the Laffer curve as a means of analysis. Some economists charge that he fails to show how a specific tax cut, such as the Kemp-Roth bill supported by the GOP, would be sure to increase revenues. Their charge is true but trivial. Like such Keynesian concepts as effective demand, the marginal efficiency of capital, and user cost, the Laffer curve registers subjective moods and expectations: how heavily the people want to be taxed, how highly they value the services of the state. The economy ultimately depends on the incalculably changing initiatives and reactions of individual human beings. Wanniski shows that again and again throughout history reduced taxes have led to the expansion of investment and growth. Most recently the 1964 Kennedy Administration tax cut, according to the 1967 Economic Report of the President, brought three years of expansion, the keynote of which was "a major advance in business fixed investment." But like low interest rates, tax reductions can never suffice if inventors and investors are unwilling to accept the risks of innovation.

BEYOND the exposition of the "Mundell-Laffer hypothesis," Wanniski's book offers a broadly gauged economics primer, teeming with bright ideas and penetrating observations. Among many intriguing points is his theory of the causes of the 1929 crash. By a close day-to-day analysis, he shows that the market simply foresaw the catastrophic effects of the impending Smoot-Hawley tariff at a time when foreigners held heavy investments in the U.S. and owed some $14 billion to Americans. We should take warning today.

The chief weakness of the book is a sophomoric "political model" in the early chapters that is written in the general tone and spirit of the meditations of Andrew Young. Extending the "efficient markets" theory from Wall Street to the world political scene, Wanniski has invented an omniscient "global electorate" that invariably picks the best of all available political leaderships, regardless of political systems, and more or less equilibrates their political utilities across international boundaries. Assassination and terrorism seem to Wanniski only the most extreme ways that an abused or neglected electorate "votes"; and to him "it is by no means clear that [the Soviet] political economy is inferior to that of the United States." This is enough to give tax cuts a bad name; but the book survives this silliness and soars. □

The (Guilty) Conscience of a Conservative
By Craig Schiller
Arlington, 174 pp., $8.95

TORY POPULISM

WILLIAM A. RUSHER

Craig Schiller has read widely in the literature of conservatism and pondered deeply what he has read. A 37-year-old Hasidic rabbi, Schiller has the educational background and powers of analysis necessary to understand and distinguish among the various strands of American conservative thought, and in this work he gives us a guided tour of what he conceives these to be, then tells us. why conservatism has failed and how it might hope to prevail.

The book's largely meaningless title and often flippant chapter headings do it less than justice. This slim volume is no threat to George Nash's massive and magisterial *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America: Since 1945*, but in its chatty way it has a good deal to say that is stimulating and incisive.

In a devastating opening chapter entitled "The Great Retreat," Schiller demonstrates beyond argument "the general erosion of the once firmly held principles of Fifties conservatives." It is, to say the least, rather discomfiting to read again the ringing assertions that characterized (just for example) NATIONAL REVIEW in its first five years of publication. Of integration it observed: "If the majority [in the American South] wills what is socially atavistic, then to thwart the majority may be, though undemocratic, enlightened. . . ." As for Soviet imperialism, the magazine firmly endorsed the uncompromising words of the Hungary Pledge: "The Soviet regime having by the Hungarian massacre demonstrated once again its isolation from the moral community, I pledge that until all Soviet troops and police are withdrawn from Hungary, I will enter into no economic, social, political, or cultural relations with that regime. . . ."

It may be possible to explain why adherence to these positions became impractical, or even undesirable; but there is no blinking at the fact that they were, for whatever reason, quite simply abandoned. We conservatives have played footsie with Nixon and (some of us) even lunched with Kissinger, and "the clear, moralistically phrased policies of Fifties conservatism have gone the way of the dodo." But Schiller has come to praise conservatism, not to bury it, and having taken clear-eyed account of where the movement stands today he sets briskly out to "understand the inner reality of conservatism and to seek to express that reality in terms that can be politically advantageous."

First he discusses various well-known conservative thinkers and spokesmen, classifying their views, according to a system of his own invention, as "provincialist" (Evans, Meyer), "universalist"—divided into three subcategories: "metaphysical" (Wilhelmsen), "empirical" (Zoll), and "historical" (Kirk)—and "realist" (Molnar). It is the last-named category that commands Schiller's own allegiance: "Molnar's conservatism provides a firm link between theory and practice, thought and deed. Pointing to the fact that God has enjoined man to live in an imperfect world, it concludes that men of the Right must seek to protect and advance their first principles in an empirically realistic manner."

There follows an extended analysis of American conservatism, its four major political manifestations since 1932 (the presidential campaigns of Landon, Taft, Goldwater, and Reagan), and the reason for the failure of all four. This latter, Schiller identifies as the conservative movement's failure to understand its own first principles and to relate them "to the aspirations of the majority of men."

