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## The Cresset (Vol. LVIII, No. 6)

Valparaiso University

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# C<sup>the</sup>resset

A Review of Literature, Arts, and Public Affairs



APRIL, 1995



# the Cresset



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**Cover:** Barry Gealt, *Early Morning Fog*, 1993, woodcut, 22 x 30 inches. Collection of Josephine and Byron Ferguson. Promised gift to the VU Museum of Art.

**Back cover:** Dean Porter, *Untitled (Passing Storm)*, 12/24/94, watercolor, 13- 1/2 x 21-1/8 inches, VU Museum of Art. Gift of the artist.

Artist, scholar and Director of the Snite Museum of Art, Dean Porter has said, "Storms in Taos are the most exhilarating times. The changes in the sky are so rapid and enormous. It's wild and wonderful to experience." This winter Porter presented an exhibition of paintings entitled *New Mexico Storm II* at the Moellering Library Sloan Gallery. *Untitled* is from that exhibit.

Concurrently, in the Wesemann Hall Atrium, Barry Gealt presented an exhibit of paintings and woodcuts entitled *The Hidden Nature of Indiana*. Professor of Art at Indiana University, Bloomington, Gealt is inspired by the woodlands and brooks around his studio. His vision is of nature fresh, in the early stages of creation. *Early Morning Fog* is from his exhibit.

*Both photographs are by Jack A. Hiller and Richard H.W. Brauer.*

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## IN LUCE TUA

### Some of My Best Friends

Still trying hard to put the best construction on the actions and behaviors of my fellow human beings, as my memory of the catechism instructs me to do, I find my resolution tried every day by the headlines. It must be true that the new Congress is largely made up of persons with old-fashioned values and good manners, since it is certainly the case, as Clarence Page recently pointed out, that with these guys it is, "Women and Children first!"

Checking a story from our local paper of mid-March, titled "Local schools face painful cuts," we have a full account of what our local system stands to lose from an equalization formula designed to spread out the state's meagre education monies more evenly across school systems. As the board goes through the list of possible items to cut (a 'writing to read' program, a middle school foreign language program, coordinators for art, elementary guidance, and music, at-risk coordinators, attendance officer, etc., all those frills) the list includes a notation of what it identifies as the "savings" for that particular item. For instance, cutting the middle school foreign language program would be a "savings" of six thousand dollars.

Now, wait a minute. I don't know much about finance, but I know when I'm being had. A "savings" is when, by good fortune, or good management, or somebody else's pricing strategy, you get something for less money than you planned to spend for it. A "loss" is when you don't get the thing at all. As in cutting a middle school language program. You can fiddle all you want with the semantics, but the fact remains, clear and unequivocal: if you cut a language program, you have lost, not saved.

I understand that the "savings" is easier to identify, certainly to quantify, than the loss. How would we work out and present an account of what is lost when a school system loses a program of introducing middle school children to the study of foreign language? Six thousand dollars sits there on the page with all its solid, unarguable fact. And on the other hand? Some small pieces of knowledge and skill, some understanding, some awareness, some curiosity, some unmeasurable amount of interest in others perhaps? A few children who can say, "Buenos dias, amigos," and understand that many, many people in the world use those words to greet each other in a friendly way.

An example like this is a small one, but it is being repeated geometrically around us moment by moment in what must look from outside like a feeding frenzy. The funding equalization here is premised on a clear preference for spending as little as possible on schooling. For example, why don't we, in deciding to fund schools in Indiana more equally, decide to bring all the schools in the state to the level of spending that our local system enjoys? Why not, instead of losing a middle school language program, put one into every school system? You know the answer. To do that would mean raising taxes. We have to 'make hard choices.' We have to 'bite the bullet.' It just happens that for some people a mouthful of bullets is about the closest they're going to get to a balanced diet.

Which brings me to the second set of headlines. These mark two Associated Press stories from March 17, so I don't know how they were titled in your paper, but in mine the first one read, "White men still hold the power over U.S. economy," and the second, immediately underneath it, read, "State control of infant formula buying may be windfall for industry." This one is complicated, but worth some attention. As part of the GOP welfare reform plan, a regulation requiring competitive bidding for infant formula purchased under the Women, Infants and Children Supplemental Feeding Program would be dropped. States would now be allowed to pay whatever they wished to one of the four manufacturers of formula, but they would have the same carefully fixed block grant amount to spend.

Suppose the director of a state agency could buy, say, two cases of formula at \$5.00 and supply two mothers for a week. If the company raises the price of each case to \$5.00 (or worse, if the four companies which control the market together raised the price to \$10.00), the director could decide whether the agency would continue to spend the \$5.00 and support one mother—or not. According to the block grant provisions, they will not have more than the \$5.00, but without the mandate to use competitive bidding, they are perfectly free to feed fewer babies for the same money.

Is that what they would do? Hard to say, but the same article cites a USDA official as saying that in 1994, the mandate for competitive bidding "saved \$1.1 billion and allowed states to provide food and formula to an estimated 1.6 million women and children who otherwise would not have been

served." In other words, what is the savings for? If you use the savings to feed more babies, that is one kind of priority. But you could use the money you don't spend on formula to build highways, or you could spend the same amount of money to buy less formula, and thereby increase the profitability of Abbott Labs, Mead Johnson, Wyeth-Ayerst, or Carnation.

Now, given that the responsibility of corporate managers at least includes encouraging the latter option as a priority, does it make a difference that, as the first article reports, "97 percent of the senior managers of Fortune 500 companies are white, and nearly all of them are men"? In one sense, it shouldn't make any difference, because "qualified,"— the adjective of choice when discussing which persons are most likely to rise to the top of the decision-making teams in, say, Carnation or Abbott Labs—would mean "most likely to make the kinds of decisions that would enhance the corporation's profitability." And *that* qualification could belong equally to a white woman or a black man or a hispanic woman. So any of those people could presumably put the same pressure on the state agency to buy less formula for more money. And any of those people, in the position of state director for the agency charged with supplying the WIC program, could "save" money on formula in order to put it into some other program.

But would they? That seems to me the unanswered question. Would the nature of programs for which public money is spent be different if more of the decisions were made by people who were not white men? We seem less than ever likely to find out. After all, as the headlines and the news anchors and the pundits and certain very active writer-professor-Speakers tell us, affirmative action programs have had their day.

□

This month's *Cresset* adds to your Easter celebration with several facets of faith questions. Gary Fincke's essay on the face of Christ will strike a familiar chord in a new key. Pamela Schwandt makes a gentle argument for taking Willa Cather at her word on faithful living and faithful dying. Mike Becker's essay on TQM and the Protestant Ethic also comes at a familiar subject in a new direction. And familiar subjects from a new direction? Sounds like Easter to me. These, with lots of particularly fine poetry, a goodly supply of book reviews making up for a certain winterish paucity of same, and our covers full of nature's freshness — winter is over. Lhude sing cuccu!

Peace,

GME

## Now I Am Old

Oh, just to be where the people are,  
not sitting by the fire,  
but different benches where I go,  
at coffee in McDonalds, or in the square  
where people pass, nervous, straining to live,  
each in a Pilgrim rhythm.

Toward the end in Bergen, Ibsen would lean  
at the window, looking out,  
his breast on the sill, like a pigeon  
after crumbs of conversation,  
the soft exchange of mouths as the body shrank.

I too have learned to sit where the murmur is,  
not among stars but streets.  
There has never been any lessening of this.  
I will wake more and more until  
the last drowsiness.

William Aiken



# THE FACES OF CHRIST

Gary Fincke

I sat in the audience, once, while a professor explained the Shroud of Turin to a hundred senior citizens. He had slides and sources. He waved a wand of light to trace the face of Jesus in case someone didn't see it. "Look," he said, "the eyes, the curve of lips exactly the same as in the pictures you know of Christ."

He ran overtime with the possibilities of belief. Except for the professor and me, there wasn't a person in the room under sixty, and I was betting myself that very few of them would stay for the second half of the program, a poetry reading I was giving to publicize my latest book, *Inventing Angels*.

That week a patient had discovered the face of Christ in the grain of a hospital door, and the citizens of a nearby town had witnessed Jesus on the side of their municipal water tower. People gathered, some of them joyful, some apprehensive about the inevitable skeptics.

Those aren't the only sightings. Certainly, they're not the oddest. For instance, Mrs. Edward Rubio, in 1979, in

New Mexico, discovered the face of Christ seared into a burrito she was cooking for her husband. She enshrined it in a room in her house—flowers, votive candles—and worshippers and the simply curious came from all over to look long and hard at that burrito.

The first movie I ever saw on a Sunday was *El Cid*. I was fifteen years old. My friends were going, and some of them had convinced me this was a movie not to be missed. My mother, when the car pulled into the driveway, told me she was disappointed; my father refused to speak to me.

I was uncertain then, and still am, about the logic of such belief. I understood my grandmother's disapproval. She refrained from card playing and restaurants as well as movies on Sundays, but my parents played Canasta without a care and ate out nearly every Sunday after church. They had no difficulty watching television, which showed films of its own to their approval, so I'm left with the image of Charlton Heston as the dying Cid propped on his horse to lead his inspired men to victory and the sense that I took one step closer to damnation because I sat in a Pittsburgh theater on a Sunday afternoon.

Our family, in the years preceding my defiance, went regularly to the movies on Saturday night. There's hardly a film from the 50's I don't vaguely or vividly recall. We saw whatever films happened to be showing in Butler or East Liberty, depending on whether we went north or south. If there was a choice, my parents opted for Biblical epics, costume dramas, westerns, musicals, or comedies. What I

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Gary Fincke contributes frequently to *The Cresset*. He is a poet, with several published collections (among them *The Double Negatives of Living*, reviewed here in February 1995), and poems forthcoming in *The Paris Review*, *the Ohio* and *Gettysburg Reviews*. In addition to teaching creative writing at *Susquehanna University*, he coaches tennis. He sends this essay, he says, "before tennis starts," a new way of marking the calendar.

missed, I've discovered, were B-movie thrillers, film noir dramas. If I saw them at all, I saw them on Friday nights with my Uncle Bill, who didn't even know what was playing at the Etna Theater, except that it was Friday and seven p.m., so off we went, walking in mid-feature, or near its end, no matter, because we just waited it out to watch until the story returned to the point where we'd come in. For years, I thought this was how everyone went to the movies, knowing the endings before the beginnings. For *El Cid*, my friends and I were seated during a set of previews. I didn't know about the Cid's heroics until the final fifteen minutes.

Certainly, I didn't know there were film critics, production budgets, or films in foreign languages, but I knew movies on Sundays were sinful, and I knew a film which showed the face of Christ was blasphemous. After the first one we saw of these, my father had had enough. He started reading about movies to insure it wouldn't happen again.

The movie which changed our viewing habits was called *Day of Triumph*. An actor named Robert Wilson, for the first time, turned, playing Jesus, to face us instead of looking at crowds of disciples and followers who gazed at him in awe while we stared at his back and flowing hair. It was 1954, but it was the first crucifixion and resurrection film since Cecille B. DeMille had made a silent in 1927, so my parents had sought this one out, not knowing that Jesus, played by an actor who looked old enough to be playing Joseph, was going to face us.

There was a family in Texas who saw the same face of Christ in swirls of plaster on their ceiling; there was someone in Ohio who saw that countenance on the side of a soybean oil tank, but my father refused to sit through another film which showed the face of Christ. Christ was a flowing robe and outstretched hands; he was a beatific voice and sandals. No actor could possibly take on the role of Christ if he allowed himself to be filmed from the front.

It was worse than nudity. It would be doubly worse on a Sunday. In 1959, five years after *Day of Triumph*, we went back to a film which featured Christ called *The Big Fisherman* because Jesus was depicted as the sleeve of a white robe and one blessed hand.

Howard Keel, a singer who starred in some of the benign musicals my father loved, played Simon Peter; I don't know, even now, whose arm, clothed in baggy white, rose and fell, but watching that film, years later, I noticed a vaccination mark on one of the women, something of a miracle, and about that time, in 1983, a woman named Josephine Taylor saw the face of Christ on her bathroom floor in Ontario. Three thousand people came to witness the miracle, although someone from the church eventually

concluded the face had been formed from the scars of old linoleum adhesive.

Arelene Gardner, in 1987, in Tennessee, saw the face of Christ on the General Electric freezer sitting on the front deck of her trailer. Her neighbor's porch light, apparently, caused a bearded face to appear, so it took a bit of teamwork to generate that miracle.

My father started choosing the films for his family more selectively. We passed on *King of Kings* the same year I saw *El Cid* because Jeffrey Hunter, unlike previous film Christs, acted as if he were just another character, facing the audience, turning in profile, but worst of all, acting as if he were an ordinary human being.

A year later, when, as a family, we had nearly stopped going to the movies altogether, we sat through a film called *Whistle Down the Wind*. It featured Hayley Mills, so wholesome, in my father's view, anything she starred in was a safe choice.

Instead, it centered on a character played by Alan Bates whose identity was ambiguously linked to Christ. Hayley Mills and enough other children to suggest the twelve disciples begin a sort of cult after they find him in a barn. So strongly does it appear that the vagrant Bates plays is Christ-like that there are scenes which prod us to remember the three denials of Peter. My father grumbled. He leaned over and whispered to my mother, but we didn't walk out. There was uncertainty, after all, although my father, after that, refused any movies unless he knew the entire story for fear he'd be subjected to blasphemy by metaphor.

Now, when I visit him, we watch whatever's on one of the two channels which come in clearly on his television. No cable, no antenna—he lives on a hill near Pittsburgh, or there would be no picture whatsoever. I've sat through soap operas and made-for-television movies where the characters could have used the behavioral adjustments a sighting of the face of Christ might bring. My father never criticizes the sins of these characters; he doesn't say a word about violence and sexual innuendo. The brightness and contrast on his television are nearly gone. The color is the kind I remember from the 50's—fields of primaries washing into each other. Everyone is garish in a sort of colorized comic book effect. In these shades, all of the women look tawdry, all the men threatening—if the face of Christ appeared on his television, it would be sponsored by NBC or CBS, and it would appear as unnatural and unconvincing as Jesus on a burrito or wood paneling.

