

everywhere bracing and everywhere felt. No book related to his subject better expresses the idea that conservatism is not an ideology or a political prescription but, rather, a vision or a way of seeing things.

Williamson has taken the opportunity, as well he should, to make his version of the conservative heritage one that is personally infused with his experience. When he writes about Edward Abbey, we can sense much of his own relation with wilderness and freedom. When he writes about Peter Brimelow and the issue of immigration, we also sense his own engagement with that issue and the penumbra of his own brilliant book about it, *The Immigration Mystique*—the best study of that subject ever penned. When he writes about Samuel Francis, Clyde Wilson, and Thomas Fleming, he deals with men he has himself known, and in so doing, he decisively clarifies the induced confusion about the meaning of conservatism.

He has also taken the opportunity to honor those he rightly calls “prophetic artists.” The presence of T.S. Eliot, Ernest

Hemingway, William Faulkner, Evelyn Waugh, and Flannery O’Connor is right, for the modern traditionalist must live in revolutionary times, and we need the vision of artists as much as we do the theories of political thinkers—and maybe we need them more.

Perhaps now I can address my favorite thing about Chilton Williamson’s book, and that is his writing. *The Conservative Bookshelf* is not only readable, it is positively fun to read, and with that pleasure comes the sense that the style is the man himself. Those who know Chilton Williamson know that he has a zest for living, a talent for being in the world, and everything he does, he does excellently well, whether it is wrangling horses, stalking game, fly-fishing, or writing. His cogent sense of reality animates his writing, and his unified sensibility and flexible mind are effortlessly expressed in his articulation. I predict that his book not only will find many grateful readers but will be of special value, in these confusing times, to the young. c



## The Remnant’s Library

Rascals and Prophets

by Thomas Fleming

Chilton Williamson has taken an important step toward giving postmodern conservatism a set of respectable literary credentials. If readers are expecting a conventional walk through the conservative “classics” or a set of reflections on the writers celebrated by Russell Kirk in *The Conservative Mind*, they will be disappointed. Rather than taking tea with Dr. Johnson or fencing with the legal minds of Henry Sumner Maine or Fitzjames Stephen, readers of *The Conservative Bookshelf* will find themselves rubbing shoulders with a rascally set of novelists and essayists—Ernest Hemingway, Edward Abbey, William Faulkner, Edmund Wilson, and Aldous Huxley—few of whom ever thought of themselves as conservatives.

Some readers will be reassured by the presence of such reactionary liberals as Ortega y Gasset and Albert Jay Nock or the one or two legitimate conservatives thrown in (to confuse the reader?)—Cicero, T.S. Eliot, and Clyde Wilson; for the most part, however, what this book represents is an act of subversive bricolage—a patching together of disparate elements as a means of defining a tradition that cannot really be defined. In Williamson’s hands, Edward Abbey and Edmund Wilson are inducted as involuntary soldiers in the conservative cause—and very effective soldiers, too. His insight is impeccable. Even William F. Buckley, Jr. is represented by his last decent book, *God and Man at Yale*.

Everyone would write his own book, of course, though I cannot imagine anyone really keeping Ann Coulter on any book-

shelf, conservative or otherwise. My own list would have begun with Aristotle’s *Ethics* and *Politics*, which, taken together, are the single most important contribution to conservative thought. And, if there is room for the Stoic emperor Marcus (whose philosophy was subversive of the Roman order), why not true-blue conservatives such as Sophocles, Livy, and Plutarch?

There is a chapter on Edmund Burke, as there should be, but the British tradition produced a number of powerful conservative writers and thinkers—Richard Hooker, Samuel Johnson, Walter Scott, and David Hume—beside whom Burke, for all his brilliance, is a fairly slender reed. I would not have represented T.S. Eliot by *The Waste Land*, a work of despair written before he found his moorings, and I think some room in a work of this kind might have been found for the best-selling reactionary writer of the 20th century, J.R.R. Tolkien. But this is not my book.

Publishers who commission this sort of book generally expect a piece of routine hackwork that represents conventional opinion. They must have been disconcerted to receive—and publish—an original contribution toward making sense of the helter-skelter traditions and movements, which, taken together, can compose a conservative tradition. *The Conservative Bookshelf*’s greatest strength is, as one would predict, in the depth of common sense and in the strength of the writing. Indeed, it is better written than many of the more recent conservative classics it has celebrated. A healthy sale during the Holiday Shopping Season would be a sign that there are still (in Nock’s phrase) a saving remnant in America who esteem the practitioners of “Elijah’s Job.” c

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*Thomas Fleming is the editor of Chronicles and the author, most recently, of The Morality of Everyday Life.*

# THE CONSERVATIVE BOOKSHELF

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by Chilton Williamson, Jr.

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by Aldous Huxley

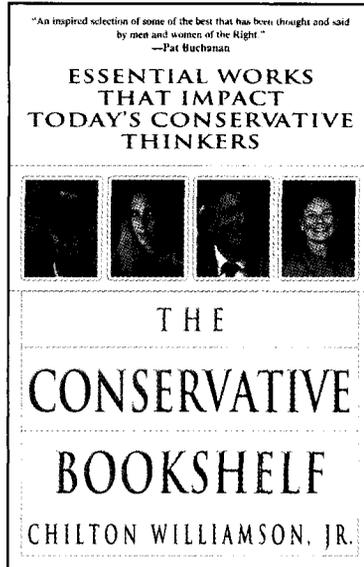
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by Jean Raspail

*City of God*  
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by Russell Kirk

*Ideas Have Consequences*  
by Richard Weaver



“Williamson, the former book review editor at *National Review* and current senior editor for books at *Chronicles* and the author of several novels and non-fiction books himself, knows the difference between a real classic and the mental belches that today often masquerade as ‘conservatism.’”

