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The Cresset (Vol. LXXVI, No. 3, Lent)

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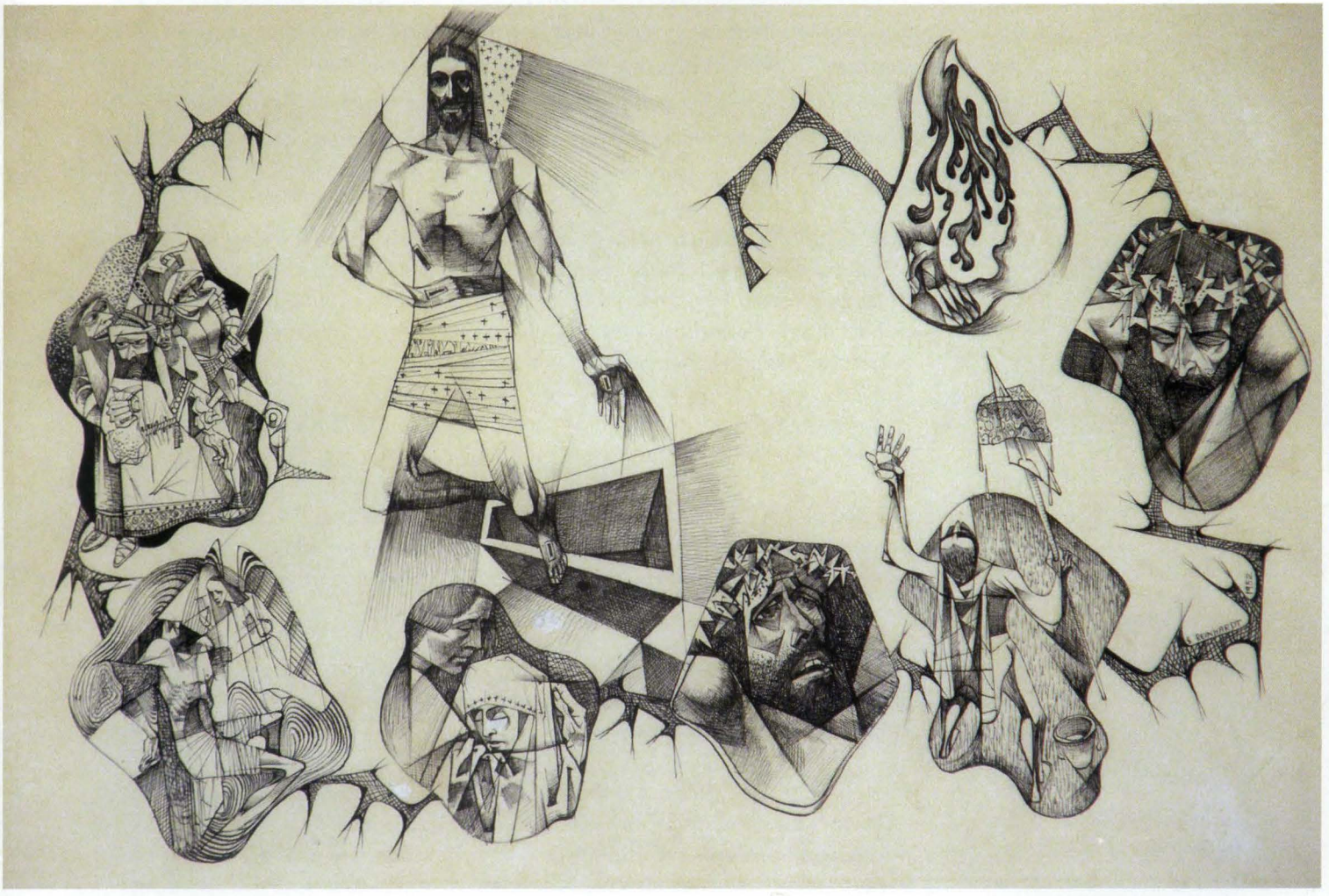
CRESSET

A review of literature, the arts, and public affairs

Lent 2013



Valparaiso University

My Eyre Affair
Lisa Deam

Reviving the Dead
Gary Fincke

The Incorruptible Youth of Poetry
Stephanie Sears

A Caravaggio Meditation
Edmund Santurri

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On the cover: Siegfried Reinhardt (1925–1984). *Seven Last Words from the Cross, and Easter*, 1952. Pen and ink on paper. Gift of Crossings Community and of the Reverend Dr. Edward H. and Mrs. Marie (neé Hoyer) Schroeder. Brauer Museum of Art, 2011.21.005.

When he created this drawing at age twenty-six, St. Louis Lutheran Siegfried Reinhardt had been ranked by *Life Magazine* as among the nineteen most promising artists under age thirty-six in the United States. He was born in East Prussia in 1925, migrated with his family to St. Louis in 1928, and later married a descendant of a founder of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. A self-taught artist who learned by copying Old Masters in museums and from reproductions, he found work as a designer of stained-glass windows for Emil Frei, Inc. Reinhardt created a style of "sharp-edged realism and luminous abstraction" including "a preoccupation with the religious and allegorical" (Richard Brauer).

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THE CRESSET (ISSN# 0011-1198) is published five times during the academic year (September through June) by the Valparaiso University Press as a forum for informed opinion about literature, the arts, and public affairs. Periodicals postage paid at Valparaiso, Indiana, and at additional mailing offices.

Postmaster send address changes to The Cresset, Valparaiso University, 1300 Chapel Drive, Valparaiso, IN 46383–9998.

Subscriptions: Regular subscription rates: $20.00 per year; Student/Senior subscription rates: $10.00 per year; single copy: $5.00. International subscriptions add $8.00. Subscribe online at www.thecresset.org.

Letters to the Editor: Readers are encouraged to address the Editor and staff at cresset@valpo.edu. Letters to the Editor for publication are subject to editing for brevity.

Submissions: Manuscripts should be addressed to the Editor. Authors who wish their manuscripts to be returned should include a self-addressed envelope with sufficient postage. Submissions of articles, essays, or reviews may also be submitted via email to cresset@valpo.edu. Poetry submissions are not accepted via email. For further submissions guidelines, please refer to the inside back cover of this journal.

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Re-Inventing the College Idea

Among the various Titles that I've acquired over the years is Pre-Law Advisor, a job that brings with it responsibility for guiding undergraduates through the law school admissions process and, sometimes, helping them decide if they want to go to law school in the first place. The last few years have seemed like a roller-coaster ride for people who do this work. Not long ago, the number of students applying to law school was at a record high. Now, as we emerge from the "Great Recession," applications to law school are down, and down by nearly half since 2004 ("Law Schools' Applications Fall..." *New York Times*, January 30, 2013). This is a serious concern for many law schools, and it is just as much of a concern for any university or college where the liberal arts are taught.

Liberal arts professors preach the gospel of knowledge for its own sake. In fact, most of us cringe just a bit when our brightest students tell us they are applying to law school, but the truth is that law school has always been among the most attractive options for our students after graduation. The even uglier truth is that we all tout our own disciplines as ideal "pre-law" preparation and try to attract pre-law students to our classes and majors. Now that fewer students are planning to go to law school, this pitch has become a harder sell.

While college education can enhance employment prospects, this has not always been its only, or even its primary, purpose. As Andrew Delbanco discusses in *College: What It Was, Is, and Should Be* (Princeton 2012), Americans have long believed in the "college idea." Beyond getting us a job, a college education is supposed to prepare us to be engaged and thoughtful citizens of a democracy. It helps us develop our ability to evaluate conflicting claims and to "tell the difference between demagoguery and responsible arguments" (29). Even more fundamentally, an education should shape and form our character. It provides "...a hedge against utilitarian values... It slakes the human craving for contact with works of art that somehow register one's own longings and yet exceed what one has been to articulate by and for oneself... it is among the invaluable experiences of the fulfilled life..." (32).

This type of education—in fact, any type of college education—was once the privilege of the rich. But in the last half of the twentieth century, federal programs such as the GI Bill and Pell Grants opened access to higher education to many who could never have afforded it otherwise. New kinds of colleges—including regional state universities and community colleges—let students live at home and work full-time jobs while also working on their degrees. But this democratization of higher education soon came into tension with the college idea, one aspect of which holds that higher education is best pursued within a certain kind of community of learning.

The American image of the ideal college campus is shaped by both the Christian model of monastic communities and the Socratic model of education through dialogue. A college campus is supposed to be a place where young people with different backgrounds can live together in a safe and secure environment, somewhat removed from the "real world." In this semi-monastic isolation, they can learn from one another at the same time as they are learning from faculty members with whom they have daily, face-to-face, in-person interactions (Delbanco 53–54). This is a compelling image of how to go about higher education, but it is also an expensive way to go about it.

As access to higher education increased, more Americans begin to think about education primarily as a means to achieve social mobility and financial stability. It became an investment in the future, and the point of any investment is, of course, to create return. That reality encourages many students to choose a field of study with the best job prospects as well as to consider less expensive means of getting an education. In short, the goal is to get the most bang for your educational buck. The traditional college idea of schools with beautiful

campuses isolated from the outside world where students and professors could leisurely chat about the meaning of life is not always the choice that makes the most financial sense.

For many students, of course, where to go to college and what to study is not simply a financial decision. Lots of liberal arts colleges are still doing quite well and even small public institutions and community colleges offer degrees in the humanities, but in recent years the old college idea has started to look like a much riskier investment. The economy, though recovering, is doing so slowly, and the fields that are producing the most new jobs are those that usually require some sort of specialized technical training. Universities are facing increasing pressure to give students marketable skills and to train workers for the fastest growing industries. Last year in Florida, a commission appointed by the governor to propose reforms in the state's educational system recommended holding down the cost of degrees in science, technology, and health-care fields, but charging higher tuition to students who majored in the humanities ("Pricing Out The Humanities," *Inside Higher Education*, November 26, 2012).

At the same time, new technologies are changing how young people think about education and information. Whether or not online schools provide the same kind or quality of education as traditional schools, the reality is that there are cheaper, faster ways that young people today can access almost all of the information that they think they need to further their careers and go about their lives. The monastic model of education does not interest many young people anymore, and, even if it did, schools couldn't really offer it to them anyway. The quadrangles at the heart of many college campuses once served two purposes; they kept the world out, and the students in. Today, they can do neither.

Unfortunately, a few universities are responding to these challenges by cutting their philosophy, classical languages, arts, and other humanities departments. But don't count out the liberal arts yet. While schools cannot ignore their students' desire to enhance their employment prospects, these students should not be forced into an either/or choice between preparing for the job market through mastering science and technology or preparing for life through the liberal arts. They must have an opportunity to choose both, and universities today are developing curricula that make this possible. Even the very distinction between professional and liberal arts education is less sharp than it once was. The best professional-education programs today incorporate collaborative learning, development of critical-thinking and problem-solving skills, service-learning projects that address real-world problems, and training in ethics, as well as engagement with both the sciences and the humanities through complementary course work.

As for the liberal arts faculty, many of us are still purists who believe that a liberal arts education, even with little emphasis on acquiring practical skills, is the best thing we can offer our students, and we often argue that it is the best preparation for almost any career. Yet, we are well aware that out students still have to find that first job. To help with this, many programs are encouraging, often requiring, students to take advantage of internships and civic-engagement opportunities that expose them to the practical working world and give them a chance to learn how their intellectual skills can be assets in the workplace. Many schools are creating interdisciplinary majors that combine professional training, scientific literacy, and liberal arts coursework into a single program. In his book, Delbanco describes the many experiments that liberal arts educators are making in their efforts to help students—as well as policy makers—recognize the value of the liberal arts.

American universities and colleges will change, because they must. They will learn how to combine professionalization and liberal education, and they will learn to use technologies in ways that enhance communities rather than undermine them. They will find new ways to make higher education affordable not only to the wealthy and privileged but to students from every level of our society. They will meet these challenges because the people who work at these institutions continue to believe in the college idea—as do many other Americans. They believe that our system of higher education can and must offer everyone both a chance to make a good living and the possibility of living well.

-JPO

My Eyre Affair

Lisa Deam

I KNEW THAT I SHOULD HAVE DEMURRED WHEN a member of my book group suggested that we read *Jane Eyre*. Or I should have skipped the meeting at which our discussion took place. Although some in our number were encountering Charlotte Brontë's classic tale for the first time, its characters have walked with me for much of my life. I knew, or at least suspected, that I wasn't ready to distance myself from them. I wasn't ready to assign words to my passion for a coming-of-age story so rooted in my own journey through the world.

Up to this point, I never had read *Jane Eyre* as an assignment. The book was an experience of pure pleasure. Pure escape. When I began reading it for book group, questions distracted me from my normally single-minded pursuit of Jane's adventures. What would we talk about at our meeting? What plot elements or themes should I bring to the attention of my fellow readers?

The evening of the discussion, the grinding music of the café where we met accosted me when I walked through the door. The volume was just right for a girls' night out—but all wrong for the flowering fields of Thornfield Hall. I didn't want to have to shout my tender feelings for Brontë's creation.

And then it got worse. I was nearly speechless, as I had suspected I would be. Clutching my well-worn copy of the book, I listened, with growing dismay, to the comments flying around the table:

> "Bertha Mason may or may not exist. She represents Jane Eyre—the passionate side that Jane has repressed."
>
> "Jane should have started a teaching co-op with her two cousins instead of getting married!"

And, most crushing of all:

> "I just couldn't root for Mr. Rochester."

Comprised of bright and lively women, my book group nearly always leads me to a better understanding of the novels we read. This time, however, my well-meaning friends threatened to destroy a cherished icon. As the novel was deconstructed before my eyes, I wanted to scream, "No! No! No! Please don't take *Jane Eyre* from me!"

Jane Eyre goes by many names in the literary world. It has elements of the Gothic novel. It contains features of the *Bildungsroman*. But it is, at heart, a romance. Girl meets boy. Girl falls for boy. Girl almost loses boy. Girl—at long last—gets boy. A mistrust of the genre of romance, I believe, partly accounts for my friends' desire to rewrite significant portions of *Jane Eyre*. We do not often read romance novels—of any era—in our group. We want a challenge, not a set of conventions. We want a satisfying ending, but not necessarily a happy one. We want, if I can use a romantic term in an argument against romance, to be wooed—not by rules that are time-honored and trite, but by a great piece of literature.

My own courtship with Brontë's book began some thirty years ago. As with many romances, the course of true love did not run smooth. When I first began reading *Jane Eyre*, I didn't much like

it. The novel's first section, in which the young Jane suffers at her aunt's house and attends a charitable institution, seemed tedious. It contains enough angst to satisfy any reader poised for a journey through adolescence. As I discovered, it contains some serious gaps as well.

Narrated by the title character, *Jane Eyre* tells the story of a girl who overcomes her rootlessness to find a place in the world. Orphaned as an infant, she is taken in by a cruel aunt, educated at a harsh boarding school, teaches at the school herself, and then takes a post as governess at Thornfield Hall. The book originally was published in 1847 with the subtitle "An Autobiography," which seems misleading given the fact that it narrates only the first nineteen years of Jane's life. Of these nineteen years, eight are elided. After Jane gets settled at Lowood Institution when she is ten years old, we do not hear from her again until she is eighteen and a teacher at the school. Other than obtaining a well-rounded education, what did Jane experience during the years in which she became a woman? I myself stood at the threshold to womanhood when I first met Jane, and I believe this explains my initial dissatisfaction with her story. Without being able to pinpoint the cause of my frustration, I felt the adolescent Jane's absence. I missed her. Tired of reading about a ten-year-old who seemed to be going nowhere, I put the book down. My romance with *Jane Eyre* nearly ended before it began.

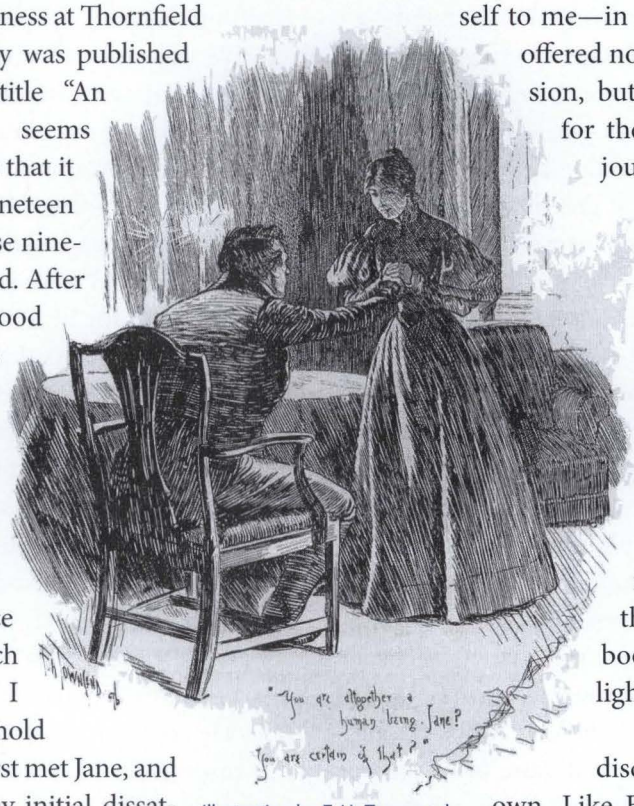

Illustration by F. H. Townsend.
1897 Service and Paton edition.

When I took up Brontë's creation again, some months later, the older Jane came to my rescue. This time, I made it to Part Two, in which Jane arrives at Thornfield Hall. Her adventure began in earnest for me here, and I irrevocably was drawn in by the novel's combination of mystery and love story. The two genres develop hand in hand: as Jane falls in love with the master of Thornfield, Edward Fairfax Rochester, she becomes aware of a harmful and shadowy presence at the hall. The mystery is solved—to Jane's detriment—at the moment her love reaches full flower. How appropriate, how chilling, a story arc to a young reader for whom all romantic love was a mystery! Plot holes and other weaknesses in the novel no longer registered with me. As I agonized with Jane, I wondered if passion ever would grip me as thoroughly as it had this otherwise levelheaded heroine.

After a slow beginning, Jane redeemed herself to me—in more ways than one. She offered not only the promise of passion, but also a glimmer of light for the darker moments in the journey of life. Things do not begin well for Jane. But as her story progresses, she exchanges solitude for belonging, loss for gain, despair for hope. She makes every good thing—or at least a good ending—seem possible. I did not yet know the term "catharsis," but that is certainly what I felt as the darker threads of the book's tapestry gave way to a lighter weave.

Parts of my journey, I discovered, mirrored Jane's own. Like Brontë's heroine, I waited for passion, and I eventually found it. My real-life romance has a good ending. Yet part of me misses the agonizing. Or at least the wondering, the expectation, the mystery of a journey not yet begun. *Jane Eyre* represents a time when my choices—however good these choices turned out to be—had not closed off other possibilities in life and love. When I read Brontë's novel, even when I catch a glimpse of it on my bookshelf, I believe that all things are yet possible.

