

The Sculpture of Frederick Shrady

by Paul Horgan

DURING a four year tour of duty as a staff officer in the Pentagon throughout World War Two, I was often hard put to find in wartime Washington any restoration or relief from the long hours—in winter we worked from before daylight into the dark—and from the sedentary nature of my job which had a tendency to turn the spirit gray as it made the body flabby. My few open hours came on Sunday afternoons. Then I would roam the National Gallery, taking renewal of spirit from the wonderful collection there. One late snowy hour I wandered up toward the Capitol grounds to watch the day fall over the city and the lights come on in the open vistas which gave Washington a French impressionist look. I walked past grand ornamental lamps high on cast metal posts and up some terrace steps, and in the lovely revealing twilight I discovered a heroic work of sculpture which I had never heard of, and which immediately became one of my personal resources of art, and remains so today, whenever

I go to Washington. It was the Grant Memorial sculpture group on the west grounds of the Capitol, the creation of the American sculptor Henry Shrady. It seemed then, as it does now, the finest piece of monumental public or official sculpture known to me in this country.

In the center of a broad esplanade is the equestrian figure of General Grant, quietly gazing into the national air. He is in repose, yet filled with the dignity of existence. His simplicity speaks from the figure, as does his selfless submission to hard duty. If he were alone there on his battle charger, he would still stand as a notable work of art and historical reference. But he is not alone; at generous distance on either end of the esplanade he is flanked by a tumultuous and magnificently dramatic group of soldiers—his own soldiers. One group represents the cavalry, the other the artillery. They are men, somewhat over life-size, struggling with the terrible tasks of war—hauling heavy caissons through frozen mud;

FREDERICK SHRADY,

was born in New York in 1907 and has pursued the art of sculpture as a profession for the past twenty years. Earlier, he was an established painter whose works are in the Museums of Paris, Lyons, Grenoble, Belgrade, Zagreb, the Metropolitan in New York and in Hartford, Conn. His first piece of sculpture—a head of Father Martin D'Arcy—is in the Metropolitan Museum. His major current work is "The Life of Mary" in a twelve-~~foot~~^{PANEL} study to be cast into bronze for the entrance doors for a new cathedral in the Holy Land, now under construction. Mr. Shrady was educated at Choate School, Oxford University and the Art Student's League in New York before moving to Paris for painting studies with Yashudi Tananka. In 1937 he was awarded a medal at the Paris Exposition and was decorated by the Legion of Honor. Mr. Shrady lives in Easton, Connecticut, with his wife, the former Maria Likar-Waltersdorff, the author, and their six children.

Left: JOB
eleven-inch bronze



driving horses through the terror and pain of animals who serve but do not comprehend; striking against enemies who are simply men like themselves but lost to empathy; and in every complicated yet harmoniously resolved shape and volume, expressing through art the splendor of which men are capable in action. It is a work whose countless details may be studied over and over for their own sake, whose individual portraits pay respect and love to the beauty and dignity of mankind, and whose spirit, captured through astonishing technical virtuosity, never fails to give the sense of its abiding truth. The work was completed in the 1920's. It is the rare critic or student of America's art heritage who knows or thinks about this work and its creator; but I have no doubt whatsoever that it will one day be held above value as a national treasure.

I have chosen this somewhat roundabout way to come to my subject for two reasons. First, because it is rare enough in our culture to see a great tradition of art pass on through generations in the same family—the remarkable sculptor Henry Shrady was the father of Frederick Shrady, the artist to whom we pay tribute here; and second, because—though I did not know it at the time—one of the most vital and expressive figures in the soldier groups of the Grant Memorial, that of the youthful drummer boy, is a portrait of Frederick Shrady, who posed for his father in the role. In a sense, then, I knew Frederick Shrady anonymously, long before I really met him, encountered his work, and came to hold for both man and artist very great esteem, something of which I hope I may manage to express here.

IT seems to me clear that strong values of his father's artistic vision carry over into the work of Frederick Shrady. His own best ideas seem to occur to him also in heroic scale and dramatic forms. Like his father, he is a master craftsman who can make his fixed materials serve the release of emotional gestures larger than life.

When you look at the work of Frederick Shrady, whatever its size, you have a realization that successful sculpture is really displace-

ment of space; and that it is the energy of the sculptor's vision which makes space visible, as it were, by defining it through sculptural volume. This is not true of all sculpture; it is true only of that sculpture which seizes emotion, makes it visible, and suggests the idea of movement—not a movement arrested, but a movement thought of before it is actually performed. It is a faculty of the true artist's imagination that, to be valid and survive for every kind of observer, it must achieve its total vision before the act of its execution in whatever medium. Without this essential act of conception, the artist's authority is very tentative, unsure, a matter of improvisation rather than illumination. I always find in Frederick Shrady's works the expression of a completely conceptualized idea, and never a mere imitation of a fact or surface of nature.

It is of course his temperament which has created his personal style. Perhaps I may suggest aspects of this which will be clearly visible in the accompanying photographs of Frederick Shrady's work.

I would say first that though he is a son of tradition, he is also a man very much of his own time; and therefore while he gives allegiance to the visible beauties of life which we all perceive and understand in common, he uses these as points of departure for his own



JUNIPERO SERRA
Twelve-foot bronze

style of utilizing the human figure primarily as a source for semi-abstract gesture to carry the idea he wants to release. He is so soundly grounded in the academic understanding of anatomical form that he can make free of it for his own expression which, however free, never does violence to the essential truth of natural organic form.

