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**ARTS & LETTERS**


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*Hello, Mr. Chips*

"James Hilton's *Goodbye, Mr. Chips* and the Strange Death of Liberal England" by Patrick Scott, in *The South Atlantic Quarterly* (Autumn 1986), Duke Univ. Press, Box 6697, College Station, Durham, N.C. 27708.

James Hilton's staunch schoolmaster, Mr. Chips, has survived as one of the most familiar figures in British fiction. But critics typically measure *Goodbye, Mr. Chips* against the tradition of novels that decry the caning-and-cold-water discipline of British public schools, and dismiss Hilton's 1933 classic as sentimental and reactionary.

A mistake, says Scott, professor of English at the University of South Carolina. Hilton's is "a hard book, not a sentimental one."

Rather than take the "easy and well-established" angry posture of anti-public school tracts such as *The Loom of Youth* (1918) by Alec Waugh, Hilton maintains "a beautifully modulated ambivalence." His real object is a "detailed obituary" of British liberalism—that faith, crushed by World War I, in middle-class decency, progress, and "a genuine inclusive democracy of duke and dustman." Chips's pastoral world at Brookfield—modeled on Leys School in Cambridge, which Hilton attended—is "rooted in things that had stood the test of time and change and war." But those things are doomed by the Great War—that "vast disarrangement," as Chips says, "for which England had sacrificed . . . too much."

Chips's life spans Britain's liberal era. He is born in 1848, the year of European revolutions that, in Britain, launched a period of uncharacteristic social and political stability, presided over by the Liberal Party and its leading light, William Gladstone. Chips's wife dies in 1898, the year of Gladstone's death. Chips retires briefly in 1918. He dies shortly after the 1929 Crash, from "exposure to the chilling air of autumn." So, suggests Hilton, does "middle-class liberal decency" soon give way to a dog-eat-dog brand of 20th-century individualism.

The popularity of *Mr. Chips* does not simply reflect the "obsessive concern of the English about the eccentricities of a public school education," argues Scott. Rather, on one level, the novel calls forth a "general 20th-century cultural dilemma": that repositories of "humane significance" such as Brookfield "tragically cloister" the finest hearts and minds from a world that needs their healing influence. And more broadly, Hilton powerfully evokes a Britain "for whom days of ease were nearly over."

*Gone with the Wind*

"*Gone with the Wind* and the Southern Cultural Awakening" by Darden Asbury Pyron, in *The Virginia Quarterly Review* (Autumn 1986), 1 West Range, Charlottesville, Va. 22903.

Margaret Mitchell reportedly "yelped" with laughter when she saw what Hollywood's David O. Selznick had done with her thick 1936 novel, *Gone with the Wind*. The antebellum Twelve Oaks plantation looked to the amused ex-journalist like a hybrid of New York's Grand Central Station