



## NEWSLETTER

Fall 2008

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### Director's Corner

Troy Jollimore, Philosophy

We herewith present the first tree-friendly issue of the *Humanities Center Newsletter*. Yes, we are boldly stepping into the twenty-first century and going paperless. We hope that you like it; but as always, we are open to your comments and suggestions. (And of course, if you are one of those people who just *hate* reading things on a computer screen, you can always print out a copy of the newsletter for your own use – we promise we won't tell anybody.)

Our theme this year is "Regarding Beauty," and we have a number of events lined up that we are excited to tell you about. This issue also includes my "Director's Statement" regarding the theme – again, comments and responses are appreciated! Finally, for our readers' enjoyment, we have included a number of responses to last year's call for "Desert Island Books" which, due to my negligence, were *not* distributed last year, but have been languishing on my hard drive for some months. My sincere apologies to those of you who responded for taking so long to get these into a newsletter. Fortunately, the discussion of books, at least in my humble opinion, remains ever timely.

### Upcoming Events of Note

#### *President's Visiting Scholar:*

Our President's Visiting Scholar, Elaine Scarry, will be with us in late October. On Wednesday, **October 22** she will speak on "Beauty Restored: The Moral Pull of the Beautiful" (7:30pm, PAC 134). A reception will follow in the Humanities Center Gallery, Trinity 100. And on Thursday, **October 23** we invite you to join us for a conversation with Professor Scarry, during which she will answer questions about her lecture and other work. (Humanities Center Lounge, Trinity 126, 3:00 to 5:00.)

### *Other guest lecturers:*

Early October will see two talks connected to the University Art Gallery's show *Nature & Spirit: The Landscape Photographs of Ansel Adams*. On **October 2** Michael Adams will present "Ansel Adams, A Son's Perspective." And on **October 9** Byron Wolfe will speak on "Yosemite and Beyond: Revisiting Ansel Adams' Singular Vision." Both talks begin at 5pm in the Humanities Center Gallery, Trinity 100. The Adams photographs will be on display in the University Art Gallery from October 2 to October 30.

Wednesday, **October 15**, Stephen Berry will present the Cowden Memorial Lecture, "House of Abraham: Lincoln, the Todds, and the National Family" (7:30pm in PAC 134). A reception will follow in Humanities Center Gallery, Trinity 100.

Thursday, **October 16**. A lecture by Michael Bitz of Columbia University, in connection with *Manga Power! The World Through a Child's Eyes*. (See "Art Gallery Shows and Events," below.) Reception to follow. Trinity 100, 5:00.

Thursday, **November 13**. Koichi Watanabe, Department of Education, Fukushima University, Japan, will speak on "A Child's Eye: The Meaning of Bodies as Seen Through the Pictorial World of Children." Trinity 100, 5:00.

### *Symposia, Tertulias, and Talks by CSUC Faculty:*

Friday, **October 3**. Andrew Flescher of Religious Studies will present "Bringing Religion to the Public Square in the Context of the Separation of Church and State: Barack Obama's Endorsement of Faith-Based Initiatives." 3:00, Trinity 100/126.

Wednesday, **November 5**. Jessica Clark of the History Department will speak on "Mussolini's Roman History" 7:30pm, PAC 134. A reception will follow in Trinity 100.

Friday, **November 7**: Kyle Wiley Pickett, conductor of the North State Symphony, will speak on beauty and music, in connection with the Symphony's November 15 performance of works by Beethoven and Schoenberg. 3:00, Trinity 100/126.

Friday, **December 12**. "New Yorker Cartoon Caption Contest Tertulia." Help us kick off the holiday season with this special tertulia, at which the collective intelligence of the Faculty of Humanities and Fine Arts will be called upon to come up with amusing captions for one of those famously whimsical New Yorker cartoons. Refreshments will be served.