I sometimes wonder how my reaction to *Jane Eyre* might have differed had I come to it later in my life. Would I have been as willing blithely to follow Jane through hills and plot holes to the end of her journey? I rather doubt it. Discovering Jane

at the right moment might make the difference between an admirer—or perhaps a detractor—of Brontë's book and a die-hard fan.

It also matters *where* one meets Jane, even where one discusses her. In a coffeehouse playing music loud enough to wake the dead? This is probably not the best setting in which to explore the refined mind of an English governess. In school? It probably depends upon the teacher. I first read *Jane Eyre* in blissful solitude. I put down, took up, and fell in love with the book in the confines of my childhood bedroom. It is my JFK moment—a defining life event forever linked to a particular set of surroundings. I can still see the room in which I encountered Jane's story—pale green walls, matching green shelves holding my collection of model horses, and the dark green binding of the book, which was given to me by my grandparents. Jane had her red-room. My room is green. Neither of us can forget the spaces and colors associated with our childhood.

Jane's red-room, of course, recalls terror and shame. It is the room in which her uncle died, the room in which her cruel aunt unjustly locked her. My green-room, by contrast, evokes shelter. The color of new life, it is the place to which I retreat when I want to reenter the cocoon of youth. In my green-room, my responsibilities are few and my possibilities endless. I have parents to take care of me instead of being the parent myself. My road stretches before me. There is time, all the time in the world: to read, to dream, to imagine, with the heroine of my favorite book, what my life will be. It is a romantic, not to say romanticized, vision of my childhood. But I find life's journey more bearable with nostalgia as a traveling companion.

And what of romance in the traditional sense? What of the figure I have skirted around but not directly addressed? What, dear reader, of Mr. Rochester? There would be no girl-meets-boy without his formidable and somewhat fearsome figure. There would be no passion, no agonizing, and no good ending. As I discovered the night of my book group meeting, my fellow readers would have few objections to these absences. Most of them seemed quite willing to send Jane's hero galloping off the page on his black steed, Mesrour, never to return.

Every reader who gathered for our discussion was married. Did we not, then, believe in love? Did we not want Jane to have what we had found? We did. But we also—and here I speak not only for my book group but also for several generations of readers conditioned by progressive notions of fulfillment—wanted Jane to have it all: a career, certainly, and perhaps true love and a couple of kids if she could manage it while running her teaching co-op.

We did not, in other words, blindly accept the idea that every heroine must have a hero. Yet Mr. Rochester is my blind spot. I could no sooner send him galloping away than I could time travel to nineteenth-century England. I believe that I blushed when we began speaking of Rochester, and then I reeled from surprise to find that I carried my torch for him alone. As I listened to my friends, I discovered that they did not object to the idea of a hero for Jane as much as to the particular hero that Brontë provided for her. They did not like Mr. Rochester. I hated to admit that their criticism made sense. As the evening progressed, I began to feel like a bride who realizes, after the wedding, that her husband has some faults she had overlooked before. Could it be that Rochester is not all I thought him to be?

That Mr. Rochester loves Jane seems certain. He sees her worth when few others do, and this does much to endear him to me. Yet, as my friends led me to realize, his affection takes disturbing forms. He makes Jane believe that he is in love with the accomplished Blanche Ingram. He masquerades as an old gypsy woman in order to make Jane confess her feelings for him. And, of course, he never tells her about the present Mrs. Rochester, alive and well (or not so well) and incarcerated in the attic. Mr. Rochester, in other words, not only teases Jane. He toys with her for much of the novel. I began to see plot elements that previously had seemed suspenseful in a more sinister light.

Rochester manipulates Jane partly in order to draw her out, but he also does it because he can. He remains, irrevocably, her master. Jane herself speaks of her love in these terms. Rochester, she

confesses, exerts an influence that "quite mastered me—that took my feelings from my own power and fettered them in his" (620).* She "sirs" and "Mr. Rochesters" him to the point that I sometimes forget his given name. And then I reify the master-servant nature of their relationship by calling him "Mr. Rochester" myself. I would like to rescue Jane from this situation—not from Rochester, but from the servitude that follows her into his arms—but I do not know how. I wondered, briefly, if I could do so by seeing their master-servant relationship as a metaphor. Brontë is not the only person to characterize love as a kind of enslavement. We use clichés to this effect every day. *You hold the key to my happiness. You have captured my heart.* Perhaps the novel can be read as a meditation on the all-powerful bonds of love.

Perhaps. Yet pesky plot details make this metaphorical reading difficult to sustain. At the end of the book, Jane finally breaks free of her (literal) bondage. Taking the name of Mrs. Rochester, she is no longer her master's dependent. Yet, as the astute readers in my book group gleefully pointed out, Jane triumphs because the characters' worlds have been turned upside down. Jane has gained a family and a hefty fortune, while Rochester has been injured in a fire that destroyed Thornfield Hall and killed the first Mrs. Rochester. In other words, Jane claims her man only when she acquires a fortune and he is disfigured; when she has gained and he has lost. She can only have him when he needs her to take care of him and they have retreated from society to a reclusive manor.

My friends' opinions receive backing in the form of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, a 1966 novel by Jean Rhys that purports to be a prequel to *Jane Eyre*. In fact, Rhys's novel can be read as a sustained critique of Rochester and his world. It tells the story of Rochester's first wife, Antoinette Cosway (whom Rochester later renames Bertha), including Cosway's marriage to Rochester and her relocation from the Caribbean to Thornfield Hall. I learned of Rhys's novel, and the post-colonial subtext of *Jane Eyre*, during the meeting of my book group. I previously had not given Bertha much thought other than to wish that she would get out of the way of the rightful Mrs. Rochester! Now, I considered the fact that Bertha, known to most readers as "the madwoman in the attic," might have been mentally damaged through the psychological abuse of Rochester—or that she might be perfectly sane, her grotesque features and unruly sexuality merely the projections of the imperialist minds that imprison her.

After being assured that *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a work of literature and not a piece of fan fiction, I acquiesced when our group decided to read the book. I missed the discussion, and so I will confess here that I did not enjoy Rhys's novel. I found its style opaque and the plot difficult to follow. Fortunately, the book's minimalist style is so removed from the confessional tone of *Jane Eyre* that I had a hard time connecting the original to its "prequel." I could almost pretend that the colonial Mr. Rochester did not exist.

> Whatever his faults, Rochester speaks words that, in one form or another, each of us surely longs to hear. They are words that define the most elemental connection between two human beings.

I do not have to work very hard to pretend. Introduced to me at an impressionable age, Mr. Rochester will always be my knight in shining armor. I find in him a truly heroic figure, one whose dark moods match my own; who sees gold glittering beneath the plainest of surfaces; who knows how to announce his love—beneath a towering thorn tree, with a storm brewing, using words to rend the heart:

> [I]t is as if I had a string somewhere under my left ribs, tightly and inextricably knotted to a similar string situated in the corresponding quarter of your little frame. And if that boisterous Channel, and two hundred miles or so of land,

> come broad between us, I am afraid that cord of communion will be snapped, and then I've a nervous notion I should take to bleeding inwardly. (677)

Whatever his faults, Rochester speaks words that, in one form or another, each of us surely longs to hear. They are words that define the most elemental connection between two human beings. When he addresses Jane, Rochester appeals to her first as a friend. In an earlier scene in the novel, Jane herself tells Rochester that in him, she has found her home. Rochester is her place of belonging. He is her green-room.

I am not immune to less elevated feelings toward the master of Thornfield Hall. I confess to a girlish infatuation that I doubt I ever completely can repress. Mr. Rochester stands before me, broad and brooding, sometimes brutish. He represents the passion I want in my life, and he speaks—I admit it—to my desire to be rescued, to be lifted, in one magical moment, from the poverty and obscurity of my own existence. Unlike the thorn tree, which ominously splits into two in the storm following the lovers' meeting, Mr. Rochester is strong enough to do this lifting.

Yet, strangely enough, it is Jane herself who gives me strength. Even when she is swept off her feet, she remains rooted to the earth. The love scene beneath the thorn tree is stirring. Yet I always have been haunted by the more poignant moment of the lovers' parting. Once Jane discovers the existence of Bertha Rochester, she cannot stay at Thornfield, despite Mr. Rochester's pleas and the urgings of her own heart. She cannot go against her convictions. Jane flees in the early hours of the morning, taking next to nothing with her (although I always have thought that she should have taken a few of the jewels with which Mr. Rochester sprinkled her before their aborted marriage). I am not the only reader for whom this scene resonates. In his 2011 film adaptation of Brontë's novel, Cary Fukunaga begins *in medias res*: he opens with Jane's dramatic and wordless flight from Thornfield. Other scenes in the film become precursors to or results of this decisive moment.

Even the members of my book group who found Jane lacking admitted that her departure defines her character. In our meeting, we discussed the scene in which, after the abbreviated wedding ceremony, Jane retreats to her room, takes off her finery and muses:

> And now I thought: till now I had only heard, seen, moved—followed up and down where I was led or dragged—watched event rushed on event, disclosure open beyond disclosure: but *now, I thought*. (emphasis in the original, 705)

Although Jane ostensibly is thinking about the events of the morning—her failed wedding and Mr. Rochester's confession of his existing wife—my friends made the case that Jane thinks, really thinks, for the first time in her life. And this leads to her resolve to depart.

What does it mean that the most memorable scene in a romantic novel is the one in which the lovers part? It means that progressive readers can rest easy. *Jane Eyre* is not a typical romance. Jane herself is not a naïf, young and impressionable though she may be. In her moment of crisis, we see what Brontë's heroine is made of. She may have next to nothing; what she does have is integrity. She knows what belongs to her, and she leaves with it.

At times, I still yearn for Mr. Rochester to save me. But he invariably fails to come galloping into the landscape of my life. Jane, by contrast, is always there. Her rootedness and resolve have come to my rescue more than once. The spring before I took my PhD exams, I summoned Jane to my side. As I took a break from my studies and delved into the world of Thornfield, Jane's journey—her setbacks, steadfastness, and eventual triumph—reminded me that I could overcome the hurdles in my life. And it provided much-needed distraction as I prepared to jump the hurdle fast approaching. Jane kept me sane.

A few years later, during an even more critical time in my life, Jane stood by me again. I recalled the decisive moment in her own life—her decision to leave Thornfield Hall—when I needed to extricate myself from a cherished but ultimately

untenable situation. Leaving is never, or rarely, easy. In my difficulty, Jane gave me strength. I thought about her options—to stay at her own peril or to leave with nothing but her integrity—and I imagined them to be my own. I played a bit of a role, and in so doing, I did the right thing. I came to realize that I, too, possess a certain strength.

Perhaps, then, *Jane Eyre* is a romance with myself—the better part of myself, in which I always know what to do, and I do it unhesitatingly. I know what belongs to me, and I leave with it.

It is no wonder that the mere mention, and sometimes just the sight, of Brontë's dark green book can send me to my pale green room. I go there not only to protect my fondness for *Jane Eyre*, but also to find my faith in myself. I nurture the possibility that I can have it all—not a career, a husband, and a couple of kids (I only have two of these three things, anyway). I want to have it all in the Janian sense—to be romanced yet rooted to the earth, to be swept off my feet yet secure in the person I have become.

My complicated relationship with Jane—and her equally complex ties to the hero of Thornfield Hall—explains the dismay I felt during the meeting of my book group. The Jane that surfaced that evening—the one who never can be Rochester's equal and who should have run off with her female cousins—this Jane may be savvy and sexy, a heroine for whom modern readers can root. She is not my Jane, however. She is not the character that tells me I can have it all, the one that whispers in my ear that everything is possible.

Yet I cannot fault my friends for their iconoclasm. They could not know that, as I sat dumbly clutching my large volume, I was not green with envy from the astuteness of their analysis, but washed in the pale hue of remembered bedroom walls. They did not know that the sad state of affairs at our meeting was really an affair of the heart. It is my Eyre affair.

The next time around, I will be better prepared. I will warn fellow book-lovers not to worry if, at the mention of *Jane Eyre*, I become suddenly distant, perhaps mute. It is not, dear reader, because I am unfriendly or unintelligent. I am merely on my way to another world—verdant fields, a green room. I know what belongs to me, and I am leaving with it. ✟

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*All citations from: Brontë, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. Orig. pub. 1847. Reprinted in *The Brontë Sisters*. London: Octopus Books Limited, 1982.

Reviving the Dead

Gary Fincke

1

When my wife and I are dressed and healthy, her body temperature registers eight-tenths of a degree colder than my ordinary one of 98.6. She shivers in any weather below seventy degrees. Occasionally, in central Pennsylvania, she wears gloves in May and September. It's not much use joking about how she's farther from fever, how sweaters become her, how her jackets are stylish and smart. Or, if I feel the need to use a bit of trivia I picked up from the local PBS station during halftime of a football game, to bring up the Thomsonians, who believed all sickness was caused by a deficiency in body heat, claiming that every disease could be cured by a medicinal steam bath.

It's something to consider because three months past ninety, my father is wrapped in two late-August sweaters, the furnace growling in his delirious house where each plant has wilted like his short-term memory and his stove, for the past year, has been covered by signs that say NO in large letters to lower the probability of fire. My wife and I have driven the two hundred miles to Pittsburgh the day after our own discussion of aging to meet with a woman who specializes in Elder Law, the legalese of wills and trusts for the future distribution of whatever assets we have, the talk turning to assisted living, comas, and long-term vegetative states while air conditioning chilled my wife to putting on the jacket she carries, even in the heart of summer, for overcooled rooms.

Afterwards, walking outside to the surprise of warmth, she didn't remove her jacket. "How could you stand it?" she said.

"She made everything seem hypothetical," I said. "It was like we were talking about somebody else who was going to fall apart and die."

My wife hugged herself in the late afternoon sun. "I mean the cold," she said. "It was absolutely freezing in there."

2

"The face seemed to warm up suddenly, sparkle returned to the eyes." So wrote a scientist named Robert Cornish in a report to the University of California in 1933. He was working on a way to revive the dead by strapping them to a seesaw and rapidly teeter-tottering the corpses in order to circulate their blood.

He and his assistants had spent a long time at this primitive CPR, working the seesaw as if they were attempting to draw water from a long-unprimed pump. At least once, according to Cornish's report, their persistence brought a bit of color to the face of a recent heart-attack victim before it reverted to ashen.

Cornish needed to perfect his technique, but human bodies were hard to come by. He began to work with dogs, personally killing fox terriers and naming each of those freshly dead dogs Lazarus, in reference to the optimism of the New Testament story. When some of those dogs breathed again, reviving for an hour or two before dying a second time, he was sure he was on to something.

Better yet, Lazarus IV and V lived for a few months. Newspapers reported the story. There was enough excitement and curiosity about his work that a movie was made in Hollywood that spliced in five minutes of footage of Cornish and his dogs. Lazarus IV and V, however, were blind and brain-damaged, inspiring, according to the newspaper stories, "terror in the ordinary dogs they met."*

3

Within one of those annotated lists featuring "famous last words" is the final one spoken by Dr. Joseph Green, a nineteenth-century English surgeon. Upon taking his own pulse, he managed, according to *The New Book of Lists*, to say "Stopped" before he died.

My father, by the end of September, has been moved to a facility for the nearly dead. He has a room with a door that doesn't lock, and the first time my wife and I visit he is wrapped in a flannel shirt and one of those sweaters from August, both buttoned to his throat while the heat hums from three baseboards on a warm fall afternoon.

My wife places her jacket on a chair. My father, nearly deaf, guesses at what we say. "That's good," he comments from time to time, imagining, I'm nearly certain, that we're telling him about how well we're doing or what our children have accomplished. "Nothing much going on here," he says at last, but he has begun to take his pulse every ten minutes or so as if he expects to hear, like that dying English doctor, the moment it will stop.

Finally, I tell him he's been in this building before, that he and I visited years ago because he had made a significant gift to the foundation that operates this facility. "That's good," he says, reaching for his wrist, and I lean close to say, "Let me show you something special" before I wheel him to the elevator that takes us one floor below to where the chapel is located.

He doesn't react to the brief journey. My wife helps me navigate his chair between a set of pews in the chapel, and I wheel him to the window he purchased fifteen years ago, a stained-glass mural in memory of my mother who, at that time, was already more than five years dead.

He doesn't recognize anything even when I set him inches from the plaque that states his name and hers. I ask him to read, but despite this prompt, he doesn't seem to understand. My wife, who stands nearby, bends down and reads the words aloud, shouting into his ear.

"How about that?" my father says. "It's for Ruthy."

"Yes," I say, "you paid for it."

"How come I've never seen this?" he says, and I wish I'd brought along the photograph of him standing beside the window the day it was unveiled.

My father stares at the window for a minute, and then, without taking his eyes off it, he begins to reminisce about my long-dead mother. He settles on listing old gifts he bought for her—a set of pearl earrings, a Sunday-dress, and a piano, all of them things that my sister helped him pick out.

He doesn't mention the one time he asked me to help him: in late November, for their fifteenth anniversary, the gift of wax fruit he'd somehow set his heart upon. "Each piece will last and last," is how he put it. I was eleven years old and didn't ask him to reconsider his choice. I thought the fruit looked real, the colors blended to look just short of ripe, as if, when he arranged them in the wooden bowl that sat on our kitchen table the following day, they would be perfect.

My father handled the apples and pears; he hefted the peaches, bananas, and bunched purple grapes. He seemed to be weighing them. Finally, he made a small pile of assorted wax fruit on the department store's countertop, estimating, I thought, the size of our kitchen's wooden bowl that was usually full of opened envelopes and advertising circulars that featured store coupons my mother intended to use.

The next afternoon, while my mother was changing clothes after church, he dumped all of the paper out of the bowl and placed the mess on the dining-room table. With his right hand, he swept his breakfast sweet-roll crumbs into his left and shook them into the wastebasket. He ran hot water into the stained coffee mug he used for a week between washings, a habit, he'd told me once, that he believed was his gift to my mother because reusing it reduced the number of dishes she had to scrub every day.

Finally, he spread that wax fruit out like a set of trophies. The grapes were the last to go into the arrangement, lying on top, the overhead light reflecting off their surfaces. "Isn't this a pretty picture, Gary?" he said when he'd finished. I heard my mother coming down the hall. Before she entered the kitchen, he added, "Just think. They'll look beautiful forever."

4

For a year or two, just after that wax-fruit anniversary, I was fascinated by pretending to be dead. "Soon enough, your time will come," my mother said, catching me holding my breath in front of the sweep hand for seconds on my bedroom clock radio. "Kid stuff," she said. "You should know better."

