

# Practical Thinking

## An Essay on the Evolution of Science (Part 2)

by Ed Ferlauto

*This is the conclusion of an article that began in the March 2012 issue of Practical Thinking. A few copies of that issue are still available.*

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### Energy and the Sun

The builders of Stonehenge, some 4500 years ago, aligned the monument to point at the sunrise of the summer equinox. (12) They also created alignments to the rising and setting of the sun and moon at other meaningful times of the year. Although Stonehenge is the most impressive and best preserved, other stone circles, found all over Europe, are believed to have had similar functions. While some of Stonehenge's purposes remain uncertain and controversial, it is well established that these sites functioned as astronomical almanacs. (13)

Many other cultures are known to have been capable of similarly precise measurements. The Big Horn Medicine Wheel in Wyoming has a similar design and presumed purpose, although it is simpler in execution. The Caracol temple, built by the Mayans around 1000 CE, is much more sophisticated than Stonehenge; it probably played a similar role as an astronomical observatory. Its many windows are accurately aligned with astronomical events, such as sunrise and sunset at the solstices and equinoxes.

Aztec rites that centered on the creation reenacted the sacrifices of the gods. The bravest of the deities, lying in darkness, threw himself on the pre-dawn fire that would become the sun. This resulted in the mandate to die—by human sacrifice—so that the sun might be revived. (4)

What do we believe of the sun today? It is still a major focus of our society. However, our interest is based upon advanced scientific advances and developments. In addition to capturing the sun's radiation with photovoltaic and/or reflective devices here on earth, there are proposals to capture radiation with satellites in space and beam the energy down to earth with microwave or laser technology. There might be some analogy to Greek mythology where Icarus flew toward the sun.

Current nuclear reactors use nuclear fission to generate power. In nuclear fission, energy is released from splitting one atom into two atoms. Another process, nuclear fusion, creates energy when two atoms join together to form one. In a fusion reactor, hydrogen atoms come together to form helium atoms, neutrons, and vast amounts of energy. Nuclear fusion is the process that powers the sun. It could be a cleaner, safer, more efficient, and more abundant source of power than nuclear fission.

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Solar energy, along with wind power, nuclear energy, and possibly clean coal technology, is the wave of future energy sources. Technology will allow radiation from the sun and nuclear fusion to provide nonpolluting and cheap fuels as well as electricity, to be in essence the basis of life in the modern world. (14)

## Communication and Mathematics

The earliest existing remains of Egyptian writing go back to the beginning of the First Dynasty, about 3100 BCE. (16)

Gutenberg and his collaborators developed the technologies needed to make printing available on a mass scale, creating letters made of metal that could be quickly assembled and reused. Part of Gutenberg's genius was to recognize the need for all the letters to be identical in height so they could be easily combined. (17) The printing press is deemed one of the greatest inventions of the recent second millennium, since it introduced standardization and speed in the dissemination of knowledge, and is largely responsible for the great strides of the modern world.

Mathematics has been a medium of communication, before and after Gutenberg, which enabled the building of cities and structures.

In ancient times, Pythagoras, Plato and other Greek philosophers developed mathematical methods largely dependent on geometry. In the first millennium, the Arab and Islamic world introduced algebra (actual translation of the Arabic word *aljabr* is 'mending of fractured bones'; by extension, to restore hidden numbers in an equation). (16)

It took centuries to develop the gifts of communication and calculation into the age of computers. We sit at the beginning of a new age of discovery, termed the Information Age.

Some theorists suggest that everything in the universe can be understood as the information it contains. (9) In this view, quantum state information is the foundation of everything. The sum of this information encompasses the rules that govern the behavior of quarks, boulders, stars, galaxies, and the universe itself. (17)

Vastly greater computing resources than we have currently are needed to make testable predictions from such a theory. Researchers are now trying to construct a new type of computer that uses quantum state information rather than simple on/off "bits." These "Quantum Computers" may someday be able to perform feats of communication and computation once thought to be impossible. (18)

## Back to Basics

Cosmologists are still asking the same questions that Ancient stargazers posed as they surveyed the heavens. Where did the universe come from? What if anything preceded it? How did the universe arrive at its present state, and what will be its future? Although theorists have long speculated on the origin of the cosmos, until recently they had no way to probe the universe's earliest moments to test their hypotheses. In recent years, however, researchers have proposed a method for observing the universe as it was in the very first fraction of a second after the big bang. This method involves looking for traces of gravitational waves in the cosmic background radiation that has permeated the universe for 13.7 billion years. (19) Unfortunately, one such project has been canceled because of current economic conditions. However, the possibility of conducting such an investigation is another indication of the incredible advances in the state of modern science.