Last night, on one of the tabloid shows which interperse with the melodramas, I saw a photograph of a tumor excised from a woman who had somehow denied its presence and growth for years. She had dressed and lived her

life until it sickened her irrevocably and the excision had made no difference. "Look at it closely," we were told, "and what do you see?"

"Death," I said at once, and immediately described to my father the literal apparition of a troll-like figure, his arms and legs spread in a sort of frenzied jig of triumph, like Hitler in France, his face set in the bearded leer of the satyr.

"The face of death," the announcer said, but I didn't need anybody to corroborate what I was witnessing. That woman's tumor, malignant or benign, was clearly anthropomorphic. And then, at once, I thought of all the faces of Christ, the hysteria and worship. I reminded myself of foolishness, turned away, repositioned myself, and looked back on the same troll still dancing with the glee of success.

What we bring to our vision. My father didn't say a word about trolls and cancer, but he can see the recent history of weather in a field where I'm busy with insects and thorns and poisonous leaves. He understands the effects of variations in rain and heat; he names the plants which thrive or decline accordingly. If the face of Christ appeared in that field, created by design or accident, he'd say blasphemy or miracle, depending on which technique proved to be at its source.

He told me, later that evening, the story of Saint Wilgefortis, the patron saint of women who wish to be rid of beastly husbands. She prayed for deliverance from her forced marriage to the brutal King of Sicily and sprouted, on her wedding day, a full black beard and mustache. She was crucified by her father, the king of Portugal, who had arranged the marriage for all of the standard reasons of wealth and power. "What do you think of that?" my father said, and I told him it sounded like another face of Christ story, most likely, a man dressed as a woman, the explanatory story fabricated by the church to accompany it.

"You'll see some day," he said, and though I kept my silence, I think my father was right about the face of Christ on film. By the time I watched a Jesus movie on my own, Christ, once veiled and awe-inspiring, then mellow and human, had become flawed and worst of all, silly.

Just out of college, I sought out *Johnny Got His Gun*, in which Donald Sutherland portrays Christ as a sort of hippie, laid back and unable to intervene in any meaningful way in the miserable lives we lead. Two years later, I watched *Jesus Christ, Superstar*, the film version of the rock opera, and a man named Ted Neeley opened and closed his film career by singing badly and suggesting, by the fixed expression he carried throughout, that Jesus was stoned for most of his waking hours.

There were other full-frontal Christ films released within a year. One of them was seriously pious, but unin-

tionally stupid. Johnny Cash, the country singer, made a film called *The Gospel Road*, which featured a non-speaking Jesus played by a non-actor named Robert Elfstrom whose deep meditations are interrupted by Country/Christian tunes written and sung by Cash himself. My father would have demanded his money back.

Shortly thereafter, a film called *Him* was released with the promotional line: "Are you curious about his sexual life?" My father would have picketed the movie theater which showed this one, a film featuring a homosexual Christ, crosses gleaming, in the advertisement, from his aroused eyes.

Watching the holy hand of Christ in *The Big Fisherman* had been ludicrous in its own way, something like watching, during that era, the *papier-mache* hand of Allison Hayes, the enraged housewife in *Attack of the Fifty-Foot Woman* or the one movable claw which represented, in close-up, the terrible threat of the giant vegetable space invader in *It Conquered the World*. Just like those monsters, however, Christ had more power when I couldn't get a glimpse of him. The fifty-foot woman is stupendously comical when we see all of her; the terror from outer space turns out to be physically challenged, obviously pushed forward on wheels when it decides to attack. Seeing too much is risky.

I've never told my father about any of these blasphemies, the religious and the artistic. I tell him, though, about the face of Christ that's been seen in the construction site for a bridge a few miles from where I live. Some of the landscape slashes have merged into cheekbones; some have turned into hair and beard running toward the Susquehanna River.

Now there are planes overhead, people paying fifty dollars to judge this symbol for themselves. Below them, they claim, is a face in the Rushmore soil, and those who have witnessed say this bridge is better left unfinished because it will surely collapse.

So I live near where progress pauses while priests decide whether we've been handed a shrine which will surely erase itself regardless. But what I believe is we need a sighting of the face of Christ turned away from us. There, the witnesses will say, is the back of his head, trusting in instinct reinforced by faith. We look away and turn back, and still we see. We change angles and distance, and continue to believe. And when the back of Christ's head crumbles or caves in or is erased by wind and water, we know that underneath us the ridges and troughs go on aligning themselves in persistent, suggestive ways. □





# THE PROTESTANT ETHIC BORN AGAIN

**Michael Becker**

In the unlikely event a movie on manufacturing quality control is ever nominated for an Oscar, the screenplay will be based on the life of W. Edwards Deming, patriarch of a major movement in management most often encountered under the banner, "Total Quality Management." Deming, a professor of statistics, went to Japan in 1947, recruited by the Supreme Command for the Allied Powers to help prepare for the 1951 Japanese census. He stayed on to teach his theory of statistical process control. His technology has had such an impact that Deming is given much of the credit for Japan's post-war success in quality product manufacture and world-wide marketing. The highest prize in Japan for outstanding industrial performance is called the Deming prize.

In the 70s I toured our firm's manufacturing plants and heard managers proudly describe new statistical process controls (SPC) being introduced in their operations. This technique of short-interval sample inspection signals a process going out of control (due to defective raw material, tools becoming dull or out of adjustment, etc.) long before significant quantities of defective parts can be produced. This contrasts with traditional "final inspection" which occurs after all parts have been completed, including those defective. There was also a great deal of enthusiasm expressed whenever SPC was discussed in our firm's division review meetings, along with its cousin, the just-in-time (JIT) approach to production scheduling. American automobile producers, for which we supplied parts, displayed a similar passion for these new approaches to quality. That they helped explain Japanese industry's success in world markets intensified the interest for all but a few die-hard rememberers of Pearl Harbor.

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Michael Becker *professes finance and accounting in VU's College of Business Administration. He is an active writer of poetry and prose, an avid theatre-goer, and a clergy spouse. He contributes frequently to The Cresset, particularly since he has completed a Ph. D. program at the University of Illinois.*

If W. Edwards Deming, who died last year in his 90s, was ever mentioned during those meetings, I don't remember. The discussions little prepared me for encounter with the cosmological extensions of Deming's manufacturing techniques in the 80s—Total Quality Management, TQM for short. An ideological, new age mantle seemed to have been wrapped around the basic production methods package. The name and the language used to describe it seem bizarre. Total Quality Management advocates take "...pride in one of the most sinister adjectives in the language," in Leon Wieseltier's words. "It is . . . a totalizing theory. This is not QM, this is TQM." It "is an organic ideal of life, a romanticism for executives and foremen," Wieseltier continues, describing Deming's idea that a business is best managed as a single system.

Deming would not classify himself a New Ager. He draws upon the classics, and on scripture in particular for his illustrations. "St. Paul understood a system," says Deming, quoting Paul's I Corinthians 12 metaphor of the church as body. Many of his followers manifest a religious fervor. "Quality must become the new religion," says Mary Walton, one of Deming's most ardent supporters. "Xerox has sought to transform its quality movement into nothing less than a corporate cult," according to Andrea Gabor. "Like TV evangelists preaching to the converted, they [top executives] are beamed by satellite...to two enormous monitors in Rochester convention center...filled to SRO capacity by thousands of applauding Xerox-ers."

I began to meet TQM advocates oozing enthusiasm with the humorless smiles of the Mormon missionaries I have encountered on my doorstep. Like those young zealots, TQM enthusiasts demand faith and offer little explanation. To question TQM, even to ask what it is, has somehow become incorrect. I have colleagues in my college, of course, who know a very great deal about TQM, and can explain every one of Deming's "14 points for transformation," his "7 Deadly Diseases," and the "Parable of the Red Beads," with sound logic and a minimum of blind

faith. But the question remains of why this particular package of business practices, as economically sound as they may be, comes in its quasi-religious package, and why the package has sold so well.

TQM seems to be more than just another variation in the packaging of timeless wisdom to sell management consulting, with a durability lacking in predecessor management theories like Y Theory, Management by Objectives, Zero Base Budgeting, Grid Theory, Search for Excellence, and so on. The concept has succeeded in capturing the imagination of a wide audience of executives, including the heads of the majority of Fortune 500 companies, hundreds of institutional leaders, many cabinet heads, and the Clinton White House itself. TQM's ideological quirks and quasi-religious aspects just may have something to do with it.

Before reading Deming, I supposed TQM was the result of some postmodern deconstruction of corporate America. Its elaborate, sometimes obscure language might thus be explained, although such hype might also be product of *me too* consultants pushing their own versions of Deming. After examining Deming's writings, I see his philosophy more as a counter-postmodernist movement, a reassertion of values without which business cannot be efficiently done. As to the hype, Deming's imitators have watered down the message, if anything.

The term Total Quality Management is not Deming's, but his viewpoint is certainly totalistic, and he chooses adverbs every bit as sinister as the adjective "total." "Improve *constantly* and *forever* the system of production and control," (emphasis added) is the fifth of his 14 points for transformation. That word is actually Deming's translation from the Greek *metanoia*, a word used by Jesus in the Gospel of John, which is traditionally rendered in the King James translation as "born again." Deming, who quotes scripture liberally in his books and speeches, may well have been conscious of this association. But as Nicodemus had difficulty understanding Jesus' meaning, many employees today are uncertain just what Deming's *metanoia* will mean in their institutions.

In his preface to *Out of the Crisis*, Deming promotes transformation as the one way of return to American leadership. He ignores the irreversible effects of the entropy which has dissipated many of America's monopoly positions as the world has become globally connected. "Only transformation of the American style of management, and of governmental relations with industry, can halt the decline and give American industry a chance to lead the world again."

If Deming does not promise, he certainly suggests the possibility of return to Eden, the America of the 50s, the boom time of modernity. Society was famished from a war-induced hunger for material things and craved the latest in automobiles, appliances and new homes, and it had the

means to satisfy its hunger. It was more than a materialist age. It was a time of optimism; space travel was an exhilarating prospect, not another wasteful government program. It was a time of family values, of Ward and June Cleaver and the Beaver. It was the time when rock and roll was born, with only that one thing beholden to any race but the white. What other race was there in the retail store we visited, the office where we worked, and the television we watched at night, save for Amos and Andy?

The 50s were also a time of conformity. In Levittown, NY, and elsewhere, houses made of ticky-tacky were inhabited by "organization men." The intense company loyalty of the "company men" upset some scholars, partially in its parallels to the unfettered nationalism cultivated by the authoritarian leaders of the defeated axis powers. In the late 60s the children of the post-war boom rebelled against 50s values and, so it is supposed, sent them into decline. But read of the Japan's *salaryman* today, his extreme loyalty to the firm, and recognize "the man in the gray flannel suit." Look at the essentially one race, prosperous society in Japan and realize that Japan from the 70s and 80s is the America of the 50s.

One quality in those 1950 organization men is viewed with nostalgia today: their work ethic—the Protestant ethic—a value system firmly rooted in the work of John Calvin. The gray flannel suited manager *and* his counterpart on the assembly line believed that hard work, thrift, and efficiency would bring the desired rewards. And so does his successor in Japan, the industrious and loyal *salaryman*. The shared values of the 50s may not have been shared so widely as we supposed, and the rewards of the modernity boom were limited pretty much to people who resembled Ward and June Cleaver. But oh, was business good!

The postmodern era we inhabit is not like theirs of the 50s. Its differences make it a difficult time to do business in, and not just because of the economy's internationalization. We can't even describe our era with succinctness. Wilfred McClay suggests that

...postmodernism is best described—indeed can only be described—by a series of antitheses. Where modernists believed in determinacy, postmodernists embrace indeterminacy. Where modernists value synthesis and comprehensiveness, postmodernists value deconstruction and fragmentation. Where modernists value the type, postmodernists emphasize the deviant. Where modernists esteem a personal ideal of responsible agency and integrity, postmodernists reject "the authenticated self" as an illusion, an attempt to reify a mere collocation and ensemble of social roles...Where modernists think foundationally, and believe objective truths can be discovered, postmodernists think anti-foundationally. They believe that truths are constructed by social groups and their languages; dismiss language as totalizing "metanarratives"; and view history as nothing more than "a network of agonistic language games."

This may be a navigable world for the postmodernist who is independently wealthy, or a gangster, a street person, or a university professor. But how are the dividends, the swag, the handout, and the students to be provided? How do we make and market automobiles and computers and college educations without determinism, a foundation of knowledge, and responsible agency? A tough world to do business in.

Demingism, as Mary Walton calls the movement, has a visceral appeal to many who cannot embrace the uncertainty of postmodernism—as reflected in world economy or in scholarly discourse. Its appeal justifies the lavish language and the scriptural metaphors which surround Total Quality Management. That appeal rests, I believe, on Deming's promise of a set of shared values for all one's employees, from whatever strata of the multiculture they come. If those values are embraced, he tells us, employees will work together in constancy of purpose, a close knit team producing quality products, recapturing market share, and bringing America out of the pit into which it has been cast. In *The New Economics*, Deming writes:

The transformation will release the power of the human resource contained in intrinsic motivation. In place of competition for high rating, high grades, to be Number One, there will be cooperation on problems of common interest between people, divisions, companies, competitors, governments, countries. The result will in time be greater innovation, applied science, technology, expansion of market, greater service, greater material reward for everyone. There will be joy in work, joy in learning. Anyone that enjoys his work is a pleasure to work with. Everyone will win; no losers.

Nothing less than pure joy is Deming's prophecy. "Remove barriers that rob the hourly worker of his right to pride of workmanship" is Deming's point 12. Work hard, be loyal to your employer, and be proud; you will receive your reward. This is the Protestant ethic *transformed*, as it were, for a postmodern era, and the reason TQM's appeal is so much greater than justified by a mere set of improved manufacturing methods. Deming will reinstate for us those shared values whose loss we suppose drove America from Eden. If TQM is the Protestant ethic born again, the scriptural trappings and prophetic exhortations of Deming are exactly appropriate.