After that, I was more careful about my secret pastime, one that moved past simple breath-holding. In a library book, I studied what the mystics did to appear as if they'd stopped their hearts, shutting down the pulse with a block of wood under the armpit, pressure that worked like a tourniquet. I kept the book in my desk at school, but I mastered that technique well enough to simulate a stilled heart. I laid fingers to my wrist as I died, coming back again and again to the excitement of briefly muffling one part of my autonomic system, dying in my room, or better, among trees in the game lands near our house, lying down where somebody, someday, might discover me. I stared at the path I'd taken to whatever small clearing I'd chosen, imagining hikers who would turn curious or eager or absolutely afraid, everything so still for seconds that I believed in the power of leaving and returning, the comfort of being sprawled like the nearly drowned, doing CPR on the self, taking that first great gasp and bringing my heart's beat back after someone laid fingertips to my wrist, holding them there in wonder.

5

In the early nineteenth century, there were scientists who demonstrated how electricity seemed to reanimate a dead body. Executed criminals were often used, their faces twitching, an eye opening, an arm or a leg jerking when a powerful battery was connected to particular muscles. There was enough publicity about these demonstrations that's it's nearly certain Mary Shelley was aware of them. So Dr. Frankenstein, with the advantages of her fiction, was able to reanimate the dead, standing over the body like a glorious thunderhead, in love with choice.

The second time my wife and I visit the nursing home, I notice that my father has no pictures of my mother in his room, which means I have two more pictures of her in my house than he displays. "Do you want a picture of Mom?" I ask, and he shakes his head.

"It won't bring her back," he says, for once not saying "That's good," and when I show him the wedding announcement I've discovered between the pages of a book about the national parks he had sitting out in his living room, he can recite all four paragraphs from the local weekly newspaper. "Thanksgiving, 1941," he says. "Dorothy Seitz, maid-of-honor. Ruth Lang, given by her brother Karl. Mildred Van Wegan (née Lang) attended from Michigan. The Reverend Blair Claney officiated."

How many times had he read that notice in the twenty years since she'd died? "We had the long weekend for our honeymoon," he says. "And a week after that, the war."

It's nearly Halloween by now, and the children of the nursing-home staff wear costumes and go from room to room to do an indoor trick-or-treat. My father, because he can't hear or he doesn't read the facility's weekly newsletters, doesn't understand, so he has no candy on hand. Regardless, he seems fascinated by the princesses and vampires. "Remember Frankenstein?" he says. "I saw it in the theater as a boy. Boris Karloff. That was scary for a boy my age. And then he was in all those movies about trying to raise the dead."

"It's a wish that's always with us," I say, but he doesn't hear.

"Remember Frankenstein?" he says again. "I saw it in the theater as a boy. Boris Karloff. That was scary for a boy my age. And then he was in all those movies about trying to raise the dead."

I consider showing him the wedding notice again.

Nearly twenty-one years ago, after my mother died at home, my father told me, "Your mother didn't want a hospital. She'd just seen her sister in misery with the tubes and machines and all that coming to nothing."

This week, when we talked on the phone, my sister has told me that his chart says *Resuscitate* where a choice is asked for. Thirteen years ago, nearly eight years after my mother died, my father's heart was stopped during bypass surgery. For a year, each time I visited, he showed me his scar. "The things they can do," he said. Within the next few years, his brother and sister died of cancer. "There has to be a limit on miracles," he said at the time. "Maybe it's one for each family."

When we get home, I look up Boris Karloff's films. Sure enough, there are some that sound as if they repeat the plot of a doctor trying to raise the dead. *The Man They Could Not Hang* and *The Man with Nine Lives,* for two. The plots feature grave robbing and secret serums for curing cancer and providing eternal youth. The common denominator is Boris Karloff as the mad scientist, not the reanimated body.

6

"I never would have thought," my father frequently said after my mother died, meaning that he would outlive her.

"I thought I'd be with Ruthy by now," he repeated once he passed seventy-five, and he described an afterlife that seemed to be so much a physical continuation, I thought he expected to play golf and tend a garden forever, having time to master the sport he'd taken up in his sixties, enjoying fresh vegetables for a billion meals. By the time he was past eighty, I suspected that he worried about finding himself revived as the decrepit man he was becoming.

In 1964, when I was a freshman in college, a scientist named James McConnell published the results of his experiments with flatworms. Flatworms were stupid, difficult to teach, but he'd rehearsed them until the brightest reacted to light, learning its link to a simple shock that McConnell supplied. He pulled aside the best of those slow learners and halved those pupils to see whether their heads or tails, both of which survived, could exceed the coin flip of chance. And later, when they were completely regenerated, he doubled those gifted students again into dozens of nervous worms, ones that quivered as soon as the light flashed to prophesize the imminence of pain. They were learning, it seemed, to anticipate the agony of an artificial sunrise and the relief of darkness. Finally, eager to discover whether learning could be physically passed from one generation to another, he fed those that had mastered the simple association of light with pain to those without such training. The success he began to claim was that what one worm had learned could be transferred to another by a regulated cannibalism.

The flatworms were learning, it seemed, to anticipate the agony of an artificial sunrise and the relief of darkness.

Here, he declared, was the possibility of outrunning the slow meander of evolution. He saw the future of humanity in the precocious curling of worms, memory a matter of gorging to omniscience. There were people who, after hearing of his experiment, dreamed of their children feeding upon them, how their fear and love and knowledge would be passed on to their children, keeping them, in one sense, alive.

"Pretty soon," my father began to say at eighty-five, "I'll be the only one who remembers the old days." He told me his "growing up" stories over and over until it seemed as if he was feeding me his memory. I was a willing listener. I didn't tell him that this was my version of revival, passing through the memories of future generations.

7

In November, I read that another new oldest living person has been certified, beginning her bout with the condensed celebrity of age. As always, the biography opens with the frequencies of cigarettes, beer, and deep-fried dinners. Nobody mentions those faraway villagers who once helped to sell yogurt based on its connection to longevity. The rustic-looking peasants

Now, after more than eight decades of devotion to his church, he says nothing about eternal life, not even the back-lot pearly gates set piece of childhood.

in the television commercials were seen enjoying yogurt while the announcer claimed most of them were over one hundred years old and that some of them were one hundred and twenty or more.

I think of Joice Heth, the slave who nursed George Washington, yet lived to be displayed by P. T. Barnum at 161. Her secret, Barnum explained, was thinness, just forty-six pounds on her ancient frame, as if fasting, not yogurt, was the best defense against death.

My father, at ninety, is approaching half his former weight of 210 pounds. No matter what's served, he cleans his plate; he craves a nightly snack. He hoards the cookies and candy he refused for more than eighty years, making himself sick with overeating in his nursing-home room.

And now, after more than eight decades of devotion to his church, he says nothing about eternal life, not even the back-lot pearly gates set piece of childhood. He says less and less, his sentences shrinking like cheap trousers until, during this visit, we share the long conversation of the unsaid, rehearsing the future.

8

For a few years, the headless woman was a staple at the county fair. Justina, she was named one summer, and the pitch man claimed she'd lost her head in a faraway Egyptian train wreck. One year her name was Tiffany, who'd been decapitated when her speeding car ran under a truck. The last one I saw in person was Britt, the bikini girl, beheaded by a shark, so lucky, like the others, to die near a doctor who could save her.

Impossible, I said, by that time in junior high school, but just after I spoke, Britt shuddered, letting me know she was suddenly cold. "What she deserves, dressed like that," my mother observed. Britt's alien silhouette was shadowed on the wall behind us, a threat of flexible tubing twisting up like new plumbing from her sliced, scarf-covered throat.

No matter their names, by then I understood that those women's headless bodies were always going to be young and sexy, preserved for study as if research was driven by lust. The old and the heavy were left headless; nobody repaired boys who were reckless, a thing to consider. "Those women aren't angels," my mother cautioned. "Don't you forget that."

Which was fine with me. By that September, I was an eighth-grade smirker who wouldn't admit that all I wanted was a brainless whore who knew only what touched her—my fingertips and tongue, my lips and warm breath. Right then I was wishing that if there were miracles, I'd rather have my body saved than my soul.

9

Sometimes there are verifiable revivals. It was claimed, recently, that an eighty-one-year-old man in Chile woke up in his coffin. Sitting up, dressed in his finest suit, he asked for a drink of water before rejoining his family.

Astonishing. Although it wasn't long until the even more recent case of a two-year-old boy in Brazil who sat up in his coffin, asked his father for a drink of water, and then lay down and died again.

Sometimes, however, revival comes carrying the direct consequence of loss:

My student, years ago, was tagged incorrectly after an auto accident, his parents discovering the dead body of his friend when they were asked to verify his identity. Eventually, they were escorted to a private room so that the parents of the other young man, just arriving with anxiety and joy, would not cross their path. "Inconceivable" was how a colleague put it when we heard how they had to be told that a mistake had been made, the mother and father guided, at last, to confirm what everyone now understood to be the truth.

And sometimes revival can be extraordinarily terrible. Primo Levy tells this tale: During his days in a Nazi concentration camp, he was assigned to dispose of bodies after a gassing. On one of those occasions, a girl rose from the dead tangle of the gassed, and his work crew was saddened past despair because there was never charity in the camp, all of them knowing she would be returned to the gas, unbearably understanding what was coming, her resurrection so dreadful it would madden the living.

10

Some animals have returned from the dead, resurrected after a century extinct like the Cebu Flowerpecker or Jordan's Courser, both of them sighted and confirmed by the radar of science.

It's the work of Thomas, such confirmations, as close as laying fingertips to wounds. Consider the naturalist on Fiji who searched for Macgillivray's Petrel; consider his optimism as he set out to lure the lost from extinction's deep privacy. He spent a year sounding its call like a prayer against absence until one morning the long-missing bird flew into his head as if he were the object of desire.

Consider, too, how to present that news, breathlessly beginning, "Listen." What's next to say? Each thick history of belief is crammed with illustrations that depict the loneliness of the single sighting, the man, recently, who claimed he had seen the Ivory-billed Woodpecker sixty years after its case was closed tight by science. Without corroboration, he's become the prophet for improbability, someone with a camera who sits still and loves the silence of expectation while every faint flutter of color turns into the promise that phantoms whisper.

11

During the 1950s, a Soviet surgeon named Vladimir Demikhov sewed the heads of puppies onto full-grown dogs. Both heads were alive. The puppies even lapped milk with their tongues, though it ran from their severed throats. This is how we will be revived one day, he said, meaning with the hearts and lungs of others. Tissue rejection killed those dogs in a month or less.

Those puppies must have wondered why the milk dribbled out behind them. Their heads remind me of old dolls, the way their rubber faces, always with their one expression of breast hunger, could be squeezed loose from their pink, sexless bodies.

Those full-grown dogs, on the other hand, must have been aggravated every moment by the nuisance of a second, useless head.

12

I've made a list of the times I might have died, yet, as my mother always said, "Lived to tell about it":

Pneumonia—four bouts, each one relieved by antibiotics.

Being a passenger in a car driven by drunks or speeders—a good many times before the age of twenty-two, surviving each trip unscathed and discovering, months or years later, that several of those drivers eventually killed themselves behind the wheel.

Falling asleep while driving—not me, but the man who'd picked me up as I hitchhiked, a corn field fortunately level with the highway at the spot where he left the road.

The list doesn't seem extraordinary except for the time that I braked my Volkswagen hatchback hard when a trailer truck I was passing suddenly veered into my lane. The hatchback locked into a four-wheel drift, lurching sideways

across the median strip and through two lanes of oncoming, limited-access, speeding traffic, somehow missed by all of them before the tires, just as miraculously, caught on the opposite shoulder as I spun and ended up facing sideways.

I took a breath and chose a break in the traffic to cross back to my lanes, swerving into the passing lane where I'd been seconds before. Two miles later I exited and found myself behind that same truck at a stoplight. The truck driver climbed down and walked toward me. It was summer. The car wasn't air conditioned. My window was open. He bent down and said, "Fuck, I'm so sorry. You must be sitting in it."

It didn't take his shaken expression to convince me I'd had something like a last-second pardon.

13

We visit my father a few days before Christmas. He nods off at short intervals, a signal, I'm sure, that something serious is happening to the amount of oxygen that is reaching his brain. During the four hours we are there, the only thing he responds to is an old album of photos. "Everybody in here is dead," he says, able to name his sister and his three brothers, his two best friends, and three girlfriends, one of whom, near the end of the album, is my mother. His head sinks, one hand resting on her picture. I measure his breathing until he snaps back.

I talk to him by phone on Christmas, calling when I know my sister is there so she will answer and tell him it's me. Twice, as we speak, I am sure he nods off because there is more than a minute without a response, not even a "That's good." Two days later, while I'm interviewing candidates in San Francisco for a position at my university, he dies.

His minister tells me that my father has fallen back into resurrection's arms, his body surrendering its balance to the trust exam of eternity. He is intent on convincing me that all's well, that the dead are always revived. He doesn't ask me if I share that faith.

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Note

* I originally came upon some of the odd histories in *Elephants on Acid and Other Bizarre Experiments* by Alex Boese (Mariner Books 2007).

The Incorruptible Youth of Poetry

Stephanie V. Sears

DESPITE INCREASINGLY SOPHISTICATED and easily available acoustic and visual distractions, despite an incipient but growing aspiration toward robotic standards of performance, despite a proud faith in science and rationalism commonly opposed to lyricism as its contrary, the taste for poetry persists, not only as an aesthetic distraction but as a means to understand and experience the world. While some may disdain poetry as a futile activity left to those dreamy cicadas among us, for a significant number of others poetry emerges as a means of understanding life with more immediacy and greater breadth than science or philosophy can afford.

One might say that poetry is an offspring of youth, a youth that fundamentally has not to do with the number of years but much to do with temperament. It springs from a longing to feel and understand differently and better. It is a quest to decrypt the universe by following the wild paths of experimentation without fear, without prejudice, and with a ruthless honesty.

In this last, science and poetry may be said to be siblings, though there are obvious differences in their respective efforts. The first evolves within the realm of mathematical rigor, meticulous observation, proof testing, practical application, and development. The second evolves in the highly subjective sphere of lyrical interpretation and in the diffuse domain of inspiration. Science is a controlled effort elaborated from past and equally pragmatic restraint, while poetry, in essence, is and must be an outlaw. Nonetheless, they are similar in that they are equally fueled by that youthful energy to perceive, decipher, grasp, and deliver a harmony and a revelation.

In both, focus on a detail may trigger a broader revelation; small observations may justify a much larger inference and a more encompassing configuration. In the case of science, however, the quest is spurred on by a sense of constant incompleteness, of a perpetual "further on." The how of the discovery may be given but never its why. Science remains a hostage to its inflexible rules of rationality. Poetry, on the other hand, may provide a sudden and complete understanding by way of its own particular magic, freeing us from our three-dimensional constraints.

Despite this fundamental difference or rather, perhaps, because of it, science and poetry have approached each other, attracted to each other's sense of adventure and to the possible prospect of finding in each other that which they felt missing or inspiring in themselves. They have sometimes made significant incursions into each other's territory. This mutual magnetism has come to the attention of a few who, to prove their point, have provided lists of scientists who wrote "serious" poetry and of poets who found motivation in science.

Sometimes, in fact, lyrical interpretation of the universe has shown to have spontaneous and accurate insights into the scientific realm before the scientific discovery itself. Edgar Allan Poe's premonitory interpretation of the origin of the universe and the equivalence of time and space in his prose poem/essay "Eureka" is a famous example of such intuition. Goethe, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley, and Keats (who had scientific training) were all drawn to science as a source of inspiration, the implication being that they too might accurately perceive the functioning of nature, of the universe

by way of poetic perception. Going back in time, John Donne showed a similar preoccupation in his *An Anatomy of The World*; a Benedictine nun called Hrotsvitha wrote verse on mathematics; Geoffrey Chaucer demonstrated his interest in trigonometry in the *Canterbury Tales*; Ben Johnson wrote *The Alchemist*; John Milton approached science in *Paradise Lost*. Phineas Fletcher, in *The Purple Island*, produced an allegory of the human body and mind. Samuel Butler demonstrated his interest in astronomy in "The Elephant in The Moon." More recent writers notably inspired by science were Herman Melville, Walt Whitman, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Elias Canetti who was both Nobel Prize winner in literature and a trained chemist. The list is far from exhaustive.

Will physics and poetry feel, then, a growing need to mingle, neither relinquishing ascendancy over the other, as the boundaries of both expand and become increasingly subtle?

Scientists, for their part, have borrowed poetic language to describe and discuss famous equations by the likes of Isaac Newton, James Clark Maxwell, Albert Einstein, and Erwin Schroedinger in terms of beauty or ugliness. Such unscientific qualification, applied both to scientific relevance and to the visual quality of a formula, here related to the substance of the equation. In the initial stages of a scientific breakthrough, researchers will speak of "creativity" and of the "romance" of intuition.

The advent of quantum physics and the discovery of "oddities" challenging typical rational thinking and leading to, for example, Werner Heisenberg's principle of uncertainty, seem to have deepened the opportunities for science and poetry to cross over into each other's domain. Indeed Nobel Prize-winning physicists have seemed notably prone to writing poetry. J. C. Maxwell won a poetry prize; Richard Feynman, Marie Curie, Erwin Schrödinger, Werner Heisenberg, Maria Goeppert-Mayer, Wilhelm Busch, all wrote poetry; Max Born also translated poetry from German to English; Max Planck composed songs.

Is this outreach the effect of overactive and exceptional minds seeking another way to exercise themselves, or do scientists themselves recognize an inevitable and essential bond between the poetic and the scientific mind?

Physics research and poetry writing seem indeed at times to mirror each other in the thinking process. For example, one might say that the concept of entanglement of the universe by which the physicist Erwin Schrödinger explained the connection between particles separated by any distance also describes quite precisely that impulse of poetic inspiration during which different threads of emotion suddenly recognize each other and communicate within the poet himself. In its discovery of irregularities or idiosyncrasies in the universe, quantum physics has had to reevaluate the scientific underpinnings of impregnable logic and view the universe under a more unpredictable light. By doing so, it has taken another step toward the unpredictable world of poetry, sufficiently to consider the possibility/plausibility of an elusive, even metaphysical dimension.

Will physics (and science at large) and poetry feel, then, a growing need to mingle, neither relinquishing ascendancy over the other, as the boundaries of both expand and become increasingly subtle? Will they mutually inspire each other and perhaps attain, by way of equations and words, a truth that neither can hope to convey alone: a poetic science and a scientific poetry leading to the understanding of the essence of life?

It would be an interesting if somewhat outlandish partnership. And as with all surprising matches, one may wonder cynically if it is not based on a measure of weakness and collusion to nurture an illusion. What we call understanding, intuition, inspiration may be the result of language, history, and culture, the common tools used to conceptualize. In his *Truth and Method*, the German philosopher Hans Georg Gadamer dissects the concept of knowledge. He suggests that the words we use inevitably limit

and close us off to other understandings. Therefore, a discovery, an inspiration that would be entirely free from a given cultural basis would be nearly impossible, so that one may legitimately wonder whether both poet and scientist, instead of being ignited by timeless and pure understanding in moments of revelation, are not, like most of us, conditioned by culture, by what preceded them, by their own time and ideas brewing in that particular time broth. As in Robert Frost's poem "The Road Not Taken," science may close itself off to other paths and solutions through its inheritance of prior established scientific laws. And science and poetry, both progeny of the same bank of culture, may use similar semantic and conceptual paths and therefore mutually recognize their "truths" and reinforce each other.

