

Valparaiso University

ValpoScholar

The Cresset (archived issues)

12-1982

The Cresset (Vol. XLVI, No. 2)

Valparaiso University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholar.valpo.edu/cresset_archive



Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#), and the [Public Affairs, Public Policy and Public Administration Commons](#)

This Full Issue is brought to you for free and open access by ValpoScholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Cresset (archived issues) by an authorized administrator of ValpoScholar. For more information, please contact a ValpoScholar staff member at scholar@valpo.edu.

A REVIEW OF LITERATURE, THE ARTS, AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS / DECEMBER, 1982



THE CRESSET

- *The Attractive Genius of Henry Adams*
- *A Modest Proposal for the Elimination of TV*
- *Of Virtue and Honorary Degrees / An Exchange*

NOV 23 1982





ROBERT V. SCHNABEL, *Publisher*
JAMES NUECHTERLEIN, *Editor*

DECEMBER, 1982 Vol. XLVI, No. 2

ISSN 0011-1198

Contributors

- 3 *The Editor* / IN LUCE TUA
4 *Mark R. Schwehn* / OF VIRTUE AND HONORARY DEGREES
8 *J. T. Ledbetter* / BARN
9 *James Nuechterlein* / OF MEASE AND MEN: A RESPONSE TO MARK SCHWEHN
12 *Bernhard Hillila* / SOME ANGELS
13 *Dot Nuechterlein* / STUDENT IMPROBABLES: GEMS OF UNDERGRADUATE WISDOM
16 *Louise Williams* / RIDDLES, PARABLES, AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD
18 *Joe McClatchey* / THE LINCOLN MEMORIAL
19 *Karen Melang* / MOTHERHOOD AS VOCATION: THE CALL TO THE DIAPER PAIL
20 *Joe McClatchey* / PREDESTINATION
21 *James Combs* / THE DAY THEY TURNED THE TVS OFF
23 *Charles Vandersee* / THE ATTRACTIVE GENIUS OF HENRY ADAMS
26 *John Steven Paul* / LANGUAGE AND REALITY
28 *Richard Maxwell* / FANTASY FOR ADULTS
30 *Gail Eifrig* / ECONOMIC INDICATORS
31 *Joe McClatchey* / WHO WAS ALSO HIMSELF LOOKING FOR THE KINGDOM OF GOD
32 *John Strietelmeier* / THE JOYFUL WORD OF RECONCILIATION

Departmental Editors

Jill Baumgaertner, *Poetry Editor*
Richard H. W. Brauer, *Art Editor*
Dorothy Czamanske, *Copy Editor*
Walter E. Keller, *Book Review Editor*

Business Managers

Wilbur H. Hutchins, *Finance*
Betty Wagner, *Administration and Circulation*

THE CRESSET is published monthly during the academic year, September through May, by the Valparaiso University Press as a forum for scholarly writing and informed opinion. The views expressed are those of the writers and do not necessarily reflect the preponderance of opinion at Valparaiso University. Manuscripts should be addressed to the Editor and accompanied by return postage. Letters to the Editor for publication are subject to editing for brevity. The *Book Review Index* and the *American Humanities Index* list Cresset reviews. Second class postage paid at Valparaiso, Indiana. Regular subscription rates: one year—\$6.50; two years—\$11.50; single copy—\$.85. Student subscription rates: one year—\$3.00; single copy—\$.50. Entire contents copyrighted 1982 by the Valparaiso University Press, Valparaiso, Indiana 46383, without whose written permission reproduction in whole or in part for any purpose whatsoever is expressly forbidden.



Cover and above: Felix Ekblad, Swedish-American, *Untitled (Western Mountain Solitude)*, ca. 1884, 19-9/16" x 31-5/8". Collection of Ron Zaruba.

Felix Ekblad, faculty member from 1884-86 of the Fine Arts Department, Northern Indiana Normal School (now Valparaiso University), was trained at the Stockholm (Sweden) Academy of Design. Subsequently Ekblad must have emigrated to the American West. In 1886, a 6' x 10' Ekblad painting of South Park, Colorado was used as a backdrop in the NINS commencement exercises. The painting shown in this issue formerly belonged to the daughter of Henry Baker Brown, NINS president. Further information on Felix Ekblad is being sought.

RHWB



Comment on Contemporary Affairs by the Editor

The Postponed Verdict

On the morning after the 1982 elections, when (quite literally) these lines are being written, the most important developments appear to be those that did not occur. A suitable election summary might read: no realignment, no repudiation.

This was not, as the Republicans had once hoped, another 1934, the year in which, following Franklin Roosevelt's defeat of Herbert Hoover in 1932, the Democrats consolidated their position as the nation's new majority party. The great Republican victory of 1980 turned out to have no second act. On the other hand, neither did the election deliver the crushing rebuke to the policies of the Reagan Administration that the Democrats had looked for and that a 10.1 per cent (and rising) unemployment rate gave them plausible hope of obtaining. Given the nation's near-disastrous economic situation, the Republicans have reason to be grateful that they contained their losses as well as they did.

Still, the recognition that they averted a potential catastrophe can serve the Republicans as only a modest consolation. They lost the election. The Democrats remain the nation's majority party, and their pickup of some 26 seats in the House of Representatives came at the high end of the 15 to 25 seat improvement most observers had predicted for them and serves as evidence that if the American people did not totally reject Reaganomics neither were they willing to give it anything like a vote of confidence. The message of the election was an ambiguous one—the GOP did manage to maintain its eight-seat margin in the Senate—but the Democrats have more cause to read it happily than do the Republicans.

Perhaps the most accurate judgment to be made of the election is that it added up to a postponed verdict on the Reagan Administration. The voters in effect said to the President that he may "stay the course" if he so chooses but that he does so at his own risk. Their interim report on the course he has charted gives notice that their patience is wearing thin even if it is not yet fully exhausted. The results of the election point to no clear policy mandate (though they reveal some skepticism as to supply-side prescriptions), and they indicate that the public will not be ready to issue a definitive judgment on Ronald Reagan and his conservative revolution before 1984. Presumably by then we will know better than we can today whether the battle against inflation has truly been won and, if so, whether Reagan

managed to accomplish that without putting the economy into a semi-permanent coma. Other considerations will enter in, of course—social issues, foreign and defense policy, social equity—but the state of the economy remains the key to the fate of the Reagan experiment.

In the meantime, the nation will almost certainly endure two years of political stalemate. The Democrats now will add policy control of the House to their previous nominal control, and with the Senate and White House in Republican hands that should virtually guarantee two years of mutual posturing and elaborate political gamesmanship. On such critical issues as Social Security that partisan maneuvering could do grave damage.

The Democrats demagogued outrageously on the question prior to the election (even as the Administration indulged in its own demagoguery by taking credit for all positive developments of the past two years while disavowing any responsibility whatever for things that had gone wrong) and there is no reason to expect that matters will improve now. Meanwhile the Social Security system is going broke and if politicians in both parties continue to refuse either to increase taxes or reduce benefits the program could wind up in disaster. We can expect no more responsible behavior on other controversial issues than we are likely to get on Social Security.

Yet for political junkies, the next two years should prove fascinating, however perverse. Politics will have to do overwhelmingly with the 1984 presidential race, and the focus will be on the Democrats (assuming that President Reagan will choose to run again). The struggle over the Democratic presidential nomination will decide much about the future of American politics. The Democrats must choose between clear identification with the liberal tradition—which would mean selecting Senator Ted Kennedy of Massachusetts as the candidate—or making some concession to the conservative trend of recent years, which would dictate nomination of someone like Senator John Glenn of Ohio. (Former Vice President Walter Mondale hopes to position himself between Kennedy and Glenn as a choice acceptable to all factions in the party, but we would guess that his only hope would be in a stalemated convention, which is unlikely.)

How will it all turn out? We foresee a classic and epic struggle between Kennedy and Reagan, one that will determine the shape of American political life for years to come. We won't tell you who is going to win, because that would spoil the fun.

But we know.

Of Virtue and Honorary Degrees

Who Should Be Honored—and Why?

Mark R. Schwehn

Whom should church-related universities honor? Presumably such universities should honor excellent persons. But what then is excellence? What is virtue? What is Christian virtue? Questions such as these lie at the root of the recent controversy over the decision made by Valparaiso University to award an honorary degree to Presidential Counselor Edwin Meese III. Since I agree with James Nuechterlein (*The Cresset*, September, 1982) that "there is much to be said for letting [the Meese issue] rest undisturbed," I do not intend to address that issue here. I do intend, however, to examine some of the discourse about the Meese decision, because that discourse often betrayed uncertainty or confusion about matters that lie close to the heart of Christian higher education. The arguments advanced by both the defenders and the opponents of the Meese degree seemed to reflect unconsidered or ill-considered assumptions about the nature of virtue.

The practice of conferring honorary degrees is probably a tribute to the force of custom in human affairs. To my knowledge, no one, during the course of the Meese debate, challenged the practice of awarding honorary degrees. Yet I seriously doubt whether, if there were no precedent for this practice, any university could successfully introduce it now. Imagine, for a moment, what would happen if someone were to propose that Pacific Lutheran University should, during commencement, announce a firm university position on some matter of public policy, say, the nuclear freeze proposal. Faculty and students would rightly regard such a policy pronouncement as an infringement upon their academic freedom. Yet I would guess that, on any given campus, the range of conflicting opinions about a nuclear freeze is much narrower than the range of conflicting opinions

about virtue. Thus, it would seem that conferring an honorary degree, in the name of the university, upon anyone would be potentially more controversial than issuing political positions would be.

Why has this potential source of controversy not become an actual one? Academies continue the practice of awarding honorary degrees, I think, because most academicians recognize that matters of virtue or excellence are everyone's business, insofar as they are human beings, and especially insofar as they are educators. Furthermore, this custom provides a regular and excellent opportunity. In awarding an honorary degree, a university may clarify for itself, for its current and prospective students, for its alumni, and for the world which it seeks to enlighten, the ethical and spiritual ideals that inform its educational mission. Precisely because this custom is so important, in my judgment, I propose to begin a radical consideration of it by pursuing the questions of honor and virtue or excellence. I shall refer to the Meese debate only to focus this consideration.

I

Whom then should we honor with honorary degrees? There are at least three possible lines of argument that one might develop in response to this question. First, one might argue that persons worthy of public esteem are those in whose words and deeds the classical virtues shine forth and in so shining command admiration by their very nature. Following Aristotle, one might admit that we cannot determine virtue in an absolutely precise manner. Nevertheless, we can, through inquiry, approximate ethical ideals and then find embodiments of these ideals whom we might properly honor with honorary degrees.

Ethical ideals and the virtues that constitute them will, of course, vary to some extent according to vocations and practices. Physical strength would seem to be an essential virtue for the ideal athlete but not for the ideal statesperson. Eloquence, on the other hand, would seem essential to good statesmanship but not to good horsemanship. Some virtues like courage are doubtless essential to a good human life regardless of vocation.

Mark R. Schwehn is Assistant Professor of Humanities at the University of Chicago. He received his B.A. from Valparaiso University and his Ph.D. from Stanford, where his dissertation on Henry Adams won the Allen Nevins Prize awarded annually by the Organization of American Historians for the most distinguished doctoral thesis in American History.

Defenders of the honorary degree awarded by Valparaiso University to Edwin Meese III were able to make a case against the critics but they often failed to make a case for the degree.

But others like physical strength and eloquence are more or less essential depending upon vocations and practices.

How might this line of argument apply in the case of Edwin Meese III? Meese is a counselor, and the practice of counseling those in power has received a good deal of disciplined study since at least the time of Castiglione's *The Courtier* in the early sixteenth century. What then are the virtues proper to the good courtier? Have Meese's words and deeds manifested these virtues? In other words, has Meese been a good courtier? If so, we should honor him. If not, we should not honor him.

Good Courtiers Can Give Bad Advice

Few persons have considered Meese's worthiness for an honorary degree in these terms. Those opposing the degree for Meese have done so either by deploring certain isolated actions and speeches or by condemning the policies of the Reagan Administration which Meese serves. But surely good courtiers might occasionally give bad advice. They may even make serious errors from time to time. George F. Kennan made some spectacular errors in judgment, but he was a great courtier, in my estimation, and he would therefore deserve an honorary degree. As for the politics of the Reagan Administration, I join Meese's opponents in opposing most of them. But I would also join James Nuechterlein in arguing that one should honor excellent courtiership even if one opposes *some* of the courtier's politics.

Indeed, Nuechterlein has mounted an impressive case against some of Meese's critics, but his argument exhibits two very curious features. First, he sometimes maintains that the quality of Meese's advice to Reagan is *completely* irrelevant to the question of whether or not Meese is a good courtier or counselor. "The relevant point," Nuechterlein writes, "is not whether or not one agrees with Edwin Meese's political/legal beliefs, or whether they are in themselves either profoundly wise or abysmally foolish."

This claim seems odd, assuming as I do that wisdom is a virtue and foolishness a vice in counselors. For, on Nuechterlein's reckoning here, it looks as though an abysmally foolish courtier *might* yet be worthy of an honorary degree. But this could be true only if we come, through some strange ethical alchemy, to think of foolishness as a virtue or if, thinking foolishness a vice, we think we *might* honor vicious courtiers as well as virtuous ones. Nuechterlein might object here that he meant *only* to suggest that a given courtier might be abysmally foolish and still be a Christian. I agree. But if this is Nuechterlein's point, he should then be reminded of the same dictum that he called to the attention of his readers. "All Lutherans ought to keep in mind Luther's

observation that it is better to be governed by a smart Turk than a dumb Christian." Dumb courtiers might be Christians, but they should not be honored.

Nuechterlein does not, of course, think that Meese's beliefs are in fact abysmally foolish, and he thinks that Meese deserved an honorary degree from Valparaiso University. But this brings us to the second curious feature of Nuechterlein's editorial: the absence of a case for Meese. True, Nuechterlein asserts that Meese and other recipients of VU honorary degrees "have served honorably in their professions." But this claim begs the question of what constitutes, in Meese's case, honorable service. Furthermore, Nuechterlein points out, probably correctly, that the majority of Valparaiso University's constituents share Meese's political views. But this claim is no argument for *honoring* Meese unless it is also an argument for honoring the majority of the university's constituents.

Indeed, Nuechterlein seems to think that a successful refutation of Meese's critics by itself constitutes a successful defense of the university's decision to award Meese an honorary degree. According to this first line of reasoning about virtue, Nuechterlein's defense is, however, unsuccessful. It fails both to specify those virtues proper to good courtiership (say, wisdom, fortitude, eloquence, honesty, prudence, and justice) and to demonstrate that Meese's character in fact manifests these virtues. Simply because Nuechterlein chose not to make such a case does not mean, of course, that he *could* not have done so. Still, it would seem thus far that both Meese's defenders and his detractors have failed to prove their case.

II

I spoke earlier of *three* lines of argument that might be developed in answer to the question of whom church-related universities should honor with honorary degrees. The second of these three lines has sometimes been advanced, during the course of the Meese discussion, to challenge much of the foregoing analysis of virtue. "Frevinssakes!" exclaimed one of my relatives, "Meese is the second most powerful man in America. Of course he deserves an honorary degree." Eminence of office is, on this view, in and of itself honorable. Hence, to speak of honorable eminence is to utter a pleonasm. Any courtier in a democracy is honorable simply by virtue of the eminence attending courtiership.

