



## NEWSLETTER

February 2004  
Trinity 126, 100, and hallway



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### DIRECTOR'S CORNER

by Laird Easton, History

For some years now I've heard of the "Burning Man" festival which takes place towards the end of the summer in the deserts of Nevada. I am astonished by the range of people who attend an event that seems to me, as an outsider, to represent an effort to "re-enchant" the world in defiance of Weber's iron law. Among the frequent visitors is **Sarah Pike, Religious Studies**, who has kindly offered us the following piece "**No Novenas for the Dead: Ritual Action and Communal Memory at the Temple of Tears.**" Pike, the author of *Earthly Bodies, Magical Selves: Contemporary Pagans and the Search for Community* (California 2001) and the forthcoming *New Age and Neopagan Religions in America* (Columbia 2004), is one of the country's foremost authorities on neopaganist religious movements in America.

#### Guest Speakers

**James Kincaid:** As part of our "Eros and Culture" theme, we welcome **James R. Kincaid, Aerol Arnold Professor at the University of Southern California**, to campus on February 10. Professor Kincaid, an expert on Victorian literature, has written extensively on the controversial theme of eroticism and children. His most recent book, ***Erotic Innocence: The Culture of Child Molesting*** (Duke, 1988), explores the current obsession with the sexual abuse of children, using the model of the Gothic novel to uncover its origins. Kincaid argues that preoccupation with this misguided sexuality allows the public to ignore the poverty, neglect, malnutrition, and poor education that constitutes true child abuse. He argues for abandoning the Gothic model for a more mature view of eroticism and children. **Kincaid will give the talk**

**"Eroticism and Children: The Last Taboo" on Tuesday, February 10 at 7:30pm in PAC 135** (Wisner Theatre). The event is free and open to the public and a reception for the author will follow in the Humanities Center Gallery where copies of *Erotic Innocence* will be on sale. The next morning from 8:30 to 9:30am in Trinity 126, Professor Kincaid will conduct an informal breakfast seminar on this issue. Given recent headlines about child abuse, from the Catholic Church to Michael Jackson, this promises to be a fascinating and topical public lecture.

**Richard Powers:** Keep your calendar free for the last week of April when **Richard Powers** will arrive for a three-day visit as a **Presidential Scholar**. Author of seven novels, including *The Gold Bug Variations* (nominated for the best novel award by the **National Book Critics Circle** in 1986), *Galatea 2.2*, *Operation Wandering Soul* (nominated for the **National Book Award for fiction** in 1987) and most recently *The Time of Our Singing* (nominated for the **National Book Critics Circle Award** for the best novel in 2003), Powers is the recipient of a **MacArthur Foundation Grant** as well as of the **Richard and Hilda Rosenthal Foundation Award** for best American fiction.

Given that much of his innovative work is characterized by the integration of scientific themes, drawn especially from biology, cybernetics, and computer science, Powers has been invited by the Humanities Center to address the theme of "Science and the Aesthetic Imagination." On **Tuesday, April 27 in PAC 135**, he will give the short talk "**Fiction as Knowledge**," which will be followed by an onstage interview. The next day on Wednesday, April 28, he will give a public reading of his work for the **Writer's Voice** series in Trinity 100. **Both**

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events begin at 7:30pm and are free and open to the public. In addition Powers will lead an informal discussion/seminar on his work on Wednesday morning from 10am to noon. The Humanities Center will soon have a limited supply of gratis copies of one of the author's novels available for interested faculty: I will let you know when they come in.

