



Everything Is Jake

The Unmanned American

by Thomas Fleming

My old man did not think much of writers; he had known too many of them. He did not like what little he had seen of Hemingway, and regarded his obsession with virility as unmanly. Hemingway, at least as a younger man, must have had few illusions about himself and his generation, and his first and best novel, *The Sun Also Rises*, is an American's Good-bye to *All That*, to manhood as well as civilization.

Poor Jake Barnes, impotent from a war wound, spends his life finding alternatives to sex — fishing in Spain, horse racing, bull-fights, laconic appreciations of good food — but in the end, he is sustained only by a hardheaded cynicism that does not permit him even to imagine life might have been better if he had been whole. His answer to every illusion is his last line in the novel: “Isn't it pretty to think so?”

Hemingway's childish fascination with blood sports, bull-fighting as well as big-game hunting, his affection for prize fighters, and his lifelong fear of the suicide he ultimately committed all mark him as one of the unmanned men of the 20th century. Ernest is Jake, and *The Sun Also Rises* is an accurate diagnosis of a generation (rather an entire age) which, in giving up on civilization, had forgotten how to be men and women. Jake is impotent, Lady Brett is a slut, Mike is an alcoholic, and Robert Cohn is the rich untalented boor who was replacing the aristocracies of Europe and America.

“Robert Cohn,” as the first sentence describes him, “was once middle-weight boxing champion of Princeton.” Young men like sports, and if they do not, there is usually something wrong with them. I was lousy at all of them, but playing baseball and football meant much to me at the age of 12, and even after I discovered girls, I sometimes preferred fishing. (Still do.) But as boys grow into manhood, they find the thrill of competi-

tion in their jobs, in the pursuit of learning, in politics, and they reserve only a few hours a week for the physical stress of the basketball or tennis which keeps them fit and clears their heads.

It is a bad sign when a man does not relegate sports to the attic or gunroom of his life. My father owned a baseball team and had, if anything, even more contempt for professional athletes than he did for writers. He loved the company of managers and scouts and always spoke of Al Lopez with affectionate reverence, but the “phenoms” under contract he diagnosed as so many cases of arrested development. Even when I was only 12, I had begun to realize there was something wrong with most of these guys, and when, at the age of 18, I spent a season as my father's “press secretary” (i.e., general flunky) I came to view his players as crybabies and brats, incapable of managing their own affairs, always overspending their salaries, unable to resist a pink Cadillac or the peroxide blonde that came with it as a standard accessory. Big as they were and tough as they could be in a brawl, they were boys, not men.

Whenever I hear of a professional athlete who wants to be president, I shudder, remembering the childishness and moral effeminacy of the phenoms. A big-time college football coach once told me of how he first heard about a hot talent who was not bright enough to get into a real college. What a shame to have to pass up a chance at getting young Joe Namath!

I met the coach when I was in college because I used to drink beer with Big John Canaday, a former lineman with the New York Giants. John was no more intellectually inclined than Broadway Joe, but he was a man who once saved my skin when I got into an argument with a Marine just back from Vietnam. When the Marine, who was built like a shot-putter, invited me to go outside where he was literally going to kill me, I had no

choice but to put my 130 pounds on the line. As any young man knows, it is better to face death than to lose face.

Big John, knowing the inevitable outcome of this mismatch, flexed his massive biceps and told the big Marine to leave. My slayer-to-be—who when he rose up, revealed himself to be bigger than John—was unimpressed: “You and who else are gonna throw me out?” Smiling calmly, John told him, “Me and”—reaching out from under the bar—“this Colt .45.”

Big John may not have had brains, but—with or without a gun—he had grit, and to this day I do not know why he befriended me. Young “intellectuals” and New York journalists are fond of ridiculing “dumb jocks,” specifically black athletes from the South. These males without chests, dead from the neck down, are not even man enough to understand that intelligence is of no earthly use if the intelligent lack the courage to put their minds to honorable use. Some “dumb jocks” have more humanity than the entire editorial staff of the *New Republic*.

Football players are not paid by the cerebral ounce, and even quarterbacks like Namath can be none too bright. Once, in a conversation with former Sen. Eugene McCarthy, I brought up the candidacy of Jack Kemp, whom even O.J. Simpson (in his memoirs) ridiculed for his limited intelligence. McCarthy found Mr. Kemp’s entire political career excruciatingly funny.

