

ment's chief of statistics] said.

Danforth noted the historical and necessary legal limitations of minors:

Because he may not foresee the consequence of his decisions, a minor may not make an enforceable bargain. He may not lawfully work or travel where he pleases. . . . Persons below a certain age may not marry without parental consent and they may not vote. . . . But even if it is the most important kind of decision a young person may ever make, that assumption merely enhances the quality of the State's interest in maximizing the probability that the decision be made correctly and with full understanding of the consequences of either alternative.

Opponents say the decision to abort should be left to minors. But a 1989 *Los Angeles Times* poll of women who have undergone abortions indicates that one out of every four women (26 percent) "mostly regrets" her abortion. Such women subsequently experience profound grief.

Adolescents in particular manifest confusion about an abortion decision, changing their minds frequently. Abortion involves a severe double loss for some adolescents: fully 17 percent of minors who have abortions compensate for a first abortion by becoming pregnant again within one year.

Opponents of parental involvement laws wrongly argue that minors already notify parents. One study confirmed that 71 percent informed a best friend, while only 37 percent informed mothers and 26 percent informed fathers. In *Hodgson v. Minnesota* (1988), the Eighth Circuit noted the testimony of a clinic co-director: "Prior to the [parental notification] statute, approximately 25 percent of the pregnant women she counseled told one or both parents of their pregnancy and intended abortion."

In *Pierce v. Society of the Sisters*, the Court upheld the rights, authority, and responsibilities of parents over their minor children: "[T]he child is not the mere creature of the state; those who nurture him and direct his destiny have the right, coupled with the high duty, to recognize and prepare

him for additional obligations." Other precedents concur, such as *Prince v. Massachusetts* in 1944: [P]arents . . . who have the primary responsibility for children's well-being are entitled to the support of law designed to aid discharge of that responsibility."

Opponents of parental consultation dismiss the significant issue of family integrity. Yet the parent-child relationship is a *permanent bond*, unlike that between an abortionist and his client, or between two teenage best friends. Research by Dr. Everett Worthington of Virginia Commonwealth University reveals that the anxiety and burden of secrecy in a teenager cause alienation, isolation, guilt, fear, depression, and an increase in family estrangement. In dissenting from invalidation of Minnesota's two-parent notice provision, Justice Anthony Kennedy agreed: "[T]o deny parents this knowledge is to risk, or perpetuate, estrangement or alienation from the child when she is in greatest need of parental guidance and support."

Critics also claim that parents will "beat, abuse, and even kill" their pregnant daughters, but there is no verifying evidence from states with such laws. Instead, there is substantial evidence that most parents support their daughter during an adolescent pregnancy. Worthington also found that after an initial period of disequilibrium, there emerges a more stable period of problem solving in which both mother and daughter take steps to resolve the pregnancy's difficulties.

In addition, a parental consultation statute usually contains a bypass permitting a doctor to proceed with abortion surgery *without* parental notice if the child is in an abusive home (including incest). Indeed, the abuse reporting requirement is an added safeguard for the minor to trigger remedial state intervention she otherwise may *not* have received in chronically abusive situations. As Justice Stevens wrote in 1981 in a concurring opinion for *H.L. v. Matheson*:

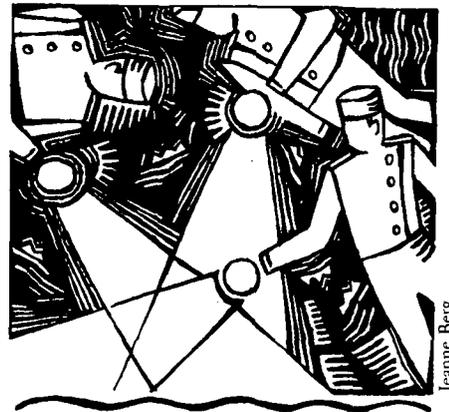
A state legislature may rationally conclude that most parents will be primarily interested in the welfare of their children. . . . [A]n assumption that parental reaction will be hostile, disparaging or violent, no doubt

persuades many children simply to bypass parental counsel which would in fact be loving, supportive and indeed, for some, indispensable.

