

believes, it should be necessary or desirable to impose on it the marriage bond. Nor does his eulogy of marriage take account of the exchange of vows and the idea of a contract that is central in the traditional marriage ceremonies. Of course, vows are not easily exchanged between metaphysical illusions.

**H**ad Scruton taken a more serious interest in religion he might have noticed that the Christian idea of love has suggested the pattern of a genuine reconciliation of sexuality with morality. The love that ties God and man in the Christian picture does not rest on any unity or identity between them since God is a wholly different kind of being from man. It is rather an appreciation of a distinct kind of being, which rests not on approval or admiration but on a will to love. The object of God's love is not any part of any man, nor the species as a whole, but each person, in all his individuality, as an independent substance. Here then is a love that is wholly a decision, and wholly real, because its object is neither a projection of the lover's imagination nor a temporarily imprisoned spirit but a distinct, unique, existing personality.

A lover of this sort is to be found throughout English literature, from Chaucer on. He is discussed brilliantly in John Bayley's *The Characters of Love*, which does not appear in Scruton's lengthy and exotic bibliography. This English view of love is minutely explored, though in different ways, by both Jane Austen and Anthony Trollope, among others. It postulates that human beings are not, as Scruton believes, divided selves or at most spiritualized animals, but wholly unified intelligent beings whose rational experience includes a variety of kinds of perceptions. They are not the victims of their bodies because they necessarily choose how to interpret and respond to whatever sensations they experience. And their personalities are revealed in all their attributes, both bodily and mental. Since the object of their love is a real person, not an illusion, and since this sort of lover is the maker of his love, not a victim of it, he can choose to take into account moral as well as other considerations without destroying his love. He is therefore nothing like Scruton's obsessively possessive lover—Jane Austen's Mr. Knightley insists on teaching Emma to correct her faults just because he loves her. In short, the reader in search of an answer to permissiveness that shows proper regard for individuality would do much better to read Jane Austen or Anthony Trollope than Roger Scruton.

**P**rofessor Scruton misleads the reader not only about sex and morality but also about politics. For he is not, as he claims to be, a conservative, certainly not a conservative of the English sort. It is true that conservatives emphasize that we must draw on the resources of civilization in order to cultivate and appreciate individuality, and that these resources are made available to us by the traditions and institutions of our communal life. But Scruton is saying something very different, that the "human person" is an "artefact" of "collective endeavour," that is to say, not a reality resident in every human being. In reducing human individuality to an illusion arising out of social life and resting ultimately on the force exercised by the state, Scruton is at odds with the distinctive moral and political tradition of England.

That tradition emphatically rejects the view that he attributes to both conservatives and Aristotle, that the *polis* is founded upon "a perception of the nature of domestic relations and of the erotic bond which underlies them." This is an extraordinary reading of Aristotle, who unmistakably defines the *polis* as a form of association distinct from and independent of the relationships of family and tribe. Similarly, the idea that runs through all of British political practice, as well as philosophy, is that civil association is distinguished by its ability, which is indeed its justification, to contain within itself a variety of other forms of association. But Scruton's idea of a civil society is nothing more than an extended tribe, with "the state" its chief, issuing commands to regulate the lives of his subjects. Nothing could be further from either Aristotle's *polis* or the British constitution.

Scruton has no sympathy for the importance attached to human individuality in British political practice and philosophical thought. Yet that regard for individuality is associated with a rejection of the belief that human beings have a divided nature, and with—what is an implication of that belief—an insistence that sexual behavior is necessarily part of moral conduct. In this view, if men behave like beasts it is not because their bodies have taken over but because they have chosen to adopt the behavior of beasts. A philosophical exploration of this tradition would be able to show how sexuality can be reconciled with morality. But no such new moral understanding, nor indeed any coherent understanding, is to be found in Scruton's book. At best, he offers a sado-masochistic solution to the mind-body problem. For conservatives, his book may serve as a test of their ability to recognize and resist siren voices. □

## THE WHITE HOUSE MESS

Christopher Buckley/Alfred A. Knopf/\$16.95

R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr.

