DIFFERENT VALUES

AN ANALYSIS OF PATRICK McGOOHAN'S

THE PRISONER

by Chris R. Tame

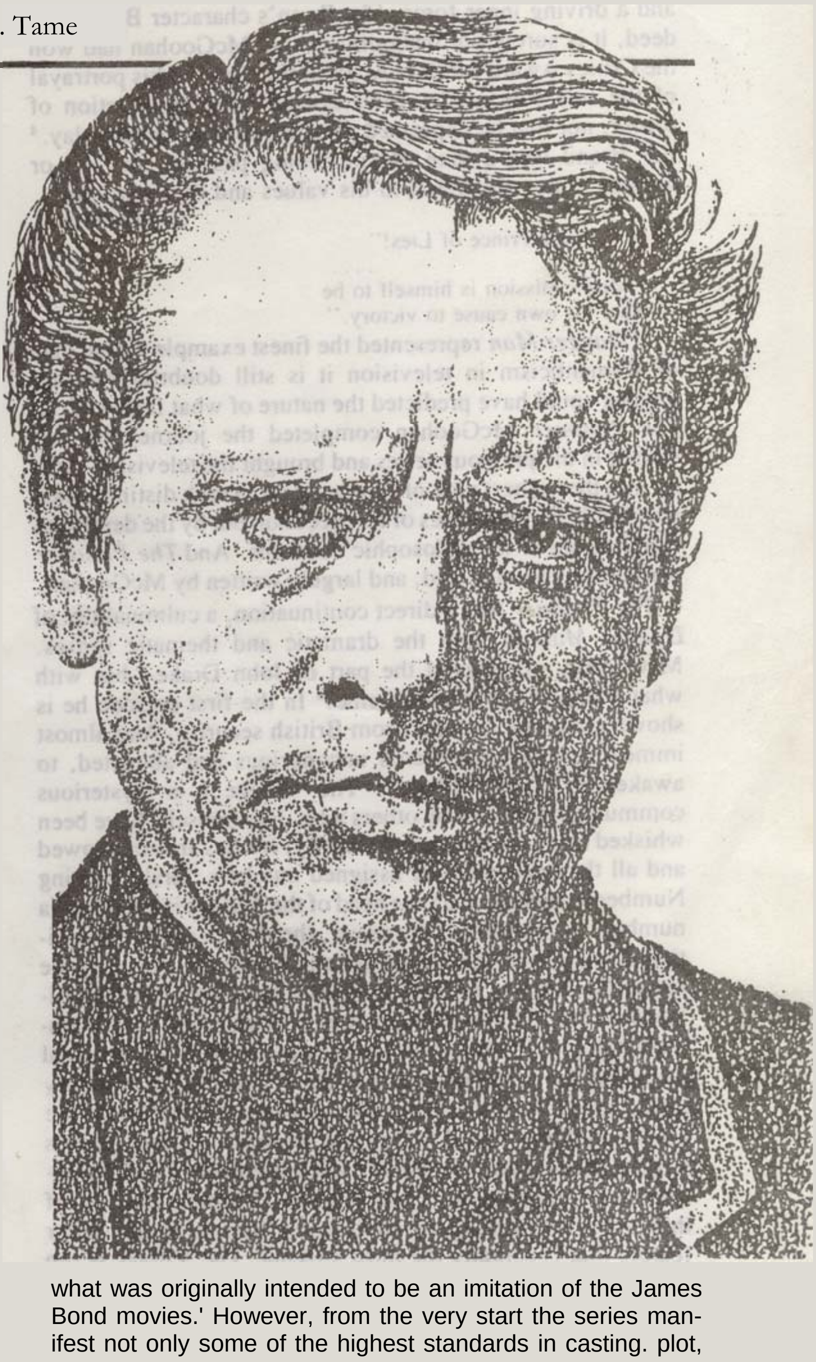
Observer: "I have my duty to everyone . You're a wicked man.
Have you no values?"
Number 6: "Different values."

* * * * *

I will not be pushed. filed, indexed, stamped, briefed, debriefed, or numbered. My life is my own."