Another notable major experiment is now on the doorstep of scientific discovery: The Large Hadron Collider (LHC) outside of Geneva, Switzerland, has been built by CERN, the European Physics consortium. The LHC is the first accelerator capable of exploring the full range of energies within which the Higgs boson is thought to exist. Scientific theory predicts a standard model in which all of space is filled with a so-called "Higgs field." Unlike magnetic or gravitational fields that can vary from place to place (things weigh more here than on the moon) the Higgs field is the same everywhere. What varies is how different fundamental particles interact with it. The interaction of the Higgs field with fundamental particles is what gives particles mass. If the LHC finds the Higgs boson, it will solve the ancient question of just what mass is. The LHC has been termed the most complicated thing that humans have ever built. (20,21) Recent reports indicate that evidence of the existence of the Higgs boson has been observed but as of this writing the scientific community is waiting for verification.

In Brian Greene's recent book, *The Hidden Reality*, he reviews the string theorist's reference to parallel universes as well as bubble universes sitting in a different dimension unseen by humans. (22) These references refer to our latest scientific and mathematical hypotheses. Yet there also exist in our beliefs the ideas of the man in the moon, little green men from Mars, and aliens traveling above us. How can one judge and separate myths from reality? Given that our religions have referred to an afterlife, is it strange to consider the possibility of multiverses?

It is in the nature of humans to seek understanding. The basis of our philosophies and beliefs will ultimately change with time. Whether we will ever find the answers is uncertain.

## Summary

As stated at the beginning, this essay is a brief review of beliefs of early societies and the accomplishments of modern science in explaining our universe and the life in it. Our inquisitiveness is a constant and the answers are never sufficient. It is interesting to note that early sages saw their world as having been created suddenly and that they believed it would, in the end, face an apocalypse of consuming fire. These predictions are recorded in the Bible and are also a part of many religions that exist today. Today's scientific theories envision the creation of the universe by a sudden big bang and the eventual consuming of the earth in a ball of fire as our star, the Sun, evolves into a red giant. Modern science has come a long way in explaining our beginnings and our destiny. However, the questions and answers have not changed significantly.

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## ***Seasons of Desire: What I Discovered Along the Way***

*Book review by Shirley Whiting*

*Seasons of Desire* by Evelyn D. Klein. Northstar Press: St. Cloud, 2012. 139 pages.

*What are seasons  
but a merry-go-round  
of days  
to different times—*

Weaving seasons and time like a tapestry throughout her book, MISF member Evelyn Klein has structured a unique blending of artwork, poetry and prose as she matches her encounters and observations of her outer world with spiritual and psychological corollaries to her inner world.

She states in her introduction, "For me the spiritual, psychological and artistic side of existence form a kind of triangle so intricately connected that it is hard to tell where one starts and the other ends, as the three seem fused into one." She refers to the work of Swiss psychologist, Carl Jung.

Form mirrors content in this book. By alternating prose pieces, of two to three pages in length, with short poems that burst upon the page with an incendiary image, such as "struck by lightning. the forest burns," we get a full range of visual and emotional expression.

In sharing her creative process, Klein writes: "Poetry, with its short lines and rhythm, its succinctness and metaphor is one way to share my experiences and discoveries. Prose is the way I like to examine aspects that invite a more direct approach. Visual art releases the soul to travel with crows in air or with angels in spirit."

I had the privilege of introducing Evelyn Klein at her recent reading at the Loft, and was impressed by the ease of her ability, on stage, in front of an audience, to weave anecdotes from her life with their poetic equivalents, while adding observations in the extemporaneous fashion of the teacher she has been for many years.

*Seasons of Desire* is the product of an artistic temperament, embodied in a poet of extraordinary observational abilities, deeply attuned to her inner life. Klein has the ability to share that life with others while providing a model for their own exploration.

As she says in: "The Game Along the Way"

*Life is a participation game, a sort of Monopoly,  
between you and me and the world,  
played along the road of change,  
on the train of vision,*

*continued on page 4*

*Seasons, continued from page 3*

across bridges of ingenuity,  
and along paths lined with berries of good luck,  
over mountains of challenge  
and gullies of denial,  
to the forest fire of disaster  
and the spring of new life,  
through valleys of doubt  
and nights of mystery,  
into the arms of love  
and the dawn of truth,  
into the daylight of understanding  
and the orbit of transformation and growth.  
Success does not follow the number of chips we hold  
at the outset but on how we play the game,  
on how far we have come and have yet to go  
in the Easter of our tomorrows.

I recommend *Seasons of Desire* to anyone seeking to connect with and deepen a spiritual life and revitalize personal creativity.

For teachers: this book will provide your students with an inexhaustible source of riches, a boon they will treasure for a long time to come.

## Book Review

### ***Idiot America: How Stupidity Became a Virtue in the Land of the Free***

*Idiot America*. By Charles. P. Pierce. New York: Anchor Books, 2009. 307 pp. (no index). Paper.

