

Once More Beyond the Pale

by Chilton Williamson, Jr.

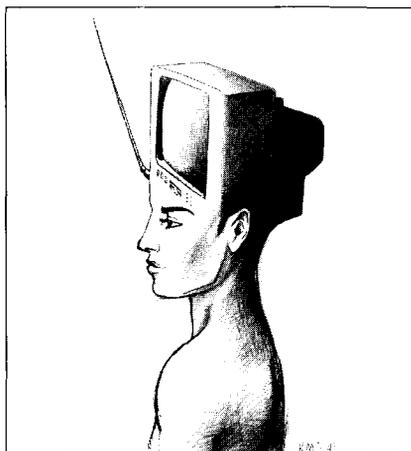
“A thousand years scarce serve to form a state; An hour may lay it in the dust.”
—Lord Byron

**The End of the Twentieth Century
and the End of the Modern Age**

by John Lukacs
New York: Ticknor & Fields;
291 pp., \$21.95

**Around the Cragged Hill: A Personal
and Political Philosophy**

by George F. Kennan
New York: W.W. Norton;
272 pp., \$22.95



Krystyna Jachmiec

Few antiliberal writers are disliked and distrusted so much by mainstream “conservatives” as John Lukacs and George Kennan. Like most movements that achieve a degree of success, intellectual “conservatism” in America has petrified into an establishment far more concerned with maintaining proximity to power than with preserving its own integrity of mind, which in any case was compromised from the start by an unwillingness to risk a commitment to circumscribed interests by examining too critically the structure and function of postwar American society. Since World War II, “conservatives” in this country have mainly been corporate capitalists and anticommunists whose hatred of the left is far greater than their love of the truth, which they are willing to fudge rather than concur with the leftist critique on any point whatever. Compounding this commitment to power and interest is a prep-school code of ethics by which people who refuse to be team players are judged unreliable eccentrics at best, dangerous scoundrels at worst.

Since American “conservatism” for the past 40 years has been little more than an apology for corporate capitalism and modern technomaterialism, it is naturally suspicious of traditionalists

who believe that the time has come to reappraise the modernist idea of “progress” and who are not reluctant to say that the environmental crisis is no bogey of the left but a crucial—perhaps the most crucial—issue of the age, or that “national security” and messianic democratism are not adequate justification for the imperial state. In his review of Mr. Kennan’s latest book in the *New York Times*, George Will called the author’s brand of conservatism “anachronistic” and observed that “his thinking is, strictly speaking, un-American. . . .” The answer to this is that Kennan’s thinking is congruent with the majoritarian thought of many generations of Americans, and that it is Mr. Will’s neo-Kristolian conservatism that is likely to become an anachronism, sooner perhaps than later.

Formally speaking, *The End of the Twentieth Century* and *Around the Cragged Hill* are very different works, Lukacs’ being an historical meditation while Kennan’s, as the title suggests, is a personal and political testament, meant to aid scholars attempting to discern a coherent philosophy from his earlier books. They have in common, though, besides an episodic structure and an impressionistic and subjective technique, a shared view of civilization—meaning es-

entially a preference for the high-bourgeois epoch that Lukacs calls the culmination of the Modern Age—that critics will find easy to dismiss as representing simply the prejudices of age, as indeed George Will came close to doing. (Who says conservatives can’t learn new tricks?) Yet, Kennan’s opinions aside, no reader not already familiar with the man would guess that this vigorously written volume was the work of an octo-, about to become a nona-, genarian.