One hears an unusual syntax in reading Deming, sparse with articles, and full of unconventional phrasing. "This type of rating is management downstream, managing the outcome, too late, so much easier than to provide leadership on improvement." After a while one realizes that Deming is writing with a Japanese accent, not surprising considering the amount of time he spent in Japan. The syntax does not impede understanding Deming, but it does make one wonder what other influences of Japanese cul-

ture have permeated the man's thinking. How much is success at Total Quality Management contingent on understanding a single race culture descended through Samurai warriors, emperor worshippers, and mid twentieth century corporatists? One wonders if firms which claim TQM success actually transform their old employees, or just fire those who don't fit the new job descriptions, American Industry's traditional system of dealing with transformation of any kind?

TQM has not been without its failures. Howe, Gaeddert, and Howe, who are themselves management consultants, chronicle any number of failed corporate quality programs. These are generally attributed to a failure to embrace all of the necessary aspects of change—an unanswerable argument. You hear that sort of thing from TQM people all the time—TQM includes success in its definition (it is total, after all); failure means it's not TQM. Annoying as such remarks may be, the explanation is probably correct much of the time. Deming's 14 points constitute a mighty big pill to swallow (all the better to sell consulting services, the cynic adds). Managers in one part of the firm or another may have highly vested interests in avoiding parts of the Deming philosophy. Consider Deming's entire 14 points:

1. Create constancy of purpose toward improvement of product and service, with the aim to become competitive, and to stay in business, and to provide jobs.
2. Adopt the new philosophy. Western management must awaken to the challenge, must learn their responsibilities, and take on leadership for change.
3. Cease dependence on inspection to achieve quality...build quality into the product in the first place.
4. End the practice of awarding business on the basis of price tag.
5. Improve constantly and forever the system of production and service.
6. Institute training on the job.
7. Institute leadership.
8. Drive out fear, so that everyone may work effectively for the company.
9. Break down barriers between departments.
10. Eliminate slogans, exhortations, and targets for work force...the bulk of the causes of low quality belong to the system and thus lie beyond the power of the work force.
11. Eliminate work standards (quotas); substitute leadership. Eliminate management by objective.
12. Remove barriers that rob the hourly worker of pride of workmanship...[abolish] the annual or merit rating system.
13. Institute a vigorous program of education and self-improvement.
14. Put everybody in the company to work to accomplish the transformation. The transformation is everybody's job.

There is much here to frighten managers when their organizations approach TQM from scratch (even without simultaneous layoffs, a frequent and often self-defeating concurrence, as discussed below). Change from the old

and comfortable ways is threatening. Point 4 threatens the purchasing agent, for instance, point 6 the foreman, point 9 department heads in general, and point 12 the merit rating system designer. Small wonder that firm management may opt to do Total Quality Management on a selective basis, keeping to the old ways for certain processes and transforming to TQM for others, unaware of the internal inconsistencies thus created and the conflicts which will result.

Holder and Pace have studied a large sample of TQM companies, self-defined in their public reports, and compared them to a control sample of firms which do not apply TQM terms to themselves. Prior to adopting TQM, adopting firms as a group had significantly lower performance than the control group. This is no surprise; troubled firms are most likely to feel the need for outside consulting of any kind, and most consultants include some form of TQM in their product mix these days. More interesting is the fact that there were no significant differences measured in the performance of TQM firms, as a group, in the years following announcement of their TQM transformations. The Holder and Pace findings first suggests that many firms pursue TQM out of desperation. Therein may lie the seeds of failure.

Inferior business performance is seldom the result of failure across all divisions and product lines. There will be more successful and less successful parts of a business. The traditional quick fix is to prune the unprofitable lines and reduce staff, often under cover of words like restructuring, downsizing, rightsizing, reengineering and the like. Whether some business purpose is served by such transparent euphemisms is unclear. But Humpty-Dumptyian word games are characteristic of our era. A language whose meaning has been undermined reflects the uncertain, foundationless, chaotic world of the postmodernist. We tend to attribute that sort of thing to the "counter-culture," but corporate America has played its own part in the destabilization of language.

Twice in recent months I have talked with friends who feared loss of their own or their spouses' jobs *because* the employing firm was adopting Total Quality Management. The linking of Total Quality Management transformation with the layoff list is anathema to Deming's philosophy. TQM is not really total; it makes no provision for cost cutting scenarios in the face of falling revenues. Deming advocates the Japanese system of life-time employment (though this goal was more often achieved in the 70s than in the 80s or 90s.) Management is charged with a continuous improvement which assures financial success and avoids downturns. Management's job of driving out fear includes particularly the fear of losing one's job.

Some American managers are accustomed to using fear as a tool, however. The traditional way of dealing with short-term redundancies is speedy termination. Those who

keep their jobs when others are laid off are expected to work harder and show more loyalty—if they don't want to be next. If the carefully crafted vocabulary of TQM is debased, becoming a source of fear rather than eliminating fear, the lexicon may be unusable for Deming's purpose, organizational transformation to Total Quality Management. TQM perceived by corporate employees as only the latest euphemism for Mushroom Management is a poison pill to Demingism. (MM: Keep them in the dark, feed them manure, eventually can them.)

It is not likely that TQM is the optimum way to run every organization, nor that TQM organizations offer the optimum working environment for every person. Some organizations have cultures so alien to TQM they defy transformation in any case. Other organizations will fail at TQM because of half-hearted commitments to the philosophy. But some will succeed, as many already have. Many TQM successes outside of Japan are spectacular, as noted above, and in the considerable recent literature on quality management. There is substantive achievement, replicated many times, achievement which goes well beyond the successes of any technique of management since Ford's assembly line. Seldom has a management theory encompassed a set of values so deep—the Protestant ethic itself I see within Deming's 14 points—and this value orientation is probably the root of TQM's unusual success.

Is it possible that the Protestant ethic, in its sad and deconstructed condition, can crawl back into its mother's womb to be born again? Can such a rebirth be mid-wived by an expatriate statistician and his disciples? It could happen. Critics are beginning to prophesy the end of post-modern era. A just and orderly God could do no less than end one era and bring another into being at the end of a millennium, could He? The post-postmodern era could be one of those ages of reason that occur from time to time. Such an age would need deterministic systems, responsible agents to manage its commerce, and values rooted in an absolute foundation, if business is to be done. Demingism offers it all, wrapped in an appealing package and available for undergirding the third millennium. □

[Author's Note: The interested reader will find Deming's work in *Out of the Crisis*, and *The New Economics*. The Howe, Gaeddert and Howe study, *Quality on Trial*, was published in 1993 by West Publishing. The Holder and Pace study is by Mark Holder and R. Daniel Pace, a workpaper produced at VU in 1994. Wilfred McClay's article, "After Modernity, What?" appeared in *First Things*, in December of 1994. And Leon Wieseltier's "Total Quality Meaning," appeared in *The New Republic* in the July issue of 1993.]

**Parable:  
Barbed Wire Comes To Kansas**

In those days  
wire was law,

a sharp-tongued  
justice

repeated at  
regular intervals, penalty  
strung tight

as a fist,  
and pitiless

as a Pharisee.  
No one noticed

the purple clover,  
milkweed,

prairie orchids  
growing with grace

over the  
boundaries,

or the rain  
running

under the fence  
free as mercy.

**Barbara Seaman**



# LOOKING DEATH IN THE FACE: CATHER'S LATE FICTION

Pamela Schwandt

*Death Comes for the Archbishop.* A melodramatic title like this could be printed in embossed red letters on the cover of a murder mystery, whose pages we keep turning anxiously to find out who killed the archbishop. Instead Willa Cather has given the title to the most serene of her twelve novels, a work in the form of a saint's life. It unfolds quietly, in a series of discrete and calmly narrated scenes. Most of its characters and events are taken from books of history and biography. Cather, in the work of fiction she made out of such facts, depicts the life of Father Jean Latour as he carries out the mission assigned to him by his superiors: to reclaim and order the Catholic Church in the vast territory of New Mexico, acquired in 1846 by the US government. Most of the novel is given over to episodes from his first ten years there, during the 1850's. Then in his thirties and forties, he shares the task with Father Joseph Vaillant, who is a childhood friend from France. When death comes to this archbishop in the last pages of the novel, it arrives peacefully, to claim an elderly man who looks back on his life with satisfaction and gratitude.

The real mystery within these covers, I have long thought, is that the novel does not suffocate from such material and such a method. It miraculously remains alive from beginning to end, a pleasure to read and re-read. Though I cannot hope to solve such a mystery, it is one worth investigating. The title, which Cather says she took from Holbein's *Dance of Death*, provides a clue to the novel's vitality and I will come back to that later. But first I will weigh the difficulties in plot and character that she overcame.

The main plot of the novel contains little suspense: Father Latour slowly and deliberately does what he was sent to do, and the outcome of his mission to re-establish the Catholic Church in New Mexico territory is never in doubt

for long. The secondary plot, the story of the friendship between the two priests, contains no suspense at all: they work closely for a quarter of a century without discord, though they are opposites in upbringing, temperament and taste, and though one has been appointed the superior of the other. Furthermore, Cather has chosen as her main character a person most difficult to make interesting: one whose life, outward and inward, is obedient. He must and does submit to his ecclesiastical superiors, to the doctrines of his church, to the will of God as he understands it. In this novel, Cather has set herself no small artistic task.

It was a task she had long been training for, artistically, culturally, and spiritually. When she began writing the novel in 1926, she was fifty-two years old. She was a seasoned writer of fiction, with two books of short stories and eight novels behind her, one of which had been awarded the Pulitzer Prize three years earlier. She had undergone a series of displacements: she moved from her birthplace in Virginia to the prairielands of Nebraska at the age of nine; after college at the University of Nebraska she moved East, to Pittsburgh for ten years and then to New York City, where she lived among artists and intellectuals, and had access to the homes of the wealthy. She traveled frequently to Europe as well as to Nebraska and the Southwest.

Also, in the years immediately preceding 1926 she had been engaged in an intense spiritual quest, if we can judge by her fiction. The exterior sign of this quest was a quiet and deliberate act, taken in December of 1922, at the age of 49. She, along with her parents, was confirmed into the Episcopal Church in Red Cloud, and the three remained active members there for the rest of their lives. Cather had grown up among strict Baptist grandparents and attended church regularly with them and her entire family. When she went to the university she scoffed at religion and religious bigotry. In her fiction before 1922 she drew harsh portraits of such bigots, but also sympathetic portraits of Nebraska pioneers whose lives rested upon deep religious faith.

Joining the Episcopal Church was for Cather a return

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to the religion of her great-grandparents in Virginia, where she was born and lived her first nine years. The act seems to have touched off an inner firestorm. The two novels she began immediately after that—*The Professor's House* (1925) and *My Mortal Enemy* (1926)—center on characters who have abandoned the religion of their forbearers and return to it when they must face death. Both of these novels leave the taste of ashes and gall in the mouth. They are trenchantly bitter, a shock to the reader who knows Cather only through the buoyant earlier novels set on the Nebraska prairie.

These two protagonists, Professor Godfrey St. Peter and Myra Henshawe, resemble their creator: they grow up in small Midwestern towns, but as adults live in worlds of much greater social, intellectual, and artistic sophistication. In their early fifties, both characters discover a wide split between the way they have been living their lives and what they need in order to look death in the face. They have taken a wrong turn somewhere, they sense; they have not sufficiently nourished their spiritual lives. Both return to memories of childhood for guidance. Both eventually seek peace in the Roman Catholic Church, its rites for Myra, its teachings for Godfrey (who in his adult life has considered himself God-free, an enlightened and successful academic who sneers at religion). But the understanding each character finally gains is bitter to the taste, and the remedy harsh and unlovely. Both lose all love for their spouses of several decades, who earlier claimed their passionate attachment, and for whom they once re-arranged their lives. Godfrey St. Peter has been coldly withdrawing from his wife for years. Myra Henshawe turns fiercely against her loyal husband Oswald while he cares for her during her long illness. She broods about the poverty into which they have recently fallen, and she regrets eloping with him and forfeiting her great-uncle's fortune. Her last statement about her husband and about their thirty-five years together gives the novel its title, as well as its tone. Myra, lying with a crucifix beside her and drugged with codeine, says in Oswald's hearing, "Why must I die like this, alone with my mortal enemy" (577). Clutching at the religion of her childhood brings her to the only raft of peace she knows, but it is tossed by waves of resentment and repudiation of her human ties.

Cather wrote that bitter ending, and then she took up her pen and wrote *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927), about a character who, like Godfrey and Myra and their creator, has gone through a series of geographical and cultural displacements—from Auvergne in the mountains of central France, to Ohio in the flat farmlands of the American Midwest, to the deserts of New Mexico. Throughout his travels, however, he has carried the faith of his childhood along with him, and has shaped his adult life to rest upon it. He seems not to dwell in anxiety or regret; his characteristic attitude is rather one of profound trust:

in the life he is living at present, in the human bonds he is forging, in the death that will come for him eventually. And throughout the novel, this trust proves well founded.

How did Cather get from Myra Henshawe to Father Latour in such a short time? She tells us something about this in a letter she wrote to *Commonweal* in 1927, a few months after the appearance of *Death Comes for the Archbishop*. Quoted by Sharon O'Brien in her edition of Cather's short pieces, she describes her mood while composing this novel: "The writing of it took only a few months, because the book had all been lived many times before it was written, and the happy mood in which I began it never paled. . . . Writing this book . . . was like a happy vacation from life, a return to childhood, to early memories" (961). And she describes her two sources of inspiration: a 19th-century series of paintings and a recent biography of Father Machebeuf, the historical counterpart of Father Vaillant, which contained letters he wrote to his sister in France.

