

his fully automatic firearm at home. The murder rate in Switzerland is actually lower than that in Japan, where the civilian population has virtually no access to firearms. For centuries the Swiss have viewed weapons as synonymous with citizenship; in Switzerland, to put it differently, the symbol of a free man is ownership of one or more firearms. (It should be added that while Switzerland has a suicide rate twice that of America, only 33 percent of suicides are committed with firearms.)

The Founding Fathers of the American Republic intended that universal gun ownership should prevent the federal government from having a monopoly of force. The goal was "to prevent a standing army, the bane of liberty," said Elbridge Gerry of Massachusetts, one of the members of the Constitutional Convention. The West (from the Shenandoahs to the Rockies and beyond) was opened by armed Americans moving ahead of the police or the army. This experience was very different from anything in British, as well as in Canadian and Australian, history—though not, interestingly, from the example of New Zealand, whose gun laws are among the least oppressive of the English-speaking world.

Kopel devotes a fascinating section of his book to the rise of vigilantism in the absence of police service, or when the police have been totally corrupted by the criminal element. Contrary to the Hollywood depiction, vigilantes tended to represent the sense of the community and were drawn from leaders who were well-established and elected. They usually ran criminals out of town in preference to executing them.

The history of race relations in America has been influenced by the right to keep and bear arms; the 14th Amendment was added to the Constitution, in part, to overturn Jim Crow laws in the South, one of the purposes of these laws being to disarm blacks. The logic was simple: disarm the freedmen, and it would be easier to continue their slavery *de facto*. Less than a century later, Deacons for Defense and Justice armed and organized in order to protect civil rights workers who could expect little or no protection from some Southern sheriffs. Surprising as it sounds today, the NAACP convention of 1957 resolved that, "We do not deny but reaffirm the right of individual and collective self-defense against unlawful assaults."

Kopel's analysis of contemporary violence in America leads him to conclude that Americans are not very likely to want to give up their guns, since the claim that "the police will protect us" is less and less credible. As a chief justice of the West Virginia Supreme Court has remarked, "Private security guards are simply vigilantes for the rich." Clearly, for the rest of us who cannot afford our own vigilantes, a handgun in the pocket and an AK-47 for defense from social disruption (as in Los Angeles in April 1992) seem to be the accepted answer for a growing number of people. Besides, self-defense may actually be safer than police protection, since police shoot innocent people 5.5 times more often than do civilians.

Larry Pratt is executive director of Gun Owners of America and author of Armed People Victorious.

Pro Patria

by J.O. Tate

Against the Barbarians and Other Reflections on Familiar Themes

by M.E. Bradford

Columbia: University of Missouri Press; 268 pp., \$37.50



The recent passing of Mel Bradford has cast a chastening light upon this latest of his collections. Who had wished to be reminded of the author's indispensability in this or indeed any other way? Yet reminded we are and must be. This book means much in itself as it stands, and means more as the product of a powerful mind and a courageous man.

As he himself insists in his introduction, these 25 pieces are united by much more than the identity of their author. The essays on Southern literature are informed by the same historical and cultural consciousness that encapsulates the lives of 14 "Fathers": men of the founding of the Republic, whose service and convictions have been overshadowed, perhaps, by those of the colossi we know better than we know Rawlins Lowndes of South Carolina or James Duane of New York. Such short lives impress them-

selves upon the memory, delighting us as revelations of character, and instructing us in our national history in all its variety and specificity. The Antifederalism of Patrick Henry, the glory and shame of "Light-Horse Harry" Lee, the sketches of Samuel Adams and James Iredell—these and others are incisive attempts to restore American history and the political patrimony to those who have inherited it, but too often do not know it.

Informed by such awareness, Bradford was uniquely the man to write a study of the ratification debates, and a study too of their related and consequential inversion, the Southern valedictories of 1860-1861. His treatment of the arguments for and against ratification of the Constitution clarifies the meaning of that tormented though clear document. His account of the Southern farewells reverses more than a century of received opinion about the tone of the debates preceding the secession. In addition, his essays on Abraham Lincoln and Lyndon Johnson extend the logic of his views to those redeemer-figures, whose rhetoric and claims to virtue are linked to their search for power. Bradford has done more than any commentator I know to make the study of American history as "exciting" and "relevant" as any liberal historian could wish.

