



Windhover

A Journal of Christian Literature

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Alan Berecka

**STROKE AND DISTANCE:
THE EDEN GOLF AND COUNTRY**

Adam made it to 17, a short par 5.
His drive sat square in the middle
of the checker-grained fairway.
His lie was perfect. The Sky Caddie
told him he had 235 left to the green,
215 to the water, 220 to clear the hazard.
As he addressed the ball, preparing
to lay up, a serpent slid between his feet,
coiled around his ball, and looked up
saying, "Go for the green; God does."
Adam stood startled. He had never seen,
let alone named, any species of talking snakes,
but he was even more surprised by the notion
of shooting something other than par.
He never had. There were no handicaps
in paradise. He thought about it,
and asked the snake, "Why?" "Because,
you can." Adam turned, placed his 7 iron
back

into the quiver and pulled out a 3 wood.
His heart beat in a rhythm he had never heard.
He muscled up, choked the club's grip.
He sped the tempo of his swing. The extra torque
forced him a bit off kilter. He struck the ball
thin, but, having known only success,
he watched it fly with high hopes until it fell
short, dropped in the drink and kicked up
a terrible spray. Adam reached by reflex
to his hip for an extra ball only to realize
that he wore no pants. The serpent slipped
into the rough and laughed like hell,
while the man stood there dead
certain that he would have to pay
some type of penalty.

D.S. Martin

AN AVERSION TO FILM

There is death in the camera
—C.S. Lewis, “On Stories”

The room grows black & a beam from the back
projects monochromatic film images
Jack Lewis has been dragged out to a movie It’s 1938
He squirms in his seat not wanting to look
There’s an irrelevant young woman in shorts
He splutters *She’s not in the book*
In the story he knows the three cohorts
(minus the girl) are about to suffocate
in the mummified kings’ tomb creating
a mythopoetic atmosphere of claustrophobic doom
But here it’s exchanged for the cinematic thrill
of instant earthquake & a subterranean volcanic boom

In 1956 he suspects another novel he’s read
as a film has been undermined
by having a love story intertwined

What do you think he’s said
(considering his knowledge of the Norse)
of the depiction by Disney of dwarfs?

What do you think he’d think of two
of his own characters twisted into rivals & fighting
or a teen love scene altering his own writing?

Barbara Fryrear

LOT'S WIFE

He says our days here loom like the wings of a moth,
fragile and impermanent. We must trek beyond the known
horizon, away from this beloved, accursed place
out into the frigid darkness of a desert night.

How many nights have I snuggled
against his silences and his lies?
How many suns must I see as I trudge
in this man's wake?

There's the Sodom Galleria under that dark cloud.
They sell diamonds and rubies and emeralds
big as swan's eggs, and tangles of necklaces,
bracelets and pendants. Garnets and amethysts
loll on the counters. It makes my mouth water.

This inertia, as though my feet were part
of the ground I'm loath to leave, I feel it in my veins.
He says there's crystal running in them. That I should
long for higher things. Metamorphose.
Not make such mournful eyes.

He says he sees for me a future shining white.
I see low tide on a dead sea.

Angela Alaimo O'Donnell

SAINT SALIERE

*I absolve you all... for I am your patron saint:
the Patron Saint of Mediocrity.*

—Peter Shaffer, *Amadeus*

As if a bitter tongue could taste honey,
bile rising from a bitter heart—
the ear, a vessel made for art,
were pricked with pride, waxed with envy.
As if a monk could love the world
and sing the flesh's aria,
a blind man see the sun unfurl,
the night's starry *Gloria*.
As if a saint who had no skin
could feel the coals beneath his feet,
a sinning soul who claimed no sin
could own the joy of sin's defeat.
As if desire could serve for love,
the crow become the dove.

Mary Cimarolli

A FURNISHED MIND

There is an eastern European legend, possibly of Hasidic origin, that thirty-two righteous men sustain the moral universe. If this number drops below thirty-two, the legend goes, the moral universe is certain to collapse.

It has been my good fortune to have known for many years, at least one of those thirty-two good men, Paul Wells Barrus, as my college professor at East Texas State University (now Texas A&M University-Commerce) and years later, improbably, as my parish priest. Paul Barrus died on the first day of the new millennium at the age of ninety-eight. He had never married. He had outlived most of his family and old friends, yet at the end, he was surrounded by people who loved and esteemed him.

