volved in every act of every living being.... It is accordingly a moral truth which no subterfuge can elude, that some things are really better than others. In the daily course of affairs we are constantly in the presence of events which by turning out one way or the other produce a real, an irrevocable, increase of good or evil in the world.[9]

Santayana insists that the awareness of human difficulties in arriving at the truth does not discredit the validity of the conception itself. In the preface to his *The Realm of Truth*, Santayana reasserted his belief that the everyday meaning of the notion of truth was philosophically valid and in doing so restated his ideas about the relation between philosophical analysis and "human orthodoxy":

> An unsophisticated reader will find no difficulty in understanding the sense in which the word truth is used in this book. It is the sense which the word bears in ordinary conversation; and such refinements as I may be led to suggest are not calculated to subvert the plain signification of the word, but only to clarify and confirm it. In this matter, and in many others, I follow common sense; not indeed in its conventions, not in respect to popular dogmas which may be local, verbal, mythical, and contradictory; but I follow common sense in its general momentum and presuppositions, which are indeed the only possible foundation of science, of literature, and of human intercourse.[10]

Like the Marxists who railed at the "false consciousness" of the masses, or the Freudians who blamed every critique of psychoanalysis on the neurosis of the critic, today's academic theorists are confident that their theoretical sophistication allows them to ignore common sense and the culture of the past. The obscurity of their prose is for its authors only another confirmation of their superiority to the unilluminated. In contrast, Santayana's undoctrinal humanism is evident in both the lucidity of his prose and his willingness to acknowledge the authority of the "funded experience" of the human race in whatever form it presents itself—in religion, in literature, in art, in history, and in everyday life. Irving Singer's little book will accomplish a great deal if it will turn our attention to a philosopher whose stylistic elegance and intellectual clarity are derived from such wise modesty.

1. George Santayana, *Character and Opinion in the United States* (New Brunswick, 1991), 156. **2.** *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (New York, 1950), 128. **3.** George Santayana, *The Genteel Tradition at Bay* (New York, 1931), 177. **4.** George Santayana, *The Life of Reason* (Amherst, N.Y., 1998), 445. **5.** George Santayana, *The German Mind: A Philosophical Diagnosis* (New York, 1968), 145. Originally published in 1915 as *Egotism in German Philosophy*. **6.** George Santayana, *Philosophical Heresy*, *Obiter Dicta*, ed. Justus Buchler and Benjamin Schwartz (New York, 1936), 95. **7.** Jerry Z. Muller, "Dilemmas of Conservatism," *The Public Interest*, 139 (Spring 2000), 50-64. **8.** George Santayana, *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion* (New York, 1957), 98. **9.** *Ibid.*, 100. **10.** George Santayana, *The Realm of Truth*, The Works of George Santayana, Triton Edition, Vol. 15 (New York, 1940), 3.

The Last Stand

Edward S. Shapiro

A Defender of Southern Conservatism: M. E. Bradford and His Achievements, edited by Clyde N. Wilson, *Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 1999. 193 pp.*

As the career of M.E. Bradford (1934-1993) illustrates, it has not been easy in the twentieth century to be a conservative intellectual. The attitude of the American intelligentsia toward conservatism was perhaps best expressed by Lionel

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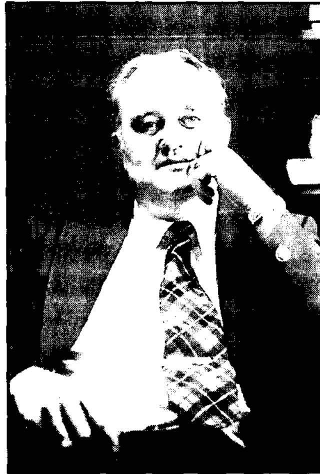
Trilling in the introduction to his 1950 collection of essays, *The Liberal Imagination*, published about the time Bradford was entering high school. "In the United States," Trilling wrote, "liberalism is not only the dominant but even the sole intellectual tradition.... This does not mean, of course, that there is no impulse to conservatism or to reaction. Such impulses are certainly very strong, perhaps even stronger than most of us know. But the conservative impulse and the reactionary impulse do not, with some isolated and some ecclesiastical exceptions, express themselves in ideas but only in action or in irritable mental gestures which seek to resemble ideas." That same year a man was arrested in the Middle West for creating a public disturbance. As one witness recalled, "he was using abusive language, calling people conservative and all that." Even conservatives have shared the common assumption that conservatism was irrelevant in America. Albert Jay Nock titled his autobiography *Memoirs of a Superfluous Man* (1943); Robert Crunden named his anthology of writings of twentieth-century conservatives *The Superfluous Men* (1977); and Samuel Francis called his collection of essays on American conservatism *Beautiful Losers* (1993).

