
Editor's Comment

I am occasionally reminded (some would say warned), by people whom I respect, that the *Chronicles'* polemical tone carries a seed of zealotry. This may result, say those who remind me, in unreflective rejections. If this is the case, we must have misguided some messages, as narrow partisanship was never our ambition. We do not want to become a cause of showdowns, in either word or deed. But we do want to stir intellectual emotions.

With the '70s close to ending, we feel that the fissures of the last two decades must somehow be defined in ideological categories. The liberal/conservative dichotomy, imprecise as it is, befits those categories. These days, a liberal is one who has no qualms in accepting that everything around him is deteriorating into what he sees as a better world; the conservative stands aghast at the sight of everything improving for the worse. Along these lines of confusion, there is slowly emerging a rift between two cultures which may determine the future of this country.

The duality of culture within a society or nation was noticed already by the Greeks—the inventors of both democracy and snobbery, plebeian sloganeering and cultural sophistication. Ever since, sages and socialites have been talking about culture and folklore, court culture and the vulgar one, high- and low-brow, pop or mass culture. These are well-documented distinctions, but not always valid. The Middle Ages witnessed a situation when an intense Christianity transcended borderlines and different tastes: Gregorian chants moved to tears the feudal squire and his serfs alike; both the lowborn and the knight admired Giotto, Cimabue and the Chartres Cathedral. The dual cultural pattern was ideologically delineated at the peak of the Renaissance by Castiglione in *The Courtier*, but it was susceptible to perversions. Early romanticism fed on folk legends only to fashion attitudes of modish melancholy quite alien to the bustling reality of early capitalism. Karl Marx turned his socioeconomic teachings into a moral proposition; it was soon transformed into a morality play, and as such is still staged in university halls and the Central Park West salons of the wealthy. Bertolt Brecht and René Clair created great art from proletarian street ballads, only to contribute to the most high-brow cultural contents, though it would be unfair to claim that their consumption was limited to millionaires' drawing rooms. Abstract painting found its way onto Woolworth's neckties. D. H. Lawrence, a coal miner's son, wished to speak about the conscience of the common Englishman, only to become the minion of literary gourmets. With television in almost every American household, the demierudite tube priests daily convey high-brow cultural concepts, dry-roasted and prepackaged according to the liberal recipe. The end effect is once again confusion: truckers debate Freud and Sartre in turnpike diners without even knowing it, Mahler is passed on to the masses

via movie scores, and telephone installers look as if they have just come from Vidal Sassoon. Thus, the ideological ivory tower in which the court culture still seems to be ensconced is social conscience and revolution: dreams about utopian justice achieved through violence, upheaval and blood in the gutters remain the single exclusivity which the masses have left to the literati and cognoscenti. If the contemporary American farmer or worker is quite able to acculturate himself to every fad and antic of the establishment, the one he refuses to ape is its craving for fuzzy idealism at someone else's expense, one that is rooted in self-hatred, neuroses and psychic debilitations.

Court culture was not always radical; most often it was supercilious, exclusive, contemptuous or just enamored with dimwitted mendacities (*bergerettes* in the *Petit Trianon*). The last 200 years have seen a variety of oddities: 18th-century Jacobin bankers from New York City, populist terrorists of patrician wealth from Massachusetts (*vide* the latest trenchant description and analysis of them in Otto Scott's *Secret Six*), Anita McCormick Blaine from Chicago squandering the International Harvester fortune to support Henry Wallace and communist papers, and the latest California "radical chic" which makes procommunist stars and movie moguls (the Fondas, MacLaines, Beattys, Altmans, et al.) pour their millions into the cultural advance machine for revolution. And the masses refuse to follow. The promiscuously fondled social conscience reached its climax on the infamous cover of the *New York Review of Books*—an organ of high-brow cultural elitism: it featured a diagram for how to make a Molotov cocktail for the benefit of the liberal establishment's sons and daughters at Ivy League schools who might have felt like bombing a bank or a precinct. Thereby, the court culture of the USA has reached the depths of degeneracy. Its decay is hastened by journalistic maggots who permeate the new pop-mass cultural amalgam of the '70s with venom and insanity—and a letter to the editor can now begin: "I am a normal 19-year-old bisexual woman . . ."

