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Finding Common Ground

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STAFF WRITER

Hamilton deserves praise for Common Ground, the new series aimed at bringing together distinguished individuals from across the political divide to engage, with the help of a moderator, in civil discussion about some of today's most controversial topics. Last year, Common Ground focused more on the speakers than on subjects for debate. Hamilton

certainly had more agreement than disagreement in condemning the current administration's foreign policy. The college has not yet invited a pair of speakers who hold and discuss positions which fundamentally conflict with each other. In particular, Hamilton should invite logical, informed, balanced, and persuasive speakers to campus to discuss, in detail, something from a broad range

Students should be open to having their minds changed and should submit questions to the speakers which indicate a willingness to amend one's own position, not just to highlight agreement or disagreement on a speaker's position. Furthermore, students should show support for a speaker during an event not necessarily based on a position, but how well a position is argued.

could expand this platform by making ideas, not just the guests, central to it.

Those who have attended past Common Ground events may have been entertained and enlightened, but also sensed an air of hesitation in truly getting at the core of an issue. David Axelrod and Karl Rove last fall adopted the role of elder statesmen, swapping old war stories and looking back nostalgically from the twilight of their distinguished political careers. Condoleezza Rice and Susan Rice, last semester, displayed more disagreement in policy and were willing to sharpen their language to address core disagreements, but only came to serious conflict on the Iran nuclear deal. In both cases, the names and personas on stage drew us in as a community, at the expense of heated yet civil debate.

So far, Common Ground has missed an opportunity to truly test the notion that two people who disagree can sit down and rationally discuss issues that polarize our nation. Rove and Axelrod easily found common ground in commenting on President Trump's unorthodox approach to governing. Condoleezza Rice and Susan Rice, as members of the Washington foreign policy establishment,

of divisive current issues. They should aim to find "Common Ground" while disagreeing on topics such as abortion, gun control, and immigration, presenting arguments that are reasonable, persuasive, and defensible.

Hamilton's student body could take the opportunity to truly test its ability to hear and appreciate dissenting opinions. While many on this campus hold strong convictions on certain issues, how many of us have listened to two experts calmly articulate their conflicting viewpoints? It would reflect especially well on Hamilton's student body if we could appreciate and acknowledge the strength of a competing argument, even when it runs completely opposite to one's own view. If the Common Ground series included more real debate between the guests, it would provide the Hamilton community with good examples of how emotion can be minimized in discussions of highly-charged but complicated issues.

For these events to fully achieve their purpose, students must adopt two important attitudes. First, they must approach each event with an open mind. Acknowledging the strength of

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Catalonia: Understanding the Situation in Spain

FRED POLLEVICK
STAFF WRITER

On October 1 of last year, as most Hamilton students were preparing for midterms, civil unrest and violence broke out in Catalonia, the northeastern region of Spain, as a constitutionally illegal referendum shocked one of Europe's largest countries. The news did not have a big impact in the United States, and understandably so. The Catalan independence referendum occurred on the same day as the worst mass shooting in American history, when Stephen Paddock killed 58 people in Las Vegas. On October 2, many news outlets reported the vote and unrest in Spain, but it took a necessary back seat to a story which news outlets had to cover for the American public. And with that, the Catalonian events soon faded away from America's attention. I must admit that I too brushed aside the referendum in light of the massacre in Las Vegas.

It was not until this semester, when I went for a run in the beautiful Retiro Park on my second day of Hamilton's

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...

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program in Madrid, that Catalonia came to my attention again. I found a Spanish news podcast, to catch up with what I thought would be the local news. Instead, the entire news hour was about Catalonia. So I decided to do a little research, to see if this was true of just one podcast or if Spaniards were really still

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FINDING COMMON GROUND *cont.*

a competing argument does not necessarily weaken your own position. Second, students must engage in conversation within the framework of the event. Students should be open to having their minds changed and should submit questions to the speakers which indicate a willingness to amend one's own position, not

just to highlight agreement or disagreement on a speaker's position. Furthermore, students should show support for a speaker during an event not necessarily based on a position, but how well a position is argued. The right way to address divisive issues is to listen first, then speak. Trying to speak over someone, or not listening at all, would only suggest that civil discussion and bridging

the divide on an issue are not possible. Our student body should make our college proud by showing an air of respect at these events, without disruption from audience members who are too rigidly invested in their opinions. Under these conditions, our community will gain a valuable forum in which to have our views strengthened, modified, refined, or even completely changed.

CATALONIA *cont.*

talking about events from a year ago. It turned out that almost every day since October 1, 2017, the newspapers' opinion sections focused on Catalonia. Endless opinion pieces from all political sides flooded newspapers like torrential rain. So naturally, I decided that I needed to learn for myself exactly what happened in Spain.

To understand the situation, one needs to go back to the brutal regime of Francisco Franco. Before the Spanish Civil War of the late 1930s and the decades of dictatorship under Franco, Spain had a diverse culture. Its different regions, like Galicia and the Basque Country in the north, Andalucía in the south, Madrid in the center, and Catalonia in the east, all enjoyed a certain amount of cultural freedom. Catalonians, for example, could speak Catalan. When Franco came to power, however, he banned any identity that was not "Spanish." He also killed many

thousands of political enemies who did not fit his ideal vision of Spain, including many who were proud of their Catalonian heritage.

