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The Promethean

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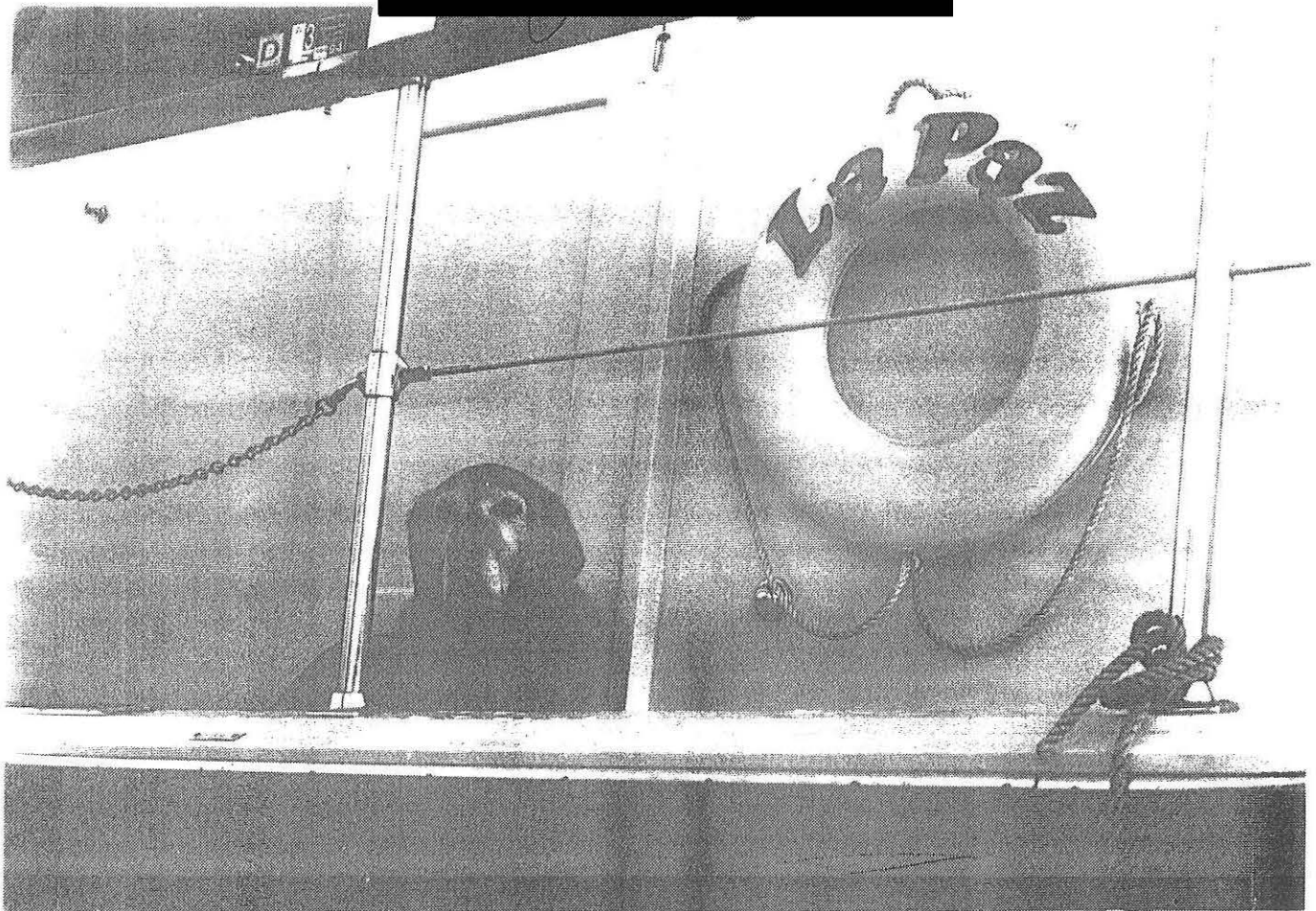
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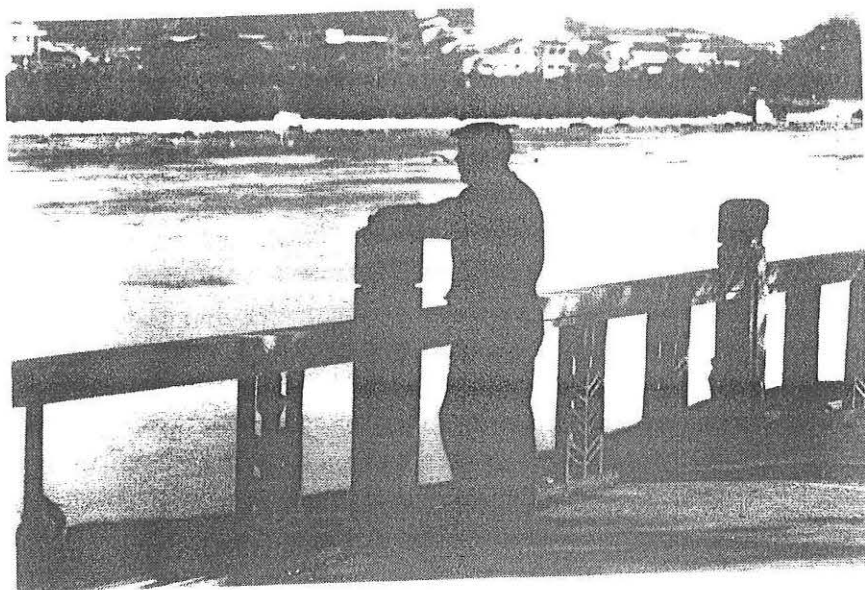
From the Editor ...

During the course of the term, I have been fortunate enough to have studied the many complex ideas behind the question, "What is a hero?" It has occurred to me that heroes may do very little but stand for very much. Consider the "hero" whom we applaud for saving someone's life: the action, in itself, may take very little time and is done with even less thought; the "hero" places herself in a perilous position in order that someone else may live, not to gain attention or reward. It is this force, this respect for humanity which holds us together.

In the same way, the writers herein are heroes. With the exception of thought-out intent to write a good piece, what they have contributed may take little time to read. However, the thoughts expressed in these pages stand for far more: concerns about relationships, origin, understanding, power, morality, and places of meaning in one's life are expressed for our thoughtful consideration. This force also holds us together; for we are communicative beings whose lives depend on interaction, expression, and sharing.

