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P^{the}romethean

A Forum for Literature and the Arts

Spring 1993



P^{the} Promethean

Concordia College
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From the Editor...

When given a full page on which to write freely, one should always pick up a pen and begin, and I, luckily, have been given this page. Only the reader can decide if what I have written is thoughtful and important.

This is the third issue of a journal which has yet to realize its full potential. Improvements have been made, and they will always be necessary as we strive for (near) perfection.

To realize this goal, everyone must contribute; submissions must be made (from both on and off campus); support must be offered. When this is done, the journal will truly be a group project to be looked upon with distinction and pride. In this capacity, *The Promethean* very well could be the very unifying identity of which Concordia is in need.

I would like to take this opportunity to address a concern that was raised with the last issue: *The Promethean* didn't print all submissions received from Concordia students. No, we didn't. In fact, we printed many pieces received from off-campus sources. Our goal is to publish a number of diverse pieces. Such a goal requires input from many sources and support from all readers. I can only offer critics this advice: celebrate the creativity and work behind each piece with an open mind.

If you read a piece you don't like, write something to top it. If you read something you do like, tell the writer. In either case, the journal will become a creative outlet and marketplace.

In this process of creating a forum for writers, I have a very small part. So, with the rest of my free page, I would like to thank the writers; without their desires, dreams, hopes, fears, creativity, concern, love, and highly perceptive way of living life with an eager curiosity, this journal would not be missed when printed late.

I would like to thank Scott Ward for his simplicity and perception.

I would like to thank Peter Huggins for a unique twist on the season.

Thank you, Angela, for taking time out of your busy schedule--good luck, by the way--to submit your thoughtful verse.

Hey, Tim! Thanks for not being too bent out of shape when you realize I have used your real name for your piece. If anyone has a problem with his piece, re-read the first half of this column. Can you believe Tim was actually concerned?

Erich, thank you for becoming involved and writing a piece many artists will appreciate.

Randy, thanks for the disk and saving me a lot of time. Your piece is one of my favorites. (Do I have to be objective?)

Dr. Wright, thank you for including a piece that will probably bore some because it is well written and addresses an idea that takes a great deal of literary background and scholarship. Isn't that ironic?

I would like to thank Dr. Kunert for writing a piece in which he is personally involved. It answers questions and reaffirms a genuine sense of what faith can mean to those in need.

With this space left, I would like to ask that people get involved. Pull an old poem out of a drawer, write what you feel, inform those who search for knowledge. Write your part in this collective effort and send it in.

Steven Jackson

Spring Fever

Driving to work in my twelve-year-old Ford
morning air is warm and the first smell
of wisteria so sweet it makes me dizzy.
My burgundy car is washed gold with pollen: suddenly

I am a two thousand pound germ,
going sixty five, and I feel good
about everything, stepping on the gas to ram the bright
egg of the sun, ready for a pregnant world,

Scott Ward

At Table for Jana

My first year in school
I purchased the red oak table unfinished.
My own hands smoothed
the rough surface with rasping
sandpaper until the search of both palms
told me the top was smooth and even.
Then I painted on clear varnish, guiding
the brush stroke along the patterned tracks
of the great oak's girth
and growth's journey.

This exposed growing
was my reminder of how to fashion
words--my daily struggle
to capture that life--compact, robust
this growing, layered strata
of seasons, both bounty and dearth
encircling, burgeoning, drawing power
from the dark humus of earth
up through that marrow with radical words.

Now it sits in the center
of my kitchen. My wife and I eat supper
on the fine lace table cloth
her parents gave us for our wedding.
As she talks with me
in the evening, her face ruddy
as a fall acorn, shaped
in the candle's soft halation,
my creased palm resting on the table cloth
feels in that deep grain
the latest round of my living.

Scott Ward

The Sadness of Gardens

Nothing sadder anywhere than this:
A garden at the end of summer.
Gone are the tomatoes and beans,
The broccoli and lettuce, the squash, melons,
And peas, all that rich promise
Earlier in the year. But even as
The rose petals fall and the hydrangeas
Brown and wither, they are preparing
For next year's crop, for return from rest,
For warm weather, turned earth, spring.

Peter Huggins

Joseph Campbell and the Snake Dance of the Hopi

The Hopi make friends with snakes.
They take these snakes in their mouths,
Then send them back to the hills.
The snakes leave this message:

We live in the field of time,
All life does, and we are we,
You are you, in this world
Of differences, of opposites.

You may enclose us,
But you will set us loose
To flow like the waters,
To flash our tongues of truth like fire.

