

attacks. Like the Pharisee, he'd rather not be inconvenienced and would rather pass by on the other side.

Well, enough. But two final points: I don't have to use Bartlett's (I don't own a copy, and I've taught Dryden, Burke, and Waugh for 25 years), and I've just retired after 35 years of enlisted and commissioned service in the United States Navy and Naval Reserve, two organizations which don't tolerate lap-dogs and eunuchs. □

feminists, art for art's sake writers, bureaucratic generals, egalitarian republicans, and fat women—in fact, with just about everything that would become the 20th century. Hillaire Belloc and G. K. Chesterton imagined a social system straight out of the 12th century, and Belloc refused to drink anything invented after the Reformation. More recently in Britain you could point to Evelyn Waugh and Anthony Powell, while in America a good case could be

made for the “nonliberal” vision of Peter DeVries.

Roy Blount is hardly a conservative, and he *is* sometimes offensive (so were Aristophanes and Rabelais) but he is also often funny. Your reviewers' failure to respond to the funny side of contemporary life is part of a larger failure: the inability to grasp the zaniness of the universe. I wonder if they can really be conservatives. □

Who Cares?

by Harry Zoylus

The anonymous reviewers at *Chronicles of Culture* don't seem to like anything except right-wing polemics. The problem is the usual plague of the self-righteous: they have no sense of humor. For them, Roy Blount Jr. is “a humorist of sorts.” What's the worst thing that can be brought up against him? He wears makeup in the cover photo.

There is a big world out there, where men still engage in “sports, drinking, chopping wood . . . and sexual relations,” although these subjects are obviously too earthy for the little puritans who review books. It's not so much Roy who is too much for them, as the reality of everyday life. Don't conservatives chop wood, drink bourbon, or make love? Don't they have any of what Roy calls “the crown jewels”?

The dismal prissiness of so many American conservatives is a modern phenomenon. We don't have to go back to Aristophanes or Juvenal or even Swift to find great humorists who were arch-reactionaries. Most brilliant comedy—and all great social satire—is intensely conservative, because it is a disgruntled response to the present's failure to live up to the standards of a mythical past. W. S. Gilbert managed to be offended at:

Mr. Zoylus writes from Whiskey Lake, Wisconsin.

Caveat Emptor

In Art, as in most areas of life, California is ahead of the rest of us. A new set of California laws, collectively known as “An Artist's Bill of Rights,” prohibit the buyer of a work of art from making any alterations in that work without consent of the artist. According to a recent issue of *State of the Arts*, the official publication of the California Arts Council, buyers of art are beginning to feel the force of this new law. In one reported case, the owner of a painting is facing legal action for removing dollar bills that the artist had originally sewn to his canvas. The law allows the artist to sue the offending owner for “actual and punitive damages, attorneys' fees, expert witness' fees and injunctive relief.”

It is hard to calculate the effect of such a law. For some time now, the serious arts have been divorced from the greater public. The books of new poets go unread, most new music goes unheard and even unplayed, and nobody much likes modern painting except the people whose lives depend upon it—painters and critics. It is easy to blame these developments upon the public's philistinism or (which comes closer) the artists' arrogance. Whatever the cause, few people regard paintings and verses as somehow their own. Art is something abstract, recherché, and recondite—accessible only to the initiated few. In

California art is so etherealized, it is no longer even property.

If the California law catches on (remember Proposition 13?), no one will dare buy a work of art of any period. Lawyers being lawyers, we can expect to see briefs filed on behalf of Praxiteles and Michelangelo over the matter of certain fig leaves in the Vatican. □

Commedia dell'Arte

George Balanchine died a year ago April. Last July the Ballet Master of the New York City Ballet, John Taras, was finally persuaded by Mikhail Baryshnikov to join the American Ballet Theater. In a recent interview with *Dancemagazine*, Taras observed that with Balanchine gone “things will not be the same.” How right he was. The New York City Ballet waited only a year and a half to dishonor the memory of their master. They recently sent to Italy a reduced company of dancers, bravely flying the Balanchine flag, in order to bolster the European reputation of the company. By all accounts, they could just as well have stayed home. The scaled-down productions put on in impossible locations were more like vaudeville than ballet. The most unintentionally surreal performance was given in an abandoned velodrome. Since the bleachers had been given over to plantings of trees and bushes, plastic chairs had to be brought

THE AMERICAN PROSCENIUM

in for seating. As *The Economist* described the effect, it was "more a giggle than a gig." This travesty of Balanchine's choreography was part of a celebration of the Italian Communist Party's *festa dell'unita*.

