wander a 743-acre park "whose different zones emphasize natural, recreational, and interpretive areas."

"The ways in which we meet the challenges of urban sprawl, open space preservation, resource consumption and waste, and environmental protection and restoration are crucial to the quality of our lives—maybe even to the survival of our species," asseverates Beardsley. "It is landscape architecture that confronts these challenges."

EXCERPT

Living Other Lives

It is the curious identity of books in general that history and philosophy, invaluable though they are, cannot, by their very nature, contain novels; yet novels can contain history and philosophy. We need not quarrel about which genre is superior; all are essential to human striving. But somehow it is enchanting to think that the magic sack of make-believe, if one wills it so, can always be fuller and fatter than anything the historians and philosophers can supply. Make-believe, with its uselessness and triviality, with all its falseness, is nevertheless frequently praised for telling the truth via lies. Such an observation seems plainly not to the point. History seeks truth; philosophy seeks truth. They may get at it far better than novels can. Novels are made for another purpose. They are made to allow us to live, for a little time, another life; a life different from the one we were ineluctably born into. Truth, if we can lay our hands on it, may or may not confer freedom. Make-believe always does.

—Novelist and essayist Cynthia Ozick, in *The Yale Review* (Oct. 2000)

A Misunderstood Masterpiece

"The Real Presence of Christ and the Penitent Mary Magdalen in the *Allegory of Faith* by Johannes Vermeer" by Valerie Lind Hedquist, in *Art History* (Sept. 2000), Assn. of Art Historians, 70 Cowcross St., London EC1M 6EJ, U.K.

Allegory of Faith (c. 1671–74), which may have been Johannes Vermeer's last painting, is quite different from all of the Dutch master's earlier, straightforwardly naturalistic works. It shows a woman striking a rhetorical pose, surrounded by religious objects in an otherwise typical Dutch domestic interior. Perplexed, most scholars have dismissed the painting as a crude religious allegory done when Vermeer's artistic sensibilities were growing duller. Other scholars have given incomplete interpretations. But Hedquist, a professor of art criticism at the University of Montana–Missoula, contends that *Allegory of Faith* is "a finely painted masterpiece" that must be understood in the context of the Dutch Roman Catholic community to which Vermeer (1632–75) belonged.

The painting, she says, is a sophisticated allegorical apology for the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation (whereby the bread and wine in the Mass are miraculously transformed into the real presence of Christ's body and blood). Disagreement about the sacrament of the Eucharist was the main issue dividing Roman Catholics and Calvinists in the northern Netherlands. The Calvinists, who did not believe in transubstantiation, insisted that simple faith, without the special sacrament of communion, was sufficient for salvation. In the Catholic community in Delft, clandestine gatherings to celebrate Mass were not at all unusual, says Hedquist. Indeed, parishioners probably gathered in Vermeer's home for that purpose.

In *Allegory of Faith*, a tapestry curtain (with decorations standing for the outside, secular world) is pulled back to reveal a richly attired woman whose right foot is on a terrestrial globe

and who is gazing heavenward at a hanging glass ball above her head. She leans with her left arm on a table, which is actually an altar (where heaven and earth meet). On it are liturgical objects, including a chalice (for the wine), a crucifix, and a crown of thorns.

The woman not only personifies faith, says Hedquist, but also represents the penitent saint Mary Magdalen, the favorite female saint of the Counter Reformation. In the background of *Allegory of Faith* hangs a large painting of the Crucifixion, based on a work by Flemish artist Jacob Jordaens. But Vermeer, Hedquist notes, has removed or obscured the figure of Mary Magdalen in Jordaens's original composition, so that Vermeer's female figure of faith seems to take her place in the background painting while coming to life "as the penitent saint within his domestic church interior." The dress, pose, and adornments of the woman echo depictions of Mary Magdalen in other 17th-century paintings. Her pearls and elegant costume

Allegory of Faith *(c. 1671–74), by Johannes Vermeer*

"refer to Mary Magdalen's life of vanity before turning to Christ."

In the foreground of *Allegory of Faith* are representations of the original sin: a partially eaten apple and a snake crushed by a fallen cornerstone (symbolizing Christ). Also in the foreground, just beyond the drawn-back curtain, is an empty chair—a seat for the viewer, Hedquist says, who is being invited to join in celebrating the Mass.

Ellison and the Wright Stuff

"The Birth of the Critic: The Literary Friendship of Ralph Ellison and Richard Wright" by Lawrence P. Jackson, in *American Literature* (June 2000), Box 90020, Duke Univ., Durham, N.C. 27708-0020.

Sixteen years before he published *Invisible Man* (1952), a young Ralph Ellison left his music studies at Alabama's Tuskegee Institute and plunged into the unfamiliar world of art and radical politics in New York. Within a year, he had found a mentor—Richard Wright (1908-60), who would go on, like Ellison himself, to become one of the century's leading black writers. "Their friendship blossomed," writes Jackson, an English professor at Howard University. But over time, the two black writers would come to have very different visions of art and American life.

Wright was working for the Harlem branch of the Communist *Daily Worker*, and Ellison admired his zeal for exposing racial injustice and his "almost religious devotion to the craft of writing," says Jackson. As a fledgling literary critic, Ellison "fell under the sway of Wright's commanding Marxist examination of history and culture." Wright, whose award-winning collection of short stories, *Uncle Tom's Children*, appeared in 1938, "used his party clout" to get Ellison a job with the Federal Writers' Project in New York, and also introduced him to the editors of the Communist literary journal *New Masses*.

Wright's best-selling *Native Son* (1940) made him a celebrated author. In the novel, a black Chicagoan named Bigger Thomas accidentally kills a white girl, takes flight, and is captured, tried, and, defiant to the end, executed. *Native Son* was the first black "protest novel."

Ellison, meanwhile, was developing his own artistic vision, one that went beyond Wright's social realism. In a 1941 essay, he lauded *Native Son* but contended that future black writers could do even better if they gained more technical expertise from "advanced white writers" and brought "the imaginative depiction of Negro life into the broad stream of American literature." Ellison's critique soon encompassed more than aesthetics: he came to see black writers' social realism as dishonest, an extension of the "Communists' manipulation of the black rights movement," Jackson says.

While Wright, who grew up in poverty, felt rejected by the black bourgeoisie and alienated from the unlettered black working class, says Jackson, Ellison was comfortable in both worlds. Steered to Henry James and Feodor Dostoyevsky by Wright, Ellison not only came to speak "with growing confidence about high art" but also "reached deep" into black folk culture. Wright, who considered blacks oppressed by their impoverished environment, found little of value in their folk culture. In a review of Wright's 1945 autobiography, *Black Boy*, Ellison defended Wright's assertion of the "essential bleakness of black life." But he also argued that the black folk art of the blues had enabled blacks to face and triumph over adversity. Privately, Jackson says, Ellison deemed *Black Boy* "a deliberate regression in artistic form and near propaganda."

The gulf between the two writers widened, especially after Wright permanently moved to Paris in 1947. In 1952, Ellison's *Invisible Man* appeared, a modernistic novel whose unnamed hero, a southern black who moves north, gives a dreamlike account of his journey toward disillusion and of his alienated and "invisible" condition. The novel was immediately acclaimed a classic. Ellison became "something of an American patriot," Jackson says. By the time he saw his former mentor for the last time, in 1956, Wright "felt betrayed" by him, according to Jackson, while Ellison saw Wright as someone caught in an ideological trap.