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A review of Literature, the Arts, and Public Affairs
March, 1983
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Above: Junius R. Sloan, American 1827-1900. Emma awake on Windsor chair, c. 1861, graphite, pen and sepia ink, Sketchbook 3, leaf 8 (verso), leaf: 6¾ x 4¼ inches.

Cover: Junius R. Sloan, American 1827-1900. Emma asleep on Windsor chair, c. 1861, graphite, pen and sepia ink, Sketchbook 3, leaf 9, leaf: 6¾ x 4¼ inches.

These two affectionate drawings of Sloan's five year old sister-in-law were included in a recent VU exhibit curated by junior Rhonda Schaper. The drawings are in the Sloan Collection of American Paintings, Valparaiso University Museum of Art as a gift of J. Carson Webster 81.14.20
George Bush Encounters a Slight Awkwardness

David Duke’s campaign last month to win a seat in the Louisiana House was not entirely based on racial issues. Nonetheless, the stink of bigotry was strong. Duke was running in a racially homogeneous suburb of New Orleans. Rich people moved to Jefferson Parish during the twenties and thirties, settling in a neighborhood known as “Old Metairie;” later decades brought poorer but equally white voters. These circumstances seemed to have encouraged the emergence of an unusually forthright candidate. Duke has advanced “concrete proposals to reduce the illegitimate birthrate.” These proposals include a plan for offering sterilization incentives to welfare mothers. Not, he adds, to “black” welfare mothers: it is the media, so he asserts, who “suppose illegitimate welfare recipients are black.” Duke also argues that whites are biologically superior to blacks. Appropriately, he heads an organization named the National Association for the Advancement of White People. The NAAWP, which Duke says has 25,000 members nationwide, publishes an instructive newsletter, including items on “unassimilable minorities” and the best way of handling them (apparently they would benefit from separate states—homelands, I am tempted to say). Duke himself has produced a videotape concerning “the truth about the Holocaust”—a truth apparently quite different from that offered by more conventional historians. (For these and other details about Duke’s ideas, see Zack Nauth’s article for In These Times, February 15-21).

Until 1980, Duke was Grand Wizard of the national Ku Klux Klan. As the above positions suggest, he has not worked very hard to distance himself from the KKK—just far enough to benefit from that association without having to defend it. What exactly are the benefits of having a past with the KKK? A photograph of Duke in Grand Wizard regalia was widely circulated during the campaign, as was another photograph of him in American Nazi Party uniform. (His association with the Nazis was evidently short.) None of this fazed voters. Quite the contrary. Returns show that rich and poor alike rallied around this enterprising candidate. Duke won narrowly—with 51% of the vote—but carried most precincts. In other words, his support came from people of many socio-economic backgrounds. At a press conference following his victory, he felt sufficiently justified to put it all on the line. Speaking of himself in the third person, he announced: “David Duke has said openly and loudly what a lot of other Republicans are not willing to say on the campaign trail. I can tell you this, ladies and gentlemen, a lot of Republicans talk about those issues quietly.” (Chicago Tribune, February 20, 1989)

Available evidence suggests that the national GOP wasn’t very happy at David Duke’s election. George Bush’s son, George Jr., appeared on behalf of Duke’s opponent, John Treen; Ronald Reagan recorded radio messages urging a vote for Treen; immediately following the election, Lee Atwater took steps to ban Duke from the Republican party. I couldn’t say what the chances are of Duke’s keeping his seat in the Louisiana House—and anyway, that isn’t the heart of the matter: it has hardly gone unnoticed that this legislature, along with many others throughout the country, already contains its share of slick racists. All the same, the consternation of Bush, Reagan and Atwater is well-grounded. The people who gave David Duke his victory have also given him a national forum. And within it (Duke is this far correct) there may well be considerable discussion of issues previously avoided.

Among these issues is the nature of presidential politics in the United States. Our most significant domestic legislation since the Second World War was the sequence of civil rights acts passed between 1964 and 1972. The political consequence of those laws was the “Southern strategy.” Capitalizing on the rift between the national Democratic party and white Southerners, Republicans were able to dominate Presidential elections. With the exception of Jimmy Carter’s 1976 victory, the Southern strategy—along with an accompanying appeal to so-called “white ethnics” in the North—has worked reliably for the GOP. There is no indication that it will stop doing so. The national party’s future is now wrapped up with white resentment against minorities and minority-support programs in a way that could hardly have been predicted thirty years ago.

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Is it possible to benefit from white support based on racial polarization without exploiting the worst American instincts? This problem pops up now and again; nobody wants to think about it for very long at a time. One occasion on which it seemingly came to the fore was during the Bush-Dukakis campaign of last summer and fall. Everybody who bothered to read the newspapers knew that Bush and Reagan had supported furlough programs like the one that got the hapless Dukakis into trouble. (Their support, I take it, was thoughtfully given: if we jail many more people, we'll be in position to top South Africa's record.) Under these circumstances, the Willie Horton ads concocted under Lee Atwater and approved by Bush could hardly be seen as directed to the issue of crime per se. Nonetheless, Dukakis protested feebly and late. There appeared to be an unspoken consensus that speaking the word "racism," much less repeating it, would alienate white voters further.

Interestingly enough, this consensus has begun breaking down. A committed Republican newspaper like the Chicago Tribune (see the lead editorial of February 21) now grants that Bush has created a problem for himself. He was elected largely as the result of a sustained appeal to white fears about blacks. In a popular phrase, he "did what he had to do"—which is to say, he became a polite racist, politer even than the beautifully-coiffeured Duke. It is now widely admitted that the Bush-Atwater campaign cannot be dismissed as an error, a prank, or a slightly dubious piece of vulgarization. The difficulty avoided by the Tribune, as well as by many other commentators, is that of deciding what consequences should follow upon this admission. George Bush is hardly about to resign in remorse. And even if he did, that would leave us with Dan Quayle—an eventuality desired by no one except perhaps Marilyn Quayle.

Practically, the national GOP could take several steps to separate itself from the Duke phenomenon. One is immediately within reach and so deserves special emphasis. David Duke uses a kind of rhetoric which implies that white Americans are oppressed by black Americans, with the assistance of a perverse Federal Government. The real racism, says Duke, is affirmative action. "Massive government-sponsored discrimination" against whites has stained the United States. The obscene idea of an NAAWP (implying that downtrodden whites now find themselves where blacks once did) illustrates this argument in a nutshell. The disturbing point is that many people assume that respectable conservatives think much along the same lines. An article on Duke in the Chicago Tribune, once again (front page, February 19), identifies "halting affirmative action" as a "traditionally conservative" goal. Halting affirmative action? Even our highly-conservative Supreme Court has not gone so far as that. George Bush could clear the air (as well as reorient the mixed-up Tribune) by forgetting about banning Duke from the Louisiana legislature and articulating his own position concerning some of the sore spots which Duke has touched. In particular, Bush should make it clear that the mythology promoted by Duke—according to which the victims are actually the victimizers—lacks a factual basis. A statement of this kind might do more to alter the nature of public discourse on racial relations than a hundred attempts at condemning, overturning, or ignoring embarrassing local elections.

* * *

The recent difficulties of Salman Rushdie (who may, indeed, be dead by the time the March Cresset appears) have afforded some odd glimpses into late twentieth-century culture. One of the oddest was the resurfacing of Cat Stevens, composer of "Peace Train" and other folk-rock ditties, now—under the name Yusuf Islam—an Islamic educator based in London. Yusuf declared a few weeks ago, "The Koran makes it clear. If someone defames the prophet, then he must die." In other words, he agrees with Iranian authorities that Rushdie should be assassinated for writing and publishing his novel, The Satanic Verses. I was led to wonder: how many former bearded hippies have consoled themselves for the passing of the anarchic sixties with an absolute, unquestioning submission to authority? And by what law of human nature does this sort of turn-about occur?

* * *

The Cresset this month features essays on Mississippi Burning, shopping malls, and John Cowper Powys. The first two subjects are topical. Alan Parker's film (touching on some of the same issues raised by the election of David Duke) is up for a slew of Oscars. Malls are an almost inescapable fact of life in the United States and around the world. Who, by contrast, recognizes Powys' name? Several of his finest novels have been recently republished here: Wolf Solent, Weymouth Sands, and A Glastonbury Romance. The latter remains in print, along with Powys' great autobiography and Maiden Castle, as well as some lesser works. Nonetheless, next to the other great figures of twentieth-century literature Powys remains virtually unknown. The opportunities for presenting an authoritative introductory essay on a rediscovered writer of the first rank are, by their nature, few. For this reason, I am particularly pleased to offer Charles Lock's piece. May it encourage a few readers to search out some of Powys' extraordinary books and perhaps to share them with others.
FOUR EYES THAT CAN'T SEE

Reflections on the Success of Mississippi Burning

I

Near the beginning of Alan Parker’s Mississippi Burning, Gene Hackman tells a joke I first heard as a New Orleans fourth grader in 1958. “Do you know what has four “eyes” but can’t see?” he asks Willem Dafoe. The answer to the riddle, “Mississippi,” is obviously a simple word play about spelling. But in Mississippi Burning, the joke has a greater resonance. The movie is based on the 1964 murders of three civil rights workers in rural Mississippi. And so in the context of the film’s narrative, the joke implies that the people of the state of Mississippi can’t see the vicious injustice of their entrenched racism. More than that, the joke is a comment on the film’s two lead characters. Hackman and Dafoe play, respectively, Rupert Anderson and Alan Ward, FBI agents who have been assigned to investigate the murders. Anderson is rumpled, folksy and unorthodox, but in the film’s view he instinctively understands what measures must be taken to bring the guilty to justice. Ward’s by-the-book approach, in contrast, proceeds practically nowhere. Clean shaven and straight-laced, intellectual and preciously sensitive, bespectacled Alan Ward is the typical bleeding heart liberal “four eyes” who just can’t see what steps are necessary to defeat the forces of unrestrained evil.

Regrettably, I find that Hackman’s opening joke echoes in still another, unintended way. Mississippi Burning is the product of the creative endeavors of two men, director Parker and screenwriter Chris Gerolmo. Together these two have made a motion picture of undeniable power and considerable artistry. But in ways thoroughly dismaying, in their blindness both to salient points of history and the transcendent lessons of the American Civil Rights Movement, Parker’s and Gerolmo’s are the four eyes that evidently cannot see.

I am not alone in objecting to Mississippi Burning. It has received negative reviews from the likes of Pauline Kael in The New Yorker and Sheila Benson in The Los Angeles Times. It has been criticized for its historical inaccuracies by Julian Bond on TV’s Nightline. But for the most part the film has been greeted with critical hosannas. A host of prominent critics have designated the picture one of the year’s ten best, including Richard Schickel of Time and Vincent Canby of The New York Times. Canby has called the film “one of the toughest, straightest, most effective fiction films yet made about bigotry and racial violence, whether in this country or anywhere else in the world.” Chicago Sun-Times critic Roger Ebert has chosen Mississippi Burning as the best movie of 1988, as has the National Board of Review.

Given such praise for Mississippi Burning, I find it ironically fitting that I sit drafting my commentary about the film on the birthday of Martin Luther King. Dr. King, of course, was the central public figure in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and ’60s. And Parker’s film is a fictional account of one of that movement’s darkest passages, the officially sanctioned Ku Klux Klan violence during the “Freedom Summer” of 1964. The picture recalls a horrifying and shameful time in American history. And in reminding us of a despicable past, it serves us well as we look forward with hope to a more honorable future. But in deeply distressing ways, Mississippi Burning is muddleheaded and ultimately objectionable. Dr. King, I believe, would be saddened by it, would agonize that if Alan Parker’s understanding of the lessons of 1964 is that of all America in the 1980s, then perhaps those brave victims of Klan brutality, James Chaney, Andrew Goodman and Mickey Schwerner, died in vain.

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Mississippi Burning isn't about Chaney and Goodman and Schwerner, of course. The facts of their murders outside the town of Philadelphia, Mississippi, are altered here. Neither they nor the community in which they died are ever named in the movie. And the story doesn't address their courage and commitment in journeying into rural Mississippi on their summer vacations in an effort to register black people to vote. Rather, the story in Mississippi Burning is a fictionalization of the FBI's investigation of their murders, the endeavors of the federal government to break the back of Klan lawlessness in the South. To accomplish this, the federal agents must overcome the race prejudice rife among even those who aren't members of the Klan. The public wisdom in Mississippi at the time is that "our colored folks were happy till the beatniks arrived and started stirring things up." There's even a widespread belief among whites that the civil rights workers are still alive and have themselves concocted their disappearance and alleged murders as a black-humored hoax.

Parker's story of the investigation to disprove this theory structures itself as a kind of mismatched buddy picture. Parker and Gerolmo may well have been working with a model like Alan Pakula's All the President's Men, since in that film also two men of strikingly different sensibilities try to solve a criminal mystery that is obstructed by official corruption. In Mississippi Burning both federal cops assigned to the case are determined to bring the guilty to justice. But they are utterly different kinds of men, with widely divergent approaches to their jobs.

Rupert Anderson is a native Mississippian. He grew up with racist parents in a poor rural community near Memphis and thus possesses an inherent understanding of the people in the town where the civil rights workers were murdered. He's repelled by racial hatred, but he knows the socio-psycho womb from which it's born. Alan Ward, on the other hand, is a Harvard-educated Northerner. He's a Kennedy liberal who, before switching to the FBI, worked in the Justice Department and accompanied James Meredith during the Ole Miss integration crisis in 1961. Ward is appalled but almost stymied by the racial violence in the South. And initially he suspects that Anderson may secretly sympathize with his fellow Southerners.

