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Corey Hagelberg was born and has lived most of his life in Gary, Indiana. The imagery and symbolism in his work come from his local environment on the southern shore of Lake Michigan, where the rare biodiversity of the Indiana Dunes meets one of the most industrialized regions in the world. Much of the natural beauty of this area was destroyed in the name of "progress." However, nature ultimately dominates. As the lake and wind move sand on the shore, new dunes are formed. It is this symbol of rebirth that inspires his work.

Hagelberg emphasizes and embraces opposites and contradictions in everyday experiences. His work blurs the line between humor and tragedy, current and historical, traditional and non-traditional, high and low art, natural and industrial, accusation and confession, beautiful and grotesque. He aims to encourage the viewer to evaluate and challenge their own notions of meaning, value, and beauty.

Currently, Hagelberg is an adjunct professor at Indiana University Northwest and maintains a studio practice focused on black and white woodcut and assemblage. In 2012, Hagelberg co-founded the Calumet Artist Residency. Centered in the Indiana Dunes, this nonprofit organization aims to promote the arts and connect people, art, and nature in the Calumet Region. He earned an undergraduate degree in sculpture and a graduate degree in printmaking from Ball State University.
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whatever is **RIGHT**

whatever is **PURE**

whatever is **LOVELY**

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

*Philippians 4:8*
WE ARE WRAPPING UP THIS ISSUE AFTER THE end of the semester. Campus is quiet; some students are in far-flung locations for work or travel, but most are back home for the summer, navigating familiar environments with new perspective.

The experience of home is different after a significant time away, as college students can surely attest. For some summer reading that gets at the crux of that dynamic, students especially may enjoy Jennifer L. Miller's essay (page 29), in which she compares and contrasts how Dorothy from The Wizard of Oz and Eleven from Stranger Things—two beloved characters separated by eight decades—think about home following their life-changing departures from it. "For Eleven," Miller writes, "running away is much more in line with Joseph Campbell's idea of the hero's journey, or the German bildungsroman, where leaving home leads to maturation and growth, and ultimately enables the hero to return home and effect change."

Speaking of home, it would behoove all parents and those who love them to read Agnes R. Howard's deep dive into contemporary parenting—motherhood in particular (page 4). Howard examines the hard, weird, over-the-top aspects of the job and provides historical insights while suggesting some potential solutions to the thorniest problems. It takes a village, as the saying goes, but perhaps not in the ways one might expect.

The theme of home continues throughout this issue, from Joel Kurz's centennial commemoration of Sherwood Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio (page 22) to Kelsey Lahr's big-picture take on Earth as home (page 16) to Rebekah Curtis's meditation on card games (page 55).

THE VALPO CAMPUS WILL BE BUZZING AGAIN IN A few weeks. Students will move back into residence halls, hauling supplies and belongings with them. (Perhaps Matthew Landrum's poem, "On Being Asked What Would Jesus Do in IKEA," page 35, can inspire their back-to-school shopping.) These college years are fleeting, much like the sand mandala that Thomas C. Willadsen writes about on page 36. At the same time, as George C. Heider notes in his column (page 42), the relationships, lessons, and experiences during these years can have an impact long after graduation—extending, perhaps, all the way home. ✨—HGG

Congratulations to Our Award-Winning Writers

In April, the Associated Church Press recognized seven of our contributors with "Best of the Church Press" Awards:

Stephanie Paulsell, Award of Excellence for Theological or Scholarly Article and Award of Excellence for Professional Resource: "The Unknowable More: Contemplation, Creativity, and Education" (Easter 2018).

Debra Dean Murphy, Award of Excellence for Critical Review: "Our Sentimental Poet? Mary Oliver in an Age of Excess" (Lent 2018).


David Heddendorf, Award of Merit for Theological or Scholarly Article: "Joyce Carol Oates and the Springs of Belief" (Trinity 2018).


Tania Runyan, Award of Merit for Poetry: "Let Go and Let God" (Easter 2018).

Caroline J. Simon, Honorable Mention for Theological or Scholarly Article: "Can Two Walk Together Unless They Be Agreed?" Traditions, Vocations, and Christian Universities in the Twenty-First Century" (Michaelmas 2018).

The Cresset also received an Honorable Mention in the "Best in Class" category for journals. You can read all of these award-winning pieces on our website, thecresset.org.
I belonged to a swim-practice carpool for a while and I am not proud of it.

When my daughter joined her high school team in ninth grade, I failed to anticipate practices after and before school, which meant leaving before 5:00 a.m. every morning to drive her there. To my surprise, few other mothers were looking for carpools. When I asked, one excellent woman consented. Miraculously, she offered to take mornings if I would do most of the evening pick-ups. I let her do this. Her reasons for wanting a carpool were more compelling than mine.

Here is what pick-ups were like for her before our arrangement. She would leave her job a little before 5:00 p.m. then go grab her son to take him to afternoon soccer/basketball/baseball practice, as season dictated. Sometimes she had to wait for him there. Other times, his practices would be long enough for her to drive to the high school, pick up her daughter, then pick up her son again. One irritable teen or the other was always left waiting. This woman looked apologetic admitting what I also had noticed: that swim practice didn't exactly get out the same time every day. It might end at 5:00 but usually that meant 5:15 before girls came out dressed. If the coach called a meeting or someone needed extra laps, it might be closer to 5:30 before their release. Planning to arrive at the later time, say, 5:25, wouldn't work either because sometimes practice might release early or the girls might decide not to shower and then her kid would end up waiting, wet and embarrassed, while the coach, tapping his foot impatiently, wondered where the mother was so he could lock up and go home.

I was so grateful to lose the morning drives that I would have agreed to pick up every day for the rest of high school and have still been in this woman's debt. But our arrangement did afford me many sometime-after-5:00 spans spent idling in a line of SUVs and minivans, wondering at the situation. Sure, the sport was important to our kids. Sure, it was good of the coach to put his all into helping our kids be their best. But what had called this situation into being? Here were dozens of capable adults, overwhelmingly female, commandeered into stop-start loops around the back entrance of the high school, unapologetically kept waiting fifteen minutes, a half hour, forty-five minutes, five days a week, not in a neutral slice of time but in that frenzied one wedged between finishing up a day's work and heading home to cook dinner. What was the meaning of our own modest swimmom queue multiplied by all the other sports and clubs predicated on the same maternal obedience?

So much has been written about problems of working motherhood, of the demands and compromises and rewards. Hasn't all this been hashed over enough? Maybe. Usually this puzzle is addressed in terms of work-life balance, familiar solutions touting affordable childcare and gender equality in housework, with state or employer changing policy to make family life more sane. These discussions feel as exhausted as a working mom at her toddler's bedtime. What we have to "balance" is not "work" and "life" but work and work. The fact that all these women still line up here, there, and everywhere suggests that something has yet to be fixed, and it's not all fixable by parental leave or day care policies.
The problem stretches across a range of life issues, but solutions tend to focus on single parts. Sometimes we focus on the children, willing parents just to do whatever is best for kids, as though the effect of nurture on the nurturers is insignificant as long as the kids come out okay. On the other hand, we might focus on jobs, cheering for whatever will allow women to keep their sense of self fixed in employment and earning capacity. In either case, children tend to be reckoned as objects whose fates will be decided by adult priorities and whose own agency does not enter in.

Both approaches miss the felt experience of working-family life. Any approach to the difficulty of holding a job and nurturing beloved children that scants the worth of either work will be inadequate. Women are shortchanged when we only esteem their professional accomplishments, when we do not count household work properly as such, and when the job description of parenthood expands with evermore childhood perks. The solution is neither to stop having children nor to stop having jobs, but to give motherhood a makeover.

In classic fashion, makeovers usually start with lopping off something. Very well. The place to start is by trimming off the accretion of unnecessary frills of middle-class childhood that weigh down middle-class mothering. That doesn't mean paying other people to do the things moms now do, it means consigning some of those things to oblivion. Doing that would clear time and head space in children and adults alike, which we might use to help each other flourish. Second, children should be enlisted in the solution to the work-life crunch by becoming capable, full-functioning members of the households they inhabit. Third, we might rethink the place of employment in the flourishing life, trimming it down to size, too.

The Problem

Write-ups about what's wrong with American motherhood all mark the same things—that women in charge of children are assigned too many tasks. Children of all ages require work, and much of what American moms do just comes standard with the embodied, changing needs of children. Some extra efforts spring from the initiative of mothers themselves, from women well educated and capable of doing virtually anything who, for a period of time, direct their best efforts to the young ones in their homes. This is motherhood "in an age of anxiety," as Judith Warner named it years back in Perfect Madness (2005), preceded by Sharon Hays's The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood (1996), Ann Crittenden's The Price of Motherhood (2001), Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels's The Mommy Myth (2004), and a lot of mommy-lit like Allison Pearson's I Don't Know How She Does It (2002) et al. But after all these words and debates, mothers still are asked to do all kinds of ridiculous things in the name of children's opportunity.

What we have to "balance" is not "work" and "life" but work and work. The fact that all these women still line up here, there, and everywhere suggests that something has yet to be fixed, and it's not all fixable by parental leave or day care policies.