### *Performances and Readings:*

Tuesday, **October 28**. A poetry reading by Manuel Paul Lopez. Part of the Writer's Voice Series. 7:30pm, Trinity 100.

Wednesday, **October 29**. Tim Miller performs *Glory Box*. 7:30pm at the 1078 Gallery (820 Broadway).

Thursday, **November 6**. Peggy Shumaker will read new poems & selections from her memoir, *Just Breathe Normally*. Part of the Writer's Voice Series. 7:30pm Trinity 100.

Thursday, **November 13**. A poetry reading by contributors to the anthology *Cadence of Hooves: A Celebration of Horses*. 7:30 pm at the 1078 Gallery (820 Broadway).

### *Art Gallery Shows and Events:*

*Apropos Appropriation*. Artists: Marion Bronson, Richard Whitehead, Elizabeth Newman Kuiper, Darice McGuire and David Sutherland. Also *PHOTOS (untitled)* by Peter Hogue; *Small Collections* (photographs) by Jason Tannen. Humanities Center Gallery, Trinity 100 and Hallway. Now through **October 9**.

*Manga Power! The World Through a Child's Eyes*. Curated by Masami Toku, Art and Art History Humanities Center Gallery, Trinity 100 and Hallway, **Oct. 14 – Nov. 20**.

*David Johnson@Eighty: A Retrospective (1947-2008)* Humanities Center Gallery, Trinity 100 and Hallway. Dec. 4 Reception 5-7 (artist's talk at 6). **December 2-17**.

Friday, **October 17**. Far East Fusion! Art of Food and Fashion Part I (Tea Ceremony & Kimono Auction) 5:30–7:30pm, Humanities Center Gallery. (Advance tickets: \$10/Students \$5, Art Dept., Ayres 107)

Friday, **November 14**. Far East Fusion! Art of Food and Fashion II: Sushi Demo & Contest of Sushi as Art 5:30—7:30 p.m. Advance tickets: General \$10/Students \$5 (Art Dept., Ayres 107). Sushi demonstrations and sushi tastings, and a sushi as art exhibit and competition. For information e-mail Dr. Masami Toku at mtoku@csuchico.edu.

*University Film Series – “Regarding Beauty” films:*

(All films are in Ayres 106 at 7:30. For the complete UFS schedule please see <http://www.csuchico.edu/hfa/hc/filmseries.html>)

*Rashomon*. 1950, Japan. Directed by Akira Kurosawa. Hosted by Rob Davidson, English. **Tuesday, October 21**.

*L'avventura (The Adventure)*. (1960, Italy) Directed by Michelangelo Antonioni. Hosted by Troy Jollimore, Philosophy. **Tuesday, October 28**.

*The History Boys* (2006, U.K.) Directed by Alan Bennett. Hosted by Laura Nice, Humanities Program, for the Phi Alpha Theta History Club. **Tuesday, December 2**.

*Sawdust and Tinsel* (1953, Sweden) Directed by Ingmar Bergman. Hosted by Peter Hogue, emeritus, English. **Tuesday, December 9**.

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## Director's Statement: "Regarding Beauty"

*The impulse of modern art is the desire to destroy beauty.*

Barnett Newman

There are perhaps two kinds of academic: those who are vaguely embarrassed by the question of beauty, and those who are acutely embarrassed by that question. The methods of intellectual analysis, so well suited (one would like to think) to exploring other areas, strike many of us as just *wrong*—too cold, too objective, too detached—for the task of coming to terms with the beautiful. Beauty, it is thought, is not to be theorized about but experienced, apprehended, lived. Some would go further, and question whether we should even allow ourselves to *talk* about beauty. At the end of the day, isn't one's experience of beauty a fundamentally private matter? Does it not demean the experience, somehow, to try to share it with others?

