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William D. Richardson was an avid Dunes photographer and Chief Chemist for the Chicago meat packing company Swift & Company. The archives for William and his wife Flora are at the Westchester Township History Museum in Chesterton, Indiana. Both the Brauer Museum and the Westchester Museum had exhibitions in the summer of 2012 about the Richardsons; the Brauer focused on William’s photography, while the Westchester Museum focused on the lives of William and Flora. William lived and worked at a key time in the history of art and photography. By the late nineteenth century, photography had established itself as an effective documentary medium. Painting, for so long the medium for portrait likenesses and realistic representations of still lifes and landscapes, began changing in approach and perspective to call attention to its unique traits. As photography evolved in the early twentieth century, practitioners saw the medium as more than simply a means of recording appearances and began to consider its artistic possibilities. While painters focused on the rich vocabulary of the medium and left behind the primary goal of documentary veracity, some photographers adopted a more painterly approach to their images, in some cases applying paint and drawing material to their creations as well as experimenting with tonal effects and paper qualities. Richardson belonged to this group, initially categorized as the Photo Secession and later known as Pictorialists. They strove to make photographs as rich and atmospheric as paintings through using the camera and darkroom processes expressively rather than solely as means to a documentary end.

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whatever is TRUE

whatever is NOBLE

whatever is RIGHT

whatever is PURE

whatever is LOVELY

whatever is ADMIRABLE

if anything is excellent or praiseworthy
—think about such things.

Philippians 4:8
THE DAYS ARE GETTING SHORTER, AND THE
air is cold and damp. After a long pleasant
autumn, the signs of winter are in the air. It
can be a bleak season in these latitudes. When the
sunlight appears, it is pale and fleeting. The trees are
bare, and our backyard garden patches have been
stripped to the stalks, nothing left but mounds of
dirt and compost. Nearby Lake Michigan might
bury us in deep snow on any given night, and after
the snow falls it quickly melts into slush and mud.

Every year, as winter casts its shroud and the
secular calendar nears its last days, the church's
calendar is just beginning with the season of
Advent. This is a season for fasting and almsgiving,
for meditation and penitence, the time
when Christians await the miracle of the Nativity.
We wait in darkness, both the darkness of this bar­
ren season of decay and the darkness of our own
sin. We wait, believing that into our world of dark­
ness and decay will come light and new birth.

In Lutheran churches during the early
Reformation, the liturgy during the season of
Advent was appropriately subdued. The music
was simple; marriages and other celebrations were
delayed until after Christmas. But the quiet time
did not begin until the Second Sunday of Advent.
On the first Sunday, formal, concerted music was
still allowed, and the cantatas that J. S. Bach wrote
for that Sunday were a precious gift to the people
of Leipzig. In "Splendor and Solemnity: Bach at
Advent," Andrew White of Eastern Mennonite
University examines two of the cantatas that
Bach composed to be performed during the early
Advent season. White helps us recognize not only
the brilliance of these works but also how they are
perfectly crafted to fit into this particular moment
in the church calendar.

Also in this issue, Fredrick Barton of the
University of New Orleans considers the films of
Canadian director Sarah Polley. In "Requisites
of Love," Barton explores the themes of love,
betrayal, and loss that recur throughout Polley's
work. In "Inflatable Youth," Wheaton College's
Jeffrey Galbraith tells us what it is like to be
a young, "naive sensualist" experiencing the
world while traveling in a foreign culture. Two
other pieces in this issue also involve adventures
abroad. Last year, a group of recent Valparaiso
University graduates set out together to hike the
route of an ancient pilgrimage in northern Spain.
Jeremy Reed, in "I learn by going where I have
to go," tells his story of falling down and getting
back up on the Way of St. James. And in "One for
the Living, One for the Dead," Steven Wingate
of South Dakota State University describes his
shock and sense of disorientation at being a wit­
ess to violence directed against the image of
Christ in a Bulgarian Orthodox cathedral.

Perhaps these stories of going out into the
world seem like odd choices for our Advent
issue. After all, Advent is a season of waiting,
not of going out and looking. But in each story,
something that the authors never expected hap­
pens. They all went seeking something, but none
of them found exactly what they thought they
were looking for. Before leaving they believed
that somehow their travels might help them
answer questions about themselves and their
place in the world, but by the time their trips
ended they were left with more questions than
they had when they set out. In fact, they were
left with a recognition that there will be no easy
answers to many of the most difficult questions
we face, with a recognition of the limits of our
own self-knowledge, with a piercing awareness
of the mark of sin upon us. And it is precisely
this sort of awareness that we are called to in
Advent: to patience, to humility, to penitence.
This is a time to wait, to turn our attention to
God in prayer. We wait for the Coming, for the
Word made flesh to dwell among us and to bring
God's light to the world.

—JPO
The Lutheran Church and the Cantata

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH IS ONE OF THE most influential composers in the Western music tradition, and, arguably, the greatest composer of Protestant church music. If the latter is true, it is ironic that Bach’s church cantatas, which represent the heart of his sacred compositional output, are among the least familiar of his works. Alfred Dürr, in the preface to the first edition of The Cantatas of J. S. Bach (1971), laments the “Cinderella status” of the cantatas (v). In recent years, Bach’s cantatas have become better known due to numerous recordings of complete cycles and exciting projects like John Eliot Gardiner’s “Bach Cantata Pilgrimage,” during which he conducted the church cantatas in commemoration of the 250th anniversary of Bach’s death.

Yet despite their growing popularity, the cantatas can seem inaccessible to modern listeners. As Dürr notes: “…the Bach cantata is... more tied to its period than the ‘timeless’ instrumental works” (v). They are liturgically-centered, and many listeners are unfamiliar with the intricacies of the Lutheran worship service in eighteenth-century Germany. Many of the cantata texts consist of archaic German verse (which can be awkward, even when translated into modern English), and their language is typical of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Lutheran theology. However, the cantatas demonstrate the same level of genius, invention, and attention to detail that we find in Bach’s more familiar sacred works, such as the Mass in B Minor and the St. Matthew Passion, if on a smaller-scale. Indeed, the St. Matthew Passion was the fruition of the experience Bach gained from three years of cantata composition in Leipzig, and a number of movements from the Mass in B minor are taken directly from the cantatas.

The Lutheran church cantata developed over several centuries; Bach’s Weimar and Leipzig cantatas were based on the cantata model designed by Erdmann Neumeister (1671-1756), a theologian and chief pastor at the Jacobikirche, in Hamburg, from 1715-1756 (Dürr 6). Though he included well-known Lutheran hymns in his cantata text, Neumeister was particularly enthusiastic about the potential of the Italian operatic genres of recitative and aria for concerted church music: cantatas could be set to interpretative verse paraphrases of the “Word” for a given Sunday or feast day. The recitative, “originally a quite formless speech-song with continuo accompaniment,” was used in opera to explain and advance the plot (Dürr 17). This form lent itself to textual declamation, an important component of Martin Luther’s theology of the “Word”—“[t]he conviction that God’s Word, as laid down in the Bible, is dead and ineffectual unless it is proclaimed” (Dürr 3). Neumeister also saw the utility of the aria for church music, with its “lyrical and... melodic tendency” (Dürr 17). Its function in opera was to provide an emotional response to an event in the plot, whether it be anger, love, surprise, sadness, etc. (Dürr 17). In its church function, the aria could provide an affective expression of the biblically inspired text, and, in so doing, help churchgoers better connect to the message. Arias
typically began with a ritornello, a musical theme that would be reiterated throughout the aria. The theme alternated between vocalists and obbligato instruments, “leading to a lively reciprocal exchange between singers and instrumentalists” (Dürr 18).

By the time Bach began his twenty-seven-year tenure in Leipzig (1723–1750), the Neumeister church cantata “had its fixed place in the principal Sunday and feast-day service (the ‘Office’), after the Gospel had been read but before the singing of the Lutheran creed, Wir glauben all in einen Gott” (Dürr 23). Sometimes longer cantatas were split into two parts, with the second half performed after the sermon. Other times, two shorter cantatas were performed—one before and one after the sermon. Given the length of the Sunday morning service (with a sermon often as long as one hour), Bach did not have much time for a cantata (“barely half an hour,” Dürr 23). On feast days the cantatas were often performed in both of Leipzig’s principal churches—Thomaskirche and Nicolaikirche—once in the morning and once in the afternoon (Wolff 254).

Bach’s cantatas are then best appreciated in the context of Lutheran worship, since they are direct responses to Sundays and feast days in the liturgical year. As Eric Chafe has noted, for eighteenth-century Lutherans the liturgical year “...itself was a form of theological expression on the largest scale” (11). The astronomical and meteorological conditions of Europe correlated with the events of Jesus’ life and the beginnings of the church:

Beginning at the darkest time of the year, the liturgical year aligns the coming of God’s light into the world (the incarnation) with the turning of the sun at the winter solstice (Christmas), the coming of light to the Gentiles with the New Year (Epiphany), and the Passion and resurrection of Christ with the spring equinox and the coming of the Holy Spirit, and the revelation of the Trinity with the summer solstice. (Chafe 11)

In the liturgical year, then, the seasons correspond with key moments of Christian salvation history. With the First Sunday in Advent, the liturgical calendar organized around key events in the life of Christ, the temporale, begins. But, for Leipzig and many other Lutheran centers, this “New Year” was not to be a time of excess. In Christian Instruction on the God-pleasing Observance of Advent, Christmas, and New Year’s (1737), Neumeister argued that the new church year should be a period of gratitude, introspection, reflection, and repentance for inevitable shortcomings. As Jaroslav Pelikan notes, Neumeister, appealing to the church councils of the early medieval period, “explained that Advent, like Lent, was a penitential season, during which, for example, there were to be no weddings” (4). For Neumeister, the Christmas season was not to be a time of secular celebration, but rather should be characterized by “attending worship; reflecting at home on the meaning of the word of God; pondering the grace of God; ‘rejoicing over thy birth and grace’; thanking and praising God; and doing good to one’s neighbor” (Pelikan 5).

The Second, Third, and Fourth Sundays of Advent were part of the penitential period of Advent in Leipzig. The absence of “high” music on these Sundays accentuated the emphasis on reflection, self-denial, and general solemnity in the churches (Dürr 25). This liturgical tradition, then, put a particularly heavy emphasis on the First Sunday in Advent (Gardiner 8). Not only was this Sunday the beginning of the liturgical year, it also
marked the beginning of the Christmas season, a month-long period of expectation and waiting for the birth of Christ. As Tadashi Isoyama notes, it is this “double significance [that] caused Bach to devote particular care to creating a deep emotional content in his cantatas for this Sunday” (4). The First Sunday in Advent was the last opportunity for churchgoers in Leipzig to hear concerted music before Christmas; the emotionally profound music for this Sunday was highly valued because it could help to dispel the midwinter gloom in the weeks ahead (Gardiner 8).

Bach's cantatas for the First Sunday in Advent (like his other cantatas) are essentially sermons in music; they are theologically and emotionally-rich articulations of the themes of the Advent season. In these works, Bach achieves a remarkable synthesis between the old and new forms at his disposal (textual and musical) and a harmonious balance of the theological complexities of Christ's "Advent"—his incarnation, his ongoing presence in the church, and his second coming. Bach's music vividly underscores the paradoxes of Advent and the incarnation: joy, yet solemnity and expectation; light in the midst of darkness; divine power manifested in human weakness (as the "Ruler of Heaven" comes to earth as a baby); royal magnificence and intimacy (seen in the image of Christ knocking on the door); and peace and clamor (the response of wonder at the mystery of the incarnation).

The Scripture Lessons for the First Sunday in Advent

The designated scripture lessons for Advent 1, the first Sunday of the liturgical year, are Romans 13:11—14 (the epistle) and Matthew 21:1—9 (the Gospel). These texts illustrate the theological complexity of the incarnation and the ways in which Christ "comes" to his people. The epistle focuses on watchfulness and righteous living:

Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires. (Romans 13:11—14, NRSV)

Along with the exhortation for wakefulness and watchfulness, we see the trope of light and darkness (living in the day versus living in the darkness), commonly used during the Advent season. The notion of living "honorably," of avoiding drunkenness, debauchery, and licentiousness, and of making "no provision for the flesh," speak to the restraint and general solemnity that was expected during the Advent season as observed in Lutheran Germany in the early eighteenth century. At first glance, the Gospel reading, from Matthew 21, might seem inappropriate for this particular Sunday. Instead of focusing on the events leading up to the birth of Christ (the Annunciation and the story of John the Baptist, for instance), we have an account of Jesus entering Jerusalem before his crucifixion. This passage is the same Gospel reading assigned for Palm Sunday, and, on the surface, a seemingly unseasonable choice. The key phrase from the passage for Advent 1, however, is: "Look, your king is coming to you, humble..." The entrance of Christ into Jerusalem represents the culmination of his first coming, the beginning of the week of his passion, the very reason for his coming. However, in keeping with the tone of the epistle passage, Matthew 21 also foreshadows the second coming of Christ. Though events in the life of Christ follow a chronological pattern throughout the temporale, on the first Sunday of the church year the various theological aspects of Christ's "Advent"—his incarnation, his ongoing presence in the church, and his second coming—are deliberately conflated.

Luther's Advent Hymn: "Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland"

The cantatas that Bach performed for Advent 1 in Leipzig in 1723 and 1724—BWV 61 ("Now
Come, Savior of the Gentiles; i) and BWV 62 ("Now Come, Savior of the Gentiles," ii)—touch on these multivalent elements of Christ’s incarnation.

Both cantatas are centered on the Advent chorale, "Now Come, Savior of the Gentiles," Martin Luther’s 1524 translation of the medieval church hymn, Veni Redemptor Gentium. By the time Bach’s tenure as Thomascantor began in Leipzig, Luther’s eight-stanza translation had a long tradition of being sung in the Lutheran church during the Advent season (Dürr 76). The hymn’s invitation for the Messiah to come as Savior of the Gentiles is appropriate for the inauguration of the church year and the Christmas season, which, in the Lutheran tradition, focused on Christ’s coming to the Gentiles, as illustrated by the story of the Wise Men (the Gospel text for Epiphany, January 6, which marked the end of the Christmas season).

The melody of the hymn “has a dark, imposing character,” in the words of John Eliot Gardiner, but “one that Bach reinforces—or softens—though his inventive variety of treatments” (8).

"Now Come, Savior of the Gentiles"

Variation 1: The Indwelling King (BWV 61)

The libretto for BWV 61, “Now Come, Savior of the Gentiles,” i, was published by Neumeister in his collection Geistliches Singen und Spielen (Gotha 1711). Bach originally composed the cantata for Advent 1 in Weimar in 1714, but he revived it for his first Advent season in Leipzig on November 28, 1723. The opening movement of the cantata is entitled Ouverture, a French-style setting of the first verse of Luther’s Advent hymn: “Now come, Savior of the Gentiles, / Known as the Virgin’s Child; / All the world marvels that / God has ordained for Him such a birth.”

Bach’s musical setting of this text is, in the words of Alfred Dürr:

...an ingenious combination of chorale arrangement and French Overture: the overture inaugurates the church year. In French opera an overture was customarily played while the king entered his royal box. In this cantata too it serves to greet the entry of a King. (77)

The mixture of a medieval chant and the avant-garde music of the court of Versailles is striking (Gardiner 8), and, for much of the congregation (who would have been familiar with French musical fashion), this music would have conveyed “celebration and magnificence” (Kuijken 4). However, in keeping with the tonality of the hymn tune, the overture is in a minor key, giving it a severe and even melancholy quality (Schulze 8–9).

French baroque overtures (that follow the model developed by Jean-Baptiste Lully) are characterized by ceremonial dotted rhythms and are typically composed in three parts: grave-gai-grave (slow-fast-slow). Bach accommodates this structure to the four lines of the hymn. In the opening grave section, in 2/2 time, the violin parts provide a musical introduction, but they play at a high pitch which makes them sound dramatic, almost astringent in tone. In this section Bach sets the hymn-line, the text here, in keeping with the gai tempo, is “repeated very frequently, and thereby illustrates the crowd of people, who remain astonished” (Kuijken 5). With the last line of the hymn, Bach returns to the grave tempo, again in 2/2 time, and, as with line 2, all voices enter in unison. The brief, chordal setting of the text symbolizes, perhaps, the focus and singularity of God’s purpose in sending Christ to earth. This opening overture/chorus is an exceptional
achievement—in the words of David Melamed, “among Bach’s most striking creations... perhaps the best example of Bach’s imaginative treatment of chorales and his fusing of musical types” (167).

The second movement of BWV 61 is a tenor recitative, a setting of Neumeister’s verse paraphrase of stanza 2 from Luther’s hymn that focuses on the paradox of the incarnation—though “[n]ot from man’s flesh and blood,” Christ has taken on flesh and blood, “and accepts us as blood relations.” As with Stanza 1 of the hymn, the response in the text is amazement: “O supreme Good! / What have You not done for us? / What do You not do / Still daily for Your people?” The wonder expressed here is not merely in reference to Christ’s birth, but also to his incarnation among his people—his ongoing presence in and sustenance of the church. The movement starts as a secco recitative, but evolves into an arioso (a recitative with aria-like qualities) by the tenth measure, with the text: “You come and let Your Light / Shine with full blessing.”

