

NEW LIGHT?

A LETTER OF MINE, "THE STERN A Gang-Nazi Link" (ITT, Jan. 18), ran to 7 3/4 column inches. The paper followed that with an attack on me, "Zionist-Nazi tie is a smear," by Harold Karabell (ITT, Feb. 8) that ran for 30 inches. Needless to say, I replied immediately, to his many points, naturally at length.

Not seeing my letter, I finally called the saintly democratic socialist editor: "It was too long, and, besides, the debate on Zionism has gone on too long." Now the wonderful fellow could have told me to shorten my reply, but he had done no such thing, and if I hadn't called, weeks later, to demand the right of reply, nothing would be run, even now. Readers will therefore understand that this is perforce, a much too brief response:

Karabell doesn't deny that the Stern Gang, the organization of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, offered to go to war on Hitler's side. How is the truth a smear? Karabell insists that "No necessary political conclusions follow from Brenner's indictment." Hilarious! The prime minister of the Zionist state was a rank traitor, and we are forbidden to draw conclusions!

Karabell proclaims himself a supporter of the Zionist peace movement, and denounces as extremism my call "For a democratic secular Palestine in a democratic secular world." I would ask: what is extremist about a democratic secular world? Or, for that matter, about a democratic secular Palestine? Karabell knows, or should know, that Israel denies Jewish women the right to initiate a divorce, and he doesn't ever expect to wake up and find that some fabled democratic secular Israel has granted them that elementary right, at least not until Orthodox rabbis take to eating pork. How can we ever expect such a state to grant equality to its Arab citizens?

It should be perfectly obvious that there is only one state that will ever grant equality to Jewish women or Arabs: a democratic secular Palestine, in a democratic secular Middle East, and a democratic secular world.

Those who would wish to know more about Zionist-Nazi collaboration should read my book, *Zionism in the Age of Dictators*.

For the revolutionary overthrow of all the states in the Middle East,

—Lenni Brenner
New York

St. James replies: Lacking any new ideas or new information, Brenner's communication didn't warrant a full page response.

RAISIN

THE MUSICAL *RAISIN*, PIECED TOGETHER after Lorraine Hansberry's death illustrates some of the twisting suggested in Aishah Rahman's excellent article (ITT, March 28). Matriarchal Lena Younger is reduced to a character from *The Jeffersons*. The show deals patronizingly with her Christianity and her arguments against a family liquor store; church and barroom scenes are introduced to make room for musical numbers toying with black religion and celebrating booze. Ruth Younger's abortion dilemma, bravely handled in the original story, is dismissed, and her troubled husband (Lena's son) is transformed into a candidate for a minority business loan, eager to help his boy get into a good college. As the family departs for its new home in a white neighborhood, this "strong father figure" is given the last gesture. When Lena, the moral and mental force behind the change, leaves behind the flower she has been nurturing, he gathers up the plant for his forgetful momma as the curtain falls.

Now a new generation is rediscovering Hansberry's original play. When undergraduates gave an outstanding

performance of *A Raisin in the Sun* here at Duke University last year, the audience of young pragmatists—learning to defer their own idealistic hopes—accepted the logic of settling for a cash rebate from bigoted suburbanites rather than pursuing a dream. So they were caught off-guard by the family's decision to pull up stakes, against all odds. But they were deeply moved when Lena Younger returned, alone, to pick up her fragile plant and carry it tenderly to a new home.

—Peter H. Wood
Durham, N.C.

EVERYWHERE IS SOMEWHERE

AT THE BEGINNING OF JOAN WALSH'S otherwise useful review of two books on gender gap politics (ITT, March 21), she writes of finding herself "in a Nowhere, New Mexico bar."

Perhaps she doesn't realize that the same literary, visual and intellectual devices, that have long been used to stereotype, caricature and dismiss women, minorities, the elderly and the Third World, have also frequently been applied to rural and provincial areas. You need only apply the general lessons of Goffman's *Gender Advertisements*, McCannell's *The Tourist* or Said's *Orientalism* the next time you address a provincial area, to understand what I mean.

New Mexico, in many ways, is an internal colony. Our resources are exploited by outside capital to provide energy for the cosmopolitan centers. We are left with pollution, nuclear waste, substandard roads, education, housing and health care, and one of the highest proportions of people below the poverty level in the nation. Our history and varied cultures are romanticized and trivialized to cater to the shallow preconceptions of tourists.