* * * * *

"As far as their fiction aspects are concerned", wrote Ayn Rand in *The Romantic- Manifesto,* "movies and television, by their nature, are media suited exclusively to Romanticism .. .to abstractions, essentials, and drama".' Yet it is unfortunately true, especially in the case of television, that "abstractions, essentials, and drama" have largely been noticeable by their absence. In so far as Romanticism has survived in television it has been in that restricted manner typical of so much 'popular' literature. That is, "it takes moral principles as the given, accepting certain generalized. commonsense ideas and values as it base . ..it assumes that man knows what he needs to know in order to live, and proceeds to show his adventures in living . . .The distinctive characteristic of popular fiction is the absence of an explicitly ideational element, of the intent to convey intellectual information (or misinformation).'[2] Even at their best then, detective, spy, and thriller series on television have operated on this low intellectual level. Their themes have remained restricted in both range and depth, confined to the often bromidic levels of, for example, Law and Order versus Crime, 'Free World' versus Communism. 'Our Side' versus 'Their Side'. And, of course, they have all to frequently degenerated to near moronic levels of stereotyping and sterility in both plot and characterization. Moreover, because of their non-intellectual, 'common-sense', nature, such series have not unusually manifest some of the more offensive and irrational elements in contemporary mores. Most notable, of course, is their almost universal subservience to the dehumanizing dichotomy of 'masculinity' and 'femininity'. their reduction of women to the role of helpless and irrational sex-objects, and their portrayal of promiscuous and predatory sexuality as a normal—nay, admirable and enviable--characteristic of the male.



Only one man has broken through the barrier of mediocrity and cultural bankruptcy to proclaim the relevance of values to human life. to redeem excitement, adventure, and drama from the concrete-bound world of moral orthodoxies. That man is Patrick McGoohan.

In the series *Danger Man* (entitled *Secret Agent in* America) McGoohan was cast as secret agent John Drake, in what was originally intended to be an imitation of the James Bond movies.' However, from the very start the series manifest not only some of the highest standards in casting. plot, acting, *etc.,* but McGoohan refused to allow himself to be manipulated into one of the pallid Bond imitations which were flooding the screen at that time. He prevented the series from becoming subject to the gratuitous injections of sex-

LIBERTARIAN REPRINTS

LIBERTARIAN ALLIANCE ISBN 1 85637 216 2
25 Chapter Chambers - Esterbrooke Street - London SW1P 4NN

Number One

sensationalism, 'womanizing', and violence which in most similar works took the place of **real** drama and excitement. It was, however, McGoohan's own characterization and interpretation of his role that really distinguished *Danger Man* from its rivals. McGoohan portrayed Drake not simply as a man of physical courage, but as one of intelligence and self-esteem, unwilling to compromise himself and his values in a seedy world of intrigue, danger, and violence. One realized that in the figure of Drake. and of McGoohan himself, was a man a world apart from other popular heroes, and actors. It was soon obvious that here was a man of both emotional depth and intellectual stature, a man with idealism and a driving inner force, like Ibsen's character Brand. Indeed, it is surely not insignificant that McGoohan had won the Critics Award for Best Actor of the Year for his portrayal of the title role in the 1959 London stage production of *Brand,* nor that he expressed great admiration for the play.' For Brand was a man of consuming passion, an "all or nothing" man dedicated to his values and declaring that,

> "Compromise
> Is the very Prince of Lies!“
>
> "Man's mission is himself to he
> Bear his own cause to victory."

If *Danger Man* represented the finest example to that date of Romanticism in television it is still doubtful whether anyone could have predicted the nature of what followed. In *The Prisoner* McGoohan completed the journey he had started in the previous series and brought the television thriller into the highest rank of Romantic art, a rank distinguished not simply by the virtues of its execution but by the depth and significance of its philosophic concerns. And *The Prisoner* was conceived, directed, and largely written by McGoohan.

The Prisoner was a direct continuation, a culmination, of *Danger Man* in both the dramatic and thematic senses. McGoohan still played the part of John Drake—but with what a difference in plot-theme!' In the first episode he is shown resigning in anger from British security. And almost immediately he is rendered unconscious and abducted, to awaken in "**The** Village". The Village is *a* mysterious community inhabited by others who, like himself, have been whisked away for reasons of security. Names are not allowed and all the occupants are assigned numbers, Drake's being Number 6. Indeed, even the head of the Village is known by a number, as Number 2. However, the occupant of this position changes with each episode, and Number 1, the ultimate master(s) remains unseen and unknown. Constant surveillance of the Village's inhabitants is maintained, and brainwashing and frontal lobotomies are reserved as the final treatment for recalcitrants. Yet the Village is no ordinary prison camp. Rather, it resembles a prosperous and attractive seaside holiday, resort.' Outright coercion in fact proves largely unnecessary, however, since the majority of the inmates are prepared to "compromise", to make the best of things by conforming to community life. It is this latter feature that is actually the most striking. The Village is run like an ordinary affluent community, with its own currency, shops, taxi service, newspaper ("The Tally-Ho"), art gallery, swimming pool, parks—and even social security, old peoples home, and guaranteed income! "Social alienation" is frowned upon by the authorities, and people are expected—and encouraged—to participate in community life. There is even a democratically elected council, and successive Number 2's deliver speeches in praise of "participation" and "social responsibility".