It's too bad Balanchine couldn't have been there to see it. Before his defection in 1924, he had danced in performances given for the party leadership in the Soviet Union. Waiting in the wings, he would hear snatches of fervent debates. To the end of his days, he used to entertain friends with his imitations of Trotsky. The aesthetic commissars of the U.S.S.R. were not ready for Balanchine's innovations in dance. Even in 1959 the chief choreographer of the Bolshoi

arrogantly informed Balanchine that his work would be condemned back home as "mere formalism."

Balanchine loved his American home. The State Department had to work hard to convince him that it was his patriotic duty as an American citizen to take the company to the Soviet Union in 1962. The émigré's hostility to communism and to the Soviet regime was unbending. Throughout his successful tour, whenever he was hailed as a great Russian, he always responded—in pre-1917 Russian—with a denial. No, he was only an American. In his native city of St. Petersburg (now Leningrad) he was hailed as a conquering hero, a hometown boy who made good. He accepted

the tribute—not for himself, he said, but on behalf of the United States and New York City.

Balanchine *was* a great American, a deeply religious man, and a militant anticommunist. The New York City Ballet's clowning for the Italian communists is worse than bad taste. The aims of the Italian Party are no different from those of their Russian brethren who drove and are still driving so many artists, musicians, writers, and dancers into exile. In putting itself at the service of the Party, the NYCB demonstrates once again the connection between artistic integrity and moral conscience: bad faith makes bad art. □

And the Winners Are . . .

In my opinion, the winners of the 1984 presidential election were:

**President Reagan
liberalism
and
the conservative eggheads, with
whom the Republican politicians
are so ostentatiously impatient.**

Faced with such judgment, a wise rabbi would caress his beard and say: "How come such disparate, even antithetical, elements could all win at the same time and place?" And that's a good question, which makes politics in today's America such a confusing, if not disturbing, spectacle.

President Reagan certainly won on his record, but part of his record is the asset of his smile: an endearingly all-American smile that conveys an impression of fortitude and conviction. There were others before Mr. Reagan who went a long way on their smiles: Clark Gable managed to turn his grin into a national emblem. The press has already tagged this unprecedented victory as a triumph of popularity.

That is not exactly the case. Reagan won because, next to his substantial economic accomplishments, he effectively symbolized certain ideals, and longings, and emotions. Some of them were superficially articulated but at the same time were as hot as a branding iron pressed against the nation's flesh.

So the question is why did Reagan's coattails stretch no further than George Bush?

When America woke up on November 7th, the election, as seen by extreme partisans on both sides, could have been reduced to the defeat of the party of Sister Boom-Boom by the party of Brother Falwell. The entire nation—down to the stratum of the 18-year-olds—seemed permeated with a desire for a society profoundly different from what we inherited from the 1960's and 70's. Obviously, the nation in its mass voted against mindless liberationism whose consequence has been the moral and existential emptiness in the lives of, at least, one generation. Mr. Mondale somehow represented

San Francisco and Mr. Reagan Lynchburg, Virginia. But the clarity of people's decision becomes blurred, if we try to pit the liberalism of the Democrats against the conservatism of the Republicans. Massachusetts reelected an unrepentant homosexual congressman who seduced a congressional page, while the voters of Illinois turned against a congressman guilty of a similar but more "normal" transgression, despite all his tears of repentance. Small things, perhaps, but they speak volumes about some vectors of our society that seem to be beyond the understanding of Republican conservatives.