After Franco's death in 1975, Catalonians still felt repressed and furious. When Spain formed its new system, many of them wanted nothing to do with it, with the memory of the previous attempt at unification still fresh in their minds. They were a part of Spain, but in the Franco years had gained more and more autonomy. Nonetheless, Catalonian officials in 1978 signed a constitution that asserted Spain's status as a unified, *indissoluble* nation.

Tired of the Spanish government, Catalonians held a referendum for independence last October 1. The Spanish Supreme Court declared this illegal under the constitution, which states that Spain is indissoluble. National guard troops and police officers started to raid voting centers in Catalonia and broke ballot boxes. Violence and protest ensued as pro-independence

Catalonians tried to rapidly count the votes. The Spanish government refused to acknowledge any outcome. According to the pro-independence side, of the 42 percent of the votes that could be counted, 90 percent of Catalonians (also known as "Catalans") voted for independence. But it is unclear exactly what the real or complete numbers were, since the national government was able to partially block the referendum.

In the wake of these events, the Spanish government has sent the Catalonian officials in charge of the referendum—except the regional president, Carles Puigdemont, who is currently in exile in Belgium—to prison for sedition. More than a year after the referendum and unrest, there is a stronger-than-ever tension between pro-independence Catalans and Spain. And while nothing as major as the referendum has happened since, it is only a matter of time before another major event in the region rocks the fifth-largest European economy.

Flannery O'Connor's "Revelation"

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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Flannery O'Connor was a remarkable 20th-century American writer of startling, strange, and sometimes violent short stories and novels set in the rural South. In the last year of her too-short life, she worked between medical treatments and hospitalization, writing and correcting the last draft of "Revelation," one of her final short stories. It remains a well-crafted masterpiece, the culmination of all she intended to say about the fallen human condition and the power of grace to pierce through the veil and open your eyes to yourself and those around you.

In "Revelation," as in other stories, O'Connor relies on the archetype of a bigoted, narrow-minded busybody old woman who prattles on endlessly, setting everyone else on edge. Such a woman decides immediately who is worthy and who is found wanting. Such a character epitomized the writing of O'Connor, who thrived on poking fun at the narcissist, the puffed-up intellectual, the spiritually dead, and the arrogant gossip. Mrs. Turpin was perfect fodder, a mixture of smug, delusional, and self-assured. She thought she saw the world clearly, but could not fathom her proper place in it. She was hypocrisy and propriety personified, with not an ounce of love or mercy.

Mrs. Turpin may have acted genteel, but her thoughts of ill will toward her fellow

human travelers seethed below the surface. She disparaged others who she thought were beneath her, and fancied herself perfect: "When I think who all I could have been beside myself and what all I got, a little of everything, and a good disposition besides, I just feel like shouting..." She was so sure she was ahead of her neighbors in all manners, understanding, and virtue that she could barely keep herself from speaking. So consumed with denouncing the failings of others, Mrs. Turpin pondered and enumerated all the classes of folks who were inferior to her in economic rank and social stature. Her faith was

"Revelation" deftly reveals to the reader that the demands of faith are not for the false or weak-kneed, but are shouldered by the authentic, the unexpected, and the humble.

tepid, and her treatment of others was vulgar.

She was, however, given a moment of clarity, a vision of her malignant spiritual deformity. This epiphany came from an unlikely prophet: a pimply-faced, disrespectful, Wellesley-educated, awkward girl named Mary Grace. After listening to Mrs. Turpin talk endlessly in the doctor's office waiting room, mocking and

agitating against others, the girl saw "beyond time and place and condition," hurled a book at her, and dove across the room to choke her. Mary Grace urged Mrs. Turpin to "Go back to hell where you came from, you old warthog." The people in the doctor's office believed Mary Grace had become unhinged, but Mrs. Turpin was not so convinced. The outburst had hit its mark.

Deep inside her small heart and even smaller mind, Mrs. Turpin perceived that she might have deserved the knock on the head and the name-calling. Mary Grace's words were a rebuke to her false "Christian attitude" and superficial manners. Moreover, she was so unnerved by what had transpired that she sought confirmation from her husband and the hired farm workers that she was no "warthog." They falsely attested to her goodness. She even scolded God Almighty, asking, "What do you send me a message like that for?" Mrs. Turpin was confounded.

Near the end of "Revelation," Mrs. Turpin is shown a profound and painfully clear vision, across the night sky, of a line of souls marching onward to heaven – and in the front of the line singing praises to God are "whole companies" of trashy folks she had written off, derided, and belittled. Transfigured, they are now beautiful souls. To her horror, she sees in the back of the line a group of her friends – chastened, the pretenders with their fake pieties "being burned away." It is both a sign and an admonition by O'Connor to all the Mrs. Turpins and those resembling her: self-blindness is lethal, grace causes people to change in unforeseen ways, and the mind and heart of God are often a mystery.

"Revelation" deftly reveals to the reader that the demands of faith are not for the false or weak-kneed, but are shouldered by the authentic, the unexpected, and the humble.

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CONTINUE THE CONVERSATION

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