We will carry your words with us
When we return to the hills.
You and nature are on
You are not against nature

Nature is not against you.
You and nature are on
You journey into the unknown
To experience yourself.

In the experience of yourself
You'll experience eternity,
Here and now, an open door
Into the field of time.

Peter Huggins

Even Before the Spring Equinox

Today is a day to sip
Italian sodas
don new frocks and nibble
Asparagus spears.
It's a day so clean
even the trash left
on Third Avenue
Glitters.

Angela Vahsholtz

Thinking of Chios on a Winter Evening

Plunged under warm quilts
Memory, like an Aegean wave,
washes over me.

Hot sun and garlic enfold me
on this island that varnishes
my perspiring skin with dust.
Mellowed by August light, I am
soon to embark
again,
yet further from the coast
I knew.

I wait rubber band taut,
this time to be played not by fingers,
but by breeze floating through
sidewalk cafes,
open ship decks.

Angela Vahsholtz

The Window

by Erich Schnieder

I look at my window. It shows me the same scene it has for nearly three years. That's what my logical mind tells me, anyway, that nothing has changed. There is the green grass blanketing the front yard. It has been growing there for nearly half a century. Beyond the grass is the blackness of the street. Then more grass surrounding another row of houses.

In the distance looms the school, the students no doubt protected within its great walls of learning. I have seen this sight before. I know this sight. You must be the thing you see. I look again at what is before me, this time more closely. Beyond the grass and the houses sits the school, gray and somber. It appears to be like many other schools. It is a large gray building with a well equipped playground. Beyond the playground is a large field--more grass. It appears the same as it would any other day. Gray and boring. But something catches my eye. Contrasting the old, oxidized gray paint of the school is a vivid collage. This is new. Over the night, somebody has painted graffiti on the side of the gymnasium. It's not the work of a careless delinquent, just a name, a set of initials or a gang insignia, but a full mosaic involving many colours, and covering an area the size of a Volkswagen. The bright colours are visually pleasing, yet this scene is discomfoting. It deviates from the norm with which I am comfortable. It is the result of defiance. You must be the thing you see. Again, the words taunt my mind. What are you? Who put you there? I ask of the graffiti. In that painting, I see the results of a restrained creative soul. What does this mean? What are you trying to say? I can see the frustration and anguish of the artist. The art work itself is very abstract and colourful, yet its meaning not readily apparent. It's true purpose eludes me. You must be the thing you see. I step back and view my handiwork--a small mural of the various images that have been present in my mind. The frustration I felt at the

It deviates from the norm with which I am comfortable. It is the result of defiance. You must be the thing you see.

world is temporarily suppressed. In a simple display of defiance, I have expressed all that I have felt. My identity is right there on that drab, gray wall: my fears, my pain, my struggling, my hope, my wonder, my own perception of the mysteries of life.—Tomorrow it will be gone, whitewashed discreetly by the school custodian while the rest of the school, including myself, goes about the routine of life, pretending to be happy. Such is my life: my hopes and desires displayed in full colour one day, only to be washed away the next.

Whoever made that beautiful piece of work come to life, although a delinquent in the eyes of the custodian who is now applying a fresh coat of plain gray paint, is a true artist, a true thinker. He (or she for that matter) has come to terms with himself and recognized his true identity. He is able to display his inner self in a way that few others have the courage (defiance) to do.

I KILL

by Tim O'Connor

Hopping down off the bus, toolbox in hand, I find myself in a frenzy of three piece suits. Morning pedestrian traffic in the big city, nothing could be worse. Nearing the paper box on Third and Oak, I reach through the slit in my coveralls to find the thirty five cents in the bottom of my pants pocket. I've always wondered why someone doesn't just steal all the papers out of one of these things for thirty five cents. I guess you can only read one at a time. But I don't have time to read the paper just yet. It will have to wait in the top of my toolbox until later. Right now it's off to work.

For the past two weeks I've been working in the Cambridge building across from the Justice Center. It's an old twenty-two story building in the middle of a group of brand new skyscrapers downtown. It seems very meek and humble among the surrounding giants. Walking up the front steps, I feel a little awkward surrounded by all these business people with me in my coveralls, but my security badge gets me past the guard at the front desk just the same. The lobby of this old building is small and the elevators are very slow, but it has a relaxed atmosphere about it and no one seems to mind its antiquity.