But Kemp and Namath and Simpson seem like intellectual giants beside Bill Bradley. Bradley has given up running on his record in the Senate—18 years of sucking up to the *Washington Post*—and now wants to be elected president on the NBA ticket. Bill felt so bad as a white boy in a black man’s world that he internalized the bogus values of the NBA and wants the rest of us to be as race-obsessed as he is. Better Gore. Better Bush.

Most sports are obviously mock battles and war games, designed to train boys to become men, capable of defending their homes and fighting for their country. Amateur and professional sports, over the past several centuries, were usually brutal combats in which the victor was the last man standing. As recently as a generation or two ago, athletes were poor tough kids who worked hard and played the game. Today, they seem more like spoiled darlings paid to sweat in public and act out the fantasies of testosterone-starved suburban “males.” As entertainers, they are lower than rock musicians who write their own songs and perhaps a little higher than film stars who act out sex in movies. But if the Vegas-style sports productions of the NBA-NFL variety continue to provide a degraded model for male competition, what defense is there of boxing (the effete Norman Mailer’s favorite moral allegory) and wrestling? There is a difference, of course, between boxing and wrestling: Some people are dumb enough to bet on boxing matches.

Like most Americans my age, I have seen, usually by *force majeure*, an hour or two of televised wrestling in almost every decade. Back in the late 50’s, our neighbors stayed up to watch the rassling in the years when Gorgeous George was king. Everyone knew the matches were scripted, but in the early days the performers were, for the most part, trained wrestlers who were not simply acting, even if the outcome was foreordained. The Harts—father Stuart and his sons Bret and Owen—were genuine athletes who took their craft very seriously. Owen, it is said, was very unhappy with the increasingly goofy and humiliating scripts and costumes imposed by wrestling czar Vince McMahon, and it is no small irony that Owen Hart died a few years ago doing a super-hero descent

from the rafters when his harness opened prematurely.

There is no point to making fun of the rasslers, most of whom are ordinary guys trying to make a living for their families. It cannot be good for their souls, however, to live a lie for so many years. My old man used to repeat the old saying that acting was the highest profession for a woman but the lowest for a man, and in later years, I used to ponder the second half of that statement when an actor-president awarded a Medal of Freedom to John Wayne, as if John Wayne were really a war hero and not simply an actor who played war heroes. Mr. Wayne was undoubtedly a patriotic American, but to receive such a medal, he should have waited in line behind each and every combat veteran of World War II—including Jimmy Stewart and Clark Gable, who did go into combat; the Coast Guard men who ran the landing crafts; the merchant sailors who faced death from German U-boats; and director John Ford, who risked his life shooting films for the Navy.

It is not just that rasslers are actors but that the cartoon characters they play are, for the most part, potty-mouthed brats, the dream-fulfillments of girly 12-year-old boys who will never reach manhood. Some of the *personae* are simply comical clones of characters who might have been invented by Japanese animators. Sometimes the *personae* go over the top. Amiable Nick Foley has turned himself into Mankind, whose self-destructive antics astonish even The Undertaker. Far from athletic, Mankind attracts and holds his audience by enduring a level of abuse that is almost suicidal.

Stone Cold Steve Austin (profiled in a recent A&E *Biography* series that included profiles of Owen Hart and Jesse Ventura) started out as a nice Texas boy from a broken home, a good student and star football player in his high school. Steve Williams (né Steve Anderson) was a shy overachiever who made a tragic miscalculation in choosing an occupation that offered fame without glory and swallowed up his personal life. Now on his third marriage, nice Steve Williams spends much of his life as Antichrist Stone Cold Steve Austin, whose fans carry signs reading Austin 3:16—Stone Cold’s anti-gospel of amoral violence he created one night to ridicule a “Christian” rassler. It is all, he says, just good fun.

But if Steve Austin is laughing all the way to the emergency room, what of the fans who, in their desperate search for conflict, pay their money or waste their time on what they know is a sham? Preadolescent boys make up an increasing segment of the target audience that Vince McMahon and his imitator, Ted Turner, are going after. This is the demographic justification for the cartoon atmosphere created for stars like Hulk Hogan and the hero he displaced, André (not Navrozov, as my children used to think) “the Giant.” The 12-year-old doughboys who foul their name-brand jeans for joy when the House of Pain is lowered onto the ring are a pathetic spectacle, but less disturbing than the post-adolescent American *castrati* who spend so much of their free time in front of a TV set, drooling over the steroid-inflated mercenaries of the WWF and the NFL.

