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in medias res



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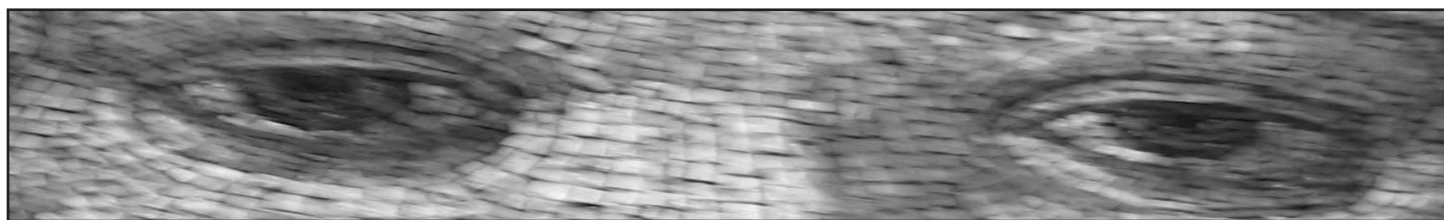
with **Yann
Martel**

EDITORIAL POLICY

In Medias Res is a journal devoted to the dissemination of the liberal arts in light of the Christian intellectual tradition. Our publication's title derives from the Latin language, the ancient tongue of the Western Academy and Church, and denotes the state of being "in the middle of things." We select a broad range of publications, such as articles, essays, travelogues, reviews, poetry, fiction, and art, which represent the thought cultivated in various programs studied at the University of Saskatchewan. Indeed, the university must contain something of all these disciplines to be called a *universitas*, a whole which has sufficient diversity and

depth to merit its name. Situated as we are amongst many ideas, both within the University and the wider world, we are well-advised to reflect critically upon the principles that constitute our culture. The purpose of this paper, then, is to foster the intellectual growth of our University's students, to confront the philosophy of contemporary society, to reflect upon the Western tradition, and, peradventure, to incite the human soul. Both students and faculty are encouraged to contribute to this publication, and anyone who is interested in becoming a member of the Editorial Board is most welcome to contact us for further information.

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In Search of a Liberal Education

Professor Celene Sidloski | English

All human beings by nature desire to know. (Aristotle, Metaphysics 980 a1)

It is not an exaggeration to say that for me it has been the project of an entire lifetime to acquire a liberal education. I was in search of one year in advance of knowing what one was, and came to university with the sense of excitement of one who believed in some dim way that here I would find what I sought. What I did find both justified my instinct, and paradoxically disappointed it. Rooted first in the sandy soil of the College of Education, then in an Honours B.A. program, my undergraduate education was a series of hits and misses. At times, I was able to read the actual works of real thinkers and writers, and contend with their still-living ideas; at others, I was floating on the surface of masses of derivative notions whose sources no one bothered to examine. Even in my first philosophy class, I did not know the pleasure of reading the actual words of a single philosopher, falling back momentarily upon the unsatisfactory conclusion that Plato, Aristotle, and the rest must not be worthy of more than bland paraphrase. I tried to get to the root of everything I read nonetheless; and just when I thought I had built a stretch of solid road through the history of ideas, I found myself on the precipice of a great canyon or yawning wasteland which threatened the integrity of the little I knew.¹

One could argue that this is in fact the necessary condition of all learning, and perhaps it is—but still something was missing, if I only knew it, something that was unfairly denied me for some time, that made my struggle more fruitless than it needed to be: the promise of a liberal education, an implicit promise to provide a comprehensive and unified view, an approach to manage the interrelations of ideas, and even a teacher or teachers who could direct my studies and point out to me my own blind spots. So

what was it that I really sought? I had thoughts, and I had ideas; I wanted to know what kind of relation these bore to the thoughts of other, more capable human beings, living or dead. I wanted to know what others had thought, and why, and how. I wanted to know why my age looked as it did, and what I had to do with all of this. I knew that I was less than nothing in the large scheme of university life, but that did not matter to me. I was excited and knew that what I searched for had nobility in it. Ultimately, I was in want of a proper liberal education which pays regard to ideas as serious things, which regards the desires of the human soul as having some real meaning and reference, and which would give me the perspective, judgment, and wisdom to rise above the deficiencies of my own self and situation, inherited or otherwise. This is in essence the definition of a liberal education: an education which seeks to perfect the intellect, will, and whole being so as to provide the person with the freedom to pursue what is good and fruitful in human life. It was really only in my fourth or fifth year of study that I found those guides, here at St. Thomas More

Ultimately, I was in want of a proper liberal education which pays regard to ideas as serious things, which regards the desires of the human soul as having some real meaning and reference . . .

College, who would aid me in understanding the scope and depth of ideas, and their relations to one another. I came to know, through them, that it was not wrong-headed, but necessary to desire to read Dostoevsky alongside Dickens, and Shakespeare alongside Sophocles. I could see the beauty of Plato in Augustine, and Aristotle in Aquinas.

It would be an under-statement to say that the university has in general lost its vision for liberal education. Although there is a renewed sense of concern just now at our own institution in light of Transform US about the fate of the liberal arts in particular, there has been more than enough hand-wringing about it in the last 20 years, from both

within the liberal arts – “The university doesn’t appreciate us!”—and from without—“What the heck has become of the liberal arts?!” It is only my opinion, but liberal arts programming in general, with the exception of a few programs that have not been well-supported, still harbours the deficiencies that left students afloat 20 years ago: it has lost faith in itself, has lost confidence in its own historical claims to the unity of knowledge, and has forgotten that the university is still for the education of the student. It has also, unfortunately, been undervalued and overlooked by university leaders whose judgments are frequently based upon standards that cannot measure its value.

What is Liberal Education?

Before we can examine the problems threatening the liberal arts, and a possible revisioning of them, it is useful to determine what we mean by a liberal education. The notion of liberal education originated in the Classical Period with the trivium of grammar, logic, and rhetoric, all of which were examined through the lenses of philosophy and literature. The Medieval university added the quadrivium of mathematics, geometry, astronomy, and music. Renaissance humanism extended liberal education and framed it within the notion of the Humanities, namely, the broad range of subjects which help to make us human and which included literature, drama, philosophy, history, art, and languages, together with the sciences, or the various forms of the *desire to know* (those disciplines which we now classify as the liberal arts).

In his foundational work *The Idea of the University* (1852), Blessed John Henry Newman eloquently and brilliantly articulated the purpose of a liberal education. Based upon the first principle that knowledge itself is “capable of being its own end” (97), a sound liberal education is one which “cultivates the intellect” for the sake of “intellectual excellence” (111). The purpose of the university is thus to educate “the intellect to reason well in all matters, to reach out towards truth, and to grasp it...” (114). It has no distinct end outside of this. Just as health is to the body, so is a cultivated intellect to the mind itself. The fact that a liberal education so envisioned has no

articulated end outside of a perfected intellect does not prevent it from participating in a good beyond itself, however—just the opposite: “educated men can do what illiterate cannot; and the man who has learned to think and to reason and to compare and to discriminate and to analyze, who has refined his taste, formed his judgment, and sharpened his mental vision, will not at once be a lawyer, or a pleaser, or an orator...or a chemist, or a geologist...but he will be placed in that state of intellect in which he can take up any one of the sciences or callings I have referred to, or any other for which he has a taste or special talent, with an ease, a grace, a versatility, and a success, to which another is a stranger” (145). That a sound liberal education should provide a comprehensive view from which to know “the relative disposition of things” (105)² necessary for the formation of sound judgment is also essential: “a truly great intellect...

T*he fact that a liberal education so envisioned has no articulated end outside of a perfected intellect does not prevent it from participating in a good beyond itself...*

is one which takes a connected view of old and new, past and present, far and near, and which has an insight into the influence of all these one on another; without which there is

no whole, and no centre. It possesses the knowledge, not only of things, but also of their mutual and true relations...” (121).

The Ailing University

In defending liberal education, Newman signalled his intent to revivify and recall to itself what he perceived as a faltering university. His concerns to some degree look startlingly like our own. He thought, first, that the university showed signs of abandoning its commitment to liberal education in bending to the arguments of a utilitarian philosophy. Encouraged to consider learning itself as a mere expedient to an external end, the student not surprisingly treats it as a necessary evil at worst, or as merely something to be gotten through at best: “Learning is to be without exertion, without attention, without toil; without grounding, without advance, without finishing” (127). What Newman saw as a fault with the 19th Century university many consider today as a promising development: a turn toward justifying or choosing an education based only upon its results in the marketplace, or field of paid work. As we have seen above, Newman rejected John Locke’s notion that

an education of the intellect for its own sake made that education useless, and that the usefulness of an education could only be judged by its “bearing on the future profession or trade of the pupil” (140).