I would personally like to thank the writers as the experience has been and will always be one of discovery.





The Man of Winter

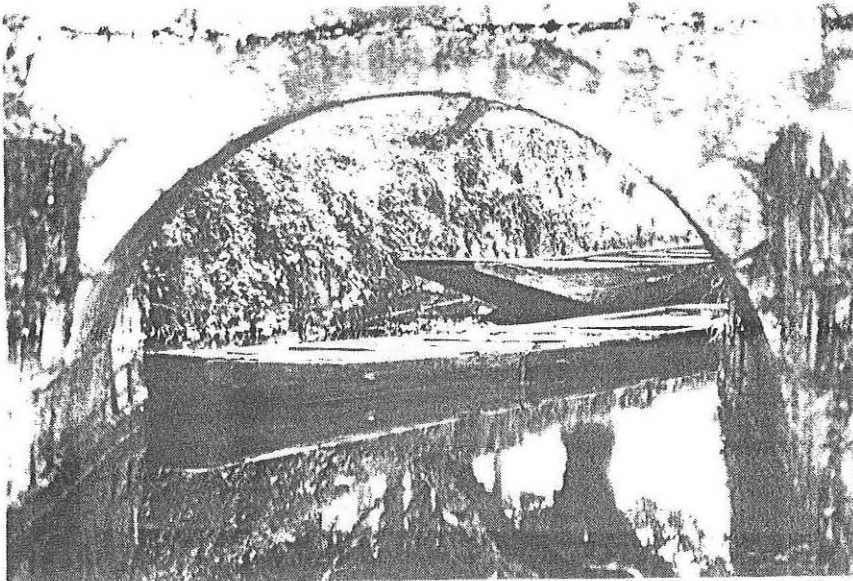
He died in Asia, fighting.
A hero they say.
I didn't know him for I was
Too young, only a boy.
He we because he was called.
He didn't resist the call,
That voice which promised him
Glory beyond measure, breaker
Of men, and he broke them, wildly,
In his anger, in his revenge
For the death of his friend.
He would have broken all men
Everywhere, turned spring
Into winter to satisfy his grief.
Die on, die on, all, he said,
Monstrous in his longing.
Death came when he didn't
Expect it. Shot by an unseen
Enemy on rank of men melting
Before him, he took his turn
At the orange byre.
So he went, so I go,
One more son after his father,
Adding my pitiless glory to his.

Peter Huggins

Homeland

Rememberance has kept me spellbound from
my homeland--the Big Sky country that
I long to cast my eye upon.
To smell the fresh, brisk mountain air,
And gaze at the marvelous wildflowers
covering the new Spring ground.
My head tilts back in admiration to
The never-ending sky of blue and the
Rays of the dry sun.
The cool stream hurries its troubled
Waters away;
Listening for the voices under the rocks
That hold the past memories of a past
Time.

Lisa Hixson



A Statue for Mishima

Captured in marble by chisle and strain,
I stand on a base of white-veined stone.
Pan my eyes of purest view and see God
In my cracked neck and wear of sun and rain.
I stand before men; they stand beneath time.
Snow, Horses, Temples, and Angels are mine.

Steven Jackson



I wonder why everyone hates me?

When I
Tell My
Stories
They Don't
Listen.
I tell
Them about
My house,
My car,
My money.
They are
Unimpressed.

I wonder why everyone hates me?

Randy Kohltfarber

Untitled

An intruder stood at my door.
His feet moved softly across the floor.
The blanket falls, I close my eyes,
I grasp for truth in social lies.

There is a hook upon a line;
It gracefully glides through space and time.
Piercing my flesh, it invades my soul,
I stumble through life and play a role.

Cattle follow another's back.
Fruit is picked and placed in a sack.
The slaughter's near, the bag draws tight,
Open your eyes and swim for the light!

Randy Kohltfarber

I Woke Up This Morning

This morning, I woke up.
Sipping on coffee,
I peered through a steamy window.
A violent storm raged before my eyes,
Pounding, beating, thrashing a small tree.
The tree could no longer hold its prize;
A tiny bird flew blindly from the branches,
Madly searching for refuge.
When it hit the window, I saw its eye.
I woke up this morning.

Randy Kohltfarber

Iris

Funny little, forty-year-old, sad little girl.
You did all the right things, so, where's your
happy world? Were you led to believe there's a
guarantee you'd be grown up and free if
you did the right things?
Children and housework and making a home...
No time for song, so time for a poem.
Now you're sitting alone with a cry and a moan.
You did all the right things.
You did all the right things!

Pat Redjou

Terminal Bliss

I've run swiftly and quickly
To this far off place,
Which takes no time
And occupies no space.

I've escaped to the forest
Of beauty and freedom
To free myself of Life
And to find my kingdom.

The dry leaves and sticks
Crackle all around,
As I step heavy and eager
On the hard covered ground.

An old mossy log
Makes a soft loving throne;
Some marks on a Fir,
Showing I've grown.

I've been to this place,
In my life, more than once
To escape the living
And my everyday stunts.

We all need a place,
Serene and subtle as this
To escape from reality
And our terminal bliss.

Joshua Dwier

Shaking Morality

In Celo the Shakers are dancing
On their graves. Dying, I see,
Hasn't stopped their desire for perfection.

They're dancing for God, the Shakers say,
As He would want them to. They're singing,
The Shakers say, for Jesus.

If singing and dancing would open
The gates of heaven, then I believe,
Listening to them sing and seeing

Them dance, Saint Peter himself
Would bend an ear, lean down and say
Come on, we're ready for you.

Dancing and singing, the Shakers would rise
Into Heaven on a great round table
Of their design and make.

They'd turn the world over and roll it
Into Heaven with them. In that work,
Hearts, hands, and God would rest easy.

Peter Huggins

Cameo People, Cameo Times

Where do these people come from
Who touch my life forever...
Then vanish, go!
They leave behind a seed, a sprout
That flourishes throughout my
Veins and blossoms in my brain.

They drop a word,
An hour's conversation,
As lightly as a summer zephyr
Cools my skin.
Only later do I realize a spark
Has kindled deep within.

A white haired smiling lady
Rode beside me on the bus
When I was very young,
My first house within my trust.
She whispered in conspiracy words
Living yet among my dusty corners.