The recitative sets up the following aria for tenor, a dance movement in 9/8 time. As an emotional response to the text of the previous movement, it contains a warm invitation to Christ: “Come, Jesus, come to Your Church / And grant us a blessed New Year!” The new year in question here is not January 1, but the beginning of the church year. With the musical setting, the high-pitched strings (violins and violas playing together in unison) have a “strict and unified character” according to Alfred Dürr (77), but Tadashi Isoyama describes the unison strings as conveying “richness and warmth” and “the unity of the church” (5). After the severe opening movement in A minor, this aria, in C major, has a softer, gentler sonority, with a wonderfully active basso continuo. In Section A of the aria, the tenor repeats the word “come” often, with musical figurations on the word “blessed.” The minister in Neumeister comes out in the text of Section B of the aria: “Maintain sound doctrine, / And bless pulpit and altar!” Bach places vocal emphasis on the words “pulpit” and “altar” here, before a da capo return to Section A.

For many listeners the most extraordinary moment of this cantata is the briefest and most fleeting one: a ten-measure recitative for bass soloist and pizzicato strings. The text is taken directly from Revelation 3:20: “See, I stand before the door...
and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will go in to him and have supper with him and he with me.” Here, the librettist goes from a community-wide invitation for Christ to come to the church to the more intimate invitation of Jesus to the “lukewarm” believers of the ancient church of Laodicea. Bach’s musical setting calls for the strings to play senza l’arco (without the bow), i.e., plucked strings playing staccato notes. Alfred Dürr notes that this movement is the ”true high point of the work, with the strings ”creating the impression of knocking, and the voice likewise turning to pictorial representation at the words ‘klopfe an’ (’knock’)” (77). Assigning the recitative to the bass seems deliberate, since that voice part is often the vox Christi in Bach’s sacred works. For John Eliot Gardiner, the bowless strings ”create a mysterious and hugely evocative backdrop” for Christ’s entreaty (9). There is a deep intimacy in this setting, a profound tranquility and warmth conveyed musically with minimal forces. Thematically, this portrait of Christ is strikingly different from the opening movement, with its associations of the splendor of the French royal court at Versailles.

Equally arresting is Bach’s setting of the response of the individual believer to Christ’s knocking on the door of the soul—a soprano aria with sparse basso continuo accompaniment. The key lines are set in Section A: “Open, my whole heart: / Jesus comes and moves in.” With the warm but minimal cello obbligato in 3/4 time, the human voice is foregrounded in ”[h]eartfelt naïveté” (Schulze 9). In Section B the soloist does not marvel at the birth of Christ, as one would expect in an Advent cantata, but rather at Christ’s indwelling of the believer: “Though I am but dust and earth,” Christ chooses “that I become His dwelling” (Isoyama 5). Bach underscores the ecstasy of the believer by having the soprano sing “how blessed (I shall be!)” six times in this middle section of the aria. According to Kuijken, the fact that the aria is assigned to a high voice “allows us to suspect that Bach connected these words with the ‘annunciation’” (Kuijken 5).

Bach concludes this cantata with three lines from the last verse of Wie schön leuchet der Morgenstern [How beautifully shines the morning star] by Philipp Nicolai (1599): “Amen! Amen! / Come, you fair crown of joy, do not long delay, / I await you with longing.” This text seems to conflate the first and second coming of Christ, which was common in the scripture readings for this season of the liturgical year. Eric Chafe traces the various advents of Christ in the developmental structure of this cantata:

‘Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland... interprets the coming of Jesus in a fourfold scheme...: first as His coming in the flesh to Israel (the incarnation, represented in the opening chorus...), then as His coming in the spirit to the church (the tenor aria...), then as His coming to the individual believer through faith (soprano aria...), and, finally, as His coming to the believer at the end of time (final chorale...). (6)

The musical setting of these lines, like the text itself, is brief but intense. In the last line, “I await you with longing,” the sopranos sing in long, descending notes, perhaps symbolizing Christ’s return to earth from heaven above. But after the voices trail off, the “obbligato violins soar up to top g3 [three octaves in all] at the close in Advent jubilation” (Dürr 77). The trajectory of the cantata is intriguing: from the royal welcome of Christ by the wondering world, to the response to Christ’s entreaty to enter in, to the expression of longing for Christ’s imminent return.

“Now Come, Savior of the Gentiles”
Variation 2: The Hero of Heaven (BWV 62)

BWV 62, “Now come, Savior of the Gentiles,” ii, was composed by Bach for his second Advent season in Leipzig (and first performed on December 3, 1724). The entire text of the libretto for BWV 62 is derived from Martin Luther’s eight-stanza hymn for Advent, “Now come, Savior of the Gentiles (Dürr 78–79). This holistic treatment of the hymn is typical of Bach’s chorale cantata cycle (1724–25), with the text and music of the chorales foregrounded.

As with BWV 61, Bach begins this cantata with the first verse of Luther’s Advent hymn,
again emphasizing the notion of the entire world marveling and wondering at the mystery of the incarnation, which Bach underscores with a wonderfully polyphonic and melismatic treatment of the phrase “all the world (marvels).” Musically, there is much to treasure in this exceptional movement—“repeated rising figures evoke the sense of welcome and anticipation in the chorale’s text, which heralds the coming of the Savior” (Burkholder, Grout, and Palisca 453). The first movement of Bach’s earlier Advent 1 cantata (BWV 61) was shaped by the musical structure of the French Overture; here, Bach follows the late-baroque Italian concerto model. With the admixture of voices, the movement is musically complex; it is full of intense energy, with the chorale melody lying with the soprano (in long notes) and the horn (which doubles the sopranos). The chorale tune is cited in the opening instrumental ritornello twice: first by the basso continuo, then, before the first vocal entry, by two oboes, who double the speed of the chorale tune, perhaps signifying the imminence of Christ’s coming (Kuijken 9). All of this builds up a wonderful frisson of excitement before the actual vocal entries. In all, this is a brilliant movement of Italianate brio, but in a minor key (like the chorale tune, in this case B minor) some of the solemnity, even severity, of the medieval hymn is retained. This creates an intriguing tension, “setting up an opposition between the concertato brilliance of the instrumental writing and the reflective gravity with which the wonder of Christ’s becoming man is celebrated in the chorale” (Dürr 79).

After this vivacious opening movement, Bach moves to an aria for tenor whose text is a paraphrase (by an unknown author) of Stanzas 2 and 3 of Luther’s hymn, focusing on the divine origin of Christ and the purity of Mary. In Section A of the aria, the text highlights the sense of wonder: “Marvel, O people, at this great mystery: / The higher ruler appears to the world.” Section B includes several key metaphors: (1) treasure (“Here the treasures of heaven are disclosed,” and at Christmastide one thinks of the three treasures presented by the Magi); and, (2) manna (“Here a divine manna is for us ordained”), referencing the Exodus story of God’s provision for Israel in the wilderness and Christ’s proclamation that he is “the bread of life,” God incarnate, and immanent in the Eucharist. The musical setting of the aria is full of joy and uplift, with a tempo that “evokes the physical body though dance” (Schulze 9; Burkholder, Grout, and Palisca 454). Two teams of paired violin and oboe, along with the violas, enter into dialogue with the soloist who marvels at the mystery of “the Great Ruler of Heaven” coming to earth as a child. This particular phrase is given special emphasis throughout, with some extraordinary virtuosic passages of word-painting. First, the initial syllable of the German word for “highest” (höchste) is extended in melismatic embellishment over six and a half measures. This is followed by a ten-measure melisma on the second syllable of the German word for “Ruler” (Beherrscher—“herr,” by itself, can mean “Lord” in German). As if this were not enough vocal ornamentation, Bach then assigns another extended melisma on “Ruler” to the tenor, but this time doubles its length to twenty measures!

The tenor aria is followed by a short recitative for bass soloist, which features the trope of the Son of God as hero, the man of divine descent (in both senses of the term): “The Hero from Judah breaks forth / To run His course with joyfulness / And to redeem us fallen ones. / O bright luster, O wondrous light of Blessing!” In the last line of the recitative we see, once again, the familiar Advent theme of light. This sets up an exceptional bass aria calling for Christ, the Hero, to support weak human flesh. This is a testosterone-filled piece focusing on the first two lines of the text: “Fight, conquer, strong Hero! / Be mighty for us in the flesh!” The aria has been described as “robust,” containing “fanfare motifs and rolling passages” (Schulze 9); “pompous [and] combative” (Gardiner 10); and “militant” (Dürr 80). These impressions are derived from the rhythm of the aria and its scoring, in which the upper strings play in unison with the basso continuo (though an octave higher), described by Hofmann as “an expression of power” (7). Vocally, the bass has to negotiate long bravado-filled melismas as he sings the words “fight” and “mighty.” Bach’s approach here is clearly operatic; Handel’s Julius Caesar could have entered the stage with such an aria.
However, this aria is an expression not of human power, but of divine strength. God renders to humans, "us weaklings," the divine ability to overcome evil within and without.

The recitative duet for soprano and alto that follows is yet another moment of contrast in this cantata. Here the believing community’s collective (hence two singers—unusual for recitatives), awe-filled approach to Christ’s manger is portrayed through a beatific recitativo accompagnato (with the strings creating a halo of music over the voices of the soprano and alto). It is an intimate scena—“enraptured,” in the words of Schulze, “[w]ith turns to distant, yet celestially luminous tonalities” (9). Indeed, the Advent trope of light figures once again, in the line: “Darkness did not disturb us / When we saw Your unending light” (Dürr 78). Bach concludes this cantata with a plain chorale setting of the final verse of Luther’s hymn, a collective response of praise to Trinity: “Praise be given to God the Father, / Praise be to God His only son, / Praise be to God the Holy Spirit / Always and in eternity!” This closure is remarkable, perhaps, for its simplicity after the broad range of emotional expression and musical invention in the previous five movements.

Conclusion

In BWV 61 and BWV 62, Bach demonstrates his compositional prowess—his ability to set the same text and familiar (perhaps, even tired) Advent themes through a rich variety of musical means, simultaneously evoking splendor, solemnity, amazement, hope, joy, and expectation. BWV 61 emphasizes the intimacy of the incarnation, with Christ knocking on the door of human hearts, and invites Christ to be incarnate in the life of the church as it begins a new year. In the two arias of BWV 62, we see the joy of amazement at the incarnation and Christ, a heroic figure fighting on the believer’s behalf. This combative energy is foreshadowed in the instrumental framing of the opening chorus, with lively violin figures animating Luther’s hymn tune. Though we have no record of the congregation’s response to this music, surely the theological and emotional profundity must have gone far in tiding over Leipzig churchgoers until the exuberant celebrations of Christmas Day. These immensely rich musical sermons provide us with a lens that transmits and refracts the converging light of the Advent season, with its theological complexities and contrasting emotions.

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Recommended Recordings


Works Cited


**Endnotes**

1. This includes cycles by Helmut Rilling, Gustav Leonhardt and Nikolaus Harnoncourt, Ton Koopman, Pieter-Jan Belder, and Masaaki Suzuki.

2. Though there are three surviving cantatas for the First Sunday in Advent (BWV 61, 62, and 36), this essay will focus on the first two, performed for Bach's first two Advent seasons in Leipzig (1723 and 1724), both of which bear the name: “Now come, Savior of the Gentiles.”

3. This medieval chant has similar roots to an Advent hymn that is better known in English-speaking countries, "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel."

4. All English translations of the cantata texts are taken from the English translation (by Richard D. P. Jones) of Alfred Dürr’s authoritative study, *The Cantatas of J. S. Bach: With Their Librettos in German-English Parallel Text* (Oxford UP, 2000). Cantata librettos, along with multiple translations, scores, commentaries, articles, and many other resources are available at bach-cantatas.com, the most comprehensive website devoted to Bach's cantatas.

5. According to Sigiswald Kuijken, the “arioso-dialogue between the tenor and basso continuo” illustrates “the intimacy of contact with God” (5).

6. Kuijken continues: “Mary is invisibly present here... as the greatest example of the ‘opening’ of the hearts of mankind to the coming of God” (5).
Requisites of Love
The Films of Sarah Polley

Fredrick Barton

“Love is not proud.”
“Love always protects.”
“Love always perseveres.”

—First Corinthians

(Author’s note: In order to discuss Sarah Polley’s films fully, I have inevitably revealed some of her carefully crafted narrative surprises. Please don’t let that deter you from searching out her films.)

Near the end of his life, my father had a heart attack that left his brain deprived of adequate blood flow for crucial minutes. He survived to live another three years, but he never recovered his intellectual prowess. A professor, theologian, and writer of prodigious analytical acumen, he was left in his final days unable to do third-grade arithmetic problems. He was embarrassed when I had to help him balance his checkbook. Such experiences with loved ones are sadly common as we age, and certainly anyone who has cared for someone in decline will be a receptive audience for debut writer/director Sarah Polley’s brilliant Away from Her, a heartbreaking rumination on the power and obligations of love in the face of losing someone who hasn’t gone away. When I saw Away from Her during its original release in 2007, I thought of the picture largely in its context as a film about Alzheimer’s disease. Now that Polley has written and directed two more features, I see her first film in the broader perspective of her reflections on marital love and the temptations of infidelity.

I had been aware of Polley before Away from Her. She had already established herself as a talented and stubbornly independent performer unusually committed to quality work, regardless of a film’s financing or commercial potential. Today I regard her as a master artist. And yet, outside her native Canada where she is justifiably regarded a national treasure, she is little known except among ardent film buffs. Born into a show business family in 1979, her performance career began early. She was cast in Disney’s One Magic Christmas at age four and in Terry Gilliam’s The Adventures of Baron Munchausen at age eight. At eleven, she starred in the Canadian television series Road to Avonlea, which led her national entertainment press to dub her “Canada’s Sweetheart.” In 1991, her hit series was picked up by the Disney Channel in the United States, and she began to attract attention in the lower forty-eight as well. That attention increased with her role as a teenager in Atom Egoyan’s adaptation of the Russell Banks novel, The Sweet Hereafter in 1997 and in 1999 for her performance in the indie hit Go.

If Polley harbored more conventional aspirations, we might all know about her as a movie star. In 2000, she was offered the role of Penny Lane that launched Kate Hudson’s career in Cameron Crowe’s Almost Famous, but turned it down for a part in the low-budget Canadian film The Law of Enclosures. Remaining in Canada, she won the Genie (Canada’s Oscar) for her lead role in My Life Without Me, Isabel Coixet’s story of a young mother, dying of cancer, who is in love with her husband and another man she has met late in her
short life. This theme of divided romantic loyalties is one Polley would return to when she began to make her own films.

Polley is blond, slim, lithe, and striking, not conventionally beautiful, like Kate Hudson, but very pretty and commanding on the screen. We can easily enough imagine for her the career trajectory that Hudson has followed, a series of romantic comedies with handsome male co-stars, many nights of blinking through camera flashes on the world's red carpets, entertainment magazine cover shoots, and a comfortable life. But Polley wasn't interested. Instead, after turning away from Almost Famous, she attended the Canadian Film Centre's directing program, took acting roles like that of a deaf factory worker in Coixet's The Secret Life of Words, a film that was barely released, or small parts, like that of Nabby Adams on the HBO television series about the second American president that starred and won both Golden Globes and Emmys for Paul Giamatti, Laura Linney, and Tom Wilkinson.

Then in 2007, at the age of only twenty-eight, Polley wrote and directed her first feature, the shattering Away from Her. The picture captured a Golden Globe for star Julie Christie and Oscar nominations for Christie as lead actress and Polley for adapted screenplay. But it grossed only fifteen million dollars in the United States. Not surprisingly, the film was much more warmly received in Canada where the movie won Genie Awards for best picture, best direction, best screenplay, best actress, best actor (Gordon Pinsent), and best supporting actress (Kristen Thomson).

Again, a filmmaker of a different sort might have tried to build on this impressive debut writing/directing performance by seeking out a big Hollywood project, which Polley almost certainly could have commanded. But as usual, marching to the beat of her own drum, she instead wrote and directed the independent romantic drama Take This Waltz, which grossed less than two million dollars in the United States. In commercial terms she was going backward. But she made no correction and instead brought out as her third feature, Stories We Tell, a documentary about her family. Or at least this film presents itself as a documentary, even though it contains many surprises, reversals, and other narrative techniques that we more commonly associate with fiction. In fact, one of the film's central points is that even stories we regard as "true" are so influenced by the vagaries of memory and point of view that they are inevitably in some significant part fiction.

The Mother in the Frame

A conventional strategy in an essay of this kind would be to discuss Polley's films in the order in which they were released. But the filmmaker reveals so much of herself and her background in Stories We Tell, I find it more enlightening to look at her work in reverse and to start with the most recent film, released at the Telluride Film Festival in September 2012.

Sarah Polley was only eleven years old when her mother, Diane, died in 1990. Stories We Tell is an attempt on the part of the filmmaker to learn more about the parent she lost too early. The picture purports to be assembled home movies and the filmed recollections of Polley's father and siblings and a number of her mother's friends and professional associates. But the movie ultimately reveals itself to be something other than it initially pretends.

Born in 1935, Diane Polley was a television and theater actress and casting director in her native Canada. She was married twice. Her first marriage to George Buchan produced two children, John and Susy, and her second to Michael Polley, Sarah and her older siblings Mark and Joanna. Or so everyone long believed.

Diane was high spirited and energetic. She was the life of every party. She was the wild girl who became the mother that every child wanted. Her second husband, Michael, was her polar opposite and confesses in the film that he suspects Diane fell in love with the character in a play he was performing and not with the actor himself. Diane wanted Michael to pursue his acting and writing career, but with children to feed, clothe, and house, he went into life insurance, disappointing his wife for much of the rest of her life. Michael liked little better than reading
or listening to music while alone. Diane craved perpetual interaction with others.