Apparently Number 6 has been abducted in order to elicit from him the reasons for his resignation from the security service. But it is soon obvious that more than mere information is required, since any interrogation that could provepermanently damaging, either physically or mentally, is ruled out by his captors. What is wanted from Number 6, in fact, is **co-operation.** The authorities seek from him a "compromise", no matter how small. For once that first small concession, that betrayal of his own values b^{y} Number 6, takes place, further inducements would obviously follow until he has betrayed **all** his values at his captors' behest. And then, of course, he would have lost all autonomy and his abilities would be at the disposal of his masters. And this is their ultimate goal. The parallel with Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged* is striking. Authority, Collectivism, all manifestations of evil, depend upon the "sanction of the victim" and upon the compliance and support Of men ability, men who of necessity must first have lost their autonomy of mind and values.

But who runs the Village? Who are Number 6's captors? Is it the Communists, or is it "our side"? Could it perhaps be British or NATO security who are simply imprisoning security risks or suspected traitors? Or is it some other criminal or political conspiracy independent of the Eastern and Western blocs, perhaps even manipulating them both? We never find out. In one episode one of Drake's security chiefs from *Danger Man* is clearly revealed as being in league with his captors. In another episode Number 6 escapes to London to inform his ex-colleagues of the existence of the Village, only to find himself once more whisked back there. But it is intentionally obscured whether Drake's "side" is instrumental in returning him. However, the identity of Number 6's captors is really irrelevant. In fact the message of *The Prisoner* is even underlined by the mystery. As Number 2 states in an early episode (at the same time giving some evidence for a conspiratorial interpretation of Village), the day will come when both sides in the Cold War will look at each other and see that they are fundamentally the same. At that moment, he observed, they will both realize that the system functioning in the Village is the ideal type of social control. It is the trend of the present and the society of the future.

Clearly, McGoohan had progressed far from the "common-sense" context of Cold War platitudes to the realization that in fighting the "enemy" we in turn are becoming the very mirror image of the society we supposedly oppose. (This, of course, was the Orwellian vision of many of the Isolationists, "Old Right" intellectuals, and Revisionist historians in America—as it is of the contemporary Radical Libertarian movement.) Just as Orwell's *1984* was actually a portrayal of the political **essentials** of 1948, of the conflict of equally nefarious and ruthless power blocs, so McGoohan's Village is a portrayal of the essentials of,our own society—with its vicious bromides of "social responsibility", its dominant ideologies of altruism and collectivism, its conformity, and the paternalist coercion of the "Welfare State". And if our society has not **quite** reached the state represented by the Village (and this is surely more debatable as every day passes) then it is only a matter of time. The essentials are the same.

The theme of *The Prisoner* was strikingly clear, then: the Man versus the State, Autonomy and Individualism versus Regimentation and Conformity, **the Individual versus the Collective.** The series undoubtedly. fulfilled one of Ayn Rand's critieria for inclusion in the top rank of Romantic art; it possessed a theme which was among the —fundamental, universal, timeless issues of man's existence" .7

Technically, *The Prisoner* was brilliant, certainly the most imaginative and dazzling television series ever executed. There was nothing in it which was not calculated to illustrate McGoohan's theme, to create the impression he wished to create. Take the Village itself: its rather sickly Mediterranean style architecture combined most effectively with the sinister technology of surveillance and repression to evoke the sense of a cloying and "benevolently" despotic society. Similarly, the omnipresent figure of Number 2's mute and dwarf butler (played by Angelo Muscat); the carnival-like happenings in the Village, its colourful trappings and the casual dress of its inmates; "Rover", the horrific man-sized balloon which guarded the Village and which possessed the power to asphyxiate its victim; the unexplained symbols of authority in the Village"; all these things helped to create the nightmare vision of life in a totally planned and regulated society.

The same qualities of imagination and inventiveness were also manifest in the plot-themes of each of the seventeen episodes of *The Prisoner.* Their variety, originality, and sense of drama never faltered. And, despite their basic seriousness, they never lacked wit. Consider, for example, the episode "Living in Harmony". Who could have expected "Harmony" to be not simply that perennial collectivist weasel-word, but a Wild West township?! Into this township Number 6 found himself transposed in another bizarre attempt by his captors to break his "disharmonious" will. Equally audacious in conception was the episode in which the Prisoner's personality is transferred into the body of another individual. For virtually the whole episode another actor (Nigel Stock) thus played Number 6. On a different, but equally effective, level was the episode in which the Prisoner wakes up one morning to find the Village totally deserted. Although puzzled he seizes the opportunity to make his own nautical instruments, construct a raft, and embark on another escape bid. The depiction of his preparation and voyage takes up nearly half the episode. Not a word is spoken, and there is. very little background music. yet one's attention is riveted upon what occurs on the screen. One is enthralled by a vision of human efficacy, will, and determination.