If the first line of argument was, in a loose sense, Aristotelian, this second one is, in an equally loose sense, Hobbesian. For Hobbes, honor is simply a sign of power. The honorable is simply what people in fact honor. We do not *begin*, as Aristotle does, with opinions about what is noble, praiseworthy, and honorable, and

A life lived according to the Christian virtues of faith, hope, and charity will often scandalize the world, for it will look to the world like a life marked by failure, nonconformity, and defeat.

move from these opinions to an inquiry into what is really noble, praiseworthy, and honorable. Rather, our inquiry ends once we determine what people at a given time and place generally honor. Worthiness is nothing more than what people value, and people always value power. Courtiers are thought to have power; thus, they are honored, and whatever is honored is honorable. Any courtier is therefore an honorable courtier.

This Hobbesian line would not be worth developing, if it were not for the fact that fragments of it have been put forward with alarming frequency during the course of the Meese discussion. When I was asked to sign an alumni petition protesting the Meese degree (I should say that I eventually signed it), I quite naturally asked about the grounds for the protest. They were largely "political" in nature, and as such some of them were, I think, vulnerable to Nuechterlein's criticisms. But during the course of the conversation, the petition organizer made a rather startling admission. He would not, he said, object to an honorary degree for President Reagan, even though Reagan's political views are virtually identical to Meese's. This is modified Hobbesianism *in extremis*. The more power a person has or is thought to have, the less exacting we should be in assessing that person's worthiness for an honorary degree.

Is Eminence of Office Honorable?

Fragments of Hobbesian thinking have not been confined to the arguments of those who opposed the Meese degree. Nuechterlein quotes a portion of the citation that accompanied Meese's degree, noting that Meese is "probably the most eminent Lutheran in public life since Peter Muhlenberg, the first Speaker of the House of Representatives." Nuechterlein concedes that this claim is "arguable," but suppose that it were incontestably true? It would, by itself, support Meese's worthiness for an honorary degree if and only if one were to assume that eminence of office is itself honorable.

I doubt very much whether any readers of this essay would, upon reflection, defend the proposition that eminence is honorable. Yet, as Samuel Johnson observed, we need to be reminded more often than we need to be instructed. Those who may harbor lingering doubts about this matter should consider this question. There was once an eminent courtier, a man as dedicated as Edwin Meese III, a man who shared many if not all of Meese's political views, a man who was very probably even more powerful than Meese. But would anyone seriously propose for an honorary degree the name of H. R. ("Bob") Haldeman? Meese is surely a better man and a better courtier than Haldeman, but *not* by virtue of his dedication, not by virtue of his political views, and most assuredly not by virtue of his eminence.

III

I turn now to the third and final line of argument that might be advanced in response to the question of whom church-related universities should honor with honorary degrees. Such persons, I think, should be those who lead excellent Christian lives. An excellent Christian life seems to me to be a life of discipleship, a life lived in faithfulness to Jesus Christ, a life in which the Christian virtues of faith, hope, and charity shine forth as witness to the Lord whom one seeks to serve and follow. Often, though not invariably, such a life will scandalize the world, for it will look to the world like a life marked by failure, nonconformity, and defeat.

This brief account of the excellent Christian life is, I know, essentially contestable, but the scope of this essay does not permit me fully to defend it here. I will, however, formulate some of the questions that I think this view entails, and I will then consider some of the practical implications of this view for the subject at issue here, the conferral of honorary degrees.

My view presumes that the excellent Christian life might well be frequently and radically opposed to the Aristotelian account of the excellent life. But is this true? Does grace sustain and perfect nature, even our second natures which we acquire by training and habituation? Is faith, for example, the perfection of the classical virtue courage? Or do the Christian virtues complement the classical virtues: is faith simply a virtue in addition to courage? Or are the Christian virtues radically at odds with the classical virtues? Are humility and forgivingness, for example, opposed to Aristotle's account of virtue? Writers like H. Richard Niebuhr in his book *Christ and Culture* and James Gustafson in his book *Christ and the Moral Life* explore these questions in more depth and with more ability than I could now manage.

I turn now to the practical implications of my view. The most important one is this: there is neither an ethical nor a spiritual hierarchy of vocations. Statecraft is, in no sense, a higher calling than football coaching. Pastors are not closer to or more distant from God by virtue of their callings than are carpet cleaners. There are, of course, some occupations (one thinks here of the "oldest profession") that would seem to be constituted by immoral practices, and such practices are therefore better abandoned than well performed. But, except for such extreme cases, all other vocations are equally worthy. All such callings can be followed nobly or ignobly, excellently or ineptly.

Indeed, one of the features of an inherently corrupt occupation would seem to be this: one cannot give a consistent account of what it would mean to practice it well. Accuracy of aim or marksmanship would seem to

If the majority of honorary degrees are conferred upon the wealthy, powerful, and prominent, it might well seem to the world as though Christianity honors wealth, power, and prominence.

be a virtue proper to professional assassins, for example. But one would, I think, be inclined to attribute more virtue to the assassin whose aim was unsteady than to the one whose aim was sure. And one should definitely wish that there were no such profession at all.

Whom should we honor with honorary degrees, on this view? We should honor Christians from *all* walks of life who perform their tasks excellently. I do not know, but I would guess, that the vast majority of honorary degree recipients from church-related schools (excluding honorary degree recipients who are recognized for a distinguished record of academic achievement) come from the ranks of businesspersons, politicians, and "professionals" (lawyers, doctors, and clerics). Nothing I have said here should be taken to exclude such persons from consideration for honorary degrees. I simply wish to *include* more mechanics, firefighters, baseball players, steelworkers, dancers, and carpenters.

No Sentimental Egalitarianism

This recommendation can be easily misunderstood and hence easily abused. I am not advocating a kind of sentimental egalitarianism here. My view is, I think, both more and less exacting than the views of many of those who currently award honorary degrees. Judged by their *practice* (the actual record of honorary degree recipients as opposed to the stated criteria for selecting them), church-related universities tend, I think, to be more exacting than I would be in their selection of worthy *vocations*.

But partly for that reason, they tend to be less exacting than I would be in selecting persons within any given vocation. On my view, all vocations (except for the kinds mentioned above) should be equally eligible. But *within* any given vocation, the highest standards of excellence should apply. Let me state this issue as sharply as I can. If I were on an honorary degree selection committee and were asked to choose between former President Jimmy Carter and former St. Louis Cardinal pitcher Bob Gibson, I would choose Bob Gibson without hesitation.

Another implication of my view might seem initially to conflict with the preceding discussion, and it is, I think, at least nominally held by most of those who select honorary degree recipients at church-related universities. I assume that discipleship means, among other things, loving God with one's whole heart, soul, and mind. I therefore think that moral and spiritual virtues are surely as important as intellectual ones.

The citation accompanying the Meese degree seemed to endorse this view of Christian excellence to some extent, for it cited not only Meese's eminence as a counselor but also his virtues as a Lutheran layman. Indeed,

the best evidence I found presented on Meese's behalf was offered by Richard Baepler in an article that appeared in the Valparaiso University *Torch*. Baepler noted that Meese's pastor and his fellow parishioners had testified that Meese, in their estimation, had always led an exemplary Christian life. I take such testimony very seriously, though I should note in passing that it would not seem at all pertinent to either Hobbesians or Aristotelians.

There are, however, problems with Baepler's argument. The conferral of honorary degrees is a rhetorical problem as well as an ethical one. What does a church-related university's overall record of honorary degree recipients say to the world on the subject of Christian excellence? If, as I assume, the vast majority of honorary degrees are conferred upon those who are wealthy, powerful, and socially prominent, it might well *seem* to the world as though Christianity honors wealth, power, and social prominence.

I think that Baepler's argument is valid and pertinent, but it would gain more *rhetorical* force if it were articulated within the context of a record of honorary degree recipients many of whom were not wealthy, powerful, or socially prominent and many of whom came from vocations other than law, medicine, ministry, politics, and business. It may be true that honorary degree recipients from church-related schools are not deemed excellent by virtue of their wealth and power but rather wealthy and powerful by virtue of their excellence. The world may nonetheless grow gradually suspicious of the claim that Edwin Meese, Vance Hartke, and Richard Hatcher were chosen by virtue of their piety rather than by virtue of their power.

Again, one must avoid sentimentalism in these matters. I said at the outset of this section that the life of discipleship often looks to the world like a life of failure, nonconformity, and defeat. But this does not mean that church-related universities should honor failure and defeat *per se*. Jesus promises his disciples that their discipleship will result in persecution and suffering, but he does not exhort them to seek persecution and suffering for the sake of persecution and suffering. Still, I would insist that the roster of honorary degree recipients from church-related universities should probably include a large number of persons whom the world would regard as failures.

An example, suggested to me once by John Schramm, might make this point clearer. A high school basketball coach in a small midwestern town has been, by all accounts, an exceptionally skillful athlete and teacher. She knows every aspect of the game. The girls on her team respect her, and all of them, under her tutelage, play as well as they can play. They all, moreover, enjoy playing well. This coach is, furthermore, in the estima-

Men and women who lead exemplary lives of Christian virtue and excellence exist in good supply, but they tend to escape public notice. "Failures" do not last long in the headlines.

tion of her fellow parishioners, a splendid Christian woman.

She believes, however, that her sense of Christian discipleship requires a somewhat unusual coaching philosophy. She insists that all twelve of her girls play in every game, because she wants each of them to develop fully as athletes and as persons, and she believes that competition under the most strenuous conditions is essential to this development and to the development of the team as a whole. She tries, under these conditions, to win every game. But the inevitable happens. Her teams lose more games than the alumni think they should, and the alumni attribute losses, rightly or wrongly, to this woman's coaching philosophy. Though her players continue to admire her and play their best for her, she is fired. "Winning," she is told, "is the bottom line." The world regards this woman's life as a life of nonconformity and defeat. But this woman never sought defeat: she merely sought to be a disciple within her chosen calling. She is, I think, an ideal candidate for an honorary degree from a church-related university. I would vote for her over both Jimmy Carter and Bob Gibson.


IV

Persons very much like this high school basketball coach exist in good supply, but they tend to escape public notice. "Failures" do not last long in the headlines. Church-related universities may therefore be tempted to use mere eminence as an operational criterion of candidacy if not of adequacy for honorary degree recipients. Ignorance of the virtuous, however, should be no excuse here. Church-related schools are blessed by constituencies that are, unlike the constituencies of secular schools, composed of not only persons but also of communities—local congregations. These parishes are, among other things, the nurseries of Christian virtue.

Let church-related schools invite these parishes to establish nomination boards, and let these boards then reflect upon Christian virtue. Let them also choose from their midst one person each year as an honorary degree nominee. This should be a difficult but pleasant task. Finally, let them submit their nomination, together with pertinent supporting evidence, to the selection committee of the relevant church-related school. This selection committee should be composed of board members, administrators, faculty members, and students.

The task of these selection committees will not be easy. They will have to consider many nominees, all of whom profess Jesus as Lord and all of whom, in the estimation of their fellow parishioners, lead excellent Christian lives. They will have to regard these testi-

monies as the best evidence, this side of Paradise, of the Christianity of nominees. But they will have to do this remembering that not everyone who cries "Lord, Lord!" shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Thus, they will have to remain finally agnostic regarding the state of their fellow human beings' souls. They will furthermore have to consider the vocations of nominees, to discuss which virtues are essential to the excellent practice of these vocations, and then to determine whether or not nominees have in fact performed excellently in their callings.

But they will have to do all of this only after they consider whether the arguments put forward here and in other much richer discussions of virtue conform at all to their collective judgments about the kinds of lives that are worthy of honor. The theological, ethical, and rhetorical problems that their deliberations will generate ought not to deter them from their task of hard thinking. Hard thinking is the business of universities. And hard thinking about Christian virtue defines the corporate mission of universities that are church-related. 

barn

as a child I was convinced
the old barn held something
besides cows

that straw floating
on sunbeams
was not put there by cows

and the pigs in the next stall
giving birth to god-knows-what
screamed in two languages at once

and my uncle said to stay the hell
out
but at night
when the chores were done
and my grandmother took down
the large Bible with the iron hinges
I listened over Leviticus
for sounds the barn made
and my grandmother must have heard
for the Bible slipped to the floor
and she rolled her head on the chair's
back
and her eyes and mouth were open

J. T. Ledbetter

James Nuechterlein

The first thing to be said concerning Mark Schwehn's essay is that it raises the level of discussion surrounding Edwin Meese's honorary degree to a more significant plane than it has previously occupied. In asking what kinds of people church-related universities should honor, and in framing an answer within the context of a consideration of the nature of Christian virtue and excellence, Mr. Schwehn induces us to look again at some of the most intriguing and vexing problems related to notions of Christian ethics.

Even where one disagrees with Mr. Schwehn's arguments, as I in part do, one is forced in considering them to take up with utter seriousness the very idea of what it means to lead a Christian life. And if one believes, as I fully do, that much of what passes in church circles for discussion of Christian morality is so vapid and sentimental as to merit neither our intellectual nor moral attention, then it is doubly valuable to encounter an argument, like Mr. Schwehn's, that combines intellectual rigor with unmistakable Christian commitment.

My comments on the Schwehn essay fall naturally into two parts: 1) a response to the specific questions raised concerning the Meese degree and my *Cresset* editorial supporting it, and, 2) more general reflections on the issues that come up when one asks what kinds of people a Christian university ought to honor.

I

If, Mr. Schwehn argues, Edwin Meese has been a good counselor (or courtier), then a university could justify honoring him, at least according to Aristotelian standards of virtue. (Mr. Schwehn displays some ambivalence as to whether or to what extent church-related universities should place reliance on those standards.) But, he says, that Aristotelian case has not been made. If Meese's opponents have relied too heavily on partisan arguments, his supporters have erroneously supposed that exposing the partisan nature of those arguments was enough, and have failed to establish a case justifying the honorary degree in the first place. Indeed, it is argued, the *Cresset* editorial supporting Meese went so far as to suggest that the quality of Meese's advice as a

counselor was entirely irrelevant to the question of his worthiness for honorary recognition.

Here, I think, Mr. Schwehn is guilty of paying insufficient attention to context. The defense of Mr. Meese dwelt only in passing on his positive qualifications for the simple reason that his competence never came into question. Those who opposed the degree did so not on the basis that Mr. Meese gave advice that was ill-informed or stupid, but that the advice he offered failed on *moral* grounds: it revealed, the argument went, Mr. Meese's lack of concern for humanity and his failure to act in ways consistent with Valparaiso University's Christian objectives. When I argued the irrelevance of the wisdom or foolishness of Mr. Meese's views, I did so while responding to the argument that they were morally inadequate, an argument that I thought (and think) was based on narrowly partisan grounds.

