

By James Bowman

Teaching the Gorillas

points out, the labels are stuck in the rut of issuing a 101st recording of Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony*.

There are already some signs of new life, much bemoaned by the competing establishment, attacking the classical establishment from the periphery. Labels like Chandos and Hyperion put out records of less explored works and differentiate themselves by offering great production values, such as (terrific sound) audiophile-quality recording. You realize, when listening to these labels, how many great artists are out there and how bad a Deutsche Grammophone recording can sound by comparison. The definitive recording does not have to be Barenboim or Zuckerman. Also, vital artists such as Yo-Yo Ma are using their appeal to draw in more listeners, "crossing over" and experimenting with new forms. We see the same organizational phenomenon here as elsewhere, namely that big companies are good at delivering products the marketplace tells you specifically it wants, in a survey or marketing study or box office results. Smaller organizations are better at stimulating demand for newer concepts (although Sony broke the mold with the Walkman). The latter approach—creating demand—is riskier, but economically more explosive and certainly more fun.

It isn't the music. Classical repertoire often seeps into the mass consciousness. Barber's *Adagio for Strings* was made wildly popular by the movie *Platoon*, even showing up on the pop charts. After *Amadeus*, Mozart's symphonies were heard everywhere. The classical repertoire can inspire deep feelings, be deeply moving and is rewarding to the repeat listener. It can be rebellious, soothing, tragic or thought-provoking. It doesn't just make you wish you had gone to the bathroom during the intermission. While the recording industry may downsize or fragment first, we will some day read about the "renaissance of classical music." There we will find the people who capitalized on the form's innate appeal (rather than its establishment fund-raising powers appeal) of this art form, using all the new media, technology and marketing available to them. For instance, instead of stocking 60,000 titles, an online retailer might offer custom-mixed CDs, or titles may just be "burnt-to-order." I say, let the market evolve. Classical music isn't threatened by dramatic change in the pre-production of new CDs—only our present, half-hearted way of consuming it. 🐼

It used to be quite a familiar quotation—although it is not, I believe, to be found in *Bartlett's* anymore. If I had to guess, I would say that the reason for the omission is that we wish nowadays to think better of the pioneering American feminist and transcendentalist, Margaret Fuller, than as a butt for the wit of Thomas Carlyle who, when told that she had said, "I accept the universe," replied: "Gad! She'd better!" But another reason why this once-famous retort may be fading in the folk memory is that Miss Fuller's proto-feminist assumption of alternative universes to be had for the asking—or at least to be reinvented with each new ideological advance—is now one that we all share. In this sense, we are all Marxists now.

Or at least all but a few irrelevant curmudgeons such as myself who are haunted by Kipling's *Gods of the Copybook Headings*. You remember them?

We were living in trees when they met
us. They showed us each in turn.
That Water would certainly wet us, as
Fire would certainly burn;
But we found them lacking in Uplift,
Vision and Breadth of Mind,
So we left them to teach the Gorillas
while we followed the March of
Mankind.

In other words, in pursuing the sort of Higher Thoughts that commonly occupy the minds of artists and philosophers, we may forget such basic and unalterable—also useful—data as that water wets and fire burns.

In no area of human life has this forgetfulness been more apparent—at least in the nearly 40 years since the sexual revolution of the 1960s—than love and courtship. Once among the principles too obvious even to need copybook expression was the understanding that sexual promiscuity was bad for men and much worse for women. Courtship was supposed to take place—and for the

James Bowman is American editor of
The Times Literary Supplement
and The American Spectator's movie critic.

most part did so—on a continuum leading from casual acquaintance through deepening love and friendship to marriage, because marriage and its sexual consummation were seen as the culmination of that process, a *terminus ad quem* which alone could give meaning to everything leading up to it.