And isn't it, anyway, nothing more than a matter of mere opinion? The idea that 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder' has been with us for centuries, but enjoyed a particularly high degree of popularity in the twentieth century. For much of this century, the humanities and social sciences were dominated by a deep skepticism about objective values of all sorts—an attitude that left little room for the thought that beauty could constitute a real presence in the world, and thus be an appropriate subject for academic discourse and exploration (as opposed to, say, a certain sort of psychological reaction—a *symptom*—that needed only to be explained away).

This sort of attitude flies in the face of a long Western tradition of theorizing about beauty, one that extends from Plato through Kant and into the nineteenth century. And it contradicts, too, the sort of reverence for beauty expressed by poets through the ages (until our own beauty-phobic age, whose poets want their work to be anything *but* beautiful). "Beauty is truth, truth beauty," wrote Keats. "That is all ye know on earth, and all ye need to know." Far from identifying the two, few thinkers of our time would even agree to the existence of a strong relation between truth and beauty—except, perhaps, for those postmodernists and self-styled conceptual revolutionaries who would want to discard them both as elements of the same meretricious delusion. Beauty, according to this camp, is nothing more than a sop to convention, the expression of the preferences of the powers-that-be, and so in the end merely a means to political (or at any rate philosophical) oppression.

I can't help, though, but find this view somewhat naïve. The claim that beauty and truth are illusions that can both simply be discarded is as tidy and simplistic, and thus just as unlikely to be correct, as the view that the two are not only supreme goods, but identical, so that there is thus no possibility of their conflicting. What is more worrying, again, is the very real possibility that both truth and beauty matter greatly, and yet there is no simple or straightforward relation between them—and thus, no guarantee that the two will always be in harmony. After all, some quite wonderful things (people, for instance) can be beautiful; but some quite wonderful people are *not*, it seems, beautiful, at least on the surface; and some absolutely awful things have been found by some to be beautiful as well. (Think of the Italian Futurist movement, or of composer Karlheinz Stockhausen's comment regarding the 9/11 attacks.)

And isn't it true, after all, that beauty clouds the mind? That it prevents us from seeing clearly, moving us to focus on shallow surface details as opposed to deeper, less easily discernible realities? At the very least, we ought to acknowledge that the appreciation of beauty *sometimes* encourages, and rewards, shallowness, fuzzy thinking, and downright stupidity. The social commentator Farrah Fawcett surely has a point when

she claims that “The reason the all-American boy prefers beauty over brains is that the all-American boy can see better than he can think.”

And yet . . . in the end we all care about beauty in our daily lives, in one instantiation or another. Our advertising and popular culture are of course full of it, albeit in its most sexualized and commercialized forms. Philosophers and scientists, committed to abstraction, may pretend to ignore the relentless daily onslaught of images of impossibly gorgeous faces and bodies; but they spend their days searching for beautiful ideas, beautiful equations, beautiful theories. A great many of our decisions—more, perhaps, than we would like to admit—are made on the basis of what we find pretty, aesthetically pleasing, attractive; and what are these words but euphemisms for the love of beauty, the love that, among many intellectuals, dare not speak its name? Let us not forget that Plato, for all his obsession with the vast metaphysical discrepancies between appearance and reality, nonetheless found himself unable to refuse to believe that the Beautiful was, ultimately, identical with the Good.

It is rumored that there exists a third type of academic, one who remains unembarrassed by the question of beauty, and who is willing to discuss these matters openly, seriously, creatively, and even playfully. I invite you, during the upcoming year, to aspire to that ideal, to attend the Humanities Center’s events and to take part in our ongoing conversations, during which I fully expect to hear people say many things that are beautiful, some that are good, and—let us hope—at least a couple that are true.