The dictionary makes a nuanced distinction between a jobation and a jeremiad. The former is a *long, tedious reproof, a scolding*; the latter is a *long literary work which laments the state of society*. Pierce's book is both. The brief cover blurb calls this book "a raucous rant." All the above descriptors apply in this ripping examination of "How Stupidity Became a Virtue in the Land of the Free," which is the book's subtitle. Through eleven chapters plus a new afterward in the Anchor paperback edition, Pierce skewers conservative, unreasoning responses in America to such things as talk radio, global warming, the Terri Schiavo case, reality shows, and recent developments in American politics.

The reader should be advised that the point of view is sharply tilted to the left. That is, the targets of Pierce's

heated discussion are primarily conservative America in general and the Republican party in particular. For instance, he cites a 2007 Gallup poll which found that 65 percent of the Republicans surveyed said they did not believe in evolution. (65) Pierce, unsurprised but inflamed, ponders the deleterious effect this fact has on education and policy decisions.

Pierce's lament over this and other issues derives from his conviction that America was founded as a nation that affirmed Enlightenment principles, particularly those that were articulated by James Madison. Each chapter opens with a reference to Madison's convictions and then proceeds to illustrate how far and in what ways those convictions have been subverted. At one point Pierce notes that all Madison "hoped for was that the people in that society could educate themselves sufficiently to distinguish between the good ideas and the transparently crazy ones, and engage with one another well enough to use the best parts of the latter to improve the former." (52)

Instead, public discourse is become dominated by such opinion-shapers as Rush Limbaugh, Sean Hannity, Glen Beck, and others of their ilk. Anyone who is inclined to resonate with Pierce's point of view is likely to revel in his rant. However, one might wish to be aware of some nettlesome aspects of his book. A chapter usually begins at some relatively obscure point and unreels with a measured and not always clear pace. Pierce's fondness for Ignatius Donnelly, for example, rivals his admiration for James Madison. But it takes a long time to get from Donnelly's ill-fated founding of a town in Minnesota in 1856 to Pierce's endorsement of a phenomenon he calls—and endorses—"the Crank."

Pierce affirms Madison's commitment to using the brain and the intellect. But he inveighs against the prevalence of "the Gut." The Gut, Pierce says, is democratic and often goes under the name of common sense. However, the Gut "inevitably tells so many different people so many different things at so many times that it causes them to choose up sides." (95) Fair enough. Still a more balanced account might point to places where people engaged in public discourse are offering a more reasoned approach. The voices on Public Radio, for example, speak in a more balanced way than Talk Radio, which is a special target for Pierce.

Pierce raises issues that were anticipated many years ago in Richard Hofstadter's more nuanced and probing book, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*. But if one is interested in reading a gut-wrenching jeremiad or a fast-paced jobation, then one might enjoy reading Pierce's book, which is as full

of spit and vinegar as the targets he lampoons. His three great premises of *Idiot America* are a provocative summary and an enticing place to begin reading:

- Any theory is valid if it sells books, soaks up ratings, or otherwise moves units.
- Fact is that which enough people believe. Truth is determined by how fervently they believe it.
- Anything can be true if someone says it loudly enough.

*reviewed by Robert Brusica*

## Women in Music

*March 17, 2012*

Former MISF member Jim Reilly, accompanied by soprano Terry Rowe and local poet, Sharon Chmielarz, presented a program on women composers to the MISF, Saturday, March 17. The point of the program was to highlight the contributions that women have made to classical music. In every case, these contributions were made without encouragement or recognition from the composer's male peers.

Reilly opened with a movement from a piano sonata by Marianne von Martinez (1744-1812). As a child Marianne performed before the Empress Maria Therese of Austria. Von Martinez composed both piano and choral music and was well known throughout Europe. Since, however, it would have been socially unacceptable for her to accept a court appointment as a musician, she remained an amateur for her entire life and is now virtually unheard of except in dedicated programs such as this one.

The next composer on the program was Helene Liebmann (née Riese) (1796-1835). At around age 16, Helene, who had studied with Franz Lauska, set a Goethe poem (Kennst du das Land) to music. Terry Rowe, accompanied by Reilly, sang this song. Sometime around 1814, Riese married and moved to London, at which time she dropped from the historical record. All we know of her later life is that she attended a concert by Clara Schumann in 1835, shortly before she, Riese, died.

Reilly then turned to Fanny Mendelssohn (1805-1847). Like her younger brother Felix, Fanny Mendelssohn was enormously talented; Fanny was, in fact, a better pianist than Felix. The siblings competed by writing songs for their father on his birthday. However, the prevailing attitude in

the nineteenth century was that while music could be a profession for men, it was only an ornament for women. Fanny complained of this state of affairs when she said, "not a soul dances to my music." Sometimes Felix published her music under his name, and it wasn't until 1846 that her music was published under her own name. She died in 1847. To showcase Fanny Mendelssohn, Terry Rowe sang "Warum sind die Rosen so blass?"

