

speech in *No More American Songs*.

What Miss Kaplan does most assuredly create in *O My America!* is a series of stunning portraits of her characters and their world. We read of Nicky travelling in India, of Ffrenchy unabashedly breastfeeding

her daughter on the sidewalk of New York's West End Avenue, of Ez making a desperate and unsuccessful attempt to make amends with his abandoned son Jonathan in the name of peace in Vietnam. And at a party Ez attends before he makes his famous

speech, there is this splendid remark made by the wife of a psychiatrist about her son: "'In fact, he would be here right now, but he's busy with the committee. And if anyone ever had a better reason for not coming to a party, I haven't heard it.'" But *O*

My America! is primarily a political novel, and in weaving together the personal, social, and cultural threads of the time, Miss Kaplan has superbly exposed the ideas of the counter-culture—their hypocrisies, their groundlessness, and their lies. □

S P E C T A T O R ' S J O U R N A L

A Rite of Spring

The Soviets are in Afghanistan, baby seals are under attack again in the arctic, and consumers of perfume the world over continue to worry about the shortage of placenta coming from the Caribbean. Even so, the Music Educators National Conference held their national convention in mid-April and, judging by the abstracts of the papers presented there, it was a serious affair, notwithstanding the voluptuous attractions of Miami Beach. Who, after all, would favor sun and surf to hearing about "The Effect of Participation in a Music-Based Arts Education Program on Non-Musical Factors of Selected Fourth-Grade Children"? Maybe a few people, come to think about it. But the presenting of abstruse papers in lecture form is the hallmark of any great profession's national convention, and besides, not all of the MENC's papers were so pedantically narrow. For instance, Patricia Flowers of Florida State University revealed in her paper that, according to her experiments, students who listened to African music *qua* music liked it better than those who had never heard it at all.

What is more, the subjects of the conventions' papers ranged beyond music, narrowly defined, to include, among other things, Kansas. George Heller spoke on music education in Kansas from 1854 to 1870 and Reginald Buckner presented a paper on "The History of Music Education in the Black Community of Kansas City, Kansas, 1905-1954." Paul Haack is from the University of Kansas but, significantly (as the music educators would say), in his paper he chose not to discuss Kansas, as a state, at all. Realizing that "little is known about the manner in which high school students value artistic objects, nor [sic] about their valuing awareness," he decided to do some digging. The results: Having been instructed in the value of art and music, students "demonstrated significant increases in the ability to assess personal values." But not everyone's results were so heartening. Donald Hamann

and Shirley Herlong of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro discovered that stress and anxiety had no (significant) effect on music performance, a finding all the more important for being counterintuitive and probably dead wrong.

At a time when serious music is under attack for being—besides ugly—lofty, cerebral, and of course elitist, the music educators at their national convention showed themselves to be anything but indifferent to the concerns of both the *popolo minuto* and, incidentally, academic promotion committees. Charles Elliott and Nell Sins discovered that most music students respond "positively" to handicapped peers, although female students "tended to be more positive." According to Alicia Gibbons, although probably to her chagrin (for her results are nothing if not ammunition for the enemies of the welfare state), elderly people with high morale are not necessarily more musical than elderly people with low morale, proof of which follows when she points out that the female elderly scored better on musical aptitude tests than the male. Another aborted thesis: Ann Small and Frances McCachern found that first-graders sing about as well after hearing a man's voice as after hearing a woman's. Ann and Fran-

ces, however, were far from cavalier, or concise, in stating their conclusion: "Results indicated a similarity of pitch-matching accuracy means which, in this context, suggests that male vocal modeling may not necessarily present unique pitch-matching problems to first graders."

Whatever the other achievements of the MENC convention, it did put Kutztown State College on the map—though of precisely which state remains uncertain. Laree M. Tollinger sits on Kutztown's faculty. Her "Study of Creative Women Musicians With Implications for Nurturing Creativity in Music Students" dared both to subvert and shore up our conventional notions about music and sex. Affirmed: Women musicians reveal "androgynous personalities." Denied: Highly creative women musicians show a "stronger endorsement of feminine characteristics." According to Miss Tollinger, highly creative women were "significantly [!] more self-reliant, ambitious, willing to take risks and to defend beliefs—desirable masculine traits. They were also more childlike, a feminine trait, and conceited, a neuter trait."

Isn't it inspiring to know that, even as the baby seals are being thumped brutally and Soviet peace-keeping forces are being called upon to pacify

what our President refers to as the "freedom-loving" nation of Afghanistan, some Americans remain undeterred from their devotion to Art?

