
Kramnick's Burke

Isaac Kramnick: *The Rage of Edmund Burke: Portrait of an Ambivalent Conservative*;

Basic Books; New York, 1977.

Prof. Kramnick seems to be another casualty of the epidemic raging among liberal scholars—the *dementia sexualis*. Its symptoms are easily discernible: an academic person, mostly in the field of humanities, feverishly begins to trace the conception of ideas, art, social movements, historical facts, as well as the behavior of historical figures, solely to the genitals of all involved. An entire generation of scholarly hustlers and playboys appear to be in the making.

In other times, students amused themselves spinning theories about battles lost because of emperors and field marshals having been caught with their pants down; or about poets whose exclamations of grief or outrage were stimulated by a merciless itching in the parts of their personalities most unsuited for a source of poetry. We tended to see it in a sophomore pastime. This century's debate on whether the genitals engender and conceive more than just other humans began with some features of seriousness. Freud attributed to those instruments an uncanny power to generate dreams and neuroses, and discovered their indirect relation with many human endeavors, from creativeness to crime. But the American scholarly playboy's fascination with them of late seems to have skipped Freud and gotten out of hand. Prof. Kramnick illustrates the failing: the bombastic pretentiousness and unctuous empathy with which he elaborates on "real" Burke and his *faiblesse*, rather well known before his book, border on caricature. "There is an air of plausibility which accompanies vulgar reasonings and notions, taken from the beaten circle of ordinary experience, that is admirably suited to the narrow capacities of some . . ." Burke wrote in the preface to the second edition of *A Vindication of Natural*

Society, published in 1757. These words read today as a trenchant anticipation of the libicultural climate in America of the '70s. It is doubtful, however, whether

the Kramnicks will ascribe their relevance to themselves. Most likely, they will see in them the expression of troubled glands. □

Screen

The Impossibility of Being Dispassionate

The Turning Point; directed by Herbert Ross; written by Arthur Laurents; 20th Century Fox.

by Eric Shapearo

This is a perfect mediocrity of a movie. It is written with a mediocre sense of melodrama, and directed with the mediocre skills of a cinematic craftsman. It displays, at moments, interesting camera work, and, throughout, the habitually acceptable performances of old Hollywood hands—Anne Bancroft and Shirley MacLaine. The picture's human message is smoothly tailored into inoffensive and not unpleasant platitudes about the difficulties of existential choices. Mediocre banalities flow incessantly from the screen to the audience. And in the midst of this fiesta of mediocrity, dance sequences dazzle as performed by Mikhail Baryshnikov, perhaps the greatest living ballet dancer. They are couched in first-rate imagery by the best choreographers and stage and costume designers in New York. To be sure, the ballet element is suffused with what can be termed glamorized realism—a relatively new Hollywood concoction that mixes tinsel with slickly conceptualized truth: the ballerinas are covered with perspiration, their feet with blisters, but life in their environment seems to be reduced to rather modish stereotypes about the sexual routines and traps of success, no more profound than the chaste tearjerkers of the early '50s.

There is, however, one aspect of the movie which bothers at least this review-

Eric Shapearo feels impressed by movies, on occasion, but never by stars.

er. Can, should, or ought, a critic as well as the regular movie watcher, who knows more about Miss MacLaine than is conveyed by her performance, remain unbiased toward her presence on screen? A difficult and complex question, though all too easy answers can be delivered from the standpoint of the enlightened toleration, liberal righteousness, progressive sanctimony. How could a viewer be affected by the actor's political attitude? Isn't it solely the actor's art that counts? Isn't she or he fully entitled to take any position she or he wishes, without generating any feelings in us other than those stimulated by the acting itself? Of course, he and she is, and the public cannot demand that one become an ideological neuter because of one's profession or vocation. Nonetheless, it is not a matter of substance or logic, but of a specific degree of exposure as given by the liberal media to those who espouse the predominant liberal philosophies. The more so as Miss MacLaine is far beyond the liberal range of colors—she is an unabashed communist sympathizer who spouts dimwitted slogans about Maoist China or Ho Chi Minh Vietnam—all of them alacritously relayed to the common folks by the liberal establishment. Miss MacLaine told a receptive *New York Times* reporter that she recently visited Cuba, where she spoke about *The Turning Point* with Cuban women who ". . . told me 'we don't understand your part . . . why did the character you play give up her work to get married?'" And Miss MacLaine adds: "Fidel is very strong about women's rights—two years ago, they made it part of the Cuban Constitution that men have to do 50% of the housework there . . ." So Miss