Not long ago, Lord Snow declared that court/elite culture versus folk/pop culture is an ancient story, whereas the duality now rests on the basis of science posited against the humanities. Mathematicians of genius know all about the metaphysics of nuclear physics but have never read one word of Kafka. This has its cause in the monstrous effort necessary for specialization in our epoch. However, even if there's merit to this argument, I doubt that it conditions the cultural reality in which we live. And this reality is definitely dichotomous. Whether we like it or not, we must call the two opposing cultures liberal and conservative. Thus, the crucial questions are: What are their similarities and differences? Where is the epicenter of cultural power in today's America? Who holds the levers? How are the gears operated?

These are difficult questions, devoid of any common denominator. Gulf & Western is a mammoth corporation which should stand for capitalism, profits and a free market. Yet its subsidiaries—publishing houses, record companies, Paramount Pictures—publish books, sell albums and make movies which present capitalism as Satan's invention and openly desire its instant demise. This is nothing extraordinary, as Gulf & Western is also a *liberal* conglomerate, whose leaders believe in culture as a bazaar of ideas, where cultural and moral values should float freely and win or lose according to the laws of the market. Under these conditions, cultural commodities earn money—and Gulf & Western is primarily interested in money. Since social conscience is the foremost money-making proposition these days, economy and ethics happily readjust one another in Gulf & Western's boardroom philosophy, and no spiritual conflict threatens the minds of its top managers. Now, there are many corporate giants which are both utterly liberal and into culture. Together with the liberal eminentos, they form the liberal cultural establishment which rules the liberal culture. Whether their opposite is either organized, traditional religion, or a particular and solitary American who believes that culture (and its sway over daily life) should be value-oriented and related to the cultural riches of our heritage—the outcome of the power game is quite obvious. The liberal culture just engulfs the American culture.

Which, of course, means suppression of the adversary culture. Suppression? In democratic America, where everybody can, thanks to the First Amendment, express his views? No one prohibits anybody from publishing a book, making a movie, launching a TV station. That's true, but in our complex, technotronic social reality, an idea, a defense of a value, or an alternate view is not a matter of expression but of visibility, audibility, dissemination. The media are the modern

passkey to human consciousness and they are overwhelmingly dedicated to the liberal culture. That is—the media are committed body and soul to the idea of progress toward an endlessly inferior world. The liberals, proud of their non-conformism, have rebelled against hypocrisy over the centuries; now their rebellion has become an orthodoxy, saturated with hypocrisy, and anybody who *now* rebels against their cant is branded a bigot and made the object of either ridicule or stony silence. The liberal media will never be interested in the puzzling circumstance of why the anti-ERA movement is a women's movement. The liberal orthodoxy has only malignant epithets for it instead of explanations.

The official stand of the liberal culture is that its adversary is culturally inferior. The liberal worldview *only* is declared respectable, and the culture engendered by it auspicious, wise, worthy of attention. But is that so? Even if conservatives and traditionalists command the allegiance of more minds and souls in America (and we don't know if that is the case, since the pollsters are reluctant to let conservative scholars formulate their questionnaires), the media will always make it invisible: they know how to do it. *Time* refuses to print, in its "Letters to the Editor" column, any intelligent rebuff of its liberal biases, favoring instead inarticulate and doltish ones, giving them an instant yahoo imprint by innuendo. The media are masters of tokenism: prominent among the exceptions are William Buckley (he's a yachtsman, an author of spy novels and his wife is photographed in *Women's Wear Daily*), some neoconservatives (Kristol, for he was once a liberal, thus a black sheep), Emmett Tyrrell (he sticks out his tongue at the liberals and they've just noticed it), Marabel Morgan and Anita Bryant (because their unsophistication is so easy to mock), Phyllis Schlafly (because she's so difficult to refute that it's easier to badmouth her), William Safire (because he draws money from the *New York Times*, what a feat for a nonliberal). But to reduce the conservative cultural force to a handful is a fraud, particularly when Marabel and Anita are pushed as standard bearers, as they constantly are. The open liberal hatred of the nonliberal substance makes them quickly banish other names. Why does *Time* never quote Russell Kirk, an historian? Why doesn't the *New York Times* register the existence of Eric Voegelin, Gerhart Niemeyer, Thomas Molnar—all eminent and prolific philosophers of culture, whose profundity of views equals if not surpasses the top official theorists of the liberal culture? Why are Robert Nisbet and James Hitchcock—both incisive commentators on modern culture and its trends, whose intellectual potential could energize universities—never asked for a comment by *Newsweek*, the *Washington Post* and CBS, as Galbraith and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. constantly are? Why do ABC and *The New Republic* never refer to Reed Irvine, one of the most

Philosophy in America

"O philosophy, thou guide of life, O thou explorer of virtue and expeller of vice!"

—Cicero, 45 B.C.