Those objecting to the Meese degree never suggested that he was a poor counselor in terms of intelligence, competence, diligence, courage, loyalty, or prudence. They argued simply, in effect, that he was excessively conservative, therefore morally deficient, therefore disqualified for honorary recognition. The dispute over Mr. Meese did not arise with respect to the level of distinction he had achieved in public life. Those who proposed him for an honorary degree apparently felt that his career was self-evidently a distinguished one. That judgment might have been open to challenge, but so far as I am aware, the challenge was never made. Since it was not, and since it seemed obvious (as I stated) that Mr. Meese was equivalent in distinction to those in his field who had been honored previously, I did not think it necessary to make an elaborate case in favor of granting the degree.

Indeed, I was not interested in doing so. I wanted to argue not that Mr. Meese was peculiarly deserving of recognition, but that the particular objections raised to his recognition were invalid. The fleeting positive case I made (which Mr. Schwehn has overlooked) stated simply that "the degree awarded to Mr. Meese was highly appropriate . . . because he is an active Lutheran Christian layman who makes no secret of his religious commitment and who has achieved high distinction in public life." Given the circumstances of the debate, that seemed to me sufficient. It does so still.

I am not at all sure as to how one would go about making the positive case Mr. Schwehn is looking for. In the first place, given the confidential nature of the

James Nuechterlein is Editor of *The Cresset* and Associate Professor of American Studies at Valparaiso University.

The opposition to Edwin Meese came not from concern that he lacked sufficient distinction or excellence, but from the conviction that he had the wrong politics. The rest was sophistry.

advice Mr. Meese proffers, only Ronald Reagan and a few other White House insiders are in a position to offer credible testimony as to the quality of Mr. Meese's counsel, and I suspect that the opponents of Mr. Meese would be hesitant to credit testimony from those sources. How, in other words, could we reasonably set up the test for the foolishness or wisdom of Mr. Meese's advice that Mr. Schwehn would require as evidence of Meese's qualifications for an honorary degree?

All we have is inference. We know what policies President Reagan endorses, and we suppose that Edwin Meese has, along with others, urged those policies on the President. It seems to me that our judgments as to the wisdom or foolishness of those policies, and thus, presumably, of Mr. Meese's accomplishments as a counselor, will inevitably depend on our political preferences. Simply put, since we in the nature of things cannot be privy to the precise nature of Mr. Meese's advice, we will think him a wise or foolish advisor according to the degree we think Mr. Reagan a good or bad President.

Are we left, then, simply in a partisan muddle, with those sympathetic to Mr. Meese's politics instinctively supporting his honorary degree and those lacking that sympathy inevitably opposed? I think not. In my editorial, I argued that I could not imagine feeling otherwise than I did about the awarding of the degree "if Mr. Meese had happened to be as liberal as he is conservative." In the same vein, I frequently made the following case to colleagues who had opposed the Meese degree. Suppose, I said, that the University had proposed to offer a degree to a candidate identical to Mr. Meese in every way *except* that he was as far to the Left on the political spectrum as Meese is to the Right. Would you have opposed that candidate? A number of my colleagues admitted that they would not have.

That, it seems to me, exposes the heart of the issue: the opposition to Mr. Meese came not from concern that he lacked sufficient distinction or excellence, but from the conviction that he had the wrong politics. The rest was sophistry. Given Edwin Meese's accomplishments (he, is, after all, Counselor to the President of the United States) and his active Lutheran Christian convictions, it made eminent sense for Valparaiso University to offer him an honorary degree, whatever reservations people might have as to his political views. As I stated in my original editorial, "One can honor a political figure for what he has achieved without thereby necessarily indicating agreement with his political philosophy."

But this leaves matters at a point that Mr. Schwehn finds unacceptable. If, he says, we are honoring Mr. Meese essentially because of the distinguished position he has attained, then we have placed ourselves in a

Hobbesian world in which eminence is honored simply because it is eminence. In order to demonstrate the morally intolerable nature of this position, Mr. Schwehn invokes the name of H. R. Haldeman, a man almost identical to Mr. Meese in eminence of office yet one who, we would all agree, Valparaiso University would never propose to honor (even if he offered to convert from Christian Science to Lutheranism).

But consider. We find the idea of honoring H. R. Haldeman absurd because of what, thanks to the Watergate disclosures, we know concerning his moral behavior. In the absence of that knowledge honorary recognition for Mr. Haldeman would not have been unthinkable. He disqualified himself for recognition for which he would otherwise have been eligible because of what he did. If we knew similar things of Mr. Meese, we would not have honored him either. Mr. Schwehn wonders if anyone truly wants to defend the proposition that eminence of office is itself honorable. I would say yes, so long as that eminence has been earned and not simply bestowed, and so long as it has been achieved and thereafter maintained in ways consistent with established moral principles.

Since Mr. Meese, as far as I am aware, has met those conditions, then there is indeed a *prima facie* case for considering him—or any other like eminent figure—for honorary recognition. Universities need not exhaust themselves in meticulous investigations of those proposed for honorary degrees. If the candidate is generally considered among knowledgeable people to have achieved high distinction in his field, and if he has no known major moral failings, then we need not ordinarily pursue further our inquiries into his eligibility. To do so would be supererogatory.

II

Thus far the case of Mr. Meese. But Mr. Schwehn is not primarily concerned with the Meese affair; indeed, he refers to it only in relation to his central concern: consideration of what sorts of people Christian universities ought to honor. Here, as I have already indicated, the Schwehn essay is highly useful and stimulating, even if, in some matters, it is not entirely persuasive.

Mr. Schwehn proposes that church-related universities should get beyond the Aristotelian and Hobbesian models that currently dominate standards of eligibility for honorary recognition and should honor those people "who lead excellent Christian lives." He never explicitly argues that Aristotelian versions of excellence should be discarded, but he does contend that they should, at the least, be supplemented by Christian standards. (As indicated below, I think Mr. Schwehn encounters some difficulty because he has not fully worked this

It takes great skill to do what Bob Gibson used to do, and he did his job better than Jimmy Carter did his, but throwing a baseball is finally a less significant occupation than governing a nation.

matter through.) This suggests, of course, that some tension exists between Christian and Aristotelian models of the excellent life. As Mr. Schwehn puts it, a life lived according to the virtues of faith, hope, and charity will often look to the world like one marked by failure, nonconformity, and defeat, and such a life of Christian excellence "might well be frequently and radically opposed to the Aristotelian account of the good life." Mr. Schwehn does not insist on this point, but the rest of his argument assumes it.

It follows from the Christian view of things, Mr. Schwehn argues, that there can be no ethical or spiritual hierarchy of vocations. Statesmen and football coaches, pastors and carpet cleaners, all are, by virtue of their callings, equidistant from God. If all vocations are of equal station, then it makes sense that the cluster of occupations from which honorary degree recipients are currently drawn—business, politics, the professions—should be expanded and democratized to include athletics, skilled or manual labor, entertainment—any occupation that is not inherently corrupt. While bringing virtually all occupations into his circle of eligibility, Mr. Schwehn would at the same time tighten up standards for honorary selection within them. Thus he would, "without hesitation," select former St. Louis Cardinal baseball pitcher Bob Gibson over former President Jimmy Carter.

Mr. Schwehn is surely right to argue that for Christians there is no moral hierarchy of vocations, but his leap from there to criteria for conferral of honorary degrees does not necessarily follow. Football coaching may not be morally inferior to statecraft, but it probably is inferior in terms of moral and intellectual seriousness, and I would think it perfectly reasonable for a university normally to restrict its honorary recognition to those fields that provide most fully for significant moral and intellectual accomplishment. It takes great skill to do what Bob Gibson used to do, and I agree entirely that he did his job better than Jimmy Carter did his, but throwing a baseball is finally a less significant occupation than governing a nation. Now it might be that a Bob Gibson, in addition to his skill, would display such exemplary courage and decency in living his vocation that a university would want to accord him honor, but that does not challenge the assumption that, other things equal, statesmen are more appropriately honored than baseball players. (This does not at all suggest, of course, that it is preferable in terms of Christian virtue to practice one occupation rather than another: the doctrine of vocation reminds us that we can serve God honorably wherever he has placed us.)

We are speaking of what is appropriate for a *university*—even a Christian university—to honor, and while a Christian university would pay more attention to cer-

tain personal moral criteria than would a secular one, it would still normally prefer some fields to others in conferring its honors. One can acknowledge that universities might be far more imaginative and bold than they have been in selecting their degree recipients without moving all the way to Mr. Schwehn's occupational egalitarianism. Let us take a hard case: I would find it difficult to imagine any but the most extraordinary circumstances in which a university would appropriately honor a disc jockey (Larry Lujack?) regardless of what degree of excellence he had attained in his occupation.

Mr. Schwehn's problem, I think, arises in part from confusion of categories. He rightly suggests that Christian universities should honor more often than they do those lives "in which the Christian virtues of faith, hope, and charity shine forth." Now the Christian virtues exist with only incidental reference to the occupations of those in whose lives they occur; they are as likely to be displayed among sanitation workers as among brain surgeons, and the one occupation would be no more likely than the other to provide opportunity for them to be practiced. If someone were to be honored on the basis of those virtues, he or she would be honored not as an exemplary surgeon or sanitation worker but as an exemplary Christian.

This is an entirely separate matter from Mr. Schwehn's parallel argument that universities should not distinguish among vocations in making honorary degree selections. It is one thing to argue that universities ought to award honorary degrees primarily on the basis of personal moral excellence (as interpreted in a Christian framework); quite another to argue that, without regard for the Christian character of the persons involved, one vocation is as good to honor as another. Mr. Schwehn's example of honoring Bob Gibson over Jimmy Carter (which presumably has to do only with comparative vocational skills) belongs to a separate category from the argument concerning Christian virtue with which it is intermingled. Excellence in moral life is separable from excellence in vocation, even as comparative degrees of excellence within vocations are separable from comparisons between vocations as to their moral and intellectual significance. Thus if our disc jockey mentioned above were ever legitimately to be honored, it would be for the excellence displayed in his personal life, not for his excellence as a disc jockey. Our brain surgeon, on the other hand, might conceivably be eligible for recognition because of either his vocational skills or his Christian piety.

Questions of a different, and far more vexing, nature arise in connection with the larger matters Mr. Schwehn raises. It would be difficult to quarrel with the eligibility for honorary recognition of that Iowa basketball coach (even though basketball coaching is not one of the voca-

Most Christians live by a makeshift ethic that mixes traces of Christian teaching with idiosyncratic combinations of folk wisdom, jerrybuilt philosophy, and frantic improvisation.

tions I would think most appropriate in itself for such recognition), but I am uncertain whether her case can be generalized as far as I suspect Mr. Schwehn would like it to be. Or perhaps I should say I am uncertain as to how it can be generalized as a case for emulation as well as for admiration. After all, when we make suggestions as to what kinds of life should be granted moral recognition, we are implicitly making suggestions as to how life should be lived.

Here I immediately enter territory that I am unequipped to deal with. I know none of the answers. But I do know some important questions and problems.

I am uneasy with an ethic that proposes as its *norm* a life defined by the world as one of failure and defeat. I know that this is the way Christian ethics is most commonly taught and preached. I have so preached it and taught it myself on occasion. But I know also that virtually none of the Christians in my acquaintance, those who do the teaching and preaching included, actually live that way. I am not talking here of the normal gap between profession and practice; I am talking of speaking one way and living largely another. Most of the Christians I know are willing, even eager, to perform acts of love, charity, and self-sacrifice. But they do not lead consistently sacrificial lives, and they would be eaten up if they did. They do not normally live in a way that would mark them as failures and losers, and they do not want to. They want to be decent, loving, and honorable people, but they also want to make their way in the world. They want to do and build and achieve, for themselves and for others, but accomplishing those things requires acting in ways—such as striving for success or dealing in power relationships—that they are regularly told contradict their religious duties.

How can Christians live as Christians and yet deal with the world of reality—a reality that necessarily involves us in situations of competition, self-assertion, and the manipulation of power? (Such situations, it is worth emphasizing, exist in full measure within the “sheltered” realms of the church and the university.) I suspect—though I am open to instruction here—that some sort of prudential ethic is necessary to living in a fallen world, and I desperately wish that our churches and teaching institutions would do a better job than they now do of helping their members to deal effectively with that world without becoming so conformed to its standards as to lose their Christian identity.

As matters stand, most Christians avoid moral schizophrenia only by a careful compartmentalization of their lives into six-day reality on the one hand and sabbath piety on the other. Caught between their vocations and their pieties, they survive by reserving their piety for private occasions and personal relationships and otherwise living by a makeshift ethic that mixes traces of

Christian teaching with idiosyncratic combinations of folk wisdom, jerrybuilt philosophy, and frantic improvisation.

Perhaps there is no escaping these conundrums. Perhaps Christian ethics really are so revolutionary and countercultural in their implications as to render those who would live by them unfit to survive in an unforgiving world. Perhaps I am wrong to tax churches and schools for failing to resolve contradictions that are in the nature of things incapable of being resolved. And perhaps that is why Christians must live by grace, because there is in the end no other way that they can live.

All this takes us far afield from the question of honorary degrees, but it is the mark of Mark Schwehn's excellence that his thinking and writing prompt those who encounter them to their own moral and intellectual grapplings—and with matters of true significance. A teacher can earn no higher commendation. ❏

Some Angels

The desk clerk, bored by couples
checking in at the inn
at any hour, without reservations,
did find a make-do room.

There the first-born
of the First Family
first saw the light of day
as, unabortedly, he lighted
the night of Bethlehem.
He had a kitchenmaid for a midwife;
he had God knows who for a father.

Diapered tight in Swaddles, he cried
(in spite of “Away in a Manger”)
and sucked at Mary's breasts
and burped and wet the hay
of a manger made for the hungry.

“Innkeeper, some shepherds
at the servants' door
want to know if Shepherd David's son
checked in tonight.”

“Innkeeper, some foreigners, star-struck,
need a conference room.”

“Innkeeper, some angels . . .”

Bernhard Hillila

I shudder in recollection of the student who complained that her senior "college prep" English class had spent the year analyzing rock music album covers instead of learning how to write.

Student Improbables

Gems of Undergraduate Wisdom

Dot Nuechterlein

Once upon a time TV host Art Linkletter made a career out of collecting the "darndest things" that kids said to him. *Reader's Digest* and other publications sometimes run columns featuring misquotes or glaring errors that appear in the press, or bloopers that come out across the airwaves.

In the half dozen years that I have graded college students' exams and term papers, I have amassed a file of what I like to call my "Student Improbables." Certainly many instructors find them: misspellings, malapropisms, and other mistakes in written work which are amusing, mystifying, and even occasionally insightful.

Sometimes these result from time pressure, such as rushing to finish an examination essay question. However, many invented phrases and odd wordings crop up in term papers, when presumably there is opportunity to proofread, edit, and rewrite awkward or troublesome spots. I tend not to penalize students for many of these miscues; they appear like gems among what is sometimes tedious verbiage, and they often demonstrate the wondrous capacities of the human mind. The fact that such errors can be intentional simply adds to the fun.

Please do not misunderstand: I take written work seriously, and require a great deal of it. Each of my sociology students does a term paper, all answer essay questions, and some complete book reports or special projects. Now and then one will chafe at these expectations, especially if work has been returned all marked up because of grammar and wording problems.