Although no longer here to shoulder his portion of the moral universe, I do not worry about its imminent collapse because Paul Barrus touched so many lives, inspiring so many people to rise above their ordinariness and to become, each in turn, supporting shoulders.

His intrinsic qualities overshadowed his physical characteristics. He never called attention to himself, but people gravitated toward him. Formal in speech and manner, he was gentle and self-assured. And somehow, charismatic. Memory of the early and traumatic death of his beloved mother, Daisy, shortly after the birth of his infant brother when he was six years old remained with him until the end of his life. When his father remarried shortly after his wife's death, six-year-old Paul chose to live with his maternal grandparents while his father took the infant with him to the new marriage.

When he was a child, he wondered about the rows of older men who sat day after day in the courthouse yard, staring dully into space or whittling without end or purpose. They had come to the evening of life, he told us, with unfurnished minds. He contrasted these "pathetic whittlers" with a wonderful old gentleman, a veteran of the Grand Army of the Republic, who came to his Winterset Iowa elementary school regularly on Lincoln's birthday to tell the children the story of Gettysburg:

We always looked for him at the public library after classes, and we children involuntarily softened our footsteps and spoke in whispers when we saw him there, rapt in his reading. He was alive and eternally young in the world of ideas. Throughout the long years he had been busy furnishing his mind.

My professor could have been talking about himself.

I met Dr. Barrus at college registration in 1969. He was director of the English Department, and I, a returning student after a seventeen year absence from academia, a widowed parent with small children, a commuter, and a person with low self-esteem who hoped that going back to school would lend some legitimacy and purpose to my life. In a crowded room, he noticed me struggling with my course schedule, trying to make sense of catalogue “college speak,” and he came over to where I sat. He helped me in such a way that I felt I had figured it out for myself and that there was hope for me. I instantly liked him and felt drawn to him. This small kindness he extended to me that day illustrates in part, I think, why he had so many good friends. Myriad small kindnesses and many of larger dimension extended without thought of reciprocation or gain, gained for him a host of dedicated admirers.

He sometimes spoke of the passion he had to teach, and told a few of us one day how it was that he got such an early start as a teacher.

“In those days, you see, a special course for teaching in grade school was offered in high school. I took the course, but I was too young when I graduated to be given the teaching certificate. According to state law, one had to be at least eighteen. It so happened though that there was a shortage of country school teachers that summer I was seventeen, and so they issued me my certificate.”

He began teaching in a one-room country school in Iowa, and loved it. He had only six pupils. A coal strike that fall left the tiny schoolhouse without heat. In an interview with a former student, he said,

I used to have to get to school early to gather up kindling and have a good fire in the big old stove. I walked a half mile from where I boarded. And the snow that winter was hip deep. The youngest little girl and the youngest little boy, who were in the first grade, would come on their ponies, and they'd be almost frozen. The little girl used to be so cold she was crying. I would hold her on my knees around the fire until she thawed out. We would gather around the organ which one of the older girls could play, and how we used to sing!

Among his possessions when he died were a few letters from some of those first students and hundreds of letters from relatives and friends from all walks of life; many bearing 1, 2, or 3 cent

cancelled postage stamps. From a short, unpublished piece Paul Barrus wrote in 1990, one can see the value he placed on the almost lost art of letter writing and understand why he became such a prolific practitioner of this art:

Letter writing is essentially a civilizing practice in a world more and more addicted to insincerity, self-gratification, and narcissism . . . I cannot spare a single friend—those who are still with me and those who are gone. To bring them into my study, I merely read their letters, some written 50 or more years ago . . . Letters have a kind of immortality. Let us carry them close to our hearts.

After his conversion to Catholicism, Army service in WWII, and the completion of his doctoral studies at the University of Iowa, he came to Texas in an effort to avoid the severe Iowa winters. At an ETSU gathering to honor him a few years ago, he said: “I arrived in Commerce, Texas during one of the worst ice storms in the town’s history . . . I came to remain two years and stayed on the faculty for twenty-seven.” He often said that what kept him in Texas so long was the “natural courtesy of the students.” He had also won over the townspeople of Commerce, some of whom were, in the beginning, very skeptical of someone who was “both a Yankee *and* a Catholic.”

