

Pennies From Heaven

Isaac Kramnick and
R. Laurence Moore

America is a secular society nervous with its secularism. Since the nation's founding, that nervousness has manifested itself in periodic redrawing of the boundary between church and state and in practices that compromise the "wall of separation." Today, however, the conventional wisdom about religion in public life, shared by many politicians, journalists and intellectuals, finds religion on the defensive; this wisdom claims that religion has been evicted from public life—and it worries about too absolute a division between pulpits and the public square, and between pew and polling place. It holds that religion is tolerated, even lauded as a personal or private matter, appropriate for the home, the church, the synagogue or mosque, but regrettably considered inappropriate for the public space of communal civic life, where, according to this reading of today's America, religion is marginalized and thus prevented from playing its beneficent role by a misguided, overly zealous commitment to a wall of separation. As Stephen Carter, the Yale Law School professor who is among the most articulate spokesmen for this lament, claims: "In our sensible zeal to keep religion from dominating our politics, we have created a political and legal culture that presses the religiously faithful to be other than themselves, to act publicly, and sometimes privately as well, as though their faith does not matter to them."

This conventional wisdom is flat-out wrong. Far from being excluded from the public square, religion is ubiquitous in American public life; it permeates our politics now as it has in the past. There is a long history in America of religious influence on public life and public policy. No one excluded religious discourse from the debate over slavery, with both sides enlisting its support. No one excluded religion from influencing temperance legislation, or from shaping the social conscience of the progressive movement, or from justifying each and every instance of American imperialism. Religion was a crucial force in molding our Cold War mentality, and in persuading America in the 1950s and 1960s to rid itself finally of Jim Crow.

Americans today, compared to Europeans, are pious in public and proud of it. Most city councils across the country begin deliberations with an invocation, as does the United States Senate. Across the South, many public schools still begin with prayer. And is there a baseball, football or basketball team left in America that doesn't before or after its game bow heads and join hands? Is there a presidential address from the oval office that doesn't conclude by invoking God? Only public piety joins many liberal African-American Democrats with many conservative white Republicans.

We know from every national public opinion poll that Americans are the most religious people in the industrialized world. Ninety-four percent of Americans say they believe in God; in Britain the figure is 68 percent.

Seventy percent of Americans say they pray daily; 20 percent of Englishmen say they do. Approximately 40 percent of Americans claim to attend a religious service weekly; in Britain and Germany that figure is 10 percent, in France 15 percent. When asked if they find their religious beliefs important to their personal lives, 86 percent of Americans say yes compared to 49 percent in Britain. And recently, in a question prompted by the arrival of the new millennium, one out of every four American adults polled said that they believed Jesus would return to earth before they died.

Whether or not this professed devotion to religion translates into deep spiritual feeling, it certainly explains religion's continued presence in public life, especially in American politics. Religiosity is linked to citizenship, to the very concept of Americanism. Imagine, if you will, a candidate for Congress, the Senate, or the Presidency acknowledging publicly that he or she is an atheist and then being elected.

Jefferson, the infamous deist, would have fared poorly at the polls today. That you have to appear to be religious to succeed in politics today is indicated by polling which shows that while a very large number of all Americans, 65 percent, say they belong to some religious group, a whopping 95 percent of the members of Congress claim religious affiliations.

So pervasive is public piety in our politics that Newt Gingrich, before his conversion to statesmanship, introduced the proposal for a school prayer amendment by arguing that it would produce "an America in which a belief in the Creator is once again at the center of being an American." Even those who opposed the amendment did not challenge the statement. So ordinary and normal is our joining Americanism and belief (often just Christian belief), that there was little public notice (let alone outcry) when in the 1996 presidential campaign five Republican candidates spoke at a rally in Memphis which began with this flag salute: "I pledge allegiance to the Christian flag, and to the savior, for whose kingdom it stands, one savior, crucified, risen, and coming again, with life and liberty for all who believe."

In the recent presidential race God did very well. The public square reverberated with talk about God, as if only believers can be good presidents and presidents are chosen to be defenders of the faith, not defenders of the Constitution. As the candidates lined up to tes-

tify to their religious faith, they appeared not to know that the Constitution, in Article 6, Clause 3, expressly provided that "no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office." George W. Bush consistently performed on the stump as someone who had proclaimed over the years that "my faith tells me that the acceptance of Jesus Christ as my savior is my salvation and I believe that." He no longer said, as he had in 1993, that people who did not accept Jesus Christ as their personal savior could not go to heaven. Still, he boasted of reading the Bible daily. When asked what thinker had most influenced his life, he said Jesus.

God was also alive and well in the Democratic Party. Al Gore let everyone know, more than once, that he was a born-again Christian and said that whenever he faced a tough decision he asked himself What Would Jesus Do. Perhaps attending multi-million dollar soft-money galas in Hollywood did not



Jack Sherman

count as a tough decision. Gore had little choice last year. Pollsters who told him that he was in electoral trouble with religious America forced him to say something about Jesus. What else could a politician do when he learned that 40 percent of Americans thought that the Republican Party "shared America's fundamental faith in God," whereas only 18 percent said the Democrats did? What indeed would Jesus have done to get rid of the trail of Monica Lewinsky?

Enter Joe Lieberman. As William Safire put it in the best journalist's one liner of the campaign—it took a Jewish Hail Mary pass to keep the Democrats in the game. Yet in Gore's choice of Lieberman, the key factor was not his Jewishness, but his unassailable, unembarrassed religiosity. In his debut appearance on

City With Attitude

Shannon Cochran

One isn't supposed to call it Frisco, though in my heart I still do. Emperor Norton¹ outlawed the term, and Herb Caen never liked it either, and anyway San Franciscans never pass up an opportunity to feel superior, so it's been decided that only yokels call it Frisco. But San Francisco can be a mouthful, and "S.F." is so bland. Most people just call it "the city," and that's really the perfect term to convey our smug and careless love. The city, you know, the city, the Platonic Ideal of City, the Irene Adler of cities, the only city out of all possible cities that will ever really be worth mentioning.

The Society for Creative Anachronism was born in Berkeley. The SCA members don't live in the Bay Area; they live in the Principality of the Mists. San Francisco is the Shire of Cloondara. Meetings are held on the second and forth Tuesday of every month, at the Round Table Pizza Parlor.

San Francisco is very indulgent to these sorts of conceits. If you want to live in the Principality of the Mists you jolly well can. This city is its own little kingdom anyway, set apart by temperament, and bodies of water, and time zones. It's strange how much difference three hours makes. It's very hard to call the East Coast during business hours, because when our day starts it's lunchtime for you. There's really only a few hours to make a connection.

We don't even watch the same television as you. Believing that, I could easily believe that it's a different moon out here.

Even L.A. seems very remote. People speak of it like a distant fiefdom. Our SCA people have wars with their SCA people.

The city's famous tolerance is displayed like a landmark. Rainbow flags fly from the streetlamps. Front-page newspaper headline: "Cross-dress For Less: Which Department Stores Are Really Prepared To Help Men Dress As Women?" It's nice. But a bi-feminist can feel a bit estranged in the "gay district" itself: it's extremely phallogocentric. There's a bar called "Moby Dick" and a burger joint called "Hot 'N Hunkey." It's all very self-conscious and everything's expensive.

I prefer North Beach, where old Italian men hobnob on benches in the park, and you can get a huge slab of fresh focaccia from the bakery on the corner. If you don't care for the middle ages, you could relive the Beat Era in Mario's Bohemian Cigar Store, which is actually a coffeehouse.

Chinatown is just a skip to the south, and that makes for some potent cross-fertilization, like the morning tai-chi practice sessions in front of the church where the old Catholic Italians go.

I live in a remodeled toolshed in the Mission district, for which I pay \$1,100 a month in rent. I was lucky to find it. It's a very nice apartment, for a toolshed.

I've been here a year now, but I vividly

remember the first morning I spent here. I managed to lock myself out, so I knocked on a neighbor's door and asked to use her phone. She said sure. After I'd left a message with the landlord, I went back to my place to find my door, what was left of it, swinging freely open. "Yeah, I do a little kung fu," my new neighbor said proudly. "I kicked it in for you." I was too shocked by all the large scattered splinters to make any articulate protest. Plus, I'm not about to piss her off.

I commute to work every morning. Generally, the conductor on the CalTrain commuter train announces the stations in a repetitive monotone—"Twenty-second street, this is twenty-second street." "Millbrae, approaching Millbrae." But once, coming home to the end of the line: "Ladies and gentlemen, once again your daring CalTrain operators have navigated the perils and pitfalls of the peninsula, bringing your train safely speeding back like a silver bullet to our magnificent metropolis, the City by the Bay. We said we'd stick with you until the end, and this is the end."

It's a city of grand gestures.

But speaking of endings, they're not usually much remarked on. Leave the CalTrain, get on a city bus, and stay on it until the world runs out and you are at the edge of the ocean, at the furthest possible point of travel. You're at Embarcadero Station.

Births and beginnings are much heralded around here. You have to be alert to notice the endings. The lights go out every now and then, and it turns out that those dot-com millions are buried somewhere near the Seventh City of Cibola, but people here are still only talking about the future. When all those yuppies go home, we say, we'll be able to live in their beautiful apartments for just pennies a month. When those usurious power companies go bankrupt, we'll switch over to wind power and make the whole grid public.

It could happen.

It's in exactly the same spirit of trusting abandon that the Society for the Promotion of Seismic Activity spreads their gospel. Earthquakes are good, they say. Earthquakes scare off the faint of heart, leaving the city spacious and cheap. The society distributes earthquake-instigation kits, filled with dominoes, and small weights to put in your shoes. "Every little bit helps," they say.

As a young woman given to walking around alone in the city, I've been able to collect several examples of folk lingo. Once, among a string of more banal comments—"hey gorgeous," "hi baby girl" and the like—I was hailed with "hey tenderfoot!"

Definition: Tenderfoot—slang of the Wild West, denoting a young and inexperienced cowboy. No longer current, except possibly in "Lone Ranger" reruns and the novels of Zane Grey. And on the streetcorners of San Francisco.

Nothing really changes. This is a saloon

town, a bordello town, a town for cowboys and sailors and prospectors. Dot-com stock options are no different from any other get-rich-quick dream that this city has embraced. It's a good thing. San Francisco is a boom town and always has been, and in those periods when there was actually no boom she was a little pathetic, like a dancehall girl on stage with no music.

Right now she's a queen in feathers and sequins. She's making millionaires with one hand and killing homeless indigents with the other.

The best thing happened to me a few months ago. There's a place downtown that sells all the tickets for public transportation, from cablecar rides to weekend tourist passes to the monthly Fast Pass that gives you unlimited transit rights. I was waiting in a line full of tourists from around the world: you hear a lot of French downtown, and for some reason Australians love to come here, and then of course there are families from Kansas singing the Rice-a-Roni song. So the people in front of me were getting their cablecar tickets and their three-day passes, but when I got to the window I hadn't even opened my mouth when the operator handed me a Fast Pass. I blinked and stared, and he smiled and said, "You look like a local."

I look like a local!

The other day I was talking to someone over dinner. He wanted to know where I'd moved here from, and I said New York. "Oh, you're from New York," he said.

"Well, I lived there for a couple of years," I said.

"So where are you from?" he asked. And then I had to explain why that's always a hard question for me to answer: usually I say that "I went to college in Philadelphia," or that "I finished high school in St. Louis," or that "I was born in Indiana." But I also grew up in Arkansas, and North Carolina, and Michigan,

and Washington, D.C. He laughed and said, "So where are you from?"

I said: "San Francisco."

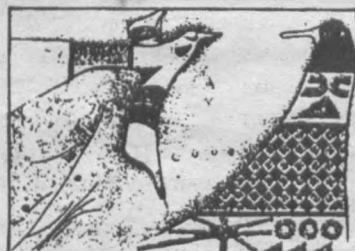
A man died on my doorstep a few months after I first came here. He had been sleeping in the alley outside my apartment for almost a week. I passed him in the morning; he was wrapped in a blanket, sleeping. Sometime during the day he overdosed on heroin. When I got home from work my neighbor told me she'd found him slumped over his needle right beside my front door. She said the paramedics worked on him for half an hour before taking him away in the body bag.

I didn't tell anyone about it. I was ashamed. I can't decide what my responsibility should have been. Surely we cannot take on all the problems in the world. Yet I think we should take care of the ones that come to our doorsteps.

You have to be alert here to notice the endings.

¹Joshua Norton was a 19th-century local celebrity: he basically was a failed businessman who went crazy. Norton proclaimed himself Emperor of the United States and Protector of Mexico; he made some of his own money and declared it the only legitimate currency; he walked around with an "entourage" of other eccentric people. And the thing was that the entire city of San Francisco basically humored and loved him: most restaurants would accept his currency, and the newspapers would print his "proclamations." In 1869 he ordered "a suspension bridge to be built from Oakland Point to Goat Island, and thence to Telegraph Hill." (The Bay Bridge was built 60 years later.) He also "dissolved and abolished" both the Republican and Democratic parties, "and all religious sects." Most famously, he announced that "Whoever after due and proper warning shall be heard to utter the abominable word 'Frisco,' which has no linguistic or other warrant, shall be deemed guilty of a High Misdemeanor."

Shannon Cochran is a former managing editor at The Bookpress.



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CONTRIBUTORS

Shannon Cochran, David N. DeVries, Harvey Fireside, Paul Glover, Isaac Kramnick, J. Robert Lennon, Ruth M. Mahr, R. Laurence Moore, Adam Perl, Joel Ray

ILLUSTRATORS

Dan Burgevin, Allison Dailey, Don Karr, Jack Sherman

INTERN

Mike Loughran

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Gentlemen and Officers

Harvey Fireside

The "Jewish Threat": Anti-Semitic Politics of the U.S. Army

by Joseph W. Bendersky

Basic Books, 2000

538 pages, \$30.00

When I was a teenager in New Jersey during World War II my friends could spout the batting averages of their baseball heroes. Their heads were filled with the exploits of Joe DiMaggio and Stan Musial, Hank Greenberg and Duke Snyder. As a Viennese refugee, I followed the war maps in the papers instead. My heroes were the American commanders whose armies were battering Hitler's *Wehrmacht*.

Over my couch I had tacked up pictures of these generals: the dashing Mark Clark, who had led his troops up the Italian boot; George S. Patton, whose tanks, after defeating Rommel's Afrika Corps, were racing across France; Carl ("Toohey") Spaatz, whose B-29s were making daring daylight raids on Germany; and towering above them, Dwight D. Eisenhower, supreme Allied commander in Europe, a plain man from Texas whose steady hand was on the tiller. My treasure was a letter from Ike thanking me for sending best wishes to him and his soldiers.

