

Wilderness House Literary Review 4/4

Don MacLaren

Wretched of the Earth

"Don, stop looking out of the window and daydreaming," one of my teachers in my 4th grade class at St. Stephen's, in Grand Rapids said. "I'm not looking out the window and daydreaming, I'm busy...having a vision," I responded. "Don't get smart with me!" the teacher said. I had not moved, and to the teacher it appeared that I was still looking out the window. "I'm not smart," I said, still trying to remain focused on the vision though it was quickly going fuzzy and out of focus, like the TV sometimes did when I was watching Gilligan's Island, The Beverly Hillbillies or the Vietnam War. If only my teacher would shut up and stop asking me to answer stupid questions, like I was a Nazi war criminal, then the vision might come back into focus, but no. In fact the teacher came marching down the aisle just like I had seen the Nazis march when I was watching TV, when the TV was in focus. The teacher got to my desk, picked it up off the ground, with me in it, and turned it around so that my head was now turned toward the front of the blackboard at the front of the class. No matter how far I might turn my head with the desk now facing the door, I couldn't take in the vision through the window as I had been doing.

I thought it was odd that my teacher would order me to stop looking out the window because it seemed that in just about every page of the Bible we studied in Religion class one of the heroes had a vision. Sometimes they were visions that told them how to outsmart the villains, or even how to kill the villains. I thought that if anyone interrupted the heroes while they were busy having a vision it could only be a villain that would do so

It wasn't healthy for me to get my visions interrupted like this, and the spirits who gave me messages would sometimes get frustrated when the messages they were trying to send were cut off. But they knew it wasn't the fault of the intended recipient, and they would find a way to transmit the messages later, perhaps when I was sleeping, on my way to or from school, playing football or sitting on the toilet.

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One day one of my schoolmates and I began digging up pieces of what we thought was clay from the dirt alley behind my house and began making a statue of The Holy Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God. It had rained the night before so the ground was wet, and the task wasn't too difficult. We'd spent about a half hour in the alley molding a Mary statue when my mother came out of our house to go shopping.

"Donald Roy MacLaren, what are you doing back there?"

"We're making The Holy Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God," I told her as my friend put the finishing touches on the statue.

"You're late for school," she yelled.

My friend and I thus proceeded to run back to school with the statue of Mary we had so diligently been working on.

"Where've you been?" the teacher demanded, as we were panting and out of breath.

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"Making it with The Holy Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God," my friend said. (He had heard the term "making it" on Rowan and Martin's Laugh In recently and decided to use it in conversation, thinking it would make him appear more adult and sophisticated.)

The teacher gave us a Nazi stare; then there were a few seconds of roaring silence.

"You're late," she finally said. The class was in the middle of Religion class, my favorite subject.

"We're sorry, but we hope this will make up for being tardy," I said and presented her with the statue. It was brown and resembled an hourglass shape. I held it out, as the fluorescent light reflected off it, expecting her to take it, thinking I would surely be forgiven once she held it in her hand. "We made her out of clay."

"Donald, it stinks. It's not made out of clay, it's made out of...." She cleared her throat and hesitated. "...It's made out of doo-doo."

At that moment the head of the statue fell off as if the teacher's words were too unbearable to hear. My friend reluctantly held out his hand and caught it before it crash-landed on the floor.

"Get rid of it," the teacher demanded.

I began to feel like I myself was crumbling apart, just like the statue, and my face began turning red. I had trouble breathing and had to force myself to take a step toward the wastebasket. "What are you doing?" the teacher demanded, as she was writing on the blackboard. The headless statue fell to the bottom of the wastebasket with a "plop" sound. "I'm throwing...." I hesitated, [^]the doo-doo Mary away." My friend stood loyally by my side, holding the shit-head in his hand.

"Not in there. Where does doo-doo go?"

I didn't know what to say. "Umm, in the alley?"

The teacher then turned cold and hard and stone-faced, looking kind of like an evil statue of a Nazi guy - even though the teacher was a woman - not like the soft, warm, loving doo-doo statue of The Holy Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God.

"In...the...toilet..." she said, uttering each word slowly and coldly, making me feel with each word uttered as if she were dropping a rock on my head from high above me. I got down on my hands and knees and reached into the wastebasket to scrape out the pieces of the doo-doo Mary statue, but the pieces fell apart in my fingers and I couldn't seem to grab a sufficiently big piece in the wastebasket without breaking it up. Despite all my good efforts I completely failed at the task. I began to feel my whole body, not just my face, turn red as the other kids in the class laughed at me while my friend stood by my side, like a statue himself, waiting for me to finish the task. My body broke into a sweat and I could feel tears welling up inside me, but I refused allow them to escape.

Finally, the teacher directed me to take the wastebasket to the bathroom. I proceeded to carry out her order as my friend dutifully followed me, with the head of the Mother of God in the palm of his hand. I had by

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this time gotten a considerable amount of the body of the Mother of God on my hands, shirt and coat sleeves. Upon entering the bathroom my friend proceeded to a toilet and dropped the head of the Mother of God. It made a "plop" sound as it hit the water.

I turned the wastebasket upside down and the body parts of the Mother of God splattered all over the toilet, the toilet seat, the wall and the floor. Then I spent a considerable amount of time cleaning up all the doo-doo all over the place with toilet paper and paper towels. Then I scrubbed the wastebasket in the sink, though I felt like I could hardly even move. There was something inside me that felt cold and gray, like a ghost that was trying to choke the life out of me.

But the ghost lost its grip on me a little by the time I finished my doo-doo task, and I was able to walk back to the classroom without too much trouble. I knew that I smelled like doo-doo while I sat in the classroom, but I just tried to pretend I wasn't there, as if I were invisible to those around me, as if I were one of the prophets in the Bible who would call on God's help to defeat one of the evil forces, or who was told by God that he would have to contend with various trials and tribulations before he could be saved. I didn't have the strength to look out the window for a vision that might be awaiting me outside, though I knew that if I was patient a vision would surely come sooner or later.

"You made Mary outa dookie!" one of the black kids nearby me said, and all the kids around me laughed. Then, when I knew my face was as red as a beet, and sweat began to fall from my forehead, someone else said "your face is red because of the doo-doo," and everyone in the class cracked up again. I made it through the day though, and when the clock struck 3:00, I walked outside and into the rain. I was glad it was raining because I thought the rain would help to wash away the doo-doo and its scent. I went to the dirt alley behind my house again and crouched down like I saw the Viet Cong do on TV - in the rain and mud - as the doo-doo gradually left me. Then I sat down in the mud, then I lay down in it, then I cried and cried, praying to God as I did so, while the heavens rained and rained on me, burying me in a flood. "I didn't mean to do anything wrong," I moaned. "I'm sorry." And after awhile I felt good there in the rain and mud after I'd cried so much that I felt like a part of me had died, and my eyes opened, ready to receive the next vision sent my way.