The examples of outright wit and humour to be found in *The Prisoner* are, in fact, countless. But one incident was especially amusing, however. An arts and crafts show and contest is organized in the Village, and for once Number 6 allows himself to be chivied into participating. Is this to be his first fatal compromise? However, while all the other entries—portraits, sketches, statues, busts etc.,—are in the likeness of "our glorious Leader, Number 2", only that of the Prisoner's is not. His is a strange abstract work carved from wood and which attracts respectful attention, if not understanding. Seemingly entering into the community spirit the Prisoner even purchases the winning entry, a large tapestry of the face of Number 2. And then the real nature of Number 6's "compromise" becomes clear. His abstract composition turns out to be the easily reassembled parts of a boat! And the tapestry makes the perfect sail! In fact, McGoohan frequently combined a serious philosophic intent with an almost black-comedy-like sense of nightmarish horror. In the episode "Checkmate", for example, we find a chess game being played on a giant board in the Village. The pieces" are the Villagers who move according to the commands of the two players sitting overlooking the board and who give their instructions over megaphones. However, when one of the "pieces" spots a winning move which his controller has missed and moves of his own accord, a crisis ensues. Alarm bells sound and the offending "piece" is removed for "adjustment" in the mental hospital. "A sudden attack of egotism", explains an onlooker to Number 6. "It's not allowed—the cult of the individual".

But, of course, what finally remains in one's mind long after *The Prisoner* has finished is McGoohan himself and his performance. Never before in television or the movies had the autonomous individual, the man of self-esteem and efficacy, been conveyed in such a manner. Alert for any chanceof escape, keeping physically fit with the equipment he has constructed himself, Number 6 demonstrated that even in the face of his captors' massive resources he could still, by the use of his intelligence, outwit them. But it is not simply McGoohan's undoubted skills as an actor which made his portrayal of the Prisoner so impressive; it was the fact of his emotional and intellectual **commitment** to the role that he himself had created. Number 6, the Prisoner is, we sense, McGoohan himself. I doubt if any other contemporary actor, no matter how good at his craft (and few **can** actually begin to rival him) could have begun to convey what McGoohan did.

However, what really secured for *The Prisoner* its place in the highest rank of Romantic art was its achievement of "the perfect integration of plot and theme . . with superlative virtuosity"." McGoohan avoided that failing to which so many artists with strong convictions are liable, that of *imposinghis* ideas upon his work. Never did he simply tack some philosophic sermon onto an essentially unrelated plot. Rather, the events of each episode of *The Prisoner* proceeded from, and perfectly dramatized, the theme. Likewise, excitement and action were never sacrificed for the sake of the "message"; they too emerged from the very plot-theme. And, of course, all the plot-themes were characterized by an audacity of imagination, by a "superlative virtuosity". So consistently high were the standards of the whole series that to isolate for analysis any particular episodes or sequences almost necessitates rendering a slur upon the remainder. However, a number of specific examples were especially notable.

The sequence that opened the series and which was repeated in a slightly condensed form at the beginning of every episode established both the thematic and narrative background—and did so in a superbly dramatic manner. To the sound of a crash of thunder and the opening chords of the theme music McGoohan zooms into view in his Lotus Elite sports car. Speeding through the London streets he arrives—via an underground entrance—at his destination. We then see him striding angrily down a long tunnel until he reaches a secret office. With a dramatic pause in mid-doorway he storms in and hurls down his resignation, his fist repeatedly striking the desk of his boss. Suddenly we are presented with the view of McGoohan's personal file being marked "Resigned" amidst a vast automatic filing system—a system which stretches into the distance as far as the eye can see! We then return to McGoohan, who is speeding back to his home. But as he enters it, a sinister hearse appears in the street outside. And while he is packing he is rendered unconscious by a gas which is administered through the keyhole by the "undertakers". He awakes to find himself in a comfortable apartment in the Village. The sequence begins to draw to a close with a dialogue between McGoohan, now Number 6, the Prisoner, and an unseen Number 2:

> "Where am **I?"**
> "In the Village."
> "Where is it?"
> "That would be telling!"
> "What do you want?"
> "Information."
> "You won't get it."
> "By hook or by crook—we will."

And then we see McGoohan fleeing down the Village's beach. He turns, his fist hurled defiantly in the air as a beam of sunlight catches him and his words ring out: "I am not a number. I am a free man!" The scene fades to the sound of Number 2's contemptuous laughter. Undoubtedly, this sequence constitutes one of the finest and most dazzlingly dramatic pieces of televison or cinematic art ever produced.