This suspicion develops in part because Ward is so determined, first to prove a murder has been committed (the bodies haven't been found) and then identify the murderers, that he's always calling for reinforcements until the town is aswarm with more than a hundred federal agents. Anderson, in contrast, wants to keep the investigation small and low key. He's worried that a greater federal presence will result in increased violence, that the suffering in the black community will be escalated rather than diminished. In short, Ward is an idealist, Anderson a pragmatist; Ward is an optimist, Anderson a cynic. They constantly put a different slant on the same events. Expressing his sympathy for an infuriated black community that riots in its own shantytown, one says, "If I was a Negro, I guess I'd feel the same way." The other rejoins, "If you were a Negro, no one would give a damn how you feel."

There are sundry elements to praise in Mississippi Burning. There's the subtle artfulness in a scene where Anderson interrogates the wife of a town deputy he suspects of having collaborated in the murders. Anderson is attracted to Mrs. Pell (Frances McDormand) and has brought her a spray of flowers. Her comment about them is a devastating clue to the cruelly manipulative reasons for Anderson's presence. "My father used to call them Ladies from Hell," she says of the flowers. "The pretty color is the bait and insects home in there and ... wham, they're dead."

But mostly the picture is praiseworthy for its effectiveness in reminding us of the horror of racial segregation and the relentless violence blacks had to endure to crack Jim Crow's spine. And that's hardly an insignificant achievement. In a day in which the former Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, David Duke, has emerged as a political power in a suburb of my native New Orleans, we need reminders that the legacy of the Klan dangles from the loop of the lyncher's noose and explodes from the barrel of the assassin's gun. Mississippi Burning communicates that legacy with memorable efficacy. From its opening image of a "Colored Only" sign above a public drinking fountain, to its closing shot of a chipped tombstone bearing the words "1964 Not Forgotten," Mississippi Burning is a searing reminder of a bitter past not nearly long enough gone. To this end director Parker exerts his considerable cinematic gifts, most notably in the murder sequence which follows the opening credits. In the shadowy gray of a Southern summer night, violence hides in the swale beyond every hillock, and menace drapes like Spanish moss from every roadside oak and willow.

The lingering wound the movie inflicts on our consciousness, however, derives from keen details in Chris Gerolmo's script. Anderson has another little joke he likes to tell. "You know what baseball is?" he inquires. "It's the only situation in which a black man can wave
a stick at a white without causing a riot.” How telling and effective a line of dialogue; how it causes the dividing walls in our memories to collapse and the information stored in separate compartments to mingle and interact.

For me, like most American boys, summer was a time of endless baseball games. The summer of 1964 was no different. My weekday afternoons were spent playing baseball in my age-group league organized by the New Orleans Recreation Department. My weekend afternoons were spent watching major league heroes on television. 1964 was the year the St. Louis Cardinals marched to a National League pennant and a World Series victory over the New York Yankees behind the pitching of Bob Gibson. By 1964 Jackie Robinson had been retired from baseball for almost a decade. Hank Aaron was well on his way to becoming the most prodigious slugger in the game’s history. The great Willie Mays was more than halfway through his storied career, his finest seasons already behind him. And still, none of these men could have found a motel room in rural Mississippi. None could have eaten at a bus station dining counter anywhere in the state. None could have taken a downstairs seat in a Southern movie theater. Not nearly enough of us acknowledged the bitter anomaly of that fact in 1964. And it is valuable for all of us to be reminded of it today.

However far we are from true racial harmony in America, however far from genuine racial equality—and statistics about the disproportionate suffering of black people from poverty, unemployment, illiteracy and other social ills argue that we are far indeed—the world has changed since 1964. Alan Parker relates the story of being stopped on a Mississippi back road while searching for locations to shoot his film. He tells of his rush of identification with Chaney, Goodman and Schwerner as the law enforcement officer approached his car. Only the sheriff who asked to see Parker’s license was black, in 1988 an elected official in his rural county. Thus, however much it needs further alteration, the world had changed enough in the quarter century since the setting of this film that its events seem like tales from the Dark Ages. But 1964 is hardly so far in our past. This is what Mississippi Burning reminds us. 1964 was in my lifetime. It was in the lifetime of most of you who read these reflections. And Gerolmo’s screenplay has something to say to all of us who were alive in those days. It comes from the lips of Alan Ward. Ward pronounces a kind of benediction for the town’s mayor who has hung himself even though he wasn’t Klan and wasn’t in on the murders. “But he was guilty,” Ward says. “Anyone’s guilty who watches this happen and pretends it isn’t.”

Elsewhere, in a story Anderson tells about his own father, Gerolmo’s script shows a particular sensitivity to the seemingly intractable rootedness of Southern racism. Poor and demeaned in the world at large, Anderson’s father derives a toehold of dignity from feeling superior to blacks. “If you ain’t better than a nig-
ger," he argues, "who are you better than?" With comparable insight, Gerolmo has Anderson question the judgment of certain (presumably white) civil rights leaders who seem anxious for blood—particularly white blood—to be shed in Mississippi so as finally to focus the outraged attention of the (white) nation on the violent resistance of the South to the end of segregation. In this one deft development, Gerolmo underscores both the bedrock racism of the supposedly tolerant North and the tarbaby nature of American apartheid which seemed to dirty the hands of so many who touched it.

The element in Mississippi Burn which proves most viscerally powerful and emotionally satisfying, however, arrives in two scenes in which we see evil receive its due. In one, Anderson grabs the genitals of the film's most viciously racist character and taunts him with his momentary helplessness. In the second, a black FBI agent threatens to emasculate the town's mayor unless the mayor cooperates with the Bureau's investigation. Prior to these scenes Parker and Gerolmo have accosted us with repeated instances of unspeakable white-on-black brutality. In the most shattering of these, a ten-year-old black boy has knelt to pray in front of his church while around him hooded Klansmen are using baseball bats to beat his parents and the other members of his congregation. A Klansman approaches the boy, curses him, and then, taking vicious aim, kicks him, once in the stomach, a second time in the head. Thus, by the time the FBI has the Klansmen in its clutches, our anger has been built to such a pitch that we lust for righteous retribution. The violence of those who oppose the racists is earned, we are made to feel. And we want swift and brutal justice, vengeance for all those innocents we have been made to watch suffer. When Anderson undertakes the tactics that bring anguish to the Klan, he is our "liberal" Rambo, and we cheer that he has come to Mississippi.

But powerful and gratifying as such scenes are, they could not be more wrongheaded, more thematically disastrous, more deeply perturbing. And they provide crucial insight into the confused nature of what Mississippi Burn has to say and how the picture goes about saying it. Among the wrongheaded things to condemn in director Parker's execution of this film is its falsely satisfying resolution. Presumably inspired by Constantin Costa-Gavras' incomparable Z, which is also the story of a murder investigation, the conclusion to Mississippi Burn provides sudden stop-frame photographs of the picture's villains with subtitles announcing the prison sentences they've received. The emotional crescendo that Parker has orchestrated creates the feeling that significant justice has been done. But it hasn't. None of the murderers were sentenced to prison for longer than a decade. Few actually served half that long. Some of the collaborators were acquitted outright. Most, still today, walk the streets of

Mississippi burns throughout Alan Parker's film. More specifically, homes and churches in black communities burn while their inhabitants are beaten or killed. Here a Klan member threatens a boy who has had the nerve to speak to Leroy Anderson (he points the investigation towards the sheriff's office and, by implication, towards Deputy Pell). Parker stages symbolic tableaus of this sort at several crucial junctures in Mississippi Burn. His icons are hard to resist.

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The Many Moods of Gene Hackman, II: having entered a members-only bar where he is clearly unwelcome, Leroy Anderson discovers an ingenious method for asserting himself. Anderson gets as close, if not closer, to this thug as he does to Mrs. Pell. He has just—or perhaps is about to—grab a particularly tender portion of his opponent’s anatomy. Mississippi Burning dwells upon the male genitals and their potential vulnerability. Just whose obsession is this, anyway?

Philadelphia, largely unpunished for their crimes. The contrast with Costa-Gavras’ handling of Z is instructive. For Z makes clear that justice most certainly has not been done. But despite the “defeat” of Z’s ending, its viewers depart the theater challenged to embrace the values of its slain main character (Yves Montand). The clarion call arrives by way of a list of things the victorious government has banned, last of which is the letter “Z,” which, in Greek means, “he lives.” Mississippi Burning hasn’t a modicum of comparable motivating power. The “justice” of the film’s end is imposed outside of our contribution or even affirmation. Anderson and the FBI have broken the case and put the guilty in prison. In contrast to Z, we do not have to carry the struggle forward; the struggle, the film implies, is over.

More significantly, Parker fails to develop but a single sympathetic character among the white Mississippians. Occasionally, as if they are being interviewed by some unseen newsperson, Parker cuts to faces of Mississippians who offer comments about the state of race relations in the summer of Chaney, Goodman and Schwerner’s disappearance. Most of these faces speak the common creed of white superiority. But even those few who don’t are not made into characters. Save for Mrs. Pell, the only white Mississippians we come to know are either Klansmen or Klan sympathizers. When Mrs. Pell says near the movie’s end that there are people who will understand her actions in cooperating with the FBI, we wonder where they’ve been hiding the entire film.

I’d even argue that there’s a whiff of (presumably careless and unintentional) class prejudice in Parker and Gerolmo’s depiction of the racist white Mississippi populace. Granted, the filmmakers include the town mayor among its cast of villains, and the head Klansman seems a man of some affluence and standing in the community. But for the most part, the face of evil in Mississippi Burning is positioned upon a red neck. Mississippi whites are depicted as working class, biological mutants (they appear to have escaped from the cast of John Boorman’s Deliverance). And I submit that racial subjugation became an institution in the South precisely because it served the interests of those in the upper, reputedly genteel, reaches of Southern society who presumably possessed the power and influence to end it if they had only chosen. On the one hand, Parker and Gerolmo don’t show us those white characters with whom we could identify and sympathize. On the other they let the ruling Southern classes off the hook without proper indictment. In sum, their facile portrait dresses Mississippi racism always in the white robes of the Klan and seemingly never in the vested suits of the business place and the reversed collar of the white church.

Related to both of these last two failings, Parker also neglects to illustrate the extent to which Klan violence intimidated whites who might not themselves have been brutes. As Nicholas Von Hoffman writes about the era in Mississippi Notebook, “there was a special molecule in the air: fear. Everyone watched and everyone was watched.” Radical Southern Baptist
preacher and noted civil rights activist Will Campbell has tried to downplay his own willingness to speak out on racial issues by stating that he never believed one white man would kill another over a black man. But if such an attitude were ever true, it had ceased to be by the early 1960s when Campbell was warned he'd be killed if he made a visit to his Liberty, Mississippi, boyhood home. By 1964 the truth of that threat was reality. James Chaney was black. But Andrew Goodman and Mickey Schwerner were white. And plenty of white people feared that speaking out against the Klan meant risking one's life. It is fully arguable that rural Mississippi in 1964, for both white and black citizens, was in the grips of a paralyzing terror. Depicting nigh all white Mississippians as Klan collaborators diminishes the reach of that terror, underestimates the vast extent to which the tide of racial hatred had extinguished the spark of human liberty for Mississippians and other Southerners of whatever color.

Defenders of Mississippi Burning, such as Chicago Tribune columnist Mike Royko, have argued that the movie must be understood as a work of fiction. "You don't go into a movie theater expecting to see and hear facts," Royko posits. "The best you can hope for is a sense of reality. And that's what Mississippi Burning provides." I beg to differ. A whole generation has come of age since 1964. Those approaching their mid-twenties have grown up, black and white alike, without having to experience the ugliness of legal segregation. For many of those young people, Alan Parker's movie represents an exercise in popular history. And that is traumatically sad. For this film suggests all manners of things about the Civil Rights Movement and the death of Jim Crow that are patently false. First, it is more than a little unseemly to make FBI agents the heroes of this struggle. As there were certainly sympathetic white Mississippians in the 1960s, there were no doubt honorable members of the FBI. And I'll grant that Parker and Gerolmo labor to establish that Anderson and Ward are disgusted by racial hatred and discrimination. But, to choose a deliberately extreme example, making the FBI into civil rights heroes is as distasteful as making Hitler into a founder of Israel. Throughout his career, Martin Luther King complained about the indifference of the FBI to the Southern black man's struggle for legal equality. And we know without qualification that FBI director J. Edgar Hoover harbored disturbingly racist ideas and possessed an almost pathological hatred for Dr. King, whom he called "the most notorious liar in America." To state the proposition baldly, the FBI's behavior during the civil rights crusade was appalling. Rather than being dedicated to helping black people achieve justice, the Bureau spent most of its energies trying to besmirch the reputation of the Movement's most prominent leader, going so far even as attempting to humiliate and blackmail Dr. King into suicide.

