

IS THERE GOLF AFTER DEATH? | By George Mangan

Most golfers, if not all, are existentialists. Like Camus, they believe that life is absurd, especially on the golf course; the mind often aspires, and the world often disappoints. Just ask any golfer standing on the tee facing a force carry over water; he imagines his ball soaring towards the green, only to hear it plopping unceremoniously into the briny deep. What golfer does not agree with Sartre that hell is

other people, certainly during a five-hour round paired with a plaid smiling stranger who entertains your foursome with jokes about God, Moses and Jesus playing golf?

For golf pro Herman Fins-Winston, in Roland Merullo's *Golfing With God: A Novel of Heaven and Earth* (Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2005), this is not the case. He has died and gone to heaven, and heaven for Fins-Winston is where the fairways are lush, the tee is always open and even God

replaces His divots. Heaven, Merullo also tells us, is not a static place; people grow. "We carry our talents beyond the thin curtain of death. If we enjoyed the work we did, God gives us some of that work to do in paradise." In other words, people, even in heaven, are in the process of becoming.

And Fins-Winston, as a teaching pro, is asked to give God a lesson. God, we learn, takes on many incarnations. He can be an Einstein look-alike who is "ragged around the edges, a sort of stevedore with flashing eyes," or a drop-dead gorgeous wife for Hank when he and God visit earth.

Fins-Winston and God play a round at Eden Hills. God's drives are pure as the virgin snow, and his game is most impressive, but as we all know even in paradise there is always a serpent—and for God the serpent is the yips, that nervous tic that causes so many golfers to yank the three-foot putt three feet by and then jam it by again. How can Fins-Winston cure God's yips when even a group of doctors at the Mayo Clinic have concluded there is no cure, only an explanation concerning blood flow

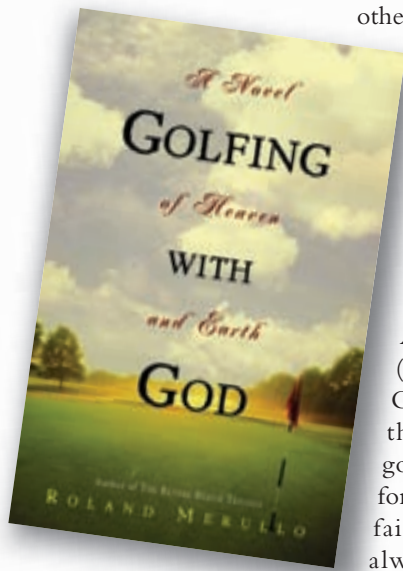
and synapses? We all, however, know that God, being God, doesn't need any help. And so starts the journey, or the beginning, where the teacher is the one who learns the lesson, and it has nothing to do with the yips.

Merullo, whose previous books include *Revere Beach Elegy* and *A Little Love Story*, invites us to join the lesson. In someone else's hands I would have politely refused the invitation. I am glad, however, I accepted. Merullo has taken what has become a common theme in too many books—golf as metaphor—and given us a fresh view. He has made the ordinary seem new, and therefore weaves a narrative that both informs and delights. Take, for example, a scene at Augusta where Fins-Winston plays with a central casting yahoo by the name of Larry Five Iron. At the end of the round, Five Iron does what any golfer who has been snubbed by the simpering superiority of some club members imagines himself doing: he moons the club house. Thanks to Merullo, I learned that Moses is a bit of a grump, largely because he feels underrated and overlooked. Granted, some stabs at humor elicit groans rather than laughter—there is no need to have Moses part the waters on a force carry—but these are minor flaws in an otherwise wonderful novel.

More often than not, I found myself joining in on the conversations with God, Jesus and Moses. Merullo makes it easy to suspend your disbelief, to ask whether life parallels golf, to wonder, when souls flounder, do their troubles move them towards grace? Maybe those questions are too heavy for a sunny day on the fairway, or maybe, like Jesus, we want to tell Fins-Winston, "...you shouldn't really think about it too much. Just do your best. Go forward with courage and goodwill."

Merullo makes it clear that Fins-Winston, like Camus' Sisyphus, will nevertheless continue to hone his craft; like Sisyphus, he is, we realize, happy. In his process of becoming, Fins-Winston realizes that life is not a mystery to be solved, but a drama to be lived, and thus ascends to another spiritual and existential level. ●

George Mangan, a member of the English department since 1976, is the longtime coach of the Exeter golf team.



In Golfing With God, the latest novel by Roland Merullo '71, golf pro Herman Fins-Winston surrenders to a higher pupil when he is asked to give God a lesson.