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## Desert Island Books

*The task was to provide a list of books one would choose to have on hand, were one to be exiled to a desert island. The thought was that deep and important truths about the character of our colleagues would be thus revealed. Readers may judge for themselves to what extent this has been achieved. (It will be noted that two titles appear by Michael Crichton, only one by Proust. On the other hand, Proust's monumental novel is mentioned three times, on three distinct lists. But where, one must ask, is Moby Dick? Pride and Prejudice? The Sun Also Rises? And is the Ashley Book of Knots really as fortifying as Professor Easton suggests?)*

*As will be noted, several respondents provided not just lists, but essays attempting to justify their lists. There was, too, much cheating, with multiple titles being grouped together, or with the use of such devices as 'honorable mentions' to extend the length of the list. One cannot resist noting that the sole respondent from outside HFA was, in this regard, the worst offender, supplying five lists of five books each. This may seem excessive – though it should be admitted that the current Humanities Center Director is still struggling to reduce his list down to double digits. In the end, he might just have to give in and buy a Kindle.*

### Andy Flescher, Religious Studies

Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*  
Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*  
Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*  
Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*  
Heller, *Catch 22*

Honorable mention: Two books by Michael Crichton: *Jurassic Park* and *The Great Train Robbery*

### Joel Zimbelman, Acting Dean, HFA:

Here's my list of books for the desert island. My criteria were a) I could not have read most of it before; b) I had to have it on my shelf waiting to read. I'm not giving justifications, other than to say that the authors or the subjects just interest me.

Marcel Proust, *a la recherche du temps perdu* (I'm actually starting this one next week before the shipwreck)  
Jagdish Bhagwati, *In Defense of Globalization*  
Robert Hughes, *Goya*  
Simon Schama, *Rembrandt's Eyes*  
Kermit Hall, ed. *The Oxford Companion to the Supreme Court of the United States*

## Jeanne Clark, English

William Stafford. *The Way It Is: New & Selected Poems*

Denise Levertov. *Breathing the Water*

I return to both of these collections for their quiet presence and responsiveness to what is small and daily; for the ways the poems bear witness, expressing ideas as both intimate and visionary; and for the poets' anti-war activism evidenced in the poems' subjects and voices.

Charles Wright. *Negative Blue: Later and Selected Poems*

This selection of poems from the third of Wright's poetic trilogies—Chickamauga, Black Zodiac, and Appalachia—continues to reveal what the contemporary poetic line can do musically. Both Wright and Levertov prove the lyrical possibilities in the free verse line and stanza. I delight in the marriage of Wright's interest in art/literature/music with his intimate attention to landscape.

Emily Dickinson. *The Poems of Emily Dickinson (Reading Edition)*

"If I read a book and it makes my whole body so cold no fire can ever warm me, I know that is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is poetry. These are the only ways I know about it. Is there any other way?" (Emily Dickinson). Exactly. Reading Dickinson is that visceral and that necessary.

David Lee. *The Porcine Canticles, Day's Work, and My Town*

I'm cheating a bit here, in that I've listed three Dave Lee titles; however, the three form a trilogy with each book's construction necessary to the whole. In other words, collecting poems from the three books wouldn't begin to capture the machinery of this contemporary epic of the American West. Inspired by the poems of Milton and Dante and the hard-luck stories of rural life in Southern Utah, Dave Lee has created an epic song of common talk. And he always reminds me that hell can be an uproariously funny place.

## Matt Thomas, Political Science

5 Books I Think I Still Like:

- Evelyn Waugh, *Brideshead Revisited* – I think that this taught me a lot about class differences, religion, betrayal, getting older, and most importantly, friendship.
- J.D. Salinger, *Franny and Zoey* – I think this book presented me with a picture of sophistication.
- Richard Brautigan, *Trout Fishing in America* – I'm sure this wasn't about trout fishing, and I think it was wildly creative.
- Ernest Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast* – An unabashed advertisement for moving to Paris, writing fiction, and enjoying life.
- Eugene O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey into Night* – I remember this being about both the beauty and the horror of family, with plenty of pain and suffering.