Locke’s position nonetheless retains its attraction today, not least in the academy itself, among those charged with marketing liberal arts degrees to prospective students. The attempts in our own age to “sell” the liberal arts on the basis of their utility in the marketplace miss the mark so radically, and undermine the possibility of allowing students to regard it as its own end, and thus examine its propositions with fresh, clear, open eyes. To this misdirected attempt to sell liberal education on the basis of its utility we might add a more dangerous corollary: the trend in our universities to eliminate courses or programs which do not satisfy the “production” and “bums in seats” demands of the university as a marketplace in which vendors fight for competing resources. No one needs to be reminded that it is just those disciplines considered foundational for the goals of liberal education which are most vulnerable under universities’ weigh-and-measure schemes: philosophy, theology, and even history, not to mention drama and the fine arts. These two problems—the utility-based selling of the liberal arts to students, and the university’s utility-and-resource-based valuations of disciplines and programs—are really two sides of the same coin: they both herald the loss of a properly-articulated vision of the liberal arts.

It is with some irony that we also recognize in Newman another concern that we presume could only be relevant today in our postmodern milieu and which strikes at the core of the project of liberal education: a displacement or elimination of the notion of “truth” altogether. While Newman was feeling the pinch of a cold and arid rationalism stripped of its holistic search for a truth worthy of being its own end, a rationalism born or at least nurtured in the Enlightenment, today we breathe the air of heightened emotionalism, and live in a culture permeated by the view that feeling is the arbiter of everything. The culture of feeling is a necessary by-product of a postmodern dismissal of truth in general, along with the promise that language can bear determinate meaning. “Truths” are thus not sought, but given; not perceived from the fertile ground of reason and vivified by the light of faith, but transplanted from the vacant philosophy of Self and Identity in the abstract to the shallow soil of the

personal ego. It’s OK to debunk truth, some stable, objective principle outside of ourselves, but thank goodness, thank Oprah, we can and should never abandon “Personal Truth.” What, then, to study? Unfortunately, some disciplines, or at least many scholars, in the liberal arts capitulated long ago both to postmodernism and to Oprah. It is now primarily the self that is under the microscope, subsequently and puzzlingly built up and then stripped down to become a sensitive mechanism perceiving every pain, every slight, every insult, real or imagined. When the possibility of objective truth goes underground, why, then, “feeling comes first,”³ or, should we say, the self and its feelings *become* truth. What is then left but to know the self and its own preferences, and thus its right to those preferences? What is there left for the university to provide but an exploration of oneself?⁴ In sum, our current systems of education have in significant measure capitulated to a hostile cultural anti-rationalism. Those charged with setting the course for education have lost faith not simply in the capacity of the intellect to know comprehensive truth, but in the notion that truth exists, or that it is even knowable. They have also generally lost faith in the nobility of the intellect as a faculty worth perfecting for its own sake.

Restoring a Lost Vision

Any liberal arts education that fails to lay the ground sufficiently for a student to know and examine first principles, by which we can know “the relative disposition of things” (*Idea* 105) is deficient. Ultimately, then, three foundational tasks are given the contemporary university which proposes to provide a true liberal education: first, a student must have access to a wide programme of study, a programme with direction and purpose, so that the principles and suppositions of different disciplines can be discerned and evaluated, and so that these different dispositions toward knowledge, these different ways often of knowing the same truth, can be placed in fruitful relation to one another.⁵ A university which strips down disciplines that provide the foundation for a comprehensive approach to knowledge—disciplines such as philosophy and theology—violates the very principles upon which the university is based.

Second, if necessary, a university must provide a means by which that same student might acquire the developed intellect that is capable of knowing those

things put before it: this means restoring grammar, logic, and rhetoric—namely, the building blocks of organized thought and expression—to their rightful places. Whether or not directly teaching these disciplines is the task of a university is not in our own times at all clear. But regardless of whose task it is, one thing is certain: any university that proposes to provide a liberal arts education in its truest sense will not functionally be able to do so unless and until its students have developed those primary capacities I have spoken of. To some degree, the ideal of liberal education has long been abandoned by primary and secondary educators,⁶ and so the task of preparing students to “know” anything at all must in fact be taken up by the university itself. We must be prepared to rebuild the foundations for thought itself so that the student may thrive.⁷

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, professors of the liberal arts must stand up to defend the principles and character of their own disciplines—and for some, this might mean rediscovering these principles. If such a defense is to be undertaken, it must be made from the ground of the language and ideas of the liberal arts themselves, not the co-opted rhetoric of its attackers. When we look at our students, we must be capable of seeing and regarding the deeper needs of his or her person, needs which cannot be satisfied merely through the credentials provided by education. Only in this way can liberal education fulfill its own excellence, namely, the development of its self-defining character as education which

frees the human person. Only thus can it fulfill its proper potential—by being its own end, and not by subordinating itself to some end outside of itself, in which the human person is made a mere expedient, no matter how well intentioned the framers of such expediency may be.

1 I still know little, but not in the sense that Socrates knew nothing, unfortunately.

2 This is also Plato's view: “For he who can view things in their connection is a dialectician” (*Republic* Book 7, 537c).

3 e.e. cummings

4 A few years ago, while travelling in the U.S., I saw a large billboard advertising the University of Arizona: “Study Yourself!”, it invited.

5 Within this programme, professors must ensure that their students read the primary texts of their discipline, especially in the first two years of their development. This means a significant commitment on the part of professors to teach students how to read primary texts rather than circumventing this through ready-made summaries and superficial explications.

6 Homeschooling parents are generally an exception. If you want to know something about classical or liberal education, ask a homeschooler.

7 In the classical scheme, it was necessary that grammar come first, as it prepared the student to understand language as the vehicle for our propositions, our claims about what is true, and the relations between our various presuppositions and propositions. Logic came only after grammar, building upon it to provide the student language now with which to determine truth and falsity. Rhetoric came next, as it was presumed that only she who can fruitfully employ grammar and logic has the privilege of clothing her thoughts and arguments with the beauty, elegance, and muscularity of a prose style which does justice to her subject matter and makes her more capable of inviting her listeners into an intellectual dialogue.

THE PATHS OF EXILE

by Mark Doerksen

In that night did God appear unto Solomon, and said unto him, Ask what I shall give thee. And Solomon said unto God ... Give me now wisdom and knowledge.

It is not entirely impossible that the less than stalwart reputation that the liberal arts have begun to receive is a product of the impoverished state of modern academia. Amidst a deluge of politically correct dogma, the unrelenting pursuit of 'relevance' (in the narrowest sense), and the self-obsessed study of our modern relativistic culture, it is no wonder that there are those who believe that to achieve a degree in the arts is little more than to read contemporary literature and fondle the feelings it arouses in oneself. Our continual subversion of the western tradition only serves to construct an artifice of modern belief, which lithifies our modern misconceptions and rejects everything opposing the 'truth' as appears within the artifice itself. Not only does this approach thwart the intellectual growth of the individual, but it corroborates the utilitarian argument that the arts do not serve the needs of society. The ability to form an opinion, intelligent or otherwise, about a piece of art or literature, and to mould this opinions into an (ideally) complete sentence is indeed useful, but it falls woefully short of the academic tradition which we have inherited. That tradition is long and storied and of greater veracity, and indeed utility, if I am permitted to use the term, than the shallow pool in which we students of the modern era are wont to flounder.

If the acquisition of employable skills and the investigation of personal feelings are not the true purposes of the university, then what are we left with? In the *Apology*, Socrates responds to his accusers by saying "that an unexamined life is not worth living." This is not only true of the life of the individual, but also of life in the universal sense. The *artes liberales* are ultimately

about seeking truth, not only as an end in itself, but for the good of man and thus mankind. Theology, philosophy, literature and music, and the myriad of disciplines now devastated by modernity were all considered by the ancients as those pursuits worthy of a free man. As free citizens of a democratic state, we are all capable of using our intellects to better ourselves and our fellow citizens.

The university of yore produced scholars who mastered multiple languages, possessed a large knowledge encompassing history, literature, and philosophy, and were able to engage in critical thought at a high level, which allowed them a perspective on their world not afforded to those whose point of view was transfixed on their own personal present. Despite this, there are those spurring on a Bradburian future where the technical arts finally relegate the liberal arts to oblivion, along with all the adversaries of the modern conception. Yet true wisdom will not so easily be thrust upon the paths of exile. King Solomon was a great king because, of all things on this terrestrial globe, he chose to be blessed with wisdom by God – may we all be so blessed. We all seek and strive not only to provide a living and means of subsistence for ourselves, but also to seek and strive for a greater purpose in life and a means of spiritual sustenance. So too should we as a society not only seek and strive to train our hands, but also our minds. The liberal arts, by definition, exist to liberate the human imagination, to free our thought of its fetters, to introduce the mind to the soul. A university education grounded upon the *artes liberales* may not necessarily make one a better person, but it may at least set one upon the path to truth, and that is the path best walked by any man.

Wisdom and knowledge is granted unto thee; and I will give thee riches, and wealth, and honour, and such as none of the kings have had that have been before thee, neither shall there any after thee have the like.

