



DARKNESS

One thing which has disturbed me since the renovation of Mellon is that the lights in the southern part of the building are automatic—if they're off, they'll turn back on if someone is in their range. Aside from this fact that this, like much of the renovation, is slightly out-of-place with the rest of the building, I find such a phenomenon rather disturbing. I understand that automatic lights may be a great convenience, but as someone who is averse to convenience when it strays from beauty, I must say that I don't appreciate the rudeness of these lights. If any of my readers have been in the rest of Mellon when its lights are out, I hope you have noticed the subdued and quiet nighttime atmosphere that the darkness generates—but in the lobby and fishbowl, this atmosphere is entirely missing at night, since the lights so impolitely assume that you want them turned on. Think further how much better it is to work by lamplight than under overweening ceiling lights.

I'm not writing just to complain about a minor situation in Mellon. I am reminded by this of humanity's improper and grotesque obsession with light. Have you ever seen one of those satellite images of the earth at night? They are very upsetting; our hubristic and decadent insistence* that we have glaring lights wherever we go is an offense to nature. The nighttime is supposed to be dark, and I think we ought to respect that. Even right now, as I write this at midnight with my lights turned out, if I exit my room, my dorm's hall light will be on: I can even see it under the door (and believe me I have looked all over for a light switch to turn it off)! The impairment of vision at night is, I believe, a very important thing. Don't even get me started on the Naval Academy's obscene alumni building, which flies in the face of God, who made the night dark.

*This is a necessary rhetorical ellipsis. In truth, it is not only hubristic and decadent, but pleonexic, hedonistic, tasteless, insomniac, selfish, cowardly, brutish, troglodytic, vociferous (don't even get me started), hypertensive, capitalistic, prideful, pitiful, impatient, democratic to the point of tyranny, oppressive, insolent, bad, etc. Most of these adjectives apply to motorcycles, too, those impudent and phallically compensatory vehicles. Some also apply to airplanes, but at least those are fun to ride in, and when I do feel annoyed, I can just point a laser at them.

Tarik Mahmud

BIRD POOP AND THE JOY OF THE UNPLANNABLE

Last weekend after Saturday brunch, I sat down in the library to read the Wall Street Journal—one of my many small indulgences. I happened across an article in the travel section which caught my eye: a spotlight piece for the Parador Hotel in Cuenca, Spain. A large, color photograph of the hotel covered nearly half the page. It showed the former convent, old and tile-roofed and imposing, crowning a sheer hill-top. One sees such pictures frequently in travel journalism; but this one grabbed my attention because I had been there.

When I was thirteen, my family traveled to Spain. We rented a car in Madrid, and over the course of a month, drove south through Toledo, Córdoba, Seville, and Granada, then north-east to Valencia and Barcelona. Near the end of the trip, on our way back to Madrid from Barcelona, we stopped in Cuenca, and stayed at the Parador. The town of Cuenca is small. A deep gorge divides it from the hill the hotel is built on—its old houses built flush to the cliff-face on one side, the repurposed abbey standing isolated on the opposite edge. One can imagine the monks in older times looking out from their cloister windows across this geological divide which separated them from the townsfolk, and pondering its apt, spiritual symbolism. Today there are no monks in the abbey, only tourists; and tourists want to go into town. Thus, a narrow, iron bridge was built some time in the last century, which spans the gorge from one cliffside to the other.

I remember walking across this bridge. My father is afraid of heights, and fear is contagious; so each time our family crossed it to or from town was an ordeal. Besides the landscape, I only remember a few things from our days there—an old church, meeting a local American expat. Really, we did not do much. In Granada, my sisters and I had got very sick, and though we had mostly recovered, by this point in our Spanish traipsing we were travel-weary; all of us were happy to take things at a more leisurely pace.

One episode which remains distinctly in my memory concerns a visit our family made to an art museum in Cuenca. The collection was small, consisting mostly of modern paintings. For me and my sisters—children of nine, eleven, and thirteen, not yet introduced to the pleasures of ostentatiously touting one's well-developed taste for humbug—some creativity was required to enjoy our time at the gallery. We decided to give a humorous name to each painting based on what we thought it resembled (for most of the pieces, the actual subject was entirely inscrutable). Both of my

sisters have a great talent for absurdist humor, so it was tremendous fun. The greatest success regarded a large canvas painted with amorphous blotches of white and grey paint. Previously in Granada, at the Alhambra, a bird had pooped on my shoulder. Upon seeing the white-grey canvas, my sister Blythe cried out, "Look, its Jackson's shirt with bird poop on it!" We were in stitches. Indeed, we found the joke so uproariously funny that we had to leave the museum—my parents embarrassed at the scene we were making.