But even more troubling than the filmmakers' glorification of the FBI is their diminution of black people to solitary roles as victims. Viewed from this vantage point, Mississippi Burning says something alarmingly wrong: that black people weren't central to the struggle for their own civil rights, that white oppression in the South was ended by the federal government rather than black activism. The film never makes clear that Chaney, Goodman and Schwerner weren't isolated interlopers interfering in somebody else's business but were pacifist soldiers in a battle for true democracy. It never discusses the whole push for voter registration that was "Freedom Summer," a drive led by such black organizations as the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and Dr. King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). The leaders of these organizations and their legions of followers were rather more than mere helpless victims, who, as in this film, occasionally marched in a protest parade, but always fled in panic before the onslaught of violence. On the contrary, those who demanded equal standing before the law of every state in the land did so with a defiant courage all the more remarkable because it was done in the name of brotherhood. In the history which this film ignores, the leaders of the Civil Rights Movement were active in the pursuit of justice for Chaney, Goodman and Schwerner. Dr. King himself came to Philadelphia, Mississippi, in July of 1964 just six weeks after his young followers disappeared and before their bodies were located. He led a march through the town and rallied the spirits of local blacks with a speech in the town square. That's the realism that's missing from Mississippi Burning. Mr. Royko, the realism of black people uncowed, looking evil in its jaundiced eye and declaring for all the world to hear, "We shall overcome someday."

But the greatest failing in Mississippi Burning resides in its confused and objectionable theme. The filmmakers take one of history's few instances of the triumph of right over might and turn its legacy inside out. It's important to recognize that this movie is less the heir of the Civil Rights Movement than it is the product of the Reagan Era in which it was made. Mississippi Burning is to the Civil Rights Movement what Oliver Stone's Platoon was to the Vietnam War. Stone's film has sympathy for the soldier who fought the war
in the field, but fails in serious ways to understand why America's involvement in Vietnam was so tragically wrong. In glorifying the "good" Sgt. Elias (Willem Dafoe), the picture makes the same mistake that the Kennedy liberals made at the outset of the war's disastrous escalation. *Mississippi Burning* stumbles in a similar way. It has evident sympathy for the suffering of Mississippi blacks. But in concocting a fictional justice to compensate for that suffering, the film embraces an ideology execrable to the Movement that black leaders founded and to which the black populace flocked. In order to stimulate our appetites for such an ideology, Parker and Gerolmo shamelessly manipulate our emotions—with scenes of the praying black boy, defenseless before the Klansman's jackboot, and, notoriously, with their devotion to footage of burning black churches. In Parker and Gerolmo's history of 1964, the Klan must have burned every black church in Mississippi. And there is method to their inflammatory madness. We grow as incensed with the Klan as we evidently has the welfare of Mississippi blacks most immediately at heart. He chastises Ward for questioning them in public and then endangering them. "These people have to live here long after we've packed up and gone back to Washington," he says. Anderson rails against the callous view of the two white civil rights volunteers' martyrdom as advantageous to the movement, but he's not exactly careful about the welfare of Mrs. Pell. His manipulation of her is willed and ruthless, not merely insensitive as can be said of Ward's ill-advised interrogation of local blacks. Furthermore, Parker and Gerolmo muddle things even more through the pointless injection of an analogy to the tactic of military escalation in Vietnam. For them, quite clearly, Anderson is the "good" Sgt. Elias. At the outset of the investigation, Anderson counsels Ward against bringing in more men. But just how does Anderson propose to fight the invisible Klan army without adequate troops? "If you bring in more men," he warns Ward, "you'll start a war." Mississippi blacks would no doubt maintain that a war started a long time ago when the first boatload of Africans were snatched from their homeland and brought forcibly to the New World. The question is not one of starting a war; it's one of how to go about ending a war. And the legacy of the American Civil Rights Movement remains a beacon of courage and inspiration into the current day: the world can be changed through non-violent resistance and civil disobedience.

How alarming then for Anderson to come to such a diametrically opposite conclusion. "These people," Anderson states, referring, it seems, to all white Mississippians, though perhaps only to Klansmen and Klan sympathizers, "crawled out of the sewers. Maybe the gutter is the place we have to go to fight them." In short, Anderson advocates engaging the Klan on its own violent turf, employing its own means of physical intimidation. The lesson of Anderson's approach, embraced and proclaimed by the film, is that the end of achieving civil rights for one group justifies the violation of the civil rights of another group. And that, of course, is a philosophical position with which the Klan would feel fully comfortable. Martin Luther King, on the other hand, would find it a crushing repudiation of everything that he believed in, a desecration of the banner under which he asked his followers to march.

If Approached, He Might Recognize Me
—for my grandfather

He sits in an undershirt on the soft sofa, half-asleep and curved in a pose that resembles the arched outlines of the oak trees beyond the orchard fence, and fingers the metal-rimmed glasses still not quite powerful enough.

He holds no grudge, is not yet eccentric, and, though he doesn't admit this frail body is any longer his, seems confused by the strange single-minded satisfaction he receives when he opens the shutters to watch the workmen fill in the trenches exposed at the edge of his clean evening.

If approached, he might recognize me. With a quiet gesture he'd call me closer, tell me of an encounter in France, the sanged forests, or the elegant fountains of Paris. He might even recollect a song, the names of victims, or the pain of lungs in a gas cloud.

Then, with a faint smile, crouching to touch below his knee, point to the entry wound still visible, and, once again, I'd glimpse into that peephole.

Edward Byrne
THE HORN OF PLENTY

The Mall as a Possible Utopia

News item: Ralph Bakshi, best known for his 1972 X-rated animated film "Fritz the Cat," will make a movie depicting life as it really was during the 1950s and early 60s, "before there was greed and shopping centers."

Like so many of our contemporaries, the shocking and amusing Mr. Bakshi has decided to search for the Golden Age, a time always located before. And while denunciations of greed can be fun, why refuse to live in the present? Why refuse to see and understand the spaces we occupy now? The shopping center or mall (to use a less dated term) has become a prominent feature of the postmodern1 landscape; yet the mall is not the mystic center, either in its origin or its current function, of some apocalyptic greediness. It's simply wrong to assume the weekly or daily pilgrimage to the mall results from the insatiable lust of homo economicus for cash and gadgets. Yes, in America the mall is servant of capitalism. But this says nothing about its essential nature, seeing that the form of the mall exists in socialist economies (the great GUM store in Moscow is effectively a mall in its operation and architecture). The human needs gratified by the mall are powerful and, if not ancient, certainly older than the ideological disputes of the 20th century. But if the needs are as old as Jericho or Kiev, the mall itself, this form in which the needs are now expressed and satisfied, originates in a 19th-century commercial invention, the arcade.

Johann Friedrich Geist's wonderful book, Arcades: A History of a Building Type (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), offers not only a descriptive catalog of nearly 300 arcades but also a concise account of the architectural and social history of the arcade. A practicing architect, Geist notes that he conceived the idea of his book while designing an arcade for the Kurfürstendamm in Berlin. Questions concerning the function and regulation of public space led Geist to inquire further about the history of the arcade, an architectural type defined by the period between the French Revolution and World War I (Geist, vii). Despite a wide variety of structures with some resemblance to the arcade (the early Christian basilica, the fabric bazaars of Isfahan and Bokhara, the store-lined Renaissance bridge, the London coal exchange, Paxton's Crystal Palace) none of the earlier models displayed all of the arcade's defining characteristics. These, according to Geist, are seven in number:
1. A system of access;
2. Public space on private property;
3. A symmetrical street space;
4. A skylit space;
5. A system of access;
6. A form of organizing retail trade;
7. A space of transition or movement (Geist, 12 & 54).

Some of these characteristics have been retained in the postmodern mall while others (such as #1) are inapplicable or of diminished importance. To my mind, the crucial continuities reside in the factors which make for a space protected against the weather but "naturally" illuminated, a space which the public is not only invited but almost biologically fated to visit. Yet the differences between arcade and mall provide important clues for understanding the peculiarities of our own time.

When Geist describes the arcade as a means and system of access, as a kind of enclosed street, we begin to realize that our own malls are not so much avenues connecting one place with another as they are destinations or, perhaps more exactly, resting places on the circuit of a round-trip by automobile. Americans don't use the mall to go from one location to another. Unlike the arcade which, as its French and German term

1This adjective, at once applying to a period and a style, is a matter of some controversy. My own use of the term largely differs from the sense attached to it by the architectural historian Charles Jencks in his What is Post-Modernism? (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986) For more on this subject, see below.
The postmodern mall resembles these ancestors in conceived as short-cuts not only allowing access into the interior or courtyard area of a block of buildings but permitting passage all the way through a block. In Paris the Passage des Panoramas and the Passage Jouffroy afforded pedestrians a much shorter path to the next street; even now the Cleveland Arcade connecting Euclid and Superior Avenues provides an important artery for pedestrians in downtown Cleveland. The postmodern mall resembles these ancestors insofar as the inner spaces are given over to people walking. But the arcades were continuations of sidewalks, plazas and streets that accommodated pedestrian traffic. Contrarily, the mall’s entire existence rests on a discontinuity between pedestrian and vehicular arteries. The first large-scale “regional shopping centers” of the 1950s, like Northland in the Detroit area and Southdale in Minneapolis, were located in the middle of vast parking areas. These early malls offered an intriguing contrast to the shopping areas downtown, where parking was difficult, expensive and potentially dangerous. In time, however, the malls would cease to attract shoppers away from downtowns which, like Detroit’s, were rapidly becoming retail deserts. If there is still an important contrast between the mall and another environment, it would be with the surrounding suburbs and their pathless, sidewalk-free world. Originally a competitor with the centralized shopping districts of large cities, with the urban world of crowds on foot, the mall has restored a place for walking in an otherwise automobilized culture. If the mall has become our new metropolis, the focal point of the region it inhabits, a key factor in this development is the automobile, itself an invention made necessary by an American ethic of freedom of movement. Contrary to the dismal notion, first promulgated by the historian Frederick Jackson Turner, that our frontiers were closed and henceforth America would force Europeanize its habits and institutions, the automobile proclaims the fact that frontiers are just another name for getting out of the house. Westward ho! where else is this but the nearest mall?

The mall as frontier could not have been predicted on the basis of the original arcade, the Palais Royal. The building (completed in 1636) began as the city residence of Cardinal Richelieu, who bequeathed it to the crown which, in the person of Louis XIV, presented it to the Duc d’Orléans whose descendants retained the palace until the French Revolution but regained it subsequently. By 1786, however, the palace had been reconstructed by the addition of arcade spaces known as the Galeries de Bois, thanks to their wooden building materials. The Galeries de Bois were demolished in 1828, but not before they had established the Palais Royal as a city within the city, a microcosm which Geist, quite unaware of any contradiction, describes as follows: “For decades it was the focus of public life; the public life, that is, that was introduced by the bourgeois emancipated by the revolution. The Palais Royal became the mecca of the leisure class” (448). This seems a peculiar way to characterize a building project undertaken by the nobility for the purpose of financial speculation before the revolution. And Geist suggests or careless allows us to think that there is somehow an equivalence between the bourgeois of the 19th century and a leisure class. The leisure class? It is true that bankers and businessmen congregated there during the twenty years that the stock exchange occupied the ground floor, yet these captains of commerce were by no means in the majority. In fact, the class character of the visitors to the Palais Royal would have been very hard to determine with precision. In addition to the stock exchange there were many bookshops and hat stores, a variety of restaurants, betting offices, furniture stores, shops for jewelry and clothing and perfume, gambling rooms, apartments for rent, luxury markets, stores selling pottery and antiques and tobacco and souvenirs, finally “brothels for all inclinations” (458). An 1815 guide to Paris warned the visitor to “pay attention to your pockets in this narrow arcade, which is often congested with crowds.” Clearly, the denizens of the Palais Royal comprised a broad spectrum of Parisian society, from the noblemen speculating at the Bourse to the “dangerous class” of criminals accosting the unwary, bourgeois or otherwise.

Where the original arcade resembles the mall is in the variety of commercial enterprises and the presence of a sociologically diverse crowd. Compared to the Palais Royal, however, the mall appears rather tame in its offerings—no betting parlors, no massage parlors (not yet, anyway)—and equally tame in the composition/behavior of its crowd. In 1839 Balzac had described the Palais Royal as “a temple of prostitution,” a phrase which in the context of his novel Lost Illusions signified not only the selling of sex but equally the sale of one’s spiritual integrity (the fate of Balzac’s hero Lucien de Rubempré). Suburban malls, whatever else they have to offer, don’t seem to have love for sale. Possibly a factor in the relatively unerotic social aspect of the mall was its housewife clientele at the outset. As a recent article in the real estate pages of the Chicago Tribune observed, the primary visitors to the large regional malls of the 1970s were women and teenagers who commonly spent the entire day at the mall. With
the increase in the number of working women in the 1980s, the article noted further, shoppers no longer stayed in the mall for such prolonged periods (edition of 5 February 1989). Current retail strategy calls for luring the entire family to the mall, making it not so much an alternative to the household as the direct competitor of hearth and home.