—EE

Anonymity Too Soon

No one has ever explained why it is easier for the human brain to produce a 500-page book than a one-line epigram. Book authors come in shoals; there is never a shortage. But at no time, ever, is there more than the thinnest trickle of those capable of fashioning a *mot* that, in a sparse sentence or two, turns a laser-beam of penetration into the way things are or with a flash of insight exposes a hidden aspect of human folly. We owe a debt to these conjurers of the phrase who express, brilliantly and succinctly, what we would all like to say ourselves if only we could get our thoughts into sharp enough focus and arrange the words in the right order.

One would like to think that the special quality of the authentic aphorist, the rarity of his gift, would cause his name to be universally treasured and chiseled into the stone of public memory. What happens, though, is that the bright saying, the gem-like epigram, the curtly comical remark, is taken up and endlessly repeated while the name of its author

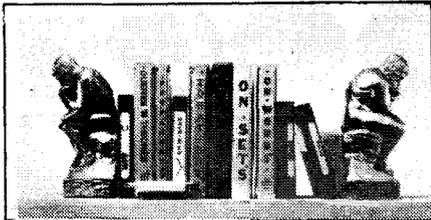
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is all too often forgotten. Or worse, he is confused with somebody else who said something entirely different.

Thus, the newspapers regularly attribute to Will Rogers lines that belong to Mark Twain, or the reverse; on a network broadcast an immortal saying of Milton's is blandly handed to Winston Churchill; a literary interview transfers Wordsworth's definition of poetry to Keats; and virtually no one remembers that the phrase about less being more, so tediously trotted out in the better journals, really belongs to Robert Browning. In her day, which is not yet entirely over, Dorothy Parker served as the legendary bulletin board on which every loose and drifting epigram and wisecrack was pinned by way of attribution. She was even credited in her own obituary (in the *New York Times*, no less) with a line of La Rochefoucauld's, written 300 years before she was born.*

Worse, perhaps, than having a durable observation taken from its

"Most good women are hidden treasures who are only safe because nobody is looking for them."

"onlie begetter" and handed to someone else is to have it relegated to the catch basin of "Anonymous" before its time. When that happens a pall of antiquity beclouds the saying and its vitality and relevance drain away. The name of the poor wretch who produced the gem—for gem it must be to get repeated often enough to qualify for "Anonymous"—is in danger of being lost beyond retrieval. A hard thing, considering how scant are the souls capable of producing a memorable line in the first place.

A cruel example of inflicting premature, and needless, anonymity on a gifted writer occurred recently in the *Reader's Digest* under the rubric "Quotable Quotes." One of the quotes quoted, the best on the page by a wide margin, was attributed to "Anonymous" though the name of its author was well known to many on two continents. The man so unceremoniously bundled off to limbo by the *Digest* was Stanislaw J. Lec, hardly more than ten years in his grave. The saying he had so unjustly been detached from was: "In a war of ideas it is people who get killed." The line appears on page 105 of a little jewelbox of a book called *Unkempt Thoughts*, published in 1965 by St. Martin's Press.

Stanislaw Jerzy Lec was a Polish poet and satirist who has been called "one of the notable wits of our dark time." Born (in 1909) under the Austro-Hungarian Empire, he lived to be imprisoned in a Nazi concentration camp, to escape and join the underground, and, after the war, to become Cultural Attaché of the Polish Embassy in Vienna. His own dark time did not prevent him from being, now and then, frivolous and a little naughty in some of his sayings—

"Hay smells different to lovers and horses" for instance, or "Are naked women intelligent?" But there is little of the Oscar Wilde-Noel Coward style of juggling colored balls in the air about the essential Lec. It is his grimly on-target political comment that will fend off for a long time to come the anonymity which the *Digest* so heedlessly thrust upon him. His aphorisms are, to quote Clifton Fadiman, "witty as they can be; but they also make the scalp crawl." A brief sampling, crisply translated by Jacek Galazka, will give the flavor:

In some countries life is so open you can spot the secret police everywhere.

Burning stakes do not lighten the darkness.

I give you bitter pills in sugar coating. The pills are harmless; the poison is in the sugar.

It is easy to hang puppets. The strings are already there.

He was 57 when he died, but his reputation had spread far beyond the pages of the satirical weekly *Szpilki* to which he regularly contributed. His sayings, so uncommonly incisive and fresh, made his name known not only in his native Poland but also in Germany, France, and England, and then, across the ocean, here in the United States where two printings of his *Unkempt Thoughts* have appeared. Being quoted in *Reader's Digest* would have made the name of Stanislaw J. Lec known to millions more in America if not for the curious slip-up which wiped it out with the eraser of "Anonymous." Still, Lec himself would have had the true wit's attitude of detachment about such a matter. One of his epigrams goes: "The first condition of immortality is death."

