



The Fearless Spectator

Charles McCabe

Nemesis vs. Hubris

"NEMESIS defeated Hubris 6-5 last night in a game that went 14 innings, even with fabled Old Nick throwing for Hubris."

For those who do not follow sports, we will provide a scoreboard. Nemesis in Greek mythology is the goddess of vengeance. She figures in Greek myth and drama as the inevitable consequence of wrongdoing by wicked and presumptuous mortals.

Hubris describes the wicked and presumptuous mortals. It is the Greek word for insolence. Hubris was the tragic flaw in Greek heroes that led them to ignore warnings from the gods and thus invite catastrophe.

In Sophocles' "Antigone," Creon rejects warnings from the blind prophet Tiresias, and consequently suffers the death of Antigone and the self-destruction of his wife and son. The play ends with these words about Hubris from the leader of the chorus:

"Wisdom is the supreme part of happiness; and reverence toward the gods must be inviolate. Great words of prideful men are ever punished with great blows and, in old age, teach the chastened to be wise."

★ ★ ★

WE ARE TALKING, of course, of the recent moral collapse at the White House. The whole Watergate affair fits into the Nemesis-Hubris

pattern with a terrifying neatness. If there is anything which can describe the advertising-mentality junta which has been dumped by the President it is Hamlet's insolence of office.

The junta had long forgotten that when you are in politics you are dealing with people; if indeed they ever knew it. The two top dogs, Ehrlichman and Haldeman, got their training and their morals from the merchandising end of the ad biz. That is a rough, rough world whose basic tenet is that anything can be sold, if you are totally unscrupulous and if you can make the rules of the game.

The junta was selling a product and the name of the product was Nixon. And they sold it, by God. We are only beginning to learn the shabbiness of the methods they employed. In their doglike fidelity to their leader, the junta well and truly persuaded themselves that the end justified any means. The product must be sold. More, the product was the client.

★ ★ ★

NOT THAT anyone should have been particularly surprised by the methods. When Mr. Nixon ran and lost for the governorship of California in 1962, Brother Haldeman as his then chief of staff cooked up an outfit called "Committee for the Preservation of the Democratic Party in California."

This fraudulent organization conducted a fraudulent poll, which was supposedly designed to save the Democratic Party from the devilish activities of Commies and other subversives. Haldeman denied all; but a suit was filed against him. Months after the election Haldeman, under oath, allowed he had formed the odious outfit and had operated it. The judge found that Haldeman's client, Mr. Nixon, had personally okayed the whole scheme.

★ ★ ★

TO SELL a product really well you need a prodigious contempt for people. Those lads in the White House really had it. They treated Senators like delinquent kids. Top administrators were treated like office boys, as when Ehrlichman handed FBI Chief Gray two folders to burn which contained a phony State Department story implicating the late President Kennedy in the murder of Ngo Dinh Diem in 1963.

These clowns might have gone on this way forever; but Nemesis was there, lurking in the wings. Insolence was riding for a fall. The gods finally had to be placated.