Kennan contemplates with dismay the United States at the close of the 20th century. “If I were to be asked by a foreigner what strikes me most about my own people, two points . . . would come most readily to mind: first, that we are a nation of bad social habits; and, second, that there are far too many of us.” He deplores the American “addiction” to the automobile and to television; the resolute advancement of mental unreality by advertising and popular politics; the trend from constitutional republicanism toward plebiscitary democracy exemplified by the acceptance of the results of public-opinion polls as *vox populi* and by a growing reliance on ballot propositions and constitutional amendments to circumvent representative government; the destruction of rural life and of the land itself by population growth and spreading suburbanization; the destructive and counterproductive social and environmental effects of technology; uncontrolled immigration; and the advanced centralization of American government that has so far failed to live up to its billing as the solution for the country’s most fundamental problems, which are by now approaching critical mass. As a step toward coping with these, Kennan recommends the creation of a Council of State from among the most intelligent, knowledgeable, experienced, and disin-

Chilton Williamson, Jr., is senior editor for books at Chronicles.

terested of the country's elite and proposes that the 50 states be replaced by a federation of larger geographical regions more independent of Washington, D.C. "I regard myself," he says, "if anyone wants to know, as a Christian, although there are certainly others who would question my right to that status." (This reviewer, having read Mr. Kennan's version of Christianity, is one of them.) He regards man as a highly imperfect creature and is therefore opposed in principle to the progressive agenda. The end of the Cold War, he argues, presents "a demand for nothing less than a redesigning of the entire great pattern of America's interaction in the rest of the world." While favoring a strong military, he believes that America must now abandon many of its foreign entanglements in order to concentrate on domestic problems. Though he values the United Nations as "the only symbol of the community of fate that unites all branches of the human family," he defends "the sound old principle of noninterference in the . . . domestic affairs [of individual states]."

John Lukacs, who insists on being regarded as a historian, not a prophet, is nevertheless in the (professionally if not personally) happy position of a man whose lifetime work is being confirmed by history. (As an admiring friend of mine has remarked, Lukacs can say more about the 20th century in ten pages than anyone else can say in a book.) In *The End of the Twentieth Century*, he restates a theme that has preoccupied him for most of his professional life and tests it against the events of the last four years in Eastern Europe. Also he reverts to an argument he developed 17 years ago in *The Last European War, 1939-1941* (still in my opinion the best of his many wonderful books): that Hitler, not Lenin, was the great revolutionary of the 20th century, in which wars rather than revolutions were the formative events and nations, not classes, bore arms against each other. This century, Lukacs proposes, actually began in 1914 and ended in 1989, comprising a period of 75 years dominated by the two great "mountain ranges" of the world wars and brought to its anticlimactic conclusion by the Cold War.

To the extent that George Kennan and John Lukacs are *bêtes noires* for American "conservatives," their evil rep-

utation rests largely upon their understanding of the Soviet Union and of the Cold War. For four decades, both men have been simply unable to credit American anticommunists as the heroes they have always claimed to be. At no time since 1945, Lukacs and Kennan believe, was the Soviet Union a serious threat to the West. Defensive rather than offensive by nature, it was doomed by its weaknesses and contradictions to eventual implosion, making "rollback" an unnecessary as well as a highly imprudent policy. Stalin, Lukacs insists, was a Russian nationalist, devoted to the consolidation and retention of domestic power and utterly disinterested in the triumph of "international Communism." The Soviet Union, he argues, "had nothing to do with these Communist revolutions" in the Third World, where "a tribal hatred of foreign, in most cases white, power," prevailed. "The obsession with Communism obscured the main condition of the Cold War, which had little to do with Communism" but everything to do with considerations of national power and security. In Lukacs' opinion, anticommunism in the United States was a sort of Masonic ring by which respectable patriotic Americans could recognize one another, and an elaborate professional structure in which opportunists could engage in what today is called "networking" and thereby establish careers for themselves. Anticommunism "was the ideological cement that bound the Republican 'conservative' movement together—a cement that may be dissolving now." (Indeed the issue is whether the "conservatives" *themselves* will not dissolve: already they appear to be evanescing slowly, slowly before our wondering and astonished eyes, and their network with them.)

