

more important in the broader picture."

If the sole aim of all the rural uplift was to halt the migration from farm to city, then the efforts have to be judged an utter failure. But,

Holt notes, America's farm families did enjoy improved health and education, a reduction in backbreaking work, and more opportunities for organized activities such as 4-H.

PRESS & MEDIA

The News, With Feeling

"The New Writers' Bloc" by Katherine Boo, in *The Washington Monthly* (Nov. 1992), 1611 Connecticut Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009, and "Mo Knows" by Leslie Kaufman, in *Washington Journalism Review* (Oct. 1992), 4716 Pontiac St., Ste. 310, College Park, Md. 20740-2493.

Washington correspondent Maureen Dowd is a talented and amusing wordsmith. During the Democratic primaries last year, Senator Robert Kerrey (D.-Neb.) emerged from her word processor with "large blue eyes and a light-bulb shaped head that give him the look of a bemused extraterrestrial." Another erstwhile presidential contender, Paul Tsongas, was turned into a turtle, "look[ing] around him with a slow, blinking bemusement at the vagaries of fate." Dowd did not invent impressionistic "New Journalism," but the fact that she practices it on the front page of what used to be called the "good, gray" *New York Times* is highly significant. According to Boo, a *Washington Post* editor, and Kaufman, an assistant editor of *Government Executive* magazine, Dowd and a host of imitators are transforming political journalism. The change, say critics, is not entirely for the better.

When the New Journalism emerged in the late 1960s, newspapers usually relegated it to the opinion and style pages. No longer. "Faced on the one hand with engaging a generation raised on MTV, and on the other with stiff competition from faxed newsletters, on-line news services, and CNN," Kaufman writes, "newspapers are being forced to reinvent themselves."

Dowd herself, who likes "to do stories that tweak and amuse," compares politics to Shakespearean drama. "It's one of the few arenas where you can watch character development." But is "character" all in politics? Showing, as Dowd did, how President Bush, while campaigning in Texas, marred "his pork-rind image with a prep-school tendency to say 'whoopsie daisy' and 'by golly,'" Boo notes, may well provide "a better feel for [the] geeky commander-in-chief than a dozen lesser profiles." Franklin Roosevelt was "another patrician who used cornball props . . . in an attempt to come off as a regular guy." Yet the policies of Roosevelt and Bush were worlds apart.

"I don't care about character reporting," syndicated columnist and former *Times* reporter Richard Reeves told Kaufman. "What politicians do or say in private is irrelevant. It is what they do and say in public that's important. We need less focus on character and more on ideas and issues." In its novelistic focus on the personal, that is what the New Journalism often fails to provide. In Dowd's preprimary profile of Kerrey (the "bemused extraterrestrial"), for example, the health-care issue—which was the centerpiece of his presidential campaign—somehow never came up.

Enquiring Minds?

"Reading the Supermarket Tabloids" by Christopher Clausen, in *The New Leader* (Sept. 7, 1992), 275 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001.

Editors at respectable newspapers like to look down their journalistic noses at the *National Enquirer* and other supermarket tabloids. After a close examination, however, Pennsylvania State English professor Clausen concludes that the "tabs" are not so far removed from the mainstream press as the latter would like peo-

ple to believe.

"The tabloids merely cater, albeit at the extreme, to American culture's obsession with personality and generally weak interest in abstract ideas, political or otherwise," Clausen contends. In capitalizing on that obsession, he points out, they are no different than the main-