

PRISM

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"The Ignoble Leviathan"

by
Charles Bergman

The following article is an excerpt, from a book I have just completed. Tentatively titled *Leaving What's Left*, the book is scheduled for a fall, 1988 publication by McGraw-Hill Book Company. It is about endangered animals in North America. One premise of the book is that the nature movement has taught us to be much more ecologically sophisticated, but we remain psychologically naive in the ways we view animals. I try to understand these animals both as creatures and as symbols of ourselves.

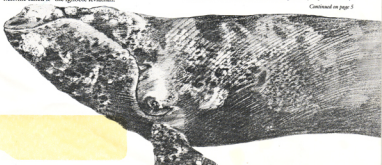
The North Atlantic right whale is now the most endangered whale in the world, with a total population of about 250. It is big, full of blubber and baleen, very slow, and hugs the coastline; early whalers thus considered it the "right" whale to hunt. New Englanders quickly devastated the species, developing their whaling skills in the process. By the nineteenth century, they had come almost to spurn and forget the right whale in their much more heroically conceived quests for the noble sperm whale farther out at sea. Because it was so ugly and so easy to kill, Herman Melville called it "the ignoble leviathan."

Lately, my dreams have been filled with shorelines. I walk or drive or even fly along the edge of the water, drawn to enter but ambivalent, keeping to the safety of the shore. It seems time to enter these new waters. But every attempt I make is tentative and frightened. In one dream, I was returning from a long trip, but the airplane could only land at Boeing Field in Seattle, not at Sea-Tac, and the 747 taxied absurdly along the rocky coast of Puget Sound on the way to my house. When I got home, my wife was waiting for me in the doorway, holding up a huge dead salmon by the tail.

Pressed into it, most of us would probably have to admit that leaving is easier than coming home; that we'd rather travel all over the country than face our own shorelines and ugly fish-facts at home. The right whale is a national fish fact close to our own shores—ugly, battered and abused, forgotten as we moved on to conquer other whales and other worlds.

Who doesn't have ugly fish-facts at home or in their hearts? Yet I know very few people who are trying to face themselves and who they are. Instead, in the 1980s, we seem bent on some mad national hypocrisy. The Faustian dream that drove Captain Ahab isn't dead; it has just grown sillier in the way we live it out. Instead of the long voyage to destroy the embodied evil of the world—which Melville makes clear was Ahab's monomania projected onto the white sides of the whale—we now measure our pretenses and ambitions with a "frequent flyer plan." Every

Continued on page 5



A Prism Primer

Prisms come in several shapes, but these shapes are all three-dimensional and bear no resemblance to the flat, folded paper you now hold in your hand. Typically, a prism boasts multiple angles and a solid substance, in just the right package to enable the generation of a continuous spectrum of light. We think of the prisms sparkling in a crystal chandelier or the glistening object decorating a neighbor's windowpane. What possible association exists, then, between the humanities and prisms? An answer to this question may be drawn from literature, specifically from a contemporary work by Norwegian writer Torborg Nedreaas (b. 1906).

In *Trylleglasset* (*The Magic Glass, Oslo: Aschehoug, 1950*) young Herdis is allowed to borrow her friend's treasured prism: "Herdis did as Christ showed her and held it up to her eyes. She captured the rainbow at the very moment it burst into a thousand pieces and all the pieces became houses and streets and horses and children. And if she moved just a tiny bit, the houses and streets and horses and Myren and children burst and became new houses and streets and children, some half, some whole, some double, and some in pieces which flew away from each other and flowed together again and disappeared in a conflagration of colors. And the stones in Myren were amber and rubies and emeralds and gold. If she moved her eye, they disappeared in rivers of violet and red and pale-green light. She pointed it at some little girls playing down the street and they became a long, long row of dancing flowers that flew away from each other like butterflies and melted back together again; and now they were a single giant flower quivering and frothing and swishing and sparkling with blue light—cornflower blue and sky blue and evening blue with soft shadows of yellow and red which split and turned green with violet rays."

Later Herdis receives the prism, the magic glass, as a gift. It makes her glad to be alive and satisfies her intense longing for beauty, "for in this magic glass, fairy tales resided in every single thing and experience in the simple act of seeing." The prism thus furnishes Herdis with a new perspective and sensitivity, as when it penetrates the murky waters of a black, sterile, and frightening pond, to capture the sleep shapes and warm hues of the resident fish: "She sank and sank. There was life, there was life down there, and she felt such a part of that life her heart throbbed. The sensation of happiness was so dazzling that it felt like fright and through the magic glass everything grew so lovely that it felt like grief" (*my translation*).

Torborg Nedreaas sets her story in Bergen, Norway, just prior to World War I. The children of this generation confront a volatile modern world, as has each generation since. Depression, fear, uncertainty, are tempered, not by altering the basic elements of creation, but by the angle of light and the sensitive eye of the beholder. Yet not everyone is disposed to value the prism, where budding artist Herdis finds magic, little Julia discovers only distortion.

The role of the humanities is, in some measure, to present and polish the prism, so that our vision may be both clear and wondrous. To study the humanities is to confront the very nature of being human as we explore expressions of the heart, mind and soul. What for us is the prism? The literary imagination, spiritual quests through the ages, texts of the great philosophers, the power of language. Just as importantly, the humanities mold the critical eye, so that the flashes of brilliance, the paradoxes, the intellectual and aesthetic transformations, may be discerned and appreciated.