Poetry, however, has an advantage over science in that, unlike science, it has always been free of any need of proof or a view toward practical application. It is, so to speak, its own self and for its own sake, free of the sequence of progress and therefore perhaps more apt to transform.

While we continue to live by scientific principles discovered long ago, the enthusiasm and surprise they once generated have somewhat faded, the discoveries having gradually been taken for granted. Whereas if the fascination and pleasure drawn from reading a poem were to the reader only a question of its relevance to a particular period, he or she should only be moved by poems written during or around his or her lifetime and not centuries before. But this is not the case, and a poem several centuries old can infuse one with a gut-wrenching sense of beauty and revelation. The incorruptible youth of poetry resides in an expression of freedom that relies fundamentally on the sensitivity and intuition of inspiration, rather than on paradigms of logic and proven evidence. By its law-breaking nature, poetry is compelled to create alterations, loopholes, hybrids of thought that in turn help to bring the mind to new dimensions.

The impulse to compose a poem is the urge to transform the personal experience, be it pleasurable or not, into something vastly more comprehensive; it is a profound desire to transcend the egoistic experience of I in the moment and elevate it to the ineffable. Each word, each pause wishes to "live out" a kind of unity with all consciousness. To achieve this result does not necessitate a standard progression of the poetic phrase from A to B to C. More likely, there will occur a skipping over in any direction according to the leaps of inspiration. In the best of cases, a previously invisible underlay of the visible human experience will emerge. A poem may thus give an enlightening reply to a question without any obvious process of induction or deduction, but by way of emotion in which a truth, an ideal is felt. Despite the absence of a strict format dictated by determinacy as in science, it will nonetheless irresistibly convey a reality. In fact, the genuineness of the initial emotion is essential for the poem to be recognized as successful and true. One has entered another dimension.

Over the centuries, the poet has transformed himself from magician, genealogist/historian, raconteur, musician, to warrior-poet (as typified by the samurai in Japan), to the visionary physicist of words described by Arthur Rimbaud in *Les Illuminations*.

Whatever poetry's social role may have been, the value of the poet, like that of the scientist in the sphere of research, has resided in absolute honesty, in the authenticity of inspiration. Because genuine emotion is fresh by nature, composing poetry is essentially a youthful act, and the text will preserve that youth in which the initial emotion can neither dwindle nor die. This, in turn, conveys an aura of immortality to the poet that science has not quite been able to offer the scientist, however great; perhaps because, as said previously, science is rooted in the tangible and provable, to the contrary of poetry.

One may wonder with some excitement—if science and poetry continue their relationship in more systematic fashion and if science takes this relationship seriously—whether poetry might not be able to trigger an acceleration, even a mutation within the process of scientific discovery that will help humanity achieve more than just partial understanding of the universe.

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ANSWERING MIDAS

he paces pulls at his beard
and asks old men
—how many days does the ant live
—why does the dog howl before a death
—how high would a mountain be
piled from the bones
of all past animals and humans

Zbigniew Herbert

Its days uncounted
as the first Israelites,
the ant dies by intuition,
weakening beneath a crumb
that will mark its grave
until gleaned by a colleague
from humus manured

by the scats of a howling dog
that smells decay even before
cells switch off and darken
every window in the body's city.
his voice thus precedes
the stretching of sheets over faces
and unknowingly laments the day

his own ant-cleaned bones are set
atop the heap of past creatures,
above dinosaur strata, mammoth midden,
Greeks and Trojans in level defeat,
interspersed with fragments
of shrew and tortoise, and farmers
fallen in the turning of seasons.
Thicker layers mark Crusades,
a Cultural Revolution,
and rise to a summit
past the altitude of bones
where one could confirm these words.

We are likely to be waiting for you there,
but, gladly, we would follow.

J. D. Smith

A Caravaggio Meditation

Edmund N. Santurri

My candidate for the greatest Christian painter in the history of the West is the seventeenth-century Italian painter Michelangelo Merisi, better known as "Caravaggio."[1] "Caravaggio" is actually the name of the place in Northern Italy where Merisi was born, or at least spent a good bit of his young life (historians are not agreed on this matter). Thus, "*Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio*." The artist sometimes signed his name that way, but among art historians he is known as just "Caravaggio." Of all his paintings, my favorite is called variously "The Taking of Christ," "The Betrayal of Christ," "The Arrest of Christ," or "The Kiss of Judas" and was painted by Caravaggio as a private commission for a man named Ciriaco Mattei, probably in 1602 or 1603. The painting's subject matter, of course, is given in the New Testament texts that recount Judas's betrayal of Jesus with a kiss. The painting was thought to have been lost for about four hundred years and was rediscovered in the early 1990s in a Jesuit house in Dublin, Ireland. The Jesuit brothers residing there thought that what they had in the house was a copy of the original Caravaggio done by the Dutch artist Gerard von Honthorst, but the painting was identified, again in the early 1990s, as an authentic Caravaggio by Sergio Benedetti, Senior Curator of the National Gallery of Ireland in Dublin. The painting is now on permanent loan to the Dublin gallery for general display. I have not seen the painting in that setting, but some years ago I had the opportunity to see the work in a special exhibit at the McMullen Museum of Boston College. People who know me know that I am not given typically to transcendent experiences, but seeing this painting was about as close to a transcendent experience as I am likely to get.

We should always resist the temptation to reduce a painting's meaning to the artist's biography, but in any interpretation of Caravaggio's art, it is hard to neglect his life entirely. What about that life?[2] When I lecture on Caravaggio, I sometimes say that we can think of him as the Bobby Knight of the seventeenth-century Italian art world. Those who know about the career of the fiery former basketball coach at Indiana University and Texas Tech will sense my intention in employing the analogy. Bobby Knight, of course, has been and still is commonly recognized as a basketball genius, but his public behavior also has been deplored as boorish, bullying, outrageous... "in your face," one might say. Like Bobby Knight, Caravaggio was consistently "in your face" or, more accurately, in the face of his contemporaries. Though he was widely recognized, at least in certain significant quarters, as an artistic genius, he was also constantly in trouble, and the public records offer a litany of transgressions, including: throwing a plate of artichokes in a waiter's face during a dispute about the food's quality, carrying his sword in public without a license, drawing his sword against another man in a love dispute over a prostitute, throwing stones at his landlady's window when she accused him of not paying his rent, harassing a woman and her daughter about some unidentified matter, writing and distributing verses mocking his rival contemporary artist Giovanni Baglione, an action for which Caravaggio was sued by Baglione for slander—and most disturbing of all, murdering a

The Taking of Christ. Caravaggio. c. 1602.

man in a fight over a tennis match. Because of the murder, Caravaggio fled Rome where he had lived for many years and had done his greatest work. He spent the rest of his life as a fugitive, in Naples, Sicily, and then Malta where he joined the Knights of Malta until he was expelled from the order and imprisoned after a conflict with another member. Eventually, he escaped prison and returned to Sicily and then to Naples, where he was horribly disfigured in a sword fight. He ended his life in commensurate fashion. Having just received a papal pardon for the murder, he was traveling north on the western coast of Italy toward Rome in a small boat with all his goods. Along the way, the boat pulled into a small port, and there Caravaggio was mistaken for another criminal and arrested. When the mistake was discovered, he was released only to find that his boat with all his worldly goods had left without him. He chased the boat on foot along the western coast until he died in pursuit, apparently of malaria.

So we are talking about a complex life, outstanding and outrageous. The complexity is captured ironically (at least for English speakers) in a phrase that appears in a contract for one of Caravaggio's Roman commissions (Rowland 1999). The contract identifies the artist in Latin as "*egregius in Urbe pictor*," which literally means "the outstanding painter in the city." In Italian today the phrase would be "*egregio… pittore*," but our English word derived from the Latin "*egregius*" no longer means, of course, outstanding in any positive sense. In English "egregious" suggests something that stands out *in a bad sense*—something flagrant, outrageous. So for those of us who think in English, the irony of the Latin identification is inescapable even if originally unintended. Caravaggio was the outstanding painter in the city of Rome but also the outrageous painter in the city. That Caravaggio himself sensed the outrageous character of his own life is suggested by the story that the artist would not take holy water in a Sicilian church "because it only absolved venial sins" and his sins were "all mortal" (Puglisi 1998, 253). Apart from that incident, we don't have much external evidence either about Caravaggio's actual religious convictions or about his attitudes toward his own spiritual condition. We can imag-

ine that as a seventeenth-century Italian painter he held the convictions typically held by denizens of seventeenth-century Counter-Reformation Catholic Italy—even if a few of his paintings were seen by certain Catholic authorities as violating standards of religious and moral decorum. At any rate, as one scholar has put it, the best evidence of the artist's religious or spiritual disposition is indeed given in the paintings themselves (Varriano 1999). After meditating on those paintings, I sense that Caravaggio did harbor deep Christian convictions, but that he did so with a bit of an attitude.

With all of that as background, let us return now to "The Taking of Christ." Just to the left of center, of course, are the two main characters of the narrative. A balding Judas, garbed in the iconographically-traditional yellow, seems just to have planted the infamous kiss. Or perhaps he is just about to plant the kiss. In any event, he grips his victim from the viewer's right with his left grubby hand (the grubbiness reflecting both Caravaggio's relentless naturalism and his use of live models). Judas stares at Jesus, waiting, so it seems, uncertainly, anxiously, for some response from the man he is betraying. In Judas's face, we detect perhaps the beginnings of the eventual despair that generates his suicide in one biblical account. Jesus, on the other hand, is no less than love crushed. His face, like Judas's, illumined by a light source from the left, reveals a certain meditative calm, but signals also a kind of wearied spiritual deflation or resignation. The enmeshed fingers of his clasped hands now being pulled apart suggest a prayerful attitude broken by the onrush of violence. The exhausted sadness of his face, again, is so heavy that it seems to bear the burden of all the world's exhaustion in its totality of persecuted moments. Three ominous figures (either Roman soldiers or temple police) break in from the viewer's right and seem to concentrate in their darkened, armored presences all of the world's evil force in one consummate moment of violence. At the far left, a figure flees in horror. He suggests the young man identified by the Synoptic Gospels as the Jesus follower who is grabbed by the arresting agents but who finally escapes running off naked, leaving behind his only garment, a linen cloth—though Caravaggio departs from literal depiction by indicating that the man will have something left to wear even after he has lost his flowing red robe. There is also a tradition of biblical interpretation that associates the fleeing figure with St. John the Evangelist, and Caravaggio affirms the association by depicting the young man without facial hair, just as St. John is typically depicted in Christian iconographic tradition. Art historians commonly note that the young man's horror-stricken head seems to emerge Siamese-like from the back of Jesus's own, standing symbolically as a double of Jesus's psyche and suggesting thereby that underneath Jesus's calm, if saddened, visage is a deep sense of horror over this act of betrayal. As the action rushes narratively from right to left the subjects are thrust aesthetically from the picture's depth forward crowding the space at the picture plane (in the viewer's face, as it were). Indeed, the armored plate of the soldier's left shoulder and upper arm seems to burst through the picture plane invading the viewer's space. The forward thrust of the subject matter is heightened by chiaroscuro; the dark background, that is to say, pushes the action forward into the viewer's space. Characteristically, Caravaggio is insistent, confrontational. His manipulation of space challenges the viewer with the subject matter.

I have left for last the curious dark, bearded, un-helmeted figure to the far right holding a lantern, craning, rubber-necking upward and toward the left, struggling to see, or to illuminate what he dimly sees. There is no explicit biblical warrant for this figure though there are aesthetic antecedents. As noted by art historian Catherine Puglisi, previous visual renderings of the betrayal scene (e.g., Durer's) depict a lantern-bearing figure at the periphery (Puglisi 1998, 220). What is striking about Caravaggio's figure is that in a painting dominated by chiaroscuro (or light-dark contrast) the figure seems with his own lantern to cast no light at all—except perhaps on his own face. Again, the painting's principal light source comes mysteriously from the left outside the picture frame. This flood of light serves to heighten dramatic intensity and three-dimensionality, but its mysterious source also conveys a sense of spiri-

tual or supernatural presence without disrupting the naturalism of the rendering. Yet, back to the lantern-bearing figure who casts no light and to the most intriguing thing of all. Art historians are largely agreed that this figure is none other than Caravaggio himself. In this account, the artist has put himself in the painting, and he has depicted himself as one straining to see, to comprehend this remarkable event—as one who tries to cast light but fails. True enlightenment, true understanding, has another source. Is this Caravaggio's judgment on his own limitations as artist to capture the full significance of this deeply spiritual event? Perhaps. Certain commentators (e.g., Varriano 1999, 202) have suggested as much.

Actually, I am not entirely convinced by the art-historical arguments that the lantern-bearing figure in this painting is a self-portrait. As opposed to other Caravaggio paintings where self-portraits are identified, there is no external evidence in this case that the artist intended such, and while a character looking like this and drawing our attention in this way appears in other paintings of the artist, there are significant physical differences between the characters and available portraits of Caravaggio. At the same time, I can understand why historians have been prompted to make the identification. The figure stands not as a principal agent in the events but as an onlooker, a bystander—and an artist is an onlooker, a bystander of sorts.

Yet there is another way of looking at the matter. The figure is also a bystander in the sense that he simply stands by. He looks, cranes, stretches, rubber-necks, almost luridly at this awful event—but does nothing. He does not intervene. He raises no questions, issues no protests. He looks innocent enough, just a curious passerby trying to take a peek. He intentionally does no harm. He just stands by and gawks, just as we stand by and gawk—certainly at the painting. Caravaggio has thrust us into the scene with consummate artistic skill, yet we are still onlookers. We stand by and gawk, again, at the painting, but like the lantern-bearing figure on the right we also stand by and gawk at this event of betrayal and more generally we stand by and gawk luridly when the subject matter of the painting, the betrayal of the innocent, is endlessly reenacted in the history of the world. Of course, we distance ourselves from the world's Judases. We actively intend no harm. We just look, try to see, try to understand, and do nothing.

Church historians often note that seventeenth-century Counter-Reformation Italy was a culture suffused with the penitential spirit and that this spirit marked the art of the period. I read Caravaggio's "The Taking of Christ" as an expression of that penitential spirit. The painting invites us to identify with the lantern bearing figure on the right, to consider the various ways we stand by and do nothing when the innocent are betrayed, to recognize our complicity with Judas even as we are distanced from him. Like Peter who denied knowing Christ, we may not actively betray the innocent, but we refuse to combat betrayal in a vigorous way. To be blunt, we are, more often than not, cowards—when the innocent are persecuted, when injustice is done. Caravaggio's painting invites us to consider the various ways this is so. Indeed, as I recall, a placard at the Boston exhibit noted that the light-reflecting armor plate seeming to break into the viewer's space suggests a mirror inviting the observer's self-reflection in a way consistent with mirror iconography in the Counter-Reformation art world. More generally, the painting is a kind of call to self-conviction and penance, just as it may have been for the painter himself a kind of penitential exercise.

I sense that Caravaggio for all his braggadocio was a man well-attuned to his own failings and the failings of the world. I sense also that he was a man well-attuned to the various evasions, self-deceptions and hypocrisies by which the world covers its failings, well attuned to the world's consistent efforts to get to Easter without passing through Good Friday. And he was particularly well-positioned to see all of this because his own life was a kind of Good Friday. ✟

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Endnotes

1. What follows is the latest version of a meditation originally delivered as a chapel talk at St. Olaf College some years ago.

2. My account of Caravaggio's life and work draws, in varying degree, on the commentary and analysis of prominent art historians, especially. Friedlaender 1955, Graham-Dixon 2010, Hibbard 1985, Langdon 1999, Puglisi 1998, Rowland 1999, Seward 1998, Varriano 1999 and 2006, and Wilson-Smith 1998.

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ST. FRANCIS WORKS AT THE COLUMBUS ZOO

At night, I take off my shoes.
We pretend we're in West Africa. Together,
we talk of rubber trees, how you miss the warm
throats of antelopes, a sun so hot the earth smells
of distant fires. We imagine our feet
calloused from heat, away from the patches of night-
silver snows in Ohio. Mostly, I'm here
to listen, then remind you of your role. Isn't that
what we all need from time to time,
for someone else to notice, say *Yes,*
you're living what you were made for?

Other workers play poker in the aquarium lobby
or sleep near the gift shop after feeding
the nocturnals. They only suspect me once, the night
two high school boys dared one another to sneak into
the polar bear pool before dawn.
One boy's hand was already missing
by the time they all got there, having heard
the screams. I was already in the water
talking not to the boys, to the bears.

Tonight, the same bears are teaching two cubs
a creation myth, describe great walls of ice
that they will never touch.

Remembering only a land of heat, you want to hear
this story, too. So we follow winding sidewalks
to the other side of the world. Animals reach
beyond cages, tuck small flowers in your mane:
bush deer and elephant, pepper bird, baboon.
Cool cement beneath our feet, distant
highways for rivers, streetlamps for giraffes.
Does a soul really change when we can't see
its beginning?

Becca J. R. Lachman

Remembering Lincoln

Robert Elder

"It's all now you see. Yesterday won't be over until tomorrow and tomorrow began ten thousand years ago. For every Southern boy fourteen years old, not once but whenever he wants it, there is the instant when it's still not yet two o'clock on that July afternoon in 1863..."