I would say further that a really important ingredient in his temperament is a non-trivial fastidiousness which rejects the cliché, the expected convention, and proceeds directly to an original vision, expressing it through wonderful simplifications of form.

Again, as he so often works in heroic scale, his powerful sense of the dramatic gesture to express an act or idea is always given to us through interplays or extreme tension between the flowing elements of his design. The parts seem to strive against each other in sweeping lines of almost choreographed gestures—and then to come together in the whole to effect a great act of release. Ever so many of his works



Left:
**CHRIST
THE TEACHER**

carry the effect of aspiration—rising like flame, a reaching in desire for that which can be attained only through the manifestation of the invisible, which has much to do with what we achieve in the attainment of true religious faith.

And again, a significant aspect of his gift is elegance. It is not the elegance of fashion or sophistication—it is the elegance of great strength which achieves its purpose with just exactly and only the amount of energy required. It is, in other words, the sort of elegance shown by great athletes who succeed only when they expend all their strength in stresses and acts which remain precisely within the vehicle of perfect form. It is elegance in the sense of a proper equation of form and function. It is beautiful—though, curiously, to be beautiful in the commonly understood sense may not be its first concern.

For the rest, it is his honesty, by which I mean his faithfulness to his own view of life rather than to somebody else's influential view,

such as all artists are tempted by now and then, which completes his temperament and makes it possible for him to speak through his own idiom of matters nowadays often regarded as bereft of the ability to inspire the artist or the man of intellect. I refer to matters of sacred theme and the reality of God.

ASIDE from portraits and nude studies, Frederick Shrady's work has been devoted to the grand themes of the Christian revelation, specifically as bestowed upon the world through the Roman church. What theme is greater, in all its implications, than that of redemption? But what theme contains more diverse and intimate variations, such as can be searched for in any life among us, including our own?

We have inherited a vast tradition of religious symbolism, a profuse and complex hagiography, and certain fixed references which have long made allusion to religious experience and learning a common culture for the Western world. For the most part, present day attempts



Left and above: Front and back views of LAZARUS. Right: SAINT PETER.



to set forth the Christian idea in art end up as illustrations of ignorant piety or, worse, condescending banality for the edification of the poor in taste if not the poor in spirit. Here I heartily join with Daniel Patrick Moynihan in his recent cry of fury against the complacency of the Church in America which all too often has been content to propagate images and structures of the most vulgar saccharinity as illustrations of the holy persons (and their acts) who figure in the evolution of our Faith. To paraphrase Professor Moynihan, the presence of banality in religious art actually attests to the absence of grace. Art has directly to do with the spirit, and bad art can corrupt the spirit in subtle ways. Worthy parochial purposes may often be threatened by the sort of sanctified trash to which most people in our country are exposed when they try to pray in church.

In both aesthetic and spiritual terms, it is Frederick Shrady's triumph that he restores to the glorious and terrible subject matter of the life and consequences of Christ on earth a sense of the true awesomeness of their power.



Far from merely acquiescent piety, he feels and presents to us a sense of the primal strangeness of the holy mysteries. His works reflect a tormented sense of the revelation. Faith is not a simple affair, it has its terrors, it may strike almost with the impact of an affliction, in the terms of the values of this world; but if it is real, it also brings an exalting certainty which can make even the extremes of suffering, such as discovery often brings, into the proper materials of sacrifice.

So in his major religious works, this artist gives us the most stark evidence of the ordeal of the divine experiences of Christ, the saints, the Holy Family.

Saint Peter casting his net over the world as a fisher of souls is a figure attenuated to the skeletal by the rigors of his life and work, the weight of his sacred mandate. Lazarus breaking from his bandages of the grave flings one arm upward in a miraculous reach back to life, even before his head is able to lift itself out of its deathly sleep. The Prodigal Son and his father suffer together the agonies of confession and forgiveness. Christ giving his pro-



*From left to right:
SAINT JAMES, ten-foot bronze;
THE PRODIGAL SON, twenty-
seven inch bronze; JOHN THE
BAPTIST, thirty-three inch
bronze owned by Pope Paul VI.*

tecting spirit to a child, Christ blessing the world, Christ teaching, is not a passive figure from a passion play, all sweetness and somnambulist forbearance, but a figure of such power and directness in energy that we react to this vision of Him as we do to the elements of our world in tempest. We think of the winds made visible, the lashing curl of the sea, the twisting spiral of fire: the powers that shake us in our small humanity. It is the sweep of such symbolic elements as these that this artist brings into his statements of religious vision.

It is such art as his, confident in its own technical and philosophical authority, which does true honor to man's noblest aspiration—his desire to reach toward his Creator. Finally, this aim, as we find it in this artist's work, yields us high serenity.

FREDERICK SHRADY'S work will live long and enter many lives with an abiding reminder of truth from two sources—the divine truth of Christ the Teacher, and the human truth of man the artist.



PAUL HORGAN, *historian and novelist, was born in Buffalo, New York, in 1903. He won the Harper Novel Prize in 1933 with his *The Fault of Angels*, and the Pulitzer Prize for 1954 with his two volume study, *Great River: The Rio Grande in North American History*. Among his other books: *The Centuries of Santa Fe*; *Rome Eternal*; *A Distant Trumpet*; *Citizen of New Salem*; and most recently, *Memories of the Future and Things as They Are*. Next month Farrar Straus & Giroux will publish a book of his short stories under the title *The Peach Stone*. Mr. Horgan is currently Director of the Center for Advanced Studies at Wesleyan University.*