Hungry Ghosts, Honorable Elders, and Senior Citizens
Is America on the Verge of a Liberal Reawakening?
Trials and Triumphs of American Lutheran Female Clergy

A review of Literature, the Arts, and Public Affairs
April, 1988
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Above: Marjory Wood Crawford, Chesterton, Indiana. Purple and Yellow Iris, 1985, watercolor on paper, 22 1/4 x 30 inches. Sloan Collection, Valparaiso University Museum of Art. Sloan Fund purchase. 87.23


In the watercolor still life, the soft dapples of watery pastel petals gently celebrate a delightfully fresh state of floral nature, while the oil still life seems redemptively to release truncated fish forms into a prismatic bouquet of light-filled energy. The watercolor is by a VU alumna, the oil by a nationally prominent figurative expressionist. RHWB
A New Political Agenda?

As the Reagan Administration enters upon the terminal stages of its lame-duck phase, the obvious question arises: will Reaganism depart national politics with Reagan? Will the coming to power next January of a new administration bring with it a transformed political agenda for the nation? The answer to that question depends in major part, of course, on which candidate of which party wins the November election. A George Bush administration would look nothing at all like that of, say, a Jesse Jackson (or even a Michael Dukakis). But a number of political observers have recently suggested that, regardless of who wins the White House in 1988, we are on the verge of a new era in national political discussion. (How close to that new era we are will itself obviously make a big difference in the election outcome.)

Professor Gary Orfield, a political scientist at the University of Chicago, believes that after an extended period "of very constricted national political debate" politicians are taking on a range of issues and liberal policy options that the Reagan ascendancy had relegated to oblivion. Writing in the Chicago Tribune (March 29-30), Prof. Orfield notes that until very recently the terms of political discussion had been set by the Reagan revolution of 1981. The President's supply-side tax cut program of that year reduced government revenues and starved federal programs even as his anti-government rhetoric worked to delegitimize an activist federal role. As the deficit increased, debate focused not on what government programs might accomplish but on where they might most substantially be reduced.

Liberals in fact did a better job of preserving existing programs than is often supposed; the rate of government spending on domestic programs stopped growing, but it did not go into reverse. Still, the terms of debate had been fundamentally recast, and liberals found themselves perpetually on the defensive. The stagflation of the 1970s had first raised doubts as to the efficacy of liberal policy prescriptions. As Orfield indicates, the waning of liberal confidence originally showed itself during the Carter administration, which suggested that it would "cut the federal government more effectively and humanely than the Republicans would." The Reagan administration built and expanded on the mood of the Seventies.

But now, Orfield and others suggest, things are about to turn around. Even the Republicans have caught the imperatives of the new mood. They no longer speak as if free market economics, once freed from the constricting hand of government, could solve all our problems, and they have edged away from libertarian influences within the party. George Bush talks about compassion (the all-purpose term of the new politics) and says he wants to be known as the "education President."

The Democrats, of course, have gone considerably beyond that. Prof. Orfield traces with evident approval their revived enthusiasm for an activist government role. On a great range of issues that encompass liberal dreams from the New Deal through the Great Society and beyond, Democratic candidates are learning again to speak without apology of the national government as instigator and sustainer of social progress. Whether talking about economic inequality, trade policy, education, civil rights, minimum wages, job training, urban development, environmental protection, or antipoverty programs, Democrats are sounding like Democrats again. Richard Gephardt’s own campaign floundered, but his essential argument that the Democratic party can only regain the White House if it recaptures its essential role as an agent of fundamental change" appears to have triumphed.

It is not surprising that Democratic liberalism should be experiencing something of a resurgence. No political mood lasts forever, and Reagan conservatism has dominated national politics for a long time. The instinct for change today is quite similar to that which occurred in 1960 at the end of Dwight Eisenhower’s second term. Two-term presidencies, however successful, dwindle to a dying fall. That natural tendency is accentuated by the Reagan administration’s fiasco over the Iran-contra affair, a policy disaster that has led to other political embarrassments. Prof. Orfield in fact indicates that it was the failure of the Bork nomination more than anything else that energized the liberal community and brought the Administration to its present low estate.

Still, one wonders. That there is a reaction against Reagan conservatism no one doubts. That it heralds a significant shift to the Left is something quite else again.

What one observes in the current presidential campaign is a revival of the rhetorical populism that is a regularly recurring phenomenon on the American political scene. Richard Gephardt spoke ominously of
an American "establishment" that was out to do in ordinary American farmers and workers. Jesse Jackson carries on about an atmosphere of "economic violence" in which "corporate barracudas" prey on innocent members of the working class. Paul Simon talks of restoration of a government that will care—as the Reagan administration presumably has not—about the poor and destitute, while Michael Dukakis works desperately to prove that beneath his technocratic surface there beats a heart impasioned over the iniquities visited on the people by the rich and powerful. Even Albert Gore, the most conservative of the Democratic contenders, finds himself compelled to portray himself in populist terms as the candidate of ordinary Americans besieged by the special interests.

Populism looks and sounds like liberalism or even radicalism, but it is often not so much an expression of those ideological instincts as a substitute for them. Few Americans, when it comes down to it, want to change the American system or even substantially to modify it. But from the time of Andrew Jackson onward, a number of them have regularly found political vehicles to express their discontent over their relative lack of success within it. Thus populism has characteristically been not so much a rejection of the system as a protest that it is currently rigged in favor of privileged interests and against "the people." The historian Richard Hofstadter long ago informed us of populism's susceptibility to conspiracy theories and a view of social reality that often reduces to a Manichean dualism. Its tendency to the ideologically random is illustrated by its habit of lifting up as its leaders people as removed from each other on the political spectrum as George Wallace and Jesse Jackson. Stirred more by resentment than ideology, populism characteristically expresses itself in terms far more radical than it genuinely intends.

That is not to say that all is well within Reagan's America and that there are no legitimate reasons for discontent. Injustice and inequity do not reign in American society, but evidences of them can readily be found. Efforts to remedy social ills will require more than the ministrations of the free market, which, while it does solve more problems more equitably than its critics are willing to concede, is not the panacea for all social dilemmas that some Reaganites take it to be. The President's anti-government rhetoric, originally a salutary corrective to the illusions and excesses of the Great Society, has exhausted its resources. We don't need a return to the dreams of an omnicompetent federal government, but the next administration will have to envision a more positive role for government than has the present one.

But a political corrective does not a liberal resurgence make. Prof. Orfield himself concedes that the nation "may not yet be at the point" where his revitalized liberalism can command majority support. The new populism evident on the Left is longer on outraged oratory than on specific policy prescriptions. The problems of the deficit remain, and hopes for revived liberal programs come up hard against the absence of funds to finance them. A restored liberal agenda will require higher taxes, and neither the public nor the politicians (as Orfield ruefully admits) have displayed any enthusiasm for a reversal of Reagan's tax cuts. The same polls that register the public's approval for increased social spending by government indicate the people's unwillingness to pay the additional funds necessary for the programs they say they want.

One suspects that there are limits to the political saleability of a vigorous liberal ideology. The new populism may play much better in the restricted social world of the Democratic primaries than it would with the public at large in a general election. (And even among Democratic presidential candidates, there remains a certain reluctance—Paul Simon aside—to own up to the "liberal" label. It's a strange resurgence that hesitates to speak its own name.) Most Americans, after all, are neither homeless, nor poor, nor unemployed. The economy continues to grow, unemployment continues to decline (at 5.6 per cent it is at its lowest rate in a decade), and inflation remains firmly under control. Political rhetoric that presupposes conditions of general social misery does not conform well to the actual state of the economy.

And even for those areas of society where social misery does reign, there remains considerable skepticism as to the efficacy of government solutions. Reluctance to support government programs to combat social ills cannot be attributed simply to the callousness or indifference of the comfortable majority. Much of it traces to the suspicion of Great Society programs that produced not restored lives and communities but widespread patterns of dependency and social pathology. Social engineering is a far less advanced art than liberals of an earlier generation supposed it to be.

All of which suggests that the liberal resurgence Prof. Orfield hopes for may be a more modest thing than he anticipates. That the nation is ready to countenance a more activist government than Ronald Reagan thinks desirable seems clear. But a Democratic party that follows Richard Gephardt's prescription that it make itself "an agent of fundamental change" will likely invite electoral disaster upon itself. A moderate liberalism could do very well next November; a re-McGovernized liberalism would almost certainly end up on the same scrap heap of history as the original.
HUNGRY GHOSTS, HONORABLE ELDERS, AND SENIOR CITIZENS

Reflections on Intergenerational Relations

A friend who finds perverse delight in probing well-hidden anxieties posed the following moral conundrum: Suppose you are standing on the banks of a swollen river rapidly sweeping away your spouse and your parent. Suppose, through swift, decisive action, you can save one. Which one would you save?

Uneasy with absolutes, habituated to human complexity, trained by background and inclination into awareness of cross-cultural differences, I could only respond—"That depends." It depends on one’s relationship with the two individuals, on their age and gender, on the nature of the family unit. The raging river may have provided a swift resolution to problems of an untenable marriage or to a horribly ailing and painful old age. It could deprive vulnerable dependents of their sole economic support, young children of nurture they sorely need. Beyond all this, I remain aware of how culturally conditioned one’s response is likely to be. In traditional India, Japan, or China, the impulse to save the parent would have been far more compelling than it is likely to be in America, though nowhere, I imagine, could the choice ever be simple or easy.

The bond of a child to a parent is a cultural as well as a biological phenomenon. Certain variables predispose a culture towards filial piety. From Durkheim (The Division of Labor in Society) and Weber (Economy and Society) to more recent formulations of Cowgill and Holmes (Aging and Modernization), privileges of and reverence for old age have been linked to older, agrarian societies. Where tradition reigns supreme so do the elders. As mediators between the past and the present, the old embody tradition, their authority both deriving from and reinforcing that tradition. In all communities, writes Max Weber, "which orient their social conduct towards tradition, i.e., toward convention, customary and sacred law, the elders are, so to speak, the natural honoraries not only because of their prestige of wider experience, but also because they know tradition."

Where tradition reigns supreme, so do the elders. As mediators between the past and the present, the old embody tradition, their authority both deriving from and reinforcing that tradition. Theirs is the authority of knowledge and experience.

This authority based on knowledge and experience is reinforced through ritual and religion. Confucianism of pre-revolutionary China and the Shinto cults of Japan still in practice involve ancestor worship which is predicated on the belief that ancestors form an important link to the spirit world, or more simply, are the spirit world. These ancestral spirits, who continue to inhabit the living world, influence events and control human action. To offend them through neglect and disregard of custom is to invite serious material and supernatural repercussions.

Within Confucianism, a descendant’s obligation to serve and worship these ancestral spirits reciprocates an overpowering need of the spirits themselves to be so worshipped. Without descendants to worship an ancestor’s soul is in jeopardy, cursed to become a Hungry Ghost (and cursing the living in return) wandering alone in the underworld. The Japanese Shinto, "The

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Way of the Gods,” embraces all levels of individual and social existence—the domestic, the communal, and the state—through its worship of family, clan, and imperial ancestors. Filial piety in Japan goes even beyond Confucian precepts in demanding unconditional loyalty, irrespective of the parent's behavior to the child.

Both in sociological literature and in conventional wisdom the loss of status for the aged is often linked with industrialization and modernization; it's part of “the world we have lost.”

In the hierarchical Hindu religion, while there is no ancestor worship, absolute duty to one’s parents remains a cardinal virtue. Memories from my childhood in India reverberate with preceptory tales of filial devotion, and the story of Sarvan is easily the most vivid example. To fulfill the desire of his aged and decrepit parents, Sarvan walks the length and breadth of India, surrendering the best of his youth in abnegation of personal desire, in order to carry his parents from pilgrimage to pilgrimage. The image of this youth, his shoulders stooped with the weight of the balance-like contrivance in which he carries his parents, on his way to salvation through such filial devotion, remains indelibly impressed upon my mind.¹

The weight of parental authority, sanctified through religion and myth, was economically shored through ownership of land and other resources which most naturally resided with the older generation in farming and pastoral societies. Similarly, the elderly controlled human resources through kinship (ability to command labor) within extended families. Where there was polygamy or heavy expenditure for marriage, the old retained power over sex and reproduction among the young.

