

ideas of masculine self-worth."

Radicals like John Reed, Max Eastman, Bill Haywood, and Floyd Dell, Fraser argues, were also greatly influenced by the chivalric mythos. Ironically, these militant radicals, with their agonistic views of justice and rights, war and peace, were far less violent than the seemingly rational and benevolent progressives who used professionalism and the social sciences rather than chivalric ideals to buttress their power. The rationalistic, anti-chivalric, and nonagonistic view of peace of progressives like Woodrow Wilson led to violence, while radical thinking worked against violence. "It was imperative for the employing class to see itself as having wholly clean hands when it comes to violence"; only violent men committed violence—irrational types, workers, criminals, immigrants. Thus it was reasonable to smash unions, break strikes, and make war to keep peace.

This is the paradox that Fraser emphasizes, and he is right to do so. The connections he makes between

literature and politics and labor history and foreign wars and movies and detective stories and children's books are very impressive. There is much to be said for his argument (supported by 971 footnotes) when it is clear; the problem is that his convoluted style seems to mirror a confusion of thought. I at least, after several readings, could only conclude that he is of two minds in regard to chivalry's impact on American life. On one hand he seems to see it as beneficent; on the other malign. It is hard to reconcile Fraser's view that "Kennedy had demonstrated that exciting possibilities could still be realized, including the possibility of acting upon the promise of American ideals" with other statements he makes about Kennedy's British-influenced imperialistic romanticism.

The problem is with chivalry itself. At heart it is a macho, overly romanticized myth of the solitary man of honor, the lover/warrior, the scholar/athlete out to prove he is a real man. Fraser tries to reconcile the irreconcilable. In trying to say too much, he confuses his argument.

Yet in this age of Star Wars and Spider Man, a time when bored children avidly play war on home computers, he is surely right in saying that "ideologically, the atomic bombs that devastated Hiroshima and Nagasaki belonged with the havoc-wreaking magic swords of Galahad and Ariosto's Amazonian heroines, and the robotic Talus who served as enforcer for Spenser's Artagall in his merciless justice dealing, and the heavenly technology with which the loyal angels smashed the rebel ones in *Paradise Lost*.

Yes, ideals, especially those that appeal to bored and unimaginative sensibilities, do have consequences, often murderous. Chivalry is one of them.

Correspondence

THE BRITISH IN NORTHERN IRELAND

To the Editors: Alfred McCreary's review of Jack Holland's *The Prisoner's Wife* (Books, June) has some keen and thoughtful insights, just as Holland's own nonfiction work on Northern Ireland has had. On key points, however, McCreary sounds less than objective.

Quick to inveigh against IRA atrocities, he is silent on the Loyalist gangs. Neither does he acknowledge that maybe, just maybe, there is something fundamentally pernicious about the Six Counties with its history of discrimination and about a British patriotism which is little more than a mask for maintaining relative, and unjust, privilege. The struggle is not simply one over national identity and allegiance; it also has its roots in an unjust state and social order. Life may be not so bad for Belfast's middle classes, and Protestant and Catholic slumdweller may endure through a combination of courage, stubbornness, and self-delusion, but the fact remains that life for many in Northern Ireland is grim. That it is grimest for portions of the Catholic population is a judgment on British policy and Orange intent. Mr. McCreary ought to acknowledge that before he complains that the British and Orange cases are misunderstood.

As to Britain's commitment to "the decent thing," what decency was there in Mrs. Thatcher's handling of last year's hunger strike? Her inflexibility made martyrs of the strikers and stirred divisive passions in both communities, thus making accommodation that much more difficult. And how responsible is it for Britain to assure the Orangemen that she will never leave without their consent, at once legitimizing their bigotry and removing any incentive to negotiate? Giving the Falkland Islanders an absolute guarantee of self-determination was merely absurd. Extending such a veto over political change to Northern Ireland's Loyalists is both foolish and unjust, but that is what Britain has done, to the detriment of her own democratic principles. There is also this, perhaps more debatable point: Rightly or wrongly, British troops in Catholic areas are at worst a provocation, at best a device for holding a fundamentally unsatisfactory line. They should go, but they will not go until British, and Irish, politicians overcome the pride, arrogance, obtuseness, and avoidance of responsibility that have caused them to fail to institute a more just political and social order. The people of Ulster have contributed to their own entrapment, but the politicians have much to answer for as well. Could we not expect more of the "Mother of Parliaments"?

Ed McCarthy

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