Why do I recount this? Seeing the picture of the Parador in the Wall Street Journal, and finding my memory flooded with my own personal experiences in Cuenca, I found it curious that my happiest memory there had nothing to do with the striking landscape or the medieval architecture or the food—it was a silly joke about bird poop which I shared with my family. Spontaneous moments of human connection—moments of life—can't be planned. Everyone has memories like this. I hope, reader, you remember your own such moments, and treasure them. Nearly half a dozen and more come to my mind—singing Disney songs in the car with a friend-of-a-friend I carpooled with once; weeping uncontrollably with my sisters after hearing news of a family tragedy; playing Uno with two pretty Belgian girls in an Oxford hostel; lying, sick as a dog, quarantined in an empty squad bay at Marine officer training, and discovering that the cadet in the rack next to me was a philosophy major; restraining a psychotic Ukrainian man at 3 AM with a prominent Presbyterian theologian; swimming in College Creek on a moonlit summer night with a friend—I savor the recollection of these moments, and so many more. They are the grass which grows up through the cracks in the pavement of life.

As I make plans for the future, after I graduate from St. John's, I wonder what unplanned moments will define the next few years. No matter how well I plan, the best things and the worst things will likely be unexpected. Friendship, love, enmity, loss—such is the stuff of real life which does not acquiesce to our attempts to rigidly plan it out in advance. Sometimes your family spends a great deal of money to stay in a beautiful, historic European town, and the best thing you find there is an opportunity to laugh at a poop joke with people you love. Perhaps in such instances, one misses out on more refined pleasures; but in life, it is better to accept the good moments one is given and enjoy them. What a curse it would be to cultivate such good taste that one forgot how to love simple things!

Jackson Green

This Week in Seminar

Freshman:

- Thursday, February 27th: Aristotle: *Nicomachean Ethics*; Book X
- Monday, March 17th: Aristotle: *Politics* (selections)

Sophomores:

- Thursday, February 27th: Montaigne: *Essays*; "Of Experience"
- Monday, March 17th: Machiavelli: *The Prince*

Juniors:

- Thursday, February 27th: Locke: *Second Treatise of Government*; Chapters X–XIX
- Monday, March 17th: Jane Austen: *Pride and Prejudice*

Seniors:

- Thursday, February 27th: Freud: *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*
- Monday, March 17th: Dostoevski: *The Brothers Karamazov*

Friday Night Lecture:

None

Upcoming Events:

Friday, February 28th

- Enjoy your Spring Break!

THE OTHER BOARD MEETING

On Saturday, February 22, 2025, the Board of Visitors and Governors (BVG) held its plenary session. Among other things, the much-discussed polity review was passed with one opposing vote. But there was another board meeting taking place the same day. After the BVG and all the spectators had left the Conversation Room, another, much smaller group entered: the Alumni Association Board (AAB).

The BVG and AAB have some common concerns, including enrollment numbers, state and federal funding and the future of international students. During the four-and-a-half-hour meeting, Dean Paalman was invited to speak to the board. In addition to discussing recent changes on campus, such as the discovery of a military uniform from the War of 1812 and the Greenfield Library’s partnership with BetterWorldBooks, she also covered academic updates, including the college’s new ability to award degrees in December and changes to the reading list (switching the Protestant Reformers).

Alumni were eager to learn how they could better support the college and its students. Ms. Paalman emphasized that alumni already provide invaluable support by mentoring students, particularly in career guidance, serving as positive examples, providing hope and increasing students’ self-confidence. Alumni suggested resurrecting an old tradition of senior dinners and proposed new ones such as an Alumni Association-sponsored enablement event.

AAB President Katharina Wong shared that the new initiative to combat food insecurity on the Santa Fe campus during winter break was, thanks to local volunteers, a great success. She expressed the board’s intent to expand the program to spring break and potentially to the Annapolis campus, pending campus leadership approval and the availability of local volunteers.

The AAB’s career development group provided insights on the restructured Odyssey program, which shifted from a one-on-one mentoring model to a group format based on the eight career pathways developed by Career Development Services (CDS). This year, 88 students and 35 alumni are participating, with the program set to conclude by the end of March. The AAB hopes to survey participants to improve the program and to host additional alumni career panels, offering opportunities for alumni who could not commit to the program but still wish to contribute.

