

That Was Then

The case for improving the quality of strategic political fictions

BY LOUIS BLACK

"It's only a whimsical notion
To fly down to Rio tonight
And I probably won't fly down to Rio
But then again, I just might"
— Michael Nesmith, "Rio"

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two

both are stories of the purity of innocence and the perfect impurity of corruption. The remarkable artistry of the film and the book finds their narratives complemented by the absolutely inspired and almost unimaginably ambitious use of the medium. Whether the story argues for hope or insists on despair, these works by their existence are transcendent, humanist, and inspiring.

Now

The election simply confirmed that the contradictions between what citizens say they want and what they seem to really want are so pronounced that American politics demonstrate the aesthetics of silent-movie play-acting more than ideologically loaded political positioning.

Then

During my freshman year of college, I was hanging out in a dorm room with a number of other students. Mostly we were talking and listening to music, but at some point one of the roommates handed me a book. It was *Gods' Man* by Lynd Ward, a novel told entirely in woodcuts, published in 1929 — almost a half-century before Will Eisner used the term "graphic novel."

Now

Held down by neither gravity nor negativity, I find myself, as almost always, anchored by small but persistent hopes. Counter to these consolations run the current fashion trends — the artificially cheap national discount-chain sale on abandoning hope, accompanied by the more penny-ante convenience-store degradation of same by opinion-addicted, thought-averse lay pundits. This obvious and too generally accepted sense of mundane despair asserts a vision of the present as beaten flat and colorless, lacking history, context, and humanity.

Then

Reading *Gods' Man*, I was completely sucked in by the art, the story set in a world of absolute and rigid morality. Seeking success, an artist travels from his rural (natural) home to the city. There he finds fame, but it is in exchange for and inextricably tied to losing his soul. The city and its citizens are so polluted and polluting that he has to flee back to nature in order to have any real meaning in his life. This return to purity gives him a context in which to find love and start a family. The city is such a malevolent corrupter of nature that, once one is touched by it, there is no escaping its poisonous cancers.

In many ways *Gods' Man* is an immediate, though far more pessimistic, relative of F.W. Murnau's stunning silent film *Sunrise*, released two years earlier. It is not just that the works tell such insistently moral tales but that they are mostly stripped of baroque affections and complicating nuances. Even though one story offers hope and the other provides none,

Now

The pessimistic worldview that we are indeed living in the worst of times is beyond lightweight: Though dour, it is void of substance. The conviction that the sky is falling, shared by so many despite radically different faiths, ideologies, and philosophies, in and of itself is not proof that it is actually falling. Regardless of the completeness of the case made for how perfectly the details of the present align with those laid out in the direst of biblical prophecies, nothing is validated. This catalog of evidence does not prove that God has abandoned us, because the underlying modes it relies upon are all cockeyed. Belief does not trump nature. King Alfred the Great long ago refuted the notion that human distinctions and perceptions actually influence the tides.

The extent of our despair, even with the certainty that a spiritual or even nonspiritual Armageddon is at hand, is not just irrelevant but meaningless. There is little real difference in validity between a shared massive pessimism that insists on impending doom and the most expansive, arrogant sense of self as the center of the universe. If anything, it is simply that if the former case proves untrue, the disappointment would be far less devastating than it would be if the latter proves so as well.