Both in sociological literature and in conventional wisdom, then, the loss of status for the aged is often linked with industrialization and modernization, what Peter Laslett has termed the “world we have lost syndrome.” (“Societal Development and Aging” in Binstock and Shanas, eds., Handbook of Aging.) The logic of such thinking is easy to summarize. Industrialization undermines the prestige of old wisdom and knowledge through the introduction of new technology and new science. The old are indeed old-fashioned because their judgments, whether at home or at work, are uninformed by most recent scientific developments. "Progress" has made their skills and ideas obsolete, and this even among the highly skilled and knowledgeable, so that middle-aged scientists often confess that they have little hope of contributing further to the ever-expanding knowledge in their fields. The old are out of date, no longer effective role models for the young. Similarly, wage labor frees the young from the parents’ control of economic resources just as the mobility resulting from modern economics frees them from parental authority exercised within the extended family. Religious sanctions, even when religious beliefs hold firm, are no longer fully effective when the offenders may escape the social disapproval attending violation of these sanctions by simply packing up and leaving home. And as medicine prolongs life, more and more elderly find themselves forced into mandatory retirement in order to make room for the young.

However plausible this linkage between modernization and decline in the status of the aged, it offers but a partial explanation. One cannot deny the complex

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¹Some of my observations on family in China and Japan I owe to Deborah Davis-Friedmann, Long Lives: Chinese Elderly and the Communist Revolution, and Erdman Palmore, The Honorable Elders: a Cross Cultural Analysis of Aging in Japan. From the latter I have as well adapted part of my title and the moral conundrum of the opening paragraph.
web of interconnections between economic, social, and value structures, but the very complexity of this web argues against a simple inverse relationship between modernization and regard for age. At the very least, the flow of influence between various parts of a cultural system is seldom in one direction. Weber had argued, for instance, that the Protestant work ethic provided impetus to the rise of capitalism (The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism). Certainly, the values and beliefs of a culture have a remarkable tenacity in the face of even the most rapid and revolutionary change. China and Japan, so radically transformed in economic and political terms, offer intriguing evidence of this persistence.

In Japan children learn a formal code of gestures that embodies respect for their elders. During the mutual bowing at meeting, a younger person bows longer and stays down longer.

In post-revolution China, the Communist Party has taken several steps that reduce parental control over children. Child betrothal, dowry, and bride price have been outlawed. The rituals of ancestor worship have been suppressed. Transformation of the economy through subsidized primary education and state sector jobs has opened up avenues of economic independence for the youth. Also, the Party actively supports more egalitarian relationships between parents and children, as between husband and wife, through propaganda against the Confucian tradition and through social reform. After all, now the primary loyalties of the young must belong to the state first rather than to the family.

Yet, while the autocratic authority of the elders has certainly been reduced, the Party has neither tried nor achieved any radical diminishing of respect for the old. Instead of economic dependence of the young there is now economic interdependence between generations. And multigenerational households persist, partly still necessitated by housing shortages in urban areas and by restrictive migration laws which curtail an exodus to urban areas. Religious beliefs like ancestor worship are dying but the moral imperatives survive. Joint living obviously cements ties between generations, but even when parents and children live separately in urban areas, children often undertake long journeys to their parents on their one free day. During these visits they share housework, often bringing along thoughtful gifts of food. The three-day holiday of the New Lunar Year invariably calls for visits to parents, a tradition few would think of abandoning.

The persistence of this regard for the elderly is rooted in values firmly embedded in Chinese culture—a profound sense of obligation for the gift of life and nurture that the children owe to parents, an obligation that demands reciprocation. In accepting this code of life-long reciprocity between generations, the aged are freed from any guilt at their dependency and the children saved from undue chafing at the dependency of their parents.

Similar notions of profound obligation to parents have mitigated whatever ravages the rapid industrialization of Japan may have inflicted on intergenerational relations. The total subservience demanded from children has surely been modified. Writing in 1946, Ruth Benedict (The Chrysanthemum and the Sword) suggests the ideal of extreme filial piety through her description of a popular movie plot.

A village schoolmaster has collected money from the village to redeem a young schoolgirl about to be sold by her parents to a house of prostitution because they are starving in a rural famine. The schoolmaster's mother steals the money from her son although she is not poor. . . . Her son knows that she has taken it but . . . shoulder[s] the blame himself. His wife discovers the truth, leaves a suicide note taking all responsibility . . . and drowns herself and the baby. Publicity follows but the mother's part in the tragedy is not even called into question. The son has fulfilled the law of filial piety. . . . He is a virtuous hero.

We may imagine that the modern young of Tokyo may today find themselves somewhat uneasy with this extreme devotion, but even for them the elders remain honorable; indeed "honorable elders" is how oto-shiyoui, the most commonly used term for the old, translates into English.

In Japan, as in India, children learn a formal code of gestures that embodies this respect for their elders. During the mutual bowing at meeting in Japan, a younger person bows lower and stays down longer. In India, the young touch the feet of their elders at their first meeting. Undoubtedly, with modernization there has been some attrition in these obligatory gestures of respect. I no longer bow down to touch feet unless I meet a most honorable elder. Yet much remains. Within a household the best is still reserved for elders, the best room, the best chair, the best bed. Their taste often dictates the food cooked at home.

Most important, I think, is the persistence of the multigenerational household in Japan and India. As a consequence of urban living and job mobility, the true extended household, where several married sons with their families live in the same house with their parents,
is gradually diminishing as the norm, at least among the affluent middle class. Nevertheless, most households, especially of the elder son, include parents. When there are sons (and now even daughters) to live with, it would be unthinkable for the parents to retire to an independent household. The choice to do so is in a large measure independent of economic dependence of the aged in nations without social security or old age pensions. It is, fundamentally, a choice of life style, dictated by a culturally conditioned sense of what is right and natural. This multigenerational household is the forming ground of those affiliations and obligations that characterize filial piety in these cultures.

To turn finally to America—the culture that concerns us most, whose ways of interacting within generations we must strive to understand, deal with, and, if necessary, ameliorate—here the typical family structure has, in obvious contrast, a much narrower base, providing very different social learning for its young. Let us begin with Margaret Mead's rather severe comments: (And Keep Your Powder Dry):

The American baby is born into a family which is isolated from both paternal and maternal lines of kindred. His parents typically live in a house by themselves. If they do not, they seek to create some sort of social isolation to recompense themselves for presence of relatives. The mother dreams in secret of the day when "John's mother won't have to live with us anymore." And the father hopes that "one of Mary's brothers will be able to take Mary's mother before long." This attitude is conveyed to the baby. He learns that only his father and his mother are really relevant to his life, that grandparents should live at a distance, if at all, and are not really necessary.

The harshness of Mead's critique of the nuclear family may need qualifying. Nevertheless, many of the values characterized as particularly American tend to undermine ties of mutual obligation between generations. The ideals of liberty and equality, for instance, in challenging a hierarchical conception of the world, also challenge the authority conferred by age. For Americans, respect and awe are somewhat ungenial emotions because they involve a degree of self-abnegation we find uneasy, if not painful. An exaggerated respect for self can take the form of a touchy individualism making it difficult to practice that constant accommodation so necessary in joint living. We crave space for ourselves if we are to breathe easy, a metaphorical if not a literal door we can shut on others quite frequently. Our independence, which nurtures our individualism, makes us reluctant to incur obligations.

Within the family, children are trained from an early age to acquire this independence. One simple example of such habituation is the American custom of making children earn their spending money by doing designated chores around the house. At the outset, this seems no different from the norms of other cultures where, too, children among the poor are called upon to contribute to the financial well-being of a household. However, within the American system the child is often not contributing to the household so much as earning from the household. Instead of fostering family solidarity, such a practice tends to free the child from a sense of obligation to parents. Certainly, there is much merit in not letting the child take parental caretaking and providing for granted. Osten­sibly, this should make children aware of their obligations to their parents. However, when the allowance becomes a right, rightful wages earned for work, the custom may actually undermine the child's sense of obligation to parents. Through this implicit favoring of individual rights over duties, it may undermine, as well, a larger sense of relatedness. The American family teaches self-reliance, independence, and self-sufficiency to its children. We must remember, however, that the line between self-sufficiency and alienation is rather thin.

Where independence is so highly prized, dependence produces guilt and unease. We have seen that the aged in some other cultures have relatively less difficulty in coming to terms with their increasing dependence. Their growing need for help they view as merely a natural development within those reciprocal obligations that bind generations. For Americans, the problems of aging are often compounded by the psychological trauma of shame at their dependence. Naturally, then, most aged Americans prefer to live independently, and will surrender their independence only in dire necessity. Such a transition is particularly difficult for elderly men whose self-image, earlier fueled by the American work ethic, has already suffered a blow through the obsolescence of retirement.

Old age in America, then, brings no special rewards except for a few economic concessions granted to these senior citizens. Our term, senior citizen, identifies them as a group apart; if a community, then an antisepic one, at the very least an artificial community because the identifying referents ignore ties generated during a lifetime of living in and raising a family. In India, a stranger accosts an old man or woman as "father" or "mother," recognizing thereby the family relationship as the primary one. How is a stranger to accost a senior citizen in America, except by those very neutral appellations of "sir" and "madam" whose vague politeness is free of regard or resonance?

The preceding analysis of American attitudes need not imply that the situation of the elderly is particu-
larly grim in this culture, or that other cultures necessarily produce a healthier interaction between generations. Indeed, each cultural system carries its own rewards and losses. The extremes of filial reverence exact their price in autocratic despotism within the family where the young are denied freedom of choice, thought, and even the means to achieve personal fulfillment. An Indian psychologist remarks: "In our country the father is ... a dictator ... and every member of the family must try to keep him happy. ... The father thinks that to look after the child's training is not his field and so he should not waste his time with the child." (From Margaret Cormack, *The Hindu Woman*.)

The extremes of filial reverence exact their price in autocratic despotism within the family where the young are denied freedom of choice, thought, and the means for personal fulfillment.

Such authoritarian neglect sometimes fosters feelings of inferiority and inadequacy within children. Never fully weaned from parental authority, youth in India find it difficult to think for themselves, to act for themselves. A typical Indian student tends to be uncomfortable with the Socratic method, preferring the dogmatic. Indeed, the teacher who first presents facts and then draws a tentative hypothesis is likely to be dismissed as an intellectual lightweight compared to one who first makes authoritative pronouncements and then invites discussion. Ideal students must surrender their minds, their will, their very selves to the Guru. Cocooned in the affective closeness of the joint family, many live, remarks Erickson (*Gandhi's Truth*), "always dependent, expectant, demanding, sulking, despairing, and yet always seeking the fusion which affirms, confirms, and fulfills"—a state of existence which can "lead to an utterly passive sense of non-responsibility as an individual." The joint family shelters but it also drains. Living in close quarters inevitably produces domestic bickering (particularly between sisters-in-law), frustrations, and frayed nerves.

Similarly, each culture finds its own means to balance its extremes. Thus, while the ideal of the self-sufficient nuclear family may imply a fearful atomism, the facts are hardly so grim. Children in America continue to care for their parents in a variety of ways. Habituated as they are to a lifetime of independent living, most older Americans prefer to live in their own home, and only move in with their children when constraints of health or money make them incapable of taking care of themselves. Even so, over a third of aged parents live with their children, and over two-thirds live in close proximity to (less than an hour away from) their children. Through a form of reverse migration, parents usually, though sometimes reluctantly, relocate themselves near their children who had earlier moved away. True, there are very few instances of a genuinely multigenerational household. Typically, older parents will live with a single child or with children whose nest has become empty through migration of their children. However, even without joint living, different generations enjoy considerable interaction through frequent visits. Despite the prevailing myth of neglected old age, few Americans abandon their parents.

Nor does the rapid and considerable growth of retirement communities in recent years necessarily support this myth of abandonment. Deep down, many of us cherish sentimental visions of a graceful old age spent amidst the laughter of young children, of lives still lived vitally at the center of the family. There may, however, be a cultural lag between our perception of our needs and our actual needs. From the vantage point of middle age, I can already see that I have become addicted to pursuing my interests independent of family life, of sharing my life with my age set with compatible interests and needs. Interactions with children remain a vitally sustaining part of my existence, but, nonetheless, they are merely one such element and not the only center. I can even look forward to the time when the demands of nurturing a family will diminish, allowing greater leisure to explore other dimensions of my richly complex world. The trauma of the empty nest, experienced, we are told, by countless older women, is likely to lose its edge when our already changing culture continues to adapt itself to a longer life span of its members, to a relatively vigorous old age free of economic restraints, through expansion of the means for social interaction to the elderly.

That retirement communities have become increasingly popular may indicate an active preference among the elderly for such a life style rather than a last-resort measure. Recent research reveals that most older people enjoy the social interaction with their age-peers which such retirement communities offer. New ties of friendship are quickly formed even when frequent contact is still maintained with children. After all, mere physical propinquity of the old and the young does not guarantee meaningful interaction. Certainly the elderly retain a sense of well-being in not

being dependent. And the retirement communities also free the residents from the normative prescriptions of the work ethic, allowing them that life of leisure and recreation they may feel they have now earned. They are freed as well from restrictive notions of behavior most fitting for their age, for like-minded residents are more likely to have liberal or permissive attitudes.3

If America faces a crisis of age, it may largely be a crisis of consciousness. We have been, for some time, a nation of youth with a youth-oriented economy and youth-oriented values. Swept away by the cult of youth in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, we identified the promise of our culture with the vigor and vitality of youth. In a typical expression of such attitudes, Jane Addams (The Spirit of Youth and the City Streets) wrote in 1909: “Youth is so vivid an element in life that unless it is cherished, all the rest is spoiled.” In 1900, only four per cent of Americans were sixty-five or older. Today, we must adjust to a nation no longer so young.

