

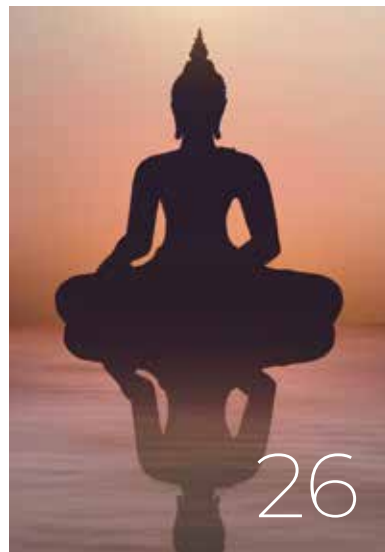
HUMANITIES

NORTH DAKOTA MAGAZINE | 01.24

the SPRING PROGRAM issue

quiet solitude of the plains, where the winds whisper, tales and the grasses sway in harmony with the earth. The Bison roams as a custodian of ancient wisdom, an heir to the stories of generations past, its strength and adaptation that have been etched into its very being. As it grazes upon the beautiful prairie grasses, it imparts its tenaciousness, reminding us that the spirit of the land is unyielding to the passage of years. The Dakota plains, with their vastness and untamed beauty, serve as the canvas upon which the bison writes its masterpiece. Here, beneath the vast expanse of the open sky, the bison roams the land with a wild grace that is a living testament to the untamed spirit of the American wilderness. As it grazes, its energy resonates through the very earth, infusing the plains with a vitality that is both primal and profound. The bison, in its sheer presence, becomes a harmonious choreography that has been danced through millennia. As it grazes, its hooves press into the soil, nurturing the earth and facilitating the growth of prairie grasses. In this symbiotic relationship, the bison is not merely a resident of the land, it is a guardian, a steward, and a symbol of the balance that exists between the wild and the human. On the wisdom and majesty of the North American bison, a timeless connector to the land and a reminder of our responsibility to protect and cherish these magnificent creatures, let us be inspired to

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HUMANITIES NORTH DAKOTA MAGAZINE is published by Humanities North Dakota.



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Humanities North Dakota Magazine has been made possible in part by a major grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities: Democracy demands wisdom.



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A GOOD TEACHER

BRENNA GERHARDT
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

A good teacher can change your life. I've been fortunate to have many in my life thanks to a liberal arts education.

One of the best was George Frein, who passed away on October 4, 2023, at 91. He was sharp as a tack until the end and didn't hoard the wisdom he'd gathered from a lifetime of serious study in the humanities. He gave it away freely, a consummate teacher to the end.

In 2022, he co-founded, along with Charles Pace, Susan Marie Frontczak, and John Dennis Anderson, a national Chautauqua Training Institute through Humanities North Dakota (HND). Over the course of a year, they trained a new generation of Chautauqua scholars to revitalize the living history tradition George was passionate about. He was also one of HND's first Public University scholars, teaching a course comparing *Moby Dick* and the *Odyssey*. I took his class, embarrassed that I'd never read the famous book about the whale. Reading it was a slog, and I would have quit if it weren't for George's insightful guidance. I pulled more from the text than I ever imagined possible. That's just what he did – give flesh to the bones of history, mythology, literature, and theology. After years of being out of school, he reminded me that, like the story of Jacob and the angel in Genesis, a text or an idea must be wrestled with, not simply accepted, because larger truths are often gifted through struggle.

Somewhere along the way, I'd lost that lesson. I'd been panicking about keeping up with reading, tearing through books and articles at breakneck speed to keep up with the blizzard of recommendations passed along to me. This was a reminder to read slowly, to re-read, and most importantly, to seek out teachers and fellow students to expand the text in ways I alone could not imagine. Surface-level knowledge is a thin veneer; deep learning creates foundations.

The lessons I learned from George are embedded in Humanities North Dakota's programs. We do lifelong learning in service of questions of ultimate meaning and purpose, not the rote accumulation of knowledge.

Seeking wisdom in a world driven by data is challenging, but let's slow down and make space in our busy lives for deep exploration into the eternal questions of the soul. George would love that.

Much heart,

Brenna Gerhardt

Executive Director & Fellow Lifelong Learner

ABOUT THE COVER ARTIST, JODEE BOCK

During the long winter of 22-23, entrepreneur Jodee Bock moved into a new office in Fargo with three blank walls. While trying to decide which local artist she would like to decorate with, a friend surprised her with six canvases, some with a few splotches of paint and some completely blank. She decided to teach herself to paint via YouTube. Now, nearly a year later, she has ventured into abstract realism, painting colorful bison, dragonflies, landscapes, and even Teddy Roosevelt. Each painting has a quote or words embedded in it.

Jodee's work can be seen and purchased at JBockArt.com.

A LEGACY OF COURAGE

by Kari A. Hall

The Holocaust has always intrigued me. It is rich with human perseverance in the face of depravity. The happenstance that allowed one to survive and yet another to perish. The unwavering human spirit to rebuild after the war what the Nazis could not destroy. The way that many survivors not only survived but flourished.

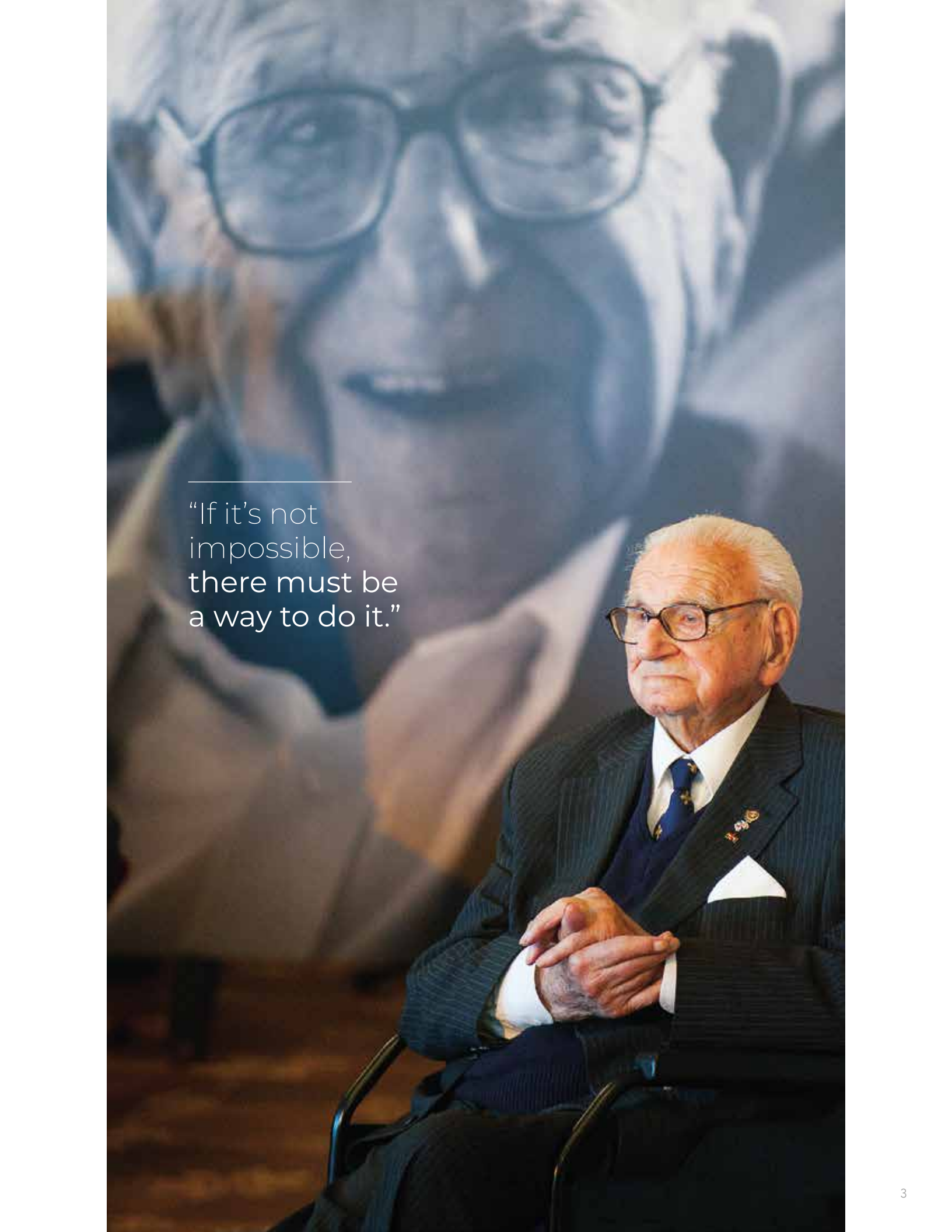
When I began teaching a high school Holocaust Studies elective course six years ago, I didn't quite know what to expect. Would I get the students who devour books like I do? Would I get students who have been impacted by the lives of Corrie Ten Boom, Eva Kor, Elie Wiesel, and others like I was at their age? Would I face Holocaust denial?

On the first day of class, I faced 55 teenagers—two full sections of students signed up for *The Holocaust: History & Memory*. Many were my former students who trusted me enough to take another course, but the surprise was that I had a huge crew of auto-tech, World-War-II-loving, salt-of-the-earth North Dakota boys! Every section of the course I have taught amazes me; young people want to understand tough ideas like antisemitism, the harshness of war, politics that prevent action, or the personal story of the eyewitness.

History is the human story. My job is to bring to life the humanity behind an event and personalize the struggles of the people who lived it. A great story intrigues the listener, but on a deeper level, it forces us to see our reflection and ponder who we are.

Let me share with you the captivating true story of Nicky Wertheim, a young Englishman who changed his surname to Winton to avoid anti-German and anti-Jewish sentiment on the eve of war. How did a young stockbroker become one of the most renowned British humanitarians in the days leading up to World War II? According to Sir Nicholas Winton, he just happened to be in the right place at the right time.

A dear friend had requested Nicky visit Prague in the winter of 1938. Nicky was well aware of the danger within the Czech borders as Hitler had annexed the Czech Sudetenland in October 1938. The attacks of *Kristallnacht* in November of that year were splashed in the press, and Nicky was primed for action. Nicky's sense of urgency for these refugees, his prior work with the Red Cross on the continent, and his own family's German-Jewish experiences decades before had led him to see what most Englishmen were not grasping when he arrived in Prague on New Year's Eve.



“If it’s not
impossible,
there must be
a way to do it.”



Nicky's work with the *Kindertransports* evacuated 669 Czech children from a war zone. Today 15,000 lives are linked to those transports.

After touring the displaced person camps, Nicky committed to assist Jewish refugees as German government agents had already descended on Prague searching for political enemies, anti-Nazi leaders, or others deemed a threat to Nazi control over Czech lands. Smuggling children out of this region was already underway, but Nicky realized that no one was planning for long-term evacuation. Nicky lived his life by this adage: “If it’s not impossible, there must be a way to do it.” During his two-week “holiday” in Prague, Nicky committed to be secretary for the newly created *Children’s Committee for Czechoslovakia* and wrote to his mother to start making immigration inquiries as to what was needed to bring refugee children into England.

Back in London, knowing that the clock was ticking and that borders would soon be closed, Nicky and his mother set about this work. As Nicky’s daughter Barbara wrote in *If it’s Not Impossible...The Life of Sir Nicholas Winton*, Nicky simply used his trade and negotiation skills after the stock market closed at midafternoon each day. She shared that “these skills were underwritten by the drive to give aid to those in need without any financial reward involved” and placing “compassion

before personal advancement.” His skills and tenacity allowed him to make connections with those who could open doors for refugee transports.

Nicky made contacts, wrote letters pleading for funding, published press releases to drum up publicity, and finagled permission to publish photos of children needing sponsors—whatever it took. His biography describes his commitment to the cause when “one day rabbis arrived to complain about Jewish children” being placed in Christian homes and evangelical missions. Nicky, motivated by the urgency of the situation, “told them that he would not stop placing children wherever he could, and if they preferred a dead Jewish child to a converted one, that was their problem.”

By March 1939, only 25 children had been brought out of Czech borders, and British citizens were not necessarily welcoming of these placements. By June some positive press accounts described how new arrivals were organized, and the formal procedure of pairing children with foster families assisted in drumming up other supporters. The largest transport that summer included 241 children. The ninth transport was set to disembark on September 1, 1939, with 250 children, but the “train was canceled hours before it was due to

depart, as that day, fatefully, Germany invaded Poland and all borders were closed.”

As war was declared, Nicky’s efforts were thwarted. During the first nine months of 1939, although Nicky and his colleagues “managed to rescue 669 children from war, for most of the rest of the families, the fate of internment and murder in concentration camps” became reality. Do these actions make Nicky a hero? His daughter contextualized that “his character and views helped to make him the right man in the right place to have maximum impact when it was needed.”

Nicky did not define himself by a few months’ work embedded within his lifetime. The crazy race against time that allowed the *Kindertransports* to safely relocate almost 670 mostly Jewish children was not forgotten by Nicky, yet he did not comprehend the magnitude of significance for those whose lives were saved. A colleague who worked with Nicky on the refugee project compiled a large scrapbook that was given to Nicky during the final months of 1939. This scrapbook contained artifacts such as letters, news articles, photos, official government documents, and an official list of all rescued children and the foster placement addresses. As 1940 dawned, Nicky was busy looking forward to finding his next role as war engulfed Europe. Nicky went on to serve as a Red Cross ambulance driver in France in 1940, by 1942 was a RAF flight simulator instructor, and spent the last months of the war in Brussels and Paris. The scrapbook, along with old diaries and letters, remained boxed up as he made “various moves over the next fifty years.”

As time passed and he entered retirement, Nicky sought a home for the old scrapbook, hoping someone would appreciate the documentation it held, but a surprise was in the works. He was contacted by the BBC *That’s Life!* Program in 1988 and asked to sit in the studio audience. Thinking his role was to simply verify details about the *Kindertransports*, Nicky was ambushed as the program’s host flipped through his scrapbook

and zeroed in a child’s name from the list, Vera Diamant. Spotlighting Vera as part of the live studio audience, the host introduced Vera to Nicky Winton seated beside her. This wonderful moment turned extremely emotional as Nicky and Vera faced each other. The full Winton family was invited back for the next taping of *That’s Life!* when Nicky was reunited with 25 more of the rescued children and a full studio audience made up of the children and grandchildren of those rescued. I play these old television clips to my students in my Holocaust Studies course. I keep the lights off extra-long as there isn’t a dry eye in the classroom!

Nicky’s work with the *Kindertransports* evacuated 669 Czech children from a war zone. Today 15,000 lives are linked to those transports. Many rescued children contacted Nicky over the decades trying to piece together their flight from Czechoslovakia into the arms of strangers who served as foster families. Nicky became an honorary father to some, and all were welcomed as extended family members by the Wintons. Never one to seek the limelight, Nicky was awarded Czechoslovakia’s highest honor, the Order of the White Lion, and was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II. The scrapbook found a permanent home at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, the world center for documentation, research, education, and commemoration of the Holocaust.

Why did Nicky help when so many others stood idly by? What motivated him? What led him to comprehend the urgency to evacuate the children when England’s own Prime Minister Chamberlain boasted that “we have peace in our time”?

Last November I had the privilege of spending time with Sir Nicholas Winton’s son. His visit to North Dakota was made possible through a PBS classroom grant in partnership with the Jewish Community Relations Council of Minnesota and the Dakotas. As a professional speaker, Nick focuses on the legacy of courage left by his father, who passed away in 2015 at the age of 106. Nick speaks candidly about growing up, life lessons

Sir Nicholas Winton's story isn't just a Holocaust story, but rather a human story.

learned from business and through tragedy, and uses his father's legacy to inspire audiences of all ages. After speaking to our student body, Nick requested to meet with my Holocaust students in a small group setting. He explained that being the son of Sir Nicholas Winton has not only instilled a sense of responsibility but has empowered him to convey timeless lessons. Nick captivated my students as he challenged them to leave a mark on our school and community.

His connection with the group was dynamic. The students were surprised that a British man in his 70s was interested in their hopes and dreams. The personal connections were amazing and genuine. Nick carries on the legacy of his father's work. Sir Nicholas Winton's story isn't just a Holocaust story, but rather a human story.

In true North Dakota fashion, I hosted Nick for supper to enjoy frybread tacos and "the best crisps ever" (my daughter baked Great-Grandma's chocolate-chip cookies). Nick and I enjoyed the geography and bison herds of the Badlands along with the vast prairies of this great state as I played tour guide. Nick and I laughed and talked about history. We shared stories and shed tears while discussing topics we are passionate about. Nick is now my friend across the pond. He repeatedly commented how nice and welcoming everyone was, and I said the same about the people I have met during my trips to Europe. Aren't we all just ordinary people who need to be mindful of how we can help others around us?

I have often been asked why I am so passionate about Holocaust Studies since I'm not Jewish. Growing up in North Dakota, I don't remember knowing anyone who was Jewish. But the message of Deuteronomy 4:9 should resonate with all of us:

Be careful and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them.

We are historical witnesses. As Holocaust survivors age, we must tell their stories to the next generation. □

KARI A. HALL is a veteran high school teacher who spends her days stimulating young minds and her summers enjoying historical adventures. Honored to represent North Dakota as a James Madison Fellow and Gilder-Lehrman History Teacher of the Year, Hall was recently awarded the 2023 Leo Weiss Courage to Teach Holocaust Educator Award.