Perhaps I am making too much of this slight, but such small things often reveal larger prejudicial and harmful attitudes.

—Chris Wilson
Nowhere, N.M.

POTLESS

DAVID OSBORNE'S ARTICLE (ITT, March 28) was excellent and essentially correct. Leftists should consider working to secure the Democratic nomination for Gary Hart. If past ADA ratings are any indication, Mondale is more liberal than Hart. But Hart does offer a synthesis and new ideas worthy of the support of leftists.

Voters will peel off, and Reagan will win in a Hartless election. Osborne is correct on this point. But, to expect that the locked out—blacks, women, Hispanics, progressive white males, etc.—will automatically vote for Hart is wrong. Without Jesse Jackson or a woman such as Maxine Waters sharing

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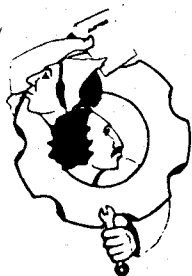
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LETTERS

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the ticket, Hart is unlikely to see a rainbow after the November storm. And, without a rainbow there will be no pot of gold at the end.

—Elmer P. Chase III
Elmhurst, Pa.

GEORGIE BOY

CONCERNING YOUR ARTICLE ON George McGovern (ITT, March 28), not only did McGovern not "rise alone in the Senate to attack Lyndon Johnson's Vietnam policy," he did not rise at all at the fateful hour. That distinction of honor belongs to the late Senators Morse (Oregon) and Gruening (Alaska) who stood alone against a president bent on war and a pliant Congress, when voting on the "Tonkin Gulf" Resolution of 1965.

—William Morosoff
Sherman Oaks, Calif.

HORSEMEN

RE "CONSERVATISM AFTER 1984 AND Reagan" (ITT, March 21): Ronald Reagan is neither Neville Chamberlain nor Hitler, but rather von Hindenburg. The so-called American "conservatives" are like fascists everywhere, searching for their man-on-the-white-horse. Obviously, Reagan is not their man (too timid, too cautious, too much wanting to be loved, too old). Al Haig, anyone?

—William Morosoff
Sherman Oaks, Calif.

AH SO-O

JULIA REICHERT (ITT, MARCH 14) notes that critics of the Communist Party dismiss its members as "Stalinists—whatever that means." Perhaps I can offer Reichert a definition of the term in two parts.

1. Active support for the tyranny of Joseph Stalin. During the years covered in *Seeing Red*, all the Western Communist parties, not just the CPUSA, worked diligently as publicists-apologists for a regime that had mass murder and terror against its own citizens as its primary method.

2. Behaving like Joseph Stalin, personally and politically, here in America. The structure and organization of the CP was inherently anti-democratic, and the inner circles of the party were governed by the same methods of suppression of rational free thought and

ritual informing-confession-humiliation-expulsion that their beloved Uncle Joe used. The CPUSA devoted almost as much energy to attacking the rest of the left, be it social democratic or Trotskyist, as it did to organizing workers or fighting racism. A point of some interest not mentioned in *Seeing Red* is that the Smith Act, which was used to prosecute CP leaders, was, when first conceived, supported by the CP as a means of shutting down the Socialist Workers Party.

To define a Stalinist for someone who spent seven years making a film about Stalinists may seem a bit presumptuous, but since the above facts are given little attention in Reichert's film, I offer this humbly.

—Bill Wilson
Dayton, Ohio

PRIVATE SECTOR

JOHN JUDIS (ITT, MARCH 21) WRITES that I believe that "private stagnation is the result of fiscal crisis." This is untrue. I believe that "private stagnation" is the result of capital underproduction (*Accumulation Crisis*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford and New York, 1984). It is true that in *The Fiscal Crisis of the State* (St. Martin's Press, New York, 1973), I "did not view the fiscal crisis of the state as a reflection of the stagnation in the private sector" (Judis' words). In my interpretation of crisis tendencies in the '60s and early '70s, I rejected the standard social democratic, Keynesian view of the relationship between the growth of private capital and the state economy—a view that Judis apparently retains. I argued that the fiscal crisis was the result of private growth, not private stagnation, which postdated the fiscal crisis by a decade.

—James O'Connor
Professor of Sociology and Economics
University of California, Santa Cruz

CORRECTION

IN A STORY ABOUT THE SCREEN ACTORS Guild's proposed merger with the Screen Extras Guild in the April 11 issue, part of a sentence was dropped. It should have read: The SAG-SEG merger proposal won the endorsement of the SAG national board by a whopping 70-1 margin.