But of course, when we think about Bradford, we think of Southern literature. Here we have a personal tribute to Andrew Lytle, two useful pieces on Faulkner, a reconsideration of William Gilmore Simms, and a fine piece connecting Donald Davidson's poem about Simms' home, "Woodlands, 1956-1960," to the "great house" tradition of Horace, Jonson, Marvell, and Yeats. This last piece in particular reminds us of the loss implied by Bradford's exit, for he was working on a biography of Davidson when he died. And it reminds us too of other essays on Davidson in Bradford's *Generations of the Faithful Heart* (1983).

The title essay illustrates the scope of Bradford's mind, the extent of his engagement. It reminds us that Bradford could never be "politically correct" precisely because he was correct politically (and morally). Against nihilists, neo-Marxists, multiculturalists, and all the rest, he speaks the truth about the perversion of the academy in our time:

For there can be no rational response to the errors of judgment and analysis made by persons who

have absolutely no respect for the evidence of reason. Young people who have been taught to distrust all authority as a deception recently exposed—who have experienced too much change to believe in permanence—agree easily that nothing can be taught or learned. They gravitate naturally toward responses to reading and information that search only after relevance—often an anachronistic or far-fetched connection to the tendentious and/or topical concerns of a political subculture. For them reading and interpretation are merely private acts about which almost nothing can be communicated—a communion in *rejection of their culture as it has been* and of its would-be preservers, a rejection of legitimate authority. The nature, meaning, and purpose of education in the humanities cannot be understood on the basis of these presuppositions.

Bradford's words about reading and interpretation, his corporate and transgenerational sense of the construction of meaning, are I think best exemplified in this volume by some of his most instructive pages on Faulkner.

Bradford shows us that though Faulk-

ner famously used modernist techniques, he was no modernist. The imperial self in Faulkner is hedged by contrast, qualification, the family, the social order, tradition, and community. Yet Faulkner's works have been interpreted as symphonies of alienation and despair. When Bradford points to Faulkner's chivalric themes and to his novels as conduct books, he has indicated something more than a truth about Faulkner, his books, or even a broader cultural value. He has also shown or demonstrated something of his own generosity, his amplitude of vision, his magnanimity. He has not projected upon Faulkner something of himself; rather, he has responded to texts and to values that were woven from elements which he knew profoundly, and which he was born to articulate.

So when M.E. Bradford writes of the man on horseback, the chevalier, the gentleman, the thought of his own demeanor and deportment and being as a Christian gentleman must come to mind. In his many sallies, sometimes as a Chevalier Bayard *sans peur et sans reproche* and sometimes as a Don Quixote, though never with a rueful countenance, he always fought nobly against various opponents. His good cheer and sustaining humor well became him. The writings he has left us—such as the evi-

dences of mind and spirit collected in *Against the Barbarians*—remain an education, but also a reminder of a loss of international impact. Yet Bradford himself, always taking the long view, would have been the first to see even that loss as a mystery rather than a conclusion.

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Beautiful Excess

by Fred Chappell

The Hard to Catch Mercy

by William Baldwin

Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Algonquin Books; 451 pp., \$19.95



The Hard to Catch Mercy, William Baldwin's entrancing first novel, is bound to remind some readers of Mark Twain, especially of some of the bleaker pages of moral fables like *The Mysterious Stranger* and *The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg*. But Baldwin's purpose is not to piggyback a Grand Master. He desires to remind us of Twain because he wants us to know "where he is coming from," as the current slang phrase puts it.

Geographically speaking, he comes from McClellanville, South Carolina, a low-country village on the outskirts of Hell Hole Swamp, a place that in 1916 must have resembled quite closely his fictional locale, "Cedar Point." His narrator, Willie Allson, describes this village as a "closed-in, private place" that differs entirely from the "wide-open universe" we all now inhabit. Literarily speaking, he comes from that bright-dark homeplace of the Southern spirit that Mark Twain and William Faulkner and Allen Tate (in his novel *The Fathers*) have so resonantly rendered for us. These writers are Baldwin's forebears and he is not ashamed of them and not timorous about standing before or among them.

Nor should he be. *The Hard to Catch Mercy* justifies all its author's confidence. It is a gripping tale and beautifully complicated as all three sides of the plentiful Allson family work out a single destiny. The family patriarch—100 years old and still going strong as the book opens—is

Beautiful Losers

Essays on the Failure of American Conservatism

Samuel Francis

The changes of the last decade have led to a virtual disappearance of the political Right. *Beautiful Losers* is a timely look at a crucial moment in the history of American conservatism, when, for the first time since the New Deal, the nation faces the prospect of political democracy without an oppositional force to liberalism. 256 pages, \$37.50

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