World of the Creightons:
From Ireland to Omaha

College of Business
Builds New Foundation
On Top of the Old

Professor Studies Both
Bible and Comic Strips,
Finding Life Lessons

Writer Ron Hansen
Shows how an Author
Approaches His Craft
Addressing Issue of Race
I was so pleased to see the WINDOW address the issue of “race” in Dr. Burk’s article. As Dr. Burk states, race is a social, not biological, construct.

Because Creighton touts in its fund-raising efforts to alumni the Diversity Project Dr. Burk mentions, I recently contacted Dr. Fleming to learn more about it. As an openly gay man it is sad to say, though race and gender are included, sexuality remains a “closeted” topic.

For how long will Creighton University continue to deny its gay and lesbian faculty, staff, students and alumni the opportunity to be treated equally? Denying that me and others are valuable members of the Creighton Family continues to divide and hurt more and more every single day. Is this something to be proud of?

Homophobia and hatred exist in this world because of ignorance. If Creighton’s continued neglect remains status quo, then I strongly question the Diversity Project’s objective to “raise the awareness of all the members of the Creighton community about domestic and international human diversity.”

Mark J. Murphy, BS’87
San Francisco

Government Intervention
I highly concur with Mr. Dunn’s comments in the Summer issue of the Creighton University WINDOW. America’s increase in socio-economic problems is a direct result of increased government intervention. As “Uncle Sam” gradually became our baby-sitter, he had to infringe upon our freedoms in order to implement the various grandiose social plans we clamored for. This, in turn, absolved us of our self-
accountability, and even worse, our basic human dignity.

I must however take exception to Mr. Dunn’s portrayal of the U.S. being the freest, and hence, greatest nation on earth. No doubt we once were, but now, according to the report Economic Freedom of the World: 1975-1995, we rank fourth in the degree of market freedom and even lower in standard of living. Though it is debatable whether pure capitalism ever existed in this country (outside of our underground economy), the concept of producer and consumer exchanging goods and services without any outside interference has been effectively crushed by the government.

As for personal freedom, we lead the industrialized world in incarcerating the highest percentage of our population behind bars (1 of every 167). Is this because our society has become so violent? No, per capita rates for murder, rape, robbery and other violent crimes have remained relatively flat over the past two decades. The reason our prisons are overflowing is because we now lock people up (and steal their property) for victimless crimes—crimes involving the peaceful exchange or possession of illegal drugs. The government also has been given the authority to seize any property it simply suspects was used in connection with a drug violation. In 80% of property seizures, the law enforcement agency never charges the alleged perpetrator with a crime (because it knows the victim is innocent!). The government says it is only trying to protect us from these dangerous chemicals, but why is it that 95% of all drug-related deaths are due to alcohol and tobacco substances that are perfectly legal? Ironic, isn’t it, especially when you consider that the primary financial sponsors for the Partnership For A Drug-Free America are the alcohol and tobacco industries. Not exactly what I would call “encouraging” developments in the land of the free. That’s because America is not “free” — but it certainly is for sale!

History will record that our country was the first to establish a government that existed solely to serve the people, not vice-versa as had been the case with all previous governments. However, if we don’t maintain our diligence, all that was gained will be forever lost. Where we’re going is more important than where we’ve been. Violence, poverty, and drug abuse have been around since the birth of this nation but have only recently reached catastrophic levels. Why? Because basic human morality is now institutionalized within the collective state as opposed to the individual. Ever since FDR we’ve been told that the government will provide for us and protect us from ourselves, that we as individuals are no longer responsible for our fate — now we’re paying the price. If we want to save our country, we need to replace group accountability with individual accountability. Unfortunately for Uncle Sam, in order to be held accountable for our actions, we must be given back control over our lives. This means old Sam would have to go on a drastic weight loss program. Though he won’t be there to watch over us like a mother hen, I’m sure we’ll all manage to get by somehow. Yes, we’ll still have the potential to do wrong, but at least we would finally have the incentive to do right.

Kevin Paul Hamilton, MCSM’89
Roswell, Ga.

Dental School on the Rise
I enjoyed reading the recent article in the Fall issue of Creighton WINDOW magazine concerning the Creighton Dental School. I believe the dental school is taking its place as one of the leading dental schools in the country with the increased emphasis on research and the success of the students on their boards. I feel confident that Dean Barkmeier and his faculty will do an outstanding job of leading our school into the next century.

Edward J. Schultz, DDS’62
Cincinnati

In Touch
Each quarter, I look forward to receiving the WINDOW magazine, which not only keeps me in touch with the positive changes happening at Creighton University, but also reminds me of the wonderful traditions that led me to Creighton University as a freshman. Keep up the good work!

Janet Lee Isom, BSN’82
Palm Springs, Calif.
The much-publicized U.S. News & World Report survey of America’s best colleges might have read this way:

“McCraren University, a Dominican institution located in Omaha, Nebraska, and founded in 1877 by the wife of a telegraph pioneer.”

History turns on minor events, on simple decisions, and these often lose themselves in the larger reality. If Irish tenant farmers had not lost hope; if the American frontier had not moved rapidly west; if transportation and communication had not become essential industries; if the American Civil War had not occurred; if Edward Creighton had not been at the right place at the right time; if those abandoned cattle in western Nebraska had not survived; if Father Michael D. Lilly, vicar-provincial of the Dominican Order in the United States, had not turned down the prof-

ferred bequest of Mary Lucretia Creighton.

If, if, if.

The reality of Creighton University, however, began in what poet Patrick Kavanagh called the “stony grey soil of Monaghan,” one of Ireland’s poorer counties, stubbed against modern Northern Ireland. Its rolling hills support small farms, shelter chains of lakes, and lure fishermen from Dublin and the States. The people here are reputed to be blunt though witty, with “razor edges around their speech.” In ancient times, this was MacMahon land, ruled by that powerful clan.

But some Creightons lived there, too, although their genealogy, like that of many Irish families, is not neatly accessed. There are variant spellings, broken lines, misunderstandings, even deliberate confusion. At least three distinctly different surnames blend to create a series of anglicizations. There were MacCrohans in Kerry, and Croghans in Roscommon, and Crehans in Mayo, Sligo and Donegal. These spawned Cregans, Grehans and other variations. Even the Scottish name, Crichton, became Creighton during the 17th century plantation in Ireland of British settlers. Crehan, perhaps influenced by the Scottish spelling, also became Creighton. The Earls of Erne in County Fermanagh were Creightons and the name spilled over into neighboring Monaghan.

Pinpointing a specific family line that leads to Creighton University’s founders is risky business. Tenant farmers sometimes took the surname of their landlord, as apparently happened with my ancestors from Cavan and Down. Socially ambitious Irishmen gave their names an English twist, both at home and, when they emigrated, in their new home. Record keepers made errors, and illegitimacy and adoption further blur any search. For many years, in an area called The Pale, which circled out from Dublin, Irish people were forbidden to use their Gaelic names. Thus MacGowan, based on the root word gabha for blacksmith,
became Smith, and Feeney became Hunt and Carrig became Rock and so on.

So Creighton may not have been the original family name.