Another woman composer inhibited by male attitudes about women was Clara Wieck Schumann (1819-1896). Clara's father was an absolute tyrant about making her practice the piano, which with her native talent, made her into one of the most famous child pianists of her day. As part of her musical education she learned to compose, and the MISF program included one of her songs, a poem by Friedrich Rickert, "Liebst du um Schönheit." However, since neither Clara's father nor her husband was supportive of her career as a composer, she is best known by history for her performances.

Other women composers on the program included the Venezuelan Teresa Carreno (1853-1917), and Amy Beach (1867-1944). Carreno was based principally in Europe where she performed and composed at least 40 works for piano. Amy Beach was the first successful American female composer of large-scale art music. She is ranked with Edward McDowell and Arthur Foote. Reilly played Beach's composition "La fée de la fontaine." He also played, and Terry Rowe sang, a piece by Lily Boulanger (1893-1918), "Reflets" using the poetry of Maurice Maeterlinck. Other female composers included Hilda Neupert (1848-1908), Agatha Grundal (1847-1907), Glenna Ustvolkska (1919-2006), and Billie Holiday (1915-1959).

In between selections poet Chmielarz read some of her poems, such as "Between Art and Usefulness," "The Shape of Music," "The Accent on Flat," and "The Basilica's Bells." These poems, one of which contained the phrase, "A note is a shard of a thought" added to the appreciation of the music.

Overall the theme of this very enjoyable morning was that all of the music on the program was written by women who faced serious social obstacles. The program was designed to be an inspiration to all women who compose music.

# Annual Poetry Reading

April 21, 2012

The Minnesota Independent Scholars Forum hosted its annual poetry reading April 21. The theme was Earth Day and many of the poems dealt with related subjects.

Under the leadership of Evelyn Klein, three poets read their work. Klein, a poet and a creative writing teacher, read from her two published books *From Here Across the Bridge* (Minneapolis: Nodin Press, 2006) and *Once Upon A Neighborhood* (St. Cloud: Northstar, 2009). Some of the poems were "Two Dogs," "God Made Adam," "I am the Night," "Reawakening," "Tornado Country," and "Spirit of Saint Paul." Klein has recently published a new book of poetry, *Seasons of Desire*, which is reviewed elsewhere in this journal.

The second person to read was Jill Breckenridge. Formerly the director of the Loft, Breckenridge is now a poet and a writing coach. She read from three of her published works: *How to be Lucky* (Emporia, KN: Blue Stem Press, 1990), *Civil Blood* (St. Paul: Milkweed, 1993), and *The Gravity of Flesh* (Minneapolis: Nodin, 2009). *Civil Blood* is a series of poems and prose about the Civil War period. *Gravity of Flesh* and *How to be Lucky* are collections of personal poems. Here is a part of a poem from *How to be Lucky*, which won the 1990 Bluestem Award from Emporia State University.

"Helen Hart's Summer Watercolor Class"

*She wore gold earrings  
big as Kerr Jar lids,  
and a purple scarf waving behind  
her yellow jeep for blocks  
as she picked us up for watercolor class.  
She drove faster than our mothers'  
voices calling us home.  
Instead of aprons, she wore eyelashes  
so long and black we couldn't  
take our eyes off them. Her work  
was our play, her play, our delight,  
and her laugh sailed every pond  
in Julie Davis Park, startling  
the iridescent mallards  
we girls painted, greens flowing  
into blues, blues into greens...*

The last poet to read was Linda Back McKay. McKay is the author of several poetry collections as well as *Shadow Mothers: Stories of Adoption and Reunion* (St. Cloud: Northstar, 1998). She read from her recently published collection of poetry,

*The Next Best Thing* (Minneapolis: Nodin Press, 2011). Since it was April, the following poem seemed especially appropriate.

"April Blizzard"

*The dry wind shuffles  
through a slog of leaves  
from last fall and the weeds  
wait, generous and abundant;  
the devilish creeping charlie,  
whimsical dandelions and buckthorn,  
noxious, invasive pests; they rest  
for now. They would laugh if they could  
and the snow that will fall  
tomorrow is not an end  
to the beginning. It is a moment  
melting in the palm of your hand.  
It tastes of orange and smoke.  
After tomorrow, the birds  
will sing as madly as before.  
... Spring's sense  
of humor is a dance step.  
Forward and back, forward.*

*ΔThe editor is grateful for the help of David Juncker in producing this report.*

## **Minnesota's Maverick Tradition in Politics**

May 19, 2012

Rhoda Gilman began her talk to the Independent Scholars on May 19 by saying that Minnesota has a maverick tradition in American politics. While this fact is fairly well known (an example is that we presently have two people in Congress who represent radical ends of the political spectrum—Michele Bachman and Keith Ellison) in fact many younger people do not realize that the tradition of political protest in this state goes back much farther than the 1930s and the Farm Labor Party.