Despite Diane's electric personality, her life included its sorrows. Acknowledged by all who knew her, her marriage to Michael fell short of what she hoped. And her first marriage to George Buchan ended in sad acrimony. When Diane tried to share custody of her first two children, both of whom preferred to live with her, George fought her in court and prevailed. His lawyers painted Diane as obsessed with her acting career, and the judge ruled against the mother on this basis, for perhaps the first time in Canadian history. Diane was allowed to visit with John and Susy only once a month, and their absence ate a hole in her heart which she concealed with drink and flamboyant behavior.

Michael and Diane spent their first extensive time apart when Diane was cast in a 1978 Montreal production and Michael had to stay home in Toronto with the kids. By this time, much of the physical passion in their marriage had been depleted. Or, at least, most of Michael's passion had disappeared. He admits as much to his children and tells Sarah's camera that Diane wanted sex much more than he did from the beginning of their relationship. Ironically, Diane's time in Montreal rekindled Michael's libido, and for the first time in some years, the couple began to have sex again. The result of their renewed relations was the birth of daughter Sarah in 1979. Or so for years, everyone believed.

However, blond Sarah looked little like her dark-haired full siblings or her dark-haired father Michael. But Diane was a blond, so Sarah's looks were the subject of teasing and little more. When Sarah was eighteen, though, she did seek out Geoff Bowes, the actor in Diane's 1978 production who her siblings claimed she resembled. Bowes denied paternity, and Sarah let the matter rest for a long time. Years later, in an early quest to get to know her long deceased mother, Sarah arranged an interview with Harry Gulkin, her mother's friend, a founding titan of Canadian cinema, and the producer of the movie Lies My Father Told Me, a title almost laughingly a case of art imitating life.

Harry Gulkin looks amazingly like Albert Einstein at the great physicist's most frazzled and wild-haired. Yet, Harry Gulkin told Sarah Polley that he had an affair with Diane in 1978 and that he was Sarah's father. Subsequent DNA testing proved it to be true, although Sarah and Harry kept that fact a secret from Michael for a long time, revealing it only when a reporter got the story and revealed to Polley his intention to publish her true paternity. Michael, remarkably stoic, accepted this news well despite his telling Sarah that he was always closer to her than to his other children, primarily, he thought, because he had to raise her after age eleven by himself. Michael not only let himself be interviewed for Stories We Tell, but agreed to write and read the film's narration. He and Sarah have remained close.

These surprising details are plenty and could be all. But there is more. As the film draws to a close, Sarah edits in shots from behind the camera. Those home videos we watched are not what we have been led to believe. They are not home videos; rather, they are reenactments with actors playing all the members of her family, including...
Harry Gulkin. We see them in make-up. And we see Sarah giving them notes and directing their scenes. This is her way of saying that, though she set out to tell her mother's story, what she has in the end told is her own story about her mother, and about Michael, John, Susy, Mark, and Joanna. And about Harry Gulkin too, Harry who didn't come forward to claim Sarah as his child for three decades. Harry says he and Diane continued to have an affair for several years after Sarah's birth. Are we to believe this? Are we to believe that he was present at Diane's funeral? Michael says he wasn't there. And the scene showing him at the back of the church during the service was one that Sarah staged. Is Harry really Sarah's biological father? He says so, and DNA confirms it, save for those few unlikely decimal places of uncertainty. So what are we to make of the film's concluding scene where Geoff Bowes finally admits to an affair with Diane during the very season that Sarah was conceived. Could Harry be lying and the DNA be wrong? It depends on who is telling the story.

**The Child in the Adult**

Note well that Sarah Polley was born of infidelity and grew up loving as a father a man to whom she is not biologically related. Marital infidelity plays a major role in both of Polley's fictional features. It is the primary concern of her second movie *Take This Waltz* (the film's title taken from a haunting Leonard Cohen song), which focuses on a young couple whose relationship ends despite the fact that they do care for each other.

*Take This Waltz* is the story of the strikingly childlike Margot (Michelle Williams), a sometime travel writer who has been married for five years to Lou (Seth Rogen), a cookbook author. On a plane returning from a writing assignment, Margot meets a man named Daniel (Luke Kirby), and they end up sharing a cab ride home from the airport. It turns out that they live right across the street from each other. We can tell that Margot is drawn to Daniel almost instantly, though she acts on her attraction only gradually. Daniel is better looking than Lou, and he gives off an air of greater mystery. He supports himself by pulling tourists around town in a rickshaw, but when he's not working, he paints. That he doesn't exhibit his work invites suspicion that he isn't very good, although it remains possible that he merely lacks confidence. Daniel is apparently unconnected to other people (there is no mention of family and no personal friends appear) and focuses on Margot from their first meeting forward. Lou, in contrast, comes from a large, loud, and complicated family, with whom he is constantly involved, and though we are to believe that he loves Margot, he has a cooking and writing project to complete, so she isn't the sole object of his attention.

Margot and Daniel begin to see each other, chastely at first. When Margot tells Daniel early on that she's married, he responds, "That's too bad." And gradually their meetings become sexually charged. Drinking martinis in a bar one afternoon, Margot invites Daniel to tell her "what you'd do to me" if they made love. Daniel responds in such pornographic detail that the scene plays as adultery without their having yet touched each other.

Polley plainly sees many acts of marital infidelity as the product of emotional and intellectual immaturity. Scene after scene establishes Margot's childishness. Daniel teases Margot during their first conversation when she orders a glass of milk for her inflight beverage. What adult orders milk, he wants to know. Adults order a cocktail or Bloody Mary mix, at least a soft drink. Lou and Margot act like children with each other on a regular basis. "I wuv you," they tell each other. They wrestle and pinch each other, and Lou says, "You're the baddest little baby." They squirt each other in the kitchen, and Lou repeatedly pours a pitcher of cold water over Margot's unsuspecting head when she's in the shower. When Lou tries to conduct an important conversation about his publishing contract, Margot, the child not the center of attention, tickles and kisses him—any and everything to distract him from adult behavior. They play a regular game of violent gross out that recalls the silliness of junior high boys. "I love you so much I'm gonna mash your head with a potato masher," Margot says, to which Lou replies, "I love you so much, I'm gonna put your
spleen through a meat grinder." In a subsequent scene Margot coos, "I want to kick the snot out of you and sell you for glue," and Lou responds, "I want to rape you with a pair of scissors." And in perhaps the defining scene of Margot's childish thoughtlessness, she pees in the middle of the community pool, requiring a couple of dozen women performing aquatic aerobics to flee the water in disgust.

Granted, Polley makes clear that Margot and Lou's problems are not restricted to immaturity. Lou is professionally focused, while Margot remains adrift. She doesn't know what she wants to do with herself. And she is insecure in ways we don't at first suspect. Daniel's physical attraction for her is all the more powerful for Margot because Lou can be inattentive, preoccupied, and romantically dismissive. She is crestfallen when she proposes lovemaking one night and Lou isn't immediately interested. "Don't you understand the courage it takes to try to seduce your lover," she tells him. On the surface the statement seems nonsensical, but I suspect it rings true for most of us who have sustained relationships that outlast the urgent fires that rage when love is new.

Lou, moreover, suffers from among those oldest of human failings: blindness to the feelings of others and overweening pride. When Margot complains that they are eating their fifth anniversary dinner in complete silence, Lou responds, "Well, I'm not just going to say something so we can have a conversation." Later, when Margot tells Lou she is leaving him for Daniel, he responds in self-protection, "I won't beg you to stay because if I did, I'd be humiliating myself." We can only wonder how much, how long, and how often he regrets this statement.

In *Take This Waltz* as elsewhere in her work, Polley shows herself a master of the visual and aural metaphor. In a scene which presages both the consummation and the decline of Margot's relationship with Daniel, the two are riding a tilt-a-whirl car in an amusement park. Spinning, laughing, holding on to each other, their mutual attraction is intoxicating. The music by the Buggles that accompanies the ride repeats the lyrics, "Video killed the radio star; we can't rewind, we've gone too far." Slim, sexy, mysterious Daniel is the video who kills Lou, the slightly chubby, not nearly so handsome, radio star. Once they make the break together, Daniel and Margot feast from a buffet of physical passion. They make love at all times of day, in all places, and in sundry posi-

Michelle Williams and Luke Kirby in *Take This Waltz*.
Margot are showering after a swim, and when Geraldine bends to shave her legs, she muses, "Who am I shaving my legs for? I've been married ten years, and James [her husband] certainly wouldn't notice." She pauses, and then resumes her shaving, saying rhetorically, "But I like James after ten years. Is it worth trading that in for something exciting with someone I might not like in ten years?" Another woman in the shower room interjects, "Sometimes I just want something new." But still another counters, "Yeah, but new things get old."

The film ends on that implicit philosophic note. Margot and Lou needed to grow up, but Margot didn't wait long enough for that to happen. Their marriage possessed no fatal flaw, and they could have made it work. Here is how Sarah Polley communicates that sentiment. Lou and Margot see each other again, and they talk for a while, flirting around the edges of the idea that maybe they had made a mistake. But Lou's pride rears its ugly head and leads him to deny any responsibility. Saddened, Margot starts to walk away. They will perhaps never see each other again. Realizing it, Lou says in a soft voice with a rueful smile, "I just bought a new melon baller, and I'd like to gouge out your eyeballs with it." "Yeah," Margot replies, "me too."

What Love Demands

Though Away from Her is certainly the film about Alzheimer's I originally thought it to be, the picture is also a reflection on a different example of the reasons for and results of marital infidelity. Adapted from Alice Munro's short story "The Bear Came Over the Mountain," Away from Her is the story of Fiona (Christie) and Grant (Pinsent) Anderson, a Canadian couple in their sixties. They have been married for forty-four years, and Grant is now retired from his position as a university professor. Twenty years ago, Grant had a series of affairs with his students, the final one of which led to a scandal that required his early retirement. But the marriage endured. Today Fiona and Grant live a quiet life in a rustic house on a lake. They like to hike, cross-country ski in the winter, and entertain friends for dinner. They are sexually active and exude a fond comfort in one another's company. Their habit of quiet evenings of reading side by side reminds us of Margot and Daniel in Take This Waltz, evenings that could have been shared by Margot and Lou had their marriage endured.

In an early voiceover repeated later in the film, Grant speaks of his mad love for Fiona when they first met and then later calls that first burst of love "superficial" compared to what they had until recently. Fiona proposed to Grant when they were very young—she was only eighteen, he a little older—and he accepted because, "I never wanted to be away from her. She had the spark of life." (The latter is a sentiment many friends and family attributed to Diane Polley.) Grant still feels that way toward Fiona even as cruel fate begins to steal her away. Fiona is suffering from ever more debilitating symptoms of Alzheimer's disease, and in the film's early scenes she has to be institutionalized. Grant was unfaithful to Fiona, but he never left her, and it always remained true that he never wanted to be away from her. Now he has to be.

We presume that Grant is contrite about betraying his marital vows, and we presume also that Fiona has forgiven him. Polley establishes these developments in a telling visual metaphor, typical to her work. In the footage behind the opening credits, the couple sets off skiing across the frozen lake. Then Grant begins to ski in an angled direction as Fiona continues straight on. By the time the opening credits are ending, however, Grant and Fiona are next to each other, headed together again on a straight path. We gather that they have been faithful to each other for the twenty years since the scandal. But that does not mean that either has forgotten what happened. And the memory of the infidelity on both their parts no doubt influences what happens once Fiona begins to live in Meadowlake Alzheimer's facility.

To help them adjust, patients are not allowed visitors during their first thirty days at Meadowlake. So Grant is forced away from Fiona for a long, bitter month. Then when he shows up for the first of his permitted visits, Grant finds that Fiona has formed a fierce emotional attach-
ment to another patient, Aubrey Burke (Michael Murphy). The film doesn't address whether the facility allows sexual connections among its residents, and we aren't sure that sex is an element in the relationship between Fiona and Aubrey anyway. But they are indubitably a couple, and Fiona is as devoted to Aubrey as she previously has been to Grant, whom she now finds familiar and treats politely, but doesn't really recognize.

Grant arrives at Meadowlake daily, bearing flowers that Fiona doesn't want and books that Fiona isn't interested in or capable of reading, always hoping that his next visit will jog her memory and she will be his again. Fiona doesn't recognize Grant as her husband of four and a half decades, but she does acknowledge his solicitations, usually by saying with a smile, "My but you are persistent, aren't you." But until the film's end, in a scene of cruel irony and uncertain portent—probably just a blip of momentary recovery that a nurse has warned Grant sometimes occurs but almost never lasts—the recognition Grant yearns for doesn't come. Fiona remains constantly at Aubrey's side. These developments would be sad enough, but then a twist arrives that's sadder yet and demands even more from Grant than he has previously been asked.

We learn that Aubrey is not a permanent resident of Meadowlake but has only been housed there for a brief time to allow his exhausted wife Marian (Olympia Dukakis) a time of recovery from her usual duties as his sole caretaker. Without selling her house, which is her only financial asset, Marian cannot afford to let Aubrey remain in Meadowlake. She must take him home. And when she does, both Aubrey and Fiona are devastated. Fiona is so psychologically destitute after Aubrey is taken away, that her mental and physical health decline rapidly, and Grant is afraid she will soon be bedridden and vegetative.

That fear leads to this story's most insightful and emotionally affecting turn. Betrayed though he has, Grant loves Fiona with all his heart, and he realizes that he can only save her by restoring Aubrey to her side. His love for his wife demands that he yield Fiona to another man. But accomplishing Aubrey and Fiona's reunion requires convincing Marian to allow it and making it possible for Marian to afford it. Moreover, Grant has to overcome his distaste for Marian. Polley and her actors establish the differences between these two characters with great subtlety. Whereas Grant is an intellectual scholar and patrician of manner, Marian is lower-middle class in her financial resources and in her affordable tastes. And though she is not ultimately a mean or insensitive person, she is brusque and suspicious and also faintly coarse. But while Dukakis renders Marian as edgy and raw, the actress lets us glimpse Marian's flinty exterior and naked calculation as a mask for her vulnerability. The terms of her agreement with Grant are never quite spelled out, but they amount to this: if Marian is to give Aubrey to Fiona, then Grant has to take Marian unto himself. Grant's love for Fiona demands that he be away from her and, more, that he make room in his life for another for whom he will have to learn to care. Away from Her will reduce you to tears, not once, but many times. It is as powerful a statement about what love requires as any I have ever encountered.

How has so much artistic maturity and human wisdom come to reside in someone as young as Sarah Polley? A blessing. Hers and ours. May she make more films and share her understanding of the human heart and soul with moviegoers for decades to come.

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THE YOUNGER DAUGHTER

The girl I left by the side of the road
Was not the one I met at the well.
She was beautiful with an open hand
By the end she was scared of every thing

So she took her father's bric-a-brac
(I don't see how you could call those things gods)
And she kept them to feel safe and sound
out with me finally at night.

Was that a reason to take her hand
And let it clutch only the sand?
I ask the one who blows the wind
But he answers only with gusts.

So I remember at the well
She came, she let her vessel down
And I hit seven other men
To let her take her water home.

And I heard who she was and then
I wept that I could have such luck
And it was only fourteen years I worked,
I left with her—and she had to take rocks!

When my son walks around these tents
And flashes that great coat
I think about her and those hands,
How she would laugh, he has her throat.

And if he ever finds himself
Heaven forefend—alone at night—
I hope he knows his father's hand
Found everything the rocks covered in sand.

I hope he knows you can leave all
The world behind and find a girl
And make a world between two walls
And lose it all for a few toys.

I hope he knows there's nothing there
To fight for—only wind—
And when his brothers do what's been required
Let them know his mother was my victory.

Atar Hadari
TRAVEL ENHANCES A PERSON’S TASTE AND VISION. IT CAN BLIND AND MAKE DIZZY. IT CAN CAUSE WHIPLASH AND UNMOOR.

I see it clearly. As a college student in Mexico years ago, I am a young adult in enormous sensuous contact with the world. I might look like an ordinary tourist, paying a few coins to photograph a squat woman with an iguana on her head, or holding my nose to drink the milk of an agave plant. More accurately, I am a sensualist. I yearn to close the distance that separates me from my surroundings. I want to be somebody who has seen marvels and scaled heights and ingested strange bacteria. It is my animal passion to accrue knowledge through even the most outlandish experience. It is perhaps also the case that my encounter with other cultures becomes a form of indulgence, a way to fatten up the goose of self.

In Mexico, my desire to travel is partly the result of gamesmanship. It offers a chance to one-up those who remain at home. The previous summer, while I worked two jobs to pay for my semester abroad, my friends conspired to jump a train to Kansas City. While I went to bed early, they stayed up playing at hobos, risking loss of limb to gaze at the starry sky from a flatbed rail car. Just to say they had done it. I told myself to be patient. Mexico would be my daring adventure. Soon I would fly with a group of students into Mexico City and then bus it to a language school in Cuernavaca. After passing a month there, we would travel by train to Guadalajara where we would hunker down for the rest of the semester.

In his travels, the sensualist takes in an experience without pausing to question. Especially if he is raised in a small town and nourished by books, the sensualist assumes that experience always happens elsewhere and to other people. There is a certain sense of belatedness, a rush to catch up. Perhaps we should call this particular personality type the naïve sensualist. This is not the place for a full definition, but the naïve sensualist should not be mistaken for the hedonist, with whom he is often confused. The sensualist may or may not have tried hedonism, but it does not suit his temperament. His belatedness makes him quixotic, but not necessarily prone to decadence.