Sports are one figment in the collective delusion of modern America, a televised orgy of pseudo-virility in which the athletes play the part of porn stars, and the fans are self-abusing cases of arrested development trying so hard to believe that Jesse Ventura is a real hero, Michael Jordan a wonderful guy, Mark McGuire a baseball great.

Back in the 50’s, my old man knew a sports promoter. His mother was forever ragging him about the dirty business of this

mock sport until he finally took her to one of the "athletic exhibitions." Within minutes, she was at ringside begging her new champion to murder the bum.

The fans do know these matches are not only rigged but staged—on TV it is clear that few, if any, of the punches come close to hitting meat—and none of them is dumb enough to bet on a WWF "championship" match, yet they continue to act out the fantasy. Here is the "willing suspension of disbelief" with a vengeance, and Vince McMahon is more poet than promoter. But what kind of poetry? Imagine the philosophy of the Marquis de Sade set to a greeting card rhyme. Like so many modern American males, Sade was incapable of taking pleasure in the ordinary things of life. Morally and intellectually feeble, he wallowed in *unnatural* fantasies of sex and violence.

Those who have never read Konrad Lorenz imagine that he believed that man was a naturally vicious predator who could not escape the competitive violence of his bestial ancestors. On the contrary, Lorenz proved that real predators like wolves and lions were naturally programmed with social mechanisms that could bring a fight to a bloodless end. Every dog owner has seen a beaten or dominated dog roll over, exposing its genitals, as an act of submission. It is non-predatory creatures, such as Lorenz's jackdaws, who will peck one another to death because they lack the necessary social inhibitions.

Man is not wolf to man, as the Latin proverb has it, but bird to man. Once the appetite for violence is created, only the artificial constraints of society and civilization can restrain it. The popularity of rassling shows us that those restraints are gone.

If American males are now sissies addicted to violent fantasies, the question is: After rassling, what? The really creative cultural entrepreneurs in our society—people like Vince McMahon, Jerry Springer, and (on a lower level) Ted Turner—understand that, as our own personal lives thin out like watery batter on a hot grill, Americans are demanding real-life soap opera. The obvious next step is rassling-to-the-death as a live-audience game show.

The brightest new TV show, *Survivor* (CBS), will strand male and female contestants on a desert island off the Borneo coast, and every three days the survivors will vote to expel one of their number, with the last man (or woman) standing to receive one million dollars. This is a recipe for sexual intrigue and intimidation, and viewers can hope that some lucky contestant will be trampled to death by a wild boar or murdered by a rival. *Survivor* is a rip-off of a Swedish show, *Expedition Robinson*, whose first loser killed himself a month after returning from the island.

This movement toward real-time soap opera was anticipated by Ray Bradbury in *Fahrenheit 451*, but it took pop writer Stephen King to put the elements of the game show, rassling, and the soap opera together into the greatest show not yet on television: *The Running Man*. In the Arnold Schwarzenegger vehicle, innocent and heroic men, vilified by their brutal government, are forced to run for their lives and face a series of professional slayers, including a very campy all-American "Captain Freedom"—played by Jesse Ventura, gussied up in a red-white-and-blue rassling costume.

The Running Man is only 12 years old, but it has the feel of reality 2000, when a very campy Captain Freedom with a mind to match his foul mouth is the political hero to millions of unmanned American males. That excessive use of steroids may lead to sterility and impotence is only one more reason for America's resentful capons to identify with Jesse Ventura.

DICTATIONS

Contemtable Familiarities

"Would you guys like somethin' to drink?" I could not help smiling at the lady and two men sitting across the table from me in this California restaurant injected into the middle of North Carolina. We had just been deploring the use of this unisex slang expression to mean "ladies and gentlemen" and debating the possibility of asking waitresses to avoid it. The waitress cocked her head and asked if something was wrong. After a few moments of embarrassed hesitation, I told her: "This is a lady sitting next to me, not a guy, and the rest of us are men or even gentlemen, not guys or kids or fellows."

"Then what am I supposed to say?"