The broad differences in scope and aim between these books may easily obscure the fact that both are in some degree treatments of the same subject, viewed respectively in its particular and general aspects. The concern of *Around the Cragged Hill* is essentially the destruction of the Old Republic and of the virtues of republican society (including the availability of domestic help!) by progressive and nationalist forces—which, Lukacs shows, are actually one and the same thing, as the career of Theodore Roosevelt clearly demonstrates. ("To think that nationalism is a reactionary phenomenon is a grave er-

ror.") And *The End of the Twentieth Century* is about these same forces at work throughout the rest of the world, beginning at least with Otto von Bismarck who imposed the first social security system on the new German state. Lukacs speculates that nationalism, while remaining "more than the wave of the past" and "still the tide of the present," may not dominate the future: "Something new (and probably unexpected) will emerge in Western Europe during the next few decades."

Parliamentary liberalism was a product of a particular social structure the likes of which we shall not see again. Multiparty democracy of the Western sort, which immediately replaced the communist system in the newly liberated states of Eastern Europe, is unlikely to survive, Lukacs predicts, but will probably be supplanted by single-party government. In the West, the concept of a united Europe lacks "character and meaning," the "conscious (and therefore historical) ideal" needed to give it life. Meanwhile, at century's end, liberalism is in retreat, while "almost everywhere overextended and heavily bureaucratic governments vacillat[e] atop societies whose cohesion is loosening visibly. . . . At the end of the Modern Age the size of the state increases along with the decrease of its authority, because of the decreasing respect and efficiency of its powers."

That passage, encountered at the end of the first disastrous month of the Clinton administration, appears not just insightful but truly prophetic: a compelling explanation of the President's list (already nearly as long as Leporello's) of broken promises made last year to the American electorate. Bill Clinton's actions in office strongly suggest a strategy developed from the start of his campaign for the presidency but kept carefully hidden from the voters: a strategy designed to promote a last-ditch effort at imposing socialism on the United States and reasserting the waning prestige—and through it the power—of the modern state. "I have been heartened," George Kennan told an interviewer before the inaugural, "by what I have seen and heard said by Mr. Clinton, his actions and statements during the interregnum," adding that he was happy to see "younger people coming in, who listen to others." Obviously, they have not been paying attention to Mr. Kennan.

The End of Something

by Jeffrey Meyers

Hemingway: The American Homecoming
by Michael Reynolds
Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell;
264 pp., \$24.95

Hemingway: A Life Without Consequences
by James R. Mellow
Boston: Houghton Mifflin;
704 pp., \$30.00



Hemingway continues to fascinate. The legendary life and heroic exploits of the man who was so admired, honored, and imitated are now well-known: fisherman in the Michigan woods, reporter in Kansas City, wounded war hero, foreign correspondent from Constantinople to Córdoba, Left Bank drinker, bullfight *aficionado*, innovative stylist, African lion hunter, reporter in war-torn Spain, expatriate in Cuba, witness of D-Day and the liberation of Paris, victim of the FBI, survivor of two plane crashes and of two series of shock treatments, husband of four wives, father of three sons, creator of some of the best fiction of the century, winner of the Pulitzer Prize and the Nobel Prize—and brain-blasted suicide.

Yet books about his life continue to roll off the presses. Since my biography appeared in 1985, publishers have brought out seven others by Fernanda Pivano, Kenneth Lynn, Peter Griffin (2), Michael Reynolds (2), and James Mellow; five memoirs—by Jack Hemingway, Denis Brian, Henry Villard, Slim Keith, and Peter Viertel; as well as a second book on Hadley Hemingway and an autobiographical novel by his granddaughter Lorian Hemingway. It seems there is nothing more to say. But viewing familiar material from an original point of view (as Mellow does), instead of presenting a mass of trivial facts (the way Reynolds does), reveals that it is still possible to write a valuable biography.