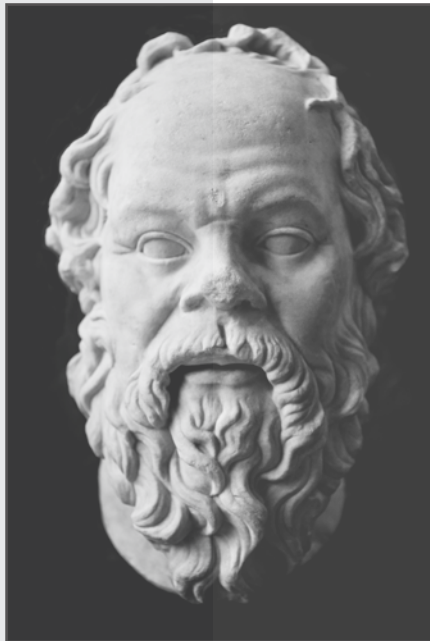
*Socratic Pestilence:
The Campus Gadflies Ask...*

Do the liberal arts matter?

For each journal issue, members of the In Medias Res editorial board assail the University of Saskatchewan's academic community with a quasi-philosophical question, after the fashion of Socrates. For this issue, we inquired about the value of the *artes liberales*.

“It is first necessary that we make a distinction: what makes a liberal art? Liberal arts are not subservient to productive concerns. They’re the kinds of activities that belong to man *as man*, not as *homo economicus*, but as free and as possessing a dignity that goes beyond his own material needs. They recognize the supremacy of intellectual activity. The liberal arts are the kinds of activities that remain immanent in the practitioners of them; they’re not transient in terms of making a product that is external to the person. There are certain products of the liberal arts such as paintings and literature and music, but still these are activities which are perfect in the doing of them, and don’t constitute a product that is superior to the activity that produces them. If the life of man is to having any kind of meaning, it must recognize the supremacy of the liberal arts to all servile arts, which terminate in the production of items that are better than their activities, which are fundamentally a function of man as a producer of economic goods.”

Charles Robertson, Dept. of History



“A well-rounded education is important, and the liberal arts is the way to achieving this. I firmly think that we need to start teaching things like languages and other liberal arts subjects starting from elementary school, because it gives students the skills they need to be effective communicators and effective planners, and it will give them the creative outlet that our culture needs to keep moving forward.”

Anonymous

“The liberal arts is not only the study of what makes us human, but there is not one single great mind in the history of man that has not been greatly benefited by its study.”

Kyle Dase, CMRS & English Student

“Ancient Sparta is a very good example of a people who did not have a well-rounded education (a “liberal arts program”) in their society, and literally fizzled out and died as a result. They were very militaristic – that was the heart and soul of their society – and they had a fantastic army, and they were hugely successful in their campaigns. Not long after their great victory against the Athenians in the Peloponnesian War, the city still existed for a few hundred years afterwards, but really had no heart or spirit. They didn’t study philosophy, they didn’t build temples, they didn’t create great works of art, they didn’t even make coins. There’s a reason why Athens is still on the face of the planet, and still (sort of) thriving. Athens is the heart of Greece, and there are barely any remnants of Sparta. Why? Because they did not have the creative spirit that keeps a culture

flourishing. They were a fantastic military machine, but that only carried them so far. Just like in modern society, we are a fantastic technological machine, but if we don’t have the creative spirit incorporated into this, science and technology will only take us so far...”

Tracene Harvey, Museum of Antiquities Director

“The liberal arts matter because studying the art, literature, and philosophy that has developed over time allows contemporary society to view the products of same disciplines in a more nuanced manner. By being able to recognize common patterns and recurring themes we can realize how much of our modern experience is informed by the cultural views and products of the western tradition. For me personally, the ability to situate myself within this rich tradition makes me feel more connected to the people I interact with in my own life.”

Christina Fowlie-Neufeld, CMRS Student

“Of course they matter. They provide the foundations that people need to deal with life. If we only teach what’s current, we do our students a disservice, because the world changes very rapidly. The role of liberal arts is to prepare people to live in the future, not in the present. It prepares us to live in the present as well, but looking to the future. Twenty years ago the world looked much differently than it does now – there’s been a communications revolution since then. People were stuck if they were not able to accommodate to the rapidly changing circumstances. This requires the ability to think, to analyze, to reason, and to recognize the obligations we all have to strive for a society that’s just – our ability to recognize injustice, and also the ability in the will to do something about it. All of these are instilled by the liberal arts.”

Terrence Downey, President of STM

“The liberal arts matter because they are the best way – maybe the only way – to shape and to educate the whole person, so that when a person takes on a profession or a job, they are already more completely formed as a citizen and as a human being before they take on the specialized tasks of their profession. While the professional sciences and disciplines train you to be an expert in a profession, there’s really no substitute that I know of to train you to be a whole human being and to think as big and as deeply and widely as you should as a human being.”

Carl Still, Dean of STM



“An institution that does not embrace, or at the very least stress, the great importance of the liberal arts in its primary humanist pedagogy may not risk losing its stature as a “quality institution” (at least from the perspective of the larger culture). Instead, said institution will produce nothing but bull-minded individuals that will produce nothing but doublespoken dogmas that undermine and do not revolutionize today’s society and culture.”

Ian Hampton, Archaeology Student

“The liberal arts continue to matter in the modern university because the study of the artes liberales has the lofty object of improving the student and giving him the cultural capital necessary to play a beneficial role in civic life. Marginalising the liberal arts, as so many modern university administrators and members of the chattering class often attempt to do, risks undermining this vital wellspring of our higher culture, and shall ultimately result in our University becoming nothing more than a glorified technical college, lacking any deeper meaning or value.”

James Hawkes, History Student

“Understanding according to universal, abstract concepts is the activity that is special to humans in comparison to all other animals. The activity that is special to a thing is the specific good of that thing. Some uses of human understanding terminate in thought alone (mathematical understanding, for instance) while others terminate in some product (a knife, for example) that is ordered to the attainment of some other good (such as acquiring food). The latter use of understanding cannot be the truly proper good for human beings since it is subordinated to goods that are not proper to humans, but are shared in common with other animals. The truly human good must therefore be understanding that terminates in thought — the simple grasp of the truth of things. The grasp of such truth is the aim of the liberal arts. The liberal arts therefore matter.”

Jordan Olver, Dept. of Philosophy

Poetry

DEOR

Weland knew of wrath by serpents wrought,
the strong-minded smith endured strife;
for a companion only sorrow and longing had he,
winter-cold wretchedness; woe often found
since Niðhad fast-laid fetters on him,
supple sinew-bonds on the elfin prince.
As that has passed, so may this.

For Beaduhild the bane of her brothers
on her heart was not such a sore as proved her own
predicament
she had learned that well with-child was she
ever without ability
to rightly reckon about what she should do.
As that has passed, so may this.

Many of us have heard that for Mæthilde
so amaranthine became the amor of Geat
that this sorrow-love utterly bereaved them of slumber.
As that has passed, so may this.

Ƣeodric kept for thirty winters
the keep of the Mærings; to many that was couth.
As that has passed, so may this.

We have heard of Eormanric's
wolfish intent; widely ruled he the weak
in the kingdom of Goths. That was a grim king.
Many a warrior sat enslaved by sorrow,
awaiting woe, always wistful
that this dominion would be defeated.
As that has passed, so may this.

The sorrow-carer sits sequestered from fortune,
his soul beclouded, it seems to him
that perpetual is his portion of want;
Then he may consider yond this world
that the wise Lord ever weaves.
To many men He shows mercy,
easy breath, to others He measures out misery.

Regarding myself, I wish to relate
that once I was poet of the Heodeningas,
beloved by my lord, Deor was my name.
I kept for many winters, that worthy post,
a gracious lord, now to Heorrenda,
a silver-tongued scop, the right is ceded
which my noble guardian gave formerly to me.
As that has passed, so may this.

*Translated from the Old English
by Megan Wall*



MEGAN WALL, *Falconer from a box
of Earl Grey*

JESSA HUGHES

THE FELL CATHEDRAL

*Dominum diligere
odisse mundum est.*

As once an undiminished light
Death-dark, now. Sepulcheréd white.
A sophist's homily forth sent,
the faithful feebly lament.

Cathedral, wrought of island dust
whose windows false-light shadows thrust
upon her congregation, blind –
malspok'n shepherd, crook malign.

Now Sacrament's perversion whole.
Nuptials ungospeled extol'd;
new covenant of flesh and man:
accipere uis maritum?

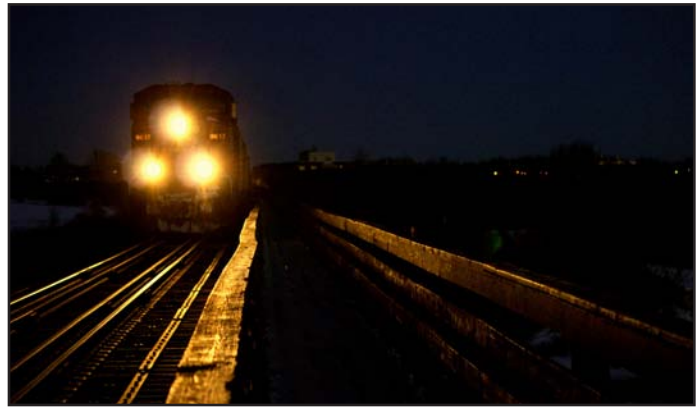
You, Prophets, no more behold sin;
Seize flight, Spire, to Empyrean;
Altar, storm your fell flesh'd captors;
Candles, drive back blackened vespers.