To begin, Gilman, (citing her recent book, *Stand Up: The Story of Minnesota's Protest Tradition* [Minnesota Historical Society: 2012] which was reviewed in the last issue of this publication), talked about the long years of agrarian revolt in the late nineteenth century. The protests were begun by Oliver Kelly and the Grange, but their wide popularity is

attributed to Ignatius Donnelly (1831-1901), a Congressman and populist writer. Donnelly took up the cause of the Grange and was responsible for its phenomenal growth as a farm protest organization. In 1892, in the platform for the Populist Party convention in Saint Louis, Donnelly said, "The fruits of the oil of millions are boldly stolen to build up colossal fortunes, unprecedented in the history of mankind, and the possessors of these in turn depise the republic and endanger liberty. From the same prolific womb of governmental injustice we breed the two great classes—tramps and millionaires." Although Donnelly died in 1901, the protest movement lived on in Minnesota.

To illustrate this continuation and to consider the question of whether there were parallels between today's protests (she was speaking of Occupy, etc.) and earlier ones, Gilman quoted from various radicals in Minnesota history.

Just before World War I, when mine owners started making big profits from the war in Europe and miners' wages stayed the same, the IWW (Wobblies) organized strikes; several union leaders were jailed. From jail, in 1916, one of the strikers wrote this poem, "Solidarity." "The Miners of the Iron Range/Knew there was something wrong/They banded all together, yes,/In One Big Union strong./The Steel Trust got the shivers,/And the mine guards had some fits,/The Miners didn't give a damn, /But closed down all the pits."

Eventually the unhappy farmers and the unhappy wage earners got together and replaced the Democratic Party with the Farm Labor Party (the forerunner of the DFL). In 1930, they elected Floyd B. Olson as governor. Olson described himself as a radical in the "sense that [he wanted] a definite change in the system...I am not satisfied with hanging a laurel wreath upon burglars and theives and pirates." Nonetheless, Olson is thought of as a compromiser.

Later in Minnesota history, in 1946, another DFLer, Elmer Benson, became the governor. Benson was a true radical, saying, "We are the mightiest power on earth; we need fear nothing but our own rashness. Yet by our senseless piling of atomic bombs we are paralyzing half the world with the sickening fear of another war."

Gilman also quoted Eugene McCarthy (1967) "Instead of the language of promise and hope, we have in politics today a new vocabulary in which the critical word is war: war on poverty, war on ignorance, war on crime, war on pollution. None of these problems can be solved by war but only by persistent, dedicated and thoughtful attention."

Finally, she quoted Alice Tripp, who opposed a power line through western Minnesota and ran for governor in 1982:

"the pressure of the business establishment has more influence than the voice of the people."

In conclusion, Gilman pointed out that most Minnesota protesters are not really "radical" in the sense of wanting to change society, rather they are asking for "the enforcement of rules and regulations set up to safeguard and preserve our existing society." In this sense they are actually conservative, in wanting to preserve a way of life that respects order and protects laws from the forces of power, wealth, and unchecked growth.

*Δ The editor is grateful for the help of Phil Dahlen in producing this report.*

## The Dakota War

*June 16, 2012*

Stephen Osman addressed the topic of the Dakota War at the MISF meeting on June 16. Osman, retired senior historian at the Minnesota Historical Society and formerly the manager of Fort Snelling, gave a Power Point presentation that tried to put the events of the war in appropriate order. Lasting just five weeks, the Dakota War created the largest number of victims (generally estimated at 800) of any Indian war in US history and for a time resulted in the depopulation of half the state of Minnesota.

The fur trading business (to protect which Fort Snelling was established in 1818) did not encourage settlement by Europeans and for twenty years the territory that is now Minnesota was mostly occupied by Indian tribes. However, by 1837, the tribes were ready for treaties and the territory became a mixed settlement of Indians and whites. As settlers moved in during the 1840s, the state became predominately white and Indian agencies were set up to make Indians into "white men" by teaching them farming.

Unfortunately, cronyism and chicanery on the part of various Indian agents and crooked bookkeeping on the part of traders meant that the Indians were always in poverty.

Every time land was ceded, most of the money went to settle debts with traders.

By 1862, Indians were having to hunt some forty miles from their reservation near Traverse des Sioux. Young Dakota men were hungry and could see no future for themselves, so they went to their war chief, Little Crow, to demand that he lead them in battle against the settlers. Little Crow tried to tell the young men that this was not a good plan, but he also wanted to be popular, so he agreed to lead the fight. (The Dakota as a tribe were divided on this decision; the Christian Dakota did not want war.)