Abortion tragedies rarely are reported honestly. Media attention instead focuses on the myth of abortion as the hallowed panacea for women. If the state legislatures explore the substantial evidence that has emerged, they will discover that the High Court's original concerns in *Bellotti* were right on target—and pass sensible laws restoring parental protection to pregnant minors in their time of critical need.

Anne Marie Morgan writes from Richmond, Virginia.

FILM



jeanne Berg

Dick Tracy and the Bad Guys

by David R. Slavitt

I wanted to check out *Dick Tracy* mostly because the Disney stock had gone down four points and a fraction on the Monday after its first weekend's disappointing grosses of only \$22.5 million. That news was not encouraging to investors, but I saw it as an indication that perhaps some of those enthusiastic reviews I'd seen might not have been altogether crazy. Even at these stratospheric levels—and we're talking about \$25 million for the film and another \$25 million or so

for advertising and promotion — there is a kind of Gresham's law operating. Quality can creep in to betray the dreams of even the shrewdest and most avaricious studio operators.

Well, I saw the film and liked it — a lot. So much so, that I began to wonder whether my judgment was still reliable. What was I doing, responding with such delight — yes, real delight and admiration — to a piece of such frankly commercial art? Back in the 60's, when I first started writing about films, I recall how I used to get worried in just the same way when I caught myself liking an Annette Funicello beach-blanket movie, for instance. This was at least a way of discovering what Robert Warshaw had meant when he'd said, in *The Immediate Experience*, that the hardest thing about being a movie reviewer was to admit that you were there. This rather gnomonic pronouncement had made no sense to me at all when I first encountered it, but later, when I came out blinking into the late morning dazzle and caught myself out having enjoyed some dopey piece of celluloid, I got the point. I had been there and had, at some level, responded to whatever changes on the old routines these cine-tasters had whipped up for me. How could I admit this? What standards were left? How could I continue in this pozzo job?

In almost that dilemma, I sat there during *Dick Tracy*, altogether entertained. I'm a lot older now and I worry less about standards, but I am still sometimes suspicious of my own mental status. So, to check myself out, I rented *Batman*, which I am rather relieved to report I found incoherent, dumb, violent, uncertain in its attitude toward its own material, and — with the singular exception of Jack Nicholson's bravura performance — totally skippable.

Nicholson didn't play the movie but did comic turns that were parodies of his own old performances and screen personae. He was worth whatever he got — his participation in the film and the subsidiary rights amounted reputedly to something in excess of \$50 million — because there was no movie without him. Even the old comic books in which Batman first appeared were more intelligently plotted. You can't have your hero and villain in a

belltower (a set-up for Nicholson's line about a "bat in my belfry"), have a huge bell fall to block the entrance to the tower so the police can't come in to help either combatant, and then, out of nowhere, produce a half dozen of the Joker's henchmen for Batman to have to disable or kill. Even the funnies had higher standards of coherence than that.

Michael Keaton is hardly there. He's earnest and boyish out of his Batman costume (and he wears glasses, which I had thought was Clark Kent's schtick), and altogether uninteresting. He is persuasive enough in the Batman outfit, but it is never explained to us why he chose the Bat symbol and paraphernalia, what it means, why he isn't Moleman, or Voleman, or Ratman, or Pangolin-person. The Joker has a logical or anyway plausible history, rather like that of the Phantom of the Opera. But the Batman business is simply a dumb *donée*.

And there's no Robin. The whole idea of these comics is to appeal to a certain group of (for lack of a better word) readers. And those appropriate readers are likely to be males between the ages of seven and fifteen. In other words, late latency and early puberty. The buddy system is a vital reality to this cohort and, so far as I can remember, the only interesting thing about the Batman figure was the "deadly duo" of him and Robin. Take that away, and there's nothing left.

Dick Tracy recognizes this underlying reality and plays itself extremely adroitly to capitalize upon the potenti-

alities for fantasy. The Kid is the identifying figure in whom we invest ourselves, the necessary mediating presence who is all appetite and, appropriately, is almost always shown gorging himself. Tracy, the hero, is torn between his love for adventure (yammering calls on his time and attention keep coming in on the old wrist radio) and his love for Tess Trueheart. What is brilliant about the film's underlying structure is that Warren Beatty's screen persona is exactly right for this shy, troubled Tracy who is fearless with villains but tongue-tied and almost helpless before Tess. It may be that Beatty's off-screen reputation enables him to play the helpless and inarticulate lover on screen (and vice versa, for all I know), but it is what he has been doing ever since *Splendor in the Grass*, and he brings this bag of tricks to Tracy and turns it into pure treasure. There is no villain as terrifying to an eleven-year-old boy as any girl he's stuck on and shy about! And this is just enough humanity to leaven and enliven the comic/cartoon figure and turn him into somebody we can identify with and even care about for a couple of hours.