Fr. Patrick J. Mullens’ early biographical sketches of Edward and John Creighton and their wives tell us that “James Creighton, a native of County Monaghan, Ireland, came to America in 1805. Six years later, in Philadelphia, in St. Mary’s Church, he was married to Bridget Hughes, a native of County Armagh, Ireland.”

However, the marriage certificate for that date, October 16, 1811, lists the groom’s name as “James McCraren” while the bride’s name and other details fit. The passenger list from 1805, when James arrived in America, carries a “James McCrarin, age 21, a laborer from Clontibret Parish, County Monaghan.” The name “Creighton” doesn’t appear. The wording of the wills of siblings also confirms the McCraren title, and we do know that there were people with this name resident in Monaghan in the 18th century. It seems likely that James McCraren changed his name to “Creighton” sometime after he came to America, and we do have specific documentation of that switch by his brother, Christopher.

James was the fourth of seven children born to Bridget McCraren and a husband who apparently died before the family trekked to America. They lived on a small farm near Clontibret, southeast of Monaghan town, and close to the 1595 site of a successful battle by Hugh O’Neill against the English.

James was born about 1788 (although this date doesn’t compute with his stated age at immigration) into an era of turmoil and revolution. America’s exit from the British Empire and, in France, the impending overthrow of Louis XVI; both combined to inspire the Irish to push for further freedoms. Volunteers, organized to meet threats of invasion, soon became a force capable of influencing legislation that briefly returned governance to the Irish Parliament and took a little sting out of the oppressive Penal Laws.

While James was toiling on that Monaghan acreage, probably oblivious to the political situation around him, the separatist plotting by the newly formed United Irishmen dominated the Irish domestic scene. In 1798, when James was 10, Theobald Wolfe Tone, a Protestant attorney allied with the French, spearheaded one more rising that failed. The Irish Parliament was then dissolved and restrictions against Catholics reimposed. Irish unrest continued.

But in 1805, two years after Robert Emmet’s abortive rebellion, James McCraren sailed from Newry, a border town some 20 miles east of Clontibret, and, coincidentally, the birthplace of Dr. Donal Magee, longtime Creighton physiology/pharmacology professor. The crossing to Philadelphia took two months, aboard the Roe Buck, probably one of those overladen and undermanned vessels common to the period.

“Young voyages were bad, however,” writes Leonard Wibberley in The Coming of the Green. “Usually the bad and good were mixed together. In foul weather, when hatches had to be battened down, the immigrants were confined to the hold, while the waters thundered like judgment about them. But in fair weather they could go on deck, and on mild nights...”
they would dance reels and jigs to the
tune of a fiddle, or they would sing
songs, often in Gaelic."

All of James’ siblings followed him,
as did their mother, who family legend
declares was evicted from her Monahgan
homestead.

How they survived in the
Philadelphia area is uncertain. Most of
the Irish immigrants were illiterate,
thanks to the Penal Laws that denied
them education, and they ended up in
crowded, unsanitary slums, ghettoized
with their fellow Gaels. Although largely
unskilled at urban labor, these new
arrivals had strong backs, an exemplary
work ethic, and a willingness to erect
buildings, pave roads, dig coal, and
manage households for as little as six
dollars a month.

The McCrarens may have tried their
hands at some of these occupations, and
James felt secure enough, just six years
after his arrival, to espouse Bridget
Hughes before Fr. W. V. Harold, pastor of
St. Mary’s Parish and Vicar-General to
the Bishop of Philadelphia. The wed-
ding’s three witnesses — Patrick
Hughes, Thomas McHenry and
Margaret Sweeny — testify to the tight
social ties of the Irish community.

While Napoleon was dominating
European headlines, events in America
were equally potent. Two years before
James McCraren stepped ashore in
Philadelphia, the Louisiana Purchase
had doubled the size of this country, and
the year he arrived, Lewis and Clark
finally reached the Pacific. In the next
decade, America prevailed against the
English in the War of 1812 (a fact that
must have delighted the immigrant
Irish).

The nation began to look west,
encouraging settlement in far-
away places like Ohio.

In 1807, an elder
brother of James, who
signed himself
Christopher
McCrearen in pur-
chasing land in eastern
Ohio, became the
first of the family to
leave the East Coast.
Christopher, now
owner of 164 acres, mar-
rried Margaret McKiggan
before a Justice of the Peace,
became a Methodist and
changed his name to
“Creighton.” Soon, the rest of
the McCrarens took off for
Ohio.

Two other brothers, John
and Michael, were them-
selves married before a
Methodist minister, even though they
remained Catholic. There were no priests
in this frontier location.

James migrated to Ohio in 1813, farm-
ing near Barnesville, Belmont County,
where Edward, the fifth of nine children,
was born on Aug. 31, 1820. That year,
Congress enacted the Missouri
Compromise in an
attempt to defuse the growing debate
over slavery, and the Land Act of 1820
was signed into law to promote west-
ward expansion. Prices per acre in the
new territories were dropped to $1.25
and holdings limited to 80 acres.

Many settlers felt the law
favored the rich.

By this time, the
Creighton name was in
regular usage, and fam-
ily members were
probably taking
advantage of the
favorable land prices.

James is described
by Fr. Mullens as “a
man of robust
physique and strong
character, which left its
impress upon his chil-
dren” and as “living in
the midst of people who
despised his race and
hated his religion.”

According to Mullens,
James Creighton “asked
no favors, but suffered
no insults.”

His wife, Bridget, is
seen by Mullens as “a worthy compan-
ion and helpmeet” who struggled to
make a home for her family in this
remote area, but who “found time to
look after the instruction of her children
in the essential points of Catholic belief.”

To supplement his farm produce,
James hired out to help build the pike-
roads across Ohio. He evidently earned
enough by 1832 to purchase 80 acres next
to his brother, John, in Licking
County, Ohio, a place favored by
Bridget because of its proximity to a Dominican mission church. Three years later, James added his brother’s 80 acres and also bought from him 24 lots in the nearby village of Mount Hope, plus land north and west of the town.

By now, the population of the United States exceeded 13 million, the first covered wagons had crossed the Rockies, and the Monroe Doctrine, banning colonization of the Americas, became a key factor of American foreign policy. Passenger train travel came into vogue.

In 1831, the last of James’ and Bridget’s nine children was born. Christened John Andrew, he would later partner with his older brother, Edward, becoming one of Creighton University’s co-founders.

Farm work demanded a lot of the Creighton children. Keep in mind that the first steel plow wasn’t introduced by John Deere until 1833, so there was considerable stoop labor required for planting and harvesting. What crops the Creightons tended or livestock they owned is unknown, but Ohio was excellent growing country.

Like his moonlighting father, Edward Creighton balanced farm chores with the role of cartboy on the Ohio turnpikes, twin duties which left little time for other pursuits. He attended school only as far as the fifth grade, but continued to read and to educate himself. Somewhere he mastered the art of pugilism and taught his better-educated brother John how to box in return for tutoring. (Among their friends and co-workers was Phil Sheridan, later to receive acclaim as a brilliant Civil War general.) All of these boys became men very early.