"Who'll know twenty years from now
If your windowsills are spotless?
Look out. Look past.
Enjoy your world my dear!
Walls are only to shelter behind
In times of storm.
Nature needs your footsteps.
Don't keep her waiting!"

I can be depressed, forlorn,
Under Staturm's gloomy spell,
When some soul rich in merriment
Will verbally kiss, and make it well.

Outside a tavern's restroom door,
Afraid to suck my stomach in,
One such fellow gave a grin
And motioned with puckish courtesy
Across the hall.
"Gotta pee? I'll gaurd the door!"
He's in my mind's eye forevermore.

And where did he come from,
The retired engineer,
Who chatted with me and
Stilled my fear?
He spoke to me of baking bread
And making ruby wine.

A poor swimmer, I, in the
Human sea, I'd found it
Surging in on me.
But he made me a raft
Of living yeast and
Turned a Zombie-crowd back
Into a feast of humanity.

Where do they go, these people of mine,
Who show up at needful times
And drop a flavor into my life?
They fill holes in my reasoning,
Supply a thought, some seasoning,
I didn't realize I craved.

Do they exist beyond my mind's appeal?

Pat Redjou

Upon a Retreat Into Paradise

There is a place whose beauty I know;
Slow steps upon a soft, descending path
Lead to woods within whose shadows low
Sleep wanders Nature hides beneath her hand.

A dampened trail whose winding way impedes
The traveler with moss-capped twigs and stones,
Provides an ample guide for one who seeks
A secret Eden to be his, alone.

What coliseum greets the sobered eye!
What darkened wooded colors overcome the mind...
A dozen paces further and you've left
The world of men and voices far behind.

An ancient log with a golden lichen gilt
Supplies a grande seat than kingly throne.
This forest, noble kingdom, proudly boasts
A grandeur of the like no king has known.

Above the patient whisper of a stream
The songbird's lullaby consoles the ear.
Reality has fast become a dream.
This place, it has no name. It's simple here.

This air--untouched, untasted but by me
Yields up its perfect purity in full
And bears the perfumed scent of flower and tree
While gently, softly sings the halcyon lull.

Sweet nature draws her breath, the woodland stirs
Each swaying limb soon murmurs soft reply;
She sighs contentedly for all is hers.
No blade of silken grass could riches buy.

Deep rug of dew-moist needles underfoot
Absorbs and crackles dimply with each step,
While further, deeper still the wanderer drifts
Into this world of silence--dark and wet.

Here can the sleepless mind and body rest
At last! Upon the ground find true repose,
Yet, knowing that outside a grey world waits,
Pricks sharp the soul like thorns upon a rose.

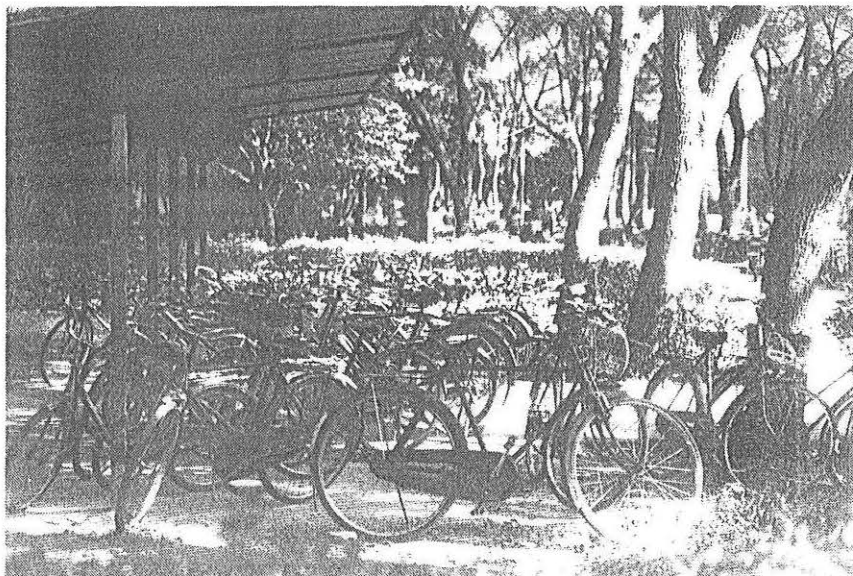
And slowly now, the trail grows thin, is gone.
(All roads to beauty seem to melt away)
As Nature's gentle voice implies it's time
To turn around and walk the other way.

Now steps retraced much slower than the first
Drag longingly past waterfalls of green
Which cause an unexplained and quenchless thirst
For things that lie beyond, for paths unseen.

Now golden glow of sunlight warms the face.
A greedy world reclaims its captive stray
And Paradise, deserted, starts to fade
With rainbows melting. Now, a sea of grey.

The dream grows dimmer, flickers, and is gone.

Joshua Dwier



The Burdens Our Children Carry

The burdens our children carry are us.
Our defects are mirrored in them.
They glare like lions on the Mirawandi,
Hunting gazelle or buffalo at night.

What will our children do with such burdens?
Will they lug them into their adult lives?
Or will they shed them like outgrown clothes?

Neither Cassandra nor Teiresias,
I won't impose on my children
The burden of doing things one way,
For many paths lead through
The bush, and they all lead home.

Peter Huggins

Breton Stones

In a forest of stones she waits
For the moon to find her.
Lying beneath the dolmen,
Her back against the grass,
She thinks of the women
Who've come before her:
The baker's daughter,
The mayor's wife; even
The baroness, she remembers,
Had her first child this way.
She knows her husband doesn't think
Much of this idea, but she's run
Out of remedies and her prayers
Go unheard, unanswered.

When the moon rises,
She's ready to begin.
She calls him softly to her,
And she knows that he's heard
Her call as fingers of light
Expose her to the dialating moon.
As the moon quickens, she quickens.
At daybreak she rises and in her arms
She bears a child of light,
A child of morning, red
As red-fingered dawn stretching
Under a roof of stone.

Peter Huggins

The Island

by Emily Junken

The grinding of the ferry's engine is the only noise to interrupt the quiet of the Strait. The tension ebbs away as the ferry slowly slips away from mainland Washington. All of life's problems and stresses stay behind on the dock. I sit staring, unseeing, at the beautiful scenery. Memories from childhood flash through my mind of the ferry ride and the islands.