Is it an acknowledgement of the mall’s attractive powers that the architecture of recently built houses seems to reflect the mall’s arrangement? The new suburbs of Valparaiso offer very large houses which attain their size through the expansion of areas like the oddly named family room or through the addition of rooms devoted to novel possessions like the hot tub and the home gymnastics machines. There is a demand for larger internal spaces rather than for more rooms, resulting in 5,000 square foot houses with only three bedrooms. Furthermore, these spaces are now defined by very high, grotesquely named ceilings (as though a “cathedral ceiling” guaranteed the spirituality of owning such a gigantic residence) often penetrated by skylights and, on the second story, framed by a loft or a catwalk. Access to these residential leviathans is by automobile, with garages inevitably connected if not completely integrated with the house. There are no sidewalks in such neighborhoods; the postman is probably forbidden to walk across the lawns and the ceremonial walkway linking the front door and the drive is for “company” only. Such houses are large enough for crowds of people to circulate, for families to engage in mall-type expeditions (“I’m going to the jacuzzi, I’ll meet you and the kids in the video room in half an hour”), and the only real drawback would seem that there is nothing to buy inside one’s own

The greatest of all the nineteenth-century galleries was the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II of Milan, seen here in an aerial view of projected inner-city developments. The dome at the center, with its four radiating arms, defines the structure. Its location at the heart of Milan—connecting the Piazza Della Scala to the north with the Piazza Del Duomo and the cathedral to the south—is evident. The Galleria was planned and built over the course of some two decades. Geist chronicles its glories and vicissitudes. First opened in 1867, it was finished in 1878, shortly after Mengoni, the principal architect, had fallen to his death from the as-yet unveiled triumphal arch. The Galleria quickly became a Milanese institution: a local proverb described it as a “miracle.” Damaged in 1943 by air raids, the Galleria was reopened in 1955.
house. Perhaps without realizing it, the mortgage brokers and defense attorneys and plastic surgeons who have erected these fabulous dwellings have already been contaminated fatally by contact with the mall and its particular culture. A private mall is a contradiction in terms, and the suburban “estate homes” are doomed to remain empty and cheerless in comparison with the public structures they have unwittingly emulated.

The mall, nevertheless, has yet to reach the democratic symbolism and public accessibility attained by the arcades. Perhaps the most notable instance of an arcade where the private, commercial aspect was almost entirely dominated by a public character was the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II, built in 1864-7 in Milan and finally completed in 1878. The history of this structure is laid out superbly by Geist, whose account I am compressing here. From the inception the project had an international flavor. The construction of the Galleria was part of a larger plan to modernize the area of the Piazza del Duomo, and this plan seems to have arisen shortly after the liberation of Milan from the Austrian occupation. Probably the inspiration came from Napoleon III whose French troops had fought with those of Vittorio Emanuele at the decisive battle of Magenta; Napoleon’s city planner, Baron Haussmann, had already achieved a kindred revamping of the major boulevards of Paris. The Galleria was financed by the City of Milan Improvement Company, Ltd., an English firm; the design was awarded to the winners of an international field of competitors (a Frenchman, Joret, built the dome over the center of the arcade, while an Italian, Mengoni, constructed the arcade proper). The Galleria, like its French and Belgian precursors, was something of a center of communication; the first offices of Corriere Della Sera, Italy’s first mass-circulation paper, were located in the Galleria. Apart from the fact that the arcade was (and remains) “the largest, highest, and most ambitious of all shopping arcades” it differed from its forerunners in the larger amount of space devoted to residential use. Of the arcade’s seven stories (comprising a total of 1,260 rooms) the top four floors were entirely residential. Similar combinations of retail and residential use did not reappear until more than a century later, in such buildings as Chicago’s Water Tower Place. In any case, the presence of shops and residences within the same architectural space endowed the Galleria with an immediately public character, quite independent of the pedestrian traffic that the arcade’s central location would have guaranteed. And if size, centrality and mixed use were not enough, the style of the building consciously referred to national symbols, to the dome of St. Peter’s in Rome, to the triumphal arches of Imperial Rome and, in the floor plan with its shape of a Latin cross, to the cross in the coat of arms of the family of Vittorio Emanuele II, the “architect” of Italian unification. By purchasing the arcade from its developers in 1880 the city of Milan confirmed the function of the Galleria as the heart of a city which prided itself as the moral capital of Italy (Geist, 371-401).

To speak of “il cuore della città” and “capitale morale” in connection with American malls and cities would be unseemly, possibly ridiculous. And not just because a sentimental or moralistic vocabulary is out of place in any discourse about urban and suburban landscape in our region. The problem of using a language of feeling in connection with the American scene is a reflection of the relative lack of a tangible, visible past (much as Tocqueville observed in the 1830s). People my age will remember what the tallest building in the world was in 1955; yet this building is repudiated or ignored in the high-rise structures of today, and their styles don’t make any use of the vaguely “streamlined” shape of the Empire State Building. Here the past doesn’t seem worth re-appropriating, in contrast to the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele’s secular resumption of the dome of St. Peter’s. The absence of a symbolically charged reference to history helps explain the success of modernist minimalism, e.g., the work of Mies van der Rohe, when it crossed the Atlantic. Whereas the modernist architectural idiom had appeared so sharply anti-traditional in Europe, in America there was nothing to contradict the notions of “doing more with less” (Buckminster Fuller) and reducing form to the handmaid of function (Mies). In the absence of impressive historical reminders of previous or competing institutions (Church, State, nobility) the American mall is in the process of becoming the dominant and most distinctive

One reason why postmodernism as defined by Charles Jencks applies less to American than to European architecture lies in the capabilities for ignorance on the part of American architects. The Renaissance Center complex in Detroit (1977-81, John Portman and Associates) makes use of clever quotations from Garnier’s Paris Opera, the interior of St. Peter’s, the architectural fantasies of Piranesi and so forth. And to that extent it satisfies Jenck’s definition of postmodernism as a “double coding” which combines modern techniques with references to traditional buildings. But the Renaissance Center makes no reference whatsoever to its local precursors, ignoring the Fisher Building and its art-deco arcade. See Rachel B. Mullen, “Renaissance Center,” in The Critical Edge, ed. by Tod A. Marder (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), 175-87 and Jencks, Post-Modernism, 14.


March, 1989
architectural type of our time.⁴

Sweet home Indiana! No survey of the mall would be complete without an exemplary visit to an actual mall. I will describe the one I know best, having been there many times. Southlake Mall in Merrillville, Indiana is about twelve miles east on U.S. Highway 30. To get there I usually follow the old, winding Joliet Road out of Valparaiso, with its farms on one side and suburban ranch houses on the other, until I reach Highway 30, a pedal-to-the-metal fight for survival against trucks and V-8 rustbuckets. Soon the early signs of commerce appear, the euphemistically titled "convenience" stores, the carpet outlet, bowling alley, the evangelical churches with their illuminated crosses and wishful parking lots, auto dealers, a miniature golf course, the waterbed outlet and the only record store in the area. The moment is near.

Southlake Mall has the size to make its appearance seem very different depending on the angle of approach and entry. Although the interior plan develops around what is basically in a two-level arcade structure, the exterior appears rather asymmetrical—seemingly built into and over and down a rolling landscape. Only the Sears store at the east end of the mall can be entered from the outside only at ground level; the other three "anchor" stores—Carson's, Ayres', Penney's—can be entered by foot on either first or second floors thanks to the artificial hills on which the parking lots rest. Penney's like Sears occupies the end of the mall's long axis and they form the east-west poles while the two "upscale" stores lie on the shorter north-south axis. None of the axes joins directly to any other axis; as a result, the vistas along any given axis are interrupted by interior plazas or lobbies. On my visit I enter on the north through the second floor of Ayres, first confronting displays of designer watches and earrings, then gloves and purses, finally a labyrinth of cosmetics counters and display cases. Stocky women in jogging shoes and designer jeans are resting their Gucci bags on the counters. I pass into a split walkway and gaze down at people, mostly faded men, sitting in one of the oases, barely shaded by the peculiar low-light palmish-looking trees that grope towards the skylights. Past the cinnamon roll stand, down the escalator toward the central plaza framed on one side by a fountain containing vaguely modernistic bronzed shapes illuminated by colored spotlights. I am in the heart of the mall, ready to move down the artery of my choice or, alternatively, to take a seat in the central plaza. Which I do now rather than shop for self-help books or Italian slacks or valentines.

It is in the spectacle, finally, that the secret of the mall resides. In 1957 the architect Morris Ketchum described the mall as a place where "honky-tonk signs and store fronts—the architectural jazz of Main Street—are outlawed in favor of harmonious architectural patterns."⁵ Which is true, although it must be added that the jazz, minus the neon, has been taken inside. The rush of people of all ages and races, of both genders and (presumably) of all sexual orientations, moves now fitfully and now flently on all sides. But it is not yet as Whitmanesque as possible. This is still middleclass territory, still the turf of teens and housewives, middle-aged couples at night (until nine, that is, when the carriage becomes a pumpkin, the theater-of-the-world a warehouse of merchandise). Since the 19th century the poets and intellectuals have sought in the arcades the secrets of a possible utopia. Fourier, then André Breton and Louis Aragon, the prophet Walter Benjamin and others have pursued within the arcade and its doubles (the Crystal Palaces, the Centuries of Progress, the Habitats) the key to an internal transformation of society. Is the moment at hand? In 1880 Mark Twain wrote of the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II in A Tramp Abroad as follows: "Blocks of new buildings of the most sumptuous sort, rich with decoration and graced with statues, the streets between these blocks roofed over the glass at a great height, the pavements all of smooth and variegated marble, arranged in tasteful patterns—little tables all over these marble streets, people sitting at them, eating, drinking, or smoking—crowds of other people strolling by—such is the Arcade. I should like to live in it all my life." The mall will have come of age when it is possible for someone to make this same wish. But until the time when all are welcome, when the rents are low enough to enable the little shops to endure, when the decor is characterized by "tasteful patterns," the mall must remain a tantalizing hint of democratic vistas internalized, of a possible utopia.⁶

¹More precisely, it is the North American mall I have in mind. Largest at the moment seems to be the West Edmonton Mall in Canada, over 5 million sq. ft. of floor space, 838 (!) stores, a few hotels, an amusement park, zoo, a life-size replica of Columbus' ship the Sta. Maria and who knows what else.


⁶A stronger taste of utopia can be found at places like New York's South Street Seaport, which combines an old warehouse and pier site with modernized inwards, in sum, a place where crowds can stroll and gaze about at the tasteful patterns. But even here there is a decided class bias to the surroundings, not unlike Water Tower Place in Chicago.
JOHN COWPER POWYS:

The Life and Works of a Neglected Master

John Cowper Powys' beginnings were neither strange nor exciting. His father, the Reverend Charles Francis Powys, a clergyman in the Church of England, of strong Evangelical convictions, was unbending, austere and humble. The vicarage of Shirley, a small town in Derbyshire, where John was born, and Rothesay House, Dorchester, and Montacute Vicarage in Somerset, the homes of his childhood and youth, are solid and substantial—emblematic of their customary inhabitants, well-endowed and well-connected.

It would hardly be necessary to assume—and it would be most unfashionable—that imagination can be inherited, were we not faced with the phenomenon that John Cowper Powys was not the only manifestation of genius in his family. One gifted child might be fortuitous: ten out of ten has the look of conspiracy. What siblings have in common is of course a mother, and it is to Mary Cowper Powys, née Johnson, that biographical speculation inevitably leads. Her fifth son, Llewelyn, eloquent on most subjects, described his mother as "that strange woman who ever loved sorrow rather than joy" and as "one who ever preferred the shady side of the road." John, always more reticent than Llewelyn, is peculiarly silent about his mother. His great Autobiography contains almost no mention of any women, and it has been widely assumed that this was to spare the reputation of those still living. But John writes, in a letter of 1933, about the Autobiography: "It will contain No Women at all—not even my Mother." His mother had been dead for twenty years, and yet the Autobiography is "Dedicated to Mary Cowper Powys," not "to the memory of." In letters John often remarked on his likeness to his mother: what he termed her "ironic submission," her readiness to be used, humiliated and ignored, was an attitude that John admired and adopted. And as if in compensation, among Mary Cowper Powys' favorite writers were Fielding, Smollett and Walt Whitman. In 1919 John described himself as "more and more like mother in my evasions of all but mad remote imaginative feelings."

John Cowper, born in 1872, was the eldest of ten children who reached maturity: all of them showed signs of their mother's imagination, and of her ironic submission to circumstances. Even the most conventional of her sons, Littleton, who was to become the head-master of Sherborne Preparatory School, was to earn the lasting gratitude of many not entirely conventional pupils, including the poet Louis MacNeice. Of the other sons Theodore Francis Powys (1875-1953) and Llewelyn Powys (1884-1939) were distinguished authors, the former of novels and stories, the latter of essays and memoirs; A.R. Powys (1881-1936) was an architectural historian, and a pioneer in the movement to preserve and restore ancient buildings; and the youngest, Will (1888-1978), was a sheep-farmer in Kenya. Of the four sisters, Gertrude (1877-1952) most closely resembled her mother, even following her literally in taking care of the father after her mother's death. In doing so, she abandoned her training as an artist in Paris: her early paintings are instinct with potential. Marian (1882-1970), seeing what duty and convention required from Gertrude, fled from England: in New York she was to make herself one of the world's leading authorities on the history of lace and lace-making. Katie (1886-1963) published a novel and some poetry, and Lucy (1889-1986) lived until very recently, an exemplary Powys.

Merely to list the children is to celebrate the mother. And yet in that extraordinary family, approached by the Brontes but unequalled by any family in European literature, John Cowper Powys hardly fits. So vast is his imagination, and so massive his genius, that even...
such a family as his constitutes an inadequate frame. Had he remained in England he might have led an odd and marginal existence as a peripatetic lecturer on the University Extension circuit. Until the age of thirty-three that was the outcome of a conventional education at Sherborne and Cambridge; Powys had perhaps reached the limits of non-conformity as prescribed by English civilization in the late nineteenth-century. His first two books, *Odes and Other Poems* (1896) and *Poems* (1899), are a predictable blend of Keats, Tennyson, Swinburne and Yeats. It is indicative of Powys' lack of independence at this time that he should think of writing poems. Poetry, not prose, was the conventional mode of rebellion, of expressing a sense of being different. It was not until years later that Powys discovered his genius in his prose, and by that time—the 1920s—James Joyce had conferred on prose the status of poetry. All of Powys' great works were written after the age of fifty-six. Until then he was struggling with and making his way through all that he had inherited: from his father (to be grossly schematic) the middle-class values of propriety and dullness, and from his mother "ironic submission," the willingness, humorously, contemptuously, to tolerate such a notion of "life."