In 1838, Samuel Morse was trying to persuade a reluctant Congress to finance construction of his innovative telegraph line (a project that would prove important to the Creightons later).

That same year, at age 18, Edward Creighton took the team and wagon his father had presented him and went into business for himself. He’d haul anything — timber for homes, foodstocks, construction tools. His contracts took him to distant places like Wheeling, Va., and Cumberland, Md. In the 10 years he spent expanding this enterprise, he learned how to handle men and equipment, how to keep records, and how to push himself to the limit.

When her husband died at about age 60, Bridget Creighton moved again, this time to a farm near Springfield, Ohio. Edward returned to help her at harvest time. One of the family legends has him meeting some men on a country road who were stringing telegraph wire. Intrigued with the potential of this new communication method, Edward set off for Dayton the next day and negotiated contracts to deliver telegraph poles as far south as Evansville, Ind.

John, at the urging of Edward, devoted his share of his father’s inheritance to further his education. At St. Joseph College, run by the Dominicans in Somerset, Ohio, John took honors in math, history, English, geography and religion, but might have benefitted from a speech course, since he never felt comfortable expressing himself in public.

While John studied, Edward carted poles and wire through Ohio and Illinois, supervising construction there and as far away as New Orleans. One of his early bosses, a Henry O’Reilly, had inspired Edward with the dream of a telegraph line which would link both coasts. The Gold Rush of 1849 brought that reverie to the planning stage. Meantime, Edward soldiered on, and by the time his mother died in 1854, he had 40 crews working for him, with his brother John, a college dropout, along as special assistant.

Ed Creighton wasn’t infallible. A street-paving venture proved so unprofitable, he lost almost all his equipment. So he headed west, with John, brother Joseph, and their cousin James. The year was 1856, with James Buchanan in the White House, the Plains Indian Wars a fresh concern, and with the nation edging closer to internal conflict.

The Creighpons traversed Indiana, Illinois and Iowa, arriving finally at the Missouri River and Omaha City. This well-located village of 600 consisted of sub-standard housing and streets clogged with mud. Despite this inhospitable panorama, Ed Creighton, whose glass was always half-full, decided to set down roots. He returned to Ohio only long enough to wind up business and, in October, to wed his fiancee, Mary Lucretia Wareham. No ordinary honey-mooner, Creighton transported a load of lumber on his trip back to Omaha, thus defraying the cost of the journey.

Once settled in Nebraska Territory, the experienced Ed Creighton landed a job constructing a telegraph line between Omaha and St. Joseph, Mo. While he and his crews stretched wire along the course of the Big Muddy, they learned from the papers about the Lincoln-Douglas debates and the hanging of John Brown. They also weathered the Panic of 1857 and witnessed the creation of the short-lived Pony Express. This relay system of delivering mail to California and points between lost half a million dollars in 1860, but, along with the Butterfield
Stage Line, was the only regular service to the western reaches of this country. The subject of a transcontinental telegraph was again introduced.

Edward Creighton insisted the line was a necessity. If war broke out, he argued, California might be cut off from the rest of the country. Teamed with Creighton in this campaign to sell the idea to the Federal government was Hiram Sibley, a former Rochester, N.Y., sheriff who created several small communication firms. In Washington, Sibley failed to win Congressional approval.

Congress saw only treeless plains, formidable mountains, and hostile Indians. Such a proposal was impractical, even impossible.

To convince skeptics, Ed Creighton set out alone to survey a feasible route, challenging winter weather and nearly 2,000 miles of difficult terrain. All the way he was dogged by problems, losing his horse and gear in the icy Platte, struggling to Denver, travelling by stagecoach to Salt Lake City, where he met Brigham Young and became fast friends with the Mormon leader. Despite warnings about snowstorms, Creighton rode off on horse and mule to navigate the 500 miles to Carson City. When he exited the Sierra Nevada Range, he was snowblind and the skin had been peeled from his face by blowing sand and alkali dust. Recuperation in Carson City was shorter than some current HMO confinements, and he pressed on to Sacramento, completing the journey. These heroics silenced critics, and Congress anted up the $400,000 needed to link the continent by wire.

The plan, conceived under the pressure of a fast-approaching war, was for the Overland Telegraph Company to build east from California to Salt Lake City, while Creighton and the Pacific Telegraph Company (later incorporated into Western Union) moved west from Omaha to the Mormon capital. The team that arrived first at this destination would receive from their competitors the sum of $50 for every day they were beaten. Creighton had the most miles to cover, but Overland the toughest natural obstacles.

On July 4, 1861, a few weeks after the fall of Fort Sumter, Ed Creighton himself set the first pole. His three crews, supervised by the Creightons and others, were divided into those who dug the holes, those who planted the poles, and those who strung the wire. News of the war served as a stimulus, and they might cover as much as 12 miles some days, setting over 250 poles.

This romantic tale has been recounted many times, in books, articles, and even one Hollywood film. Let’s shorten the scenario and imagine this story being played out in a series of scenes:

- Floods wash away supplies. Prairie fires have to be combated. There are wagon breakdowns, dust, mosquitoes, savage rainstorms. Ed Creighton neutralizes the Sioux and Cheyenne by letting their tribal leaders pass messages along the wires, beating the fastest

- Horse, and by allowing one chieftain to suffer an electrical shock when he touched the “singing wire.” The burly leader moves ahead of the work crews, disposing of unfriendly elements in towns along the way. He saves a man from being lynched. He cajoles, encourages, threatens.

- His crews swore by him. They wrote to their relatives, declaring their boss was “a steam engine of energy” and “a good fellow and fine teacher” and “a man who was close and friendly but could command respect.”

Creighton reached Salt Lake City a full week ahead of his rivals, on Oct. 17, 1861. Behind him stood 25 thousand functioning poles. From nearby Fort Bridger he telegraphed Mary Lucretia, saying:

“The Pacific to the Atlantic sends greetings. And may both oceans be dry before a foot of all the land that lies between them belongs to any other but our united country.”

A hundred years later in Omaha, in 1960, the year the Reinhart Alumni Library was dedicated on the Creighton campus, we recreated that scene, setting up a platform on the courthouse lawn, with actors in period costumes, and sending across a temporary telegraph line the identical message. All along the route, Creighton alumni showed up at their local Western Union offices to retrieve their copies. The University sponsored a luncheon, presented the president of Western Union with
an honorary degree, and we circulated stories on the anniversary to the nation’s press. Arden Swisher, a Mutual of Omaha executive, wrote the music to a tune dubbed “The Singing Wire,” and I contributed the lyrics. Gene Autry recorded the song, I believe, but I don’t think it ever hit the charts. Western Union supplied the University with a section of the original wire, neatly displayed on a polished plaque.

In payment for his success, Edward Creighton was given Western Union stock, ultimately worth well over $1 million. He re-entered the freighting business, collecting goods from steamships arriving in Omaha, hauling them to Benson, an assembly point, and then carrying them by wagon over 1,000 miles to Virginia City, Mont. John and Jim remained part of this enterprise, occasionally filling in as storekeepers, even vigilantes. For a time, Ed served as general manager of the Pacific Telegraph Line and continued to supervise construction. When nearly 50, he was summoned to keep Indians from burning the poles and disrupting communication. With a cavalry unit of 30 men, he kept open 300 miles of telegraph lines.