—Richard Hanser

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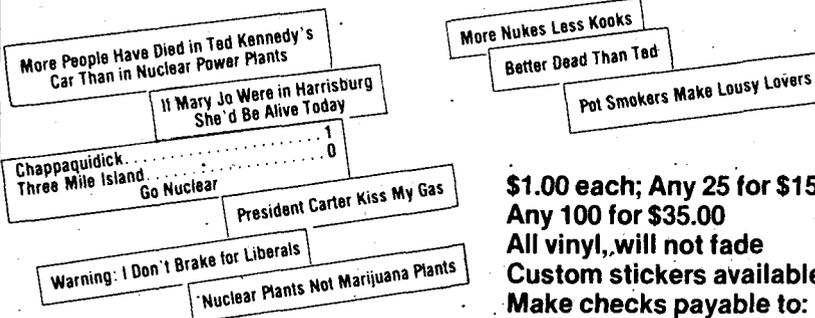
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C U R R E N T W I S D O M

The New York Times Magazine

A student of the Galbraithian argle-bargle lets out some high-toned economic commentary in C major, re: Margaret Thatcher:

So Margaret Thatcher, preaching the gospel of capitalist fundamentalism, wants to turn back the clock to the 19th century....What a leader for the 80's! Just what specific aspects of 19th-century capitalism does Mrs. Thatcher admire? Slavery? Colonialism? Racism? Mass unemployment? Infant mortality? Famine in Ireland? Subjugation of women? After all, these items, and not the fantasy of "sound money," were the building blocks of British capital's happy days. Nostalgia is just a prelude to barbarism.

For five years under the Labor Government, the British working class was cajoled and coerced from social contract to self-restraint in the name of economy. Future growth in exchange for immediate austerity. Every temporary respite purchased for British capital and capitalists through this reduction in living standards has only underscored capital's inability to maintain and organize the economy on a rational basis.

Mrs. Thatcher presents the same pay-now, eat-later program in a more virulent form. This economic primitivism has not "righted" any economy when implemented. Primitivism can, and has, expanded capital's universe of impoverishment; and poverty, not growth, is capitalism's salvation. DAVID SCHANOES

New York City

[February 3, 1980]

Pravda

The lugubrious state of the world as seen by Dr. Leonid I. Brezhnev, Hero of Socialist Labor, and reported in *Pravda*, a beacon of hope for free peoples everywhere:

Unfortunately, the international situation has noticeably deteriorated at the meeting point of the 'Seventies and 'Eighties. And the peoples ought to know the truth about who is responsible. I will answer without any reservation: the blame lies on the imperialist forces, and above all on certain circles in the USA.

[January 13, 1980]

Vegetarian Times

The heretofore irreproachable editor of *Vegetarian Times* is notified of a shocking dereliction by an unsung rigorist now slowly starving somewhere amid our amber waves of grain:

I cringed when I read Ms. Natural's answer to Sue Seliny, that natural sea sponges could be used as an alternative to paper sanitary napkins or tampons.

Sea sponges are sea animals! Don't these creatures have as much right to live as the creatures on the land? Sure I care about the trees, but they're plants, and sponges are animals.

—Name withheld by request
[January/February 1980]

The Los Angeles Times

A recent intelligence estimate on revolutionary activity in the Mullah Brown's home province:

Gov. Jerry Brown has named nine persons, including a lesbian author, a psychiatrist and two county supervisors, to a newly created commission to study the possible root causes of violence and crime.

The Legislature last year passed AB23 by Assemblyman John Vasconcellos (D-San Jose), creating the California Commission on Crime Control and Violence Prevention.

Vasconcellos envisioned the commission as exploring "possible root causes of violence in 13 human experiences-processes: birthing, parenting, diet-nutrition, human touching, self-esteem, suppressed emotions, repressed body, sex role stereotyping, sexual repression, television, prejudice, poverty and powerlessness."

[January 5, 1980]

The New York Times

From John R. Oakes, cogencies born of desperation and presented with a schoolmarm's grace:

...is this latest Soviet outrage so directly threatening to us that it warrants sudden capitulation by Mr. Carter to America's traditional hardliners, in order to prove he's the toughest guy on the block?

Is the White House response, though emotionally satisfactory at the moment, not likely to be counterproductive in the long run, and ineffective in the short run, leaving us in a less tenable position vis-à-vis both the Russians and our allies than we were before it all began? Will public bluster be more effective than quiet diplomacy....

[January 22, 1980]

The Progressive

A fragrant dithyramb for the bovine readers who graze with *The Progressive*, one of American journalism's leading fields of alfalfa:

Throwing people in prison and vastly increasing the number of prisons is not an appropriate cure for unemployment. The influx of new prisoners, and the alarming increase of minority inmates in the Federal system, should stimulate the Department of Justice to review the economic and racial biases of punishment, rather than blindly building ever more cages to house the victims of repression....

