

Cracker College

by [Kirby Olson](#) (August 2019)



View from My Studio, University Street, Mabel May, 1925

There were a handful of Lutheran colleges left but were so poor they paid even less than Calcutta State. I maintained a certain worldly ambition, still believed in the parable of the talents, kept up with all the journals, and did my best to hide my Lutheranism. This meant that if I could just play the role of the enlightened liberal, I might get a better job.

I went to the MLA job bazaar in Washington DC and took the elevator up to the 12th floor. I got out with a woman who was dressed like a prostitute in fishnet stockings, a red bodice, carrying a whip. She knocked on a door, and I heard

her say, as the door opened, "Did you have a call for an S&M blonde?"

"Yes," the man answered, and unchained the door.

At a door down the hall, I knocked, and said, "Did you call for the English professor of S&M?"

The door was unchained.

The interviewer was a woman 6'8" inches tall. I drew myself up to my full height and shook her hand.

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The woman was from Cracker College in the Great Smoky Mountains that had been Baptist but was now bankrolled by a green billionaire from Vermont. The woman was wearing a trout-fishing outfit, with lures sticking out of her many pockets. She smelled like fish roe.

"We want someone to teach lesbian S&M, green, and American Indian sexuality," the woman said. "Is that you?"

"God help me!" I screamed to myself.

"Yes," I said.

It was difficult to look at the woman. She was a mountain beneath a party dress. She'd long been fat, but now she verged on morbidly obese. I tried to picture her as she trudged through the hallways of the dim building where she worked, holding on to the core convictions of Marxist feminism.

With her heavy body she trundled to her office and sat down every day and flipped through her messages. She had never been regarded as a beauty. She was squat, her nose was flat,

her skin coarse, her heavy mid-section had 30 or 40 ripples of fat that were visible even through a heavy sweater. Her thighs were enormous, her ass like that of a hippopotamus. Her heavy ears and eyelids hid a penetrating stare. Never intelligent, she was none the less an intellectual. For her, thought consisted of policing the language and the thoughts of others: you couldn't say kike, fag, homo, retard, bitch, but you could say redneck, Christian, Republican, Nazi, racist, white trash. Control of the terms of discussion gave her total control which she renamed civility. Such women proliferated throughout academia and every major university now had two or three hundred of them.

"I am a Missouri Synod Lutheran," I ventured. I was pretty certain the interview was over. The woman looked like she didn't know what I meant. I had reason to hope.

"Would you be able to teach Queer Theory of S&M?" She asked.

I knew what Queer Theory was, and knew about S&M, but I didn't know how they went together. If I did know these things, it didn't mean I condoned them. What if I kept an open mind and explored them? Would that be defensible?

"God will provide," my wife had said. "Remember the parable of the flowers. God provides the raiment."

God will put milk on the table, and pay the rent, and fill the gas tank. In heaven. But this is this world, and in this world, people not only wanted the theory, but the practice, of S&M, and someone had to teach them, and they wanted someone normal to do it, to double over the students with laughs. This last requirement gave me an edge. Paul had already written, in Ephesians 4: "They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity."

My true philosophy was made in Wittenberg in 1520 by

Martin Luther. I was torn between the Truth, and liberal Lies. I appeared far away from myself.

“How do you feel about gay marriage?” She asked.

“It’s all love!” I said.

The woman smirked.

“You’re a hater,” she said. “If you are really Missouri Synod Lutheran, you would be against. You prefer the Ten Commandments to the Sermon on the Mount, and I bet you secretly pore over Leviticus.”

“My views are evolving,” I stated, parodying the former president.

When I got back to the motel, I was pretty sure the job was already gone.

Flowers sat on the table from Cracker University, with a note indicating that they had decided to pursue my candidacy.

Maybe they needed one normal person in the mix to trot out when their state legislature went Republican.

The Interview

It snowed. I rented a car, and followed the Google map into the Smokies. It was night so I wanted to get to the motel next to the campus for my eight a.m. interview. Up a steep mountain the car began to sashay first one way then the other. The other lane had recently been plowed. I decided to put one tire on the dry surface. This caused the tire on that side to grip the surface and spin my car around thrice. To my surprise, I was facing forward when the car stopped, and continued driving up the hill.

I arrived at the top. The car didn’t have four-wheel drive, and I wished instead of the Google map that I had a topographical. How many more mountains to face?

The road was smooth from then on and great boughs from trees laden with snow leaned over the road in the darkness. My headlights caused the whole to sparkle. No one had been that way for at least an hour as there were no tire grooves. I followed the sparkling reflectors on the sides of the road, hoping I wouldn't plunge off into a canyon.

They wanted a theorist of homosexual S&M, with an interest in green and American Indian sexuality. I would have to discuss the sexual practices of the praying mantis and the mating of beavers. I had no use for any of this, but decided I could explore them with those who did. Was it sado-masochistic to pursue this job? Christ himself was a sado-masochist. If He wasn't, Christ would never have allowed himself that final scene at Gethsemane. Perhaps that final scene could be construed as S&M? I arrived at the motel as the blizzard stopped. What wouldn't I say?