Thou blackguard bishop, unatoned,
forfeit your fell usurpéd throne.
Evangel's revelation light
again be ardent, Truth incite.

D. M.



STACIE HUCULAK



TIGER AND WOLF

The lord has come into his jungle—
His, by right of a complex of sharps.

His murderous extravagance is plain
To the green-eyed and the blind;
He makes it so, for his seat of power
Lies within the lesser beasts.

Only a splendid robe befits him: he sees
The land as green, enriching and enriched,
Unsullied by the two-faced piece of meat,
That injurer and hater of the strong.

This worshiper of astigmatism
Has never beheld the old, squalid city of apes.

But another has come into the jungle:
A Promethean wolf, man-born,
His lot to endure and overcome
The surreptitious, lame-footed lord.

His kind has weaponized a spark
To incinerate the soul of a lord
And not the skin; to drive out the tiger
Will be the triumph of the man-born.

But the man-born, too, must leave this place.
Or is his seat of power also in beasts?

Bruce Parker

Poetry

PRO

Pro et

Should universities employment

By Dr. Avarus Denari, *Professor of Economics*

It is the role of the modern university to impart upon its students the knowledge and skills that are practically profitable to themselves, and necessary for our society. Education that is directly ordered towards professional employment is that which most effectively achieves these goals. Students who pursue studies in the professional sciences and disciplines – such as Engineering, Medicine, and Business – are not only the best-equipped to enter the job market, but they are also the most likely to gain employment immediately upon graduation. Likewise, the students who advance through these disciplines are best able to engage in financially profitable sectors of employment which allow them to efficiently recoup their tuition expenses, and continually contribute to the university.

Given the current economic state of our society, any large scale university institution that is constituted by disciplines with little financial profitability will prove unsustainable. In the last century, universities have become increasingly more accessible to the lower classes, resulting in a democratization of education, and an unprecedented dissemination of knowledge throughout society. This very favourable social circumstance has led to an increased financial burden upon students of lesser means, and thus the university is accountable for the employment success of their graduates. The professional disciplines, then, are the most financially viable, both for the students and the institution, and are those which universities should focus on developing.

In the past, the university was an elitist institution, which was a privilege of the few, and an advantage for those with the means to obtain a university education. While education remains an advantage, it is becoming increasingly necessary for employment in both the public and the private sectors. Furthermore, in our highly specialized and technologized age, it is imperative that our universities produce specialists and individuals who are capable of serving the needs of this economy. In addition, new specialized fields are proliferating along with our advancing technology, and it is the university's role to provide experts in such spheres.

The economic and scientific paradigm of the modern world necessitates a modern university, which is adaptable to the ever evolving needs of our culture. The model that best secures the relevance of the university, and its ability to meet the requirements of modern society, is that of the professional sciences and disciplines. In short, not only does this model ensure the success of the job market, and contributes to the rich mosaic of modern thought, but it also fosters in its students the talents and intellectual abilities necessary for the progress of our society.

Contra:

CONTRA

ities focus on education?

By Dr. Walter Kreyszig, *Department of Music and Classical, Medieval, & Renaissance Studies*

Central to the founding of the universities, beginning in the eleventh century, was the development of a comprehensive curriculum, with focus on the *quadrivium* (*arithmetica, geometria, musica, astronomia*), the *trivium* (*grammatica, rhetorica, dialectica*), both known under the heading of *artes liberales*, the *artes mechanicae*, and a number of disciplines outside these curricular confines, such as *theologia* and *medicina* — all of which provided for a comprehensive education, placed in the hands of able faculty, who through the four facets of scholarship, namely, teaching, application, integration and discovery (as identified by Ernst Boyer),¹ were responsible for “arousing in the student an inward spiritual activity, to develop capacity for thought, for feeling, and for decision, and to form character”, to cite Walter Murray (1866-1945), the first President of the University of Saskatchewan, in his inaugural speech at Dalhousie University in September 1893.² Implied in the term *artes liberales* was a liberation from an overly dogmatic approach to a single discipline in favour of a fluidity between disciplines, and that with regard to the delivery of the curriculum as a whole, which provided a most fertile ground for the studia humanitatis firmly anchored in interdisciplinarity, a mode of inquiry to which we have returned in more recent times, though in an overall curriculum that is largely locked into an approach favouring an individual discipline of choice. Nevertheless, there are copious examples of scholarly endeavours focussed on the interdisciplinarity, as for example the humanist Franchino Gaffurio (1451-1522), the first to call himself a “*professor musices*”, and it is indeed the richness of such an approach taken in his trilogy,³ which fosters and enhances learning, not in the narrow sense of learning for the moment, but rather for the more distant future, as captured in the paradigm of lifelong learning.

With the recent shifts of universities focusing on employment education and a more corporate approach, solely as a means of assuring funding,⁴ often turning away from a humanistically inspired agenda, the latter which should inform and indeed dominate our thinking, at least in the humanities and fine arts, we are reminded of the visions of Timothy Dwight (1828-1916), former President of Yale University, who in 1887 captured his firm belief of a well-rounded university education with focus on the mandates and visions characteristic of and central to the founding of universities in Europe and the upholding of and adherence to these important principles of creation and dissemination of knowledge as the key pillars of the curriculum in North American universities. “Who are we [...] that we should contradict the generations past? Movement is dangerous; let us abide in the old things which have a permanent foundation.”⁵ Dwight’s statement, in my opinion, does not preempt the importance of the present and progress towards change. However, we must be cognizant of what has transpired in the past, producing people of excellence and their thoughts worthy of reflection.

1 Ernst Boyer, *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professorate* (Princeton 1990).

2 Michael Hayden, *Seeking a Balance: The University of Saskatchewan, 1907-1982* (Vancouver 1983), p. 30.

3 *Theorica musice* (Milan 1492); *Practica musicae* (Milan 1496); *De harmonia musicorum instrumentorum opus* (Milan 1518).

4 Howard Woodhouse, *Selling Out: Academic Freedom and the Corporate Market* (Montréal 2009).

5 Timothy Dwight, *What a Yale Student Ought to Be* (New Haven 1887).

IMR ATTENDS THE MONUMENTS MEN

CULTURAL EVENT INTRODUCTION

*This spring, members of the In Medias Res editorial board saw the 2014 film *The Monuments Men*, written and produced by George Clooney, in which he also stars alongside Matt Damon, Bill Murray, and Cate Blanchett. This film is based upon the true story of an allied unit, consisting of seven winsome and militarily inept scholars, tasked to retrieve the art treasures of Western civilization stolen by the Nazis during WWII.*

I - What do you think was the message of this film?

DF: I think that the fundamental message of *The Monuments Men* is a philosophical one, although its immediate message is more practical in nature. The latter is that we ought to preserve the Western intellectual tradition; the former, that in this tradition subsists our humanity. The *nature* of man is specified by his being *supernatural*, by his possession of that faculty by which he composes symphonies and builds cathedrals and paints his own terrible and divine likeness on canvas — by which he stands as a god (or as a singular abomination) among brute animals. The message of this film, then, if one might avail himself of an imbecile analogy, is that we must protect the cathedral against the vandal, for humanity dwells in its sanctuary.

MD: Indeed, I concur. George Clooney's character bespeaks the importance of the Monuments Men's much-criticized mission by stating that to truly wipe out a people, one must destroy their art; for in the destruction of their art a people's own history is lost, and a people without a history may not be able to reclaim their nationhood. The film, then, not only reexamines the evil of the damnable genocides of the Nazi regime (which it also does in its portrayal of the loss of those whose worldly lives have also been taken), but also steers our attention towards a loss just as permanent and damnable, and a loss which is currently being felt as the foundations of our western culture are being actively undermined.

KD: I agree with these statements in general. I also think that this film had the benefit of being able to show the very human realities of war since it was not an action film. The first two enemies that the group really engage with are a single soldier and a child. These encounters raise interesting questions about how we perceive an enemy. At what point does a hungry man in a soldier's uniform stop being a Nazi and become just another person? At what point does a child, or anyone who has grown up under a certain ideology for that matter, become a victim? Would these encounters be so black and white if this film and operation had taken place during a different stage of the War? This film also makes a point of evaluating how our value system is dependent on our position in society. The Nazis, in their state of retreat, forfeit high-minded concepts of art and destroy priceless artifacts because such things are worthless to them in their current state but valuable to their enemy. The Allies, on the cusp of winning the war, have the luxury of debating whether a piece of art is worth the sacrifice of one's own life. In this film, many of those soldiers serving with the Allied forces who have been fighting for so long and have lost so many refuse to consider the notion that this film promotes. I do think this film raises a very interesting question: "Would you be willing to sacrifice a brother, sister, or dear friend in order to preserve the artifacts of our culture's past?" The answer to that question is for each individual to consider. Quite frankly, I don't think that we in our current privileged way of life can conceive the weight of such a sacrifice.

