

II. The hatreds they aroused, though not ancient, were easily rekindled.

He identifies the decentralizing constitution of 1974 as a contributing factor in the country's dissolution; it made the federal government virtually impotent and unable to govern. Unfortunately, he reflects on the point almost as an aside, as if to show he has read and agrees with Susan Woodward's *Balkan Tragedy*. What he does state categorically, however, is that "the prime agent of Yugoslavia's destruction was Slobodan Milosevic" with assistance from Franjo Tudjman. History is filled with imperfect players, and to put the blame for Yugoslavia's demise on two individuals, though as a device it might work in a Shakespearean play, is naive. And while the collapse of a country can be laid to the faults of its inhabitants, we read (one would hope) the ambassador's book not to marvel at the failings of the south Slavs but to learn something about American foreign policy: how the United States behaves under certain circumstances, and how it should behave.

Our policy in those days assumed that, for the benefit of its inhabitants, and for the peace and security of Europe, Yugoslavia should remain one country. Most Yugoslavs agreed. The author, for one, was convinced that unity and democracy had to go together, but he feared that unity meant coercive Serbian hegemony, with a loss of democracy in other republics. Encouraging democracy in Slovenia and Croatia, he felt, would mean the breakup of the country, and possible war. Our policy, then, became one of hoping for the best while watching from the sidelines. Most disturbing was America's lack of vision during these critical years: our inability to see beyond the present, and our passivity in the face of dangerous developments.

One could say that, given the rising tensions within Yugoslavia, dissolution was inevitable. One could also say that, given the economic limitations of such small entities as the six republics, which are bound to provoke popular discontent, some sort of union is inevitable. As Zimmermann predicted, civil war followed the declarations of independence.

With the commencement of hostilities the ambassador's position was completely reversed. When the Yugoslav National Army began shelling Croatian cities, he called for armed intervention. This was in sharp contrast to his belief while still in Washington that with the

ending of the Cold War Yugoslavia's importance had diminished, that the United States would not fight to preserve Yugoslav unity. He was also, of course, among the first to call for armed intervention in Bosnia.

These paradoxes of policy (the unity of Yugoslavia is not worth fighting for, the unity of Croatia is; it is legitimate for Bosnia to secede from Yugoslavia, but not for Serbian areas to secede from Bosnia) go unexplained, even unnoticed, and in the book much goes unexplained. Actions proceed from unarticulated assumptions. There is an underlying naiveté about the account that is highly unsettling.

The demise of Yugoslavia was a low point in international diplomacy, both European and American. It is difficult, and possibly unfair, to say that we could have done better; but it is even more difficult to say we could have done worse.

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## To the Lighthouse

by Loxley F. Nichols

The Fennel Family Papers

by William Baldwin

Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books;

284 pp., \$19.95



When Camilla, the elderly spinster daughter of the infamous Captain Jack Fennel and matriarch of the Fennel family, sees her house guest holding an antique spyglass, she comments, "My father's glass, Dr. Danvers. Are you planning a voyage?" Actually, the voyage is already underway for the young history professor who shows symptoms of seasickness the moment he steps into the Fennel house. In this house that is literally a land ship, constructed "every post and lintel" from the debris of shipwrecks off Dog Tooth Shoal, everything is awry from the wavy floors and unplumbed joints to the ideas and actions of the eccentric Fennels. Upon discovering that Ginny Fennel, a student in his class, is a descendant of the illustrious Fennels, Paul Danvers sets out to gain tenure by using the girl to get to and publish the

private family papers. However, when he actually arrives in Port Ulacca, South Carolina, to examine the logbooks of this family of lighthouse keepers, his travels take him on a journey through time and experience that is quite different from what he had anticipated.

Like *The Hard to Catch Mercy*, Mr. Baldwin's previous novel which won the William Smith Award in 1993, *The Fennel Family Papers* is an initiation story. Although Paul Danvers has been awarded his doctorate and is teaching history at the state university, he is illiterate, immature, and insubstantial—a mere ghost of a man. Ignorant, inexperienced, and inept, Paul Danvers embodies the worst of what we think about college professors. A textbook example of "those who can't," it is only Paul's utter dissociation from everything and everyone, and his acute awareness of his deficiencies, that render him salvageable.

At the onset of his week with the Fennels, Paul is impervious to beauty and ignorant of violence. He does not recognize, nor does he know how to respond to, Camilla's recitation of Wordsworth, and he cannot fathom Ginny's mother's love for her flower garden. As unsteady as he is inside this house, Paul feels more comfortable indoors than out, and he is no less than horrified when asked to help with the slaughter of a chicken for supper:

The idea that they would eat an animal that was at that very moment alive and running in the backyard made him uneasy.