I had all my life wanted to do something in the style of legend, which is absolutely the reverse of dramatic treatment. Since I first saw the Puvis de Chavannes frescoes of the life of St. Genèvieve in my student days, I have wished that I could try something a little like that in prose; something without accent, with none of the artificial elements of composition. . . . In this kind of writing the mood is the thing—all the little figures and stories are mere improvisations that come out of it. What I got from Father Machebeuf's letters was the mood, the spirit in which they accepted the accidents and hardships of a desert country, the joyful energy that kept them going. (960-61)

At crucial points in her novel, Cather creates scenes in which this joyful energy flags, and then is renewed. Each time, the renewal seems connected to a willingness to face death daily, as part of the vocation the two priests long ago accepted once and for all time. When Father Vaillant's spiritual life is the subject, Cather takes details and incidents directly from the letters of his historical prototype. But she apparently had no printed source for most scenes in which Archbishop Latour's spiritual life is the subject and here she was left to draw upon her own experience and imagination. The opening scene of the novel proper is an example of such a scene, and its placement suggests that Cather considered it important to introduce this dimension of her central character, his calm in the face of death, upon our first meeting with him. Acceptance of death releases a joy within him at the beginning of the novel, when he is young, as well as at the end, when he is old.

In this first scene, the newly appointed Bishop Latour is on horseback, solitary and thirsty, in the midst of the blazing New Mexican desert, and he is about to succumb to a vertiginous despair. The landscape seems to have no pattern: each conical hill is like every other conical hill, topped with conical-shaped juniper trees. He sees himself

as "wandering in some geometrical nightmare" (285). The landscape seems aggressive, hostile: "The hills thrust out of the ground so thickly that they seemed to be pushing each other, elbowing each other aside, tipping each other over" (285).

The novelist's task in this chapter is to convey how the priest moves from this nightmare state of lostness, of patternlessness, to a state of trust and serenity. Cather does this with assurance and subtlety. Bishop Latour closes his eyes, "to rest them from the intrusive omnipresence of the triangle," and when he opens them, he is able to see that one of the juniper trees is not conical, but shaped like the cross. He perceives a pattern, something familiar, something to steer by. He dismounts, takes out "a well-worn book," and kneels at the foot of the cruciform tree. He remains at his devotions for half an hour and arises refreshed.

As he continues his ride through the desert, suffering intensely from thirst, he wonders if his life is soon to end, but he now reminds himself of

that cry, wrung from his Saviour on the Cross, "*J'ai soif!*" Of all our Lord's physical sufferings, only one, "I thirst," rose to His lips. Empowered by long training, the young priest blotted himself out of his own consciousness and meditated upon the anguish of his Lord. The Passion of Jesus became for him the only reality; the need of his own body was but a part of that conception. (287)

His horse, whom he has allowed to wander while pondering his problems with his new bishopric, suddenly quickens, as does his pack-mule, and an hour later they bring him to a river, where he sees

running water, clover fields, cottonwoods, acacias, little adobe houses with brilliant gardens, a boy driving a flock of white goats toward the stream. [A little girl runs up to him with the greeting] "of a Christian. 'Ave Maria Purissima, Señor. Whence do you come?'"

"Blessed child," he replies, "I am a priest who has lost his way. I am famished for water" (289-90).

He is warmly received into this Mexican settlement, where no priest has ever come before, and where there is much marrying and baptizing to be done. That night after his devotions, he lies in a deep feather bed thinking:

He had expected to make a dry camp in the wilderness, and to sleep under a juniper tree, like the Prophet, tormented by thirst. But here he lay in comfort and safety, with love for his fellow creatures flowing like peace about his heart. (293)

Some time later, when he is in Santa Fe with Father Vaillant, he gives his definition of miracles:

The Miracles of the Church seem to me to rest not so much upon faces or voices or healing power coming suddenly near to us from afar off, but upon our perceptions being made finer, so that for a moment our eyes can see and our ears can hear what is there about us always. (307)

He might be describing the miracle of his rescue from despair amidst those conical hills.

In these opening chapters, we glimpse the inner drama that invigorates the spiritual life of the central character, the way he confronts despair and death, the way he views the relief that comes to him. All is part of a spiritual drama much larger than himself, in which he plays a role, the one assigned him by God. This is the bedrock on which the novel rests, and the episodes that follow assume it. These vary greatly in tone and subject matter, and often are more overtly dramatic. The two priests confront murderers, misers, and rebellious priests. They endure dangerous illnesses, blizzards, loneliness, and then geographical separation. Father Latour builds a cathedral in Santa Fe and Father Vaillant builds a diocese in Colorado. All their own adventures are interspersed with tales told them by others, quiet domestic stories and bold adventures, as well as a beautifully-wrought tale of a gluttonous priest whose Indian parishioners hurl him off a 300-foot high mesa.

This book is full of contrasts, as well as adventures. Built into it is the contrast between the patrician, intellectual, slightly aloof Father Latour, with his educated sensitivity to shape and color and sound, his passion for order, on the one hand, and on the other, the warm-hearted, ebullient Father Vaillant, the son of a butcher, who enjoys mixing with all people, begging money for his mission, eating and drinking and cooking, and who is wholly indifferent to architecture and art. But at the same time this is a book about harmony. In the midst of all the adventures and contrasts, we get flashes of the deep harmony possible between a human being and his work, his landscape, his fellow creatures. It is interesting to note that Father Latour, secure in his own faith, is able to appreciate the spiritual lives of people very different from himself, such as Father Vaillant. He is also able to respect and appreciate religions different from his own, those of the Navajo, Hopi and Apache. He intuits their depth and mystery, and he notes the contrast between their reverent attitude toward the land and the rapacious conquering way of the American settlers. He mourns the action of his misguided friend Kit Carson in driving the Navajos from their ancient lands.

In Book Seven, Father's Letour's spiritual life is again dramatized as the central subject of an episode. The chapter entitled "December Night" presents the Bishop sleepless in the middle of the night, in a state of spiritual drought,

one of those periods of coldness and doubt which, from his boyhood, had occasionally settled down upon his spirit and made him feel an alien, wherever he was. . . . The sense of failure clutch[ed] at his heart. His prayers were empty words and brought him no refreshment. His soul had become a barren field. He had nothing within himself to give his priests or his people. His work seemed superficial, a house built upon the sands. (404-05)



He longs to go into the church to pray but shrinks from the thought of how cold it will be. He goes back to his warm bed, but despises himself for shrinking from merely physical discomfort. He arises again, dons his fur-lined cloak, and goes to the church. Outside it, he comes across Sada, an abused and frightened slave woman from the town. She too has been sleepless on this cold night; her bed is in an unheated woodshed. She has worked up the courage to sneak away for an hour to see the church that her owners have forbidden her to attend, and now she finds it locked: "Nineteen years, Father; nineteen years since I have seen the holy things of the altar!" (407). Father Latour places his cloak around her shoulders, lets her inside the church, and watches her as she kneels before the altar, exalting in "the holy joy of religion." He begins to share her joy, feeling "those holy mysteries as he had done in his young manhood. . . . the pity that no man born of woman could ever utterly cut himself off from; that was for the murderer on the scaffold, as it was for the dying soldier or the martyr on the rack" (408-09). Afterward "the peace without seemed all one with the peace in his own soul" (410). His spiritual drought is over. Once again his perceptions have been made finer so that he can see and hear what has always been about him, "the holy mysteries." This time the agent has been a poor slave woman, whose physical and spiritual deprivation he pitied and ministered to.

In this book, work and worship are conjoined. They are not in opposition. The two priests have a vocation, and obedience is central, to their vow as priests, to the orders of the church to which they have pledged themselves. When personal preference and the orders of the church are in conflict, by training the priests forego personal preference. This is their discipline, and when the bishop's faith seems cold and does not rise up of itself, he relies on the disciplines he has learned long ago to carry him to the next phase of renewal.

All of Father Latour's life is a preparation for the serene death which arrives for him on the last pages of the novel: he has continually renounced his own will in favor of a larger purpose. Book Nine is entitled "Death Comes for the Archbishop" and takes place thirty years after the scene in "December Night," during the last months of Father Latour's life. Here he is preparing for a death he knows will come soon. He thinks of it as a reunion with his childhood friend. He writes to Father Vaillant's sister:

Since your brother was called to his reward, I feel nearer to him than before. For many years Duty separated us, but death has brought us together. The time is not far distant when I shall join him. Meanwhile, I am enjoying to the full that period of reflection which is the happiest conclusion to a life of action. (437)

Father Latour spends this period of reflection on his small country estate four miles north of Santa Fe, where he indulges his passion for gardening. By now he is in his sev-

enties and has retired. It is an anomaly that a fastidious, scholarly man such as he, coming from a highly bred family and highly bred civilization, should choose to spend his remaining years here in this untamed land, amidst so few comforts. And he does choose to die here, rather than return to his beloved Auvergne, where he always imagined he would retire. But by this time, the once hostile New Mexican desert has become his place of refreshment and renewal:

In New Mexico, he always awoke a young man; not until he rose and began to shave did he realize that he was growing older. . . . Beautiful surroundings, the society of learned men, the charm of noble women, the graces of art, could not make up to him for the loss of those light-hearted mornings of the desert, for that wind that made one a boy again. (443)

The old Archbishop chooses to die in a place where he has lived and worked and worshiped in his daily life.

The new Archbishop also was trained in the college at Auvergne, and when he receives young clergy from that college, he sends them to Father Latour "to receive instruction in Spanish, in the topography of the diocese, in the character and traditions of the different pueblos" (438). The old Archbishop has repose in his old age, but is not rendered useless by retirement—he has the young to teach. For the last five years one of these new priests has become like a son to him: Bernard Ducrot has "in himself the fineness to reverence all that was fine in his venerable Superior. He anticipated Father Latour's every wish, shared his reflections, cherished his reminiscences" (439). In his last years the Archbishop has rest, occupation, friendship, respect—and his faith, which has always been his source of joyful energy.

He remains in good health, until he comes down with a cold and fever. He requests and receives permission to occupy his old study in Santa Fe "for a short time" (439).

The next morning Father Latour awakened with a grateful sense of nearness to his Cathedral—which would also be his tomb. He felt safe under its shadow; like a boat come back to harbour, lying under its own sea-wall. . . . The sisters had sent a little iron bed from the school for him, and their finest linen and blankets. He felt a great content at being here, where he had come as a young man and where he had done his work. (442)

He spends the weeks of his dying enveloped in that same sense of safety and contentment. He is tended by his old servants and by the young Bernard. He receives visitors. But the time most precious to him is the period between breakfast and dinner, when he pretends to be sleeping, the "long hours of solitude" (448) during which he re-lives his life. He takes a special satisfaction in recalling episodes from his friendship with Father Vaillant, but he also remembers the moments of revelation given to him. In these he can perceive goodness operating in the world, in the midst of sorrow and wrong. He thinks of the

many stories he has heard of "the blessed experiences of the early Franciscan missionaries. Their way through the wilderness had blossomed with little miracles, it seemed" (446). He rejoices in the knowledge that "I have lived to see two great wrongs righted; I have seen the end of black slavery, and I have seen the Navajos restored to their own country" (454).

Death comes for him painlessly and peacefully. He is surrounded by fellow pilgrims who watch and pray for him, a few in his study and multitudes gathered in the Cathedral and the courtyard. When he dies the Cathedral bell tolls: "and the next morning the old Archbishop lay before the high altar in the church he had built" (459).

This then is the peaceful wait for death of Father Jean Latour, very different from the despair and frenzy that rise within the central characters of Cather's two previous novels when death approaches. What, if anything, does this change indicate about the spiritual life of the author? Do the resemblances in circumstances and in temperament between Cather and her three protagonists extend to their spiritual lives as well? Godfrey's weary and joyless acceptance of his need for religious instruction, Myra Henshawe's bitter grasping at religious rite—do these represent Willa Cather's own state at an earlier time? And Father Latour's deep faith—with its periods of doubt and coldness, but also its indestructible sources of comfort and renewal—is this her own faith at a later stage of her spiritual journey? Cather was always highly autobiographical in her fiction, but also one whose large gift of sympathy allowed her to depict characters thoroughly unlike herself. Is Archbishop Latour a case in point, a character whose intense spiritual life was created by the artist's skill and intuition alone, or was Cather, like the Archbishop, a believing Christian?

Critics and scholars have approached this question from every direction, as we see from the way two recent scholarly biographers treat Cather's confirmation in the Episcopal Church. James Woodress assumes this decision expressed Cather's faith: "by 1922 . . . Cather began to feel the need for religion and found it in the Episcopal Church. 'Faith is a gift,' she once told her old friend Carrie Sherwood." Woodress quotes a dialogue between two characters in *One of Ours* (1922). Both are soldiers on leave toward the end of World War I, about to go back to battle where death lurks everywhere:

[David confesses to Claude:] "I've come to believe in immortality. Do you?" Claude was confused by this quiet question: "I hardly know. I've never been able to make up my mind."

"Oh, don't bother about it! If it comes to you, it comes. You don't have to go after it. I arrived at it in quite the same way I used to get things in art,—knowing them and living on them before I understood them." [Then Woodress adds:] Cather apparently came to her faith in the same way and by 1922 was ready to believe. In her search for a spiritual mooring she also came to think, as she has Myra Henshawe say in *My Mortal Enemy*, that "in religion seeking is finding" (337-38).

Sharon O'Brien, however, seems uneasy about her subject's adult confirmation into the church:

As a professional woman, a lesbian, and an artist she was a rebel against social norms; yet in other ways she was deeply conservative, coming to value *even* [emphasis mine] her family inheritance of religion, though she redefined her Baptist heritage when she and her parents joined the Episcopal church in 1922. (226)

This is the sum of what O'Brien says about Cather's confirmation, tucking the action and its motive into subordinate parts of the sentence.

If the mature Cather had declared herself an atheist, scholars would take her at her word. She declared herself an Episcopalian, however, and this seems to require an explanation or defense. In 1988 the journal *Literature and Belief* published a Willa Cather issue. John J. Murphy, a Cather scholar and the guest editor, begins his forward thus:

Devoting an entire issue to religion in Cather is appropriate because whether satirized or devoutly explored, religion is one of Cather's flood subjects. Some critics try to deny this and style her most religious novel, *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, as reflecting merely the aura not the substance of religion, the spirit of the archaic rather than the supernatural. (1)

Mildred R. Bennett, in the keynote article in this collection, "Cather and Religion," seems to agree with those who do not take Cather's faith seriously. She begins with this sentence: "Cather's interest in religion, obvious from the time she began to write, signified more the mind of an inquirer, than that of a devout religionist" (5). Later she says, "Confiding in Carrie Sherwood [a childhood friend] during her visits to Red Cloud, she said she liked to read the Bible each morning before beginning to write. This practice evolved, I think, not from religious fervor but from literary appreciation" (8).

