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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

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Scarlett (Vivien Leigh) loved Ashley (Leslie Howard), but he loved the Old South mystique: magnolias and darkies. To author Margaret Mitchell's disgust, so did movie viewers.

and the Alabama state capitol. "We Southerners could write the truth about the antebellum South . . . until Gabriel blows his trumpet," she wrote to an editor at Richmond *Times Dispatch*, "and everyone would go on believing in the Hollywood version—lavender-and-old-lace-moonlight-on-the-magnolia."

Mitchell was not alone in wanting to portray the *real* South. As Pyron, an associate history professor at Florida International University, notes, the year 1926, when Mitchell started writing her epic, began a decade of intense activity by "Young South" writers. Among them: William Faulkner (*Absalom, Absalom*), Thomas Wolfe (*Look Homeward, Angel*), Allen Tate (*Ode to the Confederate Dead*), W. J. Cash (*The Mind of the South*), Ellen Glasgow, Robert Penn Warren, Cleanth Brooks, and Erskine Caldwell (*Tobacco Road*), who had worked with Mitchell at the *Atlanta Journal*.

Mitchell's sprawling novel is not high art—Malcolm Cowley branded the prose "trite and sentimental." Yet, in Pyron's opinion, it not only has a "desperate vitality," but also shares certain values with the more honored Young South fiction. If Faulkner's Flem Snopes and Caldwell's Jeeter Lester reflect a rejection of Old South ideals and a taste for alienation and irony, so do Mitchell's north Georgia characters.

As Pyron notes, Mitchell "used all the conventions of the plantation romance and then subverted them." Scarlett O'Hara is no "innocent virgin"; the men are "neither heroic nor noble." Rhett Butler, played with gusto by Clark Gable in the movie, is in print a dashing wimp who ultimately flees Scarlett to return to Charleston, respectability, and Mother.

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The novel, Pyron notes, rejects the past as a source of authority, and ridicules such alternatives as religion, politics, and learning. What counts in a society fated to struggle with "circumstance" is pure being; energy and determination, or what Mitchell calls "gumption," are essential.

Scarlett had gumption. So, says Pyron, did Mitchell. She deserves equal mention with her Young South contemporaries.

Rescuing Liszt

"The Noble Liszt" by Alfred Brendel, in *The New York Review of Books* (Nov. 20, 1986), 250 West 57th St., New York, N.Y. 10107.

Last year music lovers paid homage to the Hungarian-born Romantic composer Franz Liszt (1811-86) on the centennial of his death.

Unfortunately, says Brendel, a pianist and author, the festivals marking the occasion may have "further obscured" the real virtues of an artist who was attacked by his peers and gloried in personal recklessness. He blithely told his 19th-century biographer, Lina Ramann: "Don't get too entangled in details. My biography has to be made up rather than made out."

Liszt combined precocity (he began composing at age eight) with prolixity, "masculine beauty, social triumphs," and "a love life bordering on scandal." He was resented at the court in Weimar, Germany, where he settled in 1848, but Richard Wagner, Hans von Bülow, and other composers wanted to be his students. He gambled and drank. He was the first important pianist to move from the salon to the concert stage, where he was a ham, eyeing the ladies and tossing his kid gloves. The worst side effect, says Brendel, was careless composition. With some exceptions (e.g., the Sonata in B Minor), his large-scale works suffer from "a lack of economy, direction, thematic distinction, or freshness." His parroting of different styles could yield a smorgasbord effect, as when he used gypsy tunes he mistakenly thought were native to Hungary.

But if Liszt's faults were personal, so were his strengths. Liszt's music, says Brendel, unlike that of the meticulous Mozart, "projects the man." For him the piano was a means of "poetic expression." Ultimately, his best qualities triumphed. Liszt mustered enough self-control in middle age to quit the concert stage and move to Rome, where he developed a "spare and uncompromising" style influenced by Catholicism and *musica sacra*.

Liszt spread his genius thin, agrees Brendel. Yet if his fans focus on the works that balance "originality and finish, generosity and control, dignity and fire," they may end the debate over whether he belongs in the "pantheon" of musical greats or the "bazaar of oddities and monstrosities."

Getty's Museum

"The Getty Goes Global" by Maks Westerman, in *Art and Antiques* (Dec. 1986), 89 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10003.

"If you can count your money, you're not rich enough."

So said the U.S. oil Croesus J. Paul Getty, who died in England in 1976 at age 84. He was easily rich enough to be casual about the place to which he willed the bulk of his estate. He never even saw the California museum