Almost by accident, Creighton got into the business of cattle raising. A small herd of oxen he had abandoned while surveying for the telegraph company had grown fat when he rediscovered them a year later. This led to his purchase of cattle and sheep to pasture on the rich prairie. His other business “hats” included a CEO post with Omaha & Northwestern Railroad and founder/president status with First National Bank. Creighton erected the Shoaf Building, Morgan and Gallagher’s Mercantile House, the Central Block and the Grand Central Hotel — all within Omaha. He even lobbied successfully for the designation of Omaha as the eastern terminus of the Union Pacific Railroad, a decision that insured the growth of the city.

All of this energy finally spent itself in 1874. As was his custom, Ed Creighton knelt by his bed that morning, joining his wife in prayer. Then he arrived at the First National Bank, working into the afternoon, when he suddenly collapsed on the floor. Stroke! Two days later, without regaining consciousness, Edward Creighton expired at 7 a.m. on Nov. 5. Omaha virtually shut down for his funeral, and his obituary made the front pages of most American papers.

Edward and Mary Lucretia had one child, Charles David, but he died at age four. Edward’s brother, Count John Creighton, who earned that title via Papal knighthood, died with no surviving children. But there were plenty of Creighton relatives sprinkled around the Midwest, including many who settled in Omaha in the wake of their affluent kinsmen.

The late Fr. Thomas Murphy, S.J., long-time Creighton treasurer, could recite the litany of those relatives like a Jeopardy contestant, adding information about each, sometimes crucial, sometimes trivial.

“Oh, yes,” he might respond, “she was a cousin once removed on the Driscoll side, and lived in that little house on Burt Street where an old man who claimed he rode with Custer later died,” and the place burned down two years after, and they never found the one who did it, but the girls who lived next door, one of them married a Creighton pharmacist, and ...” Like that.

Many of the Creighton-connected names persist in this area — McShane, McGinn, Cannon, Furlong, McCreary, Fitzgerald, Condon, Gallagher and others. Creighton, Neb., in Knox County, which dates from 1885, commemorates the Count. Bluejay alumni have added “Creighton” to the forenames of their offspring. There’s a family-run hotel in Clones, County Monaghan, called the Creighton Hotel. “All bedrooms en suite and heated. Ballroom dancing every Thursday evening and live entertainment most weekends. Newly refur-
bished restaurant offers freshly cooked traditional meals in a cozy atmosphere."
Not bad for $30 a night.

I confront the Creighton name in varied places. In a textbook I learn that a John Creighton from Athlone introduced vaccination to Ireland. In Thomas Flanagan's masterful novel about the 1798 Rising, The Year of the French, an Andrew Creighton appears. Alas, he is of the Scottish clan and an agent for a Mayo landlord.

In 1965, while endeavoring to raise funds from New York foundations on behalf of Creighton, I ran an errand for Fr. Tom Murphy. He’d seen an ad in The New Yorker for a Creighton Shirt Company and wondered if they were kin to the University founders. I took the elevator myriad floors up into the Empire State Building tower, arriving at a compact little clothing store. A young man, one of the owners, was on me in a moment, mentally taking my measurements. I told him I wasn’t shopping, but was from Creighton University in Nebraska, and some people there wondered how this firm happened to bear that name. Immediately, he smelled a lawsuit and became docile, apologetic, defensive, the reverse of his salesman persona. He confessed that he and his partner were seeking an upscale name for their establishment and reviewed a list of colleges and universities before settling on “Creighton.” I assured him I was merely curious and not litigious, and he settled back into his pitch. “You’re about a 42, right?”

Of course, the greatest monument to the Creighton name is the University they helped establish. Acting on Edward’s stated desire to inaugurate a free school for poor Irish Catholic boys, Mary Lucretia, who survived her husband by two years, left $100,000 to establish Creighton University. Because of the family connection with the Dominican Order in Ohio, the new university was first offered to them. They rejected it, partly because of the conservatism of the vicar-general, Fr. Lilly, who was nearing the end of his term, and partly because the Dominican Master General did not look with favor on the educational work of the American Dominicans.

So Bishop James O’Connor called in the Jesuits.

The years between the death of Edward Creighton and his younger brother John were monumental ones. In their native Ireland, independence was merely decades away. In America, Yellowstone became a national park, Edison developed the electric light, Billy the Kid was gunned down, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn hit the bookstores, 10-story buildings made headlines, the Statue of Liberty was dedicated, the Blizzard of ‘88 killed hundreds, Wounded Knee left an ugly mark in the quest of Native Americans for justice, Omaha hosted the Trans-Mississippi Exposition, the Spanish-American War was concluded, immigrants streamed through Ellis Island at the rate of 100 per hour, Jell-O was first marketed, Enrico Caruso made his Met debut, an earthquake ravaged San Francisco, and the automobile became the preferred mode of transport. The World of the Creighbons had come nearly full circle.

John Creighton, who received $300,000 in Mary Lucretia’s will,
invested in cattle and real estate and amassed a small fortune. He was generous to Creighton University, underwriting a wing on the initial building, donating scientific equipment, funding the Medical College, helping to create St. Joseph Hospital, building a convent, and paying for improvements on these properties.

John’s portraits, often with the knighthood medal displayed, make him look stuffy and pompous, whereas contemporary accounts make him out to be congenial, somewhat diffident in speech, and with considerable courage. He may appear portly, but the discreet Fr. Mullens characterizes him as possessing a “tall, well-proportioned figure.”

Count John died Feb. 7, 1907, and was buried from St. John’s campus church, with William Jennings Bryan as one of the pallbearers and University students forming an honor guard. Since his wife, Sarah Emily, sister to Mary Lucretia, had died in 1888, with John’s demise the last direct tie to the founders was dissolved.

Horatio Alger, born the year after Count Creighton, might have added this tale to his repertoire of young lads who made good. We are more likely today to regard such stories as corny, exaggerated, even suspicious. Our modern heroes are entertainers rather than entrepreneurs. But today’s Bluejay student body, no longer exclusively poor, male, Irish or Catholic, should know from whence it came.

The rest of us need to be reminded of the benefits of immigration, recalling the gifts of people like the Creightons, who emerged from poverty to leave an enduring legacy. What looked like opportunity to them has now flowered into opportunity for thousands of others.

I thought about that concept last September, when South High principal, Jerry Bartee, responded to his alumni award at a reunion dinner. Bartee grew up north of the Creighton campus and said he used to look up on that hill, partially obscured by the stadium wall, and wonder if a poor black youngster like himself could ever aspire to such academic heights. He made it to the hilltop, graduating in 1976 with a bachelor’s degree and earning a master of science degree in 1983. In his acceptance speech he catalogued the many blessings he received at Creighton and thanked a roster of professors who had shaped his life.

He closed by remarking, “You know, there are many Jerry Bartees out there; there should be more Creightons.”