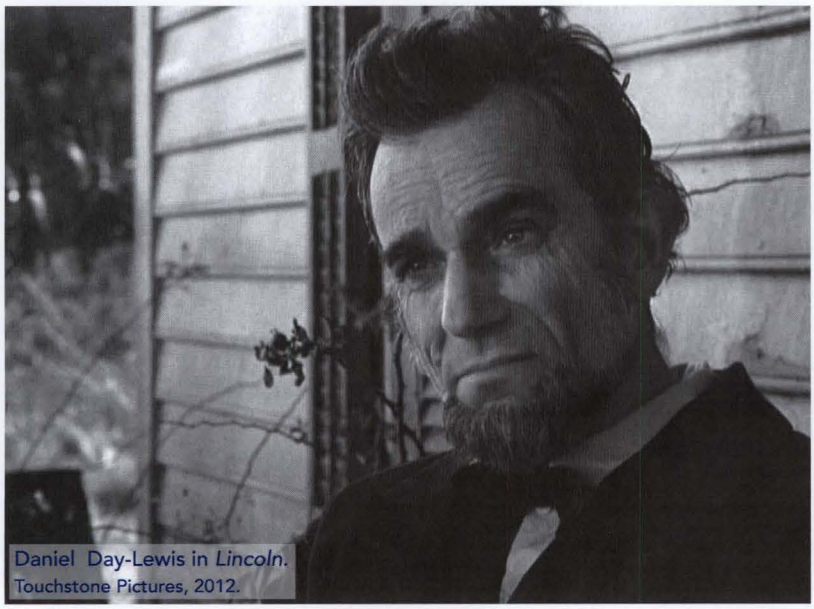
William Faulkner on
Pickett's Charge at Gettysburg,
from *Intruder in the Dust* (1948)

The first time that Abraham Lincoln appears on the screen in Steven Spielberg's *Lincoln*, he is sitting on a bench under a canopy in a rainstorm with his famous stovepipe hat sitting beside him. Sitting in a darkened theater, I felt the hair on the back of my neck rise as he appeared. I felt a little as if I had encountered a long-dead relative, the memory of whose physical presence lay housed deep in my mind, nearly forgotten, until now. The feeling owed little to Daniel Day-Lewis's overwhelming performance as our sixteenth president, which really had yet to begin, or to Spielberg's attention to historical detail, a trait that, while appreciated by historians such as myself, rarely raises the hair on the back of my neck no matter how expertly executed. Instead, I think the feeling happened because of how the Civil War and its characters, Lincoln in particular, occupy the same mental territory in the American mind as the quasi-religious construct of the nation itself. They prompt the same subterranean responses elicited by symbols of the nation such as the flag. Robert Penn Warren once wrote that the Civil War is not only the "great single event" of American history, but that "it may, in fact, be said to *be* American history." The war, Warren famously wrote, is our only "felt" history. This is one of the reasons that the film Spielberg and Day-Lewis have so lovingly and carefully crafted is so powerful, and yet as we sit in the darkened theater we must recognize that we have left the realm of history, strictly understood, behind, and entered the deep and murky pool of memory.

Most responses to Spielberg's masterpiece from historians have focused on the extent to which it gets the history right or wrong. There is a lot to like about the film in this regard, most of it revolving around Day-Lewis's portrayal of Lincoln. From his squeaky tenor voice to his plodding, springless gait, there is ample evidence that Day-Lewis did the research on his subject; these characteristics are drawn directly from contemporary descriptions of Honest Abe. In one scene, the film's passion for historical detail even extends to the ticking sound of a watch, which Spielberg reportedly captured by recording a watch once carried by Lincoln. My own favorite part of the marriage between Tony Kushner's script and Day-Lewis's portrayal was the way Lincoln often broke into extended stories to make a point, a trait of Lincoln's that contemporary observers sometimes recorded with frustration. In addition, several of the casting decisions in the film are inspired, particularly David Strathairn as Secretary of State William Seward (the physical resemblance between Strathairn and Seward is uncanny) and James Spader as the wheeling and dealing W. N. Bilbo, a character based on a Tennessee lawyer who helped lobby for the Thirteenth Amendment and who serves in the film as the embodiment of the era's horse-trading style of politics. In particular, historians have applauded Spielberg's recreation of Lincoln's political style, which mixed a fierce pursuit of ultimate goals with a remarkable

flexibility and awareness of the limits and possibilities of the political moment.

Other historians have taken Spielberg to task for a wide array of alleged historical inaccuracies and half-truths in the film. One intrepid historian analyzed Tony Kushner's script using the Google Ngram project, which tracks word usage over time in all the print materials digitized by Google. He found a variety of anachronisms in the film, including words and phrases such as "racial equality," "bipartisan," "peace talks," and a soldier named Kevin, a name that was not in wide usage in the mid-nineteenth century.



Daniel Day-Lewis in *Lincoln*.
Touchstone Pictures, 2012.

Some of the more significant half-truths in the film concern the issue of race and the agency of African Americans. Some point out that the film ignores the fact that it was the self-emancipation of hundreds of thousands of slaves who escaped to northern lines during the war that eventually forced Lincoln's administration to consider the abolition of slavery as a war aim that would weaken the Confederacy and keep the English, who sympathized with the Confederacy but had recently abolished slavery throughout their empire, out of the war.

Still others have decried the lack of complex black characters in the film. Elizabeth Kleckley and William Slade, the White House servants who are the film's central black characters, were in real life leaders of the free black community in Washington and members of societies aimed at aiding fugitive slaves and supporting economic opportunity for freed blacks, but you would never know this from the movie. It would have added a great deal of dramatic depth to the film to show Kleckley and Slade as leaders in their own community while at the same time serving in the White House, but this might have detracted somewhat from the film's depiction of Lincoln as a champion of equality and human rights.

Others point out that Spielberg felt the need to massage the historical details in order to set up the dilemma that Lincoln struggles with throughout the film: whether to negotiate with the approaching Confederate peace commissioners and possibly end the war with slavery still intact or to prolong the bloody conflict in order to bring the peculiar institution to its final and definite demise through a constitutional amendment. The best reading of the available evidence concerning the Hampton Roads Conference, the meeting between Lincoln and Confederate officials such as Vice President Alexander Stephens that occurred in February of 1865, only a few days after the House of Representatives approved the Thirteenth Amendment, suggests that Lincoln never truly considered the possibility that the meeting might end the war. Instead, as David Herbert Donald, Lincoln's most famous biographer, suggests, Lincoln appears to have viewed the conference as an opportunity to give ammunition to Southerners who favored surrender and peace. Lincoln's consistent and constantly proclaimed position was that the war could be ended instantly, but only by an immediate cessation of hostilities and a willingness to rejoin the Union on the part of the Southern states. However, he was fully aware that Jefferson Davis had irrevocably committed himself to Southern independence. Thus Lincoln proclaimed to

Congress in December of 1864 that the issue "between him and us... can only be tried by war, and decided by victory." The conference, in other words, was inconsequential.

Spielberg himself has been quick to concede that his creation is not completely historically accurate. Speaking at the 149th anniversary of the battle of Gettysburg last year, Spielberg thanked all the historians who served as consultants for the film, while clearly delineating their work from his own. Standing on a dais erected near where Lincoln gave his famous address, Spielberg said, "You gave us the history from which we made our historical fiction." He then eloquently described the difference between history and art. "One of the jobs of art is to go to the impossible places that other disciplines like history must avoid," he declared. "Through art we enlist the imagination to bring what's lost back to us, to bring the dead back to life. This resurrection is of course just an illusion, it's a fantasy, and it's a dream. But dreams matter somehow to us."

Spielberg clearly considers his work art, not history, and yet this distinction does not completely capture the complexity of *Lincoln*. The unique combination of art and history that *Lincoln* represents, and which distinguishes it from other kinds of art, identifies it as an example of historical memory, an attempt to put the past to work in the present. Hollywood has a long history of producing this sort of memory, beginning in 1915 with D. W. Griffith's anti-Reconstruction, pro-Klan screed *The Birth of a Nation*, which represented Reconstruction as a misguided attempt to impose the national will and black rule on a noble, conquered South. This particular way of remembering Reconstruction later undergirded resistance to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. In his own day, Griffith's art was considered history, pure and simple. Woodrow Wilson reportedly likened the film to "writing history with lightning," while a number of academic historians at the time generally embraced and propagated Griffith's view of Reconstruction. While most viewers today can instantly recognize the agenda behind Griffith's particular way of remembering the past, reviewers of *Lincoln* today busily assess its historical accuracy and often forget to ask what the stakes of this particular form of remembering might be. Historical memory, as recent political movements as various as the project to recover a Christian America, the Tea Party, and Occupy Wall Street have proved, is a potent motivator in the field of popular politics, and viewers would do well to consider the particular implications of *Lincoln* as an artifact of historical memory, rather than as simple history.

> Spielberg's decision to focus his film on the last year of the war and the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment serves the interests of both art and memory well, but it serves the interests of history poorly and possibly to our peril.

As the epigraph at the beginning of this review attests, there have always been different ways of remembering the Civil War and its aftermath. Robert Penn Warren divided these streams of historical memory into two great rivers. Writing in the mid-twentieth century, Warren wrote that for the South the war would always be "the Great Alibi," the explanation and excuse for all the South's problems. Equally pernicious wrote Warren, was the way the war functioned in Northern memory as "the Treasury of Virtue," a moment of national righteousness that could cover a whole host of sins and justify a thousand crusades. It was just this sense of historical righteousness, the sense of being redeemed and justified by history, that theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, writing a few years before Warren, had identified as the myth of American innocence that fueled an arrogant approach to foreign policy during the Cold War.

This particular myth reared its head again after the events of September 11, 2001 and arguably sent us careening into two wars from which we have yet to extricate ourselves. *Lincoln* represents a furthering of this particular myth. In this regard, Spielberg's decision to focus his film on the last year of the war and the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment serves the interests of both art and memory well, but it serves the interests of history poorly and possibly to our peril. By focusing on the culmination of Lincoln's and the country's long and winding journey to emancipation, and obscuring the costs and historical exigencies of that moment, Spielberg has constructed a potent parable of political courage for the present. But, as he himself said in his speech at Gettysburg, "history forces us to acknowledge the limits of memory." And, one might add, its dangers.

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TRESTLE

(Newly Engaged, 1997)

We peal and snort through Highland Park,
send a few ground hogs under the lilacs,

gray squirrel into mountain laurel,
heron to perch on Frederick Douglass

whose face, through blue feathers,
lets me know that this laughter's inculpable,

clean, corrective—
this dreaming that's above good sense

like a natural arboretum, in whose sunken garden
freedom-fighters wear their hair long,

or a fishplate cross-tying two sleepers,
railroad conceived of a star.

Bethany Bowman

King Derwin, Big Jim, and President Obama

The Role of Apology in American Political Discourse

Jennifer Lynn Miller

Dr Seuss's book *Bartholomew and the Oobleck* tells the story of a king who apologizes. One year, King Derwin of Didd tires of the regular weather; sun, rain, snow, and fog are no longer enough for him. He demands that his magicians create a *new* kind of weather, and so they do—they create oobleck. While the king is overjoyed to see this new, green substance falling from the sky, Bartholomew Cubbins, the king's page, is hesitant and wonders whether oobleck is safe. Bartholomew's fears turn out to be well founded. The oobleck is sticky, and before too long, everyone in the Kingdom of Didd is stuck to something.

The climax of the book comes as King Derwin is searching for magic words to make the oobleck go away and Bartholomew finally demands that the king instead look for some "simple words"—"I'm sorry." Bartholomew tells the king, "You may be a mighty king, [b]ut you're sitting in oobleck up to your chin. And so is everyone else in your land. And if you won't even say you're sorry, *you're no sort of a king at all!*" Bartholomew turns to leave the king stuck to his throne, but King Derwin calls him back, admits his fault, and apologizes. Once the king has said the words, "I'm sorry," the oobleck melts away and everything goes back to normal. King Derwin's apology turns out to be magic after all.

Science-fiction author Stephen King's *Under the Dome* is a very different kind of book than *Bartholomew and the Oobleck*, but it also portrays the act of admitting fault as possessing nearly magical qualities. King's 2009 novel tells the story of the fictional town of Chester's Mill, Maine and how one day, a giant force-field-like dome instantaneously appears around the borders of the entire town, completely cutting it off from the rest of the world. King shifts between several characters' perspectives as he tells the story, including Dale "Barbie" Barbara, a former Army officer who was just passing through Chester's Mill; Julia Shumway, the editor of the local newspaper; and James "Big Jim" Rennie, the most influential of the town's elected officials. The novel explores not only what made the dome appear, but also how the behavior of the people of Chester's Mill shifts as a result of being cut off from the rest of the world.

While Barbie works with town residents and outside military personnel to find the source of the dome, Big Jim Rennie seems primarily interested in using the catastrophe of the dome to secure his own political power. Big Jim, it turns out, is not the one responsible for the appearance of the dome, but he *is* responsible for several horrible events that happen after the dome arrives: the riot at the grocery store, several murders, a chaotic and deadly town meeting, and most notably, the police raid on a meth lab that he himself has created. The police raid on the meth lab results in the lab being blown up, an explosion that consumes all of the oxygen under the dome. Only thirty-two of the residents of Chester's Mill survive the inferno, mostly those who were near the edge of the dome and able to suck oxygen through the barely permeable barrier.

Big Jim Rennie is one of those survivors. Much like King Derwin of Didd, he is stuck—not to his throne, but in a fallout shelter under city hall. The only person with him is Carter Thibodeau, one of the town's police officers. When Big Jim snaps irritably at him, Carter thinks, "*Don't you snap at me when you were the one who made this happen. The one who's responsible.*" But unlike Bartholomew Cubbins, Carter Thibodeau keeps his thoughts to himself; he does not take Big Jim to task for his role in the town's annihilation.

Nor does Big Jim recognize his fault on his own. As time passes, Big Jim kills Carter to prolong the supply of oxygen in the shelter. Now alone in the dark, Big Jim becomes increasingly panicked. He prays, but his prayers are not those of a penitent man. Rather, Big Jim's prayer "was basically a series of demands and rationalizations: make it stop, none of it was my fault, get me out of here, I did the best I could, put everything back the way it was, I was let down by incompetents..." Big Jim's disavowal of personal responsibility for the fate of Chester's Mill and its inhabitants is a stark contrast to King Derwin's acknowledgement of and remorse for his own failures as a leader.

The elements of an apology—an owning of responsibility, a desire to right a wrong, and an openness to communication—are qualities that we value in ourselves, our friends and lovers, and our children.

These two fictional examples of King Derwin and Big Jim Rennie stand in stark contrast to each other, but the overall message of the two narratives is quite similar. While King Derwin apologized and restored his kingdom to its rightful state, Big Jim refused to admit responsibility and eventually dies amidst the ruins of the town that he governed. In these depictions, both King and Seuss paint a picture of a good leader as one who can accept responsibility for his (or her) actions, acknowledge personal limitations, and apologize when things go wrong. And in an interview with *Time* magazine (November 9, 2009, online), King made the real-world implications of such a portrayal explicit, as he criticized the George W. Bush administration for what King views as an unjustified war in Iraq.

King Derwin and Big Jim continue to be relevant in the current Obama administration, as both came to mind after watching the third debate of the 2012 US presidential election. During this debate, Governor Mitt Romney criticized President Barack Obama for what Romney called "an apology tour, of going to various nations in the Middle East and criticizing America." Obama responded to Romney's claim by vehemently rejecting this idea; he stated, "Nothing Governor Romney just said is true, starting with this notion of me apologizing. This has been probably the biggest whopper that's been told during the course of this campaign. And every fact checker and every reporter who's looked at it, Governor, has said this is not true." While pundits later discussed whether Obama had, in fact, apologized for the policies of the United States, what is notable here is that in a debate filled with disagreement, in this moment, both Romney and Obama agreed on one thing: apologizing is a political strategy to be rejected.

Certainly, there is a fundamental difference between King Derwin's apology and President Obama's alleged "apology" tour. King Derwin's apology was a personal one, while Romney was concerned about statements that Obama made that seemed to apologize on behalf of the nation as a whole. But even in instances where a more personal apology would be appropriate, President Obama seems to shy away from the words, "I'm sorry." In the second presidential debate, when moderator Candy Crowley asked who was responsible for the events surrounding the attacks on the US consulate in Benghazi, Libya, Obama replied, "I'm the president and I'm always responsible, and that's why nobody's more interested in finding out exactly what happened than I do [*sic*]." While the president admits responsibility, the words following this admission were a call to action, rather than an apology. This observation is not meant as a specific critique of President Obama, but rather as an indicator of how in American society apologies are perceived as signs of weakness and failure, rather than strength.

But does this truly reflect what we, as Americans, think about apologies? In the 1970 film *Love Story*, Jennifer Cavilleri (played by Ali MacGraw) famously tells Oliver Barrett (played by Ryan O'Neal), "Love means never having to say you're sorry." Cavelleri's words are so memorable in part because we recognize them as fundamentally

untrue—love means being willing to apologize, to humble yourself for the sake of repairing a relationship. And starting when they are very young, we teach our children to say "I'm sorry" when they hurt someone. The elements of an apology—an owning of responsibility, a desire to right a wrong, and an openness to communication—are qualities that we value in ourselves, our friends and lovers, and our children. King's and Seuss's texts emphasize the importance of these elements in a good leader, too, and suggest that perhaps, there should be a larger place in American political discourse for an honest apology.

But *Under the Dome* and *Bartholomew and the Oobleck* do more than simply provide guidance for a country's leaders; both texts also portray actions of individual citizens that are needed for good leadership to be possible. Bartholomew Cubbins challenges King Derwin, refusing to let him wallow in self-pity and denial. Without Bartholomew Cubbins, the oobleck would still cover the entire Kingdom of Didd. While Carter Thibodeau does not challenge Big Jim in the same way, the contrast between him and Bartholomew highlights how speaking up is a difficult, and often dangerous, thing to do. Individual citizens play a vital role in bringing leaders face to face with their mistakes, often putting their own reputations, livelihoods, and even lives on the line for the sake of society at large.

Even more important, however, is the role played by the remaining citizens of Chester's Mill at the end of *Under the Dome*. Big Jim, dies alone and forgotten, and it is these citizens who finally get the dome lifted. It turns out that the dome has been put in place by a group of young children from an extremely advanced alien race—a race that views humanity as nothing more than ants. In a last attempt to get the dome lifted, Julia Shumway communicates telepathically with the alien race, putting on display everything from her life that she is most ashamed of. She also draws on Barbie's shameful memories from his time in Iraq, along with her own recognition that she and the citizens of Chester's Mill were responsible for electing Big Jim Rennie. Somehow this act of admitting and repenting for these actions convinces one of the aliens to lift the dome and set the surviving inhabitants of Chester's Mill free.

King includes a discussion of pity and shame that makes this chain of events more complex than a straightforward cause-and-effect relationship, but when read in conversation with *Bartholomew and the Oobleck*, the important role played by individual citizens is once again made clear. Here, though, the role of the citizens is not to call for an apology, as Bartholomew Cubbins does, but to apologize themselves—to admit how they have contributed to the messes that surround them. And so, before we storm up to the throne room, the Oval Office, or even the local city hall, demanding acknowledgement of mistakes and public apologies for them, we should recognize the role that we have played in enabling and even creating such events. Maybe then we will create an environment in which an honest apology is a recognized and valuable part of American political discourse.

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The Day of Betrayal

Paul Koch

My parishioners are familiar with me saying: "The lectionary is nice, but..." I have always enjoyed having some calendar of scripture readings. I am far too indecisive to be left picking out lessons each week, and I am glad for the challenge to preach on texts I might not otherwise consider. So, the lectionary is nice, but...

One of the flaws of the *Revised Common Lectionary*, as used in Evangelical Lutheran Worship, is its excising of texts. The Psalms are an easy place to see it. Glance at a hymnal and its list of propers, and you will see Psalms chopped up like a fruit salad. Here and there, verses are left out, mostly imprecations against the Psalmist's enemies. Psalm 17 is used three times in the lectionary, but never verses 10–14: "Arise, O Lord! Confront him, subdue him!" Psalm 31 is used four times, but not verses 6–8: "I hate those who pay regard to worthless idols." Psalm 72 appears twice, but not verses 8–9, where the king's enemies lick the dust. The lectionary has a clear distaste for violence, although it leaves one to wonder how effective its paring of texts is. The curses in the Psalms' prayers of imprecation do have a point. Instead of resolving matters ourselves, violence come what may, we leave the matter to God by praying for deliverance from our enemies.