It is in fact a little surprising that this situation does not generate more of an uproar. After all, Americans have rejected old models of female subordination. In earlier editions of the American wife, a wife's fulfillment was supposed to be found in providing amusement, adornment, and domestic maintenance for the man she married. In the nineteenth century this meant creating a haven from the bustling outside world. By the early twentieth, it meant becoming an interesting companion, facilitating a man's rise in business. A wife's sense of accomplishment would come from being useful to someone else who was accomplishing something. We have tossed these models to the curb and no longer mostly perceive wives as accessories to husbands. Instead, women are
repurposed as accessories to children. To be clear, the error here is not in the fact of children or the love and nurture and moral formation mothers give children. What is objectionable is the foolish disregard for women's time and abilities that comes in the course of carting them through pit-stops of American childhood. The offense comes not so much from children themselves but from institutions putatively in service of children who demand uncomplaining obedience from their mothers. The mother is made into a tool with a soul, and motherhood is warped by pettiness, consumerism, and on-call utility.

The Problem Explained

In addition to paid employment, women do disproportionate degrees of domestic management. This is old news. Americans have wrangled over this imbalance for decades. While women now share many more household tasks with partners or husbands, they retain a lot of them, either because it is not obvious how some tasks should be divided or because some tasks, when offered to men, did not seem to them worth doing. Women then had to decide whether they would let those tasks lapse or take them back, sending birthday party invitations, writing thank-you notes, completing school forms, making pediatric appointments. Before going any further, we must recognize that some men are really good at these things and do a lot at home. But even due defensiveness on that count can hit a sore spot, that dads get fulsome praise when they do the kinds of things moms do unheralded every day.

Nature lays the groundwork of this conundrum. Unless prevented, reproductive coupling produces new humans who need food, clothes, and care. But who takes care of them, and how, are decisions made by culture. Women were long shut out of other opportunities and works on the grounds that child-rearing was theirs to do and that angling after other prospects might disrupt or unfit them from doing it. The short story of the culture of American motherhood is not all pretty. By the early nineteenth century, gendered division of labor sequestered middle-class white women in the home, justifying this as natural and desirable. The sweet matron made the home a haven of peace from the hard, competitive world. But by the early twentieth century, smothered by mother love, many modern Americans wanted to knock that matron off her pedestal. Mom: yuck. A whole boom of babies raised more “naturally” let mom be comfortably distant, discernable from afar by a whiff of the cookies she'd taken fresh from the oven or by the chemical-clean smell of floor wax, but mostly an enabler of the playscape where children ruled and roamed at will—glory days now hearkened to by free-range parenting advocates. Underemployed at home, more moms went to work. Others, as decades wore on, found themselves urgently needed at home, where a lot needed doing.

What needs doing? Here distinctions must be made. Caring for children is not the same thing as doing housework. Though some women announce gladly that they are stay-at-home-moms, not many are likely now to describe themselves as housewives. To wit, mom bloggers routinely gush about love for husband and sweet babies and then admit with some pride that their home is kinda messy. Here's the rub: children tend to be at home unless you put them somewhere else—daycare, school, aftercare—and if a parent is also in that space to take care of children, it makes sense to simultaneously do tasks that need doing. Taking care of children may be distinct from taking care of the house, but the presence of children generates more household tasks and requires their performance. In a reciprocal continuous loop, care of home and care of children entangle.

That knot, housework, can be untangled in many different ways as culture dictates. The fact that a family has children who must be fed and kept from drowning in wells can present a problem that a woman, Mother, solves by her own lights. But there are other solutions. We can mechanize it, assigning more to our internet of things. We can monetize it, hiring other people to do what machines cannot. Americans have kept and do keep servants to perform domestic and child-rearing tasks. This solution can turn exploitative by race or class or both, richer women undervaluing the time of poorer women. Under some terms, buying “help” is sensible. American households used to require lots of heavy labor—cooking over
wood fires, heating water for laundry, beating rugs, draining iceboxes—and when the work was too much for one woman, she could bring others into her space to help complete it. Alternatively, the work of one household could become too small for one woman, inefficiently done by her alone in her own space, and better done with a pooling of efforts. Serious social reformers used to think about how to solve this problem. Lyrically grouped as “dreamers of a new day” in historian Sheila Rowbotham’s book by that title, such women, whom another historian, Dolores Hayden, calls “material feminists,” sought better lives through changes at home. Hayden traces their experiments in a book whose title reflects their urgency and optimism: The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities. Rather than each private family having to duplicate efforts in their own private spaces—I cook my dinner and mind my children while my neighbors separately do the same thing—they sought ways to make the work collective or collaborative, like having professionally prepared food delivered to kitchenless homes.

These women’s campaigns for shared or outsourced housework were not just trying to find an arrangement to make their own private lives go more smoothly. Their plans differed, as Hayden explains. Among faculty wives and literary folk around Harvard, Melusina Fay Peirce organized a housework cooperative in the 1860s, managed and staffed by women. Later in the century, admiring how industry was transforming other facets of city life, Charlotte Perkins Gilman dreamed of hotel-like apartments with professionally planned and industrially produced food. Ellen Swallow Richards showed off a public kitchen at the World’s Fair in Chicago in 1893. Ethel Puffer Howes in the 1920s tried to organize women’s cooperation in household chores, facilitating women’s service in “trained vocations” outside the home. Collaborative dining clubs, public dining rooms serving whole buildings or neighborhoods, and dinner-delivery services seemed like the way of the future into the early twentieth century.

Most Americans since have found such cooperatives unattractive. We’ve gone all in for prepared-food delivery and meal kits and take-out, but eliminating our kitchens or sharing our appliances is another matter. We like our privacy, home as a refuge from the work world. The very fact that nineteenth-century folk—or we—could configure home as a refuge away from work shows our blindness to the work that gets done in houses, especially by women. It may be a measure of how stuck we are in private-home idealization that the only way we can imagine sharing household duties with our neighbors is in a dystopia. Or a natural disaster.

But our preference for this lifestyle creates other problems for us. In some ways, it makes sense for us to idealize our single-family homes: because agriculture dominated our economy for many formative years and that backyard used to be the back forty, the start of your farm; because many Americans came from places without opportunity for their own land or home and here could make
a home under their own vine and fig tree. In other ways, though, it does not make sense to idealize the single-family home: it separates families from each other while wasting resources in land and water and transportation. As Hayden reminds us, it is an ideal shaped by land-use policy, real estate development, and transportation planning—as well as gendered ideas of what home was supposed to be and who was supposed to be in it.

The problem gets personal. Picture the American woman—with-young-children in her house around 6:00 p.m., making dinner. She may have just returned from her job or may have been here all day. Parents nickname this the witching hour. The woman tries to cut carrots, tosses chicken in a skillet. Children tug on her shins or throw blocks on the floor, or smack each other or jump off the back of the sofa, or watch TV or play video games. She tries to return to her cooking, perhaps convinced that it’s important to provide children nourishing food or because the other adult returning home soon expects this kind of dinner. The picture grows more complicated as it pans out across the street to peer in the window of her neighbor, duplicating the same labor that the first woman is doing, each separately and simultaneously cutting vegetables while minding children while wiping countertops, instead of collaboratively, say, three families doing it together. The way we live makes our daily work harder to do.

Housework was harder in other eras, especially before electricity, but it was also reckoned with more honestly as work in other eras. When in the nineteenth century men increasingly earned wages outside the home, unpaid labors of the home correspondingly got demoted. In her book From Marriage to the Market, Northwestern University sociologist Susan Thistle explains how support for what women did in the home ebbed in elite and popular opinion in the second half of the twentieth century. Whereas state and society previously had supported women’s work done in the home, by the 1960s, with women’s livelihood increasingly coming from wages rather than marriage, men began to think that “[L]ifelong support for women’s domestic labor” was “a poor bargain.” Thistle quotes one man’s explanation of how he successfully got out of having to marry: “I find I just have to own an awful lot of underwear and shirts.” What women were doing at home began to seem like doing nothing, so they were free to seek gainful employment.

Now, any one of these particular women may really like to cook, enjoy her children’s company, or find peace in tidying up. But that does not solve the problem. We don’t even know what to call the problem. Being too busy? We now cover up the drudgery by claiming to find cooking or cleaning relaxing in contrast to, say, analyzing spreadsheets. But still, cooking dinner for a single family with young children has its downsides. Saying so requires neither regretting the cooking nor the children. We may try to make it a joke. We can print slogans like “Mommy’s Sippy Cup” or “Mommy’s Time Out” on wine bottles, making light of affluent moms’ admission that days with children drive them to drink. Or we could see all that domestic labor as just trivial, hardly worth fretting over. In her 1970s Redstockings classic, Pat Mainardi remembers that she was just finishing a paper on housework when “my husband came in and asked what I was doing. Writing a paper on housework? ’He said. ‘Housework? Oh my god how trivial can you get?’”

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After all, appliances enabled women to manage their own housework without hired help and still have time to spare. Our homes now bristle with machines eating electricity. But some measures show that women spend even more time on housework and childcare than they did formerly. Why? Washing machines save time—but we have more clothes and change them more often. Refrigerators and ovens save time—but we crave better food. Children have more toys to keep them busy—but children have more toys, and these need to be chosen and put away and maintained.
Most of us want to live well rather than at bare minimum. Living better means more work for Mother. Much as we downplay the importance of housework in the life well lived, the well-lived life presupposes clean sheets and family dinner. We want somebody to do this. We resist giving up the expectation that it be done somehow out of love and not just for cash after services rendered. One benefit of looking to earlier solutions to the puzzle of women's work is that household flourishing then had to be taken seriously. There was no path to stimulating and profitable employment without a solution for a family’s daily bread.

