

February 15, 1990 (Vol. 5, no. 12)

Dear Colleague:

We are in the news. Here is what The New Republic (Feb. 19, 1990) says about our ROTC action and inaction. "Nineteen eighty-nine was a bad year for ROTC. The faculty at the University of Wisconsin voted to recommend dismantling the program unless it changed the rules to admit gays and lesbians by 1993." The article goes on to say, however, that not all university administrators are eager to see ROTC leave--discrimination or not. "ROTC brings a school such as Wisconsin \$2 million a year in scholarships and salaries. And ROTC scholarships are strong incentives for attracting minority students, a perpetual problem for Midwestern schools."

The strength of anti-gay feeling in Western civilization struck me forcefully while I was reading a legend concerning the emperor Charlemagne. Charlemagne, the legend goes, fell in love with a German girl, to the degree that he neglected his imperial duties. When the girl died, Charlemagne transferred his love to the corpse. He refused to part with it. Archbishop Turpin, who suspected enchantment, examined the dead girl's body and found a ring under her tongue. He removed the ring, but as soon as he had done so, Charlemagne fell passionately in love with the Archbishop. To escape the embarrassing situation, the Archbishop tossed the ring into Lake Constance. "Charlemagne thereupon fell in love with the lake and would not leave its shores."

The legend goes back to the Middle Ages. In a sixteenth-century version, the author not only makes Charlemagne stay in bed with the corpse but provides him with a lamentation several pages long. The incident of homosexual love is, by contrast, sharply curtailed. In other words, necrophilia is acceptable, indeed a subject for poetry, but love for a member of one's own sex is best hidden. (See Italo Calvino, Six Memos for the Next Millennium).

When partisans of ROTC on our campus tried to influence faculty votes at the Stock Pavilion, they enclosed a letter from a black ROTC cadet who pleaded for retention of the program on the ground that it benefits minority students. This pitting of the weak against the weak, a classic ploy of Established power, should make all of us feel a little sad.

Best wishes,

J. Fu