That extraordinary transaction having been completed, producer-director Beatty can then have himself a good time, making a movie that is, from first to last and frame by frame, simply gorgeous. *Batman* existed in no particular time. There were television monitors to suggest contemporary high-tech, but the cars seemed to be about five years old. All the cars in *Dick*

LIBERAL ARTS

YOU'RE IMMORTAL — ALL THE EXPERTS SAY SO

A Harvard professor told a Senate hearing into the controversy over the National Endowment for the Arts that a basic logic was being overlooked by all sides in the question of whether federal tax dollars should be allowed to support art considered by some to be obscene.

Kathleen Sullivan of the Harvard Law School said previous U.S. Supreme Court decisions had defined "obscenity" as, among other things, lacking "serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value." Thus, she said, a project selected by a jury of the peers of the artist, as part of the NEA grants process, would by definition have "serious artistic value."

—from Publishers Weekly,
May 19, 1990

Tracy are period cars—including a delicious lavender Cord that Breathless drives around in. There is a nostalgia for the 30's of Chester Gould's strip and the innocence of its assumptions, so that the grown-ups in the audience are flattered and comforted while the youngsters are being entertained. Such villains as Flattop, Pruneface, and The Rodent are more fun and less troublesome, surely, than Mike Milken. They were rather fun as grotesques, in part because the subtext was that their villainy was a deformation of a more natural condition of virtue and decency. (Milken looks rather like Michael Keaton out of his Batman suit.)

It used to be a rule of thumb that when you noticed how pretty a movie was there was probably something wrong with the plotting, the acting, or the directing. In those self-conscious shots in which the cowboy and his horse would appear upside down, and then, as the camera pulled back, we'd see that we'd been taken, that we'd been shown their reflection on the surface of a pretty lake, and that, above them, correctly oriented, was the real horse with the real cowboy sitting tall in the saddle. We were being diddled. That still holds in Westerns (or would, if they were still making Westerns), but a comicbook movie has different rules. Here in *Dick Tracy* the idea is to conjure not so much the world of the funnies as the nostalgia for them. The real comics were mostly ugly with the colors garish and often off-register. The film takes this dreary truth and uses it as an occasion for a flight of bizarre and mostly breathtaking matte shots and palette effects. The primary

colors are the hues of dreams. This isn't Chester Gould so much as Gould remembered and transformed by a Roy Lichtenstein—or, in this case, cinematographer Vittorio Storaro.

In *Batman*, when Nicholson appeared in a purple suit with a bright orange shirt and a metallic blue tie, we were seeing something arbitrary and mannerist. The next shot might have his shirt and vest off-aqua. The uglier the better, or anyway the wilder the better in a display of cheerful camp nonsense. In *Dick Tracy*, however, the colors are characters. The costumes relate to the sets, and the suggestion is that there is a coherence somewhere, if not that of the world then the more important coherence of dream and fantasy.

The temptation is to compare Nicholson's work with that of Al Pacino (who is Big Boy) and Dustin Hoffman (Mumbles). Nicholson got more attention in *Batman* because there was nothing else to pay attention to. But Pacino and Hoffman are quite wonderful, and what they do is in the service of a work that includes their odd characters and draws its strength from them. I don't think Pacino has ever been better. His menace is menacing—especially when he is rehearsing a line of exhausted chorines in his night club. Hoffman is perfectly brilliant as Mumbles, also self-parodying but in a way that doesn't ever distract from the film's actual business. And even Madonna, who is not exactly on my top-ten list of people I'd cross the street to see or hear, is quite right in this, sexy and, in the end, slightly frightening, as she should be in a late-latency drama.