**T**his is the memoir of the unfortunate Mr. Herbert Wadlough, accountant, factotum to the governor of the great state of Idaho, and finally deputy chief of staff to President Thomas N. Tucker, Ronald Reagan's successor (if Christopher Buckley has anything to say about it). Mr. Wadlough is a man who has suffered bodily

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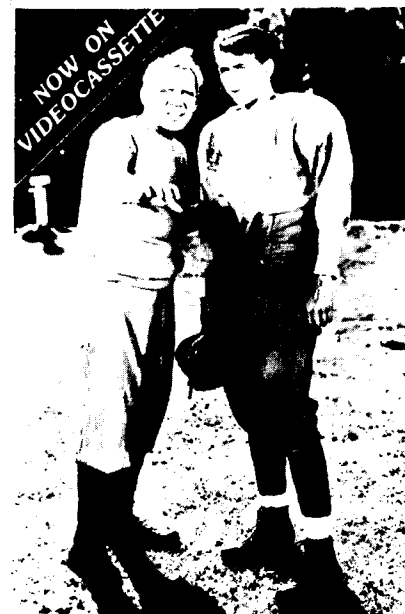
injury on numerous occasions for his devotion to the commonweal and to the Tucker legend. Readers of refined sensibility will find his suffering sycophantic and repellent. More intelligent readers will only note that Wadlough bled a lot, while we laughed.

Wadlough is afflicted by allergies, a weak constitution (he prefers a steaming cup of hot water to strong matutinal coffees or teas), and dim vision. He relies on his glasses, thick ones,

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which fog up in time of strenuous exertion and fall off in time of danger; as when Mrs. Thomas N. Tucker assaulted him while wielding a chintz pillow with "surprising force." The violence occurred in the executive quarters of the White House itself, and there the First Lady bashed him to the floor, pinned him behind a door ("I could hear her exertions on the other side as she leaned against the door, attempting, I would guess, to inhibit the flow of oxygen into my lungs"), and belabored him about the calves and shins with her shoes ("I was grateful she was not wearing high heels"). Upon retreating from her enraged presence, Wadlough is summoned downstairs to the Oval Office, and there he promptly impales himself on one of his President's favorite *objets d'art*, Frederick Hart's "Javelin."

Herbert Wadlough is the kind of precious boob whose eminence would never take him beyond jerkwater in any age but our own gorgeous era, an era when mass education puffs up millions, educating them beyond their means and booting them up with a software of high-flown patois to conceal their essential oafishness. In *The House of Intellect* Jacques Barzun, writing in the late 1950s, warned of the dangers that modern education posed to the mind. Now, with education reigning over us like an established church, our society is suffused with stupidity and mediocrity unimaginable a few decades ago, even in jerkwater.

Following in the hoof prints of thousands of other would-be Harry Hopkinses and Harold Ickeses, this Wadlough has come to Washington to serve his master and his cartoon vision of history. On Capitol Hill and in each presidential administration such amusing stoneheads are plentiful. Our own Ronald Reagan has employed them, and recently he has suffered on account of their petty shenanigans. They fret over corner offices, parking spaces for themselves and their staffs, White House mess permits, and other such immensities. They are, while they last, renowned Machiavels, held in awe by the pols and the journalists alike. Then they pass on. No longer are they the celebrated figures on the Washington cocktail circuit. Some are indicted.

When Christopher Buckley, Priscilla Buckley's nephew, served as speechwriter to Vice President George Bush he collected every telling detail of high political life, carefully pasting them into his notebooks. Now, as an amused Tacitus, he returns, and in creating the memoir of Wadlough he has written one of the most hilarious books on Washington ever to come to my attention, and I once read every memoir written by the immortal memoirists of the Carter administration. I slaved

away on that project for several hours of a summer afternoon; no restoratives were allowed me until the last word of the last page of the last preposterous book. Through the pages of this splendid tome walk many of the greatest figures of our capital city, a city that is proud to call itself "The Most Important City in the World." Read it and you will recognize some of the giants of recent times.

For the immortal Wadlough there are only discomfitures and misadventures. There is the time the President's young son inadvertently knees him in his private parts. Of course his glasses fell off. Why the young man kneed him inadvertently I cannot fathom; Wadlough deserved it. Then there is the time when the President telephoned whilst Wadlough was showering. A dutiful maid thrust the telephone into the shower, nearly electrocuting him and leaving him sprawled across the bathroom floor bruised, bleeding, and, of course, bereft of his glasses. On the Eastern shuttle he hears that his President has been shot, begs to use the plane's radio, and is immediately identified as a crank. Flight attendants batter him mercilessly. Once on the ground he is arrested and reluctant White House personnel have to go down to the lock-up to spring him. Finally there is the time that the wretch—dubbed "Auntie Herbert" by the White House staff—is summoned to accompany President Tucker on one of his seaside walks. This one takes place along slippery rocks beside raging waters and ends with the President falling head first to certain death were his fall not broken by the hapless Wadlough crawling beneath him. Wadlough is confined to hospital with "contusions of the forehead, a fractured clavicle and a ruptured plantaris."