Now, Joseph Bendersky, a history professor at Virginia Commonwealth University, has revealed in his painstaking account of anti-Semitism in the U. S. Army that most of my boyhood demigods had clay feet. From 1900 to 1960, the record based on lectures, correspondence, and reports by leading military officers reveals that they harbored various degrees of suspicion, even hatred, of Jews. Clark, who had a Jewish mother, nonetheless believed that "unassimilated immigrants lacked 'respect for American institutions' and could be found among the most active 'forces of disloyalty.'" Yet, as postwar commander in Austria, he saw to it that Jewish survivors were adequately clothed, housed and fed, in line with Eisenhower's orders. Patton, however, "proved to be the crudest sort of racist anti-Semite." When his troops liberated German camps, he described the freed prisoners as "animals, a subhuman species without any of the cultural or social refinements of our time." He balked at giving Jewish DPs "special accommodations" and complained to Secretary of War Henry Stimson of "pro-Jewish influence in the Military Government of Germany." His public denunciation of the denazification program caused Eisenhower finally to remove him, though Patton blamed his dismissal on a plot by "Jews and Communists."

General Spaatz ignored a request from Washington that his Strategic Air Force consider bombing the death camps at Auschwitz in October 1944. Earlier requests for targeting the rail lines carrying thousands of Hungarian Jews to their deaths had been rejected because not a single plane could be spared. But David S. Wyman's *Abandonment of the Jews*, cited by Bendersky, has shown that two other U. S. raids hit factories near the rail lines, less than five miles from the gas chambers. As for Eisenhower, no anti-Semitic remark or policy has ever been attributed to him. His only failing, according to Bendersky, was loyalty to friends such as General George Van Horn Moseley, one of the most notorious anti-Semites and Communist-baiters in the military.

Where did such prejudices originate? Bendersky hints that some of the Army's racism emerged from its role in occupying the Philippines after the 1898 Spanish-American War. In this spasm of American imperialism, which let future commanders such as Moseley win their spurs, U.S. "lib-

erators" of Filipinos from Spanish rule soon moved to brutal repression of native freedom fighters under Emilio Aguinaldo. That part of the history, skipped by Bendersky, helps to explain the racist attitude of American veterans toward their "little brown brothers."

But why does Bendersky include officers such as Eisenhower in his rogues' gallery merely for serving under the likes of Moseley who wanted the U. S. to accept refugees from Hitler only if they were "sterilized before being permitted to embark?" Surely, Ike's provision of care to the Jewish survivors in the DP camps and later refugees from Eastern Europe makes up for some of his bad choices in friends. Among the hundreds of officers with anti-Semitic views in this book, Bendersky might have distinguished rabid racists from those merely guilty by association.

Indeed, after the reader's initial shock at the pervasive hatred of Jews by the U.S. officer corps—amply documented by Bendersky—the obvious question is how much that attitude resulted in specific acts of discrimination. The only clear-cut case of spurious charges against a Jewish officer here is an attempt in 1946 by Colonel Frederick Doll, of G-2 (Military Intelligence), to accuse Colonel Fred Herzberg, an instructor at the Army Information School, of being "subversive." The school commander found that Doll could supply no facts, just suspicions, against Herzberg for his advocacy of "better treatment for racial minorities," i.e., fair treatment of black soldiers. In a Hollywood ending, Doll was reprimanded, Herzberg given a commendation for "meritorious performance of duty."

The linking of Jews to Communists was standard paranoid fare for G-2, at least since America's "Red Scare" that followed the Russian Revolution. Bendersky finds the "Jewish threat" of his book's title a constant refrain of reports from M.I. From 1918 on, the New York office circulated such fantasies together with "ethnic maps," indicating the Lower East Side as a hotbed of revolutionaries. Military attachés in Europe added their reports of Jewish conspiracies. Their evidence was the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion," a notorious Tsarist forgery of a mythical 1912 meeting in Kiev where Jews plotted to dominate the world.

But don't spies in uniform require dangerous subversives to justify their existence? Although Bendersky doesn't use comparative data, it is interesting to note that the French high command in the 1890s concocted an accusation against Captain Alfred Dreyfus that turned into a national anti-Semitic campaign. Surely there were similar attitudes at that time in the upper echelons of the German and British military as well. Ultranationalists need to invent enemy aliens. Not that I am trying to downplay the seriousness of this scourge in the U.S. Its most nefarious expression may have been during the Nazi rise to power, when officers at the elite Army War College were taught that Hitler's war plans were "directed toward the East" and represented no danger to the West.

It was at this training school for staff officers that Bendersky dug up lectures by a flock of misguided Ivy League professors. Among them, Harvard psychologist William McDougall in 1925 warned that the country had to be saved at once from the fast-breeding "inferior half of the population" by sterilization and segregation before it overwhelmed the superior half. Harvard historian William Langer in 1938 and 1939 discounted the chances that Hitler would start a war because of the horrors he had himself experienced during World War I. Following Chamberlain's Munich pact with Hitler, Langer predicted that the Germans would be "content with their gains."

It may not be surprising that the military had its devoted followers of eugenics—an attempt to breed for desirable characteristics, in this case for Nordics over South and East Europeans. This noxious fad had even attracted such luminaries as Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. Despite his Supreme Court dissents on behalf of free expression, Justice Holmes (in *Buck v. Bell*, 1927) justified the government's sterilization of a "feeble-minded" woman because in her family "three generations of imbeciles are enough." Society, said Holmes, had to "prevent those who are manifestly unfit from continuing their kind."

It is more puzzling to find U. S. officers being attracted to the isolationist cause, even to the extent of rationalizing Hitler's persecution of the Jews. One military committee in 1939 argued that "the insignificant Jewish minority" in Germany had incited its troubles by controlling "the country economically and politically to a degree that amounted to enslavement of the Gentile majority." American attachés in Germany at that time warned against letting "the Jewish question" disrupt Washington's relations with Berlin. Bendersky does not point out that, on the eve of World War II, the United States had become a second-rate military power—sixteenth in the world, by one estimate—so that the rearmament ordered by President Roosevelt should have been welcomed as long overdue by the Army. Yet, initially, some officers—plus Charles Lindbergh, Henry Ford and *Chicago Tribune* publisher Robert McCormick—blamed FDR's interventionism on his Jewish advisers and pro-British feelings. Eventually, of course, everybody closed ranks in the war effort.

It remains a mystery why President Roosevelt, at the crest of his powers, could overcome the country's pervasive isolationism but not its reluctance to find shelter for Jewish refugees. For one thing, Bendersky indicates that the president had swallowed the M.I. myth that "fifth columnists" were waiting to slip into the U. S. disguised as immigrants. For another, he suggests that Roosevelt was "inhibited" in publicizing "the destruction of European Jewry" or providing relief because of public perception that "this was a war for Jews." The rhetoric of FDR was commendable but his actions quite limited. "Although Roosevelt sympathized with the plight of Jews," claims Bendersky, "in the end he usually deferred to the judgment of his military advisers." In any case, prominent Jews were loath to distract the president from successfully pursuing the war against Hitler, and the White House found it could ignore this timid constituency, allowing the nativists in Congress and the State Department to reject refugees on a variety of pretexts.

Doris Kearns Goodwin's *No Ordinary Time: Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt: The Home Front in World War II* is more enlight-

ening on the immigration standoff than is Bendersky's account. She gives the administration credit for accepting 105,000 refugees from the Nazis in the 1933-1940 period. But the president proved unwilling to go against the anti-immigrant mood of the country and actually tightened visa applications in 1940. Eleanor Roosevelt kept sending lists of European socialists and Jews being hunted by Hitler to her husband and the State Department, but Franklin resisted her pressure. That is also the view of Joseph P. Lash, in *Eleanor and Franklin: The Story of Their Relationship*.

Bendersky has written an important book, based on newly accessible archives. His book contains a wealth of data on a little-explored subject. One problem, however, is that he could have gone further in fitting the material into a theoretical framework. As it stands, it is somewhat daunting for the general reader looking for a narrative atop the nearly seventy pages of end notes. Another problem is that what the U.S. Army did, especially during its decline in the 1920s and 1930s, may not have been as significant as its officers thought.

Let me close with one example: Captain John B. Trevor, the G-2 officer in New York, who is given major credit by Bendersky for anti-Semitic input into the congressional decision to pass restrictive immigration quotas in 1924. A fuller picture would include in the cast of villains labor leaders, who were trying to keep out competitors for jobs to hold on to wartime wage gains, as well as racist intellectuals. The novelist Kenneth Roberts warned in the *Saturday Evening Post* of the impending flood of "human parasites" who would produce "a hybrid race of good-for-nothing mongrels." Also the 1929 Immigration Act cut the 1924 quotas in half. From then on only 150,000 persons would be admitted each year—132,000 from northern Europe, only 20,000 from southern and eastern Europe, leaving none for Africans. Instead of one decisive push by Captain Trevor, we can identify multiple agencies shutting down what had been a fairly open immigration policy before 1921.

Of course, Bendersky's voluminous data lends itself to a variety of interpretations. Was the Army really playing a rogue's role in the interwar years, as this book suggests, or was it merely exaggerating the country's widespread religious and racial prejudices, as I suspect? My teenage idealism about the military has long since evaporated. In light of my current skepticism, I recommend *The Jewish Threat* as proving once again that Military Intelligence is an oxymoron par excellence.

Harvey Fireside is a visiting fellow of Cornell's Peace Studies Program. His latest book is *The Nuremberg Nazi War Crimes Trials*.

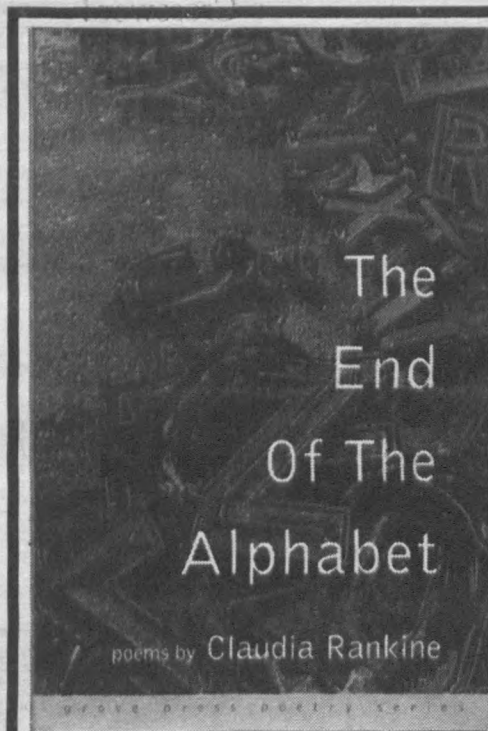
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National Health Coverage Begins at Home

Paul Glover

During the next twenty years we could write weekly letters to our representatives, ride buses to monthly Washington rallies, and gripe about government venality at parties. But Congress would notwithstanding not enact universal health coverage. Banging our little fists on the heavy iron gates of U.S.A. Incorporated will not prevail. That's because the federal government is now firmly owned by private insurers (HMOs were the largest category of contributor to Gore and Bush), and they crave profit more than healing.

Meanwhile, until campaign finance reform gradually restores democracy, roughly one-third of Ithacans have no health insurance, and many others pay heavily for protection. Few have dental coverage. Much suffering goes untended.

Principled futile demand for national single-payer coverage, and nothing less, won't help these fellow citizens, nor the 44 million nationwide who are hurting for care. The frontal attack has not worked and cannot as long as corporations rule Congress and the media, but there's a subtler process which has proven effective.

The Canadian single-payer campaign was begun in 1947 by Swift Current, Saskatchewan, a farm community of 15,000. They organized a local plan which was so successful that people throughout Saskatchewan demanded a provincial system on that locality's model. This was enacted in 1962, despite solid media opposition and a strike by doctors. By 1971 all Canadians followed Saskatchewan to achieve free health care access. Even today, while besieged and underfunded by conservative politicians, single-payer is endorsed by 90% of Canadians. Only 2% prefer the US system.

Ithacans are likewise not waiting for the government or HMOs to become generous. We began a local, nonprofit, member-owned health security system in 1997. The Ithaca Health Fund, now serving over 400 residents, combines features of the Amish health funds, consumer co-operatives, and direct democratic control, with innovations which have made it unique, and attracted national attention.

The Health Fund is already capable of making substantial payments (anywhere in the world with any credentialed healer) for several categories of preventive care (exams, treat-

ments, sterilization) and emergencies such as broken bones, stitches, burns, appendectomies, and dental repair. We operate a dental revolving loan fund, and have also secured discounts with 120 Ithaca-area health providers.

Every big thing starts small. As more people have joined, the size of payments has steadily increased, and our payment categories broaden.

Here are ways that the Ithaca Health Fund is distinctive:

Anyone in the world can join the Fund and rely on any credentialed practitioner they prefer. The special advantages to Ithaca residents are access to discounts with 115 area health providers, plus the dental loan fund.

Fast payment: the Fund holds world records for prompt payment—20 seconds and 40 seconds. Current-paid members approached the Fund's agent on the street with a bill for services and were paid instantly. We usually pay overnight.

More for same fee: The Fund has not raised its \$100 annual membership fee since its founding in 1997, while expanding its payment menu from two categories to twenty and increasing the maximum size of payments. Ithaca-area health providers still pay on a sliding scale of \$30-\$100 year.

No deductible: The Fund pays from ground zero—from the first dollar. Many people with high-deductible insurance have joined the Fund also.

Community rating: We're here to help each other rather than exploit weaknesses for profit, so the membership fee is the same for all.

Members vote: Every member has a vote to decide how we expand coverage, and to elect members of the board of directors. Members vote by mail, email, or by ballot at GreenStar Co-op.

Public meetings: The elected board of directors meets in public. All are welcome to attend. Meeting time and place is on the Fund's website.

Local currency: Ithaca HOURS are welcome for 25% of membership fee from general members, and for 100% from health providers. Other community currencies beyond Ithaca may be used for 5% of the fee.

Barter: The Fund keeps a database of skills members can barter for health services,

if a health provider agrees.

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Paul Glover is founder of Ithaca HOURS and the Ithaca Health Fund, and author of several urban histories.