A female pundit in the *Village Voice*, the ideological organ of those for whom a mattress and stereo set together form culture, reflects on the Pope, his visit and the larger horizons of human experience:

"... religion is the genitals of the mind ..."

Wow! It beats Duns Scotus, Spinoza and Pascal! You can bet that Aquinas, that fascist, never thought of that



logical, clear-thinking, and persuasive publicists in America, or Arnold Beichman—one of the most captivating ones? Has any reader of *Esquire* or *Nation* ever heard anything about the distinguished American philosophers Albert Jay Nock or Frederick Wilhelmsen? Why is it that the only opinion on hard-working small businessmen comes from Burbank, or Manhattan, where smart alecks are making fortunes by turning the moral satisfactions of decent, hard work into a rat race by means of derisive one-liners? Everybody knows that Goldwater is a conservative, but nobody knows that Faulkner was our greatest conservative writer. We are sternly instructed by the press and show biz that love is a liberal idea, and faithfulness a conservative one. But is love not ennobled by faithfulness? By preaching anticapitalism and chintzy hedonism in the same breath, the liberal culture has lost any title to the moral representation of hard-working, law-abiding, normalcy-and-common-sense-craving America. However, the near monopoly of cultural means, to which the liberals cling by the almost totalitarian method of ignoring voices of protest, endows them with impunity.

Which makes the two-culture syndrome in America a rigid system of oppression that facilitates and justifies every abuse. To some, it may seem amusing that punk rock, with all its beastly imbecility, caters to the elite and court culture, while the music of Arthur Fiedler serves the plain folk. These paradoxes are at the core of fateful social aberrations. Tremendous amounts of money accumulate in the hands of those who will use it for cultural endeavors unconcerned with the future of *our* civilization. The pristine conviction that social and cultural power are still in the hands of the old financial establishment is an illusion. The cultural, thus the political, standards are now ordained by what some call the New Class. In the early '50s, plenty of brainy and fiercely liberal, if not outrightly radical-minded people, scared stiff by McCarthy, went from politics into professions—labor law, publishing, etc. Within two decades, they had monopolized the opinion-making apparatus of the country, and gathered fabulous wealth along the way. But their allegiances remained the same, and today a certain Mr. Weiss, a mining tycoon, is financing the Institute for Policy Studies, an overtly procommunist research center. Professions whose social basis was the bohemian left (stage setting, fashion photography, sound engineering, etc.) have become sources of financial opulence and keep “creatively” interacting with the liberal culture and politics. The critics of the New Class, like Irving Kristol, locate it mostly in the academe, bureaucracy, the media; but what about the weight of all that money for liberal left causes that comes from the superaffluent Hollywood cameramen or radical disc jockeys?

Some time ago, one could read in the *New York Times* “Book Section” that *now* ideas matter, that intellectual movements are *now* influencing politics—Moynihan became a U.N. ambassador in the wake of one essay, Carter was ad-

vised to read *The Culture of Narcissism* before preparing a speech. But hasn't it always been so? Didn't ideas always generate political events, only in slower sequence than today—the era of Telex and communication satellites? Aren't the TV anchormen and press editorialists just the tom-toms of the modern idea producer, only quicker in transmitting the watchword to immense audiences? The high-brow culture enamored by radicalism has been a particular beneficiary of this rapid change. And, consequently, that culture has become the source of the infectious moral and social bankruptcy of our time, the modern symbiosis of court and pop culture has turned into the wellspring of our woes.

This brings us to perhaps the fundamental difference between *their* culture and *ours*. Great art, poetry, music, or literature comes from the struggle against the real enemies of mankind: conquest, subjugation, death, cruelty, ignorance, insanity. It never originates in bantering with minor afflictions, discomforts, boredoms, frustrations, artificially inflated social “sufferings.” An epoch in which there's no fight for that which meets with the approval of the common folk engenders a minor culture which mirrors trivia and whose reflections are easily forgotten. When contention is moot because everything is permitted, no creativity flourishes. The liberal culture of today seems precisely in such shape. A reigning culture that pushes books which are nothing but extensions of newspapers is inferior; thus—when faced with cultural propositions that speak of moral discipline—it must crush the latter's superiority by totalitarian means. When Pope John Paul II, who clearly belongs to the contemporary, nonliberal culture, preaches antiviolence and antipoverty, but culls his spiritual force from principle, tradition, fidelity to canon, he must be denounced, for he exposes the liberal culture's mushiness and he proves that humane goals and progress can be found in a conservative impulse. Every

Literature in America

In *The New Yorker* magazine, for more than half a century an oasis of delicate literary finesse, we now find a tone of lyricism more personal than even that of the egocentric poets of yesteryear:

“Parting the slit in the front of his underwear, he sent his urine in an arch out onto the frozen ground. It glittered in the moonlight.”