'You thought chickens came from meat counters, didn't you?'

Paul shook his head no, but she was right—he did.

Terrorized by the witchcraft of Da Bena, the family cook, and brutalized at the hands of Leroy Ramona, Ginny's homicidal uncle, Paul suffers damage to both his physical and sartorial person—the tweed jacket with chamois elbow patches, the flannel trousers, the pipe are destroyed or discarded one by one, as his hands, feet, and eyes sustain various breaks and lacerations. Acute physical and emotional suffering, however, is for Paul ultimately benevolent and even necessary. For what he loses is irrelevant or false, and what he gains is courage, insight, and wisdom. Goaded past irritation he discovers for the first time true anger and laughter; stripped of affecta-

tion, he becomes authentic. By the end of his stay, Paul Danvers has learned what it means to become “de man of the family” and to “do the right thing” (rather than the expedient thing).

In Baldwin’s fiction, becoming human means learning how to love—becoming a man means being willing to kill, when it means defending or protecting oneself, or what one loves. This same sort of trial or test is the text of *The Hard to Catch Mercy* as well, but in both books it is not so much the act of killing that makes the difference as the protagonists’ willingness to face his fear. The Fennel papers and tenure, per se, become superfluous once Paul learns that for the first time in his life he has something of value to impart to his students: “And he didn’t need tenure or an article to do it. He could tell them—he could address them in an open and honest manner. He could tell them—he could tell them that despite what they would learn about the world in his class—and despite the armies of despair arranged against them—they must take responsibility for themselves and for the people around them. And above all else they must not

be afraid.”

Mr. Baldwin is a versatile writer, if his first two novels are any indication. *The Hard to Catch Mercy* is an old-fashioned country saga that spans years, a sort of *Cold Sassy Tree*, but better; while *The Fennel Family Papers*, which takes place within a matter of days, is a compressed morality tale of contemporary life. In both the narrative technique is excellent.

Less polished is Mr. Baldwin’s prose style. In *The Fennel Family Papers* instances of knotty syntax sometimes occasion awkward references to “the man,” and one winces in reading that an individual “enthused” (even if this particular character is effusive). Also Mr. Baldwin sometimes overextends himself in the intricacies of his ambitious plots. When past and present vie for equal time, clarity (and the reader’s comprehension) are sometimes sacrificed. In *The Hard to Catch Mercy*, Big Sister’s identity and role and Maum Anna’s history remain a puzzlement. In *The Fennel Family Papers*, which includes an epigraph from Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* indicating many other signs of indebtedness to this novel, we may conclude that

Mr. Baldwin intends a kind of dreamy cohesion of past and present, but his technique is not entirely successful in this regard. The narrative can become irritatingly fuzzy, as in the case of Da Bena’s role in Adam’s fall and Jack Fennel’s part in his sister’s death. But Mr. Baldwin’s occasional missteps and obscurities are easily offset by his facility with characterization. The zany Fennel household is populated with colorful characters such as the desiccated Camilla (surely an incarnation of Miss Emily Grierson), the ebullient Azalea, and the sociopathic Leroy. Baldwin displays an impeccable ear in rendering the Gullah dialect of coastal South Carolina, and his depiction of blacks who are not simply hired help but part of the family—blood kin, in the Fennel case—is expert.

Further pleasure is afforded by the depth and richness of Baldwin’s themes. *The Fennel Family Papers* is a comic satire on college life, Southern aristocracy, and the modern ethos of paranoia. He uses the absurd not to validate absurdity, fear, and despair, but to point the way toward meaning, courage, and hope. Baldwin explores the elasticity of language and variability of perception by offering multiple interpretations, or versions, of such concepts as “doctor,” “history,” “truth.” Thus Da Bena is not merely some voodoo crone who menaces Paul Danvers and the periphery of the plot, but—like Martin Ruppel, the family physician, and Paul Danvers, the doctor of philosophy—she too is a veritable “doctor” (a witch doctor) who works to bring him to an emotional and moral healing that could be wrought only by active suffering and displacement. While the entire clan at Port Ulacca work (conspiratorially and malevolently, it seems to Paul) to “educate” the young professor, it is Da Bena who receives most of the “blame”—and eventually the credit—for his coming of age. With her long tentacle arms, chocolate eyes, and piano-key teeth, Da Bena, like the house itself, seems a gift from the sea, as she and *The Fennel Family Papers* are indeed a gift to all readers of good fiction.