Clearly we will get no agreement from scholars and critics on the matter of the genuineness of Cather's faith. The fiction she wrote after *Death Comes for the Archbishop* speaks to the matter, but being fiction, it speaks no more conclusively than does a convocation of scholars. But religion does continue to be one of Cather's "flood subjects" in her fiction right up to her own death in 1947, implicitly in some works, directly in others. Among the characters she presents in some depth, all who are required to look death in the face do so with strength and serenity, at peace with God and those around them and with what life has given to them.

The fiction Cather wrote in the five years after *Death Comes for the Archbishop* appeared is particularly rich in characters who must face death. These were unhappy and stressful years for the author, full of losses. "The vacation from life," "the happy mood" in which she wrote the story of the Archbishop extended to preparing the novel for

publication: she said that reading its proofs early in 1927 was "like having a gorgeous party all over again" (Woodress 412). The party ended for Cather decisively that summer: first her father suffered a heart attack and then she was forced to move from the Greenwich Village apartment that had been her haven for fourteen years. For almost five years she lived in a hotel, without a settled New York home. During that time both parents died, and she lost along with them the stable Nebraska home that for 35 years she had returned to for refreshment. These years were draining for her personally, but the fiction she wrote during them continues the serene note of *Death Comes for the Archbishop*. In it we can see several variations of the Archbishop's peaceful death.

In "Neighbor Rosicky," written in 1928, the title character is modeled partly upon her father, Charles Cather, who had died earlier in the year. Anton Rosicky is a good man who loves his life and all the people in it. He is a healing presence among them, and he has much work yet to do. Immediately after learning from the doctor that he has a bad heart, he stops by the graveyard that abuts his farm and gently reconciles himself to the news:

He was awful fond of his place, he admitted. He wasn't anxious to leave it. And it was a comfort to think that he would never have to go farther than the edge of his own hayfield. The snow, falling over his barnyard and the graveyard, seemed to draw things together like. And they were all old neighbours in the graveyard, most of them friends; there was nothing to feel awkward or embarrassed about. (594)

When his fatal heart attack comes upon him a few months later, he is smiling, thinking about the discovery he has just made about his discontented daughter-in-law, that she has a "sweetness at her heart" that will make "everything [come] out right at the end" (617).

It is not only the saints who die peacefully, in a state of grace. At the end of *Shadows on the Rock* (1931), the haughty and hard-bitten old Count Frontenac learns he must die in Quebec; he will not be recalled to the court of Louis XIV and rewarded at last for his decades of arduous military service. So be it.

The Count himself was ready to die, and he would be glad to die here alone, without pretence and mockery, with no troop of expectant relatives about his bed. The world was not what he had thought it at twenty—or even at forty. . . . He would die here, in this room, and his spirit would go before God to be judged. He believed this, because he had been taught it in childhood, and because he knew there was something in himself and in other men that this world did not explain. (619)

On his deathbed, he receives the Sacrament "in perfect consciousness," then slips into a coma and receives the last rites of the Church. He awakens and sees the room filled with nuns and priests.

The Count raised his eyebrows haughtily, as if to demand why his privacy was thus invaded. He looked from one face to

another; in those faces he read something. He saw the nuns upon their knees praying. He seemed to realize his new position in the world and what was now required of him. The challenge left his face,—a dignified calm succeeded it. Father Joseph held the crucifix to his lips. He kissed it. Then, very courteously, he made a gesture with his left hand, indicating that he wished everyone to draw back from his bed.

"This I will do alone," his steady glance seemed to say.

All drew back.

"Merci," he said distinctly. That was the last word he spoke. (629-30)

The most overtly autobiographical work from this period is "Old Mrs. Harris," written in 1931 as Cather's mother lay dying. It is also the work that takes up most overtly the relation between faith and serenity in facing death. The main characters, three women who live under the same roof, are modeled after her maternal grandmother, Rachel Boak, her mother, Virginia Cather, and herself as a teenager, about to leave for college. Mrs. Harris, the 70-year-old grandmother, is the household drudge. Her days are filled with feeding the family of nine and caring for the children. She sleeps on a cot in a room that is little more than a corridor between the kitchen and dining room, and she has almost no personal possessions. Widowed young, she accompanied her daughter Victoria from their family home in Tennessee to this untamed frontier town in Colorado. On the day the old woman goes to bed to die, her daughter Victoria and granddaughter Vickie are both so absorbed in their own dramas that they do not notice the old woman's illness. Victoria has taken to her own bed and is brooding about yet another unwanted pregnancy. Vickie has overcome the last of the many obstacles to attending college in the fall and now she is irritated because no one is helping her get ready. She has just two weeks "and no trunk and no clothes or anything" (670). Before they heed the grandmother's condition, she has slipped into the irreversible coma that precedes her death by a few hours.

This could be a most bitter tale about selfishness and ingratitude, ending in the pathetic death of an elderly, neglected woman. It is anything but this. It depicts the deep bonds of love that exist in this house throughout the three generations. The self-absorption of the mother and granddaughter is not glossed over, but it is understandable, given their age and circumstances, and both are given attractive traits: good humor, kindness, intelligence, passion, strong family loyalty. The chief way in which the story is rescued from bitterness is the grandmother's vision of her place in the household. Any resentment over it expressed in the story comes from neighbors, especially from Mrs. Rosen, who is indignant that this finely-made old woman drudges in the kitchen while her handsome daughter dresses up and strolls downtown to shop and her moody and self-absorbed granddaughter keeps her nose in a book. Mrs. Harris doesn't see it this way at all. She performs her

tasks with gratitude, glad to be needed, glad to be able to carry them out. According to her Tennessee notions, old women are "tied to the chariot of young life, and had to go where it went, because they were needed" (629). She is glad to lighten her daughter's load, glad to see Victoria enjoying herself while she is able, glad to have the children flock to her small room for comfort and companionship. Sometimes when the grandmother arises in the morning, her feet aching, she feels "a little low."

But the moment she heard the children running down the uncarpeted back stairs, she forgot to be low. Indeed, she ceased to be an individual, an old woman with aching feet; she became part of a group, became a relationship. She was drunk up into their freshness when they burst in upon her, telling her about their dreams, explaining their troubles with buttons and shoelaces and underwear shrunk too small. The tired, solitary old woman Grandmother had been at daybreak vanished; suddenly the morning seemed as important to her as it did to the children, and the mornings ahead stretched out sunshiny, important. (647)

This is her source of renewal in the morning. At night after a day of work, she finds two sources of comfort. One comes from the "bound girl" Mandy:

"Oh, Miz' Harris, your feet an' legs is swelled turribltonight!"

"I expect they air, Mandy. They feel like it."

"Pore soul!" murmured Mandy. She put Grandma's feet in the tub and, crouching beside it, slowly, slowly rubbed her swollen legs. Mandy was tired, too. Mrs. Harris sat in her nightcap and shawl, her hands crossed in her lap. She never asked for this greatest solace of the day; it was something that Mandy gave, who had nothing else to give. If there could be a comparison in absolutes, Mandy was the needier of the two,—but she was younger. The kitchen was quiet and full of shadow, with only the light from an old lantern. Neither spoke. Mrs. Harris dozed from comfort, and Mandy herself was half asleep as she performed one of the oldest rites of compassion. (627)

Mandy performs the service of footwashing, "one of the oldest rites of compassion," rendered by Christ to his disciples. And when Mrs. Harris lies down on her cramped, uncomfortable bed at night, she turns to another source of comfort, repeating the Twenty-Third Psalm: "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. . . ." Mrs. Harris's selflessness is overtly Christian, a matter of disciplined faith and service. It has much in common with Father Latour's conception of his mission and the hardships that come with it, the joyful energy that comes with release from self.

Mrs. Harris is by no means lacking in spirit. Two-thirds of the way through the story, her cat Blue Boy dies. Victoria arranges to have the carcass hauled away the next morning, to be dumped in a gully with the trash. Mrs. Harris simmers all evening and that night waylays the ten-year-old twins on their way to bed. She countermands her

imperious daughter's orders. The boys are to get up early, she tells them indignantly, to dig a grave "an' bury him right" (651). They obey their grandmother. Mrs. Harris is selfless, but it is a high spiritual selflessness. She is not indignant on behalf of herself, but on behalf of others, on behalf of principle. The cat they loved should not be thrown on a trash-heap in death. The traveling preacher should be lodged at their house—the Grandmother is angry and resentful when this does not happen. After Vickie tells her grandmother that she cannot use the scholarship she has studied all summer to earn—her father cannot spare the additional three hundred dollars she will need—Mrs. Harris stares at the door for a long time with "a look of such intense, accusing sorrow," as if it "were the door shut against all young aspiration" (660). Mrs. Harris is the one adult in the family who feels the force of Vickie's claim to an education and who acts to secure it.

This is a woman whose life is given to the service of others, as if all that is merely personal has slowly dropped away. During her final days, she "scarcely noticed how her strength was failing, because she had so much on her mind" (661). She has been preoccupied with arranging a loan for Vickie, which she does in secret. On the day after Vickie announces that their neighbor Mr. Rosen has offered to lend her the money, Mrs. Harris finally allows herself to be ill: that morning she does not force herself to get up to make breakfast for the family. And a day later she is dead.

Victoria and Vickie are too preoccupied with their own concerns to notice Mrs. Harris's condition, but she is not made to spend this last day of her life alone. She is tended by the little boys of the family, whom she has tended all their years and whose freshness has revived her. They read to her, as she has read to them each night:

Grandmother was perfectly happy. She and the twins were about the same age; they had in common all the realest and truest things. The years between them and her, it seemed to Mrs. Harris, were full of trouble and unimportant. The twins and Ronald and Hughie were important. (669)

In one of the many tender scenes in the novella, ten-year-old Bert sits with his dying grandmother in her cluttered room, quietly finding ways to minister to her: he hangs up the children's clothes strewn about, closes the curtain, substitutes a glass for her old tin cup, goes to his room upstairs and brings down a box for her to use as a table as well as one of his new linen handkerchiefs for her to wipe her face.

After supper Mandy, who has been vigilant on Mrs. Harris' behalf all day, again washes her feet. Then Mrs. Harris lies in her cot alone and prepares to die. Her reflections constitute one long prayer. She tells over her blessings, whispers "gratefully" the Twenty-Third Psalm, rejoices in her daughter's real happiness—"Yes, Lord, I always spoiled Victoria. She was so much the prettiest. But

nobody won't ever be the worse for it: Mr. Templeton will always humour her, and the children love her more than most. They'll always be good to her; she has that way with her" (671). She thinks about the good life in Tennessee that she has left behind. "Toward morning all these pleasant reflections faded out. Mrs. Harris felt that she and her bed were softly sinking, through the darkness to a deeper darkness" (671).

She loses consciousness thinking she has been granted what she has prayed for every night for years: "that she might never have a long sickness or be a burden. She dreaded the heart-ache and humiliation of being helpless on the hands of people who would be impatient under such a care. And now she felt certain that she was going to die tonight, without troubling anybody" (671). But the teller of the story, who keeps Mrs. Harris unconscious but alive a few hours more, is merciful not only to the grandmother but also to Victoria and Vickie. They discover the seriousness of Mrs. Harris's condition in time to call the doctor and place her in a more comfortable bed. They are aghast at their own self-absorption, and they are allowed to be present at her dying, to minister to this woman who has always ministered to them. In the last paragraph, the narrator extends forgiveness to them both:

Thus Mrs. Harris slipped out of the Templetons' story; but Victoria and Vickie had still to go on, to follow the long road that leads through things unguessed at and unforeseeable. When they are old, they will come closer and closer to Grandma Harris. They will think a great deal about her, and remember things they never noticed; and their lot will be more or less like hers. They will regret that they heeded her so little; but they, too, will look into the eager, unseeing eyes of young people and feel themselves alone. They will say to themselves: "I was heartless, because I was young and strong and wanted things so much. But now I know. (672)

This novella was written in 1931, when Cather's mother was slowly dying of a stroke that had incapacitated her for almost three years. It is noteworthy that the narrator predicts that both of the younger women will eventually "come closer and closer to Grandmother Harris." One can read this at its simplest level: both will eventually have

to give up the preoccupations of youth and face death. One can also say that in this novella Cather has found a way to reconcile her much younger self with her mature self, a problem for which she had not found a solution in *The Professor's House* and *My Mortal Enemy*. That younger self was impatient to leave Red Cloud and all its narrow ways behind and to live in a more sophisticated world. Her mature self returned to the faith of her childhood and of the people she loved and admired from her childhood world, but the author still lived in that sophisticated world, which had also become a part of her. How could two such different worlds be harmonized? I suggest that in reading those letters of Father Machebeuf and in imagining the spiritual joy of the fastidious and cultivated Father Latour, Cather was able to cross the bridge between the bitterness of the novels before *Death Comes for the Archbishop* and the serenity of that novel and those that follow. □

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from ***THE SON'S BOOK***

**Daniel Tobin**

*Oh hours of childhood  
when behind each shape more than the past appeared  
and what streamed out before us was not the future.*  
Rilke, "Fourth Duino Elegy"

**The Worker**

Father on his knees behind the house  
lays the rose plants in their beds,  
palms them before he covers each.

Inside, too, he finds work,  
building at his bench in the cellar,  
fixing any lost thing: a table and chairs,  
a picture frame, the grotto  
christened for the Virgin.

The boy loves his father's hands,  
coarse-grained, furrowed like the garden.  
When he cries at night  
and the dark figure fills the room,  
he suffers against his face  
their rough warmth.

**Washing, and a Game**

His mother sings, washing his hair  
in the kitchen sink,  
white lather whirling  
down the drain's black hole.

Later, in living room's terrain,  
tucking blonde hair  
under a blue kerchief, her face  
is shadowed by houseplants.

Through his gunsight's tunnel  
the boy takes dead  
aim on his mother's heart.