**Why Bother?**

A few years ago, Facebook’s Sheryl Sandberg and political scientist Anne-Marie Slaughter argued about “Why Women Still Can’t Have It All,” Slaughter’s title of the *Atlantic’s* most-read article of all time, both insisting rightly that workplace structures need change. But both are wrong when they describe family life in terms of having. Being a mother is not “having” but doing. Some parts of parenting are necessary and good, if hard. Features like this come pretty much standard: surviving on interrupted sleep for months while newborns accustom themselves to circadian rhythms and liquid diets; teaching fine-motor-manners in use of forks, spoons, toothbrushes, shoelaces, buttons, and zippers; punctuating transportation to and from anywhere with buckling and unbuckling unwilling passengers in car seats; supervising homework assignments boring to teacher, child, and parent alike; stomaching stink in shoes, gym uniforms, in sports gear unpacked from sports bags; navigating interactions with other women more or less permissive, more or less wealthy, more or less woke; bra shopping with a twelve-year-old girl; driving with a fifteen-year-old boy; managing drug testing, STI testing, AP testing. No exhaustive list, that, and it mostly describes normal tasks on behalf of relatively privileged, healthy kids in a stable environment. Add poverty, add mental illness, add accident, addiction, disease, disability, or crime, and the requirements for bringing a small person safely to adulthood overwhelm. On what grounds would one human being do this for another? Even trying to parse the reasons risks sounding obtuse, especially to those with experience in doing it. Children appear. You love them. They need things. You provide things. You do your best. You fail them in countless ways even when your efforts are excellent. It may all work out. There are fun parts.

Nurture bears big benefits for children, obviously, but the experience also has parts to recommend it to any thinking adult. Observing a child observe the world, acquire language, mobility, curiosity, is among the most astonishing phenomena we know, like discovering a new planet or synthesizing the human genome. It is jaw-dropping. Any human should be able to see this of another human. Except mostly we do not situate ourselves to see it. Some of us miss this phenomenon because we lack proximity. Even if we know this amazing development is occurring right now next door, we simply are not around enough to see that fourteen-month-old learn that the sound “dog” means that loud hairy thing that licks his hands. And then we miss it again when his brain connects those odd squiggles on a page, d-o-g, with that sound his mouth makes and his ear hears and signifies that hairy animal. It is not only parents who have proximity to witness this. But affection helps us pay attention. When we care about someone we watch him, learn her habits and dislikes, listen to her words, even meaningless words. Being a mother to a young child includes not only having to feed this creature and keep it from harm, but also having the affective inclination to scrutinize him or her and a lot of time to do it. Not only do men and women often find themselves with these small humans physically adhered to them 24/7, but they often find themselves warmly disposed to them and, happy miracle, have their attentions reciprocated by the fascinating subjects of their human development study. Appreciating this is not sentimentality. This is what women, having been stuck with this job over long centuries, have learned to see. It would be a thousand pities to waste this insight.

One might say that the very nature of loving someone requires self-effacement, that virtues are advanced by self-effacement in service of children. But we don’t say this! Middle-class American
mothers in the nineteenth century were reassured that they were morally superior because self-sacrificing by nature, and then encouraged to practice this congenital endowment. In contemporary America, that very idea offends. Instead, parenting advice and markets expect women to behave like this without crediting it either to mother's nature or excellence, presenting it as simply what a normal woman would do in the face of what a normal child wants. Moms just do these things.

Social pressure has turned what might have once been rare treats into daily dues. Kids think: you would if you loved me. Other mothers think: what, are you a Bad Mom?

The problem is not that base-model parenting is arduous. It is, but that can be handled. The problem is the way institutions and conventions, empowered in the name of doing what is best for children, run kid-serving operations with appalling disregard for the time, intellect, and dignity of women. Childhood has been glammed up in ways that have made mother-work swell grotesquely. Nice, normal, middle-class child-rearing calls for whimsical cupcakes for the full calendar of school holiday parties: Halloween, Christmas, Valentine's Day, Hundredth Day, End-of-Standardized-Test-Day and so on. Also cupcakes for birthdays, gussied up as gnome parties, spa parties, floral-design parties, Minecraft parties, slime parties. For spending weekends at generic hotels by interstate exits, watching girls with supersized hairbows and undersized skirts in cheer competitions. For ironing five layers of tulle in a wear-it-once tutu so the dance teacher won't call you out for wrinkles spotted from the audience during three-hour recitals. For chaperoning field trips to historic sites where fourth graders make fun of old-fashioned underpants. It may sound wrong to complain about things that are actually luxuries enjoyed by comfortable people in safe neighborhoods. But this stuff should not be normal.

Nobody is conspiring, necessarily, to take advantage of women trying to be good mothers. Sure, there is a lot of money to be made by making women feel like they have to do a bunch things or else their children will feel unloved or disadvantaged. This is not all the market's fault, though. Some items on moms' burgeoning to-do lists also come at the behest of pediatricians, teachers, coaches, or college admissions committees, bodies carrying moral authority high enough to prompt guilt and dishing out tangible rewards that moms can't afford to pass up.

What there is to do proliferates endlessly in Making Every Day Special. Social pressure has turned what might have once been rare treats into daily dues. Children may feel and be deeply loved without requiring that a mother do all this, but it is hard to opt out of doing it individually. Kids think: you would if you loved me. Other mothers think: what, are you a Bad Mom?

In the past few decades, requirements for middle-class child-rearing have ramped up. As traced by Viviana Zelizer's landmark book, *Pricing the Priceless Child* (1985) and Jennifer Senior's analysis in *All Joy and No Fun* (2014), economic uncertainties make frenzied parents feel like they have to put 110 percent into everything so by some chance their children may succeed. Rising wealth allows rising expectations. Some rise is attributable to women themselves who, becoming mothers later after acquiring education and experience, accustomed to bringing their best to whatever occupation they do, find quite a lot they can do on behalf of children.

We may pride ourselves on our creativity in parenting, just loving those kiddos and having a blast watching them grow, etc. But we have less liberty to improvise than we may think. Motherhood does not really come on our terms. Unless we raise children in isolated caves, we are subject to somebody else's script. Tacit obligation to observe all the trappings promises not much option or honor. Worse, the very engines pressing women to do all this stuff come with built-in critical apparatus faulting women for doing it too well, calling them helicopter moms, lawnmower moms, snowplow moms.

To change the terms of what constitutes a good childhood, we might offer less confetti and
more responsibility. What is needed is for us all, or at least a critical mass, to say, no, I'm not doing that. Because who has time for all that nonsense? Women now have access to jobs that both fulfill some social good and supply income, and it is right that jobs once closed to women now offer opportunity. We recognize that the economy and the state profit from women's contributions. We rightly rue inequities, gender pay gaps, glass ceilings. But we do not have to concede to work the power to define whole lives, selves, of males and females. The best critiques of American working conditions not only aim to grant women access to arrangements designed for men, but seek to make work fit together better with family life. Even as child-rearing became more demanding, jobs have done the same, disproportionately rewarding those who show up for extra hours and unpredictable schedules—often men—and disadvantaging those without that flexibility.

Childcare—subsidized or universal or safe and affordable—is usually the first solution proposed to allay the distress of working moms. This comes with its own conundrums. Childcare is expensive, though childcare workers are not notoriously well compensated, and poor women often take care of the children of wealthier women. Occasionally women made wealthy by a high-stress, high-status job cash it all in to do something meaningful like teach in an elementary school. My children have had a few such teachers. I have not yet met any who left a rewarding career to become a nanny and take care of somebody else's babies instead. Although that certainly would be interesting.

Paying for childcare in accordance with the importance of the job would make it unaffordable for most people. Think of what the job of taking care of young children actually entails. Sometimes your kids are good for the babysitter. Sometimes your kids, unaccountably, decide to injure each other or themselves, refuse to go to bed, or vomit all over the carpet in your absence. You just can't pay someone enough to have made this temporarily not your problem. Sometimes babysitters not only behave warmly to your children—they are, after all, getting paid to be nice—but they all authentically admire and enjoy each other. When this happens, is there an hourly wage adequate to return value for this? It may be possible for some to pay others a reasonable wage to oversee safety and occupation of young children, and people who seek this work might even do it happily and well. But that's a lot to take for granted.

Another assay at work-life balance seeks more flexible work schedules. This is possible in some jobs. But the trouble with jobs may be not jobs themselves but thinking about them in the wrong way. Employers can alter the way they hire and compensate, but we may reconsider work in a personal way too. Some people love their jobs. Plenty of others, even highly placed and well-paid people, experience frustration, their humanity boiled down to metrics and rankings in stressful but meaningless jobs that they feel unable to leave because of lifestyle choices that depend on those earnings. These laments are prevalent in 2019. Highly educated men and women who make careers the center of life and determiner of identity may find themselves unfulfilled. When we size up our skills, hopes, and demands of dependents, why is work the only category in which we think to "lean in"?

The Solution

Without dismissing the potential benefits of affordable childcare, flexible office hours, and gender-balanced housework, I suggest changes closer to home. A big positive change in family life requires three subordinate ones. The first gestures at simplicity: strip some of the bells and whistles from the childhood-experience package, conceding less to the way commerce and fashion dictate kids' needs. The second concerns children themselves, who get a promotion: inviting them to become collaborators in the goods of the household rather than passive dependents awaiting delivery of services. Together, those shifts help cultivate a household where life together is the point of living together, not just as a second shift or break room for working parents or a launching pad for future adults. The third change concerns work, which gets a demotion: recasting one's job not as the dominant feature of adult identity but in a proper subordinate place, work put in relationship to other aspects of a flourishing life.

