

## Toobin Wins Coogler Again!

# The Worst Book of the Year

R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr.

**T**he season of cultural awards is upon us. The Grammys! The Pulitzers! All are decided by smooth orthodox minds pledging in unison their devotion to unorthodoxy. All hold to a dozen or so myths about Art; for instance, the myth that Art is always obnoxious, blasphemous, and occasionally smelly.

And yet, today's critics throw few eggs. They mostly applaud. Whether operating out of New York or Council Bluffs, they generally serve as public relations agents for the touring Artists and poetasters. And who slaughters the modern novelists or the boring journalists? The most fashionable critics are those who shout *hip-hip-hurrah* at whatever is pumped out by the *Kultursmog*, and it apparently never occurs to them that they might be adding to the fame of dolts while genius is ignored.

Pulitzer Prize committees are lobbied by public relations firms, media organizations, and the candidates' neurotic relatives. Yet committee members remain convinced that they can find the non-conformist genius, the pariah Artist. Genuine talents suspect the humbuggery of awards.

The story is told about Mencken and Nathan getting wind of their friend Sinclair Lewis's nomination by the Pulitzer Prize committee for *Arrowsmith* and prevailing upon him to reject the indignity. Years later, when he was menaced with the Nobel Prize for literature, Mencken made heroic efforts to reach Lewis and preserve his honor. Unfortunately Lewis was drinking with his alcoholic wife and too stewed to

accept Mencken's call. He became the Nobel laureate and never wrote another word worth reading. Today writers accept Pulitzers and Nobels even while sober, a state that afflicts them all too often.

For twenty-seven years *The American Spectator* has attempted to deflate the award mania by conferring the J. Gordon Coogler Award for the Worst Book of the Year. We are not perfect, but we repose in the confidence that the Coogler Committee regularly comes much closer to finding the year's worst book than the Pulitzer Committee comes to finding a distinguished book.

This year the Coogler Committee is charting new artistic waters. Usually a literary award is given for a recent work, occasionally posthumously for a life's work. Following George Gilder's belief that all paradigms are there to be broken, this year the J. Gordon Coogler Award is being given to a writer *prematurely*; we know what the sap thinks, we know the book will be bad, why wait?

Last year Jeffrey Toobin signed a contract with Random House to write a book on the "inside story" of the recent presidential election with special attention to the Florida infamies. Toobin's past books have been so slipshod, his present utterances on his idol, Bill Clinton, so stupid (Quoth Toobin on the Clinton impeachment: "Clinton was, by comparison, the good guy in this struggle."), that no reasonable person can fairly doubt his ability—if only he will put in the work!—to snag the coveted Coogler.

Neither the Pulitzer nor the Nobel judges have ever acted so boldly. But we owe this bold achievement to Toobin.

He has inspired, and this first for us is really just another first for our honoree.

Of course this year's award makes Toobin a rare two-time winner. Last spring at the White House Correspondents Dinner I congratulated him on winning our 1999 Coogler for his admirably devious, slavishly pro-Clinton *A Vast Conspiracy: The Real Story of the Sex Scandal That Nearly Brought Down a President*. He seemed delighted. Any recognition a Washington flak can attract is always good for advancement.

One of the distinguishing features of Toobin's work is the slipperiness of his partisanship. Toobin has been a perfect patsy for the Clintons while deftly posing as scrupulously objective and authoritative. In his next book he is promising to give the definitive account of the famous Florida recount. And who was one of the main figures in that recount? David Boies. And who served as Toobin's lawyer in that repellent row with his former employer, Independent Counsel Lawrence Walsh? David Boies. Random House is justly proud of its unbiased chronicler.

The spectacle of Toobin writing on Boies is another example of the *Kultursmog*. Such is the power of the *smog* that the Democrats' electoral defeat will for years be passed on as a victory. Books such as Toobin's will pump out more poisonous particulates presenting it as such. Such is the power of the *smog* to confuse, to generate moral phantoms and historical hallucinations, that in Florida it has raised to the level of injustice what in prior years was merely an incompetently cast ballot. The "undercounted ballot," the "overcounted ballot," all were once dismissed as incompetently cast. Now they are seen as the cruel consequence of a conspiracy of Republicans. Toobin in his last book spread the falsehood that the Clintons were the victims of conspiracy. Now he will spread the falsehood that the entire nation was the victim of conspiracy. He deserves another Coogler. 🐭