## Flight

The boy no longer says goodnight,  
no longer whispers Sacred Heart Bless  
as he's tucked under covers,  
his parents grown tired of his moods.

One night, he wakes  
unable to move, unable to see,  
and feels inside a sudden stirring  
like birds before an earthquake—

then: the explosion . . . .

Was it a dream? Only an unheard shout,  
the fluency of wine in water,  
a white streak across a white vault  
of sky, unnameable . . .

## Crosses

Christ in marble,  
pillowy white,  
outside the convent  
in the cedar house.

Christ in wood  
of the carved stations  
framed on walls  
of the parish chapel.

Christ in paint  
below the altar dome,  
his crown dripping blood,  
his eyes raised to heaven.

Christ in bronze, Christ in glass.  
To each he'd kneel  
with his rote prayers,  
with the fierce mystery.

Christ in the flesh:  
his mother's rosary  
pressed to his palm  
as if to feel his pain.

## Priest Mountain

When the late snows melt  
and a few early crocuses  
blossom sides of ditchbacks,  
he hikes up Priest Mountain,  
past shacks of the poor  
and Klansmen's homes,  
past the black bear's cave  
and goshawk's nest,  
till he finds a steep path  
through broken woods, the cropped  
granite and scrub-pine  
when he reaches the summit.  
And he thinks he knows  
what Joshua must have known  
gazing over the last crag  
into Canaan, the Jordan  
rising below him, the whole  
valley filled with light.

## Calvary's Tree

For nearly a month in spring,  
dogwoods bloom, almond-white,  
as if to gather  
the dead snow of winter  
to a dream of flesh.

Soon, each blood-daubed  
petal falls  
to the street, is swept away.

## The Incinerator

Each night with a clean tug,  
his father frees  
the bruised garbage bag  
from its bin, hands it  
to his son to carry.

In the lightless hall,  
alone, he brings his hand  
to the latch, hears  
as the door opens

wind sucked down,  
the bag like fingers of the desperate  
scraping the chute  
as it falls.

Each week, the Super  
ignites the waste,  
and from that burning  
ashes ascend.

## His Mansion

Straddling the high stone wall that rises  
abruptly from the street to the mansion  
overlooking the bay, he finds his way  
to where someone cut a passage  
through the cankered fence at its crest,  
through a garden's brittle hedge, its beds  
of broken bottles where night-drunks bloom.  
From there he sees trawlers heave into narrows,  
while above them the bridge vaults towers  
through which passes an endless thread of cars.  
But climbing down, it's the same docks,  
battered facades of homes. Raw brick. Cement.  
The fish smell drifting from waves.



## Nativity

*You'll help your father with the tree?*

He climbs the clattery ladder  
to the closet's highest shelf;  
one by one lowers crates  
filled with lights, balls—the store  
of twenty Christmasses—into his father's arms;  
passes down the draggled spruce,  
its quills smelling of the year's must.

Together, they set it in its place  
beside the window, drape the lights,  
the garland, hang the balls,  
fix the crowning star.

*Lovely*, his mother says, as he arranges  
the creche: shepherds, kings, Mary, Joseph,  
the beasts with back-turned heads,  
each dulled figure chipped—  
the child, too big for the manger,  
already cast in his prophet's stare,  
arms outstretched, missing the right hand.

## Leavetaking

There's no road  
in the dream he dreams  
of himself as his father  
working in the garden,  
himself as his mother  
nursing the child  
who will be murdered  
by Herods.

On his back,  
all he is: earth  
that will someday lift him  
into dust.



## (Can you stand?) One Word More on *Forrest Gump*

Jennifer Voigt

I was the victim of an allergic reaction to *Forrest Gump*'s ontological box of chocolates. While the 300 other Megaplex patrons were sobbing uncontrollably during the credits—a reaction the film was obviously designed to produce—I was considering asking for my money back. My mother, who was with me in the theater, provided me some support with the stock phrase she uses to describe every film she wishes she hadn't wasted her time seeing. "What a piece of fluff," she said.

What I found remarkable about *Forrest Gump* was the reaction it produced in my 300 fellow moviegoers—and obviously in moviegoers around the country. People seem to relate to

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the film's nostalgic and sentimentalized version of American history. There seems to be an understanding that *Forrest Gump*'s description of America is how it should be, and that deep inside the title character is what every American is. Mary Tyler Moore, featured in the February 13, 1995 edition of *The New Yorker*, is reported to have given *Gump* consideration for her vote for the Academy Award because *Pulp Fiction* disturbed her. What I'd like to ask her is why *Forrest Gump* wasn't disturbing.

I am particularly sensitive to sentimentalization. I find my eyes misty after watching those cotton commercials on television. I become sad when I contemplate the baseball strike—and I live in Denver, where no one even considered baseball until the Broncos started losing Superbowls like they were loose change. But *Forrest Gump*'s brand of sentimentalization is downright frightening because its reduction of the American experience to simple nostalgia trivializes most of America's national struggles since the middle of the century.

*Forrest Gump* suffers most from technology's ability to alter reality. The film's gimmick is a special effect that allows filmmakers to superimpose actors onto old media footage. The result is Tom Hanks as Gump "interacting" with Presidents Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon and participating in events critical to the shape of history in late 20th century America. But where a book like Tim O'Brien's *In the Lake of the Woods* combines fiction with events that have actually taken place to explore and elucidate memory, *Forrest Gump*'s combination of fact and fiction clouds and re-orders memory. It is demeaning, and when you think about it, frightening the way the special effect diminishes the emotion of the event, erases its significance altogether, or gives it an alternate meaning.

Scenes from American history as potent as George Wallace standing at the schoolroom door barring black students from registering at the University of Alabama combined with Forrest's simple musings reveal the film's naivete in regards to race relations, American social history, and just about everything else. Gump's simplicity in this scene insults the movement for civil rights in America by making the struggle for racial equality look easy. All we have to do is overlook color and be nice to each other, the scene tells us, then everything will be okay. The scene stifles any national contemplation, either of the circumstances that would lead the governor of a state to refuse any of its citizens an entree into one of its institutions, or of the consequences of such an action.

If *Forrest Gump* is deplorable for its simplification of issues that have shaped America as a nation, it is just as deplorable for treating them as episodes in a situation comedy. The treatment of a situation as terrifying as Wallace's human blockade of the University of Alabama as a joke in one long stream of jokes is simply an attempt to give America an easy way out of a sticky situation. Our laughter during this scene erases our national guilt, acquits us of blame, and relieves us of any present or future responsibility. The altered reality of the altered media lead the way to mass denial. We want to forget that Forrest is the namesake of Nathan Bedford Forrest, founder of the Ku Klux Klan. We want to forget everything that George Wallace stood for in the 60s—or any of the implications that stance has for today—not realizing that we should be disgusted with a film that treats something as complex a social problem as US race relations with a kiss and make up attitude.

This is especially true at a time when other formerly ethnically diverse

countries have collapsed in the wake of national hatred. We are meant to laugh at this scene just as we laugh at the rather tasteless scene alluding to Lyndon Johnson's appendectomy scar. This "chronicle" of late 20th century American history remembers Johnson as the good ol' boy he was, but refuses to recognize him as a major American political figure behind the Vietnam War.

As Johnson's very presence in the film indicates, *Forrest Gump* downplays the significance of America's foreign entanglements as thoroughly as it does the country's civil wars. The film's blatant sentimentalization of the political climate surrounding the Vietnam War is just as insulting as its reaction to racism. The shot of the war hero and the war protester embracing in a D.C. reflecting pool during the march on Washington could only be imagined in the post-Gulf War era, when we support our troops because no one wants to be blamed for the bad feelings we have left over from Vietnam. Forrest and his childhood sweetheart overcoming political difference because they have a common background is an artificial and wholly fictionalized account of the political turmoil the war caused. It is in the film to make us feel good about that part of our history without confronting the era's anger, fear, or sadness. It does the same thing that the yellow ribbons worn during the Gulf War did for us; it makes us feel good about an act of aggression against another country, it takes our minds off the fact that the troops we're supporting are killing people and being killed.

*Forrest Gump* also suffers from the notion that ideas are smaller than people, that the average individual can exist without ever intersecting them. Forrest drifts through the late 20th century without being effected by any of it. He visits the presidents and all he's excited about is the availability of Coca-Cola. He is injured saving his entire platoon from death in Vietnam and he is excited only because the

nature of his injury allows him all the ice cream he can eat.

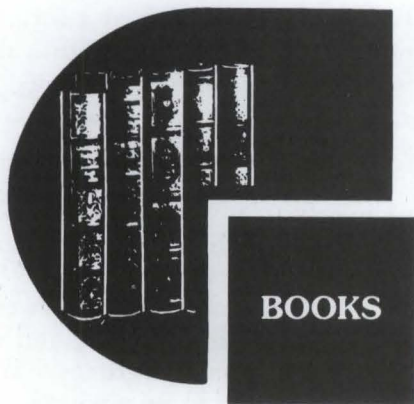
To explore the consequences of such a reality that severs the personal from the he political within the context and language of film, it is instructive to take a brief look at Zhang Yimou's most recent film, *To Live*. As *Forrest Gump* relies heavily on American history for theme and backdrop, *To Live* spans decades of China's history from before the Communist ascension through the Cultural Revolution. But unlike Forrest Gump, who at times walks through Hell and emerges unscathed, the lives of *To Live's* characters are constantly being upset by even the slightest of their government's ideological changes. They smile through the pain in their lives not because of their simplicity, but because they realize that acquiescence often means survival. They are made aware at every turn how ideas influence their lives, how ripples in the waters of Peking's bureaucracy cause tidal waves in their lives. The color red is an important symbol in Zhang's unusually colorless film because it is a symbol of communism and also because is it the color of blood. Zhang's characters bleed—often literally, and at times fatally—because of their relationship to ideas. *Forrest Gump* cleans up the blood. It exalts in the individual's triumph over ideology by embracing an ideology of its own.

*Forrest Gump's* ideology is probably most apparent in his Gumpisms—the one line inspirational phrases by which he lives and which provide him a moral armor against ideas that could lead him to stray from his path. Americans probably relate to Gumpisms because, in part, we have a culture based on them. Americans have always loved one-line inspirational phrases. As Whit Stillman's film *Barcelona* points out, the entire American business and self-help culture depends on inspirational phrases. Benjamin Franklin, whose *Autobiography* reads like a blueprint for material success in America, included

in his *Poor Richard's Almanac* single snippets of wisdom designed to make one "healthy, wealthy, and wise," as it were. We are so familiar with them as ways of guiding us through emotional distress that *Saturday Night Live* writers can spoof them in skits like "Stuart Smally" and "Deep Thoughts." Such phrases have paved the way for our national culture of the soundbite. Happy since Franklin to eat life in small easily digestible bits we, like Gump, allow them to define how we live our lives.

Soundbites prevent us from developing life-philosophies of our own. Ronald Reagan knew this, and throughout his presidency gloried in the sheer prevention of introspection they foster. "The Great Communicator," he realized much as Nixon and Kennedy before him did, that Americans will believe—and I choose that word carefully, relying on *Cresset* readers' understanding of what belief entails—what they see on television. The result of Ronald Reagan saying "God Bless America" so many times during his eight years in office is that now it seems that God blessing America has become official policy. The Reagan eighties in many ways created the environmental conditions that gave rise to *Forrest Gump*. Reagan's silent message to the nation that sincerity is the primary virtue resonates through Hanks' portrayal of Gump. Director Robert Zemekis' use of altered media footage takes up the alteration of reality where Reagan left off.

Mom was wrong when she called *Forrest Gump* a piece of fluff. If it were, it would have disappeared harmlessly into the film purgatory of the video store. Instead, America's adoption of Gump as a hero, a son, and a sage testifies to the film's power. The fluff factor in this scenario are the moviegoers who allow their senses of nostalgia to dictate their reaction to this film. *Forrest Gump* calls for a national *unconsciousness*—and that's what we should cry about. □



## Home and Away

Peter A. Scholl, *Garrison Keillor*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1994.

Years from now, will humorist Garrison Keillor be remembered as the Shy Person Bearing "The News from Lake Wobegon"? Or the storyteller some compare with Mark Twain? Or the author of books? Or the *New Yorker* writer whose heroes—White, Thurber, Liebling, Perlman—inspired him to seek out that magazine?

Peter Scholl, in his literary biography *Garrison Keillor*, offers no opinions on where in history the tall Minnesotan of Public Radio and printed page fame might land. Rather, his heavily researched work leaves such conjecture to the reader. Scholl, professor of English at Luther College in Decorah, Iowa, does provide ample resources for readers to get a good handle on the complex Keillor and the complexity of being a gifted storyteller

as well as a writer who has gained critical and popular success.

The clashes of Keillor's public career as a radio performer with his more-protected writer's life are examined by Scholl who traces the dual careers. Significant dates include: 1970—Keillor takes his first radio job at 18 with a University of Minnesota station; 1970—His first *New Yorker* pieces are published; 1974—The first live show of "A Prairie Home Companion" is broadcast; 1982—The book *Happy to Be Here* is published; Keillor quits his morning radio show to work on *Lake Wobegon Days*; 1987—He moves to New York to join the *New Yorker* as a staff writer after the "Prairie Home" broadcasts end; 1989 Keillor begins the "American Radio Company" series that continues even after he returns to the Midwest in 1992. Keillor now lives in rural Wisconsin, commuting to Minneapolis for "Prairie Home" broadcasts.

Keillor once said he never thought of radio as a real profession but it was through radio's "PHC" that he first gained fame that found him on the cover of *Time* in 1985. He had entered radio on the spur of the moment as a college freshman. Near the end of the 13-year run of "PHC" ending in 1987, Keillor said he doubted he still would be in radio if it weren't for that program. "I'm a writer who is a temporary performer." Scholl notes that "Keillor's immense popularity as a writer was made possible in large part because he had a huge, enthusiastic following from his radio shows. That the horse of the radio show should pull the cart of his greatest literary success is an irony fully discernible only in the light of Keillor's early and singular devotion to

the task of writing words for the permanence of print, as opposed to those he wrote to fly away over the air." When 29 pieces, 26 of them from *The New Yorker*, were published in *Happy to Be Here* in 1982, most reviewers focused on "PHC" and the shy storyteller from Lake Wobegon, "giving the impression almost that he had written it in his odd hours, as if writing for publication was his hobby, which ironically, is exactly how he had thought of the radio show in its inception."