Too often when reckoning up demands of
home and family, we include children only on the demand side of the ledger, generating needs that need to be met. We talk about equitable division of labor, but contention over which share falls to mom or dad presupposes a finite pie, his and hers tasks—just you and me, honey. But that is not how families are. Those other people in the household, the ones who generate more work to do, can also do some of it. At present, men and women work so children can play. We can shift that order. When children enter a home, they start as entirely dependent creatures. But as they grow, adults should do less for them and more with them. Living together as embodied creatures generates real work. It belongs to all in the family.

Caring for someone else may help us become more patient, observant, considerate, and courageous, whether or not the good we give is appreciated or reciprocated.

It turns out that placing oneself in service to another human being, especially one with acute needs, curiously helps not only the receiver but the giver, too. Caring for someone else may help us become more patient, observant, considerate, and courageous, whether or not the good we give is appreciated or reciprocated. If, as we sometimes say, changing diapers and making sandwiches has the effect of making the doer greater-souled, it would be selfish for women to keep this benefit to themselves. Men and women should both avidly seek opportunities to grow in this sphere. And they should share these opportunities with children.

Special conditions may prevent some children from participating, but by and large, most children tend to have more raw energy than adults. And unlike their parents, most have all kinds of time on their hands. Parental time-crunch problems frequently arise from having to keep kids busy while adults attend to needful household tasks, paying bills or vacuuming or making dinner or cleaning it up. Kids can’t do all of those things but they can contribute to many of them, so parents both lighten their own loads and remove altogether the keeping-kids-busy duty. Moms should shift the work-life balance for their kids. Indeed, we may even frame childhood helplessness as a feminist issue. If children do not learn to take care of possessions and share the work arising from their embodiment, somebody else has to do it. More often than not, even now, the somebody who does it their mother. And when one party gives and the other does not, the recipient of all this parental largesse not only depletes precious and finite gifts, but trades character development for bratty entitlement, and learns that picking up slack is the function of female adults.

Objections raise themselves. Kids won’t like doing more housework. Kids love the little sports-resort worlds their parents have created for them, money in the school-lunch account, free Wi-Fi at home, snacks in the pantry. They might prefer that it stay this way. But we can treat kids more as active agents. Certainly that is how they think of themselves, if not in terms of housework. Parents may find it irksome to make kids do chores because they have to supervise, assist, and correct. Most parents agree that it is easier for the grownups to do these tasks themselves. Absolutely it is. All those obstacles can be surmounted.

To be sure, many people actually do have their children perform a few chores on the grounds that it will help them become functioning, independent people, that it’s good for kids in the future. But that’s not the only reason to do it. The American approach to parenting already is too focused on stocking kids up with resources they might be able to use in the future, kids like polyps prepped to float away after they have absorbed enough bulk. There isn’t a twelve-year-old kid who, knowing how to do his or her own laundry and cook a few simple meals, would fail to reap the benefits of that after going to college, getting an apartment, or finding a loved one with whom to share that domestic felicity. But their benefits later are not the only reason why we want them to do it at present. It is for the good of the household right now, so that during those precious years when kids live together with parents in the same house, all do better together. Benefits might be a little delayed or elusive with some children, but
some mutual boons can be experienced nearly instantly. Parents even may be nicer to be around when less beleaguered.

If we still wish to use a future-oriented justification for kids’ housework, consider the disapproval attached to parents who fail to ensure that their kids know how to read, brush their teeth, or drive a car by the time they leave the nest. We might attach similar censure to letting kids enter adulthood lacking basic techniques of keeping themselves in domestic space. Why do we disadvantage them this way? Perhaps the reason we let slide instruction in how to make beds or do laundry or cook dinner proceeds from adult confusion about the value of these things when we do them ourselves. We may regard this household stuff as something on the side, whether something unpleasant that impinges on our time or something we choose as a hobby, but think of a job as the thing we really “do.”

Along with a different approach to family life, then, we might try a different approach to work. Given the history of relegating women to home and hearth, it is not strange that women, like men, would want to look to jobs for satisfaction and a sense of self. People who have unglamorous jobs might be ahead of the curve in recognizing that one’s job does not deserve the investment of one’s whole self. Jobs that boost ego and buy luxury do not necessarily deserve it either. Dissatisfaction with high-demand work is daily news. Human beings can find a range of worthy ways to frame their short lives beyond work.

Like what? Many of us do poorly at naming ambitions for life beyond the professional, the consumer-oriented, or the personal best. Indeed, for all our refrains about being exhausted and busy, some, frankly, might be terrified to imagine what we would do if there was nothing we had to do. What is there that is not a subset of vacation, consumption, binge-watching, or just decline?

**Motherhood on FIRE**

A spark of possibility comes from a source that is perhaps surprising: the FIRE movement. That’s Financial Independence, Retire Early, a life plan advocated by savvy folk like Peter Adeney, otherwise known as Mr. Money Mustache (www.mrmoneymustache.com). Because its ambitions stretch beyond the categories implicated in the career-and-childrearing problem, the FIRE approach yields some options not dependent on either of these categories. The basics: youngish people in well-paying jobs commit themselves to strict budgets and high savings in order to be able retire early. Really early. They may step away from a weekly paycheck in their thirties. Then they do lots of different things. Their aim is not not to work, but not to need to work, not to organize their lives around what they get paid or titled to do. But neither are they just the idle rich on vacation. FIRE people live their long retirements with a kind of conscientious frugality in order to make money go further. Way-of-life frugality—choosing food carefully, cooking it and perhaps even growing it, shopping at thrift stores, riding bikes more often than cars, learning how to repair things that otherwise would have been spendy to have serviced, reading more books, cultivating friendships, cultivating one’s body, mind, and curiosity—incidentally compose a kind of program for living well. On top of that, their retirements, as the euphemism suggests, give them more time to spend with family while children are of an age to desire that attention.

**What can we learn from the FIRE movement that can help make better sense of motherhood?** Consider what stay-at-home moms have in common with early retirees. First, it’s generally clear that both are still “working,” and in no meaningful sense should we see them as simply leisured or lazy. Second, both are clearly pursuing some human good that extends beyond their own particular preferences. Third, while wide variations exist, some evidence suggests these frames of life both can be conducive to strengthened bonds with other people. Both sets are not doing nothing; they are doing things eminently worth doing and often obviously so. The fact that they could be employed for wages but are not helps limit the import of paid work in their sense of self to just that: pay. Jobs don’t make them who they are. They can step into them, out of them, away from them, back over to them. Who they are comes from some other integrated sense.
of purpose not named by gross earnings or title.

It could be objected that this package only exists for the affluent, and that carries some truth for both groups. Some people’s jobs would never allow early retirement. Furthermore, that FIRE ideal hits at the work conditions many Americans now choose or obey, a gig economy constantly demanding one to self-promote, pressing us to identify as competent at a certain job even if we don’t stably hold that job and aren’t getting paid regularly to do it. Still, the ideal itself is powerful, and may be no less out-of-reach than popular alternative ambitions, ones inviting smart young people to stock their whole selves in supposedly glamorous work, sideline the rest of the stuff of life, and making all choices expressive consumer ones.

FIRE mindsets can go far to adjust the work portion of the working-mother equation, so that both work and children get fit into a larger sense of purpose rather than jostling for priority. The very idea of “family life” suggests a common weal. Rethinking common good can begin at home. It does not need to end at home. The dreamers of a new day had something right. Imagine a woman who has balanced work and life so effectively that she’s feeling great when she arrives home at 6:00 after a productive day at the office, with dinner in the crockpot and the dishwasher unloaded. Should we declare victory? No, because chances are that her neighbors do not have it together so well.

**Which brings us back to the swim carpool.** I am ashamed that I lay in bed on subzero mornings at five o’clock and only took the easy shifts. And ashamed that I didn’t seek a more general solution to that problem. Perhaps such a solution would look something like this. Carpooling would be part of pretty much every kid’s participation. Parents with schedules that conflicted with pickup or drop off times could rely on those whose schedules didn’t. Parents toting homemade go-team posters, sandwiches, cookies, and orange slices to meets and tournaments could understand themselves as not just supporting their kids but supporting each other. Sign-up sheets would circulate not only for team snacks but for rides and supplies helpful to their parents. Going to a meet—or orchestra concert or basketball game—might then become another expression of a family’s commitment to all its members and to others. Kids, having taken note of their parents’ support, would reciprocate in small ways at home that investment of time and care, cleaning up after dinner or going out early to scrape ice off predawn windshields. Weird practices or erratic schedules threatening holidays or family life would be refused. Those are the conditions. Agree to them, or no one plays.

Whether or not we are in the thick of child-rearing at this moment, some of our neighbors are. It helps us and them to recognize that child-rearing really has merit, accessible to those who have children and those who do not. At base, care for our neighbor must be part of the fix for our privatized, drained-dry lives. And that care, for our own family and for others, is work as real as the kind drawing paychecks. We’d better learn to esteem it. ❍

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**Works Cited**


Dissertation on the Art of Flying

The sun bronzes willow branches,
slice of fire on the snow,
frozen houses hunkered down.