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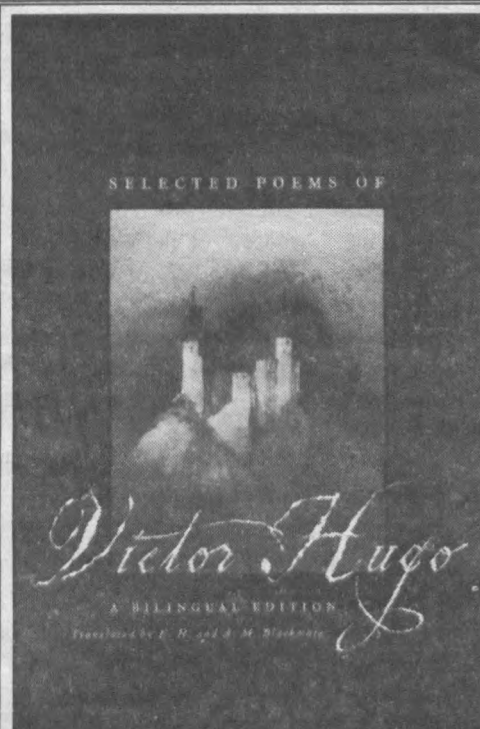
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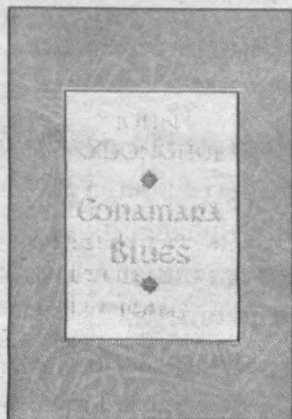
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The Inevitability of Stephen King

J. Robert Lennon

Dreamcatcher

by Stephen King

Scribner, 2001

620 pages, \$28.00

If you're a writer between the ages of thirty and forty, especially a male one, especially a white one, you are likely to have a cardboard box of paperback books stashed in your parents' attic. These are not books you talk about very often, or even admit to having read. Maybe some of them are by Isaac Asimov: the *Foundation* or *Robots* series. Maybe *The Lord of the Rings* is in there. But it's nearly certain, if you have such a box, that it contains at least one book, and maybe three or four, and quite possibly a dozen, by Stephen King. *The Stand*, certainly, *The Shining*, *Carrie*. Maybe *Firestarter*, *Salem's Lot*, *Pet Sematary*, or *Night Shift*. These are not books you brought up in your MFA workshop, or your Contemporary American Literature seminar, or (god forbid) your PhD dissertation. They aren't books you talk about at dinner parties. You don't recommend them to friends, you don't cite them during job interviews, and you don't allude to them—not on purpose, anyway—in your own writing.

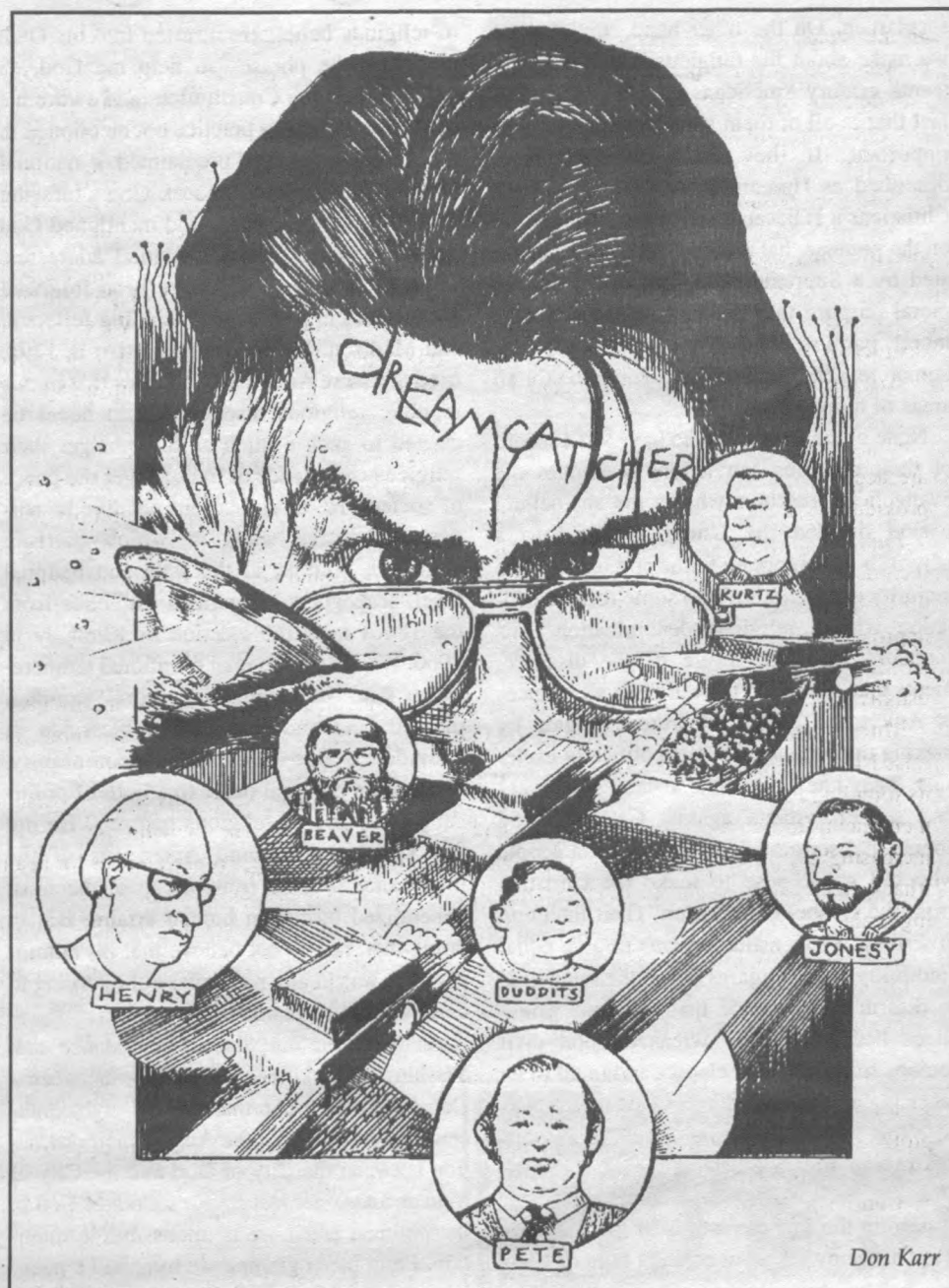
But when you're taking out the garbage at midnight and the neighbor's dog startles you with its barks, you are not reminded of Henry James's *The Ambassadors*. When you're unlocking your car in a barren parking lot and a ghostly pair of headlights appears in the middle distance, Charles Olson's *Maximus Poems* do not spring suddenly to mind. And lines from Conrad's *Victory* do not form on your lips when you see a girl in a prom dress. No, what you think of, respectively, are the monstrous dog from *Cujo*, the evil Chevy from *Christine*, and Carrie, the telekinetic teen, drenched in pig's blood. You don't even have to have read these books to be reminded of them: you could have seen the movies, or you could know somebody who's seen the movies. Even if you don't have friends, or have never been to the movies, you still know that *Cujo*'s a dog and that Carrie didn't have a good time at the dance.

Let's face it: there's no getting away from Stephen King. Believe me, I tried. I had a bad experience with a Stephen King book in my mid-teens (the dreadful *It*) and quit him cold turkey, but damned if he didn't keep writing them, and damned if I didn't sneak peeks in bookstores and libraries when I thought nobody was looking, and damned if I'm not being sucked in again. I've read his last three, and I'll probably read the next one too, and the one after that. Just recently I made the final revisions to a novel I've been working on for two years, and only now, at this late stage, does it occur to me that the dead mobster who haunts my protagonist's dreams is a product of my lifelong affair with Stephen King.

Now, I am not going to tell you that King is a great writer, because he isn't. Sometimes, however, he can be pretty good. His particular pretty good is not the kind you can appreciate by reading a couple of paragraphs; you might not even notice it after reading an entire book. An entire book will be plenty for some people: King does indeed test the patience of the refined reader. He has got a logorrhea problem, for one thing. Here's a paragraph from the first page of *Dreamcatcher*, his occasionally pretty interesting new novel:

To say that Beaver's marriage didn't work would be like saying that the launch of the Challenger space shuttle went a little bit wrong. Joe "Beaver" Clarendon and Laurie Sue Kenopensky made it through eight months and then kapow, there goes my baby, somebody help me pick up the fuckin pieces.

You could get rid of almost everything in this paragraph: the Challenger metaphor in the



Don Karr

first sentence, the characters' full names, the "kapow," the "there goes my baby," the "somebody pick up the fuckin pieces." It's all filler, except for "Beaver's marriage...made it through eight months." And even that could be shortened without any loss in sense.

But if you're going to read Stephen King, you are going to have to get used to it. It's just the way he is. You might say to hell with it then, and you'd be justified in doing so, but those of us who have fallen under his shaggy, twelve-steppin', bear-huggin' spell have no such option. King is annoying, all right, but so are some of your friends (I'm sure I've been an annoying friend myself), and you like them just fine. They are probably the oldest friends you have, in fact.

And that's what King wants: to be your friend, forever. His books are all written in the same style, and it is a rhetorical style—a bar-yarn style—and not a literary style. Every idea is fully expressed several dozen times, usually in a colloquial, rib-elbowing way, with some song lyrics thrown in, a few literary references (often to his other books), and plenty of puns and one-liners and scatological gags. His female characters are always plucky and self-sacrificing; his male characters are smart, book-readin' (and often book-writin') fellas who nonetheless have excellent working-class street cred. This is a major concern of King's. He is one of the most class-conscious writers in America: in interviews this man of letters is always quick to remind his fans that he grew up poor, that he kicked booze and drugs, that he rides a motorcycle, that he plays guitar in a rock band.

Frankly, I am not immune to this kind of charm; it's what I want from a bar-yarn-spinner. King is not a jerk—he takes himself plenty seriously, but he always seems to be having a great time, and fully expects that you'll have one, too. He exemplifies a certain bootstrapping, leather-jacketed American type: the smart guy who loves his wife, knows how to fix his own truck, and can quote Theodore Roethke and the theme song from "Scooby-Doo" in the same breath. This is a fine type to exemplify, an emphatic type. On the page, this emphasis reveals itself in exclamatory dia-

logue ("Get off the road! his mind screamed") and in typographical highlighting: King likes *italics*, he likes ALL CAPS, he even likes **boldface** from time to time.

He loves single-sentence paragraphs.

But what King really appears to like is writing. He does it incessantly, at a rate of eight pages a day (according to his memoir/handbook *On Writing*) and significantly more than a book a year. His prose, slapdash as it seems, can be a lot of fun to read, if you're willing to accept the King persona, with all its excesses. He is, like the fungal menace in *Dreamcatcher*, infectious.

Because here's the thing: Stephen King has good ideas. He can't always distinguish them from his bad ideas, and his is not prose you'll want to return to again and again, but there is something to him that is hard to ignore. He has access to, and control of, a powerful iconography that really does get at the heart of America's fear and shame. He's our sin-eater, the guy who shoulders the burden of our nastiest thoughts, who poisons the wellspring of our vanity, and for this service we have made him one of the wealthiest people in the state of Maine. And more power to him.

Dreamcatcher begins with four short sections, from four separate points of view, that introduce four childhood friends: Henry, Jonesy, Beaver and Pete. They're adults now, each of them wallowing in one or another form of discontent, but they do have at least one good week each year, when they gather at Hole in the Wall, Beaver's family cabin in the Maine woods, for a hunting trip. They share a particular bond, these guys, above and beyond nostalgia: each has a kind of weird empathic power that borders on telepathy. Henry, a psychologist, knows a little too much about his patients; Pete, a used-car salesman, has a knack for finding lost things. James can detect cheaters in his history classes at Harvard, and the gregarious Beaver's casual insights into the lives of those around him have depressed him and made him a loner. These powers seem to be connected to another friend, a man with Down Syndrome named Duddits (after his own mispronunciation of Douglas, his real name), who the four once saved from the tortures of a cruel high-

school football star. The guys treated Duddits like a normal kid, including him in all their fun, but now everyone's grown up, and Duddits has been left behind with his mother.

We are brought to the present day (November 2001), when this year's hunting trip (it will be the last one ever, King ominously informs us) is in full swing. We are with Jonesy in a deer blind. He sees movement in the trees and raises his rifle, but it isn't a buck: it's a man, staggering like a drunk and mumbling "Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear." Jonesy leads him back to Hole in the Wall. Turns out the man has been wandering for days, and he has come down with something: a red, mossy growth is spreading on his cheek and he suffers painful abdominal distress. Within a hundred or so pages, three of the four main characters have either had their minds overtaken by a sentient alien mold or been eviscerated by legless space weasels.

You see, there's been a UFO crash in the woods. The Army has swooped in, cordoned off the area, and blown the helpless aliens (they're the little gray guys you hear so much about these days) to smithereens. But some kind of spores have been released, and the Maine woods are lousy with red fungus, and hundreds of people are infected. In some, we are given to understand, this fungus ("the byrus") has metamorphosed into the aforementioned weasels ("the byrum"), which burst from their hosts' bodies and lay eggs. The Army, under the command of a ludicrously nasty figure named Kurtz (a name he gave himself, and I don't think I need to tell you why), rounds up the infected, sticks them in a barn, and makes plans to kill them all, then nuke central Maine.

Several complications arise, however. The byrus and byrum, as it turns out, don't last long in the earth's hostile chemistry, and don't pose a significant long-term threat, making Kurtz's plan seem a tad excessive. And the byrus—this is the fungus, remember—happens to have the effect of imbuing its host with the ability to read minds. It is this last that allows the mildly infected and Army-cordoned Henry, already pretty telepathic himself, to learn of Kurtz's plan. He must convince Owen Underhill, Kurtz's right-hand man, to betray his boss, set the infected citizens free, and prevent the nuclear explosion.

Meanwhile, Jonesy's mind is taken over by an alien presence he calls Mr. Gray. Gray has access to Jonesy's memories, and ransacks them for a good way to get the byrus into New England's water supply. He takes control of Jonesy's body and slips out of the quarantine area, casually murdering strangers and stealing their cars along the way. Pete and Beaver, sadly, have succumbed to the aliens by now.

Up to this point, the story proper of the novel has taken the form of an action thriller; the plot dominates. But interspersed here and there are bits of the four friends' adventures with Duddits, and their gradual recognition that he has somehow given them their bizarre abilities, and these sections, both lurid and psychologically complex, are the kind of thing King is best at. We see Duddits's rescue from the sinister Richie Grenadeau, and the subsequent "accident" Richie is killed by, which we understand was really caused by the collective effort of the five telepaths, in their sleep, no less. We also watch the five use their powers to rescue a lost girl. The friends feel guilty about the killing of Grenadeau, however just it might have seemed; they feel guilty that they didn't, after rescuing the girl, use their powers for good. In general, they all feel that they've blown it, that they've ignored the powers when it would have been right to engage them. This present crisis, we're meant to imagine, might be a way to make amends.

That brings us through the first two parts of the book, which have been pretty exciting, if perhaps a little serendipitously complex. Is it just a coincidence that the already-telepathic

continued on page 12

Pennies

continued from page 1

August 8 with Gore in Nashville, Lieberman mentioned God 13 times in 90 seconds. One hopes the Guinness people were nearby. This was a record. More convincingly than the Religious Right ever had, Lieberman managed to quiet American nervousness about the place of religion in our politics. This was a shame.

