

The Thug as Rotarian

As with so many things, there is in art a synergism, a collaboration between the artist and the fragrances, the wails, the rhythms of his environment. The artist, if he is worth his salt, has one ear cocked towards the chatter and bustle of the living. He inhales life in voluptuous gulps. What he exhales, he palms off to the highest bidder. All this is common knowledge and demands no further commentary. What might be worth a few moments of meditation is how often the artist has collaborated with the criminal inhabitants of this orb and how absurd this collaboration has become during this glorious epoch in the American saga.

Succinctly stated, there is in the works of most artists a curious hankering for the louse element; it is a hankering shared by their audiences. In *Beyond Good and Evil* the indelicate Mr. Friedrich Nietzsche put it just so when he observed that writers "are in the habit of taking the side of criminals." He might have added that so are readers and even non-readers, a point tellingly demonstrated by John Millington Synge in his masterpiece *The Playboy of the Western World*. In that grand play a wretched youth walks into a strange Irish village, allows as how he has killed his father, and becomes a figure of awe. How redolent of the Bernsteins and their Black Panther soirées; how reminiscent of our popular fascination with the Mansonites.

There is today a widespread enchantment with what is squalid and iniquitous. It inheres through all classes, but it seems to be especially rampant amongst the upper classes and the better educated, that is to say amongst those least exposed to the unpleasantness of squalor and iniquity. One could see it all emerging earlier in the century when *vox populi* glamorized swine like Mr. Dillinger and Mr. Capone, and when suave degenerates began to wander into the works of the O'Neills and the Hemingways. Often the art was genuine, and the insights could even be edifying; but as the years have passed and as the lout motif has become more brazen, its significance has become increasingly meretricious.

During the 1930s Steinbeck often wrote as though a paisano wino, moonlighting as a thug, were one of the higher forms of Homo sapiens. Deadbeats came off as prefectors of moral philosophy, and ladies of the night were so often likened to the Little Sisters of Charity that by the 1950s many college boys believed that the remuneration received by the ladies went directly to the United Fund. Many tipped the girls handsomely, and doubtless there was always a gullible businessman inquiring as to whether or not his payments were tax deductible.

Perhaps our present fascination with the louse element is no greater than in

years past, but I know for a certitude that it deals with even more wicked varieties of criminals and that it is even more ill-conceived. Nowadays the literary set from Queens to Needles, California is regularly set atwitter by tales of murderers, sadistic pederasts, kidnappers, and other such species of desperadoes. All are served up as tortured, sensitive, creative souls—the ideal companions for one's literary teas or for TV chatter shows. If the trend continues I have no doubt that soon one of our mass murderers will be costumed as a modern Faust, adorned with the rarest percipience. Perhaps even the villainous Nixon will some day become the stuff of literature, though I doubt that this particular breakthrough will come in our lifetimes. Until then we shall have to settle for the touching stories of John Dean and Jeb Stuart Magruder.

I cite the above not out of any moral prissiness or philistinism, but rather because I find it all ironic and nonsensical. How peculiar that a nation whose upper classes are currently enthralled in a dither of goody-goodyism should be so obviously fascinated with the doings of swindlers, butchers, and other such ambidextrous rogues! How moronic that writers should romanticize them! Truth to tell, the run-of-the-mill scoundrel is not in and of himself any more interesting than a midwestern professor of sociology or a male hairdresser. Most have little to say that is not arrantly self-serving and stupid. In this they are even more blatant than the dozens of Presidential candidates at large in America today. Some have managed to mimic the flummeries of left-liberal enlightenment, but this only leaves them sounding like editorialists from the *Nation* or the *Progressive*, and whoever found those neurotic sheets interesting?

The lives of most criminals are vulgar beyond belief. The literary set might romanticize them as heroic dissidents from the bourgeois sludge but can you imagine a clod of tawdrier tastes than, say, Joey Gallo, the subject of innumerable columns, a book, and now a Hollywood movie? Long hours in the archives have convinced me that the consumer preferences of the late Mr. Dillinger were indistinguishable from those of millions of Babbitts. Huey Newton's tastes fall in somewhere between those of Elton John and our present Vice President, he of the \$35,000 bed. What piquant thoughts has Elmer Wayne Henley or Richard Speck ever recorded? The asseverations of Clifford Irving, the poor fish caught *flagrante delicto* peddling a bogus autobiography, are regularly served up on the idiot hour on National Public Radio, yet I have never heard one that was more challenging than the maunderings of William O. Douglas, and when it comes to taste Douglas is a

veritable aristocrat beside the trashy Irving. Let me state it here and now: notwithstanding the celebrity and commiseration sloshed on them by the educated classes and the literati, I would be willing to bet my antique toothbrush with the genuine mahogany handle that the louse element consumes more nauseating cologne, more mod or double-knit rubbish, and more trendy gadgetry than any other element in our society. Members of the lit set reflexively hold their noses when Jerry Ford comes to mind, but I doubt there is an inhabitant of one penitentiary in the land whose aesthetic sense is any higher.