The problem of overcrowded prisons, like the problem of crime itself, can not be solved by building ever more prisons. We will have no true order or real criminal justice until we seriously pursue economic, racial, and political justice for all. The key to unlocking our caged criminal injustice system will not come from prosecutors, judges, prison administrators, or others with a vested interest in enlarging the crime control industry. It will have to come from ourselves, the real victims of this violent process.

[December 1979]

The New York Times

Whittaker Chambers, as seen by Vincent Canby, quondam restaurant critic for the authoritative *Times*:

What he has left behind him is a record of pathetic confessions and pathetic deceptions, some of which had horrendous consequences. We see no sign of Dostoyevskian character wrestling with guilts as old as Christian time. Instead, he looks to be superficial though dangerously deluded. He reminds us of the Son of Sam.

[March 9, 1980]

The New York Times

Craig R. Whitney, writing from Moscow, views the Soviet peace-keeping forces in Afghanistan and sees a historic and portentous parallel. Will Beverly Hills see things this way? Would Jane Fonda be willing to appear in an *Apocalypse Now* whose protagonists donned little red stars? The official version, that the Afghan Government is in charge, is as difficult for the Kremlin to sustain as it was for the Johnson Administration to contend that Americans would have only a limited role in Vietnam in the 1960's.

[March 9, 1980]

Valley Advocate

(Amherst, Massachusetts)

An affecting letter to the editor of the *Valley Advocate*, reminding the heterosexual community of metropolitan Amherst that there are times when it is not so gay to be gay, for instance during the dark hours of Valentine's Day:

Don't you think it inaccurate, to say the least, that a series of no less than six Valentine's Day articles on "the peaks and valleys of contemporary relationships" failed to mention gay relationships even *once*? We, too, have had great loves and love songs: we too feel the thrill of clandestine affairs, the pain of breaking up, the problems of sexual "dysfunction." And as for "the wrinkles of single parenthood," try on the wrinkle of being a lesbian or a gay man, and see if you can even get *near* your own children, let alone worry about how they feel about your lovers.

The problem with the articles, in tone as well as substance, is one we as gay people run into all the time: *everyone assumes that everyone else is heterosexual*. I know there are many non-gay people out there who really want to ally yourselves with us. To do so, you will have to challenge this profound assumption, both in yourselves and others.

With the overt and frequently violent oppression of gay men and lesbians on the rise, we don't need the covert oppression of being ignored by you who should be with us.

—Bruce MacDonald
Greenfield

[February 13, 1980]

The Progressive

A proud declaration from the lunatic fringe:

For many years now, *The Progressive* has made it a practice to provide a free subscription to any prisoner who requested it. We know from the correspondence we receive that these copies are widely circulated and deeply appreciated.

[December 1979]

The Boston Globe

Another grim interlude with a feminist metaphysician, this one a 200-pounder with unshaved legs:

Freud posed the curious question "What does a woman want?" He asked it as if there were only one woman, or as if all women wanted the same thing, or as if there were any better way of finding out than by asking a woman.

Freud's question seems silly. But one question that has always taunted me is, what do women need? What do I need, as a woman? So much of feminism is about what we don't need, about the constraints and insults that push women around. It's taking me quite a long time to realize some of the things I do need that women haven't been able to get—for centuries, or maybe never.

One of the things I need the very most is to think.

[January 25, 1980]

The Portland Press Herald

Following the Kennedy comet through Maine, where the Peoples' Senator was eventually to lose to the Wonderboy (Carter 46.7%, Kennedy 38.9%), Mary McGrory falls under the great man's spell:

PORTLAND, Maine—In the Lazarus of the Month Club beat of this year's struggle for the Democratic nomination, Sen. Edward Kennedy looks like the February choice.

Kennedy's defeat in Iowa was supposed to put his candidacy under. But the wallop cleared his head, and Jimmy Carter played into his hands with a bell-cose State of the Union speech; and Kennedy, with his troops revived by the Georgetown manifesto he delivered on Jan. 28, is moving around Maine for all the world like a real, live challenger....

He goes before a group of feminists. He tells them that his wife Joan, like so many of them, has decided to go to graduate school. Her decision has meant that he has much more time with the children. It is a new "liberation" shine on a hitherto troublesome question....

Now, his candidacy has taken on the aura of a cause and he is a free man.

He has been freed from the shadow of his brothers. His campaign has acquired a moral imperative that has nothing to do with them. Someone has to speak out against the "war hysteria" emanating from the White House, and the other liberals have fallen silent. The man who could not shake Chappaquiddick is being reborn as the conscience of his party.

[February 5, 1980]