There is nothing wrong with religious faith shaping one's political and policy views, although it might have been more credible had Lieberman's deep religious faith moved him to champion the Old Testament's prophetic call for repairing the world, for working to improve the lot of the poor, or for turning swords into plowshares. Instead that faith shaped his attacks on Sodom and Gomorrah, Hollywood and New York. Lieberman suggested even more strongly than his counterpart Dick Cheney that only a religious people can be a moral people. If so, one wonders why less religious Europeans take better care of their poor, their children, and their elderly and provide a higher percentage of their budgets to repairing their social fabric than Americans. Lieberman used his political opportunity to call upon Americans "as a people" to "reaffirm our faith and renew the dedication of our nation and ourselves to God and God's purpose." His charge mirrored George W. Bush's statement that "our nation is chosen by God and commissioned by history to be a model to the world." And modeled against the Constitution, Lieberman's charge was not much different from Senator John Ashcroft's absurd claim at Bob Jones University that the slogan of some revolutionaries "we have no King but Jesus...found its way into the fundamental documents of this country."

We may be certain of one thing about the 2000 presidential election—God had no hand in the outcome. Politics is an affair of very mortal men as the writers of the American Constitution wisely suggested. God's creation may be messy, but we have to descend very far down the great chain of being before we come to the butterfly ballots, chads, and split judicial decisions that suggest even advanced democracies have trouble recording the will of the people. The infamous and utterly secular 5-4 decision handed down by the Supreme Court in *Bush v. Gore* at least had the virtue of reminding us of how distant we are from the doctrine of rule by divine right.

II

The American Constitution is a Godless document. In its failure to mention God or to evoke God's protection or to pledge the federal government to God's will, the document shattered past models for written political documents, including the Declaration of Independence, the constitutions of the various state governments, and the Articles of Confederation. It separated church and state with the intention of beginning an era when a person's religious convictions or lack thereof had no bearing on his fitness to assume public office. However, almost as soon as Americans took the revolutionary step of separating the purposes of government from the will of God, they invented ways to fudge their resolve.

Religious politics in fact began with the men who proclaimed American secularism in the strongest terms, and any hopes we might have to reform present practices must acknowledge the compromises they were willing to make. The religious persuasion of the men who wrote the Constitution and who launched the American republic remains a subject of perennial debate. About the spiritual practices of some of them we know many things, but most of them have left little evidence of their devotional habits beyond an uncertainly ascribed denominational affiliation. The fact that religion does not much figure in accounts of their lives of course argues

secularism. On the other hand, any surmise we make about the religious beliefs of eighteenth-century Americans must begin with the fact that to all of them some idea of God was important. If they are best collectively described as Humanists rather than partisan Christians it is because they rested Humanism on the premise that men and women were created by a Supreme Being who built a clear moral purpose into the order of things. That moral purpose was open to discovery by human reason and provided a guideline for all areas of human behavior.

None of the founders who have left a record of their religious convictions resembles the evangelical preachers who in the antebellum period divided the United States into a labyrinth of competing faiths and brought the majority of Americans into some formal affiliation with a religious denomination. The founders, however, aware of the disagreements that splintered the religious allegiances of Americans, sought to protect religion by making those disagreements politically irrelevant. They knew about the ancient grievances that set Protestants against Catholics and about the discriminations heaped upon people who did not choose to make the Christian cross the symbol of salvation. Their intention in writing the Constitution was to give equal credibility to all religions and at the same time to disarm the violence that religious grievances had historically wreaked upon civil society. In its religious clauses and in all of its other features the American Constitution was an effort to overcome the effects of discord that played such a predictable role in human affairs.

Among the favorite words of the founders was "harmony." As that concept bore on their personal religious affairs, it made them less doctrinaire than the ministers of the various faiths to which they pledged allegiance. The men who took prominent political roles in the early Republic, Washington, Adams, Hamilton, Jay, Jefferson, Madison among them, all ascribed to religion a good, in fact vital, role in perpetuating a democratic society. However, they were not in our contemporary sense celebrants of religious pluralism. Searching for formulas to overcome selfish group interests, they envisioned a republican citizenry united in common moral practice based on general religious principles. They loathed religious controversy even when circumstances in the political arena placed them in the middle of it. Jefferson, like Washington, could not escape his religious critics. The partisan cries that faulted both men with a lack of religious fervor increased their convictions, shared apparently by most voters of their time, that religious bickering was a private matter, that is, outside the realm of state affairs and of the men charged with governmental responsibilities.

Yet the idea of a secular public realm remained a divisive concept and one open to many interpretations. One influential group of voices was furious about the omission of God from the Constitution and from the first day of the new government blamed every woe that beset the American nation on that slight to Christianity. The no-religious test clause in Article Six of the Constitution upset many delegates in state ratifying conventions, especially since 11 of the original 13 states had clauses in their own Constitutions restricting office holding to Protestants. They noted that unless it were deleted "papists, pagans and Jews might be at the helm" of the national government. Their complaints, as we shall see, never entirely disappeared. However, even the founders who came closest to approving Jefferson's famous gloss on the religious clauses of the First Amendment, that it established a wall of separation between church and state, regularly incorporated into their public addresses phases about the need to seek God's protection and guidance.

In his Farewell Address, Washington explicitly linked public and private morality

to religious belief. He inserted into his Oath of Office the phrase "so help me God," a phrase not in the Constitution, and swore his oath upon a Bible, a practice not mentioned in the Constitution. He proclaimed a national Day of Thanksgiving to seek God's blessing for the American nation, and mentioned God prominently in his two inaugural addresses. Most of these practices have been followed by most of our presidents, including Jefferson and Madison. Yet Washington, also in 1792, tried to assure American Catholics that in this republic religious disputes would never be carried to such a pitch as to endanger their religious conscience or to endanger the peace of society. He of course did not live to witness the sorry ways in which partisan American politics, at the state and national level, scapegoated American Catholics from the 1840s until the election of Kennedy in 1960. Washington, a man of rational temperament who believed that moral conduct pleased God and brought the blessings of Providence upon any moral community, imagined a political order free both of political parties and of religious quarrels. He did not hesitate to remind Americans of the importance of God (referred to in the most generalized terms) in human affairs. But in doing that, he did not believe that his administration was in any particular policy trying to carry out God's platform.

As it turned out, the irenic balance that Washington and others imagined—between a Constitutional order that had in eighteenth-century terms etched the Augustinian distinction between the City of God and the City of Man and a proper respect for a Creator God in the political arena—was impossible to maintain. From the beginning we have had a peculiar national history of divine give and take which has encouraged a language of extreme secularism on the one hand and recurring efforts to write God into the Constitution on the other. Timothy Dwight, an early chaplain at Yale whose name graces one of Yale's undergraduate colleges, attributed the successful British bombardment of Washington during the War of 1812 to American irreligion, in general, and to God's absence from the Constitution, in particular. The linkage of American calamity with its Godless Constitution energized a national crusade in the midst of the Civil War to pass what became known as the Christian Amendment. Led by the great preacher Horace Bushnell from Connecticut, hundreds of Protestant ministers convened two national conventions in 1863 that blamed the horrible bloodshed of the Civil War on God's vindictive punishment, not for slavery but for the Constitution's Godlessness. They urged an amendment to the Constitution changing its preamble to:

We, the people of the United States, humbly acknowledging Almighty God as the source of all authority and power in civil government, the Lord Jesus Christ as the Governor among the Nations, and His revealed will as of supreme authority, in order to constitute a Christian government...do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

Lincoln, whose speeches referred to God almost as often as Senator Lieberman's, refused to endorse the Christian Amendment. Baptists, Catholics, Jews, Seventh Day Adventists and Unitarians opposed it as well, and it never made it through Congress. The Constitution, America's fundamental law, would remain secular, but in that same year, 1863, perhaps to appease the nervous protestant ministers, God, in whom we trust, was put on our money, then certainly much less venerated than the Constitution. God is in our wallets but not in the Constitution.

Six more times, four in the twentieth century, efforts were made to amend the Constitution by adding reference to God to its preamble and six more times God was kept out. The most recent failed try occurred in the

1950s, in the early years of the Cold War, even as Americans were defining themselves as the Godly champion of freedom against "Godless atheistic communism." And once again as they kept their Constitution Godless, some Americans, nervous at the affront, chose to place God in a less fundamental part of American public life, this time the Pledge of Allegiance, where in the 1950s America became "one nation under God."

The Constitution, however, remains Godless, and with it the reminder to all politicians that a political campaign is not a very good place to discuss one's religion, if religion really deserves special respect. God is not running for public office, and God doesn't care who wins. Evoking God's name in partisan gatherings usually amounts either to political pandering or to unpardonable arrogance.

Our national history nonetheless suggests that some of our office seekers will continue to reflect the national nervousness about the bold secularism of our political system. We seem to want to find ways to assure ourselves that having a secular political system is not the same thing as having a society that has abandoned God. The trouble is that this nervousness too often results in awarding God a sort of booby prize. A God who is too exalted to be named in the human document that is our Constitution does not really belong on our currency or in our flag salute.

III

That God is so named in these two places and also invoked in the prayers that begin Congressional and Supreme Court sessions is a compromise that may or may not have passed muster with Washington, Jefferson, and Madison. Nonetheless these booby prizes for God signal uncertainty about secularism that in the political arena turns religion from time to time into a partisan matter. Office seekers play upon any nervousness they sense about the bold secularism of our national origins. At that point the line between a sincere profession of one's faith and political pandering blurs and the notion that religion should not be a test of office flies completely out the window. The question that should have been put to all of the candidates in the year 2000 was whether they believed atheists should be attacked for their religious views if they ran for president.

Religious politics works best in this country when it manages to clear itself of partisan politics. The religious appeals of abolitionists during the 1840s and 1850s, and the religious rhetoric of Martin Luther King during the Civil Rights struggle of the 1950s and 1960s are different from efforts made by the Christian Coalition to take over the Republican Party. That said, however, it remains extremely difficult to figure out how we can use religious resources in public life in non-partisan ways. During the most controversial period of the Civil Rights struggle, King's speeches bolstered the liberal wing of the Democratic Party more than any other political interest. If we remain strictly true to the American Constitution, we ought to insist that government policy should never be determined by a religious claim. However, the American Constitution also protects free speech and ensures that religious voices may make whatever arguments they want in political contests or in the Halls of Congress. And if we pay attention to what the first generation of American politicians actually did and to the patterns of American history since, we learn that Constitutional zealotry in the name of secularism is counterproductive and that the elimination of religion from public life is not an option.

We will venture a prediction. The sort of non-productive religious boasting that has been so much a part of the American political scene since Reverend Jerry Falwell first proposed a Moral Majority will fade away, at least for a time. It will fade because the major-

From Heaven

ity of American voters don't like it and are increasingly willing to punish presidential candidates who try to run with God. Al Gore's spiritual professions could not carry his home state of Tennessee. While George Bush undoubtedly got some help from the Christian Coalition, history will record that he lost the election. Most religious groups are acutely aware of how little they gain from placing God on the political hustings.

However, one legacy of the last twenty years of political God talk will continue to weigh on public policy decisions and not incidentally to divide Americans in important policy debates along religious lines. What seems to have been accepted by influential sections of both political parties is the notion that religion can solve some of America's biggest social problems. It can solve the problem of crime. It can solve the problem of education. It can solve the problem of poverty. We may hear fewer claims in the future that America is a Christian nation, which it most assuredly is not, but we will hear a great deal more about government partnerships with faith-based charities and faith-based schools. Congress and the Supreme Court are poised to rethink the lines that have been drawn between Church and State.

American liberals must react with something more than cries of horror, remembering that it was they who were angry in 1986 when conservatives tried to keep religious conviction out of the public square, when Ronald Reagan's Secretary of the Treasury William Simon worked feverishly and unsuccessfully to keep the Catholic Bishops from issuing their statement on the American economy. Polls consistently show that people at the low end of the economic scale—whites, African Americans, and Hispanics—view churches as valuable resources in community struggles against crime, drugs, and functional illiteracy. Our secular nation has always granted churches tax exemption, a financial contribution to religion that has never been held to violate the non-establishment clause of the First Amendment. From one perspective tax-exemption is a notorious exception. We do not allow a local government to give one dollar to support a minister's salary, but we give churches the much greater boon of tax-free property. From another perspective however, the exception makes perfect sense as public policy. Like universities and other secular eleemosynary institutions, churches perform public services beyond converting people to particular religions. They feed the poor. They build hospitals. They create institutions for the infirm and elderly. The more of these services they provide, the more religion contributes to the general public welfare.

The proposals for government endorsement of religious work will surely multiply, but we will here confine ourselves to a consideration of President Bush's opening of a White House office to promote faith-based charities and social services. Any measure to promote social justice deserves attention, although there is surely reason to be cautious in this case. That caution is based on three considerations. The first has to do with the wisdom of separating religious institutions from their specifically religious missions, a separation that the First Amendment requires in any government-financed program managed by a religious organization. The second has to do with an encouragement to churches to compete for public funding, a potentially unspiritual competition that will inevitably shower more government money on some religious institutions than on others. The third consideration is the most important and goes back to the concerns of the founders—to enlist God in the cause of making human government work better may finish both by demeaning God, subjecting churches to the charge of failure, and bringing out the worst possible behavior from religious institutions. It is absolutely wrong for government to use its money to entice churches to change the

nature of their social missions into enterprises for which they lack expertise.

We already have some experience with Charitable Choice legislation passed in 1996, the intention of which was to encourage charitable giving and to make it easier for government to enter contracts with churches to provide social services well beyond the usual charitable activities of religious denominations. Before this legislation religious organizations had to establish separate secular agencies to administer federal funds. Now they can do so through their regular religious institutions. By far most charitable activity sponsored by individual congregations and other local religious groups has to do with feeding the poor and handing out used clothing. Nonetheless, the totally untested assumption was that faith-based institutions were better able to get people off drugs, out of prison, and into regular jobs than secular agencies. John Ashcroft's Senate sponsorship of the legislation made liberals nervous, but it passed with bipartisan support. Lieberman backed the original legislation as firmly as he has endorsed the more recent Bush plan. There were of course rules governing these contractual relations between church and state. The issue was pragmatism. Did a program work? The rules for determining success applied equally to religious and secular agencies. In running a drug program, a church did not have to move out of its building or strip the walls of religious symbolism or never mention God. However, it was enjoined not to proselytize and to make any religious participation entirely voluntary and not a requirement for the services it provided.

Implementation in some parts of the country was predictably lax, and a number of cases hit the courts. Texas, for example, gave \$8,000 to the Jobs Partnership of Washington County that required participants to study Scripture and taught them "to find employment through a relationship with Jesus Christ." Perhaps a less predictable result has been the reluctance of churches to climb on board the program. In the first few years after the trumpeting of Charitable Choice, churches did not pick up the available public money. The largest church charities in the United States, run by Catholics, Methodists, and Jews, continued to run their operations without claiming that they could bear a major role in solving America's social problems. Smaller church agencies were apt to take the attitude of a local group in Ithaca, New York: We can provide a free lunch for the poor but we cannot do much about the circumstances that bring these people to our door.