*The New Yorker*, its editors and writers long had been a strong influence on Keillor, who, at age 24, made a trip east seeking a writing job with *The New Yorker* or *The Atlantic*. He was unsuccessful but did crack *The New Yorker* four years later. The magazine's "Talk of the Town" intrigued him from the start. He viewed the pieces as "the voice of inexhaustible youth, charged with curiosity and skepticism . . ." Keillor himself was to become a writer of unsigned "Talk" pieces. *The New Yorker* never disclosed authorship of any "Talk" articles, yet in many of his pieces, Keillor took pains to preserve his anonymity.

Mark Twain ranks high as an influence on Keillor, the storyteller, and it can be said the two share membership on the short list of literary comedians. Twain insisted the humorist must master the art of telling, and Keillor must be regarded as an exceptional teller. In a radio show originating from Twain's house in Hartford, Connecticut, Keillor said, "He is the father of us all who wrote humorous and semi-humorous stuff."

What other influences made a mark? Scholl notes that Keillor was a student of old-time radio and studied

radio tapes of performers of the 1930s and 1940s. As a longtime fan of Bob and Ray, this reviewer thought it odd that Scholl did not mention that remarkable team since Keillor and Bob and Ray had strong ties as radio performers whose work was grounded in gentle humor, much of it poking fun at radio and television commercials.

**Karl Henrichs**

*After Eden: Facing the Challenge of Gender Reconciliation.* Mary Stewart van Leeuwen, et al. Wm. B. Eerdmans: 1993.

Lady Astor was wrong. One can be too thin and, absent any value-based moderator, sociopathically rich. Moreover, argue the authors of *After Eden*, words hurt every bit as deeply as do sticks and stones, lacerating the human spirit and irrevocably disabling the means by which individuals form relationships with others and with communities. For women, the lacerations which build up over time in the forms of socially-dictated absolutes about language, dress, work or family become scars that can harden with each successive generation.

These are strong claims which intend to call into question some deeply held cultural understandings of men, women and individual agency in society. They are not new claims, however. Indeed, feminist criticism has been raising them for some time and, if one reads only the title of this book, one might erroneously categorize it as restated grievance literature concerning the status of women in American and leave it at that. As the book's subtitle, *Facing the Challenge of Gender Reconciliation*, announces however, these authors clearly have a much more complex project in mind.

The complication is that the several authors, led by Project Editor Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, set out to study the problems of gender from a specifically doctrinal forum, the Calvin Center for Christian Scholarship. That forum is rooted directly in the biblical Protestant tradition which underwrites social interaction with a historically male-dominant normative system. Accepting the biblical tradition as valid at the outset means that the authors cannot simply reject traditional male-dominant normative systems out of hand. Instead, they take on the tradition to do what the book's title promises, face the challenge of gender reconciliation while, to their significant credit, remaining faith-filled and true to their tradition.

It is no mean task. It requires engaging both scripture and history, identifying, and exploring some uncomfortable truths presented by both. One truth is that, without benefit of some interpretation, scripture can be a fertile ground for those who would justify subjugating women to external control authorities on account of gender. Another truth is that, claiming justification in scripture, much of Christian tradition has done just that. Still, argue the authors, to stop there is to fall short of the whole truth. If one is really to claim the challenge of gender reconciliation within a faith tradition, one must do so from within the integrity of that tradition. That which societies have done to women at the hand of scripture must be rejected without rejecting scripture itself.

In this project, the authors succeed by placing their study squarely in its soteriological context, the "times between the times" in which they live faith lives in the assurance of a specific future inextricably evolving out of a specific past. That context is important because it offers two components to the discourse about the interaction of women with men in religion-governed relationships. First, it makes it far more difficult simply to chuck out the past as medieval patristic nonsense. Tradition is part of the whole story, a whole which makes no sense without it

and, for persons of faith, risks the future if it is dismissed.

Second, perhaps more importantly, setting the study in the current times between the times shows how very much times change. Within feminism itself, modern deconstructionists and critical theorists are taking on Enlightenment liberalism. Liberal feminism, to its credit, argued a certain moral system with its liberation call, one which asked the institutions of society to move toward a new social goal of incremental change in participation by persons without asking for an absolute relativizing of the whole social ethos. Enlightenment liberalism, translated into feminist terms, asked for what other forms of liberalism were asking, a rationalist reorganization of society, free of dominant groups of any stripe and willing to negotiate questions of social participation on grounds of individual right and reasonable distribution of social goods. To do that required identification of the causes of women's experienced oppression and a reasoned appeal to the oppressors to change in service of a common, higher good.

Granted, the project proved more complicated than most feminists realized, particularly when the kinds of critical theory methodologies raised by liberalism found use among social radicals who began to criticize other women as part of oppressive economic structures and critical race theorists who found legitimate fault with many liberal feminists' culpability in racist social oppression. Most recently, deconstructionists have targeted feminist scholarship as self-serving and its claims of moral content irrelevant. Like the rest of society approaching the 21st century, feminism in general is left searching for solid moral-code material among the *bricolage* of its own recent fracturings.

It is from this dilemma that Van Leeuwen and her colleagues make a move forward. Reformed Christian feminists have to face two tasks. They must at once overcome the wrong of tradition without destroying the right of the future. To live with integrity in the "times between the times" is to

embrace all chapters of the soteriological story, those past and those for which Reformed Christianity waits in blessed assurance. To look at that future time accurately from the ambiguity of our own does require revisiting the past. We must rediscover how we got here in the light of where we are going. Certainly we must discover why moral theory—more importantly moral theology—became hegemonically male-dominated to begin with and how that dominance worked to make gender-specific the rules of language, dress, work and family. If traditional moral theory is taken only within the relativity of modern social morality, it is a history of the rights abuse of genders and of class and race within genders. That is sufficient to indict history as a positive wrong and call for change in the social engineering of temporal institutions and power structures. When moral theology is taken in the soteriological faith context, however, the gendering of relationships and consequent manipulation of female epistemology renders a more chilling effect, one that should and does speak to religious persons of past wrongs in ways which imply future consequences.

Theologically gendered social role and restriction, reinforced by generations of institutional reiteration, do manipulate women's ways of knowing, learning and understanding, so that anything identifiable as a "female epistemology" is one manipulated by male hegemony. Such manipulation does not just keep women from understanding an independent relationship of person to social power, it does not allow women to understand an independent relationship of person to moral truth. Women who learn, over time, to speak in a "different voice" in society also learn that, since the voice orients women differently more than just to one another and society. It orients them differently to God.

Women, like men, are freed from sin by Christ's passion, death and resurrection. Gendered ethics which require them to exercise a gendered freedom, limited by hegemonic male moral theory, proscribe them from ful-

filling freely their obligation to respond to the grace of Christ's salvific act. It is in discharging that obligation, however, that the moral imperative to human agency concerning God is fulfilled. Yet, recognizing that obligation for what it is, an obligation to God, irrevocably lays claim to direct exercise of the moral imperative by the individual, irrespective of that individual's gender. The higher good served by properly discharging one's obligation to God thus renders not only a relativist contemporary ethic unacceptable but indicts the moral vision of a gendered Christian ethic as well.

Herein lies the rub for the Reformed tradition. Proper exercise of the moral imperative to respond to grace requires that the respondent be free to act in light of the individual moral agent's understanding of grace. Male hegemony, which limits women's actions, indeed women's epistemological liberty, is itself then failing to recognize the soteriological context it must honor. The eschatological truth of living between the times is that the future must be honored by all persons of faith in freely shaping their individual moral activity. The tradition that fails to acknowledge the whole of the salvation story is not honoring that truth.

Simply to argue, however, that in a fallen world all have fallen short of grace is hardly the stuff of headlines. Yet, if all have fallen short, then all, including men and male hegemonic institutions, have good reason to amend their actions and, in doing so, begin to address the destructive element identified in gendered traditions. To that end, it is useful to remember the announcement in the subtitle of this book, that it aims to face the challenge of gender *reconciliation*. That goal now may be understood as worthy of pursuit by both men and women living between the times who understand that the times themselves call out the imperative of responding to grace and that response is required both of each and of all.

What changes are necessary to meet the challenge the authors do not explain. Their project was to rectify

the task to the biblical tradition they share. To the degree that they succeed, they still must know they offer a critique of the past that not all within their tradition share and a vision of the future that not all within their tradition would seek gladly or with great conviction. Still, if one accepts the presupposition that the biblical tradition seeks and finds Biblical truths, then one must also accept that revelation does not stop with the passing of time. Each generation must respond to grace in its own time, find the truth revealed to it and build in that truth the culmination of history in which a reconciled people of God respond with authentic, freed voices, not just to one another but to the God who gives voice to all.

Patricia McIntyre

Bradley P. Holt, *Thirsty for God: A Brief History of Christian Spirituality*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1993.

As several recent studies of American religious practice have observed, the late twentieth century is a time of great seeking. There is a hunger among us for what is vaguely called "spirituality," which may or may not have anything to do with a particular religion. Indeed, the term is often used to describe the search for personal wholeness, for a lifestyle which nourishes creativity, or for a connectedness to the life force of the world that is understood apart from any religious tradition. In *Thirsty for God*, Bradley P. Holt invites those who seek a spiritual dimension in life to investigate the richly various traditions of Christian spirituality which, he argues, integrate the contemporary desire for self-healing with the broader perspective that arises from attending to the self's relationship to God, to others, and to cre-

ation. He writes also for Christians who are unaware of the spiritual traditions to which they are heirs and for the students in his Christian Spirituality courses at Augsburg College.

Holt's method is to weave significant moments and figures in Christian spirituality in and out of an account of the multicultural history of Christianity itself. A former professor at the Theological College of Northern Nigeria, Holt wants his readers to feel accompanied not only by Augustine and Teresa of Avila, but by significant figures in non-European and non-Western Christian contexts and by ordinary Christians of every continent whose names we do not know, but whose daily practices deepen and renew the tradition which claims all for us. *Thirsty for God* is a good book for those who suspect that spirituality divorces us from the political. In examining all the cultural contexts in which Christianity has thrived, Holt keeps political questions always before us.

Holt's approach is marked by an openness to Christian spirituality in all its variety, although he insists upon the centrality of Christ and the Bible as its boundaries. His historical approach has much to commend it, not least that the tradition itself undercuts many contemporary assumptions about Christian spirituality, such as that it is wholly individualistic. Holt searches the tradition for a wide variety of images and practices. In his search for feminine images of God, for example, he turns not only to Julian of Norwich but also John Calvin and the Odes of Solomon. At the end of each chapter, he offers brief instruction in spiritual exercises drawn from sources as diverse as the Ignatian and Lutheran traditions, Eastern Orthodoxy and liberation theology.

Considering the sweep of Christian history as he does, Holt must necessarily paint with a broad brush. Although he makes no claims to be on the cutting edge of scholarship, there are a few places where his large strokes mislead. He once refers, for example,

to the early Middle Ages as "the Dark Ages" (52), a phrase that has certainly fallen out of fashion, in not small part because of the work of scholars of medieval spirituality. Secondly, he restricts his definition of mysticism to the striving after union with God. The recent work of Bernard McGinn has offered a broader definition, one that includes the consciousness of God's immediate presence. A basic textbook on Christian spirituality like Holt's could only benefit from engagement with received notions about the mystical element of Christianity.

*Thirsty for God* is written from a decidedly Lutheran perspective, one that causes Holt several times to express his anxiety that spiritual practices might suggest a human striving that does not rely on grace. He is able, however, to cast as loving and critical an eye on his own tradition as he does on others. *Thirsty for God* incites the reader to enter into the many living traditions within Christianity and to find there, as Bradley Holt clearly has, both the blessing and the challenge of a life lived with attention to the presence of God.

**Stephanie Paulsell**

Stein, Stephen J. *The Shaker Experience in America: A History of the United Society of Believers*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992.

In this monograph, Indiana University professor Stephen J. Stein intended to provide a balanced account, both social and intellectual, of the United Society of Believers. The thrust of his project was to revise and synthesize. First, he confronts what he called a dilemma facing Shaker studies, noting that "the fascination and preoccupation with materi-

al culture have prevented a balanced recovery and interpretation of the past" (xiii). The new popular interest in the Believers had often left, according to Stein, the field of Shaker studies barren of its socio-economic and religious elements.

Also, prior to Stein's work, there existed no comprehensive interpretation of the Shakers from their beginnings until the present. Early scholarship either dealt with ante-bellum Shakerism, such as E. D. Andrew's *The People Called Shakers* (1953), or it primarily explored the eastern Shaker communities, for example Priscilla J. Brewer's *Shaker Communities, Shaker Lives* (1987). Other studies covered only special themes, of which Daniel W. Patterson's *The Shaker Spiritual* (1979) and Clarke Garret's *Spirit Possession and Popular Religion* (1987) were notable. Another prominent interpretation of the Shakers employed a feminist hermeneutic in order to discuss gender and power in this group. Many gender studies on the Shakers found representation in such periodicals as *Daughters of Sarah*, *the Journal of Feminist Studies*, and *the Journal of Women and Culture*.

*The Shaker Experience in America* provides historians with the first general (if not encyclopedic) study of the Believers. Stein himself claims in the preface that he intended to treat both the eastern and western manifestations of the group from their beginning to the present (xiv). He also says that he would show the reader important parallels between the United Society of Believers and other religious groups and between Shaker history and United States history.

Stein contends perhaps immodestly that his intended audience included three identifiable groups: the general reader, those with specialized Shaker interests, and the historical guild (xiv-xv). It is unlikely, however, that all three of these groups could appreciate the diversity of interpretive techniques that Stein employs in his analysis. Besides using the tools of the

historian, he applies methods used in history of religion, sociology, psychology, and biblical criticism. Many famous theorists inform Stein's work, including Peter Berger, Ernst Troeltsch, Max Weber, William James, and Rudolf Bultmann.

