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I HAD HOPED to be the only columnist in America to let the Frost-Nixon television interviews pass without comment. Having lived through the entire Nixon era, I doubted that anything he had to say to David Frost would require column-length treatment.

And so it proved, as far as Richard Nixon's own statements were concerned. I assumed he would have some carefully-constructed exculpatory explanation for his role in the Watergate cover-up, and sure enough he did: a stress on the requirement of "corrupt intent" as one element in the crime of obstruction of justice, and an insistence that his intent has not been corrupt.

I also assumed that, on balance, Nixon was sure to pick up Brownie points in the interview series, not only because he is an accomplished actor with a dramatic story to tell but because his enemies in the media had so overdone the villain bit.

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WHAT I DID not expect was the truly pathological reaction of some of Richard Nixon's most inveterate media foes.

Pete Hamill harked back to Hollywood versions of Dracula for a suitable analogy. Nixon, Hamill moaned, "is the Bela Lugosi of American politics, lying out there in the crypt of San Clemente, and rising into the darkness at night. We think we have put him behind us

... And then he is walking among us again..."

For Garry Wills the appropriate analogy was to Frankenstein's dread creation: "The monster, lurchily, walks ... He is our living death, all our yesterdays returning, the past that waits just around the corner as our future."

Rather sad, isn't it? Not for Nixon, I mean, nor even for anything these lurid passages have to tell us about Nixon, but rather for what they tell us about their authors. We are all entitled to our pet aversions, but one is a little horrified to note the particular form of detestation Richard Nixon has taken in the cases of Hamill and Wills.

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IT IS NOT enough for them to criticize his misdeeds, or even his personal style; let him appear afresh on television, and both writers promptly draw metaphors from the mythology of supernatural evil: Count Dracula, leaving his coffin at midnight to suck the blood of the sleeping; and Frankenstein's nameless monster, half alive, bent on destroying the scientist who had created him.

From which we must conclude, I guess, that Wills and Hamill secretly think of themselves as monster slayers, and now suddenly realize — with what dismay it is easy to imagine — that the job is not yet done.