Anyone that tells you that they have never considered, or at least thought of suicide, is a liar. They are lying to you and themselves. Three years ago I thought of committing suicide. They use the word commit as if it's a terrible thing to want to escape this insane world. I decided that throwing my life away served no purpose. But I felt that in order to justify my life I had to find a way to create purpose for myself. I felt a need to contribute, or at least equalize the negative. I felt like the character Emilio Estevez plays in the movie *Wisdom*. No matter how hard a person tries, the good never seems to outweigh the evils of all man's sins. I found my hands tied at every junction. In freeing myself to do something positive I would be breaking rules of the system. So, it was back to suicide.

The advantages of starting work later in the morning is the elevators are not as crowded. Still, the elevator seems to stop at every floor. When it finally reaches the twelfth floor, I get off. Across the hall I get on the other elevator which takes me to the twentieth floor. Again I get off and cross the hall back to the other elevator. This takes me to the twenty-second floor where I go to the house phone and pretend to call someone. It's always bugged me when people who are faking phone conversations sit there and act like they're listening; only making affirmative grunts every once in a while. I prefer to make it more convincing. So, here I sit conversing with myself into the phone until the people coming out of the elevator disperse from the corridor.

At the end of the hall, the door enters into the stairwell. I look over the railing for a moment, staring into the vast abyss of spiraling handrail below me. Up the flight of stairs above me is the ladder to the roof. My first week here I cut the lock off the roof hatch and replaced it with one of my own. I also got a lock to lock it from the outside. That ought to slow them down this afternoon.

I decided to live above or outside the law, to work around the system instead of with it or through it.

At the end of my personal debate, I modified the general concept of suicide so that it met my needs. I decided to kill the part of me that felt the need to follow all the rules, no matter how inhibiting of justice those rules seemed to be. I decided to live above or outside the law, to work around the system instead of with it or through it. Now I've found my purpose. Now I can contribute. Now, I kill.

After I close the roof hatch and secure the padlock, I sit back on the hatch to find it pleasantly warm from the morning sun. Enjoying the warmth of the hatch, I take two plastic bags out of my pocket and put them over my shoes, holding them on with rubber bands. Across the roof, on the south side, is the elevator machine room. I'll wait in here till it's time. I'll be out of sight in there and I can sit and read

my newspaper.

Inside, there is a small desk for the maintenance guys. This is where they usually take their (on the clock) coffee breaks. Sitting down at the desk, I take out the newspaper and start to read.

You're probably wondering what that song and dance was with the elevators. It will remove a lot of witnesses later. No one person will know exactly where I came from and where I went. The plastic bags on my feet will erase information such as shoe size and other debris from my shoes that might be traceable. I love to make things difficult. Looking at my watch, I see I have an hour to kill. No pun intended. On page nine, I find the article I've been looking for. It reads "Brutal Murderer Up for Parole." Five years ago, Jim Nelson forced his way into an elderly couple's house. He told the police that he was only there to rob the place, but when he found the couple home, he bound them and then executed them. One bullet to the head. Their five-year-old granddaughter whom they were babysitting was found a few miles away in a ditch in about the same condition. The gun that he used was never found, which weakened the case against him. Now, after fifty-two months in jail, some parole board who must be just as sick as Jim, thinks he has paid his debt to society. Not by my watch he hasn't.

Here's another article about the greenhouse effect. It seems silly to me that the slogan for the campaign is "Save the Earth." The Earth appears completely indifferent to what the little fleas on its back do. A proverbial scratch of the itch and life goes on. Millions of species have come and gone from the face of the Earth. It just continues to exist with apparent disregard for these happenings. And yet we have the audacity to think that it matters in the big picture weather we live or die. Only to ourselves. The slogan should read, "Save the environment to save your own ass."

Another look at my watch tells me I have ten minutes to go. Opening the bottom of the toolbox, I take out the barrel and receiver of my rifle. With one locking twist they're together and I'm ready for the stock. After tightening everything down, I check the optics and the laser sighting systems to make sure everything is working the way it should. I'm ready to go.

The newspaper goes in a stack of papers next to the desk. I put it near the middle of the stack so it won't be noticed. The toolbox goes on a shelf above the desk with two other toolboxes just like it that the maintenance men keep on hand.

Near the northeast corner of the building, there is a three-foot by four-foot vent opening. The vent leads all the way to the kitchen in the basement of the building. Reaching over the edge of the vent, I grab the rope that I had secured in the vent earlier in the week. The figure eight I had laced into the line I hook onto the D-ring on the climbing harness under my coveralls. The plastic bags over my shoes will also keep the greasy grime from the sides of the vent from getting on my shoes as I repel down into the vent. The vent goes to the stoves down in the kitchen, so the warm air that is rising from below me smells like a mixture of burnt food and grease.

