

## Intellectual Corruption?

IN THE OLD MELODRAMAS you had no trouble recognizing the villain. Not only did he usually wear black and have a mustache but he was physically ugly in the bargain. Everyone knew whom to hiss.

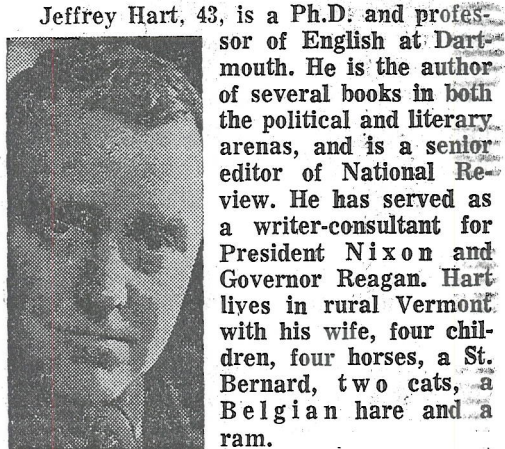
The same is true, allowing for variations, in the fashionable New Journalism. Here for example is Mary McCarthy describing John J. Wilson, counsel for John Ehrlichman and H. R. Haldeman in her Watergate Diary, now running in the London Observer. Wilson is "a querulous, dropsical old party with a mean City Hall mouth and fish eyes that seem to be looking up from some horrible weedy tank."

NOW THIS FARFETCHED STUFF is not really intended to convey to the reader anything about the real John J. Wilson. It merely plops the black hat down over his ears.

Of course Wilson's sins, one understands, are egregious: 1) he is counsel for E and H; 2) in an exchange over the scope of "national security" he showed that he knows as much constitutional law as Sam Ervin; and 3) not knowing he would be quoted, he called Sen. Daniel Inouye a "little Jap." This last must be much worse than Inouye calling witness Ehrlichman a "liar" over a live mike, since Inouye completely escapes Miss McCarthy's black-hat treatment.

Exhibit B comes from Murray Kempton's new book, "The Briar Patch," which is about the 1970 trial of 13 Black Panthers in New York City. Here, for instance, is Kempton describing the voice of one of the Panther defendants, one Michael Tabor: "It was the voice of the organ in the cathedral, a voice that made the ceiling above him seem like a vault over which angels and archangels leaned to catch the word of God arising."

Place beside the McCarthy and Kempton mush the aesthetic striven for by the young Hemingway, and, after long labor, achieved in his work; "I found the greatest difficulty, aside from knowing truly what



you really felt, and had been taught to feel, was to put down what really happened in action . . . the real thing, the sequence of motion and fact which made the emotion and would be as valid in a year or ten years or, with luck, as if you stated it purely enough, always."

Exhibit C. department of literary corruption. In the prose of writers like Norman Mailer and Garry Wills, taste, such as it is, obliterates fact and moral judgment.

Wills, for example, disapproves aesthetically of the Mission Inn, where Pat and Richard Nixon were married. "It is a pseudoecclesiastical Wuthering Heights, mainly mission but also pagoda and castle. The St. Francis chapel, where big weddings are held, has an 18th-century Spanish altar and four big Tiffany windows . . . The serious young man, son of a Quaker saint, docilely lines up at the marriage mart, where all the the gooiest extras — orange blossoms, 'O Promise Me,' illusion veils — cover the emptiness of the transactions."

So the wedding was meaningless, an empty transaction, because the Mission Inn displeases the writer aesthetically. Could intellectual corruption be more gross?