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Jeffrey Archer, one of the world's most popular writers of literary thrillers, has, with the help of Simon Bainbridge, put together a collection of his favorite stories about the denizens of the political jungle. Among the authors represented in this volume are Mark Twain, Charles Dickens, James Thurber, Kingsley Amis, Jack London, James Joyce, and Jeffrey Archer himself.

The category of "political short story" is a deliberately loose one, for not many writers have hands-on experience of the world of politics. The authors here might have described their stories as being about people, rather than politics. And so the collection is wonderfully diverse, ranging from Joyce's evocation of tarnished ideals and a fallen hero in "Ivy Day in the Committee Room" to Jack London's vivid fantasy of a general strike across the United States in "The Dream of Debs," to Mark Twain's dark satire of the venality of political life in "The Man that Corrupted Hadleyburg." If there are few genuine heroes in the stories Mr. Archer has selected, perhaps that is an accurate reflection of the real world. In any case, this generally dark view of politics has a silver lining: for as readers of Milton's *Paradise Lost* discovered long ago, the doings of a charismatic villain make for more interesting reading than the deeds of a virtuous man.



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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Of these 10 stories collected by novelist Archer (*Kane and Abel*) and English bookseller/editor Bainbridge, some are political only in the most tenuous sense. Mark Twain, in "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg," strips away the pretensions of self-appointed arbiters of morality. In "The Greatest Man in the World," James Thurber reveals the petty personality behind an aviation hero's public persona. Other entries show how Dickens, Joyce, Kipling and Saki use the milieu of politics for their own ends, often to score a moral point. Kingsley Amis's "I Spy Strangers," about a disillusioned British unit stationed in Germany at the close of WW II, turns on Labour's 1945 election victory, contrasting the faith that sustained the men through war with the need to readjust to an unknown postwar reality. In Archer's own "The Coup," a Brazilian corporate mogul visiting Nigeria navigates treacherous waters in the wake of a bloody palace revolt. Only the socialist Jack London's "The Dream of Debs," about a general strike, is politically committed. Politics, in these feisty, stinging stories, is for the most part a breeding-ground for ruthless self-seekers.

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