Once more I check my watch. They should be coming out any minute now.

With my full weight on the line, I cut the middle fold of line in the double sheep shank knot near its anchor. About ten feet down I come to the first knot in the line. Passing it through the figure eight, I continue down. At the second knot I tie myself off. I've descended about thirty feet from the opening of the vent. In the side of the vent, an opening has been made to allow moisture to drain from the walls of the vent down a down spout on the exterior of the building. Through this small opening, I can see the Justice Center across the street.

The top of the vent, along with the rest of the parapet around the roof's edge, is capped with a copper flashing that hangs down about two feet on either side. When I anchored the rope here earlier in the week, I pulled part of the flashing back and anchored the rope up under it. I used a double sheep shank knot through the anchor eyelet. The double sheep shank is used by climbers and rappellers to retrieve their rope after climbing down from a rock structure. The knot consists of a fold in the rope that is secured at both ends with two or three half-hitch knots. After putting weight on the rope, the part of the rope that doubles back can then be cut and the

knot will hold as long as there is tension on the rope. Once the climber is down, a simple shake of the rope loosens the knot and the rope drops leaving only a couple feet of rope at the anchor point.

Once more I check my watch. They should be coming out any minute now. About two floors below me, in the Justice Center the floor is enclosed only by chain link fence. The prisoners are brought down from the above floors to get their exercise on this playground seventeen stories up. They have access to weightlifting equipment, basketball and volleyball courts, etc. Hell, if I ever were to get busted, I believe my life would improve in a place like this.

On second thought, I hope that someone like me will take care of business. Humans are not meant to be caged up; not in the gray walls of a prison doing time, nor within the walls of their own homes, afraid to venture beyond those walls, fortifying them against intrusion.

There they are. The inmates are starting to come down on the elevators. The target gets off the elevator with the third group. He settles in with the same group as usual near the weightlifting equipment. I range him at eighty yards. This should be no problem.

The optics, mounted on top of the rifle, are used for general acquisition of the target. Once this is done, the laser sight mounted below the barrel narrows the focus of the shoot on the target-"drawing a bead" it's called. The laser targeting system has proven to be very effective at shorter ranges, and the optics used for general acquisition reduces the amount of time the red laser dot is visible on the target.

I fall into a deep, steady pattern of breathing. At this range he fills the entire eyepiece. A deep feeling of relaxation overcomes my entire body. A slight pressure on the trigger activates the laser sight. The few seconds that the dot is on his chest seems like an eternity. I add the minutest additional amount of pressure on the trigger. The trigger seems to travel an excessive distance. Without warning, the rifle rocks me backwards slightly as a whisper of gasses escapes the end of the barrel.

Some may find it hard to understand how a person can take the life of another living creature.

Many people would pose this question to me about hunting when I was younger. In the case of my friend Jim, and others like him, it could be said that psychological failure is to blame in all cases where a life is taken. Under this definition, even I couldn't escape the guilt. Not to justify myself, but I feel this view is too limited. I would argue that humans are predators. The eyes face forward. The teeth are sharp. The ears face forward, fixed in place, not working independently of one another. All of these facts and more are characteristics that place the human race in the predator family.

Only when we as predators learn to live in harmony with our prey can we learn to co-exist with the other predators of the planet. Because when the predator destroys its prey the predator is in turn destroyed. We seem to have lost our respect for the animals that we attempt to co-exist with. Even the hyena, who is subject to the more powerful lion, will respectfully rub against a dead lion or stray cub before eating it.

I could hear the dull thud of the bullet as it hit the target.

I believe that people like Jim have lost this respect for life in general; not just for other animals, not just for other predators, but for other humans as well. Where he kills with disrespect to destroy life, I kill out of respect for that life to maintain that life.

I could hear the dull thud of the bullet as it hit the target. As he fell, I noticed that there was no blood on the wall behind him. The bullet would have had enough energy to penetrate through the ribs and since it didn't exit, I must assume that it lodged in the spine. I'll take that as a confirmed kill.