We could say that Powys rebelled so magnificently, became so authoritatively *himself*, because he delayed so long. When he first went to the United States for a lecture-tour in 1905, he could then have cut loose from everything in England that constrained him. Although he was to derive almost all his income from the United States over the next thirty years it was not until the 1920s that he did not return to England for the summers. Powys was, by absolutely *all* accounts, an astounding lecturer, and in America he found some audiences sufficiently uninhibited to appreciate his dramatic mode of "dithyrambic analysis," in essence, of becoming the subject about whom he was speaking. His lectures were neither discourses about the subject, nor addresses to the audience, but evocations of the subject's voice. There are, in contrast, no reports of his lectures in England before 1905—and the absence of testimony suggests that they were not very far from average.

America gave to Powys not only the freedom to be his own special type of lecturer; it also offered him a social and cultural milieu. Although he had had the "best" education, and mixed with all the "right" sort of people, in Cambridge, Oxford and London, Powys found few congenial souls, and formed no lasting friendships. His friendships with Louis Wilkinson and Bernard O'Neill did not begin until after 1905: both these men were contemporaries of and had first been friendly with Llewelyn. The only lasting relationship that Powys made in England was through marriage, in 1896, with the "right" but utterly wrong kind of wife. Once again we find an instance of a pattern: absent all winter long, Powys returns each summer to England and to his wife and son, pleading financial necessity for his American sojourns, and otherwise sustaining the appearance of a conventional marriage. Only in the 1920s did his wife learn that the marriage was finished.

All of Powys' close friends were Americans. Based first in Philadelphia, then from 1910 in New York and Chicago, Powys fitted very easily into avant-garde circles—such circles as had not existed in England. Among his closest friends were the novelist Theodore Dreiser and the poet Edgar Lee Masters; other close friends were less famous; among the famous who were in Powys' circle were the dancer Isadora Duncan, the lawyer Clarence Darrow and, later on, writers such as e.e. cummings and Edna St. Vincent Millay. Greenwich Village, the heart of America's avant-garde culture through the first half of the twentieth-century, was Powys' "scene." Numerous memoirs of that period testify to Powys' presence and visibility: the theatre critic Lionel Abel has recently described, in *The Intellectual Follies* (1984), "Romany Marie's," a restaurant frequented by Bertrand Russell, Powys, Will Durant and others. To outweigh the thirty-three years spent in England, at least twenty years of Greenwich Village were needed.

When Powys eventually, at the age of fifty, settled down to live with a woman not his wife (he never obtained nor even sought a divorce) he wrote to his brother Llewelyn: "I doubt if I should have the gall or courage to risk living with her anywhere except in Greenwich Village." In many ways 1922-23 marked the watershed of Powys' creative life. Until that time he had lectured with astonishing energy, in every one of the mainland states except for South Dakota, often delivering as many as ten lectures in a week. But between 1899 and 1914 he wrote very little and published nothing. For a man notorious to posterity as a compulsive writer of too many overlong novels these fifteen years pose a puzzle. One possibility is that he gave far more of himself to his lectures, both in time and energy, than was required, in order to absorb the creativity that would otherwise have gone into writing. It is as though Powys was happy in America, and creatively inspired, but still sufficiently apprehensive of those in England, of "English opinion," as deliberately to keep from the English any evidence of his contentment. For fifteen years the only opinions that Powys dared to solicit were those of his anonymous audiences and of his friends in New York and Chicago.

Fifteen years without a publication—not even an
essa...
the scenes of the book, Sussex and New York (with Paris in the background), are scenes with which Powys was familiar as an adult. The settings of all his other novels before *Maiden Castle* (1936) are based not on adult familiarity but on childhood memory. *After My Fashion* provides us with a glimpse, and little more, of Powys' life in New York, and a startling portrayal of one of his most ardent admirers, Isadora Duncan, in the character of Elise Angel. A further uncharacteristic feature of this novel is that it is less than three hundred pages long.

In the early 1920s Powys was much in demand not only as a lecturer but as a contributor of essays and book-reviews to numerous American journals. His growing reputation as a "sage" led to requests for philosophical works and essays on issues of contemporary concern. *The Complex Vision* was the first of Powys' books to be issued by a major American publisher—one of those who had rejected *After My Fashion*. This was followed by booklets on such topics as *Psychoanalysis and Morality* and *The Religion of a Sceptic*, and critical essays on Joyce and Proust, important less for what they tell us of those authors than for their tone and attitude, positive, enthusiastic, on the side of the new.

Proust and Joyce were important for Powys. Having been convinced from boyhood that he would one day be a great writer, Powys had so far, by the age of fifty, failed to achieve that status in his poetry or plays. The two whom Powys reckoned as early as 1924 the greatest writers of his generation had shown something of the possibilities of prose. While Powys was in no way a "disciple" of either writer, he gained from them the inspiration and the confidence to take prose fiction away from its dependence on realism and narrative, and to shape novels in accord with his vision.

1922, the year of *Ulysses*, and of Eliot's "The Waste Land" (also greatly admired by Powys), was by happy chance the year in which Powys came to know Phyllis Playter, the American with whom he was to live from 1923 until the end of his life. Of this quiet, self-effacing woman, little can be said but this: until Powys met her his life had been passed in purposeless disorder, his energies variously and continually mis-spent. From the mid-1920s onwards there is a purpose in Powys' life, a pattern in his energies, and an enormous confidence in everything that he writes: Phyllis was to be muse and guide.

That confidence is most apparent in the gathering maturity of Powys' style through the 1920s. It can also be detected in his mode of publication. *Ducdame* is the first of his novels to be issued by prestigious publishers on both sides of the Atlantic, and it is the first of his books whose British edition was organized in advance of its publication in America. The obvious assumption is that this reflects the growth of Powys' reputation. It may be, however, that it was only now that Powys could face up to the consequences of publication. Now that he seemed to be permanently based in America there was no longer the need to protect himself and his reputation in England. In puzzling over one of the major enigmas of modern literary history—the reputation of John Cowper Powys—one is occasionally led not to blame it all on reviewers and readers but to note Powys' incompetence as a promoter of his own books—an incompetence unusual in one so adept at promoting himself through his lectures. That, until 1925, his publishers were almost exclusively cousins or lecture-managers, with very limited distribution channels, might suggest not a failure to find a more serious publisher but a deliberate reticence, a chosen obscurity.

*Ducdame*'s theme, fittingly for one who had now settled permanently in America, is that of family succession and inheritance. Sibling rivalry is prominent. The novel exemplifies the tension in Powys between his "clannishness," his exceptionally close and affirmative relationships with all his brothers and sisters, and his desire to be alone, to have an existence independent of his family. For his own son, Littleton, born in 1902, John had felt an extreme responsibility and his "pretense" of the marriage continuing until the 1920s had a certain justification. By his American earnings Powys was able to support almost entirely his wife and son, and enable them to live in a far from modest house in Sussex. Furthermore Powys himself was determined to pay for his son's education, following his own footsteps, at Sherborne and Cambridge. By 1923 Littleton had graduated from Cambridge, was in training for the Anglican priesthood, and was set to inherit a large sum of money from a relation of his mother's. All Powys' financial duties, at least, had been honorably fulfilled. But Powys was also aware by then of his son's homosexual leanings, which he might well have attributed to his own absence. Littleton had been the eldest of C.F. Powys' grandchildren, but John Cowper would not become a grandfather himself. It is this circumstance that gives such poignancy to the meditation in Powys' fiction from *Ducdame* forward on relations between father and son, on questions of paternity, succession and family lineage.

*Ducdame* is a fine and sensitive novel; *Wolf Solent* is the first of Powys' works of mastery and one of the great novels of the century. Its most striking accomplishment, when compared to the earlier novels, is the realization of Wolf Solent's character. Because all of the story is filtered through Wolf's consciousness—in the manner of Henry James—and because that
peculiar, devious, obsessive and deluded consciousness is so accurately and plausibly presented in and by the story, there is always the potential for shape and order. Potential, but not actual, for all of Powys' major works cultivate instability and frustrate expectations and solutions. Wolf is a most unpleasant character, akin to the anti-hero of existentialist fiction, and yet he has all the best ideas and the most sublime visions. In one way Wolf is a vehicle for everything that we associate with Powys' works of non-fiction: he accepts the mythology of "cosmic dualism" which Powys presents in *The Complex Vision*, and he exemplifies the "cult of sensation" advocated by Powys in *In Defence of Sensuality*. Historically and formally, the novel is a social genre, tracing the movement and placement of individuals within society. Powys' philosophical positions are essentially selfish: his is *A Philosophy of Solitude*, if not of solipsism. By placing a "Powys-figure" in the social milieu of a novel the limitations of the Powysian philosophy are thrown into relief. His philosophy constantly exhorts us to avoid the crowds, to cultivate solitude, but in the novel as a genre there is no escape from others. It is this tension, manifested biographically, thematically and formally, that gives such superlative force to *Wolf Solent*.

"Zeus loved Mnemosyne
with a beautiful hair
and of her the Nine Muses were born"

An exuberant Powys inscription to Homer and the Aether.

When one appreciates the originality of *Wolf Solent* one can begin to understand why Powys had taken such a long time to become a novelist. Poetry is the appropriate form for the imaginative expression of isolation and detachment; the novel is the form for the depiction of cohesion, interaction and social mobility. *Wolf Solent* is about the ordeal of one lover of solitude in society—that is, in a novel. Powys' next work, *A Glastonbury Romance*, probably the longest single-volume novel in the English language (so Powys thought), extends and complicates the tensions of *Wolf Solent*. Here there is a multiplicity of characters, and no main protagonist: each of the characters has his or her private world and exclusive visions. Social relationships are conducted at the mundane level, in order that each character's world might be unchallenged. When private worlds do come into open, public conflict, the outcome has the look of apocalypse, it gestures towards the transcendent. *Wolf Solent* includes too many worlds for one novel. As such, it elaborates upon and exemplifies William James' concept of the "multiverse" that had fascinated Powys for many years. Each consciousness constitutes its own universe: a plurality of consciousnesses constitutes a "multiverse" which cannot be comprehended in its totality by any single consciousness. Fragmentation, limitation and partiality are thus necessary components of any attempt to go beyond the individual's universe. But in *A Glastonbury Romance* we find not synthesis and communication but fragmentation, partiality and formally, even thematically, incoherence. The example of Dostoevsky is here crucial. In all of literature only Dostoevsky matches Powys in rendering the world's randomness, its irreducible multiplicity.

And to say that is to move from an exposition of the novel's abstract philosophical principles, which may give a desiccated, uninviting impression, to the details of that irreducible multiplicity. For there are just as many vivid depictions, idiosyncratic actions, intensities and perversions of passions, things magnificent in their contingency, as in the works of Balzac or Dickens or Tolstoy. The difference is that all these components gain their livingness from their separateness: there is neither a single plot, nor a single consciousness, nor an aesthetic structure that binds all together. Even the landscape of Glastonbury, magically evoked, has a disturbingly shifty quality that partly suggests the geological evolution and motion of the landscape, and partly derives from a deliberate topographical disjunction. One could give examples, and go on for many pages. *A Glastonbury Romance* has 1,176 of them as richly written and filled as any in English fiction.

*Weymouth Sands*, almost six hundred pages long and published less than two years later, sustains the level and in some ways advances the structural subtleties. The sands, the beach on which many of the actions have their place, is the shifting margin between earth and water, and between the human and the elemental. The insubstantiality of the sands and the ebb and flow of the tides serve as figure for transience and reversal. In the carnival atmosphere of the summer vacation at the sea-side, the puppet-show becomes a microcosm, and the novel's mirror of itself within itself. On the grim side there is near Weymouth a research establishment for the advancement of science where vivisection is practised. For Powys this was the worst of all abominations, and of the many political and ideological
causes with which he engaged, no other elicited his passion so absolutely. One of the characters, Richard Gaul, is deeply absorbed in "The Philosophy of Representations," something which concerns Powys much in his philosophical works of the 1930s. The novel's theme could perhaps be termed the equivocation of representations, whether in a puppet-show or in a laboratory (for experiments to be useful for humans it must be assumed that animals are in the place of, representing humans); and that equivocation extends of course to the novel itself within a historically realistic tradition. Representation is central to the relationship between sexuality and imagination which is presented and explicated in all his novels; in Weymouth Sands Powys reaches in Sylvanus Cobb, "a mystic," an unprecedented and shocking crux: that imagination can work so successfully against instinct as to destroy "the great erotic force that creates the world." That ranging of imagination against creativity is a variation on the pairing of Eros with Thanatos, but Powys' theme cannot be presented for it strikes at representation itself, at the very act of writing.