5 Fiction Books:

- Richard Powers, *The Gold Bug Variations* – The intertwined stories, coupled via DNA, seemed genius, and his ability to write a sentence amazes me.
- Graham Greene, *The End of the Affair* – One of the saddest books I've ever read, without being overly (or overtly) sentimental.
- Robert Penn Warren, *All The King's Men* – Warren could go toe-to-toe with Powers in a sentence-writing contest, and the fury that he brings to this larger-than-life story is palpable.
- Homer, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. Perhaps I'm cheating to take both as one choice, but they are a pair, and for me, one of the most fantastic adventure stories ever.

• P.D. Eastman, *Go, Dog. Go!* – “Do you like my hat?” “I do not like your hat.” Dogs have a party in a tree.

#### 5 Non-Fiction Books

- Robert Caro, *The Power Broker* – How does an unelected official literally construct New York (city and state) over a 35 year period, without any meaningful checks on his power? Caro’s portrait of Robert Moses is spellbinding.
- Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters* – Branch’s entire trilogy on the Civil Rights Movement is fantastic, but this one is the best.
- John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography* – Anyone who experienced the childhood of Mill would either go crazy from information overload, or would write *On Liberty*.
- Plato, *The Republic* – The start of all we talk about?
- Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* – It’s funny that it took a Frenchman, here to tour American prisons, to really tell us what America was all about, especially the interplay between our institutions and citizenry.

#### 5 Books That I Should Have Read (And Would Have the Time to Read on the Island)

- *The Complete Works of Shakespeare* – Sure, I’ve read some of his works, but all of them? Not yet.
- Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity’s Rainbow* – I’ve been stuck on page one for quite some time.
- Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past* – This seems much too lengthy to casually dive into, so I’ve avoided it.
- James Joyce, *Ulysses* – Count me among those who’ve pretended to read it, but really haven’t.
- Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* – I’ve read parts of this, but never all the volumes.

#### 5 Indispensable Work Books

- Clarence Stone, *Regime Politics* – This study dominates the urban politics field like no other work.
- Herbert Kaufman, *The Forest Ranger* – I use it in class, and in my own writing, and every time I reread it, I learn something new. It’s hard for me to think about organizations without thinking of Kaufman’s Rangers.
- Robert Dahl, *Who Governs?* – A brilliantly conceived rejoinder to elite theorists, and another work that continues to inform with rereading. It shows some of its age, but still says a lot about power in cities.
- William Muir, Jr., *Police: Streetcorner Politicians* – Ostensibly about patrol officers and their supervisors, the book is really about human nature and leadership.
- *The Chicago Manual of Style* – Absolutely necessary.

### Laird Easton, History

Being marooned on a desert island poses two challenges, once food and shelter are secured: consolation to answer the question of “Why me?” and serious distraction to confront the yawning boredom. For consolation I would choose (1) Hegel’s *Phenomenology of the Spirit* so that I would understand that my little predicament was a necessary part of Geist unfolding through history. Of course there’s no reading the *Phenomenology* without a guide which probably should be (2) Alexander Koyré’s *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*. Historically poetry has been of great consolation to prisoners in the Gulag and elsewhere so I would be sure to be shipwrecked with a copy of (3) Palgrave’s *Golden Treasury* as most—not all!—modern poetry exacerbates rather than relieves anxiety and boredom. Two other secular theodicies that offer both consolation and distraction would be (4) Proust’s *À la recherche du temps perdu* (I think it would be time for me to finish reading it in French so any good French-English dictionary too, which should not count against my quota) and (5) Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*, which I find I can always reread. For distraction there’s nothing better than

games and there is no greater game than chess. So let's say—since forever is a long time—(6) *Chess: 5334 Problems, Combinations, and Games*. The mind needs a rest, however, and so it's time to learn one's knots: (7) *The Ashley Book of Knots*. As this would be a tropical desert island, I assume, then—to escape the relentless sunshine and retreat into the foggy London of childhood—the (8) new two-volume complete edition of Sherlock Holmes. Finally (9) an extensive Greek grammar and dictionary—if not now, when?. That about covers all the bases.