Chopin’s piano, a rim of sunrise. Soul.
I drop into this moment
where the muse enters, shining light

on fading words. Wanting
is all we have, our last star in the night.
Bumping against one another in the dark,

we are too often silent.

Once I had a friend, awkward, luminous,
brilliant. A great winged bird forced
to hop along the ground.

It was easy to laugh, until
his wings filled with sky.

Chris Harold
The Glory of the Stars
Thoughts on Dreading the New Heaven and the New Earth
Kelsey Lahr

For a long time I lived in Yosemite National Park. Except when it is cloudy or the moon is full, you can see the Milky Way there in the night sky, and usually catch a glimpse of a falling star or two over the course of an evening of stargazing.

When I was a kid, I only got to see the Milky Way on annual summer camping trips to Yosemite; it was invisible from our home on the coast. Once I began working in the mountains, I was dogged by the feeling that I had to make up for lost time—that I had to gorge myself on the Milky Way now that it was visible so I could save up those views for a time when it might be invisible to me once again.

Stargazing was usually a solitary activity; I preferred not to fill the space between the universe and myself with the static of another’s presence. I would pile on layers of clothing and take the sturdy woven serape from the end of my bed and head down to the riverbank, clear of trees, to watch the constellations chase themselves in circles across the universe. I spread out the serape on the granite bank as a woolen shield from the ice-cold stone, and arranged myself on top of it to stare up at the dark and wait for night vision to bestow itself. It would come gradually, without my notice, until I could see even the dimmest spattering of stars that forms a dusty backdrop for the brilliance of Scorpio’s tail, the impossibly tangled bodies of the dragon and the little bear, and the Milky Way that runs from horizon to horizon like a loose ribbon twisting in the wind. On those nights it was easy to pray.

I made one exception to my preference for solitary star viewing. When the Perseid Meteor Shower rolled around each August, my friends and I made pilgrimages out to high, dark places to wait for the cascade. We lay shoulder to shoulder under blankets on slabs of granite on the clear riverbank or on a domed mountaintop. We breathed in silence until we saw a streak of light run across the sky; then we gasped, “There!”

The Perseid shower is so named because its meteors appear to spring from the constellation Perseus. Perseus, according to Greek myth, beheaded the gorgon Medusa, who had snakes for hair and turned any mortal who looked at her to stone. Perseus got around Medusa’s power by looking at her reflection in his mirrored shield, avoiding her gaze. After the deed was done, he carried her head around as a weapon, turning his enemies into rocks. In the midst of all this slaying he rescued the princess Andromeda, who had been chained naked to a rock to be sacrificed to a sea monster as punishment for her mother’s boasting. Perseus took Andromeda home to be his wife, and they both ended up as constellations, side by side forever, whether either of them wanted to spend eternity together or not.

This couple looks a bit different today than they did to the ancient Greeks who found their images in the sky. Over just a few thousand years, a mere blip in astronomical time, stars move, dim, and brighten, shifting the patterns that were handed down to us. This shift is nothing, of course, compared to the radical alterations that we humans have made to our own vision of the night sky. The lights of our cities—our skyscrapers, porch lights, neon signs—create a pervasive glow called light
A view of the Milky Way from Olmsted Point in Tenaya Canyon, Yosemite National Park. The glow on the horizon is light pollution from the Fresno area, more than seventy miles away.

pollution, which obscures our vision of the stars dramatically. Eighty percent of the world’s inhabitants live under a night sky illuminated primarily by the collective reflections of all our electric technology instead of by the stars. In the United States, ninety-nine percent of us do. Ninety-nine percent of us cannot see the Milky Way.

So the night sky you see is a far cry from the sky your great-grandparents saw. As recently as the early twentieth century, the loss of stars to light pollution could not even be imagined. Many cities lacked widespread electrification until roughly World War I, and some even later. My maternal great-grandfather was a lamplighter in a small town on California’s Central Coast in the 1930s, when the streets were still illuminated by gas lamps. He met my great-grandmother on his evening route. She would hang around on the front porch and chat him up as twilight fell, and the lamps after her house were always lit a bit late. I guess family history would have played out differently had the town been electrified earlier.

It is an element of our ancestors’ everyday life that we rarely consider. As often as pioneers, cowboys, Indians, medieval rulers, and great-grandparents appear in our contemporary entertainment and discourse, do we ever imagine the simple pleasure those figures may have enjoyed by looking up at night? Or maybe the experience was so utterly quotidian that they took those stars for granted. My paternal great-grandfather crossed the Great Plains in a covered wagon and lived to see humans land on the moon. Do you suppose he noticed the stars fading, missed the Milky Way?

I, for one, miss the Milky Way now that I live in a city. I regret the nights that I failed to look up back when I had a real night sky above me. Now I take my dog for long walks after sunset along the bluffs above the beach, and I look up out of habit. I can almost see the Milky Way. I blink and it’s gone—I probably imagined it. My dog sometimes stops dead in her tracks and stares up over the water, like our city lights don’t get in the way of her view of the ancient night sky, like she can still see the stars her wolf ancestors saw. Maybe she can.

Today there is a growing movement to preserve the precious few places where one can encounter a dark and starry night sky. Government agencies like NASA and the National
Park Service advocate for a certain type of porch light with a kind of shade over it to direct the light down and prevent it from pointing directly into the night sky. It's hard to imagine how effective this campaign might be given the increasing prevalence of illumination, and of Las Vegas, purportedly the brightest spot on earth, which can be seen from space. Imagine that—the stars can see Vegas from their spots in the firmament, but we can't see the stars.

I already miss the stars—I don't want to live an eternity without them. I love the stars, as I love the changing of seasons, the sea—all of which are on their way out in the life to come.

A while ago I attended a lecture by a dark night sky advocate, a woman who works with city governments and federal agencies to get people to adopt those covered porch lights. “The problem of light pollution could be fixed like that,” she said, snapping her fingers. “This isn't some complex, hard-to-solve problem like so many of our environmental challenges. We could all just decide to turn out the lights, or put covers over them, and the stars would be back instantly. They haven't gone anywhere!” Easier said than done, of course, but I got her point.

If we're going to get our view of the stars back, we'd better do it soon. The stars might be on their way out, along with the whole of the earth. At the church service I attended today, we heard about the end of all things, when the world will end and we will get a new heaven and a new earth, one where there is no darkness, no cold. “On that day there shall not be either cold or frost,” says the book of Zechariah. “And there shall be continuous day (it is known to the Lord), not day and not night, for at evening time there shall be light,” (Zech. 14:6-7). One continuous summer afternoon. “And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb,” says John in the book of Revelation, about the new Jerusalem that will be the seat of God's glory once the world has ended, and with it, the dark night. “There will be no night there” (Rev. 21:23, 25b).

Then, to drive the sermon home, the pastor quoted from Randy Alcorn, who, according to his website, writes books about investing with an “eternal perspective.”

“Since God, his Word, and people are eternal, what will last is what is used wisely for God, his Word, and people,” the pastor read from the pulpit, as Alcorn's words appeared on the screen behind her. “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be burned up,” said Pastor Colleen, quoting from the book of Second Peter.

The point of the sermon is to stay awake, to keep focused on the things of God, on loving God and loving our neighbors, the things that will survive the fire. But I am thinking about granite and stars, the very heavens and elements that will melt with fervent heat.

I am afraid of what it means that I dread this new heaven and new earth. I already miss the stars—I don't want to live an eternity without them. I love the stars, as I love the changing of seasons, the sea—all of which are on their way out in the life to come. “On that day living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem, half of them to the eastern sea and half of them to the western sea; it shall continue in summer as in winter,” says Zechariah again (Zech. 14:8). No cold, no frost, no shifting in the flow of the river.

“And the sea was no more,” says John, seeing the old heaven and the old earth—the ones we have right now—pass away (Rev. 21:1a). Bam—gone. So long, ocean.

The truth is that I love this earth. I don't want a new one, I just want this one fixed. I want frosty mornings like I had as a kid, crunching the icy grass on my way to school. It hasn't gotten that cold around here in years. I want the autumn, the peaks lined in the outrageous yellow I loved so dearly when I lived in the mountains. I want the
Milky Way. Summer is great, warmth and daylight are great, but so is the rest. So is the cold, the snow, the sunset, the nighttime.

I'm not the first person to confess that the idea of heaven as a continual harp concert in the clouds sounds boring, monotonous. It's not very inspiring as a vision of eternity. “You’re leaving out the best part!” said my pastor when I told her I had my doubts about heaven. “Heaven will be the very presence of God!” A look of pure, genuine excitement scrolled across her face, like she honestly couldn't wait to get there. “Think about the times you’ve experienced God’s presence during times of worship or prayer! That is what heaven will be like, and it will be like that all the time!” I did not admit to her that I have rarely experienced the presence of God during times of worship or prayer, but more often when I’m looking at the stars. I persist in worship and prayer mostly out of habit; I don't expect to experience God’s presence anymore, because I can’t see the stars from here.

My pastor is not the only person to note that my view of heaven is pretty shallow. Marilynne Robinson addresses the hereafter fairly often in her books. In her novel Gilead, one character says about heaven, “Mainly I just think about the splendors of the world and multiply by two. I'd multiply by ten or twelve if I had the energy.” In Robinson's books, heaven could not possibly be a lesser place than our present world. I hope she's right. But I still can’t shake my sense of urgency. I have to look up at the stars now, to feel the cold wind on my cheeks, to put my feet in the ocean, right now, while it all lasts.

