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vertently wins the "Miss Rhode Island" title and thus becomes a contender for "Miss America." The supposed sensibility of a Seven Sisters college girl is to be brought down upon the undoubted vulgarity of the beauty pageant world.

A condescending recent movie about a beauty pageant, *Smile*, now often appears in the television listings, along with a few made-for-TV imitations. For television programmers the appeal is obvious: the great ratings potential for a format which can accommodate pretty actresses galore.

For writers the subject seems to have two perverse attractions: the required chastity of pageant participants and the ugly aspects of American middle-class culture. With chastity abolished as a conventional virtue, the lives of those of whom it is still asked retain dramatic possibilities which screenwriters lust to explore. The clumsy satirical attack upon obvious middle American targets—as well as the cartoonish television representation of rich people—seem to be a part of a kind of "class imperative" which has New Class screenwriter/novelists satirizing, usually broadly, those "above" and "below."

The promise of something better which *Miss Rhode Island*, with its bright heroine, seems to offer is smothered in authorial brilliance. Where Stephen Alter contorts his voice to suit the supposed first person tone of his various characters, Norman Kotker puts all their thoughts into his own excessively clever voice. The capabilities of this voice are more interesting to him than his characters or their fates, and perhaps with good reason. It's a grim view from behind their eyes. But it's even uglier from his. Occasionally, the author will veer off into amazing punning soliloquies—"Miss Maine, I want to Bangor! Miss Mass., feel that ass!" and worse.

The clichés about characters "not coming alive" can and should be applied to *Neglected Lives* and *Miss Rhode Island*; but beyond technical failure—they seem to deny life, not just fail to

create it. As to the old creative mission of the novel, Kotker is not interested, and Alter is not able. For whatever reason, the negative becomes so terribly accentuated in these books that to blandly greet them with appreciative

remarks would involve almost a breach of faith; criticism is, in their cases, not attack but counterattack. There is a recipe for philistinism here, but with our popgun we are not going to kill off any masterworks. □

In Search of Cons* Appeal

Craig Schiller: *The (Guilty) Conscience of a Conservative*; Arlington House; New Rochelle, N.Y.

by Kenneth Kolson

Those who get excited about bio-rhythms, or who otherwise have a fetish for periodicity, can find much of interest in American electoral history. Since the founding of our republic there have occurred, at remarkably regular intervals, certain elections that may be termed "critical," in that they resolved old debates, defined new issues, and drew the lines of partisan combat for succeeding generations. It is generally agreed that these elections occurred in 1800 (the "revolution of 1800," according to Jefferson; it was the death knell of the Federalists); in 1828 (a second Adams vanquished; Jacksonian mobs flowed into Washington like the "revolting silo juices of Ohio" that were to turn Mencken's stomach a century later); in 1860 (the party system of a riven republic fails; the party of the Union prevails); in 1896 (McKinleyism triumphs over the silo juices); and in 1932 (McKinleyism expires; Big Brother is conceived). Each period is associated with a dominant party, and, as John Zvesper puts it, "each of these parties, although born in intense conflict, has yet been so victorious that it has been able to enforce its own principles as a consensus."

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*Conservative, of course.

Readers who have been keeping score will note that another electoral realignment was "due" during the 1960s. At the time there were good grounds for believing that it was occurring. For one thing, critical elections are often accompanied or preceded by strong third party movements (the Populists of 1892, for example, or the Progressives of 1924), and in 1968 the American Independent Party, apparently on cue, came close to throwing the presidential election into the House. Even the "surge" that so often follows on the heels of realignments seemed to have occurred with the Nixon landslide of 1972. Intelligent observers such as Kevin Phillips seemed justified in proclaiming an "emerging Republican majority."

But Jimmy Carter's victory in 1976—so often attributed (wrongly) to his resurrection of the original New Deal coalition—now seems to have put the lie to the Realignment hypothesis, and gives new hope to regular Democrats and the practitioners of the Old Politics generally. What gives? It is now becoming evident (to me, at least; many political scientists would disagree) that the parties are not in the process so much of realigning as of assuming room temperature. Reports of their immortality, it seems, have been greatly exaggerated.