Memories of waiting at the ferry dock for hours. Catching the red-eye on a cold summer night. Watching the ferry rock violently during a winter storm we were in the middle of. Drinking hot chocolate with five creams to give it taste and eating huge chocolate-chip cookies. Sleeping or playing cards on the deck. Begging my parents to let us go outside on the deck. Watching the ferry dock at Lopez and getting off.

The quiet and peace of the island surround us. A place where time almost stands still and life's pace is slow. The cows and sheep in the pastures. A deer darting across the road. Hundreds of bunnies cover the lawn and eat in the garden. The house my grandparents built on an acre of land with the deck on three sides. The leaning tree that protected the entrance to the trail to the beach. Running down the gently sloping lawn and the steep trail. The playhouse grandfather built for us. The salt-and-pepper rocks that we could sit on. Clams squirting you during walks at low tide. Watching our grandfather and father row out to bring in the crab pot. Boiling the live crabs and picking their meat. Walks down to Spencer Spit on the beach and back by the road. The dinner bell that called us up from the beach. Ice cream from Richardson's and tee-shirts from T-Town. The Orca running at Sharks Reef while the seals play close by.

Life was relaxing and carefree. Now, these are all just memories. Oh, the island is still in the San Juans, the house still stands, and the beach remains, but they are no longer mine. Grandmother moved to be closer to family and now a new family is making memories there.

The ferry grinds to a halt at the Lopez dock. For the first time in my life, I will not get off. My heart and body tell me to move, but my mind keeps my feet rooted to the spot. A sadness overwhelms me and I look away.



The High Church of Despair: An Unfolding of Thomas S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" by Steven Jackson

Although he strove to maintain a private life, T.S. Eliot tells all as his "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" sobs, "These are the thoughts of my creator; every emotion felt by this man is contained in my lines, questioning, warning, grieving, and shyly smiling." Eliot's Prufrock walks the streets and heaves his weighted conscience around bleak corners and before blinded eyes in order that the reader might be forewarned: we live "till human voices wake us." Prufrock's existence is limited to the hard pews in the high church of despair. And what has been gained by this experience?

Prufrock, an unbeliever in his very name, demands an answer: show me proof, give me something tangible--rock. However, contained in Prufrock's thoughts, Eliot's observations of life are firmly grounded only in abstraction. On this most difficult journey to Truth and understanding, Prufrock will not go alone; he invites the reader to join him on his questioning path: "Let us go then, you and I," at a time when there is no longer light by which one might discern meaning, when time is numbed by the coolness of night, when evil pervades and holds lost souls closely by its side, "when the evening is spread out against the sky." "Give me an answer, help me know myself, and let us begin at the close of yet another day," Prufrock cries. Where will we go? How will we get there? "Like a patient etherized upon a table," we will slowly pace "through certain half-deserted streets,/ The muttering retreats/Of restless nights"--nights during which it will be impossible to sleep--"in one-night cheap hotels." This seedy life of quarter-consciousness and lack of dreamtime allows little hope. "Half-deserted streets" are occupied by those who will also sigh heavily at the thought of living another day in the light, a light that reveals nothing but pain and a promise of another night not

soon enough arriving. Through "streets that follow like a tedious argument" we will wind and suffer under ignorance; but do not ask, Prufrock warns, "What is it?" We must suffer through the tinted shade of experience if we want to know release or pleasure. And this experience is one in which our time is measured; we cannot stay. Perhaps we are not welcome even here. We will go only to return empty-hearted, broken, defeated: "Let us go and make our visit."

In two lines with a wealth of meaning, Eliot says, "In the room the women come and go/
Talking of Michelangelo." Prufrock is utterly unaware of this; he does not even know that beauty exists. Yet, the recurring image of women plays a vital role in Prufrock's discontent. The women in this room know about, discuss, and appreciate the lofty works of a master. And who is J. Alfred Prufrock? Not only is he a man without worth; he is a man who does not know himself--and much less the endeavors of human creation. Prufrock is lost in a city, walking the streets in the dark while women in some faraway room discuss a man who knew gods, an immortal in the artistic community. Prufrock is completely disengaged from the rest of society where there is time to discuss art because people find diversion and enjoyment in it; they succeed in the day-to-day ritual of life and have ample time to praise men who have come before them and have dropped pearls from their minds so that they might have a glimpse of that which is representative of meaning and knowledge, pleasure and art, leisure and reflection. In Prufrock's reverie, fog engulfs a city and settles in as it realizes that, indeed, it can, because there is little opposition to its arrival. In Prufrock's world there is no time to discuss art or pleasure; a dirty yellow fog dissuades thought.

During the time of the dirty yellow fog, "There will be time, there will be time/to prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;/There will be time to murder and create,/And time for all the works and days of hands/That lift and drop a question on your plate." During this endless time, you and I will have time, and plenty of it, dragging on and on as we work our hands on works that will amount to nothing. And at the end of this long day, our labor

earns only a nagging question, dropped on the plate before us, blocking our physiological sustenance; we must first cut away at a puzzle; we must earn our food in order that we might answer the question. But food never comes. We are left only with the question. And during the time to murder and create (one negates the other) we are still left only with unanswerable questions, questions that will remain until we find a means by which we might approach them with an answer. Our very own hands deliver this pain and anguish. We are to blame for the strife which prevents our full existence. And just when we feel that we know how to go about an answer, there is "time yet for a hundred indecisions,/And for a hundred visions and revisions,/ Before the taking of a toast and tea." When we do have a chance to rise to the occasion of knowing, we falter and review our initially flawed thought. With a blank face and less hope, we gladly clink glasses filled with an escape, a drink that settles one's nerves. As Prufrock remembers easing into a chair (drink in hand), the women still "come and go/Talking of Michelangelo."

In two very different tones, Prufrock asks, "Do I dare?" It is at this time we realize that while our walk is one on which answers may be found, we will not even try to open doors behind which the answers may lie. Prufrock asks twice, "Do I dare?" Am I allowed to go forth and seek an answer to this life? If so, do I take the risk? The lighthearted time during which the "Do I dare?" of a child (destined the fall, although not from a great height) offers hope and possibility is negated by an older man's "Do I dare?"--a question involving personal safety, security, and the sickening feeling that his time may have already passed. And, indeed, it has.