"This isn't an English class," s/he will protest, "but you seem to pay more attention to the English than you do to the ideas."

"Unfortunately," I reply, "English is the language we use in order to communicate our ideas. I cannot

evaluate what is in your head unless it shows itself in your work."

Still, I try to give the benefit of the doubt much of the time, and I do enjoy the word-profanities along with the pseudo-profundities.

My collection is divided into a number of categories. Some of the things I keep would not mean much to those outside of my field, but the quotes included here are all of sufficient generality that I trust any *Cresset* reader might savor them.

Spelling woes

By far the most common blunders are spelling mistakes. Of course some of these are not laughable. When every third person thinks that "alot" is one word, or when at least a tenth of this generation seems not to have gotten the hang of "there/their/they're," I become most irritated. Have they never paid attention when taught the fundamentals? Or were they never properly taught? I shudder in recollection of the California girl who complained that her senior "college prep" English class had spent a year analyzing rock music album covers instead of learning anything about writing; was that but the capstone of an ill-conceived educational system?

But other misspellings prompt smiles, as they provoke mental images different from what must have been intended. As a case in point, a number of papers over the years have mentioned "the duel-income family"—and while combat must surely be the state of affairs in some two-earner households, we might question whether students truly mean to suggest that. Every now and again someone writes of the "Gallop Pole," and I cannot avoid fancying the writer visualizing either an Eastern European who is careening around somewhere, or perhaps a hitching post at a neighboring racetrack.

Occasionally the error is of the I've-got-it-right-on-the-tip-of-my-tongue-but-can't-quite-spit-it-out variety. For example, "parents may be too lenious with their children" has a nice ring to it; I had no trouble understanding what was meant. Doesn't "status is your nitch or rank in society" sound like it should be spelled that

Dot Nuechterlein is an Instructor in Sociology at Valparaiso University and a doctoral student at the University of Chicago. She earned her B.A. in Theology at Valparaiso University and her M.A. in Sociology at Queen's University.

From time to time a student will create a word: one that does not exist in the English tongue, but which so splendidly expresses a concept that I check my Webster's to be sure it isn't in there.

way? And certainly no anti-Semitism was intended by the student who wrote that "Jewish families seem to be very close nit."

Still another illustration is the following:

The more prestigic the school is, the better chance a student coming from that school has at obtaining a job or entering college.

Prestigic-ism, however, is determined in large part by the quality of the institution's product, and I would wish that all of us who encounter students would continually call to attention their expressive errors.

Finely-tuned phrases

This category in my collection contains fewer items than most others, but when encountered they provide special pleasure. I treasure one I came across several years ago: "This situation resulted in a breakdown of the family backbone." There are such charming mind-pictures associated with that sentence, of which the writer was no doubt totally oblivious.

Another sentence I appreciated was this one: "Teachers must give their upmost to encourage students." Notice how the change from "t" to "p" in one word conveys an intensity not found in the correct version. But my pupil would have been surprised to learn that.

Because this file folder is slim, I use it as a catch-all for items that do not seem to fit easily elsewhere. Two of those were comments gleaned from separate papers on Hitler and his use of power and authority. The first stated that in Germany during Hitler's dictatorship there were "plots inside the party to assassinate their leader." (I kid you not.) The other student concluded a somewhat limited discussion with what has become a rather wide-spread sentiment: "Personally, I think Hitler had definite mental problems."

Fruitlessly florid

How well I recall the day when I walked into my very first college English class and heard the Freshman Comp professor say: "Some of you have natural writing ability, and some of you haven't. I cannot teach you talent if you were not born with it, but I can show you techniques that will make the most of whatever gifts you have. The first rule is, keep it simple."

Oh, do some of my students need that advice. There seems to be a fundamental miscomprehension among many that if a word is big or a sentence complex, it must sound intelligent. I myself regularly reach for my thesaurus, and I applaud the efforts of those who incorporate variety and precision into their prose. But the nuances and the specificity of certain terms and phrases must be captured if writing is to convey apt meaning. Too many students use dictionaries and other aids thoroughly, but not well, and their papers are so con-

voluted they are barely intelligible.

The best (worst) example of this I have encountered was in the first batch of term papers I marked as a graduate teaching assistant. Each paragraph in this paper needed minute dissection before it could be deciphered, and even then it was largely guesswork. I thought the trouble was my own inexperience until I showed it to the professor who had made the assignment. He assured me that this was an extreme case, that the problem was common but usually much less serious. I wish I had kept a copy of that paper, as I have never seen another quite like it.

The less severe stuff, though, crops up all the time, such as in this fragment: "... the grandeur of the source of perplexity . . ." You need not know what the kid was talking about to recognize a communication difficulty there. Or see how the wish to sound profound messes up what could have been a perfectly clear point:

The introduction of this policy in the Canadian society does not seem to command amusement and I feel it should be extremely opposed to for some incredible reasons associated with it.

Words that ought to be

This category is teacher's pet. It is delightful to stumble onto the product of an inventive mind—indeed, that is one of the rewards of teaching. From time to time a student will create a word: one that does not exist in the English tongue, but which so splendidly expresses a concept that I check my Webster's to be sure it isn't in there.

Not long ago a student apparently read over her exam essay before handing it in and discovered that she had left out a point. She added it at the end, labelled it plainly as an addition, and then wrote this little note to me at the point where it should be included: "See page three for the incerpt." Incerpt? My dictionary does not contain that word, but after seeing her usage I think it ought to.

Then there was the person who wrote about "permiscuous sexual activity," combining the idea of the permissive society with the promiscuous behavior which it engenders. Nice.

And how about this one: "problemsome."

Sociologists, who theorize readily about the process of social interaction, might do well to make space in the lexicon for "interactionships" as coined by an Intro Soc. student.

Another word, which does not have a flowing quality but which neatly gets a notion across, is "insuperior."

In discussing theories of maturity, one student mentioned "the well stabled adult."

Once I found this sentence: "It is almost impossible to vote or opinionate on the subject of capital punishment without being emotional about it." Purists object

Several student neologisms are now a part of my mental vocabulary. Other findings I could not imagine ever using, yet they show that spark of creativity inherent in the human intellect.

to the making of verbs out of nouns and adjectives, but our normal term, "opine," seems so stuffy and archaic it is not often used. I vote for "opinionate."

Several of these neologisms are now a part of my mental vocabulary. Other findings I could not imagine ever using, yet they show that spark of creativity inherent in the human intellect. It seems not to be the most brilliant minds that produce these pearls; perhaps those individuals process information in a more standardized way, reserving their originality for higher levels of analysis and synthesis. New words come from those who are engaged in an elemental human struggle—coming to grips with symbolic communication, using words to express thought. I enjoy seeing the results of those efforts in the same way I once relished the fantastic word associations my children produced when they learned to construct sentences. And I learn from them, too.

Unintended wisdom

The incongruity that can result from choosing the wrong word is a technique long used by comedians. The humor my students' mistakes bring is doubtless unintentional. There was one who spoke of "the onslaught of children," although in context he must have meant "onset." (Parents with closely-spaced young can probably resonate with this student's terminology, however.)

Another Soc. of the Family student had this interesting thought: "In this day and age it is vertically impossible to raise a large family." (Think about that one for a minute.)

Not long after I had searched the literature for some elusive information concerning family life, this offering tickled my funny bone: "There are a vast mirage of studies being done on the family today."

Part of the intrigue in these cases comes in trying to figure out what the writer must have had in mind in the first place, and comparing that to what was actually written. Consider: "It may be the underlining phenomena." The appropriate word would be "underlying," which connotes support or foundation, whereas the chosen word has to do with emphasis. Would a student think through these distinctions and go for the technically incorrect word because of what it meant? Hardly; in the fleeting moment it probably sounded fine, and no attention was paid to clarity or sense.

On the other hand, at times it is evident that the student does mean something specific, but somehow it comes out comically. One book report attempted to describe the hero of a novel and concluded that "he did not understand the depthness and uniqueness of women." Amen.

Huh? and Now, really!

Some sentences do not just get a word or phrase con-

fused, but whole sections come out garbled. Others contain redundancies, or say precisely the opposite to what must be intended. Here are several examples:

If you live in a country where alcohol is used every day at meals for everyone, then [in a new country] the idea of drinking is unlawful if your underage isn't appropriate.

We are discussing the recent future of the family.

All individuals are uniquely unique.

Then there was a fellow who poignantly lamented that older people today "have feelings of unwanted and loneliness," and someone else asked "Why is death so openly hidden and ignored?" Poor word choice with ridiculous consequences is illustrated by this statement: the director of a residence for senior citizens interviews applicants and "pairs up combatible roommates."

Peddling fast, or "Please let me think up an answer"

Once I worked under a professor who was so dismayed at the garbage that spewed forth on exams that she decided to give out major essay questions ahead of time. Students could then prepare in advance, organizing their thoughts, and leaving no excuse for them to make up facts as they went along. Since that seemed to work rather well, I have adopted the same practice in my own teaching. At the same time, however, I do ask some short answer or definitional questions, and then those old fictive juices begin to flow.

Most of the samples I have in this category might not be of interest to non-sociologists, but I can share with you my all-time favorite. In fact, this answer was so hopelessly wrong, so totally the product of cunning and fantasy, that I awarded the student a point or two purely for entertainment value. One class period had been devoted to the topic, complete with diagrams which most students recalled and reproduced, but this student must have been absent that day.

As a rule I do not keep in mind which individuals contribute improbables to my files, but this particular young man persists in my memory. He was a good-looking, charming, blond giant, without a surplus of book smarts but possessing an enormous supply of self-confidence, shrewdness, and determination. The lad will go far.

I leave you with the exam question and his ingenious sink-or-swim improvisation. I love it.

Q: How is the public attitude on aging being affected by the baby boom?

A: The public attitude on aging is being effected in the respect that nobody wants to get old. Sex makes you feel good and young and having sex causes children, many times. Having sex keeps one younger, and causes children to come in this world.



From The Chapel

Riddles, Parables, And the Kingdom of God

Louise Williams

And he said, "The Kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed upon the ground, and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he knows not how. The earth produces of itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come." And he said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."

Mark 4:26-32

Louise Williams is Director of Deaconess Services of the Lutheran Deaconess Association and Part-Time Instructor in Religious Education at Valparaiso University. This homily was delivered on June 27, 1982 at the conclusion of a conference, "The 'M' is for Me: A Gathering for Mothers," held at Valparaiso University and sponsored by the Lutheran Deaconess Association.

INI

Perhaps some of you remember a few years ago when those little Dixie cups—the kind some people have in dispensers in their bathrooms—had riddles on them. I remember it well because one of my nephews was about four or five at the time. He memorized all those cups and drove us crazy all summer asking us those silly riddles. But after a while, even he got a little bored and began to make up his own riddles. He would ask me questions like, "How is an elephant like a horseshoe?" I'd say, "I don't know, how is an elephant like a horseshoe?" He'd say, "An elephant has a trunk" and he would laugh. After a while he'd stop and say, "I don't get it. Can you explain it to me?"

Sometimes Jesus' parables seem a little like some of those made-up riddles. We hear them. They often sound very familiar. We nod our assent and perhaps remember something we learned in Sunday School. But then we wonder if we really get it. What really is the message in that story about the farmer, and what really does that parable of the mustard seed mean?

Just How Tall Is a Mustard Plant?

As a matter of fact, it seems that the story-teller might even have some of the facts a bit confused—or, at least, over-stated. While it is true that a mustard seed is small and that a comparatively large plant grows from it, I doubt that the mustard plant is really taller than all the other plants. And anybody who has farmed or grown a garden or tried to keep house plants alive knows that there is more to it than just scattering some seeds around and reaping the harvest.

Jesus fails to mention plowing and fertilizing and pulling weeds and keeping the insects away. Nor does this parable mention too much rain, hail, early frost—whatever. Obviously these stories miss some of the finer points of farming or some of the facts about the botany of mustard seeds and mustard plants—much less what it's like to be a mother or to live at all in this complicated world.

Even if these parables do not give us comprehensive pictures of the meaning of life, they do provide little pieces of the picture given by the whole Scriptures and by the lives of the people of God since then, pieces of the picture of what the Kingdom of God is like. The Old Testament lesson, the psalm, the dialog at the beginning of the service all help to give us a little more of that picture of God at work, acting in history and in the lives of people—raising the lowly, making the dry tree put forth buds, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, freeing the imprisoned, encouraging the discouraged, and call-

When we are tempted to think that what we see is all we get, the parable of the mustard seed comes with a word of hope and assurance that God is acting, even if it doesn't seem that way.

ing us to be the people of God who do what we do. These all help fill in and flesh out the picture of the Kingdom of God.

But, like the people to whom the parable is addressed in Mark, we, too, sometimes feel impatient and discouraged, sure that nothing is happening, and we wonder, "Is God really at work here? Is this the Kingdom of God?" The people who surrounded Jesus wondered, too, "Is this it? Is this how God ushers in the kingdom—with a simple carpenter's son who is at odds with all the important and powerful people and who associates with all the unimportant and undesirable people? We really can't see much going on—perhaps we should do something about it. We could perhaps force the coming of the kingdom. Perhaps a revolution would be in order. We can take matters into our own hands and make it happen. Surely this isn't all there is."

These two parables are addressed to exactly that kind of thinking and feeling—thoughts and emotions which grow, it seems to me, out of at least three misconceptions we are all tempted to believe.

First, we are tempted to believe that what we can see and what we can understand is all there is. If it doesn't look like anything is happening, nothing is. This kind of thinking is problematic on two counts. One, we know that our perceptions are colored and sometimes even distorted by many things—by our past experiences, by how we're feeling about ourselves now, by the messages we get from others, by our present circumstances and commitments, by our expectations about what should be happening. The list could go on. But the truth is, even though our perceptions have validity, there are times when we don't see all that clearly, and if we believe

that what we see is all there is, our lives will be sad indeed.

This way of thinking is also problematic in that it drives us to be constantly looking and checking for signs that God is really at work, even when we ought to be using our time and energy to be about the vocation to which God calls us. It means that we behave as I did the first summer my mother gave me my own garden seeds to plant. I fixed my little row and planted corn in the corner of the garden, but I didn't ever reap and harvest because every day I would go out and dig up the seeds to see how many had sprouted. I think only a couple of undisturbed seeds actually grew, but when the young plants peeked through the ground, I was so curious about what was happening underground, I pulled them out, and they died too. That may be a good way to learn about corn, but you don't get much corn on the cob out of it.


Hope and Assurance of an Acting God

When we are tempted to think that what we see is all we get, this parable comes with a word of hope and assurance that God is acting, even if it doesn't seem that way—that growth is happening in us, in our children, in the coming of the kingdom of God—and that even from tiny beginnings, something valuable and important can happen.

The second misconception these parables address has to do with the temptation that we somehow have to assume the role of God. We are tempted to believe that we are compelled to do it all ourselves. If we don't expect ourselves to be God, someone else will. Somebody will lay on us those expectations to be the "Kool-Aid lady" or "supermom" or all things all of the time to our family, our church, and our community. And if trying to live up to those expectations is not enough, we can also get caught up in planning what we would do if we were in charge of the world.