In launching this biannual publication, the Division of Humanities at Pacific Lutheran University anticipates the sharing of research and points of view with our alumni, teacher-colleagues, and friends. Together, we represent the Departments of English, Languages, Philosophy, and Religion, with forty-one regular faculty members and ten undergraduate programs. Our faculty and students are busy with a broad spectrum of activities and assignments and it would be easy to fill these pages with reports of them. We have, however, chosen a different emphasis. Prisms will offer perspectives on the humanities, some provocative, all we hope stimulating, together with a guide to recent works in print.

The first issues shows this intent. Charles Bergman depicts an "ignoble" species of whale, the right whale, assigning it an undeniable majesty as he charts its precarious existence along the New England coast. Paul Ingram considers the prism of two faiths—the Christian and the Buddhist, through the prism of interreligious dialogue. Poet Rick Jones focuses his eye on the academic environment, projecting a student-centered view of intellectual sterility and prompting us to engage in a bit of critical self-examination (surely my courses aren't like that?). In focusing on the teaching of writing, Richard Jensen offers a theoretical perspective on the relationship between skill development and analytical context. And finally, summaries of recently published scholarship by Joanne Brown, Tom Campbell, Taiping Chang, and Walt Pilgrim underscore the diversity of faculty interest in the division. We invite you to sample these perspectives on our world and we welcome your comments and responses. ■

Janet E. Rasmussen, Dean

A Concluding Unscientific Postscript on the Modern Buddhist-Christian Dialogue

by
Paul O. Ingram

Historians of religions are an unconventional lot, mostly because the focus of our academic training is the religious experience of humanity. We employ a series of interrelated methodologies—anthropological, textual-critical, ethnological, theological, social-scientific, linguistic—to deal with a number of perennial questions. What is the generic nature of religious experience? Are there generic features common to all historical and cultural forms of religious experience? If so, why is there so much diversity in the religious faith and practice of human beings? What does religious pluralism tell us about human nature? What does religious pluralism tell us about the Sacred? How does religious faith and practice influence art, politics, economics, literature, ethics, and history? How do aesthetic, political, economic, literary, ethical, biological, and historical factors influence religious faith and practice? In the modern world of religious and secular pluralism, which religious Way is best? Or is this question meaningful—or important?

There are other questions and they keep coming. They also haunt theologians and philosophers. But unlike theologians and philosophers, historians of religions seek descriptive, rather than normative, answers to these questions. That is, historians of religions do not ask what religious people *ought* to believe and practice. Instead, we are professionally interested in analytically describing what religious people *have* believed and practiced, apart from passing value judgments about the truth or validity of their beliefs and practices. Assessing the truth claims of religious people is not normally part of the discipline of history of religions; only accurately describing religious matters of fact is important.

But this sort of neutral objectivity is probably impossible. First, historians of religions have their own theological and philosophical commitments that can never be completely set aside. These commitments contribute to any analysis of religious matters of fact. Value judgments must of necessity be part of our work because presuppositionless scholarship in any academic field is neither possible nor desirable. Pure objectivity is an illusion. Second, ignoring normative questions of value and meaning does not make these questions go away. The attempt to do so is an intellectual cop out, especially if one is a teacher confronting students daily with the facts of religious pluralism.



In my case, twenty-two years of teaching experience have taught me that students are passionately interested in not only "what religious persons have believed and practiced," they are even more passionately interested in "what they *should* believe and practice" given the facts of religious pluralism. Students ask normative questions because they know what every religious person knows: separating religious matters of fact descriptively analyzed from the lives of religious persons is at best an abstraction, and, at worst, a falsification of the religious experience they seek to understand.

Consequently, like a revivalist facing reality, historians of religions are sooner or later dragged—sometimes kicking and screaming—into confrontation with the normative philosophical issues engendered by the facts of religious pluralism. Besides, my student's questions are also my own.

My recent book, *The Modern Buddhist-Christian Dialogue*, confronts some of the theological-philosophical issues modern religious pluralism poses for Buddhists and Christians. This topic is most easily illustrated by an experience I had while attending the First International Conference on Buddhist-Christian Encounter, sponsored by the Department of Religious Studies of the University of Hawaii at Manoa in 1980. Indeed, I wrote this book because of this experience.

The Conference was intensely busy and lasted for two weeks. There was always much to think about. I arose early one morning after a very restless night—about 4:30—and took a walk on a quiet beach in order to "clear my head." I felt intellectually and emotionally drained, and I thought watching the sunrise would improve my perspective on the scheduled events of the new day. I wanted solitude—something not easily found at an academic conference. I only got my wish about the sunrise.

Continued on page 4



As I walked, absorbed in whatever it was that was on my mind, a shadow-form jumped into my field of vision—a female figure quietly sitting under a palm tree in the lotus posture, her presence barely outlined in the dim light of approaching dawn. She was a Chinese T'ien-t'ai Buddhist nun in deep meditative concentration, rooted in the special practice that anchored her in the Buddhist Way. Head shaven and erect, eyes half closed and focused on a spot in front of her crossed legs, dressed in the dark gray robes of her order, she looked like one of those standardized images of the Buddha gracing the numberless altars of Buddhist temples dotting East Asia.