A cynical view of the Bush program, which expands corporate deductions for charitable giving and eases the regulations that restrict religious activity in faith-based charities receiving government money, would hold that it seeks to shrink government, with tax benefits for the rich, by making patsies of the nation's churches. Interestingly, research by Mark Chaves of the University of Arizona suggests that American churches with conservative theological and political profiles are less likely to reach for government money or to invest much in charity at all than liberal churches. Liberals after all are more conditioned to expect great things from government, though in this case they ought to think carefully about the implications of failure. Bush's plan might yield some important benefits in black communities, simply by making more money available to institutions with a long history of providing a range of services beyond spiritual counseling. Whether that makes up for the unseemly prospect of the Church of Scientology benefiting substantially from government largesse is another matter. But in no eventuality will churches save the cities.

Let's assume that experience will quickly lead to the scaling back of rhetoric and expectations. Is there any reason then not to

give John DiIulio and Stephen Goldsmith, who are spearheading the President's initiative, the chance to show what faith-based institutions may more moderately provide, and with parameters that do not destroy the establishment clause of the First Amendment? Neither man has courted the extreme points of view associated with the Religious Right. A lot depends on what the Bush administration means by easing regulations. In its 1988 *Bowen v. Kendrick* decision, the Supreme Court laid down appropriate guidelines assessing the Constitutionality of federal grants to religious organizations providing social services. Written by the Court's bare conservative majority, these guidelines held that funded agencies cannot limit their services to people affiliated with any particular religious denomination; that services provided under an act cannot be religious in character; that there be no substantial risk that aid to the religious institution results in religious indoctrination; that religious institutions must not be the sole or primary beneficiaries of legislation; and that any arguable effect of advancing religion must be "incidental or remote."

America's largest religious charities have for years carried out their mission in ways that satisfy these requirements. Without question, however, there is a problem in umpiring a broader range of social services when an important reason why many churches claim

success in working with drug addicts and criminals is that they convert people. They can provide people with beliefs that don't solve their material problems but that give dignity and meaning to their lives. We run quickly then up against a dilemma, which Pat Robertson also noted. Why on earth should government do anything to discourage churches, especially Christian churches, from trying to help people by converting them? Yet any truly Constitutional program for government assistance to church social services may do precisely that.

Unless of course you fudge the rules and hope that the Supreme Court will change its 1988 resolve. If that happens, then we have reaped the worst of what this season of partisan religious politics has always threatened. We will have destroyed any pretense of the secularism of the American state and put it in the business of promoting religion, of interfering with religion, and ultimately of favoring by its financial favors one group of churches over another group of churches. All of which, liberals should trumpet, is not what the framers intended.

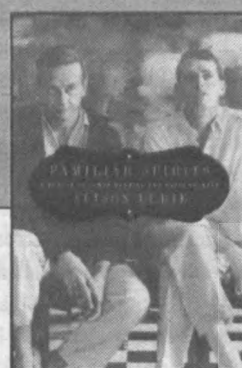
Isaac Kramnick teaches government and R. Laurence Moore history at Cornell University. They are the co-authors of *The Godless Constitution* (Norton, 1996). This article is taken from a piece they wrote for *Dissent* magazine's Spring issue.

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SUNDAY, MAY 6, 2001, 2:00 P.M.

Alison Lurie
Familiar Spirits

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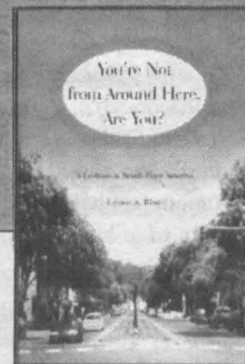


Familiar Spirits is Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist Alison Lurie's poignant memorial to her friends, the poet James Merrill and his partner David Jackson. In her signature mix of comedy and analysis, she deftly charts the rise and fall of their relationship.

SUNDAY, MAY 13, 2001, 2:00 P.M.

Louise Blum
You're Not From Around Here, Are You?

Tompkins County Public Library



You're Not From Around Here, Are You? is Louise Blum's autobiographical account of the year she and her partner unleashed a storm of controversy in their small town by deciding to have a child. Blum's razor wit and deft precision expose rural America in all its comforts and terrors.

SUNDAY, MAY 20, 2001, 2:00 P.M.

Jeanne Mackin
The Sweet By and By

Women's Community Building Auditorium



The Sweet By and By is the strange but true history of Maggie Fox, 19th-century founder of the American spiritualist movement, who haunts a 20th-century journalist in this double-barreled tale of love and loss.

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Other Realms

Ruth M. Mahr

Exiting Nirvana: A Daughter's Life with Autism

by Clara Claiborne Park
Little, Brown & Company
240 pages, \$23.95

Exiting Nirvana: "What a strange title," I thought, as I fingered the book, attracted by the colorful Victorian house on the cover. "How could anyone possibly describe the world of an autistic person as 'Nirvana'?"

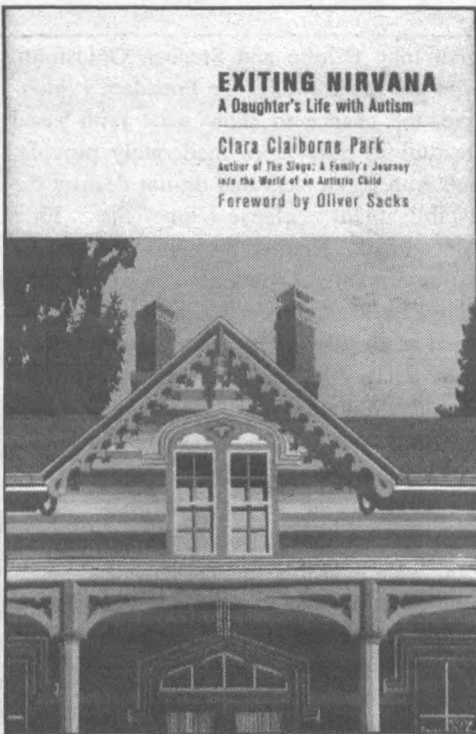
But Clara Park, author of this book and mother of Jessie Park, got it right! As an autistic child, Jessie Park's world was her Nirvana: a static world of order and contentment. When Jessie was an infant her family faced a choice: let her rock happily—perhaps in an institution—in her world, or try to draw her into our world—one of risk, change, and reciprocity. Using their own resources, which happily included love (obviously lots of it), an abundance of patience, and a determination to understand Jessie's mind and how it worked, Jessie's family undertook the latter course, thereby beginning a lifelong commitment to Jessie's education, growth, and progress.

The ensuing story is warmly told. Its great achievement is that Jessie emerges from these pages as a lovable human being; she is a person we would like to know. But there is more: interwoven in the story is up-to-date information regarding the most recent understanding of the autistic condition. *Exiting Nirvana* is, first, the story of Jessie Park and her emergence from Nirvana; second, a primer on autism; and, third, a glimpse at the workings of a fascinating, albeit autistic mind.

All of these attributes, plus the succinct, well-organized way in which the story is told, make this a wonderful book—for any reader. The insights the book provides into the workings of an autistic mind will be fascinating for the layman with only a casual interest in the topic. And, for parents, professionals, and others who work with people with autistic-like traits and behaviors this book should be both useful and inspiring.

When Jessie Park was an infant, 43 years ago, little was known about autism. Today we know more, but still not enough. Case studies like this and, for example, that of Temple Grandin (*Thinking in Pictures*, First Vintage Books, 1996) add considerably to our understanding of people with autism and related disorders and of the difficulties they confront in their dealings with our society.

Autism is no longer as sharply defined as it once was. Typically, the word "autism" was associated with "a child mute, rocking, screaming, inaccessible, cut off from human contact." (Oliver Sacks, Foreword to Grandin, *Thinking in Pictures*, p. 11). More recently, Temple Grandin has helped to expand public consciousness of a high functioning variant, called Asperger's syndrome. Psychologists



now recognize that autistic disorders fall along a spectrum (pervasive developmental disorders: PDD) that includes autism at one end and Asperger's followed by another variant (PDD not otherwise specified: PDD NOS) on the other. Sometimes the word "autism" is used in the more inclusive sense. The Autism Society of America, for example, uses the term more broadly to include "children and adults (who) . . . have difficulties in verbal and nonverbal communication, social interactions, and leisure and play activities." (*Exiting Nirvana*, p.215) Within each classification there is a wide variation in abilities and impairments, but generally speaking those with Asperger's and PDD NOS, although they continue to exhibit the social/emotional/relational deficits characteristic of autism, are more capable of functioning successfully in our world. Like Temple Grandin, some may go to college; many, or even most, will hold jobs. Some may be highly successful professionally, but in other cases, social deficits may prevent achievement commensurate with intellectual abilities.

The good news that we learn from Jessie's story is that a child's place on this spectrum need not be fixed permanently. As a result of her parents' intervention, Jessie was able to move from the low-functioning, classical autism end of the spectrum toward a higher functioning place closer to Asperger's.

Suppose that a child's brain is impaired in its ability to process information. The child thus impaired will have difficulty in making sense of a world in which sensory information is constantly changing. In response she may, as did Jessie, shut the outside world out entirely by focusing—sometimes for hours—on objects, like chains or bits of paper, that are reassuringly familiar and unchanging. As she grew older, Jessie exhibited an uncanny ability to make sense of the world by ordering information through the use of numbers and symbols. Here

is an analysis of Jessie's thinking at age 13: "Most daythings. . . have numbers, in which the digits 1, 3, and 7 predominate. Most of the numbers are primes: 7 is good, 3 is bad, but almost always 3 is associated with 7. The numbers 73 and 137 are . . . magic, and the concept of days in general belongs to their product $73 \times 137 = 10001$." (David Park and Philip Youderian, "Light and Number: Ordering Principles in the World of the Autistic Child," as quoted in *Exiting Nirvana*, p. 76.) Similarly, Jessie's interest in words sprang not from their ability to convey meaning but from the systems she discerned in them: ". . . Jessie reports a new word . . . 'remembrance.' A new fluffy-in-the-middle!" (*Exiting Nirvana*, p. 3. Five small letters on either side of a tall one are "fluffy-in-the-middles.") Jessie's systems disclose an astonishing intellect. Indeed, we are impressed with Jessie's busy mind. Yet, in this penchant for ordering words, objects, events, it is the system that is important to Jessie, not the human content.

This exposes a fundamental core common to all PDDs: the brain's difficulty in processing includes difficulties in processing social/emotional information, such as changing facial expressions and vocal intonations. There is an impairment in the ability to intuit and to respond to other people's feelings and emotions. Whatever their other abilities, a person with a PDD will remain socially handicapped.

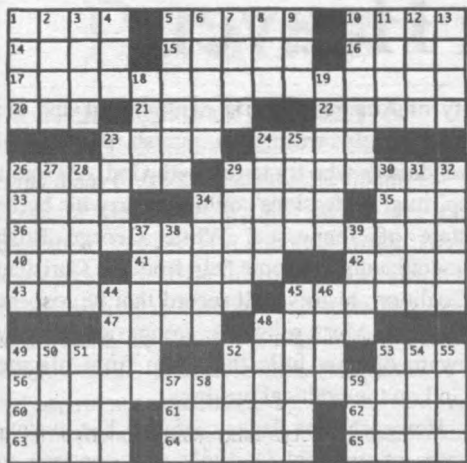
The task of drawing Jessie into our world was enormous. It required of Jessie's parents that they enter Jessie's world, understand it, and use this understanding to teach Jessie enough about our world that she could become, as far as her limitations permitted, a functioning member of society. Today Jessie works in the mailroom at Williams College and is a talented artist. (Just look at that book jacket!)

This success is all the more remarkable when we realize that much of Jessie's achievement is a result of her family's own resources, including their interest, intellect, and dedication; for, while Jessie would eventually go to school, in 1963 when she would, by virtue of her age, have otherwise qualified for a public education, a law mandating that she receive that opportunity was still almost ten years away. Even when the opportunity for a public education did become available for children with handicapping conditions, including eventually Jessie, little was known about autism or its variants, and, generally speaking, teachers and public school administrators at that time were ill prepared to deal with "hard to teach" children.

Fortunately, things have changed for the better. Early detection of developmental delays in children and public funding of early intervention programs mean that families need not feel so alone and bewildered when they realize that their child is "different." It also means that, assuming parents, pediatricians, and care givers are alert to the need, help arrives early. There is no cure for autism or other forms of PDDs, but the Parks' experience

continued on page 10

Crossword by Adam Perl



Solution on page 2

ACROSS

- With 1 down, classic toys
- Valuable instrument, for short
- "The Green _____"
- Vogue competitor
- Poet's muse
- Fall stone
- Some insurance stock
- San Francisco's _____ Hill
- Skip
- Church parts
- Mimics
- Clean up
- Made anti-macassars
- Willy Loman, e.g.
- Rocker's knob
- "I didn't know you had it _____!"
- "_____ to Joy"
- Popular read
- It's an even bet (almost)
- Car model
- New Year's Eve word
- Foreign travelers need them
- Cold sore virus
- Wine choice
- Role for Costner
- Economical
- Guadalajara greeting
- Host
- Engage in risky behavior?
- Former African dictator
- Band leader's phrase
- Solo
- They're often made
- Lyric poem
- Emulate a willow

DOWN

- See 1 across
- Rival rival

- Smooth-tongued
- Date
- Appeared
- Un et deux
- Host
- Communications corp.
- A word from Homer
- Changes
- Some NASDAQ offerings
- Trim
- Part of B.P.O.E.
- Manage
- Abate
- Director Egoyan
- The Duke
- Falling off place?
- Aquarium favorite
- Hurt
- Bara of silents
- Cuts
- Kind of operation
- Fred's sister
- Pocket protector crowd
- Harden
- Sushi bar offerings
- Expensive eggs
- Seniors org.
- With 49 down part of a Captain's Plate, perhaps
- Winter melter
- 60's photo magazine
- Rodrigo Diaz de Vivar
- See 44 down
- Cronyn of film
- Chisolm trail town
- In re
- Tender
- Buffalo's county
- PDQ
- End preceder?
- Cool
- Keyhole, for one