This most productive and successful phase of Powys' writing life—so successful financially that he had been able to retire from lecturing in 1930—was abruptly halted by a most unjust libel suit. A land-owner in Glastonbury—a town Powys had visited once since his youth—claimed that he had been portrayed in the character of Philip Crow. In April, 1934, an action was brought, and in the summer it was settled out of court. Powys had to pay in damages all his earnings from A Glastonbury Romance. For this reason Weymouth Sands had all its proper names replaced for the English edition, which was entitled Jobber Skald. This libel suit was the most gratuitous misfortune of Powys' life. The savings from his lectures were being rapidly depleted by the Depression and now his longest book, which had remarkably good sales, was to yield no remuneration. Life in the small house in upstate New York, Phudd Bottom, where Powys and Phyllis Playter had moved in 1930 and where he had hoped to spend the rest of his life, was no longer viable. Before the libel suit they had been contemplating a move, and they now decided, rather precipitously and without any obvious good reason, to live in England.

Before leaving Phudd Bottom Powys completed the last book he was to write in America, his Autobiography. Of this book Henry Miller, one of Powys' earliest and most influential admirers, wrote: "The Autobiography I still believe to be the greatest, the most magnificent, of all autobiographies. I say this, having read most if not all of the celebrated works in this category." As a presentation or, rather, re-presentation of a self Powys' book is indeed unrivalled. If we assume Miller to have been thinking chiefly of Augustine and Rousseau we can praise Powys' autobiography by contrast for managing to be confessional—just as confessional as theirs—without being egocentric.

By the time the Autobiography was published Powys and Phyllis Playter were in England, living in Dorchester, near to many of his brothers and sisters and at a discreet distance from his wife and son. There Powys began to write a novel about Dorchester, Maiden Castle, whose protagonist, as unsympathetic as and reminiscent of Wolf Solent, is a historical novelist called Dud No-man. While Maiden Castle does mark a slight falling-off from the level of achievement of the three previous novels it is an important transitional work, initiating Powys' second series of major novels. Things Celtic, and especially Welsh, had interested Powys from childhood, and almost all his novels give some prominence to the Celtic theme. In Maiden Castle it is central, and one of the characters, who has named himself Uryen, explicitly belongs in Wales.

In 1935 Powys and Phyllis left Dorchester and moved to Corwen in North Wales. Powys had not chosen his name, but he certainly chose to make a myth out of its Welshness. For twenty years they lived in Corwen, and Powys saturated himself in Welsh history and literature and folklore, even learning some Welsh. Here he wrote an enormous and often brilliant series of literary essays, The Pleasures of Literature, some more philosophical books, a couple of slight and unsuccessful novels, and three important novels, fit to stand with Wolf Solent, A Glastonbury Romance and Weymouth Sands: Owen Glendower (1940), Porius (1951) and Atlantis (1954). The years between Owen Glendower and Porius were taken up largely with two important critical studies of the two writers who had perhaps been of the greatest importance and inspiration throughout Powys' life: Dostoevsky and Rabelais.

In 1955 John Cowper and Phyllis left Corwen and moved up into the hills. In a tiny worker's cottage in Blaenau Ffestiniog, near Mount Snowdon, Powys continued to write. The Brazen Head is a novel about Roger Bacon, in which the conflicts between science and magic, religion and superstition, progress and its opposite, are recreated as modern problems. Homer and the Aether is a visionary re-telling of the Iliad, spoken as if by the Aether which transcends History in the oneness of myth. With the help of the Aether Powys and Homer are hardly distinguishable; and so it is not only a re-telling but also a questioning of the idea of tradition, of the use of history in the growth of myths. And toward the very end, in what he called his second childhood, Powys wrote stories of earthless fantasy, utterly ungrounded. Out of the context of Powys' other works these can be charming; in context
we can see that Powys is at last indulging in the freedom from reference for which his imagination may always have longed, but which the novel as a genre did not allow. These stories can be read as the free-play of words in the mind. And so he wrote until his death at the age of 90, in 1963. Phyllis Playter continued to live in the same cottage in Blaenau Ffestiniog until her own death in 1982.

It is perhaps not necessary nor even advisable to say much about the Welsh novels in an introductory essay. These are not the novels of Powys to be read first for adequate comprehension, and secondly these novels at the age of words in the mind. And so he wrote until his death from reference for which his imagination may allow. These stories can be read as the free-play of words in the mind. And so he wrote until his death at the age of 90, in 1963. Phyllis Playter continued to live in the same cottage in Blaenau Ffestiniog until her own death in 1982.

It is perhaps not necessary nor even advisable to say much about the Welsh novels in an introductory essay. These are not the novels of Powys to be read first for they pose two obstacles. First, the details of Welsh history and mythology obviously need to be familiar for adequate comprehension, and secondly these novels trace an inward turn of Powys' imagination. Of the group, *Of Glendower* is the most lucid, almost an easy read; *Porius* is doubly obscure, and it is doubtful whether the uncort text—still to be published—will bring much clarity. And yet it must be insisted that although Powys was almost eighty when he wrote *Porius* its obscurities owe nothing to senility. They are comparable to the obscurities of other late works such as *Finnegans Wake* (about which Powys was, incidentally, a pioneering enthusiast). Obscurity is necessary for Powys' project: somewhere in history or prehistory is a passage into the recesses of the human mind. These late works are filled with images of caverns and holes and tunnels, all means of access to what is down and back. Of *Porius* especially it could be said that it is a fierce, tenacious attempt of the imagination to comprehend itself, and to comprehend its situation in and perception of time and space. Future generations (if we get that far) may well see *Porius* as Powys' central novel, and as one of the most truly original and original works of the modern European imagination.

I want to stress both "modern" and "European" for two common and still flourishing misconceptions of Powys are that he is a late-born nineteenth-century writer, and that he is primarily a local or regional writer, whether the region be the West Country or Wales. He is a contemporary of Proust and Joyce, of Pound and Dreiser, and the least of his novels obviously transcends any mere local interest. While he owes much to America for providing a milieu encouraging to the writer, and for the inspiration of friends there, Powys is not part of American Literature. It is increasingly evident that Powys' imaginative and philosophical concerns with myth and history and consciousness are symptomatic of what might be a terminal phase in European civilization. Symptomatic also are the self-questioning, self-involved structures of his novels. A further common misconception, and probably the most troublesome, is that Powys is not part of civilization's woes but offers a solution to them. If the idea of the cosmos still appeals as a common grounding of varied meaninglessnesses, it is well to remember that "cosmos" poses a threat to freedom: Powys would say that we would retain our right to solitude, to ourselves, only in a "multicosmos." If Powys offers some hope he does so, I think, no more than other great writers of less manifest exuberance, such as Beckett, or Canetti.

An emblem of Powys' relationship to his age is to be found in the following anecdote, told by Frederick Davies in *The Powys Review*, No. 19(1986):

One Sunday some years after J.C.P. had died I arrived to find Phyllis very excited. During the week she had noticed through the window a little man wandering up the land slowly, as though he was looking for something. Then there was a knock at the door. It was the little man. He introduced himself. He was Elias Canetti. He had explained that he wanted to see where John Cowper had lived. Phyllis said she had had a wonderful afternoon talking to him. Without either of them knowing it, both men had greatly admired each other's works.

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**In Memory of Primo Levi**

You are the one who follows me ghostdancing down a winding stair, yours is the face I meet at dawn the dreaming brow still bandaged by a tawny smoke of moonlight.

The day your death was ready you gazed down its eternity dazzled with the ashes in your mouth—then the slow blizzard began and your eloquent body glissaded into the majesty of its final bow. You felt a bitter rush of icy wind that lifted you weightless high up through the ghostly arcade past the floodlit marionettes waving fingers that snap, blinking eyes that roll—past the black scattered music of babies fluttering swooning into frail, lonely shrieks.

Now fly, fly back through that glowing sandstorm the cold hell that would have made Dante gasp—enter that sheeted desert singing with the ashes in your mouth.

*Rita Signorelli-Pappas*
and strikes, are we not left with the horrors of relativism, wherein anyone can dispute the authority, and the eyesight, of the person in charge, claiming that my judgment is just as good as yours? Are we reduced to mere nominalism, where balls and strikes are names given to fleeting events, but exist in name only? Is knowledge of balls and strikes knowable at all, and if not, how do we know this?

It is easy to treat such questions as frivolous, the amusements of "academics" in the worst sense of the word. Yet Klem raises a question that is not only philosophical, but also something we all confront daily: who calls 'em? Who do we believe? Who is a trusted authority? What indeed is truth? Do we have to rely on someone with special knowledge to tell us what's happening, or can we somehow figure it out for ourselves? There are no sure philosophical and social answers to such questions, so they bedevil us, all the more because in the late twentieth century so many large-scale events and processes seem so unknowable. The more we communicate, the less we seem to know; the more facts at our disposal, the less they seem to mean; the more access we have to the mass media, the less sure we are of who or what to believe. If it is the case that we are drowning in a deluge of facts while we thirst for knowledge, this raises again all those disturbing questions about the extent to which the proliferation of the mass media has really contributed to our understanding of what is happening in the modern world. Both print and visual media have enhanced our fund of information and imagery about the world, but we may wonder whether they have given us any more perspective as to what a fact or an image means for the sweep of contemporary history or the conduct of our lives. Perhaps the daily media bombardment of seemingly unrelated events does little more than confuse and even depress us, since it all does little more than convince us of our own helplessness and fragmented existence, leaving us with a feeling of political isolation and social impotence. But is that the fault of the media, or simply the limits of the human condition? In what sense are we ever able to call the balls and strikes ourselves, or must we rely on an institutional or communicative authority to do so for us? Is the world outside of our immediate horizon always a procession of flickering images reflected on the cave wall? Is there someone we can turn to who not only knows the ball-and-strike count, but also what the score is?

In everyday life, we are all constantly asking ourselves the question, what's happening? Sensing that things of importance are happening outside of our immediate purview, we turn to the news. A massive industry exists to supply us with "the news of the day." We feel we are well-informed citizens if we take an interest in the news, since then we know what's happening. But occasionally we have doubts about the quality of our knowledge: the news media may not be telling us the truth, they may be ideologically biased, they may have gotten it all wrong, they may have missed something fundamental. Most of us get a daily "fix" of news, but once in a while reflect on whether we know a great deal or very little. News, we think, is somehow not satisfying, just an accumulation of facts that add up to nothing.

This dissatisfaction can be seen when "news junkies" experience the depressing feeling that for all of that information they absorb it still is no reliable guide for the perplexed. And indeed it is disconcerting if you take seriously the

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rather normal human desire to figure out what is happening out there, on the premise that such knowledge is not only useful but also possible. But surely, we say to ourselves, there must be somebody who knows what's going on and can tell us not only the ball-and-strike count but also the inning. If we conclude that there isn't, then we may be left with nothing more than a kind of existential despair, crying with the poet Theodore Roethke, "Voice, come out of the silence. Say something."

It was this sort of vexing question about news and knowledge that inspired a famous exchange between Walter Lippmann and John Dewey. In his seminal book *Public Opinion* (1922) Lippmann cast great doubt on the traditional notion of the rational public's ability to understand, much less decide, complex matters of policy, since the "pseudo environments" of mass communication inhibited rather than enhanced knowledge. What was needed, he declared, was reliance on experts, specifically social scientists, to interpret and explain to both public and policymaker what the news meant and what should be done in response. Reviewing Lippmann's book, Dewey took exception to such an elitist and technocratic solution, arguing that the "enlightenment of public opinion" was not only possible but essential to the "intelligent direction of social life." Further, he insisted that we are not all doomed to live in an epistemological darkness: "There remains the possibility of treating news events in the light of a continuing study and record of underlying conditions. The union of social science, access to facts, and the art of literary presentation is not an easy thing to achieve. But its attainment seems to me the only genuine solution of the problem . . . " But this view confuses news with truth, Lippmann insisted. News is not truth, it is rather a passing episodic item extracted for temporary audience interest from "the ocean of possible truth." The press is constantly engaged in The Drunkard's Search, looking for the dropped housekey under the streetlight because that's where you can see the pavement. News is something sought and discovered, but truth, whether sought or not, is harder to discover. News presents itself as available and evident in the light, but truth scurries away in the darkness. News is a snapshot, but truth is an intricately woven tapestry. For Lippmann, the snapshot can never be included in the tapestry, at least under the conditions of news-gathering and reporting as practiced.

It is not easy for us to live with such epistemological doubts, and our response to such a position is often the familiar idea that news is history in the making, the conversation of democracy, and eventually the warp and woof of the historical tapestry. There is still much to commend this view, but there is also something slightly archaic about it. For such a traditional notion that "the press" still serves an informative and even historical function has been superseded by its transformation into "the media," the monster that commands and devours the news, the news reporters, and the newsmakers. It is an insubstantial monster, changing form and location in the twinkling of an eye, and forever appearing, in new and interesting tableaux in the pageant of its rebirth. The press reported the news, but now the media makes the news. The press assumed that something important was happening, and they were supposed to tell their readers about it; the media assume that what is happening that is important is the media reportage of, and complicity in, the event being reported. Lippmann's snapshot becomes a series of images without clear relation, and the tapestry of history disappears altogether. The monster flits from event to event, taking shape and surveying the surface images that define the event, and then when the surprise and uniqueness of the event wears off, abandons it for something newer.

