

## Novel Pleasures

As I write this, JanTerm is coming to an end and our students and faculty will be returning from travels around the globe. In a very few days we all will be collected back on campus to begin the adventure of the spring term. I have learned that January is an important time in the yearly cycle of Austin College. It is a time for catching a breath, having a new experience, and getting connected with things that keep us grounded. One of those things for me is finding time to read fiction.

Few pleasures compare with the discovery of a truly great novel. In the past month or so I've been delighted to stumble on three: *The Housekeeper and the Professor* (by Yoko Ogawa, translated from Japanese by Stephen Snyder), *The Elegance of the Hedgehog* (by Muriel Barbery, translated from French by Alison Anderson), and *36 Arguments for the Existence of God: A Work of Fiction* (by Rebecca Goldstein). These are three beautiful novels, from three different countries, and each one has been profoundly thought-provoking. Although they tell very different kinds of stories, and although each carries elements of tragedy as well as comedy, they share a wisdom and an irrepressible sense of sacred play. These novels share a common theme as well: the way that Holiness continually reveals itself to us despite our best attempts to reason it away. As Elizabeth Barrett Browning tells us, "Earth is crammed with Heaven." These books reminded me of some different and surprising ways that is true. If you've read any of these books, I'd love to hear your thoughts on them.



I can hardly wait for the excitement of the new term; so many things will come to fruition in the months ahead. We will honor Muhammad Yunus with the 2010 Austin College Posey Leadership Award, mark 100 years of basketball with a weekend of games and celebrations, move fundraising into high gear for our new IDEA Center (read more inside this issue), and gather for our annual law symposium (newly named in honor of Professor Emeritus Kenneth Street).

Yet, in the midst of these and other wonders, I am mindful of the shadow side of the spring term. In this economic climate, with an endowment that remains battered by the stock market drop of last year and a student population that finds it harder than ever to afford tuition, we will be faced with difficult choices as we seek to balance our budget. As I face the various dragons that stand between Austin College and its forward movement, I take great comfort in the many friends and alumni who continue to commit their energies, time, and resources to Austin College so that we may realize our shared vision of changing the world through liberal arts education.

We need each of you. When I sit across the table from people who have the ability to make a significant gift to the College, the first question I often am asked is, "What percentage of your alumni make an annual gift to the College?" At the moment, my answer is, "Our alumni giving rate hovers at about 30 percent." That is not a number that inspires excitement—great liberal arts colleges regularly top 50 percent.

I think the reason our giving rate fails to match the rate of enthusiasm and love our alumni feel for Austin College, is that many of you are convinced that the only gifts that matter are the large ones. I can assure you that we certainly need big gifts, but just as important, we need the many smaller gifts that improve our overall giving rate and that together add up to significant support for the College. I encourage everyone who cares about Austin College to become an annual donor. Your regular support makes a real difference for Austin College. We make it easy for you to add your name to our list of annual donors. You can visit the College's Web site right now and make a gift, mail a gift in the reply envelope included in this magazine, or contact our office of Institutional Advancement to learn the many ways you can structure your annual giving.

Please keep this great College in your conversations. Visit us when you can. Watch for the unveiling of our new Web site sometime in March. Let us know about talented students for whom Austin College might be a good match. And—since January comes around every year—send me the names of some of your favorite books so I can add them to my reading list.

Best,

Marjorie