

against the organized coercers. The movie is a defense of a century-old creed, unapologetic, hardnosed. It presents the case for the productive contract as against the contract to restrict production by violence. It says, in short, that collective coercion is not preferable to family solidarity and hard work.

The language is earthy in places, in the same way that the language in "Patton" is earthy. It is not forced; it is part of the culture of the lumber town in Oregon. It fits in as well as the magnificent scenery does. And the final scene is the most delightfully obscene film footage in recent years.

## Prejudices, First Series

### The Machiavellian Novelists

IF THE AMERICAN novel is in immediate danger of extinction it may be a result of overproliferation. Perhaps the population explosion applies as much to fictional characters as it does to human beings.

Although it is fashionable to proclaim that the novel is in terrible straits, the observant critic cannot be so sure. The novel as an art form, the novel as literature in the Aristotelian sense, is in trouble, but it always has been. In the last thirty years we have seen only a few good novels emerge from the clutter of the best-seller lists, among them Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, and, perhaps, Saul Bellow's *Mr. Sammler's Planet*. But we have also seen a considerable increase in the publication of novels of all types, mostly designed to appeal to the mass market and produce a goodly income for the author (is there no doubt that Jacqueline Suzann and Erich Segal are the dirty and clean sides of the same sheet?). Yet new forms of fictional treatment are in constant development, regardless of their literary merit. Some, such as the contemporary naturalism displayed so beautifully in Joyce Carol Oates's *Them*, have been critically noted and acclaimed. Others, operating under the imperative of Gresham's Law, have not been worth seriously bothering about.

Of the latter group, one relatively recent arrival on the fictional scene has been the political novel. Personally, I am a fanatical follower of the political novel. This might be an awkward confession, to admit allegiance to a school of writing which one critically dismisses. However, I recently read Jacques Barzun's excellent study of the detective novel and decided to cast pretension aside.

The political novel is not even a poor cousin to the novel-as-art-form, but it is a direct and profitable heir to the novel-as-popular-amusement. It is a

When it finally comes, don't be surprised if the demure little grandmother seated behind you shouts, "Lay in on them, Hankus!"

What amuses me most, however, is the genuine, authentic, rustic cabin which serves as the Stammers' dwelling. It cost well over \$100,000 to build. You just can't get cheap rusticity these days. It makes you wonder how the rustics ever could afford it.

Gary North

Gary North is on the staff of the Foundation for Economic Education.

distinct genre within the general classification of the entertain-and-sell species. Ever since *Advise and Consent* hit the top of the charts, the political novel has become a familiar addition to the obligatory offerings of our larger publishing houses. *Seven Days in May* showed that the political novel was here to stay. Both of these novels sold so well, received such publicity and were so original in concept that they may be considered, respectively, as archetypes of the two different kinds of political novels. *Advise and Consent* represents the conflict class, in which the struggles and machinations involved in attaining higher public office are minutely described. Other examples: *The Last Hurrah* (which discloses the machinations involved in holding on to public office), *The Election*, *The 480*, *The Image Makers*, and the other Aller Drury novels in the A&C series.

The second group, which intrigues me more, is the Machiavellian novel, in which a conspiracy is uncovered or unravelled or revealed, shocking us with the final revelation. The founding father of this particular subspecies was *Seven Days in May*. In recent years it has been followed by such attempts as *Night at Camp David*, *Vanished*, *The President's Plane is Missing*, *The Jesus Factor*, and recently, *Their Man in The White House*. (I'll also throw in *Fail-Safe*, although in that case the evil genius was a machine whose malfunction led to the accidental elimination of Moscow.) The Machiavellian novels have common characteristics, which is a euphemistic way of saying that they share common flaws.

To start with, the conspiracy novels are on the whole pretty bad books. That is, they all rate high on the entertainment scale and at the very bottom of every other scale. Publishers and reviewers sometimes describe them as suspenseful but this is an opinion

which is open to doubt. (I stayed up all night reading *The Jesus Factor* — Mario Puzo, author of *The Godfather*." Q.E.D., Mario Puzo is an incurable insomniac.)