It's no longer her hair or lips, a nightingale or a rose bush, that glitter in the moonlight. How could *The New Yorker*, that prince of style, be outdistanced in the field of modern prose? □

ruling set of values which upholds its unassailability by administrative and bureaucratic means begins to rot first in arts and letters—precisely because they are privileged and protected. The liberals in America have not yet attained the Soviet style of protectionism, but a special tariff for the liberal twaddle became a rule of cultural life in America in the '60s and '70s. Updike, Didion, Vonnegut, the Hollywood radical cinema may be only occasionally and mildly admonished by the liberal interpreters, but never meaningfully criticized, dissected, evaluated. The formal shortcomings may be pointed out, their philosophy—never. No one may ask what the Cheevers, Styrons, Vidals, Hellers et al., have ever given to America, to mankind, to their fellow man—except for literary smartness, cynicism touted as inquiry, desperate mannerism, pharisaical or sanctimonious depressiveness, lascivious pseudomelancholy and modish etiolation of characters. The fertile Americanism of the Hemingways, Sinclair Lewises, O'Haras, has been abandoned amidst the coquettish squeaks of self-hatred. The old naturalism used to proclaim: "Look how it really is! Isn't it terrible?"; the neonaturalism of the Mailers and Baldwins now says: "Look how it really is! Isn't it cute, interesting, amusing, etc.?" Hope, dynamics, respect for the dignity and heroism of the other, indeed, the entire democratic pluralism recedes before the onslaught of the neurotic phobias of the other, and capitulates to the other's freakishness. No one knows any longer in whose name cultural facts are praised or condemned. Is there any moral or intellectual yardstick still around? If nonliberal critics condemn a Cheever or a Didion, they know why they do it. But what are the liberal culture's normative criteria? In *Time*, Inc.'s in-house leaflet, we can find a clue to *Time* magazine's critical ethics, as its foremost literary critic, R. Z. Sheppard, elucidates on the subject: " 'When I write,' he explains, 'it's just me and the book. I have two basic responsibilities to an author: to try to understand his purpose, and to evaluate how well he succeeds. The reviewer's third responsibility,' he [Sheppard] adds, 'is to be absolutely clear and accessible to the reader.' " Thereby, Sheppard tells us that if he had to review Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, he would have praised it to the skies: Hitler's purpose was easily understandable, he perfectly succeeded in articulating his message, and Sheppard would have had no trouble in conveying it clearly and accessibly to his readers. End of *Time* magazine book critic's responsibilities.

In contrast to the cultural ethos of *Time* and its Sheppards, central to *our* culture is permanence and an orderly hierarchy of values. For instance: the individual's moral obligation and responsibility toward another person, community, society, nation, toward civilization and its laws, traditions, institutions. The immanence of human bonds in cultural facts is the norm of our judgment of those facts—ideas, trends, books, movies, intellectual inquiries, etc. These bonds are for us the source of mankind's two most precious concepts:

freedom and human dignity. It seems to us rather evident that liberal ideas, as they are embodied in the culture engendered by them and created daily by the American cultural production, are neither willing nor able to defend and sustain human dignity; about freedom, they mean something different than we do. During the 20th century, the idea of social equality celebrated countless triumphs: in America, for one, things once accessible only through birth privilege or money—plenty of food, abundant leisure, factual political leverage—have become standard. But freedom and dignity were trampled in Auschwitz and in Gulags; and in the same socially successful America, the vulgarization, depersonalization and dehumanization of private life nowadays reduce them both to mockery. Thus, the defense of freedom and human dignity has become the gist of the conflict between *their* culture and *ours*.

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We all feel confused and benumbed, sensing the loss of the center on which we can safely hang our ideals, beliefs and preferences. We all feel the urge to defend cultural goods, we sense a sort of salvation—general and private—in upholding them; we vaguely realize that this salvation begins *there*, in the cultural climate, not in economics, politics or social solutions. Many do not understand the cultural and spiritual dimension of our predicament: the average American has never been confronted with this interpretation of his malaise; he used to leave it to schools, churches, political and social arrangements which were supposed to give him sloganlike explications. Then, television, with its power of smirking insouciance, overshadowed them all. The average American does not realize that the breakdown of sexual conventions means not only that people can do to their bodies what they wish, but that sooner or later, it entails the collapse of everything built on rule, custom, tradition, even the social contract itself; that it ultimately cancels both human warmth and those bondings on which his sense of life rests.