Now that can be kind of fun for a little while, but it can become a heavy burden, especially when we begin to believe that we are in charge of the world. And while we are busy trying to be God, we have no time to be who we are called to be—daughters and sons of God, much loved and always forgiven—people whose calling is not to make growth happen, but to rejoice in the growth that God gives between our planting and our reaping.

The third misconception is the most beguiling. We are sometimes tempted to believe that the Kingdom is



**THE CRESSET
REPRINTS**

***On Abortion
Six Essays in One
Twenty-Four Page Folio***

***Single Copy, 35¢
Ten Copies, 25¢ Each
Hundred Copies, 20¢ Each***

**The Cresset
Valparaiso University
Valparaiso, Indiana 46383**

While it is true that the Kingdom is to be found in that future fulfillment, in the rich harvest yet to come, it is also to be found in the sowing and the reaping and in the waiting in between.

only found at the end of these parables—in the full-grown mustard plant or in the reaping of the ripe harvest. If we believe that, we are always living in the future, for the time when the last child is potty-trained or in school or grown, for the time when we can leave this phase of our life and move on to what we really want to do, for the time when all the problems are solved, for the time when we go to heaven, or for whatever time we dream about when we can rest like birds in the shade of that full-grown mustard plant.

While it is true that the Kingdom is to be found in that future fulfillment, in the rich harvest yet to come, it is also true that the Kingdom is not found *only* there. The Kingdom is also in the tiny mustard seed—in every little beginning. The Kingdom is also in the sowing—in the planting of every seed, whether or not we see it through to the harvest. And the Kingdom is also found in the waiting.

Parables, like jokes and riddles, are strange things—not everyone gets them. For a joke to be funny, the hearer needs to know something about the subtleties of language and culture (although some jokes, like most I tell, are not all that subtle).

The Kingdom Is Not an Abstract Idea

It might be kind of hard to get these parables in Mark if we were not part of the family of God in Christ Jesus. And we people who don't know too much about farming or who think that mustard is something we put on hot dogs, might miss the meaning of these parables and we might not notice all the parables that happen in our lives except that for us, the Kingdom of God is not just some abstract idea. It has a name and a face—the name and face of Jesus Christ.

That makes it possible for us to look out at the world through the cross of Christ marked on us in Baptism and see and experience things that cause us to think "The Kingdom of God is like . . ." You know better than I what those things are for you. Perhaps it is something in nature—a tree, a flower, a mountain. Maybe it is something with your children—the way they hug you or the way they grow. Perhaps it is something in your relationship with your spouse or with a friend. Perhaps it is being in the midst of people who care for you and support you.

Today's reading from Mark invites us to be on the lookout for such parables, for these little glimpses of God at work in our lives in our world.

Whatever form our parables take, these signs of the Kingdom are important in our lives, because they help us keep things in perspective. They help us realize on good days—and especially on the bad ones when we are discouraged and we wonder if this is all there is—that what we see is not all we get. By God's grace, there is much more. Our parables remind us that we don't have to be God—we can leave that to him—and that the Kingdom exists now as well as in the future.

In the sowing and the reaping, and in the waiting in between, may God help us to see and to hear and to understand such parables of assurance and hope. ☛

The Lincoln Memorial

It was a rotation, as Walker Percy calls it,
Just to be there at all,
After days of talk about an Englishman
With professors and priests
In a nuns' house high in the hills
Above the town of Ellicott City,
Whose street slopes down from the church
Above its top to the creek at its bottom by the mill,
And where I found a Percy hardback like new
For three dollars and a ceramic candle-carrier,
And where a salesgirl told me that Daniel Boone
Used to come to Ellicott City
To trade his furs.

On Lincoln's arm and knee
I saw blue and gray doves
Playing (or were they blue jays?).
One (was it blue or gray?) walked
About on his bow tie.

I looked to the left
To his Gettysburg Address on the wall,
And to the right
At his Second Inaugural,
Which I read all the way through
For the first time in my life,
I think.

I turned to leave and saw what Lincoln sees:
The mirror-lake and the Monument,
Where I had stood minutes before at the 500-foot level,
And beyond it the complaisant Capitol.
The birds, quite at home there,
Stayed with Lincoln and his marbled words.

Joe McClatchey

Motherhood as Vocation

The Call to the Diaper Pail

Karen Melang

Everybody used to be in favor of motherhood. Remember that unassailable trio: mom, apple pie, and the American flag? Whatever the current status of apple pie and the flag, motherhood can no longer be assumed to elicit universal approval. I'm not sure it has fallen so far out of favor as to require major rehabilitation, but it probably could use some shoring up. For Christians, that can be accomplished, at least in part, by thinking of it in terms of vocation.

One way we use the word "vocational" today is to mean a skill, as in "vocational school," where you can learn to do hair or cook for a restaurant or whatever. Vocation also means a calling to a job. Often it's still used in a semi-religious sense, particularly in Catholicism, as in "a vocation to the religious life," meaning being a priest or nun.

Our Lutheran forebears talked about vocation extensively in the sixteenth century, and I think they enlarged the meaning of the word in a way that is still important and can speak to us. They wanted to say that vocations aren't just to full-time church work, but that God calls people to all kinds of work. When they talked about vocation, it was a way of describing the fact that God is interested in getting done whatever needs to be done to keep this world going. They meant to say that it is God who works in and through and for people when we work, no matter what our work is.

And so God is interested in having Christian youth workers and clergy and diaconates and Sunday School teachers and Bible School organizers. He is also interested that some people are lawyers, and that some people keep the water supply clean, and that some people make the world more beautiful through their art and architecture, and that some people raise crops, and that some people raise children, and that other people perform countless other jobs.

I appreciate this picture of vocation because of the perspective it gives me. I think it lets us take a moment or two away from the diaper pail and from the 48-ounce box of Cheerios that the kids spilled on the bedroom floor and which now seems to be multiplying there. It

lets us get away from that and get a view of our work from a much wider perspective. I think when we see mothering from this wider perspective, we see at least two important things.

The first is that mothering is a real *bona fide* vocation that is in no way inferior or substandard to any other vocation.

The second thing that we see is that mothering is a vocation alongside many other vocations, most of which are useful and which can bring great rewards and which can also make you crazy in their own distinctive ways. Seeing this can protect us from the Poor Me syndrome which can affect mothers and, of course, everybody else, too. Mothering is no doubt more intense in many ways than being a plumber, though plumbers surely have their days as well. There are different headaches and different rewards.

So I appreciate the old Lutheran Reformers' views on vocation. They help us affirm that all work is honorable because, even though it may not be evident at first glance, all work is God-at-work, preserving and ever creating his beloved world. And they help us say that mothering doesn't have to take a backseat to any other vocation. It is one of many, but it is surely one.

The word "vocation" calls to mind another idea besides having skills or doing a job. The word itself derives from the old Latin verb *vocare*—to call. And so "vocation" carries with it the idea of not simply doing a job but of being somehow "called" to do it. We still fairly routinely talk about the "call" to the ministry, but that's about it. We speak of people *deciding* to become accountants or police officers or hospital administrators. Our words make it clear that we mean that something inside of themselves propels people to various jobs. But to use the word "vocation" implies that we acknowledge something outside ourselves as beckoning us to a particular task.

When we think about how our children came to us, how we came to be mothers, we may wonder about how appropriate the word "vocation" might be. I've always said about my own experience that it seems almost like I spent half my life trying to get pregnant and the other half trying not to. Maybe you have had a very different experience than I have. You may have become a mother in a way that might be termed "accidental," like the proverbial adage about the couple who wash their underwear together, or maybe you became a mom after a long wait with an adoption agency or after surgery

Karen Melang is a 1969 graduate of the Deaconess program at Valparaiso University. She currently serves as President of the Lutheran Deaconess Association, and lives in Hackensack, Minnesota with her husband, James, a Lutheran pastor, and their two children.

for endometriosis or just after a lot of years, that seemed like eons, of trying. Was it fate or your tenacity that brought you to motherhood? Even if it seems like it was one or the other or a little of both, could it still be a vocation, a calling? Does God call people even without the fireworks of a burning bush?

It seems to me that God calls people to vocations by setting tasks before them. Whether the task of mothering has come to us "accidentally" or through tenacious hard work, the Christian tradition wants to affirm that it is in these very ways that God calls us. Queen Esther's uncle tells her, as they talk about the imminent extermination of the Jews long ago: "Maybe it is for such a time as this that you have been made queen." All of a sudden being queen has become for Esther not just a daily round of tea parties and dinners—but a vocation. Esther still does the same work. She still plans dinner parties for her husband and his colleagues, but now things have

changed. Now she has a vocation and not just a job. She recognizes in her job God-at-work. It is her uncle's voice she hears, but she recognizes God's voice, too.

Who is calling you? Is it a baby crying or a toddler whose distinctive way of getting your attention is to stuff a whole roll of toilet paper into the bowl? Is it your first-time-at-schooler confiding to you how hard it is to make friends or your older child wondering aloud how bad the principal's office would really be? Listen to the voices. Is it your vocation calling?

Christian mothers do not have tremendously different or special tasks. They chauffeur kids to games; they break up fights; they try to keep turtle eggs and dead caterpillars from being slipped into the house. Their work is the same, but their vision and hearing are not. They see the people in their families as gifts of God—at least some of the time—and when they hear those people talk, they hear God's voice, too. ☩

Predestination

Isaac's agenda failed to include the day of his death.

Lucky are those who know

And copy it plain in their daybooks' ending:

Alike condemned, cancerous, cross-weary,

Whose purblind arbiters have written

What they have written:

"A matter of months at most."

And the suicides, of course.

They know

And wish it so

Into being

Or should I say non-being.

(Such knowledge is still too high for me.)

Isaac didn't know his sons, either.

Esau's hairy hands preferred pottage to praise,

And his twice-blind father overlooked the distinction,

Thinking, "He's my first-born, after all, though twinned;

And anyway, I love him better."

Isaac's certified and stamped image, meanwhile,

A stay-at-home always underfoot

And in-the-way and underhanded besides,

Whose own spotty agenda

Lacked certain weddings, bed-mates,

In-laws, births, massacres, famines, and reunions,

One day overheard his father tell Rebecca:

"You are raising an indigent.

When I was young and sinewy,

I dug wells in the desert

And named them for the Lord.

What will this one do, I wonder—

Laze in women's skirts in the kitchen

And salt the mess for the real men?"

That night Rebecca drew up her own agenda.

Joe McClatchey



The Day They Turned the TVs Off

A Modest Proposal for The Elimination of TV

James Combs

Social theorists of the so-called "phenomenological" school have made much of what they call "the world-taken-for-granted." This is—boiled down—simply the notion that we live in a world of which we are aware, and a lot of what we are aware of we take for granted. Married couples can understand the thought that "I've grown accustomed to her/his face." The world that we grant out there takes on a familiarity and predictability that we count on. The power of tradition, habit, and role is strong indeed, inuring us from the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to, and getting us through the day. The shock of the new is cushioned by the soft fabric of our everyday lives, the world of custom.

The world becomes threatening to us when we can no longer take it for granted. The standard plot line of the horror movie, for example, involves the destruction of the familiar or, worse, having the familiar itself become the threat. When we can no longer take the world for granted, it becomes terrifying to us. The nice harmless young man who rented us a motel room may stab us in the shower. When we can no longer count on a granted world, we are afraid.

James Combs teaches Political Science at Valparaiso University.

Perform a mental experiment. Imagine that all of a sudden someone turned off all the television sets.

One of my favorite old 1950s sci-fi flicks is *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. It was scary for the simple reason that the alien from outer space could stop all our machines. Now think how frightening that is: if some force could stop all the technological gadgets we depend upon in everyday life, what would we do? There is an anarchist group in Berkeley whose symbol, and weapon, is the wirecutter; the injunction is to snip every wire you see, thus bringing society to a halt. Without our machines, our lives are disrupted, and society is reduced to chaos.

So let us, in that spirit, perform a mental experiment. Suppose today that some force had the power to stop all the television sets. No TV. No kiddie shows, morning and evening news, soaps, game shows, docudramas, Shakespeare on PBS, late shows, not even Howard Cosell. No nothin' to watch. In that case, what would we do? This occurred to me during the NFL players' strike. With the prospect of no pro football on TV this fall and winter, what would people do? It was seriously suggested that there would be an increase in domestic violence since people would have nothing to divert them on Sunday afternoon. Without the cushioning mediation of TV, people would beat and kill each other!

In any case, the disappearance of television would be a major deletion from our world-taken-for-granted. It has taken three decades, but now TV is pervasive, as much a part of our customary world as brushing our teeth or doing the wash. In many homes, it is always on, there in the background—often in several different rooms—offering its multiplicity of messages. When you sit in the waiting room for car repairs, you watch TV. When some major event occurs, people huddle around TV sets in offices and lobbies. Young people growing up today cannot imagine a world without television.

For them, the world before TV must seem like a dark age, in which the window on the world didn't exist and people lived in the parochial ignorance of the medieval serf.

But let us ask the question again: what would our world be like without TV? Those of us who use it little or not at all seem to suffer no ill effects from abjuring it. The charge that TV produces ill effects on the individual and society is aimed at the heavy user, the TV consumer. What would such people do without TV? Go into withdrawal? Talk to their spouses? Read books? Become better people?

A world without TV would be a different world, all right. Indeed, some critics of TV have gone so far as to say that TV should be eliminated as a matter of social policy. None of this you-shouldn't-watch-so-much-TV business; rather television should be done away with, abolished, eradicated, junked.

The most sustained argument for such a radical—and unlikely—change in our world-taken-for-granted is Jerry Mander's *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* (New York: Morris Quill, 1978). This is the kind of book that recurrently comes up in wine-and-cheese media circles: "Well, he makes a good argument, but you know, it just won't happen, so you just have to be selective, and use the 'Off' button." But Mander steelily admits of no such rationalizations and compromises: TV, he says, is an evil thing, irredeemable, a danger to our psyches, society, and politics. It cannot be reformed into an instrument of enlightenment. It is a malevolent medium, a threat to humane values and the integrity of human consciousness.

How so? Summoning logic, evidence, and personal experience, he argues along four lines. First, he says (I have to oversimplify), television has become our major "mediator of experience." It has moved us

I suspect that the elimination of television would likely not make most people happier, freer, more intelligent or humane, or suddenly kind to kids and animals.

into a totally artificial environment, snapping our direct contact with and knowledge of nature. The truths of nature and direct experience are replaced by "arbitrary realities." TV becomes the "guru speaking reality," and we are cast adrift in mental space, living in an almost schizophrenic world in which we are confused as to what is real and what is imagined.

Secondly, television "colonizes experience," in which corporate power over mass communication, in league with advertising, influences us to consume, even to the point of doing it when we can't afford it and it isn't good for us. TV is an "influencing machine" that, to use Bernay's old term, "engineers consent."

Third, TV produces unintended neuro-physiological responses in viewers, creating illness, confusion, and "submission to external imagery." TV actually reduces our sensory experience, depriving us of the ability to perceive our environment. The artificial light has detrimental effects. TV dims the mind, and turns us into the images we see.