Untune that string, as Shakespeare's Ulysses said about "degree" in *Troilus and Cressida*, and hark what discord follows. Or watch what ugliness follows in a film like *Some Body*, directed by Henry Barrial from a screenplay he co-wrote with his star, Stephanie Bennett. For me the problem with this movie was the need to believe that, even today, there is a sufficiently large body of opinion among thirtyish single women that it is a *good* idea to be sexually promiscuous, to get paralytically drunk and sleep with whomever can be bothered to take you home, to drink and do drugs and go to bars and parties for casual sex. (See sidebar.) That this is a common point of view among women would seem to be the minimum requirement for us to sympathize with one such as Miss Bennett's character, Samantha, who only learns from bitter experience that it is a *bad* idea to do these things.

Who doesn't know this? That Samantha must learn it the hard way—and that without any of the obviously *really* bad things that can happen to people who don't know it—strikes me as being too trivial a matter for treatment at feature length, a demonstration of the obvious. It's true that movies have for some time offered us portraits of sociopaths of one kind or another for whom we are meant to feel, if not sympathy exactly, at least a kind of admiration—like Hannibal Lecter, say, or Angelina Jolie's character in *Girl, Interrupted*. But the point about such people is that their splendidly awful personal authenticity, which is what is admirable about them (if anything is), is *chosen*. In some sense they *like* being like this. But Samantha is just a ninny who thinks that playing the slut will make her happy and then finds that it won't.

Well, duh. Here there are no Gods of the Copybook Headings because there is no copybook. Everything has to be

earned from scratch. At the beginning of the film, Samantha breaks up with her boyfriend, Anthony (Jeremy Guillroy) after a party at which she leaves him to go upstairs for a casual coupling with another party-goer. The next morning, Anthony says to her: "I wish you wouldn't party so hard like that, Sam . . . You gave the impression that anybody could be with you, so I think: What's so special about us?" What indeed! Poor Anthony! He has to explain to her what's wrong with sleeping with other people. Well, *why* do you mind? He wonders. Absolutely nothing is given; absolutely everything has to be learned, argued over, justified.

Just as obvious to men as the lesson of *Some Body* ought to be to women is the message of Bart Freundlich's *World Traveler*, in which Billy Crudup stars as Cal, a successful young architect who suddenly and for no apparent reason abandons his wife and young child to go on a solitary road trip across the country, stopping here and there to pick up friends and lovers—most notably the drunken fantasist Dulcie (Julianne Moore)—before finally fetching up at his dad's place in Oregon. And what do you think? It turns out Dad had abandoned Cal and his mother when he was a child and Cal had—not to compare notes, exactly—but to define himself negatively in relation to his father. He had to make sure that he was not *him*, and then he could go back to the wife and kid.

It's both a charming and a morally responsible way for the film to end, but somewhere lurking in the back of our minds is the question: Why did Cal have to do this bad thing in order to understand that it is bad? Was it a lack of imagination? Could he not have imagined the pain that his leaving without a word cost his wife and child and *not done it*? Presumably not. For men as for women, the committing of even the most egregiously wicked or foolish deeds, at least when it comes to sex and "love," might almost be seen as necessary to any understanding of why they should not be—if they should not be—committed. The moral question is treated as an afterthought at best. What really matters is the characters' feelings and what they are induced to do because of them.

These two movies are admittedly extreme examples, but we see something similar over and over again, particularly in the plethora of

films that deal with the hardships and disappointments women endure while negotiating the "dating" scene. The one thing that would obviate all these difficulties, the avoidance of casual or experimental sex with relative strangers, is the one thing that is never even considered. It's as if we were seeing people constantly talking about how hungry they are while seated at a banquet and not eating. In movie after movie—*Lovely and Amazing*, *Never Again*, *Sunshine State*, *Cherish*, *Crush*, to name just a few of the most recent examples—the heroines sleep with men on little or no acquaintance and then wonder why they get hurt.

In the "real" world we would expect them



to know, but *real* doesn't necessarily mean what is the case. Life, as we know, imitates art and the invention in some respects becomes the reality. So far as sex and courtship are concerned, the various reports one gets from the "singles" scene seem to suggest that a world of female promiscuity is no longer just the stuff of male fantasy, though the fantasy element is not necessarily removed by making the fantasy come true. For the reality is that sex, particularly for women, inescapably implies some deeper attachment the denial of which, for ideological or other reasons, involves a tearing away of

emotional tissue and a permanent scarring of the psyche. The denial of our nature may be real enough, but it does not change that nature's own, deeper reality.