Now television has been much criticized for helping to create "the context of no context," but I have a feeling that the monstrosity of the media is part of something larger, a change that is vaguely associative with "postmodernism." Postmodernism has been given many meanings, but here I have in mind the recurrent contemporary view that sees the world as incoherent, a random and unknowable place. What we do know is fragmentary, immediate, the discourse or appearance of the moment. Action, such as writing and reporting, is not a matter of participation in history or the production of mimetic mimesis; rather it is an aesthetic exercise that celebrates its own artifice rather than historical or mimetic verisimilitude. If a search for news, not to mention truth, is pointless in terms of social or historical function, then what's happening has an ephemeral and ghostly existence, something that exists only as popular theater. Events don't occur except as a media artifice, so it is their aesthetic representation as "news theater" that becomes crucial. What Dewey had called "the art of literary presentation" becomes primary at the expense of facticity and historicity. The media are called powerful, but it is an artificial power, since it can only command the present, and has neither memory nor continuity. Everything on the news happens out of time—the Palestinian uprising, Presidential pseudo-events, even sports and weather—and also, I fear, out of space.
Whatever one thinks of the concept, and the writers associated with it, postmodernism helps us understand the media in at least two ways. First, it mixes up the observer and the observed. Second, it interweaves the fantastic and the real. For many of the postmodernists, the self-conscious critic who interprets texts is the key figure, shifting emphasis from the text to be studied to the heroic stance of the inquirer. Similarly, the advent of media celebrities has made many of them into the focus of a story. They affect an ironic and even parodic air of condescension in covering, for example, a Presidential campaign, communicating themselves as central to the story by seeing through it and “deconstructing” it for us. Further, some celebrated media figures confuse roles by working for politicians or magnates, then moving back into the limelight of reportage with no sense of conflict, suggesting that now the realms converge to the extent of considerable confusion as to news reporting and news making. This blending is related to the complementary overlap, and even identification, of the fantastic and the real. In postmodern realms of politics and public relations, the fantastic complements the real, and comes to be seen by many as quite compatible with it. The media are often complicit in this, since their self-conception is to represent events as fantastic occurrences that only they, the reporter-critics, can understand. In this way, the reporter becomes an actor, and news events become fictions, or at least they are treated as fictions, media creations of aesthetic but not historic import.

If there is merit to this view, perhaps it helps us explain the expanding trend on television towards “reality-based programming” which combines actual events, fictive recreations, and reportorial or professional involvement in the program. There are now programs that feature “real doctors with real patients,” and actor-doctors with actor-patients; programs where real policemen recreate, and try to solve, real cases; programs with fictive trials but real lawyers, others that are quite real, if condensed, versions of trials; marital counseling programs with sometimes real, sometimes fictive, marriages on the rocks; and news programs that are not only oriented towards “tabloid” news but also towards the intrusive intervention of reporters in the news. Indeed, there are even “news programs” proposed that feature fictive reporters pursuing fictive news in the documentary “on-the-scene” style of all such programming, and some futurists even see the news media someday “making news” in much more creative ways than they have already discovered (this could range from staging riots to confronting a candidate with a past illicit lover). The postmodernists have made much of the idea of simulation, the notion that the "referentials" of history and memory become appropriated into such simulated worlds as theme parks, designed experiences such as baseball fantasy camps, and historical re-enactments. However, reality-based programming takes us a step further away not only from the integrity of the news, but also from the hope that in the long run news could become the common rubble of truth rather than the scaffolding of media facades.

John Dewey would go on to write as an old man a book entitled *Knowing and the Known*, that attempted to envision a new “transactional” theory of knowledge that was ambitious and difficult, but hopeful. Walter Lippmann would of course go on to become the country’s leading journalistic pundit, trying to put the news of the day into some kind of political and historical framework for the very kind of understanding he had originally denied. Neither could have anticipated the developments in

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**Was It Something We Said?**

On one in a string of lachrymose bluffs hanging over the peevish Atlantic they have fashioned, well, sort of a house from planks, panes, and doors cast up on the shore. Just to watch wildflowers weep rainbows around it? And a copper snake-lane sneak off with their children? And sky’s mauve ennui yawn past more of nothing but shiplights, like the eyes of an ebony monster, menacing night in the harbor?

Ah, they imagine communion with one distant neighbor. Thrill to each puff above trembling fir his chimney transmits. Sing by a castaway stove all of winter. And only seal cracks with letters of cheer we loft from Chicago.

Lois Reiner

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*The Cresset*
communication that created "the media" nor the strange turn that
takes to that would lead to such a label as "postmodern,"
suggesting that everything has changed but how and why and to
where we just don't know (what does "postmodern" precede?). Nor
could they have foreseen a trend that is not only further divorced news
from truth, but also further wed it to fiction. Fiction may be a "higher
truth," to be sure, but what's happening is also the stuff of history.
If news continues to merge with fiction, then eventually history be-
comes fiction too, since the only, or most vivid, way it is known is
through media such as television which have long since yielded to
the sweet cheats of entertainment.

It is this thought about "history becoming fiction" that I find the
grimmest prospect of the postmodern world. Without a sense of
history, we can gain no context for the news, nor respect for a truth
independent of art. It would serve us all well if we could regain an
awareness of historical continuity, but we may also wonder how much
that is possible in an age of such discontinuity, with our denial of the
past and neglect of the future. Psychologists talk of the attitude of
"radical futurelessness" among the young, living on apocalyptic or
hopeless assumptions about the shape of things to come. The ques-
tion is how do we make them, and ourselves, feel part of the temporal
loom of a history that has been somewhere and is going some-
where? For my part, I wax nostalgic for the authoritative Bill Klem
to tell me the true count, the score, and most of all, the inning. And
for those of us who through our values or our children, have a stake
in the future, we can only hope that we won't get called out on
strikes without ever knowing whether the game was fair or even
when it was over.

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Trips

John Steven Paul

Picture this. You're at the hottest show in Chicago, at one of the
trendiest dance clubs on the North Side. The club is occupying the
auditorium and stage of an old vaude-
ville house. A huge, ornate and old-
-fashioned proscenium arch arises over the large stage. The theatre
seats have been removed, and in their places on the raked tiers are
tiny tables, just about big enough to hold four cocktails and a theatre
program or two.

You bought a ticket priced far above what you're used to paying
at off-loop theatre in Chicago, a ticket which entitles you to try to
wrap yourself, and three other people, around that tiny table.
You're still extracting your left arm from your overcoat when a cos-
tumed waitress—her idea of what a "hippie" might have worn—arrives
to take your drink order. She looks disappointed when you and your
company alternately order coffee and seltzer.

The house is filling. Demographi-
cally, the audience has selected itself into two groups:
There are the affluent in their late-
thirties to early fifties, and there is
a younger group, eighteen to
twenty-five. It's a very fashionable
crowd. Lots of mink coats. Obvi-
ously, this club is the place to be.

John Steven Paul teaches at Valpara-
iso University.

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On stage, are a couple of young
actors also dressed as hippies, wear-
ing dark glasses, taking reefers and
looking somewhat contemptuously out over the audience. Finally, as
the last drinks are being dropped off at the tables and the last minks
are being shed, the cast sneaks si-
ently onto the stage. A floor-to-
ceiling banner sporting zodiac sym-
boles and peace signs is drawn up
into the flies. "When the moon is in
the seventh house/and Jupiter
aligns with Mars..." You look up
to find that your thirty-dollar seat
do es not provide you with an un-
obstructed view of the stage. To re-
ally relive the Age of Aquarius,
you're going to have to stand next
to your seat.

In case you haven't heard, an in-
ternationally prominent polo player
has tried this fall to appliqué the Age of Aquarius onto the Age of
Reagan. It just doesn't stick.

The polo player to whom I refer
is Michael Butler, scion of the Chi-
cago Butlers, and the original com-
mercial producer of Hair. Butler
first produced "the American Tri-
bal Love Rock Musical" for Broad-
way in 1968, moving it uptown to a
discotheque from its first home at
Joseph Papp's New York Shakes-
peare Festival. In 1988, he has
funded a revival, on the north side
of Chicago. (Incidentally, it is But-
ler's own theatre program bio-
ography that tells us he's an "inter-
nationally prominent polo player.")

The home of the new Hair is
The Vic Theatre, a 1912-vintage
former vaudeville house that has
been converted into a video dance
club. The Vic has two outstanding
features: a huge rack of synchro-
nized video monitors that covers
the backstage wall, and lousy sight-
lines.

Enough said about the sightlines.

The video monitors, on the other
hand, really added something to
the experience, especially for that
portion of the audience under age
forty. On a magic carpet of a hundred little televisions, they are taken on a video trip from the last days of RWR to the last days of LBJ. Like a newsreel run backward, one image yields to another, and we are all reminded that, at least on television, that’s the way it was in 1968.

Anno Domini 1968 has gotten a lot of attention lately. It’s as if the dust covering the events of twenty years ago has hardened into a layer of sandstone thick enough to require an archaeological dig to see what the year was all about. Newsweek and Time, and others, devoted major portions of weekly issues to reflection on the stories of 1968. Now Time has come out with a glossy pictorial history of 1968, “The Year That Shaped a Generation.” On the front cover are a pair of daisies and a machine gun shell. On the inside, in the Cultural Department, the first reference is to Hair.

The superb young performers in the 1988 production Hair were, for the most part, too young to remember much about the year 1968. One envisions them sitting at the feet of the director Dominic Mis­simi, listening to stories about the SDS, the Days of Rage, the Black Panthers, the Democratic National Convention in Chicago. “Back in those days, kids, drugs were fun and love was free.” One wonders how many of the hopes and fears of 1968 they might have been able to recover for undergirding their performances. Such are the challenges of producing period pieces!

Let me say right now that this production of Hair makes a great evening of entertainment. And then let me wonder with you why I left the theatre feeling so hollow.

It is an understatement to say that Hair, the invention of James Rado and Gerome Ragni with music by Galt McDermott, is short on story, even in the original version. And, in transferring the play to Broadway in 1968, the director, Tom O'Horgan, cut much of that story and added more music, turning Hair into, in O'Horgan’s words, a singspiel. (One might add that its lack of plot puts Hair squarely in the middle of the American musical-comedy tradition.) What plot remains trails a boy named Claude Bukowski during his last days before going off to the war in Viet Nam. In between the songs, Claude commiserates with his friends, Berger (the leader of the tribe, tuned in, turned on, and dropped out), Woof (a homosexual), and Hud (a fists-clenched symbol of black power); pursues his dream­girl Sheila (a social protest groupie and a sophomore at N.Y.U.); and argues with his parents.

Claude’s noisy conflict with his Mom and Dad resounds throughout the script of Hair, which, more than anything else, is about the now-famous Generation Gap. On one side of the gap, Rado and Ragni placed the Adults, the “establishment,” and caricatured them as militaristic, racially bigoted, sexu­ally repressed, verbally prudish, and slavishly patriotic. On the other side are the flower children, the Kids, who seek to throw off conventional morality and their parents’ stultifying values which stand in the way of “harmony and understanding/sympathy and truth abounding/no more falsehoods or derisions/golden living dreams of visions/mystic crystal revelation/and the mind’s true liberation.” In other words, the Age of Aquarius. Twenty years after the first performance of Hair, its generational conflict seems simply, almost melodramatically drawn. In the name of values, the adults use their power to support the Viet Nam War (“I say, support our fighting, short-haired men in Viet Nam,” says Mom), racial segregation (“The draft is white people sending black people to make war on yellow people to defend the land they stole from red people”) and the rigid restriction of sexual relations to the marriage bed, occupied only by heterosexual members of the same skin color. In the name of humanity, the Kids doggedly defend peace, racial equality and integration, and free love with whomever you’re sitting next to.

As with any melodrama, the clear identification of heroes and villains, of good and evil, is momentarily satisfying to our need for moral order. But the absence of moral ambiguity on either side of the con­flict lifts the play out of the realm of reality and ultimately undermines its ability to speak truth. The Adults are nothing more than cartoons and their legitimate concerns about corporate and personal mo­rality are ridiculed. The Kids’ desire to live life in totally unfettered fashion, to simply grow, like un­trimmed hair (“shining, gleaming, streaming, flaxen, waxen.”) is al­lowed to stand completely uncritcized, as if a steady routine of sex, drugs, and rock ‘n’ roll would have no consequences.

If one really took the Kids’ philosophical line seriously and traced the consequences of their call for total personal freedom and the utter rejection of the social and moral order, one might be deeply troubled. Sheila, one of the free lovers, spends much of the play very unhappily pregnant. Claude himself suffers a prolonged bad drug trip. But Hair was never meant to be a serious analysis of contemporary social issues. It is a nearly formless eruption of the deepest feelings of alienated youth in the latter half of the nineteen­sixties.

The play remains interesting as a cultural document partly because it celebrates powerlessness, lack of status, and rejection of material wealth. The Kids rejoice in what
they haven't got: home, money, shoes, class. Their refusal to accept the comforts of the society they renounce binds them together into a communal effort, not only to survive, but to live openly as symbols of protest. Rado and Ragni borrowed Marshall McLuhan's concept of "tribe" to describe the Kids, who turn to one another for satisfaction of their physical needs and for moral validation. The tribe has come together for a common reason, write the authors in the preface to the published edition of Hair, "a search for a way of life that makes sense to the young, that allows the growth of their new vision, however defined or undefined that may be; to find an alternative to the unacceptable standards, goals, and morals of the older generation, the establishment."

The tribe doesn't want things, it wants life; the Kids simply want to BE. They joyously match every material item that they lack with a part of their bodies that they're tickled to have. At the end of Act I, their exaltation of the human body culminates in a "Be-in," in the park, where the tribe gathers to protest against the war and social injustice. Soon, however, protest gives way to a kind of frenetic revel, a celebration of being. In the original version of Hair, it was only Berger, the de facto leader of the tribe, who, in a moment of ecstasy, shed his clothes. By the time the play made it to Broadway, lots of the actors stripped down to nakedness, and the American commercial stage had its first nude scene.

