

families. In their efforts to cope with these challenges, they were not always successful, sometimes contracting into myopic hatred and narrow bitterness. But often they rose above themselves, articulating with clarity, intelligence, and courage the perceptions and visions of a frustrated people. We can still learn much about black history and hopes from their lives and words. We will learn little about them from Allison Davis, however. Indulging in wildly speculative psychobiography, smug historical pronouncements, shameless hagiography, and lobotomized ideology, Dr. Davis



frequently finds himself without a shred of evidence for his sweeping points. So he puts an impassioned phrase or sentence in italics and considers the case proved. Even if the reader tried to swallow every enormity Dr. Davis offers (e.g., Lincoln suffered from "irrational anger" deriving from a compulsive desire to be loved by everyone), the internal contradictions would make the stew difficult to digest. How, for instance, can we simultaneously praise King for seeing that some things are more important than living *and* the no-nukes forces for asserting that nothing is? Or how can we lament the passing of Judeo-Christian values *and* pathologize the effects of "puritanic morality" on blacks' marvelous "sexual vitality" (as if family disintegration, illegitimacy, and VD were not exacting a terrible toll in the black community)? Perhaps after his death, someone will write a book on Dr. Davis's schizophrenia. □

## Of Peter Pan and Pig Heads

**Wilhelm Reich: *Children of the Future: On the Prevention of Sexual Pathology***; Farrar, Straus & Giroux; New York.

Little children are wonderful. Everyone loves them. Wordsworth envied their spontaneity and sense of wonder in the presence of nature. Dostoevski believed they were like angels sent to soften our hearts. Jesus taught His disciples to seek Heaven by emulating their trusting faith and guileless humility. But as much as adults may learn from children, children must nonetheless grow up and to do so must be trained in mature modes of thinking and acting. To remain childlike, stressed the Apostle Paul, does not preclude the laying aside of the childish. The hope of remaining forever in the nursery is a vain one, harmless enough in a whimsy like J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*, but terribly destructive when taken seriously in works like Wilhelm Reich's *Children of the Future*.

Physiologically, the dividing line between childhood and adulthood is the maturation of the sexual functions during puberty. Since the sex drive unleashes powerful emotions and produces children requiring adult care, society has traditionally stabilized the emotions and provided child care by sanctioning sexual expression only between married adults. Reich will have none of this. The glorious inborn instincts of children should be trusted as the only guide to sexual behavior. Adults just mess things up by imposing their religious and moral values, especially Jews who circumcise. Parents and teachers should simply provide factual information and then get out of the way—unless, of course, a little one needs a bit of help getting started. A 5-year-old boy not yet

making genital advances to girls, for instance, is in need of Reich's "orgonomic" treatment.

Because they deny children's "right" to genital gratification, Reich loathes religion, governments on the right and on the left, and the "rotten institution of marriage." Posing as an objective scientist interested only in promoting the good of the child, Reich ignores the studies showing that nothing ensures the emotional well-being of children as much as stability in their parents' marriage and that high-school achievement is closely correlated to religious upbringing, not fornication and masturbation. But then Reich especially abhors the Church, "the main institution that continues the sexual suppression." What he wants instead is a "true religion" permitting children to "grow up as nature or 'God' has prescribed." Indeed, Reich is sure that if men could get rid of cultural "armor-ing" and live by our instinctive impulses, as animals do, we would be as blissfully in harmony with nature as they are. Eternal children would romp in a peaceful paradise, freed from war, guilt, and confusion. But what kind of paradise is Reich actually offering, especially since he does not share the orthodox view that all of nature fell with man? What would Reich have said about the "good of the child" had he seen the recent studies on how chimpanzees (usually considered our closest biological relatives) often kill their young and each other in the wild? Before his death Reich should have read William Golding's insightful novel about what adolescents likely would do if left alone on a tropical island with all of the advantages of nature and none of the impediments of civilization or religion. Golding's characters behaved rather like chimpanzees, killing one another as they worshipped a fly-covered pig head. Adults like Reich who will not teach their children the

"thou shalt nots" of the Lord of Hosts can only abandon them to the murderously natural "true religion" of the Lord of the Flies. (BC) □

## Conspiracies and Other Cankers

**Jack Lynn: *The Factory***; Harper & Row; New York.

Americans are conspiracy crazy, especially when it comes to matters concerning the Kennedys. Both nonfiction (or so the publishing information claims) and fiction books have appeared—and continue to appear—that *prove* that Jack and/or Bobby were the victims of a conspiracy. The nature of these described theories tends to be such that the news media are under the thrall of the conspirators (the government can't even keep classified information out of print or off the air, so those malefactors really must be tough guys), so the authors can be very selective about what reporting is said to be true or fraudulent. The message they convey is: "Nobody *knows*—but *I* do." It is unsettling to realize that the people who inflict such books upon the reading public are able to drive automobiles, to consume liquor, to vote, and to perform other acts that are limited to those who have passed, presumably successfully, the age of reason.