The absence of the Psalms' curses from the lectionary may be due to nothing more than the old embarrassment over the Bible's honest depiction of sin. What kind of holy book tells of patriarchs passing off their wives as their sisters or uses a prophet marrying a prostitute as an object lesson for God's faithfulness? Actually, the greatest embarrassment for many Christians is not that the Bible is populated by sinners, but that the Bible tells of a God who continues to deal with them. Marcion is alive and well, and he has been given a place on the lectionary committee.

One of the lectionary's most interesting excisions comes on Maundy Thursday. Maundy comes from the old Latin *mandatum*, arising from Christ's giving of a new mandate, a new commandment. On this night, we hear from John 13 about Christ washing his disciples' feet, leaving them an example and a new commandment: "Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another." It is a stirring moment in the Gospels, when Christ, on the eve of his death, performs an act of tender service for his followers. His humble act challenges the church in her care for others in need. The text as presented by the lectionary, however, leaves out some crucial details. Older lectionaries, appointed John 13:1–15. Others—including the *Revised Common Lectionary*—add some combination of verses 16 and 17 and/or verses 31–35. In every case, verses 18–30 are left out, as well as verses 36–38.

What happens in those missing verses? In verses 18–30, Jesus speaks of Judas's betrayal, and in verses 36–38, he predicts Peter's denial. It is easy to see why lectionaries skip those verses. They are unsightly details in an otherwise uplifting event. The *Revised Common Lectionary* does assign verses 18–32 for the Wednesday of Holy Week, but it is a day seldom observed in congregations. More to the point, the story of the foot-washing itself is not heard alongside the sad details of the betrayal and denial.

These absent verses raise challenges about human potential. Without these verses, it looks as if Jesus had given his disciples a nice example to follow, the washing of feet, and left it at that. He tells them to love one another, and who could object? If you stop right there, it is a perfect depiction of the way we would all like the world to operate, and it seems within our grasp to accomplish it, as graspable as my neighbor's feet. It would appear that humans have the potential to create communities

where people all care for another and everyone gets along. People loving each other: shouldn't our world look more like that? Shouldn't our church? Well, yes, they should, but they don't. Our world and our church are inhabited by sinners, and sinners aren't so good at following their Lord's commands.

This incident of Jesus' washing the disciples' feet is not about human potential, nor is it an ideal vision of what the church could be. Rather, these verses speak honestly about what Jesus asks of his followers in the midst of sin, and more importantly, they tell us how deeply Jesus loves his followers, serving them in their most shameful moments.

We must hear of the foot-washing alongside the accounts of Peter and Judas, because Christ issues his new commandment against a backdrop of injury and broken promises. Foot-washing is not simply the way Christians ought to behave. Foot-washing is the way Christians treat one another, precisely when their fellow believers don't behave.

I have heard numerous accounts from people who stay away from church because of incidents that happened years or even decades ago. The incidents involve someone who was injured by a hurtful word or interaction with a fellow church member, and the stories conclude with some observation along the lines of "The church is supposed to follow God's commands; it's supposed to be a loving place." The implication is that a person is excused from church participation because fellow Christians are not holding up their end of the bargain.

The full story of the foot-washing, however, would suggest that fellow Christians are indeed holding up their end of the bargain—in their betrayals of one another. Betrayal is the very context in which Christ issues his new commandment. Indeed, this is why he speaks of love as a command, a mandatum, not as an observation of the way things already are. Within the church, love is not a given. Sin is a given, and Christ commands love for people who have hurt us. Furthermore, the love he shows is not a warm regard from afar. It would be easy to convince myself that I love someone who has hurt me if my love were merely a feeling. I can conjure up good thoughts and well-wishing, even for an enemy, without getting too close. The love Christ exemplifies, however, is close, as close as a hand grabbing a foot. It will not settle for keeping a peaceful distance. It demands my renewed interaction with people who have sinned against me.

One of the most interesting omissions from this story is in the *Revised Common Lectionary's* splicing of verses 17 and 31. If you look at the appointed reading, you see that it jumps from verse 17 to 31b, meaning that it leaves off the first half of verse 31: "When he had gone out, Jesus said..." That is an introduction to the rest of the verse in which he announces, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him." The interesting part about the deletion is that it shifts the focus of Jesus' glory. With the deletion, we hear of the foot-washing, and then Jesus saying, "If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them," followed by, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified." The way the lectionary has it, Jesus is glorified in giving an example of service and in his disciples following that example.

Within the church, love is not a given. Sin is a given, and Christ commands love for people who have hurt us.

That is not how John 13 operates. In its entirety, verse 31 tells us the moment when Jesus announces his glorification: "When he had gone out." When who had gone out? When Judas had gone out. Jesus' betrayer leaves the room, on his way to the authorities to bring about Jesus' demise, and it is at that moment when Jesus says that he has been glorified. Jesus, and his Father in him, receives glory, not when he is passing along commandments to his followers, but when he is being attacked by them. He can certainly wear Moses' hat, and he spends much of his ministry doing so, but lawgiver is not his true office. His true office is being betrayed. His true ministry is being crucified.

It is a strange logic. When sinners turn against Jesus, that is his best moment. That is when God

receives glory, not when people show off their virtues and demonstrate their obedience, but when sinners reveal their ugly sins. "Those who are well have no need of a physician," Jesus said, "but those who are sick." When we see how great our sickness is, then we might give thanks for the superlative doctor who cured it.

What a delightful thought! When hearing complaints about the behavior of fellow church members, we could respond: "Finally, Jesus is getting the praise he desires! If he died for someone like that, then he must be quite a Savior! And if he died for someone like that, then you and I can hope, too."

Maundy Thursday is a good name, but perhaps we could try a new one: Betrayal Thursday, or if we need a Latin word, Tradere Thursday. In this betrayal, and in all our betrayals, Jesus is glorified as our Redeemer.

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HERMAN HESSE LEARNS THE LANGUAGE OF COLOR: MONTAGNOLA, SWITZERLAND, 1919

"I have shown my appreciation to the old houses and stone roofs, the garden wall, the chestnut trees, the near and faraway mountains, by painting, using hundreds of good sheets of drawing paper, many tubes of water paints, and drawing pencils."

Herman Hesse

Outside my window, the sun casts
a thousand shades of green upon the retina.
Beyond them—stones, hills.
Rooftops sing out burnt sienna,
orange, against a cool wash of blue.
From metal tubes I squeeze viridian,
terre verte, chromium oxide, emerald
green onto the palette. I dip the brush
in water, tease a tributary between
gleaming heaps of paint, mix in yellows, blues—
a few dozen shades suggest an infinite range.
War has stolen the language, my words
the shards of shattered bridges left behind.
For now, I will let color play.

Ann Hostetler

True Light Full Gospel Baptist Church

John H. Timmerman

On Sundays our whole family of six walked to the large brown church a few blocks away from our house on Neland Avenue. That was the church of our growing up as children—my two sisters, brother, and I. There we learned the denominational doctrines in catechism, endured services that stretched a young boy's patience to unholy extremities, and made profession of faith in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. It was a brick building of weighty memories, and it rooted one's faith deep in the soil of Biblical teaching.

It was also, for all its virtue and profundity of doctrine, a ponderous church. Not too long ago, on a weekday, I found myself, by no clear decision that I can remember, driving out of my way and turning into the parking lot of that church. A few minor amenities had been added. Fancy glass doors replaced the heavy oak ones on an expanded narthex, that sort of thing. I crept in a side door, one I remembered running out of after Wednesday catechisms hoping I would get home in time to get in a baseball game or shoot some baskets before dinner.

The narrow, dark hallway confuses me. A state-mandated elevator had been added, disorienting me slightly from expectations. I found my way to the door leading to the sanctuary.

Here nothing had changed.

Tentatively, I climbed the steps to the chancel—the better to see the sanctuary, I told myself. And I could see it all. I flashed back all those years. I found the spot where we usually sat, way back in that hot, stuffy alcove under the balcony. The church was always hot. During the sweltering summer days no breeze touched the alcove through open windows. In winter, the janitor jacked up the boiler, trapping heat there like an incubator.

With the tendency common in those days among families with four children and restricted means, I acquired my first suit in seventh grade, but it was deliberately purchased several sizes too large so that it would last a few years. A suit, after all, was a major investment of capital, not one to be taken lightly. Standing high in the chancel, I could see myself there in the alcove, twitching and sweating and itching in that loathsome green wool suit. It seemed I could almost see my mother reach over and pinch me on the leg as my squirming escalated beyond reasonable bounds. My father, who kept a generous store of pink peppermints in his suit pocket, passed a few my way. I wasn't, of course, allowed to chew gum. That would be irreverent.

Curiosity compelled me. I had once thought of being a pastor. Then I took a semester of Greek and said, Thank you, Lord, for changing my mind. But now I couldn't resist.

I climbed to that high old pulpit, the wood dark and stern, and looked out over a sea of imaginary faces in the shadows of that sanctuary. I looked once more toward the alcove, saw that young boy who, unknowingly, also suffered from ADHD, and said softly, "May the Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give to you, and to all those whom you love, his peace."

I was quite sure nobody saw me leave.

I left, however, feeling I had been in a sacred place, a place where people had, for so many years, come to meet God. Somehow these old dark-paneled walls, the austere lights suspended from rafters, the huge, ornate wooden pulpit, even the alcove, had housed the Holy Spirit.

That was the church where I grew up. Twice a Sunday, the family walked on pristine streets—

the grass fresh from Saturday mowing, the houses small but neat clapboards—to that church. There, I learned elementary doctrine and suffered through catechism. But every few months or so, we went to another church. I didn't understand then why my father bundled us into that old black, turtle-shaped Ford of his and ferried us down to where the streets turned sullen and then turned into a small, intensely-weathered building to which was affixed a sign: True Light Full Gospel Baptist Church. I think that now, many years later, I am beginning to understand.

There is no need to describe the detritus of the streets. This was a place where no people I knew of went. Around the corner on Grandville, some houses really did have red porch lights in those days, although most were turned off by the time services started at True Light.

For Fitzgerald, the river of time was something one could not escape; the past keeps tugging no matter how hard you beat the oars to escape it.

Inside, the building was as neat and orderly as its age allowed. The tiny narthex gave way immediately to narrow rows of pews, holding maybe six to eight people per pew. Our family was large enough that we took a pew to ourselves, usually near the front where a flight of seven stairs led up to the platform, the baptismal font, and the lectern.

The service progressed more by accident than liturgical direction. I believe they were quite lengthy, but I really don't remember. The choir, clad in ochre robes, ascended the stage, belting out handclapping tunes directed from an old upright piano in the corner. I can't remember singing. I didn't know the tune, and I kept my hands in my pockets while they clapped. It seems strange to me that now, these many years later, I still hear one of these songs squirm to life in my brain, and if I'm not clapping my spirit seems to sway a bit.

We are, F. Scott Fitzgerald observed at the close of *The Great Gatsby*, like boats beating against the current. For Fitzgerald, the river of time was something one could not escape; the past keeps tugging no matter how hard you beat the oars to escape it. And for Fitzgerald, the consequences were most often tragic. He found nothing redemptive in his life. At the end, his own past seemed swallowed up with alcohol, his once powerful talent a seedy spectacle of itself. All one can do is beat that little boat, trying to stay abreast of life's desolate tug on the spirit.

I don't like to think of the past that way. Surely there have been times I would just as soon forget, even excise from my memory altogether. Nonetheless, I am more drawn to the conclusion of Willa Cather's *My Antonia* than that of Fitzgerald, for Cather speaks there of the "precious, incommunicable past." We are shaped by our pasts; if we persist in denying the shaping events, we deny a part of ourselves.

So it was for a time during those teenage years that one's thoughts would turn almost exclusively to oneself. We grow up; we seem to grow out of our past—even the traditions that shaped us. So too we grew out of those irregular trips to True Light Full Gospel Baptist Church. We older kids started attending different churches with friends, even boyfriends or girlfriends. It was a time for seeking new paths to the old truths of the Gospel.

During my college years during the unsettled sixties, when fear and anxiety seemed to hover like a dense cloud over national campuses, I occasionally attended services at different churches with my older cousin, also a student. Invariably our path gravitated to the old inner-city churches. There seemed to be something authentic, enduring, in those obdurate and begrimed edifices. So too in time we found our way once again to the end of Hall Street down by Grandville at the True Light Full Gospel Baptist Church. To a casual glance, much had changed. The streets were even seedier. Rusted autos, stripped of wheels and tires, canted toward the gutter on concrete blocks. A startling number of houses were burned out

by riots of a summer before. The city had nailed plywood over vacant windows and doorways, much of it already stripped away.

The church had, however, changed not at all. The tiny narthex still exuded that sweet, musty smell of old wood; the pews seemed even narrower now to adult eyes. We sat in the second row. In the first row, six per pew, sat the twelve church elders, clad in dark suits, shoes buffed to a deep gloss, white shirts starched as hard as polished marble.

Having become accustomed to inner-city churches, we each had a two dollar roll of nickels in our pockets. We were students, after all, and the plate came around every fifteen minutes or so for random offerings. The service proceeded routinely, or so we thought and despite our wonderment of the dark-clad elders, arranged like a phalanx of the guardians of the truth, the way, and the life before us. The old wooden pews seemed to hold the rump prints of countless generations who had worn their way to this holy place where, one believed, the eternal flashed into the temporal and God's spirit sat among us.

The choir sang. Pastor Butterworth preached. His large voice wrapped the body of worshippers whether in a whisper or singing proclamation. His message *was* the power of that voice, the heartfelt rhythms of it that sailed each word forth on a holy wind. I understood, then, why I loved to come to this drab little holy house at the end of Hall Street. I understood why my father took us there. Here the liturgy, formulary, and doctrine were eclipsed by a divine meeting with God. Here one fell before the burning bush and cried, Holy!

When the preaching was done, the service was not. I had hardly noticed the slight young man at the end of our pew. Oddly, when Reverend Butterworth called him forward—"Robert Lee Butterworth, my son, will you join me at the altar?"—and I saw the dark sheen of his worn green suit, I felt a sudden shiver convulse through me. I saw myself at the end of the pew, in that hatefully-hot green wool suit.

But Robert Lee, about my own age I figured, stepped forward with a smooth grace. His face betrayed no emotion, neither fear nor discomfort. Rather, serenity bathed him like a nimbus as he climbed the seven steps to the altar. "Altar" may be a strange term. It was only a wooden platform and an open baptismal font. As Robert Lee ascended the stairs, two elders fell in place behind him, flanking father and son behind the baptismal font. The choir by the piano stood, softly intoning words or humming melodies. The choir was smaller than I remembered, but the ochre robes were the same.

We are soldiers
in the army.

Reverend Butterworth was speaking, but my mind was transfixed on Robert Lee, hands loose at his sides, his face uplifted, expressionless. I thought of Stephen. When he saw Jesus at the right hand of God, he simply announced the fact and died under a hail of stones. What did Robert Lee see? Something I longed for? Something I would never, but always hope to see?

Then Reverend Butterworth stepped down into the baptismal font. So that was why the altar was seven-steps high. I hadn't guessed the font would be so deep. Water rose to his chest as he lowered himself down into it. Then Robert Lee, for the first time with a smile on the thin, dark angles of his face, stepped down. The water rose into little rivulets from the font, splashed across the altar, and dripped down onto the worn floorboards of the church. When the two attendant elders followed, the rivulets became streams. The choir sang with heartbreaking melody, taking notes from deep within and letting them soar among the rafters of the church. As one body, the remaining ten elders stood and walked to the altar. Some of the old ones, gray hair like fleece upon their dark heads, wept openly. More of them climbed down into the font, laying hands on Robert Lee's head and shoulders. Those who couldn't fit in fell to their knees by the rim, some prostrate with tears. Water overflowed the font in small rivers now. It splashed on the floorboards. Little eddies worked toward the second row. I bent quickly and dipped a finger in.

Grace like a river. Let it flow.

In my room that night, I wouldn't do the things a college student had to do. I couldn't read.

I couldn't study. I couldn't think about papers to be written or tests to be studied for. I thought of the river. I thought of grace. I thought of Robert Lee Butterworth—my age—walking into the river of grace and, held in his earthly father's arms, being lowered fully under, immersed, bathed.

It was a bit over two years later that my mother sent me a clipping from a local newspaper. I was married now. I was in my first year of graduate school and facing regular skirmishes with the draft board, soon to end in my being drafted into the Army. This was 1968, the most unsettled year in perhaps the most unsettled decade of our century.

The clipping was not lengthy. It was headed by a portrait of Robert Lee Butterworth in his Army uniform. It was an obituary notice: Killed in action in the Republic of Vietnam.

I wonder still what Robert Lee saw as he looked upward from the altar, as he bathed in grace in the baptismal font.

The small church isn't there anymore at the end of Hall and the corner of Grandville. In a long overdue effort to rejuvenate the inner city, the local government bulldozed the burned-out homes. Habitat for Humanity has constructed dozens of neat, well-designed homes to replace them. True Light Full Gospel Baptist church moved to larger quarters—a red brick building in another part of the city. I drove by it once. They had a new pastor listed on the sign.

I drove on with my memories.

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"What Do You Mean By This Service?"

George C. Heider

Most of us have probably heard some version of the story about "Why Mom Always Cuts the End Off of the Ham Before Putting It in the Oven." As the story goes, a child wondered about this practice and asked Mom. The mother said that she did it because her mother always had done so. Following up with Grandma, the child learned that early in her grandmother's marriage the oven had been quite small, requiring a roast or ham of any notable size to be shortened. And so a custom was born, and so it continued, only without any reason whatsoever.

To suggest that this kind of deracinated ritual occurs with any frequency in Christian worship would caricature tradition-based liturgical practice in the worst way, but, at least in my experience, rituals like this occur with sufficient frequency to merit a gentle caution. For example, at least prior to the most recent hymnal issued by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (Augsburg Fortress, 2006), the presiding minister greeted the people before the Prayer of the Day with the Salutation, "The Lord be with you," to which the congregation would respond, "And also with you." (The new hymnal of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Lutheran Service Book* [Concordia, 2006], retains this practice.) The purpose of the exchange is that before taking on the first task in the traditional order of the mass in which the presiding minister approaches the holy God on behalf of the congregation, the pastor shares a greeting with the people in which they endorse the pastor's intercession in their name.

Well and good. But quite some while back now (I recall it popping up already when I was in seminary, over thirty years ago), some congregations began offering the Prayer of the Day in unison. The change was explained to me at the time as reflecting the Lutheran teaching that no one need come between the individual Christian and God; we all have direct access in prayer. Whatever the rationale, when the practice of praying in unison was adopted, the Salutation was generally retained. The upshot was that the people would assure the presiding minister of their endorsement and blessing as he prepared to come before God on their behalf, and then they would all pray together anyway.