It's my view that *Dick Tracy* is one of the great movies. That Warren Beatty was able to do so grand a job on a budget as big as this (and therefore with such scrutiny from villains, knaves, and fools) is remarkable. His arrogance and zaniness have been well demonstrated—in *Ishtar* for instance. Those qualities were his allies this time. They kept him from worrying too much about what would sell, what would do well, what would bring in those teeming hordes that would be needed to rack up that thirty-million-dollar opening weekend management had in mind. (*Batman's* opening weekend brought in \$42.7 million in box

office receipts, just as a comparison figure.) Beatty just made a movie, a perfectly lovely movie, which was more than nifty. It's miraculous.

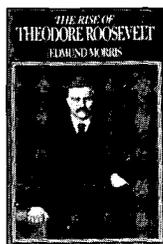
One of those films that underscored the disappointment of Disney executives, opening the same month, was Carolco Pictures' *Total Recall* (it did three million dollars better in its first weekend of play) in which Arnold Schwarzenegger is . . . Arnold Schwarzenegger. This time he is a secret agent from Mars, or maybe not (that's the minimalist plot—I swear). I saw this in a local theater, on opening day, and it was an experience. We're not talking motion picture art here; we're talking raw meat being flung to the beasts. Every time anybody gets kicked in the testicles (which seems to be almost a way of saying hello) or impaled or has his forearms severed, the audience makes a kind of animal noise of delight. The plot is as irrelevant in this kind of picture as in a pornographic film, where the only object is to get from this trio to that quartet. Here, too, there are trios and quartets, and superiors and inferiors, and the gorier the special effects the better the mob seems to respond to it. Schwarzenegger keeps making jokes ("Consider this a divorce," he says to his wife as he shoots her dead with a machine gun), but they are only winks and waves to the animals in the auditorium, acknowledgments that we're having a great time in this *abattoir*, aren't we? The jokes in *Dick Tracy* are good natured and actually very funny. Pacino, particularly, has a kind of moronic delivery patterned perhaps after some of Kevin Kline's routines in *A Fish Called Wanda*. Big Boy is also fond of inventing quotes from great thinkers: "A man without a plan is not a man—Nietzsche." What makes it funny is the earnestness, the stupid effort with which he delivers such fake pearls. Schwarzenegger's jokes are not straightforward but embarrassed, as indeed they ought to be.

That's the environment. That's the ecology. And in such a setting, *Dick Tracy* isn't just another blossom in somebody's garden but an astonishing flower that has managed to bloom in a toxic dump.

David R. Slavitt is a poet and novelist who lives in Philadelphia.

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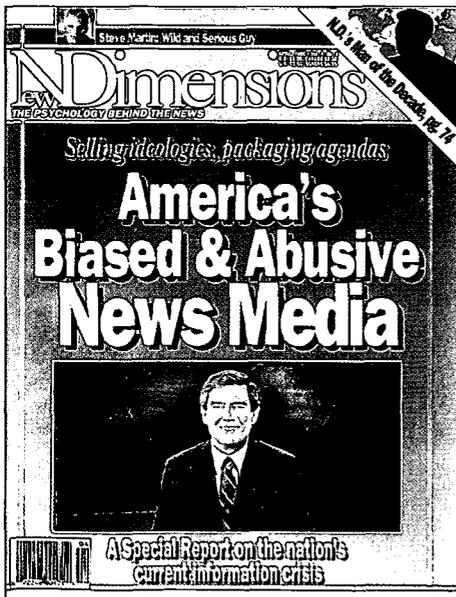
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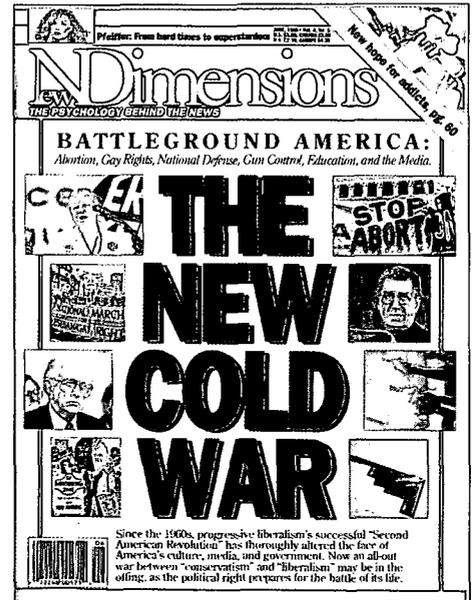
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