4 As I stared at this meditating woman, a movement to my left caught my attention: a Franciscan monk slowly walking back and forth between two palm trees, contemplatively reading his morning vespers. He too was focused, attentive, balanced in the self discipline he practiced that opened him to the depths of his Roman Catholic Christian Way. I had never seen anyone sit so naturally, so noncompulsively as that Buddhist nun. Nor had I ever seen anyone walk so naturally, so gracefully as that Franciscan monk absorbed in his daily contemplative discipline.

The Buddhist nun and the Franciscan monk were discussion leaders of the main topic of this period of the conference—Buddhist and Christian “practice” (*praxis*). Both were scholarly, articulate, and conversant with the major traditions of the Buddhist and Christian Ways. Because each existentially dwelled so completely in the depths of their own religious Way, they could apprehend and appreciate the authenticity of the other’s religious faith and practice. Neither was a religious imperialist who preached the “one Way” chauvinism characterizing most religious persons today, both East and West. They learned from one another, appropriated insights from one another, and yet remained fully Buddhist and Christian in their world views.

What I saw on that shadowy dawn morning was the source of their commitment, faith, and openness to one another’s religious Way: their practice. Because each was centered in their religious Way, each was open to dimensions of reality most people lack the imagination to think possible. What were these realities? In spite of religious and cultural differences, what had this Buddhist nun discovered in this Franciscan monk’s faith and practice that helped her become more authentically Buddhist and human? What had this Franciscan monk discovered through encounter with the Buddhist nun that helped him become more authentically Christian and human? What was going on? *The Modern Buddhist-Christian Dialogue* is my response to these and other questions engendered by the “facts” of contemporary Buddhist-Christian dialogical encounter.

The first nine chapters follow a similar format. Each is devoted to analyzing some of the important issues which have emerged from contemporary Buddhist-Christian dialogical encounter by (1) describing what these issues are and how Buddhists and Christians might respond to them, and (2) identifying those questions to which I have responded most completely in chapter ten, entitled “Conclusions in Process.” While it is impossible, as well as unnecessary, to summarize all of the conclusions of *The*

Modern Buddhist-Christian Dialogue and the steps by which they were drawn, one “conclusion in process” bears brief, if undefended, comment. It is an example of what I call “the process of creative transformation” that can occur in the Buddhist and Christian Ways as a consequence of their mutual dialogical encounter.

The obvious conceptual and experiential differences between Buddhists and Christians need not imply contradiction. For example, Christian faith in God revealed through Jesus as the Christ, and Buddhist rejection of all notions of deity, are based on different conceptions of the meaning of “God.” The traditional Christian understanding of God assumes a world view entailing permanence and stability as the basic forms of reality—a world view that is also contradictory to Biblical images of human selfhood, God, and the world. But traditional Buddhist rejections of God assume a world view in which reality is conceived to be impermanent process and change—a world view that is in many ways very similar to that implied by *Biblical* portrayals of human selfhood, God, and the world. Because contemporary process theology reveals important contradictions between traditional Christian theological conceptions of God and Biblical portrayals of God, process theology can, by opening Christians to realities more fully encountered in Buddhist experience, simultaneously open Christians more fully to the experiential realities pointed to by Biblical tradition. In other words, dialogue with the Buddhist Way can revitalize Christian appreciation of its own scriptural foundation.

But Christian encounter with the Buddhist Way does more than deepen Christian understanding of Biblical tradition. Buddhist dialogue with the Christian Way may benefit Buddhists. Using process theology as a means through which to enter Christian experience will allow Buddhists to understand Christian teaching about God more accurately. Process theology’s conception of God is not at all contradictory to the traditional Buddhist world view or to Buddhist religious experience. Therefore, appropriating this understanding of God into the Buddhist Way can lead to the creative transformation of Buddhist faith and practice. So doing could allow Buddhists to appropriate notions of history and social ethical sensitivity to the political and economic issues of modern existence that are more fully developed in Christian experience.

The mutually creative transformation of the Buddhist and Christian Ways through interreligious dialogue continues. Participants in this dialogue have discovered something extraordinary, most dramatically stated by the Christian process theologian, John B. Cobb: it is “possible for a Christian to be a Buddhist, too.” Just as, in other words, a Christian can be a scientist or a historian or a teacher and still remain Christian, so a Christian can be a Buddhist and still remain Christian. Likewise, it is possible for a Buddhist to be a Christian while remaining Buddhist as well. Could it be that Buddhists and Christians have experienced the same Sacred Reality, named differently in each Way? If so, as many of us participating in Buddhist-Christian encounter have found ourselves believing, interreligious dialogue itself becomes a form of religious practice. ■

THE LECTURE

by R. P. Jones

I can't really see why he said it
makes no difference to me
or anyone else who heard him
ramble on about the Demi-Urge
was not the urge we felt
was more full bodied
than abstractions
please

I'd rather hear
that thick thighed Mother Earth
spread her knees for Chaos
or cut Uranus' orbit off
with a sickle made of adamant
held in her left hand
while the nails of her right
gouged the mighty rivers in his back
after all
it is a hunter's moon
Libra is young yet
and salmon
still scale
the falls

THE LECTURER

by R. P. Jones

As he spoke
a brace of rhododendron
grew out of his ears
and slowly
slowly
slowly
as slowly as
blossoms
all the leaves and leavings
of twenty centuries of thought
rolled up
brown at the edges
and dropped off
one by one
as if autumn
as if autumn were a way of saying things
the leaves died
before our very ears
where no wind in October
is so thick with dust
as the anesthesiology of words

5

Leviathan
Continued from page 1

one thinks they're going somewhere. It's a debased version of the old humanist ideal of self-creation—all these people bursting with the latest hype from some minister of positive thinking, choosing not who to be but how to make more money. Imagine this: I get on an airplane. It's full of people flying executive class, all of them on their way to the same business meeting in Atlanta, all of them reading the same book, *Celebrate Your Self*.