This liturgical muddle occurred to me recently, as I thought about another change that has, in my fallible view, left many a pastor and congregation "caught between two stools," to cite a favorite Briticism. This is the matter of the manner of administering communion to the presiding minister. The historic practice of the presiding minister was to self-commune, then to commune any who were assisting with the administration of the Eucharist, then to join such assistants in sharing the bread (the pastor) and the wine (the assistants) with the people. The rationale for this approach was that it falls to the forgiven to share the things of forgiveness, viz., the means of grace, much in the manner of John 20:22–23, where Jesus first breathes the Spirit on the Apostles and then grants them the authority to forgive (or not) with the Spirit's power (cf. Matt 16:19; 18:18). The presiding minister, then, is simply starting the process in the only possible way, acting as both giver (in the stead of Christ) and recipient (as a sinful human).

Still, there has long been significant discomfort with the practice of self-communion among both clergy and laity. One can cite Luther, but his concerns had to do primarily with private masses and the "merits" claimed for the "sacrifice of the mass." More to the point, many a pastor has

felt mightily strange in the dual role described, and some laity have discerned clericalism gone amuck, as if the message being sent is that the sacrament does not "count" somehow (or at the very least that things are not being done "decently and in order"), unless the hands administering at least the bread to all present—pastor included—are ordained.

This long-term dis-ease has recently been joined by the emergence of "hospitality" as a cardinal virtue in the theology of the sacrament (to the point that *The Christian Century* recently featured a cover article concerning whether the sacrament should be offered to all who desire it, baptized or not, but that is a topic for another day). Taken all together, the upshot has been a steep increase in the number of presiding ministers who both decline to commune themselves and see their role, above all, as host at the Christian family table.

If the model is to be hospitality and the home dinner table, we need to ask: what host serves him- or herself first, or, stranger still, exchanges servings with the person seated to their right, before passing out the food to anyone else?

To my mind, there is nothing problematic either about pastors' scruples over communing themselves or about the rise of the value of hospitality vis-à-vis the sacrament. Depending on one's cultural context, some historic practices can simply never be explained satisfactorily or are at least not worth the required effort, so letting go of self-communion and the rationale behind it may be the responsible, pastoral thing to do. And for my money, at least, the conversation and conceptualization of the Eucharist have only been enriched by the metaphors of hospitality, so long as one doesn't imagine that the metaphor encompasses the referent (such that hospitality becomes the only value at issue in discussions of right teaching about Holy Communion and good practice).

What does bother me is that after getting rid of the objectionable practice of self-communing, efforts are then made to retain the rationale of the forgiven sharing the means of forgiveness, usually by means of a quick mutual communion at the outset of the meal by the presiding and one assisting minister (followed then by their communion of other assisting ministers). Rather, if the model is to be hospitality and the home dinner table, we need to ask: what host serves him- or herself first, or, stranger still, exchanges servings with the person seated to their right, before passing out the food to anyone else? (Yes, I am aware of the ancient custom of taking a bite to assure guests of the absence of spoilage or poison, but today?) Far better, it seems to me, is a bit of thoughtful consistency here. If one wants to do away with self-communion, fine. But then let those who are serving the meal eat last—and last of all the host, the presiding minister.

When Moses passed along God's instructions for the celebration of the Passover, year-by-year, for all time to come, he concluded by mentally staring off into the far distance, when God's people would be settled in the Land. Surely, he foresaw, that the day would come when a child would ask his or her parent, "What do you mean by this service?" (Exod 12:26 RSV), and Moses saw to it that parents would be prepared with a meaningful answer. That, at the end of the proverbial day, is my concern with our liturgical practice. Let it be rich; let it be multisensory; let it both teach and delight. But above all, let it be consistent and explainable to any and all who would ask the Israelite child's question.

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MAKING TRAIL

At first, he raked a few eucalyptus limbs
and leaves from the face of the ground, cut
down some poison oak. But soon
he had shoveled a dirt path up every canyon
of the campus, laid out switchbacks
on the hills, connected stream to stream
until a secret web contained us all.

It kept growing. He found himself asking
the college president if she wouldn't mind
the occasional hiker just below her patio.
And he thought about the Winchester House
in San Jose, the woman who added room
to room, built stairways into empty space.

Why is it when we start something, we cannot stop?
Cheops and his pyramid, rails to Omaha—
trenches on the Somme, perhaps. Or, on a sunny
afternoon, just tinkering around with an atom.

Lately he has been pondering the luster of soil,
the shape and scent of it, winding across the cranberry
carpet of the faculty lounge. How it would meander
like the flaking crest of a gopher's passage,
taking the eye out the door, into the distance.

Paul Willis

Listening for the Mild Voice of Reason

Christian Pragmatism on the Edge of the Fiscal Cliff

Peter Meilaender

The week between Christmas and New Year's is not, for most of us, spent paying close attention to politics. Yet for those who cared to watch, it was a week of feverish activity in the year that just drew to an end. For at the stroke of midnight on December 31, 2012, the United States was poised to go over the "fiscal cliff." At precisely that moment, two joint measures, previously agreed upon, were due to kick in: a number of different tax rates were scheduled to increase, while a range of automatic spending cuts, shared between the military and domestic spending programs, would simultaneously be enacted. Most observers expected this combination, intended to achieve significant deficit reduction, to have negative economic consequences, perhaps sending the US economy back into recession.

The chattering classes were agog at the drama as the president and Congressional leaders sought to avoid going over the dreaded cliff, only to have one potential deal after another fall through as the clock ticked. First President Obama and House Speaker John Boehner appeared to have a deal worked out, and then they didn't. Then Speaker Boehner announced plans to pass an alternative "Plan B" out of the House, but when too few Republicans lined up behind the plan, he had to withdraw it. Attention turned to the Senate, where Majority Leader Harry Reid and Minority Leader Mitch McConnell tried, and then failed, to work out a deal. An exasperated McConnell complained on the floor of the Senate, "I need a dance partner." Finally he found one in Vice President Joe Biden. Ultimately, the two of them worked out an agreement that passed the Senate a few hours before the witching hour, and then passed the House the next day. Disaster averted!

Under the terms of the agreement... but seriously—be honest with me—how much do you really care? Doesn't this narrative sound all too familiar? Didn't we go through a similar soap opera not that long ago (in the argument over raising the debt limit in 2011, which produced the spending cuts and tax increases of the fiscal cliff that we have just been trying to avoid)? And, because the recent agreement dealt with taxes but not with spending—the real crux of the problem—we can look forward to more of the same in February, when it will again become necessary to raise the debt ceiling. They wear thin quickly, these rounds of repeated, last-minute, closed-door negotiations, with their grandstanding, brinkmanship, and melodrama, delaying the day of reckoning without solving our problems. Over time the public becomes numbed to them. Pretty soon our politics will look like the quarterly circus of European Union debt bailout talks.

One of the most interesting comments I read about the fiscal-cliff crisis had nothing to do with the economic desirability of its outcome, but focused instead on this soap-opera quality of the whole affair. Michael Auslin, writing on *National Review's* online blog "The Corner," described the debacle as what he called government by "Hail Mary," suggesting that the effort to resolve a problem of this magnitude through last minute, high-pressure negotiations was comparable to heaving up a long touchdown pass in the hopes of pulling out an improbable win in the game's final seconds. "[O]ne cannot govern through Hail Marys," wrote Auslin. "It simply cannot be expected that serious, thoughtful legislation or policy can be created under conditions little short of panic." You may get lucky once or twice, but you cannot expect to win consistently with this strategy.

More importantly, Auslin continued, repeated efforts to solve our fiscal problems this way affect

the manner in which we approach policy solutions in the future. They are "destructive of any common sense of responsible governance" and amount to "the unlearning of government." Though Auslin did not use these terms, we might borrow from Aristotle's ethical theory and say that by acting in certain ways, we become habituated to act in similar ways in the future. We become unaccustomed to identifying problems well in advance, before they metastasize and become (almost?) too difficult to solve. We forget—"unlearn"—how to engage in legislative deliberation and compromise. Auslin offered one striking example of what this might mean. The Senate last passed a budget in 2009. Auslin wondered aloud how many new Senators have been elected since then—by my own rough count, it is actually just over a quarter of the body—and pointed out that these new members have "never passed a constitutionally mandated budget; indeed, they may not know how to, since it is not part of their governing experience." As Aristotle said, we become courageous by doing courageous acts, just by doing just ones—and, we might add, we learn to govern by governing.

This idea has a fine pedigree in American political thought and practice. In slightly different terms, it was at the core of Tocqueville's praise for American democracy in the 1830s. Tocqueville was impressed by the energy and skill that American citizens brought to the task of governing themselves. They exhibited a degree of competence that was surprising to a French aristocrat and upended his preconceptions about the political ability of ordinary citizens. He attributed their success in large part to the American emphasis on federalism, decentralization, and local government. By offering so many opportunities for people to become involved in government at different levels, the American system provided its citizens with an ongoing political education. As Tocqueville said of New England in particular,

> The New Englander is attached to his township because it is strong and independent; he has an interest in it because he shares in its management... in the restricted sphere within his scope, he learns to rule society; he gets to know those formalities without which freedom can advance only through revolutions, and becoming imbued with their spirit, develops a taste for order... and in the end accumulates clear, practical ideas about the nature of his duties and the extent of his rights.

Citizens can thus learn to govern themselves well. Practice makes perfect, or at least better. But what can be learned can also be forgotten.

Joseph Bessette makes a similar point in his fine book on Congress and deliberative democracy, *The Mild Voice of Reason* (1994). He argues that after witnessing the failures of governance, especially in the states, during the early years of independence under the Articles of Confederation, the Founders carefully sought to structure Congress in such a way that it would be both truly representative—that is, responsive to the popular will—and also sufficiently independent to exercise deliberative judgment. Bessette quotes James Madison, writing in *Federalist Forty-Two*, describing the goal to be attained: "[T]he mild voice of reason, pleading the cause of an enlightened and permanent interest, is but too often drowned, before public bodies as well as individuals, by the clamors of an impatient avidity for immediate and immoderate gain."

Watching the fiscal-cliff negotiations, knowing that we have been through this before and will shortly go through it again, it is hard not to wonder whether our institutions are failing us. Are our politicians in danger of "unlearning" how to govern? Can the mild voice of reason still be heard? If many find it hard to hear in the context of these negotiations, another cause may be their secretive character. If the mild voice of reason is speaking, it is doing so quite confidentially, in backroom negotiations between only a couple of people—in the end, between Mitch McConnell and Joe Biden. It would no doubt be preferable if we could tackle a problem as immense and complicated as the budget deficit in a more public forum, with broader debate and wider input. In reality, though, the secrecy is necessary if any deal is to emerge at all under contemporary circumstances (even if that

truth is unwelcome in an age for which "transparency" is a favorite buzzword). The intense scrutiny of a twenty-four-hour Internet news cycle—in which any pundit or blogger with access to a leak about some possible concession opposed by loud voices in either party can throw a monkey wrench into efforts to reach an agreement—means that dealmakers need to be shielded from premature public exposure if they are to have any chance of reaching consensus. Yet this very fact contributes further to the "unlearning" of governance. Among those who feel excluded from the very narrow circle of power, it promotes a shrill, showboating style of politics, in an effort to exercise some influence over the talks to which they lack access. Combined with the increasing polarization of American politics, this style makes compromise solutions even less likely (no doubt the goal of at least some who engage in it).

There is no one "Christian politics," no single set of morally correct positions. This ought to free Christians for vigorous debate, but also to work freely and creatively with those of different views in order to reach workable and broadly acceptable solutions.

This situation is all the more depressing, not only because our long-term fiscal problems are so serious, but also because their basic shape is so clear. We are burdening our children with far too much debt; and that debt is driven overwhelmingly by the two largest entitlement programs, Social Security (which should not be too difficult to fix) and Medicare (which should). Similarly, there are two ways to approach the debt problem: by seeking higher revenues, through either increased tax rates or the elimination of various deductions, credits, and loopholes; or by cutting spending. The devil, of course, is in the details. But these seem to be issues upon which the mild voice of reason ought to be able to reach reasonable accommodations.

Like many of my fellow citizens, I hold strong opinions on how best to go about tackling the deficit. Nevertheless, it would be helpful if we could lower the temperature of these debates and decrease the intense resistance to compromise that leads inevitably to last-minute, secret negotiations. To that end, it is worth reminding ourselves that *morally* speaking, neither the revenue-raising nor the cut-spending approach is the "right" one. Voters are free to decide to tax themselves at higher levels in order to provide more government services. And they are equally free to decide they would rather limit government services and reduce spending. Citizens in different Western democracies have made somewhat different choices about these issues, and reasonable people can disagree in good faith about the most desirable solution. My own view is that the only realistic way to resolve our budget problems is by focusing primarily on spending cuts and entitlement reform. But I could not reasonably claim that this is the only morally acceptable solution or that others are obliged to share my views.

Forthrightly recognizing this fact may be one of the most important contributions we can make toward creating a context in which serious debate and reform becomes possible. Christians are often accused of contributing to our politicized political system by moralizing political issues and turning them into matters of right and wrong on which no compromise is possible. Ironically, the opposite should be true. More often than not, the real Christian approach is to "de-moralize" politics. There may be rare issues on which Christianity dictates a particular political position, or at least sharply limits the range of acceptable positions. Abortion is the clearest example of such an issue, and it is no coincidence that the Supreme Court's refusal, through its *Roe v. Wade* decision, to let Americans work that issue out through their processes has done as much as anything to polarize political life more generally. By and large, however, there is no one "Christian politics," no single

set of morally correct positions. This ought to free Christians for vigorous debate, but also free them to work creatively with those of different views in order to reach workable and broadly acceptable solutions.

In saying this, I am not making a mealy-mouthed call for "moderation." To the contrary: a pox upon those who self-identify as moderates. Firm convictions about political matters are all to the good; partisanship is all to the good; vigorous debate is all to the good. There is a type of politician and pundit that prides and preens himself on avoiding "partisan excess" and strives carefully to take positions located exactly between whatever are taken to be the standard Republican and Democratic positions. These people are political publicans praying on street corners. The point is not to abandon our convictions, but to have the humility to recognize that others may reasonably disagree while remaining well within the bounds of morally acceptable policy. As Edmund Burke once said, in his famous speech urging conciliation with the American colonies, "All government, indeed every human benefit and enjoyment, every virtue, and every prudent act, is founded on compromise and barter. We balance inconveniences; we give and take; we remit some rights, that we may enjoy others; and we choose rather to be happy citizens, than subtle disputants."

This attitude alone will not solve our problems. Institutional reforms may also be necessary. Rethinking our use of primary elections, for example, might be a helpful place to begin. But such a "Christian pragmatism," or perhaps "Christian realism," would be a welcome contribution to our ongoing economic debates. It would be a step toward making compromise solutions more attainable, solving our serious problems, and restoring a measure of deliberation to our democracy. It could help the mild voice of reason speak more clearly and, in the process, forestall the unlearning of democratic self-governance.

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The Earth, the Road, and the Tomb

The Mortality of the Earth and Care for Creation

Robert C. Saler

The notion that Christians ought to be concerned about care for creation, and to be concerned for specifically Christian reasons, has now firmly established itself in the ethos of large sectors of the church. This emerging consensus has been fueled partly by the work of Christian theologians—including Joseph Sittler, Paul Santmire, Sallie McFague, and Ivone Gebara—who have placed environmental concerns at the center of their work and partly by the fact that Christians across the denominational spectrum have found resources within their tradition for thinking about "green" practices as expressions of fidelity to God's purposes in the world. Large numbers of Roman Catholics, Orthodox, evangelicals, and liberal Protestants have found resources within their specific traditions for affirming the importance of creation care.

This is not to say that all Christians are environmentalists; clearly all are not. The reasons why many Christians resist prioritizing care for the environment run the gamut. Some of these reasons are dubious, such as the idea that "going to heaven when we die" means that the Earth is disposable once salvation history has played itself out. But some Christian uneasiness about ecological activism stems from the fact that the rhetoric employed by many environmental movements does not always cohere well with more essential Christian styles of thought. As early as 1954, Sittler was pointing to this very problem: "...the largest, most insistent, and most delicate task awaiting Christian theology is to articulate such a theology for nature as shall do justice to the vitalities of the earth and hence correct a current theological naturalism which succeeds in speaking meaningfully of earth only at the cost of repudiating specifically Christian categories" (Sittler 30). In other words, how to talk meaningfully about the need to care for the environment while still "speaking Christian" is a perpetual concern for those who wish to foster greater collaboration between the church and worthy ecological movements.

As with any dialogue between faith and science, the willingness to change must be present on all sides. Christians throughout history have changed how they think about God and ethics based on insights from more "secular" disciplines; however, on occasion Christians have also insisted that these insights be "baptized"—that is, translated into specifically Christian idioms—before they could be taken up as part of the church's self-understanding. Science may change the practice of the faith; however, sometimes the church needs for science to learn how to "speak Christian" before its contributions can take on vitality within the life of the church. There is one important point of agreement among science, ecological rhetoric, and Christian theology, and it can be captured by a single truism: dying is what living things do. Mortality is built into the very fabric of life, and "mortality" at its most primal level asserts not simply the fact that that which is alive can die, but that it will die.

While ecologists have taken great pains to insist that life on earth cannot end, their rhetoric is haunted by the consistent testimony from various scientific disciplines that the earth cannot sustain life indefinitely. As William Stoeger points out, "From all the indications we have from the neurosciences, biology, physics, astronomy, and cosmology, death and dissolution are the final words" (Stoeger 19). The scenarios by which our planet might become incapable of supporting life are well-rehearsed and legion. The transformation of the sun from its current state to that of a red-giant (then white dwarf) would render the planet uninhabitable. Impacts by asteroids and comets

could prove ultimately destructive. Meanwhile, the universe itself, should it follow observable patterns in evolution and dynamics, might well contract or expand indefinitely to the point where ongoing life on any planet would become impossible.

Even though care for the environment is a passionate avocation for the vast majority of working scientists today, the simple truth is that these hard-nosed scientific facts about the ultimate mortality of the earth provide little aid and comfort to ecology. This is largely because North American environmentalism in particular has, from its inception, emphasized the rhetoric of "conservation." One of the signature moments in the development of the American ecological consciousness came with the presidency of Theodore Roosevelt, who crafted the Act for the Preservation of American Antiquities and who asserted, in his seventh annual message to Congress in 1907, that "the conservation of our natural resources and their proper use constitute the fundamental problem which underlies almost every other problem of our national life." This emphasis upon conservation, as it developed throughout the twentieth century, undergirded the thinking of ecology's most significant champions (such as Rachel Carson, Edward Abbey, and Aldo Leopold). In our own day, it seems clear that most Americans, if asked to state a rationale for such eco-friendly practices as recycling and energy-use reduction, would reply using the language of conservation and preservation: "I want the earth to be a good place for my children to live." "We need to preserve natural resources."