Did you find this article interesting? Kari A. Hall will be teaching **Looking Back: History and Memory of the Holocaust** on Mondays Jan 8, 15, 22, 29, Feb 5, 12 - 7-9 pm Central time, using the Zoom platform. **Register at humanitiesnd.org/classes-events**



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TALKING ABOUT WAR

by Charity Anderson

“**W**ar,” said Pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus, “is the father of all things. War is the king of all.” While we have endeavored through the centuries to define our humanity through the lenses of art, history, and literature, no small part of that task has drawn us to the act of war. One could even argue that the humanities began with, and from, war and have remained intertwined with it throughout time. The *Iliad*, Homer’s epic poem detailing the final weeks of the Trojan War, dates to approximately 800 BCE but continues to captivate modern audiences. Indeed, the experience of war has been lodged in the heart of the humanities since the days of Homer.

Some of our greatest works of art and literature have been inspired by war: the *Iliad*, Tchaikovsky’s *1812 Overture*, Sun Tzu’s *The Art of War*, Goya’s *The Disasters of War* series, Picasso’s *Guernica*, or Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*. Writers from Homer onward have worked to capture and describe humanity’s most horrific creation: war. “How can I picture it all?” Homer asked in the *Iliad*. “It would take a god to tell the tale.” To write about war, Homer argued, is to reach beyond humanity’s capabilities into the realm of gods. More than 2,000 years later, Herman Melville, contemplating America’s Civil War, agreed, “None can narrate that strife.” Yet both writers tackled the subject and sought to find words to convey the incomprehensible experiences of war.





Artists, filmmakers, historians, journalists, poets, and the like make war their subject precisely *because it is so hard to comprehend and because its paradoxes demand our attention.*

Why is human creativity so closely bound to the experience of war? Perhaps the connection of conflict with creativity is the product of war's pervasiveness in the human experience. Historians might argue over the exact details, but, by most accounts, there are no periods in recorded human history that have been without war. Our art and literature are so full of war because our history is so full of it. Artists, filmmakers, historians, journalists, poets, and the like make war their subject precisely because it is so hard to comprehend and *because* its paradoxes demand our attention.

The paradoxes at the heart of war form the basis of its attraction to artists and writers. War engages with, and thrives on, differences—we fear war but are also fascinated by it; we simultaneously experience both horror and admiration when faced with it. War bestows upon its participants a license to kill but also requires selflessness in the willingness to sacrifice one's life for others'. Within the experience of war are the seemingly anomalous dimensions of what Vietnam veteran Tim O'Brien called the "awful majesty of combat" and its "powerful implacable beauty." "War is nasty; war is fun," O'Brien

wrote in his best-selling war memoir, *The Things They Carried*. "War is thrilling; war is drudgery. War makes you a man; war makes you dead." War both resists and demands our understanding. It challenges us, as it has challenged artists and writers for centuries.

Despite the ubiquity of armed conflict in the human experience, most people are uncomfortable talking about it. Likewise, the study of war is largely ignored in most Western universities, perhaps because we fear that the very act of researching and thinking about it may signal that we approve of it. Yet in the United States, war, weaponry, and security are a foundation of our culture and a federal spending priority. According to the Office of Management and Budget, the U.S. spent \$766 billion on national defense during fiscal year 2022, pouring investments into hi-tech weaponry and military recruitment. Nevertheless, conversations about the experience of war are relatively few and far between among Americans, except in times when it dominates the international news cycle.

For a long time, Americans had the luxury of thinking about war as an activity that took place *somewhere else*, on a far-off

battlefield. Popular culture has treated military service as a chapter separate from civilian life—a tidy, encapsulated experience that reappears only on veterans' holidays. We have long been content to admire military heroes and battle stories from afar, believing that we will never have to take part in acts of war. The result of keeping such a safe distance from war, though, is that we neither face, nor engage with, its true reality. The lines are not so easily drawn between war and peace, hero and enemy, combatant and non-combatant, bloodshed and sacrifice, or front lines and home, and these blurred boundaries have only increased in American warfare since Vietnam. In Afghanistan and Iraq, like Vietnam, "victory" has been tenuous and vague. As Janice L. Jayes, professor of history at Illinois State University, so succinctly surmised: "We are in an age of unending war and everywhere war."

Talking about war, difficult as it may be, is important. It is next to impossible to comprehend the human experience without such dialogue. While the private experience of combat can never be fully expressed across generations, we, as humans and

members of a democratic nation, are obligated to *try* to understand war, including how both veterans' and civilians' lives are changed by the experience. Exploring the experiences of warfare is part of our shared responsibility to each other and our belief in democracy and a civilian-controlled military.

Importantly, the war experience doesn't end with a veteran's return to civilian life. The service member, their friends and family, and larger society are all affected by veterans' experiences of war. Opening discussion and raising awareness of the transformations, both positive and negative, hastened by war is our responsibility and an act of empathy for those affected by it.

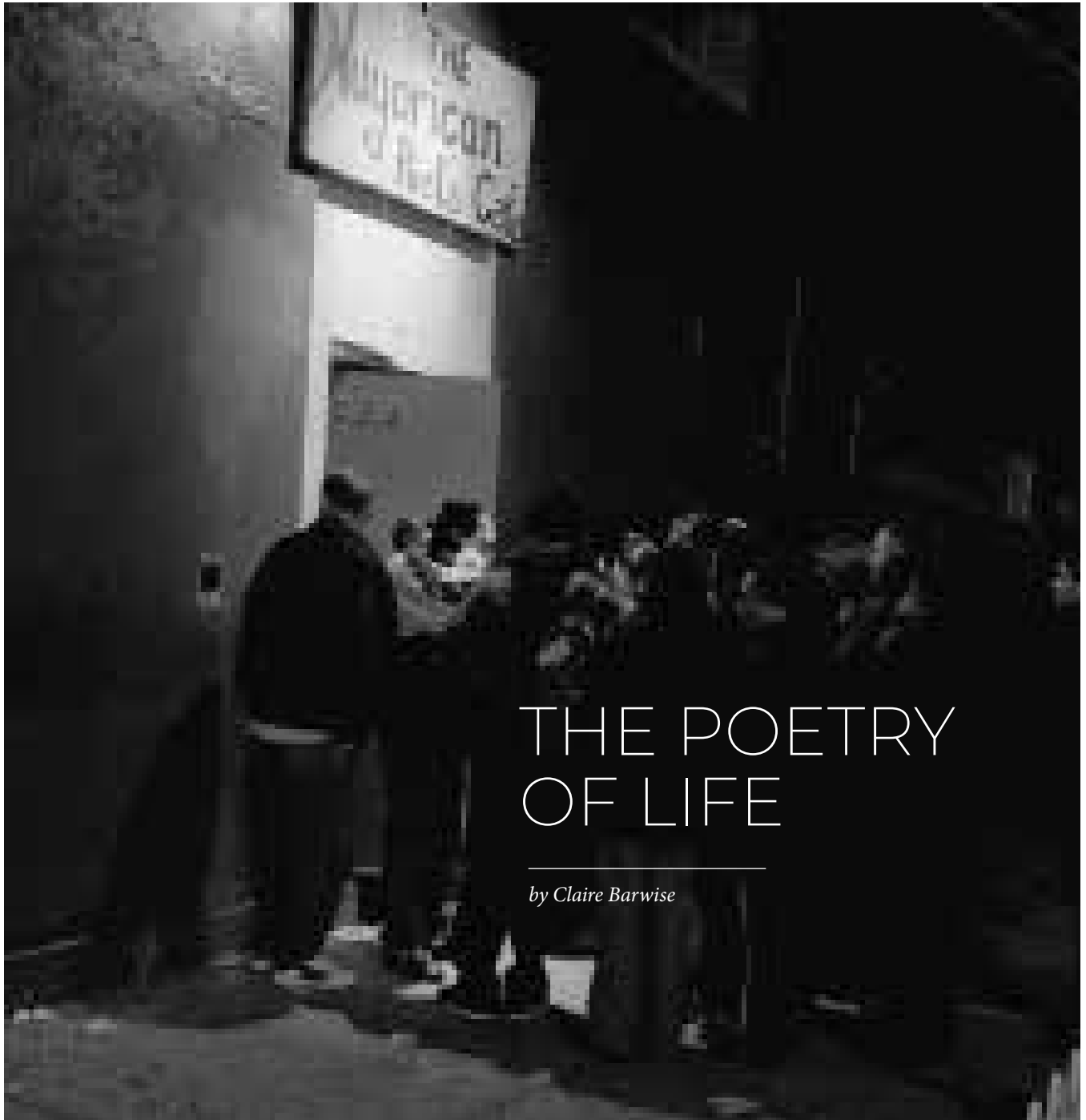
The humanities offer a natural starting point for discussion of war. Art and literature, for example, offer us a tradition of investigating the ways humans struggle to communicate across time and space, allowing us to examine the myths, legends, and realities of war in ways that statistics and bullet points cannot. Paintings, poems, and plays all represent efforts to explore shared human questions, helping people reconsider not just their own experience but their experience within broader humanity. By examining personal experiences of war through the humanities, we come to see war as a common challenge, not a private activity.

Many of us would prefer to avert our gaze from what is so often a dark and disheartening

topic, but we should not. We should include armed conflict in our study and discussion of history if we are to make any sense of the past. In *The Unwomanly Face of War*, investigative journalist Svetlana Alexievich writes that, "War remains, as it always has been, one of the chief human mysteries." Indeed, she is correct: war is mysterious, and it is a complex, frightening mystery at that. That is precisely why we must keep trying to understand it. □

CHARITY ANDERSON is Academic Director of the Clemente Veterans' Initiative Newark, a humanities course for veterans and military-connected civilians. Charity holds master's degrees in art history, education, and social work. She earned a PhD in social work from the University of Chicago.

Did you find this article interesting? Charity Anderson will be teaching **Dialogues on the Experience of War** on Tuesdays, Jan 16, 23, 30, Feb 6, 13, 20, 27, March 5 - 6:30-8:30 pm Central time, using the Zoom platform. **Register at humanitiesnd.org/classes-events**



THE POETRY OF LIFE

by Claire Barwise

My first teaching job out of grad school was teaching English in Harlem. I had just moved to New York City after a childhood in the Midwest and undergraduate years among the mountains and rivers of Montana. My first apartment was a sublet in Crown Heights: one room in an apartment of hairdressers that I remember mostly as an island of bed within a sea of the permanent resident's clothes. I fell asleep to the thumping music of the bar on St. John's street below, and in the morning, I would walk past Rastafarian stores flying the red and green flags of Jamaica to the Hasidic neighborhood south of Eastern Parkway, which on Friday nights were a sea of *shtrreimel*, the round fur hats worn on Shabbat. Yet it was only walking along 125th Street in Harlem, past the Apollo Theater, to the tiny college housed above the Studio Museum, that I became truly aware of my own race. The city at large was dazzlingly diverse, but in Harlem, I was often the only white person in the room. The effect served as a sort of reverse telescope. Instead of looking out, I was suddenly looking at myself as if from far away. Furthermore, because the college served adult learners, I was often the youngest in the room by at least a decade. Many of my students had children or grandchildren; some had faced homelessness or prison. I had been to college and graduate school, but here, I realized, I knew nothing. My education had involved plenty of books, but compared to my students, very little of life.

The first thing I realized was that my syllabus fell painfully short. While my own English classes had made nods toward non-white authors, they were rarely centered in the curriculum. Here, such a choice felt even more egregious. Why should my students read only a few poets of color, as if their

own experiences were only a footnote in the story of America, rather than central to its text? In *Between the World and Me*, Ta Nehasi Coates writes of a childhood in which “[e]veryone of any import, from Jesus to George Washington, was white,” with “black people only as sentimental ‘firsts’—first black five-star general, first black congressman, first black mayor—always presented in the bemused manner of a category of trivial pursuit.” In attending Howard University, and immersing himself in black history and literature, Coates found “the black world expanding,” and “more than a photonegative” of the white one. I wanted to give that to my students: to introduce them to voices that would resonate and challenge, voices that proved that their lives were the stuff of poetry.

As a result, when it came time to teach fiction and poetry, I found myself on a journey of discovery. Like Coates, I immersed myself in literature. The journey was not always comfortable. Instead of the joy of discovering an occluded tradition, I found culpability. In reading the narratives and verses of the historically oppressed, it became painfully clear that being well-intentioned was not enough: I had benefited from a lifetime of privilege, and had chosen comfort over justice. Yet in those pages, I also found wonder: windows into lives nothing like my own, yet with points of affinity and connection. With a well-turned line, a writer can render the formerly unknowable intimate—sometimes startlingly, even frighteningly so. Poet Terrance Hayes speaks of metaphor as a bridge, “a gesture of empathy. The metaphor is always reaching to connect to something else.” As much as language can divide us, it can also bring us closer, by turns welcoming and forcing us away from a comfortable myopia.

I wanted to show them that poetry could, and should, have a life outside of it.

My experience in Harlem forced me out of my comfort zone not just in terms of content but medium. I had been to dozens of poetry readings—subdued, often portentous affairs—but had little experience with spoken word, or slam poetry. But in preparing my new syllabus, I had found myself watching YouTube clip after YouTube clip, witnessing astonishing feats of verbal acrobatics powered by the fuel of raw emotion. In our windowless classroom, lit by too-bright fluorescent lights, the concrete walls already echoed with shouts and applause when a reader finished. I loved the space that we had created, but I wanted to show them that poetry could, and should, have a life outside of it. I arranged a field trip to the Nuyorican Café, an Alphabet City bar that hosted slam poetry nights nearly every night of the week. Here the lights were dim, only the stage lit. It was a Tuesday, and yet the house was packed. A few of my students performed—nervous beforehand, and then elated after, buoyed by the cheers of their classmates and friends. The poems were full of joy, frustration, triumph, rage, and also what Coates calls “the small hard things—aunts and uncles, smoke breaks after sex, girls on stoops drinking from mason jars.” There was dizzying wordplay. Laughter. Shouting. Sometimes, tears. The poetry of life.

Now when I teach, I center voices from the margins. I do it not because I find myself in the minority, but because I want to teach great poetry. I teach Natalie Diaz, whose backward slashes in “Hand-Me-Down Halloween” evoke the skeleton bones on a white boy’s costume as he taunts the speaker on her “first Halloween off / the reservation /” until she “tackle[s] his / white / bones / in the street.” I teach Danez Smith’s “dear white america,” in which the speaker imagines leaving Earth “in search of darker planets,” away from America’s “master magic trick... now he’s breathing, now he don’t. abra-cadaver.” I teach Suji Kwock Kim’s “Monologue for an Onion,” and witness how an ordinary vegetable, through the magic of extended metaphor, gives shape and form to the most complex questions of identity. “Hunt all you want,” Kim writes. “Beneath each skin of mine / Lies another skin: I am pure onion—pure union / Of outside and in, surface and secret core.”

So much of the joy of teaching, for me, is discovery. An excuse, with each new class, to search out texts that allow me to see through new eyes, to imagine myself into another body, another form. The world is so much richer than we can ever know through our one brief life. But through literature, and previously unheard voices, we can begin to glimpse its staggering breadth. □

CLAIRE BARWISE holds an MFA in Creative Writing and a PhD in English Literature. Her work has appeared in *The Minnesota Review*, *Feminist Modernist Cultures*, and *Modern Fiction Studies*. She currently lives and teaches in Philadelphia, PA.