I suddenly feel claustrophobic with even the thought of so much narrowness and denial. We're all so competent and boring, so noble and, excuse the rhyme, so upwardly mobile. What these bourgeois platitudes of self-creation boil down to, in my experience, is that we are all free to choose our own hair styles. To choose the illusions we want to live by.

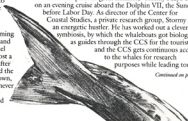
Heading for Provincetown, Massachusetts, right whales, and the Labor Day weekend, I battled an incoming storm front, hating the weather and feeling dispirited and sullen. The American myth about whales is that Ishmael "blindly plunged like fate into the lone Atlantic." I'd lost a big chance for that in Lubec, Maine, for a trip at sea after whales, and here I was in a Ford Escort about to spend the next week watching whales with tourists in a tourist town, riding whalewatching boats in the Dolphin Fleet and never getting out of sight of land. It took me days to see the revelations in my own experience, to quit trying to read

whales in terms of an inherited national myth. It's not just that at Cape Cod I discovered some of the forgotten past about New England whaling and right whales. But I began to see the correlation between these near-shore whales and something in myself. I feel like I've just entered some vast new sea, but I'm still close to shore.

Most important, I came to love the ugly right whale.

The Dolphin Whalewatch boats cruise out of Provincetown to Stellwagen Bank, only a half hour away, an underwater extension of Cape Cod. Stellwagen slopes from 60 to 200 feet and attracts fish and whales. "The whales have shown this as a place of great richness," Stormy Mayo said on an evening cruise aboard the Dolphin VII, the Sunday before Labor Day. As director of the Center for Coastal Studies, a private research group, Stormy is an energetic hustler. He has worked out a clever symbiosis, by which the whaleboats got biologists as guides through the CCS for the tourists, and the CCS gets continuous access to the whales for research purposes while leading tours.

Continued on page 6



Out of this arrangement, Stormy has developed a catalogue of over 330 humpback whales around Provincetown. "Stellwagen is a legend," Stormy continued, now speaking to the 50 or so tourists on board as well, "because of the humpbacks."

The enthusiasm in his voice held the crowd's attention. He went on to explain that this year the humpbacks have vanished from Stellwagen, and that while no one is sure why, he thinks it's because the sand lance or sand eels (both are small fish) have dwindled on the shoals.

A transition was coming, and his energy jumped one quantum. "Now we'll see animals on this trip we used to think we'd never see here."

Dramatic pause.

"The most special animal on earth—the right whale."

Some of this seems rhetorical, the stuff of a salesman working an audience. But there is more to it than public relations on behalf of the tour boat or of whale ecology. Once Stormy worked on humpbacks, but he has now given that over to someone else so that he can devote himself to right whales. His nimble, slightly bizarre mind—"I have lots of flights of fantasy," he says—has led him into an ingenious piece of experimental research at the Center to try to understand the right whale's food needs and the relationship between its habitat and its slow recovery.

"The right whale is such a rare species," he told the crowd, and you could tell they were feeling involved with something that's actually happening in these waters. "It's poorly understood." Stormy explained that he thought the right whales had come to Stellwagen this summer, which was unprecedented in his experience, to take advantage of an increase in plankton (small plants and animals that float on the tides) and copepods (small shrimp-like creatures), their main foods. "Luckily we're out here, in a position to document this phenomenon. We're trying to get every bit of information on these cruises as we can."

Until recently, the right whale off Massachusetts was considered a very rare accident. The few sightings were explained as strays.

Motivated by a chance meeting in 1983 with an historian who told him that Mayflower puritans had described abundant numbers of right whales in Cape Cod, Stormy agitated for a boat for the CCS, got it, and in January, 1984, began finding right whales once again near Provincetown. He told me, "Finding right whales in Cape Cod Bay has been the single biggest contribution the Center for Coastal Studies has made to science. We've found a mother lode for right whales." These animals have been there, just off the coast, but we'd forgotten about them and had lost the ability to see them.

I found Stormy irresistible. He has a flair. In the low light of evening, he wore sunglasses and a double-billed boating hat. His flannel shirt was cranberry and lavender, and when he took his glasses off, his eyes revealed an eagerness for the main chance—a good joke, a funny phrase, even biological fame (which he thought I might help with). But it was his uninhibited, gregarious passion for whales

that won me.
("I'm notorious
for yammering,"

he said in one aside.) I got
the feeling that his talk was generative, a
way of inventing ideas and discovering opportunities,
almost as if in a chance talk with an historian he had
invented the right whales he later found.