But what happens to this language of conservation when it encounters clear-eyed assessments of the earth's mortality? If dying is what living things do, including the living planet, then whither care for creation? This is, I would suggest, not simply an academic question. Those of us who have worked in ecological activism for a number of years have an intimate awareness of the fact that maintaining hope and avoiding burnout in this work is difficult. In my experience, the deadliest enemy of hope is the temptation to conclude that efforts on behalf of the environment, however successful in the short term, are finally futile. If such despair often arises in the face of the sheer magnitude of the environmental challenges facing our world (and the corresponding magnitude of many people's unwillingness to admit that these challenges exist), then an even more fundamental threat to ecological activism might accompany honest acknowledgment of the earth's very capacity to sustain life. Eat, drink, and be merry (and burn as much coal as possible), for in the end all will die. As Ernest Becker pointed out in his classic *The Denial of Death* (1973), the fact that we are haunted by mortality tends to drive us toward more and more frenetic activity with less and less existential joy.

But if Christian theology joins ecology and science at this precise intersection—the intersection where the rhetoric of "conservation" fails in the face of the earth's mortality—then what new possibilities emerge? If the impasse between the science of mortality and the impulse toward conservation is itself "baptized" into the sensibilities of the Christian faith, then can a style of thinking that honors what is true in all three disciplines emerge?

The cheap and easy way to bring theology into scientific discussions is to use theology to "solve" science, and thus the cheap, easy, and thoroughly unsatisfactory solution here would be to invoke Christian hope in the resurrection in such a way as to eliminate the pathos of the earth's mortality. It is true that the Christian scriptural witness testifies to the hope that all things, including a "new heaven and new earth," will find renewal when the fullness of God's Kingdom arrives. However, it is equally true that every pastor—and indeed, every spiritually sensitive person—knows that using hope in resurrection to deny the reality of mortality misses something essential about the human condition in the face of death. Easter might transcend Good Friday, but it does not eliminate it. This means that any simplistic attempt to shore up Christian enthusiasm for ecological "conservation" by allowing Christians to ignore science's testimony to the earth's mortality fails, and it fails not only on scientific and ecological grounds, but on Christian grounds as well.

A far more promising approach would be to ask whether Christian styles of thinking, when

grounded in unsentimental acknowledgment of the earth's ultimate death, might offer to ecological ethics a more evocative and authentic way of thinking about care for creation. The most distinctively Christian contribution on that front would be to press the issue to its full extent and assert that every act of care is an act not of conservation, but of care for the dying. *Every act of care is an act of care for the dying*, and this applies as much to the earth and its creatures as it does to the various people for whom we care (and to whom we must one day say goodbye).

To conceive of every act of care as care for the dying suggests a definitive style of understanding how and why "care" happens. To illustrate that style, we can briefly consider two biblical episodes.

In Jesus' Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29–37), the man on the side of the road who is rescued by the Samaritan is not rescued into immortality. He is mortal, and he will die—presumably not from the wounds sustained during his beating (since he has been cared for), but from some other cause at some other time. The act of care given by the Good Samaritan is an act of care for the dying, but it is an act of care that affirms the value of life even in the face of that life's inevitable end.

Even more significant is the account of the women who bring spices to Jesus' tomb to anoint him following his crucifixion and entombment. This is an act of care for one who has died, which, as Kierkegaard reminds us, has a certain unique purity in that it is precisely an act that cannot be reciprocated. This kind of care is given in the depths of the effects of mortality, where resurrection occurs—not as a cheap evasion of death or mortality's gravity, but as a divine act of rebellion against death's reality. The women's care for the dead Jesus creates a space in which resurrection becomes, not a possibility (for resurrection as such is never "possible"), but a salvific act of overcoming on the God of life's part. Such spaces cannot be summoned, or manipulated, or even reproduced at will.* But they can occur.

And this is why considering every act of care as an act of care for the dying has profound significance for ecological ethics (and indeed, for Christian life as a whole). It is to renounce control over outcomes. It is to refuse to tie the value of an act of care—whether for a child, a tree, or an ocean—to its efficacy in conserving the cared-for thing. It is to celebrate care for its own sake, and for the sake of the possibility that the act of care might be the occasion for the creation of resurrection space. To relinquish "conservation" in favor of "care for the dying" is to acknowledge reality as we know it, but also to honor the hope that the reality that we know might not be "the final word" at all. ✟

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Endnotes

* My thanks to the Rev. Callie Smith, who highlighted this point in conversation with me.

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WINDSOCK

It starts inside the chest. Hiss
zipping from deep in one's lungs
in search of a way out. Lost

for years in a nylon shell,
mine is the heart who believed
in love as both particle and wave,

who, upon seeing a woman of
a certain age always stood still,
assumed she was my mother.

A silent witness, *want* never
denies darkness and when
the soul constricts on what it targets,

you have to break its spine,
slap its coil against a tree
until fermented prayers release

snarling in the cool of the grass,
orange shed thrashing
until all ribs are broken.

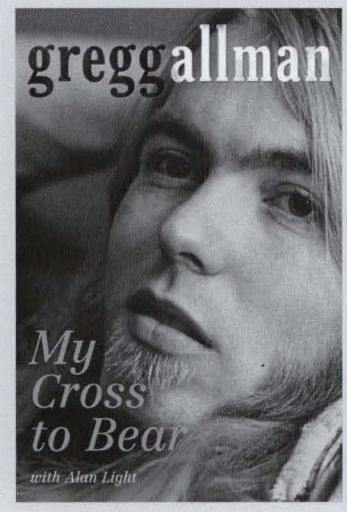
Jae Newman

Reviewed in this issue...

Gregg Allman's

My Cross to Bear

REVIEWING HAYDEN CARRUTH'S COLLECTION of autobiographical fragments *Reluctantly*, a *Booklist* critic was convinced that "men and women of letters... write the best autobiographies. Such authors present the philosophical, psychological, and emotional realities of their lives, demonstrating that the examined life is, if not the life most worth living, then the life most worth reading and thinking about." Autobiographies by the frequently unlettered men and women of popular music often present a life that has not been examined until very recently, sometimes not until the suggestion of a book has been made, and then through the fog of an abuse-compromised memory. Musicians, even songwriters, rarely display the care for language or the patience for research needed to present an accurate, involving story; rock autobiographies can feel slight, forced, and either sensationalized or lacking in narrative drive. They often leave it to others to examine their lives and bring to a reader the philosophical, psychological, and emotional realities that make these fascinating figures who they are.



MY CROSS TO BEAR

Gregg Allman

William Morrow, 2012

400 pages

$27.99

Reviewed by

J. D. Buhl

After the resounding success of Keith Richards's *Life* (2010), and Patti Smith's *Just Kids* (2010), the fall of 2012 brought a harvest of long-awaited life stories. Rod Stewart, Rick Springfield, Neil Young, John Taylor, Peter Criss, and Pete Townshend all published theirs, while major biographies of Leonard Cohen, James Brown, Mick Jagger, The Smiths, and Bruce Springsteen made it out by Christmas. Most rock books fall short of achieving "essential reading" status, but *My Cross to Bear* by Gregg Allman comes close. With the help of co-writer Alan Light, Gregory Lenoir Allman follows a four-point outline common to the genre; he provides entertaining evidence of ignorance, indulgence, isolation, and illumination with a memory as fuzzy as one of his brother's guitar pedals.

Duane "Skydog" Allman was America's first guitar hero, our answer to the Pages, Becks, and Claptons of the British Blues Invasion. What Duane had in mind for the Allman Brothers Band, formed with brother Gregg in 1969 after the disintegration of two earlier bands, was "a revitalized rhythm and blues band" combining elements of blues, rock, and jazz into an exploratory, ecstatic music featuring two guitars playing "all this harmony." More importantly, Duane valued harmony within the band itself. "The word 'band,'" writes Gregg, "means a bunch of guys working together for the same goal," and the Allman Brothers defined that. Gregg's discovery

of the fragile temporality of such togetherness threw him for years after Duane's death in 1971: threw him from opiates to cocaine to alcohol; threw him into inter-band turmoil, break-ups, and reunions; threw him into an intermittent solo career with its own apex and nadir; and finally, threw him into a new Allman Brothers Band that continues to live up to Duane's vision. It is, in fact, the repeated use of the phrase "my brother" that gives Allman's book its poignancy. "I didn't learn to grieve until my brother had been dead for ten years, maybe longer," he writes. "They ought to have a mandatory class in school to teach kids how to deal with loss, because sooner or later, somebody dear to them leaves this earth."

Gregory's ignorance of how to deal with loss is only the most moving example of the theme of ignorance in *Cross*. He confesses ignorance of the hazards of heroin use ("No one ever used the word 'heroin.' The only word that was ever said was 'doojee.'"); he falls victim to the classic songwriter's ignorance of publishing rights, so that a so-called producer ends up owning some of Gregg's music (including the beloved ballad "Melissa") which "he had nothing to do with for a grand total of $600"; and then he is ignorant of what to do with money once he has plenty of it: "Having money really was something I had to learn. And it was tough. I blew a million before I saved a nickel."

You can imagine the indulgence this involves. The entire band and their road crew were deep into "doojee" by the time their breakthrough album, *At Fillmore East* (1971), made them one of America's most-loved musical brotherhoods. "We played for each other, we played to each other, and we played off each other, which is what the Allman Brothers is all about." But playing inebriated eventually makes such sublime interaction impossible. And personal proclivities can pull a brotherhood apart: Allman describes a desperate search for companionship both in and out of marriages that eventually has him living in Hollywood, overdubbing his vocals on tapes the rest of the band sends from Macon.

My Cross To Bear captures isolation with one of the funniest lines in any rock book: "When the Allman Brothers got that goddamn plane, it was the beginning of the end." This Boeing 720 came to symbolize the excess that was souring the band's harmony.

> The truth is, we couldn't... stand each other; with each day on the road, the separation grew between us. We didn't talk, we didn't hang, we didn't do nothing together. Everyone had their own limo, everyone stayed in their own suite. Rehearsals slowed down to almost never, and sound checks became a thing of the past. It happened little by little, where you don't even notice that it's happening, until it's wrapped all around you, and then the realization hits you like a ton of bricks.

So did the bill. Gregg describes their "epicurean attitude" of eat, drink, get laid, get high, and play music as typical of the day, but when the tour for the band's most successful album—*Brothers and Sisters* in 1973—came to an end and "that check arrived, forget about it. That's when the Allman Brothers broke up, right then and there." By then, the sense of isolation had spread to the band's audience, and not until 1990 would a subsequent regrouping of the band reconnect with their old fans and all those harmonies resound. Gregg considers the 2003 album *Hittin' the Note* to be "the best thing we've cut since my brother was around." The reason is simple: "For the first time in as long as I could remember we were a group who all liked each other."

As important as these themes can be, most readers come to rock books seeking the revelatory: that story detailing how key players met, what inspired a great song, the poor judgment that led to the right decision. *Cross* is full of such revelations, and Allman's laid-back, off-hand style tosses them out with the same casual determination with which he would fold after a disappointing hand of poker. That one of America's finest slide guitarists came to the instrument as the result of mishandling a horse in Los Angeles is indeed a striking disclosure.

Gregory had warned his brother to walk the shod horse across the asphalt to the meadow, "or he'll slip and bust both your asses." But Duane

balked at taking any direction from his little brother, so he mounted and took off and—sure enough—ended up with his arm in a sling for six weeks. He blamed Gregg for the accident and refused to speak to him during his convalescence. Then he caught "a raging cold," making things worse. In an attempt to make amends, the younger Allman wrapped up a bottle of Coricidin and the just-released first album by Taj Mahal, put them on Duane's doormat, knocked, and ran. Several hours later Duane, inspired by Jesse Ed Davis's playing on the album, called his brother and demanded he come over at once. What Gregg found was an empty Coricidin bottle with the label washed off encasing Duane's ring finger as he played along with "Statesboro Blues." So the Allman Brothers Band's signature song came from a Southern blues boy turned on to the slide by a Native American musician in California. Wow.

"Sounding good was what mattered, and my brother really believed that." Such devotion to the music itself meant that Gregg could fend off requests from managers and others to "get out there and stand up with a microphone and be a frontman" as well as expectations that he abide by Southern norms where "race relations" were concerned. With the inclusion of Jai Johanny "Jaimo" Johanson on drums, the Allman Brothers Band became the first integrated combo to gain success, and they went up against plenty of consternation if not outright hostility. Writing about the time he and Duane were kids in Florida, Gregg realizes that devotion to the music was already there: "If a musician could play, we didn't look at his skin." The boys were confused by racism in the South; even their mother confounded them by demanding that a black musician be ejected from their home. Gregg soon came to the countercultural conclusion that "there are good and bad people, there are heartful and heartless people, and they come in any color."

That Gregory is one of those "heartful people" becomes endearingly clear throughout *Cross*, so that by the time he submits to his final rehabilitation attempt (his eleventh or twelfth, he is not sure) the reader is as ready as he is "to be set free from that shit." Brother Gregory is a lovely cat, as Duane would say, and throughout the book the singer tries to be "as good a person as [his] brother." "He set the pattern for my life to follow," Gregg writes; but he goes far beyond that pattern. When Duane died he was still drinking and drugging. Despite his unwavering advocacy for the band, Duane remained impulsive and reckless. Whatever hardship Duane endured during his short life, it is clear by the end of *Cross* that it was nothing compared to what his "babybrah" had gone through.

Illumination follows. Gregg has been able to find "some sort of spirituality"; he can say "[both] music and my Maker… serve as anchors," a confession Duane could not have made. Growing up, the boys "didn't really believe in God, but didn't really not believe in him either." Now, attending an Episcopal church in Daytona, Gregg can see the purpose and reason behind what he does best: "I help make people happy, and I think in the eyes of God, that's pretty damn good. I think he wants his children to be happy—that's why he made music."

J. D. Buhl used to stay up late with his radio down low, waiting for KFMG in Des Moines, Iowa, to play the Allman Brothers Band's "Whipping Post." He'd just turned thirteen when Skydog died.

Qui Tollis

First published June 1972

O. P. Kretzmann

A JUNE EVENING OUT OF THE TROPICS, HOT and breathless. The elms are still, and the haze over the valley shimmers with heat. Lazy shadows make the campus a study in gray and green. Inside a building, some students and I are listening to one of the great musical authorities in America. The subject of the lecture is the Mass in B Minor.

"A strange mixture of great, good, and bad music," the learned lecturer says . . . "Never intended for performance as a part of divine worship" . . . "Seven themes directly appropriated from other sources" . . . "Almost every imaginable style of composition" . . . "Sometimes so crowded with notes that it cannot possibly be performed well."

He arrives at the choral section "Qui Tollis Peccata Mundi" . . . "This," he says, "is beyond description" . . . "The greatest choral music ever written, matchless clarity, amazing profundity, marvelous solemnity" . . . "Here Bach was at home."

The visiting lecturer placed the recording on the machine and the music filled the room. "Qui Tollis" . . . "Thou Who Bearest." The words and the notes soared through the open windows and flew upward into the night sky. The stars would not hear them, but the stars do not need them. They were intended for me and all men, who need them if we want to understand life and live.

In the words and music of the "Qui Tollis" is both the realness of our sin and the greater realness of its transfer from the world to Him who bore our sin in His body on the tree. The melody itself conveys the steady, strong, lifting and rising action which is the meaning of the text. For some music one feels the urge to stand up; here at the "Qui Tollis" one has the desire to kneel before the mystery of God and to let Him raise us up to the likeness of his Son.

The recording and the lecture ended and the shadows on the campus merged into the general darkness of the night. The end of another sun in the summer of the year of our Lord. Now the cool of the evening after the heat of the day. In the remembered echoes of the "Qui Tollis," I reflected upon the days to come. As the students gathered up their lecture notes and scattered into the night, I hoped they had also heard the deep call of one world to another in the "Qui Tollis" and taken it home. A call for amphibious men and women, at home in two worlds, holders of dual citizenship, living by the lifting power of the Bearer of our sins, living eternal life in the midst of time.

"Agnus Dei, Qui Tollis Peccata Mundi." So often sung on Good Friday—but words and music for every day. I remembered a special Good Friday service announced many years ago. It was a service offered in the middle of the day and workers were urged to come "as they are" in working garb. "As they are." There is something in that. Too often the Church is hopelessly removed from the stream of daily life. It is good for us to dress up on a Sunday morning and appear before the Lord with scrubbed faces and in our best suits. It is equally good and perhaps better that at times we come to church "as we are."

The Church which sings the "Qui Tollis" can and should be part of the warp and woof of the world, close to it, squarely in the middle. The best divine service, I believe, would be one to which the

men and women would come from their work as the vesper bell rings. The center aisle would be lined with empty lunch pails. If there should be an usher in a frock coat with a carnation in his lapel, I hope he would stumble over the pails. The preacher would say a few words fitting for the end of the day and for the day ahead, and everybody would sing an evening hymn. God, I am sure, would like that very much.

"Qui Tollis." I am finally reminded of those words of scripture which have seldom been explained properly: "The common people heard him gladly." Some of the prophets spoke in words of majesty and mystery, but not our Lord. The Bearer of the sins of the world was close to life and His speech was simple and clear. With Him we are not on the brow of Mount Sinai in thunder and lightning nor in the shaking and smoking temple with flying seraphim, but on a hillside under the afternoon sun, listening to a friend.

He talked of grass and wind and rain
Of fig trees and fair weather.
He made it His delight to bring
Heaven and earth together.
He spoke of lilies, vines and corn,
The sparrow and the raven;
And words so natural, yet so wise,
Were on men's hearts engraven;
And yeast and bread and flax and cloth
And eggs and fish and candles—
See how the whole familiar world
He most divinely handles!

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Bass, Dorothy, ed. *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997.

Wright, Basil. "Filming in Ceylon." *Cinema Quarterly* 2/4 (1943): 231–32.

_____. *The Long View*. London: Secker and Warburg, 1974.

On The Poets

J. D. Smith's third collection of poetry, *Labor Day at Venice Beach*, was published in 2012, and his first humor collection, *Notes of a Tourist on Planet Earth*, will be published in March. He works in Washington, DC and blogs at jdsmithwriter.blogspot.com.

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Ann Hostetler teaches English and creative writing at Goshen College and is author of *Empty Room with Light*, a finalist for the Arlin G. Meyer Award. Her poems have appeared in *The American Scholar*, *Nimrod*, *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, and *Washington Square*, among other journals. She is co-editor of the *Journal of the Center for Mennonite Writing* at www.mennonitewriting.org.

Paul Willis is Professor of English at Westmont College and current poet laureate of Santa Barbara, California. His most recent collection of poetry is *Rosing from the Dead* (WordFarm 2009).

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- truth-seeking
- free to inquire
- humble
- compassionate
- service-minded
- purpose-driven
- empowered
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