When the naïve sensualist believes that at long last, he is in the midst of a true-to-life, authentic experience, he takes on the role of the cheerleader. He draws attention to it. He finds it impossible to remain silent. Do others realize this is happening? How can one not feel something? Think of the gigantic, fan-blown balloon man they set up outside car dealerships to attract passing motorists. The balloon is designed to dance and jerk erect as the air shoots upward. As the air from the fan swells and subsides, the balloon man snaps to attention again and again, straight as a pine. Like him, in these moments I inflate to twenty-feet tall, the air shuddering through me. Check me out on top of a pyramid! I am the Aztec priest holding aloft my own, still beating heart.

In addition to being a sensualist, I am a newly awakened evangelical Christian, which only adds to my tendency to swell like a zeppelin.
The year before traveling to Mexico, I stopped experimenting with drugs in order to make the faith commitment that had dogged me for most of my teenage years. I mended my ways, quit my search for sexual experience, and absorbed the Gospel like a tab of LSD imprinted with the outline of a red Yosemite Sam.

Becoming born again—or at least newly revived—made me a more serious student. The encounter with Scripture awakened me to history, philosophy, and literature and imbued the hard work of learning with the promise of self-knowledge and the thrill of conveyance beyond the here and now. The Western tradition held frozen in suspension the kinds of questions I wanted desperately to pursue. My courses in elementary Spanish contributed to my life change by leading to the pleasurable loss of my bearings. Delving into a foreign language brought with it a perspectival shift that felt like renewal. The tongue felt different against the teeth.

So there I am the following fall as a student in Mexico. I am still a baby Christian. My mountain-top freshman year recedes into memory, and the provisional agreement that I had struck between sensual appetite and my zeal for the Lord begins to unravel in alarming ways. Throughout the trip the Spanish language continues to affect me. Under the unrelenting sun, new words cause a rewiring of my head and throat. There is less water in the way I pronounce my r’s, the liquid replaced by more tap and friction. Never before have I been able to trill.

Everything about this season is a bit unreal, magnified by a power of ten. My senses have remained at level orange ever since I boarded the plane in St. Louis and landed in the dry lakebed of Mexico City. It is somehow fitting that my first time flying led to my first time climbing a pyramid which led to my first encounter gazing up at the day signs that make a ring around the Sun Stone.

My enthusiasm for life is my strongest trait at the moment. There's a girl in our group who is drawn to my ability to register minute tremors of enchantment. Late one night during our first month here, I walked out of her host family's house to find two horses, unbriddled, clopping past in the dark. Where were their riders? Whence did they come? I leaned against the cool metal of the front gate, half in, half out. After pausing a long while to revel in the moment, I set out in search of a taxi as if aglow, possessed of a story without beginning or end that just had to be told.

Mexico is not unfamiliar to the girl, which is perhaps why she desires the company of the naïve sensualist, who is able to restore a sense of the magic that she has lost. The test of this theory comes on Columbus Day weekend, when the girl and I travel to Puerto Vallarta to stay at her parents' time-share.

When we finally arrive in Puerto Vallarta and find the resort, it is a relief to set down our bags. I volunteer to go to the liquor store for rum, primarily because I want to buy postcards. Somebody back home needs to hear about the long, mind-blowing bus ride over the mountains. Working its way across the mountain range, the coach downshifted on sharp descents, and how it seemed to float as it crested the high plateau. Raising the window curtain, I startled at the drop-off so close to the shoulder of the highway, the sight of the green valley cutting away far below. How ironic that our entertainment was a Spanish-dubbed version of one of the Death Wish movies, played on the bus’s small television screens.

At the resort we meet up with a young married couple named Pepe and Veronique, with whom we’ll be spending the weekend. The girl knows them because the husband used to be her tennis instructor in previous years at the time-share. Veronique is his hot American wife, who grew up in Key West, the feral child of bohemian artists. The four of us spend most of the next two days on the beach, lunching and dining together, varying it up with a few excursions to the outlying areas.

Since Pepe has a car, he planned to take everyone back to Guadalajara on Monday. I don't remember the reason, but I opt out. I decide instead to return by myself late Sunday night on the red-eye bus. Maybe I want them to spend some quality time together. Maybe I find it awkward.
that everybody has an intersecting back story and I'm the odd one out. (One should also note the difference between the girl and me in terms of social class. This is my first time at a time-share.) Or maybe there is a question as to whether we will all fit in the car given the size of our luggage.

The night of my departure, Pepe and Veronique go out to a discoteca, while the girl walks me to the bus station for my red-eye back to the city. There is something dream-like about this night, such that setting out feels like embarking on a great adventure. As we walk I experience a strong impression, which I will record later in my journal (in my newly adopted Spanish, no less), that I am a soldier preparing to leave for war. I have the feeling as I am walking that I may never see the girl or this town ever again. That I am approaching some kind of end. This imaginative awareness gives an almost palpable aura to everything around me. I try for several months afterward to write a poem about the breeze rustling the palm fronds, the echoing waves, and the disco exploding with fiesta. The word “exploding” is a bit much, doubling up, as it were, on the soldier metaphor. But one can see the connection. This is just the sort of thing that swells the balloon man’s dancing, inflatable form.

As I take my leave of the girl at the bus station, something about our parting registers a change. Why isn't she as unsettled here, as fired into possibility, as I am? Isn't the aura as palpable to her as it is for me? On a basic level, the naïve sensualist assumes that his heightened perception of the world should be readily embraced by others, confident that he is privy to a mysterious sense of reality for which others will be grateful. When challenged or ignored (or met with a quiet, reserved look, as in this case), the naïve sensualist responds by clamping up. Boarding the bus, I am aware that somehow my connection with the girl has frayed, or that the connection I thought existed never actually did. Just like that, the sensualist retreats behind the brick wall of aesthetic superiority, wounded and finding solace in self-justification.

As the years have passed, my understanding of this odd moment and the fantasy of departure that led up to it has changed significantly. If the girl hesitated to climb with me to the heights of imagination, I now think it is a testament to her practical wisdom. And the metaphor of the departing soldier seems tasteless in hindsight, over-fermented, as if the only thing I desired from travel was the opportunity to consume a variety of imaginative, escapist roles. The naïve sensualist shops for identity in a land where the dollar goes far.

PULLING out of the beach town, the bus carries me through the long night toward the simulacrum of home.

When we reach the bus station outside Guadalajara, dawn is still breaking. But there will be no quick ride home to crawl into bed. An hour and a half later, when the city buses begin running to the Centro, I finally get a ride back to town. The bus drops me a number of blocks away from my usual stop because the avenue has become a parade route. Access to my neighborhood is blocked by a procession in honor of the Virgin of Zapopán, complete with dancers and dignitaries and crepe-covered floats.

Shouldering my overnight bag, I push through the crowd, which moves to the sound of native drums and the bright flourish of horns. When I finally catch sight of the Virgin, it is nothing like I expected. Riding down the avenue in the back of a convertible Cadillac, the Virgin is a ten-inch tall painted figurine who looks more like prom-queen Barbie than the Mother of God. And why is she encased in what looks like bulletproof glass? The parade features a run-through of Mexican history. A phalanx of Aztec dancers passes by with feathers glued to arm- and headbands, quills outstretched.
like the rays of the sun, then a group of Spanish conquistadors dressed in frilled white ruffs and doublets and wielding pointy, axe-like halberds. All that is missing is the fierce pointy beard. Next come two cowboys who strike out with bullwhips at demons that swirl around them. The half-naked boys in demon masks thrill at the chance to run wild in the middle of the street, even as the lashes draw real red blood.

At this point the naïve sensualist has begun to wear down, feeling as if he himself were the one being lashed. The fatigue is the result of partying at the resort, his lack of sleep on the uncomfortable bus, and the theater of world events passing in front of him like a parody of the programming one finds on the History Channel. The fatigue is compounded by his newly purchased five-dollar sandals, which are killing his feet, and by the fact that he keeps looking in vain for a break in the procession. All he wants to do is cross the street without drawing attention to himself, so as not to feel like the boorish American insensitive to the fantastic display of Catholic national pride.

The sights and sounds of the parade continue to resonate after dinner that night when the phone rings and it is my parents on the other end, who sound massively relieved when I speak my living voice into the receiver. They have heard reports that a male student in our group has drowned on a weekend trip to the ocean. Eerily, these reports seem to match my description. Weren’t you traveling to the coast this weekend? they ask. Whoever it was who drowned went to my high school and had been on the wrestling team. This guy ruled the mat. He threw me like it was nothing, like I was a piece of meat, up in the air and straight onto my ass. When he heard I had enrolled at the university he attended, he sought me out, recruiting me for his fraternity. Before classes started my freshman year, he took me on a fraternity floating trip down a quiet river in backwoods Missouri. We spent the entire weekend baked, blissful, bonding. When I began to love Jesus that fall, I severed ties with almost everyone from my recent past. Our reconnection on this trip had been awkward, to the say the least. I often didn’t know how to act around him, and he probably thought of me as that strange bird, a Jesus freak.

Sure that no one is watching, I scale the fence of the nearby municipal park, sit down beside a small pond. I know what the moment requires. They say the first stage of grief is denial. But I can’t be incredulous about his death when I have a good idea what probably happened. Swimming when you’re high is just plain stupid. He and I had run that risk before.

Sitting by the pond I withdraw further and further inside myself. I think about how, that weekend, I ran all alone into the ocean at midnight without even testing the pull of the currents. It is scandalous to admit, but over and over I think that it could have been me, it could have been me, it could have been me.

Stuck on repeat, I feel as if my powers are draining from me. There is no more gust of air within.

In late autumn, in the calm after the drowning, after the funeral, just when things are returning to normal, a gas leak threatens to blow up the Centro. The Centro is the downtown area of Guadalajara where weekdays after school I walk through plazas patrolled by men with automatic weapons to get to the mural "Man in Flames" by José Clemente Orozco, and to the pubescent martyr Santa Inocencia stretched out in a glass coffin in the baroque cathedral. As I walk, soot from the exhaust of city buses falls silently, coating the walls of buildings like lampblack. It gets in your throat.

Underneath the downtown area runs the urban maze of sewer and drainage pipes. Today
the pipes have filled with combustible gas. Pemex is working to control the situation, but we're not yet in the clear. They have evacuated residents and shop owners and priests in the immediate vicinity. The trucks are out, as they say. The last explosion from a gas leak destroyed everything within a fifteen-block radius. The manhole covers shot into the sky, and then the streets themselves rose up in chunks of concrete and twisted rebar. According to the news, this blast could be bigger. And I live with my host family only eleven blocks away.

Despite the scare of the gas leak, this afternoon is like any other. My host family carries on as usual. The father, whose name is Emilio, gets his son to help him perform maintenance on the car. Carlos hands him a wrench, brings a pan to drain the oil. Something about the fan belt. The mother is sweet, traditionally feminine. As far as I can tell, she is hardly puritanical or over-serious. Yet every time my roommate and I leave for a weekend trip, whether to the mountains or to the sea, she thinks there's a good chance we won't make it back. She mentions this as a matter of course. The drowning last month has made the subject of death an open topic of conversation.

If nothing seems to rattle them, maybe emergency is the norm. They live behind bars, you know. The grassless front yard, which consists of poured concrete overlaid with white tiles, is separated from the sidewalk by an eight-foot high security fence. The perimeter is secure. As Emilio and his son work on the car inside the tiny compound, the steel bars defend against fortune-telling Roma and the possibility of a home invasion in broad daylight.

After the funeral, the drowning continues to echo throughout the entire student group. Whatever divisions initially separated student from student, we are brought closer together by suffering, closer even than we want to admit. It occurs to us that the appropriate thing is to take a group retreat. So there we are on the bus, headed to a colonial mountain town advertised as a quiet location surrounded by a beautiful oak-pine forest.

The weekend is meant to be free-flowing and therapeutic. We hike up the mountain to discover an amazing vista. Dinner at the local restaurant features a contest for who can eat the most jalepenos. We hear two or three times the tale of the drowning from the one who was with him. We hear with rapt attention about the drunken late-night swim, blacking out, and waking up the next morning in bed covered with sand, unable to recall either how he got there or (though this remains unspoken) whether our lost friend called out for help in his final moments.

The second night of our stay, I decide to retire early. When I come downstairs the next morning, signs abound that the after-hours festivities spilled into an anything-goes session of I'm not sure what. Classmates are three or four to a sofa or bed, in various states of undress, with sheets and blankets strewn about. They have sought solace in wine but also in each other. Everyone looks sheepish at breakfast.

In December, I return from Mexico less green than when I arrived, a little less bold. It is at this point I renew my dedication to the process of becoming who I want to be.

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THE THINGS THAT MUST SOON TAKE PLACE

Will not rush through your heart like ball lightning.
They will smolder under your skin as you wait

for your chalupa in the drive-through
or latch the dressing room door at Old Navy,

wanting nothing more than to pull a preshrunk T
over your head in peace. But you must steady yourself

on the purse hook, nauseated by the spirit
burying inside you like a tick. Soon you will see

seraphim wings in the price tags,
hear trumpets in the vents. You will awaken

to asphalt poking your soles like swords of fire,
to the grocery bagger's billowing breath.

These things will not horse through you
but nudge you like a dog in the street,

a matted earthbound begging for your touch,
wet nose you'll never wipe off.

Tania Runyan
Through a Pint Glass Darkly
Edgar Wright's *The World's End*

Charles Andrews

D. H. Lawrence’s final book *Apocalypse* was a uniquely Lawrentian commentary on the biblical book of Revelation. Part political treatise, part avant-garde poem, part scriptural exegesis, and part erotic fantasy, this work provides a fitting conclusion for a writer whose ambition was no less than a revitalization of all humanity through an expanding spiritual and sexual consciousness. Lawrence’s vision of regeneration is mostly baroque and mythical, but in one telling moment he observes that the “unnaturalness” of the imagery in Revelation which so irritated him as a boy was language heartily welcomed in the chapels of his northern English homeland. He writes: “such phrases as ‘the wrath of the Lamb’ are on the face of them ridiculous. But this is the grand phraseology and imagery of the nonconformist chapels... the whore that sitteth upon the waters is entirely sympathetic to a Tuesday evening congregation of colliers and colliers’ wives, on a black winter night, in the great barn-like Pentecost Chapel.”

Lawrence’s glance backward at his youth through a heady mixture of nostalgia, embarrassment, and apocalypse is intoxicating, much like the blend served up in the latest film by Edgar Wright. With *The World’s End*, Wright completes a loosely connected trilogy along with co-writer and star Simon Pegg. The films also have featured their ever-present third wheel Nick Frost and frequent ensemble member Martin Freeman. The international successes of the first two films in the trilogy, *Shaun of the Dead* (2004) and *Hot Fuzz* (2007), have helped propel Simon Pegg to a high profile acting career with appearances in such franchises as *Mission: Impossible* and *Star Trek*. Edgar Wright has also prospered apart from his mates; he directed and co-wrote *Scott Pilgrim vs. The World* (2010) and co-wrote Steven Spielberg’s *The Adventures of Tintin* (2011). Some of the elegiac feeling in *The World’s End* may have to do with the end of this fruitful collaboration—an ending, one hopes, that will be temporary.

*The World’s End* is an ironically epic adventure about a pub crawl through the nondescript, suburban English town of Newton Haven. Five middle-aged friends led by Gary “The King” King (Simon Pegg) embark on their quest to finish a pint at each of the twelve pubs on the main loop of their hometown, a quest they failed to accomplish as teenagers on a night which turned out for most of them to have been the high point of lives that later sunk down into depressing adulthood. Gary has fought his maturity more fiercely than the others, retaining every artifact of his 1980s self in an effort to cling to the best days of a life now long gone. For Gary, the return to the pub crawl is a last chance at glory; for his friends, it is a begrudging concession to Gary and even a kind of intervention.

Things, however, are not what they seem in Newton Haven. The vacant stares and affectless expressions on the faces of the townsfolk are not just because no one remembers Gary and not just because suburbia has sucked the life out of its inhabitants. In a literalizing of this metaphor, the citizens of Newton Haven have been replaced by robots filled with some kind of blue ink. After making this discovery, Gary, defying all logic, convinces his mates to finish their pub crawl despite the alien menace, effectively making themselves into humanity’s last hope for survival.

At first glance, the film appears to be an assault on nostalgia. Gary’s death grip on his youth is the source of much bitter humor as he struts about in his black trench coat, Ankh necklace, and Sisters of Mercy t-shirt. The haggard look and receding hairline of middle age clash with his swagger, and the style he refuses to abandon is not retro but passé.
Though morbid nostalgia is one target of Wright and company's satire, middle-aged dol­drams are another target of their criticism. Gary's friends are sober men working in non-descript glass buildings, perpetually wearing bluetooth ear­pieces and abiding loveless marriages. If Gary can be faulted for overstaying his welcome in adoles­cence, the alternative is decidedly uninviting. The film offers very little by way of a happy medium or a happy adulthood.

Much of Wright's work has been focused on this condition of middle-class, delayed-adolescent ennui. Simon Pegg's character in Shaun of the Dead works in a dead-end electronics retail job with Nick Frost as his slobby roommate. The signature joke of the film occurs near the beginning as Pegg—whose narcissism and depression match the mindlessness of his daily routines—fails to realize that his neighborhood is swarming with the undead. A slow-moving, drooling, moaning convenience store employee looks much the same dead or alive. Likewise, the near-comatose sleepiness of a provincial English town in Hot Fuzz provides the cover for a serial killer who cannot be detected because of the fine line between small-town quirk and psychopathy. Spaced (1999–2001), a television series which was Wright, Pegg, and Frost's earliest major collaboration, depicted the struggles of twenty-somethings scrounging for rent money, but presented this condition with neither the inspira­tional uplift of Rent nor the wretched desperation of Mike Leigh's Naked (1993). Instead, Pegg and Jessica Hynes portrayed platonic roommates fak­ing a marriage to retain a "marrieds only" flat. Virtually every shot in the series was designed as a geeky reference to some action/sci-fi/horror fanboy "classic" from the 1970s and 80s. The flashiness of the show's style served as an ironic counterpoint to its bored, pop-culture obsessed characters.