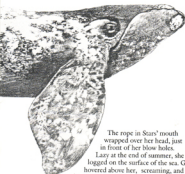
For the first time in a great while, that night, I felt happy. The evening was beautiful, the loveliest in days. The sun was warm with a late-afternoon, slow-bake feel. Summer sliding into dog days. The sun dazzled on the surface of the sea, which had only the slightest trace of a ripple on it. Breaking off these wind-waves, the light fractured into a thousand miniature sea-suns. I was totally taken in by the heat on my skin and the double brightness in the air. To starboard, we passed the Cape, and I felt like this shoreline was where I should be.

On all the trips I took out of Provincetown—two per day for a week—we never had trouble finding right whales, and I got so I could recognize individuals. There were probably only seven of them, but they almost began to seem common. The two that were the easiest to identify also exemplified the difficulties the species is having trying to make a comeback close to shore, in waters that are so near the urban populations of New England. They are having difficulties coexisting with humans already, and their numbers are still extremely low.

The two whales were a mother and calf. The mother, in fact, was almost famous among whale researchers. Named Stars, she was a calf born to Stripes (of course), a female photographed in Miami back in 1967. But it was a poignant scene. Stars had a rope through her mouth and wrapped around her head, the result of a tangle with a lobster pot or fish net. Once a whale gets tied up like this, it usually has trouble feeding. One right whale wore a rope for a year, growing more and more emaciated, until her ribs started to show, and she died.

Stormy has developed a technique for freeing whales from these ropes, and he was thinking about trying to free Stars. (I was hoping I could help him do it, but it didn't work out while I was there.) He has adapted the old whale's device of the drogue or bladder, developed on Nantucket in the original hunts that drove the right whales nearly to extinction in the north Atlantic. Moving in close, he attaches a float to the rope in the whale's mouth, and, when the creature tires from the drag, he moves in again to extricate it. It's dangerous sometimes, but exciting. So far, he's freed three right whales.

Other right whales have died from collisions with boats. One died near Cape Cod, and another (called Crease) in the Bay of Fundy had a gash that looked like a propeller had hit it. A calf, it had gobblets of blubber hanging from a bad cut.



The rope in Stars' mouth wrapped over her head, just in front of her blow holes.

Lazy at the end of summer, she hovered above her, screaming, and the water glowed molten in golds. As the sun lowered, flocks of purple and fuchsia bounced amid the golds. With an infinitely indolent move, like a submerged hippopotamus in the African heat, she lifted her head, opened her mouth slightly, and lunged slowly forward. She made a plaintive, whining moan, which seemed to catch and hang in the rich colors of the evening air. After a shallow dive, to get up momentum and rhythm, she rolled into a deep dive. Her back arched and slid through the water, and her flukes rose high. Broad as a boat's transom, they glistened with a silver patina of sea water, and then languished above the surface for one perfect, pendent moment. The crowd on the boat gasped in a chorus of oohs and aahs.

Then she slid out of sight, slick and silky. Under water, she gave a big push with her tail, as whales do to propel the dive, and left a pressure footprint on the surface, a round vitrescent mantle in the sea of gold.

I was struck by how much of her was mouth. The rope tied around the back of her head, near her blow holes, defined her mouth's size. At least one quarter, and maybe even a third, of her length was head. She seemed made to gape and gulp. It takes a mammoth mouth to sustain so much fat—the whales weigh about 60 tons. The question Stormy is researching is how efficiently the right whale filters the seas for food. He has two reasons for pursuing this question, one relating to whale's psychology and one relating to the whale's ecology. "My research is a little bizarre," he said in mock self-deprecation, "but it puts us very close to the mind of the whale and its critical decisions. How does it perceive its environment and the quality of its environment? Beyond that, it's a fundamental question about the future of the right whales in the North Atlantic: can they survive in an assaulted environment?"

About a year earlier, he had managed to get a hold of a complete rack of baleen from a right whale that stranded itself on Cape Cod. He was immensely proud of this baleen, and he beamed when he showed it to me, though it had begun to stink. He has invented a trough of water, into which he places the baleen. By pushing water through

the baleen, he wants to determine how well the right whale strains the seas for its food. "Colleagues say it filters plankton down to 1 mm, but I know that's wrong," he said. "It's filtering better than we know."

Stormy's research may help us understand why the right whale has had so much trouble rebounding in this century, when most other whales have. They may be trying to live in waters that, because of human abuse, are now marginal for them. As Stormy said, none of the patches of plankton in Cape Cod Bay now seem dense enough to support the right whales' estimated needs.

If the waters are less fertile for the whales, that might affect their reproductive abilities. Although the right whale has tremendous supplies of calories stored in its blubber, it does not live in cold waters, so the fat may serve some reproductive capacity. The calf of a right whale grows faster than any other whale in the first month. All the energy in the mother seems to go into her milk, and one theory is that right whale cows rest for two years between calves to build up their energy reserves after nursing. Stormy's research may help explain this calving cycle. More productive waters could mean more frequent calves.

"The first issues that arise with saving whales," he said, "are usually the hunting. Whaling—everyone throws energy into that. But the real tough questions are habitat, and that's the one I'd like to emphasize. Marshalling public energy is easy when you see whales dying in their own blood. But the issue with right whales will be joined when the habitat is lost. They aren't dying in crimson pools of blood anymore. They just quietly vanish. They'll die of malnutrition, or reproductive losses. We're talking habitat fitness and its effect on the fitness of a species."

I was having trouble keeping up in my note taking. Stormy was now talking so fast. I was glad I'd brought a tape recorder.