# Dodge Ball and the Damned

## NERVE.COM

*Award-winning writer Mr. Gerald Hannon courageously decides to keep his day job, even if journalism is only the world's second oldest profession:*

Fact is, I had become a prostitute. A whore. I had—I have—sex with men for money... I'm also a frequently published journalist who has

## CURRENT WISDOM



won three National Magazine Awards. Perhaps there is nothing new under the sun, but I feel part of a new social phenomenon: whores with attitude, men and women who choose this profession, men and women who have perfected that most ingratiating of personality traits—shamelessness. But it is a shamelessness untarnished by insolence, by the bravado of those who suspect they are in fact quite as trashy as everyone thinks they are. It is a sunny shamelessness.

*(February 22, 2001)*

## THE PRESBYTERIAN LAYMAN

*An important bull from the Rev. Dr. Barbara as deposited in the alien purlieus of PL.*

*Incidentally, having quit Planned Parenthood owing to its fuddy-duddyism, the Rev. Dr. is now a leading light in the growing movement for noninvasive sex:*

As a committed liberal and ordained minister in the PCUSA, I have never read your magazine. I faithfully toss it into the trash each time it comes. However, the one particular issue, Vol. 33, No. 6, caught my eye because of the article on an African-American woman named Condoleeza Rice. It would, naturally, because most intelligent African Americans have the sense to be Democrats and be liberal.

I turned and read the article and was appalled at the description given. Now, I finally understand why we are on opposite sides on the basic issues of our faith. First, she was described

as single. (How does her marital status contribute to her skills and talents?) Second, she was labeled as black (not even Black), rather than African American. Third she was described as attractive and a woman with charm. Why does it matter what she looks like?

It would truly be helpful to simply quit determining a person's worth by their externals.

*(January/February 2001)*

## EDUCATION WEEK

*Will it never end? First they take the kids' cigarettes, then their dodge balls. Will condoms be next?*

Mr. Williams [chairman of the Health and Physical Education Department at Eastern Connecticut State University] dubs dodge ball as the worst remnant of games that a new breed of physical education teachers and health educators say provide little in the way of fitness conditioning and inappropriately use people as targets. Other offenders that share the not-so-flattering spotlight include Duck, Duck, Goose and Red Rover. "Dodge ball is one of those games that encourages aggression and the strong picking on the weak," said Mr. Williams.

*(February 21, 2001)*

## WASHINGTON POST

*Mr. Vincent Schiraldi makes a curious criticism of our tax dollars at work:*

The 1990s were a punishing decade for America, with nearly as many people added to our prisons and jails as in America's entire history prior to 1990. These policies were particularly devastating to the black community, as one in three young African-American males was put under criminal justice control and states shifted funds from higher education to prisons. Fittingly, the number of adults and juveniles locked up in America topped the 2 million mark at the decade's end.

*(February 5, 2001)*

## BALTIMORE SUN

*Addressing an agog conventicle of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Mr. Julian Bond describes the present Administration just before boarding his flying saucer and heading for home:*

Instead of uniting us, the new administration almost daily separates and divides. They selected nominees from the Taliban wing of American politics, appeased the wretched appetites of the extreme right wing, and chose Cabinet officials whose devotion to the Confederacy is nearly canine in its uncritical affection.

*(February 18, 2001)*

## WASHINGTON TIMES

*The Kultursmog's final analysis of Campaign 2000 as iterated by one of the smog's lesser smokestacks, Democratic National Committee Chairman Terry McAuliffe:*

You know this: If Katherine Harris, Jeb Bush, Jim Baker and the Supreme Court hadn't tampered with the results, Al Gore would be president, George Bush would be back in Austin, and John Ashcroft would be home reading *Southern Partisan* magazine

*(February 6, 2001)*

## WORLDPOP.COM

*In answering an inquiry as to whether he will perform with crooner Ricky Martin, techno-musician Moby reveals a return to spiritual values:*

I would consider doing something with Ricky Martin if, and only if, he publicly apologises for performing at George W's inauguration and if he confirms that when he danced next to George W. Bush at the inauguration he could smell brimstone and that George W. Bush is in fact the spawn of Satan.... If Ricky Martin goes on national television to confirm that George W. is the spawn of Satan then I will perform with him.

Otherwise no deal.

*(February 23, 2001)*