

tenance of national memory. In short, she thinks like a matriarch. She is selflessly devoted to the transgenerational sense of our country and voices only the noblest of patriotic sentiments. Though Mrs. Clinton presents herself as a First Lady through and through, some may be as disappointed as I was that she did not choose to reveal her secret method for making a 10,000 percent profit on an investment in one year. (No doubt she will answer that, and many other questions, in her *next* book.) We just have to remember that *this* book was devoted to kids' letters to the First Pets. Let's try to stay focused, shall we?

Secondly, *Dear Socks, Dear Buddy* is definitely the best book about kids' letters to Socks and Buddy that I have ever seen. I don't mean that all the letters are here—it's just a vibrant sampling of a vast outpouring. But before I dispense some enticing quotes, I think it would be nice to stop and think about how many letters there were, and how nice it was of Mrs. Clinton to let the veterans at the U.S. Soldiers' and Airmen's Home in Washington handle all the mail and answer the letters, and how nice again to let us know how nice she was. There aren't any nasty letters here, thank goodness, of the "How come you SOB's don't go back where you came from? Signed, Dave" variety, or of the "Why they so many Lisbeans in yo cabinette?" stripe, or of the "Socks and Buddy ain't the only animals in the White House" ilk. The letters from our nation's selected children are sweet, humorous, and kindhearted. The texts could only be properly appreciated by the unredeemed Ebenezer Scrooge, but on the whole it's nice to know that this is a book that anyone can read without getting all upset, and you don't even have to read much because there are so many pictures of Bill and Hillary in intimate family snapshots, in color.

Mrs. Clinton does *not* say, either because she could not do so without inviting horse laughs or because she just did not want to, that there is much here to invite a sense of pride in the nation's parents and teachers. The triviality of thought and the illiteracy of much of the expression in the letters does not bode well for the future of the nation that Mrs. Clinton cares so much about. She does say, "What touches me most about the letters is how much the children give of themselves." I wish she had been able to say, "Our children have mastered the elements of orthography, grammar, and

rhetoric. Besides that, they are serious youngsters, properly concerned with our culture and civilization." The evidence is otherwise. Perhaps Mrs. Clinton simply thinks that "giving of themselves" means "revealing their lack." Or maybe what she is thinking is that in ten years these "children" will be "voters."

These young students seem not to take school very seriously, and I don't know why they should. Aimee Buchanan writes, "The stuff I like in school is math, lunch, music, gym and trips. We went to a show and it was fun. We ate lunch before we went and we went on a bus. We watch TV in school."

Looking for any irony or discursive reflection among the letters is unrewarding, but Anna Campbell makes a stab at providing some: "Does the president drink a lot of coffee? He might want to switch to decafe!"

"Ha! Ha!"

Gregory Kohl's closing question to Socks brings a welcome gothic element: "have you ever seen the Gohst of lincoln?"

The most tragic letter is from Willy DeCamp, addressed to Socks. "Is it nice living at the Whitehouse? I used to have a Dog but we had to sell it because it scratched a little boy on a tricycle then the police officer."

Emily Forden asks Buddy an astute question: "Do you help the president make new laws and government decisions?" And Jillian McGaffigan, referring to cat/dog conflict, uses the suggestive word "JELLUS," which should have

been stricken from this volume for reasons needless to relate.

So here is my third point (I've been counting). There is little spark in these letters. The subtextual interest in *Dear Socks, Dear Buddy* is in Mrs. Clinton and her projection of an idyllic home life in the White House, which is somehow related to a vision of the nation that is at once kitschy-koo nice-ums and imperial. She cannot write many words (if, in fact, she writes any at all) without references to her own virtue or to the government which she seems to have confused with those powers formerly attributed to the Deity, citing it as the authority on education, literacy, writing, and pet care. (Mrs. Clinton recommends neutering without exception for all pets, which I thought a bit much until I remembered how that policy jibes with others concerning "reproductive services.")

I don't doubt for a second that *Dear Socks, Dear Buddy* is a provocative look at hot-button issues, written with bold frankness by a woman who once scorned baking cookies and standing by her man. Made over on a recent cover of *Vogue*, Hillary Rodham Clinton knows how to manipulate the American public. What *Dear Socks, Dear Buddy* tells me—in its nuanced, piquant, poignant, starry-eyed, heartfelt, and cornfed way—is that the non-author of this non-book is running for office.

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Kind Words on a Thursday

by Constance Rowell Mastores

It seems that thoroughly modern verse,
at odds with rhyme and reason,
has been exceedingly short with us—
or long for that very reason.