Although I try, I have never loved God with all my heart, with all my soul, with all my mind, and with all my strength, nor do I love my neighbor as myself, as Scripture commands. I confess this aloud along with my fellow congregants before we take Communion. I can only hope that grace will cover this deficit of love. The closest thing I have ever come to loving with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength is this earth, and I mean the literal earth, not money and possessions and all of that, but the actual dirt beneath my feet and the mountains that rise up from that dirt, and the stars overhead. These, we are told in Scripture, are the works of God’s hands, just like you and I are, just like the sparrows and the lions and the lambs. If I’m supposed to believe that God is going to burn it all up when everything is over, I don’t buy it. And if God is going to burn it all up, then he can burn me up with it, because I want no part of

Stars. Seasons. Cold and frost. I love all of them. I miss them now as they recede into the ever-expanding reach of human influence, human damage. This earth, the one that Revelation and Second Peter say will pass away, is already well on its way to being a place of one continuous summer afternoon. Electric lights instead of dark night. Warmer and warmer days, sunshine and drought instead of cold and snow. As we reshape the climate and the very boundaries of day and night, we are already creating the new earth. But instead of the glory of God as the source of light and warmth, it is us and our machines. Either way, I want the old earth, the one with daily and seasonal shifts, the play of light and shadow, a cold wind.
any eternity that doesn't have dirt and mountains and stars.

But if God is planning to burn it all up, well, we're making the job easy for Him, because we're setting fire to all of it already, and at this rate there will be precious little left to burn by the time the end rolls around. In May, the United Nations released a report showing that "around 1 million

According to the National Academy of Sciences, "as much as 50 percent of the number of animal individuals that once shared Earth with us are already gone..." Fifty percent of animals—half! Think of all the creatures you will never get to see because we have pitched them into the fire of our own consumption.

animal and plant species are now threatened with extinction, many within decades, more than ever before in human history." This is over one thousand times higher than the natural rate of extinction, if humans weren't in the picture. According to the National Academy of Sciences, "as much as 50 percent of the number of animal individuals that once shared Earth with us are already gone, as are billions of populations." Fifty percent of animals—half! Think of all the creatures you will never get to see because we have pitched them into the fire of our own consumption. Think of all the creatures your children will never get to see, because we aren't doing anything to put out the fire.

You know what we haven't destroyed, because we can't reach them yet? The stars. Sure, we have burned up our view of them—most kids in America today have never seen the Milky Way. But the stars are still there. If we just turned out the damn lights, the Milky Way would be back. We could get off our couches, go outside, and look up. We could see what we've been missing this whole time. That's more than we can say for the millions of species of animals and plants and fish and birds and insects that we've burned up. We're never getting those back. It's too late to go out and look. It's probably too late for the millions of other species that are threatened but not gone yet, because you and I both know we're not going to change our ways in time to stop the massive die-off that's already underway. Scientists tell us we have just under twelve years to avert the absolute, utter meltdown that's looming because of climate change, and I don't think we're going to do anything about it, not in time anyway. We're going to kill off every beautiful and strange and mysterious creature and plant on earth that is not of immediate use to us.

But the stars are still there.
We could see them if we just turned out the lights.

Kelsey Lahr has spent her summers working as a park ranger in Yosemite National Park since 2008. Her literary nonfiction has appeared in Saint Katherine Review, Blue Lyra Review, Dark Matter, and elsewhere. Kelsey's work has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and publication in the Best American Science and Nature Writing series. Learn more at www.kelseylahr.wordpress.com.

Work Cited
CARTOGRAPHY
(An address to the Rand McNally map on my wall)

We have this jigsaw human map
(a paint-by-numbers world)
and the true map
(multi-colored space-marble).

Shape changer but so very slow,
with her shifty cloud mask,
she shuns our game-board
shades etched with steel and blood.

While we lie trapped in make-believe
borders that block even our dreams
she surges with markless seas
and shifts the land beneath our feet.

Fish and fowl, flower and fruit
they have no maps but sense
her ever shifting weather,
madly prodded by our unreason

that never grasps that her seasons
are a thousand of our years,
this ever changing mottled face
we once saw briefly from far in space.

B. R. Strahan
When I first read Sherwood Anderson's story cycle *Winesburg, Ohio* as a high school student, I was struck by its magnificence but also troubled by what I saw as its heresy. When I read it again in my thirties, I was convinced that every ministerial student needed to read it in order to gain a better grasp on the individual variables present in human community. When I read it again last year, toward the end of my forties, I was simply broken in the presence of truth.

Published in May of 1919 and dedicated to the memory of his mother, "whose keen observations on the life about her first awoke in me the hunger to see beneath the surface of lives," Anderson's masterwork met mostly with praise but didn't escape a share of derision. Its unvarnished candor inaugurated a significant turn in American literature, yet toward the end of his life when Anderson looked back at *Winesburg's* initial reception, he recalled that it was "widely condemned, called nasty and dirty" (Howe, 111). On its publication, some of the reading public balked at what they saw as a negative depiction of small-town life, along with its candid acknowledgement of sexuality. An unnamed critic in the *New York Sun* panned it as a "disgusting" imitation of Edgar Lee Master's *Spoon River Anthology*, but the celebrated critic H.L. Mencken saw it as "so full of insight, so shingly life-like and glowing" that it was unlike anything that "has ever been done in America" (Olson, xii). John Updike lauded *Winesburg* as "a democratic plea for the failed, the neglected, and the stuck," while Malcolm Cowley perceived it as "a work of love, an attempt to break down the walls that divide one person from another." Hart Crane declared boldly that "America should read this book on her knees. It constitutes an important chapter in the Bible of her consciousness." Given the hostile tone of our past three years and the threat of continued polarization during the lead-up to the next election, the novel's centennial offers the prime opportunity to examine the beauty and brutality that define life in this country. *Winesburg* summons uncomfortable introspection that forces the dismissal of cursory assumptions.

Written while Anderson was in his early forties and perfecting his voice, the story cycle of separate and sometimes overlapping portraits opens with the image of a white-haired and wizened, yet youthful, man. This unnamed character, whom Anderson introduces as the author of the unpublished "Book of the Grotesque," has come to understand much that previously had been beyond his comprehension concerning people and life. The old man's revelation exposes him to the reality that in the beginning "there were a great many thoughts but no such thing as a truth. Man made the truths himself and each truth was a composite of a great many vague thoughts;" yet it was "the truths that made the people grotesques" and the truth so "embraced became a falsehood." The old man's youthfulness saves him, and he realizes that the grotesques were in a way "understandable and lovable." The exploration of emotionally-charged truths that distort and define is central to Anderson's work and has much to commend to our grotesqueries—like the few gnarled and twisted apples rejected by the orchard pickers of which "only the few know the sweetness."
Following an array of jobs and intermittent schooling, Anderson graduated from an Ohio high school in 1900 at the age of twenty-three and moved to Chicago to become an advertising copywriter. He married in 1904 and left the Chicago advertising firm in 1906—because, as he put it, he was afraid he "would begin to believe the lies I wrote"—to become the president of a mail-order company in Cleveland. The next year, Anderson moved with his wife and child to Elyria, Ohio, where he established his own paint production business. After a major breakdown in November of 1912, which had him missing for four days until found and hospitalized in Cleveland, Anderson returned to the Chicago firm he had left six years earlier. This time though, he poured his personal time into the craft of story-writing and the revelatory power it offered, even as he grew more distant from his family (he and his wife divorced in August of 1915). Out of this crucible, Winesburg, Ohio began to emerge in the fall of that year.

The literary critic Irving Howe described Anderson's vision of a small town (in his first published novel, *Windy McPherson's Son*) as "a place where people haphazardly enter into relationships that can yield no personal values...they have no principle about which to order their lives, they are scattered human units" (76). Anderson hones that insight in *Winesburg, Ohio*. Based on the author's boyhood home of Clyde, Ohio, Winesburg is a place of belonging and bewilderment—marked by rural rooting and industrial dislocation, generational ties and aching alienation. The novel opens in a field of mustard weeds outside of Winesburg, with a wagon of laughing berry pickers in the summer. This scene gives way to the sad beauty of autumn as "the low hills are splashed with yellows and reds," even as "[i]t was the beginning of the most materialistic age in the history of the world...when the will to power would replace the will to serve and beauty would be well-nigh forgotten in the terrible headlong rush of mankind toward the acquiring of possessions." Torn within that ravishing and rending fabric, "[o]ne shudders at the thought of the meaninglessness of life while at the same instant, and if the people of the town are his people, one loves life so intensely that tears come into the eyes"—beholding both with a sort of reverence. Even in the worlds-apart section of town where the day laborers live, protagonist George Willard, the town's common link, feels "that all of the people in the little street must be brothers and sisters to him," making him wish that "he had the courage to call them out of their houses and to shake their hands."

