

FOREWORD



I have had the pleasure of knowing Dennis Patrick Slattery now for fifteen years...

Forewords to books often start out this way, with the “foreworder” staking claim to the relationship which gives one the “authority” to forward anything. Foreword becomes a forward, like we forward an email or an article with a foreword such as “Thought of you when I read this,” or “You’ll find this interesting.”

So who am I to foreword this book for you, to forward this book to you, beckoning you toward it like a literary pusher, whispering “Hey. You. I got something you’re gonna wanna read”?

First and foremost, I am Dennis’ student. He blew into my classroom in 1999 like a great nor’easter, nearly knocking me out of my comfortable seat and flooding my mind with his love of literature. I mean, I thought I loved literature until I met Dennis! I sat perfectly still in the eye of the storm, transfixed, as I watched him pace the room, novel in hand, gesticulating and articulating and pontificating and beatificating every word in every sentence in every paragraph of the *text de jour*. (The man could read a soup-stained diner menu into song!). Learning literature from Dennis was a singular experience of synesthesia. I would hear him read a sentence and suddenly I could

smell the nouns and taste the verbs and feel the adjectives curled up in the palm of my hand.

Second and serendipitously, I am Dennis' colleague. We both teach at Pacifica Graduate Institute in Carpinteria, California, though in different departments and usually on different campuses. Still, I sometimes walk by his classroom and though I cannot hear his distinct words, the sonorous sound of his voice makes my mouth suddenly water, and I have to keep my knees from shifting direction and my body from billowing back into his classroom again. He taught me that time spent opening a class with a poem is time well spent, and he taught me to cock my head towards my students when they made comments, no matter how peculiar or outlandish, and reply, "Say more," as if they had everything to teach you (which they do) and you had better listen (which he did).

Third and quite thrillingly, I am Dennis' co-editor. I am still not sure why he approached me to co-edit a book of essays with him, which would become *Reimagining Education: Essays on Reviving the Soul of Learning*. It was the single most collegial gesture anyone had ever made toward me, an act of great generosity from a senior colleague to one far his junior. I enjoyed every moment of collaborating with him on the project, and I believe he did as well, for after we got our first baby safely into the world and tucked into the bookshelf, we created a second literary love-child together: *The Soul Does Not Specialize: Revaluing the Humanities and the Polyvalent Imagination*. There is a common theme to these books, of course, which is reviving and revaluing the imagination, a passion project for us both, and dare I say, that which has animated every corner of his career. This began in his childhood, when he stayed home (love)sick to read books by flashlight under the covers of his bed-turned-fort (a story he recounts in the latter volume).

I have longed to lie between the covers of another book with him, and he gave my longing flesh when he cast me into another role in his life. Fourth and for this text, I am Dennis' publisher. I designed and built the cover, I laid out every page, I read each word and edited so few. To do so was both an honor and a joy. Reading a collection of Dennis' essays is to find oneself constantly in a state of delight, even while agitated or dislocated or even perforated by his words. Each essay surprises; each essay moves; each essay sucker-punches you with an aha and an insight; each essay tickles you with a

particularly facile turn of phrase.

That's only the content, the carefully crafted writing itself. What's more, however, is what each essay reveals about the writer himself. Each essay exposes a man fully engaged by life; each essay discloses the limitless leaping nature of his agile imagination. **He asks questions:** What do we remember and what do we forget, and why? (in Chapter 15, "The Confluence of Memory and Forgetting"). **He pays homage:** to archetypal psychologist James Hillman and his poetic imagination (in Chapter 8, "Myth, Method and Mythopoesis: James Hillman's Archetypal Psychology as Poetic Archeology"), to the goddess Hestia (in Chapter 7, "Hestia: Goddess of the Heart(h)"). **He disturbs our peace** (in Chapter 5, "Violent Designs: Imagining Violence as Physical and Fictional"). **He meditates on a single word:** piety (in Chapter 6, "Boxing Piety's Shadow"); trust (in Chapter 11, "The Terrible Cost of Trust"). **He challenges and critiques:** growth and development are not always virtues (in Chapter 18, "Growth: When a Myth No Longer Serves"); America has a terribly paradoxical relationship to justice (in Chapter 2, "Mythos, Logos and the Politics of Justice"). **He riffs on rhymes** (in Chapter 3, "Dante's *Terza Rima* in *The Divine Comedy*: The Road of Therapy"). **He celebrates myth** (in Chapter 20, "Myth and Wonder"); **he celebrates poetry** (in Chapter 19, "Poetry as Frame and as Form"); **he celebrates hominids** (in Chapter 14, "Lucy Under Glass"). Hominids, for god's sake! Is there nothing beyond this man's reach?

Stated simply, using another metaphor, *the man's got moves*, and though his moves are on display in 23 books, I like to think they especially dance in this vivid and vivifying volume. And so I forward this book to you with these forewords, because fifth and forever, I am Dennis' fan.

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