The AAB meeting highlighted that alumni do not only show up once a year for the Annapolis Cup, but that they care deeply about the college and its current students. Alumni are eager to be more involved, but it might not always be clear how this involvement should look like.

Helen Felbek

Aphorism of the Week

Ἐκαστον διᾶδον συνάδοντος ἐνὶ βάσει διαφέρει

Tarik Mahmud

THREATS TO SELLINGER FUND

Maryland is one of the few states in the nation that provides substantial funding for private institutions of higher education. St. John’s, along with twelve other private colleges and universities, receives state funding primarily through two programs: capital grants, such as the one that enabled the recent renovations of Mellon, and the Sellinger Program, which provides Colleges with money primarily to give financial aid to students, making private higher education more accessible in the state. In the 2023 fiscal year, the most recent year I was able to procure information from, the College received \$1.6 million in Sellinger funding, about \$1.4 million of which went to financial aid, with the remainder going to career development and support for a graduate institute program for teachers.

This legislative session, this funding is in jeopardy. The state is facing a \$300 million deficit this year, as well as a nearly \$3 billion deficit in the fiscal year 2026 budget, with billions more projected in the following years, leading legislative leaders to look to make deep cuts in the upcoming budget. Funding for the Sellinger program was already cut in half last session, and a further cut in half is proposed this session. “The governor’s original budget looked like it was keeping us at last year’s funding level, explained Nora Demleitner, Annapolis President, “but a new proposal by the legislative division looks like it would we would look like substantial, and uncertain cuts.”

State budget negotiations are shifting rapidly, as this article is being written, with the Senate’s Budget and Taxation Chair Guy Guzzone announcing

on Friday, February 21st the potential for up to \$500 million more in potential cuts, on top of what would otherwise be necessary to address the deficit. This is because Maryland faces a disproportionately large impact from federal level policy changes, with much state funding depending on pass-through federal funds. State officials fear substantial cuts, or, worse, a federal shutdown later in the spring, leaving a moving budgetary target and uncertainty about the wide variety of cuts to programs and tax proposals currently on the table. As Maryland has a large number of federal workers, large-scale firings of civil servants may also put a permanent dent in Maryland’s revenue, leading to further budget crunches, and thus to the state’s funding for the College. To deal with this uncertainty, the state has pushed back its budgeting deadlines, and proposals have been raised to meet for a special October session.

Dangers to the Sellinger fund could be dangerous to scholarship opportunities that enable students to attend the College, as well as funding for the internship and supplemental coursework funding programs (formerly Hodson and Pathways) and other Career Services activities. Additionally, mental health supports and student activities funding might be lost in order to cover cuts on the College’s end. Legislators are still discussing the budget, with various proposals for the Sellinger funding on the table leaving time for Polity members to advocate for the College by contacting their delegates and senators.

El’ad Nichols-Kaufman

LIZA LOVE’S
BEAT OF THE WEEK:

Eye Know – De La Soul, Otis Redding

Spring break is here at long last! Prepare for quad lunch, four square, barefoot frisbee and contracting a bacterial infection from College Creek with hip-hop love song “Eye Know” from De La Soul’s 1989 album *3 Feet High and Rising*. It’s an upbeat dance track that samples Otis Redding’s whistles from his 1968 classic, “(Sittin’ On) the Dock of the Bay.” Mentally, I’m kicking my feet on the field in 70-degree weather, with this in my ears and Shakespeare under my thumbs.

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“Jacob Klein Snowman”,
from SJC Digital Archives

ABOUT THE ST.
JOHN’S
COLLEGIAN

The St. John’s Collegian is the weekly newspaper of St. John’s College Annapolis. We work to bring quick and timely coverage of important events going on, to help develop a more informed student body. If you’re searching for more in-depth investigations and reporting, as well as essays, art and culture, check out the Gadfly, our affiliated publication, which is published once every three weeks.

Want to submit an article? We always need more writers, whether for opinion or reporting! Submissions for news articles should be between 400-600 words, while opinion should be kept short at 350 words. Just email sjca.collegian@gmail.com with your article, and we will work to get it in print! Longer form articles and more in-depth exploration of ideas should go to the Gadfly, which accepts submissions at eanicholskaufman@sjc.edu.

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