The largest building at left, with the cupola, is “Creighton College” as viewed from about 20th and Dodge streets in 1878.
Creighton welcomed students and faculty back to the Eppley College of Business Administration in the fall with an attractively renovated facility.

The $4.5 million renovation included rewiring the building for state-of-the-art computer technology. But the project also included a new electrical system, as well as new heating-ventilating-air conditioning and new plumbing.

Among the facility’s new features are two large skylights that provide open, natural lighting to faculty offices on the top floor.

Project architect was Holland Basham of Omaha.

Dr. Juli-Ann Gasper, associate professor of finance and a US WEST computer fellow class graduate, teaches in one of the College of Business Administration’s technology centers.

At left is one of two advanced technology centers created for the College of Business Administration.
The new student lounge (left) is a place to relax or to study for students in the new College of Business Administration.

Hallways are bright, modern and carpeted, with benches provided throughout. Skylight (left) brings the sun to the top floor.

Fr. Cahill’s COBA History Out in Book

In The First 75 Years: A History of the Creighton University College of Business Administration Fr. Neil Cahill, S.J., offers his own one-of-a-kind view of Creighton in 200 paperback pages.

An assistant professor of economics and the Jesuit chaplain for the business college, Fr. Cahill charts the history of the school and gives a colorful overview of its highlights.

The book sells for $15, including postage and handling. To order, alumni should contact:
Colleen Hendrick,
College of Business Administration,
Creighton University, 2500 California Plaza,
Omaha, NE. 68178, (402) 280-5520.

The book is also available at the Creighton University Bookstore.

Dr. Deborah L. Wells, associate professor of management, talks to a student in newly refurbished offices.
He’s an internationally noted biblical scholar and translator who can read a dozen languages, but one of the first things he turns to every day in the newspaper is the comics.

Scissors in hand, he reads all the strips, instinctively memorizing most of them, searching for gems: Linus quoting “Proverbs” to a skeptical Snoopy, Frank and Ernest asking God if the meek can inherit Saturn instead of the earth, the boy in Family Circus asking if the donkey means Mary and Joseph were Democrats.

Later, Dr. Leonard Greenspoon, holder of the Philip M. and Ethel Klutznick Chair in Jewish Civilization...
at Creighton, will share these “biblical interpretations” with a wide range of audiences including high school religion students and readers of scholarly journals.

To Greenspoon, president of a worldwide group which studies the Septuagint (the first translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek), it’s simple. “You can look at something as serious as a biblical text and have fun,” he said. “Someday I want to do a lecture that biblical scholars take themselves too seriously and the texts not seriously enough. You can have fun with something without mocking it.”

And wherever this short, intense Southerner who became Klutznick chairholder last year goes, he creates a sense of fun and excitement. “He’s very homey ... with a wonderful sense of humor,” said Gloriann Levy, Omaha Jewish Cultural Arts director. “People like to talk to him. Because of him, Creighton has become a more visible presence in the Jewish community.”

Dr. Brian Hook, an assistant professor of Classics and Modern Languages, recalled Greenspoon’s first visit to Creighton. Greenspoon, who holds a doctorate in Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations from Harvard, had been asked to lecture to a class on “Gilgamesh,” an Assyrian text which is required reading in World Literature I. “He has this sort of New York - South Carolina accent and made references to the comic strips,” Hook said. “He gave a fantastic lecture. He made the text come to life.”

Finding and showing others the “life” in biblical texts animates Greenspoon’s prolific scholarship which includes numerous academic articles and presentations. He also has written, edited or contributed to several books related to the Septuagint.
and the Book of Joshua.

But no matter how impressive his scholarly attainments, Greenspoon says they aren’t most important to him. “Theory and theology don’t interest me,” he said. “I’m interested in what people actually do with their beliefs.”

That, he said, explains his fascination with the people of the Bible and the people who have studied the Bible throughout the centuries.

In Greenspoon’s vivid historical imagination, the people of ancient civilizations and their communities are very much alive, strongly resembling modern people and our world. They shouldn’t be viewed through “rose-colored lenses,” he cautions.

“The patriarchs of the Hebrew Bible were hardly paradigms of virtue,” he said. “Just like the characters on the soaps and like ‘Dallas’ and ‘Dynasty,’ there was fighting among generations and fighting for power.”

Greenspoon especially empathizes with the nameless scribes and scholars over the centuries who have translated the Bible. He’s fascinated by how they worked, the impact their communities had on them and the politics of the translation process – all of which go on today in translating the Bible.

Too often, he said, scholars study only the “finished products” of the translators while there is much to be learned from examining the process of the translation.

“I try to empathize with the people who are doing the translations,” he said. “I try to see where they’re coming from. I enjoy looking for the quirkiness. I like to ask how do translators work and how do their communities work. There has to be some (financial) backing and, when people put money up, they expect something in return. All of this is influenced by what is going on in the rest of society. We are using texts to look at the interaction of text and community.”

This “quirkiness” hasn’t changed much in the past two thousand years, he said.

Ancient translators had their bad days just as modern scholars do.

“In one 20th century translation of Psalm 50, we have God saying ‘I will take no bull from your house,’ meaning no sacrifice,” Greenspoon said. “It’s obvious that no one read that one aloud.”

In another instance from earlier in this century, a translation of the Jewish Bible transposed two lines...
from the Book of Isaiah when the type fell on the floor, he said. The first one who noticed it was a rabbi whose middle name was Isaiah.

Greenspoon said perhaps his favorite example of the perils of biblical translation is the 1631 edition of the King James Bible which omitted the “not” in the commandment concerning adultery.

“They call this the ‘wicked Bible,’” he said. “Translation is no different than other types of work. Just like some automakers have their bad days, you can see that some scribes and printers do.”

Greenspoon said that when he finds an oddity such as lines that are repeated or omitted, he wonders if the ancient scribe had had a fight with his wife or wasn’t feeling well or was worried about a child.

Greenspoon said such incidents help put today’s battles over such issues as inclusive language into historical perspective.

In any era, Greenspoon said, translators have to ask themselves basic, philosophical questions which help determine the outcome of their work.

Is it better to translate a text literally even when that’s difficult or may not communicate very well to readers in the new language or is it better to emphasize primarily the meaning of the text?

For example, he said, should a translator convert ancient “cubits” into more understandable inches or feet, or retain the cubits of the original text?

“Within Judaism, more than Christianity, there is great stress on the original language of the text,”

Greenspoon said. “The advantage of the more literal translation is that it takes the reader to the text while the more context-based takes the text to the reader.”

Greenspoon said he’s sympathetic to both viewpoints and tries to understand various translations in the context of the times in which they were written.

“Almost every translation has some value,” he said. “Every translation was the Bible to some community of people.”

Greenspoon’s numerous current projects include research and writing a popular history of Bible translating. He’s also working on an introduction to a collection of his articles on Bible translations to be published in Rumania.

Greenspoon’s scholarly interests include the Dead Sea Scrolls on which he has written a number of articles.

This interest stems from his work at Harvard with two professors who were members of the original team of scholars studying the scrolls. At Creighton, he has already developed and taught an advanced class on the Dead Sea Scrolls in addition to teaching an undergraduate class on the Old Testament.