We've been burgled! On Wednesday, March 28, our only IBM Selectric typewriter and a KAYPRO II computer and printer were stolen from our Chicago office. We had recently purchased the computer to help modernize our business procedures, and the IBM Selectric was our only reliable typewriter. Our insurance covers only a small part of our loss, which has severely hampered our business operations. So, we are turning to you, our readers. Help us get back on our feet. If you have an electric typewriter or a personal computer that you could spare, please contact Felicity Bensch. If not, send dollars. Donations are tax-deductible.

—The Business Staff

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PERSPECTIVES

They want to be that way, so they are

By Kate Ellis

TO FREUD'S QUESTION: "What do women want?" Helen Hazen's *Endless Rapture* (Chas. Scribner's Sons) answers: "They want to read romances, and especially those in which the heroine gets raped near the beginning." Publishing and bookselling statistics back her up.

"Upwards of \$200 million of paperback publishers' annual sales are represented by romance fiction," says *Publishers Weekly*. "Readership is estimated at 20 million. No other category of paperback publishing can boast such numbers." A *Time* reporter at a Romance Writers Conference in 1981 estimated that women bought as many as 20 romances a week, for a monthly cost of roughly \$150. B. Dalton reports that 30 percent of its mass market paperback sales are in the

area of romances, of which Hazen's "rape" category (called "spectaculars" by the industry) constitutes about a quarter.

In titling her book *Endless Rapture*, Hazen probably took note of the fact that "rape" and "rapture" come from the same Latin verb meaning "to carry away." Her thesis is not that women enjoy being raped in actuality, but that they enjoy reading, and fantasizing, about the conversion of the one into the other. In the "spectacular," the rape occurs before page 100, and the novels continue for at least 300 pages more. It takes that long for the heroine to get her rapist (or, in some cases, some other man) into shape for the true confluence of hearts and bodies toward which all romances inevitably move.

Hazen uses this scenario as a blunt instrument to attack the women's movement for not taking seriously the fact that "the most important emotion women feel is love." She does not ask why this should

not be so for men. The existence of a million dollar industry is not an item to be interrogated. Women want to be that way and therefore they are. "Nor do I think," she adds, "that many women want their natures changed." Hers is an essentialist position, and the women's movement is doomed to failure because it has dared to suggest that women's relation to love may not be entirely natural.

Were Hazen to look more closely at the academic feminist front she attacks, she would see a good deal of internal debate and disagreement. Many feminists see women's nature as an unchanging essence. This tends to lead to positions such as Jean Bethke Elshtain's enthusiasm for the traditional family where "the nourishment of humanity [by women] takes place at every point of the life cycle." It also appears in writers against pornography such as Andrea Dworkin, who see an essential female purity pitted against an essential male violence.

Yet the impact of the mass media on women is a concern of the left as well as the right, and of feminists who hold widely differing views on love and women's nature, the family and pornography. Those of us who worry about an equation of women with nature, nature with nurturing and nurturing with traditional attitudes toward the family and female purity would agree with some of her criticisms. Yet one hesitates to do so, since the book is clearly intended to be part of a backlash against the movement that comes mostly from the right, even though it is abetted from within by "pro-family" types like Elshtain.

Recognizing this risk, I would like to point out some insights in the book that merit consideration by feminists. First, we need to notice that the rapes in romance have less in common than is usually recognized with the shattering experiences that women bring to rape crisis centers. Hazen tells us that they are the hero's way of telling a woman "that she is so desirable that he will defy all the rules of honor and decency in order to have her." This makes sense only as a component of women's fantasies. As a motive for rape, researchers will tell us, it is absurd.

The insight that women who fantasize about rape do not necessarily want to be raped has finally reached the mainstream, though it has hardly swept all opposing views before it. But if fantasy is not a simple representation of what you want, what is it? Hazen views it as a catharsis: "A woman's horror of defilement and a man's horror of destruction are not the wish for their occurrence. On the contrary, the interest lies in how to prevent their occurrence, and also in the temptation to imagine the calamity when normal life seems not lively enough from day to day."

This catharsis became available to women only in the last few years: Gothic novels and other women's fiction of earlier decades had no explicit sex in them.