An English teacher of my acquaintance regards them generously as "heavily plot-oriented." That is their virtue and their sin. While the plots are often mildly interesting, they are just as often idiotic. First, the story line is usually based on an improbable hypothesis. When the entire book is based on a silly notion, the author must work hard to make it turn out to the reader's satisfaction. Most of these writers don't have that much energy. *The Jesus Factor*, for example, is based on the idea that the atom bomb really doesn't work. When it is set off automatically it will explode, but when dropped from an aircraft or delivered on a missile it won't, a phenomenon which Edwin Corley's fictional scientists blame on an unknown attribute of the atom bomb, hence the title of the book. Neat, huh? Likewise, *Vanished* asks the reader to believe that a presidential adviser can disappear on the ninth hole of the Burning Tree Golf Course without the President, the FBI or the CIA knowing or being able to discover what happened to him. Perhaps I value the President, the FBI and the CIA too highly.

Second, the authors, having committed themselves to an absurd idea, depend

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on flimsy and implausible gimmicks to get off the hook. In *The Jesus Factor* the author makes his leading character a United States senator and presidential candidate who, by the merest coincidence, was a member of the task force which delivered the Bomb to Japan at the close of World War II. The senator, through a series of happy discoveries, draws from the fact that his Bomb didn't work when dropped on Tokyo the conclusion that no atom bomb works (he gets helpful hints from the Prime Ministers of England, France and Israel; the senator is a bit slow). Hiroshima? That's easily explained: on the morning of August 6, 1945, an American reconnaissance plane flew over Hiroshima, noticed that an earthquake was occurring, ordered an air strike which laid a magnesium burst over the city ("like the glare of a thousand suns"), and, well, everybody **thought** an atom bomb had exploded. Drink enough Cold Duck and you could invent such a plot. In *Vanished* the action swings on the assumption that in order for a top presidential adviser to make a secret rendezvous with the Red Chinese he must publicly disappear into thin air, causing national consternation. The main character and narrator of the story (sometimes the author steps in to narrate, just to confuse matters) is a presidential press secretary who is just as much in the dark as the reader. Henry Kissinger couldn't have done a better job of disproving every thesis on which this book rests. *The President's Plane Is Missing* begins with an interesting question: what would happen if Air Force One crashed in an uninhabitable and largely unreachable area? The book holds its excitement for a while, until we discover that the author has resorted to the gimmick of switching doubles (the president's cousin), so that the President can hold a top-secret summit conference with the Russians. You see, the President didn't really die in the plane crash but nobody — not even the Vice President — can be told because it would blow the meeting. Got it?

The third and most damaging accusation I can make against the Machiavellian novels is that they are so totally predictable. Any reasonably intelligent person who knows that the author has to find a solution and present a happy ending can guess at the solution long before the author is willing to surmount the contrived obstacles he has placed in the reader's way. *Vanished* and *The Jesus Factor* become transparent before the reader reaches the middle of the book. *The President's Plane Is Missing* is harder, because it requires that the reader be able to guess how the author is going to trick him. I was not able to do this, mainly because I do not like authors to trick me and I like to give them the benefit of the

doubt when it looks like they are about to *Seven Days In May* stands heads-and-shoulders above the others in this respect, because the reader is willing to follow the internal logic of the novel and to accept the results (However, one must accept the presumption that our military leaders would overthrow the government if they had half a chance. I haven't seen any evidence of such boldness in our military leadership).

Not only are the plots unfounded, illogical, implausible and spiced with plenty of unacceptable trickery, but the writing is usually awful. The characters are mere stick figures, the scenes are awkwardly handled, the research is poor and the knowledge of the actual workings of government is skeletal. The sex, which is a good standard measuring device, is thrown about haphazardly, usually with little or no connection with the story. One suspects that the Writers Union has decreed that each bad book will have at least one inept, superfluous and boring sex scene. The authors fulfill this obligation religiously.

Despite it all, I'm still hooked on them. Just as I continue to puff my cigarettes with the full knowledge that each good gasp brings me a minute closer to the grave, so I continue to read each new political novel with a half-hearted acceptance that I will be smirking by the end of the second chapter. And sometimes, I am happy to report, my dreadful habit leads to a pleasant discovery.