The Tucker presidency was not a success. He attempted all the wimp gimmicks of the New Age Progressive, and he was rendered absurd and futile. Castro befools him, and the revolutionary leader of Bermuda creates a genuine threat to national security. Tucker's seaside fall takes place during his idiotic reelection campaign, a campaign that put me in mind of Jimmy Carter's last great venture into mass seduction. Seizing the moment, Tucker's PR experts turn the fall into a feat of Tuckerian heroism and announce that it was Tucker who saved Wadlough. Now begins what Wadlough himself calls his time of "public humiliation." The President is presented with scores of good samaritan awards from the Republic's scores of do-gooder organizations. Into every award banquet the presidential aides roll Wadlough, now con-

fined to a wheelchair. This was indeed a low point, but there are so many others, my favorite being when, to mollify a world-wide outcry against President Tucker's use of harmless sleep-inducing gas against Bermudian revolutionaries, Wadlough is gassed on the "Today Show" to demonstrate

the benign nature of the vapors.

Christopher Buckley has created a comic figure comparable in grandeur to the Ignatius Reilly of John Kennedy Toole's *A Confederacy of Dunces*. In an agelast city Buckley has written a very amusing book about the misogynelastic toadies. Priscilla will be proud. □

## PROVIDENCE

Geoffrey Wolff/Viking-Elisabeth Sifton Books/\$16.95

Thomas Mallon

Yale University alumni between 34 and 38 will remember the spring of 1970 for the trial of Bobby Seale in downtown New Haven. It was cool. Some of them put up Panther supporters in their dorm rooms. (Before, that is, they blew off the rest of the semester: Cambodia, Kent State—the *Strike*). I never went to Yale. I was a freshman at Brown that year. We had our strike, of course, but we had a trial, too. There was a big one that went on in the courthouse down the hill. Ours wasn't for a Panther, it was for Raymond Patriarca, the Mr. Big of the whole New England Mafia, a guy to whom Skull and Bones meant skulls and bones, not some club.

This tells you something about the difference between Yale and Brown in those days. This was Brown before JFK, Jr. started going there, before Amy Carter started sitting in in the administration building against apartheid. Before Brown stopped being the backwater of the Ivy League and got chic, which is to say before Cosima von Bülow started going there, which is to say years before her father (allegedly) sent her mommy on "that long journey to napland."

That quotation is from Geoffrey Wolff, who's just written the great Providence novel—not about "rich-bitch Brownies" on Thayer Street, but about the rest of that "runt town of 156,000," that tight little gear box of hoods and lawyers and judges and small-timers that's still not so different from the way it was in 1970. About the Providence we Brownies went into a couple of times a year. Wolff describes things a little differently than we would have—"The bakery was within handgun range of Atwells Avenue"—but he makes me remember a lot of the streets

Thomas Mallon teaches English at Vassar College and is the author of *A Book of One's Own*.

he's talking about. My friends and I once or twice forayed into Manny Almeida's Ringside lounge ("Where You Meet the Leading Sports Figures of the World," the sign said, meaning, I think, guys who used to wrestle in South Attleboro). Manny's had a separate ladies' entrance, and we thought Diane Johnson was a great girl to put up with that in 1972. We never, so far as I remember, went to Federal Hill, which Geoffrey Wolff knows about and which was populated by the ethnic group from which the Governor of New York State descends. Federal Hill? "When someone up there whispers 'be careful' to a convict, or a member of a jury, this is not the same as when your mom says 'be careful.'" No, College Hill was not Federal Hill, and never for long are those particular twain going to intertwine. (However: today's paper—March 13, 1986—reports that some Brown coeds have been busted as part of a prostitution ring, which strikes me as the closest amalgamation of town ethos and gown ethos I've ever heard of, considerably more realistic than the schemes of "community involvement" Brown students used to talk about in the early seventies.)

Anyway, Geoffrey Wolff has dropped me off on memory lane. But let me tell you: if WJAR, and the Turk's Head Building, and Almacs supermarkets and dee-jay "Salty" Brine (all in this novel) set off not one bell, nor crumble for you a single Proustian cookie, you should still buy this novel because it's probably the best one that's going to come out in America in 1986. You want Baltimore, go to Anne Tyler. Boston? James Carroll. West Texas? Larry McMurtry. But those places are out, and Providence is in. Geoffrey Wolff is best known for his biographies of the wacked-out poet Harry Crosby (*Black Sun*) and his own philandering dad (*The Duke of Deception*), but from