George, a young newspaper reporter, holds together the kaleidoscope of fragmented yet somewhat ordered lives of Winesburg's residents. Clearly patterned on Anderson himself, George is Anderson's lens for viewing life in all of its particularities and complexities. He is a boy becoming an everyman. In a lengthy and luminous paragraph in the story "Sophistication," George is described as an eighteen-year-old whose life seems "a breathing space in the long march of humanity"—one who vacillates between self-surety and uncertainty, one who longs with all his heart "to come close to some other human" and find understanding. The opening story tells of one alienated
resident, Wing Biddlebaum, who rails at George for "his tendency to be too much influenced by the people around him" even as George has the inclination to be alone and dream but avoids doing that out of fear. While George often feels that he is a lonely and dejected outside observer, just about everyone else seems to envy what they view as his deep sense of belonging and his personification of the town's essence. His identity is indeed tangled up with the people and place of his life, but it is his mother's death that eventually frees him to follow his dreams and board a train, watching Winesburg disappear as he speeds toward the city: "his life there had become but a background on which to paint the dreams of his manhood."

George's life, most of all, is bound up with his mother. Elizabeth Willard is a withered forty-five-year-old woman who tries to navigate existence with a soured husband, while doing the necessary tasks to keep up the moldering hotel that is their livelihood. George is her bright star and emotional strength, the one she hopes will resurrect what she let die in herself. As a young woman, Elizabeth was fascinated by the traveling men who stayed in her father's hotel and told of life in the city; she grew restless in her small town and desired a life on the stage that would enable her to see the world and give "something out of herself to all people." "She laments that her ambitions never reached fruition and she remains stuck within the confines of small-town life. Now, she prays for God to keep George from becoming personally compromised by success—if only he would be allowed to express something that would be for both of them. Discontent with her squandered past and withering present, Elizabeth ekes her way through life until one day she becomes paralyzed—"only her mind and her eyes alive" as she thinks of her son and struggles to say something about her hopes for his future. Upon her death six days later, her husband's resentment washes away with his tears, and George has "but little sense" of the meaning wrapped up in the loss of his mother; "only time could give him that."

There's a brutality and beauty, a sort of misanthropy that leads toward mercy, flowing through the pages of Winesburg. Those who appear outwardly despicable can have an unseen goodness, and those who seem respectable and astute can be plagued with destructive darkness.

READING WINESBURG FOR THE THIRD TIME in three decades and learning more about Anderson's life and work allowed me to see his own experiences in the grotesques he so deftly and emotively presents. The personal, marital, financial, and artistic struggles that culminated in Anderson's 1912 breakdown are there in Alice, the jilted store-clerk feebly trying "to get a new hold upon life," whose "mad desire to run naked through the streets" on a rain-soaked night gives her renewed courage to face "the fact that many people must live and die alone." Those struggles are in Elmer, the distraught businessman, who tries to leave it all and finds himself alone, muddy, and cold—"miserable in body and in mind"—while trying to build a fire in the dark of night. Those struggles are in Ray, the fifty-year-old farmhand, who feels tricked and made a fool of by his existence, yet is so in awe of the countryside's beauty that he runs across the field shouting "a protest against his life, against all life, against everything that makes life ugly." They are in Tom, the gentle yet soul-scarred young loafer and workman who "could not hate anything," who drinks to feel, who wants to be hurt and suffer with others but detests doing wrong and hurting someone to suffer. Anderson's own struggles are in Elizabeth, George's mother, who in a moment of fevered despair "wanted to get out of town, out of my clothes, out of my marriage, out of my body, out of everything"—who wants to run away from everything but "towards something too."
There's a brutality and beauty, a sort of misanthropy that leads toward mercy, flowing through the pages of Winesburg. Those who appear outwardly despicable can have an unseen goodness, and those who seem respectable and astute can be plagued with destructive darkness. Social proprieties can hide the raging undercurrents of lust, rage, and repressed anguish, which often manifest themselves in excessive drinking, sexual indulgence, and emotional violence. Anderson describes this as two forces fighting in a person, wherein "a placid exterior" masks the "continual ferment" underneath. Evidence abounds in the lives of George and Elizabeth Willard, the lust-tormented minister Curtis Hartman, the sex-starved teacher Kate Swift, the quiet but angrily despairing hatmaker Belle Carpenter, the vocally misogynistic telegraph operator Wash Williams, and just about everyone else in one way or another. At the start of "Respectability," Anderson offers the image of a huge monkey caged up in a city park—"a creature with ugly, sagging, hairless skin below his eyes and a bright purple underbody"—and describes him as a "true monster" yet is quick to add: "In the completeness of his ugliness he achieved a kind of perverted beauty." This distorted yet diaphanous duality is perhaps best seen in the philosopher, Dr. Parcival, who seemed to have "but one object in view, to make everyone seem despicable"—yet who also expressed to George Willard what he saw as a foundational truth: "that everyone in the world is Christ and they are all crucified."

The first-part generational tale consisting of "Godliness" (Parts One and Two), "Surrender," and "Terror" are of special mention here because of the interplay between a family history that reads like something out of the Bible and perceived corollaries, the American Dream and the nightmare it can become. "Godliness" tells of the Bentleys, a long-rooted farm family who mostly kept silent because they found talking difficult. They knew the inner and outer aspects of life to be "coarse and brutal."

Jesse, the youngest of five sons and the only one not killed in the Civil War, left home at eighteen to become a scholar and returned home a Presbyterian minister at twenty-two—along with a delicate wife who devoted herself to hard work. Although he is of slight build, Jesse possesses an indomitable and fanatical spirit; he masters the souls of everyone on the farm even as he strikes fear into their hearts and robs their work of joy. Jesse is obsessed with making the farm the most productive in the state and sets his ambition on claiming as much land as possible. He begins to think of himself as "an extraordinary man, one set apart" from others and wants "to make his life a thing of great importance."

Jesse begins to see his success as divinely sanctioned, and he desires to be as "the men of Old Testament days who had also owned lands and herds" and with whom God spoke as specially chosen servants of his will.

Industrialism had revolutionized life for American farm-folk and city dweller alike, and Jesse senses the promise of the present as one who is preoccupied with a divine plan for his life while simultaneously becoming increasingly impatient and avaricious. He despises the fact that his farm is only six hundred acres, and becomes convinced that "all of the Ohio farmers who owned land in the valley of Wine Creek were Philistines and enemies of God." He prays for a son to be called David "who shall help me to pluck at last all these lands
out of the hands of the Philistines and turn them to Thy service and to the building of Thy kingdom on earth." What Jesse anxiously seeks is not the divinely peaceable kingdom, however, but a personal empire built on ruthless ambition. The child born of Jesse's wife is not the anticipated son but a disappointing daughter; his wife dies in childbirth. Hope finally returns to Jesse decades later when that disappointing daughter, Louise, gives birth to a son named David. Unlike his troubled and disparaged mother, David finds contentment on his grandfather's farm and it eventually becomes his home.

What unfolds is a tale of Jesse's renewed enthusiasm for God's evident favor and an examination of where his expectations get him. Before

One hundred years after its publication, Winesburg still powerfully and humanely invites us to enter the lives of others—to feel their anguish, to exult in their hopes. Much of what we see will trouble us, but more so, it has the capacity to tenderize us, too.

David's birth, Jesse was a "bitterly disappointed man," even though he owned most of the farms in the valley. When a major crop gamble turns wildly profitable and it appears God is truly blessing him again, Jesse "went among his men with a smiling face" for the first time. Jesse's fervent zeal for the Lord's blessing and his desire to express deep gratitude leads him to the conviction that he should make an actual blood sacrifice of thanksgiving. While he is convinced that such an act would endear him even more to the Lord, he does not foresee that it would terrify fifteen-year-old David and cause him to flee Winesburg—never to be heard from or seen again. Jesse lives the remainder of his days under a black cloud of God's disfavor, convinced that David was taken from him because he was "too greedy for glory." There's much to ponder in that narrative that serves as a parable for the twisted prosperity-reading of Scripture that abounds in the American context, and Anderson exposes the dark underside of success while capturing the greater complexity of the biblical telling of life.

In the 1918 foreword to his book of verse, Mid-American Chants (which Irving Howe called "the substance of Winesburg"), Anderson wrote: "There is unworldly beauty in the song of him who sings out the souls of peoples of old times and places.... But in our town and fields there are few memory haunted places." In the contrasting shadow of the cities' towering and roaring factories, where the workers' lips are cracked by the dust and heat of furnaces, he lamented and longed: "We do not sing but mutter in the darkness...and feel our way toward the promise of song" (7-8). He acknowledged in "Mid-American Prayer" that the men and women among whom he lived "destroyed my ability to pray ... destroyed the faith in me that came out of the ground" by the books and sayings of elsewhere; he and those like him stood up but "grew fat"—lived in the cities and "forgot the fields and the praying" borne of "the lurking sounds, sights, smells, of old things" (69-70). Anderson was writing, after all, out of the experience of massive personal and cultural dislocation; he was reaching out for grounding of place, illumining truth and belonging for battered, disparate souls. It is little surprise that Anderson influenced the twentieth-century writers who wrestled fervidly with wringing truth out of the human condition: Hemingway, Steinbeck, Miller, Faulkner, Saroyan, and Wolfe.

We never fully know what bedevils or breaks another person, even those whom we know well. It is all too easy to accept or dismiss others based on their color, sexual orientation, religion, political affiliation—or a host of other categories—while being blind to the traumas and experiences that also shape individuals. Inner struggles and burdens twist, contort, shape, and strengthen our personal constitutions. One hundred years after its publication, Winesburg still powerfully and humanely invites us to enter the lives of others—
to feel their anguish, to exult in their hopes. Much of what we see will trouble us, but more so, it has the capacity to tenderize us, too. *Winesburg* confronts us with humbling grace in the presence of the grotesque.