If the Democrats and Republicans (it is hard to know which has the more passionate death wish) do go the way of the dodo, it will not necessarily mean an end to the periodic convulsions that have punctuated American political history. Still, it is hard to know how

principles can be expected to triumph in a nonpartisan political system. The American Way has been for principles to become synonymous with a party, and for those principles to be imposed during that party's period of dominance. Under the present circumstances conservatives are entitled to wonder whether their principles have any future in American politics; Republicans are right to wring their hands over their party's gloomy prospects; and an intelligent man (William Rusher, for example) can be expected to ask why the fortunes of the former should be inextricably wedded to the fate of the latter.

Craig Schiller's *The (Guilty) Conscience of a Conservative* raises these questions and more. It has as its thesis the contention that "the development and clarification of conservative theory are ultimately the only means of reviving the sagging political fortunes of American conservatism"; implicitly, the book suggests that the fate of conservatism does not depend on the survival of the GOP.

The first chapter of the book aims to measure the lengths to which mainstream conservatism—here represented by the *National Review*—is willing to go to stay in tune with the times. By orchestrating a sort of mock debate between William F. Buckley, Jr. and L. Brent Bozell, former editor of *Triumph*, Rabbi Schiller shows that today's "conservative" holds almost exactly the same opinions as yesterday's "liberal." Having made its peace with *Brown v. Board*, social security, etc., the editorial line of *NR* today is a sort of echo of the voice of '50s liberalism—*The New Republic*, for example. Rabbi Schiller does not mean to suggest that conservatism, properly understood, is an inflexible creed; a petrified vestige of premodern politics. His point is simply that "respectable conservatism no longer possesses the vitality and firmness that a strong grasp of basic principles, together with starkly advanced programs, automatically results in."

Chapter Two ("What Is Conservatism?") seeks to remedy this situation; to discover what conservatives have in common with one another. It is a short course in modern conservative political thought, introducing us to the writings of M. Stanton Evans, Frank S. Meyer, Eric Voegelin, Frederick D. Wilhelmsen, Donald Atwell Zoll, Russell Kirk, and Thomas Molnar. His treatment of these writers, while cursory, is for the most part admirable. Those shying away, for whatever reason, from total immersion in this literature would find this essay quite useful.

Chapter Three explores the relation between conservatism and tradition, and Chapter Four analyzes the failure of four notable political campaigns that have been launched from the Right

since the forging of the first New Deal coalition by FDR in 1932 (viz., the Landon, Taft, Goldwater, and Reagan campaigns). The moral of this story is that there are two things wrong with contemporary American conservatism:

"First, the American conservative movement has failed to understand and relate to the aspirations of the majority of men. Second, the American Right has clung to an imagery that may have been appealing in the 1890s, but frightens the contemporary citizenry."

Chapter Five shows that a majority of Americans are, so to speak, latent conservatives. A review of the relevant survey data leads Rabbi Schiller to the following conclusions:

In the forthcoming issue of *Chronicles of Culture*:

The Oldest Conflict

"Writing about writers is a genre itself, and great and mediocre novelists have availed themselves of it because it affords so much opportunity for aimlessness *qua* freedom in the storytelling. That something poignant and artistic will emerge from a book about a writer is an assumption often made quite without reason."

from "Unintended Sadness and Unspeakable Confusion"
by Edward J. Walsh

"One of our favorite pastimes in Moscow was discussing how quickly human beings everywhere take for granted *any* new reality as something inevitable, natural, usual. For example, we were sure that once the Soviet regime had been established in the United States, in no time at all Americans would just be puzzled that someone could see in it something unusual, avoidable or even interesting."

from "The Berlin Wall: To Be Taken for Granted"
by Lev Navrozov

also:

Opinions & Views—Commendables—In Focus
Waste of Money—The American Scene
Screen—Liberal Culture
Journalism—Polemics & Exchanges

"From these statistics it becomes apparent that the American citizenry is still very much committed to what may be described as a conservative position on the so-called social issues. Americans believe in God, Judeo-Christian morality, and traditional concepts of crime control. They will listen to legitimate calls for justice. Sadly, due to the leftist domination of the media, these facts are mostly overlooked."