To be a southern conservative was doubly damning. Southern conservatives such as Bradford were seen as defending the folkways and values of a social and cultural racist wasteland, and they were obviously not to be taken seriously. In Boston, New York, and other centers of arts and letters, the South was judged to be a national embarrassment, the abode of Ku Kluxers, ranting fundamentalist preachers, snake handlers, degraded sharecroppers, drunken proponents of prohibition, and fugitives from chain gangs. In the 1930s, Franklin D. Roosevelt described the South as the nation's number one economic problem, and his Secretary of Labor, Frances Perkins, advised southerners to put on shoes. What other section of the nation has produced so many exotic real and fictional characters, including George Wallace and Jeeter Lester, Willie Stark and Scarlett O'Hara, Elvis Presley and Bill Clinton, Burt Reynolds and Richard Petty? The South, more than any other American section, has been consumed with notions of regional identity and inferiority, nurtured by the realization that the rest of the nation views it as somewhat odd. This has encouraged a regional consciousness which is unique to the rest of the country. It is not coincidental that our important regional historical society and regional historical journal are the Southern Historical Association and the *Journal of Southern History*, or that southerners have produced our most significant regional literature.

One of the most famous interpretations of southern distinctiveness, and certainly the most militant defense of southern uniqueness since the Civil War, is the 1930 volume *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition*, a collection of essays by "Twelve Southerners." These Southern Agrarians, as they came to be known, argued that the difference between the South and the rest of the nation was the difference between agrarianism and industrialism, and they called upon those southerners "who are being converted frequently to the industrial gospel" to repent and return "to the support of the Southern tradition." Among the finest of the essays in *I'll Take My Stand* is Donald Davidson's "A Mirror for Artists." Davidson, a poet, book reviewer, and professor of literature at Vanderbilt University, was one of America's leading men of letters. He was also a conservative, firmly committed to the defense of the southern way of life and all that that implied, including segregation of the races. Three decades after the publication of the agrarian manifesto, he was the intellectual mentor of Bradford, who, on

his teacher's death, would become the leading avatar of Southern Agrarianism.

Outsiders have viewed the Southern Agrarians as hopeless reactionaries, pinning away for the good old days when cotton was kind and blacks knew their place. H. L. Mencken, the *enfant terrible* of American journalism during the 1920s and 1930s, described the Agrarians as "fashioners of Utopia," "sufferers from nostalgic vapors," and ivory-tower pedagogues for believing that a southern culture was dependent on a return to the soil. In truth, southern progress demanded that its poor farmers become "proletarians" if they were to share in the benefits of modern civilization. Mencken, a resident of Baltimore, was optimistic that this was taking place. Urbanization doomed "yokel" control because it was "plainly incompatible with civilized progress." Contemporary opinion of the Southern Agrarians has not moved very far from Mencken's screed.



To admit to being a southern conservative and a disciple of Donald Davidson was thus hardly the wise thing to do if one prized academic advancement and esteem from one's peers. But this is exactly the path that Bradford chose from the time his first writings began appearing in the late 1950s until his sudden death in 1993 at the age of fifty-eight. In his abbreviated life Bradford was an authority on the literature and politics of his beloved South, an articulate defender of eighteenth-century constitutionalism, and an eloquent critic of egalitarianism, mass democracy, and other modern afflictions. His important role in the modern conservative intellectual movement was reflected in the tributes written upon his death by leading conservatives, including Pat Buchanan, Samuel Francis, Paul Gottfried, Jeffrey Hart, Russell Kirk, and Frederick D. Wilhelmsen.

A conservative toiling away in the relative obscurity of the University of Dallas in his native Texas, Bradford never received the status and wealth which his scholarship warranted. He had been, Eugene Genovese said shortly after his death, "a nonperson in all but the southern conservative circles he came to lead." His nomination in 1981 to be chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities was torpedoed by Irving Kristol and other neoconservatives because of his hostile view of Abraham Lincoln. Bradford, never one to court popularity with the keepers of the conventional wisdom, refused to back down. A couple of years later he repeated his criticisms of Lincoln in "Lincoln and the Language of Hate and Fear," an essay which appeared in *Continuity*, a conservative historical journal. Although he recognized the legitimacy of the claims for justice voiced by black Americans, Bradford continued to argue that Lincoln was a demagogue and "the American Caesar of his age." He "left behind him a trail of blood, an emancipation under the worst possible circumstances, and a political example that continues to injure the Republic which he did so much to undermine. It is at our peril that we continue to reverence his name."

These harsh words did not endear Bradford to the leadership of the Republican Party, which prided itself on being the party of Lincoln. But not even the prospect of favors from the conservative Reagan administration could persuade him to cease and desist. He remained at

his death what he had been throughout his life—an unreconstructed southern conservative and the foremost spokesman for the southern conservative movement of his day. In his book *Remembering Who We Are* (1985), Bradford noted that there was a distinction "between a conservative who is also a Southerner and a Southern Conservative." He was one of the latter, and, as he said, an "impenitent" one at that. Perhaps the chief difference between a conservative and a southern conservative such as Bradford is that the latter has a more skeptical attitude toward capitalism and the free market. The modern corporation, he realizes, can be as antagonistic to local customs and private property and as much a revolutionary force as the most aggrandizing state.