Adapting to change calls for living through transitions. And transitions are difficult. It has been so with me. Since my father’s death, my mother, still vigorous despite ailments and still seeking full control of her life despite her increasing dependency, now spends part of each year with me. She travels from India to a culture of which she often disapproves, as she must, because it is so different. Sometimes even her daughter must appear a stranger, a person so altered in habits and attitudes that sharing of our lives becomes a perpetual challenge. Outside the family there are more strangers. My American friends lack a tradition which would include parents of their friends in regular social intercourse. Indeed, I have seldom been invited to meet parents of my American friends even though, I am sure, there are regular visits. Among my Indian friends, where there is a strong tradition to include parents in social gatherings, my mother finds few in her age group because these are recent migrants whose stem families remain in India. She adjusts as best she can and I adjust to ways of joint living which have become unfamiliar through years of living apart within my nuclear family.

So we fight, we love, we laugh. I share my experiences with my American friends and find that my situation, in many ways, is neither unique nor culture-specific. A cultural relativist by conviction, I have gradually begun to perceive that there perhaps may be some universals to human behavior, at least in the area of parent-child relationships. At the very least, we are all of us caught in a moment of cultural transition where, within the family, we must adapt to new structures, new demands, and new roles.

It was in a need to understand this transition that I turned to the sociology of aging. I have found therein much that is useful in living through this transition but also a vocabulary that I have found somewhat puzzling. It is a vocabulary permeated by value-laden words like control, freedom, and escape, a vocabulary which seems to imply that the old and the young are aligned in a fearful struggle for power. While I can testify to a wide, and interesting, range of attitudes to age within different cultures, I can hardly detect a generic hostility between generations so actively bound together in human intercourse.

Whatever our age we all age. Unless we die early, each one of us will become old. Only the most insensitive among us, then, can suffer from a failure of imagination so complete that we deny our own future in our aged. Having achieved middle age, no longer young but not yet old, I can only affirm that whether junior or senior, we all remain full citizens of our wider human community.

3 See V. Wood and A. Bultena, “American Retirement Community: Bane or Blessing,” in Social Problems of the Aging.
TRUE LOVE IN THE MILLER’S TALE

Earnest (sort of) Reflections on a Canterbury Tale

( Editor’s Note: Each year the Valparaiso University chapter of Mortar Board, the national student honor society, sponsors a Last Lecture series. Participants are asked to prepare a lecture as if it were to be the last they would ever present. This lecture was presented in February.)

I am very pleased and flattered to be asked to participate in this lecture series. But I must admit that when a former student of mine first called to ask if I would do it, my instincts for self preservation sent out a full scale alarm. Which is to say that I felt a knot in my stomach, suggesting that I was on the other side of the desk again. You see, I’ve attended a fair number of these lectures, and I had more than a sneaking suspicion that I was being asked to deliver—cleverly, too—a statement of What I Believe. It’s a rotten assignment, although I did a similar thing last fall when I forced six seniors preparing for their student teaching to write statements of teaching philosophy. My student was one of them and I would not be surprised if asking me to give this lecture seemed to her a rare form of justice. As I remember, her first instructions to me were that I should speak for from 45 to 90 minutes on the topic of my choice—a suggestion which, I confess, left me making dull sucking noises. I was later assured by another member of Mortar Board, also a former student, that twenty minutes would be fine. I was relieved to hear such news, of course, although I did wonder if she was motivated less by kindness than by grave doubts about the depths of my philosophical self.

In any event, I am somewhat calmer now, am able to make spit and draw breath—skills I hope to sustain until the occasion of my real last lecture.

If this were really my last lecture, I wondered, might I try to be dignified—just once, you know, to dress elegantly and speak with grace and profundity like some of my predecessors in this series. But then I thought how could I stop sounding like a character from a Sherwood Anderson story? One of Anderson’s titles kept leaping out at me: “I’m a Fool,” it said with conviction. So then I thought well, maybe I could at least not chew gum. By the time I’m old enough to give a last lecture, I hope not to be in the perpetual state of quitting smoking. So tonight I’ll try it without a net, no gum. And rather than attempt to initiate the noble rhetorical styles of those who have gone before me, I have decided to settle for being earnest, sort of.

Perhaps the only advantage I have in explaining why I do what I do is that I don’t really have to prove anything. The shortest explanation of my title, “True Love in The Miller’s Tale,” is this: there ain’t none. As you might have guessed, that’s not the real answer. The real short answer goes something like this: Chaucer’s poem demonstrates an equal love for ideas, the people who hold them, and the conventions of his art. It is as true as it is obvious that great art takes bigger risks. And no poet ever took a greater risk than Chaucer in resurrecting an all-but-forgotten literary form, the fabliau, and employing it to its finest advantage within the context of the Canterbury Tales.

On the subject of The Miller’s Tale literary critics have been as squeamish as Chaucer’s Absalon. From the nineteenth century until very recently, editors ex-
punged such vulgar stories as those told by the Miller, Reeve, and Merchant from their polite, selected versions of the Tales. Critics either ignored such tales or dismissed them as immature, misguided, or less than serious. Even in the last several decades, when scholars have been more willing to examine the evidence before them, a certain disappointment is all too frequently registered. One result is that such an otherwise great critic as D. W. Robertson is just plain silly about The Miller's Tale. He argues that the poem defines by negation the true Christian virtues that Chaucer surely intended; that since the church bells are ringing while Nicholas and Alisoun swive and Abson hovers, Chaucer must be instructing us to be good. Ha! The other manifestation of critical disappointment is no less disconcerting. Many modern scholars lament that The Miller's Tale is such a fine poem, perhaps Chaucer's finest. The implication is that he should have devoted such energy and wit to a tale of high moral virtue.

As a professor I am only slightly connected to that real part of the world where folks work with their hands, sweat, swear, and maybe even wipe their noses on their sleeves.

Such responses bother me. I suppose, because they touch upon a larger issue that worries me a great deal. Sometimes I feel guilty that as a university professor I am only slightly connected to that real part of the world where folks work with their hands, sweat, swear, drop wrenches, and maybe even wipe their noses on their sleeves. While I argue that educated people should read important works of literature, I am profoundly ignorant of such basic things as electrical wiring. So on good days I can even feel guilty about being so earnest.

Are you wondering yet where D. W. Robertson fits in? In my Nebraska hometown was a barbershop, Mac & Lewie's, that people like Robertson—did his friends call him "D"?—should have visited on a regular basis. It seems far removed from the world of literary criticism except that there were lots of would-be literary critics and story tellers at Mac & Lewie's. They would stop by on winter afternoons to pass an hour, swap lies, and dry their socks before they had to go back out and feed cattle. I often hung around waiting for the shop to close so I could sweep up and listened to people called Fingle Pearson, Uts Trimble, Orvie Nichols, and Ed Kratzenstein tell tales. Mac carried mail on a rural route when he wasn't cutting hair, so he saw lots and told more; Lewie and I just listened. I hadn't even heard of Winesburg, Ohio yet, but had at least a clue that such a place as Mac & Lewie's was good for me long range.

Am I trying to suggest that Orvie would have loved The Miller's Tale and that blue collar literature is what the world needs now? Not likely. Nor am I advocating a literature in which the only women are caricatures like Alisoun. But the storytellers at Mac & Lewie's were on to something because their tales were part of the fabric of their everyday selves. However accomplished the individual yarns and commentaries, each mattered directly to the way these people thought about their lives and occupations. Hearing their voices certainly shaped the kind of reader I have become.

The Miller's Tale is not a blue collar poem; quite the contrary, its original audience was of the court. Yet Chaucer's poem is like those barbershop stories were to a boy like me: it allows us to think deeply about things we didn't know we wanted to consider. And better than barbershop tales, The Miller's Tale engages us with brilliant images and sustained twists of plot; it is a tale of wit triumphant.

It has often been observed that in creating the pilgrims of his Canterbury Tales, Chaucer established a fair cross-section of late medieval English society. The absolute top and bottom of the social scale may be missing, but a diverse range of viewpoints, including the narrator's own self-deprecating voice, informs the framework of the Tales. Before we think about The Miller's Tale or the Miller, we need to consider the dramatic context in which he performs and the ideas to which he responds. But we must also consider

**Severance**

The Baptist cinched his shirt of hair
Up snug about his hips. He breathed
His ration of the river's air,
Then bit his lip. A head lay wreathed

In sunlight as a flickering dove
Turned echoes in the dancing air:
"This is the consequence of love,
This cold redemption that we share."

John Gidmark
Chaucer as a poet.

Once at a graduate school party, a fellow student asked me if I could choose any writer from the past to talk to over drinks—you know, to ask about Life (big L)—who would it be? I said, "you mean besides Erskine Caldwell?" He persisted: "wouldn't you just love to know what Chaucer thought?" I had several replies, all of them silent. First, I had always imagined that I did know a fair bit of what Chaucer thought. Second, my Dad has always observed that you don't need to ask people a whole lot because they pretty much tell you what they want you to know if you just pay attention, and I assume that includes poets. And finally, I couldn't imagine that, even over a drink, Chaucer would give away any kind of Reader's Digest version of Truth (big T). In fact, Chaucer would be a good person to have a drink with (Erskine Caldwell probably would not), but not because you wanted more or less than his poetry provides.

The Miller, earlier described as a no-count, low-life, miserable, thieving scoundrel, cares so little for symmetry and restraint that he cannot pass up his moment.

Chaucer was an unusual man in a fascinating period of English history. Unlike nearly everyone else, he travelled a great deal in the service of two kings and saw a complex world from several perspectives. He was a man of sufficient faith to have a sense of humor; a man so familiar with religious customs and social codes of conduct that he could play with them and poke fun at excesses; a man of such creative genius that he could be true and powerful and surprising all at the same time. Why, I might have asked my graduate school friend, would you suppose that Chaucer would ever want to solve a riddle when he could tell another one? Again and again, certainly not just in The Miller's Tale, Chaucer demonstrates this range and depth of expression as only a true lover can.

Moreover, to dispel another misunderstanding, Chaucer was not "original" in the manner of an almost poet who waits in near meditation for the lightning bolt of an idea to overwhelm him. No, Chaucer would have been puzzled to be told he was an original poet, because he relied heavily on known stories and conventions. For instance, Boccaccio's Teseide, an epic, was a major source of plot for The Knight's Tale, a romance. Chaucer was masterful in reshaping such sources to suit his purposes.

So, The Miller's Tale. Or as it was printed in an advertisement for this lecture, t-a-i-t, not entirely an inappropriate construct of orthography, one that would seem quenitely amusing to a confirmed punster like Chaucer. The Miller's Tale could not matter in the same way if it did not follow the Knight's and give rise to the Reeve's. They are all of a piece.

The first tale, appropriately told by the Knight, may just win the competition for a story of most sentence and solas (high moral virtue and entertainment) as proposed by Harry Bailey, the hoost. It describes a world where noble ideals—courty love and gentilless chief among them—impose certain order on an otherwise chaotic void. An elegant romance in which high characters of greatest consequence suffer slowly for the idea of love, the poem emphasizes pageantry, propriety, and process over against individual desire. With deft touches of humor, the tale develops the tension between conflicting obligations, but finally insists on a vision of symmetry and restraint. If this were my last lecture, I might have to chide those of you (my class) who had not properly appreciated The Knight's Tale. I would surely remind you of line 1761 as one of the more interesting ideas in all the tales: "For pitee renneth soone in gentil herte."

Without a doubt, the pilgrims regard this story as noble and worthy of committing to memory (all 2250 lines). But the Miller, earlier described as a no-count, low-life, miserable, thieving scoundrel, cares so little for symmetry and restraint that he cannot pass up his moment:

The Millere, that for dronken was al pale,
So that unnethe upon his hors he sat,
He nolde avalen neither hood ne hat,
Ne abyde no man for his curtesie,
But in Pilates voys he gan to crie,
And swoor, "By armes, and by blood and bones,
I kan a noble tale for the nones.
With which I wol now quite the Knyghtes tale."

He vows not only to have his turn before the Monk, whose rank suggests that he should follow, but promises to match the Knight's story with his own; he is playing to win.