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# Celtic Thunder

by Roger D. McGrath

*"The Celts fear neither earthquakes nor the waves."*

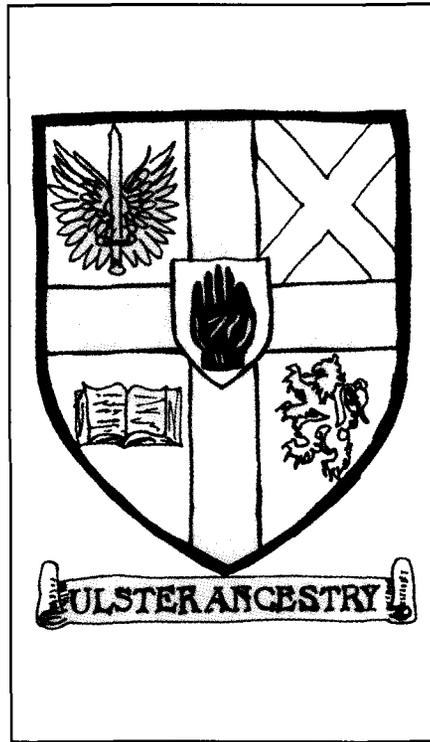
—Aristotle

**Born Fighting: How the Scots-Irish Shaped America**  
by James Webb  
New York: Broadway Books;  
369 pp., \$25.95

Nearly six years ago, *Chronicles* published "Death Before Dishonor," an article I wrote about the westward march of the American pioneer. Much of the time, I was writing about the Scotch-Irish—or Scots-Irish, if you prefer. These hard-edged folks were in the vanguard of the movement across the continent—and God help those who stood in their way. James Webb's *Born Fighting* is devoted to the occasionally perverse, often irascible, and always independent and courageous Scots-Irish. If ever a people were born fighting, it was these sons of Ulster.

Webb writes well and often—I read his *Fields of Fire* when it first appeared in 1978 (most Marines I knew did)—but not until now, after six novels, has he produced his first work of nonfiction. Part history, part sociology, part personal, and all fast-paced well-written romp, *Born Fighting* will keep the reader up at night turning page after page. It is not a comprehensive history of the Scots-Irish or a thorough analysis of their culture, which has been done well by James Leyburn in *The Scotch-Irish: A Social History* (1962) and Grady McWhiney in *Cracker Culture: Celtic Ways in the Old South* (1988), among others, but a thematic focus on the instinctive warrior nature of the people. From fighting Romans to An-

Roger D. McGrath is the author of *Gunfighters, Highwaymen, and Vigilantes*.



Melanie Anderson

glo-Saxons to American Indians to Charlie, the Scots-Irish were in the forefront. Webb relishes the fact.

Webb does not make the mistake that many others have by too narrowly restricting the bloodlines of the Scots-Irish. Since they were Protestant, so the reasoning goes, there were no Gaelic Irish among them. The Scots-Irish were purely the descendants of Lowland Scots who had been transplanted to Ireland, beginning in the early 1600's and then, after more than a hundred years in Ulster, shipped to the American colonies, especially during the 1720's, 30's, and 40's. There are two problems with this reasoning: First, the transplanted Scots—in Ireland for five or six or more generations—intermarried with the native Irish to some degree; and, second, in pre-Revolutionary War migrations to America from Ulster were significant numbers of Catholic Irish who lost their Catholicism on the frontiers of Pennsylvania or Virginia or North Carolina.

While such Gaelic surnames as Mc-

Bride, McGee, McGrath, or Kennedy are found commonly in both Scotland and Ireland, others, such as McGregor and McNamara, are distinctly Scottish or Irish. Many of the surnames (including Murphy, Doyle, and Connolly—all ancestors of Webb) in the records of those we call Scots-Irish are distinctly Irish. Folks with such names were clearly not transplants from Scotland to Ireland. Then, too, although many Americans do not seem to know this today, the Irish colonized the Highlands of Scotland beginning in the fifth century and conquered and assimilated the other Celtic peoples they found there. That is why Gaelic became the language of the Highlands and surnames began with the patronymic prefix *Mac* (whether abbreviated *Mc*, *Ma*, or *M'*) and some with *O'*. Irish blood and Gaelic culture, although to a more limited degree, spread to the Lowlands also.

Nonetheless, because various forms of Protestantism, particularly Presbyterianism, became part of the cultural fabric of the Scots-Irish, they differed from their Irish Catholic cousins. As Webb notes, though, blood counts: "Once removed from Ireland, the common Celtic origins of these two groups brought many similarities, especially in their military traditions, their affinity for politics, and their literary prowess." I might have said "military prowess" and "literary traditions," but Webb has got it right.

Webb takes us all the way back to the building of Hadrian's Wall. In an effort to keep the wild Celts of Scotland from raiding Romanized Britain, the Romans erected the stone barrier across the narrow neck of the island. A pale remnant today of its former self, Hadrian's Wall was originally something akin to the Great Wall of China. Fifteen-feet