As a tribute to his fidelity to conservative principles, eleven admirers of Bradford have contributed essays to *A Defender of Southern Conservatism*. They include, besides the editor, Clyde N. Wilson, an historian at the University of South Carolina, Mark G. Malvasi of Randolph-Macon College in Virginia, Thomas Fleming, editor of the paleoconservative magazine *Chronicles: A Magazine of American Culture*, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, an historian at Emory University, and Eugene D. Genovese, the distinguished historian of the ante-bellum South. Particularly valuable is Alan Cornett's twenty-five page checklist of the writings of Bradford, and his six-page checklist of articles and reviews about Bradford.

Wilson perhaps best captures Bradford's significance. He notes that Bradford took seriously the idea emphasized by the Founding Fathers that political thought, history, and literature were not disparate vocational activities. They were, in Wilson's words, "ethical pursuits, the final end of which was the cultivation of good men. And since the quality of men is expressed in the quality of their citizenship, politics and learning and literature should be a seamless fabric." If politics was an ethical pursuit, then intellectuals were obligated to educate the public in their responsibilities as citizens. This explains the title that Bradford chose for one of his books on the Founding Fathers—*Against the Barbarians* (1992).

Bradford took his own educational responsibilities as an intellectual and citizen quite seriously. He involved himself in national and local political campaigns, served a term in the late 1980s as president of the Philadelphia Society, and spoke frequently at political meetings. One can readily imagine how he would have responded to the claim of the defenders of Bill Clinton that the President's dalliance with Monica Lewinsky was only a private matter and irrelevant to the conduct of his public obligations. This emphasis on the moral dimension of politics along with a "compelling restatement of the value and significance of a Southern tradition that has not entirely disappeared," Wilson concludes, "are among the achievements of M. E. Bradford. Clearly we have here more than a scholarly career. We have a cultural phenomenon of extraordinary import."

Bradford's obituary in the *New York Times* was titled "Melvin Bradford, 58, Conservative Theorist." This was hardly descriptive of Bradford's life. For Bradford, conservatism was not a matter of theory, nor were books and essays the ultimate source of his conservatism. He had come to conservatism at an early age, and his conservative instincts were honed during his graduate years at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee, where he fell under the spell of Davidson, the most militant and faithful of the Southern Agrarians. Bradford never struck the pose of the alienated scholar and artist so popular elsewhere in the United States. Since he highly valued

what the conservative South stood for, there was nothing to be alienated from. He was proud to be descended from Confederate veterans, and he was a member in good standing of the Sons of Confederate Veterans, as well as being its Historian-in-Chief. He was also proud to be a Texan and was often seen wearing a Stetson. As a southern bard, Bradford mobilized his considerable talents as a literary scholar and historian to defend the good life as defined in the southern conservative tradition of John Taylor of Caroline, John Randolph of Roanoke, John C. Calhoun, and the Southern Agrarians. It was a conservatism similar to that of Edmund Burke's, which considered the "unbought grace of life" more important than a higher gross national product, valued freedom more highly than security, and defended the prerogatives of Burke's "little platoons" and private property against the ever encroaching leviathan state.

In his essay "Walking the Levee with Mel Bradford," James McClellan notes that when the history of twentieth-century America is written, "M.E. Bradford will be remembered as the plucky schoolmaster who opened the doors to a restoration of the Southern conservative tradition." This tradition involves the defense of "limited constitutional government, local self-government, political and cultural diversity, protection of the rural environment and way of life, encouragement of religion, and promotion of family and community institutions." Thanks to people such as Bradford, the South has remained the most conservative section of the nation, but it is also capable of producing a Bill Clinton and an Al Gore, two manifestations of the canker eating at the heart of the republic. The question is whether the doors opened by Bradford will be used primarily by those entering the mansion of southern conservatism or by those leaving it.

The Spirit of the Fourteenth Century

E. CATHERINE DUNN

Chauncer and the Late Medieval World, by Lillian M. Bisson, *New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999. x + 294 pp.*

THIS IS THE MOST CHALLENGING book that I have read in the last twenty years, but also the most engaging. It is not a volume of primary research but rather an admirable gathering and organizing of a tremendous collection of secondary materials. It is the product of two institutes sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities, and directed to secondary school teachers. It is based on the premise that Chaucer used his poetry as an attempt to understand and evaluate the confusing world of the late fourteenth century in which he lived. There are many citations of scholars from the so-called New Historicism, but I judge the book as an effort at literary history in the broadest sense of the term. Because the author often traces events of the fourteenth century back to their roots in the earlier Middle Ages, the scope and detail of the study are at times overwhelming. Its topics are as follows: Chaucer's role as poet; religion in the late medieval world; class consciousness and class struggle; love and marriage; and the carnival spirit as the cultural characteristic of the age.

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