Jack Lynn was associated with Bobby Kennedy's political campaigns; he produced and distributed TV programs for the senator. It comes as no surprise that *The Factory* is a would-be thriller about the conspiracy behind RFK's assassination. The whole thing is so badly executed that it even makes the script for an inane TV detective show—or *Quincy*—seem to have similarities with "The Mystery of Marie Roget." □

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## Editor's Comment

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convincing juveniles that it is their elemental human right to destroy themselves with drugs, and inducing teenage girls to become mothers, incidentally ruining both the girls' and their offspring's lives. Why is he so firmly set against our common moral and existential destiny? There are no clear answers to this enigma, and it's here where American conservatism ceases to be indebted for its resurgence to the foolishness of its detractors; here it is forced to fight for the rudiments of reason, or, perhaps, even for the survival of the species. And this is not only why it is possible to be an American conservative now, but also why such an ideological choice is the only honorable one in the reality that surrounds us.

**T**hese reflections beset me as I read in the *New York Times Book Review* some ravings about a book by a lady who mourns the lot of our children, upon whom brutal, precocious "knowledge" is forced by the Liberal Culture's current educative ideals. The reviewer, an undiscerning, arrogant feminist, called the author's defense of childhood "cantankerous." She devastated the concerned, well-meaning writer because she "seems to be disturbed by the fact that parents are not raising their children in a traditional middle- and upper-middle-class world buttressed by convention and authority—a world that no longer exists." As if the poorest black woman in a housing project wouldn't prefer her child to read *Pinocchio* rather than to peek through the keyhole at scenes of sexual bestiality.

Such petty, venomous, mendacious, feminist-liberal demagoguery trying to erase all permanent values by branding them "middle- and upper-middle-class" may be only a point of departure for a wave of regretful sadness. But it also may turn into an exhilarating realization of the abyss of paltry inanity opened by the *Times'* reviewer; it may occasion an awareness that optimism can be the armor of a modern American conservative. He knows that no world will vanish as long as people miss its inherent spiritual and moral qualities, its edifying values, its flavors and charms, its bygone moods and tastes. Forms may be torn down by history's vicissitudes, and political and social structures tend to disappear, but spiritual contents and substances linger stubbornly. They are even more tenacious if people's longing for past splendors embellished by time's venerability make those people reevaluate, reformulate, and reframe their aspirations and goals—which remain strikingly the same over millennia, notwithstanding onslaughts from the Liberal Culture, human potential movements, lesbian "family" aberrations, etc., etc. The feudal world, distasteful and unprepossessing as it may look to us today, actually invented the notion of dignity, barely cognizable in Hebrew and classical

civilizations: it derived the concept from the cult of honor, another ethical feature that cynical moderns hold in rather low esteem. The feudal forms—material and behavioral—have lain in ruins for centuries, pulverized by Cervantes as well as by economic developments, but the postulate of human dignity became the cornerstone of all ensuing social technologies, ideological manifestos, and democratic catechisms because human minds and hearts institutionalized it as a permanent value. The middle-class bourgeois culture—pilloried for more than a century for its respect for correctitude, propriety, and convention—has almost vanished under the anomic, savage assaults of the joint forces of rock "poetry," vomit art, and entertainment provided by the Hollywood cult of abomination. Yet we assume that the enraged feminist propagandist, invited by the *Times Book Review* to preach the abominable, does not let loose her physiological pressures at a dinner table—which means that she still abides by some legacy of bourgeois convention.

Therefore, if we speak of American conservatism as a novelty, we mean its newly acquired opportunity to defend *our* civilization against the intellectual barbarians and their storm troopers in all walks of American contemporaneity. The witless innocents and the preposterous neurotics are a civilizational menace, the magnitude of which is obvious to anyone with good sense. They rot in the noxious gases of their lifestyles, their monstrously bloated selves; their images are daily amplified by the servile liberal media as the mass program for pop salvation. For the last two decades, instead of feeling that each day means a better America, we feel that every day brings closer the decay of a deathbed on which the forthcoming corpse will be painted in Day-Glo colors by a caste of scurrilous cultural morticians who call themselves liberals, narcissists, paladins of the First Amendment, marijuana-perfumed troubadours of doom, or tycoons of orgasmic deliverance.