The particular brilliance of such a dramatic situation goes beyond the lively exchange among disparate characters. It is the juxtaposing of counter world views that allows us to appreciate Chaucer's fascination with the gap between what people want to believe and how they behave. The Knight's idea of love is not new, of course; the Miller would have been quite familiar with it even though he had no chance (or desire) to be measured by it.

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You will forgive me for providing a very summary definition of courtly love, a large enough topic to fill several lectures. One way to describe courtly love would be thusly: an artificial and highly structured code of behavior among aristocratic people who, caught up in a world of necessary and arranged marriages, know how to take big issues (and themselves) seriously. Men become both servants to and prisoners of love; women remain objects of such devotion. A few illustrations from Andreas Capellanus' thirty-one rules of love will amuse you, I think, but will not sound absolutely foreign—even to those of us over forty or even to those of us who may resist the very notion of rituals. Here are eight of my favorites:

I. Marriage is no real excuse for not loving.
IV. It is well known that love is always increasing or decreasing.
VIII. No one should be deprived of love without the very best of reasons.
XI. It is not proper to love any woman whom one would be ashamed to seek to marry.
XIII. When made public love rarely endures.
XIV. The easy attainment of love makes it of little value; difficulty of attainment makes it prized.
XX. A man in love is always apprehensive.
XXXI. Nothing forbids one woman being loved by two men or one man by two women.

You get something of the idea from these, I think. Wouldn't it be fun to be the Miller, your considerable nose numbed by ale, an audience of strangers at hand, and a great story on the tip of your tongue? Chaucer thought so. In order to make the Miller's parody all the more telling, he recrafted the thirteenth-century fablieu form and, for a moment, set the world of courtly love on its ear. The fablieu is defined by Derek Brewer as "a versified short story designed to make you laugh, and its subject matter is most often indecent, concerned either with sexual or excretory functions. The plot is usually in the form of a practical joke carried out for love or revenge." We might add that in representing the comic and realistic side of the coin this genre cuts people down to size; a common sense morality prevails.

Clearly The Miller's Tale is not the first or only world we should choose to visit, but, read in its context, it gives us a chance to laugh at ourselves and learn something at the same time. And once we have said that, we may say the same of The Knight's Tale. Let's begin by talking about love triangles. The Knight creates complementary triangles of humans and deities, with authority figures overseeing the tops of the triangles. So there are Arcite and Palamon vying for the affections of Emily, who for the longest time is ignorant of their suffering and later flat out disappointed in it. Noble Theseus presides. Each lover prays to a god or goddess—Arcite to Mars, Palamon rather more skillfully to Venus, and Emily, fervently but without luck, to Diana. Saturn makes all necessary adjustments. It doesn't sound much like a lost weekend, does it?

In the tale, Alisoun, who could use some practice saying "no" or even "maybe," is the object of attention of handy Nicholas and jolly Absalon. John, her husband, is literally above and figuratively at least separate from the action. Cast in Nicholas' scheme as the new Noah, John means well but fares worse.

Chaucer's representation of these figures memorably captures the world of workaday people while simultaneously aping aristocratic pretensions. Unlike the conventional romantic heroine, whose features make her seem as beautiful and as remote as a goddess, Alisoun might as well be wearing a sign that says "This truck for hire." Before we even know her name, we have a tantalizing description of her physical presence: small and slender as a weasel, she is more blissful to gaze upon than the early-ripe pear; her skin is softer than the wool of a wether; her complexion more glowing than a newly minted coin; her song as loud and lively as a barn swallow's; her breath as sweet . . . . Well, excuse me, I almost forgot myself. This is wench, not a lady, of the barnyard not the courtyard. But you get the picture.

So does Nicholas, a capable student more devoted to ale, music, women, and practical jokes than to his texts—altogether a familiar figure in any age. (Amusingly enough, the line that describes Nicholas in his room—alone, without any company—is exactly that used to represent Arcite on his deathbed.) A master of the direct approach, Nicholas lends new meaning to the courtly ideal of suffering for love. "Love me all at once or I die," he swears, holding her firmly by the haunchbones, "also God me save." In fact, Alisoun is
almost too receptive to his proposition to suit him. Pitee renneth too soone in her gentil herte. The elobarate plan by which he arranges to spend the night in the carpenter’s bed is motivated primarily by a desire to trick the old man; it is scarcely necessary for winning Alisoun’s favors.

Which leaves us with poor Absalon. If ever anyone tried to play a role he was not cut out for, it is Absalon doing his best to act like the college boys in pursuit of young women. This parish clerk is revealed in terms that make him seem more nearly like a romantic heroine than Alisoun does. His golden hair is carefully curled and combed, his clothing cut in the latest Oxford fashion. His talents—singing and dancing at local taverns—like his extravagant appearance are unimpressive to such an earthy girl. Perhaps the persistence with which he suffers for the love of Alisoun, refusing to accept her offering at church and singing in his voice gentle and small at her bedroom window, makes him deserving of his punishment. You may refer to the tale (lines 3657-59) to refresh your memories of how he is cured of love longing.

But the ridiculous mixture of values in a parish clerk trying to court the eighteen-year-old wife of a carpenter is hardly the end of foolishness or comedy in this tale. John is jealous, superstitious, and mistrustful of learning. Although he first attributes Nicholas’ swoon to too much studying of God’s secrets, he quickly believes his boarder’s vision that the world will end and that he, John, will be the new Noah. There is even the ludicrous suggestion that John might know Cato or avoid making an error by that knowledge. How sorry can we feel for one whose punishment results from his own insistent ignorance?

Or for Nicholas, whose inability to pass up one more chance for a joke results in a temporary setback? We may argue that all four characters are justly punished if we believe that Alisoun has suffered enough by being married to such an old goat as John; or that since she is a weasel she is incapable of moral improvement. But we shouldn’t worry too hard about the fairness of this tale (only the Reeve [a carpenter] takes offense). If we do, it takes us away from Chaucer’s intent and closer to Robertson’s—remember D. W., who wants to turn this into allegory? Before the tale begins, Chaucer’s narrator issues a disclaimer that helps us maintain a proper perspective. Don’t blame me for this story, he says; the Miller was a churl who told harlotries. There are plenty of other stories that touch on morality and holiness; one can always turn the page.

And even though I have been rather coy in avoiding issues of flatulence, misdirected kisses, and branding on the toute, I make Chaucer’s same statement of being earnest, sort of. Are we to take this tale seriously? If not as a moral lesson, then how? Why The Miller’s Tale matters involves the difference between comedy and farce. As comedy, its power lies in brilliant depictions of characters and their domestic life, in sophisticated and energetic attention to language in rhymed iambic couplets, in development of an elaborate three-part plot. Things described always have a later function in the story. The emphasis is on wit, and action keeps the tale from being even remotely pornographic or perverse. How it matters also has to do with its reflection on The Knight’s Tale and its prodding of the Reeve’s angry story of a miller. Whereas for the Knight love is noble and ennobling, for the Miller it is merely complex, amusing, and revealing of our foibles. Even my graduate school friend would have to admit that Chaucer didn’t intend for us to choose one or the other.

Finally, if this were my last lecture, I would tell you that pleasure is a worthy end of reading and hope that you already knew as much. Because I seem to use the phrase regularly, I might tell you to pace yourselves. But I would also tell you to read widely and listen well. True lovers always do.

What If?

What if The Creator’d made that living matter into Adam after changing clay to Eve? Say the snake instead had tested him. Then God’d promised, just as angelfires shut Eden down, his seed would the serpent’s heel crush. So he, not she, would perfume Jesus’ feet and dry them with his hair and sacrifice the mite and beg for only crumbs that from the mistress’ table fell. And, all alone, explore the tomb then run, his heart aflame with joy, to rouse the women cowered for days in secret rooms, with: “Christ is risen!”

Unless, that is, The Order after all was that important.

Lois Reiner
CLERGYWOMEN: THE LUTHERAN CASE

An Inside Look at Lutheran Female Clergy in America

Although women have made significant advances in many fields over the past few decades, many women entering careers traditionally reserved for men find themselves all too aware of their transitional role. Not exactly unwelcome, yet also not fully accepted, women entering such fields are challenged not only by their professional duties but by skeptical significant others as well. Such is the case of women entering the ordained ministry.

To examine the situation these women are in, we will look at the troubles and triumphs of clergywomen in the Lutheran Church, which has been ordaining women since 1970.¹ To do this, we will rely upon comments made by such women in a series of personal interviews conducted by the author as well as on the published reflections of other female clergy, both Lutheran and non-Lutheran. Our aim will be to look at the situation confronting clergywomen, to see how they and their congregations overcame (and are overcoming) problems, and to suggest an appropriate outlook for both male and female pastors to adopt relating to their perspectives on masculinity and femininity in their ministry. To begin, then, we look at the reactions several Lutheran clergywomen have encountered from their parish members and other members of the laity.

Accepting a first call is an exciting time for any newly-ordained pastor as well as for the calling congregation; it is a time for much enthusiasm, rejoicing, and uncertainty. This uncertainty, however, is multiplied—particularly for the congregation—when the pastor is a woman. Reverend Faye Berg, pastor of Our Lord's Lutheran Church in Chicago, says this is the case because many people do not know what to expect.

"Some members of the congregation weren't against me, but they weren't for me either," Pastor Berg says, recalling the early days of her ministry. "I think they were afraid of the unknown."

Accepting a first call is an exciting time for any newly-ordained pastor as well as for the calling congregation; it is a time for much enthusiasm, rejoicing, and uncertainty. The uncertainty is multiplied when the newly-called pastor is a woman.

Rev. Berg quickly points out, however, that the congregation was at least "willing to try" having a female pastor, and that now, after four years, most members couldn't be happier. "They have been very accepting of me," Rev. Berg says. "Some are even proud of me."

Oddly enough, women pastors seem to enjoy a kind of freedom precisely because of this uncertainty; as Reverend Mary Ingberg, pastor of Bethany Lutheran Church in West Branch, Iowa, points out, they have no preconceived images to restrain them.

"When congregation members meet women pastors [for the first time], their stereotypes of old, male ministers are torn apart," she says. "[Women ministers] don't have to go through the stereotype that older

¹Not all Lutheran churches in the U.S., of course, ordain women. The women interviewed for this study were all members of the Lutheran bodies that recently joined together as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).
men do—that they are boring, no fun, and all that." This perspective is supported by another female minister (of the Congregational Church) who writes:

Clergywomen may have an advantage in one important respect: Often we are the first woman minister a person has met, so we carry fewer stereotypes with us. Frequent comments are: "You sure aren't like all the ministers I have known;" "you don't look like a minister;" "you're a different kind of minister." Freedom from stereotyped images tends to elicit responses that people might be more reluctant to share elsewhere, and gives us the opportunity to shape the encounter as we see necessary.  

However, the lack of stereotype for female clergy is not without its drawbacks. As the above author goes on to write, some people, because of this, "may be inhibited until trust is built." Among those who are likely to be inhibited—or, to be more precise, intimidated—are the lay women in the congregation. Prof. DeAne Lagerquist, who is not herself ordained but has studied the situation of clergywomen in the Lutheran Church, notes that lay women are more likely to be hard on a female pastor because they are afraid of the idea of women having power over men; they wonder why this woman could not be satisfied by serving the congregation in a lay capacity, as they are. A number of female clergy agree with this assessment. As Pastor Ingberg notes, some of the women in her congregation had problems understanding why she at times had to take on the role of the authority figure, at the expense (as they saw it) of her role as their friend. The women had problems adjusting to this apparent paradox, although, as Ingberg points out, they did (somewhat) overcome it. A female Presbyterian minister indicates the kind of pressure felt by newly-ordained clergywomen because of the special status they are accorded, especially by congregations calling such a pastor for the first time:

... church people treat the new woman minister in a very special way. She seems unique; they want to set her apart. During the process of job interviews and upon her arrival in the new parish, she is continually singled out and held up as an example of the extraordinary. She is listened to in a special way....

In the course of all this specialness the new pastor is tempted to expect too much of herself. Inside she is scared. She feels she must prove herself.

While it is probably true that all newly-ordained pastors feel as though they must prove themselves, women may have a rougher time of this than men, particularly when it comes to the area of preaching. Most of the women interviewed say they did need to prove that they—that women in general—could indeed preach. A vivid example of this is offered by Pastor Ingberg, who is married to a Methodist minister. She recalls how, after a service in which she had preached, one parishioner said to her: "That was a good sermon. Did your husband write it?"

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Beyond the problem of proving their ability to write a sermon, many clergywomen face the added, more difficult problem of proving that a woman's voice can effectively deliver a sermon. As a Presbyterian clergywoman writes:

[Only] after I had been in [my first parish] long enough to have earned the confidence of members of the congregation did I discover some of the expectations and concerns people had held. It was clear from the tone of their comments that some were quite surprised to discover that I could, indeed, preach an acceptable sermon. And more than one woman confessed to me that she had anticipated having a problem with the voice of a woman minister, but that I was really very easy to listen to.  