Knowing that his time has passed, Prufrock lowers his head in order to take into account others' responses to his decline. During the "time to turn back and descend the stair" (I watch his easy footsteps on the stairs as he returns to one of many social engagements during which he is bored and tired) Prufrock gives up. He is no longer a young boy, virile, curious, and indestructible; he is an old man, aged, elderly, and dilapidated. And

although "they will say: 'How his hair is growing thin!'" Prufrock maintains a certain respectability; he has tried and failed to answer the questions which life poses, but he recognizes this and chooses to shield his being with "[his] morning coat, [his] collar mounting firmly to the chin, [his] necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin." In this attire, Prufrock is safe. His collar is not simply starched but "mounting firmly to the chin" to protect him; although battered with futility, Prufrock will turn away from the tempest with a slight, yet important degree of thankfulness for the chance to know and understand the nature of his helplessness.

Now far more than a question asked by a child, Prufrock asks, "Do I dare disturb the universe?" The universe! The expansiveness of all that exists is pinned and waits for Prufrock to decide. If he should choose to "disturb the universe," the pin holding the red-eyed beast of reality would crush him. Why take that chance? It is no matter, for "In a minute there is time/For decisions and revisions that a minute will reverse." Even if he were to plod and slave for an answer, it would be subject to a change of mind that time would alter and render useless.

In a delusory duality of time opposed to itself, Prufrock wants to know (but has already known) what life scrapes together in a sad offering for the struggling soul. Prufrock recollects: "For I have known them all already, known them all--/Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons:" Prufrock has been there. And since he has, why then should he have so many doubts about what he may know? He has known evenings, mornings, and afternoons--times during which he may have wakened and recalled a dream; pulled back curtains to watch the setting sun; basked in the midday heat; but Prufrock has experienced nothing of the kind. His life has been no more memorable than the swing of a pendulum; he rises each day to fall, measuring his life "with coffee spoons." And during this measured life, those who have gone before him and those who are falling barely get out the words to express whatever it is they may have discovered during their time: "[Prufrock] know[s] the voices dying with

a dying fall/Beneath the music from a farther room." He does not hear their words.

"So how should I presume?" he asks. After asking "Do I dare?" Prufrock shrugs at the thought of presuming that what he knows means anything at all. He has known "the eyes already, known them all--/The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase." I can barely see him among the people now. As he blends in, cruel eyes follow and "fix" what they do not like about his appearance. With pre-formed, rehearsed thoughts and manners polite and cutting, every eye that fixes sees what it wants, a man like any other, dissected and chiseled away to fit the paradigm of others. Prufrock wonders, "When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,/Then how should I begin/To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?" How should he begin to tell about his experiences personified in the ritual of smoking, a leisurely, mind-easing pastime of watching hopes and dreams in vapor trails rising from the tip of a tightly-rolled cigarette? The end product--"the butt ends"--interests no one.

When knowing peoples' souls in their eyes has failed him, when the windows of the soul have, for Prufrock, glossed over and reflected nothing, he says, "And I have known the arms already, known them all--/Arms that are braceleted and white and bare/(But in lamplight, downed with light brown hair!)" These working arms, filled with creative potential, stretch out to Prufrock white and pure. They are, perhaps, the arms of a woman refined, dignified, honest. The welcome image is quickly dampened as Prufrock exclaims that they have been "downed with light brown hair!" The symbol of that which may be pure and may offer hope provides only another let-down. As I take in the bleak surroundings which Prufrock has prepared for us all, I realize that we are all pure; yet we have been tainted by a film of brown which is viewed in an even dimmer light. But this scene is a mere digression. Prufrock still asks how to begin. Midway through his dismal tale, Prufrock gives up: "I should have been a pair of ragged claws/Scuttling across the floors of silent seas." All hope is lost. Why go on but to hope that things might change? If it were not for a slight change in

Prufrock's tone, he maintains that it would have been better that he had been a lonely creature on the bottom of the ocean, hiding during the day only to feed at night when the threat of a predator is minimal.

Death and the comfort it may bring to a meaningless life seem a proper alternatives to Prufrock as a small smile twitches his upper lip. The morning (mourning) is over. The pinnacle of his life has passed and the midday bell has sounded. The most welcome close of day is at hand, and it is in this that Prufrock takes a some slight delight: "And the afternoon, the evening, sleeps so peacefully!/Smoothed by long fingers,/asleep...tired...or it malingers,/Stretched out on the floor, here beside you and me." Death is at hand, and Prufrock welcomes it. The "long fingers" of Death offer peace. And there is time for Death to do His work; "asleep...tired...or [he] malingers" knowing full well that Time allows Death ample time to work. Prufrock calls on this fact and wonders, "Have I the strength to force the moment to its crisis?" Has Prufrock the will, strength, or desire to die? After "tea and cakes and ices" and other meaningless niceties, does he have the ability to accept that which may calm his mind and offer an escape? Prufrock has asked these questions, and he has come only to minor conclusions, puzzles which stare back at him from the void in his tortured soul.

Prufrock has suffered to know. He has stood inside the church of despair and "wept and fasted, wept and prayed," only to see his "head (grown slightly bald) brought in upon a platter." Prufrock may have been a believer. He may have had faith in the coming of something better in life, but, in a moment of realization, Prufrock knows that he is "no prophet." He has confronted Death as a mortal man with little or no faith in that which he had hoped might save him: "I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker,/And in short, I was afraid."

In his fear, Prufrock has but one chance to reflect on anything that may have been worthwhile during life; but like every other observation, Prufrock asks more questions, unanswerable, but necessary. If he had gathered the strength and believed that it had been possible to dare to ask,

Prufrock wonders, "And would it have been worth it, after all,/.../.../Would it have been worth while,/ To have bitten off the matter with a smile,/To have squeezed the universe into a ball/to roll it toward some overwhelming question,/To say: 'I am Lazarus, come from the dead,/Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all.'" In this challenging passage, Prufrock asks a fundamental question: would it be worth it to try to answer life's most difficult question? Even when a woman "should say: 'That is not what I meant at all./That is not it, at all,'" after having been given an answer to a question, the most basic of questions, which has been insufficient? If she is disgusted at Prufrock's answer to her question, why would the world be interested in an inferior Lazarus, a man, in this case, who has no idea what truth may be? Just as one can see the woman settle "a pillow by her head," so too may the world turn away from Prufrock as he stands to "tell [us] all."

Prufrock is inhibited, debilitated, and chained by insufferable odds against him. He knows this as he bawls, "It is impossible to say just what I mean!" The woman in his delusion merely turns toward the window, looking out, away from him and he is left alone once again.