In Spaced and their film collaborations, Wright and Pegg have gleefully rehashed the trashy genre fare that caught their young imaginations. The touchstone for Shaun of the Dead was George Romero's zombie films, which they so lovingly recreated that they earned cameo appearances in Romero's 2005 film Land of the Dead. In Hot Fuzz they displayed their affection for lowbrow action flicks like Bad Boys II. And with The World's End, they offer an alien invasion plot from classic sci-fi like Invasion of the Body Snatchers. Together these three films are referred to as the "Three Flavours Cornetto Trilogy," a joke that emerged during the press junket for Hot Fuzz when Wright was asked to comment on the recurring image of pre-packaged Cornetto's ice cream cones. Wright quipped that he was using this device to achieve the highbrow status of Kieslowski's Three Colors but with ice cream.

Of the films, this last "flavour" is perhaps the least coherent. Some of this may be due to the many large themes that it attempts to tackle within its genre conventions: aging, lost youth, alcoholism, suburban decline, social technologies, etc. But it may also be due to a sense that the alien invasion genre is not as central to their passions as, say, zombies. The film lags a bit when trying to jus-
tify why these men in a town full of robots do not simply get in their car and depart rather than continue with their pub crawl. And the entire premise of a suburban town that has lost its soul seems like an extended episode of Buffy the Vampire Slayer.

The final sequence of the film which—without giving too much away—I will say carries us far beyond the film's starting point and works hard to fulfill the promise of its title, sends us into a wormhole of destruction which appears to be Wright's favored state. Many of the problems established for the characters at the beginning of the film are resolved by its ending, but in a catastrophic way that ultimately acts like a fulfillment of Gary's fantasies. It is as if we cannot hold fast to the mediocrity of our adolescence or our middle age, and what remains is apocalypse.

The conclusion to The World's End is cheerful, but offers little by way of real solution to the twin perils of obsessive nostalgia and moribund adulthood. Just as D. H. Lawrence found the religious language of his childhood inescapable, Wright and company seem drawn like Lost Boys to the enthusiasms and the dissatisfactions of their youth. In the boozy haze of their quest with its dozen brimming grails, Gary and his friends find that regeneration requires annihilation. Saint Paul suggested that this life is obscured like a dark glass and that true knowledge only comes later, once "childish things" were put away. For Wright, the childish things may be greatly inspiring so long as we let our grip on them remain light and keep in check the worst of our addictions. As Gary "the King" demonstrates, through the distended bottom of the pint glass, the view is always distorted. Lawrence's apocalyptic vision fantasized about a re-inspired England, which, as he put it, would "re-establish the living organic connections with the cosmos, the sun and earth, with mankind and nation and family." Wright seems less sanguine, and whatever hope there may be comes at the price of global collapse.

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A Terrible Love
Adam Johnson's The Orphan Master's Son
Susan Bruxvoort Lipscomb

Every year for almost a decade, I've read whatever work of fiction wins the Pulitzer Prize. I do this to keep up with trends in literary publishing—what does the establishment say is the best fiction published this year? I also do it to force myself to read books to which I am not naturally drawn. It was easy to pick up Marilynne Robinson's Gilead, Geraldine Brooks's March, or Elizabeth Strout's Olive Kitteridge. Left to my own instincts, I would pull down these quiet volumes exploring themes like forgiveness, redemption, familial relations, and the struggles and quiet desperation of ordinary life, even if they hadn't won a prize. Reading the Pulitzer Prize winner every year, however, also has forced me to read novels like The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao—a darkly comic coming-of-age story steeped in sex, crime, and violence and written with a daunting amount of Spanglish—and A Visit from the Goon Squad—a collection of short stories centering around the music industry and featuring the timeworn triumvirate of sex, drugs, and rock & roll. I usually end my yearly dip into prize-winning fiction with an appreciation of why the committee chose this work, from the standpoint of literary craft, but I admit I don't always relish reading fiction I wouldn't have chosen for myself.

When I read a synopsis of this year's Pulitzer winner, I sighed, ordered my copy, and prepared to plug away at a book that I instinctively felt that I wouldn't much enjoy, even if I appreciated its literary merits. A thriller set in North Korea, telling the story of a professional kidnapper who eventually becomes a rival to Kim Jung Il in an attempt to save his actress-love? From its description, Adam Johnson's The Orphan Master's Son didn't even seem to have the requisite "American" flare that is characteristic of Pulitzer choices.

But The Orphan Master's Son won me over in ways I was not expecting and in ways unrelated to why most critics have been praising it. It is true, The Orphan Master's Son is a thriller set in North Korea. The main character, Pak Jun Do, spends his childhood in an orphanage, has a career as a kidnapper, abducting and sometimes killing people he finds on the shores of Japan, is sent on a diplomatic mission to Texas, spends time in a brutal prison camp, impersonates a Korean military commander, falls in love with this commander's actress wife, meets and spars with Kim Jung Il, participates in a daring rescue mission, and is brutally tortured. There are graphic scenes of torture, among other forms of violence.

Most summaries say that this is a novel about North Korea: about the ridiculous and fantastical narratives created by an oppressive state. They say it is a novel that teaches us how bad totalitarianism can be, a novel that gives us a glimpse into a place we know little about. Critics praise Johnson for his research into this elusive place and for prompting his readers to gaze with awe and horror at how absurd evil can be.

But while The Orphan Master's Son is set in North Korea, I don't think it is ultimately a novel about North Korea. If this were just a novel about an oppressive state, I would not be at all interested. I can read other accounts of oppressive states that are based more closely on documentary evidence and are more likely to depict things that have actually happened. No matter how thorough Johnson's research (and he does seem to have done as much as he reasonably could), a lot of what is depicted in this novel is, by Johnson's own admission, guesswork and fantasy. We cannot really say whether Johnson's depiction of the machinations of life among the ruling elite of North Korea is accurate because we don't really know very much
about what goes on there. And Johnson writes in the tradition of magic realism, in which improbable events stand in for claims about what actually happens in an oppressive state. Johnson gives a clear outline in his afterward of what he based on research and what he imaginatively constructed. We can say that the novel is a horrifying, imaginative, and compelling depiction of a totalitarian state in the tradition of George Orwell's *1984*. But again, I don't think we can really say that it is a novel about North Korea.

What the novel is, more fundamentally, is the story of a character, a hero, who does terrible things and terribly noble things. It is a novel about love and fidelity and courage, a novel about a martyr. What won me over to *The Orphan Master's Son* is its admirable protagonist, an unusual occurrence in contemporary fiction.

The novel is divided into two halves. The first, titled "The Biography of Jun Do," tells some of the story of Jun Do's childhood and how he is first conscripted to pieces like Winston in *1984*, he cannot act the role created by the state—even as he, ironically, is literally acting out someone else's life.

The love story in *The Orphan Master's Son* also resists the conventions of such stories in contemporary fiction. Romantic love, in this novel, is not depicted as something that transcends the characters' other commitments. The complex plotting of the novel makes it possible for the love affair between Jun Do and the actress Sun Moon to occur "within marriage" (as Jun Do impersonates her husband); indeed, this novel has one of the more affirming depictions of a marriage that I've read recently. The romantic love between Jun Do and Sun Moon is also closely related, in the novel, to her commitments to her family—to her own mother and to her children. One would think that two characters finding love in the midst of a totalitarian state would be finding a love that is separate from and transcends the difficulties of their situ-
eration. Johnson resists this well-worn trope, however, and depicts a romantic relationship that is idealized but also completely integrated with the reality of personal obligation and moral commitment.

In reading the second half of the novel, I began to understand too why this novel set in North Korea was an appropriate choice for one of the preeminent American literary prizes. This novel celebrates values that Americans love to praise. For example, one of the characters is moved to reject the absurdity and hypocrisy of North Korean life after watching a classic American movie and realizing that truthful storytelling can only happen in a place where people are free. And the emotional climax of the novel comes after Jun Do completes a rescue mission at great personal sacrifice and reflects back to an earlier moment when an American character had asked him if he knew what it meant to feel free. At the time, he had not understood the question. After he helps someone escape North Korea, though, he reflects, “It could be felt, he now knew. His fingers were buzzing with it, it rattled his breathing, it allowed him to suddenly see all the lives he might have lived…”

_The Orphan Master’s Son_ is a thriller set in North Korea, and it does all the things a thriller about a totalitarian state should do. It creates a lively and complex plot full of twists and revelations, showcasing terrible violence and setting out a clear political critique. But it is also a novel about a hero who sacrifices his life for love and freedom. That’s what won me over.

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NEW YEAR’S EVE

_for Eve_

Even though I know that this day, New Year’s Eve, is just like the others, I can’t help but hope with shaky conviction (everyone does) that this year will be different.

I look different: evening gown to the floor for a much classier affair than last year,

evergreen folds of velvet swaddling the curves of an ever-aging body. Even so

some things never change—

the straightened hair, the mascara, the everlasting fear that no matter how many resolutions we make nothing ever changes. Eat an apple a day, look good naked, keep him coming back for more

Heidi Thorsen
From the very beginning, I wanted to avoid Miley Cyrus and her twerking stunt. I promise. Why validate her antics with any more attention? Yet she has so effectively invaded my news feed that I’d like to pause and consider this moment in pop culture. When a performer can twerk at the MTV Video Music Awards and garner top news coverage, we ought to accept that something is broken. Pop music, for the most part, dead. Random movie cameos, hosting Saturday Night Live, singing with Jimmy Fallon, unfortunate Twitter pics of a skimpy Halloween costume, and then the recent appearance at the MTV Europe Music Awards where she twerked with a dwarf and then lit a joint when accepting her award—these things should inspire us to go home and listen to music, and bask in its warm glow. We can thank her for that.

Miley Cyrus’s initial burlesque routine is something of a scandal, yet the more revealing tragedy is that so much of our culture is more interested in these shenanigans than in music. This is what makes me cranky: Miley may be talented but apparently not talented enough. She has captured our attention not by the quality of her music but by successfully promoting herself as a commercial good. She’s Hannah Montana gone wild, marketing her coming-of-age in the public eye by throwing her emerging sexuality at us. The twerk is the signature of her particular brand, distinguishing her from the likes of Rihanna, Katy Perry, and Ke$ha. Like Pepsi and Coke and their respective beverage lines, each of these performers is a slightly different combination of the same ingredients. Soda comes in various flavors of carbonated sugar-water, but 99 percent of it is just sugar. Likewise, these pop performers come in various flavors of aggressive sexuality but are really just a kind of sugary, unsatisfying ear candy.

While Lady Gaga is calculated, Miley comes off as desperate. Yet Miley is only doing what she was groomed to do. No doubt she has studied Lady Gaga and Madonna, but she learned more from her father’s 1991 hit “Achy Breaky Heart.” Both father and daughter have capitalized on a trendy dance move to make their mark. Her twerking was his line dancing. So this is the family entertainment business, not the family music business.

The trouble is not with entertainment itself. Entertainment merely holds our attention. The question is what kind of entertainment is holding our attention and does it deserve our attention. Here it gets personal, and it should get very personal, because the quality of our private tastes says something about how we value our own selves. Substantial pieces of music and art not only hold our attention, they call our attention back again and again. They form an enduring relationship with us. This is a precious and vitally human exchange. In comparison, empty pop music and culture are disposable. There is a reason why we still listen to the Beach Boy’s Pet Sounds, and there is a reason why we won’t be listening to Miley’s Bangerz in fifty years.

So what is it that makes music endure? What is the music that deserves our attention? Why do we continue to return to certain albums throughout our lives and forget others? I have been trying to answer this question for and with my students for several years. At the risk of being pretentious, I have played the role of the older brother or quirky uncle as I point them toward certain artists and bands. Each of my graduates leaves with a personalized, required-listening CD with a mix of songs that I hope they will enjoy and also be stretched by. It is my last chance to sabotage their listening tastes, and it is a final way for me to share something significant with them. If I am not sharing with them
the commercialized pop songs of the radio—Thom York of Radiohead calls it "refrigerator buzz"—then what?

An easy way to subvert the hype of the Miley Cyruses on the radio is to listen to music that is made in a radically different way. If today's pop music is an empty commercial form, its antithesis is something confessional, personal, and gloriously human. What place is more gloriously human than our homes? So it makes sense that the home could be a good place to make music. The cost of recording equipment has decreased substantially in the last decade. The result is a boom in a new kind of folk music, if we think of folk music essentially as being homespun. It might not be a backporch version of the mouth harp or the washboard, but the bedroom or basement home studio brings the playing of instruments into the neighborhood again.

A classic record like Bruce Springsteen's *Nebraska* demonstrates how magic can be made with the crude, less-is-more, production tools and techniques of home recording. In the early 1980s Springsteen purchased a cheap, four-track Tascam cassette recorder and two Shure SM57 microphones to make demos for his next release. Many of those songs were re-recorded in a proper studio with the E Street Band and became Springsteen's landmark album, *Born in the USA*. The quieter and darker songs were intended for a solo project. During sessions in a professional studio, Springsteen kept reaching for his original cassette, repeating that he wanted it to sound just like the demo. The decision was finally made to release the original home recordings because they voiced a more haunting and broken sound that best fit the songs.

The counterintuitive idea is that low-fi does not necessarily make bad music. High fidelity recordings, especially of the last few decades, can end up sounding hygienic and boring. As profit margins reduce music to the lowest common denominator, record companies deliberately choose a predictable, homogenous sound that will not threaten sales. Yet music is precious and vital precisely because it is unpredictable and sometimes even volatile. Music suffers when it is constrained in a plastic, commercialized package. *Nebraska*’s raw sound is the sound of emotional immediacy. It is the intimate soulscape of Springsteen sitting in a living room groaning out one last tune before calling it a night and heading to bed. *Nebraska* contains a depth of the human experience that needs to be expressed in the simple and dirty format of a cassette tape.

Because of records like *Nebraska*, a mythological romance with cassette tapes and vintage prosumer-grade machines has developed. While it was risky for an established artist like Springsteen to release a scratchy home recording, many artists have based their entire musical enterprise on home recorded sound. Divergent movements of lo-fi rock, emo, post-rock, post-punk, and experimental have formed around these machines. Elliott Smith made little sketches on a cassette recorder that ended up on the sound track of a major motion picture, 1997’s *Good Will Hunting*. He started experimenting with the four-track in high school and discovered what would happen if he double tracked his voice and layered on his own harmonies. When pop radio artists layer their vocals, the tracks are engineered to digitally edited perfection to form a singular, larger-than-life radio voice. For Elliott Smith, the method was an imprecise smattering of his voice that is fragmented and yet somehow transformed into a larger musical whole. The grit and messiness is so essential to his records, it is hard to imagine how he could have become the same artist if his first three records had not been made on cassette.

Along with my homage to cassette recorders, it is important to note that many artists are using the digital technology of computer recording in ways that also represent a relatively lo-fi aesthetic. You can hear the hum of the computer fan buzzing in Sam Beam's early Iron & Wine recording, *The Creek*
Drank the Cradle. In Bon Iver’s *Emma Forever Ago*, you can hear the hiss of cheap microphones and the double tracking of out-of-tune guitars. The point is not to elevate low-fi. The point is to challenge the plastic sound of radio pop in order to re-discover creativity. Lo-fi garage bands can quickly become derivative of themselves. Even Guided By Voices, the post-punk patriarchs of lo-fi, eventually decided to make more sonically defined records. Again, the hope is that artists who are not constrained by the production standards of commercialized radio will explore more interesting possibilities for their music.

Whether analog or digital, in home recordings we hear lots of “mistakes”: fingers squeaking on guitar fret boards, footsteps, breathing and sighs, sirens passing by, and dogs barking outside. Some of these mistakes are musical—missed beats from the percussion, an early entrance from an anxious vocal, a dynamic irregularity in the bass guitar line. All these blemishes make up imperfect recordings that remind us that music is made for humans by humans.

Home recording especially favors the worlds of electronic and ambient experimental music, especially where the sound is intentionally non-literal and dream-like. The Scotland-based band Boards of Canada, a personal favorite, describe their studio in the countryside as “not big” but “full of gear.” In a 1998 interview, they explained that the advantage of having their own studio was being able to “live for our music.” Their distinct warm and emotive sound emerges through extensive experimentation. They start by creating their own instruments and sounds by sampling their performances on traditional instruments and then processing each sound. Sounds might be processed by recording onto a VHS tape, running a sound through a broken speaker or through samplers and synthesizers and back to digital. These sounds become percussive and melodic loops that make up lush, expansive soundscapes. Since they began in the late 1990s, the brothers have amassed thousands of tracks. They cull through the tracks to find the best ones that make up each record. Their latest album *Tomorrow's Harvest* (2013) was made over the span of seven years.

Kieran Hebden, aka Four Tet, began by using the primitive sound capabilities of early personal computers to sample instruments from his vast and ever expanding record collection to make his distinctive house music. He drew from sources as diverse as Miles Davis, James Brown, and Fela Kuti, but Hebden realized that he kept sampling records on which jazz drummer Steve Reid played. Hebden eventually met Reid and they later collaborated on three records and toured extensively. Their shared music is all about improvisation; they debunk the idea that electronic musicians must be isolated and confined to their sequencers. At the same time, many electronic artists are best described as “laptop musicians.” They create surprisingly dynamic and earthy sounds by taking advantage of the ever-expanding development of music software, digital emulations of vintage equipment, as well as forward-thinking, sound-shaping tools.

