

Waste of Money

Krantz's Marionettes in a Puddle

Judith Krantz: *Scruples*;
Crown; New York.

Seventh Avenue symbolizes American fashion the way Hollywood symbolizes the American cinema. At the opposite ends of the continent both are pivotal in molding aesthetic choices, dreams and aspirations. Fashion's ideological organ, the New York based *Women's Wear Daily*, perverts popular preferences through manipulation of marionettes, most of which happen to be real people. Both centers affect our way of spending money, the manner in which we live, and with whom (and how) we fall in love. Whether it was the curvaceous, wise-cracking blonde and her strong, silent companion of the thirties, or the sexually ambivalent, verging on androgynous prototypes of the seventies, the interaction of these fashion centers is pronounced. Fashion—in its broadest sense—as a purveyor of *lifestyle* has never been stronger. And this is all Ms. Krantz's novel is about.

As an exemplar of today's trashy pop-novel, *Scruples* is as good a guide to what the country—or a chunk of it—wants as any other. As incarnated in its heroine, Billy Winthrop Ikehorn Orsini, it wants it all: sex, money, career, love, power and to eat Lucullan feasts and remain pleasantly gaunt. Billy, an ugly duckling turned swan who marries first for money, then for love, creates *Scruples*, the world's most lavish boutique, which combines the tastes and style of both New York and California in a mecca for the frantic, never satiated consumer. As a tribute to both sex and money—the exclusive concerns of both *Scruples* and *Scruples*—the book indulges in extravagant descriptions for a reader bent on vicarious pleasures. As a *roman à clef*, both the inhabitants of the New York fashion and Hollywood movie worlds are

enthusiastically—if crudely—limned. In spite of all their forays through the wonderland of sin-and-excess, however, the major characters ultimately find happiness in straight arrow sexual orientation and the delights of monogamy. In

effect, they all live happily ever after, which suggests that Judith Krantz, an energetic lady writing a sure-fire best seller, knows a lot about how to jump into a puddle of existential filth and come out relatively clean. □

The American Scene

The Midyear's Great Loss

Max Ascoli died on January 1, 1978. He was the founder and editor of *The Reporter* magazine, a journal of courage and distinction. He came to America from Italy, a young liberal scholar and anti-Fascist, and fell into a life-long love affair with the country. He became President Roosevelt's ardent supporter, but through the years he evolved a keen pro-American instinct which, blended with his intellectual powers and European experiences, led him away from liberal dogmatism. He saw the civilization he venerated and loved eroding in the '60s. He perceived the paradox of degeneration to be the result of self-injected venom. Long before Senator Jackson, he said, during a friendly discussion: "I am a liberal but not a fool . . ." He supported the war effort in Vietnam, and this was enough to render him a non-person for the liberal Establishment. A great editor, who introduced in *The Reporter* a whole generation of journalists, publicists and writers, he lived to see his opinions blackballed by the New York liberal press. Let's hope that, proud and sensitive as he was, he did not die disenchanted, bitter at having loved a reality which did not deserve so much devotion. □

Change of Heart

"If a SALT treaty is defeated and an arms race ensues, if detente collapses and ideological war begins, if the United States becomes sufficiently aroused to mobilize its economic resources for full

scale competition with the Soviet Union, the United States almost certainly will prevail. Our economic output is twice that of the Soviet Union. We have the capacity to force the Soviets into a military spending race that would deprive their urban middle classes of consumer items, and their lower classes of food, with unpredictable consequences for the stability of Soviet society."

Nicely put—a clean, meaty, logical, flawless, robust, impeccably substantiated by reason and fact program of geopolitical strategy. Morally and politically sound, to boot. Who is demanding it? Philip Crane? Daniel Moynihan? Solzhenitsyn? That old cold-warrior Harry Truman during a seance? No, it comes from the July issue of *The New Republic*, the same liberal organ that for 30 years has ironically sneered at any concept of coercive showdown with the Soviet Union.

The American University

In an essay entitled *Ten Years On*, David Riesman, the renowned Harvard social scientist, remarks on "the higher learning in America since the events of 1968." We can read there a sentence:

"The parents of the protesters were generally liberal or even radical. Several studies have shown that many campus activists were acting on behalf of parental ideals and with parental sympathy."