### **Faculty Symposia**

This spring the Humanities Center will host five Friday Symposia. **On February 13 Chris Gaffney, Physics, and Greg Tropea, Philosophy,** will present “**A Strangeness in the Proportions’: The Role of Symmetry in the Natural Sciences.**” Gaffney and Tropea, who co-teach an upper-division GE course entitled “Science and Modern Culture,” will discuss scientists’ notions of beauty and truth and how these concepts illuminate their underlying metaphysical assumptions. **On March 5, James McManus, Art and Art History,** will present “**Duchamp’s Delays: Refracted Revelations Stripped Bare.**” Based on a talk McManus gave at the California Institute of Technology, this paper is a reading of “The Large Glass” as an elaborate and fanciful optical/photographic apparatus. These two symposia are part of the “Science and the Aesthetic Imagination” theme as will be the presentation by **Louis Buchholtz, Physics, on April 16** entitled “**Perfect Form: The Ideal Synthesis of Aesthetics and Science.**” Buchholtz will show how the ancient Greek quest for perfect form has been revived in modern physics so that almost every fundamental and derivative law of physics can be seen as springing from an appropriate “idealization” principle. **On March 26 Andrew Flescher, Religious Studies,** will present “**Ordinary and Extraordinary Morality,**” (copies of Professor Flescher’s recent book *Heroes, Saints, and Ordinary Morality*, will be available for sale afterwards). And on April 9, **Robert O’Brien, English,** will present “**Epicurean Skepticism and the Portents in Julius Caesar.**” All talks will begin at 3pm and will be accompanied by refreshments.

### **Thursday Tertulias**

The Humanities Center continues its successful informal Thursday Tertulia series with two special events in the spring. On **February 26 Andrew Flescher, Religious Studies,** will lead a discussion entitled “**A Collision of Civilizations: Samuel Huntington and His Critics.**” Participants will be able to obtain a copy of Samuel Huntington’s notorious/prophetic article “The Clash of Civilizations” prior to the discussion. We are hoping that the discussion that ensues will shed more light than heat on this very controversial matter. Then on **March 25, Sally McNall, Honors Program,** will lead a discussion

on “**Truth and Beauty in Science Fiction Narrative**” based on two short stories by science fiction writer Kim Stanley Robinson from Davis, CA. Again, gratis copies of the short stories will be made available to those interested in participating. All Thursday Tertulias start at 4pm and are accompanied by refreshments.

### **David Auburn’s Proof**

Following up on last semester’s highly enjoyable postproduction discussion of Tom Stoppard’s *Arcadia* with Dean Sarah Blackstone, the Humanities Center will host a similar discussion of **David Auburn’s Tony and Pulitzer winning two-act play Proof**, about a mathematician and his daughter. Faculty interested in participating in the discussion, which will take place on **Wednesday, March 10 in the Humanities Center beginning at 4pm,** should contact me and ask about obtaining a gratis copy of the play. The director, **Cynthia Lammel, Theatre Arts,** will be present as well as actors from the production. I encourage everyone to attend this very witty and moving play (**performances are March 3-6 at 7:30 pm; March 7 at 2pm in the Harlan Adams Theatre**). This is part of our “Science and the Aesthetic Imagination” theme.


### **Unknown Masterpieces**

Awhile ago I received an early Christmas present from the marketing manager of the *New York Review of Books Press*, which has, over the last few years, created a fascinating and unusual list of books, principally fiction but also non-fiction. Among the volumes I received was a short text entitled *Unknown Masterpieces*. In it, contemporary writers—among them John Updike, Toni Morrison, Luc Santee, Elizabeth Hardwick, and Susan Sontag—choose their candidates for most unjustly neglected masterpiece. It makes for intriguing reading—among the most interesting titles were Richard Hughes’s *A High Wind in Jamaica* and the extraordinary William Drogheda’s *Classic Crimes*—and it gave me an idea for the fall edition of this newsletter. Many of you no doubt have your own obscure masterpieces in mind, books you think deserve greater acclaim than they have received or have sunk unaccountably from sight. If so, we would love to hear from you. Please send me the title of your book and two or three paragraphs explaining what makes it worthy of notice. We will print as many of them as I can in the fall. Naturally we are looking for works, fiction or nonfiction, that transcend your particular scholarly discipline.

### **Double Acrostic**

Via email I will send around the due date for entries to this issue’s double acrostic puzzle. Correct entries will be

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entered in a drawing for a \$25 gift certificate from the A.S. Bookstore. 