JK: I think that the fundamental message of this film is that the arts are in fact a very important and fundamental part of our culture and that even in a time of crisis, war, and danger, it is necessary that they be preserved, although it does not seem like a worthwhile endeavour at the time. *The Monuments Men* shows the real sacrifice that people were willing to make to preserve the arts and culture for the future generations and help to rebuild after the inevitable end to the war, including the death of two of the members of the small group. What good is freedom to the people who survived these horrors if they had lost the touch-points to their history and culture, which allows them to see their place in the grand scheme of things and what their ancestors have accomplished and what they can aspire to achieve themselves and surpass?

Discussing *The Monuments Men*

II - How does this film relate to our culture?

JK: This film relates to our time and culture in that although we are not in the middle of a large scale war such as World War II, our country is going through economic problems causing both provincial and federal governments to cut spending to education and the arts. Although the Canada Council of the Arts was spared funding cuts in 2012, it was not certain that it would. Provincial governments across Canada are decreasing funding for universities, which are in turn making up for budget shortfalls by cutting or decreasing funding to programs that fall within the scope of the arts, being the heirs to this Western tradition, as can be seen at the University of Alberta, the University of Saskatchewan, and others. In the time being, these programs may not seem to be very important to the university, as they often do not result in high-paying jobs and may not produce immediate employment, but this is short-sighted. A university should promote all aspects of learning, including those that are more helpful to the person, intellect, and wider culture than the person's economic benefit.

MD: The film does indeed resonate with our modern culture. During the period of the Second World War the fascists sought to eliminate any and all cultural manifestations which did not enforce their own ideology. This attempt at cultural extermination was expressly felt in regards to history and historical productions of art. History which was not repressed had the Nazi ideal imposed upon it and so was distorted for the purposes of fascist ideology. Similarly, we now face a new form of intellectual 'fascism' where those aspects of our rich and storied cultural past which are deemed offensive to modern values are either 'euthanized' or 'rehabilitated' for modern consumption. This, along with the distortion of history for political and ideological ends, is very dangerous and has the potential to yield a generation (not unlike that of 1930s Germany) where few people question the values which their culture espouses and those brave few who raise dissent risk the wrath of the bureaucratic big brother.



KD: Although I'm hesitant to liken the current 'intellectual fascism,' as Mark put it, to the type of fascism that occurred under the Nazi regime, I do believe that this film stresses the importance of taking ideas at their face value and engaging them without censorship. I mean to say that just because a concept our society once held dear is now unpleasant to modern culture and society does not mean that we as a society should retroactively alter that idea. We need not be comfortable with the opinions of giants in order to stand on their shoulders.

DF: *The Monuments Men* suggests that it is better for a man to die than to abide the destruction of tradition, the *translatio studii et imperii*. Many modern universities – which were designed as a deposit for the Western imagination and intellectual tradition – are now almost exclusively concerned with the dissemination of modern inventions, and the subversion of the monumental values of the past. This film, then, is eerily relevant to our culture, whose inordinate hatred of the Western tradition sees that we do not require a Hitler to despoil our history.

Thoughts on Translation

by Kyle Oase

In my time at the University of Saskatchewan, I have learned that in some ways translation is an impossible task. One Latin instructor I had once explained to me that there is no winning: “In a translation” he said, “you are either doing harm to the native language of the text or doing harm to your own. My inclination is to do the latter.” He is right, of course. In translation one usually ends up producing a translation which is easy for the reader but inaccurately represents the word order/phrasing/literal meaning/etc. of the text, or creates a verbose and difficult to follow/understand translation that grasps what the original author was saying (if one is lucky). Few and far between are the translations that can captivate the reader without ‘harming’ the original text. Many translators are much more inclined to harm the language from which they are translating rather than the one in which they are writing. This is simply because it is often the case that the people reading these translations do not know the original language and do not know whether or not the translation is far off from the source. These are the colloquial translations printed by publishing houses much more concerned with readability than accuracy. On the other side of this spectrum are ‘scholarly’ translators. These translators would rather twist and contort their native tongue than do injustice to a dead language they hold in such high regard. Neither of these approaches is bad; they just have different aims and products. Moreover, both of these examples are hyperbolic stereotypes that are not representative of any actual translations that I have read. But I think they make the point that one cannot ‘win’ when translating. There is no ‘perfect’ translation. This outlook is not to make the situation seem bleak, but there is a long history of English translators to commiserate with if you too struggle in translating.

The Venerable Bede, an 8th century Benedictine monk, lamented over this same problem. A.M. Sellar translated Bede’s thoughts on the subject as follows:

“Verses, though never so well composed, cannot be literally translated out of one language into another, without losing much of their beauty and loftiness.” Even King Alfred the Great, ruler of Britain in the late 9th century and architect of intellectual reform, understood that in some instances one must translate ‘word for word,’ while in others ‘sense for sense.’ As long as English has been written down, translators have acknowledged that, especially in the case of poetry, translation can be impossible at times.

One of my most important insights as to the nature of translation comes from Seamus Heaney’s introduction to his translation of *Beowulf*. Heaney had been given the opportunity to do a translation of *Beowulf* in the mid-1980s (that puts Heaney somewhere around 45 years old), but he commented that as he engaged in the task “the whole attempt to turn it into modern English seemed to me like trying to bring down a megalith with a toy hammer.” That is the experience I have had on many an occasion. The insight I mentioned earlier concerns the moment Heaney wrote about after the ‘hammer’ experience:

It is one thing to find lexical meanings for the words and to have some feel for how the metre might go, but it is quite another thing to find the tuning fork that will give you the note and pitch for the overall music of the work. Without some melody sensed or promised, it is simply impossible for a poet to establish the translator’s right-of-way into and through a text.

Let me be clear. I do not claim to have had anything near the kind of epiphany that Heaney was writing about. Seamus Heaney was an ingenious poet and a marvellous translator. When I first read this passage I recognized a very basic fact that should have occurred to me much earlier: A translator is at his or her very core a creative writer and a poet. Translation is not a science, it is an art. Looking back, I think

THOUGHTS ON TRANSLATION

that my perception of translation had largely to do with the nature of language instruction in the classroom. Keep in mind; this is not a criticism of the teaching methods of my professors. The objective of studying Greek, Latin, and Old English in first and second-year courses is to learn how to read these languages and there is far too much to grasp before one is ready to discuss the nuances of translation. In some respects, I still wonder if I am not properly equipped to explore this topic. Once I reached upper year classes, fascinating discussions regarding the nature of translation did take place that would change the way I looked at what I was doing with the text forever. But during those first years, when one is slogging through Cicero, for example, just trying to find that wretched verb, one is often moving at such a pace that hardly any thought is actually put into the act of translation. Unfortunately, I do not see a way around this unless you have five to ten years to casually coast into a language.

What I would like to see for students who have taken more than a year of language classes is a class (possibly at the graduate or honours level?) that explores the nature of translations and their influence. This course would be an opportunity for students to slow down from the fast-paced nature of language classes and do translation projects that require one to be more thorough than they are in day to day translation classes. I think that a student of languages could greatly benefit from looking at the theory and practice of translation, and, as a student who aims to make translations in the future, few courses could be more practical. There is even potential for interdisciplinary work with creative

writing programs. I know that this would be a sacrifice; this would be time that could be spent reading actual texts. But if someone really wants to move past reading for oneself and conveying a text to an audience, it would definitely be worth it.



TYSON ATKINS, *Do you also base your life on books?*

HaSerek Ha'Edah:

A Selection from the Dead Sea Scrolls

TRANSLATED WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY JOSHUA KURTENBACH

Scroll 1QSa is one of the Dead Sea scrolls found in Qumran cave 1. It is an appendix to scroll 1QS, the Scroll of the Community, which describes the rules for a certain community and dates to the Hasmonean period. While 1QS describes how the community should act and govern itself, 1QSa is an end times text which describes how the Congregation ('Edah) is to act when the Messiah comes. The Hebrew used in this scroll contains alternate spellings from Biblical Hebrew, including a greater use of *mater lectionis* which aid with vocalizing as well as showing Aramaic influences such as the letter 'alef replacing *he* at the end of certain words such as Torah in line 11.

1QSa “The Rule of the Congregation” 1:1-18

- 1 This is the rule for the whole Congregation of Israel in the end of days in their gathering for unitedness to walk about
- 2 according to the command of the manner of the Sons of Zadok, the priests, and the men of their covenant, that have turned from walking in the way
- 3 of the people. They are men of His plan, who kept His covenant in the midst of wickedness covering about the earth.
- 4 In their coming, they will summon an assembly of all those who are coming, both children and women, and will call out into their ears
- 5 all the statutes of the covenant and to teach them in all their customs lest they go astray in their mistakes.
- 6 This is the rule for all of the armies of the congregation: for all the native Israelites, and from his youth
- 7 to his instruction in the Book of Meditation and according to his days they will instruct him in the statutes of the covenant. And according to his understanding
- 8 they will teach him in their customs. For ten years he will come in with the children, and at twenty years he will pass over
- 9 into those appointed to enter into the lot in the midst of his clan to be united into the Holy Congregation. And he shall not draw near
- 10 to a woman to know her by lying with her except until he is a full twenty years old when he knows good
- 11 and evil. And then he will be received to bear witness in accordance with the customs of the Torah and to take his stand in the proclaiming of judgements.
- 12 And in fully ...¹ And when he is twenty-five years old he will enter to take a firm stand among
- 13 the Holy Congregation to do the work of the congregation. And when he is thirty years old he will show himself to plead a legal case
- 14 and a judgement, and to take a stand among the leaders of the thousands of Israel, and before the captains of hundreds, and the captains of fifty,
- 15 and the captains of tens – judges and officers for their tribes in all of their families before the Sons
- 16 of Aaron, the priests, and all heads of the fathers of the Congregation for whom the lot will be cast to take their stand in service
- 17 to go out and to come in before the Congregation. And according to his insight, along with the integrity of his way, he will strengthen his back for taking the office
- 18 serving his work in the midst of his brothers. To pay attention to (both) the great and the small, to this one and to that one, a man will honour his companion.