Stein has divided the Shaker Experience in America into five major historical periods. The first section, entitled "A New and Strange Religion: the Age of the Founders: 1747-1787," presents the pivotal role of the matriarchs and patriarchs of what would become Shakerism. Here Stein takes to task many previous interpretations of the founders, especially those of Anne Lee. He convincingly applies the tools of the biblical critic, including source and redaction criticism, to suggest that most of the material about the founders, and Anne Lee in particular, had gone through various revisions during the second and third generations of Believers. He concludes, therefore, that one is left with a necessarily sketchy portrait of the founders, a portrait which tells more about the following generation than about this beginning period. He also introduces sociological terms like "sect" and "institution." Stein claims that the group, rather than being the Shakerism one knows today, had not developed its "world structure" (borrowing the term from Berger); in other words, the group was in the liminal stage of borrowing from its host culture (Protestant Christianity) and forming its own sense of identity (451, n. 96).

Stein suggests that, during the second period of Shaker history, between 1787-1826, the United Society of Believers developed the religious, economic, and social structures which allowed them to survive as an institution. As he implies in his first section, he claims that during this period the second and third generation of Shakers developed "an organized religious reality with identifiable forms and structures" (452, n. 2). The Believers set down social rules and regulations, created fixed ritual worship,

and codified theological positions. Leaders like Lucy Wright, Joseph Meachum, and David Darrow became the stars of Shakerism and the book. Stein theorized that this period of Shaker history, when the group moved away from sectarianism, was when "Shakerism" became a bona fide religious denomination. The mythology concerning the beginning period, having been created during this time, exemplified this transformation. Other evidences include the consolidation of authority, theological apologetics, westward expansion, and social strictures like celibacy and common property.

Between 1827 and 1875, Shakerism reached a level of maturity, indicated by its prosperity and the growing acceptance of the group by the wider American culture. Stein shows that the old strategies of withdrawing from society became increasingly difficult to maintain during this third period of Shaker history. The United Society experienced dissension within its own ranks in the face of unavoidable contact with the wider American culture. The period began with the closing of the first western commune in 1827 and ended with the closing of the first eastern commune in 1875. Stein discusses the regional conflicts of the period, the troubles with apostasy and recruitment, and the innovations of the group to resolve these troubles. He also provides detailed and fascinating accounts of economic and social life of the Believers in the communes. He proposes, resisting a revivalistic model of history, that the ecstatic spiritual outbreaks of this period, Mother Anne's Work, were part and parcel of the innovations meant to deal with the group's troubles, rather than a distinct historical period in itself.

Accommodation, according to Stein, characterized the fourth period of Shaker history between 1875-1948. The changes of the late nineteenth century, particularly the forces of industrialization, urbanization, and

pluralization, also led to the transformation of the Society. A new generation of Shakers like Catherine Allen sought to bring the Shakers out of their secluded existence so that they could participate in the reform of the wider American culture. Shakers also celebrated an acknowledged theological pluralism, in which some Society groups emphasized different strains of spirituality as diverse as spiritualism, revivalism, and the traditional ideas from the formative period.

Besides accommodation, the motif of aging and decline dominated Shaker thought. The Society was literally dying and shrinking. The pluralism of belief and secularization which caused creative innovations also shattered the harmony and unity of the communities. Shakers increasingly became dependent on the secular culture, chiefly through the selling of their crafts and handiwork to tourists and collectors.

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□ **Frank Vatai** is a member of the Department of History at California State University-Northridge.



The final chapter of the book bears a title from the haunting words of Believer Mildred Barker, "I almost expect to be remembered as a chair." This statement epitomized the anxiety of the Believers who were waiting for the end. Stein describes this period as both heroic and pathetic. He carefully notes that the end has not occurred and suggests that the idea of rebirth would be more appropriate. The popular interest in the Believers, "the world of Shaker," has revitalized the Society and maintained an interest and stake in the group as a whole. While little of the group's sectarian nature of beliefs exist, many have been attracted to the group because of American preoccupation with communal lifestyles. Any judgment would certainly be premature, but Stein suggests that it may be the friends of Shakers, the world of Shaker, which sustain and perpetuate the group in a way the Believers themselves did not expect or intend.

There are times when it seems that Stein's heuristic model for Shaker history—that it has followed the pattern of human life (birth, infancy, adolescence, adulthood, old age, and death)—necessarily determines how certain historical events are interpreted (121). Accommodation, innovation, and division seem to have hallmarks of Shakerism throughout its history. The distinctions between Shaker "adolescence" (1827-1875), characterized by innovation, prosperity and cultural acceptance, and "adulthood," (1875-1948), marked by accommodation and declension, seem thin at times. The former period was framed by the closing of communes and the latter period was marked by innovation in the face of cultural and religious pluralism. Despite his intentions, Stein does not always adequately make clear connections between the history of the United Society and that of the wider culture. Mother Anne's work might be understood to reflect the wider religious values characterized by the Second Great Awakening. One is

also left to consider why, for example, while the Civil War did not become a landmark event in Shaker history, the time inaugurated by the end of the Second World War did provide a clear break in periodization. These questions are directly related to the Society and their relationship with the wider American culture.

Despite these modest criticisms, Stein has provided the field of Shaker studies with its most definitive work. His treatment of this subject is sympathetic and well researched. The book's notes are copious and helpful. He has carefully synthesized an enormous amount of material with his own original research. His resulting contributions in this field are many. Identifying the creation of history surrounding the founders, he shows that it was really the second generation which was responsible for what became known as Shakerism. He also shows the important and often tenuous relationship between the eastern and western regions of the Society. Nowhere else will the novice or the scholar find a text, which in one volume treats the entire Shaker experience, east and west, from its beginning to the present by tracing its social, economic, and theological continuities.

**J. Michael Utzinger**

George Woodcock, *The Monk and His Message: Undermining the Myth of History*, Vancouver and Toronto, Douglas & McIntyre, 1992, Can \$19.95.

In an earlier book, George Woodcock characterized the period roughly coincidental with the Sixth Century B.C. as the "marvelous century." The thinkers and ideas which then emerged irreversibly altered the way in which we examine both ourselves and the world around us. In *The Monk and His Message*, Woodcock both narrows and broadens his scope. It is now the years 1989 and 1991 which bear the proud epithet, "the marvellous years." These were years of liberation, especially in Eastern Europe, when centuries of accumulated historicism were sloughed off, and thinkers and ideas which had dominated human behavior were suddenly exposed as irrelevant and powerless. To give us an idea of just how profound these changes were, Woodcock provides us with a survey of the discredited ideology, historicism. The author is passionate about his subject. It is not enough to describe the decline of historicist thinking, but, lest this hardy and, to intellectuals at least, seductive way of looking at the past and the future reemerge, Woodcock strives to get his own licks in. His aim is to deconstruct historicism, "to undermine the conventions by which so much formal, especially political, history has been written." The author targets the ways in which history has so often been perceived: history as destiny, history as determined by laws, history as eschatological drama.

Much of the book is devoted to a survey of the development of this strain of thinking, from the cyclical views of the Brahmins and the apocalyptic visions of Zoroaster to the Great Themes ideas of Herodotus and Thucydides, the millenarianism of the Roman Empire and the Middle Ages, to the full blown historicism of the modern world.

Both liberals and totalitarians of the left and the right are heavily weighed down by historicist baggage. For 19th Century liberals progress

assumed the status of destiny and Samuel Smiles' admonition that every day in every way things are getting better and better became a form of catechism leading, ultimately, to a utopia on earth. Woodcock's best chapters deal with Marx and Lenin. For the former, history remained a self-propelling prophetic force, while Lenin eagerly identified himself with 'History.' In the author's words, "he would be the apocalyptic but also the apocalypse." Fascism and Nazism were also historicist. Their thinking too was dominated by iron laws of history leading to the special destiny of the master race (as opposed to the working class). As well, a Great Man would be the instrument of destiny, the personification of History. Woodcock is at pains to point out the alliance between those in power and conservative historians. Historicism has provided rulers of all stripes from the Greek tyrant Peisistratus to the Canadian Trudeau with legitimacy. In turn, tame historians are allowed into the corridors of power and accorded the status of secular priests.

There is a price to pay for all this: we have become the slaves of destiny and have forfeited our right to chart our own individual and collective course. Not all schools of thought dovetailed into historicism. There were counter-movements. Woodcock discusses the attempts of 19th Century anarchists to provide Europeans with an alternative model. However the warnings of those such as Bakunin only came to fruition in the late twentieth century.

As Woodcock approaches 1989 his style becomes more journalistic. He chronicles the fall of communism and the Soviet empire and the emergence of democracies in Central Europe. Why did the old historicist system fail? Communism ceased to be a sustaining pillar for the rulers and no longer provided a focus of faith for the ruled. Instead, there occurred a spontaneous and massive shift of consciousness which made it possible the power of the powerless and the possibility of the impossible. These two phrases are taken from the writings of

Vaclav Havel, a key player of the time. To Woodcock, Havel is a hero, a worthy heir to the likes of Kropotkin, Proudhon, Orwell and Gandhi, a soul-mate of the Dalai Lama. But for the revolution to succeed, the masses had to participate and this is what happened in Poland, Hungary, East Germany and Czechoslovakia. Rejecting "The inevitable," the peoples of *mitteleuropa* turned instead to the best of their star-crossed traditions, to Christianity and democracy. Even granting Woodcock's point, his paean to the German masses in 1989 makes for strange reading: "For when crowds in Berlin and Leipzig proclaimed themselves 'das Volk' and implied that being 'das Volk' gave them a special function, they were reaching back into the ancient traditions of Germany, into the far days when the tribal leader Herman defeated the Roman legions with the power of free warriors among whom the chiefs were merely first among equals." Woodcock reminds us that such a tribe has more in common with the Iroquois and the Blackfoot than with Hitler's ranting stereotype.

If history is not foreordained and foreseeable, determined and prophetic, then what is it? According to Woodcock, history is change, chance and choice. The result is an eternal chaos from which a true historian or, for that matter, a great leader derives not laws, but more loosely binding patterns. As for chaos itself, the sympathetic chronicler of the Anarchist movement and its leading exponents informs us that we should view it not with trepidation but as an opportunity to affect those key ideas, the power of the powerless, the possibility of the impossible. In what is a statement of faith, Woodcock declares that the uncertainties of freedom are easier to endure than the certainties of tyranny.

Change did not stop in 1991. It continues still and now it is the turn of others to take chances and make choices. Woodcock's study of history has convinced him that the situation in China is analogous to that of Eastern Europe in the late 1980s. And we in the West labor under the baneful influence of one of the last major his-

toricist entities, the nation-state. As presently constituted, our political system is a dangerous abstraction, belligerent, undemocratic and increasingly suffering from the same loss of confidence and faith as plagued the discontented and under-represented masses of the Soviet system.

Disdaining the mantle of the prophet, Woodcock yet has some "modest" proposals. We too should make our choices for change based on the best of our past. Vision is important and liberating, writes Woodcock, and this entails a society based on voluntarism and mutual aid, on participatory democracy and referenda, on respect for the environment, on economic pluralism and political federalism. If the politicians balk at such devolution then it must be our turn to take to the streets. This is Woodcock's advice to his fellow Canadians, heirs of the bankrupt policies of Trudeau and Mulroney. The grand scheme calls for "zones of peace" where significant areas of the world become militarily disengaged and environmentally sensitive. Mutual aid would consist of individual states sacrificing part of their autonomy for the ecological benefit of planet earth. Peace between human beings, peace between all living things and coexistence between humanity and mother nature; this is the message of the Monk, the Dalai Lama. If Vaclav Havel brought about the power of the powerless, then it is the Dalai Lama with his vision of zones of peace, of *ahimsa*, who points the way to the possibility of the impossible.

It is perhaps all too easy to point out some of the difficulties with Woodcock's ideas. Nationalism of the 19th century variety, historicist to the core, is hardly dead in Eastern Europe and is becoming increasingly more vehement. The idea of citizens of the "Peaceable Kingdom" taking to the streets for anything besides hockey disappointments has about as much chance for success and humanity sincerely according wild animals the status of honorary comrades or, most farfetched, true feelings of solidarity developing between intellectuals and populace. In the new world order

countries such as Brazil, Peru and Indonesia are to place their forests under international supervision "without any sense of losing dignity or territory." Surely, all these things are, dare we say, impossible. Further, although Woodcock deconstructs historicism, one cannot but come away with the feeling that the author often sails close to historicist winds. Woodcock lists those who are adherents of the lie, historicism, and those of the side of openness and choice, contending with each other to point out that his vision is not utopian, for change is built in, and that he himself is not a prophet, merely "seismographically" sensitive, but how great is the difference between Woodcock and his enemies. Many who speak of destiny and God's plan also have our good at heart.

In spite of this, there is much to praise and ponder over in Woodcock's book. Today in the United States of America we hear increasing talk even

in the mainstream of an alternative to politics as usual. There are serious discussions of third parties. Characters such as Ross Perot make huge waves with their libertarian message. Newt Gingrich holds up to the camera a pamphlet which contains a new "Contract with America." The term limits debate shows just how much confidence we have in our politicians. Change is in the air, choices have to be made, chances taken. The contributions of *The Monk and His Message* are two fold. Woodcock offers us a radical alternative to business as usual. As important, he has done much to clarify for us our present malaise. The present is made comprehensible by reference to the past, and this, as Woodcock would agree, is the true art of history.

Frank L. Vatai

## Notes on Poets—

**William Aiken** works for low-income housing projects in Appalachia, and has published in *Poetry*, *Cream City Review*, with forthcoming work in *The American Scholar* and *The Iowa Review*.

**Barbara Seaman** is a graduate of Wheaton College, a native Kansan, and a lover of prairie flowers.

**Daniel Tobin** teaches at Carthage College. His poems have been published in *Poetry*, *The American Scholar* and *The Cresset*, among others.

**Simon Perchik** has published poetry in many periodicals, among them *Partisan Review*, *The Nation*, *Poetry*, and *The New Yorker*.

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while your one hand was folded  
over the other—without your arms

and your stone that once had a mouth  
no longer counts the others  
—for a while it grew leaves

and the green you can still see  
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