### Tom Parker, Religious Studies

There I was, lost on an island full of Yahoos endlessly screaming and gesticulating (the Yahoos, that is, not me), in love with their own gibberish. “What a lot of basement noise,” I thought, remembering one of my favorite poets. It was careless of me to get so lost. Sure, I could retrace my steps, but who knows where that might lead. So I decided to stay put. I'm a man of faith with a modicum of patience as well, and I knew that, in stories like this, something always comes along; a troll, a unicorn, a road sign. But what to do in the meantime; ah, there's the nub. What do we do with ourselves when we do that thing we spend so much time doing - waiting?

Now this may seem odd to you, but it's my good fortune that I never leave home without five books. Sure I might forget where I'm going, where I am, or where I've been, but I never forget those five books. What better to do while you're waiting around for a mythical creature that doesn't exist, than to pull out a book, settle back against a mighty oak, palm, or whatever's growing in the vicinity, and read. It passes the time. I think that's in Torah. Oi vey, what's so hard, just pass the time and be a good boy.

Faith and patience I may have, but I am not a practical man, so I don't have any books on how to survive on a desert island, or a tropical island filled with insidious predators. No books on canoe building or navigating by the stars, and no guide book that would tell me what is edible and nutritious, what will give me the skitters, and what will lay me out like a plank. Fasting seems the prudent choice, and a bit of an adventure, as if being mythically lost weren't adventure enough.

The one book I never leave home without is a Sierra Club book called *Not Man Apart*. It combines the photographs of the California coast by artists like Edward Weston, with excerpts from the poetry of Robinson Jeffers. I took this book with me when I hitchhiked across the country in my youth. The pages are warped and discolored from the foggy, foggy dew and the spindrift of beach reading, and scratchy from accumulated windblown sand. This book of wonders bulges with memory, beauty and a fierce wisdom, and it helped me understand what I am and where I fit among the seaside cliffs, the heaving Pacific, the oyster catchers and pelicans. “Love that,” the book says, “not man apart from that.” Good book to have when you're going nowhere and have nowhere to go.

In situations like this you want at least one Borges type book that mystically keeps changing so that it's always new, a book that you can never reach the bottom of or ever read twice. What luck to have Stephen Mitchell's translation of the *Tao Te Ching*. Not only is it infinite and ever changing, but it's also slim and portable, a lovely combination of virtues.

Entertainment is perhaps the most desired, yet hardest, goal to achieve in situations like this. Sure you could fill the mystery train, 16 coaches long, with entertaining books, but choose one, and how long before its pleasures pall. It is not so hard to entertain on the first or second read, but delivering continual pleasure is a tall order. Driven to distraction by the clamoring yawp of the Yahoos, I could find both pleasure and refuge in my volume of the *Complete Lyrics and Occasional Poetry of Bob Dylan*. It's a cornball choice, I know, but it does double duty because I can read and sing from it. And who's around but a bunch of no account, tin-eared, zipper-heads who won't know or care how dubious my vocal skills are. In fact, they'll never even hear me over the cacophony in their own heads.

I've been told that man is a rational animal. I don't actually believe it, but that's what I've been told, and so it's always good to have a dense, pithy rational exegesis of some aspect of human dementia. It's hard to decide between my Modern Library Kierkegaard Anthology, and my Modern Library *Varieties of Religious Experience* by William James. I love each book as much for its feel and smell, as for what's inside, but there's plenty to chew on, and sniff at, in each. Since indecisiveness is another one of my many virtues, I'll take both. I'm tempted to try to sneak them by as a single volume and so add another to my list, but frankly, I don't want to carry that much. And I'm wondering, given the sudden nature of these kinds of events, that if I were perchance carrying my guitar at the time of my disappearance, would I be required to disassemble it and use the parts in some unforeseen, but ingenious, survivalist way, or could I just pick it up and strum it?