In his isolation, Prufrock recounts the ways of his life and almost seems to be at ease with himself: "No! I am not Prince "Hamlet, nor was meant to be," he says. From this and what follows, we may infer that Prufrock knows his place; he is not one placed in a position where action is a necessity. Unlike Hamlet, Prufrock can profit from the fact that he did not falter. Prufrock knows "to be" but does not know what to be. The wealth of his life is contained in small flakes of what may be gold dust: "Am an attendant lord, one that will do/To swell a progress, start a scene or two,/Advise the prince no doubt, an easy tool,/Deferential, glad to be of use,/Politic, cautious, and meticulous;/Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse." Prufrock has some minor claims to a mediocre fame: he is one to serve and offer little resistance; he is educated, civic-minded, careful, and clean, but a graceful tombstone with high praise will not be erected in his honor.

In his ultimate futility, Prufrock "grow[s]

old." The smallest of pleasures are his only source of redemption: the simple acts of parting his "hair behind," daring to "eat a peach," and strolling along the beach wearing "white flannel trousers."

As this sad service ends, Prufrock leaves the streets and rooms behind. He closes his eyes and sees "mermaids singing, each to each." He says that they will not sing to him, nor to me, for I have been invited, ordered to come along. Like Prufrock and Eliot, I have also seen "them riding seaward on the waves/Combing the white hair of the waves blown back/When the wind blows the water white and black." However, Prufrock knows the secret. Prufrock, in his high service, wishes only to remind us of the fact that "We have lingered in the chambers of the sea/By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown." We have had the chance to live, imagine, and be. We have the perception to take in despair, hopelessness, and loss. In our ability to combine the dynamic of the beneficial life with that of the ever-confronting purpose of mankind, we find that we are living in a dream. In this dream, we may be content, we may search for personal Truth, or we may fall subject to the other questioning voices all around, "Till human voices wake us, and we drown."

What Heroes Teach Us

by Richard Hill

Dedicated to the swift recovery of Clifford Horn!

As I write this, Tonya Harding has just lost any chance of the Olympic Gold medal. Her shoe lace broke. She can't understand why bad things keep happening to her. Moralists squeal with delight: justice has been served. Men in barbershops admire her good old fashioned American spunk. The whole world is corrupt and she has simply done what was necessary to win. In the recent past, she has modified her hairstyle, attempting, the newspaper tells us, to "soften" her image. She has also ordered a new outfit from a woman in Virginia who specializes in wedding gowns--the kind which Nancy Kerrigan uses as a model for her skating outfits. The Tonya drama is endlessly fascinating, providing us, it seems to me, with a microcosm of our world. Can everything be packaged into an image of reality--or can we know the truth? How ought we to react to this contemporary morality play? Why do bad things keep happening to some people?

Other events evoke similar issues. On Monday night football, we watch the Excedrin two minute warning; on New Year's Day, we endure the John Hancock Bowl, the USF&G Sugar Bowl, the Mobil Cotton Bowl; General Electric provides educational TV programs with commercials for viewing in schools. Some people see this as merely American free enterprise at work. But commercials sell more than products; they order reality. Advertising teaches us that when we have a problem, we associate not only with a particular brand; we think we need a product. Somebody else will solve our dilemmas. And the products come with built-in messages about who we are and how to live: the Marlboro Man and Joe (and now Jill) Camel teach us that smoking is cool. Pretty, busty women in beer commercials inform us that women are sex objects. (We seem to think that gender equality is barechested men in Diet Coke commercials.) Shopping malls not only prepare us to be American

consumers; they ensure that we will drive our cars farther (i. e., consume more fossil fuels) and that neighborhoods will be increasingly difficult to sustain.

At heart, these are moral issues. Noam Chomsky says that our government and media "manufacture consent." Reality is created for us--to produce profit for corporations or to ensure domestic order. For the Environmental Protection Agency, acid rain is "poorly buffered precipitation"; sewer sludge is "regulated organic nutrient." We don't have tax increases. Read their lips: we have "revenue enhancements." We may snicker at these euphemisms. (And there is enough silliness in contemporary political correctness: according to satirist Christopher Cerf, looters are now "nontraditional shoppers"; and if they're caught, they become "guests" of the legal system, staying in "custody suites.")

But there is a deeper issue at stake. We are fond of saying that our media doesn't report the news; it creates it. The situation may be worse. We seem to report only the news that fits our current view of reality. "Desert Storm" may evoke images of power and Romance, but when our bombs in Iraq cause "collateral damage," it is 250,000 people who are killed. The U. S. media did not report the story. In the 1970s, the Khmer Rouge were systematically destroying millions of Cambodians. Not only was this atrocity the subject of a powerful film (The Killing Fields), but it was appropriately reported in U. S. newspapers. A simultaneous Indonesian genocide of the East Timorese was hardly mentioned in our press. Why? The Khmer Rouge were Communists and we know that Communists are godless animals. The Indonesians were slaughtering the East Timorese with U. S. aid--and weapons. This doesn't fit our image of reality. During the Persian Gulf War, our media forgot that George Bush armed Saddam Hussein when it was politically correct to do so before Saddam became the current "madman." It took eight years after the news about irradiated Americans was first reported to reach the mainstream media. And we didn't hear about the C. I. A. running drugs for Manuel Noriega, keeping him in power when it was in our best interests to do so. The

point is that whether we are liberal or conservative, the net effect is that we are distanced from reality and have difficulty doing our duty as citizens to create a cleaner environment and a better society.

Even more, these issues are metaphysical; they affect our understanding of truth. The Tonya Harding story underscores our difficulty telling the difference between image and reality. When we can't handle the moral complexity of this parable, we resort to either/or thinking. If Tonya Harding is the "bad girl" from the other side of the tracks, who's just a little too rough for our refined tastes, then we want Nancy Kerrigan to be the "golden girl." And she's not; she disappointed us by not winning the Gold Medal--and still going to Disney World. We want winners and easy truths. We never did measure up to Ozzie and Harriet, nor to the Huxtables--but we need these illusions. We talk about family values as if once in the "good old days" families were somehow simpler matters.