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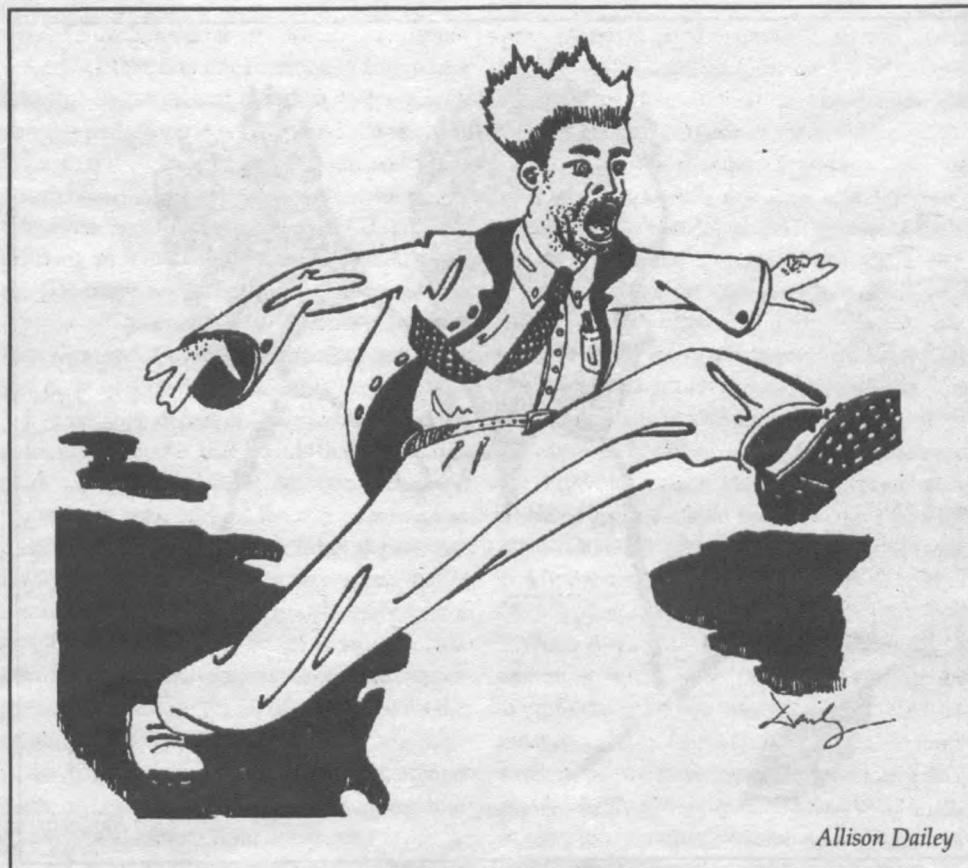
David N. DeVries

I unplugged my career today. Typed "unsubscribe" to the Chaucer.net. Ditto "medtextl" (for Medieval Text.net) and Ansax.net (for Anglo-Saxon Network). Cancelled my subscription for *Speculum*, the journal of the Medieval Academy of America, from whom I also withdrew membership. Ditto *Chaucer Review*. Resigned my membership in the New Chaucer Society. And said goodbye to the MLA. All this felt oddly liberating. Both my mailboxes, virtual and actual, will seem emptier for a time, but that means less of the day will be filled deleting blow-hard hot air from my e-mail and less of the day scanning the indexes of the journals to see how graduate school peers are faring now, years down the line; less of the day seeing the same names in the same places as the inner circles tighten and reproduce themselves into oblivion. Not that I'm bitter.

Yesterday the chair of my department knocked on the door of my office. I'd just returned from teaching my morning writing class—18 first-year students, as we've learned to call freshmen around here, struggling with Thorstein Veblen's *Theory of the Leisure Class*, a book I love to inflict on the children of the swelling managerial classes. I was harried as I had an 11 o'clock survey of Brit. Lit. coming and I'd had little time to review my notes on Keats's *Odes*, mostly cadged, I'll admit, from Helen Vendler. The chair came in, and shut the door behind her. Quickly, rushing out the words as if she were running down a dark street where unknown dangers lurked in the shadows, she informed me that I would not be receiving tenure. Nothing to do with me, my teaching, my scholarship. An official letter is coming. Institutional exigencies. She's worn her hair the same, I'll bet, since she was in her twenties: shoulder length, off center part, trimmed evenly all around so that the side to the left of her face (as you're looking at her) falls often into her eyes and she spends much of a conversation hooking hair around her ear. Now she's in her sixties and the hair is mostly gray, stringy, frizzy, always sparse on the top. This time in my office she's nearly frantic with the hair, actually pulling it from behind with her left arm bent in back of her head, her elbow out in the air swaying to and fro, as she tumbles out the words. They need to create a line in Cognitive Psychology, a growing field, and they look to find that line in a moribund field, and Middle English lit is it, the dying field whose sacrifice will fertilize the ground out of which a top-notch Psych program can grow. She doesn't actually wax that metaphoric as she tells me.

I can't even feel angry about this. Though no one has said anything for weeks about my 'status,' the vibrations were there, as if I were a dog sensing the oncoming earthquake. But now that the ground has quaked, I'm at a loss. The reason given for my dismissal catches me a bit off-guard, robbing me of any immediate anger. If it had been something trendy, something in Cultural Studies, or Pop Culture, some over the edge blur of sociology and anthropology and feminist theory and queer theory...but Cognitive Science. Even I have to admit that there's a field worth plowing.

As she's telling me my professional life is over (again, these aren't her words: it's what I hear through the actual words she says, words uttered quickly about institutional realignments, departmental and college-wide priorities, with her eyes refusing to lock into mine, skitting all around my untidy office) I think how canny she must have been back there in the 1960s to have chosen the English Romantics. Her graduate school had one woman on staff and she did Middle English and back then the appeal of working with a woman was powerful, but there was something about the closed-shop nature of medieval studies, locked up with dead languages and dead religions and death mostly, that was, to my chair, deeply off-putting and she went, instead, to the Romantics, where, to be sure,



there was a lot of death. But the field is endlessly able to absorb the waves of critical fashion washing over the department and emerge each time, new, with new reading lists and new approaches and new editions with new writers being discovered. Mostly, I suspect, in her secret reading heart she returns always to Shelley, upon whom she labored fruitfully and long to produce a dissertation that was quickly published and quickly secured her a tenure-track spot in this department and that has carried her to her eminence now, such as it is.

I, of course, had a different experience in graduate school, stumbling into a medieval lit class and being caught hard by *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and, especially, the Middle English lyrics and the even older Old English lyrics, *The Exeter Book* with poems like "The Wanderer," "The Seafarer," "The Ruin," "The Wife's Lament," "Deor"—those mysterious voices inhaling deep from the word-hoard where all the wisdom of the language seemed to breathe out between the syllables—*thaes ofereode, thisses swa maeg*, that passed away, so may this. *Eald is thes eorhsele, eal ic eom oflongad*, old is this earthhall, I am all longing.

I spent my dissertation years, as we ex-grad students call those faraway days when libraries beckoned and hours bent deep over old books in old rooms were the extent of our professional lives—the job market, of course, always a buzzing presence, but never too loudly in those days to detract from the anxious pleasure of reading and writing and waiting nervously for the director's never altogether satisfactory comments—those years I spent engaged with a Middle English poem called "Pearl".

Lecture mode should kick in here, filling in details of language, form, sources, themes, relationships with other poems in the manuscript and other medieval literature and culture more generally. But, why bother? It's all but impenetrable in its original form to most contemporary English-speaking readers. The writer, or writers, of course, had no idea that the language that clearly meant the most to him, or her, or them, that that language would become virtually indecipherable to his or her or their descendants. "*Forme of speche is chaunge*," as that canny old Chaucer put it, "*wythynne a thousand yere*." Well, here we're dealing with only half a thousand years (give or take a decade), and still the words on the page might as well be Greek to most of us.

Despite its forbidding wordy clothing, "Pearl" does tell a story, at times a very moving one at that of a man coming to terms with grief, standing over the grave of what many assume is his daughter, his pearl, having a vision of her soul in the after-life as he thinks about her body, "*hir color so clad in clot*,"—and that's what caught my breath about the poem, that line: the alliteration on the hard c-sound, with the liquid 'l' coming to cling and

the culminating, shutting sound of the '—ot' (with its resonant echo to the verb that describes what's happening in the grave)—all the sounds working to present aurally the vision of mud and muck sucking the color from his rotting pearl. But the real mind-blower about it is that the guy claims that thinking about his rotting daughter is what makes him sing, "*Yet thogt me neuer so swete a sange / As style stounde let to me stele*."

How's any reader from suburban post-modern America supposed to get these lines? And from that beginning the poem travels deeply into a knotty discussion of salvation that is even harder for those of us who've come to consciousness in the blue glow of the cathode ray and its digital descendants. But I felt like I did respond, and once I got the hang of it I was drawn to "Pearl" by the beauty of the thing, and by the way that I thought I detected the poem resisting its overt message, resisting the orthodox and, to my mind, complacent resignation to death that is articulated by the speaker's interlocutor (this is lit-crit speak and I'll be glad, to be frank, to be giving this up), the way I felt the poet breathed through the extraordinary and, therefore, celebratory intricacy of the form the kind of fundamentally elegiac melancholy I found in so many other Old and Middle English poets (this is the topic of my dissertation, which did not get published, and did not secure me tenure and such eminence as I do not now have). The fundamentally elegiac melancholy that is my normal operating state of mind, whether or not I'm engaged in medieval studies. Living in, as the poet put it, *thys doel-doungoun*, this dungeon of sorrows. That's what first drew me to the poem and that's what kept me there, hacking my way through the forest of criticism and scholarship that's grown around all those ancient voices. A convert to the impossible faith of words, looking to spread the gospel.

A tangled skein of gray and white hair slips past her fingers and swings across her eyes. She blinks rapidly, jerking her head back and tossing the strands ear-ward. Her eyes glance quickly over the row of blue volumes of *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, the titles and volume numbers and years stenciled in gold and I swear I catch a grimace tighten her already painfully thin lips. As her eyes continue to patrol my bookshelves, she quickly explains, this has nothing to do with me or with how the department views me, a valued colleague, a true friend to students, a great scholar. Paradigms shift (this is the kind of talk I've grown to loathe) and medieval lines all over the country are disappearing, continents grinding into each other and away from each other and there is medieval studies the California of the academic landscape sundering and splintering and finally sinking into the sunset-lit sea. Again, the metaphoric fancy isn't her speaking.

It's me, now, shorn of the professional apparatus, lightened so that I can make the leap from the landmass slipping away from me. But, to where? Just leap for leaping's sake?

And what the fuck am I supposed to do with Keats and Brit Lit survey? She backs out of my office without even asking me how I'm doing, without any of the sort of saccharine pabulum I've heard her offer other colleagues on a denial, or after a round of bad evaluations. I wonder, at the time, if this has some deeper meaning, if she's harbored all these years a kind of distaste for me because I chose the moribund field of medieval studies in which to labor. Ironically the class is scheduled to do the Autumn ode today, the melancholy hymn to the retreating warmth and the over-ripe abundance of harvest at its extremest verge. But I don't have the heart for it and so come up with a lame in-class writing assignment which the students welcome because it frees most of them from the onus of speaking publicly about poetry they little understand and feel not at all.

But today, mid-February, after a startling day-long thaw, with the temperatures still above freezing and a flock of wild turkey foraging through the gift of a mid-winter's melt in the long grass that marks the margin between my wooded lot and the thicker woods beyond, ducking and bopping their heads and moving, moving, moving steadily through the sunlight, today I feel like a monk jettisoning the trappings of his life as he prepares to walk the via negativa toward the clarifying mortification of less and less. Will need to rid myself of such metaphors, I inform myself, as they are a clinging reminder of my past life. Instinctively, I reach for a book. This has become a kind of conditioned reflex to the onset of powerful feelings, looking, I suppose, to surround the feelings with words, to buttress my mind, to sandbag it like delta workers against the coming waters. The first book I touch is by Ivan Illich and it is called, *In the Vineyard of the Text: A Commentary to Hugh's Didascalicon*. Another tattered rag from the skin I'm sloughing. So, instead, I reach for my *Hardy's Complete*, a volume, I'll admit, my then-girlfriend stole from the Woodbridge, New Jersey, public library in 1980. When we broke up in 1984, I surreptitiously slipped it into a box with other books. And, boy, is this a mistake. Loss and lament in every direction. I find one of the ones that I've memorized and check myself and see that it sticks no matter how much time has passed:

I look into my glass
and view my wasting skin
and say would God it came to pass
my heart had shrunk as thin

for then, I, undistrest
by hearts grown cold to me,
could lonely wait my endless rest
with equanimity.

But time, to make me grieve,
part steals, lets part abide,
and shakes this fragile frame at eve
with throbings of noontide.

Not the sort of poem guaranteed to add a lilt to your song or a lift to your step. And lord knows I'm nowhere near evening, though the frame feels pretty fragile at times, whether throbbing or not. The turkey flock has passed out of view and the wind now is in high dudgeon, roaring an advance warning that winter is rushing back. The house rocks and the windows seem to bulge inward with the pressure of the gusts. A few leaves are peeled off the ground by the wind and blown haphazardly across the lawn, until yesterday buried under a mucky pile of snow and ice. More snow is forecast for tonight and I should go outside and clean up the driveway, pick up the branches blown from on high. But I don't have the heart for that either.

continued on page 11

Fiction

Joel Ray

One night in 1975 James read the men a story about the day he found out his wife was divorcing him. He'd been in nearly four years and had four to go, with a parole hearing up soon. He had a son just turning five.

James told of waking up, the morning routine as always, touching his pictures of George Jackson and Angela Davis before he left the cell, getting in the chow line for some shit on a shingle, the usual banter with his buddy Can-do. Then back to the cell for head count, and another day is in front of him. When he reached the part about the teddy bear, the men started up with their uh-huhs and you-knows, like the amen corner. He was telling about how they were picking up white-folks' laundry in the town, and how one day when they returned to the guard house with the baskets full, and the guard failed to check the baskets, one of the guys had found a teddy bear in among the dirty sheets. James had said, well, see, some mama out there thinkin' 'bout us, and another had said, trying to get our black asses in a sling, what that mama trying to do. How you know it ain't got dope in it? Nah, said James, I'm gonna have that teddy bear. And so they had to figure out how to get it to his cell, no small deal, but they managed, and now it sat on his cot. Afterwards, the men on the detail developed their routines about guardhouse security, sudden little riffs while they were standing in chow line or out in the yard: 'Scuse me, sir, but did you see that bear go up the mountain just now? Naw, man, I too busy readin' your mail.

Benny says, "Keepin' us safe from harm, you know."

"But this time on laundry detail," James said, "things go different." He always felt happy getting out in the air and seeing the sun outside those walls, but as he sat in the idling truck waiting for the gate to open, a hack came running up and told him he was off detail. The PK wanted to see him. "Well, shit," he said to Can-do, "what the man want with me? Y'all go on, then. Have a time out there. Watch you don't pick up no barbie dolls or nothin'. Later."

Blues in F



Dan Burgevin

He went along with the guard to the PK's office, disappointed, wondering what was up. He sat on the bench outside the office for a long time while the PK talked to the guard. He could hear them joking about their wives. Then they started going on about fishing, some weird shit about snatching salmon with gang hooks.