Greenspoon said that his Dead Sea Scrolls course focused on the controversies which have marked the study of the scrolls ever since their discovery in a cave by shepherds in 1947. At the time, the area was under siege in the combat which accompa-
nied the creation of the State of Israel.

After the partition of the area in 1948, the scrolls ended up in Jordanian territory, and no Jewish scholar was allowed access to them. Since the area became part of the territory controlled by Israel in 1967, the “enterprise (of studying the scrolls) has become more inter-confessional,” Greenspoon said.

Greenspoon said that he and his students examined such issues as the authorship of the scrolls, their relationship to the New Testament, and whether they all came from the same place. Because most of the scrolls are in Hebrew and some are in Aramaic and Greek, “there’s some dispute now as to whether all of the scrolls came from the same place and if any are connected with the site (where they were found).”

The scrolls were produced sometime between the Second Century BCE and the First Century CE and seem to have been hidden in the caves for safekeeping when the Romans were coming, he said. The identity of the community which produced them is in dispute although it formerly was assumed the people were associated with the Essenes, a Jewish group which developed in the area at about the time when the scrolls were produced.

“My students learned that controversy is the spice of scholarly life,” he said. “My students got a sense that scholarly controversy, even about antiquity, can involve the personalities of scholars today.”

This course isn’t limited to theology majors, he said. Two students who took it were biology majors, one using her academic background to study how the scrolls were dated.

Greenspoon, a native of Richmond, Va., spent 20 years as a professor of religion at Clemson University in South Carolina before moving to Creighton to become the second holder of the Klutznick Chair in Jewish Civilization, endowed by the Klutznicks in 1987.

Philip M. Klutznick, JD’30, is a former president of the World Jewish Congress and a former U.S. secretary of commerce. His $1 million gift establishing the chair stipulated that the holder would spend part of his or her time working with the Omaha Jewish Federation and the local Jewish community.

This, said Greenspoon, was a major attraction of the position.

“Working with the Jewish community is not an add-on but a real plus,” he said. “For its size, the Omaha Jewish community is the most active and generous in the world.”

The 6,500 member community is small enough for one person to “make

At the northwest corner of the Dead Sea is the ruin of Qumran, where caves in nearby cliffs held the Dead Sea Scrolls.
a difference,” he said. It is large enough to support significant endeavors such as the annual fall Klutznick Symposium which this year focused on the Yiddish language and culture.

Greenspoon’s involvements with the Omaha Jewish community include serving on the Jewish Cultural Arts Committee, the College of Jewish Learning, teaching high school religion classes at Beth El Synagogue and lecturing to Jewish organizations.

“He’s present at most community functions,” said Levy. “He’s an excellent, dynamic teacher.”

Greenspoon said Creighton’s own sense of community was another attraction for accepting the Klutznick Chair. He said he feels very comfortable being affiliated with a Jesuit university.

“Catholics and Jews share a great deal,” he said. “They have a particularly strong sense of history, community and ritual. Both interpret the Bible through their traditions.”

Greenspoon said that in a short period, he has come to feel part of the Creighton community because faculty members are happy to share the scholarly work they are doing.

“In many places, you have turf battles,” he said. “Here I find a very productive faculty with opportunities to share with others. No one is doing exactly what I’m doing but we have an interest in similar issues. This is a community that works.”

**Creighton’s Accessibility Was an Attraction**

Between about 1910 and 1930, Omaha had numerous poor Jewish youths who badly wanted a college education but couldn’t afford to go away to school. They found what they were seeking at Creighton. In addition, unlike many private universities of the era, Creighton never had quotas for Jewish students.

According to Omaha attorney Milton Abrahams, Arts’25, Law ’27, and others, Creighton’s accessibility laid the basis of a strong, mutually beneficial relationship between Creighton and the Omaha Jewish community.

“We have numerous distinguished Creighton medical alumni who came here because of restrictions (against Jewish students) in the Eastern schools,” said Steve Scholer, director of estates and trusts for the University. “They haven’t forgotten Creighton.”

Abrahams, a founder of the Creightonian student newspaper and generous donor to C.U., said he and other local Jewish students had an excellent experience at Creighton. There was even a Jewish fraternity, Pi Lambda Phi, which has long been inactive.

“I thoroughly enjoyed all of my time at Creighton,” Abrahams said. “I think all of us who went there felt strongly attached to Creighton. If we hadn’t gone there, we wouldn’t have had the chance to go to college.”

Creighton’s Jewish students who later distinguished themselves have included Philip Klutznick, former president of the World Jewish Congress and U.S. secretary of commerce; noted Omaha attorney Henry Monsky; Samuel Greenberg, who operated South Omaha’s old Philips Department Store and was king of Ak-Sar-Ben, and many others.

A major bequest in recent years from Omaha real estate developer A.A. Yossem and his wife, Ethel, has underwritten a chair in legal ethics and a scholarship fund for students of the Jewish faith to attend Creighton, Scholer said.

Yossem, who never graduated from college, highly respected Klutznick, said Scholer. His bequest to Creighton was inspired by that of the Klutznicks.

One of the favorite stories about Creighton’s ties to the Jewish community concerns the Rev. Carl Reinert, S.J., and his first capital campaign, which was led by Morris Jacobs, a founder of the advertising agency, Bozell Worldwide, Inc.

Supposedly, Jacobs had initially refused Reinert’s request to head the drive, but Reinert was not a man to take “no” easily. He said he would pray until Jacobs accepted. Later that night, Jacobs is said to have called Reinert with his reluctant acceptance:

“Get off your knees, Father. I’ll lead your drive.”

Notable events involving Creighton and the Jewish community have included an Alpha Sigma Nu lecture by the late Yitzhak Rabin before he was prime minister of Israel.

Creighton’s Jewish faculty members have included current Law Dean Lawrence Rafal and his predecessor Rodney Shkolnick. W
When Saint Jerome translated the Bible into the Latin Vulgate, he chose the Latin sacramentum, sacrament, for the Greek mysterion, mystery. We understand those words to be highly different, but their difference is an efficient way of getting at my argument that good writing can be a religious act.

In the synoptic gospels mysterion generally referred to the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, and in Saint Paul’s epistles to Christ as the perfect revelation of God’s will. Tertullian introduced the term sacramentum as we know it when he talked about the rite of the Christian initiation, understanding the word to mean “a sacred action, object or means.” And Saint Augustine further clarified the term by defining sacraments as “signs pertaining to things divine, or visible forms of an invisible grace.”

Eventually more and more things were seen as sacraments until the 16th century when the Reformation confined the term to baptism and eucharist, the two gospel sacraments, and the Roman Catholic Council of Trent decreed that signs become sacraments only if they become channels for grace. But 20th century theology has used the term in a far more inclusive way, describing sacraments “as occasions of encounter between God and the believer, where the reality of God’s gracious actions needs to be accepted in faith” (Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan, eds., The Oxford Companion to the Bible, 1993).

