

# ENTERTAINMENT

## Neo-Nazi gears down with latest

**Overdrive: A Personal Documentary** by William F. Buckley, Jr. Doubleday, 1983

By Peter Michalshyn

It has been said in U.S. conservative circles that William F. (for Frank) Buckley Jr. is losing his touch. Both as a writer and as a right-wing spokesman, critics say Buckley is growing old, getting stale, and worse, going soft on traditional conservative credos.

Buckley's latest book, *Overdrive: A Personal Documentary*, tends to confirm the criticisms. The book is an elaborate diary, an eight-day romp through Buckley's appointment book including engagements with as diverse a crowd as Ronald Reagan, David Niven and "Ken" Galbraith. His reminiscences include an even more cosmopolitan group, including the likes of Huey Newton, Gore Vidal, Victor Navasky, Norman Mailer, Jimmy Hoffa and Bernadette Devlin, "...the young Ulster militant whom I had flummoxed (on television) by instinctively lighting her cigarette....causing her inadvertently to say, 'Oh thanks very much' - thus shattering her carefully cultivated bellicose front."

*Overdrive* first saw light as a 1,180-inch, two-part excerpt in *The New Yorker* magazine's Jan. 31 and Feb. 7, 1983 issues. It was released shortly afterwards, bringing to 20 the number of books Buckley has written since the mid-1950s.

Reviewers correctly assessed that *Overdrive* is less worthy than *Cruising Speed: A Documentary*, a similar diary that Buckley wrote in 1971. If *Overdrive* has a higher gossip quotient, (Buckley has been accused of name dropping), it is lacking in issue-oriented debate. In that sense, it represents a microcosm of Buckley's accomplishments in recent years.

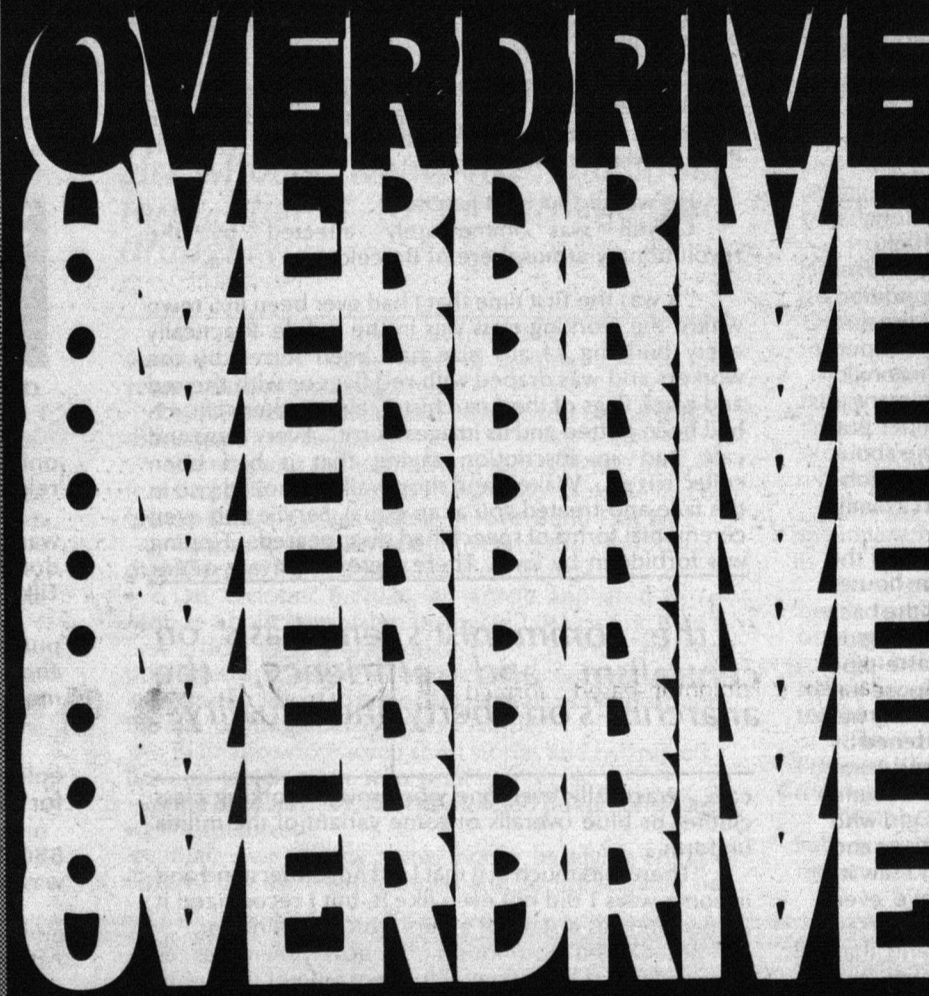
*Cruising Speed* illuminated a public figure who in 1971 was in top form and was, with friends in power in Washington, the top dog. Twelve years later, Buckley may indeed have increased his pace - thus *Overdrive*. Buck of his previous six books, two have been narratives, three are fairly good spy novels, and only one a collection of newspaper columns.