A SELECTION FROM THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS

JOSHUA KURTENBACH

הסרך העדה 1QSa

- 1 וזה הסרך לכול עדת ישראל באחרית הימים בת{א}ספם ליחד להתה[לך
- 2 על פי משפט בני צדוק הכוהנים ואנושי בריתם אשר סר[ו מלכת ב]דרך
- 3 העם המה אנושי עצתו אשר שמרו בריתו בתוך רשעה לכפ[ר בעד האר]ץ
- 4 בבוא{י}ם יקהילו אתכול הבאים מטף עד נשים וקראו בא[וניהמה] את
- 5 [כ]ול חוקי הברית ולהבינם בכול משפטיהמה פן ישנו במ[שנותיהמ]ה
- 6 וזה סרך לכול צבאות העדה לכול האזרח בישראל ומן נע[וריו]
- 7 [לל]מדהו בספר ההגי וכפי יומיו ישכילוהו בחוקי הברית ול[פי שכלו]²
- 8 [מו]סרו במשפטיהמה עשר שנים [י]בוא בטפ וב[ן] עשרים שנה יעבר
- 9 [על] הפקודים לבוא בגורל בתוך משפ[ח]תו ליחד בעד[ת] קודש ולוא י[קרב]
- 10 אל אשה לדעתה למשכבי זכר כיאם לפי מילואת לו עש[ר]ים שנה בדעתו טוב
- 11 ורע ובכן תקבל³ להעיד עליו משפטות התורא ולהת[י]צב במשמע משפטים
- 12 ובמלוא בו ובן חמשועשרים שנה יבוא להת[י]צב ביסודות עדת
- 13 הקודש לעבוד את עבודת העדה ובן שלושים שנה יגש לריב ריב
- 14 ומ[ש]פט ולהתיצב ברואשי אלפי ישראל לשרי מאות שרי ח[מ]שים
- 15 [שרי] עשרות שופטים ושוטרים לשבטיהם בכול משפחותם [על פ]י בני
- 16 [אחר]ון הכוהנים וכול שר⁴ אבות העדה אשר יצא הגורל להתי[צב] בעודת
- 17 [לצא]ת ולבוא לפני העדה ולפי שכלו עם תום דרכו יחזק מתנו למעמ[ד] לצב[ואת]
- 18 עבודת מעשו בתוך אחיו[ן] בי[ן] רוב למועט [זה על] זה יכבדו איש מרעהו

1 This is the result of a scribal error. A space was left after making the mistake and continuing.

2 Following Licht's restoration.

3 Baumgartner amends to *yqtl*.

4 Charlesworth corrects to *rshi*.

Words Impregnated with Reason

On the Degeneracy of Contemporary Rhetoric by David Foley

Sir Francis Bacon, one of the more tasteful Renaissance philosophers, tells us that “Rhetoric is subservient to the imagination.” According to Bacon, rhetoric is fundamentally disordered unless it applies “the dictates of reason to the imagination.”¹ This is a considerably nobler conception of “rhetoric” than the one to which we have grown accustomed. We typically use this term pejoratively, to accuse political opponents of forgery or baseness in their argumentation. What we

tend to forget is that rhetoric attends almost every word that we say – I am engaging in rhetoric as I produce this article, and you shall be when you fall prostrate before its resplendent truth, or inveigh against its gross fatuity.

Indeed, rhetoric, from the beginnings of the Western intellectual tradition, has been counted among the *artes liberales*, and is nothing more than a linguistic mode of persuasion. The character of rhetoric, as Bacon has defined above, is determined by whether it is rightly or wrongly ordered in relation to reason.

While I am fond of many postmodern platitudes, perhaps the one that holds the preeminent place in my heart is this: “I am tolerant of everything... except intolerance.”

O! magnificent maxim! O! dauntless banner of progress! O! effervescent star of enlightenment!

Although my interjections might have misled you, I confess that the above quotation is an example of bad rhetoric. Yes, though the phrase far surpasses Wilde’s paradoxes in wit, we apprehend in it a number of difficulties. While the statement appears to indicate some positive philosophical principle (namely, that intolerance is bad), and to prescribe some appropriate

conduct that follows from this principle (namely, to act intolerantly towards intolerance), the more perceptive reader will pause for a moment when she encounters this phrase.

The doctrine of tolerance that we are considering rests upon a single fundamental idea: that intolerance is bad, and is to be avoided. This might be a perfectly

defensible first principle, provided that the main term, “tolerance,” were being used candidly. What is the proper object of tolerance? It cannot, rationally speaking, be principles, for every positive principle necessarily entails the rejection of every contradictory principle. It is

irrational to be tolerant of an irrational principle, and an open dismissal of the law of non-contradiction. The philosophy of the eugenicist, or of the fascist, or of the misogynist, is intolerable, and must be subdued. If we tolerate such manifestly vicious and false ideas, we are not only intellectually culpable, but morally as well. Now, the proponent of tolerance will agree with what I have just said, without first realizing that it is his philosophy to tolerate everything – especially ideas.

The contemporary doctrine of Tolerance has conflated our tolerance of people with our tolerance of principles. Like the relativist, who maintains that there is no absolute truth (apart from his absolute truth that there is no absolute truth), so the tolerance proponent maintains that there can be no intolerance (apart from his own intolerance of intolerance). This is the most tasteless sort of intellectual dishonesty, however fashionable it may be.

Let us return, then, to our magnificent aphorism: “I am intolerant only of intolerance.” Every reasonable

While I am fond of many postmodern platitudes, perhaps the one that holds the preeminent place in my heart is this: “I am tolerant of everything... except intolerance.”

¹ Bacon, Francis. *Of the Dignity and Advancement of Learning*. 1605.

On the Degeneracy of Contemporary Rhetoric

human being identifies this principle to be unreasonable; indeed, to hold such a principle is to reject the necessity of adhering to reason. Now, the proponent of tolerance has become aware that no rational principle underlies his philosophy, so he employs a rhetoric that subverts reason – or, rather, one that openly disdains reason. The principle that intolerance is bad has been reduced to a mere sentiment, one which refuses to adhere to its own precepts, one that disorders our passions, and that incites our emotions and impulses to usurp over our reason. Tolerance, in its final repudiation of reason, has dogmatically prescribed intolerance.

Sophistry was a more wholesome atrocity three thousand years ago; at least then it recognized some rational principle that had to be manipulated. Regrettably, it is the nature of contemporary rhetoric – and not simply that of our tolerance comrades – to order itself to the subversion of reason. Much modern theism has degenerated to fideism, rejecting that we are able to attain knowledge through reason; much

modern atheism has degenerated to the most insane sort of materialism, which rejects that we are human, reducing ethics to social invention, intention to illusion, and thought to the collision of atoms.

G.K. Chesterton, in his singular capacity for aphorism, tells us that “it is generally the man who is not ready to argue, who is ready to sneer.”² Indeed, indulging in a sneer is infinitely easier than engaging in rational, intellectually charitable discourse. It is no surprise, then, in this age of philosophical poverty and intellectual lethargy, that sneering has become quite as natural and irrepressible as sneezing. It is time, then, that we exhort one another to the reclamation of good rhetoric, the ancient and profitable *ars liberalis*, that mode of discourse which subordinates itself to sovereign reason, as prostrate penitent to confessor. Let us employ an honest rhetoric, which is infinitely tolerant of its opponent, and equally intolerant of unreason.

2 Chesterton, G.K. *St. Thomas Aquinas*. 1933.



ALANA UNRUH, *Grandfather's Pocket Watch*

With No Art, There is No Questioning

Interviewing Yann Martel



You have devoted a great deal of time to promoting the liberal arts. Why are the arts valuable to you personally, and to our culture as a whole?