Writing, then, is a sacrament insofar as it provides graced occasions of encounter between humanity and God. As Flannery O’Connor noted in Mystery and Manners, “the real novelist, the one with an instinct for what he is about, knows that he cannot approach the infinite directly, that he must penetrate the natural human world as it is. The more sacramental his theology, the more encouragement he will get from it to do just that.”
Even secular interpretations point to the fiction writer’s duty to express the Mystery at the heart of metaphysics. In the famous preface to his novel The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus,’ Joseph Conrad defined a fictional work of art as:

a single-minded attempt to render the highest kind of justice to the visible universe, by bringing to light the truth, manifold and one, underlying its every aspect. It is an attempt to find in its forms, in its colours, in its light, in its shadows, in the aspects of matter, and in the facts of life what of each is fundamental, what is enduring and essential — their one illuminating and convincing quality — the very truth of their existence.

The highest kind of justice to the visible universe often leads to the highest kind of humility about ourselves. Writing about craft in The Art of Fiction, John Gardner held that “the value of great fiction ... is not just that it entertains us or distracts us from our troubles, not just that it broadens our knowledge of people and places, but also that it helps us to know what we believe, reinforces those qualities that are noblest in us, leads us to feel uneasy about our faults and limitations.” Writers seeking to express a religious vision often help their readers by simply providing, as Gardner puts it, trustworthy but inexpressible models. We ingest metaphors of good, wordlessly learning to behave more like Levin than like Anna (in Anna Karenina), more like the transformed Emma (in Jane Austen’s novel) than like the Emma we first meet in the book. This subtle, for the most part wordless knowledge is the “truth” great fiction seeks out.

But I have identified in my own experience and that of many other Christian writers that there comes a time when we find the need and the confidence to face the great issues of God and faith and right conduct more directly.

My first published book was Desperadoes, a historical novel about the Daltons from their hardscrabble beginnings, through their horse-rustling and outlawry in Oklahoma, to the fatal day in 1892 when all but one of the gang were killed in bank robberies in their hometown of Coffeyville, Kan. That crime does not pay is a Christian theme, as is the book’s focus on honor, loyalty, integrity, selfishness, and reckless ambition — the highest calling Bob Dalton seems to have felt was to be as important as Jesse James. But my own religious experience does not figure greatly in Desperadoes; most people read the book as a

From the book jacket: “This novel is rare — a good read, a literary debut of astonishing originality ... Hansen has the imagination to deliver the sheer storytelling that great adventure demands and the craft and compassion to turn adventure into art.” — John Irving
high-falutin Western, a boys-will-be-boys adventure full of hijinks and humor and bloodshed.

I fell into my second book because of the first. The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford is another historical novel, but is far darker than Desperadoes because I was far more insistent on a Christian perspective on sin and redemption and forgiveness. These were bad guys I was writing about, guys who were sons of preachers but did the wrong thing so blithely and persistently it was like they’d got their instructions all bollixed up. If Jesse James was a false messiah for those Southerners still in civil war with the finance companies and the railroads, then Bob Ford was both his Judas and his Barabbas, a self-important quisling who hoped to be famous and who got off scot-free for the killing of his famous friend, but who was hounded out of more than one town afterwards until he ended up as a saloonkeeper in Creede, Colo., where he himself was killed at the hands of a man who claimed he was evening the score.

It’s a form of bad sportsmanship for fiction writers to complain that too few reviewers pick up their hidden agendas, but in fact I was disappointed that the general reading of the book on Jesse James was pretty much as it was for Desperadoes. Hidden beneath the praise were the questions: Why is this guy writing Westerns? When oh when is he going to give his talent to a subject that matters?

In his essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” T. S. Eliot asserted that great writing required a perpetual surrender of the writer as he or she is in the present in order to pay homage and service to a tradition of literature in the past. “The progress of an artist,” he wrote, “is continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality.” I was following Eliot’s precepts in the wholesale subtraction of my own personality and the submersion of my familial and religious experiences in my retelling of history in my first two novels, and yet I was frustrated that my fiction did not more fully communicate a belief in Jesus as Lord that was so important, indeed central, to my life.

The English novelist and critic G. K. Chesterton wrote in his conclusion to Heretics: “A [writer] cannot be wise enough to be a great artist without being wise enough to be a philosopher. A [writer] cannot have the energy to produce good art without having the energy to wish to pass beyond it. A small artist is content with art; a great artist is content with nothing except everything.”

Everything for me, and for Chesterton, was the mystery of the Holy Being as it was, and is, incarnated in human life. Everything for me, to go even further, was the feeling that Christianity is difficult, but that Christianity is worth it. I finally got around to a fuller expression of that in my third novel.

Mariette in Ecstasy concerns a 17-year-old woman, Mariette Baptiste, who joins the Convent of Our Lady of Sorrows as a postulant in upstate New York in 1906. Her older sister, Annie, or Mother Celine, is the prioress there and on Christmas Eve, 1906, Mother Celine dies of cancer and is buried. On the next day, Christmas, Mariette is given the
stigmata — those wounds in the hands, feet, and side resembling those that Christ suffered on the cross. Whether Mariette is a sexual hysterical full of religious wishful thinking or whether her physical wounds are indeed supernaturally caused is the subject of the novel.

I first thought about writing Mariette in Ecstasy after finishing Saint Thérèse of Lisieux’s Story of a Soul. She was the third of her sisters to enter the Carmelite convent of Lisieux where her oldest sister was prioress and, like Mariette, she soon became a favorite there. You may know that Thérèse was just 15 at the time she entered religious life, and she did so little that was outwardly wonderful during her nine years as a nun that when she died of tuberculosis at 24, one of the sisters in the convent with her feared there would be nothing to say about Thérèse at the funeral. She did perform the ordinary duties of religious life extraordinarily well, emphasizing simplicity, obedience, and self-forgetfulness over the harsh physical mortifications that were common then, and she impressed some with her childlike faith in God the Father and with her passionate love of Jesus. She can seem sentimental at times, and there are psychologists who’d diagnose Thérèse as neurotic, but then there are people like me who have a profound respect for her in spite of her perceived excessiveness. When you have a tension like that, you’re half the way to having a plot.

About then, too, I happened upon Lettres portugaises, a collection of letters falsely presumed to have been written by Sister Mariana Alcoforado about her frantic love affair with a French courtier in the 18th century. At one point she supposedly wrote the Chevalier de C—: “I thank you from the bottom of my heart for the desperation you cause me, and I detest the tranquility in which I lived before I knew you.”