This Presbyterian minister then confesses that she has had much training in the area of speech. For those less well-trained, or for those in more skeptical congregations, the adjustment can be a larger hurdle. For example, Rev. Berg notes, "I've been told, by a woman, 'That was a good sermon, pastor, but I really miss a man's voice.'" Pastor Berg adds, "you have to listen differently to a woman's voice. It's just something to get used to."

Clergywomen experience other problems, too, not

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always within the congregation. Berg, for example, mentions that her congregation in Chicago had often worked with a local Catholic Church on youth programs and other functions before she arrived. When Berg showed up, however, the Catholic parish refused to work with Our Lord’s anymore, because it was led by a woman clergyperson. Another example of this problem of acceptance outside the church is related by Pastor Jane Aicher. Rev. Aicher leads a Bible study at Westville Correctional Facility in Indiana. In her first study, a number of inmates questioned her authority, asking if she really felt called to the ministry. While several of the other men defended her—one commenting, “you don’t see a man coming out here and doing this, do you?”—five to six men refused to return.

For the most part, however, those interviewed say that both they and their congregations have gotten used to the situation and are now almost unaware of any difference. As Rev. Berg says, “occasionally the issue pops up, and I’m surprised.” She offers the example of her church’s recent hiring of a secretary—a much-needed position which had never existed at the church before. One parishioner commented (referring to Berg) “next thing you know she’ll be asking for help cleaning her house.” While Berg quickly quipped with this gentleman that she would not oppose such a proposal, the comment nonetheless stunned her.

One final way congregations seem to respond differently to clergywomen is in counselling. Depending upon the particular counselling situation at hand, this difference can be positive or negative. Pastor Berg suggests that men are more at ease in confiding their problems to a woman because there is less of a sense of competition. On the other hand, the notion of competition might be present for female parishioners confiding in clergywomen (particulary those lay women for whom the idea of women clergy is threatening, as mentioned above). Clearly, the positive or negative effects of the clergy counsellor’s gender depend largely on the counselled and his/her/their particular problem(s).

II

As asked about the distinctive strengths they believe women bring to the church, most of those interviewed (as well as those who have written of their experiences) note the nurturing role women characteristically adopt. They also suggest that women, largely because of their upbringing, tend to be more open, more sensitive, and better listeners than men. Most hasten to add that these are only general tendencies, and that men are by no means cut off from these gifts.

If female clergy bring distinctive skills to the church, they also encounter distinctive problems—often with the church hierarchy. Although conditions vary radically depending on the personalities involved, certain general patterns can be observed. Prof. Lagerquist notes that many church officials are older men—men who attended school only with other men, who have been in positions of authority for a long time, and who have never before had to work with female colleagues. This presents a challenge, both to these men and to the clergywomen who must work with them. “They don’t know how to work with women,” Lagerquist says, “and they need to learn.” This problem may be expected to fade as people become more accustomed to the situation and as younger members of the clergy assume positions of authority. As Lagerquist says, “I have hopes that people in another generation might deal with [this problem] better.”

Clergywomen often experience difficulties with church officials in finding a call. Many have found their bishops to be distinctly unhelpful. Others, however, like Pastor Ingberg, have high praise for the sympathetic concern they have received from their own bishops.

Death’s Sting

Red-hat hard-hat
woodpecker
tail-braced
on paper birch
skeleton
beak-hammers
triumphant tattoo
on his way
to bronze borer
lunch.

Bernhard Hillila

The Cresset
Rev. Norma Everist represents a not untypical case of the problems women have faced with church structures and church hierarchies. Everist was ordained in the American Lutheran Church in 1977 and is now a professor at Wartburg Seminary in Iowa, but she began preparing for ministry in 1960, when she was a student in the Deaconess program at Valparaiso University. From Valparaiso she went to Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, where she was one of two women studying in a seminary of 800 men. "Those were in the days before we knew we were oppressed," she says. Because the seminary was Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, and because the only program of study opened to her was for an M.A. (this was before other Lutheran synods began ordaining women), she could not seek ordination upon graduation. Indeed, she could not even refer to the homilies she delivered as a student as "preaching." "I could take preaching courses," Everist says, "but I couldn't 'preach.' I could only give an 'inspirational address.'"

After several deaconess placements, Everist attended Yale Divinity School and received her M.Div. in 1976. She sought ordination in one Lutheran synod, but found the synod not particularly welcoming. (As she notes with a touch of skepticism, "they would always tell me their letters must have been lost in the mail.") Another Lutheran synod suggested that she wait a few years. Everist was eventually ordained in the ALC in 1977; as she quips, "I was ordained 17 years after I began public ministry."

Although the situation Lutheran clergywomen face has improved since Everist first attended seminary, many problems still exist. A recent study found that: "women leave the seminary with larger debts than men; women are more likely than men to receive assistant or associate positions, rather than pastorships upon graduation; solo women pastors tend to operate in smaller congregations, and therefore tend to receive smaller salaries than men; more women graduate from seminaries without jobs than men."

Because of the difficulties clergywomen often face, many of them feel a need to share their experiences and frustrations with other women. Prof. Lagerquist notes that through such networking women are given greater opportunity for support, locating calls, and keeping up on the affairs of the larger church. Prof. Everist also emphasizes the importance of networking, and comments that women will often travel large distances to attend other women's ordinations. Reverend Lora Gross, a graduate of Valparaiso University and the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago and currently a pastor of a Nebraska parish, also realizes this necessity. As co-director of Lutheran Metropolitan Ministries in Omaha, she helped organize a conference for churchwomen entitled "Does Power Have Gender?" She writes of the conference:

In this experience several dynamics were evident. Though each woman was at a different point in her journey, all the women expressed a strong need for support in their work. Most women shared a general feeling of isolation and loneliness at work with a great hunger for authentic affiliation with other women. . . . Female affiliation is vital to the growth of women as centered selves. Women need to be able to go to other women with pain and celebration as the journey through archaic power systems and identities derived through men continues."

Rev. Berg says, "It makes a difference to talk about these things. Male pastors understand, but other women understand." As she puts it, "to be a feminist and a pastor, you have to pay a lot of phone bills." Prof. Everist notes that male clergy often respond negatively to bonding among clergywomen. They seem to fear that they will lose the power they now enjoy to the up-and-coming female pastors. Everist refers to the revealing comments made by male church officials at recent celebratory convocations held to mark anniversaries of the ordination of women in U.S. Lutheran churches:

In the clergymen's informal greetings a number of dignitaries found themselves referring to the first time they encountered female power, telling childhood anecdotes of older sisters. To this day almost any time a small cluster of women gather to talk at seminary or around the church, a man remarks to us, only half-joking, that he believes we may be plotting an overthrow. How can we communicate that women being together is not dangerous to men?"

Everist goes on to assert that, even in the face of this fear by some clergymen, clergywomen must nonetheless continue to unite.

A problem unique to female clergy concerns clerical robes and pregnancy. Indeed, the problem with minister's garments exists for women regardless of their state of maternity. As Rev. Berg says, "When I wear my clerical collar on the street, people stare a lot. Some people see a clerical collar on a woman, and"


As quoted by Devall, p. 2.


Everist, Lutheran Partners, p. 10.
they just can't translate it, that it means the same as a man wearing one." More practical problems arise should the clergywoman become pregnant. One parish in Ohio went into business selling clerical maternity wear after they discovered they couldn't find proper clothing for their pregnant pastor.14

Pregnancy also means a leave of absence for the pastor, the details of which often need to be ironed out. "They figured it out in business," Prof. Lagerquist comments. "We can figure it out in the church." Some women note that such a leave of absence, when carefully planned for, can have very positive effects upon a congregation. One expectant pastor, for example, trained members of her congregation to temporarily assume the pastoral duties—in particular the duties of worship, care, and administration—for the time she would be on leave. The experience proved to be quite educational for the congregation. As the clergywoman later described it, "[My daughter's birth] signaled the beginning of two very important new identities; mine as a mother, and the congregation's as a people equipped to do the ministry within the church."15

How finally (if at all) are the particular gifts of clergywomen to be distinguished from those of clergymen? Are female and male pastors more alike than different? Obviously, the particular personality of a pastor is an extremely important factor in parish ministry. As a study by Maddock, Kenny, and Middleton (1973) revealed, "congregations may well consider a minister's personality more important than the actual clerical role."16 Realizing this, and interested in determining if the same motivational factors were present in both male and female ministers, Ekhardt and Goldsmith (1984) began research by surveying students in eleven Protestant seminaries. (Twelve per cent of these were Lutheran.) They hypothesized that "(a) male and female seminarians would have more similar profiles of motivational needs than men and women in the general population, and (b) they would also combine masculinity and femininity in their personality profiles, that is, that men seminarians would score more feminine and women seminarians more masculine than average."17 Both of these predictions were confirmed.

Specifically, relating to the first hypothesis, the study found that: male seminarians scored higher than college males on the survey categories of Nurturance, Succorance and Desirability, and lower on Autonomy. This pattern is consistent with the person-oriented, helping model of the clerical stereotype. Women seminarians were higher than the college norms on Affiliation, Dominance, Exhibition, Understanding, and Desirability, but lower on Aggression and Change. This pattern combines traditionally female traits, such as Affiliation, with traditionally female traits in new ways. For example, one Advent I heard a sermon, "Waiting for the Birth of the Christ Child," preached by a clergywoman who was herself "great with child." She described her delight at the baby's first movement, her fears of what might happen in labor and delivery, her own need for love and assurance, and the wonderful mystery that was growing inside of her. The clergywoman's story became a lens through which I was able to perceive Mary, mother of Jesus, and Mary's faithfulness that "... there would be fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord"

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13As quoted by Devall, p. 2.
14Devall, p. 2.
16Ekhardt and Goldsmith, p. 112.
masculine ones such as Dominance and Understanding. Both sexes of seminarians are incorporating personality traits usually shown by the opposite sex.¹⁹

Their data led Ekhardt and Goldsmith to note how the specific areas of strength found predominant in both male and female seminarians are similar to congregational preferences for these strengths. They thus concluded that “the men and women are alike in these [preferred] traits, and thus, on personality grounds, there should be no reason to consider one sex more fit for ministry than the other.”²⁰

Indeed, that those in this study evidenced an awareness of both traditional masculine and feminine traits in themselves is encouraging, as an article by Reverend Edward Morgan III suggests. Morgan uses Jungian theory to demonstrate that:

the male pastor in touch with his anima [unconscious contrasexual (feminine) traits] and the female in touch with her animus [unconscious contrasexual (masculine) traits] will be better able to do pastoral ministry because they can affirm femininity along with maleness and masculinity along with femaleness respectively. A more whole person is better able to assist another person in becoming whole.²¹

This idea of wholeness can also be attributed to the church in general. Several of the women interviewed note that they believe the entry of women into the ordained ministry will help achieve a balance that will markedly improve the ability of the church to minister. In fact, both Revs. Aicher and Everist emphasize the idea of wholeness created by women and men sharing the ministry of the church together. Rev. Morgan offers an appropriate comment about the severing of this wholeness when men and women are separated (which can apply both to a severing within individual psyches, and to a severing among those in the church community):

Adam and Eve were not only husband and wife. They were pastors to each other. Had they ministered pastorally to each other as God intended, we would not need all the tending and mending which pastoral ministry today requires to restore the image of God in men and women.²²

With this—the restoration of God’s “whole” image in the body of Christ on earth—as a potential realization, the church can perhaps find the strength and endurance to further strive towards this goal, by not only helping to find solutions to problems clergywomen face, but also by actively encouraging the entrance of women as pastors into Christ’s Church.

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Emmeringer Hölzel

If you say light
I say
what kind of light
if green
what kind of green
in sunlight
water streams over stone
(sound above silence)
and I note
scan
smithereens of quicksilver
glitter of tines
the virulence of weed
underwater
broken chancel
of leaves girlish and chrysoprase
the river gives back
under the bridge
loden
the way you talk is green
is light
pouring through one another
that moment
in the sunlight
they cannot be divided
how the float bobs and dances
each stipule and petiole
each cipher
on the surface
how the syllables wink
all your life and all my life
up on this bridge wordfishing

Kevin Crossley-Holland

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¹⁹Ekhardt and Goldsmith, p. 114 (emphasis added).
²⁰Ekhardt and Goldsmith, p. 115.
²²Morgan, p. 277.
What to Make of a Diminished Thing

Gail McGrew Eifrig

Musing recently on the *Newsweek* story that confirmed my suspicions about the end of the American Age, I found myself remembering bits of poetry. For consolation perhaps, and also for a chance to understand more than can be perceived in the ceaseless rattle and clatter of every day's news. I remembered what Robert Frost wrote about the oven bird:

He says the early petal-fall is past
When pear and cherry bloom went down in showers
On sunny days a moment overcast...