Well, personally, because they thrill me. Any number of times when I was growing up, I was turned on by a movie, a piece of music, a play, something like that. Sometimes at the most crass popular level, and sometimes at a much deeper level – reading a great book, seeing a great play. I remember seeing, at Stratford, *King Lear*, or, even better, seeing *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, the great Eugene O'Neill play with Stephen Cronin and Jessica Tandy. I was a teenager, our school had brought us there, and it was a fantastic production of a fantastic play. For those two hours, I forgot everything; I was completely focused on that play. More recently in London, I saw *Death of a Salesman* with Brian Dennehy – once again, you're completely riveted. So I realized – and at all levels, from high to low art – how incredibly powerful it is, because in a sense it is a mirror to us. When a work of art works, it is reflecting something about us as individuals. In a sense, it's like a god talking to us. And that's really deeply thrilling. Whereas everything else to me is to one extent or another completely impersonal. Business is business – corporations don't care about me as an individual, they just care about me as a consumer, and something replaceable. Science is fantastic, technology is extraordinarily powerful, but is also completely impersonal. The formulae of a science have nothing to do with me; art has everything to do with me as an individual. So I have found it extraordinarily exciting as a spectator, someone taking it in, and then eventually when I started trying to write I found it thrilling to create, to be a small god

creating a planet and populating it with characters and giving them a purpose, was thrilling, and I wasn't very good at it, but slowly I got better. And once again, because it was something that was deeply personal, it involved me as an individual. So that's a personal answer. And I think for all of us, on a wider scale, the arts is the way for us to understand who we are, why we are, where we are going. With no art, there is no questioning. Democracy cannot work in terms of strictly, flatly political questions, economic questions, because those only make sense in a greater cultural context, and that greater cultural context can only be addressed through the arts. So it's only through art and culture that we can understand who we are, and if we don't have that, then I think what happens is that people do not only stop being critical citizens, but they start having no notion of why they are, what they are supposed to do. So then what happens is that you have lives of – it sounds pompous saying this – lives of tragic frivolity, you have people living these utterly, utterly frivolous lives of crass materialism. And in fact people aren't stupid, they just have no sense of who they are, and they just waste it completely. What humanizes us most profoundly is the arts.

Having traveled to India to research *Life of Pi*, and read dozens of Agatha Christie novels to better develop one of your characters who was partial to the Queen of Crime, you have gained a reputation for researching extensively for your work. Why do you find such research beneficial?

First of all, it's my way of still being at school, in a sense, still learning about the world. It's fun, in a simple way. Agatha Christie is a wonderful writer,

and so to systematically read thirty of her novels in a fairly short time and therefore to be able to compare and contrast was even more fun. And also in terms of the work, it adds to its depth, it adds to its solidity. My starting point is that I am of no interest; I like looking out, I don't like looking in. I don't find my life or who I am that interesting in terms of the written page; I'd rather look out at this amazing world we live in. And one of the tools that helps me in looking out is doing research. You mentioned *Life of Pi*, which was such a fun novel to research. I was doing research on religion, for example. Not only for that novel did I read the primary texts of religion – the Bible, the Quran, many of the Hindu texts – but I read books about religion. Whether you like religion or not, it's a fascinating topic. Why people believe what they believe is really interesting. I also did research on animal behaviour and biology – how animals operate, to what extent they echo us, to what extent they're very different from us. I also did research on shipwrecks and survival at sea – equally interesting. And for my novel after that, *Beatrice and Virgil*, I did a lot of research on the Holocaust, the great human tragedy. But the starting point is in a sense that I know nothing. So what do I have to write if I don't do my research? It's my way of exploring the world and extracting a story out of it.

Your novel *Beatrice and Virgil* reflects upon the Holocaust through the eyes of a writer whose life in certain ways resembles your own. Why is it still important to write about and explore the meaning of the Holocaust?

Because it is a great, unique tragedy. Yes, there's been other genocides, but none quite like the Holocaust. I don't buy this idea that the Jewish Holocaust was just one among many other – there is a uniqueness to the Holocaust, which lies in the Nazi perspective, which I think was never seen before. In other words, theirs was a sort of hygienic view of the Jewish people, that they were sort of like a disease. Just as a doctor wouldn't want to eliminate polio in just one town –

or AIDS or smallpox or leprosy – and let it thrive in another; that doesn't make any sense, because it will just spread again. If you want to eliminate leprosy, you eliminate it everywhere, because otherwise it will come back. The Nazis have that same view of Jews, the view of the people as a disease that had to be wiped out everywhere was unique in genocides, because up until then genocides had nonetheless – despite their ferocity and monstrosity – a limited scope. A good example would be the genocide of the Armenians at the beginning of the twentieth century in Turkey. They Ottomans killed the Armenians because they were in the wrong place at the wrong time, i.e. in the middle of the Anatolian Plateau just when Turkey was trying to come up itself as a nation as the result of the founding of the Ottoman Empire. So you have

What was horrifyingly unique about the Nazis was that they're perspective was completely universal. It's a unique tragedy, but it's also one that, despite its uniqueness, has oddly enough been put in a box.

all these Turks, Muslim Turkish speakers, trying to create a nation, and smack in the middle of them are these Armenians, who are neither native Turkish speakers nor Muslims.

But they wanted to get rid of the Armenians in the Anatolian Plateau – they didn't care about Armenians who were in Armenia, or in Syria, or in Greece, or anywhere else. So it was genocidal, but with a limited scope. What was horrifyingly unique about the Nazis was that they're perspective was completely universal. So it's a unique tragedy, but it's also one that, despite its uniqueness, has oddly enough been put in a box. Yes, there's tons and tons of stuff on the Holocaust, but I've generally found it's all of the same kind. Especially in terms of the way artists have approached it. There are very few novels on the Holocaust – most novels are thinly disguised biographies, or autobiographies. There's nothing wrong with that, but you cannot reduce art to that. Most great novels are completely fictitious, they're complete inventions, and that's what we like about them. Even though they're complete fabrications – fantasy novels, for example, are complete fabrications of alternate worlds – nonetheless, we understand that they somehow reflect who we are, they are in some ways about us. So you cannot reduce art to a biography or autobiography. So I have always

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been struck at how limited the artistic expression of the Holocaust has been — why has it only been biographical stuff? Where is the free invention that you get with war, for example, other great tragedies? Why does the Holocaust scare away fiction writers? Why, when I was working on *Beatrice and Virgil*, did I have people asking me if I were Jewish, why I was writing about the Holocaust? — They wouldn't ask me that if I were writing a story set during the war. So it is a monumental tragedy that we have to look at, but that we've looked at in a very limited way. Which is why, for example, people are much more nervous talking about the Holocaust than they are about war, for example. People are willing to say any nonsense about wars — ancient wars or current wars — people spout their opinions about Afghanistan or the Iraq war that they feel they're entitled to, in a sense they feel that they're participants, including if they make a mistake. People get much more nervous with the Holocaust, other than that they just say the usual platitudes — “What a terrible tragedy,” “the poor Jews,” et cetera. If you start discussing it, people very quickly get nervous, and nothing shuts up an audience more than having a Holocaust survivor around — even if the Holocaust survivor were some uneducated, clueless person who just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time again, and managed to survive and didn't really understand anything — the very authenticity of being a survivor, it's phenomenal how it will shut everyone up. And I don't think that kind of nervousness is good, because the best way to get a full understanding of the historical event is to be able to freely discuss it. Which means saying the wrong thing, then being made aware of it, and then changing your opinion, or learning — in other words, thesis, antithesis, synthesis. That's the best way to get the most out of an event, to have a free-for-all discussion, which includes people saying things that are complete nonsense. That's exactly why we have freedom of speech: so we can get the fullest possible discussion out of any particular topic. And I don't think we've done that with the Holocaust — it's always the same thing. Which is why I find that whereas war is always a new story — if you write a war novel, you're going to say: what war? where? is it a real war? a war nearby? far away? long ago? is it a science fiction war on some other planet? — whereas if you say

you're writing a Holocaust novel, you'll say: Eastern Europe, between '33 and '45, we know the cast of characters, we know the emotional slant, we know what's going to happen (a lot of people will die, but one little person will survive, and that will somehow make it better) — that becomes deadeningly familiar. That is why I think the Holocaust is slowly starting to collect dust, and I think in part — not because it was 60 years ago; there are wars that are a lot older than that which still seem alive to people — it's because of the way we've discussed it. And the reasons why it's been limited is natural, because it was such a monumental tragedy, unparalleled before, it's the kind of thing that shuts people up. There are all kinds of reasons why, but the end result has been a silencing around it, and I don't think that's good. So in writing *Beatrice and Virgil* I was just trying to approach it in a different manner.

Your collection of letters to Stephen Harper, published under the title *101 Letters to a Prime Minister*, betrays the broad range of your reading. What, then, are your favourite literary works?

Well I grew up on the classics, so I would say the usual suspects of the Anglo-American tradition, the great writers of the late nineteenth century — people like Thomas Hardy and Joseph Conrad — and then into the early-mid twentieth century American writers — Faulkner, Hemingway, John Dos Passos, Sinclair Lewis, those people. They were extraordinarily experimental. We tend to think that we've invented everything and that we're the best, but go back to that time and you'll realize how phenomenally experimental they were. And then eclectic stuff. I was very influenced by a Norwegian writer, Knut Hamsun, who won the Nobel Prize about a hundred years ago. And also the modern Japanese writers, like Mishima and Kawabata, and all the great Russians. I'm not that well read in terms of contemporary writers — I'm not as voracious as I used to be — I figure as you get older you get more critical, and you're less able to swallow up everything. The living writer I most admire is J.M. Coetzee, the South African, now Australian, writer — it's amazing how inventive he is in his storytelling, and how spare he is in his style, and yet how rich what he writes is.