Finally, the inherent biases of television make it a simple and clumsy medium that reduces programming to the lowest common denominators, hypnotizing us into fixating on a world of "artificial unusualness." It alienates us from ourselves and our experience.

Mander then concludes with the radical call: let us ban television. A world free of television could only be better. People would talk to each other, minds would enliven, we would do things together, we could see the real world around us again, we would rediscover "facets of experience that we've permitted to lie dormant," politics would shift "in the direction of more decentralized, noncapitalistic, community-based structures," learning would replace brainwashing, people would be happier. How to get rid of the beast?

Disappointingly, no answer save for us "to purge from our minds the idea that just because television exists, we cannot get rid of it."

For my own part, I am skeptical that television has all the evil effects Mander claims, and I don't think for a second that TV is going to go away. Yet a good bit of what he says is, or may be, true, and since it is, it should give us pause about the ubiquity of television. I suspect that the elimination of TV would likely not make most people happier, freer, more intelligent or humane, or kind to kids and animals. But if TV does fry our brains, teach us violence, and make us callous, then it is a serious question as to whether the medium is worth the candle.

Perhaps the promise of a utopia without television is a bit much, but that returns us again to our original question: what *would* the world be like without TV? To paraphrase Ronald Reagan, would you and your family be better off in years to come if television were eliminated? Perhaps so. There is enough to Mander's argument to see the logic of getting rid of television as a social phenomenon and not merely as a machine.

However desirable that might be

in the abstract, I think we won't. Indeed, I predict that we will sin the other way: television, and related technologies, will become more important to us, take up more of our time, seduce us all the more. TV games will become more sophisticated, and kids will spend more time playing them. TV fare will become more varied and available. In the future, you will be able to play in games or plays projected out of the TV into your living room. You will have a library of movies on microchip. You will be able to will your own mental fantasy show through the TV.

What Mander doesn't consider is Ellul's Law: technology is irreversible. Technique has a logic of its own, a techno-logic. The modern world is increasingly a "technological society," a civilization, as Robert Merton notes in his Foreword to Ellul's famous book, "committed to the quest for continually improved means to carelessly examined ends." Technology doesn't repel most of us; it fascinates us. Technology is achievement, the tradition of Edison and American invention. American pragmatism impels us toward continually improving means—managing the economy, making nuclear

Give *The Cresset* As A Thoughtful Gift



The Cresset
Valparaiso University
Valparaiso, Indiana 46383

Please send one year (nine issues) of *The Cresset* at \$6.50 per year to the address below. My check is enclosed.

Please announce the subscription as a gift from:

Name _____

Street _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP _____

The perversion and power of technology is a tragic necessity wrought by historical determination.

war more efficient, increasing organizational efficiency, coming up with new machines and gadgets, and on and on. Americans believe that once the means are mastered, the ends will take care of themselves. Problems are solved through technological means. Whether the problems are worth solving, or whether the technological innovation has unintended consequences, is not often examined.

If television technology is irreversible, part of the larger "technologization of the world," and if Mander is in any sense right, does this mean that TV will produce even more ill effects in the future? Probably so. This is not to say that the awesome technology of future TV will not provide entertainment, education, and enlightenment. But the peculiar power of TV technology will be all the more powerful given the innovations promised from the Silicone Valleys of the world. For those who find television suspect, the consequences are horrifying. Ellul's book concludes with no hope: "Enclosed within his artificial creation, man finds that there is 'no exit'; that he cannot pierce the shell of technology to find again the ancient milieu to which he was adapted for hundreds of thousands of years."

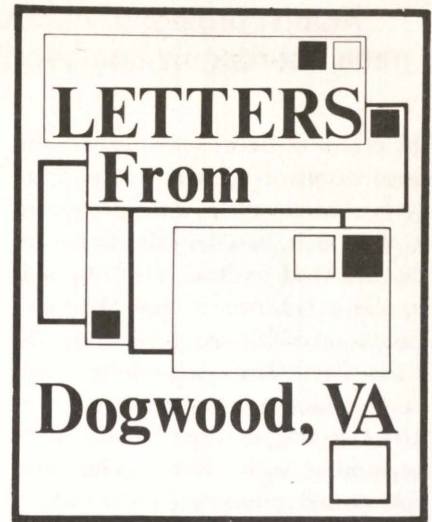
The pervasion and power of technology is a tragic necessity wrought by historical determination. It cannot be reversed, undone, or very much altered. Mander's utopian speculations, like Ellul's dream of returning us to some Rousseauian "ancient milieu" of natural existence, would require creating a civilization whose institutions, beliefs, and habits do not revolve around technique. When push comes to shove, are we really willing to give up the "artificial creations" of modernity? Probably not. Since most of us shrink from that essentially humanistic decision, then there likely is no exit.

It is a frightening thing to specu-

late that we are prisoners of our own creations, commanded by our own power. To quote Merton again, "the technological society requires men to be content with what they are required to like." The very technique we admire so much is used on us to engineer our consent. Television, as the central medium of popular culture, provides not only distraction, social learning, and information, but also stands as the household symbol of our civilization's commitment to technique.

Perhaps Mander and Ellul are right in the extreme: television, by requiring us to be what our society says we must be, is dehumanizing. A technological society requires people who are themselves technique. "Americans," argues Mander, "have not grasped the fact that many technologies determine their own use, their own effects, and even the kind of people who control them." The stupendous irony of it, and I suppose pity of it too, is that modern man, whose mastery of nature and society through technique is one of the awesome achievements of modernity, now finds that technique has mastered him, made him less than human, and perhaps even placed him on a suicidal course of self-destruction. When World War III occurs, it will be a triumph of technique.

If all this sounds gloomy, it is. But really we are saying here little more than the traditional notion that humanity is fragile, and exists at all in spite of all the forces of dehumanization. The existential choice is not to let those forces transform us into something less than, or other than, human. Perhaps we cannot transform a civilization committed to insane means applied to even more insane ends, but at least we can recognize them for what they are. If television does exist as part of that insanity, then maybe we had better take a harder look at that odd-looking device in our living rooms. ❏



The Attractive Genius Of Henry Adams

Charles Vandersee

Dear Editor,

Of the four persons who have worked together editing *The Letters of Henry Adams, 1858-1892* (Harvard University Press, December 1982, 3 vols., \$85), three of us live here in Dogwood, Virginia. This is a lot of experts in one Southern town for a man whose name is unfamiliar to most people.

Henry Adams is not one of those "towering figures" whose minds are like great blast furnaces and rolling mills, taking the mixed ore of their own lives and giving it out to us in sharp-edged steel for lesser men to use—often in high-rises that improve the intellectual landscape rather little. I think of Freud, for example, or Nietzsche, or T. S. Eliot, all more or less contemporaneous with Adams (1838-1918) through certain of their important writings.

In the popular mind, it was Freud who gave the construction industry some rather inflexible ideas about

Charles Vandersee, Associate Professor of English and Dean of the undergraduate Echols Scholars Program at the University of Virginia, is still eagerly on the lookout for more letters of Henry Adams.

Adams produced no one solid, smooth explanation—sex, money, aggression, God, nada, intrafamily combat, the American Way of Life—for human behavior and anxiety.

the power of dreams, the libido, the unconscious. Nietzsche is one of the gods of modernism, a theology cold to the touch, based on the faith that the old God is dead. Eliot, though finally a believer in the old God, gave us in 1922 (four years after *The Education of Henry Adams*) the image of wasteland for the twentieth century, an image which seems more applicable with every gulag and abandoned industrial city, but which finally is but one image of existence, as steel is but one way of building.

But now Henry Adams. After his letters come from the press this winter, people here in Dogwood will have the civility to ask us, the editors, why it is that Adams so interests us. This is the generous, genteel South; what they are really asking is the question: How could you spend all these years on a man who is not of towering importance, who is not in the popular mind at all?

Some of our interrogators will have heard of Adams in their college days, when "The Dynamo and the Virgin," a chapter of the *Education*, was forced to their attention. From that, they got a view of the twentieth century as decidedly agnostic and wastelandish, though hardly sex-driven. Mainly they got an impression of chaos (Adams' own frequent word), as if miscellaneous piles of ore came to the blast furnace and the fire suddenly went out. That is, Adams, as a result of his thinking, produced no one solid, smooth explanation—sex, money, science, aggression, territory, God, nada, intrafamily combat, the American Way of Life—for human behavior and anxiety.

This is the attractive genius of Henry Adams, mordant, to be sure, in its uncertainty, but attractive in the sense that complexity always is attractive to spirits whose souls seek wholeness and abhor false simplicity.

Adams himself learned much about complexity during a few weeks in Hawaii in the year 1890.

There, beginning a long sojourn in the Pacific, with American smokestacks and chimneys thousands of miles away, he saw what the sunset looked like. With his own eyes, in that tropical light, he saw the infinity of shades of color and cloud effects, changing too fast to remember or record. With the eyes of his traveling companion, the artist John La Farge, he saw something more: precisely the degree to which one could hope to render on canvas this visual experience. It was a depressingly small degree; ever afterward Adams recognized that the mind and hand of man could not cope adequately with experience. He became increasingly modest about what he thought he knew, this man who had already published a great deal on politics, history, and economics—and two novels of ideas. The questions all opened up again.

Over time, Adams became increasingly modest about what he thought he knew.

Most Boston intellectuals did not grant their eyes the experience of a Pacific sunset. Most had no time for the complexities of Gothic architecture, since Gothic was Catholic and Boston was Unitarian. Most Boston historians had not advanced in their concept of history much beyond that of Columbus, who pronounced the New World a theater for the acting out of God's providence. Adams, in short, in *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres*, in the *Education*, and even in his *History of Jefferson and Madison*, transcended his past, his culture, his habits of thought. Out of experience came new ideas, but few easy answers. I am inclined to think that the mind that commands our longterm attention accomplishes this transcendence.

If his transcending mind is the sound reason why a number of people find Adams a person worth staying with, my own personal sec-

ond reason is that he writes well. He does not write brilliantly or with fascinating turbulence—I have said he is not a blast furnace—but he composes with equal attention to precision and freshness.

By precision I mean partly that he has really a specific reader in mind for each letter, and an unobtrusive determination to clarify his experience for that reader, to make himself agreeable. He was 22 years old when he visited Rome in spring of 1860, and was granted admittance to "a Cardinal's reception." "Of course I knew no one there and didn't seek any introductions as I'm not up to talking French yet. What I wanted was to see the people and this I did very well. Everybody was there. The whole College of Cardinals. . . . a heap of French officers not of any very polished appearance. All the Corps Diplomatique. Heaps of spiritual dignities in red legs, purple legs and black-legs. The Italian nobility were also there . . . and every one [sic] looked bored."

Not a memorable passage, this is still not too bad for a young Bostonian to his nervous mother. What she gets is motive and perspective—and candor and calmness—not merely the requisite color and condescension of the American tourist.

Writing well, in the epistolary genre, means that the writer handles with ease all of his audiences. In this case, "Dearest Mama," in the capital of the Republic, is sharing the letter with papa, the Congressman, even more nervous, from footing part of the bill for a trip he thought insidious and corrupting. The nobility had better look bored. And ultimately we ourselves are there, the most critical of readers, bringing literary standards to an impromptu exercise (Adams never recopied his letters). It is safe to say that Adams had us in mind for probably three-quarters of the letters he wrote. No wonder the clarity, therefore, in this passage, the detail, the

In his letters, unlike his books, Adams takes the weed of an old metaphor and turns it not only into a flower but a flower held out gracefully for presentation.

journalist's eye, the impulse to make a list, to leave nothing out.

What I also mean by precision is a particular stance that Adams takes throughout his 60 years of correspondence, a unifying stance that might be got at as follows: The self that one conveys in letters, even to intimates, is never the whole of one's complex self, just as opaque paint on canvas, for sunset, is a mere semblance of the subtly changing light. But the impossibility of putting the self on paper does not mean that one must constantly bemoan the inadequacy of language. Nor does it mean that one has to let the pen scurry over the page in a kind of swift reverie or rhapsody, or succumb to a turbid ebb and flow of language, hoping that the reader will at least credit the effort. Adams knew the ultimate futility of attempts at self-expression, but he did not bemoan or abandon himself.

Instead, writing slowly, almost carving his handsome script into his Tiffany linen paper, he achieved the kind of precision that comes from neither reckless thinking nor pugnacious thinking. Not the glib gossip, the glittering triteness, that most of us settle for, and not the endless straining and qualifying of, say, his irresolute friend Henry James. From Norway in 1901, to his chief correspondent, a Washington woman 20 years his junior, he made one of his rare acknowledgments of method: "I've no one to talk to but you, and I do want to talk about it, though I don't want to talk." The letters were not to be read as mere "talk," a public performance in the drawing room, but the impulse behind them was the impulse to talk. He wanted to convey the ease and spontaneity of conversation but not to sacrifice the thought and care that go into writing.

As for freshness, I do not mean originality. It is somewhat original for Adams to transcend Boston, the hub of the universe, but originality

of mind does not require originality of form or vocabulary or syntax. The freshness in Adams' letters is a matter of two things: using the plain style and finding better expressions.

The plain style, in my definition, is the same style you use, as an adult, whether you are speaking to a distinguished man of your father's generation or to your sixteen-year-old niece. That is, you consciously—but not self-consciously—avoid the speech habits of your own generation, your profession, and your neighborhood. You also avoid an uneasy foray into the linguistic territories owned by the people you're addressing.

Adams can turn from grace to precision and then back to grace.

It is not a matter of "purifying" your language, since "purity" generally results in weak, inert, flavorless expression. To avoid certain words and locutions is simply to use the common English language shared by all people in the English-speaking world, varied only (and not very often) by the few idiosyncrasies that you have allowed yourself over the years. This is the plain style; it is so seldom encountered in our time (our American dialect combines newscasterese, adbanter, and backyard grillgabble) that it strikes the eye as fresh and remarkable as an ocean sunset. With Adams, this kind of directness is observable in any number of places, but here it is in combination with paradox: "I hardly know whether kindness or neglect is really best for children," he once, in his fifties, mused. "Sometimes I think the parental influence about the least satisfactory of all known forms of vice."


By "finding better expressions" I mean that all writers are tempted by tired metaphors, safe banality, hype, and stock attitudes, and that all these weaknesses have to be replaced

by strength. If you are tired of the old flavors, you cannot simply serve tofu by itself. Adams did not fear seasonings; in the *Education* he judiciously defended symbol and metaphor: "Images are not arguments, rarely even lead to proof, but the mind craves them."

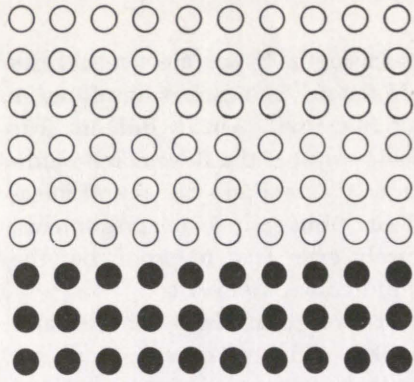
He is rightly charged, in his later books, with an overfondness for metaphors from physics, strained and belabored. But in the letters, metaphoric agility prevails. He takes the weed of an old metaphor and turns it not only into a flower but a flower held out gracefully for presentation. In a letter to a friend of his late wife, from Scotland, where he has taken his wife's five young nieces on a summer holiday: "The children are delighted. I am charmed to see that the sense of ennui is unknown to these angelic babes, as it is, I trust, to all angels, including yourself."