Did you find this article interesting? Claire Barwise will be teaching **Verse Unheard: Amplifying Minority Voices in Poetry** on Mondays Jan 8, 15, 22, 29, Feb 5, 12 - 6:30-7:30 pm Central time, using the Zoom platform. **Register at humanitiesnd.org/classes-events**



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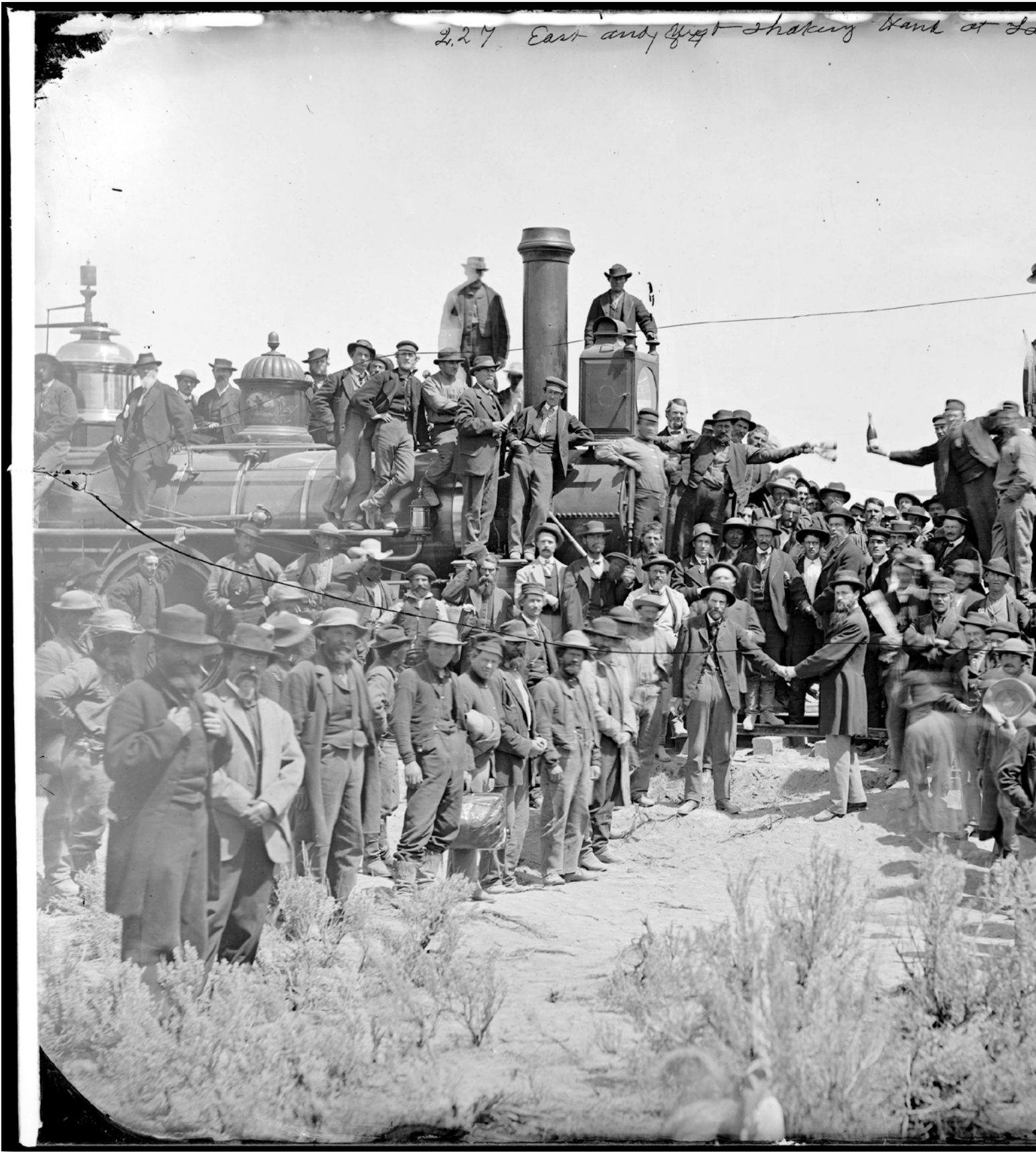
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“HELL ON WHEELS” AND THE GHOST TOWN LEFT BEHIND

by Michael A. Smith

The men were hungry. They were thirsty too, for anything other than muddied water. And when their work on the rails was done each day, they were bored, itching for something to break the monotony of laying track. In their wake followed men and women of perhaps not shining repute but of quick enterprise, however unseemly. So as laborers worked their way through the unfinished West along the Union Pacific Trail to complete the Transcontinental Railroad, an assemblage of vagabonds and gamblers and entrepreneurs followed, setting up lightweight storefronts and dance halls and bar tops that could be quickly disassembled and rolled down the freshly laid track. Samuel Bowles, a mid-nineteenth century journalist and travelogueur out of Springfield, Massachusetts, describes these loose towns as “rough and temporary” with settlements... of the most perishable materials—canvas tents, plain board shanties, and turf-hovels—pulled down and sent forward for a new career or deserted as worthless at every grand movement of the

“Benton was regarded as the worst of these towns and, not unexpectedly, the most legendary.”

Railroad company. Only a small proportion of their population had aught to do with the road, or any legitimate occupation. ...Restaurant and saloon keepers, gamblers, desperadoes of every grade, the vilest of men and women made up this ‘Hell on Wheels,’ as it was most aptly termed.

Dubbed the West’s “societal flotsam” by Dick Krek, these inhabitants had but one purpose, “to pocket the wages of the ten thousand or more men toiling on the construction of the railroad...to relieve workers of their pay.” For the railmen, the Hell on Wheels provided an infernal bargain: satisfaction of every bodily hunger for whatever you can pay, even if it is your life.

The most notorious of these towns was Benton, Wyoming. As what Krek calls the “epitome of a Hell on Wheels,” Benton’s infamy catalyzed the Western genre of literature first popularized in the early twentieth century and hints at the complex mythmaking of the West that revolves around lawlessness, romance, and the coast-to-coast building of America. Located around what is now milepost 696 from Omaha, Nebraska and 122 miles west of Laramie, Wyoming, Benton contained an astounding 23 saloons and five dance halls, in addition to a 4,000-square-foot Big Tent, which housed micro-dens of gambling and prostitution. At its apex, the town contained more than 3,000 inhabitants and, over the course of less than three months, averaged a murder a day. Benton had no natural water source, so water needed to be transported in from the North Platte River, three miles away. With alkaline land and limited water, it would have been virtually impossible to grow anything of substance. Combine the lack of nutrients with a critical mass of people and nothing to do other than drink, dance, gamble, and fight, and it is easy to see how, in the words of Brent Breithaupt, “Benton was regarded as the worst of these towns and, not unexpectedly, the most legendary.”

The convergence of these factors in Benton made for not only a town of legend but also one fated for ruin. Though Benton, like every other pop-up town along the U.P. Trail, had, in Dick Krek’s words, “extravagant dreams” that its “ragtag assembly of tents and wooden storefronts...was destined to grow into a metropolis,” it was intentionally impermanent. The town lasted only 60 days by design—from mid-July to mid-September 1868. The end-of-the-line camp of laborers, soldiers, and engineers methodically moved westward, keeping to a rough schedule of completion. This pace left Benton in its wake, with the bones of the Hell on Wheels carried to the next terminus and therein resurrected. The railroad and its financiers and managers used and discarded these remnant towns, forsaking them for new towns ahead.

The doomed nature of Benton created a space of romance and tragedy, both in real life and in the literature of the West. As Benton rapidly approached its impending destruction, railroad laborers and the Hell of Wheels desperadoes alloyed their separate voices to harmonize in what Zane Grey would describe in his novel *The U.P. Trail* as “a continuous hum” of “laughter, profanity, play.” Most notably, profanation, in the forms of violence and vice, thrives in this impermanent, doomed, forgotten place, and opens a space to what Giorgio Agamben in *Profanations* calls “the possibility of a special form of negligence, which ignores separation, or, rather, puts it to particular use.” The Hell on Wheels and its patrons and producers take advantage of the fact that the railroad has fated the town for destruction. Within this railspace, people practice this sort of “negligence”—purposeless, playful, profanatory behavior within a damned place.

Zane Grey dramatizes and romanticizes these profanatory scenes in *The U.P. Trail*. In doing so, he unites danger, death, and destruction within the Hell on Wheels to the promise and progress of settling the American West, echoing how laborers and desperadoes in Benton harmonize in the creation of the Hell on Wheels. Neale, *The U.P. Trail*'s protagonist, describes this confluence taking place within himself. In a monologue leading up to the climax of the novel, he explains,

I have crazy impulses. They've grown on me out here. They burst like lightning out of a clear sky... Strange—not understandable! I'm at the mercy of every hour I spend here. Benton has got into my blood. And I see how Benton is a product of this great advance of progress—of civilization—the U.P.R. ...Benton has called to the worst and wildness... I can't explain, but I feel. There's a work-shop in this hell of Benton. Invisible, monstrous, and nameless! ...Nameless like the new graves dug every day out here on the desert. ...How few of the honest toilers dream of the spirit that is working on them... They are men. There are thousands of them. The U.P.R. goes on. It can't be stopped. It has the momentum of a great nation pushing it from

behind... we are all so stung by that nameless spirit that we are stirred beyond ourselves and dare both height and depth of impossible things.

The Union Pacific Railroad (“U.P.R.,” in the quote above) simultaneously generates these “crazy impulses” and the progress of the “great nation.” It allows for (and perhaps even encourages) the profanity of Benton while also limiting its lifespan to sixty days. As a type of “fragile and precious” profanatory behavior, says Agamben, “Play...has an episodic character, after which normal life must once again continue on its course.” The Hell on Wheels is one such playful, profanatory process—the Hell on Wheels remakes the construction of the railroad into a space of potential and ultimate doom. Within this railspace, its residents hope to develop the space into a Cheyenne or Omaha, boomtowns that thrive long after the end of the line moves on. But as a profane playground for the wicked and purposeless, the Hell on Wheels toys with the idea of progress, embracing its own impermanence in the face of the completion of the transcontinental railroad. □

MICHAEL A. SMITH received his PhD in English from Duquesne University, where his dissertation focused on the American railroad, geocriticism, and placemaking. He has published research on the poetry of Muriel Rukeyser (*Humanities*, 2022) and interviewed the founder of geocriticism, Prof. Bertrand Westphal, for the *St. John's University Humanities Review* (2023). Michael works with *The Fine Foundation*.

Did you find this article interesting? Michael Smith will be teaching **Riding the Rails: The American Railroad through Literature and Culture** on Tuesdays Jan 9, 16, 23, 30, Feb 6, 13, 20, 27, March 5, 12, 19, April 2 - 6-7 pm Central time, using the Zoom platform. **Register at humanitiesnd.org/classes-events**

HOOKED ON SHAKESPEARE

by Janelle Masters

On Saturdays when my parents were shopping, I would stay with my grandmother and watch her crochet in her wooden rocking chair, her hands deftly creating a simple doily or a magnificent bedspread. I would sit cross-legged on the floor and listen as she told adventure stories of how she came over from the “old country” on a boat, nearly dying when she fell off, but being saved by getting snagged on some rigging. Her quickly moving fingers would stop, and the rocking would halt when she made a point. Jabbing the crochet hook in my direction, she would say, “The Lord works in mysterious ways, my little girl.” And then go back to rocking and her needlework.



So one day after my nine-year-old self had committed an infraction against my mother, I settled on the floor in front of my grandmother with the newspapers that she saved for me during the week spread out on the floor, reading the comics. I thought Grandma had not heard about my violation and that all was well. The crochet hook was whipping back and forth; the rocker was rocking. And then the rocker creaked to a stop. I sensed a crochet hook pointing in my direction.

I looked up. My grandmother's yellow eyes seemed at the moment to be searing my soul. The crochet hook quivered close to my face. She said, "How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child."

My mouth went dry. That sounded really bad.

"Do you know who said that?" she asked. I shook my head.

"God said that. It's in the Bible." She went back to rocking, occasionally tossing a meaningful look in my direction.

So imagine my surprise years later, when I was leafing through *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations* and found the true author: William Shakespeare.

Yeah, Grandma, King Lear said those words to Goneril, his ungrateful daughter. I don't think my breach of loyalty to my mother compared to Goneril taking away

Shakespeare was steeped in the Bible; his works are replete with biblical references and allusions.

her father's army, but I have never forgotten that quotation. Hearing it shook me to the core and was the beginning, the germ, of my being hooked on Shakespeare.

Grandma cannot be blamed for the confusion. Shakespeare was steeped in the Bible; his works are replete with biblical references and allusions. Most scholars think he used the Geneva Bible published in 1560 and perhaps the King James Bible published in 1611, the one my grandmother used. According to Dominic Selwood in his study, *The British and Reading: A short history*, 30% of men were literate in Shakespeare's time and 10% of women, so it is very likely that the family of John Shakespeare, a merchant in Stratford on Avon and William's father, read the Bible by the fireside in the evenings.

Because the language of the Bible and the language of Shakespeare's works are so similar, it's puzzling to me how some people revere the language of the King James, but find Shakespeare obtuse.

Here are some words or

phrases I have heard when I tell people I love Shakespeare:

Too highfalutin... pretentious... boring... impossible to understand... stupid... who talks like that?

Who talks like that? Well, according to Grandma, God, for one.

How about funny? Shakespeare is so very funny and witty. And I am not referring to his comedies. Here is an example from Act 3, Scene 1 of the history play, *Henry the Fourth, Part One*. Glendower and Hotspur, both leaders of armies, are arguing. Glendower brags about his magical powers:

Glendower: I can call spirits from the vasty deep.

Hotspur: So can I, and so can any man. But, will they come when you call them?

What a comeback! I guess Hotspur could have said, "Oh, yeah, you and what army?" But Shakespeare has Hotspur employ wit to disarm braggadocio.

And Shakespeare is so ribald! In Act 3, Scene 2 of *Hamlet*, we find this exchange:

Hamlet: Lady, shall I lie in your lap?

Ophelia: No, my lord.

Hamlet: I mean my head upon your lap.

Ophelia: Ay, my lord.

Hamlet: Do you think I meant country matters?

Ophelia: I think nothing, my lord.

That sounds very innocent. Just a little repartee between a man and a woman, but the Elizabethan audience would have been howling. An actor would certainly have emphasized the first syllable of “country.” And the audience would have had to stop laughing to hear the follow-up from Ophelia. The word “thing” was a euphemism for penis and so “nothing—no thing” meant vagina. Which gives *Much Ado About Nothing* a meaning that would be banned today if only the censors knew their Shakespeare.

And then there’s *Sonnet 135*:

Whoever hast thou wish, thou hast her will,

And Will to boot, and Will in over-plus;

More than enough am I that vexed thee still,

To thy sweet will making addition thus.

Wilt thou, whose will is large and spacious,

Not once vouchsafe to hide my will in thine?

Shall will in others seem right gracious,

And in my will no fair acceptance shine?

The sea, all water, yet receives rain still

And in abundance addeth to his store;

So thou, being rich in Will, add to thy Will

One will of mine, to make thy large will more.

Let no unkind, no fair beseechers kill;

Think all but one, and me in that one Will.

My grandma, as fond as she was of the King James language, would not have approved of that little ditty. When the word “will” is capitalized it refers, of course, to Shakespeare himself, but when it is not capitalized it is slang for, you guessed it, male or female genitalia/lust. Yup. There it is: a man bragging about his penis and sexual prowess. A seduction poem, subtle in its own way. *Carpe diem*. Gather your rosebuds as you may.

But let me delve into the true genius of Shakespeare: his ability to communicate his keen understanding of the human condition with words so precise they worm their way into the heart, cleaving it.

Alexander Pope, in part two of his *Essay on Criticism*, qualifies the genius poet’s capacity to deliver meaning as “What oft’ was thought, but ne’er so well expressed.”

That assessment conveys the true acumen of Shakespeare and

comes to me over and over when I read his works.

What could capture the agony of tragedy of losing children to slaughter than this line in Act 4, Scene 3 from *Macbeth* when Macduff learns his entire family has been killed: “Did Heaven look on and would not take their part?”

This heart-breaking line not only embodies grief but also calls into question the nature of God. Using “heaven” instead of God empowers the line by not damning the supreme being but instead doubting the place that is considered to be paradise after our earthly struggle. The absence of the word “God” in the line may not register in our conscious mind, but lingers in our subconscious. Yes, where is God?

In addition, think how the meaning would change if Shakespeare had used the word “did” instead of “would.” “Did” is simply the past; “would” implies a failure of will. Heaven and all its hosts looked on and looked away. Why “trouble deaf heaven” with useless cries? (*Sonnet 29*)

And there is something about the phrase “take their part” that is particularly trenchant and tugs at our tears. Think how the impact would change if Shakespeare had written something more dramatic like “Did Heaven look on and not strike the enemy?” An act of simple kindness is implicit in taking someone’s part. Macduff is not questioning the deity’s power, he is doubting its humanity.

But let me delve into the true genius of Shakespeare: **his ability to communicate his keen understanding of the human condition** with words so precise they worm their way into the heart, cleaving it.

But it's not only tragedy that makes life hard. Sometimes it's just the little, damnable, mundane annoyances that ruin the day. Shakespeare has this covered as well. Once when working on a project with a friend, a hammer mysteriously fell off a ladder, landing on my sandaled foot smack dab on my already damaged big toe. After I stopped moaning, I said, "There it is, just one of the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to." The line is from Hamlet's "To be or not to be" soliloquy. It is not quoted as much as the first line, but it reverberates through my mind whenever I encounter one of those daily shocks: slamming a finger in the door, choking on a Girl Scout cookie, or jabbing the hard end of a toothbrush into a tender gum. Transfixed in pain, one utters words that Grandma would not attribute to God or King James.

Which leads me to the Melancholy Dane, Hamlet. I have struggled in my life with depression as many do. Here we are in this "vale of tears," our mortal bodies, housing our soul, surrounded by the beauty

of earth, but even that beauty causing sorrow because it no longer delights us, our capacity for joy being blunted. Hamlet suffers from this condition. Shakespeare departs from blank verse in the following speech from Act 2, Scene 2 in which Hamlet attempts to explain his inability to feel human emotions.

I have of late—but wherefore I know not—lost all my mirth, forgone all customs of exercises; and indeed it goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory, this most excellent canopy the air, look you, this brave o'er-hanging firmament, this magistical roof, fretted with golden fire, why it appeareth no other thing to me, than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapors. What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason! How infinite in faculty! In form and moving, how express and admirable! In action how like an angel! In apprehension how like a god! The beauty of the world, the paragon of animals! And yet to me, what is this quintessence of dust?

Quintessence of dust.

Depression. Lacrimosa. Requiem.

The writers of the rock musical *Hair* saw the contemporary relevance of this passage and set it to music. The words of Shakespeare emerge out of the raucous melee on stage like a melodic ray from Elysium.

In my first year of teaching high school English, during our study of *Hamlet*, I told the class I would be bringing the recording of *Hair* to play for them the next day. This was shortly after the musical first appeared on Broadway in 1968 and had a nasty reputation even in the small rural community where I was teaching.

Class started. I was gingerly placing the needle on the right groove on the record, when the superintendent strolled in and nonchalantly leaned against the wall, crossing his arms. I could feel a crochet hook was about to make an appearance. Evidently, a parent had been alerted that Miss Masters was trying to draw their children into iniquity.

The class, the superintendent, and I all listened as the beautiful excerpt from Shakespeare filled the room, enhanced by musical

instruments and lovely singing voices. The tension in the room slowly dissipated as we were carried away by Shakespeare's words put to music.

Later I was called into the office. I figured my short teaching career was over. Instead I found my boss, seated at his desk, poring over an open copy of *Hamlet*. He looked up as I entered. "Wow," he said, shaking his head. "I never knew Shakespeare wrote like that. It's exactly how I feel sometimes."

