

ELVIS

by **FELIKS TOPOLSKI**

The artist-editor-author-publisher-printer of Topolski's Chronicle, the London fortnightly, recently visited America. These are his drawings and comments on an American-Greek-god-sex-hero phenomenon

RECENTLY AT A TV variety audition, the wise girl who conducted it held forth for me expertly on the merits and demerits of Elvis Presley. I was just preparing my *Chronicle* on him and I suggested that she write for that issue a professional piece of assessment as if, job-seeking and unknown, he had come for an audition. She was agreeable then, but later must have lost heart. She became unobtainable on the telephone.

Indeed, the Presley case escapes the purely expert measure. I, as an irresponsible amateur, can only attempt a few random shots—hoping that, however wide, they will encompass the mark:

The public's behavior is tremendously conditioned nowadays by the ever-present TV, film and press cameras. The speakers at the Presidential Conventions, when mounting the rostrum, would go through an extraordinary ritual of ham-acting: big gestures, toothy smiles, embracing, kissing their State's pennant—all out of character as revealed in the meek speech-delivery which would follow, all utterly for the benefit of the cameras. Any crowd conscious of being "recorded" will also ham-act to the limit its expected part. *Life* showed some time ago a series of photographs taken during a Presley act: groups of young females "beside themselves" as if on the edge of an epileptic trance. How far did these catch the truth, or merely camera-conscious amateurs eager



Presley with his manager and agent

ELVIS *continued*

to act the elation which was expected of them?

These films, these photographs, are pushed out to the millions and engender "mass snobbery"—the inescapable order of behavior. And joy at be the core of the matter. Not Mr. Presley . . .

After a full day made up of Presley's rehearsals, his TV show and his teen-agers, I was inclined to see the whole as a piece of skilled *management-cum-crowd-snobbery*. The teen-agers demonstrating at the stage-door, with mounted policemen and barriers to restrain them, seemed gathered, as any crowd, by curiosity—and, as any crowd out for a spree, eager to be amused and to show off. Their noisiest outbursts were good-humoured, either caused by the appearance of Mr. Presley (having been chanted to the window of his dressing-room) or by press photographers staging a momentary pandemonium for a "take."

When, before the Presley appearance, the announcer prepares the public (that is, the girls) and tries out the loudness of their unison-scream ("Is that all you can do? Try again!"), he is working not on their libido, but on their "esprit de corps." Indeed, Presley's face shows, again and again, a childish and rather touching surprise mingled with contentment when a single swing of his hip causes unfailingly the SCREAM.

But this cannot be all. Some people talk learnedly of his possessing the secret of the youngsters' emotional mime-cum-sound, which apparently withers with maturity. (Some talk of his great acting gifts, some of his Greek god features.) I watched him closely at a press conference and rather liked his good, posed-into-toughness shape, but was worried by his facial diversions from Greek exemplars, such as the upturned tip-of-nose, sloppy half-open mouth and also sloppy but half-closed eyes.

Yet the "god" aspect must not be dismissed.

My generation's puberty was rather private. We would steal our parents' books, thus learning the theory long before they thought it the right time to give us their progressive enlightenment. Nowadays, as in antiquity, Sex seems to be becoming an open and foremost preoccupation of the adolescent—in fact, it is developing its public rituals. The chosen god-symbol, supplied periodically from amongst the "Stars," serves as the approved fixation-object for awakening desires.



No photographers near . . .

ELVIS *continued*

And, since his sanctification is performed by the supremely august Business of Entertainment, the young virgins are free, even encouraged, to sublimate their urges in the public rites of adoration.

But, however mystically chosen, why Elvis Presley? Because, I think, he possesses very happily the godlike value of all-embracing popularity: he is vulgar, yet stylish in the "zoot" manner—hence he appeals both to the sophisticated and the simple. And his manhood is above suspicion . . .

Elvis Topol

P.S. Yet here is still another assessment. Back in London, my daughter Teresa, age 9, gave this verdict: "Better than Roy Rogers."



The cameras appear