indeed he was. But he never separated his ideological proclivities from his loyalty to what Davis calls his class. Jefferson was a slaveholder who had known the subordination of the black man all his life. To exact the full logic of his Declaration would be to ask him to deny the deepest affinities of a Virginia planter. Even when he came to see faintly the desirability of ridding the country of slavery, he did not think it possible to act unless he could maintain his credibility among men of similar status. Whatever the revolutionary generation said or believed, the slave system was imbedded in American society. It would be destroyed only when the righteousness of American belief took on the sanction of fire and sword.

Slavery turned men into things and hence "symbolized the most extreme model of treating men as exploitable objects." Interpreted in this way, a threat to the slave system became a threat to the social order itself, for all social arrangements implied subordination. For man to be other than a thing required that he assume the burden of self-justifying autonomy. Any state short of that pristine condition would necessarily lend credence to what Davis calls "less visible modes of human bondage." One can sympathize with the frustrations of reformers charged with the task of obliterating human society, and one can understand the fears of those who suspected that they might succeed. Slavery imposed a terrible burden on many Africans, but it also supplied the conditions for the creation of a genuine black society. Moreover, the master-slave relationship could be based on more than force and brutality The promise of autonomy offered none of the social necessities of human existence.

Davis has done more than any other historian to explain the intellectual origins of the antislavery movement. The insight he offers into the dim recesses of reformist thought is at least in part attributable to the intensity of his own belief. □

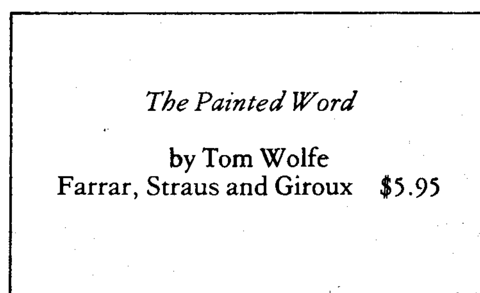
Book Review/R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr.

Succès de Scandale

One dark night in early spring of 1975 a desperate howl stabbed the darkness of midtown Manhattan, and for a terrifying moment brave men looked heavenward and maidens clutched their breasts. Even in the porn palaces thoughts momentarily strayed toward Jehovah's credentials as a civil libertarian. What unspeakable devilry was afoot? In an instant a howling cacophony of rejoinders went up all over the island. The ghostly wail was picked up in Scarsdale, and beyond into Connecticut. It was a dreadful night, and contrary to expectations the eerie chorus did not dissolve into the dawn. Quite the contrary: it continued and spread throughout all the literate parts of the Republic. This was not the howl of the noble wolf. No indeed, it was the primitive response of thousands of indignant devotees of Modern Art who had just gotten wind of the April issue of *Harper's*; and from this moment forward—though, truth to tell, I share many of their artistic passions—they go down in my ledger as worthy of rebuke. They have no humor.

It was the April issue of *Harper's* that carried the latest bit of lampoonery by Mr. Tom Wolfe, the Judas Iscariot of Manhattan trendies, and Wolfe's joke has now been published as a book, *The Painted Word*. The howls have risen a thousand decibels. What Wolfe said was that a world that sniggers at Popes and Presidents can also find merriment in the pretensions and misadventures of the world of Modern Art. Obviously the inhabitants of that world disagree.

In *The Painted Word* Wolfe mordantly notes the Modern Art world's pedantry, charlatanry, unwarranted elitism, and weakness for the kind of self-promotion characteristic of reform-minded district attorneys. It is a wonderfully successful joke, and what makes it even more humorous is that it is being analyzed and pondered by art critics all over the Republic as though it were a monograph of the gravest import. Not since Arthur Jensen talked about hereditary I.Q. has a furor of this magnitude arisen. Soon or late the puckish Wolfe will be the subject of one of those critical seminars endowed by the Ford Foundation and inspired by the proposition that the only way to ferret out the truth is to inter it beneath a monument of sonorous academic sophistries.