The author of this astonishing development in American theatre history was Tom O'Horgan, who was brought in to stage Hair when it was moved uptown from its off-Broadway home at the Anspacher Theatre in the East Village. Prior to this assignment, O'Horgan had spent a good deal of his professional time with the Café LaMama, a basement-room theatre dedicated to experiment. Café LaMama was one of two or three not-for-profit theatre groups which sent the shock of the new reverberating through the theatre of the nineteen-sixties. Founded in 1961, by Ellen Stewart, LaMama produced new works at an unprecedented rate. In the tradition of turn-of-the-century European art theatres such as the Théâtre Libre in Paris, the Freie Bühne in Berlin, and Stanislavski's Moscow Art Theatre, LaMama functioned as a theatre laboratory, a place to try out new ideas, to save the best and throw out the rest without fear of financial ruin. In addition to developing some of the most important American plays of the nineteen-sixties and 'seventies, LaMama's international tours (one of which was led by O'Horgan) can be credited with his having introduced such American playwrights as Lanford Wilson, Sam Shepard, and Jean-Claude van Italie to European audiences.

With his staging of Hair, O'Horgan brought some of the theatrical ideas nurtured Off and Off-Off-Broadway to the commercial mainstream. James Rado and Gerome Ragni had originally conceived the play as a ritual. For the purpose of Hair, they wrote in the preface to the published edition, the Kids "know they are on a stage in a theater, performing for an audience, demonstrating their way of life, in a sense, telling a story..." Derived from the acting theory of Bertolt Brecht, the idea of being simultaneously inside and outside the world of the play marked an important departure in American acting from the Stanislavskian standard of total immersion in the dramatic environment.

Building on the ritual idea, O'Horgan staged Hair as a piece of "total theatre," integrating music, movement, speaking, singing, art, and dance in the tradition of the classical Greeks, the Elizabethans, and Wagner, in his Gesamtkunstwerke. O'Horgan's focus on the physical possibilities of the script, at the expense of the words, also represented a sharp deviation from the tradition of modern American drama which was formally rooted in the thesis plays of Henrik Ibsen and George Bernard Shaw. By mid-century, Eugene O'Neill, Arthur Miller, and Tennessee Williams had developed this verbal drama to its highest point. By 1960, Edward Albee, taking his cue from the European absurdists, was to turn words back on themselves to expose the hollowness of language.

The social protest theme of Hair might have been better communicated had its language been clarified, but O'Horgan, fresh from his experience at LaMama and elsewhere, wasn't interested in actors whose expertise lay in traditional speaking, or singing, or dancing. Emphasizing the "physicality" of the play, the director populated the stage with moving, bending, stretching, lurching human forms.

O'Horgan's staging pulled Hair out from behind the proscenium arch and wound it around the audience. This idea of "environmental theatre" hardly seems radical in these days when singing cats and dancing roller skaters whiz by their audience's ears. But in 1968, the barrier between stage and audience had rarely been broken. In the Living Theatre's production of The Connection by Frank Gelber, heroin junkies brushed up against patrons in the lobby, but such experiments were rare. At the Biltmore Theatre, O'Horgan brought the hippies out into the aisles, to give the audience the feeling that it had literally entered a separate environment. Tom O'Horgan went on to direct Jesus Christ, Superstar and Lenny, but it is hard to imagine that any of his productions had more stylistic influence on the American theatre...
theatre than did his staging of Hair.

It's tempting to look back sentimentally on the 1968 production of Hair as an American classic. The script is anything but a masterpiece of American drama, even in its original uncut version. But it doesn't seem unreasonable to respect Hair as a signal cultural phenomenon, rising in significance above much of the other theatrical fare of 1968 and even the five years on either side. Beginning as the barbaric yawp of an energetic and angry generation and shaped by an artist familiar within the best thinking of the experimental theatre, Hair moved with and reflected the rhythms of its own time.

This brings us back to the current production at the Vic Theatre in Chicago. It is nothing if not energetic, wonderfully sung, and it moves to the choreography of no less than six different choreographers. The show is, perhaps, a bit over-produced and laden with technology. At center stage, a huge circular piece of motorized equipment is maneuvered automatically into any number of positions: now it's a campfire, now it's a spaceship, and so forth. The hippies climb all over the stage space and parade up and down the aisles making various sorts of contacts with the audience. The costumes are beautifully done, though they have a bit too much of a sheen. Michael Butler, Dominic Missimi and everyone connected with this production have done everything possible to approximate the original. Hair just doesn't fit into 1988.

Perhaps it is because the condemnation of materialistic values sounds so clearly throughout Hair that a production of the musical at the present moment has such a discordant ring. The audience is composed mostly of people who have, for the past eight years, fattened themselves with the help of a richer national economic policy. And, in spite of all the happy rockin' and rollin', no one in the house appeared inclined to shed the wealth and join the scruffy tribe—least of all the younger spectators. It's all very nice to sing "Ain't got no money, ain't got no shoes," but when a night on the town is costing you a hundred and fifty dollars, you'd better park such sentiments on stage.

Does one conclude, finally, that Hair cannot be and not be separated from its historical context of 1968? Do we then, for the sake of consistency, rule out revivals completely? Was Sophocles' Oedipus Rex any less a part of its own time than Hair was of its? Or Hamlet? Or Ibsen's Ghosts? Or Death of a Salesman? Of course not.

**Revivals stand in an ironic posture to first productions.**

Revivals of plays always stand in an ironic posture vis-a-vis their first productions, for no two ages are ever the same. It is either ironic that an old play could speak so incisively to the circumstances of a new age, or it is ironic that the circumstances of which the old play was a reflection have changed so fundamentally. It is that order of irony that strikes one while watching the new Hair. This irony finally overpowers the play and prevents it from communicating the truths it might have been able to tell.

Are there reasons not to do Hair, at this historical moment? Hair was the quintessential expression of the Youth Movement which had come to consciousness in the nineteen-sixties. The maturation of any new generation is psychically painful, but political consciousness of these young people was forged in the fires of the Viet Nam War, the violent reaction to racial injustice, and the general assault on moral values. For those who suffered through these days, the symbols of the time, the process, the achievements, and the failures are sacred. To see these symbols trotted out on stage as souvenirs, waved by youth of a very different time at an audience that is divided between those too young to know and those just old enough to wish it hadn't faded so quickly is offensive.

The other and better reason for not doing Hair is that, unlike Oedipus and Death of a Salesman, the script on its own doesn't and never really did have much to say. Much of the power of the original sprang from O'Horgan's staging, informed by new theatrical ideas. The theatre event that was Hair was the product of a unique interaction between artists and audience in 1968.

That audience is gone. Though many of the spectators are still around, they are not who they were. It is painfully, almost embarrassingly clear now that Hair was the expression of an age. As Suzanne Langer would say, its feelings are symptoms of its authors; those feelings are not capable as symbols that will continue to have expressive power through the ages. In 1968, Hair was a statement about the antagonism between the way the idealistic youth wanted it to be and the way it was. In 1988, Hair is just an entertainment about some kookie irresponsible kids who'd rather sit naked in the park and sing rather than go to work. Who cares?

Some of Claude's argument with his mother comes to mind. "This is 1968, dearie, not 1948," he says, condescendingly. She snaps back, "1968! What have you got, 1968, may I ask? What have you got, 1968, that makes you so damn superior and gives me such a headache?"

1988! What have you got, 1988, may I ask?
Kids and Schools

Dot Nuechterlein

It's a good thing I have no responsibility for elementary school policy-making—at least not in my present state of residence—for I would be constantly at odds over the age at which a child may start school.

I am vehemently opposed to the arbitrary statement that a child must be five by a certain date to start kindergarten, or six to enter first grade. State or local educators make such pronouncements because of what is known about developmental patterns for most children, but like all rules and regulations aimed at the majority, they would be constantly at odds over the present state of residence—for I policy-making—at least not in my maturity; while others can handle it too old for the lower class, so in- stead of being placed where he could achieve a solid foundation and get something out of school, poor Walter lived in humiliation, and no doubt dropped out the very first day it was legal. Today many schools would rectify that mismatch early on—but they tend to keep the brakes on those at the other end of the scale.

When should a child start school? When he or she is ready.

My three children had the good fortune to enter school in a community with an individualized educational policy. All went to nursery school; the two oldest began kindergarten in September after turning five in the spring—but one spent only a month there, as the teacher felt she was ready for grade one. The other had a full year in kindergarten, but after a few weeks in first grade was moved to second. The third child entered kindergarten on her fifth birthday, in February; in June the teacher recommended that she advance to regular school in the fall. So all three were a year ahead of most children their age, but they weren't singled out or ostracized, because others fit into the same policy. But when we moved to the U.S. some teachers predicted very negative consequences. So far—and the youngest is now finishing high school—bad things haven't developed. All three became National Merit Finalists. Are they social misfits? We don't think so, and more importantly, they have no regrets. The only real drawback has been having to wait longer than their classmates for a driver's license!

We didn't teach them to read; we read to them a lot from early on, but they learned by themselves. For example, at age four John wanted to know football and hockey scores first thing in the morning, but nobody had time to read the paper to him. So he learned to recognize "Pittsburgh" and "Minneapolis" and "Montreal" and "Edmonton" before he could read "dog" and "cat." The girls had similar motivations.

Early reading was, however, a mixed blessing. They didn't always understand the meanings of the words they saw, and occasionally out of the mouths of babes came things that embarrassed the old folks at home.

One night we went to that small fry's heaven, Burger King. John's dearest pastime next to sports was eating, and his favorite food was the Whopper. (Was he five at the time, or early six?) After devouring his own food and part of his sister's, he visited the men's room—alone, of course. Soon he came running back to the table, and at the top of a little boy's very loud voice, the whole restaurant heard: "Dad, Dad, there's a sign in there. It says, "For a real Whopper call Bunny at 542-3207.' Let's go get one!"

For one awkward moment I considered trading him in for a fat Walter.
A Kinder, Gentler Campus

Dick Lee

Recently, I gained two new presidents. First, Alan Harre was appointed to serve over me and the rest of Valparaiso University. Second, George Bush was elected to serve under me and the rest of the American people. I wish them both well.

President Bush promises a "kinder, gentler America" illumined by "a thousand points of light." President Harre offers the campus a time to "claim again the Christian heritage," apply it to the "issues of our age," and "add our testimonies to those of God's people throughout the ages."

President Bush may have the easier presidency. If he only restrains the growth of the deficit in pursuing his vision of America, we will probably praise him. Poor President Harre will be blamed if he grows any deficit at all in pursuing his vision for the University.

These are obviously not the best times for college presidents, but money isn't their biggest problem. Robert Maynard Hutchins once observed that a college president needs sufficient practical wisdom to decide the right means to the end (telos) of his institution where it is unclear or discover it where it is lost. If those tasks remain the proper work of the college president today, the odds are against his getting his proper work done. This doesn't mean there are more frequent moral and intellectual failures among college presidents. It means fewer on campus expect them to govern well or want them to govern at all.

Some college presidents, of course, defeat themselves by handing the decisions regarding the ends of their institutions to the invisible hand of the market place. Their colleges simply cut their cloth to fit the current fashions and sell whatever most of the customers are buying. Other presidents defeat themselves by transferring the decisions regarding the means to the ends of their institutions to as many advisory bodies as possible. Subcommittees of committees boil down the alternatives, and the president's choice is almost automatic. It is always sad when a college president turns his office into a clerical position—and it is also demoralizing. If the president will not examine and decide the unpleasant matters committed to his care, others on campus will be uninspired to examine and decide the unpleasant matters committed to their care.

To be sure, no college president sets out to become a robot. The comedy of the president seeking assiduously to avoid decisions is only a small part of the larger tragedy of the campus which wants very little decided. The lively president soon discovers many of her decisions are against somebody (even when they are for somebody else), and she quickly finds she is regularly seeking the support of many people she has alienated in the course of her duty. (Even President Bush does not set the salary and rank of the members of Congress, and he need not seek the support of senators and representatives who are miffed because he has poorly rewarded their work.) In no time at all, nearly everyone on campus feels some decision has gone against him, or will go against him, and many come to prefer anarchy to any decisive presidential leadership.

Those who prefer to seek their own institutional advantages under an amiable anarchy also prefer that the announced end of the institution remain blurry. Wittingly or not, strategic planning committees can be a great help here, for they are notorious for stating the end of the college or university as vaguely as possible. They further tend to keep every purpose correlative with every other purpose, subordinate only those activities with the least vocal constituencies, and conclude their work by exhorting the college or university to pursue its contradictions relentlessly toward excellence. Meanwhile, the one person whose location in the institution enables him to see the institution whole, who could be rather precise about the proper end of the institution, and who might justly subordinate other, lesser purposes to that end, is silent or unheeded or drowned out. If the president gets his view heard, he is seen as someone shamelessly exploiting his office, and if he should act upon his view, it is tantamount to tyranny.

As resistant to leadership as many campuses have become, no college or university can be truly anarchic. Even a mob will disintegrate if it does not know where it is going. Inertia provides an end, and institutions which have lost sight of their true ends are still busy perpetuating themselves.

President Hutchins thought people of extraordinary "courage, fortitude, justice, and prudence" could possibly administer the modern campus. The rest could, at best, hold their offices. Perhaps so. But since men and women of such extraordinary natural virtue are rare, it might be as wise to seek ways the campus can become more governable as it is to seek ways to improve our governors. There seems to be enough proper work for everybody.