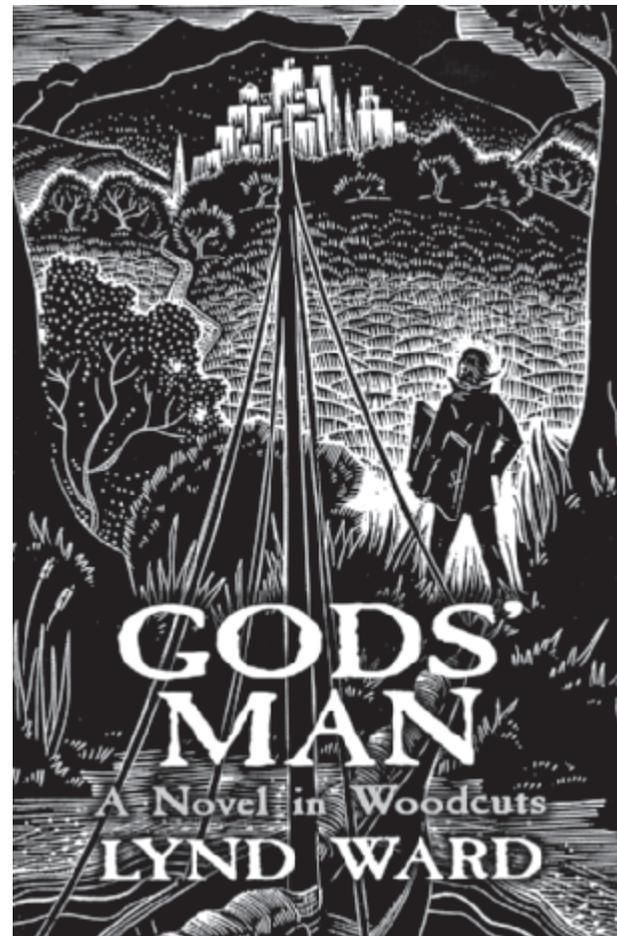
Before Then

In 1949, Arthur C. Clarke published "History Lesson," a short story about aliens arriving on this planet after it has been completely devastated. About all they find is a can of film. They watch it, wondering about the odd creatures that once inhabited this planet. It is a Mickey Mouse cartoon.

Now

The elections again demonstrated that the American people don't distrust only the government and one another but all information beyond their own opinions. This should come as no surprise, given that, rather than being geographically or racially defined, this country's creation flowed out of grand visions derived from deeply held but clearly personalized worldviews.

The great American conflict is between personal freedom and community responsibilities. Absolutely interwoven, they often and regularly are defined independently of each other by champions of American exceptionalism and completely ignorant constitutional "experts."



Being an American shouldn't and doesn't start in those easy spaces where too many act like snubbed teenagers as they whine about their rights being limited meanwhile ignoring all accompanying responsibilities.

Then and Now

Lynd Ward was an American artist whose main work was in book illustrations; he published six beautiful, innovative, and influential graphic novels between 1929 and 1937. The first was *Gods' Man*, which was published just weeks before the stock market crash but went on to be a bestseller. It was followed by *Madman's Drum*, *Wild Pilgrimage*, *Prelude to a Million Years*, *Song Without Words*, and *Vertigo*.

Now

This is a time of pick-and-choose American patriots who spend way too much time worrying that most of the rest of us have not only lost our souls but are busy selling our country short. Any deal that looks too good to be true usually is a con, but rarely does it lack investors/believers. The same is true in

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That Was Then is an American drama series that was broadcast on ABC in 2002. It was cancelled after only two episodes had aired. The series starred James Bulliard as Travis Glass, a 30-year-old who finds his life in a rut. Still living at home with his mother (Bess Armstrong) he works as a door-to-door salesman. The girl of his dreams, played by Kiele Sanchez, is married to his older brother, Gregg, played by Brad Raider. Travis is able to trace his life's downward spiral to a single week in high school. **That Was Then This Is Now** is a 1985 American drama film based on the novel of the same name by S. E. Hinton. The film was directed by Christopher Cain, distributed by Paramount Pictures, and stars Emilio Estevez (who also wrote the screenplay) and Craig Sheffer. This is the only S.E. Hinton adaptation not to feature Matt Dillon. Mark Jennings' (Emilio Estevez) only link to society is the attachment he feels towards an older brother-figure. When Bryon Douglas (Craig Sheffer) starts spending time with him, Mark's life begins to change. **Share this Rating.** Title: **That Was Then (2002)** . 7,4/10. Want to share IMDb's rating on your own site? [A group of young mutants--humans with a genetic variation that gives them superpowers and makes them feared by the population at large--begin training at a school for heroes. Their studies](#) [See full summary](#) [»](#).