The bird would cease and be as other birds
But that he knows in singing not to sing.
The question that he frames in all but words
Is what to make of a diminished thing.

"What to make of a diminished thing" resonates through middle-aged spirits. For individuals recognizing mortal limits, the time comes to make some kind of choice between existing in a state of perpetual lament, or learning "what to make" of the possibilities that now at least strike one as being more limited than they seemed at earlier times to be. There is the resignation of Tennyson's Ulysses "and though we are not now that strength which in old days moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are..." This position represents an acceptance of limitations, though there is in the poem as a whole a somewhat dogged determination to keep on doing the same things, however much the capacity to do them has diminished.

In the quintessentially opposing position is Browning's Rabbi ben Ezra: "grow old along with me! the best is yet to be, the last of life, for which the first was made." Glowing optimism about a future characterized by the inevitable failures brought on by age strikes some as whistling in the dark, however sprightly the whistle.

Can the national temper reflect any of these attitudes? Does a whole culture, moving from a vigorously productive maturity into a new era of diminished capacity, learn to be something different? Is it possible for Americans to learn "what to make of a diminished thing"?

I see few signs that such a learning is going on. Political rhetoric is at a high volume level now, and surely will continue to get louder as these months go on. But though a number of the presidential candidates are middle aged, and thus have lived in the same American history that I have, I do not hear them talking about our future as though it were any different from our past.

The rhetoric sounds like that of the Fifties as much as anything; our world influence, prosperity, growth, and inevitable success are assumed. Oh yes, these qualities are threatened by the policies of the other party, whichever that is, but they are still seen to be the givens of American social existence. We are still talking as though the next twenty years will repeat the scenarios of the last fifty, as though everywhere in the world people are waiting to see what we will do before moving in a direction, adopting a policy, taking an action. And if a counter-scenario is proposed, it frequently sounds like the only alternative to world dominance is total subjection, utter failure, doom, and disaster.

If we are indeed moving into what *Newsweek* called "The Pacific Century," then we in the United States need some leadership which understands this fundamental shift. We need to learn how to manage in a situation where we are not in control of the game. We need to learn how not to panic when other people act without consulting our interests first. When New Zealand declared that its own anti-nuclear policy led it to reject our warships from its ports, our shocked response of "How dare you" hardly reflected an attitude for a new era. Rather, our response, and our dismissal of such impertinence, sounded like the imperial nation which did not need to pay much attention to the skirmishes in the hinterlands. Comments by our administration on the peace negotiations in Central America sound the same note, as though if we do not have a part in something, it can't exist.

It is this failure to imagine a world in which we are just one nation among others that may really harm us. Returning to Frost's oven bird, it is as though the bird neglected to notice that, summer being over, the time had come to begin thinking about migrating to a warmer climate. Birds who can't learn how to adjust their activities to reflect present conditions are the ones you see on the sidewalk in November, feet upward. Looking at presidential candidates, I wish I saw one who seemed to have the insight to perceive what the present conditions are, and the pragmatic intelligence to know what to do about it. Because it is probably true that societies that cannot learn to change will have change thrust upon them.
Dirty Dancing would have made a wonderful undiscovered film, the sort a few fans managed to see—and rhapsodized about for years after—but that everybody else ignored. It makes a pretty good popular movie too. A film that cost $6 million to make has already grossed almost $60 million, which makes it one of the most successful independent pictures ever made. When we add $35 million in sales for the soundtrack album and $12.5 million in anticipated video sales, we realize that the proceeds could fund a couple of moderately ambitious wars, with funds left over to set up a respectable art museum.

Coming out of Dirty Dancing, I felt relieved. It was showing in Valparaiso, Indiana, and I liked it. The hero was inert matter, the ending betrayed all that was best in the film, but everything else about Dirty Dancing could be tolerated and the whole was far more than the sum of its parts. Here was a successful Hollywood movie that deserved success, however modestly. Though reviewers tend to be prejudiced in favor of pathbreaking masterpieces—at this very moment, I might be writing about Andrei Tarkovsky's Stalker—Dirty Dancing deserves a few good words. Read on, and you will find them... along with some critical ones.

Dirty Dancing is set in the early Sixties. The scene is a Borscht Belt resort, where an affable, liberal Jewish heart surgeon brings his dutiful wife and two budding daughters for the annual family vacation. The other guests are middle-class businessmen with bored wives. The manager of the resort is Jack Weston, a former patient of the doctor's. Weston's son, a student in the Cornell program for hotel management, is a less likable version of his father. The waiters at the resort are pre-med students at Harvard, that sort of thing: good husband material. The dancers are working-class kids of both sexes—not black, but at least urban and poor, so possessed of a good sense of rhythm. There is an old bandleader left over from the Ellington era, and he is black. Out of these pre-fabricated figures, a lively story is constructed.

I went to see Dirty Dancing in the first place because I thought that it might be a good dance film. The last one to come out of Hollywood was probably Saturday Night Fever, way back in the Pleistocene Seventies. More recent efforts, like Flashdance—which should be retitled Cashdance, in memory of the only discernible reason for releasing it—confirmed little more than the power of marketing. The choreography in Dirty Dancing is not distinguished. But it serves its purpose. This proves to be one of those stories where dancing serves as a metaphor adumbrating social conflicts which are also sexual conflicts: working-class boy beds middle-class girl, middle-class girl loves and leaves working-class boy. Class dance.

We've been here before. Luckily, Dirty Dancing is shrewder than most films in its genre. In part this is because its heroine is shrewder. Jennifer Grey, Joel's daughter, is beautiful andshows every sign of being smart. (A recent column by Gene Siskel suggests that she's a "plain Jane," but this is only by the bimbo beauty standards which have trickled from TV into Hollywood movies.) Grey plays the younger daughter of the doctor. Her character is defined by a moment early in the film, when Mr. Scumbag from Cornell asks her if she's an English major. She corrects him curtly: "Economics and International Development" (or words to that effect). The point, of course, is not that she is a philistine who likes money and hates literature: that would make Dirty Dancing an Eighties rather than a Sixties period piece. Frances—or Baby, as her family calls her—has a social conscience. It is dad, as we later learn, who has trained her to have one. Mr. Scumbag is asking her what, given his values, must be seen as a condescending question. She knows it.

Time to bring up baby. Our heroine happens in on Weston's opening-night address to his employees: that is, to dancers and waiters. The first group is to remain segregated from the guests, except, naturally, when dancing with them. By contrast, the waiters are allowed to move freely among the guests (most especially, among the girls). Baby realizes that she is a pawn in a discriminatory class system, invisible but omnipresent. (No, she doesn't say this—she just looks thoughtful.) Shortly after, she crosses the bridge—a literal bridge, also a social marker—which separates the guests' quarters from the dancers'. Dirty Dancing is good at giving the feeling of a shift out of one world into another. In the public part of the hotel there is ballroom dancing. In the working-class compound there is orgiastic swivel-

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April, 1988

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ling and thrusting among vital young people with overdeveloped bodies. (The director can't help it; he goes slow-motion for a few moments. We make a note to forgive him.)

I won't detail the film's antics: they play like eighteenth-century bedroom farce as reimagined by someone with a liberal conscience who grew up in the '60s.

Baby first enters this scene carrying a large watermelon which someone has dumped on her. Everybody, including her, realizes that this debut is absurd. Nonetheless she is tentatively—perhaps implausibly—accepted by the group. Her future lover, a pseudo-Marlon Brando character named Johnny Castle, teaches her a few moves. Castle is played by Patrick Swayze, evidently a hot ticket for junior high school girls of the present era. He is unconvincing in his Dirty Dancing role since, whatever his actual social background, he has trouble conveying the combination of anger and ambition which his character is supposed to feel. Grey projects more anger than he can just by virtue of standing around, clenching her teeth. This is a tribute to her good performance but also a commentary on a script (by coproducer Eleanor Bergstein) in which the female protagonist is much more fully-imagined than her male counterpart.

Dirty Dancing works out an elaborate plot device for getting its lovers together. Johnny Castle's former girlfriend has become pregnant by one of those arrogant Harvard waiters and needs the money for an abortion. Baby gets her the money by borrowing it from dad—without telling him what it's for; she also takes the former girlfriend's place in a dance act with Johnny. They spend many hours practicing. He instructs her in an elaborate bit of ballroom choreography. This is the obligatory sequence, bowing to ancient musical-comedy convention, where the chorus girl becomes a star. Or tries to: Dirty Dancing is tempered enough to suggest that Baby just barely makes it through the culminating performance in the hotel's big theater (a performance not attended by her parents, who have no idea what she's up to).

One of Baby's choreographic incapacities gets special emphasis. She is incapable of executing a high-flying leap into Johnny's arms. The unexecuted leap enunciates a social convention: you don't go all the way with a working-class boy. It also suggests the unfolding logic of a plot. (We already knew the plot, even before we walked in, but this modestly self-reflexive device adds wit and—believe it or not—suspense to the movie.) Baby hardly as yet realizes the pattern of her own behavior; subsequently, however, everything that happens at the resort serves to inflame her social conscience, thus bringing her closer to the leap she has thus far refused.

I won't detail the film's antics: they play like eighteenth-century bedroom farce as reimagined by someone with a liberal conscience who grew up in the 1960s. The more fully Baby is compelled to confront the class system at the resort, the more she realizes her father's inability to match his liberal ideals to his everyday social conduct, the closer she feels to the big, hunky dancer. Even though this material is somewhat hokey, we feel Baby's dilemma to be a real one.

Realizing that Swayze is sweet but oppressed, Baby takes the crucial leap (into bed); meanwhile her sister, whose awkward attempts at grace and beauty are unfairly mocked throughout (this film is full of barely suppressed sibling rivalry), tries to consummate a romance with the same waiter who impregnated Swayze's old girlfriend. Everyone's illusions are destroyed all at once in a sort of "who's on first?" sequence which brings together most of the major characters; Swayze is fired by an irate Weston but insists on doing

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one last dance with our heroine, who now executes the (choreographic) leap perfectly. All the characters start dancing. We realize that this movie is over.

This conclusion is a problem. It trivializes social tensions which every sequence thus far has implied are deeply rooted in American culture. According to *Dirty Dancing*, the United States has an invisible but highly destructive class system. So far as the film persuades us that such a class system exists, we will be reluctant to accept such a bland resolution. Class systems are not dissolved by exuberant body movements. *Dirty Dancing* insists all too clearly that they are. As the dancing in that concluding scene becomes more boisterous, Weston confides to his bandleader that somehow everything's changing—as though the Sixties, the Sixties *proper*, are about to break up the divisions which this movie criticizes. The Sixties, whatever their virtues, did no such thing.

It would be tempting to extend this criticism. Baby's affair seems to involve the same fallacy. Dancing with a member of the lower classes does not bring down class barriers. Similarly, sleeping with a member of the lower classes does not save him from oppression, destitution, etc. This is a particularly sensitive point since it recalls a familiar syndrome from the Sixties: idealistic college women orchestrating—or choreographing—their sexual lives on the basis of political commitments. *Dirty Dancing* makes the assumption that Baby (now Frances) and Swayze could never have a serious relationship. Swayze is treated by the narrative—if not exactly by Frances—as a temporary convenience, a growing-up device which allows her to feel more radical than dad. The script faintly acknowledges that there is a problem here somewhere, that Frances may not be so much of a rebel as she thinks she is. Its gesture in this direction remains inconclusive.

All the same, this movie has interest. Running my finger down an alphabetical film list, I find *Dirty Dingus Magee, The Dirty Dozen, Dirty Harry, Dirty Little Billy, Dirty Mary, Crazy Larry*, and *Dirty Work*. Except for the last (a Thirties British farce), all of these are action pictures from a period of seven years, 1967-1974. "Dirty" in this context implies grittiness, alienation, and anything-goes desperation. *Dirty Dancing* adds the obvious sexual connotation; more significantly, it adds a focus on manners. No one would call it sophisticated, but it has greater stature than any Hollywood attempt at social criticism recently perpetrated. With decent acting, some dancing by talented amateurs, and a script that almost makes a valid point about class in American society, *Dirty Dancing* deserves praise. The sixty million is no doubt an acceptable bonus.