The same letter turns from grace to precision and then back to grace; such turns, like the changes of a sunset sky, give Adams and all good letter-writers much of their appeal: "Generally I walk in the woods, or up to the moors where I wonder why heather is pretty, seeing that it is an ugly magenta, and the bush, a dull green-blue-brown. It is pretty, all the same, when the sun shines."

I am fairly sure that if I had known Henry Adams personally I would have disliked him. Despite these benign, sunlight passages, he became overwhelmed by despair for the future and disdain for the present. He was always caste-conscious and excessively introspective. But I am not inviting him to a dinner party or urging his admission into heaven—where the company would be uncongenial to him anyway. I am only enjoying the privilege of reading his friends' mail, absorbed, as Adams himself was, by experiences oceanic.

From Dogwood, faithfully yours,
C.V. 

Theatre



Language and Reality

Brian Friel's *Translations* Is a Brilliant Success

John Steven Paul

Language is the map of reality. By means of this map are charted both personal and corporate identity. If the map were lost, reality would be confused, identity would fade. If the map were redrawn, so would be redrawn reality and identity: a disorienting development and one to be prevented at any cost.

This is the theme of Brian Friel's 1980 drama *Translations* playing at Chicago's Body Politic theatre this fall. Like the best plays, however, the play is about much more than language and reality. It is, for example, a play about an old lion of a man named Hugh and his two sons: Manus, lame and plain, who stays at home to help his father, and Owen, virile and dashing, who has gone off to seek his fortune in Dublin and just now returned home.

Hugh superintends a hedge school (i.e., an informal country classroom where students pay a fee for tuition) where he catechizes his students in arithmetic and geography as well as in Latin and Greek.

John Steven Paul is Assistant Professor of Speech and Drama at Valparaiso University and The Cresset's regular Theatre critic.

Brian Friel's drama is about many things, including the truth that language charts reality and identity.

Manus aids his father, studies the classics himself, and yearns to have his own teaching situation. In fact, Manus and his father each hope to be appointed to a position in the new National school system which the British are establishing in Ireland. Unlike the hedge schools where the language of instruction is Gaelic, the instructors in the National schools will speak and teach English. Ultimately, neither Manus nor his father receives the coveted position. Manus is offered a job at another hedge school. Hugh loses the job at the National school to a local butcher.

Hugh's older son, Owen, serves as a translator for the British army. A force has come to County Donegal to make a map of the area, to standardize and to regularize the Gaelic names for the county's towns and villages. Owen's warm nature and silken charm enfold his father, his brother, and the rustic friends whom he has left behind, as well as the worldly English soldiers with whom he travels. Ironically, the English confuse the pronunciation of his name, calling him "Roland." Owen is apparently the last of the Irish to realize the meaning of misnaming.

Translations is also a tale of star-crossed lovers. Maire, one of Hugh's bare-footed peasant-scholars, is smitten by the earnest and ingenuous young Lieutenant Yolland of the cartographic task force. Friel has named the soldier "George," as if to emphasize his nationality by giving him the name of England's patron saint. A Wordsworthian, George worships the landscape and the Gaelic language that captures its pastoral beauty. For George, Maire is the Irish countryside incarnate. In romancing her, George romances the rolling green countryside. George and Maire cannot speak one another's language. They are left with only the non-verbal communication common to lovers.

Though they are reminiscent of

Juliet and her Romeo, the gulf that separates Maire from George is much wider than that which separates Capulet from Montague; these two are, after all, Irish and English. Would they venture across to one another, there are others at hand to stop them. The townsfolk understand that Maire is betrothed to Manus, son of Hugh. George's romantic ardor, which Maire lovingly shares, is an affront to Manus and his friends. One morning, the young lieutenant turns up missing and Maire is bereft.

On the most obvious level, *Translations* is about the English-Irish troubles in 1833.

On another level, perhaps the most obvious, *Translations* is a play about the troubles between the English and the Irish in 1833. In the persons of Lieutenant Yolland and Captain Lancey, the English, behind the smiling and pacifying Owen, march into Hugh's hedge school. Bristling with scarlet-uniformed imperiousness, Lancey commands and condescends. The English have come to help. They will bring efficiency to this backward region by standardizing and regularizing. And, the people *will* cooperate with the effort. As he speaks, the students, who know no English, decline and conjugate his Greek and Latin derivatives quietly among themselves. Ironically, Lancey, with little Latin, less Greek, and no Gaelic is as helpless and less learned than they. All rely on Owen to translate, which he does in language lubricated with his own diplomatic tactfulness—the English use none.

With the English enters a shadow of tragic inevitability. History teaches that an Anglo-Irish confrontation must end in destruction. When Yolland disappears, Lancey returns to the school. If the lieutenant is not restored to his com-

Friel's thematic passageway into the society of County Donegal is constructed of the meaning, the value, and the function of language in the human community.

rades, every animal belonging to the Irish will be shot. If Yolland is still missing, every building in the county will be burned to the ground, and so on. But the burning has already begun. The English camp has been set afire. George, it seems certain, is dead.

Finally, *Translations* is a play about an isolated community of County Donegal Irish—a poignant folk play with some of Synge's poetry and much of O'Casey's wit and critical edge. Maire, Bridget, Doalty, Jimmy Jack, and Manus are country people, barefooted and dirty from muddy farms and mucky livestock pens. They live a hard life in fear of natural calamity, especially the "sweet smell" of the potato blight. Yet, they are stiff-necked people. They cling stubbornly to old ways and old words, refusing to progress in the modern world. The life they know is full of sweaty toil and child-bearing, of primitive technology, of escape into alcohol, and song, and the ancient poetry of Homer and Vergil. These Irish folk live in a world far removed in time, distance, and quality from a modern Irish audience, not to mention a Chicago audience. Yet, Brian Friel has found a way to draw us inside this world so completely that we occasionally feel the need to look out a window and see what other world there might be beyond.

Friel's thematic passageway into the society of County Donegal is constructed of the meaning, the value, and the function of language in the human community. It is the playwright's ability to identify so many discrete functions of language and to weave them into the context of the action that makes *Translations* the very rich drama that it is.

For the elder members of the hedge school community language functions as a vessel, a jeweled chalice containing the precious ideas and ideals of Homer and Sophocles, Vergil and Ovid. The old men treas-

ure these authors and their own capacity to recite from them with a passion that is nearly fanatic. In the classics, old Hugh finds the models of excellence in human character and the necessary structure for ordering human life.

The most enthusiastic humanist of the group is the frightfully bedraggled old Jimmy Jack Cassie. The sixtyish bachelor, who appears to have washed neither body nor clothes in years, is blissfully content in a corner reading Homer in the original. And when later, in the lonely darkness of night, a drunken Jimmy Jack insists that he is to marry Goddess Athena and has her father Zeus's permission, the motive for his devotion to the classics becomes apparent. Total absorption in the ancient myths and legends yields emotional and intellectual escape from the desolation of modern life.

For the Irish, absorption in the ancient myths and legends yields escape from desolate modernity.

The younger students hold the classics in somewhat lower esteem, though they dutifully decline, conjugate, and explicate the words and phrases Hugh fires at them. The young hold the Gaelic as sacred as their elders do Latin and Greek. For them, language functions as another kind of vessel: one suitable for sailing on the sea of illusion. And like the young natives, George Yolland adores the musically rolling Gaelic as he does the land from which it sprang; land and language transport the lieutenant to a milk-and-honey utopia.

Hugh, no sentimentalist when it comes to Gaelic, calls the language "rich . . . full of the mythologies of fantasy and hope and self-deception—a syntax opulent with tomorrows." (Reminiscent this of the booze in O'Neill's *Iceman Cometh*.) Hugh further recognizes that Gaelic is the

"response to mud cabins and a diet of potatoes; our only method of replying to . . . inevitabilities." The Gaelic, then, is a descendant of the Chorus' songs between the scenes of a Greek tragedy—a response to inevitabilities.

Of course, *Translations*' language functions in the third sense of "vessel": a medium through which are communicated thoughts, ideas, and feelings from one mind to another. The complication of the drama arises from this function of language, for the vessel is occluded by the variations in the English and the Irish tongues. The recommended therapy, a translator, can never be 100 per cent successful. The English efforts to manage their empire efficiently are frustrated by the language barrier. Despite the aid of Owen's translations, their attempts to bring reason and consistency to the regional landscape are destined to be foiled by bloody and irreparable communication ruptures.

The lesson to be learned from the English and Irish experience is that messages flow successfully not when they are merely correctly translated but when both ends of the communicative channel are open, receptive, and mutually sympathetic. Friel illustrates this principle of communication theory in the brief but intense love affair of George Yolland and Maire. The thoughts and feelings are so impelling, the ears and the hearts of the lovers so compelling, that the occlusion in the vessel is obliterated.

As thematically important as these functions of language are, the playwright subordinates them to its function of identifying, that is, naming. *Translations* is about naming—and re-naming. In the opening scene of the play, Manus urges a student who is nearly mute to say simply "My name is Sarah." After much straining, she does so. (After the threatening entrance of the British, she loses her ability to do so.) Old

**After Friel, one is tempted to say of his subject,
"he has said it, it need not be said again."**

Hugh is often away at christenings, naming ceremonies, from which he invariably returns drunk from celebration. When George and Maire are unable to exchange any other verbal intelligence, they resort, rapturously, to exchanging the names of places in County Donegal. But in spite of sentimentalists like Lieutenant Yolland, the Gaelic idyll is destined to die. The English mapping expedition is not a cartographical christening ceremony, but a re-christening, a second baptism, subsequent to ritual death and rebirth. As the play concludes, Hugh's weakening memory for Vergil foreshadows the death of the Gaelic.

Reality re-born and re-christened is no longer the same reality. The violent passing of one reality in the advance of another is profoundly jarring; it is, in a word, disorienting. Few of us have suffered such disorientation, though recent attempts to change the names of our basic measurements from "inch," "foot," and "mile" to variations of "meter" have suggested the sense of what re-naming can mean. The essence of discomfort when traveling in countries of whose language we are ignorant is that life's necessities have unfamiliar names. Such disorientation is alienating, estranging, even injurious. Our response is often to call a thing by the name we know it—but louder. In *Translations*, the Irish are being "foreignized," in their own land.

Whether or not Friel has captured the actual historical reality of County Donegal in 1833, he has made in his drama a reality of virtual history. And, under the direction of James O'Reilly, the Body Politic Company has created a nearly seamless illusion of that reality. Here is concentration and ensemble playing of the like one rarely sees. Sitting a mere five feet from the actors, I was absolutely caught in the web of the hedge school world.

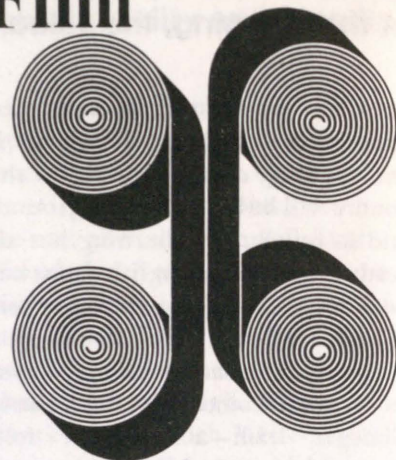
Perhaps this production's ability

to entrance stems from the peculiar character of the live theatre. The basis of theatrical form is the speaking actor. If Brian Friel's *Translations* is about language, the theatre is about speech in its many manifestations, aspects, and varieties. In order to separate the English-speakers from the Gaelic-speakers, Friel instructed one group of actors to speak in King's-English dialect and the other group in a heavy Irish brogue. These actors' marvelous achievement of the desired effect keyed the production's success. The lilting musicality of the Gaelic tongue was the cream atop the whiskeyed coffee.

On rare occasions, a dramatist discovers a new way into an old story. On rarer occasions that way in appears to be *the* definitive dramatic statement of one conflict, issue, or problem. While there is a theatre and a playwright working in the world, there will be no such thing as a definitive dramatic statement; but, in *Translations*, Brian Friel has dramatized the Irish-English conflict with such brilliance and clarity that one is tempted to say, "he has said it, it need not be said again." Friel has turned from the violence, the drunkenness, the listlessness, the keening, the posturing, and the religious bickering that mark so many treatments of the Troubles. He has found the substance of this ancient problem in linguistic conflict. And he has made a cracking good play out of it. As I watched this thrilling production by the Body Politic, I thought that *Translations* might be a play, not for the year, or for the decade, but for the ages.

Translations is one of two plays currently running with a central theme of language's links to reality. Next month, I'll deal with the other, *Torch Song Trilogy*, which you still might be able to see at Broadway's Little Theatre in New York. If you get a ticket, prepare yourself for an astounding experience. ■

Film



Fantasy for Adults

Rivette's *Celine* Doesn't Restrict Itself to the Imagination of Children

Richard Maxwell

English and American fantasy films have thrived on a curious compromise.¹ They are made about children and supposedly for them. It is adults to whom they are more or less covertly addressed. In *The Wizard of Oz*, *The Thief of Baghdad*, *The 5,000 Fingers of Dr. T*, we follow little heroes and heroines who have some special access to a world of imagination. The fun is in eavesdropping on this world. We are allowed into it through the child's privileged consciousness. The film provides an experience specifically denied to the adults who people it. Yes—the grownups in Dorothy's life reappear once she gets to Oz; Dorothy, however, is the only one

¹This is the second of two *Cresset* columns to emerge from a summer of viewing fantasy films. The first, titled "The Perils of the Cinematic Romance," appeared in the September issue. James Monaco's *The New Wave* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976) provided information on Jacques Rivette used in the present essay.

Richard Maxwell is The *Cresset's* regular Film critic and Assistant Professor of English at Valparaiso University.

Instead of insisting on unbridgeable gaps between child and adult viewpoints, Rivette opens up the possibility that anyone can be that mythical romantic child.

who retains her memories of that visit. The film recalls to us a quality of mind we once possessed but have forgotten. Such is its implicit claim.

E.T. follows this well-established convention. Despite the busloads of children arriving at the theater, despite the babe-in-arms who has seen the movie twenty times and is interviewed by Gene Siskel in the *Chicago Tribune*, despite the rocketing sales of Reese's Pieces, *E.T.* is not simply a children's movie. In the grand tradition, it exploits a supposed gap between adult and child. The mother is admitted last and admitted reluctantly into the knowledge of the space creature. She remains mom, a wistful, isolated figure: essential to this narrative yet somehow peripheral within it. She cannot even see E.T.—cannot pick him out—until her offspring help her. E.T. alone manages to be adult and child alike; the synthesis, unfortunately, is more confusing than coherent. Space creatures transcend social and perhaps biological divisions; then they leave forever.