## NO NOVENAS FOR THE DEAD: RITUAL ACTION AND COMMUNAL MEMORY AT THE TEMPLE OF TEARS

by Sarah M. Pike

Mo, you need no novenas to be in my heart," read one of the hundreds of messages penciled on the "Temple of Tears" or "Mausoleum" (as it became popularly known) at Burning Man 2001. Burning Man is an annual arts festival that takes place for a week around Labor Day weekend in the middle of a prehistoric lakebed in Nevada's Black Rock Desert and attracts 20,000-30,000 people. Robert Collier, a *San Francisco Chronicle* writer who helped assemble the Mausoleum described it as "part Balinese temple, part Angkor Wat, part Viking fantasy. The overall effect was transparent, full of light and life, uplifting and magical."<sup>1</sup> The term "no novenas" suggests festival-goers' dissatisfaction with the available religious options for mourning their beloved dead. Losses that could not be named in other religious and social contexts—suicides, estranged parents, parents who sexually abused their children—were inscribed on the walls of the Mausoleum. For instance, one woman addressed the father who had abused her: "It was the most difficult thing. But I still love you." Other messages described lost love and a dear friend dying by his own hand: "artist extraordinaire, lover, piano player, struggled with mental illness for many years, hung himself in the garage. I was not there. I'm sorry. I miss you my friend." All at once, the Mausoleum became a ritualized sounding board, a bridge between the living and dead and a site at which the private was made public. Participants wrote down confessions, grief, hopes and promises with pencils on wood and paper and placed tokens of remembrance on makeshift altars.

Soon after I arrived at Burning Man in 2001, I rode my bicycle out onto the open area reserved for sculptures and large art installations, colloquially referred to as "the playa," where I easily located the Mausoleum behind a cloud of dust. Costumed and half-nude men and women were swarming around and inside the structure, sitting in its shady niches, or intently writing messages on every surface of the structure with pencils provided by the artist. I wandered inside and around the Mausoleum reading some of the thousands of messages people had written on the pieces of filigreed plywood that had been carefully cut out

and placed to comprise the temple structure. Most messages were intensely personal and addressed loss, sacrifice, mourning, fear, guilt, forgiveness, lost friends and lovers, or the disappointment of failed relationships. Many messages were to dead relatives and a few to dead children: "5-26-88/11-25-94, I love you baby, Mommy." Other messages were plaintive cries of loss: "Billy, Billy, Billy, come back." The Mausoleum became a powerful site for many participants and seemed to offer them an experience that they did not receive elsewhere.

On my many visits to the Mausoleum, I was struck by the transformation of private grief and loss into public expression and a kind of memorializing that seemed to challenge scholarly accounts of contemporary mourning. Peter Homans has argued that industrialized cultures have lost traditional avenues for mourning the dead that "most of the world's cultures have linked together . . . the painful experience of collective loss; mourning, or the healing response to that loss; and the building of monuments or the construction of cultural symbols to re-present the loss over time and render it memorable, meaningful, and thereby bearable."<sup>2</sup> Drawing on French historian Philippe Ariès' groundbreaking work on the history of death in the West, Homans explains that the "taming" of death came about because the "commonly shared community took upon itself, in the form of its rituals, much of the burden of mourning that would otherwise have been overwhelming."<sup>3</sup> Tame death was a public spectacle instead of a private rite. In contrast, industrialized, secularized societies have privatized and individualized death, placing "the burden of mourning" on the shoulders of the individual. As death became the individual's problem, the shared experience of mourning declined in the industrialized West. Instead of shared communal rites most westerners are left with "the invisible death: a biological transition without significance, pain, suffering, or fear."<sup>4</sup> This invisibility is especially a problem for those who are not regular participants in religious communities, which was probably the case for most people who visited the Mausoleum.

The evidence from Burning Man stands in marked contrast to the broader historical current of mourning in the West. If many modern westerners can no longer access traditional religious and communal means of mourning the dead, then Burning Man participants have created new ways to deal with their grief. At Burning Man 2001 participants worked to make death and loss both vocal and visible. The

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Collier, "Building a Community for Grieving at Burning Man," in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, 9/9/01, B3.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Homans, ed., *Symbolic Loss: The Ambiguity of Mourning and Memory at Century's End* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 2000), ix.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

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Mausoleum became a site for speaking out loud, describing the dead and their stories, sharing photos of them, and bringing out silenced memories and suppressed grief. The Mausoleum and its rites enabled participants to recognize and then heal their pain and loss through the collective expression of personal loss.