So why does a nation whose instincts are behind Ronald Reagan all the way display, at the same time, such indifference to his catechism of fundamental, down-to-earth values? Why does ideological liberalism remain the big winner by thwarting all the efforts to initiate a *different* society? Why is liberalism still so potent as to be able to give the moribund Democratic Party a galvanizing shot and save it from being

JOURNALISM

Out of the Closet, Into the Street

For years the editors of *Christianity and Crisis* have done their best to make friends with the international left, even to the point of adjusting or ignoring inconvenient doctrines. Despite these efforts, *The Nation* recently took aim at all (not just conservative) religionists and fired a broadside entitled "Political Opium." *C&C*'s soul-searching response:

What's the point? On many issues and in much of its content, *The Nation*

projects a vision of the just and caring society that we (and, we believe, the editors of *Commonweal*, *Sojourners*, *The Christian Century*, *National Catholic Reporter*, etc., along with the leaders and staffs of major Jewish and Christian organizations) find attractive. We push many of the same causes and fight the same kind of enemies—in Central America, South Africa, the Middle East, on the environment, the rights of women and minorities, school prayer, the death penalty, the

arms race, superpower relationships. ... Nobody asks the editors of *The Nation* to genuflect before our beliefs; but why spit on them? Are we the enemy?



"Verily, I say unto you, they have their reward" (Matt. 6:5). ☐

decisively defeated in the political arena?

Part of the answer lies in what Rep. Jack Kemp said on the election night during a brief interview: during the long months of his campaigning for Republican candidates all over the country, he found the Democrats sounding just like Republicans on almost every issue. He may be right, but the question remains: *Why* did they and how could they sound so much like the Republicans? Did they score a major upset by preempting *something* terribly important which by dint of history and common sense did not belong to them? Did a fraud decide the outcome of the struggle?

The fact is that neither Reagan nor his Republicans were able to give an ideological identity to questions of foreign policy or to issues which they called—so naively—"social." As a result, every Democrat in the field could wrap himself in borrowed ideological finery that clearly did not belong to him or her. Whenever they wanted to strike a patriotic pose, or espouse fiscal conservatism, or refute the excesses of feminism, or rant about "real" military strength—they could do so easily because liberalism has assumed an astonishing flexibility

now so evident among bright liberal columnists and scholars and aggressively liberal TV anchormen and commentators. The Republicans were miserably deficient in the cultural sophistication which might have enabled them to defend their own ideological advantage—summed up so obviously (if simplistically) in the President's image. Anyone who happened to watch James Baker, the White House Chief of Staff, during his few minutes on CBS would detect immediately where the weakness lies: the Republicans approach politics as a supreme value in itself. All Mr. Baker could talk about was another cosmetic administration, mired ankle-deep in the priorities of purebred politicians.

It can be argued that the Reagan landslide may have historical consequences. Big upturns are often originated by commanding personalities whose symbolism succeeds in transforming the popular mind and refurbishing the national spirit. However, if such a personality actually introduces a *new* set of notions, they must derive from solid intellectual effort, that is, if they are to escape the revolving door of cultural trends.

And here is where those who try to

give conservatism its intellectual dimension come in. For years, they have observed that the Republican message is pathetically shallow, unable even to buoy up an ideology, much less a ship of state. The Party requires a meticulously and patiently carved basis of scholarly support. The "new patriotism" of the Republicans rings with a sort of, by now, antique shrillness. It is hardly a proposition on which to base a meaningful restoration of the national ethos. The Republicans' social pluralism and notions of justice and fairness are awkward and derivative; their manifestations of religiousness unrefined and without depth; their antifeminism limited to a few embarrassing slogans. For years, we have voiced the supreme necessity of a coherent public philosophy that would efficiently translate intellectual theories and moral concerns into political language and practice. We are quite positive that, at this point of history, American conservatism badly needs its Jeffersons and Madisons, but before they arrive, it needs even more its Lockes and Burkes, who, in a new and inimitable way, would be able to teach politicians how to think.

—Leopold Tyrmand