Yes, Shakespeare has our backs.

Depression, happiness, anger, lust, impotence, love, friendship... Shakespeare covers the gamut of emotions inflicted upon humanity.

I would like to focus briefly on Shakespeare's treatment of evil. Yes, there is *Richard the Third* with a dozen bodies piled on the stage. There's Lady Macbeth and Macbeth steeped in blood so voluminous that Macbeth says in Act 2, Scene 2 it would turn the "multitudinous seas incarnadine."

But I reserve the most evil character in Shakespeare to Iago from *Othello*. And the most evil line, "I like not that" in Act 3, Scene 3. Innocent enough, but it is the first drop of poison that turns a good, but insecure man into a "green-eyed monster."

Iago. People like him walk among us. The "well-meaning" destroyers.

Why did Iago wish to destroy the lives of Othello and Desdemona?

Why? Because he felt slighted when someone else had been promoted and not him.

He drips poison into the ears of Othello, the Moor, not actual poison poured in the ears in the manner that Claudius kills Hamlet's father, and not lies... but insinuations, hints, suggestions of infidelity on Desdemona's part that slowly and methodically stirs Othello into a murderous rage.

In the play, Iago is referred to by the other characters as "honest Iago." He has them all fooled. He would never say anything bad about anyone. He just drips poison, disguised as "helping." Cassio, the man who receives the promotion instead of Iago has visited Desdemona innocently and is leaving when Othello and Iago enter.

"I like not that," Iago says. Othello asks why. Iago replies that he would rather not say... and lets the suspicion dangle there, allowing Othello's mind to think the worst and every action thereafter of his faithful wife and faithful friend to take on pernicious meaning.

And that it is about all it took. The play is not about military battles, not about wars between countries, not about gaining a throne.

It is about ordinary human frailty. Insecurity. Jealousy. The need to be loved. Yes, there's a pile of bodies: Othello, Desdemona, Cassio, even Iago's wife. But who lives?

Iago.

Ordinary, prosaic, banal evil walks among us daily. And Shakespeare nails it.

So we go on in our lives, "strutting and fretting our hour upon the stage," doing the best we can in our teaching, teeth brushing, wooing, and working. Perhaps King James and Shakespeare have wisdom to impart in that lovely archaic language that haunts us and lifts us up out of the mundane grind.

To paraphrase Grandma, "Shakespeare hooks you in mysterious ways." □

DR. JANELLE MASTERS is a retired college professor and dean. She specialized in teaching English literature and Native American literature. She is a nature lover, kayaker, birder, amateur musician, reader, and writer. She is proud to be the daughter of a railroad worker and to have been raised in Niobe, North Dakota, population 32.

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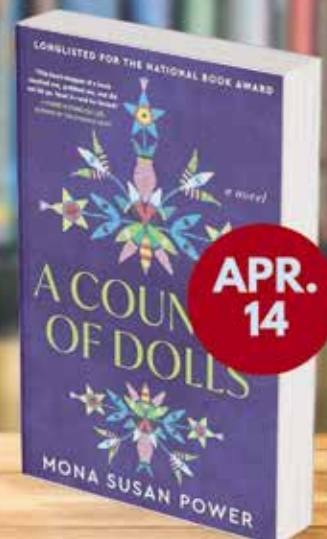
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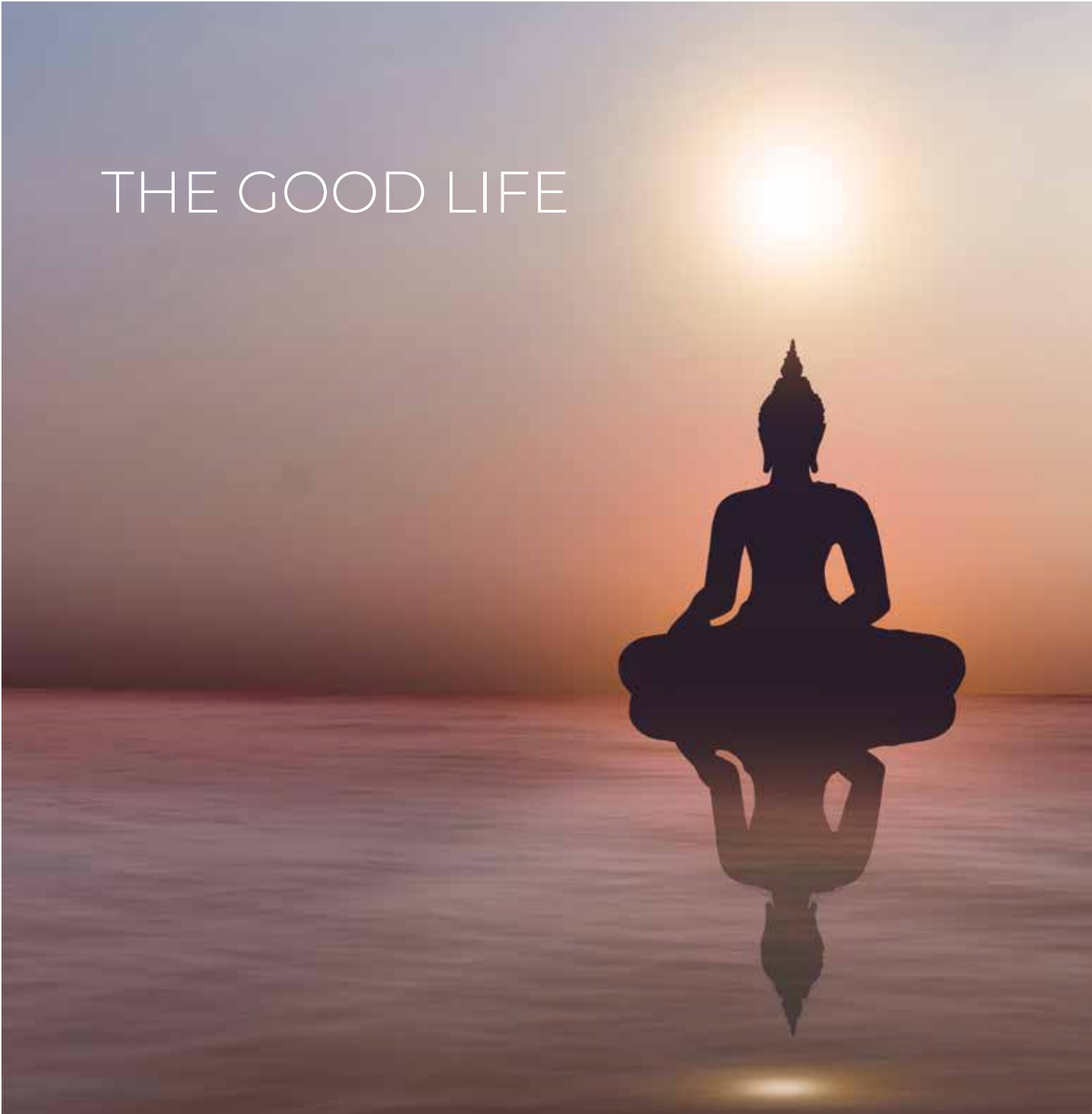


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THE GOOD LIFE





by Raman Sachdev

What is the good life? It is a complex question, but we can be guided to an answer by the ideas of Socrates and the Buddha; Emperor Marcus Aurelius and Saint Augustine; contemporary animal rights activists; those who argue in favor of free speech, which controversially includes hate speech, as a fundamental human right; and many others. As we reflect on the beliefs, arguments, and ways of life of influential figures from the past and the present, we are guided by the following questions: *How ought we to act? What kinds of people should we be? What constitutes a good life?* Two fascinating examples, along with critical questions about them, inevitably come to mind.

THE RING OF GYGES

In Book II of Plato's famous dialogue, *Republic*, we are presented with the tale of a man named Gyges. This myth would have been well known to the average Greek person of the time (c. 375 BCE), just as, if I were to bring up Superman and Lois Lane, most of us would understand the reference. Though I've taken some liberties with the details, here is the gist of the story.

Gyges was a farmer, an ordinary Joe, living on the outskirts of a small kingdom. One evening, as he was sitting around the fire with his friends having some drinks and laughs, he noticed a shiny ring hidden just under the ground. He was mesmerized by this object. Gyges picked it up and put it on his finger.

As the evening went along, he happened to turn the ring ever so slightly. Curiously, he noticed that his friends were chatting amongst themselves as if he wasn't there. As he turned the ring again, his friends looked at him with a stunned expression on their faces and said, *Gyges, when did you arrive? We didn't realize you had come back after leaving us.*

Gyges thus realized that this was no ordinary ring. With this talisman, he had the power to become invisible. As the story goes, Gyges subsequently used his power to kill the king, forcibly marry the queen, and become the ruler of the kingdom. In other words, Gyges used his newfound power to commit injustice.

In the context of the debate that's occurring in this part of the *Republic*, the story of Gyges is meant to support the argument that justice is not a good thing in itself. It is only because we are afraid of punishment that we do not commit injustice. Given the power of invisibility, anyone would commit injustice if he or she could get away with it.

As I reflect on the story of Gyges, I can't help but wonder, *If I were given a power like this, what would I do?* Granted, I may not in the spirit of Gyges take over as President of the United States.

But I might consider robbing a bank. After all, the thought experiment presupposes that I

Given the power of invisibility, anyone would commit injustice if he or she could get away with it.

will remain anonymous through my invisibility. And I can steal from the bank in such a way as to ensure that nobody is present at the time of the robbery. Thus, I will not be the cause of any immediate physical damage or psychological trauma to any bank employees.

The Ring of Gyges also prompts me to ask myself about the nature of right and wrong. If I am willing to say that people only avoid immoral actions because they're afraid of getting caught, I end up embracing the view that we do not pursue moral goodness for its own sake. To put it another way, by saying that it is wrong to kill, I would have to add the qualifier, *unless you're certain you can get away with it.* I'm not so sure that I'd be comfortable espousing, let alone teaching, this kind of moral doctrine.

THE BUDDHA LEAVES HIS FAMILY BEHIND

Buddhism is a religion with more than five hundred million adherents worldwide.

Its beginnings are traced to its founder, Siddhartha Gautama, who has come to be known as the Buddha, which translates to the "Enlightened One" or "Awakened One."

Siddhartha's biography is tightly interwoven with the development of Buddhism and the classical teachings that come out of the Pali Canon, which is the oldest set of writings on Buddhism. The Pali Canon is considered by many followers to contain the words of the Buddha himself, memorized, passed down by his disciples, and eventually put into written form.

Siddhartha was born sometime in the sixth century BCE in northeast India. His father was the ruler of a small kingdom in the region. As the story goes, a legend was told about Siddhartha—that he would grow up to one day become either a great warrior or a profound spiritual leader. Siddhartha's father had grand political ambitions for his son, so when he heard about the possibility of his son becoming a spiritual man, he didn't want any of that.

Siddhartha's father thought to himself, *What causes people to become religious—to give up the normal life of a householder and become priests or monks? It must be that they experience suffering to such an extent that they seek God or an escape from this world.* In order to avoid this fate for his son, Siddhartha's father

engineered his upbringing. He filled Siddhartha's surroundings with nothing but pleasure—delicious food, dancing, music, laughter, etc. He manufactured the palace grounds so that no one would ever reveal any pain or suffering to young Siddhartha as he grew up.

There is an old saying that *the truth will out*. Siddhartha grew up, married, and had a son of his own. By this time, now in his thirties, he fully realized that he had never been outside of the kingdom walls. Siddhartha urgently asked his childhood caretaker to take him into town, and the latter reluctantly complied. While on the tour, Siddhartha observed sick, old, and poor people on the city streets. In other words, for the first time ever, he witnessed suffering in the world, and he was deeply troubled by it.

Not long after, in the middle of the night, Siddhartha quietly kissed his sleeping wife and infant child goodbye, and unbeknownst to them, he left the palace and went into the wilderness to find out why suffering exists... and how to overcome it.

For the remainder of his life, Siddhartha pursued a spiritual path. At one point, for a number of years, he lived as an ascetic, i.e., he lived on practically nothing and deprived his body of sustenance in his quest for an answer. But he found that

this path, just like his former indulgent way of life in the kingdom, did not lead him any closer to cessation of suffering.

Eventually, Siddhartha discovered that it is the Middle Way which leads to enlightenment. The extremes on either end are not conducive to the good life. Legend has it that as Siddhartha was meditating by a Bodhi tree, he touched the ground and the whole world shook. This is when the Buddha attained Nirvana or enlightenment—the point of never returning, as it is described in the Pali Canon. After attaining Nirvana, the Buddha spent the next several decades teaching his message to a multitude of followers.

Regarding Buddhist doctrine, there is much to learn. However, considering the Buddha's biography, I can't help but ask myself, *Was the action of leaving his family behind without their knowledge, let alone any discussion or consent, the morally right thing to do? And, to what extent does the fact that Buddhism resulted in part from leaving his family influence my answer to the first question?*

What if Siddhartha had not discovered the Buddhist path to Enlightenment? What if, instead, he had been just another of the countless wandering ascetics who live and die without spawning a world religion? Would this other hypothetical

version of Siddhartha have been wrong in leaving his wife and child to fend for themselves?

Finally, if you were to hold a different moral position for each of the two Buddhas—the real and hypothetical ones mentioned above—how would you justify it?

It is these kinds of questions that we must continue to ask. □

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Did you find this article interesting? Raman Sachdev will be teaching **The Good Life** on Wednesdays Jan 10, 17, 24, 31, Feb 7, 14, 21, 28 - 6:30-8:30 pm Central time, using the Zoom platform. **Register at humanitiesnd.org/classes-events**

CONTESTING PUBLIC MEMORY THROUGH SAN FRANCISCO'S PIONEER MONUMENT

by Cynthia C. Prescott

Many Americans have debated the meaning and fate of southern Confederate monuments since 2015. Most of the roughly 200 United States pioneer monuments, such as the family grouping that stands in front of North Dakota State Capitol, have been less controversial. Protesters, however, have targeted several western pioneer monuments they consider racist.

San Francisco's Pioneer Monument reveals the dynamics of these debates. Feted at its 1894 dedication as evidence of the region's progress from pastoral idyll to modern state—and San Francisco's development from remote backwater to urban center—a century later, activists challenged the Pioneer Monument as a symbol of colonialism, while others sought to preserve it. The story of San Francisco's Pioneer Monument highlights the contested nature of public memory and suggests potential routes forward.

ENSHRINING WHITE DOMINANCE

When San Francisco's Pioneer Monument (figure 1) was unveiled in 1894, the statue celebrated California's emergence from a pastoral Mexican past into a glorious, white-dominated future. The 1849 California Gold Rush had transformed San Francisco seemingly overnight from a village of some 500 Mexican and Indigenous residents to a bustling city. By the 1890s, white San Franciscans sought to distance themselves from the region's disorderly image to establish their adopted home as an





Figure 1. Front view of Pioneer Monument as of 2017. Photo by Lisa Allen.



Figure 2. Front of Pioneer Monument with labels.



Figure 3. Reverse of Pioneer Monument with labels.

orderly, commercial American city. They installed the 50-foot-tall, 800-ton Pioneer Monument on the lawn of San Francisco’s then-brand-new City Hall. Through its retelling of California history, it proclaimed that San Franciscans were just as advanced and as white as those living in the great cities of Europe.

Sculptor Frank Happersberger decorated an impressive granite pillar with bronze sculptural groupings and reliefs to portray a progression from Native American “savagery” to white “civilization.” The arrangement of the bronze sculptures and reliefs (see figures 2 & 3) recounted popular stories of California’s development, which began with Spanish exploration and the conversion of its indigenous peoples. Yankee-led economic expansion during the Mexican period (1821-1848) up through the Mexican-American War was replaced with even greater wealth and a white American population explosion during the 1849 Gold Rush. That rough-and-tumble frontier period in turn gave way to more refined white American civilization in the late nineteenth century, celebrated in the female allegorical figure “Eureka”—declaring not just the discovery of gold, but of modern science, industry, and refined culture—at the pinnacle of the monument.

REMEMBERING AND FORGETTING

Although the local and national press feted Happersberger’s monument at its erection in the 1890s, San Franciscans soon lost interest in their Pioneer Monument. The massive monument was one of the few structures to survive the great 1906 earthquake that devastated most of the city, including the decade-old City Hall. Towering over the ruins of City Hall, the monument served briefly as a symbol of their determination to rebuild. But construction of San Francisco’s new Civic Center shifted attention from the Pioneer Monument site, even as many other western communities erected monuments celebrating settler women as symbols of westward expansion. The Civic Center’s grandiose Beaux-Arts architecture and monuments gradually lost their cultural power amid modern high-rise buildings that dwarfed them by mid-century.

But not all San Franciscans were content to forget the historic monuments in their midst. In the 1980s, in response to concerns about the decline of the city’s downtown, Mayor Dianne Feinstein worked to update and complete the Civic Center constructed 70 years earlier. City leaders proposed the building of a new Main Library on the site of the short-lived 1890s City Hall. To make room for architect James Ingo Freed’s modern library, the City suggested



Figure 4. *Early Days* (statue on plinth at rear of Pioneer Monument) as of 2017. Photo by Lisa Allen.

relocating the Pioneer Monument a few blocks away. Thus the debate over the Pioneer Monument was born.

The ensuing debate pitted urban developers against both local preservation groups and Native activists, who in turn disagreed with each other on what to do with the statue. Local preservation groups denounced the redevelopment plan, insisting that the Pioneer Monument remain in its original location. They argued that the monument must be preserved as a tribute to the former City Hall and other structures lost in the 1906 earthquake. Other San Franciscans bemoaned the nearly \$1 million cost (in 1990s dollars) of relocating the 800-ton monument even a short distance. But it was Native activists who offered the most vociferous opposition, arguing that the monument was offensive and should be removed from the Civic Center altogether.