When one Southern literary gent at the table suggested "You all," she protested, "But then I'd sound like a cracker." We assured her that the best people said "Y'all" and added that if she wanted to talk Yankee, she should talk old Philadelphia and not suburban Des Moines.

Guy, whether it is derived from the effigies of Guy Fawkes burnt on the fifth of November or, as Mencken believed, from the guy-rope of a circus tent, has nothing to recommend itself as a term of address. Chesterton objected to being called a "regular guy" when he visited America—perhaps he thought he was being accused of being a Catholic terrorist. The real point to using guys is that it is a weapon in the war to eliminate distinctions and to level sexes, ranks, and ages into one neutral category that probably includes domestic animals. Like "citizen" or "comrade," guys is a political term that does nothing to elevate the waitress but only denies the social reality constructed by men and women, young and old. If pressed, the sweet young thing from Concord might have said she was doing this 50-something old man a favor by treating him as "one of the guys," but some of us old bucks are proud to have got to where we are and can barely tolerate the society of the under-35 guys, chicks, dudes, and hey-mans whose philosophy of life is "I deserve a break today." Did somebody say "stupid"?

—Humpty Dumpty

It's a Girl's, Girl's, Girl's, Girl's World

by Marian Kester Coombs



A television ad: Single girl “Heather” has come to be videotaped for a dating service. Haltingly, she blurts out facts about herself—she’s got a Lab, a “great” job, an “out-of-control shoe fetish”—while sipping the diet soda which is supposedly the *raison d’être* of the ad. The interviewer comments, “Sounds like a pretty good life.” Taking a deep sip, the girl suddenly says, “Thank you!” in an almost normal tone of voice. “So, what kind of man are you looking for?” continues the interviewer—to an empty chair, for Heather has decamped *sans adieu* back to her pretty good life.

The message: If you have a dog, a great job, and a good shoe fetish, you do not need a man in your life, so long as you drink the right diet soda (whichever one that may be).

Another ad: A woman is driving a young man in her convertible. He explains how he is trying to quit smoking using a “nicotine delivery” system, and she laughs at him throughout the explanation. Arriving at their destination, he asks her how he looks; as she straightens his tie, she smirks, “Surprisingly intelligent.”

An even more offensive commercial has been running on radio—once again, for a product whose identity is effaced by the heavy-handed psychological warfare. A man’s voice keeps anxiously questioning, explaining, and apologizing as dinner is being prepared, while a woman’s voice drones, “I’ve got a job, I’ve got a laptop, I’ve got car payments,” and other disconnected facts of a similar nature; the only time she addresses the man is to say in a bored, annoyed tone, “Please don’t keep saying you’re sorry.” Her last words are, “And I’ve got a boyfriend—for now.”

We are back to the 60’s girl-graffiti: “A woman needs a man

like a fish needs a bicycle.” Such ads are presumed to flatter women by implying that they do not need men. But perhaps the truth is different and much simpler: These ads only superimpose a happy face on the reality that men do not want women very much anymore. The most perfect symbol of where women now stand in the radical feminist state they have been conned into supporting is our blithe President: a dedicated feminist in principle, a pig in private. Real men loathe Bill Clinton.

A few decades ago, William Carlos Williams wrote of America as “a vigorous, man’s country.” Clinton’s America, in contrast, is a woman’s world. Men tamed the Wild West, and now they—the foolhardy pioneers, the cowboys, the gunslingers, the men of honor—must be driven out of the territory so that “decent folk” can live smug and snug in the prosperity and security that those antiquated heroics wrested from the wilderness.

Men’s achievements—physical, intellectual, and moral—have made the world safe for women. Push-button war means never having to break a nail. Women stroll among the monuments, the ruins of the history men have made, exclaiming and deploring and, above all, appreciating. How easy it all looks! Whatever was the big deal? From foreign affairs to the whiz-bang applications of math and science, it is all so easy to appreciate now.

Men are being driven out, however, not by women, but by other men; not for reasons of “gender equity,” but for reasons of political power. Globalists hate and fear real men—they are men themselves, of course, but they are men of a class that wants *all* the power, just as the Disney Corporation wants *all* of your entertainment dollars. Powerful men have always sought to control other men but have never entirely succeeded. The globalist elite has hit upon the scheme of replacing these other

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