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William Gerard Noel

August 1, 1965–April 29, 2024

A Celebration

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Friday, 28 June 2024

at 11 am

Princeton University Chapel

Princeton, New Jersey

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Program

PRELUDE

The Swan · Camille Saint-Saëns

Sicilienne · Gabriel Fauré

Prelude from Cello Suite No. 2 · Johann Sebastian Bach

OPENING PRAYER

REMEMBRANCES & READINGS

Marina Rustow · Selections from Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose*; Reviel Netz & William Noel, *The Archimedes Codex*; Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*.

Anne Jarvis

Reviel Netz

Sarabande from Cello Suite No. 5 · Johann Sebastian Bach

Charles Duff · Selections from R. W. Southern, *The Making of the Middle Ages*

Daniel Weiss

Barbara Brizdle Schoenberg

Shenandoah · Arr. Thomas Hewitt Jones

Richard Leson · *Psalm 26 · Dominus illuminatio*

C. Griffith Mann

Robert M. Noel

Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven (All are invited to sing)

Praise, my soul, the King of heaven;
to his feet your tribute bring.
Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,
evermore his praises sing.
Alleluia, alleluia!
Praise the everlasting King!

Praise him for his grace and favor
to his people in distress.
Praise him, still the same as ever,
slow to chide, and swift to bless.
Alleluia, alleluia!
Glorious in his faithfulness!

Fatherlike he tends and spares us;
well our feeble frame he knows.
In his hand he gently bears us,
rescues us from all our foes.
Alleluia, alleluia!
Widely yet his mercy flows!

Angels, help us to adore him;
you behold him face to face.
Sun and moon, bow down before him,
dwellers all in time and space.
Alleluia, alleluia!
Praise with us the God of grace!

BLESSING

Simply the Best · Tina Turner

POSTLUDE

TRIBUTE · Richard Linenthal

When Will received, out of the blue, an invitation to be the Sandars lecturer at Cambridge University – a great honour and distinction – he shot off a “what the fxxx – are you responsible for this ??” email to his old friend Patrick Zutshi at Cambridge University Library, but sent it accidentally to Anne Jarvis, the head of the Library. How was Will to know that some years later Anne would be his boss here at Princeton? Perhaps Anne will say this was the moment she knew that some day she wanted Will Noel on her team.

For Will his masterful series of three Sandars lectures in 2019, *The Medieval Manuscript and its Digital Image*, was a significant homecoming. By this time he had completed fifteen years at the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore, and was Director of Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, and of the Schoenberg Institute for Manuscript Studies at the University of Pennsylvania Libraries. He had seen through publication the groundbreaking research on the now famous Archimedes Palimpsest, he had earned an international reputation for advancing manuscript studies in the digital age, he was recognised as a White House Open Science Champion of Change by the Obama administration in 2013. For a glimpse of his mastery and strength of personality there is no better evidence than the TED talk, *Revealing the Lost Codex of Archimedes*, delivered in 2012 and viewed more than one million times.

I remember spending a few hours with Will during the afternoon before his first Sandars lecture. He was a bundle of nerves, well caffeinated and pacing up and down the room, rehearsing what he had already prepared so well. These lectures were more important to him than many others he had given. He was now back on native soil. Not that many years before, as a Cambridge undergraduate, untamed and self-aware, he had knocked forcefully on Rosamond McKitterick’s office door, spread his arms wide and announced “I am Will and my Director of Studies has sent me to you because he says that you are the only person in Cambridge who can get me to work.”

Will and I first met soon after. He had finished his doctorate at Cambridge, and came to work with me at Bernard Quaritch describing a

large collection of medieval seal matrices. This was a far cry from the world of Anglo-Saxon manuscripts and the great Utrecht and Harley Psalters, the subjects of his doctoral dissertation. Will had never before seen or thought much about seal matrices, but he didn't miss a beat and quickly became immersed in the subject and curious to learn as much as he could. These qualities, a smart and curious mind, quick analytical abilities, and just so much fun to be around, were among his greatest strengths.