The problem is that the rhetoric of conservative politicians—the rhetoric of Herbert Hoover and John Foster Dulles—offends the ordinary American. Those people who wear smile buttons, or who go around saying "Have a Nice Day" are not, as Gore Vidal maintains, "clones"; but they aren't conservatives either, precisely because they have embraced the sanguine liberal mindlessness of the lonely crowd. Their good-natured optimism means, as Rabbi Schiller knows, that they will not take instruction from a Hoover or a Dulles. So how are they to be approached?

In Chapter Six Schiller indicates that the successful conservative politician of the future would have to be a kind of American Disraeli. He would have to be perceived as identifying with the "common man"; he would need "both humor and humility"; he would have to show "a fervent loyalty to traditional faith and old-school patriotism"; and he would:

"stand four-square against the abuses of the welfare state and four-square in favor of its legitimate practices. He would court the approval of special-interest groups like labor or ethnic minorities, but not in the manner of the liberal establishment, which caves in to their every demand; he would separate the justifiable from the absurd. Ideally, he would have risen from humble origins and thus could quite literally fulfill his image-projection."

Such a politician would be a fresh face indeed. For in America conservatism

has all too often worn the dour, bah-humbugging countenance of John Adams. This brand of conservatism has served well to temper American liberalism, a creed that, while largely unexamined by its partisans, boils down to a belief in Progress and the love of equality; or, as Schiller puts it, to "egalitarianism, the innate goodness of man, and the infinite plasticity of human nature." The ubiquity of this creed means that the torch of liberalism may be carried, more or less gracefully, by even the most pedestrian of men. But the cause of conservatism, if it presumes to be something more than a dyspeptic reaction against the liberal creed, needs truly gifted leaders: men such as Washington, whose virtues made him seem larger than life even to his illustrious contemporaries, or Lincoln, whose humility and sense of irony rendered him immune to ideology. The greatest conservative leaders have been men who have eschewed the politics of passion, and of interest, and who, donning the Sweet Smile of Reason, have moved through a Hamiltonian world with all the serenity of Jefferson himself. Such men are rare; more ordinary fellows will need a little help from Dr. Frankenstein's of Madison Avenue.

This brings up the one respect in which Rabbi Schiller's book is unsettling: it is quite clear that Schiller thinks that conservative politicians need to practice deceit (just one example: the successful conservative politician of the future, according to Schiller, would "have to enjoy—or at least give the appearance of enjoying [emphasis added]—crowds, handshaking, parades, press conferences, and all the rituals of mass-suffrage democracy"). In other words, pressing the flesh and exuding compassion for the downtrodden is designed as a cover for conservatism, which can't reveal its true face. Schiller seems to think that there is no difference between this type of deception and that of the New York City politician who honors a venerable American tra-

dition by stuffing his face full of bagels, kielbasi, pizza, barbecued ribs, and canapés as he rides the circuit of ethnic neighborhoods. But this institution, like Tammany Hall itself, is harmless precisely because no one would ever dream of attributing anything ideological—anything liberal or conservative—to it. Schiller's American Disraeli, on the other hand, is at once more cerebral and more calculating. Since he doesn't come by his gregariousness naturally—the way Hubert Humphrey did, for example—there is something decidedly comical about him. One contemplates Schiller compiling an itinerary for his Disraeli (read Jack Kemp or Phil Crane) on the hustings:

- 6:30 AM Breakfast with Buckley brothers
- 7:15 Tape interview with Phyllis George
- 9:00 Skull session with Eric Voegelin at Notre Dame
- 9:15 Greet workers at auto assembly plant; don cloth cap and bowling shirt
- 9:45 Rap session with Merv Griffin
- 10:25 Return Solzhenitsyn's phone call
- 10:30 Take limousine to Peoria, read Spengler en route
- 12:00 Chamber of Commerce luncheon; wear polyester leisure suit; order "lite" beer
- 2:30 PM Confer with George Meany; smoke cigar
- 4:00 Visit workingman's bar in Gary; drink Stroh's
- 7:00 Deliver Leo Strauss lecture, University of Chicago.

And so on and on.