In the first phase of the war, August 18, 1862, the Dakota attacked towns in southwestern Minnesota. The next day they attacked New Ulm where the residents built a barricade. Many citizens fled to Fort Ridgely where 180 men set up cannon to keep the Dakota war party at bay. On August 22, 1862, the Dakota attacked Fort Ridgely again. This heavy attack was repulsed by cannon and 17 Dakota were killed. On August 23, 800 Dakota warriors again attacked Fort Ridgely, which remained under siege until August 27.

Meanwhile, Henry Sibley marched to St. Peter to find survivors and to collect the dead from previous attacks. On September 2, Sibley's troops were ambushed at Birch Coulee (16 miles from Fort Ridgely), but the Dakota failed to follow up on the first attack and the militia was able to get through to Fort Ridgely.

In the third phase of the war, Sibley moved west cautiously, but was once again ambushed by Dakota warriors who were maneuvering by bugle call. This is the battle of Wood Lake, where the Dakota were defeated. Little Crow escaped from this battle.

Eventually, the warriors surrendered at Camp Release and were held at Mankato. Three hundred ninety-two warriors were tried and 307 sentenced to death for their part in the Dakota War. The early trials were fair, but later trials (under General John Pope) were more pro forma. Seventeen hundred dependents at the Lower Sioux agency were marched to Fort Snelling, where a measles epidemic killed some of them. In 1862, one half of the population of the state of Minnesota were refugees.

As is well known, President Lincoln approved the death sentences of 38 Dakota men; the other convicted warriors were sent to prison in Davenport, Iowa. All existing treaties were abrogated and the remaining Dakota were sent to a new reservation at Crow Creek, South Dakota.

Victims of the war, which created more casualties adjusted for population than did 9-11, included the Dakota people,

settler families, and the executed Dakota warriors. Seventy of the casualties were children under ten years of age.

After he had reviewed this time line, Osman reflected on how hard it is to find the truth in a complicated story such as the Dakota War. Sources such as government records, letters, newspapers, and oral tradition all compete for our attention. Letters are probably the most accurate; oral history is probably the least accurate.

Osman concluded with two further observations. First, with so many sources and so many interests it is very hard to achieve historical accuracy. There are some questions that simply cannot be resolved.

Secondly, he sees native America history as a story of stronger tribes driving the weaker tribes out of the way. It is just that the last tribe had "white faces."

For further reading, Osman recommended *Dakota Uprising: A Pictorial History* by Curtis Dahlin; *Through Dakota Eyes: Narrative Accounts of the Minnesota Indian War of 1862* by Gary Anderson; and *Mrs. Dred Scott: A Life on Slavery's Frontier* by Lea VanderVelde.

## **Scholars: Independent and Otherwise**

### *A Special Museum Tour*

*August 2, 2012*

Many scholars—Independent and Otherwise—at the Minneapolis Institute of Art were the focus of a private special tour by Bob Brusic, August 2. About fifteen scholars—*independent and otherwise*—attended the hour-long tour.

Brusic featured about ten works of art, ranging from ancient Japanese and Chinese depictions of scholars, through a scholar's study and on to various Western images of scholarship dating from the Renaissance and the modern period.

Though without the images it is impossible to recreate the tour for people who did not attend, Brusic made use of several quotations which give a feeling for images of scholarship as portrayed in art.

In talking about Jade Mountain, the Chinese sculpture for which the MIA is justly famous, Brusic quoted from a translation of the "Prelude to the Orchid Pavilion" by poet Wang Hsi-Chih: "In the late spring of the ninth year of the Yung Ho (AD 353) a gathering was held at Lan T'ing, the



Orchid pavilion, north of K'uai Chi mountain. The meeting was held to clean and repair the graves...Young and old alike were gathered together. ..Here, too, was a clear and running stream, traversing the slope which could be used to float the wine cups. We sat about the banks of this stream. Although lacking the joy of flute and string, a single cup and single poem were sufficient to draw out the deepest emotions." This prelude is inscribed in its entirety on the Jade Mountain sculpture.

Moving to the Chinese scholar's study, Brusic quoted from the label: "Chinese literati often fit up a room as a study, where they read books, carried out discussion, and relaxed themselves. The room was to be tranquil, elegant, clean, and comfortable. Such studies were ideal for tea drinking—accompanied with books, calligraphic works, and several friends. Drinking tea in a study was interesting and meaningful."

The garden that accompanies the Chinese scholar's study at the MIA is a prime example of the role that rocks play in Chinese gardens. Rocks must have "thingness, ugliness, porousness, and exquisiteness." The rocks in the scholar's garden exhibit these qualities.