Slinging the rifle over my shoulder, I release the rappelling line. Continuing down another hundred and thirty feet, I stop at the bottom end of the rope that has been connected to the wall with an anchor and a d-ring. Taking the weight off the rope by putting my foot on the anchor, I give the rope above me a whip to release the sheep shank knot at the roof. The rope falls past me with a swish. From here it's a straight shot down to the top of the oven vent. At the next knot down, the one I had passed

through the figure eight at the beginning of the descent, I know that I'm at the bottom. I can see the lights from the kitchen coming through the seams in the vent's ductwork. I fumble with my flashlight and finally find the maintenance panel that leads into the utility room behind the kitchen. Removing the panel, I peer down into the little room below me. Everything's clear.

The plastic baggies over my shoes I discard on top of the hood vent. The excess rope that is coiled up below me on the hood vent I tie up so that it won't melt and stink in the kitchen. After climbing through the opening in the duct, I replace the panel. Underneath the desk in the corner of the utility room is the toolbox I left there last night before I went home. After changing coveralls and putting the climbing harness in the bottom of the tool box, I break down the rifle and place it on top of the harness.

Walking out into the lunch crowd in the hallway, the excitement of the past few minutes is drawn out by the hustle and bustle of the unaware people. Following the sub-street tunnel to the parking structure, I whistle the tune to a slow sad song to calm my nerves. My "borrowed" car is waiting on the third level to take me west.

I push my worn out tape of Pink Floyd into the cassette player in the car. Driving out of the garage, and listening to the sirens of the emergency vehicles the next block over, my mind seems only to have feelings and no pictures as the words of the song seem to say what I think: "When I was a child I had a fever. My hands felt just like two balloons. Now I've got that feeling once again. I can't explain. You would not understand. The child has grown. The dream is gone. I have become comfortably numb."

It's a challenge to me to dream up these little adventures, and I take pride in completing them successfully. Still, I wish this would be my last one. I might have just saved your life or the life of someone very close to you. You can go on enjoying your life, but think of me the next time you hear of them setting another killer or rapist free, 'cause I'll be there not enjoying mine.

SIGNS AND WONDERS

by Randy Bush

I imagine the bird I tormented to death in the arrogance and heat of my ninth year long ago dissolved into the living mud of that brown pond. But to haul this heavy, clean, thirty-six year old body, so unlike its nine-year old shadow, to a distant forest lake to ask forgiveness would be a waste of effort. Worse still, it would be a lie. My Celtic and Cherokee blood has lost the romance of its earlier faith. And so I find shelter in the anonymity of adulthood, protected by coffee and bites of sweet roll, and watch for signs and wonders. Because in the end, and in spite of my treachery, it seems the messy residue of my crime has, itself, become part of the miraculous. By this time, each flake and molecule of my tiny victim have been sucked into trees and rain clouds and a hundred grey-backed jackrabbits. I have seen their reincarnation with the secret eyes of my mind. I have accepted their gift of sight. The signs and wonders are the denizens of a singularly beautiful natural world that remained unseen by my eyes and undetected by my brain until I had become a killer. Now, shocked awake, I drink purple hills and scarlet clouds. By sight, I know many of the trees, as individuals, that live beside the dark lines of highway that follow me from my home to Concordia College.

The price of the gift, though, is perpetual repentance without hope of atonement. The hardened burl of sin has never left me but hides in my memory, coiled in on itself. "Guilts" that would never have bothered me before that day at the lake now hold the tang of misery. Shall I answer for the act of casting an infant chicken onto water and heaving rocks at it until it perished from shock and horror? Then what of the others who, each in their turns, lost to my superior strength and cunning? The truth is, there were so many I could never recall them all. When I was a boy, every small thing that moved was an anatomy lesson begging to be un-

zipped and taken apart. There were frogs and snakes and wonderfully speckled lizards with detachable tails and June bugs and magnificent moths that shimmered like flapping cellophane. I might have filled a spectral zoo with those crumpled victims of my amoral angst. If I caught them, they died. And only once, while torturing a tiny toad, I was the one caught. I was Kwai Chang Kane (from the old TV show, "Kung Fu") and my mother was the ancient, blind priest making me walk on rice paper. She shook me just a little, and said that God had made the toad. The rice paper was under me and I ripped it to shreds without even feeling it.

The price of the gift, though, is perpetual repentance without hope of atonement.