"The right whales are already in waters potentially marginal and insufficient. Now the Army Corps of Engineers has proposals for dredging near Stellwagen. Will dredging and sewage and toxics disrupt the whales' plankton patches down to a bare threshold, or disrupt the distribution of the patches so they're no longer spaced close enough?"

The waters off Cape Cod are anything but wilderness waters. They're full of boats—explored, exploited, and exhausted. The campaign to save most whales has been immensely successful, so far. The right whale is probably the last truly endangered whale. But it is a special and unique case. All the other whale species were easier to champion. Anyone could favor saving them—it meant no real sacrifice for Americans. It was easy to oppose Russian and Japanese and Norwegian whaling, and besides, most of the whales were in Antarctica or far at sea. But the right whale challenges us close to our own shores. It's right in Cape Cod, where we live. Here is the real test of our values. The issue is coming to a head in Cape Cod Bay under the threat from the Army Corps of Engineers. Stormy and the Center for Coastal Studies are lobbying for legislation to have Stellwagen Bank declared a marine wildlife refuge. The idea has been applied on land in our National Wildlife Refuge system, but has not yet been realized in our coastal waters.

Continued on page 8

Interdisciplinary Courses and the Teaching of Writing

by Richard Jensen

How can writing help students learn history, environmental science, or art? Is it feasible for the science or the philosophy teacher to make writing a central part of learning in their courses? Whose responsibility should writing be? These are a few of the tough questions at the center of what has come to be called the "cross-curricular movement." PLU, like most other colleges and universities, is in the first stages of examining the place of writing in the larger curriculum. Implementing a cross-curricular writing program may

be years away; yet, there does seem to be agreement on several key principles. Writing can and should play a significant role in the non-English curriculum, and, as an important corollary, writing must increasingly become a campus-wide responsibility, not simply an English department problem.

What intrigues me is the wider "responsibility" for writing, in particular the responsibility for writing instruction. How can the non-English curriculum help to teach our students what they need to know about writing? In part, the answer depends on what one thinks student writers most need to know. For example, one familiar answer is to demand that history or psychology teachers assign and "correct" more papers, paying particular attention to the grammar and punctuation. The familiar corner demand is for more—and tougher—English writing courses. Even if they worked, and I suspect they don't, such remedies miss the point; they address some

Lesson
Continued from page 7

Something else about the mouth of the right whale captivated me. In addition to the great size of whales, the huge mouth used to horrify our ancestors. The old myths about whales dwell obsessively on their mouths and bellies and reveal a fear that retains a modern relevance, however unaware of it we may have become.

In Christian iconography, the whale is associated with the punishment for sin. In Pieter Bruegel the Elder, one image of the Last Judgment figures the whale's open mouth as the gate of hell, the entrance for the damned, and its belly as hell.

The biblical story of Jonah, of course, is an extended meditation upon the belly of the whale—the "great fish" which came to "swallow up Jonah." Thrown overboard, Jonah says "the waters compassed me about, even to the soul; the depth closed me round about, the weeds wrapped about my head." Jonah finally "cried out of the belly of hell." Speaking from these depths became a genre in Christian literature, with innumerable poems written *de profundis*.

Even as late as Rudyard Kipling, the mouth of the whale continues to be a powerful artistic image. In the *Juan-So-Stories*, Kipling tells of a clever sailor swallowed by a whale in "How the Whale got his Throat." And of course, there is *Pinnocchio*.

I see in these images of the whale's mouth the expression of one of the primal Freudian terrors—being swallowed up. Through these oral nightmares, we seem to be expressing our fear of our loss of self, our fear of losing our identities in nature.

But also, there seems encoded in these stories and images a projected fear of the stomach and the flesh, as if we're afraid we might be swallowed by our own appetites. This is ironic in America, where obesity and eating are national pastimes. But the paradox, which is not a contradiction, is that we are also gripped by a pervasive

cultural *anorexia nervosa*, and the poor girls who starve themselves to death are simply the most conspicuous victims of our fear of our own stomachs.

I know it is fashionable nowadays to mock the impulse to see mysteries, whether spiritual or psychological, in nature. I know it is a kind of projection. But I also know that we are all responsible for finding our own meanings in nature. More than an indulgence we should tolerate, finding meaning in whales is, it seems to me, a virtual obligation, an emotional imperative. Though I have described Melville's treatment of whales in largely heroic terms, another emphatic strain in *Moby-Dick* is the exploration of the "mystic gestures" of the whale. In the last analysis, we don't know the whale. We have only our own responses. Writes Melville, "Dissect him how I may, then, I go but skin deep; I know him not, and never will."



Part of what I loved in Stormy was this lively sense of the whale's mystery. "We had a glimpse of the whales," he told the people on the boat. "But even researchers, we get maybe ten minutes out of, perhaps, a 40-year life in thousands of miles of ocean. Plus, there's a whole social structure we don't see. Maybe all we see is an atypical situation. We see a whale grabbing a breath. It's under the water most of the time. So we can't really be scientists."

For me, the wide curling mouth of the right whale, with its massive thick lips, expresses a wry smile. Here is the body we have despised and spurned, and after the evening trip with Stormy, I felt able to respond to some its secrets. The ponderous, slow right whale smirks at us out of the folds and mysteries of the flesh. ■

aspects of student writing, but ignore others. And worse, they distract us from more serious business. If writing curriculum reform is to be creative, not just reactive, we need to re-think traditional notions of what writing is, how it is learned, and how it is taught.