No matter how false in themselves, such conventions can underlie wonderful films. At some point they start losing this power. *E.T.* is not so wonderful as *The Wizard of Oz*; its romanticized notion of childhood begins to seem a little thin. Director Stephen Spielberg can laugh all the way to the bank; the rest of us may start wondering just how fantasy film could be revived—could be cast in form true to this time and not a willful regression.²

Help comes from France, where fantasy films have followed a very different line of development. Directors like Melies, Feuillade, Clair, and Cocteau made films which can be enjoyed by children. Children, on the other hand, are seldom

conceived as mediators, perceivers of a world which adults could never grasp. The French tradition insists that fantasy is for adults.

This brings us to Rivette's *Celine and Julie Go Boating* (*Celine et Julie vont en bateau*, 1974), which shares common ground with *E.T.* *Celine's* two protagonists communicate telepathically, thus establishing a secret life on heroic terms. Throughout the story Rivette shows himself sympathetic to *E.T.*-style romanticizations of childhood. Only . . . he turns them inside-out. Parts of his film are like Clair's *Paris qui dort*; he recalls Reuillade by dressing his heroines in sinister black outfits. Within these reminiscences, Rivette dramatizes the rescue of a child and childhood. Instead of insisting on divisions, unbridgeable gaps between child and adult viewpoints, he opens up the possibility that anyone can be that mythical romantic child.

The subject of Rivette's film is a crazy friendship, a sympathy so close it creates an entire fantasy world and plucks from it reality.

The first scene of *Celine*: Julie the librarian sits in a Paris park. An oddly-attired young woman rushes past, dropping her glasses. Julie runs after; the odd young woman flees. A chase across Paris eventuates in the two of them becoming friends. The odd young woman is Celine, a Montmartre magician who believes herself the object of conspiracies. Julie, the stable one, is intrigued. Together Julie and Celine embark on an extraordinary *folie a deux*.

Here is the center of the film. Julie and Celine take turns visiting a mysterious house. Inside is enacted—daily!—a Victorian-style murder mystery. At first we catch the mystery in flashes only, for that is the way Celine and Julie re-

call it. By eating a curious candy, the only thing they can take away from the house, they bring back fragmentary memories which can then be pieced together. After numerous visits to the rue du Nadir des Pommes (Nadir of Apples) and much sucking on mnemonic candy, they figure out that a widower is being pursued by two determined women. One of the women kills his daughter Madlyn, for whose sake alone he has refused to remarry. Julie/Celine plays the little girl's nurse, thus becoming the witness to many sordid events.

Once they learn the truth, Celine and Julie come to a quick decision. They must rescue Madlyn from her daily smothering. They must pluck her out of this horrible, constantly-repeated tale. The two of them enter the house together. The house's narrative machinery breaks down around them, in a kind of grotesque comedy (the fall of the House of Nadir?). The widower and his aspiring brides become zombie-like automatons. They are not at all the human beings they seemed. Celine and Julie mock the story that surrounds them and Madlyn. The little girl points out an escape route; they regain consciousness in Julie's apartment, Madlyn now with them.

In the film's last minutes, Celine, Julie, and Madlyn go boating. A boat across the lake contains the characters from the murder story. They float past, trance-like. Then the film reverts to its opening scene in the park, with Celine this time playing Julie's role.

The subject of Rivette's film is a crazy friendship, a sympathy so close that it creates an entire fantasy world and plucks from it reality. One critic said of an early Rivette film: "The life of Paris, in a cinematic sense, is put in a new light. For the first time, the stones and the streets have a secret grace which is that of the imaginary." These sentences could describe *Celine*, whose Paris is trans-

²I am not going to discuss Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. It seems to me, however, the same kind of "willfull regression" as *E.T.*

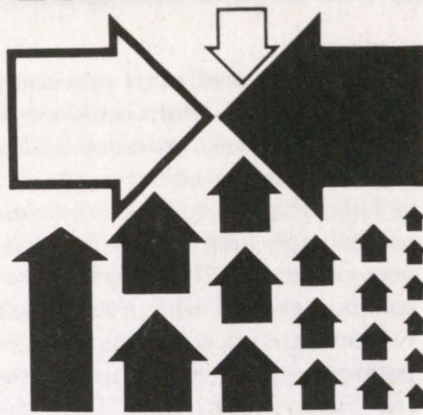
In *Celine*, memory opens the gates of imagination.

figured in its heroines' games. The world is not a given. Celine and Julie perform a rescue, thus earning the right to their own story, their own eternal (but not imprisoning) cycle of adventures.

Celine is a French-language film. It is also three hours long. For these two reasons it will never be commercially released in American theaters. We might suppose a third reason for *Celine's* restricted appeal. The film, it could be argued, is sophisticated fare, addressing itself to urban elites. Experience suggests otherwise. My projectionist, a care-free soul, remarked the other day, "I liked the one you had last year about the ladies in the haunted house." Rivette's own words on the film support this reaction. He made *Celine*, he says, "to get out of the dumps that we all felt we were in, make a film for as little money as possible and, we hoped, amuse people." Where *E.T.*, the pop film, overwhelms us with an almost driven meaningfulness, the art film is willing to amuse. Far from *working* at its playfulness, it gets there idly in a kind of enchantment. As Proust readers will recognize, Madlyn = madeleine, the little cake whose taste takes Marcel back to a vivid period in his childhood.

Telling stories about wonderful childhoods and children can often betray a tremulous lack of confidence. The rest of life (it seems) is not so good. If only we were kids again! Rivette, like his English and American colleagues, understands that adulthood can be a drag on the spirit. All the same: where a movie like *E.T.* is defeatist—much more so than we normally realize—*Celine* takes effective action. It wakes up its heroines; it wakes us too. The zombie adults go floating by. When we leave the theater, however, we do not feel that we have to go back to being them. Like Celine and Julie, we remember. Memory opens the gates of imagination. ■

The Nation



Economic Indicators

Recalling the Good Old Bad Old Depression Days

Gail Eifrig

Everybody's talking about it—a depression. Are we going to have one? Is this It? Will we know It if we see it? The media are certainly keeping close watch on the economic pulse, counting the percentages of unemployed and carefully comparing them for us with the figures in 1932, 1933, 1934. The radio announcer the other morning positively intoned the news of a bank closing in Illinois. Though in a dependent clause he told us that the depositors' funds were safe, the main clause in the sentence-long story informed us portentously that this was the twenty-ninth bank to close in the United States so far this year.

A Hollywood gossip columnist babbled brightly that the days of serious movies are over for awhile. "In a depression like this," he said, "people want to escape into movies with lots of pretty clothes, good bodies, fast cars, and exciting plots." (Notice that you can put any one of the adjectives in that series with any one of the nouns and the meaning

Gail Eifrig is Assistant Professor of English at Valparaiso University and a regular *Nation* contributor for *The Cresset*.

will remain almost unchanged, which in itself says a lot about what we like in movies.) Well, if a Hollywood columnist has identified it, I guess it is here for real. The Depression.

All my life I have heard about how great the great depression really was. "We didn't have much," my relatives have told me, "but what we had we shared. People were good to each other, and everybody endured the bad times together." And there were discussions of menus and family life. "What a wonderful dish my grandmother used to make out of cherries, cracker crumbs, noodles and sugar!" or "We loved it when Grandpa would go out in the woods and shoot squirrel—the only meat we used to have except for a chicken at Christmas." "I used to make a game out of the shopping; no evening meal could cost more than a nickel apiece for our family of seven."

Families ate together, telling jokes at the table, and afterward sang gaily as they washed up the dishes and put them away. Then followed a jolly time around the radio, listening to the classic comedians, whose side-splitting routines were interspersed with band music in the great tradition.

These bits and pieces of myth are not exaggerations, nor do they ring in my consciousness only as the result of parental anecdote. I've heard them from all kinds of people, some much older than I, some not so much; many of them are now well off, others are still hoping. I've listened to a woman who was desperately poor, whose husband committed suicide from the shame of being unable any longer to support his family.

Other tales have come from people whose lives irretrievably changed, though financial disaster did not exactly ruin them. All of them talk so similarly that I wonder what really went on. Studs Terkel's book *Hard Times* is more of the same in another format; oral history as I hear it never says anything about bank closings, brokers jump-

ing out of windows, bread lines, treks to California.

It seems to me that those of us who missed the last depression (and our number includes many who write news and feature stories, and edit the television reports) have a peculiar nostalgia for the time. We have heard so often about human goodness coming to the surface at times of crisis that we're willing to try it. It occurs to me that every piece of "good myth" I've ever heard about the depression has come in response to some piece of "bad fact" about the present.

Whenever someone laments that families don't spend time together any more, you're sure to hear about what a bond used to be created out in the kitchen washing and drying dishes. Are we fighting over television programming so divisive of its audience that family members have individual sets in order to keep family peace?—someone over sixty will comment that in the good old days, everybody (including the neighbors you invited in because they didn't have a radio) loved the same shows, and laughed together while forgetting their own troubles.

And when we consider the genuinely dreadful experiences in our own times—muggers and rapists acting in the confidence that no one will aid their victims, random attacks on innocent people whom the unhinged regard as enemies, drunk drivers who play with the lives of others as surely as if they engaged in Russian roulette, wife beaters, child abusers, and all the other evidences of human vice and folly—someone always says that it wasn't like that then. "Nowadays people don't care for each other the way we used to. When times were hard, people had human values. Now, everybody's just out for himself. People used to be different."

Many of us who have grown up since those good hard times can almost be suckered into believing that. I have a hankering myself to see just what would happen if we really did have a big bang, a depression that everybody recognized. Would

the grocery stores let us run accounts for years? Would the banks ignore the mortgage payments? Would crime stop and human goodness prevail? I doubt it.

I can hear the anxious voices of those who did live through the depression saying "You don't know what you're asking. God forbid we should have that again." Yet, the fact is that I have been influenced by their myth-making. Though I disbelieve in it, I wish a golden age

like the one I have heard so much about could return.

And I sense in much of what I read in popular journalism and commentary the same unacknowledged anticipation. Chicken Little's friends must have been as anxious, as frustrated, as reckless and impatient as many of my generation. Perhaps they wanted the sky to fall, figuring that almost anything would be better than going on in the same muddle they were in. ■

Who Was Also Himself Looking For the Kingdom of God

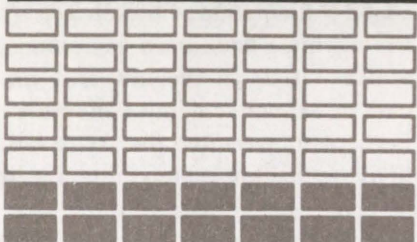
The Jesus we have never known
(Come to think of it)
Is Jesus the boy,
Before he was twelve
And after he was twelve, you know.
What do we not know
(And want to know not for curiosity now)
Of Jesus in his twenties—
If folk in his village counted years by tens—
Or did they count by fives or twos or sevens,
Or not at all?
At twenty-one did he still think like a child
And form himself in his Galilean mind
Still a boy of eleven
(Which for boys is the best age)?

Lord, will we ever know you as a boy?
(Don't think we ask idly to interrupt your work
Of intercession day and night for the uttermost,
Just to peer at the missing things,
Like Pindar's other odes
Or all those epics Henry burned or left for Cromwell)
Will you be a boy for us someday?
Can you do it—and not as a phantasm,
But as you really were?
Or are you old, Lord, perpetually old,
Old as the Father, begotten from eternity?
Such abstractions block my starting joy,
Though they root and church me week by week, I'm told.

How old should we expect you to be
When we see you in heaven?
Jesus, don't just say you will be ageless
(Age matters lots to a boy, remember?)
Or whatever age we would like you to be
(Don't play Santa Claus with us, Lord).
Is it heretical of me to ask you once again
To be eleven?
Or did Pilate's seal on Joseph's tomb
Keep you always thirty-three?

Joe McClatchey

Campus Diary



The Joyful Word Of Reconciliation

John Strietelmeier

"God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation."

Whatever difficulties man-come-of-age may have with stories of angelic appearances and astrologers traveling to Bethlehem under the leading of a star, whatever problems theologians may have fitting a divine nature in their perfect totalities into one person—there was unquestionably a baby named Jesus who was born at about the time Augustus took his great census and who grew up to be a teacher and a healer. Josephus had heard of him. Half a dozen first-century writers left accounts of his life and reflections on his teaching.

Even if you agree with Schweitzer that "The Jesus of Nazareth who came forward publicly as the Messiah, who preached the ethic of the Kingdom of God, who founded the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, and died to give His work its final consecration, never had any existence"—there was still a Jesus of Nazareth. Even if you agree with Bultmann that the person of this Jesus of Nazareth "was mythologized from the very beginnings of earliest Christianity," there was still a person there. A person who still, as He did almost two thousand years ago, addresses to everyone who claims to follow Him the question which separates those who are His

from those who are not His: "But whom say ye that I am?"

There are answers to that question which have already been provided for us by Christian theology, answers necessitated by persistent attempts by many inside the church and outside to shoe-horn Mary's child into already defined categories of existence and activity. Some said that this Jesus was actually pure God, disguised in a human body—like Zeus on one of his periodic visits to earth. Some said that he was just a man, so fine and noble and good that people sort of saw God shining through Him. Some saw Him as the latest and even the greatest of those religious geniuses we call prophets. Some saw Him as the fulfillment of the ancient Jewish hope of a liberator, the Messiah. To all of these attempts to reduce Jesus to "just" this or that, the mainline Christian theological tradition has always found it necessary to say a simultaneous Yes and No: Yes, true God, but not in the Gnostic or Monophysite sense; Yes, true man, but not in any Arian or Socinian sense; Yes, two natures, but not in the Nestorian sense.

But traditional theological answers, while they are great gifts to the Church from men and women of faith, are not themselves for any one of us the answer of Faith itself. Jesus, the Son of Mary, presumably knows better than any of us who He is in His lineage and His person and does not need information from us on such matters. But only we can tell Him who He is to us.

To St. Peter, He was "the Christ, the Son of the living God."

To St. John, He was God's "only-begotten Son" whom God, in great love for this world, gave so that "whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

To St. Paul, He was the Christ,

in whom God was "reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them."

The common thread that runs through all of these answers is that this baby, whatever the circumstances of His birth and however we may define His person, was the living God, intervening in a decisive way in human affairs, accomplishing that which lay altogether beyond human capacity: the breakdown of the wall of guilt and hostility which man had erected between himself and God.

For this act of love and mercy, carried out by God through the man Christ Jesus, theology has also supplied us terms: vicarious atonement, justification, redemption. And the terms are useful if they are not taken, any one of them, as exhaustive and definitive statements of what it was that Christ did when He broke down that wall behind which we had imprisoned ourselves. But Faith is only incidentally interested in theoretical explanations of how we got to be what we are. Its joy, its glory, and its delight are that, however He did it, God in Christ really did reconcile this world to Himself so that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.

This being the case, it is not difficult to draw the logical conclusion that, if God so loved us, we ought also to love Him. But that is not the conclusion which St. John actually does draw. His conclusion is that, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

And if, like this writer, we happen to be geographers, may we not also reasonably conclude that this lovely, weary, blood-stained, fragile planet of ours—"the world" which God made and so loved that He gave His only-begotten Son for it—is also deserving of our love and care?