While the music industry is caving in on itself, there is a flourishing of independent music to which we now have unprecedented access. Computers and the Internet opened the floodgates of illegal downloading, but this technology also has provided us with something of a music renaissance. The push-back against independent music is that it is elitist and dreadfully hipster. This is a fair concern. If we chose a band only because it is the latest thing, then we are participating in the same kind of faddism that pervades the Top 40 list. Independent music can also be worn merely as a fashion, a trendy scene. The question is how we are entertained, how well we are listening. Is our listening a substantial or precarious investment? Music should call us back to pay attention again and again and again. Anything less is just candy.

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Hands

Chris Matthis

“For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands.”

(2 Timothy 1:6)

Ordination

The first thing I felt was the weight of all those hands pressing down upon my head, shoulders, and back. Never in my life had I felt heavier—or safer—than at the moment when I knelt before the altar, crowded by men in white robes and red stoles. When more than twenty pastors laid their hands on me at once, transferring upon me the mantel of my ministry, I felt the enormity of my task and the weight of the words I had promised in my ordination vows just moments earlier.

One by one, the pastors spoke a Word of scriptural encouragement to me, mostly from Paul’s letters to Timothy and Titus.

“Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands,” Paul instructed his young protégé, Timothy, after appointing him to ordain pastors on the island of Crete (1 Tim. 5:22, ESV). Don’t be hasty! Make sure you know who you are dealing with—and that they know what they are getting themselves into—before you ordain them!

But you never really know what you’re getting into when you decide to become a pastor. You must be half crazy to imagine you can go into a church somewhere, step into a pulpit, and tell people mysteries about God and their own lives that they don’t already know. What does a young, childless, single man in his mid-twenties have to say that people in their sixties or seventies need to hear—people who’ve worked for a lifetime and raised children and grandchildren? What did I know about marriage or parenting—or life—when I was just recently engaged to my fiancée and barely out of seminary?

Only a strange mixture of faith and foolhardiness could ever compel someone to answer the call to ministry. So the laying on of hands is necessary to ground you and remind you who you really are, or rather, whose you are, and why he called you to serve him by loving and teaching these people in this particular place.

Maybe all the other pastors lay hands on a freshly minted pastor in order to keep him from running away. (Church history tells of priests and bishops ordained or consecrated against their will!) Or perhaps the laying on of hands reflects the inverted gravity of grace; rather than holding you down, the hands bear you up when you cannot stand on your own. “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2). When your burden is your vocation, your office—or even yourself—who better to bear you up than your fellow pastors, the other ministers who answered the call and wear at their throats the white tab collar that binds them to their oaths? Whatever the reason, the other pastors’ hands kept me there, and at difficult times in my ministry, they are sometimes all that keep me going.

Healing

When I was ten years old, my mother and I attended a special evening service at our Assembly of God church, where an itinerant faith healer was preaching. My broken arm was bound in a cast. My mother sought healing for the hidden scars on her heart, pain that I was too young to understand at that time.

The healer was not flashy or grandiose like televangelists in white Armani suits. I had been to healing services like that, where the preacher would cry, “I heal you!” and thrust his palm against your forehead to push you backward into the waiting arms of his entourage, who gently laid you down—“slain in the Spirit”—onto the stage floor. That method never worked for me, and I resented being knocked over by a holy roller. I pushed back.

The faith healer on this night was rather quiet for a preacher. A little overweight, he wore a gray.
suit, white shirt, necktie, and large, gold-frame glasses—the kind stereotypically worn only by engineers and serial killers. After preaching for about forty minutes, he invited people to come up for prayer and healing. One by one, the people went forward. He laid his hands on their shoulders and muttered softly. There was none of the fuss, loud music, and boisterous glossolalia that marked most Sunday services in a Pentecostal church.

Finally, my mom and I went up. He listened to our prayer requests and then placed his hands on my mother’s and my shoulders to pray for our healing. I didn’t feel any kind of electricity or warming, just his hands pressing firmly and gently upon me.

After the prayer, the healer opened his eyes, glanced at me briefly, and then turned to my mother to say, “This boy is going to be a great witness for the Lord someday.” Those words awed and overwhelmed me at the time, and I wondered how God had spoken to him. How did he know? What did he hear?

The man smiled and we returned to our seats. The following Monday morning I visited the radiologist and orthopedic surgeon for a routine checkup. After examining the X-rays, the doctor admitted his surprise at how well my arm was healing. In just a few days, the bones had mended as much as they might in a month.

I remembered the faith-healer’s hands and wondered if it really worked or if it was just a coincidence.

“Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.”

(Psalms 141:2)

Prayer

I have been praying or chanting these words in one form or another ever since my seminary days, when I served as the Evening Prayer chaplain, planning the student-led, evening worship services at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. Sometimes in the cold, dark nights of Advent, I pray or sing them still.

In the various Pentecostal churches of my youth, I learned that the proper posture for prayer is standing with your arms and hands upraised. The Psalmist prays, “Hear the voice of my pleas for mercy, when I cry to you for help, when I lift up my hands toward your most holy sanctuary” (Ps. 28:2). But after I was confirmed as a Lutheran during college, I learned that raising your arms in church is frowned upon. During worship, hands are not meant for drumming on the pew or chair in front of you or lifting in praise toward heaven. Hands are meant for folding in quiet prayer, holding hymnals, and shaking the pastor’s hand in the “meet and greet” line after the service—nothing more.

At my first call, some of the older members got up in arms when I suggested we begin each service with a friendly, hands-on “exchanging of the peace,” in which we would greet those sitting around us by shaking hands or even offering a hug.

“Pastor, don’t you know how unsanitary it is to shake all those peoples’ hands?”

I have always been a bit of a “germaphobe” myself, but the generous goodwill of human touch cannot be overstated. In our technological, anti- septic, and increasingly isolated society, church might be the only place where some people receive a safe, loving touch, even if it is only a handshake or a pat on the back. What does it matter if the person touching you is the neighborhood drunk or an elderly woman with a mouth full of rotting teeth? Don’t they also need to touch and be touched? It wasn’t as if I was asking my people to follow Paul’s command to “greet one another with a holy kiss”! The passing of the peace was too much for some of my parishioners to “handle,” and they would stand immobile with arms crossed during the three-minute exchange of “peace.” In the Body of Christ, some people are sore thumbs.

Baptism

The first time I ever touched Skylar was after she was already dead. She was born prematurely with underdeveloped lungs, and from the moment she exited the womb she fought for each breath. Skylar’s mother and grandmother were friends of my parishioners. They were lapsed Lutherans, and
as often happens in times of crisis, someone recognized the need to call a pastor.

I baptized Skylar in the neo-natal ICU at Children's Hospital. She was in a Plexiglas crib with bleach-white linens and padding around her. IV tubes stuck out of her thin arms, and a breathing tube was taped to her little nose.

Skylar's mother had been allowed to hold her only a few times in the two days since she was born. I wasn't supposed to touch her either, although I would have been afraid to do it anyway; she was so small, fragile, and close to death. I worried I might break her if I just brushed her skin.

For the Baptism, her mother handed me a foam cup with water from the nurses' station. I dipped my index finger into the water and let it dribble onto Skylar's forehead one drop at a time.

"Skylar," I intoned, "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." And that was it, the simplest and most complicated Baptism I ever conducted.

Skylar died three weeks later. My wife and I were out to dinner when my cell phone buzzed and I received the call that Skylar was going to die within the hour. We quickly paid the bill and drove to the hospital, but she died before we got there.

When I arrived, Skylar's mother cradled her dead child in her arms close to her chest. Mother and child were surrounded by Grandma, Great-Grandma, and cousins. Skylar was cold and blue, a baby robbed of life and air. Her physical appearance shocked me, but I was also spiritually traumatized. How could God let that happen? Her life was over almost before it barely began, and for what?

I watched the family weep and listened to their tears and silence. Friends and family streamed in and out of the hospital room, and every once in a while a nurse parted the curtain to update us about the coroner's arrival or other matters pertaining to the death.

Finally, I was asked to "say a few words." I don't remember what scripture I read or what I prayed, but after a vigil that seemed endless, the family asked me if I would touch her and bless her.

My stomach sickened. I didn't want to touch her. I didn't know if I could. The death in her was revolting to me. Three weeks earlier at her Baptism, I feared damaging Skylar; now, I feared that she might damage me in some way. But I wanted to comfort the family, so I did as I was asked. When I placed my head on her blue forehead, the cold flesh startled me, and I had to close my eyes to pray, so I wouldn't have to look at her anymore. I withdrew my hand as soon as I said, "Amen," but her face stayed with me in my dreams, and I had nightmares about dead children for almost two weeks.

Communion

"Take and eat," I say as I press a wafer into each palm. "This is the true Body of Christ given for you upon the cross." Over and over I repeat these words as I place the bread into my parishioners' hands. Sometimes I look at their faces, some crying, some smiling, some staring past me at the wall cross behind the altar or somewhere even beyond that, visible only to the eyes of faith. But mostly, I look at the communicants' hands. Some are smooth and hairless; others are knobby and bruised. Some are hairy and calloused, but everyone's hands are dying and empty until the Lord fills them with his Body and Blood. Someone has said that you cannot receive God's gifts if your hands are already full. At the Communion rail we can finally open our hands and surrender our idols and attachments, letting go of all that hinders us. Then, as our hands move to our mouths to tear the bread with our teeth and drink the wine, we are full, if only for a moment. 

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HOW YOU HAVE TO LISTEN

Like a jellyfish, the kind they claim can live forever—
cycling through phases like a moon,
bequeathing over and over to yourself
all your earthly belongings, owner
and heir of eternity, but
equally, equally.

Like a sandbank in a level, nightlong rain,

dissolving
into what contains you, what erodes you,
what engraves you.

With precision,
like the pressing forth of jonquils tongues
through snow.

With pent joy, like a spinning seed.
Or like a seedling newly leafed,
unfolding
to its first sun.

Or a seed crystal,
vigilant—though long inured to loneliness—
leaning to catch the first click
of latticing.

And long,
until you almost hear what
may never come.

And again,
as if you’d long ago heard it once before.

And gladly, gladly,
as if everything you’ve heard of it
is true.

Marjorie Stelmach
At first blush, "gifts" do not seem likely to create as many problems as they have in contemporary theology. To think of gifts, after all, generally calls to mind largely pleasant images—wrapped Christmas packages, unexpected surprises from loved ones tucked into our bags, or surprise parties celebrating an achievement. In fact, the act of giving and receiving gifts depends on these pleasant associations as a constitutive element. A statement such as "that was a gift" depends for its rhetorical effect on our believing that gifts are precisely the opposite of compensation, or payback, or some other comparatively mercenary mode of transaction.

However, a closer look at our own experiences reveal that gift-giving is caught up in a web of complex economies, often unspoken but nevertheless powerful. Suppose I am invited to a friend's house for dinner, where I am lavished with lovely and relatively expensive hospitality—homecooked food, well-aged wine, and hours of stimulating conversation. Such hospitality is a gift to be celebrated; however, once the glow of the evening has subsided, pressing questions emerge. Am I not expected to reciprocate? If I do, then custom dictates that I wait an appropriate amount of time before doing so, lest it look like my reciprocal gesture is perfunctory payback and not a genuine expression of gratitude. Do I also send a thank-you card, or is that excessive? If I do invite these friends over, am I obliged to spend as much money on them as they did on me, even if my household makes less money?

Navigating the unspoken social mores of the informal "gift economies" into which we are drawn is, upon reflection, a significant part of contemporary social interaction. But it is difficult to opt out: were I simply to present my friends with a check in the amount of the money spent on the meal, I would be insulting their hospitality (not least by implying that the intangibles surrounding the gift could be quantified and monetized). If I were simply to eschew any return gesture, feelings could be hurt and the relationship damaged. The problematics of the gift are seemingly inescapable.

Study of the dynamics of literal gift economies were stimulated by the work of the sociologist Marcel Mauss, whose 1925 essay "On the Gift" examined (by way of others' ethnographic reports) the economic practices of so-called archaic "gift economies" among tribes in Melanesia and Polynesia. Mauss's description of the incredibly complex yet deadly serious dynamics surrounding gift exchange in these "primitive" economies initiated a sustained inquiry among anthropologists, historians, philosophers, and (eventually) theologians about the ways in which such dynamics persist even after the advent of monetary exchange. Mauss's work not only helped scholars understand the hidden complexities of gift economies, but also gave them a rubric for investigating how the unspoken rules of gift exchange continue to sustain (and occasionally subvert) forms of social domination and hierarchy.

This link between gift economies and social structures drew the attention of the deconstructionist strand of continental philosophy, particularly that of Jacques Derrida. Derrida's work on the gift (and its close corollary, hospitality) hinges on the impossibility of a true "gift," a gift understood as a sheer act of grace free from entanglement with the aforementioned social economies. As with much of Derrida's work, his view of the gift oscillates between a deep cynicism as to whether such a gift could ever come into being and an intense longing for a kind of "impossible possibility" of such a gift, a gift that is never reciprocated because the giver is so removed from economy as to be functionally anonymous. The "pure gift" is a kind of seductive will-o'-the wisp.
This tension between impossibility and the longing for purity in gifting has set the stage within theology for an extended consideration of how God's “grace”—surely a gift if there ever was one—does and does not conform to the same problematics as human gifting. On one hand, much religious language portrays the gift of grace as having significant strings attached. In such a vision, God gives grace freely, but humans must respond with worship, moral living, service to neighbors, etc. (Calvinist/Lockean modes of “covenant theory” make this exchange a central feature of Christian life). On the other hand, theologians have also been at pains to extricate God's grace from such schemes for fear that portraying God as one more participant in the larger web of obligations surrounding the gift does a disservice to God's nature and ways of relating to the world.

Theological strategies for addressing this topic have varied throughout the last several decades. Kathryn Tanner has argued that God's absolute transcendence rules out God's gifting being enough akin to human gifting to be caught up in the problematic elements of economy. Jean-Luc Marion, in conversation with Derrida, has theorized God's gifting as a kind of "saturated phenomenon" that does not so much evade as overwhelm human gift economies so as to remake them. Meanwhile, John Milbank has questioned whether seeking to absolve God's gifts of participation in economy misses an opportunity for us to recognize that gift economies are, after all, relationships, and that such relationships properly construed can be life-giving rather than oppressive. What is striking about all of these otherwise diverse strategies is that they tend to pose God's gift as somehow transcendent, bedazzling, transformative, or overwhelming enough—in other words, “strong” enough—to break free of encumbrance in the negative aspects of human gift economies.

An intriguing recent—and distinctively Lutheran—intervention into this debate is Gregory Walter's Being Promised: Theology, Gift, and Practice (Eerdmans 2013). Walter, who teaches theology at St. Olaf College, addresses the question of the involvement of God's grace in the gift economy by framing the gift in terms of God's promise. This is, among other things, a quintessentially Lutheran move. As scholars such as Oswald Bayer and Reinhard Hütter have pointed out in recent decades, promise is a central category in Luther's own thought. For Luther, God's way of interacting with the world is constituted by the mode of promise: God creating out of nothing and justifying humanity while we are still sinners. This has important implications for how we think about God. For instance, Luther's defense of the classical "omni" attributes of God (i.e. God's omniscience, God's omnipotence, etc.) has less to do with any allegiance to medieval dissections of divine attributes and more to do with his insistence that the Gospel depends upon God being powerful and trustworthy enough to fulfill God's promises.

For Walter, promise is a unique mode of gift in that it is "doubled and extended"—the promise consists of both pledge and fulfillment (that is, the initial gift of the promise itself, as well as the gift of its later fulfillment), with a necessary interim gap between the two. The recipient's trust in this promise is an important element in, for example, the relation of the believer to God; moreover, transmittal of the promise from one believer to another (that is, the preaching of the Gospel) is at the core of Christian mission. Thus, questions of economy arise immediately.

To his great credit, however, Walter does not follow the aforementioned strategy of exempting divine promise from the problematics of gift economy by portraying it as too "strong," too forcefully overwhelming of the human experience, to be caught up in such dynamics. Rather, through a series of intriguing exegetical maneuvers centered on such texts as the Genesis 18:1-15 narrative of
the hospitality of Abraham and Sarah, the Pentecost narrative, and the Eucharistic liturgy, Walter makes the case that the divine promise exerts a "weak" power, which he defines as "a power that is open to the other, welcomes the new, and does not attempt to preserve the present in the face of the past or future" (49). Envisioning God's providence (including promise) as a "weak" force recalls the work of such philosophers of religion as John Caputo, who stresses the "weakness of God" as a force that lures humanity toward imaginative and non-coercive responsibility. Unlike Caputo, however, Walter situates the weak force of promise specifically in the Christian liturgy. He follows the Pentecost narrative in tracing how the work of God's spirit, in the mode of promise, creates spaces where the problematic aspects of human gift economy are not sidestepped but rather taken up in the broader economy of the concrete practices by which God's promises are embodied: proclamation, baptism, and Eucharist. The Eucharist, indeed, is the paradigmatic site of promise that is "doubled and extended" across time, but in interrupted and irruptive fashion. Only faith, and more importantly God's faithfulness, can make the meal the gift that it is.