MacLaine chirps idiocies for which every woman in the socialist countries, who is not employed by the secret police or the party's propaganda outlets, would stone her on the spot, and which the *New York Times News Service* reporter enthusiastically conveys to the rest of America, while the ultra-liberal *Tempo* pages of the *Chicago Tribune* immediately hasten to echo with a reprint of such a trustworthy interview. Incidentally, *The Turning Point* was the first American movie to be officially shown in Cuba in 17 years, obviously because of Miss MacLaine's friendship with Mr. Castro, and anyone who knows a little bit about communist "cultural freedom" can imagine the communist reviews, in which capitalist America is condemned for making it impossible for women to be ballet dancers and mothers of three at the same time. And between the communist reviewers and *New York Times* interviewers, the truth about what a Cuban woman would give for the "oppression" under which Deedee, Miss MacLaine's movie character, lives, for her furniture, kitchen, cars, and cosmetics that prolong her MacLaine looks past

forty (as no woman under communism dreams of looking this way after 30, unless she happens to have married Tito or Yevtushenko) gets hopelessly lost.

But the liberal interviewer is not satisfied with Miss MacLaine's love for Cuba and suggests that perhaps Nixon is guilty of persecuting her as an artist—to which Miss MacLaine gently agrees, though pointing out that "... when I was on the enemies list and ... everybody knew it, I don't think that I didn't work because of that . . ." She does not spell out that because of that she was touted and promoted by every media outlet in America, her words were trumpeted through the feminist press, while her autobiographies were pushed by the liberal reviewers up to the best-seller lists. Her opposition to what most of us consider the heart of America was for her a money-making enterprise.

A Polish actress of rather more serious dimension than Miss MacLaine, whom the Western press has featured of late, comes to mind. Her name is Halina Mikolajska and she is considered to be the best interpreter of Shakespeare and

Ibsen in Eastern Europe. But she dared to oppose the Warsaw communist regime and spoke out against the torturing and murdering of Polish workers held by the Polish secret police after the wave of recent labor unrest and strikes in the Polish factories. Miss Mikolajska was arrested by the communist authorities, beaten during interrogations, released, thrown out of her apartment, which as any other is owned by the Polish government, and permanently deprived of any opportunity to work. This is just one example of an actress's fate in this communism which seems to Miss MacLaine worthy of extolling in the *New York Times*—and let's not forget that Poland compared to Fidel's Cuba is considered a model of a free society.

Thus, even if *The Turning Point* may be seen as an inoffensive movie—the very presence of Miss MacLaine on screen makes it, at least for this reviewer, somehow offensive. *The Turning Point* does not exist in a vacuum. The promotional hoopla of the film and star has a life of its own by which the public is used and abused. □

Journalism

Chicago Tribune's Semantics

Semantics means, among other things, the study of the correspondence between words and reality. Reading today's newspapers, we begin to wonder if we *do* all use the same language to define the same reality. A *Chicago Tribune* rock critic—a puzzling occupation as rock music, by its own credo, appeals to impulses and instincts, while criticism is a function of reason—writing about the Sex Pistols, the latest effluvium of the rock subculture, sets them against "the British establishment." In one sense, they are the British establishment, and morally far inferior to the old colonial one. They earn astronomical amounts

of money, hold sway over a large, brainless and manipulable following, prescribe behavior and fashion, and exercise bigotry, even physical terror, against those who disapprove of them. Anyone who, in the impoverished Britain of today, vomits just for fun in the waiting lobby of the Heathrow Airport, and can afford to pay for the clean-up, has overcome, if indeed he hasn't replaced, the British establishment.

The *Tribune's* critic sees an anti-establishmentarian feature in the Pistols' use of "naughty words" in public. But "naughty" words constitute, these days, the very fabric of almost every dialogue

Chicago Tribune Book World's Sympathies

From your enlightened, evenhanded, liberal, broadminded, impartial, fair, reasonable, moderate, cool, middle-of-the-road, serious, responsible, leading

in the movies, even those rated R (under 17 requires accompanying parent or adult guardian). This means that the kids in the audience can listen to everything if they are brought by parents, relatives, mature teachers, governesses or wet nurses to the movie house. Movies portraying lives of university scholars, political heroes and society's most beautiful people are studded with obscenities, formerly shunned even by irate drill sergeants. Profanity has become the official tongue of the establishment. Or, rather the real, power-wielding establishment *is* those who talk in four letter words. □

Sunday cultural caterer, the *Chicago Tribune's* book section, where a certain Mr. Walton, a Henry Wallace panegyrist, reviews the notorious *The Romance of*