And precisely how are these highly desirable goals to be achieved? Here Schiller reveals himself as a devout supporter of the New Majority concept. Most Americans, Schiller insists—citing considerable statistical evidence—are broadly conservative; but they are turned off by two tenets of postwar conservatism: "First, its opposition to public charity, and second, its shrill

articulation of foreign policy goals." Nonetheless, "America is wide open for a Disraeli-style revival of conservatism. The people yearn for it and the times demand it. Indeed, should traditional conservatives fail to lead this revival and temper it with the insights of orthodox faith and with the inherited wisdom of the West, it could conceivably degenerate into a crude and uncontrollable populism."

Unfortunately Schiller sees no conservative leader on the horizon who perceives the opportunity and is ready to seize it. Whether one will appear in time, and receive enough intelligent and imaginative support from the conservative movement to unite it and prevail, are questions he leaves open for the future to determine.

THE NOTION that there is a conservative New Majority in this country, which—effectively uniting Republican "economic conservatives" and Democratic "social conservatives"—could dominate American politics, has been around for a number of years. It has gained added credibility in the last three or four, as public opinion polls began to report consistently conservative responses on the part of a majority of individuals interviewed. (It also recently turned out to have a convert in Richard Nixon. In his *Memoirs* the former Chief Executive—whose credentials as a shrewd political analyst are still very much in order—reveals that after his election in 1972, "I planned to give expression to the more conservative values and beliefs of the New Majority throughout the country. . . . I intended to revitalize the Republican Party along New Majority lines.")

There are, however, two influential institutions in this country whose spokesmen will deny the existence of any such "New Majority" with their dying breath. One is the liberal Establishment, which knows a threat when it sees one. Here is the source of all those pretzel-shaped efforts to explain away the poll statistics: A majority of Americans may be "notionally conservative" but they are "operationally liberal," etc., etc.

The other is the professional bureaucracy of the Republican Party, which is profoundly uneasy with the New Majority concept because it senses (correctly) that there are many more conservatives than Republicans in this country and that the best hope of uniting them all lies in some new and more capacious vehicle than the GOP. Thus we find Wayne Thorburn, executive director of the Texas Republican Party, commending to readers of YAF's *New Guard* a tortured and tendentious liberal attack on the New Majority concept (Miller and Levitin's *Leadership and Change*) which dubs social conservatives "the Silent Minority" and concedes to them a mere 7 per cent of the electorate.

The liberal critics can be disregarded, but the professional Republican opponents of the New Majority strategy cannot, because they hold in apparently permanent thrall one major component of the proposed coalition: that large bloc of economic conservatives for whom the GOP is home, and who can't see for the life of them why it isn't a good enough vehicle for the cause.

Conceivably an incumbent Republican President like Nixon, freshly re-elected and deeply convinced of the necessity to consolidate the New Majority within the GOP, could have faced down his party's liberals and forged the necessary link with the formerly Democratic social conservatives. If so, effective application of the New Majority strategy was just one more casualty of Watergate. But no subsequent political leader has had either the ability to impose that strategy on the Republican Party or the guts to employ it where it really belongs: outside the GOP altogether. Until one does, the full political clout of American conservatism will remain unfocused and diffuse—a victim of politics-as-usual and its closest ally, the iron law of inertia. □

SWELL LETTERS

Samuel Beckett: A Biography
By Deirdre Bair
Harcourt Brace, 736 pp., $19.95

AN INVENTED LIFE

GUY DAVENPORT

The crucifixion of the rabbi Yeshua ben Yosef on Golgotha Hill outside Jerusalem in the 16th year of the reign of Tiberias Caesar was, for the garrison detail that drove the nails, hoisted the cross, and stood guard, so much military routine. They laughed at the pain of the prisoner as a matter of course, the Roman sense of humor running to a coarseness and delight in cruelty that we cannot begin to understand, but they would have laughed even harder if they could have known that their butcher's work would stand in unmoving time forever, imagined again and again in paint, stone, music, and words, or that almost 2,000 years later an Irish writer named Samuel Beckett would write a play that seems to have nothing to do with the Crucifixion but which has three nails and a hammer half-concealed in the names of its four characters, Hamm, Clov, Nell, and Nagg (*hammer, clavus, nail, Nagel*).

In the fierceness of his human pain, Christ had cried out to ask why he was forsaken by God. It is that sense of being forsaken that Beckett examines in *Endgame*. He has changed the tempo of the Passion to slow motion, to a tedious, dripping-faucet pace.

TEMPO IS the clue to Beckett's bleak riddles. *Waiting for Godot* is two thousand years of Christian doubt and anguish compressed into two hours. The wonderful novels tend to absorb and radiate philosophical attitudes; *Murphy*, the first truly comic novel in modern literature, plays havoc with "Baroque solipsism," the Cartesian world of programmed automata. Beckett first understood the philosophical implications of Descartes by watching Laurel and Hardy, Buster Keaton, and Chaplin, as Hugh Kenner has shown us in *The Stoic Comedians* and his two books on Beckett.