The process of reading the messages of others was as much a part of the ritualizing that took place at the Mausoleum as writing one's own words on its surfaces. Reading and writing messages on the surfaces of the Mausoleum were physical and participatory acts. Although the Mausoleum's rituals for the dead were all marked by the absence of a body or corpse, the flesh of the dead was present through memories of the men and women who used their bodies in the process of remembering. In writing on the Mausoleum's plywood pieces, pencils in hand, the living connected bodily with the dead and in the act of reading messages, that connection became an experience shared with all of the Mausoleum's visitors. While the Mausoleum had a somber and peaceful atmosphere, it was rarely still. People moved through and around it, knelt to read messages, climbed on benches to write in blank spaces, meditated, wept, chanted and prayed. In these ways they reclaimed the participatory aspect of funeral rites.<sup>5</sup>

Unlike many other monuments, the Mausoleum was inclusive and mobile. Suicides, lost loves, dead parents and children, parts of the self and fallen rescue workers at the World Trade Center were all mourned at Burning Man and beyond. Participants brought home pieces of the Mausoleum discarded in the construction process and reassembled them into something new. Private memories were transformed at the Mausoleum into photographs and public stories that participants took away with them and later circulated on the Internet and in the news media. The burning of the Mausoleum provided closure and catharsis for some mourners, but it also remained intact when participants returned home to develop rolls of film from their Burning Man experience and posted hundreds of photos on their websites.

Like other monuments and memorials, contests over the Mausoleum's meaning accompanied it everywhere. In their messages to the Burning Man bulletin board after they

returned home, participants complained about, praised, and debated their final experience at the Mausoleum as it went up in smoke and flame: "The inferno, the Gregorian chant, the blinding dust storm, and the hundreds of people surrounding us were at once, somehow serene and terribly severe. The tomb before us was consumed, freeing both the souls within and our suffering."<sup>6</sup> The ritual burning made final the mourning process that had been taking place at the Mausoleum all week. Another participant, Oxeon, listened as, "Somewhere from out on the playa some camp was playing a gentle house track that had a wistful sax as its hook. People began to slowly walk away from the burn, their faces full of longing, resignation, eyes wet with tears."<sup>7</sup> But people who wanted to drum loudly and celebrate the bonfire came into conflict with those who wanted to weep in silent fellowship with other mourners. Janna, another participant at the ritual, registered her dismay at the "disrespect those people showed to all of us there, to the creator of the Mausoleum, and most importantly, to the hundreds (thousands?) of the deceased whose names were written inside . . . If you are at a memorial service that's about to begin, would you go up in front of the representation of the dead, and the group of mourners, and holler 'Hey, everybody, let's make some noise! Who!'"<sup>8</sup>

The Burning Man community was brought together at this memorial site in the most intimate ways, but multiple desires and contentious issues were also revealed here. Because the Mausoleum invited festival-goers to place their own meanings on it and to construct their own mourning rituals, it attracted discordant as well as harmonious voices. While the Mausoleum reflected the artist's vision and the intentions of individuals who participated in its rites, like shrines and memorials everywhere it also took on a life of its own. ©

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<sup>5</sup> My understanding of mourning rituals was also shaped by the following studies: Richard Huntington and Peter Metcalf, *Celebrations of Death: The Anthropology of Mortuary Ritual* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960); Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process* (Chicago: Aldine, 1969); Margaret Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974); and Greg M. Horowitz, *Sustaining Loss: Art and Mournful Life* (Stanford, 2001).

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<sup>6</sup> Lace, Burning Man e-playa bulletin board, 9/5/01.

<sup>7</sup> Oxeon, Burning Man e-playa bulletin board, 9/5/01.

<sup>8</sup> Janna, Burning Man e-playa bulletin board, 9/5/01.