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Your work deals with some of the most challenging issues of human experience: faith, family, suffering, and survival. In *Life of Pi*, Pi Patel weaves his way through Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and ends up (something like) a Roman Catholic. In what ways does this resemble your own spiritual journey?

Well it doesn't in a literal way, in the sense that I've never been a practicing Hindu or Muslim. But it does intellectually reflect my interest in a search for meaning. I find in a very secular, materialist society, a lot of people just know enough about religion to dismiss it. The great questions of religion, the great figures of religion, not only ask questions, but provide answers that are challenging and thrilling. Whether you believe them or not – it's not a question of taking them like a fish takes a

hook; you always have to be critical, and in fact you can reject most of it – but you should at least be in dialogue with that kind of stuff. The least satisfying position, as

I've said in *Life of Pi*, is to be agnostic, to say there's not enough evidence. Maybe it is the strict, correct position rationally, but we're not rational animals; we're existential animals, and we have to make a choice. So either you accept or reject; either you're an atheist or a believer. And either one involves some kind of questioning, some kind of being in dialogue *with*. Even if you're going to think of most religions as nonsense, you have to at least be in dialogue. It's the right kind of question to ask, because the answers it can provide – even if they are minimal answers – are ones that will structure your life, they will give you a sense of why you are. In a sense, the same thing that the humanities will provide: a sense of why we are and what our purpose is. In doing research for *Life of Pi*, I discovered that religion is far more complex than I thought it was. I had kind of the Monty Python version of it. Growing up in a completely secular household, I had a very superficial vision of religion. In a sense, I was as much a fundamentalist as those who kill in the name of God. My vision of it was slight. So *Life of Pi* reflects my interest, and like him I broadly choose to accept that somehow

But we're not rational animals; we're existential animals, and we have to make a choice. So either you accept or reject; either you're an atheist or a believer . . .

this all makes sense, that somehow there's something underpinning all material reality – I have no proof for this – but there's something underpinning material reality in some way that I don't understand, because I'm too small – something explains it. Including great evil. This is not a reasonable belief. If religion were a matter of reason, everyone would very easily decide the same way they decide whether they should jump off a diving board into a pool – is there water? does it look deep enough? should I investigate that? Religion goes beyond that. It involves the leap of faith. And I choose to make that leap of faith. Having said that, I'm not particularly denominational, I'm not literal. That allows me – I hope without taking a cafeteria approach, which is what you don't want – to separate what seems to strike a chord of truth in religion, and

what is merely sociocultural and therefore not necessarily deeply true. I am still unflinchingly critical of the excesses of religion, while acknowledging that it does tap into deep truth.

Many have remarked upon the philosophical nature of your writing. Do you feel that your studies of philosophy in university (and perhaps afterwards) have been profitable to your work as a novelist?

To be honest, you're asking me to step outside of myself and look at myself, and I can't do that. But, the fact is at university I studied philosophy over majoring in English. Clearly this indicates a certain bent of mind, a certain interest, which I suppose is reflected in what I write. So perhaps my style of writing is more disposed to philosophizing than otherwise – I guess that's just my bent, that's just my genetic makeup, the way I like approaching the world.

Your forthcoming novel, *The High Mountains of Portugal*, is based on Mark's Gospel. Can you give us a brief look at your next work, and why you chose to cast it in this form?

Well, that is the initial idea. It is evolve, evolve, evolve – in a sense like homeopathy – extract of extract, a distillation of a distillation. Originally, in its earliest

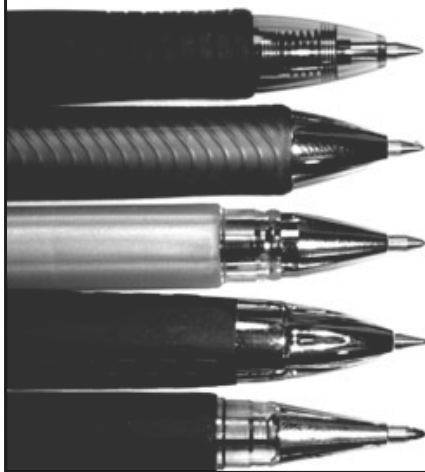
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incarnation, I was struck by the chapter headings in the Gospels, how in a sense they are a summary of the Gospel itself. I was wondering whether I could write a story that would be a parallel, not of the Gospel as a whole, but of these chapter headings. So my first draft was initially in 19 chapters, because the Gospel of Mark is in 19 chapters, using these chapter headings. But, since then, I've seen that using these chapter headings has encumbered the story, that sort

of scaffolding ended up weighing on the narrative. So now I've gotten rid of the chapter headings, and I'm starting to efface all of that outer structure to let it become a sort of skeleton, so it's more invisible now. When I talk about the book, I will tell that that's where it's from. It will be interesting whether readers who don't know anything about it will detect that progression, so we'll have to see.

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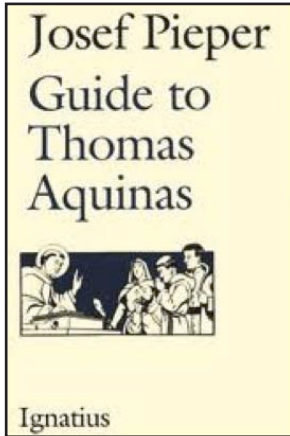


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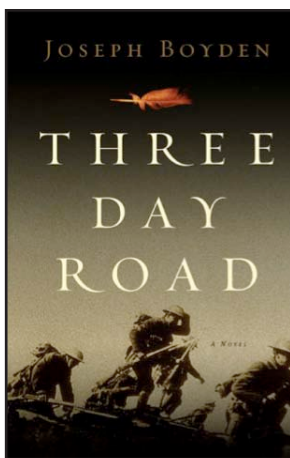


GUIDE TO THOMAS AQUINAS

by Josef Pieper

Reviewed by David Foley

Josef Pieper's *Guide to Thomas Aquinas* is a thoughtful and readable introduction to one of the monumental figures of the Western intellectual tradition. In this short book, Pieper provides a cursory biography of Aquinas, a synthesis of his philosophical and theological principles, and a compelling account of Thomas' immense relevance in our times. While many contemporary philosophers tend to transfix themselves upon the massive rationality of St. Thomas, Pieper presents a rich portrait of the Angelic Doctor as "not only a philosophical and theological thinker, not only a university professor, but also a mystic visionary, a saint." Among the finest features of Pieper's work is his explication of Aquinas' fundamental precept, that reason can in no case be contrary to faith; indeed, when each of these principles is in its true form, reason supports faith, and faith perfects reason. Pieper's admirable introduction provides new readers of St. Thomas an approachable gateway into his thought, not only as it relates to the ancient tradition of Aristotle and Plato, or the Catholic tradition of Augustine and Boethius, but also as it relates to the modern philosophical landscape. This *Guide to Thomas Aquinas* will be of great value to the venerable Thomist and nescient undergraduate alike.



THREE DAY ROAD

by Joseph Boyden

Reviewed by Mark Doerksen

On this centenary of the First World War and a mere three years until the centenary of that most famous of Canadian military triumphs, the Battle of Vimy Ridge, it is perhaps most fitting to look at a recent Canadian novel detailing the story of two aboriginal men from Canada fighting in the aforementioned conflict. Joseph Boyden's *Three Day Road* chronicles the story of young Xavier Bird and his friend Elijah, as Xavier travels home from the war with his aunt Niska. Boyden uses this journey to frame his narrative with the stories of Niska to her nephew, as well as Xavier's own memories of the war. While emotionally powerful at points, the novel becomes bogged down in a morass of graphic depictions meant either to shock or titillate the reader, and at these moments succeeds only in drawing attention to the mundanity of Boyden's sometimes rather sparse prose. Where Boyden focuses on his characters in combat and in the trenches he is most effective. Those interested in war fiction may enjoy the chapters in the trenches, but they had best skim the rest. Those interested in native fiction may find something of interest, though there are better examples of the genre to be found. *Three Day Road* could make for an interesting three-day literary excursion, but by day four one may find oneself hoping for a detour.



MEGAN WALL, Óðinn waiting for breakfast

POSTCARD STORY

"What's a postcard story? A postcard story is a condensed piece of storytelling in no more than 250 words. Use drama, poetry, humour, and dialogue to write one. Anything goes. There are no restrictions except the word limit. Stretch yourself by writing short." *Guy Vanderhague*

AN EYE AND A FRIEND

I wanted to visit my daughter one morning, so I paid an old ferryman to bring me across the lake. On the way, apropos of nothing, he said, "To lose an eye and a friend at once is almost the height of sorrow. You see this glass eye? I owe it to a boy who threw rocks in a library. He showed up in shabby clothes, carrying a grocery bag. He didn't care what he hit. By the time anyone stopped him, he had pulverized my eye. But I never learned who he was. That is what I regret."

"That kid sounds like garbage," I said. "I'm sorry about what happened, but you should forget about him."

I thanked the man for his service once we reached the shore. But to find the path to my daughter's house, I had to negotiate the misty hills as well.

Bruce Parker



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