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# Principalities & Powers

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by Samuel Francis

## The Ruling Class

One of the ironies of American political discussion in the last generation or so—indeed, of the last century—has been that, for all our boasting and braggadocio about being a nation founded on the proposition that all men are created equal, it is almost impossible to find any significant American social thinker who really believes it. Power elites, managerial elites, cultural elites, media elites, cognitive elites, the “mandarins,” the “new class,” the “rich and the super-rich,” the “overclass,” and probably half a dozen other, similar minotaurs have crept through the labyrinthine political sociology of the last 50 years, and eventually each one has escaped its academic cavern and roamed at large through the meadows and hamlets of American journalism. The entire history of social and political thought in the United States since at least the time of Charles Beard’s dubious claim that the Constitution was the product of a cabal of self-interested property owners has been one long retreat from the Jeffersonian egalitarianism that supposedly rested at the center of our founding national mythology.

The constitutional prohibition of the granting of titles of nobility is strong evidence that the Framers and most of their contemporaries did not want anything like the ruling aristocracies of Europe to emerge in this country and that they believed such powdered and privileged orders were as unnecessary as they were undesirable. But if any of the 20th century theories of elites and social and political stratification has merit, the Framers, at least for once, were wrong. Regardless of the names they take and the wigs they wear, aristocracies—minorities that control the political, economic, and cultural life of the societies in which they live—are inherent in the nature of human society, and the oratorical piffle about all men having been created equal does not alter this ineluctable fact.

The inevitability of elites and of the inequality of human beings and human society was a fact conveniently forgotten by some of our Framers’ contemporaries and successors, here and in Europe, until in the late 19th century various Italian

social theorists, mainly Vilfredo Pareto and Gaetano Mosca, rediscovered what was then dubbed the “Iron Law of Oligarchy” and explained and explored its implications. Whatever illusions the eggheads of the Enlightenment convinced themselves of, anyone who has ever actually run any kind of human organization, from a bridge club to a multinational empire, knows the law is true. Human beings do not get organized spontaneously, and things do not happen unless someone decides to make them happen. In the case of the bridge club, someone has to decide who will be members and who won’t, when and where it will meet, who will provide refreshments, and all the other little things that most of those who eventually show up never suspect have to be done. Most human beings have neither the time, the interest, the opportunity, or the ability to think about these matters, take them in hand, and actually do them, and if, as Pareto remarked, “history is a graveyard of aristocracies,” then human social life is an endless record of bridge clubs that never played a single trump because no one ever bothered to decide on a time and place to meet.

Pareto and Mosca crafted what today is known as the “classical theory of elites” largely in response to the egalitarianism of Karl Marx, which was itself an extension of Enlightenment egalitarianism gone mad. One implication of the classical theory of elites is that the “classless society” is no less a creature of mythology than the Minotaur himself, but another is that the ancient division of the forms of government into the three basic types of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy is also wrong. One man cannot rule any more than most men can rule, and behind even the most ostentatious Ozymandias or the noisiest rabble there lie the ranks of your friendly neighborhood oligarchy—priests, warriors, clerks, merchants, landed magnates, capitalists, bureaucrats, or secret police. In classical elite theory, there is really only one form of government, ever—oligarchy, the rule of the few—and the other forms are simply different costumes that different kinds of oligarchies don depending on their internal structures, interests, and circumstances. In the

aborning democracies of the late 19th century, in Italy and elsewhere, as in their more mature descendants a hundred years later, this was a school of thought that was fairly easy to formulate and sustain, and the divers experiments in classless societies founded since Pareto and Mosca wrote have yielded results that are not exactly incompatible with their ideas.

Today, the ideas of Pareto and Mosca have entered the language even of such advanced social thinkers as Dan Quayle and Bob Dole, who instruct us in the iniquities of the “cultural elite” and the “Hollywood elite,” and indeed everyone seems to have his own favorite elite as a perennial bugaboo. Hence the catalogue of elites mentioned earlier, and there is a vast academic literature on the subject of elites in American politics and society, social and political stratification, and the various kinds of elites that do or do not exist. One conventional academic distinction that still prevails is that while there certainly are different kinds of elites, there is not and cannot be any such animal as a “ruling class,” at least in advanced industrialized, democratic societies.

The distinction between an elite and a ruling class is indeed an important one. An elite is simply a dominant minority within a particular field—business, politics, culture, religion, sports, etc.—while a ruling class is a unified dominant minority that prevails over many different or all fields. The “media elite,” for example, may dominate the major newspapers, magazines, and broadcasting networks, but no one would claim that the same elite also controls large corporations, universities, the political parties, the federal bureaucracy, or other pastures of power where the high and the mighty happily disport themselves. Prior to the Industrial Revolution and the emergence of mass democracy in the 19th century, it is held, ruling classes did prevail, certainly in European and British societies, where landed and usually titled nobilities monopolized political office, the church, the army and navy, and such media as then existed. But in our own happy and progressive days of flush toilets and electronic voting booths, such monopolization is not possible. The