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**How It Spreads**

When smells from that white kingdom roamed the house—
of cinnamon and yeast on Saturdays, of Sunday's roast that stretched into a stew, then hash, then soup the whole week through, and, ah, of German chocolate bubbling, ecstatic as the birthday child—

when Christmas morning meant a velvet field beneath the tree, of new dresses hand-embroidered through a month of secret nights, to please us—

when she'd soothe the sobbing victim of some bully crime with song, with hugs against her breast, with stories about long ago when she had galloped over bare Canadian plains through driving snow to reach the far-off stain collapsed against his dray, and brought him back til blizzard's end; about how rabbits, trapped and skinned (and one mean bear), became new parkas for another winter; about cheer unequalled on her parson-groom's scant dole—

I was not a mother yet. But thought, oh, when I was, I'd be like that. And teach my daughters to teach theirs. So, that *why* a tissue spirit soars to strengthen others spreads.

Still,
times change. Men I know today are just as skilled as we at spending softness.
It's been that contagious.

*Lois Reiner*
LETTERS FROM DOGWOOD

Moebie and the Rain Forests

Charles Vandersee

Dear Editor:

"I'm amazed," Moebie said, "that in the rain forests all these cities could exist for so long without people knowing about them. Planes fly over and take infrared pictures, yet it took a long time for us to decode these pictures and then make expeditions. I'm amazed."

Moebie has been in Chicago, visiting friends who live in a commune. They are temporarily leukemia, she says, an otherwise unattractive suite in the Sears Tower.

"They aren't really cities, are they?" I asked. "They have maybe a thousand people each, rather than the teeming millions we assume to be crowding the subways in Providence and Detroit and Miami."

"None of those cities has a subway," said Moebie. "Or millions."

"I know that," I said, "but certain American place names produce powerful emotions." "Both the old industrial cities," I said, "and also the new immigrant cities suggest millions of people, the men with their shirttails hanging out, and the women with children hanging on their elbows, coming down slum and highways to pitch tents in our back yards."

"That," I explained, "is one of the perennial American nightmares of the middle class." "Although," I added, "these tents are, in a sense, the American dream for those tired elbows and starch-fed girths."

"Tents, in fact, are part of the problem, Moebie said. "As we now know—hard as it is to believe—these people in the rain forest built their cities partly of a sort of thick native fiber woven into a sort of thick native canvas."

"Cities of only a thousand people," I insisted. "Or," I said, "call them towns, since that would be our usual name for places this size." "No need," I said, "to linger in our Western habit of romanticizing the unfamiliar by magnifying, just because Dante and others have done it so well. Had he ever been to the underworld of his day?"

"It still is amazing," she said, drifting into a sort of magnification by silence.

"I don't see why tents are part of the problem," I observed. "Also, why are these friends of yours living in the Sears Tower, and whereabouts in that building?"

"Do you know the Sears Tower?" she asked. "They live halfway up, or halfway down, depending on your point of view." "The managers of the building think they're a law firm," she said. "This particular suite turned out nearly from the beginning to be the wrong size for an auditing company, a venture firm, a building permit exchange, or most of the rest of the paper infrastructure of a city like Chicago."

"So they got it cheap because nobody else wanted it," I reasoned.

"One of the strange things about it," she said, "is that it has a kitchen twice the size of the usual law-firm kitchen. Because this suite was created by the bisecting of a larger suite, at the behest of a law firm on that floor which belongs to the Syndicate." "Believe me," she said, "when the Syndicate wants you to do something, you do it."

"So they have their own kitchen, and also the Syndicate's kitchen?" I asked, not quite following. "The Syndicate did not want the kitchen?" I inquired. "And the Syndicate does not object to a commune next door?"

"The law firm is a front, of course," explained Moebie, a trifle impatient, her face attaining a sort of rich polish. It has something to do with her pores, she once explained. There is a biometaphysical reaction when she hears questions from an adult that even a child below grade-level would not normally risk asking. Certain secrets stop, and her skin takes on a sort of glaze.

"The law firm," she said, "is a front for a computer operation for the Syndicate. "The commune does not ask, believe me," she said, "questions."

"And computer people will tolerate anything next door, because they are so wrapped up, figuratively speaking, in their tapes and printouts," I said. Moebie shrugged. "The Syndicate goes out to eat," she said. "No desire to entertain. And the Syndicate, with a commune next door, a sort of strange occupant, can blame anything it wants to on that."

"Then life in the middle of the Sears Tower takes on a certain insecurity, as if one were in a tent in a rain forest," I concluded.

"Of course," said Moebie, quite radiant in her glaze, "with the Syndicate nothing goes wrong, and therefore all the neighbors are quite safe. As for tents in the rain forest being a problem, I was trying to say that they were a problem not for the rain forest people but for the curiosity agencies of the West."

"The tents," she said, "as we now know, being structures partly open..."
to the outside air, did not build up great concentrations of human heat, and, unlike metals and asphalts and plastics, did not give off signals to the heat-sensitive cameras."

"Strictly speaking," I said, "they did give off some signals, since people cannot exist in clusters of a thousand without in some ways altering the temperature and configuration." "But I grant you," I said, "they were certainly clever in escaping detection this long."

There was that glaze again, very like the plastic and metals she had been mentioning. "You say things without thinking," Moebie said. "There is no obligation on you, or on me, or on anyone except people in the curiosity agencies, to keep saying things without pause. We pay people in the curiosity agencies to tell us things we don't wish to know, and we expect value for our money, and therefore ceaseless and unreflective messages. Work talk. But you and I are merely conversing, not running an investigation or subduing a client."

I sat silently as a way of underscoring my unsupposed apology. Moebie was right; speech often is crude and unnecessary.

"Don't call them clever," she said. "They built and lived as they did because they had certain materials and did not insist on having others. They didn't wish to hide. They did not know they were hiding, in their ramparts and tents that rose only to the midpoints of the trees. They enjoyed natural protection from the sun and the torrents and the agencies by preserving the green infrastructure."

"You explain things well," I said, trying to approximate silence by a few syllables well chosen.

"But the natural remains amazing," she said, using more syllables than I, but accomplishing more, by deftly returning us to our earlier emotion. The emotion of amaze-

ment has considerable power to generate human mental activity. Little wonder that so many American people, hearing amazing things from preachers not committed to silence, decide at some emotional depth to be born again. What could be more natural? One does not call the Holy Spirit "clever."

Moebie too remained approximately silent; the glaze slowly faded, and her skin now had a healthy pallor rather than an alarming fluorescence.

"If raided," she went on, "they quietly go through those canvas walls, into the commune next door, down the stairs, into the parking garage, and away, away."

Applying close attention, I could tell what she was thinking. She was thinking that despite my failures as a conversationalist, I was at least willing to stand correction. With the proper kind of emotion, feeling neither that it did not matter to be wrong, nor that one's ground of being was somehow damaged if one were not always right. It's true, I thought. I do maintain that sane equilibrium.

"Is the commune a success?" I asked. "The one in the Sears Tower." Her face seemed suddenly mobile, as if not quite adjusted to the bone structure beneath, as buildings sometimes seek a security that human constructors have not quite managed.

"It isn't," she said. "It was not a happy visit. It's not that they're in danger of actually becoming the lawyers the building owners are supposed to think they are." "Although God knows," she said, "in Chicago it would be easy enough to do. Just a piece of paper. And think of the money."

Also, she said, they are not bothered about being off the land, since an urban commune, by definition, accepts an entirely different conception of the "natural" from that of, say, New Harmony or Pleasant Hill.

Instead, it's the noise problem. "Close to what is threatening the rain forest people, when you stop to think about it," Moebie said. "That incessant drumming of the large tropical drops on the taut canvas," she said, "seems to have deteriorated their hearing. When the expedition of the curiosity agencies got close, they were surprised to find no defense parties, no warriors with sharpened sticks, nothing. They came within range of these habitations without challenge."

I was going to speculate that the forest people are perhaps naturally peaceful, but decided to keep silent.

"You might think they're naturally pacific," she went on. "Except for the massacre of the expedition."

"So why is the Sears commune going deaf?" I asked.

"Why do you think the Syndicate computer people go out to lunch, and very long multi-ethnic lunches at that?" she retorted, her face glaring like one of those polished pocket flasks that magnified Chicago in the 1920s. "You must have concluded," she said, "that the partitions, when the territory was divided, are barely the thickness of canvas. In case the Syndicate computer operation is raided."

"If raided," she went on, "they quietly go through those canvas walls, into the commune next door, down the stairs, into the parking garage, and away, away."

"That," she said, "is a sort of cleverness."

"But deaf?" I inquired, again keeping the syllables near silence,
wondering if she meant the incessant, mesmerizing whirring of banks of computers, intolerably in cacophony with the bodily rhythms, not to mention the blower noise of the extra conditioning needed because of hot machinery motors, a constant electrical siege.

"Exactly," said Moebie, watching me closely. "All except for the worst part, the message system." "Analogous, I suppose, to the gargantuan thunder in the rain forests, if they have thunder," she speculated. "All this racket right next door to the commune, piercing the thin walls."

"The world of the future," she said, "may be a depleted world of rain forests or a phalanx of Sears Towers."

The Syndicate, she explained, was thought to be trying a new communications system. It involves a constant influx of mysterious human and machine-made sounds, from various suburban subposts, like River Forest, and more distant bases, like Fort Wayne. These sounds, messaged in code, issue from loudspeakers in the Sears Tower suite. "Which is putting it mildly," Moebie averred. "Beeps, burgps, mechanical chortles, whishes, turbine-like thrumings, screeches like fingernails on chalkboards, and other hellish noises that even Dante would not have believed." But, she explained, the members of the so-called law firm, the Syndicate computer people, do wear headsets, with advanced muffling material. "So the Syndicate does not suffer very much," she said. "As you would expect."

Although it was growing dark, Moebie looked at her watch, by the flask-like glow returning to her face. "You can trust machines," she said, "but you can't wholly trust machines." "You can trust humans," she went on sententiously, "but you can't wholly trust humans."

"The world of the future," she said, "may be a depleted world of rain forests, or it may be a phalanx of Sears Towers across the globe. Nobody knows. We do know you can't count on screens for ultrasensitive transmissions. You need an advanced system of noises—noises that can be produced and decoded by human hands and human brains. But also able to be transmitted through electronic means, and decoded by them."

"Every system, human or mechanical, has to have the other as a back-up system, equally effective." "Everybody knows this," she said, looking at me closely, to see if I knew.

"So this particular office of Syndicate people," I said, suddenly feeling the emotion of insight, "consists of teams of humans practicing decoding messages in a new noise system, all day. While machines do the same. They keep checking their human decoding against the machine decoding, until they get as perfect as humans can get. And over there behind the thin walls a low-rent commune experiences high anxiety and moderate hearing loss."

Moebie's face, which had been glowing with disgust, positively faded with assent. I never thought I would be so glad to have understood something as recondite as communal deafness as a side effect of the illicit future.

"You learned a great deal in a short visit," I said. "All this is amazing. And there must be more." Moebie composed herself and said nothing.

From Dogwood, faithfully yours, C.V.

James Combs, a regular contributor to The Cresset, teaches in the Department of Political Science at Valparaiso University.
I can recall as a child the Marilyn phenomenon. Just reaching puberty, I was fascinated. So, apparently, were millions of other males and, in a different way, females too. I can recall my contemporaries and me, confused and clumsy about ourselves at age twelve, sitting through *Niagara* twice in a row. On screen, she was something to behold. This was no "girl next door," à la Teresa Wright or Cathy O'Donnell. This was the postwar girl next door transformed into a painted adult woman who flaunted her sexuality openly and conjured up fantasies of immediate and forbidden sensual fulfillment rather than the neat kitchen of June Cleaver or the child-like,Junoesque body of Lucy Ricardo. She belonged not in the kitchen or nursery but rather the bedroom, preferably a penthouse.

The icon "Marilyn Monroe" suggested that men of the Fifties responded, at least in vicarious experience, to an extraordinary and forbidden female presence. A gifted comedienne, Marilyn played the girl with the child's mind and Junoesque body about as well as it ever has been and it drove us crazy. Perhaps the postwar vision that the soldier's reward was a drab housewife, bourgeois responsibilities, and bureaucratic work was just too grim a prospect, so Monroe became a symbolic alternative, a fantasy of sexual exploitation without guilt. For that moment, she was for us what Durkheim long ago called a "collective representation," a goddess of sexual play that meant things both metaphorical and masturbatory.

The failure of her marriage to Joe DiMaggio burst the Marilyn bubble, and as time went on it became clear that she could relate to millions of men in public but not to one in private. ("Kissing her," said Tony Curtis of their torrid love scenes in *Some Like it Hot," was like kissing Adolf Hitler.") In death, she was no longer the sex symbol of youth, but rather a pathetic and childish girl destroyed by stardom, eventually achieving apotheosis as, of all things, a feminist heroine, or at least victim.

If Marilyn was where the action was in 1952-53, Beatlemania was where it was at in 1964. But what did Beatlemania mean? In their 1986 book *Re-making Love*, Barbara Ehrenreich and co-authors maintain that Beatlemania was the first mass outburst of energy of the 1960s, and the first to feature women, or rather girls, who would achieve adulthood later on and take part in women's liberation. There had been other outbursts of teenage female repression before, directed toward the strong but sensitive James Dean and the dangerous and lower-class Elvis Presley.