Feminists are deeply divided in their estimate of the effects of imagining "the calamity" of rape. It is feared that traces may linger, or creep back into the unconscious, from whence they may influence our wishes and actions in ways we do not wholly understand. I suspect that fantasy may be a core of conservatism in all of us, and those who want to see some change in our present arrangements, including present gender arrangements, will simply have to live with our uneasy fascination with domination and submission, power and taboo, with being ravishing and being ravished. But what, then, is the relationship between that core and our behavior, or between it and our political ideas?

The study of fantasy opens up for scrutiny the relationship between pleasure, desire and the unconscious. It is an area that advocates of feminism and socialism need to take seriously, neither bowing to the prevailing forms of pleasure that are available, nor scorning or oversimplifying the desires that propel people toward them. What is called love in these novels, as many observers have noticed, does not involve dirty dishes or unpaid bills. It is a gratification of infan-

tile wishes, wishes that are more intense than any that come later.

Hazen's useful contribution to this discussion is that she sees positive features in the formulaic fantasy about love that romances offer. These fantasies, she observes, typically involve a triumph over obstacles.

"...[H]igh drama is generally a form of pleasure, even when it deals with unpleasant topics. This is especially true...where the topic is basic to the female imagination: that delightful rush of excitement when one's consort treats one unjustly—in fact or in fantasy; the challenge of it, the girding up for the grandest endeavor of life, which is the conquest."

Since feminism also sees in men the obstacles to women's freedom and happiness, she wonders why they don't also envision triumph in the way romances do.

I'd answer by pointing up, as feminist writers tend to do, the limits of fantasy in the actual lives of men and women. It seems that much of its pleasure, whether you are reading or creating your own private drama, depends on the absence of the unexpected. The fantasizer (or her surrogate, the heroine of a romance) is always able to triumph over the most extreme form of male domination embodied in her abusive (though charming) rapist. By picking the most extreme forms of domination, she increases the pleasure of her triumph.

Romance fiction is the biggest-selling category of paperback book publishing. Helen Hazen says it's because love is women's most important emotion.

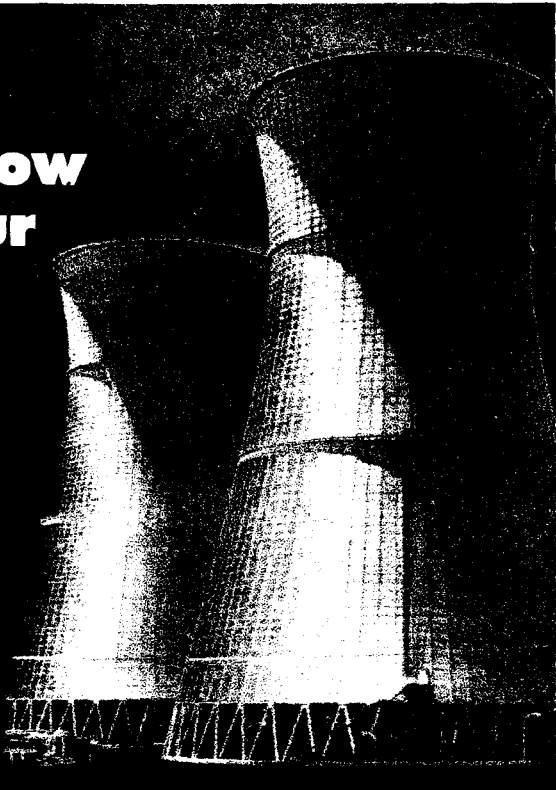


But the form of the triumph in romances—marriage—is thoroughly conventional. In romances a reader gets what she wants when she wants it: so many pages from the end. There is no room for real variety or real surprise. Fantasy follows for more individual variation, though the fantasizer cannot surprise herself. Further down on the scape of predictability, good literature goes beyond the inventiveness of fantasy to produce surprises that feel right. And in the part of our lives that is not fantasized, where we are not the sole author and director of our daily dramas, neither our obstacles nor our triumphs can be wholly predicted. We are talking about a diminishing order of egocentricity.

Hazen dismisses feminist literature for its pessimism about the power of heterosexual love to banish all pain forever. She does not ask what a craving for reading that makes this claim might say about the actual state of heterosexual relations. Fiction for women as the paperback publishers define it never speaks seriously about the limits of fantasy, which is why we need feminist writers who do. They help us not only to claim our dreams of endless rapture, but also to see their limits, what is pushing against them, and where our real strengths lie.

Kate Ellis teaches English at Livingston College, Rutgers University.

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