This Eucharistic sensibility allows for one of Walter's most intriguing moves, wherein, taking up the Derridean simultaneous longing for and skepticism about "pure" gift, he embraces instead the "impurity" of the gift as Eucharistically conceived. Here Walter can speak of the "dangerous character of the meal," and indeed the practices that the meal calls forth:

To enter into [the meal's] place is to risk betraying the one who offers his very self. Likewise, to presume to offer it in Christ's behalf is to assume the place of host. To put the Verba in another form: there is no host who is not betrayed, no community that gathers that does not itself desert Jesus, and no exchange or action taken that is pure. The Lord's Supper is the place where promise is offered and therefore the feast in which one dwells, where one eats and drinks the very body and blood of Jesus to discover the possibility that the Spirit brings, an orientation to the other place of promise: the neighbor. And so, while we do not repeat the fixtures or architecture of this meal in its historical situation, we do repeat its place...The repetition of this place comes about by declaration of the promise, the prayer for the Spirit for the anamnesis of Jesus' sacrifice, and the longing for the fulfillment of the promise. (88–9)

Far from being a situation where a romanticized view of liturgy is marshaled to cleave, like a Gordian-knot, an intractable theological problem, Walter links promise to Christian practice precisely in the impurity of both. In a manner akin to Matthew Myer Boulton's arguments in his book God Against Religion: Rethinking Christian Theology through Worship (2008), Walter frames the Eucharistic act as the concretization of ambiguity: our practices do not save us so much as they continually break us open to show us in need of salvation. The site of the Eucharist is the site of Christ's betrayal, but also the site whereby the living Spirit gifts the pledge of redemption. The Christian practices of liturgy, and the practices of serving the neighbor that flow from these practices, are thus paradigmatic of the kind of effects brought about by the "weak power" of divine promise. They do not evade the impurities of the gift economy, but they do point toward the day when all economies are taken up in the original "economy" of the Triune life of God.

Walter's book is thus extremely helpful in showing the potential of theological approaches that do not utilize the Christian tradition as a kind of triumphalist evasion of difficult questions surrounding our failures to love the neighbor as ourselves. Rather, we must take these questions seriously enough to let faith be as difficult as it needs to be in order to bear witness to the elusive but transformative promise that sustains us in the struggle.

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"I learn by going where I have to go"

Expectations and Meditations On the Way of St. James

Jeremy Reed

Pilgrim: What is it that you do here?
Monk: We fall and we get up again.

from "Setting Out" by Scott Cairns

Without tree cover, the dust on the road had been baked so hard by the sun that it didn't kick up with the scuffing of our shoes. The dirt stood as still as we didn't dare to; our blisters made us keep walking because they hurt so badly when we stopped. I was tired and hot like the rest of our group and was trying to find things to fill my mind instead of the pain and the heat. I walked through the discomfort of the gravel and stones pushing up through the soles of my shoes—stop—I walked through the memories of arguments of the night before—stop—I walked through the anger at the shuttering camera lens to my right, attempting to capture the experience of someone having not as hard a day, of someone who saw me as part of their picture—stop. “Stop thinking, just walk,” I thought.

In just that moment, my friend Lauren turned to me and stated a question that has stuck with me since: “I’ve been asking myself lately not only what I’m doing here, but what walking has to do with it. I know doing devotions and praying to God are good things, but what does walking do?”

My friends and I had been talking about, planning, and packing for the Camino de Santiago for months and in the process had set many expectations for ourselves. Just before flying across the ocean and starting the trail, we had all graduated together from Valparaiso University. That last semester, as we bought shoes, practiced walking in the evenings, and met in the library to discuss itineraries, we slowly gained a reputation around campus as the walkers, the ones setting out. We saw ourselves as trying to head straight toward the open-ended questions we had about our lives, attempting to be open to what Frederick Buechner called, “that area of human experience where in one way or another man happens upon mystery as a summons to pilgrimage” (Buechner 1970, 75). Our idea of education, or at least what we would gain from it, had changed over our time at Valparaiso; rather than as career training or knowledge gaining, we had come to see our education as acting on us and with us in helping us learn how to “[keep] the window to the transcendent open,” in words our provost had once used (Schwehn 2009). In our time at Valparaiso, we searched for and attempted to live with the mysteries we had come to see as central to our studies and our lives. We began to recognize the narrative arcs actively shaping us, even if we didn’t see where they began or ended, and even if we didn’t see them as clearly as we desired. We held our open-ended stories, and we told them to each other frequently.

For my friends and me, pilgrimage became a metaphor, a way to explain our attempts at making meaning from experiences while connecting to our traditions, our supposed futures, and each other. In our classes, we read about the dust and the desert fathers, the lectio divina of personal prayer, and we reveled in their voices and the conviction they had in their stories, conviction that we didn’t have in our own. But at some point while planning our pilgrimage, we started speaking so clearly about our own future experiences that we lost sight of what had attracted us to the stories of the desert fathers in the first place: their willingness to approach the unknown and to attempt to find the words to describe it.
We were asked repeatedly why we had decided to walk the Camino, and we tried to answer. We saw the trip as a kind of capstone to our undergraduate careers, a culmination of our intellectual and spiritual discussions, a rite of passage to pull us through graduation and the uncertainties of our futures, something to mark our transition in an intentional way. We spoke out many images of ourselves in those months of planning: arm in arm we would walk, day after day we would meet amazing characters, we would share our pain like bread, we would sing psalms and walk as we traversed the mountains and valleys. We stopped seeing the unknown, the mystery, and instead saw a system of signs we already understood. Then we left for Europe.

Once in Spain, the reality of walking five hundred miles in the supposed footsteps of St. James to finis terrae, the end of the earth, set in. Equipped with good boots, twenty pounds of necessities, and lofty notions of what would come, we started walking. And yet, like the pilgrim in the poem who asked the monk, we soon found ourselves asking each other, What is it that we are doing here? In the practice of walking, we found our footing more unstable than we originally thought. The pilgrim's question needed a response, and we were frustrated, with ourselves and each other, to find ourselves without one. We walked and continued walking, asking, Why take a pilgrimage? What is a pilgrimage?

The Camino has changed quite a bit since it was walked by pilgrims throughout the Middle Ages, but one thing that remains unchanged is the sheer feat of walking day after day. Even in a group of friends, each pilgrim must walk alone on some level, every day, the entire distance, the entire way. This sort of repetitive walking eventually strips you bare and awakens you to a more basic understanding of yourself and your limitations. You live for the next rest. You live according to numbers, kilometers from destination to destination, number of hours on your feet. All you have to do is walk, but just walking is a lot to ask. You keep repeating the monk's answer, We fall, and we get up again, hoping it proves true.

One afternoon, I felt particular frustration and pain and anger toward my friends who had left me to walk alone. I came upon them sitting on a park bench waiting for me, one of the last ones to arrive, before crossing the bridge into the city for the night. As I sat down at the bench to relax for a moment, I lifted my feet off the ground. Gravity pulled my feet down, making blisters pulse and the pads of my feet feel heavy and full. My ears pounded with blood, and I breathed shallowly to make the pain go away, and I remained, while doing so, in my own head. The rest of the group, relaxed and lively, sat around joking and telling stories from the day, looking over at me every once in a while to make sure I was alright. At first, their jokes were grating, but as I listened to the group's conversation I began to hear past the anger in my own head and began to hear their stories and jokes. I heard the laughter, genuine and full guffaws, snorts, exclamations. I looked up and without realizing it began to mirror, slightly and then more, the smiles I saw around me.

When we stood up from the bench to walk, my feet hurt even worse than before. As we entered the city, Jake, seeing my tender steps, walked up behind me after spending his day memorizing poems and began reciting Theodore Roethke's "The Waking;" a poem we had once listened to while sitting in Jake's car, that we had recited along with Roethke's voice over the speakers in Jake's living room years before. "I wake to sleep and take my waking slow. I learn by going where I have to go."

As I walked, I turned and listened while watching Jake smile at the memory of the poem, of reading aloud each intricate line in class. He discovered the words again as he recited the poem from memory, as if he were reading lines newly written on a page. Memory, present moment, and expectation combined in an attempt to avoid pain if even for a moment, and it brought us together. We passed under a bridge. Graffiti arced up the wall behind him, framing his body. Our voices echoed in the underpass as we heard the cars rumble by overhead, the whin-
and Roethke's words seemed to stand on their own, between us, and yet hold us together.

In many ways, Roethke's poem embodies for me what I mean by meditation when I think of the Camino de Santiago, our walking over those six weeks, and of the time spent meditating on that experience since. We all fell; we all suffered in different ways: Paul's infected blisters and homesickness, Lauren's stress fractures, Emily's pride, Jake's sometimes trying to create group cohesion and sometimes withdrawing into isolation, my knees, my worries about the group and my place in it. But regardless of where we found ourselves on any given day, there were always voices before and with us, words and stories from others, ourselves, and those by our side.

The hardest and last thing I grasped every time I began struggling with myself, my friends, my memories, and my faith was that I actually had asked for the struggle to begin with. It was part of the walking, just as much as the sweating or the planning or the prayers. Maybe more. I had hoped the pilgrimage would be a time for meditation, but the time for meditation came to us through our frustrations and confusions. Sometimes, in the midst of a difficult experience, a space would open up, self-reflection would begin, and a sort of peace would wash over whatever had held my thoughts so tightly just moments before. Meditation came to me in the midst of and because of our stumbling, leaning on each other, yearning for our loved ones back home, sometimes wonderful, sometimes disappointing conversations with new friends, and the sometimes necessary, sometimes hurtful arguments with old ones.

After the first couple weeks on the road, I started to hate the word *intentionality* because of how often we had used it in anticipation of walking. We had wanted to live our lives intentionally, with purpose and direction, with responsibility. I laughed as I remembered how we had described different pains and discomforts we all had expected but hadn't understood. We had told many stories about what our walk on the road would be like, and those stories had proven to be woefully inaccurate and inadequate.

![Image](https://via.placeholder.com/620x798)

I've realized since returning that intention is not a dirty word. We eventually made it to Santiago, made it home, but not without many tired steps that turned to stumbles, arguments, and misdirected epithets. And yet, we continued to find ourselves, each day, walking. The process of asking what we think about the future, what we see as our purpose, who we see ourselves as—the process of a pilgrim on the road—necessitates an attempt at forming an intention. Yet that process of intention-positing only continues, only holds meaning as we repeatedly revise both the questions we ask ourselves and the answers to those questions throughout our lives.

The process of a pilgrim on the road necessitates an attempt at forming an intention. Yet that process of intention-positing only continues, only holds meaning as we repeatedly revise both the questions we ask ourselves and the answers to those questions throughout our lives. Over time, without revision and amendment, the words begin to stick like sore joints.

Several people along the way told us that “all of life is a pilgrimage.” On the Camino, we experienced the rhythm of expectation, humbling, and meditation, and this pattern continues beyond the road. Now that we’re home, perhaps the pattern is less pronounced, but as each of us returned to our loved ones and our expectations of what would meet us as we stepped off the plane, those rhythms continued, if only faintly. When I slow down long enough to think about my current intentions, I try to keep asking the open-ended question you can only ask as you stumble: *What is it that we are doing here?*
Though each day I may not lace up my boots and hoist onto my shoulders my pack still covered in dew from the night before, I continue hoping the same rhythms and truths from the trip will keep waking me up as I walk. A year after returning, I find comfort in being reminded and reminding in turn that even as we’re always doing the dirty work of intention-making and revising, falling and getting up, we learn by speaking as we go, together and alone. The difficulty remains to walk slowly, listen openly, and remember we all are living on the way.

On July 6, not the first day and not the last but a vague middle day, I wrote in my journal about a Catholic priest who stopped as we were eating breakfast in a small town square. He told us, among many things, “Peregrinar es como vivir, ¿comprende? Peregrinar es como vivimos todas nuestras vidas hasta el punto que vamos al cielo con Dios. Antes de eso, somos peregrinos. You understand?”

We nod.
“Then I give you my blessing,” and then he spoke slowly. “I bless you in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, now and always. Go in peace.”

Go up and down in peace, continue in this command and blessing, keep walking, remember and remember and forget and fall and rise and walk and go, in peace and understanding of your own not knowing, and speak back to the voices blessing you in turn.

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Works Cited


HOPE IS A MANY-SPLENDORED THING

- Hope springs eternal in the human breast. Sickly hunchback Alexander Pope, in his “Essay on Man”

- I hope you have hope going through this journey. Reassurance given a woman seven weeks pregnant whose ultrasound showed a fetal heart rate of 50. Fertility support group forum

- Once you choose hope, anything’s possible. Quintessential Christopher Reeve

- For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man sees, why does he yet hope for? Romans 8:24

- The miserable have no other medicine / But only hope. William Shakespeare, Measure for Measure

- Hope itself is a species of happiness. Samuel Johnson to his friend and future biographer, James Boswell

- It is the around-the-corner brand of hope that prompts people to action, while the distant hope acts as an opiate. Aphorist and longshoreman Eric Hoffer

- Some people have so much hope they put pink bows on their poodles.

- So much of hope is brain chemistry.

- So much of hope is a decision.

- Two-week-old baby Azra, whose name means “Help” in Hebrew, survived more than two days, naked and freezing, in the rubble of the 2011 Turkish earthquake. When her milk was gone, the mother fed the infant with her spit. In the earthquake’s aftermath, Azra was called the “face of hope.”

- Although I have no dog, I hope to march in the Key West Dachshund Parade.

Maryanne Hannan
Justified and Unjustified Drone Killing

H. David Baer

The Obama Administration has made great efforts to deflect criticisms of its drone policy. In May, President Obama delivered a major address at the National Defense University in which he defended the legality of drone strikes but suggested that US policy was shifting. In August, Secretary of State Kerry indicated in an interview on Pakistani television that the US was winding down its drone campaign. Critics, however, view these assurances skeptically, and the Washington Post reports that drone strikes continued throughout the fall (apps.washingtonpost.com/foreign/drones). There are numerous possible objections to the current practice of drone strikes; however, one of the core questions is a legal one: can drone strikes be reconciled with the laws of war? The answer to this question is yes, but not in every case and only with certain restrictions.

To target foreign terrorists raises questions related to the rule of distinction. That rule requires parties in a conflict to distinguish between combatants and noncombatants. Campaigns against terrorist organizations present a challenge to the rule, because terrorists do not belong to the armed forces of any state; hence, it is difficult to know whether they should be classified as combatants or civilians. Terrorists are an unusual version of the “irregular” combatant. Irregulars are civilians who participate in military hostilities temporarily (perhaps in the course of a foreign invasion or occupation), thereby forfeiting temporarily the protections afforded civilians by the laws of war, as established in international treaties such as the Geneva Convention. So long as irregulars act as soldiers, they are legitimate objects of attack. When they cease to act as soldiers, they regain civilian immunity.

A key question concerning terrorists, therefore, is when are they combatants and when are they civilians? One might argue, appealing to the laws of war, that terrorists can be considered combatants only during the time when they are carrying out a violent deed (e.g., driving a suicide truck into a military check point, planting a bomb, and so forth). Yet such an argument would overlook important dimensions of the problem. International terrorist organizations like al-Qaeda are engaged in planning and perpetrating terrorist attacks on a permanent basis. In this respect, they are analogous to an armed force. Active members of al-Qaeda, in turn, are analogous to the soldiers of an armed force. We therefore rightly think of al-Qaeda’s active members, especially its leaders, not as civilians who have temporarily taken up arms, but as permanent combatants. To grant such persons the same immunities afforded civilians would undermine the difference that makes the rule of distinction morally meaningful.

Indeed, no less impeccable a humanitarian organization than the International Committee of the Red Cross has suggested that, under certain circumstances, global terrorists can be considered permanent combatants. In 2009, the ICRC adopted an Interpretive Guidance on the Notion of Direct Participation in Hostilities under International Law. Since under the laws of war civilians lose immunity from direct attack whenever they “participate directly in hostilities,” the ICRC has sought to clarify what “direct participation in hostilities” means. According to the Interpretive Guidance, such participation is constituted by activities with a direct causal link to an act or military operation intended to harm a party to a conflict. The concept of direct participation therefore functions restrictively. Civilians who sympathize with one party to a conflict, and even civilians who offer non-military support to that party (e.g., food or shelter), are not legitimate objects of attack. Only
when individuals are involved in activities directly intended to cause harm, do they become irregular combatants and legitimate objects of attack.

Even while seeking to circumscribe the definition of "direct participation in hostilities," however, the *Interpretive Guidance* also allows that certain irregulars can become permanent soldiers, in effect, by assuming a "continuous combat function." Irregulars assume a continuous combat function by virtue of their membership in an "organized armed group." An organized armed group is "the armed or military wing of a non-State party; its armed forces in a functional sense" (International Review of the Red Cross, Vol. 90, No. 872, page 1,006). Members of such organized armed groups are legitimate objects of attack. As the *Interpretive Guidance* explains:

Civilians lose protection against direct attack for the duration of each specific act amounting to direct participation in hostilities, whereas members of organized armed groups belonging to a non-State party to an armed conflict cease to be civilians, and lose protection against direct attack, for as long as they assume their continuous combat function. (996)

Again, the concept of "continuous combat function" functions restrictively. Not every civilian who sympathizes with or supports a non-state party to a conflict is a legitimate target, but only those individuals who assume membership within the organized armed group of a non-state party.

Clearly al-Qaeda is an organized armed group involved in a conflict with the United States. The leaders of al-Qaeda, engaged in planning and executing terrorist attacks, have a continuous combat function, and as such they are legitimate objects of attack. Al-Qaeda operatives like Osama bin Laden and Anwar al-Awlaki are not civilians, but irregular combatants. If US armed forces target and kill such persons, this is in keeping with the rule of distinction. Drone strikes that target terrorists are, in principle, compatible with the laws of war.