But the Beatles were different. As Ehrenreich says, "What was both shocking and deeply appealing about the Beatles was that they were, while not exactly effeminate, at least not easily classifiable in the rigid gender distinctions of middle-class American life. . . . (T)he Beatles construed sex more generously and playfully, lifting it out of the rigid scenario of mid-century American gender roles, and it was this that made them wildly sexy."

The Beatles were friendly, easygoing, just out to have fun, and they occupied a world of pure play. Why, the fans implicitly asked, can't American guys be like that, and why can't we, American girls, live like that? The Beatles represented a message of power and freedom extended across gender lines that contributed to the transformation of gender relations in the Sixties. Like Marilyn, they were to go on after 1964 to represent different things, but for that moment the fanatical attention they commanded meant that they were where the action was, and where popular learning was taking place.

Such immediate juvenile obsessions seem in retrospect quite understandable compared to more recent popular crazes. One that vexed parents and professional moralists was *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* phenomenon, which for a while in the late 1970s was where it was at. *Rocky* developed what the papers always call "a cult following." People—both kids and young adults—would dress in outrageous garb, chant in unison with the dialogue of the movie, throw rice during the on-screen wedding party, and so on. The movie itself was a parody of the Creature Features of the Fifties dressed up in Seventies glitter rock. The audience actively enacted a ritual parody of the movie parody, a kind of double Saturnalia. *Rocky* devotees had a glorious time, and they did it over and over again. Audiences would applaud and cheer those devout attenders introduced as being there for the hundredth time.

After watching all this, Ron Rosenbaum (*Harper's*, September 1979) concluded that the *Rocky* cult was indeed that, "a mutant form of organized religion, each audience a congregation with its elaborately robed episcopate and acolytes to celebrate a midnight mass that was less satanic than sophomoric, but utterly serious for all that." The audiences chanted the lines like "responsive readings"; they worked themselves up into a collective "state of ecstatic communion." Rosenbaum asked the disturbing question: "Could the same kind of longing that drives so many to surrender themselves to the possession offered by communal religious cults drive others to the more temporary communal possessions offered in the secular temples that show horror pictures?"

Now the religious metaphor, I think, makes some sense in explaining *Rocky*, and even phenomena
such as Marilyn and the Beatles. There were elements of worshipfulness and fanaticism in all these fads, and even a kind of ecstasy, coming out of yourself by finding meaning in something greater than yourself. But Rocky was one of the first popular phenomena in our sense to raise the specter of cult. Was Rocky really a cult in the same way that Jim Jones and Hare Krishna and the Moonies are so considered?

Calling something like Rocky a cult may be stretching it, but one can see what Rosenbaum and others are getting at. A cult is usually a group of believers without political power or respectable social status. (The Mormons, for example, went from being a cult to a religion with the acquisition of both.) The people who attended Rocky, conversely, temporarily abandoned respectability for a momentary communion outside of the mundane. They adopted cultic behavior without being trapped forever inside it, believing for that sacred time in the myth of the cult and sharing the joy of that conversion.

But unlike the true cultist, participants could then leave it behind by walking out of the theater and going home to homework or to job the next day as computer programmer. It was all mimicry, a put-on followed by a take-off, in and out of a role without conviction, a faithless faith. It did demonstrate the efficacy of play, offering the congregation the momentary illusion of reliable shared experience. But it was an illusion without a future, a pseudo-cult that existed only in the time out of time when the audience was the theater.

In that sense, the Rocky craze was similar to the "holy rollers" I recall seeing as a kid growing up in the southern mountains: perfectly rational human beings who, once having entered the church, were transformed into beings of intense emotional frenzy. The difference is that those folks had convictions that were renewed or expressed in the service; the Rocky fans had no convictions other than the tongue-in-cheek play with the service. The holy rollers may have been heretical, and they were certainly not respectable, but at least they were not blasphemous.

So applying the term "cultic" to popular fancies is both misleading and insightful. Popular groups like the Trekkies (Star Trek devotees) or Dungeons and Dragons freaks may spend part of their discretionary time "inside" those worlds, but they usually seem to be able to distinguish them from their real lives. Perhaps a good definition of a true cultist is someone who believes that the illusionary world inside the cult is the sum of existence, and that everything outside of it is somehow unreal. On the other hand, since Rocky we have other popular evidence that there are good numbers of people who want regularly to escape, as it were, into a meta-world of reliable and repeatable experience that is regarded as somehow superior to life. By "meta-world" I mean a universe above and beyond the merely physical and mortal. Storytelling, of course, has always been in the business of creating meta-worlds. But our question here is, why do some people become obsessed with one meta-world to the extent that they recurrently escape into it almost as sanctuary?

Perhaps a clue can be found in the so-called "cult movies" that have appeared after Rocky. A few of these have invited group experience in the manner of Rocky—chanting along with the dialogue, applauding in unison, dressing in appropriate garb. Even the venerable Casablanca was not immune, with male fans showing up in raincoat and fedora. Some cult movies seem to attract groups with a taste for the bizarre, such as Eraserhead and Repo Man. The truly funny black comedy Harold and Maude enjoyed a campus vogue for a while.

But the action most recently was with a movie entitled Dirty Dancing, released as summer fare in 1987 (see Richard Maxwell's review elsewhere in these pages). It quickly became the kind of phenomenon we have in mind. It didn't seem to inspire dress-up and so forth, but it did become for its admirers something approaching the obsessive. Newsweek found a woman who had seen it 125 times, and Chicago suburban theaters reported that groups of women would see it three times a week, week after week. The movie sold out on tape immediately, and rentals were backed up for months. People learned all the dance steps and memorized the lines. In shopping malls around the country fans could be overheard reciting key lines to each other in knowing recognition. Dirty Dancing has by now played at some movie complexes for months just on the trade of the repeaters who know the film by heart and never tire of it. Now that it's on tape, small groups of friends will "cocoon" at home and watch the movie over and over again. In a more diffuse way than Rocky, Dirty Dancing invited devotion that was revived at the cult, at least in our sense of obsessive re-entry into a shared meta-experience.

Yet maybe we shouldn't be too hard on those so taken with the movie. This is a mild pathology compared to, say, Jonestown, and is quite devoid of the pseudo-religiosity of Rocky. The largely female response to it indicates a rather healthy thirst for satisfying romance. The story has "mythic adequacy": a teenage Ugly Duckling is transformed at summer camp into a graceful swan by learning to dance and experiencing
wonderful sex. The tale has love and adventure, the entry of a girl into womanhood, the sensual power of an exciting and dangerous male mentor and lover, a satisfying outcome of triumph and reconciliation. The forces of class and sexual polarization are defeated, and the movie concludes with a ritual dance that unites conflicting generations. This is more the stuff of folklore than cult. And given some of the contemporary alternative images of women available, it is no wonder that female audiences are so drawn to Dirty Dancing.

Two movie examples will suffice: Fatal Attraction, in which an attractive, free, and sexually active woman turns out to be crazy and murderous because she insists that her married lover take responsibility for his actions; she is then killed (pregnant and all) by the wife for threatening the home. Baby Boom is the latest in the degrade-the-Yuppie cycle of the Eighties. The upscale heroine is punished for being successful in business by an unwanted baby, finally being rescued from her worst tendencies (success) by a rawboned hero. Northrop Frye has pointed out that romance involves the polarization of ideal and abhorrent worlds. Here the two women are, in different ways, abhorrent, the prisoners, respectively, of irrational and rational desires that should remain (they are told) a male province.

But Dirty Dancing envisions an ideal world, a world in which the heroine is transformed from something abhorrent (awkward childishness) into something ideal (graceful womanliness). Perhaps for the many women who see this charming little movie over and over again it offers an image that is more positive, and hopeful, than the threatening or clinical women of the other films I mentioned.

If Dirty Dancing is a popular cult, it is a cult of romance sharing a temporary grouping of people who think this is where the action is. The persistent recurrence of their action is popular evidence of the latter-day power of romantic fantasy, a collective will to believe just once more that somewhere, somehow it is possible for things to work out for the best and for everyone to live happily ever after.

A Tongue of Flint

I kicked it out of its snug in a mole-hill, flecked and milky, and listen to it sing far from home how in those same and everyday acres with their may-hedges and hedges jewelled with hips, and all those generations of seething mosquitoes under the oaks, I sat on the stile or stood by the almost stagnant stream to watch the swift year's wavings.

No breath of wind, nothing but burning cold, and one old oak dropped half its leaves. They shaved from limb to limb: a sound near the edge of sound—the sharpest scraping.

High summer, setting sun. Ten silhouettes, hefty and black, whisksl filthy tails. They spun, they wove rose wheels and golden fans.

Then I heard them feverish and shrill and saw the elm quiver. A siege of starlings singing well above themselves! Two thousand or ten thousand footnotes and tripping glosses or the colors of the year.

Up, then, up and off against banks of pearl and grey, shape-changers, raucous spirits . . .

This tongue, fierce light has knapped it and east wind stropped it. I'll pocket it and go on listening.

Kevin Crossley-Holland

April, 1988
Style Plus Substance

Dot Nuechterlein

He was shorter than I expected—also a bit, well, rounder. Not that he was plump, or overweight, or anything. No, definitely not overweight; probably "muscular" would be a good description. But for some reason I guess I imagined he'd be taller, more slender. Not that I'd ever really thought much about it. The only thing I recall thinking ahead of time was that from what I had read, he seemed to be a classy individual.

And that turned out to be true. I sat almost next to him for the better part of an hour, watching him sign his name and smile and joke with little kids and older people, and I decided then and there that Walter Payton, the "legend in his own time" football star, is indeed a first-class fellow.

Members of the Chicago Bears football team came to play a benefit basketball game to assist the University's baseball program. (How's that for inter-sport cooperation?) I was the scorekeeper for the game, which featured area coaches and alumni as the Bears' opposition.

It was a fun time: not great basketball, but then people had come to see celebrities, not strategies. The visitors were in superb physical condition and had wonderful natural athletic talents, but the locals were obviously more experienced in the sport, and they dusted off some once-upon-a-time skills to show off to the fans. So the crowd cheered for both sides. There were some high jinks—an arm lock around a neck, a football pass towards the basket, grabbing a small child and lifting her up so that she could dunk the ball in the net—and everyone had a wonderful time.

At halftime an autograph session took place, and as I said, Mr. Payton sat at the scorer's table, just down from my spot. A line formed and he began signing pictures, programs, shirts, ties—whatever anyone handed him. The pace kept up non-stop until the buzzer sounded for the second half. He said he wasn't feeling well and asked for some orange juice, which someone ran out to buy at a nearby store. But then it sat there untouched, as the fans kept coming and coming. (He also took a few sips of water from a paper cup; guess who kept that cup as a souvenir?)

What struck me so forcefully was his pleasant good humor throughout the entire period. A young girl gazed at him in awe and wonder, and he touched her hand and winked as he handed back her program. There were high fives for some of the kids, a word with others here and there. When someone gave him a stack of programs he patiently explained he could sign only one item per person, since the line was so long. Flashbulbs popped in his eyes; people yelled his name, trying to attract a little special attention. Always he seemed unresentful, gentle.

This man does this everywhere, than you or I, but they feel no need to flaunt that. Neither do his fans. It was especially good for me to observe this, because I had recently been thinking about the problem of Style vs. Substance, brought on by seeing the film Broadcast News. I have difficulty with the notion that what the public wants is good looks and superficial charm, that everything is acceptable as long as it looks good on the surface.

No one is perfect, of course, and it shouldn't surprise us when people in the public glare reveal themselves to be faulty like the rest of us. But it is disturbing to read and hear of those who seem, up close, to be petty, or vain, or ill-tempered: as though their talent or prominence gives them a right to refrain from common courtesy.

I have known a few celebrities. Once upon a time I dated someone who is now a candidate for the U.S. presidency; I served on civic committees with a woman who became a Member of Parliament and Minister in the Canadian government; as a cocktail waitress I waited on well-known entertainers appearing in the hotel lounge where I worked; several corporation CEOs and church bishops and university presidents have greeted me by name.

What I have found among most of them has been an air of humility. They are impressive individuals, yet they don't seem terribly impressed with themselves. They may be more talented, or more fortunate, than you or I, but they feel no need to flaunt that. Neither do they manipulate us into thinking they are more able than they really are, like the fellow in the movie did.

Now I have a new name to add to my list of "heroes without clay feet." It's nice to know that in the awesome world of pro sports, a man can earn big money with his abilities, while also deserving our admiration because of his character. Walter Payton has Style Plus Substance. Bravo!

The Cresset