

Chapter III

“The Smiling Gladness”

Carter’s pleasing facade shields ugly ruins — the destructive inner core of his personality. “My problem is that I smile too much,” wrote Carter in his diary during his first year at Annapolis. That is, as Paul Elovitz put it, “he smiles when he’d prefer to bite.”

During the first Ford-Carter T.V. debate in October, 1976, Carter kept smiling for 27 minutes—the duration of a failure in the sound system. Gerald Ford’s facial expressions betrayed understandable discomfort. Carter later “criticized his staff for letting him stand there feeling and appearing foolish with millions of television viewers watching.” Cartoonists have caricatured Carter as a smiling tiger or a Cheshire Cat with a secret. In Georgia, a much demanded small wooden plaque depicts Carter as a broadly smiling Mickey Mouse with the inscription: “Keep smiling. The boss likes idiots.”

History has abounded with puzzles arising from reaction-formations long before this psychoanalytic term gained currency. The mysterious La Schiavona, the beautiful, richly dressed lady, holding her left hand on the shoulder of a little African slave, has gazed for centuries with “smiling gladness” from Titian’s canvas (now hanging in the Gook Gallery in Richmond). Art historian Partigliotti finally arrived at the conclusion that this portrait depicts Lucrezia Borgia, daughter of the infamous Borgia, Pope Alexander VI, a criminal psychopath, whose memory the Catholic Church has been blotting out for nearly half a millennium. Lucrezia’s moral blindness matched that of her father. They were in this respect astoundingly close replicas of each other. Yet, their contemporary, Nicolo Gagnolo of Parma, had a different perception of Lucrezia:

She is of middle stature and of graceful form, the nose good in profile, the hair blonde, the eyes of no particular color, the mouth somewhat large, the teeth very white, the neck slender and white as snow, the aspect majestic and in all things temperate. From her whole person there transpires always a smiling gladness.

According to Partigliotti, Lucrezia's smile is "merely the external reflex of her profound and complete moral anaesthesia."

Once, during his 1976 campaign, Carter put his hand on the shoulder of a potential voter, but the man hit Carter hard in the jaw. Carter almost immediately apologized. His external reactions are often extreme opposites of his natural impulses and are manifested in a characteristically negative way. His aides have said that Carter has his "good smiles and his bad smiles." Kandy Stroud, describing Carter's doubleness, wrote:

Carter is not just complex, he is contradictory. His paradoxes are multiple. He is at once vain and humble, sensitive and ruthless, soft-hearted and tough, conservative and liberal, country boy with city wisdom, spiritual and pragmatic, loving and cold. He can be fascinating and dull.

Norman Mailer, too, wondered what kind of “secret” hid behind Carter’s “astonishingly nice ever-oncoming smile.”

There are always at least two Carters on the stage. Sometimes the real Carter shows us, but mostly he is repressed and hides behind his censored³⁸ Jimmy Carter, Provocateur-in-Chief and smiling double. His conceit and vanity translate into excessive modesty and humility. Jones wrote that reaction-formations result from conscious censorship of socially unacceptable impulses which remain suppressed and in fact one can often infer the strength of underlying impulses only through noting how intense are the reactions they have evoked.

Carter often makes assertions that indicate an exaggerated self-estimation, such as:

I am an engineer, I am a conservationist, and I am a scientist, an environmentalist, I am a nuclear physicist, I am an outdoor man, I am a Christian...

There are some variations: “I am a farmer, a scientist, a governor and a Christian.” He meant himself when he titled his campaign autobiography “Why Not the Best?” But he has also declared that “I have never claimed to be better or wiser than any other person. I think my greatest strength is that I am an ordinary man, just like all of you.” Often his self-effacement and extreme humbleness intermingle with extreme glibness. “When I get in the White House, I don’t want you to leave me there all by myself. I’ll be there at the front door waiting for you.”

At times he sounds like a helpless child:

I need you, all of you. I need your advice, your criticism, your intimacy. My strength, my support, my ability, comes out of people like you. I want you to know~when I’m in the White House you’ll have a friend there. You can come and see me, tell me your troubles.

Then comes the appeal for boundless faith in him:

If I ever tell a lie, if I ever mislead you, if I ever betray your trust or a confidence, I want you to come and take me out of the White House.

Shirley Hufstедler, the Secretary of Education, objected to the people Carter's staff invited to her White House swearing-in ceremony. She said the guest list was "too political," but Carter overruled her objections saying, "this is my house, and I'll invite who I want." He is not a very accommodating person. "I am a very quiet person," he said. "But I don't let anybody push me around." We hear the voices of an ingratiating weakling and a dangerous bully sounding almost in unison.

Miss Lillian said that she had admonished her son to "quit that stuff about never telling a lie, and being a Christian, and how he loves his wife more than the day he met her. There are some things you don't have to go around saying." She touched upon one of Carter's important traits, his exhibitionism, which is closely related to his sense of omnipotence. Both tendencies are derived from colossal narcissism, which inevitably leads to "an excessive admiration for and confidence in one's own powers, knowledge, and qualities, both physical and mental." Carter professes never to experience doubts about himself or to be embarrassed about revealing his private affairs. He takes "the greatest pleasure in talking about himself in the fullest minuteness and is never weary of discussing and dissecting his own mental attributes." Carter wrote in his

autobiography, “I never had any real sweetheart, and in fact never told any girl that I loved her.” At a rally in Warren, RI, explaining why his daughter Amy arrived so late, he announced for everyone to know that “my wife and I had an argument for 14 years... which I finally won.” But in his autobiography he advanced another version, that the doctors had “to remove a large tumor from Rosalynn’s uterus.” In another autobiographical revelation he announced that he had suffered for a long time from a “retention of urine” problem. He, so to speak, “shares” with us what he considers to be valuable information about himself.