Film has always been a pushover for propaganda, and what we see in so many of the ostensible entertainments committed to celluloid these days is a kind of sexual propaganda. Feminists, for all their lesbian self-righteousness and anti-porn crusades, exploit promiscuity as revolutionaries exploit poverty. Yet in recruiting the victims of sexual "liberation," they promise a remedy for what they themselves, with their passionate advocacy of sexual autonomy, have caused. The one thing we know for sure is that feminism can be compatible with almost anything, even porn (Camille Paglia is its great champion), but the one thing it *never* proposes is chastity and fidelity in marriage, which is what—so the *Copybook Headings* used to teach—man and woman were made for.

Well, maybe it was the copybooks that lied. But it is hard to forget the terrifying conclusion of Kipling's poem, with its vision of the time when:

. . . after this is accomplished, and the
brave new world begins,
When all men are paid for existing and
no man must pay for his sins,
As surely as Water will wet us, as surely
as Fire will burn,
The Gods of the Copybook Headings
with terror and slaughter return!

SICK IN THE CITY

One example of the sexual ethos that is part reality and part propaganda is the HBO smash hit *Sex in the City*. A good way to think of this ghastly show is as feminist pornography. By that I mean a fantasy version of sex from a female point of view, just as regular porn is fantasy sex for men. Of course the fantasies are very different. The men's has to do with naked writhing bodies, while the women's has to do with designer shoes and giggly, girly lunches. But what they have in common is the belief—or I should say, the fervent desire for belief—in no-fault sex.

It's not that the show's sex does not involve the emotions: it's that it never goes beyond the emotions, either to the spiritual in one direction or to the practicalities of permanent commitment in the other. Where the men's fantasy ends with ejaculation and a cheery goodbye on both sides, the women's positively revels in the aches and pains of longing and rejection, as well as the joys of conquest—in short, the whole panoply of emotions that sex minus commitment invariably generates. That women suffer in their fantasy is never a reason for questioning the basis of the fantasy. The suffering (and the various sorts of consolations it attracts, such as ice cream and shopping and girlfriends cooing over one another) is *part* of the dream. —J.B.

BILLY DILI

—WASHINGTON—

Who could be surprised when our debonair president took a breather from the war on terror to spoof his grandstanding predecessor? He sent Bill Clinton as Washington's representative to East Timor's independence ceremonies.

The president knows how to deal with a pest. For weeks Clinton had been popping up in the news whining about the Florida vote count, fretting about imagined slights and complaining that the Bush administration never seeks his foreign policy guidance. So the puckish son of George I sends Clinton in his baggy pants off to East Timor, where he can wear a funny hat and ogle the girls. I bet George II telephoned Bill in his Harlem office and told him to bring a ukulele and expect the girls to be wearing grass skirts.

That the capital of the new country is called Dili just adds to the joke. I can hear the president now, joshing with his advisers, "And guys get this. Condi Rice tells me East Timor's capital is called Dili. The next Clinton news stories are going to be datelined, 'Dili.'" And so they were. From Dili our great big lovable lug of an ex-president actually told his audience, "It [East Timor's independence] took too long to come, but now it is here. I hope we can all make the most of it."

"Make the most of it"? Well, Bill, party on; but first he blamed America for not being "sufficiently sensitive." He could have been talking about almost anything. For over a decade Bill has been apologizing for America's behavior in Africa, in Central America, in wars with the Red Indian, in its treatment of various endangered species. The only thing the impeached ex-president has not apologized for is his personal treatment of various women, some very young, others, such as Juanita Broaddrick, very bruised.