I was stunned and excited by that line. Emotions like that, I knew, would be at the heart of the novel. I hatched a tale influenced by both those books in which I pretended that the nun I’d modeled on Saint Thérèse of Lisieux would have a kind of love affair with Jesus, with all of a romance’s grand exaltations and disappointments, and its physical manifestation would be Christ’s wounds from the crucifixion. And further reading about religious women and the phenomenon of stigmata acquainted me with Anne Catharine Emmerich, Louise Lateau, Theresa Neumann, and, in particular, Gemma Galgani — all of them stigmatists in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Some parts of the letters that Mariette writes in the novel are paraphrased from confessions written by Saint Gemma Galgani in 1900 and included in a hard-to-find book called Letters and Ecstasies. Quotidian life in my fictional religious order, the Sisters of the Crucifixion, is based on Thomas Merton’s account of the Cistercian life in The Waters of Siloe. The mass hysteria hinted at in my book was a product of my looking into Aldous Huxley’s fascinating history, The Devils of Loudun. Simple scenes of the sisters at work and recreation were inspired by a book of photographs taken at the Carmelite convent in Lisieux by Thérèse’s sister Céline. The first investigation of Mariette’s stigmata is taken from the medical diagnosis of Padre Pio’s stigmata in the 1920s. Cribbing and stealing from hundreds of sources, I finally allowed my factual sources to be distorted and transmuted by figurative language, forgetfulness, or by the personalities of the fictional characters.
orthodoxy, but doesn’t forget that the origin of religious feeling is the graced revelation of the Holy Being to us in nature, in the flesh, and in all our faculties. If I may be permitted the immodesty of quoting a review, I was trying to stake claim, as Pico Iyer put it, to “a world as close and equivocal as Emily Dickinson’s, alive with the age-old American concerns of community and wilderness, of sexual and spiritual immensities, of transcendence and its discontents.”

Essentially, I was trying to say the unsayable, but I felt free to try it because I knew the book would get published somewhere, even if it were a small press, and I knew the books I liked best were not those that seemed tailored to contemporary tastes but those that were unfashionable, refractory, insubordinate, that seemed the products not of a market analysis but of a writer’s private obsession.

But in my rebellion against what Yale law professor Stephen L. Carter has termed “The Culture of Disbelief,” I did not feel obligated, as Catholic fiction writers in the forties and fifties often were, to be conformist, high-minded, and pure, as if I were seeking a nihil obstat from the chancery. As Robert Stone pointed out in “The Reason for Stories,” his essay on moral fiction:

It must be emphasized that the moral imperative of fiction provides no excuse for smug moralizing, religiosity, or propaganda. On the contrary, it forbids them. Nor does it require that every writer equip his work with some edifying message advertising progress, brotherhood, and light. It does not require a writer to be a good man, only a good wizard.

In fact there may be no obligation for a Christian writer or artist to overtly treat Christian themes. Writing about “Catholic Novelists and Their Readers,” Flannery O’Connor affirmed fiction writers whose only objective was being “hotly in pursuit of the real.”

St. Thomas Aquinas says that art does not require rectitude of the appetite, that it is wholly concerned with the good of that which is made. He says that a work of art is good in itself, and this is a truth that the modern world has largely forgotten. We are not content to stay within our limitations and make something that is simply a good in and by itself. Now we want to make something that will have some utilitarian value. Yet what is good in itself glorifies God because it reflects God. The artist has his hands full and does his duty if he attends to his art. He can safely leave evangelizing to the evangelists.

Evangelization for Jesus was generally by means of parables that were often so bewilderingly allusive that his disciples would ask for further explanations of his meaning. Mark has it that, “he did not speak to [the crowds] without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything” (Mk 4:33-34). Christ’s parables are metaphors that do not contract into simple denotation but broaden continually to take on fresh nuances and connotations. Parables invite the hearer’s interest with familiar settings and situations but finally veer off into the unfamiliar, shat-
tering their homey realism and insisting on further reflection and inquiry. We have the uneasy feeling that we are being interpreted even as we interpret them. Early, pre-Gospel versions seem to have resembled Zen koans in which hearers are left hanging until they find illumination through profound meditation. We find a kind of koan in the Gospel of Luke when Jesus compares the kingdom of God to “leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened” (Lk 13:21).

We are challenged, in Jesus’s parables, to figure out how we are like wheat sown in a field, or lost sheep, or mustard seed, or the evil tenants of a householder’s vineyard, and in the hard exercise of interpretation we imitate and make present again the graced interaction between the human and the divine.

My fourth novel, *Atticus*, was a retelling of what’s often called the parable of the prodigal son, though it’s the father who’s most truly excessive, having far more love and forgiveness than his son feels he deserves. Without giving away too much of the plot of what is, after all, a mystery, I can offer this: *Atticus* is the story of a Colorado rancher named Atticus Cody who, when he hears that his wild and wayward son Scott has committed suicide, journeys to a town full of expatriated Americans on the Mexican Caribbean in order to recover the body. While there, Atticus happens upon enough factual oversights and inconsistencies to infer that his son was murdered, and he tries to find out who the murderer is.

*Mariette in Ecstasy* is a parable of a young woman’s quest for the Holy Being; *Atticus* is a parable of the Holy Being’s quest for an intimate relationship with us. Each focuses on seekers, for religion and fiction have in common the unquenchable yearning to achieve the impossible, fathom the unfathomable, hold on to what is fleeting and evanescent and seen, in Saint Paul’s words, “as through a glass, darkly” (1 Cor 13:12).

I hesitate to say more for fiction is far better experienced than interpreted. And so it is with sacraments. To fully understand a symbol is to kill it. So the Holy Being continually finds new ways to proclaim itself to us, first and best of all in the symbols of Christ’s life, then in Scripture, and finally in created things, whether they be the glories of nature or art or other human beings. And those symbols will not be objects but actions. As theologian Nathan Mitchell puts it, “Symbols are not things people invent and interpret, but realities that ‘make’ and interpret a people ... Symbols are places to live, breathing spaces that help us discover what possibilities life offers.”

The job of fiction writers is to fashion those symbols and give their readers the feeling that life has great significance, that something is going on here that matters. Writing will be a sacrament when it offers in its own way the formula for happiness of Pierre Tielhard de Chardin. Which is: First, be. Second, love. Finally, worship. We may find it’s possible that if we do just one of those things completely we may have done all three.
Hill Thrill: Soccer Team Goes to the Final Four

Congratulations to the Creighton Bluejay soccer team for its thrilling season of championship play. The Jays advanced to the nation’s “final four” soccer teams, losing to St. John’s, the eventual champion.

Several Bluejays were chosen to the All-MVC (Missouri Valley Conference) team at season’s end.

Soccer Action
Johnny Torres drives for the goal in the Bluejays’ game against Rhode Island. Torres was named an All-American by the National Soccer Coaches Association of America.

All-MVC Players
Kneeling From Left: Ross Paule (Junior, Midfield, MVC Player of the Year), Richard Mulrooney (Sophomore, Midfield, 1st Team All-MVC), Brad McTighe (Senior, Forward, 2nd Team All-MVC) and Steve Bernal (Freshman, Midfield, MVC All-Newcomer Team).
Standing From Left: Johnny Torres (Junior, Forward, 1st Team All-MVC), Bret Simon (Head Coach, MVC Co-Coch of the Year), Jeff Deist (Junior, Midfield, Honorable Mention All-MVC), Marc Madeley (Junior, Defender, 1st Team All-MVC), Jon Epperson (Junior, Goalkeeper, 2nd Team All-MVC), David Wright (Freshman, Defender, Honorable Mention All-MVC and MVC All-Newcomer Team) and Zion Renfurm (Junior, Defender, 2nd Team All-MVC).