We live in a fragmented world where we no longer share agreed upon verities. In a world of such diversity, TRUTH appears unreachable; instead we have individual perceptions of reality. College teachers no longer "profess"; and if they did, at least some students would protest. They want their current view of reality to be confirmed. (And is education possible under these conditions? There is a danger in letting Business or any other institution dictate the direction of schools.) People's lives no longer mean anything or "go anywhere"; they are victims of random circumstances. Technology overwhelms us, alienating us not only from machines which purport to make our lives easier but from ourselves. Our world is split: politically, racially, personally, philosophically. We have divided our world into us vs. them. Nation-states have no objective basis for adjudicating disputes. Serbs and Croats kill Muslims; Catholics kill Protestants; Israelis kill Palestinians. And the world community sits back helpless. Black and white people, parents and children, husbands and wives, men and women no longer understand each other. We seem to have no basis for bridging the gap. Values have become personal "biases." We live our lives without context. We don't know who we are. We don't know where

we're headed. These are the real problems.

What does all this have to do with heroes? Everything! In the world which I have described, many of us conclude that heroes no longer exist. We don't believe in excellence--or, if a hero satisfies the needs of one group, that person must alienate another group. If a person achieves something great, he or she must have a skeleton in the closet. A Current Affair is on the case. I'm empathetic to the need for investigative journalists. The 1960s taught us the value of suspecting "official truths." At the same time, we must maintain the value and persistence of heroic ideals. Heroes traditionally solve the problems of cultures. In our time, as I have tried to suggest above, the predicaments are complex, though they primarily have to do with three issues: a failure of imagination, flawed morality, and splintered identities. Let me explain what heroes teach us.

In a world like ours, the first lesson of the hero is that the more things change, the more they remain the same. People usually think they live in what the Hindus call the Kali Yuga, the Dark Ages when truth and morality are absent, when the world, which once walked healthily on four legs, now totters on one. Heroes teach us that suffering is universal. As Virgil writes in The Aeneid, "Sunt lacrimae rerum." There are tears in the nature of things.

I have been slow to fathom this truth. I admit that twenty-five years ago I thought that in one generation we could produce utopia. This wouldn't happen through violent revolution as some insisted. But rather we could correct the world by transforming consciousness. As The Beatles sang, "You'd better free your mind instead." As a next step, we would raise perfect children. After all, Buckminster Fuller had notified us that "There is no such a thing as genius; some children are less damaged than others." (Just a little pressure on parents!) The reality of course has been far different. My children are wonderful--but not perfect. I'm a good bit chastened these days. Like all of us, I've suffered a bit. And maybe as the Greeks told us we could, I've suffered into some truth--the humbler sadder truth that we've got a long way to go.

The best writers of the twentieth century echo Virgil, all in their own way. The Hemingway hero is grim, telling us that we are all amputees, part of our psyche irretrievably damaged. The Existentialists insist that there are no universal truths. Each of us has to discover an individual set of values which must be fluid, open to change in a dynamic universe. One of my favorite writers that I can't teach (his books are too long) writes that "we sit here on a blind rock careening through space; we are all of us rushing headlong to the grave." Samuel Beckett discloses that we are "waiting for Godot," who presumably will solve our problems. We are guilty and responsible for evil, as Kafka says, but we don't know what we did or who to see to get a hearing. Vaclav Havel, the current President of The Czech Republic, writes that our situation is hopeless. To be alive, Tonya, is to suffer.

The real problem is fear that our lives don't make sense. We fear that the world will blow up, that we will die, that we won't find love. In short, we fear that our world isn't fertile and that there is no place to run. We are paralyzed and hopeless. The second lesson from heroes is that this desperation is in fact a desirable state. As my college roommate used to tell me, "Hopelessness is an advanced state of consciousness." It's only in despair that we have a chance to learn. As Samuel Johnson wrote, "When a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully."

Heroes traditionally live out this wisdom. Adam's sin is felix culpa, the happy fault. Out of the hopelessness into which his sin plunged humankind comes the salvific action of Jesus Christ. Heroes know that before we go up it is necessary to go down. Christ descended into hell before he rose from the dead. Virgil's Aeneas goes into the underworld to encounter his past before he fully commits himself to his future. Dante in The Divine Comedy had to go down into hell before he could struggle through purgatory and eventually find true love in Paradise.

This "going down" is symbolically significant. As heroes go down, they discover two levels of reality. First they face the "other," that shadow

side of themselves they can't control. For men, this is the anima, the creative feminine side of the character. They also confront the void, the experience of life without any preconceptions. This is where the true courage of the hero is tested. The void is the level of awesome mystery: the likelihood is that we will be destroyed; there is a chance we may find wisdom and fertility. Dante faints three times as he challenges the tangible evil of hell. But his journey requires him to know sin before he can purge it from his soul. As Aeneas goes into the underworld, he progressively peels away layer after layer of his identity. In Virgil's terms, he finally meets his true self, his father Anchises who foretells his destiny, to found a great line of Roman leaders. These heroes remind us--and this is the second major problem heroes address--that we have to give up attachment to ego (what Joseph Campbell calls desire) if we are going to find the right path on the journey of life. We give up attachment to material possessions as the source of life's meaning. We let go of our privileged assumptions about life and face the void without preconceived notions.

The potential practical consequences are enormous. We may die, we may go insane, we may shipwreck. But in fighting fear and desire, in recognizing that our individual ego identities are insignificant in light of the awful truth of the void, we may discern two important truths. In such a world, one doesn't win. Our obsession with victory is an illusion. I often tell people that baseball, one of my true passions, is not about winning and losing. I watch baseball games with little attention to the score. Rather, I think of baseball as a dance, choreographed by a small leather spheroid which dictates the beautiful movements of athletes who respond to its motion. If baseball is not your sport, consider that a similar disregard for winning might have prevented the Tonya Harding melodrama. Or, more significantly, when we realize that wars are never won, we may find alternative behaviors.

The second consequence of the "happy" encounter with the void is that we may acknowledge that all of us are in this together. In growing up, we might say that we lose our innocence twice--if we're lucky. The first is the perception that our

parents and other authorities are flawed and responsible for our problems. It is noteworthy that many hero stories are about fathers and sons (Odysseus/Telemachus, Anchises/Aeneas, Virgil/Dante, Robert Pirsig and his son Chris in Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance). We realize too that our world is not perfect, a discovery that is the occasion for deep distrust of institutions. In making this breakthrough, young people often feel bitter and lonely, intimately aware of their separateness. Later may come a second loss of innocence, the acknowledgment that we too are capable of the same mistakes as our parents. In losing innocence this second time, we realize the error of us. vs. them thinking. We come to appreciate the value of our common human heritage and are less inclined to either/or thinking (e. g. rooting for Tonya or Nancy; maybe we'll root for them both because they're both on the American team, or because we appreciate excellence in all the athletes. Because the Olympics represent a noble ideal, we yearn for a complex justice to prevail.) Above all, we empathize with our brothers and sisters who are suffering and doing their best.