1971s: "sleeper" was *Their Man in the White House*, a first novel by a young Canadian named Tom Ardies. The reasons why Mr. Ardies decided to employ his considerable talent on a Machiavellian novel are as mysterious as the best portions of this book; I suspect that he was testing to see if he could publish. At any rate, I am glad he made the decision, because he has provided *aficionados* of political fiction with that rarest of all rare gems, a decent book. But before I start speaking in superlatives I must report that this book does not entirely avoid the pitfalls of the *genre*. Ardies depends on a few tricks, including a switch of look-alikes.

"BETWEEN 1952 AND 1972 federal expenditures for national defense rose from \$46 billion to \$77 billion (a rise of 66 percent). During the same period, federal expenditures for health, education and welfare rose from \$5 billion to \$85 billion (a rise of 1,346 percent). File under Military-Industrial Complex."

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In this case it is a sin I am willing to forgive because it is well-done.

The novel revolves around a young writer who accepts an undercover CIA assignment to protect a soon-to-announce presidential candidate at his villa in Mexico. The incumbent president is worried because every announced candidate for the upcoming election has been assassinated. Needless to say, a plot is suspected. Ardies takes us from his hero's encounter with the candidate (a multimillionaire modelled on Dallas entrepreneur James Ling) through a series of adventures, misadventures and near-misses to a conclusion which leaves us with a glow of amazement. Ardies weaves his tale with a graceful style and a humorous insight. As we follow him through the various interlocking plots and counterplots we have to give him credit for momentarily baffling, then enlightening us— but never to the point where we either give up or catch on. Only the best storytellers can touch that thin line without crossing it.

Writers of Machiavellian novels have a long way to go before they can attain the level of competence demonstrated by their brothers in the conflict class, or by their cousins in the detective and spy *genres*. Tom Ardies has brought the Machiavellian novel one step closer to respectability by producing a decently balanced, original, plausible and well-written book that manages to hold the intended suspense to the very last sentence.

Which proves that it can be done.

### Wick Allison

Wick Allison graduated from the University of Texas in 1969. He worked on the Scranton Commission and is presently a free-lance writer, residing in Washington, D.C.

### THUGS

(continued from page 3)

to accept widespread — and increasing — racist policies. Spreading the anti-racist movement and the fight to stop Banfield to every school where his book is used is a very serious question for the lives of millions. There's a lot of discussion in SDS about how to do this best. Here are some ideas: 1) Start petition campaigns condemning the book or demanding it be thrown off campus; 2) Write letters to school papers exposing it; 3) Put on guerilla skits in classes where it's used; 4) Confront the teacher and demand he or she not support this racism; 5) Write us. We can help by sending you info on schools near you where the right's already started and by mailing out lit against Banfield and his racist brothers and sisters... Another scholar who has been an object of the SDS campaign is Richard J. Herrnstein, a



## The Bootblack Stand



Dr. George Washington Plunkitt, our prize-winning political analyst, has just completed a penetrating study of the last Congolese election. Published in August, it focuses on the unique position of minority groups in the Congolese electoral process; it can be purchased in all bookstores. It is titled *Escape! A New Demand Response System*. Now, through this column, the distinguished Dr. Plunkitt has agreed to advise American statesmen in this time of troubles. Address all correspondence to The Bootblack Stand, The Establishment, R.R. 11, Box 360, Bloomington, Indiana 47401, Continental U.S.A.

Dear Mr. Plunkitt:

Why does no one remember that I stormed through the Illinois Primary with a landslide 63 per cent?

E. Muskie

Dear Mr. Muskie:

You were running against an unemployed about-to-be divorced Catholic poet.

—GWP

Dear Mr. Plunkitt:

!&?\*!((\$, you should be able to help me out. Those \$\*?&!?! senators run me over the coals and its impossible to get a word out edgewise with all those \$f\*&?!\$\* newsmen around. How can I re-establish my reputation as a dignified, honest lady lobbyist.

Dita Beard

Dear Mrs. Beard:

Some time ago, I pointed out the difference between honest graft and dishonest graft and as I said, "I seen my chances and I took 'em." Frankly this whole ITT thing sounds silly to me. Who would throw an antitrust suit for money that didn't even go into their own personal bank account?

—GWP

Dear Mr. Plunkitt:

It has come to my attention, quite by happenstance, that a letter allegedly signed by me and written on Senate stationery was published in your May column. I say by happenstance because I never read, for I realize that so much more can be learned by just talking to folks and that printed matter is elitist and the work of fat cats who lack compassion and understanding for the people.

