellectual recrudescence became self-conscious and overt. As Henry himself put it, Kirk had given an "amorphous, scattered opposition" to liberalism as an "identity."

Shortly after hearing of Henry's passing, I visited the home of the late Frank Meyer, one of the muscular intellects associated with the formative years of *National Review*. In every room of the house, from floor to ceiling, was the orderly profusion of Meyer's library, a fine collection centered on the conservative revival. On shelf after shelf, the most incisive and timeless of the volumes tended to have the Regnery imprint on the spine.

Henry's proximate goal was to publish books of quality, books that had something to say. His ultimate goal, however, was to effect change of a very specific nature. He proposed to gather, between the covers of his books, ideas of such force and light as to disperse the fog of a debased liberalism that clouded the American mind at mid-century.

Did he succeed? Here is the testimony of Ronald Reagan, writing in 1985:

The first rampart of peaceful revolution is the printing press. In the early days of the resurgent movement among conservative intellectuals in the 1950's, it was Henry Regnery who possessed the vision to draw together and publish landmark books... the real source of our strength as a political

movement... We live in a time of climactic struggle for the human spirit, a time that will tell whether the great civilized ideas of individual liberty, representative government, and the rule of law under God will perish or endure. For the heroic part you have played in that struggle, I salute you, Henry Regnery.

In the course of the three years that followed this assessment, President Reagan marshaled the ideas in those very books and, without firing a shot, pushed Communism backward into the abyss of its own making. No further inquiry as to Henry's success is needed.

It was very much like Reagan to detect the true heroism of Henry Regnery's quiet stand. Yet there was nothing of conventional heroic poses in Henry's personal demeanor. His modesty was genuine, bordering on self-effacement; yet his friends remember him as a true renaissance man—musician, essayist, correspondent, friend, husband, and father. Bill Buckley once said, "The renaissance man is, I think, someone who bows his head before the great unthreatened truths and... knows enough to know, that the computer does not now exist, nor ever shall, that has the power to repeal the basic formulas of civilization."

Henry Regnery lived his life in service to those great unthreatened truths, to the unseen things that do not die—to the word. He gave voice to supreme works of the moral imagination through the transforming medium of his publishing house. Whittaker Chambers once said, "Each age finds its own language for an eternal meaning." In our age, that language is very largely to be found in the distinguished books Henry Regnery published during his fruitful life. With gratitude beyond expression, we honor his memory. ❀



# Love Isn't the Way

Hollywood always looks for it in all the wrong places.

Is love primarily a feeling or an action? The pretty nearly unanimous opinion of cheap entertainment throughout the ages has been in favor of unabashed emotion: you get shot with Cupid's bolt and the actions of love follow naturally. The serious folk with whom we were wont to entrust our moral leadership used to have another view of the matter, but lately they have largely abandoned the party of actions and duties. That capitulation to the feel-good imperative shows up in the rates of divorce and illegitimacy. In the thick of the fight against moral chaos, our generals have abandoned the field and slipped off to their tents to talk to some shrink about their precious feelings.

Our own feelings under the circumstances are ambivalent. There is, naturally, a certain relief in surrendering to mere sensualism—at least so long as we are temporarily insulated from the consequences. But inevitably there are also innocent victims of emotional unrestraint. These have been calling attention to themselves in a recent rash of movies involving kidnapping and hostage-taking for love.

In *Manny and Lo* two sisters (Scarlett Johansson and Aleksa Palladino) on the run from foster care kidnap a rather forlorn old maid (Mary Kay Place) and find with her the beginnings of a real family. In *House Arrest* two children (Kyle Howard and Amy Sakasitz), whose parents (Jamie Lee Curtis and Kevin Pollak) are separating, keep them confined in the base-

JAMES BOWMAN, our movie critic, is American editor of the Times Literary Supplement.

ment until they sort out their problems. In *2 Days in the Valley* a superannuated hitman (Danny Aiello) on the run from his chillingly ruthless young accomplice (James Spader) takes a bunch of hostages, among whom he not only finds his own dream mate (Glenn Headly) and soon-to-be co-proprietor of a Brooklyn pizzeria, but also brings together another couple of lonely lovebirds (Paul Mazursky and Marsha Mason), one of whom had been on the point of suicide.

Another kidnap drama, *Kansas City*, is of a slightly different stripe. In it, a devoted young wife (Jennifer Jason Leigh) whose boneheaded husband (Dermot Mulroney) has fallen foul of a black gangster (Harry Belafonte) kidnaps the dopeheaded wife (Miranda Richardson) of a local politico (Michael Murphy) in a vain attempt to get her beloved Johnny back.

None of these films is very good, although *Manny and Lo* is close to it and *Kansas City*, like any Robert Altman film, has its moments. All of them are struggling in their very different ways towards the insight that "love" is at least as often an action followed by a feeling as it is (in the classic Hollywood paradigm) a feeling followed by an action. And yet none of them ever quite makes that point effectively. Why not? *Kansas City* has its own Altmanian problems (principally, a terminal, paralyzing hipness), but the problem with the rest of them is that they get hung up on that well-entrenched Hollywood myth that we can or should invent families to our own taste. Even *House Arrest* is more interested in the quasi-family formed by the children of its several sets of trou-

bled parents than it is in the repair of the parents' relationships.

This myth of the do-it-yourself family is really the antithesis of love-as-duty. It also popped up this month in *Matilda*, in which a little girl (Mara Wilson) fed up with her neglectful and vulgar parents, the Wormwoods (Danny DeVito and Rhea Perlman), decides to adopt for herself a new family in the form of her first grade teacher, a lady called Miss Honey (Embeth Davidtz). If I were a little girl, I think I would rather belong to the raffish Wormwoods than to the goody-goody Miss Honey anyway, but then I'm not as clever as Matilda.

Of even more concern than the promulgation of the myth of the designer-family, however, is the myth of Rousseau's *Emile*—that is, of natural, laissez-faire education. Nowadays, anyone not a moron must know the absurdity of proposing that children suffer more from excessively strict discipline than from lack of discipline, from being made to work too hard at school than from not being made to work hard enough, from being made to watch TV when they want to read rather than from not being made to read when they want to watch TV. But Hollywood is on the side of the morons. I suppose it's not surprising that the entertainment industry sympathizes with children's desire to be entertained rather than to work, and invents cruel, Dickensian parents and teachers to justify it. But such inventions also further the myth of the invented family.

That myth is taken for granted in *The Island of Dr. Moreau* by John Frankenheimer. Here a family is literally invented by a mad doctor who operates on beasts, gives them human characteristics, and calls them his "children." One way of looking at this film is as a form of dis-