Those who called for the demolition of the monument challenged its celebration of the triumph of white civilization over the region's indigenous residents. Native activists focused their attention particularly on the "Early Days" portion (figure 4). Located on a plinth at the rear of the monument, the sculptural grouping visually balanced "In '49," a statue in front of the monument depicting white

Those who called for the demolition of the monument **challenged its celebration of the triumph of white civilization over the region's indigenous residents.**

miners in the 1849 gold rush. The sculptor placed "Early Days" behind the central pillar to indicate that it set the stage for the arrival of more than 200,000 white Americans during the gold rush. (In so doing, Happersberger erased the participation of more than 20,000 Chinese and miners from Latin America, France, and Australia.) "Early Days" portrayed a Spanish missionary standing over a generic Native American man. Dressed in only a loincloth and with feathers in his long hair, the figure aligned with late-nineteenth-century artistic conventions for portraying American Indians, but bore little resemblance to the physical traits or traditional clothing of peoples indigenous to the San Francisco Bay area. The Native man reclined on the ground, gazing up in awe at the hooded padre, who pointed to the heavens. A Mexican vaquero (cowboy) stood confidently beside the missionary.

What began as a scuffle between preservationists and urban redevelopers over the precise location of a century-old monument soon erupted into a wider debate about how to interpret that monument and the history it portrayed. Debates centered on its portrayal of Native Americans and Spanish colonialism more broadly, driven by Indigenous activists.

NATIVE ACTIVISM

Activists' critique of the Pioneer Monument reflected the city's position as a hub of late-twentieth-century Indigenous activism. Federal relocation policies brought Indigenous peoples from across the West to the Bay Area in the mid-twentieth century, where they faced endemic discrimination and racism. Decades of frustration erupted in the late 1960s, as Native peoples, alongside other marginalized groups across the nation, demanded an end to federal policies that perpetuated poverty, violence, and discrimination. "Activist" historians Cahuilla Indian Rupert Costo and Cherokee Jeannette Henry Costo founded the American Indian Historical Society in San Francisco in 1964. Other Native activists challenged physical symbols. Indians of All Tribes activists famously staged a 19-month-long occupation of Alcatraz Island, site of a former federal penitentiary, in San Francisco Bay.

As San Francisco debated moving the Pioneer Monument in the early 1990s, Native activists called for its removal, with one even suggesting that the City throw it into San Francisco Bay. Meanwhile, American Indian Movement activist Bobby Castillo tried unsuccessfully to erect a protest monument nearby depicting the dark side of the California missions. It consisted of five granite blocks chained together, pinning the foot of a Native American warrior beneath them.

Native activists also challenged Bay Area cultural events, most notably the popular celebration of Columbus Day, an event with particular resonance in Italian-heavy San Francisco. Across the US in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Italian Americans facing widespread discrimination had embraced Genoan Christopher Columbus as their own US national hero. They erected statues of the navigator and campaigned for the creation of a federal holiday.

Nationwide resistance and local protests against planned celebrations of the 500th anniversary of Columbus' landing in 1992 persuaded nearby Berkeley, California, to become the first US city to replace Columbus Day with Indigenous Peoples Day on its city calendar.

In San Francisco, Italian Americans staged the city's first Columbus Day parade in 1869, making it an annual event in 1915. Beginning in 1958, Italian immigrant Joseph Cervetto played the role of his idol in the annual parade. He also reenacted Columbus' landing on the shore of San Francisco Bay. But Native activists challenged this valorization of Columbus. Alcatraz protest leader Adam Fortunate Eagle lobbied to have American Indian characters in the parade portrayed by actual Native Americans, rather than by white Boy Scouts. And in 1968, Fortunate Eagle staged a ceremonial scalping in the middle of the landing reenactment. He asked Cervetto to get down on one knee, leading him to believe that Fortunate Eagle wanted to give him some kind of blessing. Instead, he flicked off Cervetto's toupee with a ceremonial stick (*Heart of the Rock*).

Nationwide resistance and local protests against planned celebrations of the 500th anniversary of Columbus' landing in 1992 persuaded nearby Berkeley, California, to become the first US city to replace Columbus Day with Indigenous Peoples Day on its city calendar. In San Francisco, some 4,000 protesters—Native activists, joined by a wide array of groups challenging US consumerism, patriarchy,

and imperialism—blocked the 1992 reenactment of Columbus’ landing. Two years later, the San Francisco Columbus Day parade rebranded itself as the Italian Heritage Parade in response to criticism from protesters, just as the City relocated the Pioneer Monument to nearby Fulton Square to accommodate the new Main Library.

REINTERPRETING THE PIONEER MONUMENT

San Francisco’s commitment to urban redevelopment and completing the 1920s Civic Center trumped both preservationists’ pleas to maintain the Pioneer Monument in its original location and activists’ calls to remove the increasingly controversial monument. To acknowledge those critiques, however, the City chose to erect bronze plaques describing the history of the monument itself and telling a more accurate history of Native Californians than that depicted in the “Early Days” statue. But even that mild re-interpretive effort produced significant conflict.

San Franciscans disagreed about how to tell the history of Native Californians. A wide array of San Franciscans objected to the planned text of the interpretive plaque. Some Native activists took issue with the proposed plaque’s focus on American Indian deaths. While most supported emphasizing the devastating impact of colonialism and settlement on Indigenous populations, some argued that the plaque’s statistics underreported Native deaths. American Indian Movement (AIM) leader Martina O’Dea insisted that if “complete removal” of the “offensive and insulting” monument was not possible, then she wanted a plaque that reported 10 million Native Americans who died during the period depicted from all tribes nationwide through incarceration, on reservations, and in boarding schools (“Public Art: Whose Version of History?”). Others feared

that emphasizing nineteenth-century death tolls would simply reinforce tired tropes of supposedly disappearing American Indians. They instead called for statistics emphasizing 20th-century population increases among Native Californians; others pointed out that the population rebound was a result of federal Relocation policies more so than natural population growth among groups indigenous to the region.

Meanwhile, the Spanish Consul General and the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of San Francisco both vociferously objected to the plaque’s proposed emphasis on Indigenous fatalities. Both argued it was unfair to blame the demographic devastation of Native Californians on Spanish missionaries, and that the plaque inscription implied a deliberate effort to kill Native peoples. While they admitted that missionaries carried diseases against which Indigenous Californians had no immunity, missionary defenders insisted that most of the blame for Indigenous deaths lay elsewhere: on European explorers, on Spanish soldiers, and particularly on white American miners and settlers.

California pioneer heritage groups fought back against Catholics’ efforts to cast blame on Gold Rush ‘Forty-Niners and other white American settlers for devastating Native populations. They instead blamed the missionaries, or indigenous populations’ lack of immunity to European diseases.

The San Francisco Arts Commission (SFAC) responded to these various critiques by forming an ad hoc Plaque Advisory Panel to revise the plaque language. SFAC invited local Native and Latina grassroots activists, American Indian Studies faculty, representatives of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese, and the Spanish and Mexican Consuls General to serve on that panel. Their revisions removed the phrase “and 150,000 dead” from the plaque—text that had so angered the Archdiocese and Spanish Consul General—and added the phrase “As a

result of colonial occupation” to emphasize Euro-American guilt—to satisfy Native activists—while also broadening the application of blame from the Franciscan missionaries to the broader colonial project:

The three figures of “Early Days,” a Native American, a mission padre, and a vaquero, were created to represent the founding of California’s missions. In 1769, the missionaries first came to California with the intent of converting the state’s 300,000 Native Americans to Christianity. With their efforts over in 1834, the missionaries left behind about 56,000 converts—and 150,000 dead. As a result of colonial occupation, half of the original Native American population had perished during this time from diseases, armed attacks, and mistreatment.

The compromise language quieted dissent about the plaque and the larger monument in the short run, but ultimately failed to resolve the larger conflict.

REMOVING “EARLY DAYS”

In the years following the 1990s relocation and reinterpretation of the Pioneer Monument, San Franciscans once again forgot the 800-ton installation. Though the 50-foot-tall monument stood in a more prominent location in Fulton Square before the new Main Library, completed in 1996, few visitors navigated substantial car and bus traffic to view the monument’s bronze sculptural decorations. Century (agave) plants intended to beautify its base soon grew up to disguise the plaque reinterpreting the “Early Days” sculptural grouping. The monument’s base once again became known as a campsite and urinal for the local homeless population.

Indigenous activists persisted into the new century, however, and gained visibility amid vocal debates over Confederate monuments in the US South and the global Black Lives Matter and anti-colonialist Rhodes Must Fall protest movements after 2015. San Francisco joined other US cities and states



Figure 5. Pioneer Monument as of 2023. The “Early Days” statue was removed from its plinth. Landscaping obscures the 1996 interpretive plaque.

in replacing Columbus Day with Indigenous Peoples Day on its city calendar, as nearby Berkeley had done a generation earlier. Amid global anti-colonial protests in 2020, local protesters toppled a statue of California mission founder Junipero Serra, and threats of further vandalism against a Christopher Columbus statue motivated its removal.

In this changed memory landscape, longstanding critiques of the “Early Days” portion of the Pioneer Monument finally gained traction. After winning a prolonged legal battle calling for its preservation, the city removed that bronze sculptural grouping from its plinth to storage in an undisclosed location in September 2018 (figure 5).

The San Francisco Arts Commission responded to concerns about portrayals of Indigenous persons in the Pioneer Monument and elsewhere through innovative new programming. SFAC partnered with the San Francisco Public Library, Indians of All Tribes, and various other cultural organizations to launch an American Indian Initiative to mark the 50th anniversary of the Alcatraz occupation, the establishment of Indigenous Peoples Day, and the removal of the “Early Days” statue to fine arts storage. “The Continuous Thread: Celebrating Our Interwoven Histories, Identities and Contributions” was a three-month series incorporating over 14 public events and including several art installations.

As part of that Initiative, SFAC invited Native peoples to reclaim the space once occupied by the problematic statue. In April 2019, Diné Hulleah J. Tsinhnahjinnie photographed 100 Native Americans clad in regalia or modern western-style clothing on the vacated plinth. What will happen to the removed “Early Days” sculpture, and whether SFAC will erect a new interpretive plaque explaining its now-empty plinth, remains to be seen.

San Francisco’s Pioneer Monument is a particularly clear example of broader trends in pioneer commemoration. Its 1894 installation declared white dominance. Like many other pioneer monuments, it was celebrated at its dedication but soon forgotten as urban residents turned to other priorities. Its story also illustrates potential paths toward grappling with controversial monuments, from efforts to negotiate its reinterpretation in written form to erecting counter-monuments and removing statues that are increasingly deemed offensive. Perhaps its greatest lessons are that public memory is always changing and contested, and that different symbolic forms of commemoration matter to different communities. □

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Did you find this article interesting? Cynthia Prescott will be teaching **Responding to Controversial Monuments**, an extended role-playing game where students will debate whether to preserve, relocate, reinterpret, or remove the controversial monument discussed in this article. This class will take place on Thursdays Jan 18, Feb 1, 8, 15 - 7-9 pm Central time, using the Zoom platform. **Register at humanitiesnd.org/classes-events**



ORIGIN STORIES:
ON FAITH AND
(SCIENCE) FICTION

by Patrick J. D'Silva

Why are we here? Where are we from? Who are “we”? Who are “they”? How do “we” treat “them”? Religion and science fiction both produce a variety of answers to these types of ultimate questions. In many ways, making sense of my life is only possible through examining the intersection of these two discourses.

Like many from my generation, the original *Star Wars* trilogy provided my initial foray into “a galaxy far, far away.” For my seventh birthday, my parents’ friends gave me a VHS tape with *Episode IV: A New Hope*. I had never seen anything like it before. We were living in Khartoum, Sudan, at the time, on the edge of the Sahara Desert, so the rolling “dune sea” of Tatooine felt very familiar to me. The tape was a copy of a copy, and I remember parts in the beginning were filled with static. But there was Darth Vader, Princess Leia, R2D2, C3PO, Luke Skywalker and Obi-Wan Kenobi. I was hooked! Later on, my aunt mailed us another VHS tape (this one without static) with *Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi*. I would come home from school and watch scenes in slow motion, frame by frame seeing how a laser beam traveled bit by bit from Han Solo’s blaster to vanquish yet another imperial stormtrooper. For the rest of my life, I would be fascinated with science fiction. At first it was futuristic technology: spaceships,

lasers, encountering other beings from distant planets. I see now how that last piece mapped onto my earliest life experiences, where we moved between the exurbs of northern Virginia and Khartoum, as well as to Nairobi, Kenya when I was in high school. My sense of home for the first part of my life always involved moving around, meeting new people, and getting used to new customs.

My interest in religion did not germinate until high school. My sister and I were raised Catholic, a faith shared by my parents (my father from Bombay, India, and my mother from Bode, Iowa). While Catholicism contains centuries worth of teachings on how to discern right from wrong, as a child “The Force” and the battle between the Jedi and Sith in the *Star Wars* universe was the first explicit reference point for me in terms of morality. I approached life through the prism of “WWOWKD” (What Would Obi-Wan Kenobi Do) long before the “WWJD” bracelets became popular. Later, *Star Trek*’s “Prime Directive” would become an important piece in how I approached issues of ethnocentrism and moral relativism.

In high school we moved to Nairobi, Kenya. School was incredibly diverse, with students and teachers from all over the world.

That last year of high school gave me a lot to consider in terms of what life is

Reflecting back on all of this now, I can see that my sense of how the world operated, on both mundane and cosmic levels, was being rocked on all sides.

really about. The school year began with Al-Qaeda's bombing of the US embassy in Nairobi, in which one of my friends from school died along with hundreds of others (mostly Kenyans). That New Year's Eve, I broke several vertebrae while falling during an attempt to hike up Table Mountain in Cape Town, South Africa. Some of my friends' parents said, "you survived because the Lord has a plan for you," but I was asking why that plan hadn't simply included *not* falling down part of a mountain. A few months later my mother became seriously ill during a visit to the US. My father, my sister, and I got on a plane not knowing if she would be alive when we arrived. She survived (and is still going strong today!), but the whole experience had me thinking a lot about fate, why some suffer when others do not. Reflecting back on all of this now, I can see that my sense of how the world operated, on both mundane and cosmic levels, was being rocked on all sides. In the face of so much struggle, God felt very far away, but Obi-Wan Kenobi told me (well, he was talking to Luke, but you know what I mean) to remember: "The Force will be with you, always."

When I began my undergraduate studies at Macalester College in St. Paul, MN, my first-year course was "Jesus in History," taught by the legendary Calvin (Cal) Roetzel. We spent the entire first half of the semester on the "in History" portion of the course title, studying the religious and philosophical movements in existence in 1st century CE Judea. We learned about the synoptic gospels (how Matthew, Mark, and Luke are so closely related), how half the letters in the New Testament attributed to Paul were written by other people claiming Paul's name for street cred, and again, I was hooked. Here was religion, but here too was the messiness of *humanity*. I was learning to analyze

religious texts as a way of understanding the all too *human* process that produced those texts, and this became a passion that never left me.

ON LEARNING TO READ FROM RIGHT TO LEFT

During the Summer of 2001 I studied Arabic in Cairo, Egypt. I remembered snippets of Arabic from my early childhood in Khartoum, but I had never learned to read or write it. I felt enchanted by the slow process of learning the alphabet and being able to somewhat navigate around the first massive city I had really spent time in. I started with public transit, enjoying my metro ride to and from school and the feeling that perhaps I would pass for a local. I think the fact that I spent the train ride poring over flashcards learning words like "butter" and "bread" probably gave me away. Again, I was able to visit the desert, feel the embrace of heat so hot that it had its own shadow. Sometimes during a break between classes there would be *karkade*, the hibiscus-infused tea whose aroma and taste swept me back to when I would drink it as a young child in Khartoum.

I returned to Minnesota just before the September 11th attacks. Suddenly, my plans to continue studying Arabic and Islam seemed important beyond just my personal interest. The United States went to war, first in Afghanistan and then in Iraq. The night that U.S. forces began bombing Baghdad, I was at a Benedictine monastery in southern Minnesota looking at old manuscripts (not a typical Spring Break trip for most college students, but a treat for a bibliophile like me). I looked at the television screen and thought, "this world is truly broken, maybe monastic living would be a good option." Unlike Obi-Wan Kenobi, however, I had no real mission to fulfill by retreating from the

world, so back to school I went. And fortunate for me that I did: I found my soulmate, Emily, with whom I have been ever since.

After college I apparently was not done with formal education – unlike Emily, who informed me that she had used her time *wisely* in college and no longer needed to take classes to learn things – and so I continued my studies at Harvard Divinity School. After living and studying in a few different countries, let me tell you: I have never experienced as much culture shock as when I moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts. My first day I saw a guy my age riding his bike while smoking a pipe and wearing a tweed jacket complete with elbow patches. Where was I? Tatooine made more sense to me.

This was one of the first times I had to lean on a core value I learned from *Star Trek: Infinite Diversity in Infinite Combinations* (IDIC). How do we move from *tolerating* those who are different (since “tolerance” has its origins in learning to fight off poison), to celebrating, embracing and welcoming difference? And what about when those differences are more significant than the very mild “do you ride a bike and smoke a pipe at the same time” variety? I finished my master’s degree, then we moved to Boulder, CO, where I found myself once again in a new environment, with mountains, mountains everywhere.