But the killing of the chick, stolen from our henhouse and secreted beneath my hat, was unique. Until I had committed that act, the wonder of a half-inch heart with its impossible rhythm was nothing like a miracle. It was no more grand than the action of a wind-up toy's motor. It ranked with my cap gun, my Legos, and the wad of bubble gum eternally and mysteriously made new by the magic of having been stuck to my headboard during the cool night. The notion that a small animal (other than a dog, of course) might have innate worth never occurred to me. Not once had I thought that the desperate lives fluttering in the palms of my hands and dying under my shoes sparked of real and true magic. The knowing of it had been obscured by my own childish clumsiness. Yet in one flash of time, even the air that recharged my wild, salty limbs became a mystery and a romance. It hissed through the grass at my feet and echoed in the stirring of autumn's first bright flags. Never again could I kill virginally. Never again would I grind a toad or a snake into ruin and head home, whistling, to scrub up for peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. All this happened because, in the instant before I launched the stone that forever unraveled the tiny tapestry of the bird's memories, that ruined, white shape gazed at me with its remaining eye, and I was caught full by the fiercest blast of destiny I have ever known.

That gaze gathered my stomach and the muscles

of my arms and legs into a black wad of fury. With the sudden passion and potency of the truly fearful, I aimed and fired my chip from the earth's stony heart. The bird vanished for a moment and rose, settling onto its back. I found more rocks and fired again and again until my arm and chest were sore and burning. Each time I struck, dead on, the wretched little corpse would disappear from the world. Horribly, maddeningly, it always returned to the surface. I cursed it. "Stupid Thing!" I said, "Stupid old thing! I hate you! I hate you." What I actually meant, of course, was that I hated myself. And now, looking back, I know why the hero of "Kung Fu" had to walk that rice paper before leaving the cloister of Shou Lin temple: until he could pass so gently that not the smallest tear was left in the soft runner, he could never be trusted with Creation. Otherwise, he would have left his mark on all that he touched. And it seems to me now that we have done that. Not we Americans or Soviets or Chinese, but haven't we humans, the original storm-troopers with bellies full of Manifest Destiny, done that?

Orwell would have understood perfectly. In "Shooting an Elephant," he recalled the sting of self-disgust when, as another killer with impure motives, he became his own greatest victim.

The sole thought in my mind was that if anything went wrong those two thousand [Burmese] would see me pursued, caught, trampled on, and reduced to a grinning corpse...That would never do...[I] poured shot after shot into [the elephant's] heart, and down his throat...In the end I could not stand it any longer and went away (50-51).

In the same way, I was my own victim and fool. That night, sleeping in a tent because the day had been warm, I suffered and squirmed and twisted, yet could not escape the terrible look of that dying white face dimmed by the shadow of passing innocence. I had done a wrong of appalling measure. I could never tell my mother and so would never receive her absolution.

Having spent the hours wrapped in a troubled sham of sleep, I was startled awake by the extraordinary call of the first bird of morning. There is nothing like it. I wiggled out of my sleeping bag and

into sweatshirt and overalls. The murder would not leave me. Suddenly, as I looked at the first blush on the cheek of autumn, the air became a thing alive and I could hear the forest. Farm sounds rushed at me from miles away. The trees had gone fifty shades of yellow-red-orange and were leaning, shoulders touching, heads swaying, voices "shushing," and all waiting for something magical, for some sweet word or cry. I waited, too. For the first time, I was no stomping intruder into the glories of nature. I was one of its own and was not sure whether to laugh out loud or pray. And these days, as I said, I hide in the facelessness of adulthood and secretly watch for the signs and wonders that are absolutely everywhere.

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Literary Notes

comments on literature

Faulkner's Probable Reliance on Joyce Rather Than Homer In *Mosquitoes*

by Daniel Wright

Calvin Brown's seminal work, *A Glossary of Faulkner's South* (Yale UP, 1976), first provided readers with a handbook to the rhetoric of the premiere writer of the twentieth-century American South, and Brown's work is still the authoritative standard in the field. Allusions to non-Southern colloquialisms or to other literary sources of Faulkner's works have not been as thoroughly examined, however, and such references could be more fully indexed for Faulkner scholars and enthusiasts. Some of these non-culturally-confined references are assuredly of importance in determining something of Faulkner's reference base, outline, and purpose in his novels.

For example, most readers of Faulkner's *Mosquitoes* (1926) probably assume that the name of the ill-fated yacht, the Nausikka, is a classical allusion to Nausicaa, the daughter of King Alkinous in Homer's *Odyssey*. In the Homeric account, Nausicaa receives the shipwrecked Odysseus, and after the latter's narration of his adventures to the king, Alkinous bestows a magical ship upon Odysseus to continue his interrupted voyage. Poseidon, however, angered that his will would be thwarted, turns the ship into stone.