From ancient China, Brusic turned to examples of scholars as depicted in Western art. One painting was the depiction of "Six Tuscan Poets" by Giorgio Vasari. The poets depicted are Ficino, Ladino, Petrarch, Boccaccio, Dante, and Cavalcanti. Dante is, of course, the most famous of the poets in the painting, but Brusic decided to quote from the lesser known Cavalcanti (1255-1300). Cavalcanti wrote love sonnets, such as:

*Beauty of women and wise hearts  
And noble armed cavaliers  
Bird's song and love's reason  
Bedecked ships in strong seas  
  
Serene air at dawn  
And white snow falling windlessly  
Watery brooks and fields of all flowers  
Gold, silver, lapis lazuli in adornment—  
  
These are transcended by the beauty and grace  
Of my lady for her gentle heart  
Which renders unworthy he who looks at her...*

After the Renaissance, we moved forward to modern art, specifically to the "Exile Dreaming of Saint Adorno" (2010) a three-dimensional room setting by an Iraian exile, Siah Armajani. Adorno was a German philosopher who fled Nazi Germany in 1939. Adorno wrote "It is part of morality not to be at home in one's

home." This work was created by an exile (Armajani), about an exile (Adorno), and depicts an exile dreaming about an exile (presumably Armajani dreaming about Adorno). In describing this work Armajani has said that "The most insoluble task is to let neither the power of others, nor our own powerlessness, stupefy us."

Two twentieth century works concluded the tour. In speaking of "Pascal's Pensees" by Henri Matisse, Brusic quoted two thoughts from Pascal. "On Vanity. Cleopatra's nose: had it been shorter, the whole aspect of the world would have been altered." "On diversion: As men are not able to fight against death, misery, ignorance, they have taken into their heads, to be happy not to think of them at all."

The tour concluded with Magritte's "Promenades of Euclid," a tour de force of fool-the-eye effects. To elucidate the title, Brusic read the fifth proposition of Euclidian geometry, "In isosceles triangles the angles at the base are equal to one another and if the equal straight lines are produced further, then the angles under the base will be equal to one another." This proposition is also known as the Pons Asinorum (the Bridge of Asses), which is to say that this proposition is a bridge to harder propositions.

Although the group did not have any trouble seeing the isosceles triangles in the Magritte work, there was some confusion about how the fool-the-eye effect at the base of the easel worked. Perhaps Magritte's work will really serve as a bridge for harder thought about art and scholarship. It was a thought provoking evening that all the participants enjoyed.

## Editor's Note: Marketing Scholarship

So my bewildered husband walks into the kitchen and says, "How can anyone find time to Twitter when there are so many good books to read?" Whereas seven-year-old nephew would blithely reverse the question, "How can I find time to read when there are so many fascinating things on my iPad?"

In between these two questions lie two generations (or more) and a transformation in how scholarship is and will be done.

Because of this radical change in the way information is stored, organized, and disseminated, educational institutions in general, and organizations such as MISF in particular, face significant problems in attracting new members and marketing themselves. In fact, how to market MISF has been the focus of discussion for several recent board meetings of this organization.

There are several knotty aspects to this problem:

1. The presence of the Web has radically changed the way research is done, information exchanged, and publication presented. People do not need library access or academic groups (which were an inducement for MISF members in the past) to do any of these scholarly acts.
2. The presence of the Web means that scholarship is in many cases more collaborative than it was and consists more of group talk, presentation, and exchange of ideas. The idea of an individual working alone for years on a project is disappearing.
3. The presence of the Web means that many people who do not have degrees or formal training in scholarship have wide access to information and a public podium. Moreover, on the Web, who you are or what you are is hidden unless you choose to reveal it.

Proleptically, MISF recognized some of these changes several years ago when we changed our logo from the "Lonely Scholar" to a drawing of a group of people seated around a table. Our mission statement may still be more or less applicable in this altered reality, or we may have to rethink our mission statement.

Our mission statement says that we are a group of individuals (no argument there!) who support research, writing, and publication. As noted above, when the MISF was founded in 1983, it was thought that this support would consist of peer review of scholarly work, opportunity to publish in our journal, borrowing privileges at the U, and fiscal agency (as a 501.c.3 organization we can administer grants for independent scholars). At one time we had over 100 members, but when borrowing privileges at the U were discontinued, we lost about half of our membership. Clearly, borrowing privileges were the drawing card of our membership package. The other offerings, though still in place, have not been so marketable.

Moreover, all of these benefits were *and still are* available to everyone. Whereas many scholarly organizations restrict membership to persons with advanced degrees, MISF membership has always been open to everyone. This broad membership availability is a unique characteristic of our organization (among groups of independent scholars) and is probably our strongest link to the new age of scholarship.