BATTLESTAR GALACTICA AND MAKING PILGRIMAGE TO A NEW WORLD

If I used *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* to understand earlier parts of my life, then no series resonated more strongly with me in my 20’s than the reboot of *Battlestar Galactica*. The story, in which a handful of people surviving genocide band together and migrate through the cosmic wilderness in order to find a new home, had little bearing on my life, but I was drawn to how the series explored the question of who gets to define themselves as human. Early in the show there is a character who wonders if she is a Cylon (the sentient robots from whom the humans are fleeing), and it opened up this window into examining how and why we sabotage ourselves.

Is it because we refuse to recognize what Carl Jung referred to as our shadow side? Using the framework of humanity’s Fall and expulsion from the Garden of Eden, are we doomed to struggle because of some ancient mistake? When I reflect on this time period, there seem to be so many instances of “1 step forward, 10 steps back,” both professionally and personally. Where was I trying to get? Where was I headed? Was having health insurance *that* important? Why did the idea of a conventional 9-5 job feel like I was signing over the rights to my soul? How did I *want* to navigate the burdens of adulthood? How *could* I?

I found my way back to the classroom, this time as a teacher. Growing up, the classroom was always a safe space for me. It was easy for me to sit and focus. I have learned since that many folks are not wired that way, and seen up close how damaging it can be if you are the proverbial square peg being shoved into the round hole of a more traditional educational system. Eventually, the classroom is where I would come to apply Star Trek’s IDIC philosophy. I took a full-time position teaching Arabic at CU-Boulder, walking into a program where the previous instructor had students playing “Simon Says” in Arabic and wanted them to have fun. Grammar and vocabulary were secondary. That rubbed me the wrong way. To me, studying *this* language at *this* particular time was about being able to understand people from a part of the world where our government had sent tens of thousands of troops to occupy another country and destabilize an entire region. Could we have avoided causing so much destruction if we had had more understanding of the Middle East? Why was Islam so *strange* to my students, and to most Americans? I had grown up hearing the call to prayer and I had many Muslim friends in Sudan and Kenya, and I had to remind myself that my experiences growing up meant I had a different response – on a visceral level – to events like the 9/11 attacks. For so many in the U.S., all they knew about Islam was what they heard from Osama bin Laden’s messages. That al-Qaeda’s relationship to Islam is analogous to the Ku Klux

I was distraught over the misinformation in the media, so I searched for ways to make a positive difference in the world.

Klan's relationship to Christianity was obvious to me, but only because of my upbringing. I wasn't smarter than anyone else, I simply had different experiences. I felt like I had lived in a different world, but – like most folks – I have yet to leave Earth.

I was distraught over the misinformation in the media, so I searched for ways to make a positive difference in the world. I unintentionally took on the role of a drill sergeant in the classroom, not recognizing (or perhaps not caring?) that most of my students had different priorities than my own. I shifted gears by the end of my third year teaching Arabic, deciding not to push my students quite so hard. These early years of teaching forced me to confront some big questions. Why was I in the classroom? Much like Obi-Wan Kenobi reflecting on his failure to teach Anakin Skywalker the way Yoda taught him, I felt I failed my students by not replicating the success my teachers had had with me. But then I realized that I needed to meet my students where they were. Being a compassionate presence in their lives was more powerful (and enjoyable) than commanding them to conjugate verbs.

NORTH CAROLINA (OR: DAGOBAH AND “THE CAVE”)

I had gone back and forth for years on whether or not to pursue a doctorate, and it seemed like this was a pivot point in our life together. We moved to North Carolina so I could pursue a PhD in Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Our house in Durham had THREE sheds and the most beautiful magnolia tree I had ever seen. Our neighbors brought us chocolate pie and other similarly healthy treats to welcome us, always including an invitation to join them at their many

varieties of Baptist church. The air was so thick with moisture, at times when it rained it felt like you were swimming through the air.

Looking back on this time, I really connect with the image of Luke Skywalker in *Empire Strikes Back* traveling to the swamp planet of Dagobah, where he seeks out Jedi master Yoda. Most importantly, there is a training montage where Yoda is putting Luke through his paces – running through the jungle, swinging from vines, flipping in midair – all with Yoda riding on his back – when Luke senses the dark side of the Force emanating from a nearby cave. “What’s in there?” he asks. “Only what you take with you,” replies Yoda. Luke straps on his belt with his lightsaber and blaster, ignoring Yoda’s warnings that he does not need them. In the dreamlike sequence that follows, Luke confronts Darth Vader, defeating him before learning he has actually been fighting against himself.

I would come to see Luke’s battle against himself (or his Self) in the cave at Dagobah as an analogy to what Sufis (Muslim mystics) refer to as the battle that each of us wage against our *nafs*, our lower, base ego-self. Many religious traditions contain teachings on this type of struggle. George Lucas relied heavily on the work of mythology scholar Joseph Campbell, especially his *Hero of a Thousand Faces* (originally published in 1949), in crafting the *Star Wars* universe. Campbell embraced the theory of the monomyth, that there is essentially a single core formula for mythic traditions from around the world. This claim has certainly been critiqued, but there’s no doubt that Lucas drew on this formula.

Halfway through our time in North Carolina, we became parents. Now the adventure had really begun. If I thought we received a lot of treats from our neighbors when we moved to Durham, that was

nothing compared to what happened when we walked around with our new baby. People literally sprinted out of their houses and thrust cookie tins at us, cookies that I could deny myself for the midnight and 2am wake-up sessions with my son, but when 4am rolled around I found that “resistance was futile”: The Force was strong in those cookies. (I was also too tired to avoid mixing *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* metaphors).

As I headed into the dissertation stage, we questioned what would come next. You don’t have to be a Jedi master to know that the present-day academic job market stinks worse than the garbage compactor that Luke, Han, Leia, and Chewie fall into on the first Death Star. So, what then for those of us who have trained not just to teach, but to produce scholarship? This was a period of gut-wrenching soul searching for me. My mentors thought I was making a mistake in not pursuing a tenure-track position the way they had, placing it on a veritable altar as a sacred object that I would pursue at any cost. I had to face the reality that even though I enjoyed the work, I never felt it was right to drag my family along for the sake of my career. We decided to return to Boulder, seeking the combination of family support and our beloved mountains. I will always be thankful for the years that we spent in North Carolina, but it never felt like home.

When we first moved to Boulder in the mid-2000’s, we had more dreams than concrete plans, and the same was true when we made our way back for the second time in 2018. I still teach, but I am also looking beyond the horizon of the classroom, seeing what kinds of options are out there. I’ve presented at the local Comic Con a few times, am developing a podcast focused on non-Eurocentric science fiction, and in general I want to spread my wings and fly beyond the ivory tower of academia. This road is not smooth, but it feels right. To borrow Joseph Campbell’s phrasing, my personal “hero’s journey” is not complete, but I am at peace with the present stage.

PEREGRINATION TO THE PRESENT (OR: WHY AM / HERE?)

Why religion? Why science fiction? On reflection I find that these two terms encompass the way I interpret almost everything I experience. In those most challenging moments in our lives, the times when darkness seems on the verge of swallowing us whole, where do we turn for a way out? As I get older, I have come to see that humans often share these questions, but our answers are infinitely diverse, manifesting in infinite combinations. Whether reading a story set two thousand years in the past or in the future, learning to savor – not tolerate, but really savor – difference is what keeps me going. □

PATRICK D’SILVA is a diehard sci-fi and fantasy fan who also loves studying religion. He analyzes esoteric breathing techniques from India by day, and ponders the symbolic meaning of dragons and spaceships by night. D’Silva received his PhD in Religious Studies from UNC-Chapel Hill and his MTS from Harvard Divinity School. He lives with his family in Boulder, CO, where he sometimes replays entire *Star Wars* movies in his mind while cross-country skiing.

Did you find this article interesting? Patrick D’Silva will be teaching **Worlds Within Worlds: Religion, Science Fiction, and Fantasy** on Tuesdays Jan 9, 16, 23, 30, Feb 6, 13, 20, 27 6-8 pm Central time, using the Zoom platform. **Register at humanitiesnd.org/classes-events**

ON STEAMPUNK, TIME TRAVEL, AND OTHER LOST CAUSES: ALTERNATIVE LEGACIES OF THE CIVIL WAR

by Adam H. Kitzes



If you could change a single event in history, what would it be and why?

We run into trouble the moment we ask this question. What do we mean by event? At what level of detail would we need to make the change? What exactly are our motives, dissatisfaction or curiosity? Maybe a nagging sense that pivotal events really *could* have gone another way? Oh, and what was the name of that Ray Bradbury story, the one where they travel to the Cretaceous era, and on the way home somebody steps on a butterfly?

These questions don't get easier when they are worked out in a novel, since in a novel they are combined with the additional challenge of telling a story that works. Even granting that there are as many ways to tell a good story as there are good stories, one constant is that it must produce a world that readers can recognize. Whether this is done through familiar conventions or descriptions that help us discover where we are, there is a point where a story has to say, "Look, reader, I shouldn't have to explain myself!" Alternative histories inevitably find themselves in violation of this rule.

Our narrator needs to walk us through their world, in sections that feel more like furnishing information we'd have no other way of knowing. Dull stories do this at their peril. Really good ones do it with impunity.

As a case in point, take Ward Moore's 1953 novel, *Bring the Jubilee*. One of the more familiar instances of what's known as "alternative history," Moore speculates about a world where General Lee's army fights to victory at Gettysburg and, after a series of equally crushing blows, the Confederate states win what is subsequently known as the War of Southron Independence. To be sure, there is no shortage of exposition. This comes through our narrator, Hodgkins McCormick Backmaker ("Hodge") whose diary we are supposed to be reading. As a personal record, Hodge recounts his family history and his adventures, which makes the diary read at some points like picaresque, at others like psychological realism. But it also fills us in on the differences between our world and his, and it is up to Hodge to assume which differences we need or want to know about. Among the bigger ones, we



have the new Southron superpower, bordered by the Northern “United States” that seem permanently crippled by economic crisis, indentured labor, and exploitative foreign speculators. Industry and commerce still develop, though not in the same course they might have taken had the Northern cities predominated. For anyone who’s ever felt lost in modern technology, wait till you hear about Minibles and Tinugraphs. So too, a world war looms on the horizon, though in a vastly different arrangement of powers, and for who knows what spoils. We are given updates on prominent cultural figures, though in unfamiliar roles. Picasso is a “popular academician,” while William and Henry James are stay-at-home essayists who devote their energies to a “long lost cause.”

There are lots of ways to take these details. At some moments, Hodge’s descriptions come across like a sort of inversion of history, Northern and Southern states having switched places. At others, things seem closer to Bradbury’s, “A Sound of Thunder,” which appeared one year before Moore’s novel, and which insists that slight variations in

detail have effects well beyond our powers to calculate. Then there is the occasional Easter egg; why else would Hodge take notice of Picasso? If we’re never sure which of these models best fits the story at hand, this is in part because the people Hodge meets spend a lot of time debating various theories about how time works. Is it linear or circular, limited or infinite? What if space and time, along with matter and energy, were all part of a continuum, such that matter-energy could translate into space-time?

In fact, there are several characters who suffer from traumas, a condition that gives the impression of being stuck in some individual past. We have Roger Tyss, owner of a bookstore who fills Hodge’s mind with ideas about time and free-will, but who also strikes Hodge as a man incapable of age or change. In his wanderings, Hodge meets a mysterious young girl, who has lost her speech after her family had been assaulted in a highway robbery. This encounter leads him to Haggershaven: not exactly a college, nor one of those Utopian communities that sprang up in

the early nineteenth century, but a sort of new collective society, which brings together the intellectually curious. How Hodge himself winds up at Haggerhaven is a story in itself, but it puts him in the presence of the brightest minds in the United States. These include the brilliant but troubled Barbara Haggerwells (hint hint), whose talent is for building time machines. We also meet doctor Midbin, whose studies in hypnotherapy make a neat parallel with Haggerwells' ideas on time travel. In their research and in their social relations, Midbin and Haggerwells offer conflicting views over how to revisit the past, and how to break free from it.

Through a series of hypnoses, the mysterious girl recovers her speech, and her identity along with it. As for Hodge, the time machine takes him to Gettysburg, where he makes two discoveries. The first is about the difference between history and event: the historian fails to grasp how much of daily life is taken up with "sleeping, eating, yawning, eliminating," and other preoccupations whose concern is essentially trivial. The other is about chance in battle: how little goes according to plan, how easy it is to make decisions that later appear like obvious blunders. One such chance event takes place when Hodge discovers the battlefield, and then stumbles into what happens to be the decisive event in three days of heavy fighting. The effect is profound: a reversal of fortunes between the two armies, followed by a sequence of events that leads to a world that readers will be more familiar with. As for the future that poor Hodge belonged to... We may be satisfied with some outcomes. The union is saved, slavery is abolished, the world modernizes. But are there really no other changes we wouldn't want to entertain?

Of course, we don't *need* science fiction in order to imagine all the "might have beens" that might have been, if only one of us had made just the right error. The study of how things happened invites questions about why they happened the way they did. Why, for instance, did the Civil War

begin in 1861, when debates over slavery were no less polarized ten years earlier? How did bloodshed come to be regarded as the way to resolve those differences, as though there were no better way to bring an end to slavery – assuming that was what Union forces meant to do? Many historians make a point to avoid questions like these. Why speculate against the facts when the facts already are hard enough to make sense of? But no historian can say "how things happened" without harboring at least some idea of how things happen. In this regard, it helps to read historical narratives in terms of stories, the ones they tell and the ones they keep from being told.

Part of what distinguishes Robert Penn Warren's *Legacy of the Civil War* is his sensitivity to *patterns* of thought, and to the tropes that sustain them. Indeed, Warren is one of the architects of literary criticism as it is commonly practiced today. By the time he wrote his essay for *Life* magazine, the groundbreaking textbook *Understanding Poetry*, co-edited with Cleanth Brooks, was already in its third edition. In foregrounding poems for interpretation, *Understanding Poetry* gave newfound importance to paradox, irony, and other ambiguities inherent in language. By then a standard textbook, adopted for countless classrooms, it takes some effort to appreciate how much it initially disrupted common assumptions about how to read. Among the many things colleagues objected to, poems were set out with minimal attention to historical context. Meanwhile, why emphasize *understanding* when anyone can see that reading poetry calls for judgment?

But Warren's *Legacy of the Civil War* is written very much in the same spirit as *Understanding Poetry*. As a study of the Civil War as the defining moment of American history, it is not long before the paradoxes and ironies begin to accumulate. Abolitionists are so consumed by righteousness that it is hard to tell love of liberty from lust for blood. They are opposed by slaveholders whose staunchest defenders privately acknowledge

how poorly the institution served their economic interests, to say nothing of moral ones. It is Lincoln, not Davis, who overlooks the principles of democracy, in carrying out a war meant to preserve it – and this is why the Confederates were doomed to lose! The result of the war may have been a more perfect union, but it is a union held together by industrialism, commerce, and a culture of conformism so stifling that even Confederate soldiers and officers can't help but take on mythological importance as figures of individualism and dignity.

Not that this newfound union of good manners and grey flannel suits does away with sectional differences. In turning to contemporary habits of thought, Warren invokes a notion of time travel. But unlike in *Bring the Jubilee*, here the time machine is what keeps us stuck. It is what leads the Southerner to repeat the tired clichés of the 1850s, or Northerners to accept the no less contrived tradition of *Virtue Redeemed*, a mindset that ignores the race riots, the segregated communities in Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago... Indeed, anyone who believes it was a war of emancipation might as well be living in a different universe. Exactly who was emancipated from what?

Much like the schoolmasters under Queen Elizabeth, who began to search out the origins and developments of their own institutions, Warren senses that the crises of modern life can be traced back to this great conflict. Warren also senses that the war really did test the convictions of the people burdened with fighting it, and this capacity for self-doubt and criticism cannot be overestimated. There is another interest though, and it is one that only a turn to history can address. In a pivotal moment, where he does take the time to consider those “might have been” scenarios that historians prefer to avoid, Warren makes known his fundamental principles:

The asking and the answering which history provokes may help us to understand, even to frame, the logic of experience, to which we shall submit.

If civil war teaches anything, it teaches that there is no such thing as total comprehension.

History cannot give us a program for the future, but it can give us a fuller understanding of ourselves, and of our common humanity, so that we can better face the future. (*Legacy*, 100)

What is the understanding that Warren speaks of here? It certainly isn't total comprehension. If civil war teaches anything, it teaches that there is no such thing as total comprehension. On the other hand, the study of what people thought they were doing, and of how they put their thoughts into language, might lead to new stories, perhaps better alibis.

The final pages of Warren's essay are filled with terms like “story” and “tragedy”; and Warren means them in their deepest significance. For Warren, tragedy offers a framework that allows him to approach everything from official records to the strange behaviors of the President on his return from the destruction at Richmond – who else would think to console himself with passages from *Macbeth*? – to the poems that Melville writes in his search for meaning in bloodshed. The recourse to tragedy leads to remarkable flourishes in Warren's own writing, including one passage, which dwells on the causes, the consequences, the climaxes, and the conclusions – all in a single sentence. Lest we suspect our author of being reductive, of rushing in his conclusion to some easy truism, Warren also warns us that the struggle for true understanding is no less hard fought than any other battle: “it draws us to the glory of the human effort to *win meaning* from the complex and confused motives of men and the blind ruck of event.” This hardly seems the meaning that one finds in moralizing statements, as though history could be read as fable. Rather, this human effort implies a grasp of self in the world,

compared to which even the richest of poems offers little more than a preparatory exercise.