Direct statement of the issues involved in *The Prisoner* was not absent, of course. Number 6's ringing declaration, "I will not be pushed, filed, indexed, stamped. briefed, debriefed, or numbered. My life is my own", runs like a thread through the whole series and is repeated in both flashbacks and dream sequences. However, two episodes, "A Change of Mind" and "Carnival of Death", were particularly striking in both their dramatization of the basic theme and in their forthright statement of it. The former, "A Change of Mind", was especially compelling in its portrayal of the pressures for social conformity and the acceptance by the Villagers of the ethics of "Duty" and "Society" . In it we were shown the democratically elected "community courts". Their function, however, was not to punish but to "help", to "rehabilitate" those "disharmonious" individuals who commit the crime of being "unmutual". States one court member, "We all have social obligations ...social duties' . A suitable underlining of the point is provided by the posters we see adorning the walls. From them the smiling face of Number 2 gazes down. His finger points at the observer, and the slogan beneath declares: "Your Community Needs You!"

The episode "Carnival of Death" was similarly explicit—and horrifying. In their hatred for Number 6's resolute individualism the other inmates of the Village turn on him in a mob. Much of the dialogue throughout the episode underlined its message. In one instance Number 6's personal surveillance Observer is speaking about him to Number 2: "He can't do what he likes", she states. "He's an individual", replies Number 2, "They're always trying". At another point the same Observer tries to "reason" with her charge; "I have my duty to everyone", she explains. "You're a wicked man. Have you no values?" "Different values", replies Number 6. And in the climax of the episode, when the Prisoner is hauled before a kangaroo court presided over by an odiously sinister female Number 2, the following exchange takes place:

Number 2: "It's the duty of us all to care for each other .. .Without discipline there would be anarchy".

Number 6: "Hear! Hear!"

However, in my view it was the penultimate episode, "Once Upon a Time", which was most memorable. The episode was an extremely cerebral, abstract dramatization of McGoohan's theme, and had great visual impact. Indeed, its set often bordered upon the surrealistic in appearance. In this episode the first Number 2—played by Leo McKern—is allowed by his superior(s) to implement the "ultimate" method of breaking the Prisoner's will and discovering the reason for his resignation. Accompanied by the Butler, Number 2 and Number 6 enter a specially prepared room which is secured with a time-lock set for one week. A trial of wills is going to take place between Number 2 and Number 6, we are informed, and only one of them will emerge alive. In fact. Number 6 is hypnotized and reverted to childhood and then led to re-live various major events in his life—all concerned principally with questions of authority and obedience. "The lone wolf belongs to the wilderness. You must conform . . . You are a unit of society". This is the lesson that Number 2 tries to drum into the Prisoner. Needless to say, he fails, and due to some prior conditioning by his master(s), expires. The week is now up, Number 6 is victorious, and the door of the room opens. The scene is set for the final episode.

The final episode, "Fall Out", was, of course, to be the dramatic and thematic resolution to the series. No doubt most viewers expected some dramatic escape from the Village andthe exposure and defeat of its controllers. Such expectations were not fulfilled. Or, rather, they were not fulfilled in the straight-forward manner customary to the television thriller. Most episodes of *The Prisoner* had in fact manifest a certain tension between a Romantically Realist and a Romantically Symbolist dramatic nature. There had always been present a strong tendency to abstraction, symbolism, and non-realism. Indeed, this had lent a great deal to the visual impact of the series. The final episode, however, saw the complete abandonment of realism in an explosion of symbolism, visual effect, and parody. Given the thematic importance of "Fall Out" and the difficulty of interpretation felt by so many viewers, a considerably detailed examination is necessary.

"Fall Out" opened with a resume of the penultimate episode in which Number 6 had triumphed over Number 2 in the trial of wills. Emerging from the room with the Butler, Number 6 is greeted by the Supervisor of the Village's control room (the only other regular in the series, played by Peter Swanwick) who offers him anything he desires. Not surprisingly, the Prisoner asks to meet Number I . The three of them then proceed down a tunnel, and we are given the first indication of the nature of the episode. For the tunnel is flanked by a row of juke-boxes playing the Beatles record "All You Need Is Love". Coming to the end of the tunnel, they enter a large cavern which is filled by computers, white-coated technicians, and armed guards—and which bears not a little resemblance to the cavern in *You Only Live Twice*. Number 6 is then seated in "the chair of honour", prior, he is informed, to the "transfer of ultimate power". He is greeted by "The President", a judicially wigged and attired individual, and by an assembly of identically robed and masked figures. Each of these figures in the assembly has a plaque on the desk before him, apparently designating the cause he represents (those which I was able to distinguish being: Welfare, Pacifists. Reactionaries, Activists, Nationalists, Youngsters, Education, Therapy, Identification, Recreation). [10] Also overlooking the cavern is an electronic eye with a large figure " I " above it, set (it is revealed later) in the base of a rocket.

The assembly has been gathered, announces the President, to deal with "the democratic crisis .. .to resolve the question of revolt". A stream of collectivist bromides follows. Humanity. declares the President, "is not humanized without force . ..errant children must be brought to heal . ..the community is at stake—and we have the means to protect it." But they, paradoxically (and typically!), he hails Number 6 for having "vindicated the right of the individual to be individual", and the assembly applauds! Yet "revolt takes many forms", the President continues, and three specific forms must be examined.