Consider, for instance, the traditional view of writing as a set of largely mechanical skills best taught in a "writing course," like PLU's "College English." In such a course, writing is isolated from its social surroundings reduced to "teachable" stages or elements, then studied, practiced and tested. What students write about, that is, the motive for writing, is less important than the exercise, the lesson. The hope is that what students learn in this concentrated practice will transfer to the writing they do "out there." What bothers me about this view of writing and writing instruction, besides its over-emphasis on mechanical "skills," is the way these courses isolate writers from the very language communities they hope to join. Learning to write is about skills, yes, but more than anything it is a complex social activity. In an important sense, to learn to write is to learn about language. And, the question is, where and how do people best learn about language? Psychologists and linguists tell us we learn little of what we know through self-conscious study. Most of what we learn, we learn implicitly, as we use language in particular situations, to communicate, to make sense of experience.

And so the premise of my title: that students can learn much of what they need to know about language and writing in team-taught, inter-disciplinary courses, like those in PLU's Integrated Studies Program. At their best, these courses should be dialectic and dialogue more than lecture and exam, so students find themselves in the midst of language. Which is to say they find themselves in the midst of linguistic and cultural traditions. As the physicist and the artist dispute the significance of Enlightenment "truths," students learn art and science, but they also learn about the nature of "truth." How truths get discovered or created. They learn about the nature of intellectual inquiry: how different "communities of inquiry"—sciences, philosophy, social sciences—represent different ways of looking at and talking about the world; how we create and then live with our controlling models of experience; how the very models which provide insight can blind us to other aspects of what we study.

And they learn something more. In the inter-disciplinary course, as students listen to disputes over facts and the interpretation of facts, they hear how we live with ideas, and with each other. At their best, thoughtful scholars speak with care and with some sense of humor, alert to the tentativeness of their own wisdom. Hopefully, as students listen, and as they speak and write, they begin to appreciate that language is about power, yes, but it is also about responsibility, social practice. In time, with a few years of guided practice, they find a richer sense of purpose: clear, honest exposition is always more persuasive than rhetorical trickery, and of voice: effective writing is passionate yet not strident, confident yet not pompous. These are, after all, qualities we hope for in mature, useful writing, no matter what the subject.



All of this is by way of saying that language—even the specialized language of philosophy or history or literary criticism—is never merely instrumental, but is constitutive as well. Worlds and selves are not made of words, but words mediate our experience of the world. Forms are social and cultural constructs, shared territory. We gain knowledge when we learn facts through lecture and textbook, but most of what we learn comes from living actively with people. But this means students in the inter-disciplinary course must participate actively; they must write often, in a variety of situations and modes: speculative writing done in course journals; in-class writing, to focus and extend what has been said; exploratory essays, meant for classmates as well as instructors. The point is not that these writers should try to be historians or physicists, so that we should judge what they write as though they were. Instead, writing becomes a way to try out the roles, to play in language games—a serious play, but play nonetheless.

Again, I don't mean to ignore basic "writing skills" or the mechanics of writing. The code makes its social demands of us, too. And, clearly, most inter-disciplinary programs, including ISP, are not yet prepared to address every aspect of writing. No, we won't abolish the traditional one-semester "writing course." At least not yet. But neither should we kid ourselves about where and how our students learn what they need to know—or even what's most important—about writing. If "cross-curricular" initiatives are to have meaning, they must move writing, and writing instruction, out into the larger community or "communities." James Reither puts it like this: "Writing and what writers do during writing cannot be artificially separated from the social rhetorical situations in which writing gets done, from the conditions that enable writings to do what they do, and from the motives writers have for doing what they do" (621). That must be the significance of any inter-disciplinary writing program. And it is the challenge. ■

Notes

Reither, James. "Writing and Knowing: Toward Re-defining the Writing Process" (*College English* 47, 1985).

Recent Humanities Publications

Joanne Brown:

"Daniel Marsh" in Something More Than Human: Biographies of Leaders in American Methodist Higher Education.

ed. Charles Cole, Nashville, 1986.

Daniel L. Marsh (1880-1968) was many things: a minister of God, a poet, a husband and father, a gardener, an eloquent public speaker, an idealist, a realist, an optimist, an author, an educator, and a man of great physical and moral strength with a wonderful sense of humor. But Marsh favored one characterization given him—"the friendly president of a friendly University"—and, this is how he is best remembered, as the man who "took a moldering collection of brownstones . . . in 1926 and built a multiversity," his beloved Boston University. Marsh's vision and his superb administrative skills propelled B.U. into the ranks of the country's top-rated institutions. He demanded no less of the faculty, trustees and students than he did from himself—dedication to the ideal of a united university and commitment to work for the reality of that ideal. Included in the ideal were not only freedom of thought but also the Methodist heritage of learning, virtue and piety.

The image which emerges from a study of Daniel Marsh is complex. He is often praised for his discipline and willingness to work. He is described as a good friend, and a fair opponent who was always clear about where he stood on issues. On the other hand, Marsh was also somewhat of an autocrat who demanded things be done his way. He stood firm in his opinions, even if they were unpopular. Whether one agreed with him or not, there was no denying that Marsh was a superb administrator and a shrewd business person. But it was Marsh himself—his sense of humor, his physical and mental and spiritual strength, his love for "this" university, his uncompromising principles, and his optimism—which gave B.U. its life.