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*Practical Thinking* welcomes submissions from members and non-members. We are especially interested in topical issues, but will also welcome essays, reviews, and memoirs. Generally articles should not be longer than 1800 words. Please submit articles electronically, as Word or RTF files. Use as little formatting as possible. All submissions will be acknowledged, although the editor reserves the right to decline to publish an article.

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All of our selling points (except the library privileges) are still in place and yet our membership does not increase. On the other hand, Osher Life Long Learning (OLLI) has a steady membership; the Compleat Scholar draws large attendance; the History Lecture Series at the Minnesota History Center has added a second session to accommodate its attendees. People are interested in learning, but they are not joining us. Why? Partly because we are up against some pretty stiff competition (as noted above) and partly because our basic numbers do not give us a very broad outreach. Secondly, as outlined above, the nature of scholarship has changed. The Web has somewhat supplanted the library as research tool, seminar room, and publication platform. In addition, many of our members are no longer doing scholarship; they seem happy to let other people do the heavy lifting of writing and publishing. Perhaps this is as it should be. There needs to be room at the top for new scholars.

Nevertheless, I don't think we should give up; we still have a role to play. While we may not offer creative scholarship, we do offer fellowship; we are in effect a fellowship of scholars. That is, we support, model, and carry through the principles of scholarship: critical thinking, open-minded consideration of other points of view, and rational consideration (sometimes in writing) of new ideas.

We have made an encouraging start with fine Saturday speakers who draw many who are not members. Interestingly, many of our speakers seem happy to contribute their stipends to become members of the organization. That means that we are good listeners, good questioners, and good thinkers. Speakers find the group stimulating! In effect, we are modeling a form of scholarly discourse.

We should also be offering any member who is writing and researching an opportunity to present his/her work to the group periodically. We have done this for the poets and art historians in our group, but there are others who are writing books or working on projects books. A return to the Works-in-Progress program would be a boon to new scholars and a gift to older ones.

Furthermore, we can continue to produce a quality journal. Writing is a discipline (even a scholarly discipline) that improves with practice; new writing (even about old ideas) is always appreciated.

The philosophy discussion group is going strong. We seem to be unique in the TC in offering a place to discuss philosophy; the group is a feeder for new members into the Saturday meetings.

We might also look for places in which our talents and knowledge could be helpful to the community at large. History Day, for example!

In sum, scholarship has changed everywhere and we are now largely on the periphery. Still, our Web presence does seem to bring us new attendees when the topic is provocative; clearly people are aware of our existence. Encouraging interested people to join us in support of our speakers program is definitely in order, but basically we have enough resources in our current income stream to keep the speakers going for several years. And who knows, we may find new ways to do scholarship, foster fellowship, and even attract new members.

Lucy Brusic <lucy@brusic.net>

*Please contact me if you have an article that you would like to write for this journal. I welcome all submissions.*

MISF is a non-profit organization whose mission is to support, encourage, and foster independent scholarship. We accomplish this goal by our meetings, our publication, and by our study groups. Membership is open to all. The members of the board for 2012-2013 are:

Valerie Bauer

Lucy Brusic

Phil Dahlen

Virginia Hansen

Curt Hillstrom

David Juncker

Bill McTeer

Emily Pollack

Dennis Schapiro

Dale Schwie

Mary Treacy

Shirley Whiting

Mike Woolsey, president

## MISF Special Meeting

# Thoreau Country Minnesota Symposium October 20 in Bloomington

An all-day symposium, "Thoreau Country Minnesota," will replace the regular MISF meeting (usually at Hosmer Library) Saturday, October 20, 2012. The symposium will take place at the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge, 3815 American Boulevard East, Bloomington MN. Registration begins at 9 a.m. Admission is free and open to all but space is limited. There is no advanced registration.

Sponsored by MISF, the Thoreau Society, the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge, and Refuge Friends, Inc., the Thoreau Symposium will convene at 9:30 a.m. and continue until 3 p.m.

Speakers for this event include Tom Potter, Immediate Past President of the Thoreau Society on "The Enduring Legacy of Thoreau"; Richard Smith, enacting Thoreau, on "Walking: A word for nature, absolute freedom and wildness." After the lunch break, Dale Schwie, MISF member and member-at-large of the board of the

national Thoreau Society, will speak on "Thoreau County Minnesota" and Larry Granger, of the Bloomington Historical Society will speak to "Harvesting Thoreau."

In 1861, Henry David Thoreau spent almost a month in Minneapolis and Saint Paul, in the hopes of recovering from "bronchitis." While he was here, he took detailed notes on the flora, fauna, and Indians of the region. He also had an opportunity to travel up the Minnesota River with Governor Ramsey to see the annual payment of annuities to the Dakota Indians at Redwood, Minnesota.

Unfortunately, Thoreau's health did not improve and he never had the opportunity to publish his extensive notes on his journey west. Thoreau died of tuberculosis in May 1862.

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