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## HUMANITIES CENTER BOARD

### **Director**

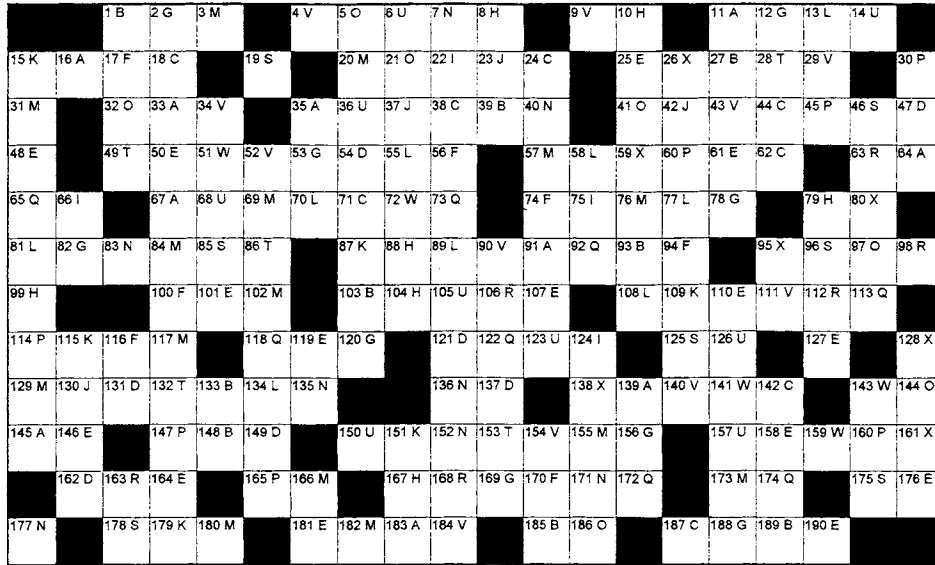
Laird Easton (History)

### **Board**

Sara Cooper (Spanish), Marcel Daguerre (Philosophy), Troy Jollimore (Philosophy)  
James Kuiper (Art and Art History), John Milbauer (Music), Robert O'Brien (English), Sarah Pike (Religious Studies)  
Fitz Smith (English), Robert Tinkler (History), Sue Whitmore (Art and Art History)

### **Ex-officio**

Sarah Blackstone (dean)  
Don Heinz (Religious Studies)  
Thomasin Saxe (director of special projects)  
Brooks Thorlaksson (associate dean)



- A. English philanthropist (1696-1785); founder of the colony of Georgia \_\_\_\_\_  
33 91 183 35 11 16 64 145 67 139
- B. Heroic canine \_\_\_\_\_  
189 27 148 103 133 39 1 185 93
- C. Racetrack profits \_\_\_\_\_  
187 38 18 44 71 24 62 142
- D. Turkish title of respect \_\_\_\_\_  
131 121 162 137 47 149 54
- E. Title of play by John Osborne (1956) (4-4-2-5) \_\_\_\_\_  
50 119 158 146 25 176 181 190 110 61 127 101 48 107 164
- F. Impedimenta \_\_\_\_\_  
116 170 74 56 100 94 17
- G. Religion associated with Madame Blavatsky \_\_\_\_\_  
120 2 82 169 78 188 53 12 156
- H. An ostentatiously skillful person; a nonstop freight train \_\_\_\_\_  
104 88 167 10 8 79 99
- I. An ancient kingdom of southwestern Asia \_\_\_\_\_  
66 124 75 22
- J. Kon Tiki was one \_\_\_\_\_  
42 23 130 37
- K. Bookish; intellectual-looking \_\_\_\_\_  
179 15 87 115 151 109
- L. Eponymous heroine of Broadway musical (5-4) \_\_\_\_\_  
13 89 55 108 70 81 58 134 77
- M. Author of The Glass Key (1894-1961) (8-7) \_\_\_\_\_  
102 69 31 173 129 84 117 155 20 182 57 76 3 166 180
- N. Hooliganism; brutal behavior \_\_\_\_\_  
7 136 152 40 171 135 83 177
- O. Sonorous; bombastic \_\_\_\_\_  
97 5 144 186 21 32 41
- P. Famous beach \_\_\_\_\_  
114 147 30 45 165 160 60
- Q. Gives vent to angry censure, rails \_\_\_\_\_  
92 118 65 174 122 73 172 113
- R. Evil spirits; grave robbers \_\_\_\_\_  
112 168 163 98 63 106
- S. Water-soluble protein found in egg whites, milk, etc. \_\_\_\_\_  
19 85 96 125 175 46 178
- T. "Something \_\_\_'s in the woodshed!" Gibbons, Cold Comfort Farm \_\_\_\_\_  
28 153 49 132 86
- U. To germinate; to teem \_\_\_\_\_  
126 6 123 157 150 68 36 14 105
- V. "Only the most \_\_\_ and the most stupid do not change." Confucius \_\_\_\_\_  
9 90 4 140 184 154 43 29 52 111 34
- W. To fund, to bequeath \_\_\_\_\_  
51 72 141 159 143
- X. Irritates, embitters \_\_\_\_\_  
80 95 138 59 128 26 161