The thrust of my teaching the last few years is appreciation for the value of Dialogue. I tell students that ideas come through awareness of ecological relationship. We listen carefully to others and respond with our best approximation of the truth. This is really the insight of The Oresteia, which is about competing notions of justice. At the beginning of Euripides' trilogy, the Greeks suffer under a rancorous eye for an eye morality. They can't kill bloodkin; such deaths must be avenged. By the end, the gods expand the range of those we can't kill to include marriage partners and people in our city. Today we live in a Global Village. An encounter with the void dictates that we don't kill our fellow villagers. One of my favorite Pacific Northwest Indian legends makes this same point. After a woman from a coastal tribe has been kidnapped by a man from another tribe, her brothers engage in a venomous feud which leads to many deaths on both sides. She has a child and finally escapes back to her own people. She finds a way to stop the bloodshed, to circumvent our tendency to blame "the other" for our problems. She tells

her son that he shouldn't shoot strangers who come to their shore. "One of them might be your father."

This ethic may appear unrealistic, but heroes tell us differently. War appears to be the inevitable human folly. We fight because of human weakness and a failure to conceive better alternatives. But we seem to misunderstand our admiration for war heroes. We are deluded if we think their gallantry resides in their ability to kill competently. What we truly revere about the brave is their recognition of a larger context for behavior. They risk their individual lives for the greater cause of community.

Another relevant case is the common perception today that we no longer have universal truths. Rather--and students tell me this all the time--we have individual opinions. We can't decide the advantage of one behavior over another. If all people are doing their best, who are we to judge the validity of their choices? In a world of cultural and ethnic multiplicity, this is an inviting temptation. And yet the presence of heroes insists that some behaviors are better than others. The next major lesson that heroes teach us is how to see our lives within context.

Whatever Charles Barkley says, we can't escape the fact that heroes are role models. What is important is to realize that the true heroes aren't necessarily people who achieve much, but those who see much. They envision a better alternative which gives advantage to individual and group alike: Oedipus solves the riddle of the Sphinx, Joan of Arc hears the word of God, Yudishthira in the Hindu epic The Mahabharata grasps paradoxical truths when examined by Dharma ("What is an example of defeat?" "Victory"). Once heroes jeopardize their lives, overcome fear and desire, and risk the possibility of a world of no meaning, they detect a larger dimension of reality. Within this larger framework, we know that our age is like any other. There's a sense in which all times are Dark Ages; we are constantly facing the Kali Yuga. The hero can teach us how to live more effectively in this world.

From the heroic perspective, it is important to know the Whole Truth. In Zen and the Art of

Motorcycle Maintenance, Robert Pirsig argues that most of us understand reality based on either the Romantic or the Classic perspective. We admire the intuitive, pioneering Romantic courage of the individual who refuses to be bound by social constraints, the person who does it "my way" (Tonya Harding?). Or we value the rational authority of the group, the perspective which recognizes the need for social order (Nancy Kerrigan?). We prefer the traditional standards of the "father" or the new possibilities represented by the "son." To choose either, says Pirsig, is to miss the Big Picture. In novelist Milan Kundera's terms, it is to choose kitsch, on one level the cheap art like the pink flamingos some people have on their front lawns or the iridescent pink plastic Jesus figures people keep on the dashboards of their cars. But kitsch has a more profound meaning. It is the simplification of reality which compels us to miss the truth of a situation. Pirsig and Kundera, both of whom dramatize the reality of contemporary voids, see yet the fertile potential of complex truths. We need both the courage of the individual hero and the security of the social bond, tradition and innovation. Pirsig insists that we best choose based on QUALITY, the hero's perspective.

As a moral term, Quality recognizes that some behaviors are better than others. The better truths--which lead to heroic conduct--value complexity, see our shared human heritage, comprehend the value of suffering, posit the need to confront the void, and imagine the beauty of humility, compassion, and service. Quality truths give us hope beyond hopelessness.—Without the hero, there is no hope. It is not surprising that we "buy" the misshapen truths of advertisers who create a materialistic haven for us, who tell us that we can't be successful without their product, that there is no proof that smoking is deadly. It makes sense that we fall for the contemptible euphemisms of those who seek social order at the expense of individual autonomy. We accept this kitsch because we don't know who we are.

The last--and most important--task of the hero is to show us the nature of our true identity. We perhaps know the story of the lost princess who is

raised among peasants. One day she discovers her true identity. In finding strength when confronting the void, heroes teach us that like the princess, we too are royalty. We are capable of greatness. Like so many classical heroes, we are the children of God who must be about the business of the father--and mother. When asked by Dharma about the inevitable destiny for each human being, Yudishthira gives the hero's response: Happiness. Lest we become prideful at this discovery, The Mahabharata also tells us that it may take many reincarnations and, like The Divine Comedy, the Hindu epic tells us that we won't achieve salvation by merely following pre-set rules. The way is narrow, but not the province of any one group. Goethe's Faust provides us with the basis for humility and hope: "there are two souls which live in me," a side which skirts close to the earth needing its security and one which aspires to fly to the stars.

Heroes instruct us that the journey to discover our true nature is perilous. The stakes are high; we may not be successful. But heroes also inform us that we must travel on this journey of discovery. A Jungian psychologist I heard once said that in the modern world, all people are neurotic and sick. Given this condition, he went on to say that we have a choice. We can become victims and endure the social conditioning of our times, acquiesce to the perception that our lives don't make sense, and actually welcome the view that there are no universal truths. Or we can become heroes. We may discover the essential truth about ourselves. As we go down that "long and winding road," the Beatles sing, we must "carry that weight a long time." Heroes can help enlighten us and lighten the way. In this Lenten season before we await the Resurrection, the lessons of heroes are particularly relevant. We must explore the void if we want to discover our identities. We must go down before we can understand there is an up. We too may seek Resurrection.

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