Firstly, Number 48 is brought forward, a young man of vaguely hippie demeanor (played extremely well by Alexis Kanner"), who represents "uncoordinated youth" , and whose spasmodic renditions of "Dry Bones" alternatively drives the assembly into hysterical panic or into joining him for a few bars. However, this revolt of youth "against all accepted standards", whilst perfectly natural must, in the view of the President, be abolished when the "common good" is threatened and "social function" endangered. Number 48 is thus accused of "the most serious breach of social etiquette", of "unusual clothes and unorthodox behaviour ...(and) differing from the mass of his fellows". He is therefore sent away to be brainwashed.

The second form of revolt, we are informed, is that represented by the first and last of the Number 2's (Leo McKern), who has mysteriously been restored to life. His revolt is apparently that of insubordination or disobedience, of "an established member of the establishment turning on the hand that feeds it".

In the view of the President these two forms of revolt "contribute nothing to our culture". But that of Number 6, he proceeds unctuously, is a different matter altogether. Number 6 is a "revolutionary of a different calibre. He has revolted, resisted fought and overcome coercion .. .has won the right to be a person—someone—individual ...We applaud his revolt". And then we might be in *Atlas Shrugged,* so clear is the attempt by Number 6's captors to gain the "sanction of the victim":

President: "You are a man of steel, manifestly fit to lead us—or to go ... You know the way, show us." Number 6: "Why?
President: "Your revolt is pure, honest. Lead us."
Number 6: "Why?"
President: **"We need you.** You see all. All about you is yours. We concede, plead. Lead us—or go."

And thus Number 6 takes the rostrum to make his speech in reply. But he gets no further in his speech than the word "I". He is repeatedly drowned out by the assembly which chants **"I, I, I".** Is this then the price of leadership—the renunciation of autonomy, of selfhood, of the "I"?

Although unable to deliver his reply, Number 6 is at last taken to see Number I , who apparently is in the partly concealed rocket. There ensues a climactic and confusing sequence. Bursting into the control room of the rocket, Number 6 is confronted by Number 1, a masked and hooded figure who attempts to flee. At that moment on one of the video screens in the control room Number 6 is shown making his defiant declaration, "I will not be pushed, filed, indexed ..." The fleeing Number 1 is screaming **"I, I,** I". and on the video screen we see Number 6's face rising repeatedly into view behind crashing prison bars and above an aerial short of the Village.[12] The Prisoner rips the mask from Number I , only to discover another mask in the visage of an ape. This too he rips off, to be confronted at last by—his own screaming face! The figure of Number **I** then scampers dementedly away. Apparently satisfied, Number 6 turns and proceeds to overpower the armed guards in the base of the rocket. However, before leaving he sets a delayed time-control to "Launch". Then, with the weapons he has seized, the Prisoner frees the Butler, Number 2, and Number 48. The impending blast-off has created panic in the cavern, and—to the musical accompaniment of "All You Need Is Love"-Number 6 and his companions make their escape bid amidst a flurry of machine-gunning, and general death and destruction (a scene which once more resembles the climax of *You Only Live Twice* and, indeed, of so many other spy films of the period). Alarm bells are ringing in both the cavern and the Village, and over the tannoy system is screamed the command of "Evacuate! Evacuate!" In the chaotic flight which ensues Number 6 and his companions are able to make good their escape in a motor van (the back of which is actually a barred section of the room in which the "Once Upon A Time" trial of wills had taken place). The evacuation continues, the rocket is launched, "Rover" perishes—and all to the strains of Carmen Miranda's "I Like You Very Much"!

The van containing Number 6 and his companions eventually emerges from the tunnel along which it had been travelling, and onto the A20 road into London! Number 48 is deposited on a grass verge, to be last seen hitch-hiking his way out of London. The others continue into the centre of London, to Westminster. Number 2 disappears into one of the anonymous Civil Service buildings of the area, and he is last seen, immaculately attired in pinstripe suit and bowlerhat, entering the Houses of Parliament. Number 6, still accompanied by the Butler, at last returns to his home, where his beloved sports car awaits him outside, exactly as he had left it. The Butler, a quietly ironic smile on his face, turns to enter Number 6's home—the door of which now opens automatically, just as the door of his house in the Village did! And the door, we notice, is now marked "1". For an instant, too, that familiar and sinister hearse passes the house, this time without stopping. And at last. Number 6 speeds off in his Lotus, to thunder into view over the horizon in the identical shot which had opened every episode in the series. In the last few moments of the episode each of its major actors is named in caption: Alexis Kanner, Leo McKern, Angelo Muscat; all except McGoohan, that is. For as McGoohan drives away the caption still labels him "The Prisoner".