So we, in these pages, are trying to express our protest by judging the other culture. Like every protest of those who are deliberately ignored, ours can also be denounced as shrill and overwrought. But is it? We do our best to debunk the false greatness fabricated by the liberal culture and, now and then, a good man or woman or thought, transmogrified into an icon by the omnipotent liberal establishment and sycophancy, gets hurt. But we do not fling mud, not even unsubstantiated charges; we do not indulge in self-serving showiness; we do not desecrate anybody's symbols. We just respectfully disagree with or simply laugh at our adversaries. Anything else would be incompatible with the most cherished precepts of *our* culture.

—Leopold Tyrmand

Opinions & Views

Moujik 'n' Pulp Sandwich

William Styron: *Sophie's Choice*; Random House; New York.

by Lev Navrozov

Mr. William Styron was born in Virginia, served in the Marine Corps, studied at Duke University. The narrator of *Sophie's Choice* was born in Virginia, served in the Marine Corps, studied at Duke University. He is also a novelist. He is introduced to us by his school nickname "Stingo." It is safe, therefore, to assume that Mr. Styron and Stingo are two different persons. However, Mr. Styron may be a whimsical ironist who has created a parody on the novel, and called this parody *Sophie's Choice*, allegedly written by a certain Stingo. For it begins to loom, in even an innocent perception, from its very first paragraph that the book is a parody. At the age of 22 Stingo found that:

"... the creative heat which at eighteen had nearly consumed me with its gorgeous, relentless flame had flickered out to a dim pilot light registering little more than a token glow in my breast, or wherever my hungriest aspirations once resided."

This is how some humorless school-children all over the world, or some adult workers in the literary courses of the Likhachov Automobile Plant, Moscow, write their novels: they believe that a writer expresses himself in clichés borrowed "from the best" in literature. They have not yet chosen an old or a modern writer to imitate: this scourge of literary mediocrity will come later. For the time being they still imitate literature. Wishing to say that their passion for writing is gone, they feel duty bound to juxtapose a "gorgeous relentless flame" against a "dim pilot light." The high school, or creative writing

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course, tyro does not know what banality is. Literature to him is the ability to form clichés that contrast with everyday life or speech.

It is sufficient to open the book anywhere to see that Stingo has this ability to an uncanny degree; if a girl's eyes implore Stingo to believe her, they implore him "with the despairing plea of an innocent prisoner protesting her virtue before the bar." A Russian novelist

to be acclaimed for this momentous critical insight.

Another interpretation of Stingo's novel is possible. In the 19th century, art in Europe bifurcated; next to the opera, drama, novel, there began to flourish cheap (both artistically and financially) imitations—operetta, melodrama, farce, vaudeville, the dime novel. A copy of a novel in its first printing was expensive (at least in Russia), so

"It is literature of the highest order."

—*Chicago Sun Times*

"A triumph on every level."

—*Newsday*

"It belongs on that small shelf reserved for American masterpieces."

—*Washington Post Book World*

"It has a look of permanence about it."

—*Newsweek*

"Eerily masterful . . ."

—*Chicago Tribune Book World*

"Magnificent . . ."

—*Women's Wear Daily*

friend of mine once compiled a glossary of the most hackneyed phrases in the world. *Sophie's Choice* would have been a treasure trove for him. When Stingo wrote (Stingo explains), his characters "seemed to acquire life of their own." Wishing to explain how deeply a girl loved music, he says that she loved music as much as one loves food. And he adds a cluster of literary elegancies: the "availability of music alone, she said, filled her insides with a sense of delectation, as one feels just before what one knows will be a sumptuous meal."

Anyway, I will refer to the author of *Sophie's Choice* as Stingo. It makes me feel safer. If Stingo and *Sophie's Choice* are parodies, Mr. Styron and his publishers should be congratulated on their indomitable sense of humor, and I wish

it was sufficient for the writer to sell two thousand copies to live quite well. An installment of a penny dreadful, on the other hand, cost 1/100 of the price, and so no financial success was possible without mass sales.

In the United States (and possibly everywhere) today the price of a copy of any newly published novel has been reduced to the same figure, no matter whether the author is the greatest genius mankind ever produced or the lowest hack. By this, I do not mean that good prose does not appear in the West today. But it appears contrary to the current publishing economics, just as in post-1918 Russia it appears contrary to the totalitarian regime.

If Stingo's *Sophie's Choice* is a pulp novel, and this genre is now the accepted