Faulkner, however, probably does not derive his name for the yacht in *Mosquitoes* from direct consultation with the Greek myth of the girl whose kindness ultimately delivers Odysseus to new disaster; rather, his more likely source is the Nausicaa chapter in Part Two of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), a work to which Faulkner was profoundly indebted (see especially Robert Slabey's penetrating study of the extensiveness of Faulkner's reliance on and use of *Ulysses* in composing *Mosquitoes* ["Faulkner's *Mosquitoes* and Joyce's *Ulysses*," *Revue des Langues Vivantes* 28 (1962): 435-37]). Furthermore, given that the Nausicaa chapter itself preceded the publication of *Ulysses* by two years (The Nausicaa chapter of the forthcoming novel had been published in an edition of *The Little Review* in the spring of 1920), it is not difficult to ascertain that Faulkner, Joyce devotee that he was, had read this work (either in excerpt or in completed form) by the time he wrote *Mosquitoes* in 1926. The likelihood of a direct or exclusive consultation by Faulkner with Homer rather than Joyce is therefore questionable, for the literary evidence suggests that exclusive reliance by Faulkner on the classical source is improbable at best and uncertain at least.

Points to Ponder

from the editor

Nothing contributes so much to tranquillize the mind
as a steady purpose--a point on which the soul may fix
its intellectual eye. --Mary Shelley

Great truths, first uttered,
are always regarded as blasphemies. --George Bernard Shaw

It is that crossed border
(the border beyond which my own 'I' ends)
which attracts me most. --Milan Kundera

What is a cynic? He is a man who knows the price of everything
and the value of nothing. --Oscar Wilde

If we begin with the inward world of thought and feeling,
the whirlpool is still more rapid,
the flame more eager and devouring. --Walter Pater

Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar. --Sigmund Freud

Can a Homosexual be a Christian?

by Charles J. Kunert

The jarring noise of the phone that disrupted my contemplative mood was not nearly as startling as the news the phone bore. My friend of many years was calling to report that the upset stomach he had been experiencing these past few months had been diagnosed as cancer. The "Big C." You read about it. In the back of your mind you know it is always out there lurking like some kind of shadowy demon. But when it strikes someone you know well, its reality is overwhelming. Like a ton of bricks.

The call, however, was not made merely out of friendship, but to obtain my advice as a person somewhat knowledgeable in recent advances in biotechnology and medicine. The friend had been given three options by the doctors: a new, experimental treatment, surgery, or no treatment. The form of cancer he had was usually fatal, even when treated. New treatment protocols using the latest tools from the lab had been somewhat promising, but had been used on fewer than twelve individuals across the nation. The advice I gave was to go with the best science had to offer. He did. Less than a year later, he was dead.

It is therefore with tremendous humility that I approach the topic of the intersection of the Christian faith and the homosexual. I know less about this topic than I do about cancer, so let the reader beware. Homosexuality, viewed from a biological, Biblical, theological, sociological, personal and political perspective, has been the focus of Concordia's spring seminar, co-sponsored by the Math-Science and Religion departments. If nothing else, this seminar has provided a wonderful opportunity to reject simplistic thinking by demonstrating the wealth of differing perspectives on this issue that is so prominent in the media.

Over the past few years I have personally counseled with several friends who have wrestled with their own homosexuality and how it affects

their view of their faith and life. I have lost a close friend to AIDS who had been forced by his perception of religion to keep his homosexuality hidden from the public and even from his wife. My own family has wrestled with the fact that one of the six boys in it is gay. What is even more significant is that my experience is not unique. Many of you reading this article could attest to similar encounters with the topic of homosexuality and how it has insinuated itself into your consciousness.

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What may be somewhat unique about my experiences is that they are framed in the protective embrace of the church. Each of the people in the examples above is or was a devout Christian...probably atypical for a randomly selected group of homosexuals. And that makes the issues even more interesting. How can people, baptized into the faith as children, participants in the Lord's Supper on a regular basis, and diligent students of God's Word be so tormented by their condition? All of the individuals of whom I speak have pleaded with God to take this burden from them. Are their pleadings insincere? Is this simply a case of insufficient yielding to the will of God in their lives? My personal guess would be that is not the case.

But it would only be a guess. And that for me is the bottom line. I cannot imagine for a moment why another male would be sexually attracted to a man, or a woman to a woman. It is as foreign to my way of thinking as for a human to be sexually attracted to a tree. Only recently has it occurred to me that, for the homosexual, my desire for a member of the opposite sex is just as unnatural. I cannot pretend to know how sincere or insincere

the struggles being expressed by my homosexual friends are all too real, rather than some superficial attempt to look good to society or the church. When I consider my own struggles with life and my feeble attempts to remain faithful to my Lord, I am constantly reminded of Paul's words: "The good that I would, I do not..." (Rom 7:19) And James writes further, "Don't be too eager to tell others their faults, for we all make many mistakes" (Jas. 3:1). What then, gives me the right to presume to judge others in the faith?