**B**ut we always were and still are a normative civilization in which sin and virtue can and must be defined for the sake of the common good. Efforts of the human soul and experiences of timelessness are never going to vanish, no matter how rabidly hated and persecuted they are by some degenerate minds on Ivy League faculties and in the consciousness industry's robber barons' Manhattan suites. Maximizing the expansion of intellectual inquiry has suddenly, within the last couple of decades, become a conservative business. This makes the American conservative the most progressive, future-oriented, humane agent of the American civilization, one who believes that life can and will bloom and that hope may flourish. Now the linguistic unity of the adjective *American* and the noun *conservative* makes sense; all traces of contradiction have evaporated from that semantic formula. And in that there is an enormous and fully substantiated pride.

—Leopold Tyrmand

***National Lampoon's Vacation*; Directed by Harold Ramis; Screenplay by John Hughes; Warner Brothers.**

by Stephen Macaulay

*National Lampoon's Animal House* (1978) had effects far exceeding any inherent merit. For example, it solidified a number of individuals as "celebrities," such as the late John Belushi. The sophomoric film about demented college students gave rise to innumerable, more tasteless movies of the same ilk that continue to appear with an inexorable regularity: college students, high school students, junior high school students—one awaits the first day-care center-based loony tune. The various commissions and reports about education should be a cause for loud cheering, not dismay, if these movies have any semblance to reality. The characters they portray do little more than belch and copulate, both instinctive processes. Learning or even semicivilized behavior have nothing to do with these "student" movies.

*Vacation* is *Animal House* all grown up—at least its characters are as adult as they can be expected to be, given their antecedents. It is a great argument against evolution and for devolution. Some movies are tasteless because they are

moronic; others are moronic because they are tasteless. The only thing interesting about *Vacation* is that it is both, simultaneously, though that level of interest is on par with poking around in a landfill.

The so-called students in *Animal House* celebrate destructiveness. It's not just college pranks: given a cruise missile, they would have aimed it at the dean's office. *Vacation* takes aim at the family. There's Dad, who seems capable of rudimentary motor functions and little else. Mom makes feints at keeping order, but before long, whatever once inhabited

her skull is replaced by a vacuum. Daughter thinks that it's "neat" to have joints in her purse because they are somehow prohibited, though it seems that if they were discovered, the family, as it is, would simply have a smoke-in. Dad gives Son a sip of beer in order to initiate him into manhood; Son takes a 12-ounce sip—Animal House beckons. A great-aunt is treated like a stranger with scrofula *and* herpes simply because she has the abominable taste to be old. The whole package is disgusting. But what is more horrible is the prospect of what bastards it will engender. □

## Movies Made Simpleminded

**John Ellis: *Visible Fictions: Cinema: Television: Video*; Routledge & Kegan Paul; Boston.**

Just when you thought that it was safe to go back into the movie theater, *Visible Fictions* emerges. From now on, seeing a movie—a plain, simple, entertainment—is no longer, well, seeing a movie. It never *was* just seeing a movie, but evil old bourgeois ideology acted as 3-D blinders, as it always does. According to Mr. Ellis, a person doesn't buy a ticket to simply watch a movie (which, he notes, is "generally constructed to be seen once and only once," which is curious, given not only the repetitions of

cult films like *The Rocky Picture Horror Show*, but Bogart films, Woody Allen productions, *Star Wars* and its offspring, etc., etc., etc.). No, a person buys a ticket for the movie *and*, more importantly, for "the relative privacy and anonymity of a darkened public space in which various kinds of activities can take place." What the "various kinds of activities" are is never made clear. Ellis perceptively points out that "the audience is seated in rows, separated from each other to some degree." Presumably, then, furtive hand-holding and kissing are ruled out. One activity is typically performed in the dark and in relative privacy: sleeping. Sure enough, Ellis comments, "Sitting still in the dark has overtones of sleep and dreaming; indeed, it is easier to fall asleep in a film than is often admitted." (Books about film are often soporific, too.) If Ellis is correct in his many assertions, then it is surprising that more snores aren't heard in cinemas, for movie viewing as he has it is hard work. The viewer identifies with the "hero and heroine, villain, bit-part player, active and passive character," and even the movie projector. Ellis claims that nothing presented on the screen is a matter of chance, so any canned goods shown must be identified with, as well. Moreover, not only does movie viewing in-

