

Opposites

From the Editor
John Williams

“Have I told you about the tension of opposites?”

Readers of *Tuesdays With Morrie* may remember that Morrie asks this question of Mitch Albom, his student, friend, and writer of the best-selling book about the old man’s last days. Morrie applied the phrase “tension of opposites” in distinctly personal ways.

Now we see the idea played out on the world stage as America battles terrorism. The hoped-for victory aside, many wonder how we will ever resolve the problems posed by the clash of Western Christian culture and Eastern Muslim thought. In less momentous ways, Morrie’s paradigm plays out in most of the articles and stories in this issue. They remind us that life consists of the tension, clashes, and sometimes reconciliation of opposites.

One striking feature of the war in Afghanistan is the presence of both modern and ancient technology. If parts of the Muslim world fear the encroachment of Western technology on their traditional ways, they are the latest of many to share this worry. As Bill Jenkins’ discussion of Willa Cather makes clear, she lamented elements of the new American as they threatened the immigrant past. In our feature article, Philip C. Williams is none too happy about the modern version of due process. He suggests that if we understood the implications of new theories, we might restore the old ideal of a speedy trial.

Technology figures in our articles on psychology, too, but happily that discipline is finding a variety of ways to synthesize its humanist goals and its arsenal of new tools. Likewise, the tension of old and new finds light-hearted expression in William Walker Woods’ article on the new Ronald McDonald. Embodying traits as old as ancient myths, Ronald serves the needs of postmodern business by balancing another opposition: conformity and rebellion.

Once you start looking for these opposites, they seem ubiquitous. But none is more basic than male and female. Nevada Barr’s story “Ione” gives new meaning to the phrase “opposites attract.” This story takes us back to a symbolic time when the “battle of the sexes” had more than metaphorical significance. I suggest that only men fully secure in their masculinity read the ending. A more gentle feminist agenda surfaces in Bill McCarron’s “Epistle of Lydia,” in which an articulate contemporary of the apostle Paul harmonizes intelligence, strong will, and appropriate submission in a way to satisfy all but the most partisan combatants in the gender wars.

So we have animosities aplenty: old/new, human/machine, male/female. In a world composed of opposite genders, cultures, goals, and values, the dream is always at some level for that final reconciliation, which I suppose is how secularists think of utopia and religious people define heaven.

If such a resolution must wait awhile, let’s hope that at least the war will be over by the time of the 2002 Alumni Issue of the *Recorder*. And while we’re hoping, let’s hope Morrie Schwartz was right when he answered Mitch Albom’s question about the “wrestling match” of these different tensions in life. “Which side wins?” Mitch wanted to know, to which the old man “crinkled” his eyes and smiled with “crooked teeth”: “Love wins. Love always wins.”