

canon Essay Contest Winner: 1st Prize

# *Offensive Art: Polemic as Comedy and Exposition*

by Mark Grueter

*The art of invective resembles the art of boxing. Very few fights are won with the straight left. It is too obvious, and it can be too easily countered. The best punches, like the best pieces of invective in this style, are either short-arm jabs, unexpectedly rapid and deadly; or else one-two blows, where you prepare your opponent with the first hit, and then, as his face comes forward, connect with your other fist: one, two. Both are effective; but they can be administered only by a real artist, with a real wish to knock his enemy out.*

—Gilbert Highet

*I rise to pay my small tribute to Dr. Harding. Setting aside a college professor or two and half a dozen dipsomaniacal newspaper reporters...he writes the worst English that I have ever encountered. It reminds me of a string of wet sponges; it reminds me of tattered washing on the line; it reminds me of stale bean-soup, of college yells, of dogs barking idiotically through endless nights. It is so bad that a sort of grandeur creeps into it. It drags itself out of the dark abyss (I was about to write abscess!) of pish, and crawls insanely up the topmost pinnacle of posh. It is rumble and bumble. It is flap and doodle. It is balder and dash.*

—H.L. Menken

In the late 1970s, conservative Norman Podhoretz wrote an article titled, "The Culture of Appeasement," in which he attempted to demonstrate that Americans, because of the Vietnam debacle, did not like war anymore. He then compared America to England in the 1930s where a strong pacifist movement existed, led by the homosexual community. In 1979, Gore Vidal countered with the following: "Aside from the fact that quite as many faggots like war as heterosexualists (Cardinal Spellman, Senator Joe McCarthy, General Walker), the argument makes no sense. When the English were ready to fight Hitler, they fought."

Podhoretz is not exactly disinterested. As a publicist for Israel, he fears that a craven United States might one day refuse to go to war

