were the ideal male types—unregenerate loafers who never took themselves seriously and who defied refined cultural norms perceived as feminine. The most savage expressions of misogyny—persisting to James Thurber's day—were sketches of humorless scatterbrains tyrannizing their husbands in stifling parlors. The male defense was frequently a resort to sarcasm that was lost on the wife, but not on the audience, a device perfected by comedian George Burns.

Habegger also documents an authentic vein of feminine wit, based on epigrams and swift repartee rather than the primitive devices of dialect and local color. The personae of the female satirists were superiors, not idiots. The first American fictional heroine with a thoroughgoing sense of humor is Penelope Lapham in William Dean Howells's *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885). Her humor is part of an easygoing nature; her refusal to be oppressed by decorum is in the mainstream of vernacular male humor. However, Penelope's fate (exile to Mexico) demonstrates that not even Howells could tolerate a high-spirited woman for long.

PRESS & TELEVISION

Priestifying Journalists

"The Imperial Press" by Tom Bethell and Charles Peters, in *The Washington Monthly* (Nov. 1976), 1028 Connecticut Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

The rapid postwar transformation of journalists from craftsmen to "professionals" resembles the advancement in status achieved by doctors and lawyers in the 19th century. Most of the net effects are good, say Peters, editor-in-chief of *The Washington Monthly,* and Bethell, a contributing editor. But the professionalization process contains elements of "priestification"; it encourages claims of special privilege which may not always redound to the public interest.

Peters and Bethell, for example, are concerned over the self-righteousness which accompanied efforts by the American Newspaper Guild to build support for CBS correspondent Daniel Schorr in his confrontation last fall with the House Ethics Committee. Both Schorr and the "Fresno Four" (the *Fresno Bee* newsmen jailed briefly for disobeying a judge's order by printing secret grand jury testimony) equated the journalist's right to protect the confidentiality of his sources with the privileges of confidentiality that accrue to doctors, lawyers, and the clergy. But in the case of the latter, the privilege inhibits the broad dissemination of information, whereas with journalists, the reverse is true and the result is not always to the good.

The authors argue that the self-interest of the press (e.g., the competitive eagerness to be first and to sell its product) may also prevent

adequate consideration of the public interest. (Clay Felker, owner of the *Village Voice,* which printed the "secret" House committee report obtained by Schorr, admitted that he decided to publish the report without really reading it.) In response to official abuses of power which resulted in a self-aggrandizing "imperial presidency," professional journalists seem to be creating an "imperial press" which is sometimes guilty of the same kinds of excesses that newsmen have been trying to expose.

Political News As TV Drama

"Captives of Melodrama" by Paul H. Weaver, in *The New York Times Magazine* (Aug. 29, 1976), 229 W. 43rd St., New York, N.Y. 10036.

Television news is "not primarily information but narrative . . . governed not by a political bias but by a melodramatic one," observes Weaver, a *Fortune* editor and former Harvard assistant professor of government. Analyzing nightly news coverage of the 1976 presidential primaries by ABC, CBS, and NBC, he finds the contenders depicted as actors in a gripping drama, starting in the snows of New Hampshire.

Carter, Weaver argues, was "lucky enough and clever enough" to benefit from TV's own biases. The Georgian put his big effort into the early primaries, won them, and thereby was established on TV as "front-runner"—despite later losses. In running "against Washington," Carter was in fact also running against an image that TV, with its simplistic news treatment of government, helps perpetuate. And, because TV likes a candidate who can be portrayed as having been raised out of obscurity by the people, Carter emerged the "good guy."

The problem, Weaver contends, is that TV's biases in coverage constantly intervene between the candidates and the voters, diminishing the voters' ability to choose on the basis of their own perceptions.

The Nature of News

"Novelty Without Change" by E. Barbara Phillips, in *Journal of Communication* (Autumn 1976), P.O. Box 13358, Philadelphia, Pa. 19101.

The nature of daily journalism, with its emphasis on "the concrete, the particular, and the individual," inhibits the development of broad insights into changing American realities, says Phillips, a former journalist now teaching sociology and urban studies at San Francisco State.

After working 13 months at two radio stations, one television affiliate, and a daily newspaper, Phillips interviewed newsmen working in large northeastern cities and surveyed 165 reporters, editors, and producers from various backgrounds. She concludes that newsmen share certain mental habits and a special perspective on social reality which is