

Editorial

Art, entertainment selections defined by economic times

You can tell times are economically bad for America, because the arts are taking it in the shorts. It's not that people aren't going to movies and plays or reading books. Rather, it's the books they are buying and the performances they are going to see.

Most of the box-office-hit movies of the last four years have been escapist: *Star Wars*, *The Empire Strikes Back*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *Superman* and the like have dominated the market with their comic book characters, simple good guy/bad guy divisions and splashy special effects.

Television continues to crank out an ever-growing number of shows that seem to have come from between the covers of a Harold Robbins novel and tend to put you between the covers of a Serta perfect sleeper. *Dallas* was the first, but *Flamingo Road*, *Falconcrest*, *Dynasty* and others followed quickly, each collecting a big audience. And even these shows don't match the popularity of those intellectual gems, the daytime soaps.

Literature has taken the worst tailspin of all. The books that sell the best are either collections of comics or self-help guides in the latter category. Check the lists of best sellers. A few years ago, we were reading *Future Shock*; now we are reading *Garfield Gains Weight*, *The Official Preppie Handbook*, and *What Color is Your Parachute?* Deep stuff.

The easy explanation is that in bad economic times, people seek escapist entertainment; it's the same mentality that gave us big production musicals during the Great Depression. It's an easy explanation that sounds more like an excuse.

This is not to suggest that a nose-to-the-grindstone, learning-is-everything approach to life is necessarily good. Much is to be gained, probably, including one's sanity, from forgetting about everything for awhile and getting absorbed in the adventures of Indiana Jones or Morgan Fairchild or Garfield the cat. But we have stepped over the line, and escaped to such an extent that we have only a dim memory of that from which we are escaping.

Some people would say the purpose of movies, television and books is escape; it would be more exact to say that escape is a purpose, not the purpose. We have forgotten about works that inform, analyze and clarify, provoke thought or advocate actions or beliefs. Communication has become something that happens between computers and their programmers more than it does between artists and their audience. We know 101 uses for a dead cat, but we haven't the slightest idea why we think they are funny. And we haven't the slightest inclination to find out.

Pat Clark

Business majors: Robots of study

SCENE: A typical college cafeteria at the end of a particularly brutal Monday. The characters, three business majors, are drinking coffee at one of the tables after finishing an accounting exam.

KATHY: Well, Bill, how did the test go?

BILL: (burying his head in his hands) Not good, Kathy, not good. I think I'm

Mary L. Knapp

only going to make it out of that class with an A minus.

KATHY: Gee, Bill, that's bad news. I hope your average is better in the rest of your classes, or you're going to have problems when you graduate.

BILL: If I graduate. I was supposed to get out of here in two years with an MBA degree, but now it looks like three. That's really going to look bad on my resume.

BETTY: (plucking nervously at her tweed lapel) I'm really worried about this test. If I don't do well on it, I'll lose my 4.0. I figure I'll have to get at least a 99 percent to keep up.

KATHY: You'd better get with it, Betty. The competition's really stiff out there, and you can't afford to fall behind.

Not meaning to be critical, but I haven't seen you in the library lately. Can't let yourself slip, you know!

BETTY: (nervously) Well, my parents were here from California last week, and I wanted to see them, and then Bob wanted to take me skiing Saturday...

BILL: That's disgusting! I never have any spare time! What kind of pud courses are you taking, Betty, anyway?

KATHY: Really. I don't have any time to see my parents at all this year, as busy as I've been, let alone have time for socializing. How many hours are you taking?

BETTY: (weakly) Fifteen... but I have a part-time job.

BILL: Hm! Pretty light load, wouldn't you say? How many centuries is it going to take you to get out of here?

BETTY: I was planning on four years, maybe four-and-a-half - with summer school, that is.

KATHY: You ought to step it up. No sense in hanging around this place any longer than you have to. Get out there and start producing, that's my philosophy!

BILL: I'm carrying 24 hours, plus three part-time jobs. You think you got it bad, Betty, just look at me. I never get any sleep. I quit eating, too. Saves time so I can work on my computer programs.

KATHY: I haven't slept for a week. You look pretty well-rested though, Betty! Of course, some people actually have time for that kind of stuff!

BILL: (with heavy sarcasm) Yeah. Some people have all kinds of time to lounge around! You know where I saw Betty the other day?

KATHY: No. Where?

BILL: At the film theater!

KATHY: Oh, Betty, I'm just sure you did that. You know you can't afford to take time out from your accounting!

BETTY: (wringing her hands) It was for a class, Kathy...

KATHY: Well, I'm sure! You know, I bet it wasn't for a class at all. You just did it to entertain yourself!

BETTY: Oh, Kathy, please don't say that. You know I'm as competitive as anyone else. Don't I have job interviews lined up with IBM? Don't I own six brown tweed suits? Didn't I stay up all last night studying, even after the library closed? Don't ruin my reputation for a silly film!

BILL: (meditating) Well, Betty, I guess we'll let it go this time. But I want to see you in the library every night this week! No excuses.

BETTY: Thanks, Bill. I won't forget this. (To herself) I wonder if I should have gone into trade school...



French firm on program goals

The Dutch banker, a man of impeccable English and, I was told, impeccable French, listened. For two days the ministers of the new French government had paraded before him and other businessmen to explain the new socialism. He was being wooed. He was being romanced. He was being charmed. But he was not being sold.

But then, if truth be told, he would not have been charmed had the Reagan administration done the same thing. He admitted as much. He would have sat, as he did



Richard Cohen

through a two-day economic conference here, and listened. But he would have found no answers to the problems that seem to have bound both sides of the Atlantic in a community of mutual misery: high unemployment, high inflation, high interest rates and no apparent answers.

Here, though, the French are trying something different. About five months after the Reagan administration came into power with its new conservatism, the Socialists came to power in France. America went right and France went left. The results have been about the same. Despite

some grand rhetoric, the Socialists have not been able to put much of a dent in either inflation or unemployment. And despite some even grander rhetoric, the Reagan administration has had much the same record. What it did to lower inflation, it more than compensated for with higher unemployment.

The banker, properly portly, acknowledges this. He just feels more comfortable with American Republicans than with French Socialists. The Socialists, after all, plan to nationalize the bulk of the banking industry and eight other key industries. Already, they have reduced the work week from 40 to 39 hours, and plan to reduce it four more hours by 1985. That, plus the history and traditions of European socialism, have made the business community nervous. And so a procession of key government ministers, including the prime minister, came forward to reassure them that things would not change so radically.

In fact, they heard some of the same sort of rhetoric that they might have heard in America. The Socialists talk of decentralization, of moving decision-making away from Paris. This is their version of the New Federalism. They talk, too, of bureaucracies, although to the Socialists the worst bureaucracy of all can be found within stodgy corporations and not necessarily within the government.

But if you came to the conference to hear talk of spe-

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