Humming to the mirror, I checked my clown outfit. I had forgotten to bring an outsized tie. I went into town, and an obscure department store remained open. I bought a huge tie, had the man tie it for me in the shape of a noose so all I had to do was slip into it in the morning, and went back to the motel.

I was ferried about the following day. The snow ceased. I had a bagel in the morning with an interim dean, and then met with Human Resources, and in the afternoon went to lunch and tea with powerful colleagues.

Finally, the woman with the fishing jacket appeared, and took me under her arm and brought me to a swimming pool. We went down under the pool to where the diving judges sat.

"Sometimes, if you're lucky, a female diver will lose their top as they enter the water." She grinned, showing me the perqs. As she said this, she seemed to invite me to respond in the positive. I looked at her and could imagine her

kicking her cat, opening the fridge and pouring liquid Drano down the neighbor children's throats. Then she would kick her cat again, lick her lips, and make for the booze cabinet.

"Leviticus says the crookbak't and the midget should never be priests. But professors are the secular priests. We have untold power to make student minds. Lies are truth." She said. I had no idea if this was entrapment.

I thought of feminist professors as a giant rhizome made of white plastic. Their thousands of hydra-headed dragons represented a revival of the matriarchal tyrannies that once infested the urban areas of ancient Greece. It had been described in Acts. Now it infested the west.

Late that afternoon I met the graduate students. They were eight lesbians. I expected them to snarl when they saw a man. They looked at me with an even stare. Each was wearing a pantsuit with a tie, and they didn't look evil.

I sat down.

The woman with the fishing outfit said to the group, "Here he is."

They all laughed.

"Well, what do you think of us?" One asked.

It was odd, because the church had banned them as pastors. But then they had banned women pastors, too. I thought straight women were reliable, nuanced, and sensible, but then there was Mari. I loved Mari. How did I know anything about these women? All I knew was their proclivity. Did Luther ever directly outlaw homosexuality? My thoughts ricocheted.

"What do you think about S&M?" The leader asked.

"Sacher-Masoch is overrated. I think sex should be one to one, with the man on top, married, aiming at a child." I was

citing the standard Lutheran position. "Everything else is a perversion."

"That won't work for us. The aiming at a child part in particular," their leader chortled. The others nodded.

"Isn't square sex hierarchical, with the man on top?" One woman with a small moustache ventured.

"Oh no," I said. "It's a team effort. Sado-masochism is hierarchical. The sadist is boss, no?"

"No," their leader said. "The masochist secretly manipulates the sadist. So the one on the bottom is in effect on top."

"Sounds like straight sex," I said. "Women have control over the events in straight sex. Unless you listen, it doesn't happen. It's all about their mood."

"You can say that again," the lesbian leader said.

I didn't know what she meant.

A mousy woman to the left asked a final question. "How can a Lutheran CIS male teach lesbian S&M theory?"

"In the same way a lepidopterist doesn't have to be a butterfly," I said. "Beauty can be better studied by someone outside."

I went to meet the college president.

He asked me what I believed, and I told him.

"American youth want college to resemble Woodstock. When they get out, of course, life is Altamont."

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"I remember Altamont," he said. He had a faraway look. He was wearing a business suit. He had a paisley tie. He would have probably been against the Vietnam War. He was a fat man, with a gray beard, and there was some harshness, and his nose looked as if it had been broken a half-dozen times.

I said, "Altamont sums up the sixties: hope without precautions, poor hygiene, poor security, utopian dopes dashed by dystopian realities. Instead of thinking about the best that could happen, I worry about the worst that could happen, and try to prepare students. Instead of thinking about lovely LSD trips at Woodstock, I focus on those who ended up in mental hospitals. There were many injuries at Woodstock to those who had not brought shoes. Several hundred injuries to feet, and three were bit by raccoons. At Altamont, 850 people were hurt. There was a shortage of toilets and food. An 18-year old man was bludgeoned with pool cues by Hell's Angels who had been hired as muscle to provide security. He died. The last thing you want to do is trust security to unstable biker gangs, but the 60s . . . they thought it was the Age of Aquarius, when it was Satan on holiday."

The president intervened. "The killed guy deserved it. He was waving a gun. I was part of the Angels then," he laughed. "A judge exonerated us, you know. Don't judge, dude, unless you know the whole story. Judge Mental, I shall call you."

Was this the guy who had killed the man at Altamont? I flashed back to the 1520s: Some of the same tendencies were present in the 1520s when Thomas Munster and hordes of Anarcho-baptists swept through Lutheran territories murdering in the name of Love. Many of them later ended up as Lutheran priests.

I was taking too long to respond.

“Any questions?” He asked.

“What issues do you face?” I asked.

“This week we will change our religious affiliation to secular. We plan to blow the word “Baptist” off the college’s front gate with dynamite. Public invited. Major donors not pleased. We got a mini-grant from the Nobel Foundation for the dynamite, and plan to go forward. Local press senses a headline. New York Times delighted, planning front-page coverage. I’m worried about letters to the paper and a drop in alumni funding. You gotta flow with the Times.”

He turned back to his papers.

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Kirby Olson is a tenured English professor at SUNY-Delhi in the western Catskills. His books include a novel (*Temping*), about an English professor who starts a circus in Finland; a book of poems entitled *Christmas at Rockefeller Center*