Donald says, "Make me think of the teach's fishing poem the other week. What I said." "Umhnn, I remember," says Benny. "Say you pulled a arm out of the East River once." Donald snickers and slaps Benny on the shoulder; eyes the teacher. James is cool, waiting to reenter.

So, James says, he sat there on the bench wondering what was up, but starting to yawn and doze from the tension, and then the PK came out and said "James." Now that woke him up right off, "'cause nobody here don't call me James 'cept the cons. Strictly last name and number." "Come on in and have a seat," said the PK, and they went into the office and the PK closed the door and walked

around to the other side of his desk and sat down, rifling through some papers. James wanted to stay standing but took the chair and sat lightly on the edge.

"Here, James, you need to read this," handing him a paper. There was a court name at the top, and James started reading. He saw his wife's name. He was being served with divorce papers by his wife, Maria. The PK was looking at him. James continued to hold the papers, reading and rereading, not looking up, and saw his name typed at the bottom with a line next to it. The PK said, "I'm sorry, James, but it doesn't look like you have much choice." Why did this honky keep calling him James? This was a private matter, between him and Maria.

"Just want to hold your hand," says Benny. "Mothafucka playin' wif you," says Donald. "Tell him to kiss my black butt."

James reads on. "So he goes on about how our women be always messin' around while we here doing time. But soothing me—it ain't nothing new, he says, I'll get over it. Talking

man to man. I be very quiet and still while he carries on this whiteman talk. Then I see. He wants to get me mad. Say to the hacks, "Watch that Williams, he's an unhappy fellow. Get me to mess up my parole hearing. He keep on saying how women are a trouble and a cross. By and by I be thinkin' 'bout his wife."

"How 'bout his mama?" asks Lucky. "Whatchu say 'bout his mama?" Everybody laughs.

"I wonder will the man go home today and tell her that another nigger lost his woman? I cannot hardly stand the thought of being mouthed over by the two of their dusty mouths."

Lucky screws up his face. "Pshoo," he says.

Then the PK came around the desk and put his hand on James's shoulder ("Up off me!" hollers Lucky). "Son, you know she's found somebody else. You just got too much time to do." James stiffened under the hand. Maria was a good woman, good mother to his son. She wrote him every week, they had their thing. She had no way of knowing about the PK's game. Wasn't her called me back from the laundry truck. We solid. We be friends. I have nothing but love for her.

"Um-hmm. Some f-f-fine chick," says Matthew.

"I do not sign the paper. I say nothing. The man looks funny at me and says take it with you, Williams, and sign it, and get it back to me. I stand up and ask if that is all. I turn and walk straight through that door. And then I be free."

James stops and stacks the papers and thoks them on the books in his lap, and sits back.

The men are quiet for a moment.

"Stone, man," whispers Matthew.

Lucky says, "You know, man, when I lay down at night I can't get to sleep 'less I fold my arms across my chest and hold my neck real tight. Feel like I got to keep hold or I'll fly away in my dreams."

Donald says, "What that got to do with anything?"

Matthew says, "Lucky worried about the invasion of the b-b-body snatchers."

"I hear it," says James.

Joel Ray is a former editor of The Bookpress. He lives in Ithaca.

Other Realms

continued from page 10

rience shows that autistic children are teachable; a good educational program—the earlier the better—is essential to the social and intellectual development of the PDD child.

But what about autistic adults—those children who passed through the system at an earlier time? As Oliver Sacks observes, "...we almost always speak of autistic children, never of autistic adults, as if such children never grew up, or were somehow mysteriously spirited off the planet, out of society." (Foreword to *Thinking in Pictures*, p. 12) This is confirmed by Internet searches which are likely to turn up scads of references to the education of autistic children, but rarely, if ever, information on autistic or other PDD adults.

Here the cases of Temple Grandin and Jessy Park are instructive, but in providing a guide for independent living for the PDD adult, their experiences are useful only at the extremes. On the one hand, Jessy Park's verbal and

social deficits are such that the question of living outside the protective environment of her family never arises. On the other hand, Temple Grandin is a highly intelligent, introspective person who is capable of intellectualizing our world even though she cannot participate fully in its emotional core. For Temple Grandin, who has chosen celibacy, independent living poses intellectual challenges which she is fully capable of meeting. But what is life like for PDD adults—many of whom, amazingly, may never have been diagnosed—who fall somewhere between these two extremes?

Recall that at the core of autism and other PDDs is a failure to intuit the feelings of others—to imagine or perceive other people's minds. Now imagine that you enter a room filled with strangers and that you are incapable of perceiving or understanding their body language, facial expressions, or voice intonations. How much of what is communicated would you miss? A lot! And much of it

of great consequence, like whether these strangers are kind, warm, sincere, trustworthy, or their opposites. Now think of a young woman or man with this kind of disability who functions outside a circle of trusted friends and family. It doesn't take much of an imagination to understand the potential for betrayal, abuse, and exploitation, including sexual. As Temple Grandin says, "People with autism desperately need guides to instruct and educate them so they will survive in the social jungle." (*Thinking in Pictures*, p. 95)

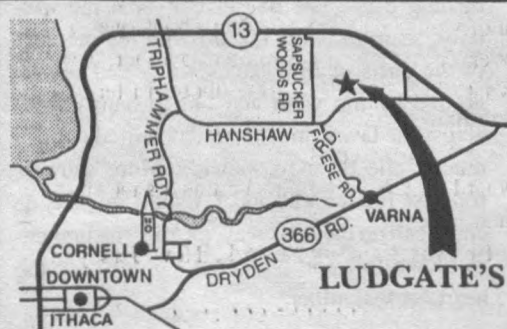
And what happens when an individual with a PDD becomes a parent? Will he or she be capable of anticipating or even understanding a child's emotional status or needs? Of understanding and ministering to the child's feelings? Now add other common characteristics: an inability to engage in imaginative play and a desire for order as manifested in certain rigidities in behavior. And, further, the parent's difficulties in discerning character and intentions

among his/her own peers. Surely, these are important questions; they raise issues about which we need to know more—much more.

Additional case studies of individuals whose social functioning falls somewhere between that of Jessy Park and Temple Grandin are essential. I suspect that those case studies, if they could be developed, would cast light on a neglected area of social policy.

A diagnosis of "autism," or, more generally, PDD, may evoke in parents feelings of fear, grief, anger, and denial. If denial extends beyond family to the entire society, resources to help those with a PDD and their families will not be forthcoming. Fortunately this is no longer the case for children. But for many adults with PDD I fear the denial is real. They may be our lost generation.

Ruth M. Mahr, a retired economics teacher, is now a freelance editor who enjoys photography, writing, and being a grandparent.



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My Calling

continued from page 11

I should have gotten righteously drunk last night. Though, on reflection, that would have been such a maudlin and silly gesture. Tonight I'll probably get moderately drunk in the bosom of my aging family. My parents' have scheduled a later afternoon and evening soirée, their monthly family get-together. The latest news has disinclined me, but familial obligation outweighs personal reluctance and what has happened to me will slowly emerge into the dim light of the family's converse, all half-sentences and mumbled tremors of deeper feelings, as we all avoid what we really want to say. And like I say I'll probably get drunk there and spend the night in the spare room they've outfitted at the top of the stairs in what used to be an attic when the previous owners were here. My folks bought the house last year. Moving to be closer to me, my brother and his wife and their four kids. I'm divorced. My ex is a lawyer here in town with a thriving practice, as they say. We never had children, too much on our plates in our separate spheres for either of us to attend much to the domestic sphere and that's why we drifted apart into other lives soaked up by our professions. Me into a teaching job at a small college struggling to hold onto its spot in the second tier of the *U.S. News* rankings. As you know, on a line for Middle English, but in a department that was and is changing the requirements for its major so that now a kid has to have only one course from before 1800 and just about anything can fulfill that, even the first half of the Brit Lit survey. The writing was on the wall ever since, really, I first arrived. My teaching load became more and more service, the genuinely medieval courses dwindling to a special reading section every now and again with two or three inquisitive juniors while the bulk of my time was taken up with composition and the survey. Not that I minded those classes. But all of it is now behind me. They'll staff the writing and survey classes with barely eking out adjuncts or with advanced grad students from the major research university on the next hill and I'll be on my way, not, I fear, hitching my mantle blue to fresh woods and pastures new; but wand'ring steps and slow taking my solitary way. That's what all my years of education and teaching have come to: tricking out my thoughts with the sparkling words of long-dead writers.

I should think about education. I should consider what has happened to me in the broader context of the on-going evolution of higher education, think the event into the longish, the *longue* durée, the stretching massing bulk of academic history, as if a minor cataclysm in the geologic unrolling of the University. Think back to the twelfth century and Paris and Peter Abelard and his calamity. A perspective drawn, again, from the failed life, the husk I've left behind. I wonder where turkeys spend the night. Where turkeys retreat when the weather turns brutal as it has right now: the wind whipping furiously the snow and the trees into a general chaos of cold. Spare comfort offered by the skeletal remains of summer out there. If winter comes, as the poet hopelessly asked, can spring be far behind? My dissertation director used to say that Frederik Klaeber, whose edition of *Beowulf* I'll soon be selling to the used book shop in town, quoted that line in a letter he wrote during the last winter of his life, starving and freezing in the midst of the calamity that was Germany in the 1940s.

But instead of performing a salutary historical survey of Western academic history, I try to recall the first conversation I had with anybody from my former department. I should say that I do have eight weeks of teaching left in this, my last, semester. Eight weeks will take us through Arnold and Tennyson and Hardy, Yeats and Auden and Woolf and Joyce in the survey and through Don DeLillo's *White Noise* and Toni Morrison's *Sula* in the writing class and then stacks of papers, exams, last-minute desperate appeals for incompletes and it's

over. I'm a lame-duck academic who cannot remember that first conversation. There was a whirl of social events: the chair threw a welcoming party for my wife and me. I had a 101 fever that day, felt miserable, went and made inane small chat with a poet and her lover and felt even worse than before we'd arrived, drinking in hopes that the booze would quell the flu; while my wife charmed the pants and dresses off of everyone. But there'd been an interview and a campus visit before that party and none of it comes back.

I remember departmental meetings, one in particular, the one that should have splashed cold water in my face, the one when the department tinkered with the requirements and tinkered away my courses. The department always meets in a small seminar room that is meant to hold ten students comfortably with a faculty member able to range from the chalk board to the lectern to the table with no impediments. We squeeze the 20 of us in there for the meetings. Always our 18th-century specialist is the first to arrive. He wrote a dissertation years ago on the picaresque novel in the 18th century, and since *Tom Jones* was a well-plowed field, he chose the perfectly charming *Humphrey Clinker*. In the early nineties he wrote two essays on the dialogic imagination in the 18th-century novel, and then he fell into tenured silence. He always sits dead center. Next to arrive is the newish fellow who runs our English Ed. Program. He sits across from our Mr. Clinker. Mr. Clinker despises Mr. Ed. I've never really understood this: Mr. Ed is an affable enough guy and perhaps his very affability irks our Mr. Clinker. But lately I've begun to wonder if a more subterranean force is at work, if Mr. Clinker senses that Mr. Ed represents the continental shelf beneath which Mr. Clinker's 18th-century tectonic plate is being subducted. Our Mr. Clinker will not look at Mr. Ed. Mr. Clinker makes eye contact with each and every person sardined into that room, except for the person who sits dead straight across from him. Nobody seems to note this oddity, conversation simply swirls around them like eddies around rocks.

This particular day when the chair, sitting next to Mr. Clinker, her elbow threatening to blind him as she battled the wayward hair, put on the table the notion of scaling back the pre-1800 requirement, there were no protests. I did wonder aloud whether students lacking a preparation in the older literatures would be at a disadvantage when they came upon the modernists and their arsenal of allusions. But the table's modernist responded that allusions were the reason that critical apparatus were designed and that faculty should occasionally lecture and all resistance surrendered to the inevitable. He is male patternly bald, but shaves the rest of the ring of hair so his shining orb can dominate the rooms full of benighted he must suffer daily. His glasses are black and pinchingly small—like the ones Joyce wears on the cover of the edition of *Dubliners* my class reads. The effect of the black glasses against the shiny pale skin stretched tight across his skull and the small veins pulsing along his temples, the effect is often disconcerting, as if the black frames were squeezing his head so tightly the skin threatens to burst. I'm sure I'm not alone, surreptitiously watching Modern Man's pulse throbbing along the skin under the black frame, or his jaw tightening and drawing the skin across his temple so taut it seems transparent like thin gauze threatening to tear and spill the considerable contents of the intimidating shiny pate all over the floor. I shouldn't have been surprised by his argument, after all we all work at a place whose president, as he announced the elimination of the Classics department, averred that the study of the ancient languages was no longer necessary since anything worth reading from them had already been translated.

This particular day Mr. Clinker said nothing, but Mr. Ed shook his head quite vigorously, indicating, I now realize, that he knows

how to build on the unstable terrain. They moved on to another topic and I remember looking out the window, the room is on the second floor in the back of the building, so the view is over the parking lot and the scruff of trees beyond where, that day, squirrels were gamboling up and down, circling in mad dashing whirls around the tree trunks and a blue jay squawked from the middle branch of a small maple whose canopy shaded Mr. Clinker's car. He drives a very old Ford LTD that is mostly all rust now and tattered. I'm not sure if this is affectation or inertia, since he can clearly afford at the least a nice used car. For some reason I remember very clearly a joined pair of maple seeds twirling through the air, like the rotors of a helicopter slowed, twirling toward the bleached out cloth roof of Mr. Clinker's Ford LTD.

Once there was a "spirited exchange," as the chair put it in a letter she sent to the department after the meeting during which our specialist in Renaissance studies, or Early Modern as we have now learned to call it—her speciality is the figure of Elizabeth I in the literature and culture of the period, and our specialist in Victorian studies—two women who received their degrees within a year of each other, on separate coasts, and who both arrived on campus two years before I did and are both now tenured and happy—the two of them tag-teamed an assault on the two composition specialists from the writing program who came to discuss ways the English department could assist the Writing Program execute its mission. Elizabeth and Victoria tore apart the advanced graduate student who sacrificially presented the Writing Program's proposal, while the faculty sponsor of the program hung his fire in anticipation of, it seemed, just the flare-up that happened. What I recall most vividly about this explosion was how many members of the department withdrew into silence—Modern Man appeared asleep through much of the hour or so, and Mr. Clinker stared at a piece of paper on the table in front of him, intently, without seeming to blink for the full 45 minutes. Only Mr. Ed, at first, chimed in with tentative support, not for the proposal itself—he's too sensitive to the ground's shifting for that—but support for listening to the proposal.