This juxtaposition of conservative philosophy with neopopulist imagery is wildly incongruous, to be sure. But

in my heart I suspect Schiller is probably right. When one considers the swollen ranks of middle-class socialists and Gucci liberals, then maybe there's nothing

so remarkable about working-class or bourgeois Tories. And turnabout is fair play, after all. Pass the Stroh's, Rabbi. □

Youth's Labors Lost

David Holbrook: *A Play of Passion*; W. H. Allen; London.

by Gordon Pradl

Has there ever been an adult who at first blush did not wax nostalgic over adolescence? We seem to have an endless capacity for such idealized retrospection. Yet when these reflections are challenged, we readily admit to the pain and suffering, the clumsy and awkward moments, that actually characterized the series of passages preceding adulthood. Indeed, it would be hard to disagree with the extreme position Shakespeare expresses in *A Winter's Tale*, "I would there were no age between ten and three and twenty, or that youth would sleep out the rest. For there is nothing in the between but getting wenches with child, wronging the ancientry, stealing, fighting." Although youth might well have been a time of boundless possibility before our categories froze and "shades of the prison-house began to close upon the growing boy," essentially it was a time of things only half-known, the "blank misgivings of a creature moving about in worlds not realized."

The trials that an adolescent faces involve seeking answers to what it means to be an adult, to what makes for life and what works against it. For this quest to be successful, for the agony of youth not to be offered up in vain, adolescents need an image of a coherent adult world they can eventually merge with. They need a facilitating environ-

ment, one which fosters integrative social values, as they struggle to infuse meaning into their probing relationships with the opposite sex, into their search for a fulfilling vocation, and into their desire for a creative interplay between self and community. Such are the major themes the British poet and novelist, David Holbrook, takes up in his latest novel, *A Play of Passion*, which chronicles the transitional seventeenth year in the life of Paul Grimmer whom we first met as a young tank officer in *Flesh Wounds*, (1966) Holbrook's powerful and graphic recreation of events surrounding the D-Day invasion of Normandy.

In *A Play of Passion* the time is 1940, the place Norwich, an east coastal town particularly susceptible to the hostilities that have already broken out. Thus the disintegrating social values which concern Holbrook have their concrete analogue in the missiles which nightly threaten the well-being of the city. Paul Grimmer is completing his final year of school before going up to Cambridge, but his benevolent and progressive headmaster has decided that at this particular juncture additional book-learning would not benefit him, so he has arranged for Paul to work part-time at the Maddermarket Theatre in Norwich. This opportunity places Paul in the larger world of art and imagination, while providing him with new bearings as he begins shaping his identity, independent of his parents and free of the materialism which clashes so with his youthful idealism.

Paul's idealism grows out of his inner feelings of communion with the ebb and flow of the natural world, an at-oneness

Holbrook evokes for us early in the novel as Paul is slowly gliding down a river in a small rowboat.

"As he watched a shoal of very small fish all lying in the same direction, and then suddenly all turning at once, to face another direction, translucent yellow, with a similar but distinct masking pattern on each back—he knew that he existed in a meaningful world. He could not formulate any meaning in relation to it; nor did he strive to . . . all belonged to a world that went on, under the sun, flowing and leaping and breathing, a slow unfolding and sweeping through the current, which had its own rhythm and purpose. And he belonged to it."

Yet from this calm center Paul goes on to experience a range of conflicting emotions. And it is Holbrook's particular strength as a novelist to be able to faithfully render the complex relationships that Paul must sort through during this troubled time. His parents, for instance, fail to understand his fears and ambitions and violent disagreements ensue, but their basic concern is revealed when they support him against a new martinet headmaster who is threatening to revoke Paul's association with the Maddermarket. Another relationship which confuses Paul is with Annie, his first girl. Although Annie awakens feelings of warmth and tenderness in Paul, she is unable to share his newly discovered intellectual and cultural interests, and thus at the end Paul is torn between jealousy and relief when she goes off to marry another.

Yet such struggles seem the normal fare of adolescence and should pose no special difficulties for the novel's protagonist. Holbrook, however, has a more pernicious drama in mind, namely that the adult landscape, increasingly dominated by the vacuous and trendy world of nihilistic culture and ideas, is failing to offer youth viable role models. It is this state of affairs which threatens to seduce Paul into false solutions to the problem of living, threatens to leave him in a void even as he works through

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