Reynolds, though he tries to establish his *macho* credentials by mentioning

visits to the track and brandies at the bar, and by feebly imitating Hemingway's style, actually belongs to the Carlos Baker school of heavy-handed academic biography. Like Baker, he combines "lyrical" passages that strain for (but do not achieve) "poetic" effects by amassing trivial facts, irrelevant details, tedious *clichés* and by exhibiting unconscionable repetition. If you want to know about Gus Pfeiffer's chess sets or Leicester Hemingway's bird house, this is the book for you. Instead of a continuous narrative, the book is chopped up into short sections, like news reports of separate events, and interspersed with fictionalized versions of real people's thoughts and stale accounts of the major stories.

Reynolds has unfortunately got hold of the lending-library cards of Sylvia Beach's bookshop Shakespeare and Company (which he spells incorrectly) and repeatedly mentions which books Hemingway and his circle borrowed. He has spent weeks reading through the *Paris Herald Tribune* and, to justify his sterile labors, reprints every familiar and pointless reference to Hemingway. Reynolds spends considerable time on Hemingway's daily writing and revision, but says very little about the *meaning* of his works. He does not, for example, connect the title and the content of Hemingway's "Neothomist Poem." When discussing two stories in the context of Hemingway's divorce and second marriage, Reynolds fails to relate the officer's advice in "In Another Country"—"A man must not marry"—to the orderly's advice in "Now I Lay Me"—"A man ought to be married."

Clutching his Paris guidebooks and fumbling with street maps, Reynolds (innocent of diacritical marks) stumbles through Hemingway's Europe misspelling a dozen names and getting the facts all wrong. "Honoraria" for "Honoraria" and "*mairie*" (town hall) for "*maire*" (mayor) are typical howlers. The elegant and fashionable *rue de la Paix* could never be described as "glitzy." And Aigues-Mortes, which Reynolds calls "uninteresting," is in fact a fascinating fortified medieval Crusaders' town. The chronology of the book is also confusing. In Reynolds' version, Hemingway moves into Gerald Murphy's studio *after* he is already living there. Hemingway's

wound from a skylight accident is described 25 pages *before* the accident is mentioned. And Hemingway writes a thank-you note for a weekend with Fitzgerald at Ellerslie *before* he arrives there.

Reynolds doggedly focuses on the trivial and ignores the significant aspects of Hemingway's life. Many of the important points he mentions desperately need, but do not have, clarification. What exactly *was* Hemingway's "dark attraction" to lesbians? What did Pound mean by Hemingway's superior "manipulation of the external world"? Why did Hemingway's mother say most marriages ought to go "on the rocks" while his father insisted she was "heart-broken" about her son's divorce? There is no explanation of why in 1927 Hemingway's sister Madelaine said she could not come to Pamplona because her parents "have a horror for Fiestas and Spain in general—ever since your books," yet in 1928 his sister Marcelline was "vacationing in Spain." And Hemingway's false statement that he did not commit adultery with Pauline Pfeiffer is quoted, without comment, as if it were true.

Worst of all, for someone who has published half a dozen books on Hemingway, are the numerous factual errors. Calling a bull "virile" is absurd. A woman's confinement takes place *before*, not *after*, the birth of her child. The Hotel Brevoort is near Washington Square, not in midtown Manhattan. France does not celebrate the American Memorial Day. St. James never visited and was certainly not buried in Santiago de Compostela. Ezra Pound was not the father of his wife's son. The events in the Murphys' social life were not "unexpected," but always carefully planned. Gerald Murphy (who never wore a bowler) was not a "first-rate painter," but gave up painting (he said) because he was second-rate. Reynolds says Hemingway disliked "pre-winter weather." But the plaque under his statue in Ketchum reads: "Best of all, he liked the fall." Hemingway was not forced to "sign away his son and wife," but abandoned them for another woman. Pauline Pfeiffer did not give up her soul to marry Hemingway. She persuaded him to convert to Catholicism and hurt their marriage by refusing to practice birth control. Dos Passos, whom Reyn-