Principalities & Powers

by Samuel Francis

Politics Without a Right

It took only a few days after the rout of the Republicans in their battle to drive Bill Clinton from office for the leaders of the Beltway Right to decide that the war was over and the only thing left to do was announce surrender. Four days after the Senate “acquitted” the President of the two charges on which he had been impeached, the grand marshal of the Beltway Right himself, Paul Weyrich, seemed ready to limp toward Appomattox. In a letter privately circulated to friends and allies, Mr. Weyrich declared that the political conservatism he has led since the 1970’s has been a failure and that the premises on which it was founded are now (if they had not always been) wrong. The news that Mr. Weyrich had given up was in fact somewhat exaggerated, but that was the conclusion to which the left and not a few on the right immediately leapt, and frankly there was not very much in Mr. Weyrich’s letter to contradict it.

Paul Weyrich, of course, was a major founder and leader of the “New Right” of the 1970’s, a movement that sought to differentiate itself from the “Old Right” by devising a populist political strategy, invoking explicit moral and religious issues, shunning (or at least de-emphasizing) philosophical rigor and sophistication, and insisting that political victory was not only possible but also necessary and sufficient for the achievement of conservative goals.

Under Mr. Weyrich’s direction or with his collaboration, the New Right actually did accomplish a good deal more, on a practical political level and for a brief time, than the right associated with Robert Taft, Barry Goldwater, and the “conservative intellectual movement” had in previous decades. Yet the 15 minutes of fame the New Right enjoyed came to an end rather more quickly than most of its apostles expected and certainly sooner than they wanted.

The main problem with the New Right, as with most political movements that bark their contempt for serious thought, was its intellectual shallowness. I distinctly recall, in the late 1970’s, talking to a young lady closely associated

with the New Right who had recently returned from her first visit to the Philadelphia Society, at that time one of the more intellectually interesting organizations of the Old Right. She told me she had enjoyed the visit and meeting the nice people there, but she didn’t understand the point of “sitting around talking about whether Edmund Burke would have agreed with Thomas Aquinas and that sort of stuff.”

No, indeed, the New Right had no time for such idle froth as Burke and Aquinas. Its leaders were made of sterner stuff than the limp-wristed eggheads who were always gushing quotations from dead Greek philosophers. There were congressional and presidential elections to win, policies to implement, and legislation to pass, and, as one prominent New Right leader announced publicly soon afterward, “There’ll be time enough for reading books when we’re all in jail.”

One result of the New Right’s contempt for intellectualism, of course, was that neither its leaders nor its followers ever thought through the slogans and truisms they spouted well enough to understand that they often were implicitly jettisoning or undercutting other ideas of the right or that their own pronouncements might soon become obstacles to fulfilling other, longer-term goals and political and cultural objectives. Another result, arising from the first, was that the whole New Right movement was rather quickly captured by the neoconservatives, at least insofar as the latter wished to absorb it. Lacking the intellectual foundations for perceiving, let alone resisting, the far less radical ideas of neoconservatism and scornful of anyone who suggested laying such foundations, the New Right, by the mid-1980’s, had ceased to exist as a distinct political movement. In 1984, when Irving Kristol’s manifesto of neoconservatism, *Reflections of a Neoconservative*, was published, it was Mr. Weyrich himself who, reviewing it in the Heritage Foundation’s *Policy Review*, hailed the book as “a vital moral force in America” and crowed that several passages “come closer to a general statement of what some in the New Right strain of conservatism believe than anything else in popular print.” If there was any one broker of the

marriage of the New Right with neoconservatism, it was Mr. Weyrich himself.

Today, after 15 years of neoconservative dominance of almost the whole of the American right, Mr. Weyrich bellies up to the bar to inform us that the war is over and “we” lost. The reason “we” lost, he tells us in his February letter,

is that politics itself has failed. And politics has failed because of the collapse of the culture. The culture we are living in becomes an ever-wider sewer. In truth, I think we are caught up in a cultural collapse of historic proportions, a collapse so great that it simply overwhelms politics.

Whether “we” have lost or not, however, Mr. Weyrich is in large part correct in what he says about the relationship of culture and politics, and indeed no magazine has drummed that message more than *Chronicles*. In 1991, I wrote in this magazine that “in the absence of a significant cultural base,” conservative political efforts “were bound to fail.” I do not quote this passage to prove that I was right while Mr. Weyrich was wrong (in fact, Mr. Weyrich was talking about the importance of “cultural conservatism” in the late 1980’s) but mainly to show that the failure of the right he now laments and acknowledges was predictable years before it actually occurred. Perhaps (indeed, probably) Mr. Weyrich himself saw or was beginning to see that some time before he wrote his letter last February, but most others did not, and many still don’t. Some conservatives even continue to imagine that their “movement” has actually won. As Paul Gottfried has written, if this is “victory,” I really don’t want to see what defeat is like.

I have no disagreement with Mr. Weyrich, then, in his conclusion that the right has lost and that it lost because it failed to find or create an adequate cultural base for political success. I would perhaps go further than he and suggest that the reason it has failed to do so is that (partly through Mr. Weyrich’s help) the right fell under the control of neoconservatism, and neoconservatism has never been willing to break with the dominant culture definitively or to ally itself with-