Harry Truman spent his golden years reading history and writing a pretty good memoir. Ike played golf and elder statesman. Richard Nixon read and wrote books, and advanced from disgraced president to elder statesman. Jimmy Carter became a carpenter and won a tortured title emblematic of the liberal Democrats' tortured condition, "America's greatest ex-president." With Clinton the tortured

condition takes a new, more preposterous twist. He gives inane speeches and claims to be writing a memoir, but frequent news stories suggest a middle-aged arrested adolescent, doing what disturbed teenagers do: hanging out.

Clinton parties in the Big Apple, in L.A. and in London, where he often stiffes his hosts. Yet his junkets are not without a serious goal. He is as intent as Alger Hiss once was on proving his innocence of all charges—even the ones he has admitted to in court. I can understand the left's support of the accused Communist, Hiss; its support of a president who moved the Democrats to the political center is more complicated. The left cannot admit Clinton's critics were correct and has fallen for his claim that "the right" did him in. The similarities with Hiss do not end here. Books are being written in his defense.

While visiting recently with ex-White House aides in Los Angeles, Clinton—the *Los Angeles Times* tells us—quoted prodigiously from David Brock's admittedly mendacious book about Clinton's critics. New refutations of its contents appear regularly. Nonetheless, reports the *Times*, "Clinton, who seems to have practically committed passages to memory, told his former aides whenever they feel down, they should read Brock's book to illuminate anew what they were all fighting against for eight years, and as a reminder of what 'unhappy' people their counterparts on the right truly are."

One wonders which passages Clinton takes satisfaction in. He claims his critics practice tabloid journalism, but Brock's book is as reckless with fact as any tabloid story. Yet thousands on the left take satisfaction in Brock's book, too. They have made it a best-seller for weeks. It sits on their coffee tables. As with those who read the tabloids, Brock's readers know Martians never impeached Bill Clinton, but they *want* to believe something dreadful happened and so they read Brock. Bill Clinton quotes Brock. I wonder if he quoted Brock in faraway Dili?

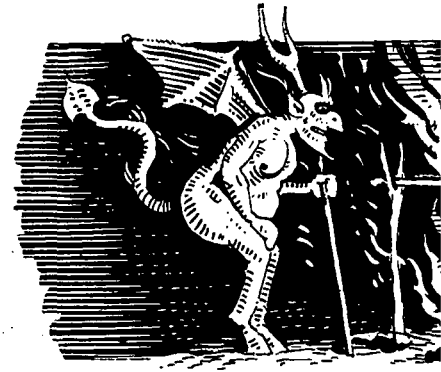
INTELLIGENCE SHORTAGE

—WASHINGTON—

Americans' antipathy to the study of history is a boon for pundits and politicians, especially when they feel the urge to declaim on urgent matters. Our pundits and pols, expounding on Sep-

PUBLIC

BY R. EMM



tember 11 and the concomitant "intelligence breakdown" *in vacua*, can do so with the greatest freedom imaginable. History will not disturb the flow of their criticism. Facts will not interrupt their moral indignation. They speak of September 11 and the "intelligence breakdown" as if both had neither precedents nor ancestry. That is good for them; it allows them to exempt their class from past foolishness, and particularly in the case of the "intelligence breakdown," from any responsibility that history attests to.

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor was but the most relevant precedent for analyzing September 11. As for last summer's "intelligence breakdown," its ancestry can be traced to Senator Frank Church and his colleagues on the Senate select intelligence committee of the 1970s. Now Church's successors are investigating the CIA and FBI. Do the past blunders chasten them? Not if they are studiously unaware of them.

For Pearl Harbor's relevance to September 11, consult the history books—most recently Thomas Fleming's *The New Dealers' War*. From the early 1930s on, there was ample evidence that the Japanese could devastate Pearl in a sneak attack and increasing evidence right up to that "date which will live in infamy" that the attack was coming.

James Q. Wilson recently noted that there have been other breaches of the peace that leaders might have anticipated. For instance, plenty of evidence preceded Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union and North Korea's attack on South Korea. Yet Stalin and the South Koreans were caught unaware. In her classic *Pearl Harbor: Warning*