Scripture, however, does not let us off the hook entirely at this point. It would be great to stop here, but we are told, "It isn't our job to judge outsiders. But it certainly is our job to judge and deal strongly with those who are members of the church, and who are sinning in these (sexual) ways." (I Cor. 5: 12). So within the teachings of Scripture we are reminded of our own shortcomings, yet encouraged to deal forthrightly with those in the church who are sinning. This is, indeed, a very fine line, and one fraught with much danger. For if we act in an overly judgmental way, we run the risk of quenching the smoldering wick of faith in the weak, but if we fail to act, we run the risk of allowing the weak to be overtaken in their sin.

What then, as a Christian, is the prudent course? If we are to take someone to task, we had better be certain that the person is doing something that is interfering with his or her relationship with God. We must avoid making judgments about things sometimes categorized as *adiaphora* (concepts not directly and clearly spoken to in Scripture). For example, many have been judged in the past because of card playing or dancing. I am even aware of churches who felt it was inappropriate to pray in any language except German. The Lutheran Church in Kankakee, Illinois had an inscription carved into its altar that read, "*Unser Gott is ein deutscher Gott!*" (Our God is a German God!) The question then becomes one of interpretation of the Bible. Clearly some have interpreted the Bible as condemning card playing and dancing, and felt these were not *adiaphora*. In the case of homosexuality, historically most scholars and Bible students have interpreted the five passages of Scripture that deal with the issue as condemning homosexual behavior.

Recent scholarship, however, has at least raised the possibility that the biblical condemnation is much more narrowly focused at relationships which de-grade or destroy rather than those which build up and support. And new advances from the scientific front lead to the inescapable conclusion that homo-sexuality, at least in many cases, is a genetic component of the brain, rather than a choice someone makes. In that light, to be a homosexual in a committed, caring relationship may not be condemned, whereas to be a heterosexual who indulges in homosexual activities which denigrate or abuse others would be. So who is right?

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Interestingly, Paul points out that not only is sexual sin evil, but so also "the feeling that everyone else is wrong except those in your own little group" (Gal. 5:20). Instead, Paul calls upon us to, "clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience" (Col. 3:12). This determination to be "right," or to have the "correct" interpretation of the Bible, creates insurmountable walls between Christians. It is evidence of our own weakness as Christians that we are not willing to truly allow the Holy Spirit to do His work of sanctification in the lives He touches when the Word is shared.

It is somewhat interesting to me that persons who proudly proclaim that they are the caretakers of correctness often fail to heed the instructions of Jesus and Paul in the manner of correction. For both Jesus and Paul indicate that correction is a one-on-one function to be approached humbly. Jesus tells us, "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you" (Matt. 18: 15). And Paul encourages the Christian to approach the fallen in meekness: "If a Christian is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help him back onto the right path" (Gal. 6:1).

It occurs to me that if this methodology were followed, a much deeper understanding of the dimensions of the dilemma would accrue to those involved in the discussion. It is much easier to be judgmental of ideas disassociated from the persons affected. When a real face appears as the object of the judgment, and when real hurts and struggles are capable of being felt, hasty judgments tend to vanish. Instead of pronouncements from a pulpit or statements in support of ballot measures, Christians should be willing to bear one another's burdens in love. And to do that requires involvement. Christ was the perfect example for us. He did not shun those who were different from Him but rather embraced them. He talked with prostitutes and drank water with the Samaritan woman and feasted with crooked tax collectors. Ultimately it was the transforming power of His love and not the judgment of the law that changed those in need of change.

So who is, after all, right in this matter? I don't really know, but I am willing to allow God's Spirit to enlighten me as I attempt to deal in love with those around me hurting in soul and spirit over the issue of homosexuality. They are my sisters and brothers in the Lord. Their struggle is ultimately my struggle. To cut them off would be to amputate part of me, for we are one in the Spirit.

To a person who prefers clear-cut answers, this discussion is less than satisfying. But my need for black-and-white is surpassed by others' need for compassion and hope. For if I am incapable of empathizing with the plight of the homosexual, I have truly missed the message of the Gospel. Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Matt. 9:12-13). And are we not all in need of that healing touch? Let him who is without sin cast the first stone.

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