Marsh was a strong proponent of the Social Gospel. He believed that people needed to be conscious that they were co-workers with God in all that they did. They needed to work to alleviate not only the symptoms of society's wrongs of hunger, poverty, drunkenness—but also to eliminate the causes of injustice of every sort. The church should be directing the great social movements of the day. Marsh worked and wrote against all forms of prejudice—against women, blacks, Jews, Roman Catholics, and immigrants—asserting that one could be a Christian and a radical. He sought to instill ideals into a world that seemed to have forgotten to look beyond itself. He used all of his varied gifts to give reality to those ideals.

Thomas J. Campbell:

Richard Cumberland's THE WHEEL OF FORTUNE: A Critical Edition.

New York, 1987.

If not among the most riveting of English plays (and only a seriously besotted sentimentalist would hazard such a claim), Cumberland's 1795 comedy *The Wheel of Fortune* is nevertheless a fascinating document as an index of a curious shift in late 18th-century dramatic taste. When he began writing for the theatre in 1761, Cumberland had embraced a 60-year old tradition of sentimental drama, a formulaic genre that dictated, in play after humorless play, the stage triumph of innate human goodness over pernicious vice. As long as this sort of entertainment was fashionable, Cumberland, prolific and opportunistic scribbler that he was, ground out plays according to pattern, even gaining a touch of real fame when his amusing sentimental comedy *The Wer Indian* racked up the longest run of the 1771 season at Drury Lane's Theatre Royal.

But by 1795 things had changed; theatres had vastly expanded both their size and production capabilities, and audiences had begun to demand something new on stage—sensation, extravaganza, melodrama. Always as preternaturally alert to promising new ideas and fashions as he was overly sensitive to charges of "borrowing" these novelties for use in his own plays, Cumberland quickly responded to the public demand. He drew heavily on the popular sensationalist dramas of the German playwright Kotzebue (a writer very much *en vogue* in England during the 1790's) and devised a canny marriage between the existing sentimental formula—Virtue causes Happiness, Vice, Misery—and the new strain of melodrama in Kotzebue's more piquant moral dilemmas and unabashed emotionalism. The result was *The Wheel of Fortune*, a sentimental play with a significantly altered atmosphere and tone, one more darkly pathetic, melancholy, almost tragic in its intensification of emotion and psychological penetration. Satisfying as it did the new taste for keener thrills on stage, the play succeeded enormously, and with John Philip Kemble in the leading role, it held the stage for over twenty years.

The critical edition, which draws on the MS, seven London and two Dublin editions, and the promptbook copy used and marked by Kemble, is a volume in the Garland series of Restoration and 18th-Century texts *Satire & Sense*.

Taiping Chang:
"The Wonders of Chinese Bronzes" in
Early China.
Spring, 1987

Ancient Chinese bronzes, which date back to 4,000 - 3,000 B.C., were not only ware, working tools, and ritual vessels, they were also military weapons, musical instruments, and decorative objects. These metallurgical wonders are invaluable cultural relics, for bronzes bearing inscriptions serve as testaments of ancient Chinese history. They provide reliable sources that corroborate historical events, and the various writing forms inscribed on their surfaces indicate the evolution of the Chinese writing system.

The ancient bronze-making artists demonstrated a very advanced technique of embellishing bronzes. Different designs have different significance. For instance, a ritual bronze vessel often had a powerful or awesome motif such as the interlaced dragons design. A dagger-axe might be decorated with a fierce animal head. With their uniquely designed shapes, elaborately conceived decorations, and their skill of execution, Chinese bronzes are the embodiment of the ingenuity of the Chinese craftsman, and show the greatness of ancient Chinese civilization.



Walter Pilgrim:
"Luke: History and Mission" in Bible
and Mission.
Augsburg, 1986.

This volume was prepared under the direction of the Institute for Mission, USA, a kind of Lutheran "think-tank" for new strategies to serve the mission of the church. The book is innovative in that Part I has studies on biblical perspectives for mission, while Part II contains practical reflections on life-settings of divergent congregations in mission.

My contribution examines Luke Acts. I sketch some basic themes in Luke's double volume "history" apropos to the modern context in which modern churches must work. The foundational mission of Jesus concentrates on good news to the poor and marginalized, while the continuing history of the church in Acts involves apostolic preaching and mission. Contrary to many scholars, I argue that this includes the church's potentially subversive attitude to the state. Many have called Acts a Roman apology. They say it was written in part to show that Christianity was not a movement dangerous to the Roman empire. Christians were responsible citizens, Paul cherished his Roman citizenship, and on many occasions the authorities declared Paul and other Christians innocent of political crimes.

While it is true that Acts does not portray Christians as revolutionaries working against the state, Luke makes it clear that Christians obey God, not Caesar. That in itself sets them on a collision course with imperial authority. Even more, the values preached and lived by the followers of Jesus "turn the world upside-down" by their insistence on God's concern for the poor and suffering, and thus clash with the old values of power and control. Hence Luke's picture of church and state is not one of peaceful coexistence, but of constant tension in which Christians remain potentially subversive subjects.

Contributors

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