Victoria led the assault. Her half-frame glasses are always poised on the end of her nose and she tilts her head back to look down the slope of her face toward whomever she is speaking. The effect is, I'm sure, calculated. She began by questioning the legitimacy of a person lacking a Ph.D. making a proposal to the department. Dr. Write sprang to the hapless grad student's defense arguing that he, Mr. abd, had devoted hours and hours to the program, knew it as well as anybody, knew the students better, indeed, than anybody on campus and was well-qualified through course-work and research to discuss the relationship between the Writing Program and the English Department, indeed between any Writing Program and any English Department, so well did Mr. abd know the field. At this point Elizabeth leaned forward. She is diminutive, with tightly curled hair cut close to the collar and thick round glasses. She was sitting to Mr. Ed's right; I was to his left. So at first I didn't see her. But she leaned far forward this time and placed both hands, palms down, forcefully on the table and asked in a tone of regal indifference, "What field?" "Uh, composition," replied Dr. Write. "Composition, I should think, hardly qualifies as a serious field of academic and scholarly study. It is the service sector of our economy." And we were off to the races. Dr. Write's face suffused so quickly and so brilliantly red one understood the linking of anger to fire in the ancient physiognomies just by looking at him. He came roaring out with words like audacity, pretentiousness, patronizing, blinkered useless navel-gazing (metaphors were mixing in the rapids of his stream of invective). Mr. abd's lower lip was trembling and his eyes

fluttered rapidly. The chair let out a very audible sigh and allowed her hair to fall straight over her face, as if finally recognizing its value as protection, as camouflage from all the chaos swirling around. Through all the anger, and Victoria and Elizabeth rose to Dr. Write's heights of indignation and the three of them spun madly around and around in incriminations and insult, through all the pandemonium Mr. Clinker maintained his vigil over his piece of paper and Modern Man kept his eyes tightly closed, though a tightening along the temples was noticeable beneath the black frame of his eyeglasses. Mr. Ed was clearly at a loss, stuck between the proverbial two worlds, uncertain which way to turn. I don't recall the denouement of the conflict. I remember the chair's letter, vaguely, as a vague attempt at patching over the considerable rifts that had opened on campus as a result of the meeting.

I can remember squirrels, a blue jay and maple seeds, and spirited exchanges around the crowded table, but, try as I might, the first few moments on campus, my first impressions of the bucolic greensward that has been home for the last many years, nothing of those first days emerges from the dark backward and abysm. Instead I go farther back, before graduate school, to the year or so I lived in Rahway, New Jersey and substitute taught at Rahway High School, living "in a basement down the stairs," a studio apartment reading John Donne at night. Smoking pounds of marijuana. Struggling with God. I was twenty-five, "out of college money spent, see no future, pay no rent" as the song goes. My larcenous girlfriend was working for an ad agency in New York and lived with her father in Woodbridge. We'd met while we both worked nights at Sterns Department store—she as a clerk, me as a security guard. A whole bunch of incommensurate jobs. Up at six to wait for the inevitable phone call and then spend the day in whatever classroom needed a warm adult body to keep order. Never tried to really teach anything during that time. But I did get to know some of the kids, mostly black guys with fancy cars and little time for some white fool who drove a beat-up old Volkswagen and had long hair and an irritating way of not understanding what their jokes were all about.

Nights I'd have to be at the store by 5 and work to 10:30. Weekends too. And on those days when the Rahway High School was fully staffed, I'd call the store at 8:30 and more often than not the Security Manager would need coverage and I'd work a full shift-and-a-half at Sterns. None of this left much time for anything else, except sucking down a couple of joints listening to the 11 o'clock news and then cracking Donne's *Holy Sonnets*, a desperate kind of close-reading, prying apart the poem line by word by syllable, battering on the little worlds made cunningly of elements, hoping for revelation. Never came. This midnight reading had become an obsession, moving backward through English poetry, from Eliot to Whitman and Dickinson, to Wordsworth and, especially, Blake, and back, back, deeper and farther into the rhythmic past of the English tongue—reading as if my life depended on it. Oddly, I guess, the most interesting things that happened in my non-reading life during that year or so happened at the store. Well, interesting for me. There were interesting things happening in the larger world, of course: the Shah collapsing, Reagan rising, and so forth.

But what sticks most clearly in my mind, and what I've been thinking about over and over since my chair blurted out her news, what I've been thinking about instead of thinking about my situation in the context of the drifting continents of academic history, what I've been thinking about is a shoe salesman I knew back then.

He was born in Newark, New Jersey in

continued on page 12

The Inevitability of Stephen King

continued from page 5

friends happened to be camped in the woods invaded by the telepathic aliens? Where do the gray guys fit into this whole byrus-byrum scheme? But never mind: King will resolve these problems (in a monumentally unsatisfying way, I'm afraid). Part three awaits: simultaneously the dumbest and most interesting of the book.

Orders have come down to Kurtz from on high: the mission is over. But Kurtz goes off on a frolic of his own, determined to chase down Owen, who has betrayed him by releasing the prisoners. Meanwhile, Owen and Henry are on a mission, too: they're chasing Jonesy/Mr. Gray, who are on their way to dump a byrum-infested dog into the Boston water supply. Mr. Gray's only concern is the perpetuation of his species, no matter the odds, and now millions of people's lives hang in the balance. This triple-chase happens in, um, Humvees. That's the dumb part. Many, many, pages are filled with scenes of people driving Humvees through the snow, trying to read each other's minds (they've all got the byrus). Owen and Henry need Duddits to do this properly, so they go to Derry to pick him up.

The Humvee chase, however, is interspersed with the interesting stuff: the battle being waged in Jonesy's head. My. Gray has moved in, confining Jonesy to a tiny corner of his mind. After awhile, this corner takes on visual form: the dusty office of a Derry warehouse where Jonesy once had a childhood adventure. Jonesy paces here, trying to figure out how to get his mind back, and gradually he makes a discovery. He can change the room, add a poster here and there, add a telephone, put in new walls. When he manifests a door, he peeks behind it and discovers a ware-

house filled with boxes: his own memories. He hustles a few of the boxes back into his office—memories of Duddits, as it happens—before Mr. Gray discovers what he's up to and stops it.

Because Gray is engaged in a mental battle of his own: he wants to get into Jonesy's office, thus taking over his mind completely. If Jonesy creates windows to look out of, Gray claps steel shutters over them. If Jonesy creates a fax machine to send telepathic messages by, Gray cuts the lines. And Gray is faced with another problem. His race is intelligent and tenacious, but lacks emotion; as time passes in Jonesy's body, Gray begins to feel all too much at home. He craves bacon, he laughs at a joke. He is going native.

The end of the book is a little ridiculous, a series of artificial close calls, near misses and timely reversals, complete with a tearjerker, a bloodbath, and lots of clever one-liners ("That's right, beautiful," Owen manages to say before blowing the byrum away, "smile for the camera") uttered at unlikely moments. But the psychological battle that precedes it truly is a pleasure. Jonesy discovers that he can expand his mental prison by remembering and analyzing the events of his life; King is implying (as he does in many of his books) that imaginative memory is our primary tool for enhancing our own consciousness. The four friends were granted their telepathy—really, a souped-up form of empathy—by committing an act of kindness and compassion, and this empathy (along with a lot of stolen military equipment) is what saves half of New England from having to incubate the byrum. It's no accident that the surviving friends are the history professor and the shrink; they represent those human qualities,

memory and emotion, that King finds most redemptive. That's why I like King, in the end; he loves humanity, and lets his characters succeed (or fail) for the right reasons.

And yet, though King is a very smart man, the very smart reader may want to throw this book across the room. Sometimes his writing is simply bad, the kind of bad that comes from a disrespect for the reader's intelligence. I won't burden you, or insult King, with a list of literary crimes—like I said, you have to take it or leave it—but I have to mention this problem, for King's mind (byrus-free, we must assume) is otherwise so agile and sympathetic. There are really nice touches: the way Mr. Gray comes to a complete stop at a stop sign, his regimented alien conscience trumping, briefly, his need to reproduce; the way Duddits's mother, anticipating her son's death, is moved to tears by the smell of the balm she applies to his muscles. Occasionally the prose is quite deft—"Dead trees clutched at the white sky, as if to snatch the clouds open"; "He...felt his lips tattoo a kiss into the springy moss all the way down to where it was moist and tasted of bark"—and reading it, you wonder why you're also being asked to read lines like "His second shot went right through the weasel's humorless grin."

It's awfully tempting to say that King writes too many books, too fast. People have said this about him before, and King has responded (King always responds to his critics) to the effect that there were plenty of great writers who wrote copiously, and plenty of bad ones who labored over every word. He's right, but he's wrong: the process is different for everyone. Stephen King does write too many books, and he writes them too fast, and they would all be better if he took more time to

reconsider what he does in them, and how.

I say this because I feel like King is robbing himself of a decent legacy. His imagination has had a real effect on our popular culture, but his words haven't influenced our literate culture, because they don't measure up to his imagination. And yet he seems blind to this possibility. The eight pages a day he cites in *On Writing* are not simply his own personal habit; this is how much he thinks everyone should write. Tinkerers, he believes, are simply lazy; self-doubters are wimps.

This is self-justifying. Flannery O'Connor's four books of fiction, for instance, are going to outlast King's fifty or so, at least as works of literature, because she wrote the way it was necessary for her to write, to create the best work she could. King, on the other hand, is never truly at the top of his form; unlike, say, Danielle Steele or Tom Clancy, who are hacks, he has got a really good writer in him somewhere. I can see this ideal writer, trapped in Jonesy's dusty office, trying to imagine his way out. And who is King's Mr. Gray? Probably his next idea, his next story or novel or screenplay. King's ideal writer succumbs, I think, to the ferocity of his inspiration.

But really, there are worse things to succumb to. Money, for instance, or fame. For all of King's millions, his insistence that he doesn't care about money is to be believed: the books, for all their flaws, are passionate, infused with a frenetic, obsessive energy; and his best images and characters, in spite of the words that brought them to life, will last longer than he does.

J. Robert Lennon is the author of three novels, *The Light of Falling Stars*, *The Funnies* and the forthcoming *On the Night Plain*.

My Calling

continued from page 11

1932. He graduated high school in 1950 and entered the Army. He was stationed in San Diego until 1951 when he shipped out to Korea where he was stationed at a supply depot well back from the front-line action. He left the service in 1954, after having spent time in Japan, West Germany, Alaska, and the Caribbean (he would later say that those years were the best years of his life). He came home and married a local girl, got a job in Macy's in New York as a salesman, bought a car, a house and 'settled down.' He and his wife had three children.

Before he knew it it was 1979 and he was 47 years old (the age I'll be turning next week), his kids were leaving for college and he was working as a salesman still; though in a different store. He sold shoes in the Ladies Shoe Department at Serns, the large suburban Department Store where my girlfriend and I

also worked. He smoked two packs of cigarettes a day and had had some trouble with his heart.

He spent most of his time, of course, at the store. He would arrive there at nine every weekday morning (and every other Saturday morning) with a newspaper. He would go first to the cafeteria for a cup of coffee and a smoke. Then he would go to 'the floor' where he would fit shoes on women's feet until 1 p.m. when he would go back to the cafeteria and order a grilled ham and cheese sandwich and a bowl of soup, eat them, smoke a cigarette, tell anecdotes about his army days or Indians and go back to 'the floor' until 6 p.m. Day in and day out.

Indians. You see, he had a hobby. He scoured the New Jersey countryside for signs of the Indians. He read and reread *National Geographic* articles about the Indians; he bought and read and reread the *Time/Life*

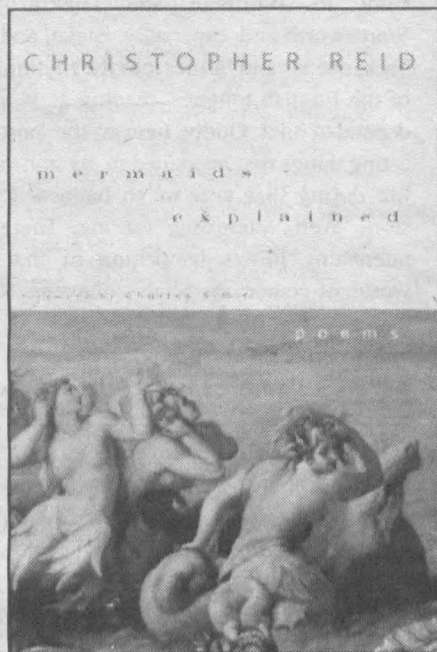
series on American Indian life; he had file drawers filled with articles about American Indians, which he had clipped from newspapers and magazines. He was a Boy Scout troop leader who specialized in acquainting his scouts with his version of American Indian life. They went on camping and canoeing trips at Camp Sacagawea, trips that simulated Indian techniques for camping and canoeing. They went on amateur archeological digs for Indian artifacts, visiting suburban tracts with names like Metuchen, or Piscataway, or Delaware; rooting in the construction sites of future Squirrel Runs and Maple Groves. He whittled thin rods of wood into figures representing what he believed were the Indian spirits of the land, the air, the water and the past. He wore a turquoise-studded watchband he had picked up from a local pawnshop. He could never articulate just what it was about the Indians that obsessed him so. It was his

'thing.' The other guys with whom he ate lunch had their 'things': playing the lottery, playing the stock market, betting on the horses, fishing, hunting, cleaning the car.

One day in early June of 1979, after a morning of coffee, cigarettes, size 5 double E width feet; he went to the cafeteria, ordered his sandwich and soup, paid for them, carried his tray to his usual table with the other salesmen from Men's Suits and Furniture, sat down, had a massive coronary and fell face-first stone dead into his soup.

His name was Tony, and I think it was when I saw his head slam into the soup bowl that I decided to go to graduate school.

David DeVries is Director of the Undergraduate Research Program in the Cornell Arts and Sciences Academic Advising and Admissions Center.

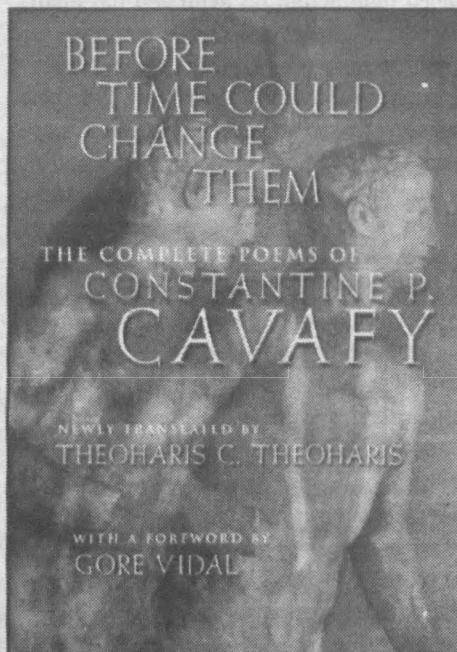


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