This does not mean that drone strikes always comply with the laws of war in practice. Critics claim the strikes are insufficiently discriminate, having killed thousands of civilians, while government officials claim civilian causalities have been negligible to nonexistent. Part of the problem behind this numbers game arises from confusion about who counts as a combatant. On the one hand, humanitarian critics incline to define irregular combatants so narrowly that almost anyone killed, even those affiliated with al-Qaeda, are civilians. On the other hand, the administration's

**Drone strikes that target terrorists are, in principle, compatible with the laws of war. This does not mean that drone strikes always comply with the laws of war in practice.**

definition of irregulars is so vague that many civilians can easily be classified as combatants. What is needed are clear and public criteria explaining the basis on which those supervising drone strikes determine who counts as a target. It is one thing to target high level al-Qaeda operatives with a clear continuous combat function; it is quite another thing to target al-Qaeda sympathizers, or anyone who has ever interacted with an al-Qaeda operative.

Unfortunately, the legal justifications for drone killing offered by this administration (whose chief executive was once a law professor) have been flaccid. A Department of Justice white paper obtained by NBC News in early 2013 claimed drone strikes were justified in situations where "the targeted individual poses an imminent threat of violent attack against the United States," But the United States has carried out over four hundred drone strikes since Obama became President. To claim that every one of these has forestalled an imminent terrorist attack strains credulity. The white paper implicitly concedes as much, asserting that "the threat posed by al-Qaeda and its associated forces demands a broader concept of imminence in judging when
a person continually planning terror attacks presents an imminent threat." When, however, imminence is flattened out to include attacks that are not imminent in any normal sense of the word, the criterion has become meaningless. Nor need the concept of imminence be made to bear such weight. In armed conflicts between states, the targeting issue is not imminence but status; individuals with combatant status are legitimate targets, civilians are not. Similarly, when confronting organized armed groups belonging to non-state parties, the targeting issue is whether or not the individual in question has a continuous combat function.

Rather than playing fast and loose with the concept of imminence, the White House would do better to articulate criteria to determine when an individual participates directly in hostilities and when he assumes a continuous combat function. Making those criteria public would be better than the administration’s current strategy for defending drone strikes, which consists mostly in having President Obama protest that, since he is a liberal who criticized the executive branch as a senator, he can be trusted to make the right decisions. As a matter of fact, some drone strikes, such as the so-called signature strikes carried out under Obama’s administration, violate the rule of distinction. Signature strikes do not target specific persons, but groups of people engaged in suspicious activities. Insofar as those individuals are not identified, however, they cannot be identified as having a continuous combat function, while to target groups for being suspicious is insufficiently discriminate.

At the moment, the moral and legal framework regulating US drone strikes is quite unclear. Were the executive branch to develop public criteria for assessing continuous combat function, this would contribute greatly to the development of institutional guidelines for the use of a weapon that has become a regular part of the American military arsenal. Drone strikes can be justified or unjustified. The US needs a policy capable of recognizing the difference.

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Endnotes

On a May afternoon, I watched a nondescript young man enter the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in Sofia, Bulgaria—a show church, Eastern Orthodox by denomination, and used less for worship than for tourism—reach into the pocket of his rain jacket and hurl a stone at the face of Christ on a larger-than-life-icon behind the altar. It was protected by a sheet of glass, which cracked open but did not shatter when the rock hit it. The young man’s aim was slightly off, so after the glass broke the stone damaged the plaster near the edge of Christ’s halo.

By the time that stone landed, the vandal already had turned around and was sprinting out of the cathedral. Though I gladly would have tackled him, I didn’t even get close. Nor did the other people milling about, tourists like me who walked to the altar to assess the damage. We saw the glass on the floor, the nick on the icon. “Schade,” said one, who must have been German. A priest came through, bellowing in Bulgarian and looking, too late, for a perpetrator.

He looked at all of us, and I tried to tell him with my disappointed eyes and my sagging shoulders that I hadn’t caught the vandal, that I wouldn’t even be able to pick him out of a police lineup. I wandered around by the altar a while longer, wishing I had been younger and quicker and more perceptive and had been able to stop the young man—an iconoclast, in the truest sense of the word—from escaping the place he had profaned, or even from throwing that stone at all. Who was he? A failed divinity school student with a grudge? A too-young father having a bad day? An atheist who wants to eradicate all signs of faith in the public sphere?

Whatever he was, I felt sure that he hated those who believed, those who prayed. I didn’t expect to see such violence in Bulgaria. In America, our cultural debate often runs along religious lines: we argue about abortion, gay marriage, and religion’s place in an increasingly secular public sphere. In many former Iron Curtain countries like Bulgaria, where religion was rendered subservient to the official atheist ideology during the long Communist reign, it plays almost no role in public life. In Western Europe, too, it has been at times drowned out by secular voices and might never recover its influence over the people. So while I could imagine why a young man would throw a rock at Christ in America, I couldn’t guess why this would happen in a place where religion is in danger of becoming merely a quaint reminder of cultural history.

Yet it happened. A stone flew, glass broke, and I fell into a listless daze. I left Nevsky Cathedral without an icon, without even a postcard, and shuffled dazed over to nearby St. Sofia Church, originally dating from the sixth century and currently being excavated by archaeologists. The friend who had given me a tour of Sofia had first taken me there instead of to the showier Nevsky for good reason: St. Sofia is a working church and simply feels more sanctified. He pointed out the crypt that we could glimpse through glass-covered holes in the floor, and also an early Christian image—a bird in the Tree of Wisdom—that I will never forget. I vowed during this tour to visit St. Sofia alone and light some candles for those I loved, and after the incident with the stone it seemed like a good time. I needed to be in a place where religion was practiced, not merely displayed as cultural adornment.

Two women walked past me with a priest, then folded their hands together in prayer as he sang. Chairs sat near the altar, awaiting worshippers. Near the entrance stood a glass-walled booth where candles, icons, and crosses were for
sale. Close by were several metal candle holders at shoulder level, as well as two sand-filled basins at shin level. My Bulgarian friend had told me the high candles were for the living and the low ones for the dead.

The woman behind the sales window was not of the generation that learned English in elementary school. As I pondered how to buy candles from her without my Bulgarian phrasebook, I called upon the smattering of Polish—like Bulgarian, a Slavic language—that I had learned as a child from my maternal grandfather. I could still count to ten, and that would probably get my point across. But when I counted the people I wanted to light candles for, I quickly ran out of fingers. Among the dead: my father, my father-in-law, and two children who never made it into this world—jeden, dwa, trzy, cztery. Among the living: me, my wife, our two sons, our two mothers—pięć, sześć, siedem, osiem, dziewięć, dziesięć.

And that was it for fingers. What about my brothers, my brother-in-law, my children’s godparents? What about the priest I met on the Black Sea coast who drank to the point of stumbling and, though married, refused to stop harassing a young American woman? What about the Catholic priests who caused all the sex abuse scandals and all those who suffered from them?

On top of those, breaking the camel’s back, was the young man who had thrown the rock at Christ’s face. He needed prayers as much as anyone, though he might be enraged at the thought of it. I couldn’t separate him from anyone else on the planet who had engaged in this thing called sin, which means all of us, living and dead.

No one is immune from the emotions that made the young man throw his rock. By the time the cock crows to end our lives, we will all have betrayed Christ not three times, not three thousand times, but more: when we pretend that we have managed to escape God’s sight, when we grow ungrateful for the life we have been invited to live, when we spill our own shame and anger onto fellow creatures of the world. As I stood before the candles that burned for the living and the dead, the distance between me and the young stone-thrower collapsed. We humans are in this thing called sin together: What have we done? I kept asking myself. Not he or they but we, the species Homo sapiens. I had too many of the dead to pray for and too many of the living. In my mind, they had become two masses from which I could not separate myself. I was part of one now and would be part of the other for the rest of eternity.

When I made my way back to the window, I knew what to say.

“Dwa, molya,” I asked the woman behind the glass, and when she asked what size, I pointed at the ones that looked right. I paid my seven leva, picked wax off the ends of the candles to expose their wicks, and lit one for the living from a candle that someone else had paid for. I didn’t try to single out any one of the living for special mention, nor did I try to with the dead when I knelt down to do the same with their candle. The dead were the same, and the living were the same. One candle for each.

I knelt on the hard tile and the priest who had just been singing walked past me, staring at this obvious tourist. I got self-conscious and my face reddened, and as I stood up I wondered how my next step would go. Not where it would lead me, because I knew it would take me out the door and back onto the streets of Sofia, but with what spirit would I be led forward now that the gap had closed—just for one moment, long enough for me to light those candles and offer a silent prayer—between me and everyone who had ever lived.

How would I walk forward? Would I have the grace to heal my wounds, our wounds? Would I have the grace to even try?  

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MISSING

"Tell me what you see missing, and I will tell you who you are."
—W.S. Merwin, misremembered

You can miss the sound of a saw mill, the smell
of oak or cedar rising with the dusk. You can long
for the taste of fresh chicken, though you were sick
enough of it once. You can make yourself almost
ill with the memory of the breath of a baby, long gone,
along the length of your neck. You can see in your keen
mind's eye the water's ripple when you throw the slick
white stone, and you wish just once more you could
take in the smell of your father's tobacco, the thing
that put him early into the ground. You can even miss
the taste of a bitter medicine, the sting of an old belt
snapped across your bare back—as much as you
miss the calm weight of an old dog, her inexplicable low howl
in the dead of night. Who can say why we miss what we
miss? We only know the familiar joys and sorrows we
carry in our deepest pockets take on the same scent,
or odor, the sweet mix of regret. You can miss the feel of dry
dust under your feet, the stir of an old spoon, the V of geese
in an autumn sky, the hum and riff in an Easter hymn, the way
your tongue used to catch on the dawn of a broken tooth.

Mary M. Brown
Reviewed in this issue...

Rod Dreher’s *The Little Way of Ruthie Leming*

"YOU’RE INSANE! NO ONE EVER LEAVES. WHY would they? You’ve lived in Los Angeles your whole life—just go to college at UCLA or USC like a normal person!” shouted a friend when I told her I would be going to college in Oregon. She could not understand why I was heading north (and eventually east).

She was right in a sense. I had lived in Los Angeles my whole life. Or, more precisely, I had lived in Fullerton—a community of over 100,000 residents that most people have never heard of since it sits awash in an ever-expanding sea of suburbs. But I knew that Southern California and its beach culture were not for me. My Scandinavian ancestors bequeathed me pasty, white skin which left me more likely to contract skin cancer than catch a wave at the beach. I thus figured that college in a place where it rained all the time was a positive move.

But what disturbed me most about life in Los Angeles was its transient nature. While no one could imagine leaving, everyone was from somewhere else. History was the 1960s, and newer was always better. Even then, something inside me knew there must be another way to live—a way to live in a community nurtured by a sense of the past. The search for this way of life led me to Texas, and then eventually to Greentown, Indiana.

Rod Dreher had a similar experience to mine, although somewhat in reverse. The author of *The Little Way of Ruthie Leming: A Southern Girl, A Small Town, and the Secret to a Good Life* (Grand Central, 2013), Dreher yearned as a child to leave his native Starhill, Louisiana in search of the sophistication of the big city. His travels would first lead him to Natchitoches and Baton Rouge but then east to Washington, New York, and Philadelphia.

While 889 miles physically separate Greentown and Starhill, the cultural distance separating the two may be just as significant. Greentown is squarely in the Midwest, and Starhill is deep in the South. People in Indiana love their basketball and a tenderloin fry. People in Louisiana love their football and a pot of gumbo. Greentown is surrounded by corn and soybean fields. Starhill is defined by piney woods and tributaries flowing into the nearby Mississippi.

Yet despite their differences, Greentown and Starhill arguably have more in common with one another than they do with larger cities in their respective states. Both are small. Greentown has about 3,000 residents, one high school, one junior high, and one elementary school. Starhill is an unincorporated area in West Feliciana Parish.
St. Francisville, a parish seat of fewer than 2,000 residents, is the only community of any size. Two elementary schools, one junior high, and one high school encompass much of life in Starhill and the parish as a whole.

While Rod Dreher initially fled Starhill, his younger sister Ruthie stayed there and over time became a fixture in the community. She was her high school's homecoming queen like her mother and grandmother before her. She married her high school sweetheart and developed a reputation as a teacher who loved even the most unlovable of students. In essence, Ruthie Leming and Starhill were inextricably woven into one another. In 2010, Ruthie, now in her early forties, was diagnosed with cancer. Rod returned to Starhill to help his sister, and when she died in 2012, he and his family moved back to Starhill for good. In part, they came home to help Ruthie's husband, Mike, raise his three daughters; however, they also moved back to weave themselves into a place he once called home.

Dreher writes this book because of what he learned from Ruthie and the battle she waged with, and lost to, cancer. His sister's battle was not one, he discovered, that she waged alone. In Dreher's words, "It won't be the government or your insurer who allows you to die in peace, if it comes to that, because [they cannot] assure you that your spouse and children will not be left behind to face the world alone. Only your family and your community can do that" (267). This kind of trust is born from deep relationships with a particular family and community, relationships that develop over time and only with stability. Dreher turns to the Rule of St. Benedict of Nursia as a model of the kind of rule that can bring such stability to our lives. "The implication for me was clear: if I wanted to know the inner peace and happiness in community that Ruthie had, I needed to practice a rule of stability. Accept the limitations of a place, in humility, and the joys that can also be found there may open themselves" (225).

Much of what Dreher has learned since returning to Starhill reminds me of lessons I have learned in Greentown. One thing that is true of all small towns is that the people who live in them have no means to escape from one another. As a kid growing up in Fullerton, if I wanted to avoid anyone I just drifted into the anonymous crowd. Fullerton was relatively indistinguishable from the communities surrounding it. In Starhill, Dreher experienced something very different. "The intolerance, the social conformity, the cliquishness, the bullying. At sixteen this is what I thought small-town life was and always would be" (19). For better and for worse, everyone knows everyone. In Starhill, Dreher observes people crossing almost every line we humans conjure up and use to separate ourselves from one another. Rich and poor, black and white, educated and uneducated, churched and un-churched—in a small town they can't avoid each other. In fact, one can argue that small towns are just as capable of fostering an appreciation for certain forms of diversity as large cities. They may not always have the same cosmopolitan orientation as their larger counterparts; however, when you are forced to get to know one another whether you like it or not, something significant can happen. Los Angeles may have had a wider span of ethnic diversity than Greentown. New York City may have the same advantage over Starhill. However, in larger communities people can settle into their own sub-communities where they are unlikely to be challenged by outsiders. In smaller communities, such forms of retreat are simply not possible. Schools, churches, grocery stores, and even gas stations are gathering places for the whole community. The usual means of withdrawal are just not available. The struggles of one family are thus often borne by others. Likewise, the celebrations of one family are shared by others.
suffering and death come for you—and it will—you want to be in a place where you know, and are known” (209).

Second, in smaller communities certain kinds of problems cannot be avoided. When Dreher returned home he found himself comforted by the embrace of many but also found himself disturbed by demons from his past. For example, Dreher recounts as a child being bullied and thus humiliated by a group of boys, in part at the prompting of a girl. This same girl, now a woman, jogged past Dreher’s home one day and paused to talk. Dreher thus surmised that “This is what it meant to move home. Communitarian romanticism is fine, but what do you do when the past isn’t even past, but is in fact jogging down your street, and stepping onto your front porch to say hello?” (230).

Shortly after I moved to Greentown, I faced a comparable challenge. I had just agreed to coach youth soccer for my daughter’s kindergarten-aged team. As our first Saturday-afternoon game progressed, a preexisting conflict between the father of a boy on my team and the coach for the other team spilled over. I soon found myself standing between the two of them with a group of kindergarteners watching. Fortunately, the issue subsided and the game continued. Upon being prompted by a pastor the next day to turn and greet my neighbor in Sunday worship, I realized the man seated behind me was the coach from the other team.

Finally, communities such as Starhill and Greentown share a sense of interpersonal stability that persists through hard times. When Ruthie died, Dreher recalls that he and his family were the beneficiaries of “steadfast acts of ordinary faith, hope, and charity” (267). Those acts, according to Dreher, were generated by people who stayed behind and held in trust for him and his family.

Many of the residents of Greentown work at the Chrysler and Delphi plants in nearby Kokomo, so when the recession struck in 2008, we were disproportionately vulnerable. As people considered their options, I heard even highly-skilled engineers say they would rather go back to school and train for another line of work than move. Being new to town, I found that commitment confusing; however, I soon learned that the identity of many of my new friends was more tightly attached to the people populating a particular place than to a particular profession. They were keenly aware of how many people held the well-being of their family in trust. They, likewise, felt responsible for the well-being of others. They could not just move, even if staying forced them to change careers.

Small towns are not perfect. Part of the promise they hold unfortunately emerges from the fact that their imperfections are well known by all. The little ways offered by communities such as Starhill and Greentown, however, empower their residents to know and more fully to appreciate what makes them human in their beauty, their depravity, and everything in between. The question is whether we can slow down long enough to appreciate what otherwise might escape us.

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ON THE POETS

Atar Hadari was born in Israel, raised in England, and studied poetry in the United States. His debut collection, Rembrandt's Bible is forthcoming from Indigo Dreams in 2013 and his Lives of the Dead: Poems of Hanoch Levin is forthcoming from Arc Publications in 2014.

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Mary M. Brown is Professor of English and Literature at Indiana Wesleyan University and an editor of The Steinbeck Review. She has published poetry in many journals including Fourth River and The Christian Century.
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