When Will was invited to go to Baltimore to be interviewed for the Walters job I asked him how much he knew about the collections there. He said not much and I immediately sent him to Sotheby's for a crash course on Books of Hours with Christopher de Hamel. The next day at the Quaritch lunch table Will said it had been awesome, and that evening we sent him home with a copy of the great Baltimore exhibition catalogue of bookbindings by Dorothy Miner (1957) so that he would be prepared for whatever he might encounter. He reported afterwards that as part of the interview he was asked to make an art historical/curatorial presentation on the famous Simon Bening Stein Quadriptych. Apparently someone in his small audience commented it was the most preposterous thing they had ever heard. I believe that Will was offered the job more or less immediately.

I remember my first visit to Baltimore to see him, that unmistakable wrinkled shirt at the end of the railway platform, and Will telling me that his new boss Shreve Simpson had given him an iron during his first week in the job. I remember how and when he first encountered the Archimedes palimpsest manuscript, and how that project grew by leaps and bounds. I remember when he was adopted by Larry Schoenberg and Barbara Brizdle at Penn as a surrogate son. I remember hearing from Will that he had met Lynn Ransom and he thought it might be serious (spoiler alert, it was). And I remember clearly where I was, on which London pavement in early May 2010, when my phone rang and it was Will with the news that Henry had been born. There was pure joy in his voice, and from that moment on it was never otherwise.

Thank you Will for so many happy memories, and so much fun. We will miss you dearly.

READINGS

Umberto Eco · *The Name of the Rose* (1980)

Poor Venantius's desk had its back to the great fireplace, and it was probably one of the most desired. At that time I had passed very little of my life in a scriptorium, but I spent a great deal of it subsequently and I know what torment it is for the scribe, the rubricator, the scholar to spend the long winter hours at his desk, his fingers numb around the stylus (when even in a normal temperature, after six hours of writing, the fingers are seized by the terrible monk's cramp and the thumb aches as if it had been trodden on). And this explains why we often find in the margins of a manuscript phrases left by the scribe as testimony to his suffering (and his impatience), such as "Thank God it will soon be dark," or "Oh, if I had a good glass of wine," or also "Today it is cold, the light is dim, this vellum is hairy, something is wrong."

Reviel Netz and William Noel · *The Archimedes Codex* (2007)

I know the owner of the Archimedes Palimpsest. I know him very well. If you don't know him by now, you don't need to know him. To the press, I say that he's of more use to you as an enigma; to the curious I say mind your own business. To those who do know him, he is a loyal, generous, thoughtful, and enlightened man. His email style is a bit short, but you get used to it.

When the Archimedes Palimpsest was sold, some scholars were outraged that the book had returned to a private collection. But if Archimedes had meant enough to the public, then public institutions would have bought

it. Archimedes did not. Public institutions were offered the book at a lower price than it actually fetched at auction, and they turned it down. If you think this is a shame, then it is a shame that we all share. We live in a world where value translates into cash. If you care about what happens to world heritage, get political about it, and be prepared to pay for it.

Herman Melville · *Moby Dick* (1851)

It needs scarcely to be told, with what feelings, on the eve of a Nantucket voyage, I regarded those marble tablets, and by the murky light of that darkened, doleful day read the fate of the whalemens who had gone before me. Yes, Ishmael, the same fate may be thine. But somehow I grew merry again. Delightful inducements to embark, fine chance for promotion, it seems—aye, a stove boat will make me an immortal by brevet. Yes, there is death in this business of whaling—a speechlessly quick chaotic bundling of a man into Eternity. But what then? Methinks we have hugely mistaken this matter of Life and Death. Methinks that what they call my shadow here on earth is my true substance. Methinks that in looking at things spiritual, we are too much like oysters observing the sun through the water, and thinking that thick water the thinnest of air. Methinks my body is but the lees of my better being. In fact take my body who will, take it I say, it is not me. And therefore three cheers for Nantucket; and come a stove boat and stove body when they will, for stave my soul, Jove himself cannot.

