

Love and Grace

by Thomas Fleming

Una vita in fabbrica:
itinerario spirituale

by Mario Marcolla

Milano: Maurizio Minchella Editore;
101 pp., Lire 18,000



This is a remarkable book by a remarkable man. Mr. Marcolla is well known to many conservatives in Europe and the United States for his observations on modern philosophy contributed over the years to *Osservatore Romano*. He is a keen student of Anglo-American conservative thought as well as having been a friend and translator of the late Russell Kirk. Dr. Kirk and the editor of this magazine are only two of many Americans whom Marcolla has served as *cicerone* in their explorations of Italian political and intellectual life.

Despite frequent bouts of ill health, Mr. Marcolla exudes an air of benign understanding, though not complacency. What this little book reveals, however, is the long and hard road that has been traveled on this spiritual itinerary. Born into a family reduced to poverty, Marcolla watched his father trying to preserve his dignity working in the factories of Torino. The young Mario was sent to work in a bakery. As he grew older, he drew up plans for his self-education, only to see them founder for lack of time and energy. He found time to study Italian literature, and learned German and English eventually.

After studying some accounting, Marcolla went into the textile industry and by the time of his retirement had worked his way up to plant manager. His real life, however, was intellectual and spiritual. As a working man, he took an eager interest in Marx and the Russian Revolution, eventually finding in it a "Luciferian rebellion" of matter against form. Working among the looms and shuttles, he contemplated the great problems of existence and came to regard the factory as "a place of pain and sorrow, a nursery of men and women devoid of deep relations, without spiritual roots."

Factory work, he realized, was inher-

ently dehumanizing:

The influx of machines modeled on scientific reasoning appeared . . . to be diabolical: assembly-line work mortified the personalities, creating psychological dissociations which were noticeable in the old workers, in their worn-out look, in a kind of inattention which was the sign of an unconscious crisis, of the impossibility of being whole men like the old-time artisans and peasants from which they were descended.

Much of this memoir is devoted to Marcolla's progress through books, from leftists to Nietzsche and Evola and finally to the wisdom of the great Italian philosopher Augusto del Noce. The higher truth is to be sought, he concludes, in the human work that "binds each and every person to a supernatural destiny of love and grace." This is not the mysticism that flees the everyday world of hope and fear, but an appreciation of the mysteries woven on the loom of life. "Every man has his talents and spends them not by himself but, in his liberty and autonomy, in harmony with a providential plan that hangs over him and protects him."

Thomas Fleming is the editor of
Chronicles.

Our Time

by Bill Croke

Mountain Time

by Ivan Doig

New York: Scribner;
316 pp., \$25.00



In a regional literary world ripe with poseurs, Ivan Doig may be the true descendant of Wallace Stegner. Unlike the typical carpetbagger who begins with preconceived notions as to the nature of the "real" West, Doig actually grew up here during an unforgiving time when the place was good for nothing except for what could be physically extracted from it. The two authors have led somewhat

parallel lives, their work growing out of their Western roots, each accepting a necessary flight from beloved surroundings to an academic life lived in cities west of the West.

In Doig's new novel, *Mountain Time*, Mitch Rozier—at 50—is at loose ends. His career as an environmental journalist in politically correct Seattle ("Cyberia") is in a nosedive because of the financial restructuring of his paper, *Cascopia*. His ex-wife hates him, and his two now-grown children ignore him as he did them while they were growing up; his aged father is tormenting Mitch long distance with tangled business affairs that directly affect him. Mitch's girlfriend, a caterer and native Montanan like himself, is the glue that holds his life together.

Mr. Doig—author of the National Book Award nominee *This House of Sky*—is on familiar ground. In novels such as *English Creek*, *Ride With Me*, *Mariah Montana*, and *Dancing at the Rascal Fair*, he has created a Montana Yoknapatawpha, complete with multi-generational interrelated families and mutually remembered local history. A native, Doig knows the terrain of working-class Montana: the ranchers, farmers, and small-town businessmen who struggle to adapt to life in a changing West.

Mitch returns to Twin Sulphur Springs, "a country of great mountains and mediocre human chances," ostensibly to deal with his father's financial difficulties. There, Lyle Rozier nonchalantly tells him of the leukemia that is slowly killing him: "The doc says it's about got me. Why I called you." Lyle—a World War II veteran of the South Pacific—is a member of that great generation of Americans who expected nothing from life except the fruits of hard work, pain, and ultimately death, a generation—unlike their progeny—for whom whining and complaining were anathema. While sticking around to care for his ailing father (and forced to tolerate the annoying Donald Brainerd, a new New West high-tech neighbor constantly complaining that Lyle's yardful of rusting farm machinery and "tractor carcasses" is spoiling his bay-window view of the Rockies), Mitch is reminded—through flashbacks to his childhood growing up in "the Springs"—what kind of man Lyle really is: a taciturn survivor of a life typically fraught with contradictions and emotional turmoil, including the guilt left over

from his estranged wife's death in a car wreck years before.

Complicating all this are the McCaskill sisters, Mariah and Lexa. Mariah, the elder, is a successful globe-trotting photojournalist. She is middle-aged, divorced, but still retains a wild, red-haired beauty that can "cloud men's minds." Mariah talks the reluctant Mitch into permitting her to photograph the willing Lyle's last days for a newspaper photo series. Lexa McCaskill, Mitch's live-in companion, patiently awaits the passing of his mid-life difficulties so that they can get on with their lives.