The Painted Word

by Tom Wolfe
Farrar, Straus and Giroux $5.95

Who would have expected that this cosmopolitan world of *avant-garde* artists, art critics, and antibourgeois bourgeois collectors would have so little wit about them? They have been the very first to chortle at the pieties and fatuities of America. In fact some of them have been among the most energetic iconoclasts in the land, and hardly a cranny of American experience has been able to claim sanctuary from their ribald genius. Now Wolfe has laid the joke on them, and not only have they lost their old brag and bounce but in their learned rejoinders one notes a neurotic fussiness. He is in error about the birth of modern art, the critics contend. He missed the conceptual nuances of "flatness." He has hopelessly confused the theories of art critics Harold Rosenberg and Clement Greenberg. Poor Wolfe; he is lost at sea in the complicated world of art scholarship and art theory.

This is the gravamen at the center of their howl, and it is in this complaint that they reveal themselves not only to be humorless but to be humorless donkeys For it is precisely this matter of emphasizing theory over beauty that induced Wolfe to write his book. Is Wolfe lost at sea? The fussy declamations now resounding through the Republic are amusing testimonials to his sense of direction. Oh, of course, the critics say, there was a speck of sham involved in those esoteric theories of the 1960s, there was a little hokum in the experimental art forms that kept popping up at the Museum of Modern Art; but Wolfe is too extravagant, too glib. What is needed is erudition and calm analysis. Hogwash!

Careful analysis, a sober marshalling of the facts: that is one way of setting things aright. But, as William Nolte has said, "It's not the simple truth that sets men free or even causes them to think, but rather the Truth apparalled in shocking garments and blown up to epic size." In *The Painted Word* the shocking garments are all about, the frauds are blown up to Wagnerian proportions, and from the cacophony of howls from Culturati, Inc. one gets the impression that the charlatans are becoming edgy. Quite possibly Modern Art may soon be set free from their moonshine.

I approve of such patriotic toil. I applaud it and roar for more. If, as Hilton Kramer alleges, Wolfe is sounding the call for a revival of philistinism I shall remain vigilant. But the fine quality of serious art has always had a way of enduring I have no doubt that it will today endure the philistines, for the philistine threat from outside the world of Modern Art is unlikely to be as dangerous to it as the subversion from within that threatened during the late, lamented, 1960s. □

The Talkies

by Robert Asahina

Farewell, My Lovely

Although the lonesome cowboy has been for some time an object of derision or nostalgia or parody (or even self-parody, as with John Wayne), the hardboiled detective has remained a peculiarly evocative screen figure for successive generations of movie audiences since the 1940s. In many respects, of course, the private eye is merely an updated version of his Western counterpart. Substitute a .38 police special for a Colt .45 and a slouch hat and trenchcoat for a Stetson and buckskins, and Humphrey Bogart might be playing much the same character as John Wayne. But the crucial difference between the two lies precisely in the updating: The private eye is the archetypal *modern* figure, the antihero lost in the wasteland of the big city; and the transformation of character from the rugged individualist facing the Opening of the West to the alienated outsider in the underworld of crime helps to explain the attraction which movie audiences have felt for the hardboiled detective. The fundamental premise of the private-eye movie was, and is, the very same cynicism which proved to be the undoing of the old Hollywood Western: The larger-than-life virtues which had made the cowboy ride so tall in the saddle were eventually scorned as mere Hollywood trappings; but audiences too cynical to accept white-hatted heroes were all too ready to respond to trenchcoated antiheroes.

However, the private-eye movie is not free from its own kind of romantic foolishness. A couple of years ago, Robert Altman made a movie of Raymond Chandler's novel *The Long Goodbye*, starring Elliott Gould as Philip Marlowe, the detective character that Bogart had made famous thirty years ago in *The Big Sleep*. To judge from the hostile reaction of audiences and critics, many people were upset by Altman's deft parody of the conventions of the private-eye movie. Gould's portrayal of Marlowe, particularly, was seen as a betrayal by those fans who had elevated Bogart's Marlowe into a veritable icon of popular culture. But what those outraged audiences missed, or blinded themselves to, was precisely what Altman had recognized: that the hardboiled detective was just as much a Hollywood fake as the lonesome cowboy; that his tarnished cynical armor was just so much tinsel, especially since it covered that same old Hollywood heart of gold.