In a sense, this proved to be ironic. Long before Vatican II, Paul Barrus was deeply interested in people of all faiths and of no faith. He was truly ecumenical long before most of us had heard that word spoken.

Through my own many years and several moves, I have held on to all my notes from his classes. From my first day’s notes from my first Dr. Barrus class, *The History and Development of the English Language*, I read, “Watch your language. *Say what you mean*. You tend to descend to the level of your vocabulary.”

He unfailingly stood outside his classroom door to greet and welcome us before class, the only professor to do so. He engaged students fully at every opportunity, addressing them always as Miss Hill or Mr. Jones, never as Betsy or Bob. Through one undergraduate and three graduate classes with him, I never heard him once embarrass a student, although a friend told me that he’d once heard our professor address a perpetually late student as “the Late Miss Miller.” One had the sense, always, that he liked students and loved teaching.

Once he came to my defense when another professor, who knew me only slightly, was about to block my bid for a graduate

assistantship. I learned this, not from Paul Barrus, but from a third professor who had been at the meeting. I got the job, and it made all the difference in my life from that point on. After I graduated, I taught English at Richland College for twenty years, often drawing on experiences I had had in his classes. Many of his former students say that they often found themselves becoming Paul Barrus in their own classrooms.

The class I enjoyed most was his *Studies in Emerson*. The first extended essay we read, *Nature*, was, to put it mildly, difficult for me. I decided to drop the course, but he encouraged me to stay. I did, and it was one of the most rewarding experiences of my life. He had us write essays in response to Emerson's essays, and to collect favorite quotations which he called "Emerson's Lusters." I collected well over a hundred, some of which I still find occasion to use, such as this one which seems to describe my dear professor best: "The true teacher can be known by this, that he deals out to the people his life—life passed through the fire of thought."

With Paul Barrus, we studied Thoreau's belief in the latent perfectibility of mankind, Hawthorne's and Melville's belief that depravity lurks in the soul of man, and Mark Twain's disillusionment and skepticism about that same human nature. Then he challenged us to decide for ourselves what we believed about our own human nature. Most of us had already figured out what *he* thought about it, but the challenge was a moral and spiritual awakening for many of us.

He was also a great Latinist and a Milton scholar. During a hot Texas summer semester, it was not unusual to find his classroom chock-full of aspiring Milton students. "You can make your life a work of art," he told us, and we believed him.

While I was his student, I knew nothing of his life outside of the classroom. Many years *after* I was his student, I went into a Catholic church near my home one day, spiritually empty and heartsick about the way my life was going. I looked up at the altar and recognized that the priest saying Mass was my old friend and professor. It was obvious to me that he had recently been very ill. I learned that after his retirement from teaching, he had served as a deacon in the Roman Catholic Church for a few years, and then this gentle man who was born June 29, 1902, was ordained a priest on December 16, 1978, and his deferred dream had become a reality.

During the twenty three year span of his priesthood, he was assigned to four parishes and always found time, among his other duties, to teach English in their parochial schools. No longer able to walk at his last school, a devoted parishioner drove him from the rectory to the classroom or to the church in a donated golf cart he had named "Mass Transit."

He had long worried that he would be left alone as he grew older and more disabled, but he was fortunate enough to have many friends who came to his aid. Chiefly, there was Father Henry Petter, the younger priest who became like a son to him. I was deeply touched by the tenderness and love with which this young man cared for the old one until the end. Through several transfers from church to church over the years, Father Henry insisted that the older priest be allowed to accompany him because, as he explained to his bishop, Paul Barrus still had much to offer and was not a candidate for a nursing home.

At their last parish, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Church in Plano, when Father Paul became too disabled to say Mass in the church, Father Henry allowed him to say Mass in the rectory on Fridays for those of us who chose to come to him when he could no longer come to us. In the dining room of the rectory, he also taught small classes in Flannery O'Connor short stories and in vocabulary building.

And to the end, Professor/Father Paul Barrus remained one of the thirty-two righteous men who sustain the moral universe, and a great teacher with a furnished mind.

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POETRY

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FICTION, NON-FICTION, AND REVIEWS

Albert Haley
Mary Cimarolli

Jeanne Murray Walker
Michael Hugh Lythgoe

ARTWORK

Philip M. Dunham

James Edward Talbot