Arguably, Buckley's last significant book was from the late 1960's, *Up From Liberalism*, in which he outlined a coherent conservative manifesto. The transformation from substance to style which, to be sure, is endearing to his converts, is detectable after Buckley's failed run at the New York mayoralty in 1965.

"The 1965 mayoral campaign made Buckley a national celebrity, and ended whatever pretensions he had of becoming a major conservative theorist," John Judis of the *Progressive* magazine wrote in 1981.

# WILLIAM F. BUCKLEY, JR.

A PERSONAL DOCUMENTARY



Instead of writing a tome on Ortega Gasset, on which he had worked for years, Buckley opted to write a syndicated column and host a PBS television show.

*Cruising Speed*, which does rank among Buckley's significant books, reprints

a letter from a reader on the author's transformation. "Conservatism in American...owes everything to your efforts alone," the reader said. "But what will be your thoughts if when you come to your deathbed you look back and realize that all your life amounted to no more than one

big highly successful game of power and self-glorification?"

Buckley recalls, again in *Cruising Speed*, encouragements from friend Ken Galbraith to 'come to the academy....only then will you discover the means to give a theoretical depth to your ideological positions.'

To which Buckley, who holds a B.A. from Yale (1950), replied: "The theoretical depth is there, and if I have not myself dug deeper the foundations of American conservatism, at least I have advertised its profundity."

A reviewer in *American Spectator* suggested Buckley was suspect because of all the time he spends with ideological foes, Galbraith among the most prominent, but by no means the sole example. Gore Vidal would appear to be the only liberal-minded person Buckley out-and-out dislikes. Legend holds that Vidal, in calling Buckley a "crypto-Nazi" on national television, elicited the uncharacteristic response: "Now listen, you queer. Stop calling me a crypto-Nazi or I'll sock you in your goddam face and you'll stay plastered."

As for his conservative credentials, Buckley has long since been usurped as 'Mr. Right'. George F. Will now commands the statist, old-style conservatives; the new libertarian right finds Buckley, like Reagan, too soft, and is led in turn by ideologues such as Richard Viguerie.

*National Review*, with which Buckley and a corps of out-of-fashion, conservative academics made conservatism respectable from the 1950s through to the '70s, is no longer the essential conservative magazine.

Buckley, 58 last November, still writes wonderfully. His struggles against the demons of the post-war world - the welfare state, communism, waning respect for individual liberty and life itself - may have left him debilitated. Others have stepped into the breach, and while not opposing them, Buckley remains above the current melee. Says the *Progressive's* Judis: "Buckley has remained faithful to a political philosophy. He has not tried to flavor it with appeals to whatever current issue inflames the most reactionary popular imagination."

Judis most appropriately calls Buckley the 'consummate conservative'. He has money, grace, wit and power. *Overdrive* contributes faithfully to that picture; for those who despise what Buckley represents, *Overdrive* will confirm their convictions; for converts, it's good reading. For Buckley, who ended *Cruising Speed* with the soul-searching question - "What does it take to satisfy, to satisfy truly, wholly....A sense of social usefulness...." - it is less clear now that the struggle availeth. The reason for being diminishes."

## Study in violence hits hard but fizzles

**Scarface**  
Odeon I, Meadowlark, Plaza II

by Richard Watts

Make no mistake; *Scarface* is one powerful movie. Yes, it is violent, and yes it does tend to play up to the cheap seats at the end. But the good points of this movie make it strongly disturbing - well worth the five bucks.

Pacino is at his intense best as Antonio Montana, a Cuban refugee who handles violence the way a formula-one driver handles his car, crashing his way up and down through the gear ratios, until in the end, the clutch burns out.

It may not be healthy to qualitatively discuss violence. But violence is such an integral part of *Scarface* that such a discussion is necessary.

When the movie is good, the violence is excellent; which is to say, it is ugly. You've heard that old gun club homily. "Guns don't kill people; people kill people." The actors in *Scarface* do not play support roles for their guns, aka Dirty Harry. Pacino, from a close distance, personally blows ugly

big holes in people. It is this immediate and personal quality that makes *Scarface* so disturbing.

When the movie is bad, the violence is gratuitous, cheap and fake even, particularly when Director Brian De Palma stages a living-room version of Guadalcanal complete with heavy artillery. At this point the movie leaves a sickening soda pop after-taste.

The screenplay has a few problems, too. The word 'fuck' gets thrown around to the point where it becomes more amusing in its own right instead of an accurate portrayal of the characters. A pact of honour, being sealed to the strains of mushy music, is a bit hard to take when the actors are saying things like, "promise me you won't fuck me, Tony."

Pacino, also complaining that the communist are "always telling you what to think" was a bit much, too. I can accept that this thug would have a few complaints about Castro's Cuba; it is hard to believe that intellectual freedom would be one of those complaints.

The main thing that makes *Scarface* a

good movie is its disturbing quality. When, after shaking the viewers out of their complacency, the movie fails to make any kind of statement at all, one realizes that *Scarface* is not a great movie.

*Scarface* has been billed as a movie

which uses a character study to explore the ugly side of the American Dream in which the world is yours, if you've got the balls to take it. And Pacino and DePalma almost pull it off. In the end, however, they seem to wimp out and allow the guns to upstage all the actors.