The cowboy may have been a child's idea of a hero, but the private eye, as Pauline Kael has noted, was surely an adolescent's idea of an antihero; and Hollywood had proved adept at catering to the audience's need for a fantasy figure at either level: a strong silent type who could ward off Indian attacks, or a cynical outsider who could plumb the murky depths of the underworld but still maintain, in spite of his alienation, a personal—and romantic—code of honor. To show just how sentimental a character Marlowe really was, Altman set *The Long Goodbye* in the 1970s, where whatever virtues the private eye possessed seemed anachronistic and foolish—as they had been all along, anyway. As if in reaction to that film, the latest adaptation of yet another Raymond Chandler novel, *Farewell, My Lovely*, is deliberately staged back in the 1940s—complete with well-preserved autos, period clothing and hairdos, and throwaway remarks about DiMaggio, Hitler, and Eleanor Roosevelt. The idea obviously is to evoke the feeling of the 1940s, and especially the feeling of the movies of that decade—as if the reawakened sentiments of the audience could breathe new life into the tired conventions of the private-eye movie.

Whatever the intent, *Farewell, My Lovely* shows just how flabby the hardboiled detective has become in thirty years. For example, the latest movie Marlowe (Robert Mitchum) gets the inspiration to continue his investigation from a young black boy (significantly, a character not found in the original Chandler novel) whose father was murdered—a piece of Hollywood sentimentality that even audiences of an earlier era would have derided. Likewise, Marlowe's loyal friend (another character not found in the novel) turns out to be a newsboy—not a cripple, fortunately, but something almost as hackneyed: a has-been prizefighter. Worse yet is the casting of Charlotte Rampling as the female lead—a deliberate and bungling attempt to exploit her physical resemblance to Lauren Bacall, who had played opposite Bogart in *The Big Sleep*. The only purpose these clumsy contrivances serve is to evoke a phony nostalgia; but like the old cars, they are just empty mechanisms.

What nearly saves *Farewell, My Lovely* from all these contrivances is the casting of Robert Mitchum as Marlowe. At first, Mitchum would seem to be entirely wrong for the role. For one thing, he's simply too old: What used to be his chest is now barely contained by his belt, and the deep lines in his face terminate in the jowly pouch that used to be his neck. Twenty or even ten years ago Mitchum would have been fit to play this tough-guy role with contemptuous ease. But at the age of 58, he would seem to be as unsuited to play Philip Marlowe as John Wayne is to play the marshal in yet another Western.

But Mitchum does not indulge in the pathetic self-parody that Wayne and other old Western stars have in recent years. Mitchum has never been a great actor, but he always has been a powerful one, bringing an immense physical presence to the screen: The insolent dangling cigarette, the casual slouch, and the heavy, hooded eyelids are his trademarks that suggest vast animal power kept smoldering under his surface. And when Mitchum begins the movie with the words, "It was this past spring that I finally realized I was getting tired, and growing old," we realize why he can succeed in the role: Mitchum himself, like Marlowe and like the entire private-eye genre, has become an anachronism; and it is our shared recognition of his seeming inappropriateness for the role that gives Mitchum the ironic edge to cut through the self-conscious treacle of the rest of the production.

Hollywood heroes, and antiheroes, have contributed significantly to the national idiom; and the movies have played a much larger part in the shared fantasy life of supposedly sophisticated audiences than they are willing to admit to themselves. The antiheroes of our adolescence are perhaps more difficult to give up than the heroes of our childhood, but the artificial perpetuation of artificial myths serves no one but those who profit from the marketing of phony nostalgia. *Farewell, My Lovely* therefore seems like a desperate rearguard action to save the private-eye movie from parody and, ultimately, derision; unfortunately, it succeeds only as a sagging tribute to a tired cinematic genre, propped up by a sagging, but still powerful, actor. The title itself is an unintentionally ironic farewell to Mitchum-as-tough-guy, to the movie Marlowe and all his faded cinematic glory, to the novels of Raymond Chandler, and to the private-eye film. Phony nostalgia only cheapens their memory; and the time has come when the hardboiled detective should follow the lonesome cowboy into a cinematic sunset. □