In this way he constructs his “image of intimacy” with people. His interpersonal relations betray an internal poverty of emotional content. Nine million people trying simultaneously to telephone him produce in him, as Elovitz put it, a feeling of a “narcissistic triumph,” enabling him to “charge his psychic batteries.” When Carter told a group of children to ask their parents to vote for him, the children, he related, “loved it.” And he too loved the children’s response: “they just mobbed me. They ran up and grabbed my legs, my hands— they wanted to touch me. It really makes me feel good.”

Narcissists “present an unusual degree of self-reference in their interaction with other people, a great need to be loved and admired by others, and a curious apparent contradiction between a very inflated concept of themselves and an inordinate need of tribute from others.” Now *is* the *Time* to Praise the Famous Man is Carter’s favorite book. The Famous Man, despite his already established fame, wants instant gratification. He wants to be praised *now*. Carter’s sister Ruth said— that the “Boop-a-Doop” inside her was “totally indulgent.” This quality resides inside “Junior Hotshot” as well.

Discussing his public speaking technique, Carter said,

I could have left them in such a state they’d still be ap-

plauding. It's easy enough to do. You pause at just the right points, end the sentence on an upbeat note. But I don't do that....

But the fact is that he does exactly that. Carter's acceptance speech at the 1976 Democratic National Convention began with an infectious smile, radiating ultimate innocence and boundless child-like happiness, followed by his standard opening: "My name is Jimmy Carter... (pause) and I am running for President." Then he gave the audience all the happiness "them teeth" could produce, and paused for applause.

There was such a happiness in the smile that followed, and such a good humor; it was such an astonishingly nice smile that Mailer to his horror understood how people become Carter converts on the spot..,

wrote Norman Mailer in the third person, describing how he had succumbed to the Carter "mystique." "I like to see the audience's intensity of concentration, their lack of movement and coughing," said Carter. "It doesn't matter to me whether they applaud hysterically. That kind of enthusiasm can evaporate right after the speech." True, it does evaporate. Yet Carter likes it when "they applaud hysterically." He also likes when "they" want to touch him. Maybe "they" want to make sure that he is as good as he sounds.

To some people he appears in the image of Abe Lincoln, coming straight from his Plains log cabin to save the Union. In his first fireside T.V. performance, Carter appeared like Franklin Roosevelt, with a sweater which, according to his aides, was intended to make him look “fatherly.” Delegates at the 1976 Convention had placards depicting Carter as Jesus Christ. His staff referred to him as J.C. Some cartoons pictured him as a fetus with a scary face, while in others he appeared walking Christ-like on water, his teeth bared. Perhaps the real Carter does not exist at all. He plays conflicting roles simultaneously.

Perhaps his most impressive performance was the televised debate with Ford. Carter recited a detailed, extremely complex technological description of how to design and operate an advanced nuclear power station. Poor President Ford could not, of course, offer in rebuttal anything remotely as impressive as that. But Carter has never designed or worked anywhere close to a nuclear power station. He memorized the whole act! In his autobiography he related that before applying to the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, he “almost memorized the little catalog,” which contained the entrance requirements. Miss Lillian said that her son “can zip through the heaviest prose and then quote it back like he was listening to the book.”

“It would take an actor of the greatest dimension to give you belief in personality as nice at this moment as the working image of the man,” wrote Norman Mailer. “What a resourceful personality had come to the greatest American theater of them all.” The *Village Voice* as well as *T.V. Guide* compared Carter to Hal Philip Waler, the mysterious Presidential candidate who came out of nowhere in the movie *Nashville*. They suggested that Carter’s “twitchy smile and other, more elusive, McLuhanesque qualities” created a “vision, or a con, or a little of both.”

Profound, if repressed, feelings of inadequacy and

insecurity have pursued Carter from childhood. “I had ridiculous and secret fears,” he wrote in his biography, citing his “deep concern” over the “malocclusion of his teeth,” “~retention of urine” problem, worries about his flat feet, and fears of stray dogs. It is still a matter of concern to him that he is only 5’9”, and he resents tall people. Before the first T.V. debate with President Ford, Carter’s campaign organization demanded that Ford be “put into a recess so that he would not look taller than Carter. “Put your man on a box,” replied Ford’s campaign aides. Napoleon also had this problem— he was short and used to threaten other people with the promise to shorten them by cutting off their heads. Stalin was short (5’6”) and he tried to solve the problem by wearing almost two-inch thick, carefully concealed soles. He stood on a wooden block while receiving parades and during demonstrations: He also would threaten people by promising to shorten them “by a head.” So far, or so it seems, putting rivals “into a recess” has been a unique approach.

Carter hasn’t said that he is a “great man.” He said only that he is going to be a “great President,” that he is “the best.” He promised to be “tough,” “strong,” “aggressive.” His administration “can and must represent the best and the highest ideals of those of us who voluntarily submit to its authority.” What would Carter do to those of us who refuse to submit voluntarily? He won’t just put tis “into a recess, or shoot our rear end with a B.B. gun,” or whip us with a “small, long flexible peach tree switch.”