What, then, are we to make of all this'? What, specifically, is the meaning of that climactic confrontation with Number **I?** Was McGoohan stating that Number 6 is imprisoned by his **self,** by his own refusal to compromise for the "common good"? At least one critic made such an interpretation: "the truth seemed to be a kind of self-humiliation in which McGoohan discovered that his personal ego was the beginning and end of his troubles".'{ But such a view seems so contrary to the spirit of the series, that one finds it hard to countenance. Moreover, although McGoohan refused to offer any detailed explanation of the final episode, his general comments regarding the series revealed a distinctly individualist and libertarian motivation. "The series", he stated, "was posing the question `has one the right to be an individual?"' .[14] ..."It's all about the dehumanizing, the loss of individuality which is happening to us all. It's something I have been wanting to say".[13] [3] " I was concerned with the preservation of the individual and his liberty.'

It is certainly clear, I think, that Number 6 remains at the end "The Prisoner". But why? One libertarian critic has suggested that McGoohan's point was that "escaping is not enough for it is very easy to fall back into the trap if you just don't bother to remove it." '[7] Number 48 returns to the life of irresponsibility and aimless wandering. Number 2 returns to the tempting prospects of political power. Has Number 6 succumbed to his own form of temptation, to the simple desire for **escape** and for the **illusion** of freedom evoked by speeding in his sports car? Has he, like Number 48, also "dropped out"? Perhaps. That merely escaping is not sufficient, that **resistance** to the forces of State, Society, and Social Duty is vital, may well be part of McGoohan's theme. This would certainly fit in with the more fundamental message of the final episode and the entire series—a message that seems to me to be very close to the ideas of Ayn Rand. McGoohan's basic theme throughout *The Prisoner* was surely that responsibility for our lives and our society resides within ourselves—within the **self.** In other words, it is the "sanction of the victim" upon which the despotism of State and Society ultimately rests. The individual **can** resist and question authority and the dominant social values, or he can, as most people in fact do, abdicate the responsibility, abdicate autonomy and individuality, and succumb to Society. It is within "Number 1", one's self, that the decision is made as to whether one is a "prisoner" of Society or not.

Was the final episode of *The Prisoner an* artistic success? Personally, I didn't find it as aesthetically pleasing as the preceding episodes. It lacked, **I** felt, the tighter construction and self-discipline that had characterized most of the others. The abandonment of realism for symbolism was certainly not reprehensible in itself. The question is, was that symbolism clear and effective? Although the **basic** symbolism and meaning of "Fall Out" was, in my view, quite clear, it was not without ambiguities in some instances. Whether

McGoohan had in some places sacrificed symbolic clarity for visual impact is a moot point. The general issue involved in evaluating the final episode has been summed up rather concisely by a libertarian commentator: "Perhaps it was a mistake on McGoohan's part to abandon his narrative in favor of his symbology in this last episode, but on reflection, it is difficult to see how he could have made his point otherwise. Part of the point, of course, was to make people think. That isn't easy. A dramatic, clear-cut ending with the situation fully explained would have been fun to watch and it would have been a great piece of television—possibly a great piece of film. But it might have obscured McGoohan's message and McGoohan is a man who takes his message and responsibilities seriously." ' A more straightforward ending might well have obscured one of the major points, that the Village was not simple the scene for a dramatic adventure, with no connection to the real world. Rather, the frank non-realism of the final episode, and of Number 6's emergence from the Village into London, underlined the message that the Village is, in essentials, our world at the present time.

The critical response to *The Prisoner* in Britain was quite stunning in the lack of comprehension it manifest. We were informed, for example, of the "absence of any continuity between the episodes ...(of the lack of any) logical progression in his captors' extraordinary attempts to break him, (of) logical pattern to his escape bids—or, indeed, to anything else" . '' And the television critic of one leading daily paper declared the final episode "as baffling as its predecessors with no solutions given to any of the problems . ..the lasting impression was of a heap of hokum carried off with all the smoothness of a confidence trick ".[20]" Thus, in an age in which those works portraying the "human condition" as essentially one of depravity, irrationality, and helplessness receive endless praise for their "sensitivity" and perceptiveness, a work portraying individualism, rationality, and commitment to values is "hokum". In an age in which the ever more confused and obscure works of the avant-garde receive enthusiastic and pretentious analysis, *The Prisoner* is "baffling"! Quite rightly did Ayn Rand declare art—and she should have added criticism—the "sum and barometer of a culture". The reception granted *The Prisoner* was indeed a graphic demonstration of contemporary cultural bankruptcy. If most critics and viewers found *The Prisoner* mystifying it was due fundamentally to no faults inherent in the series. Rather, it was an eloquent confession of how alien are the ideas of individualism and liberty to the modern consciousness. To minds so imbued with the altruist and collectivist ethos *The Prisoner* was simply incomprehensible.