The central theme of *Mountain Time* is the baby boomer generation's reaction to two inescapable facts: the passing of their parents, the realistic and hardworking World War II generation, and their relations with their own children, the alienated products of divorce, mindlessly groping their way through a seemingly nihilistic turn-of-the-millennium high-tech consumer society. Mitch spends a lot of time contemplating his dying father and his own out-of-reach kids, for which the idealism he acquired during his coming-of-age in the 1960's doesn't seem to be of much help.

Sigmund Freud wrote that the most poignant day in a man's life is the day of the death of his father. When Lyle finally passes on in his sleep, Mitch sees the event as anticlimactic and is merely numbed. He, Lexa, and Mariah set out on a backpacking trip into the stunning Rocky Mountain Front backcountry of the Bob Marshall Wilderness, with the idea of honoring Lyle's wish to have his ashes scattered—and the ritual photographed by the journalistic voyeur Mariah—atop the (fictional) Phantom Woman Peak. In 1939, the 18-year-old Lyle had helped build the Phantom Woman fire tower while employed by the Depression-era Civilian Conservation Corps, in the course of which he met—unbeknownst to him—the renowned conservationist Bob Marshall (about whose legendary tramps in the Northern Rockies Mitch is researching a piece). On that summer day in 1939, Bob Marshall almost broke a leg on an unnailed step on the tower; in 1996, Mitch Rozier does so after a row with Lexa and the professionally minded Mariah over changing his mind about the ash-scattering ceremony, because "My father never cared a whoop about any of this [the Bob Marshall Wilderness] . . . He wanted it carved up into

money. Just never quite managed to figure out how." Mitch's broken leg forces Lexa to hike out for help, leaving Mitch and Mariah to a contrived love affair in the fire tower cabin: a forced and predictable device designed to make for a happy ending when Mitch and Lexa reunite in Seattle at the novel's conclusion. Ivan Doig should know better.

He does know his Rocky Mountains, and he paints his landscapes well. He knows his ranchers and Hutterites too, and has a sharp ear for the nuances of colloquial Montana speech. But as the critic-poet Randall Jarrell once observed, "A novel is a long narrative with something wrong with it." *Mountain Time* is at once a beautiful and a flawed thing.

Bill Croke writes from Cody, Wyoming.

Damn Lies— or Statistics

by David B. Kopel

More Guns, Less Crime: Understanding Crime and Gun Control Laws

by John R. Lott, Jr.

Chicago: University of Chicago Press;
225 pp., \$23.00



The most important book ever published about firearms policy is John Lott's superb *More Guns, Less Crime: Understanding Crime and Gun Control Laws*. No other firearms book has shaped the political debate so profoundly or its author been subjected to such a determined campaign of lies and libels. The intensity of the campaign against Lott is a powerful confirmation of his book's importance and one reason why it should be read by everyone who cares about firearms policy, which is literally a matter of life or death: Lobbyists who are trying to prevent the public from discovering John Lott's research are indirectly responsible for the deaths of hundreds of innocent people every year.

Throughout the 19th century, "the right to keep and bear arms" meant exactly what it said: The right to carry a gun was protected just as firmly as the right to own a gun. Some states, particularly in

the South, enforced laws against carrying handguns concealed, but the right to open carry was almost universally respected. By the 1970's, however, the right to carry had been restricted in most jurisdictions. America was well on the way to treating guns like cigarettes: permissible in private but completely banned from public spaces.

In 1988, however, Florida—thanks to the energetic support of the Florida Chiefs of Police Association and Unified Sportsmen of Florida—initiated a national trend by enacting a "shall issue" handgun permit law, allowing any adult who has a clean record and has taken safety training to obtain a permit to carry a concealed handgun for protection. Now, 29 states have a law similar to Florida's, while Vermont and Idaho (outside of Boise) require no permit.

Before John Lott came along, a few researchers (myself included) had studied the effects of these laws. Clayton Cramer and I (in the *Tennessee Law Review*) had analyzed changes in murder rates in "shall issue" states compared to national trends and found tentative evidence that murder rates fell after enactment of "shall issue" laws. David McDowall (in the *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*) had analyzed murder rates in five counties and reported that they rose. These efforts, nevertheless, proved far inferior to Lott's.

John Lott has blown all the previous research away: His work amounts to the most thorough criminological study ever performed. Lott collected data from every one of the 3,054 counties in the United States over an 18-year period and, in contrast to the Kopel and McDowall homicide-only studies, examined changes in the rates of nine different types of crime. He also accounted for the effects of dozens of other variables, including variations in arrest rates, in the age and racial composition of a county's population, in national crime rates, and in changes made to gun-control laws, including the adoption of waiting periods. Lott's findings show that concealed carry laws significantly reduce violent crime. On average, the murder rate falls by ten percent, that of rape by three percent, and aggravated assault by six percent.

While crime begins to fall off immediately, the benefits of concealed handgun laws take about three years to make themselves fully felt. This is not surprising: In most states, a flood of applications occurs in the first few weeks the law is on the