

Another Photographic Investigation

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John Ralston Saul Interprets

Here it is. That moment in Greek theatre when all is known but nothing is understood, least of all by the perpetrator. The masks are all turned, revealing one side of the truth to the spectators. Those who wear them have only an eerie sense of their own uncontrollable role in someone else's fate.

Begin on the right. Daniel Johnson, Premier of Quebec. A clever man. He knows how to state his case, but he has been overstating it in Paris. Certain people there have chosen to understand him in a Manichean manner: the appearance of good versus evil because it just happens to suit French foreign policy. Look at his expression. Happy yet unhappy. He has made this happen. He is about to get what he thought he wanted, only it will be much more than he wanted. In place of caring support he will get self-interested interference. It will destroy his party and feed his enemies on both sides of THE question. His success here is an act of inadvertent suicide.

To the left, Norah Michener, wife of the Governor General. More to the point, an intellectual. Look at her tension. Instead of moving forward, she holds back. She senses something is wrong. She is the only one who is as smart as Charles de Gaulle.

Next, Roland Michener, the Governor General. Experienced politician, former speaker of the House. A man of solid instinct and charm. He knows men. He is filled with justified self-confidence. Indeed, moves with confidence. But his eyes. They are filled with questioning. Why is the visitor in uniform? What is wrong about this arrival? They do not share the same subterranean male experiences. How can he handle this?

Next to him, Charles de Gaulle, President and former general. Brilliant strategist. He is launched upon his adventure. He has dressed for his role. He has scarcely put on his uniform since 1945. This costume is a theatrical signal. To whom? To the United States. What is the message? He is here to destabilize their continent. They have troubled him in Europe, he will trouble them in America. Besides, eleven years before, during the Suez Crisis, Lester Pearson, the local prime minister, was central to the humiliation—as they saw it—of France and Britain. And so, as in his military theories of rapid flexible strategy, he is making one of those sorties that should destabilize the other side.

But look more closely. The uniform is comic on an old man with a large belly. He is too unsteady to sustain his speed. He needs both hands on the railings to carry off his arrival. His left foot is uncertain. His expression is caught between pleasure at his soon-to-be-revealed theatrical coup yet...and yet...is it worth it? To every action there is a reaction. Has he miscalculated? He is curiously out of his depth. He has never understood North America, francophone or anglophone. Look at his hands, his arms, he is willing himself forward, yet, at the same time,

instinctively, he is pulling himself back up the ramp. This sortie is the beginning of the end of his presidency. It will demonstrate in France that he is getting old, cannot be counted on.

At the extreme left is the General's aide-de-camp. He has put on weight in his Palace job. His uniform is too tight. This makes the sleeves ride up in a silly way. It's awful to look silly in a tight uniform. He is worrying about that.