Consider the difference between these questions: What if the Confederate armies had won the Civil War? and What if the war ended and slavery had not been abolished? The difference is what distinguishes *Bring the Jubilee* from Ronald L. Fair's neglected *Many Thousand Gone*. Written in 1965 as a response to violence and the civil rights movement, including the deaths of three Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee activists in Philadelphia, Mississippi, Fair describes his story as an American Fable. Like all fables, this one has a didactic element that carries beyond its immediate circumstances.

Chronologically, *Many Thousand Gone* overlaps with the period covered in *Bring the Jubilee*. Unlike Moore's worlds of Southron and the United States, Fair gives us one Jacobs County, a semi-fictional place that calls to mind Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha. Originally a plantation, founded by Samuel Jacobs, but through a combination of violence, subterfuge, and the help of a few Union officers, the plantation is made into a county. Within fifty years, only some few dozen individuals had any direct memory of the war. Memories of emancipation have all but vanished.

Jacobsville is a world unto itself. For those who live within its heavily patrolled borders, even the next town over is as good as another world. And while Moore and Warren write about individuals trapped by their past, in Jacobs County chronological time simply disappears. After the opening chapter briefly records a succession of events by year, from 1877 until 1920, it is not until the final chapter when we suddenly discover that we have progressed all the way to 1962. Violence is pervasive, but even in the cases of rape and lynching, violence is remembered as part of the daily fabric of a society based on subjugation by race. It is thanks only to Granny Jacobs, whose life extends back to the earliest days of the county, that

residents have anything they can call an archive.

This is hardly the legacy that Warren had in mind when he wrote about a nation pulled together by industry and commerce, forced to take notice of one another in a union that few could have imagined in all the early years of the republic. Jacobs County is the product of people who go out of their way not to take notice of each other. Neither is it in the sort of crisis that lends itself to the meticulous study of monuments and records, since for all its pretense of "preserving the old way of life," Jacobs County is on the brink of explosion. It isn't even necessary to dream up stories of technology and time travel to shake the county to its foundations. The mail is disruptive enough. (It is an issue of *Ebony* magazine, mailed to Granny Jacobs, that sets the stage for the final conflict.) But communication is also one-sided. By the time Preacher Harris writes to the President about the crisis of Jacobsville, his best estimate is that his recipient has about a week to step in with his army.

Sadly, where Warren speaks of Southern and Northern communities respectively caught up in long-outworn habits of thought, the citizens of Jacobsville refuse to let the war become a thing of the past. The consequences are dire for the federal agents who fail to recognize this condition as they investigate the local post-office. As a result, the "vulgar, illiterate sheriff" manages to outwit the "entire United States government, because only the sheriff truly grasps that he is fighting the same war his great-grandfather had fought." This difference might be what leads Warren to see increasingly complex ambiguities in his later writings about the civil rights movement, including his 1965 *Who Speaks for the Negro*, as opposed to Fair's vision of catastrophe. Even for a book saturated with brutality, the final chapters are disturbing in their accounts of torture, of lynching, and of the legally sanctioned lawlessness that the crowd identifies as "fun." Their conduct hardly seems balanced by the fire that is set when black residents of Jacobsville decide they have had enough.

Everything burns in a fire. *Many Thousand Gone* is at its most compelling in its burning away not only the town and its environs, but the tropes that sustain its ways of life – from “Happiest people in the world” to “black bastards” who have no place if their white persecutors can’t have them the way they want them. Black residents are in as much danger as the whites they set out to kill. Meanwhile, as the town burns, we are let in on the fates of the banker, the grocer, even the sheriff, all of whom lie dead, and not necessarily from the flames.

The fable ends with Josh Black, the sheriff’s assistant brought to work and live at the jail. Perhaps the sheriff is genuine in his admiration, though his motive is clear: to isolate a strong young man, recognized as a leader. With federal agents sitting helpless in lock-up, it is Josh who comes to their rescue. In a final line that holds as well as any paradox, Black hurries inside to set his emancipators free.

As the story ends with its entire world in flames, it is hard not to consider the difference between *Many Thousand Gone* and *Bring the Jubilee* as the difference over whether a writer believes, in a novel about the legacy of the Civil War, questions about the lasting effects of Jim Crow can be safely avoided. But because they also represent distinct modes of storytelling, it makes sense to read them in the company of other storytellers, including other novelists who set out to imagine what our world would be like if the dice had fallen a different way.

To take a select few examples, both *The Man in the High Castle* (1962) and *The Plot Against America* (2004) pay homage to *Bring the Jubilee*, although both Philip K. Dick and Philip Roth are more concerned with the legacy of World War II and the lingering effects of totalitarian government. (Perhaps because totalitarianism marks the termination of history?) Meanwhile, the trope of the time machine as traumatic rupture recurs in Octavia E. Butler’s *Kindred* (1979), although Dana’s discoveries about the legacy of slavery are meant

as a deliberate response to the sort of warning we are given in works like *Many Thousand Gone*. And while Ursula K. Le Guin was no stranger to alternative history, she also made a career out of radically transforming whatever genre she happened to work with. And so we have *The Lathe of Heaven* (1971), a novel about a man who changes the world with his dreams. We also have *Always Coming Home* (1985), a work that challenges all our assumptions about how novels are supposed to be written. Set in the future, well beyond whatever dates our calendars will mark, the people of Kesh appear with their own customs and traditions – including an entirely new set of stories that take up their own versions of the question: what if the course of history had been different? □

ADAM H. KITZES grew up in Chicago. After a very brief career in the world of investor relations research, he decided he wanted to become an English professor. After attending graduate school in Wisconsin, he moved around the Midwest until he wound up at the University of North Dakota. He’s made Grand Forks his home since the year the White Sox won it all, and he really has been living happily ever after.

Did you find this article interesting? Adam Kitzes will be teaching **Historical Endings Reimagined** on Wednesdays Jan 17, 31, Feb 28, March 13, 27, April 3 - 6-8 pm Central time, using the Zoom platform. **Register at humanitiesnd.org/classes-events**

ARE YOU IN YOUR WRITE MIND?

WRITING AS MINDFULNESS, MINDFULNESS AS WRITING

by William J. Macauley, Jr.

I have been so fortunate to be a writing student and teacher when I have been. I was lucky enough to show up on a college campus in the latter days of what is known as the process-writing movement. Led by scholars and teachers like Peter Elbow, Janet Emig, Ken Macrorie, and Don Murray, the process movement emphasized helping student writers learn *how* to write well. So, while the final product was important, in order to help students achieve the desired outcomes, more emphasis was put on how writing worked as a process. Some have characterized it as widening the aperture from the final product to the processes that student writers could use to get to it—writing as a verb as well as a noun, process and product, development and outcome.

It seems that, when most people think of teaching and learning writing, grammar drills, corrections, and red ink come to mind. These practices have continued, to be sure. What the process movement did for the teaching of writing was immense in the sense that we could teach a number of things that focusing solely on end results would not allow. I like to think of it as both/and. For students, it allowed them to explore production options, to be sure, but I think the more important outcome was that student writers, and their writing teachers, could begin to examine and explore what happens when people write. For students, they

could become more aware of how they worked so they could intervene where their processes were not as satisfying as they might be. For teachers, it opened up so many new and productive ways of teaching writing as a way of making meaning, as a way of learning, as inquiry, as intellectual activity, as attending to the ways information is processed and represented. This has been invaluable.

Prior to the process movement in the 1960s and '70s, much of writing instruction was reflective of what was known as *belle lettres* or the *belletristic* tradition, which goes all the way back to the late 17th century. In that tradition, writing was less about conveying meaning, communicating, or making arguments but, instead, much more about performances of cultural standards. You see, *belle lettres*' emphases were on demonstrating social standing. The priority was the reproduction of what were considered the beauty and form of high-culture texts, including penmanship but extending to what would then have been considered appropriate topics, appropriate views, and appropriate arguments and evidence for appropriate audiences. Remember that, in educational terms, the students were pretty homogenous then—mostly white, second sons of affluent families (because the first sons inherited everything), and later some daughters, who were being cultivated mostly toward their social status

as lawyers, ministers, doctors, and wives/mothers. The closed loop of cultural reproduction and homogeneity made this exclusionary work popular for some time.

But things changed. In the latter eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, we saw the rise of the managerial and middle classes. This meant that new people were making their ways into the wealthier segments of society, which included higher education. However, these middle and managerial class students, whose parents were the beneficiaries of industrialization, did not have the same cultural and social backgrounds that their more socially established contemporaries had. And

writing—*belle lettres*—was one of the places where this was most evident.

Harvard was actually pivotal to changing some of this in the late 19th century because, recognizing (or maybe worrying) that their students were becoming too homogenous, Harvard opened up enrollment more widely. But, because the same norms of social and cultural standing/background could no longer be assumed, composition programs began arising in the US, Harvard's first among them. These are the roots of most modern first-year composition curriculum. And, along with those courses and curricula came co-curricular entities known then as writing labs and writing clinics, which were



The advent of open admissions in the 1970s changed the face of college students yet again, and this change in student populations provoked the creation of developmental writing courses we still see in many post-secondary curricula today.

established to ‘take up the slack’ between where admitted students’ writing skills were and where the curricula required them to be. Underlying all of this was the knowledge that 1:1 instruction was a far superior model, and that could be approximated for the newer class of students through writing labs and clinics, outside of their more traditional courses. The truth was that, even then, they simply couldn’t make the necessary resources available for individualized instruction, both because they didn’t have the faculty or brick-and-mortar resources to make it work and because those families that were more socially established would not have stood still for that kind of change in the curricula. So, these labs and clinics came into being and eventually would morph into what we now call writing centers, which one can find on almost any American college or university campus.

A number of other changes shaped writing instruction in the 20th century. One was the returning veterans from two world wars, and more specifically the GI Bill that followed WWII, which gave many of these veterans an opportunity to better themselves through education. It also brought a vast number of students into US colleges and universities who were, again, unlike those to whom higher education had become accustomed. That’s when we saw the invention of the general education communications course, which included reading and writing as well as speaking and listening. Again, this was an effort to accommodate students who were comparatively underprepared without upsetting the more traditional curricula. The advent of open admissions in the 1970s changed the face of college students yet again, and this change in student populations provoked the creation of developmental writing courses we still see in many post-secondary curricula today.

So, why am I telling you all of this? Two reasons. One reason is that so much of what we see in writing instruction today was once alien. In the 1920s, a writing center would have been very unusual, if it were even called that. In the 1820s, a writing course in college would have been unheard of. But, the teaching of writing has continued to evolve, to change, to respond to the needs and interests of writing students, as well as employers, parents, and faculty from outside the English Department. A next step is due, reflective of our post-pandemic world.

The second is the idea that, like language, which continues to evolve toward its greatest efficiency, the teaching and learning of writing has continued to focus more deeply on the writer and the writer’s experience, choices, inputs. And it has been a challenge because it is nearly impossible to see/hear what a writer is thinking or experiencing within their heads when they are writing. I therefore take

the tack of asking them what is happening, rather than trying to tell them what I think should be going on in there. And they know, with a little bit of help to uncover it. Granted, there is a lot of work to be done in K-12 toward developing skills and processes, the valuable habits and practices that form a strong and productive foundation for writing. But we have been treading water for a while now, and we know that there is something still to attain.

I have been teaching English since 1987 and writing since 1989. My experience tells me that most students who struggle with writing do so because their writing is not lived experience. It's not them. It's like Martin Buber's idea of I-it versus I-thou; relating to writing as a textual object has no depth because it is a thing, an object, a tool. Relating to writing as I-thou means that the writer is relating to, making themselves vulnerable to the reader, no matter who that reader is. And it goes beyond that, too, or it can; writing can be an I-thou relationship with a latter self, with a reader self, with a future or past self (Ask me about heteroglossia when you come to my workshop!).

So, the workshop series I am doing with Humanities North Dakota is about helping writers take that step into an I-thou relationship within their writing. You could think of it as an I-thou between writer (I) and reader, even and especially if it's yourself (and it always is to lesser and greater degrees), (thou). We will work on being mindful in the sense of paying attention, learning to be present and with writing in ways that allow us to experience it as rich and meaningful. We will also work on using writing to explore and expand our mindfulness about the world around us. Writing to be mindful, aware, awake. Being awake and aware in order to be more available to writing as an experience, as a process, as ourselves.

On a more personal level, these workshops are so important because we live in such contentious and worrisome times. When things are scary, we tend to pull back, but that just makes things worse

because we are increasingly alone. Writing can disrupt that by making us more aware of our own experiences, by allowing us time and opportunity to think carefully about how we might describe and discuss those experiences, by giving us opportunities to reach out to our fellow human beings in ways that we can continue to revise, improve, and clarify, thus reducing the risks of saying something we don't mean or being misunderstood. It's hard to put ourselves out there, but we can do that more readily and authentically if we have taken the time to know ourselves and to be available to our writing. Yup, writing can be scary, but the opportunities and potential rewards far outweigh the risks. Come to our workshops and see. □

WILLIAM J. MACAULEY, JR. *has been teaching college-level English since 1987, as well as directing writing programs and writing centers in a variety of settings. Over the past few years, William's teaching has turned toward writing and mindfulness classes/workshops to help writers be present with their writing and break out of production/publication as singular measures of success.*

Did you find this article interesting? William J. Macauley, Jr. will be teaching **Mindful Writing** on Tuesdays March 5, 12, 19, 26, April 2 - 7-9 pm Central time, using the Zoom platform. **Register at humanitiesnd.org/classes-events**



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CLASSICAL CHATS: LEARN THE STORIES BEHIND THE MUSIC!

Linda Boyd

This is a 5-meeting virtual class using the Zoom platform. **First Tuesday of the month: Jan. 2, Feb. 6, March 5, April 2, May 7, 2024 - 7-9 pm Central time.**

ABOUT THIS CLASS: Learn about the historical context and cultural significance of classical masterpieces performed by the four orchestras in North Dakota: Fargo-Moorhead Symphony Orchestra, Bismarck-Mandan Symphony Orchestra, Greater Grand Forks Symphony Orchestra, and Minot Symphony Orchestra during the 2023-24 concert season.

INSTRUCTOR BIO: Linda Boyd served as Executive Director of the Fargo-Moorhead Symphony three times: 1993-96, 2007-2019, and once more as interim 2022-23 (during a year-long CEO search). Her career also included stints as a recording studio and record label owner (1995-2011); high school, college and church choral director and composer; elected official (Fargo City Commissioner/Deputy Mayor and School Board Member/President (2004-2018)); and visual artist/graphic designer. She has a passion for introducing people to arts experiences by meeting them where they are.

NORWEGIAN 1: INTRO TO NORWEGIAN

Steven Finney

This is a 6-meeting virtual class using the Zoom platform. **Sundays Jan 21, 28, Feb 4, 11, 18, 25 - 2-4 pm Central time.**

ABOUT THIS CLASS: An introductory course in Norwegian language, featuring common greetings, conversational phrases and fundamentals of grammar, plus a glimpse into the process of translating immigrant letters, and an introduction to the Arne Brekke Bygdebok collection at UND's Chester Fritz Library.

INSTRUCTOR BIO: Steven Finney lives in Grand Forks, ND, and teaches Norwegian language and literature at the University of North Dakota.

PERSPECTIVES ON NORWAY

Melissa Gjellstad

This is a 5-meeting virtual class using the Zoom platform. **Mondays Feb 26, March 4, 11, 18, 25 - 5:30-7:30 pm Central time.**

ABOUT THIS CLASS: This course offers a glimpse of Norway, past and present, in a five-week series on Norwegian life and society. It is an intended companion course to Steve Finney's introduction to the Norwegian language. Weekly topics explore contemporary culture as informed by historical developments. As we consider what it means to be "Norwegian" today, we contextualize some of the key traits and characteristics for which the nation of Norway is internationally known today. The proposed course themes for the five weeks will be: People & Values, History & Geography, Gender & Family, Literature & Film, and Music & Art. Course participants will be asked to discuss questions and share opinions and experiences.

INSTRUCTOR BIO: Born on the prairie, professor Melissa Gjellstad finds inspiration in the humanities, international education, and the weather of the north. Melissa works at the University of North Dakota as department chair and Norwegian program director; she earned a PhD in Scandinavian Languages & Literatures from the University of Washington. Melissa's research delves into contemporary Scandinavian literature and gender studies, centering on mothers and fathers in fiction from the millennium shift; she has also translated works of non-fiction and poetry.

DIALOGUES ON THE EXPERIENCE OF WAR

Charity Anderson

This is a 8-meeting virtual class using the Zoom platform. **Tuesdays Jan 16, 23, 30, Feb 6, 13, 20, 27, March 5 - 6:30-8:30 pm Central time.**

ABOUT THIS CLASS: This humanities course explores themes of war and reconciliation through philosophy, literature, art, music, and history. The course is organized into three parts. During the first third, we will assess the

meanings of sacrifice, honor, bravery, and trauma in ancient Greece and consider how classical learning can inform and enhance our experiences of war and its aftermaths in the present. The second third of the course focuses on the era from the US Civil War to the end of the 19th century. Many foundational American ideas and expectations about war were defined at this time, and we will evaluate the meanings of patriotic sacrifice and freedom from a variety of perspectives. The final third of the course will focus on the Vietnam War. By this time, the nature of American wars looks much more familiar: soldiers fought on distant soils as part of the world's most massive, bureaucratic, technologically advanced military. We will examine how soldiers and their loved ones experienced this war and the challenges and controversies over how it should be remembered.