Alumni/ae are urged to advise the Exonians in Review editor of their own publications, recordings, films, etc., in any field, and those of classmates. Whenever possible, authors and composers are encouraged to send one copy of their books and original copies of articles to Edouard Desrochers '45 (Hon.), the editor of Exonians in Review, Phillips Exeter Academy, 20 Main Street, Exeter, NH 03833. Alumni/ae interested in reviewing works by fellow Exonians are also encouraged to contact the editor at the same address, or by email at edesrochers@exeter.edu.

ALUMNI/AE

1944—Kenneth W. Ford. *The Quantum World: Quantum Physics for Everyone.* (Harvard University Press, 2005)

1944—Edward M. Lamont. *The Happiness of the Pursuit: Felicitous Episodes Along the Way.* (Hamilton Books, 2006)

1953—Jerome H. Farnum. *The Positioning of the Roman Imperial Legions.* (Publisher TK, 2005)

1954—Robin Magowan. *The Rim of Dawn.* [poems]. (Pasdeloup Press, 2006)

1957—Carl E. Pickhardt. *The Everything Parent's Guide to Children and Divorce.* (Adams Media, 2006)

—*Symbols: Logos for the Mind.* (Xlibris Corporation, 2005)

1958—Robert Thurman. *The Jewel Tree of Tibet: The Enlightenment Engine of Tibetan Buddhism.* (Free Press, 2005)

1968—Jerome Karabel. *The Chosen: The Hidden History of Admission and Exclusion at Harvard, Yale and Princeton.* (Houghton Mifflin Co., 2005)

1969—Daniel Wolff. *Fourth of July, Asbury Park.* (Bloomsbury, 2005).

—*Negro Leagues Baseball.* (Harry Abrams, 2005).

1977—Suzy Welch, with Jack Welch. *Winning.* (Harper Business Publishers, 2005)

1979—Kevin Boileau. *The Algebra of History.* (Loyola University Press, 2005)

—*A Reason and a Season.* [a novel] Edited by Victor Klein. (Lycanthrope Press, 2005).

1979—Ted Demopoulos and Shel Holtz. *Blogging for Business: Everything You Need to Know and Why You Should Care.* (Kaplan Publishing, 2006)

1981—Grace E. Jackson. *Rethinking Psychiatric Drugs: A Guide for Informed Consent.* (AuthorHouse, 2005)

1987—Kenji Yoshino. *Covering: The Hidden Assault on Our Civil Rights.* (Random House, 2006)

BRIEFLY NOTED

1944—George Plimpton. “Golf lessons” IN *Coach: 25 Writers Reflect on People Who Made a Difference.* Edited by Andrew Blauner. (Warner Books, 2005)

1961—John Irving. “Underdog” IN *Coach: 25 Writers Reflect on People Who Made a Difference.* Edited by Andrew Blauner. (Warner Books, 2005)

1969—Daniel J. Hoffheimer and Julia B. Meister. “The Ohio Slayer Statute, Common Law, and ERISA Preemption.” IN *Probate Law Journal of Ohio* (November/December 2005)

1979—Nate Bennett and S. Miles. “What Makes a Great COO or Second in Command: The Misunderstood Role of the Chief Operating Officer.” IN *Harvard Business Review* (v. 84, no. 5, 2006)

1988—W. Niel Brandt and G. Hasinger. “Deep Extragalactic X-Ray Surveys.” IN *Annual Review of Astronomy and Astrophysics* (v. 43, 2005)

1990—Christina Ullrich and others. “Screening Healthy Infants for Iron Deficiency With Reticulocyte Hemoglobin Content.” IN *JAMA* (August 24/31, 2005)

1994—Emily Perez. “Maker, Collector” and “On My Way to the Doctor.” [poems] IN *Poems & Plays* (v. 13, Spring/Summer 2006)

—“The People Under Your Couch” [poem] IN *The Bat City Review* (v. 2, Spring 2006)

1999—Ariel M. Goldberg and Brenda Rapp. “Investigating the Serial Order Mechanism of Spelling: A Simple Recurrent Network Simulation of the Graphemic Buffer.” IN *Brain and Language* (v. 95, 2005)

2001—Jay C. Sy and others. “Towards Developing Surface Eroding Poly(x-hydroxy acids).” IN *Biomaterials* 27 (2006)

FACULTY/ ADMINISTRATORS

William E. Campbell, Joyce Kemp and **Joan H. Zia.** “Bugs, Planes and Ferris Wheels: A Problem-Centered Curriculum.” IN *Mathematics Teacher* (v. 99, no. 6, February 2006)

Andrew R. Gatto. [Review of] “Music in Rural New England: Family and Community Life, 1870–1940,” by Jennifer Post. IN *NOTES: The Quarterly Journal of the Music Library Association.* (v. 62, no. 2, December 2005)

Joseph A. Reiter. [Review of] “L'Amé au poing” by Patrick Rotman. IN *French Review* (v. 79, no. 4, March 2006)