Now I never wrote that letter, and, in fact, I rarely write at all, having

only recently learned how to spell my name. As that letter made me sound stupid and unsympathetic to the problems of the people I demand an immediate retraction from your column. I realize that your publication of this letter was an attempt at political assassination of me by conveying to the people the fallacious notion that I write letters to fat cat elitists and running dogs.

Senator Name Withheld  
Evansville, Indiana

Dear Senator Name Withheld:

You have me wrong. I never would do anything to hinder your gorgeous career, for it has provided vast amusement to me throughout the years. Indeed, I was surprised to see that you actually wrote a letter, but then I thought you might have put one of your enlightened aides on the project. I should have known that the letter was not your work. And, certainly, I would have caught on to the real source had I but read the newspaper at the time your letter arrived in our offices. You see, at that time there was an escape by several patients from the Indiana State Insane Asylum. Had I been aware of it I would have been more attentive to their mischief. Incidentally, one of the patients is still at large. I expect he will be nabbed when he enters the governor's race this fall.

—GWP

Professor of Psychology at Harvard University. Mr. Herrnstein came under attack following the publication of his article "I.Q." in the September 1971 issue of *The Atlantic*.

In his article, Mr. Herrnstein recounts the development of intelligence tests and reviews some of the literature on the concept of intelligence, the relations between intelligence, education and socio-economic status and the effect of environment and heredity on intelligence. When he considers the extent to which intelligence is a product of environment or heredity, he takes up two articles by Arthur R. Jensen, a professor at the University of California at Berkeley and another object of the SDS campaign. Mr. Herrnstein agrees with Mr. Jensen and others that about eighty per cent of the variation in intelligence is attributable to heredity. Mr. Herrnstein states that Jensen's two papers leave little doubt about the heritability of I.Q. among North American and Western European whites, whom most data on the subject describe," and he notes that there has been little controversy over this finding. On the other hand, there has been much controversy over the extent to which racial differences in I.Q. can be attributed to genetic differences between blacks and whites. Mr. Herrnstein argues that, given the current state of knowledge about the matter,

nothing conclusive can be said right now but he maintains that, given "sufficient ingenuity and hard work," knowledge about this matter can be substantially improved.

Mr. Herrnstein advances an argument about the role of inherited intelligence in a society in which success is based on merit. At one point, he puts his argument in the form of a "syllogism":

1. If differences in mental abilities are inherited, and
2. If success requires those abilities, and
3. If earnings and prestige depend on success,
4. Then social standing (which reflects earnings and prestige) will be based to some extent on inherited differences among people.

Mr. Herrnstein lists five "corollaries" to this "syllogism" and he then concludes that "the syllogism and its corollaries point to a future in which social classes not only continue but become ever more solidly built on in-born differences." Mr. Herrnstein believes "classlessness is elusive because people vary and compete for gain — economic and otherwise." He notes the efforts of reformers who hope to achieve classlessness by improving social conditions and making the environments in which people live similar or even identical. But, as he points out, reducing the effect of environment on variations in intelligence necessarily

increases that of heredity. The paradox is that, in a meritocratic society, efforts to eliminate classes based at least partially on non-genetic differences help to produce or reinforce classes based largely on genetic differences. Since the publication of his article, Mr. Herrnstein has been given the works. At Harvard, radicals involved in the anti-Herrnstein campaign have held meetings, passed out leaflets, and put up posters. One poster, many copies of which appeared on the Harvard campus during the first semester of this past academic year, was a "Wanted" poster produced by the Harvard chapter of SDS and Harvard's radical University Action Group (UAG). Besides characterizing Mr. Herrnstein as "Pigeonman" — most of his laboratory research has been on pigeons — the poster misrepresented what he says in his article. For example, the poster said that, in his article, Mr. Herrnstein offers this definition: "Blacks: A low-capacity residue unable to master even the common occupations." What Mr. Herrnstein really says in his article is: "As the wealth and complexity of human society grow, there will be precipitated out of the mass of humanity a low-capacity (intellectual and otherwise) residue that may be unable to master the common occupations, cannot compete for success and achievement, and are most likely to be born