Weird pictures are one of the few pleasures of the presidential campaign season, which in 1956 coincided with duck-hunting season in Minnesota. You remember Michael Dukakis, back in 1988, wearing a strange Tail-Spin Tommy helmet, his head protruding from the turret of a tank. If he had any chance of winning the presidency, that picture pretty much closed the door to the Oval Office. There was Calvin Coolidge rusticating out West in monogrammed chaps (“Cal”) and a war bonnet. Nixon on the beach at San Clemente, fully dressed in a dark suit and tie, but barefoot. By their foolishness and vanity (or lack thereof), ye shall know them!

But Adlai E. Stevenson is a special case—the egghead candidate, the thinking person’s choice, the urbane, liberal divorcé with a multisyllabic vocabulary, the confidant of Eleanor Roosevelt. Here he is, on the campaign trail, taking theatrical aim at a flock of ducks along the Mississippi River, under the enthusiastic direction of Leonard Schwartz, director of the State Department of Conservation. “Here they come, Gov’nor! Let ’em have it!”

A gentleman more at home at a Junior League tea or a United Nations forum on nuclear energy has become the mighty huntsman, the stalwart slayer of wildlife, a man’s man after all. The sort of woodsman Wendell Anderson represented on the cover of Time magazine in the summer of 1973, where he was pictured holding up a trophy northern. “The Good Life in Minnesota”: a man, a gun, a rod and reel, a lake, a river, a forest—O Pioneers!

Embarrassing to the candidate himself, one hopes. Demeaning, to Adlai and his supporters. Peculiar in retrospect. Funny.

—Karal Ann Marling

Karal Ann Marling, a professor of art history at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, has written books on topics ranging from Minnesota’s state fair and Disney theme parks to Normal Rockwell, Mamie Eisenhower, and Elvis’s Graceland.