Now if the literati have rhapsodized the louse element it has been left to the social scientists to marshal the statistics and the syllogisms. As a result, for many years giddy social scientists have been earning tenure by actively promoting the most insolent rogues as victims of a cruel and corrupt system. Often their treatises wholly depart from the statistics and assume the nature of poetry. Many of these learned men actually impair their health ranting at college students about how rapists and muggers are really very nice if sorely oppressed people. Some thugs are portrayed as romantics possessed of a *joie de vivre* that would leave Hubert Humphrey looking like a sourpuss. Others are nascent geniuses of surpassing creativity who in another world would dwarf the achievements of Shakespeare and of Beethoven. We are faced with an army of ignorant or malign intellectuals playing on the average man's natural fascination with the criminal and foisting a vast fraud upon us all. Humbage on it.

If the truth be known, the average American criminal is actually no more a figure of romance than the average member of the Chamber of Commerce. The average criminal is just a shrewd go-getter who has discovered what James Q. Wilson has been admonishing against for years: to wit, crime pays. The statistics are clear. If one commits a felonious crime in America today one is almost 98 percent certain of avoiding the slammer. The crime rate from 1960 to 1970 went up 144%, yet fewer persons served prison terms in 1970 than in 1960. One may be inconvenienced by some red tape and perhaps even the bother of an appearance in court, but how does that differ from the daily experience of a small businessman or a doctor confronted by a local regulatory agency? In fact, the experience is often more comfortable for the alleged felon than for the doctor, especially if the presiding judge is one of those who believes criminals are "sick" or victimized. The eminent Mr. Ramsey Clark doubts that "we achieve one conviction for every

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Leonard Garment

Working with Moynihan

Editor's Note

Some years past, St. Martin's Press published a little book entitled Action This Day: Working with Churchill. In it, men who had toiled closely with the wartime Prime Minister reminisced about their service with him during those grim days. It was an interesting book, because these were interesting men, serving an interesting man, during interesting times. Recently, while at lunch with—among others—Leonard Garment, Counselor to Ambassador Moynihan's delegation at the UN, the talk ran from Churchill and the Second World War to Moynihan and the Third World Dizziness, and I was moved to ask this sentient and intelligent man to lay down some reflections on what it was like to work with Moynihan amidst the quotidian blitz of spitballs and paper airplanes that lend such dignity to the General Assembly.

There stood Moynihan, eloquent in his defense of principle—no, eloquent in his defense of civilization. He used words as though discourse mattered. And in some small way he may have reminded Americans that we were born of a declaration and bred under a constitution. Notwithstanding the mountebanks who hold forth on the Potomac today, words and principles have mattered throughout our history, and they matter today. They must matter if a democracy is to function.

What follows is Leonard Garment's brief reminiscence.—RET

Memorandum to: R. Emmert Tyrrell, Jr.
From: Leonard Garment
Subject: "Working with Moynihan"

This is the way we do things in the United States Government. By memoran-

dum. The form solves most problems of style. And it's just you and me.

Even if I were inclined to talk about the private life of Pat Moynihan, there would be little to say. He's a big, warm Irish guy, very much the same in private as in public, who sticks close to his family, friends, and some old-fashioned ideas. No big secrets. Tough. No one at the United Nations was sleeping better because Moynihan was there. He is the kind of man Bernard Levin described in the *New York Times* (December 16): "in a fight over an issue that counts, he knows where to put the razor blades in the potatoes."

In fairness it should be said that Moynihan can do the quietly effective things that diplomats are supposed to do. (He did them in India for two years.) The truth, however, is that this was not his intention when he took the United Nations job. And it was no secret. You'll remember that before he was appointed he published an article in *Commentary* (March 1975) called "The United States in Opposition" where he declared his hope that the American United Nations spokesman would come to be "feared for the truths he might tell" and would "shout to the heavens" the case for liberty. He didn't change his mind after his appointment. When I came to work for him last August, he laid out his general plan of action in these terms: *Let's not worry about getting fired. As a matter of fact, let's try in a responsible way to get fired. That's the only hope we have of doing a few useful things while we are here.*

As a consequence, he was cheerfully loose in the job. His lack of concern about guarding his tongue or position was put on public display at 9:45 a.m. every Mon-

day, Wednesday, and Friday, when he presided over a meeting of the United States delegation members, staff officers, and secretaries, lecturing on the United Nations' follies of the moment, inviting information and disagreement, wisecracking, evenhandedly denouncing the "Stalinoid sons of bitches" in other delegations (named), and the "disgraceful" action of one or another high-ranking official in the United States Government (also named). He kept strange hours, talked to strange groups, slept fitfully, napped randomly, and did most of his own work. He wrote his own major speeches and cables. He knew precisely where he wanted to take his Mission. And he was passionate in his belief that the success in doing so depended on words—reading, writing, delivering, dissecting words. He was the first Ambassador since Adlai Stevenson who truly grasped the importance of words, and he had the nerve and the skill to use language to bring about a complete reversal of the United States' role at the United Nations.

It has been said that Moynihan's strategy from the start was to seek a confrontation with the Third World. The reverse is true. His intention was to challenge the totalitarian states at the level of language and ideology while seeking common substantive ground with the Third World. Again the *Commentary* article: "[T]here exists the strongest possibility of an accommodating relationship [with Third World countries] at the level of principle—a possibility that does not exist at all with the totalitarian powers as they are now constituted." The first major performance of the United States Mission under Moynihan was faithful to these words. The United States played a key