We can clearly see now, from the perspective provided by time, that the

moral and social authority of the American University was destroyed by what happened during the sixties. The American University used to be an object of envy for the rest of the world, unrivaled in both its level of scholarship (witness the number of American Nobel Prize laureates of the last 50 years) as well as in its collegiate atmosphere (as measured by the degree of respect and privilege granted to the students). Professor Riesman, hardly a non-liberal, makes it unequivocal who is to blame for the reckless annihilation of a common value—perhaps an irrevocable loss for us all.

What Happened to ERA?

What happened to ERA is a most telling illustration of what has happened to American political morality in the era of liberal brainwashing.

After the amendment failed to be adopted in keeping with the customary constitutional procedure, the House voted to extend the deadline for its ratification. But, at the same time, it forbade the states that had ratified it to withdraw that ratification.

Up to now, such a method of reaching a political goal was described as totalitarian, and our liberal press called it tyranny in Chile or South Korea. In Washington, it is called the progressive fight against the lack of women's rights—according to the formula *à la mode*.

The Mini-Orgy of Liberal Jingoism

From its dawn as “the New World,” America stirred the imagination of Europe. Then, as a society and a nation, America started doing extraordinary things for itself, and the world became fascinated and envious. Then, America welcomed every traveler, every inquiry and every scientific or reportorial research. Then, America created a marvelous, captivating literature which in its own right conquered the world and endowed it with deep insights into the

American reality, society and character. Then came the movies, and the world became imbued with both America's image and fantasies—a visual saturation on an unprecedented scale.

This constant and overwhelming flow of information has produced a special abundance of knowledge about America. This phenomenon is routinely overlooked by Americans, so when put on display it causes a sometimes unwelcome surprise. But the fact remains that if Eskimos and Albanians can with good reason tell Americans: “You know nothing about us,” Americans would be presumptuous when telling the Bulgarians or Indonesians: “You know nothing about us.” In point of fact, the Venezuelans, Swiss and Moroccans who read books and go to movies know so much about America that it would make many Americans uncomfortable.

The most profound lore of America comes from non-Americans. It would be difficult to challenge what de Toqueville knew about America with: “What could he know about us that we didn't know? How can an uppity French aristocrat understand us, our institutions, our mores?” Moreover, we can't recall any vivid protests in the liberal press when Sartre and Marcuse held forth on America's alleged calamities in the sixties. No one would have dared then. Neither the America-firsters from the *New York Times* nor the love-it-or-leave-it patriots from Greenwich Village, got up to ask: “Now, Mr. Sartre/Marcuse, what do you know about America?” The message of those two rheumatic European leftists was received as critique, and a valid one to boot.

They all rose, however, like wounded lions against Mr. Solzhenitsyn's Harvard address. The mere fact that Solzhenitsyn has countless times expressed his admiration, gratitude and respect for America and its historical accomplishments, suddenly counted for nothing. He dared to criticize the new realities of America created by the liberals and the Liberal Culture during the past two decades. He did it trenchantly and from an anti-liberal position. The *New York Times*, spokes-

man for the species, immediately ran a lead editorial, entitled: “The Obsession of Solzhenitsyn.” Archibald MacLeish, in his otherwise restrained and tactful polemics in *Time*, nevertheless assumed that Solzhenitsyn: “. . . knows little of our American lives or of ourselves.”

The most perverse—unwittingly, of course, as this sort of perversion requires intelligence—summation of the episode can be found in the title of a newspaper column by a certain Mary McGrory: “Solzhenitsyn doesn't love us.” Poor Ms. McGrory. It is beyond her grasp that Solzhenitsyn just does not like her.

The Invincible Strategy

In an article published not long ago by *The Wall Street Journal* and entitled: “Failure of Nerve—or Intellect?,” the cutest of our intellectual magicians, Professor Arthur Schlesinger wrote:

“Look at Indochina today. The Communist states are at each other's throats. Communist Vietnam, the country that our official fancy portrayed in 1964-70 as the stooge of Communist China, has today the most tense relations with Communist China. The security of the United States is totally unaffected by the communization of Vietnam.”

Professor Schlesinger sounds as if this outcome is what the anti-war liberals consciously and programmatically anticipated from the very beginning of the conflict. It looks as if Schlesinger and his consorts had meticulously planned this Machiavellian foreign policy coup. Why did they tell us nothing about this devilishly clever stratagem 10 years ago? Why did they keep repeating that it was the murderous American military-industrial complex and the insane ambitions of American politicians which made peace impossible, and keep assuring us that those benevolent and loving Orientals wished only to be left alone to live in peace among themselves? If they had only told us that they had a better way of serving the interests of the United States, or that they were plotting such an in-