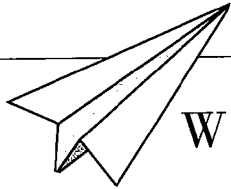


# steppin' out



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## Class Notes By Leonard Gill

Perhaps you know guys a lot like Peter Traxler. Perhaps *you're* a lot like Peter Traxler: son of the Deep but contemporary South; good upbringing; good high school; good college; and a good career, like lawyering, which is what Traxler is going to do if he can pass the Tennessee bar exam; if he can explain (to himself and to a friend) what he's doing living in a Memphis Midtown apartment and dating a girl 10 years his junior (the sister of another friend from back in Jackson, Mississippi, where Traxler grew up); and if he can stop short of putting his fist through the nearest wall out of frustration, confusion, and regret.

Things would be easier if Traxler's past didn't keep pace with Traxler's present, but it does in the nine linked stories in *The Portable Son* (Aqueous Books) by Barrett Hathcock. And so, every story, here it is, the past as key witness to what makes Traxler tick (like a time bomb): In "Afire," there's Traxler in adulthood trying to come to terms with a brutish bit of his behavior on prom night in high school. In "High Cotton," there's Traxler, age 16, getting his good buddy and that buddy's girlfriend into a heap of trouble. In "Every Good Boy Does Fine," there's Traxler, reluctant to RSVP to a wedding invitation sent from back home in Jackson. And in "Reunited," he's dead-set on not attending his high school class reunion.

Who, in the end, is this Peter Traxler? Hathcock, who lives in Memphis, who taught in Memphis at his alma mater, Rhodes College, but who hails from Jackson, isn't so sure himself, but he's willing to find out more in a fuller portrait of Peter Traxler in the novel Hathcock's at work on right now.

"Some writers talk about how they understand everything their characters do," Hathcock says. "Other writers talk about it being some kind of mystic possession thing: The characters speak through them. I'm between those extremes. But ultimately, I don't quite understand my characters, and maybe that's why I keep coming back to them, to some unsolved mystery about them."

No mystery, though, that Barrett Hathcock's a writer to watch, which you can do when he reads from and signs copies of *The Portable Son* at Burke's on Thursday. ■

BARRETT HATHCOCK AT BURKE'S BOOK STORE (936 S. COOPER), THURSDAY, JANUARY 19TH, 5:30-6:30 P.M.