INSTRUCTOR BIO: Charity Anderson is Academic Director of the Clemente Veterans' Initiative Newark, a humanities course for veterans and military-connected civilians. Charity holds master's degrees in art history, education, and social work. She earned a PhD in social work from the University of Chicago.

THE GOOD LIFE

Raman Sachdev

This is a 8-meeting virtual class using the Zoom platform. **Wednesdays Jan 10, 17, 24, 31, Feb 7, 14, 21, 28 - 6:30-8:30 pm Central time.**

ABOUT THIS CLASS: This 8-week course will study various philosophical traditions, from Buddhism and Stoicism to Christianity and Freudian Psychoanalysis, in order to explore what it means to be human and what constitutes the good life.

INSTRUCTOR BIO: Raman Sachdev is an Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Minot State University, where he began teaching in the fall of 2022. His research areas include skepticism, early modern philosophy, and the history of philosophy. He is also an avid musician and songwriter.

RESPONDING TO CONTROVERSIAL MONUMENTS

Cynthia C. Prescott

This is a 4-meeting virtual class using the Zoom platform. **Thursdays Jan 18, Feb 1, 8, 15 - 7-9 pm Central time.**

ABOUT THIS CLASS: Through an extended role-playing game, students will debate whether to preserve, relocate, reinterpret, or remove a controversial monument. We will play "Memory Reconsidered: San Francisco Pioneer Monument during the Culture Wars, 1991-1996," a game developed by the instructor. Students will be assigned a specific historic character to play. Class time via Zoom will be used to debate and negotiate the monument's fate. Students will be encouraged to engage beyond class time via a private Slack channel.

INSTRUCTOR BIO: Cynthia C. Prescott has taught courses on the American West, women's history, and material culture at the University of North Dakota since 2007. She is the author of two books, *Pioneer Mother Monuments: Constructing Cultural Memory* (2019) and *Gender and Generation on the Far Western Frontier* (2007).

RIDING THE RAILS: THE AMERICAN RAILROAD THROUGH LITERATURE AND CULTURE

Michael A. Smith

This is a 12-meeting virtual class using the Zoom platform. **Tuesdays Jan 9, 16, 23, 30, Feb 6, 13, 20, 27, March 5, 12, 19, April 2 - 6-7 pm Central time.**

ABOUT THIS CLASS: This course will take participants through popular rail spaces inside the train and beyond. From the observation car to the boxcar to Hell on Wheels ghost towns, this course will span American literature and culture while discovering the sometimes secret, hidden, and surprising curves of the transcontinental track. Pulp, poetry, and cinema will be featured along the way, including Zane Grey, C.S. Giscombe, Double Indemnity, and Strangers on a Train.

INSTRUCTOR BIO: Michael A. Smith received his PhD in English from Duquesne University, where his dissertation focused on the American railroad, geocriticism, and placemaking. He has published research on the poetry of Muriel Rukeyser (*Humanities*, 2022) and interviewed the founder of geocriticism, Prof. Bertrand Westphal, for the *St. John's University Humanities Review* (2023). Michael works with The Fine Foundation.

SHAKESPEARE LITE: SPEECHES AND SONNETS

Janelle Masters

This is a 4-meeting virtual class using the Zoom platform. **Sundays Jan 7, 14, 21, 28 - 1-3 pm Central time.**

ABOUT THIS CLASS: Famous passages from Shakespeare's plays and select sonnets will be read, enjoyed and put into context. The study will be serious, yet light-hearted with explication and discussion.

INSTRUCTOR BIO: Dr. Janelle Masters is a retired college professor and dean. She specialized in teaching English literature and Native American Literature. She is a nature lover, kayaker, birder, amateur musician, reader, and writer. She is proud to be the daughter of a railroad worker and to have been raised in Niobe, North Dakota, population 32.

THE ROOTS OF AMERICANA

Raffi Andonian

This is a 12-meeting virtual class using the Zoom platform. **Mondays Jan 15, 22, 29, Feb 5, 12, 19, 26, March 4, 11, 18, 25, April 1 - 6:15 PM- 7:45 PM Central time.**

ABOUT THIS CLASS: How do we come to believe what we do about the past? The origin stories we share serve to validate our present beliefs, practices, and wishes. When looking back to the past from our present, how do we select what to remember? Our understandings of historical events, people, and symbols are always changing, and the debates about what qualifies as "accurate" history span generations. In this course, we will seek to look beyond each

of our own opinions, and together as a group aim to learn more to pause and inquire so we may contribute constructively around us.

INSTRUCTOR BIO: Raffi Andonian is a frequent guest on ABC-NBC-FOX-CBS TV stations nationwide and also produces and hosts his own streaming TV show that aims to challenge the present by inquiring about the past. He has authored 3 Amazon best-selling books, and he has a bachelor's and a master's degree in history and another master's degree in historic preservation. He has recently spoken at Oxford, Cambridge and NASDAQ, and he began his career leading programs at the Gettysburg battlefield, the Martin Luther King Jr. childhood home, and in Los Alamos where the atomic bomb was created.

INTRO TO NATIVE LANGUAGE RECLAMATION

Lisa Casarez

This is a 14-meeting virtual class using the Zoom platform. **Saturdays Jan 6, 13, 20, 27, Feb 3, 10, 17, 24, March 2, 9, 16, 23, 30, April 6 - 10:30 am-12:30 pm Central time.**

ABOUT THIS CLASS: What is Language Revitalization and Reclamation and how does it apply to Indigenous (Native) Language Communities? How do Native Language communities factor in Language Ecology, Language acquisition and socialization into our efforts to reclaim our Indigenous Languages? This class can help get those interested in learning more about Community Language Work as it applies to Native Language Communities, including language ideology, methodology and pedagogy.

INSTRUCTOR BIO: MHA/Chicana. Language Warrior.

LOOKING BACK: HISTORY AND MEMORY OF THE HOLOCAUST

Kari A. Hall

This is a 6-meeting virtual class using the Zoom platform. **Mondays Jan 8, 15, 22, 29, Feb 5, 12 - 7-9 pm Central time.**

ABOUT THIS CLASS: Looking Back: History and Memory of the Holocaust is designed to explore what, when, why, how, and where the Holocaust took place, including the key historical events that culminated in the "Final Solution" implemented by the Nazi government. The goal of this course is to chronologically and thematically explore and analyze the complex factors contributing to the Holocaust, interpret the events of 1933-1945, and evaluate the continued impact of that genocide on modern society. Participants will read and discuss Olga Lengyel's memoir *Five Chimneys: A Woman Survivor's True Story of Auschwitz*. Each week will be filled with personal accounts, survivor testimony, and primary sources that serve to unpack the historical impact of this era.

INSTRUCTOR BIO: Kari A. Hall is in her 24th year teaching Social Studies and is an alum of The Olga Lengel Institute for Holocaust Studies and Human Rights in New York and currently serves as a teaching fellow for the National World War II Museum. She has been honored as a Gilder-Lehrman History Teacher of the Year, a James Madison Memorial Fellow, a VFW Citizenship Education Teacher of the Year and the 2023 Leo Weiss Courage to Teach Holocaust Educator Award given by the Jewish Community Relations Council of Minnesota and the Dakotas.

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Class sizes are limited.

Register at humanitiesnd.org/classes-events



WORLDS WITHIN WORLDS: RELIGION, SCIENCE FICTION, AND FANTASY

Patrick J. D'Silva

This is a 8-meeting virtual class using the Zoom platform. **Tuesdays Jan 9, 16, 23, 30, Feb 6, 13, 20, 27 - 6-8 pm Central time.**

ABOUT THIS CLASS: This course examines how religion functions in science-fiction and fantasy. We will cover popular franchises (such as *Star Trek*, *Star Wars*, *Dune*, *Battlestar Galactica*), genres such as Afrofuturism, and fiction-based religious movements like Jediism. Whether you live your life according to the Jedi Code, or just want to learn more about why that one family member keeps telling you to “use the Force,” this will be a space for fun and thought-provoking discussion.

INSTRUCTOR BIO: Patrick D'Silva is a diehard sci-fi and fantasy fan who also loves studying religion. He analyzes esoteric breathing techniques from India by day, and ponders the symbolic meaning of dragons and spaceships by night. D'Silva received his PhD in Religious Studies from UNC-Chapel Hill and his MTS from Harvard Divinity School. He lives with his family in Boulder, CO, where he sometimes replays entire *Star Wars* movies in his mind while cross-country skiing.

HISTORICAL ENDINGS REIMAGINED

Adam H. Kitzes

This is a 6-meeting virtual class using the Zoom platform. **Wednesdays Jan 17, 31, Feb 28, March 13, 27, April 3 - 6-8 pm Central time.**

ABOUT THIS CLASS: Can we choose our past? Can we imagine an alternative future – does that even make sense? If we could select an event that changed the course of history, what would it be, and what would be the effect? That sure would make quite the story... In fact, writers have been playing around with questions like these for as long as there have been stories. (I'm personally drawn to Shakespeare's history plays, where he's always imagining battles that go opposite to how he finds them in the chronicles of his day.) In this course we'll stick with more modern examples. Some will be sci-fi, some

from other genres, but they'll all be examples of what we can think of as counter-histories. We'll visit worlds where the Confederate armies have won the Civil War, or the Axis powers have won WWII. We'll find out what goes on in a place where slavery was never abolished. And we'll meet a world where California has become what we only know as Kesh. You won't need an actual time machine – I suppose one will be made available for you. Just be ready to imagine your world, both as it is and as it could have been.

INSTRUCTOR BIO: Adam H. Kitzes grew up in Chicago. After a very brief career in the world of investor relations research, he decided he wanted to become an English professor. After attending graduate school in Wisconsin, he moved around the Midwest until he wound up at the University of North Dakota. He's made Grand Forks his home since the year the White Sox won it all, and he really has been living happily ever after.

UTOPIA: DREAMS AND REALITIES

Mark S. Jendrysik

This is a 7-meeting virtual class using the Zoom platform. **Wednesdays March 13, 20, 27, April 3, 10, 17, 24 - 7-8:30 pm Central time.**

ABOUT THIS CLASS: Seekers after utopia ask many questions. What would the perfect society look like? How should relations among men and women, rich and poor, citizen and alien be organized for the benefit of all? What kind of political system would guarantee peace, prosperity and plenty for all people? In what kind of society would the individual find fulfillment? How can we harness technology for the good of all humanity? In this course we will examine and judge the answers provided across the two-thousand (and more) year history of utopian political thought.

INSTRUCTOR BIO: Mark S. Jendrysik, PhD is a Professor of Political Science at the University of North Dakota. He has published three books and numerous papers on American political thought and culture and on the history of political thought. Like Mark Twain he believes that "public education is democracy."

MINDFUL WRITING

William J. Macauley, Jr.

This is a 5-meeting virtual class using the Zoom platform. **Tuesdays March 5, 12, 19, 26, April 2 - 7-9 pm Central time.**

ABOUT THIS CLASS: This five-week workshop series teaches mindfulness for writing and writing for mindfulness. William helps writers be more present in and connected to their writing.

INSTRUCTOR BIO: William J. Macauley, Jr. has been teaching college-level English since 1987, as well as directing writing programs and writing centers in a variety of settings. Over the past few years, William's teaching has turned toward writing and mindfulness classes/workshops to help writers be present with their writing and break out of production/publication as singular measures of success.

VERSE UNHEARD: AMPLIFYING MINORITY VOICES IN POETRY

Claire Barwise

This is a 6-meeting virtual class using the Zoom platform. **Mondays Jan 8, 15, 22, 29, Feb 5, 12 - 6:30-7:30 pm Central time.**

ABOUT THIS CLASS: Poetry is not just about rhyme and meter; it's a vehicle for understanding the world, ourselves, and those around us. No matter your background or previous experience with poetry, this course offers a welcoming space to learn, share, and celebrate the voices that have been underrepresented in the traditional canon. In addition to reading, watching, and listening to poetry, we will engage in dynamic discussions and creative exercises that will help us make personal connections to the poems we encounter. "Verse Unheard" will expand your

horizons, challenge your perspectives, and leave you with a newfound appreciation for the beauty and power of words.

INSTRUCTOR BIO: Claire Barwise holds an MFA in Creative Writing and a PhD in English Literature. Her work has appeared in *The Minnesota Review*, *Feminist Modernist Cultures*, and *Modern Fiction Studies*. She currently lives and teaches in Philadelphia, PA.

10 VICTORIAN WOMEN WRITERS

Sarah Faulkner

This is a 6-meeting virtual class using the Zoom platform. **Wednesdays Feb 21, 28, March 6, 13, 20, 27 - 7-9 pm Central time.**

ABOUT THIS CLASS: Whether it's been one year or 50 years since you've read a Victorian novel, come learn about 10 talented women who wrote during Queen Victoria's reign. This six-week course will focus on 10 fascinating women writers who influenced politics, social justice, women's suffrage, education, literary history, and more.

Dr. Sarah Faulkner will share the incredible stories from the lives of best selling novelists and poets including George Eliot; Elizabeth Barrett Browning; Charlotte, Emily, and Anne Bronte; Christina Rossetti, Elizabeth Gaskell, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, and more!

This class will be a mix of literary history and biography. We'll read short selections from each writer's work for each class, and Dr. Faulkner will have an ample further reading list ready for you to peruse.

INSTRUCTOR BIO: Dr. Sarah Faulkner is an award-winning scholar, teacher, and

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public humanist. Her research focuses on British women writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; she has taught university courses on Jane Austen and Her World, Witches and Monsters in Fiction, The Romantic Age, Rise of the English Novel, and more. She taught “10 British Women Writers Before Austen” for Public University in Spring 2023 and currently works as the Program Manager for Humanities Washington.

BEYOND LITTLE WOMEN, MEET LOUISA MAY ALCOTT

Joan Leotta

This is a 2-meeting virtual class using the Zoom platform. **Thursdays March 21 and 28 - 1-3 pm Central time.**

ABOUT THIS CLASS: Just in time to celebrate Women's History Month we will take a look at the writings of Louisa May Alcott, "beyond" her master work, *Little Women*. These writings include romance and poetry and her Civil War

Sketches. We will discuss how these writings marked her as a woman of her time, yet seeking to find her own independence in spite of the cultural constraints of her era, how Alcott was involved with the issues of her day, and how all of this prepared her to write *Little Women*. The second class session will include a one-woman show presenting Louisa May Alcott and offer time for questions on Alcott and on the process of creating a costumed character.

INSTRUCTOR BIO: Joan Leotta is a writer and story performer, author of eleven books published by five different publishers. Her writings and performances are often food- or history-inspired. Her costumed character presentations of Colonial and Civil-War era women have taken her to audiences up and down the East Coast. She has written for magazines, newspapers, books, and poetry. Her latest book is *Feathers on Stone*. She is a two-time Pushcart nominee, twice a Best of the Net Nominee and was a 2022 Runner up in the Robert Frost Foundation contest.



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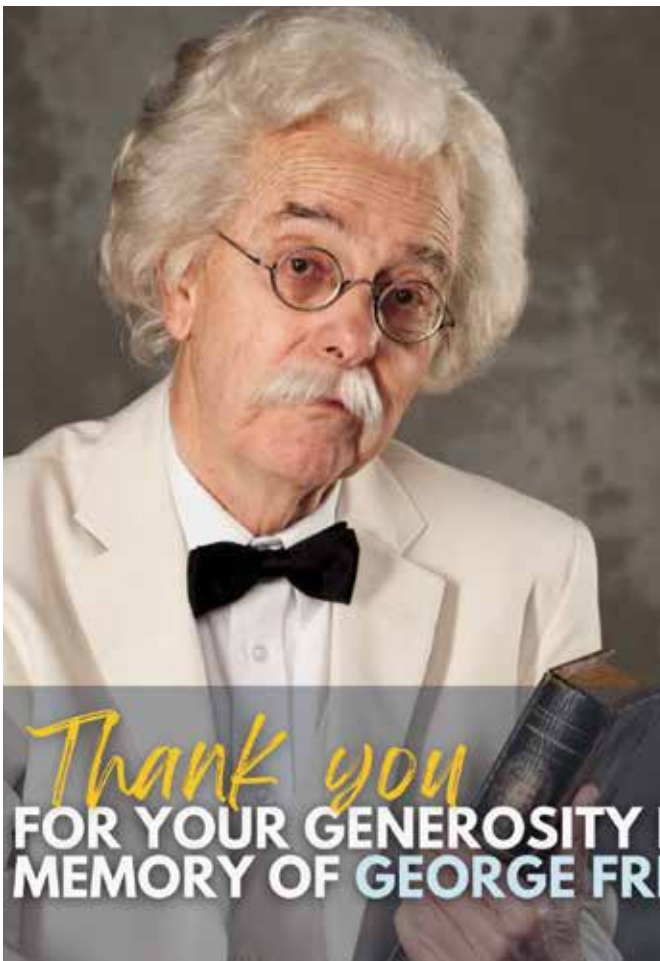


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George was a former Catholic priest turned professor who taught at the University of North Dakota for 29 years and was active in creating the modern-day Chautauqua movement.

A friend of Humanities North Dakota and public humanities programs, George was also an advocate for Chautauqua programs. To participate in these programs, which introduced audiences to prominent thinkers through historical dramatization, George immersed himself in the writings of those he was depicting.

Though George insisted that Chautauquans be scholars foremost, and not actors, he developed a flair for dramatic performance, as well as for nurturing thoughtful conversation with audiences about the characters. Pictured is George as Mark Twain.

Teaching was truly George's passion, and he will be dearly missed. In lieu of flowers, donations were directed to Humanities North Dakota. We thank you greatly for your generosity.

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