Given the intellectual and aesthetic power of McGoohan's individualist sentiments in *The Prisoner,* the thought of what might result should he ever discover and embrace the ideology of contemporary Radical Libertarianism and Objectivism is a tantalizing one. But whether such an occurence should ever take place or not, *The Prisoner* will always remain an inspiration to those involved in the struggle for individualism and liberty, to those who will "not be pushed, filed, indexed, stamped, briefed, debriefed, or numbered" and who wish to make their life their own.

NOTES

1 Ayn Rand. *The Romantic Manifesto: A Philosophy of Literature* (New York, Signet Books, 1971), p.75.

2 *!Ibid, p.* 75

3 A total of 88 episodes of Danger *Man* were made. The first 39 were each half-an-hour long, and distinguished by a great deal of physical action and excitement. The following 49 were extended to the hour-long format and placed far less stress of the simple "cliff-hanging" type of drama. Plots became progressively more comples and subtle in nature and more serious in theme. McGoohan's own influence over the series obviously grew, and in some of the later episodes he was even able to exercise his talents in script-writing and directing.

4 McGoohan's praise for *Brand* is surely a clear indication of his sense of life. His description of the play as "a passionate rebuttal of our, or any age", would suggest that it was *Brand's* almost Nietzschean text and its portrayal of uncompromising commitment to values-rather than its disappointingly weak "God is Love" ending—which appealed to McGoohan.

5 Although un-named throughout most of *The Prisoner.* McGoohan is called "John" and "Drake" in a few instances. Also, one of the security chiefs—played by Richard Wattis-from *Danger Man* is featured in an episode of *The Prisoner.*

6 In fact, exteriors were actually filmed at Hotel Portmerion. in Wales. an exclusive and expensive private resort built and owned by one of Britain's leading architects.

7 Rand,, *op* p 72

8 The penny-farthing bicycle and even. in one scene, the Bavarian Illuminati pyramid and "all-seeing eye"!

9 Rand, op. *cit.,* p. 72.

10 Given the message that emerges tram the whole episode. It is probable that McGoohan meant to convey the idea that all these apparently diverse causes are really the same in basic nature. All seek the submersion of the individual for "the good of the cause", whatever it happens to be. All require the destruction of the critical, autonomous self in favour of "The True Believer".

11 Kanner had also had a major role in the "Living in Harmony episode.

12 This was actually the shot on which each episode had ended.

13 James Thomas, in *The Daily Express* (Londonl. Unfortunately. I failed to make a note of the exact date of this. and the following. press reviews and articles.

14 Quoted by Anthony Davis, "Patrick McGoohan Talks", *The TV Times.*

15 Quoted by Denis Holmes in *The Daily Mail* (London).

16 Quoted by Mike Tomkies, "This Man McGoohan", *Photoplay Film Monthly,* June. 1969, p. 14.

17 Gerald W. Page, "The Prisoner", *Metro Magazine,* November, 1968. p. 7.

18 *Ibid.,* p. 7. McGoohan had in fact repeatedly stated that: "I wanted to make people talk about the series. I wanted to make them ask questions. argue and think". (Quoted by Anthony Davis, *op. cit.)*

19 Anthony Davis, *op. cit.*

20 Peter Knight, in *The Daily Telegraph* (London).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

To my knowledge only two other serious analyses of *The Prisoner* have been published, both written by libertarians. These were: Gerald W. Page, "The Prisoner", *Metro Magazine* (Intercollegiate magazine of the Metropolitan Atlanta, Georgia, area), Vol. 1, No. 1, November, 1968, and F.R. Chamberlain, "Individualism Comes To Television", *The Individualist,* Vol. 2, No. 3/4, March/April, 1970. [The cover of *NLN'* s second anniversary issue had a penny farthing bicycle (pictured elsewhere in these pages) and the symbol for "Number 2", both taken from *The Prisoner.* It was published in January, 1972, with a February cover date.—SEK3]

Anyone interested in acquiring the British press reviews of *The Prisoner* and some of the interviews with McGoohan can obtain photocopies (at cost) from this writer.

Given his praise for it, those interested in McGoohan's work would do well to read Ibsen's *Brand.* And anyway, it's an extremely pleasureable and worthwhile exerience in itself—Brand is surely among the world's greatest drama, certainly of those in verse, and is absurdly neglected at present.

This article first appeared in New Libertarian Review (The Journal of the New Libertarian Alliance, New York, USA) No. 34/35, September 1974.

1983 Postscript: Since writing this essay I have seen The Prisoner several times again. Moreover, a number of interviews with its principal creators have taken place that enable one to make a more accurate evaluation of many aspects of the series. In the light of these facts I believe my view of the final episode expressed above is incorrect. I shall return to the subject in an article "'The Prisoner' Revisited", which will appear in a future issue of New Libertarian.