R. W. Southern · *The Making of the Middle Ages* (1953),
from Chapter 5, From Epic to Romance

Students in the Arts Faculty were now learning about the heavens from Ptolemy and his Arab commentators – the “real stuff” at last, undebased by the tradition of the Latins – and they were beginning to be able to discuss, with all the confidence of new-found knowledge, whether there was a heaven beyond the sphere of the fixed stars, and whether the spheres were contiguous or not. The vision of the heavens which would later stir the imaginations of Dante and Milton had emerged into the clear light of day.

... The change of emphasis from localism to universality, the emergence of systematic thought, the rise of logic – to these we may add a change which in a certain sense comprehends them all: the change from Epic to Romance. The contrast is not merely a literary one, though it is in literature that it can be most clearly seen. It is a reflection of a more general change of attitude which found expression in many different ways. Briefly, we find less talk of life as an exercise in endurance, and of death in a hopeless cause; and we hear more of life as a seeking and a journeying. Men begin to order their experience more consciously in accordance with a plan: they think of themselves less as stationary objects of attack by spiritual foes, and more as pilgrims and seekers. ... It was not until the twelfth century that the imagery of journeying became a popular expression of a spiritual quest.

Then indeed it meets us on all sides – in the Arthurian Romances, in allegories of love, in descriptions of the ascent of the soul towards God. The imagery of movement seemed

at this time to lay hold on the imagination, and it invaded secular as well as religious literature. The theme had a natural appeal to the age which produced the Crusades, but it outlived the Crusades. . . . It was in the monasteries that new experiences were most quickly recognized and made intelligible.

PSALM 26 · *Dominus illuminatio* (DRV)

- 1 **T**he Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the protector of my life: of whom shall I be afraid?
- 2 Whilst the wicked draw near against me, to eat my flesh. My enemies that trouble me, have themselves been weakened, and have fallen.
- 3 If armies in camp should stand together against me, my heart shall not fear. If a battle should rise up against me, in this will I be confident.
- 4 One thing I have asked of the Lord, this will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life. That I may see the delight of the Lord, and may visit his temple.
- 5 For he hath hidden me in his tabernacle; in the day of evils, he hath protected me in the secret place of his tabernacle.
- 6 He hath exalted me upon a rock: and now he hath lifted up my head above my enemies. I have gone round, and have offered up in his tabernacle a sacrifice of jubilation: I will sing, and recite a psalm to the Lord.

- 7 Hear, O Lord, my voice, with which I have cried to thee:
have mercy on me and hear me.
- 8 My heart hath said to thee: My face hath sought thee: thy
face, O Lord, will I still seek.
- 9 Turn not away thy face from me; decline not in thy wrath
from thy servant. Be thou my helper, forsake me not; do not
thou despise me, O God my Saviour.
- 10 For my father and my mother have left me: but the Lord
hath taken me up.
- 11 Set me, O Lord, a law in thy way, and guide me in the right
path, because of my enemies.
- 12 Deliver me not over to the will of them that trouble me; for
unjust witnesses have risen up against me; and iniquity hath
lied to itself.
- 13 I believe to see the good things of the Lord in the land of
the living.
- 14 Expect the Lord, do manfully, and let thy heart take courage,
and wait thou for the Lord.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Officiant

Henry “Fitz” Fitzgerald Robertson II

Cellist

Jennifer Baxmeyer

Vocal Ensemble

Melissa Fajardo

Gregory Geehern

Gloria Kierniesky

Madeline Kushan

Noël McCormick

Kevin O’Malia

Franklin Phillips

Timothy Smith

Piano & Organ

Nicole Aldrich, Director of Chapel Music

 Reception to follow at Firestone Library

A selection of Will’s favorite items
from Princeton University Library’s collections
will be on display in the Dulles Reading Room.



Simply the Best

COVER PHOTO BY BRANDON JOHNSON

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