Emblematic of that is the book’s opening story, “Hands,” which tells of the town mystery, Wing Biddlebaum. Wing’s hands are celebrated in *Winesburg* because he can pick more berries in a day than anyone. They are also the source of his guilt and anxiety—fluttering as they often do “like the beating of the wings of an imprisoned bird”—what drive him, fearing for his life, from his Pennsylvania town to *Winesburg*, where he can live a life of relative anonymity. While Wing in no way thinks of himself as a part of *Winesburg*, “submerged in a sea of doubts” and beset with timidity as he is, George Willard has the presence to bring him out of himself while also seeing his true character. Anderson describes it like this: “He was one of those rare, little-understood men who rule by a power so gentle that it passes as a lovable weakness....And yet that is but crudely stated. It needs the poet there.”

Sherwood Anderson invites his reader to be that poet—to wrestle with the scarred and sacred, the profane and praiseworthy, so that by caring about everything, one arrives at a hard-earned and awe-filled knowledge that transforms every detail of living. That is what the poet asks of God in Psalm 90, verse 12: “Teach us to number our days / that we may gain a heart of wisdom.” *Winesburg, Ohio*, I would suggest, does just that—breaking us open in life, not only to God but to one another.

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Works Cited


I’VE MADE PLANS TO SAIL

Because there isn’t any history
I’ve made plans to sail
    to enter stealthily
those undying lands

where Boadicea and Cleopatra
meet for tea. They rise
to greet the entrance of Diaochan
    the dancing girl, the heroine
of Three Kingdoms
and Parvathi, who won her god
    by raw austerities

I’ve made plans to sail, because
I want to know the Secret such
sublime women gather
    to discuss. Or if
since there isn’t any history
must their meeting always and forever
have no agenda, no men, no need
    for secrets

Joshua Alan Sturgill
A Dorothy for the Twenty-First Century

Stranger Things, The Wizard of Oz, and Contemporary Dreams of Home

Jennifer L. Miller

In July of 2016, Netflix released the first season of its original show Stranger Things, a show set in the 1980s in the fictional town of Hawkins, Indiana, where a dark parallel universe called “the Upside Down” is starting to creep into the reality of everyday life. The show initially focuses on a group of preteen boys who are all best friends; they play Dungeons & Dragons together, ride their bikes between each other’s houses, communicate via walkie-talkie, and stand up for each other against the bullies at school. At the beginning of the series, one of these boys—Will Byers—is captured by a creature from the Upside Down. When his friends search the woods for him, they find a girl named Eleven who has supernatural abilities (including the ability to access the Upside Down) and who has been the subject of experiments by the US government. Over the course of Season 1 of the show, Will’s friends, together with Eleven, Will’s mom, Joyce (played by Winona Ryder), and Hawkins’s police chief Jim Hopper (played by David Harbor), fight against both government agents and creatures from the Upside Down to eventually bring Will back to the real version of Hawkins, Indiana.

Critics and fans alike enjoyed Stranger Things, particularly the way it evoked nostalgia for the 1980s, both through the actual setting of the show as well as the sly references to ’80s classics such as E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial, Poltergeist, and Close Encounters of the Third Kind, while still telling a story of its own. Stranger Things also received praise for its acting, particularly the five child actors at the heart of the story. Neil Genzlinger in the New York Times described Season 1 as “a tasty trip back to [the 1980s] and the art of eeri-
ness without excess." Understandably, fans eagerly awaited the return of the show in Season 2, which was released just in time for Halloween 2017.

*Stranger Things* 2 (spoilers ahead!) explores the continued effects of Will's time in the Upside Down, especially his visions of an enormous, tentacled monster that threatens to destroy the entire town of Hawkins. For the most part, Season 2 received the same generally positive reaction from viewers, but with one notable exception: Episode 7, “The Lost Sister.” During the early episodes of the season, Eleven hides at Chief Hopper's cabin to avoid attracting the attention of government researchers, which results in her isolation from her friends and a growing sense of boredom and frustration. As the season progresses, Eleven begins to rebel against her isolation and travels to find her birth mother, where she learns of another girl who has supernatural powers like her own. In “The Lost Sister,” Eleven travels to Chicago to find this girl, resulting in the first episode of the series where none of the action focuses on Hawkins or any of its residents other than Eleven.

This episode was widely panned by both fans and critics; Neil Genzlinger described it as an “unfortunate episode,” and Rianne Houghton, writing for *Digital Spy*, noted, “It's safe to say that *Stranger Things* season two was a hit—unless you try not to.” Fans took to Twitter to voice their displeasure. One user, @electricashley, described it as “the worst episode of the series” because of the way it “ruin[ed] the flow” of the narrative. Some took it even further; @RossMcClure88 said that the episode “might actually be the worst episode of a TV series I've ever witnessed.”

Focusing only on viewers' displeasure at being taken out of the action of the fight against the powers of the Upside Down, however, misses the connection “The Lost Sister” creates with a film older than *E.T.* or *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. Taking this episode on its own terms enables viewers to connect “The Lost Sister” with the classic 1939 film *The Wizard of Oz*, and in doing so, highlights the powerful commentary the episode makes on contemporary understandings of home.

In both *The Wizard of Oz* and “The Lost Sister,” the main character leaves home near the beginning of the story, pushed away by an act of betrayal. In *The Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy runs away from home because of the injustice of having her dog, Toto, taken by Miss Gulch, and her aunt and uncle not coming to Toto's defense. Dorothy is then taken even farther from home by a tornado that whisks her away to the Land of Oz. In “The Lost Sister,” Eleven, having already left her home with Chief Hopper at the end of a previous episode, is staying with her mother and her Aunt Becky. We again see Eleven reliving her mother's memories of another girl with supernatural pow-
ers, and she asks Becky for help in finding this girl, only to have Becky call the very people that Eleven is running from. Just as Dorothy runs away from home, Eleven, too, runs away to Chicago to find the girl from her mother’s memories, her “sister.”

A further similarity between The Wizard of Oz and Stranger Things can be seen in how both girls behave once they have left home. Both Dorothy and Eleven, once they arrive in a faraway place, are motivated to move forward because of a desire to return to, or find, home. Throughout The Wizard of Oz, Dorothy’s journey toward the Emerald City is propelled forward by her desire to return to Kansas—to go back home. As she tells the Scarecrow, “I want to get back [home] so badly I’m going all the way to the Emerald City to get the Wizard of Oz to help me.” Her plaintive cries for home are repeated time and again throughout the movie: she laments to her friends when they are denied entry to the Emerald City, “I thought I was on my way home!”; she tells the vision of Aunty Em she sees in the crystal ball, “I’m trying to get home!”; and she rejects Oz’s command to come back tomorrow for an audience with him, saying “I want to go home now!” But most famously of all, at the end of the movie, she follows the commands of Glinda to close her eyes and tap her ruby-slippered heels together three times, saying, “There’s no place like home.”

In Stranger Things, we see a similar refrain of home throughout the episode of “The Lost Sister,” starting at the very beginning of the episode. Before we even see any of the characters, we hear Eleven say, “Mama? It’s me, Jane. I’m home.” After she travels to Chicago and finds Kali, the girl from her mother’s memories, Eleven quickly forms a bond with her “sister,” who tells her, “I think this is your home.” Eleven repeats, “Home,” to which Kali replies, “Yes. Home.” Just as Dorothy sees a vision of Aunty Em in the witch’s crystal ball, Eleven, as she struggles to decide whether to stay in Chicago with Kali, has a flashback to Chief Hopper welcoming her to his cabin, in which he tells her, “This is your new home.” And at the very end of the episode, after Eleven has decided to go back to Hawkins, when a woman on the bus asks where she is going, Eleven says, “I’m going to my friends. I’m going home.” Like Dorothy, Eleven’s time away from home is shaped by her desire to find and return home.

Connecting “The Lost Sister” with the classic 1939 film The Wizard of Oz highlights the powerful commentary the episode makes on contemporary understandings of home.
And yet, does Dorothy actually yearn to return home? In a 1992 essay for *The New Yorker* entitled “Out of Kansas,” Salman Rushdie rejects the fundamental trajectory of *The Wizard of Oz*, arguing that the return home at the end of the movie is “a cloying ending that seems to me fundamentally untrue to the film’s anarchic spirit”; rather, he identifies the primary impulse of the film as the movement away from home. This impulse to leave is what infuses the film’s most iconic moments and songs. In describing Judy Garland’s rendition of “Somewhere Over the Rainbow,” Rushdie writes,

Anybody who has swallowed the scriptwriters’ notion that this is a film about the superiority of “home” over “away,” that the “moral” of *The Wizard of Oz* is as sentimental as an embroidered sampler—“East, West, Home’s Best”—would do well to listen to the yearning in Judy Garland’s voice as her face tilts up toward the skies. What she expresses here, what she embodies with the purity of an archetype, is the human dream of leaving—a dream at least as powerful as its countervailing dream of roots. At the heart of *The Wizard of Oz* is a great tension between these two dreams; but, as the music swells and that big, clean voice flies into the anguished longings of the song, can anyone doubt which message is the stronger? In its most potent emotional moment, this is inarguably a film about the joys of going away, of leaving the grayness and entering the color, of making a new life in the “place where you won’t get into any trouble.” “Over the Rainbow” is, or ought to be, the anthem of all the world’s migrants, all those who go in search of the place where “the dreams that you dare to dream really do come true.” It is a celebration of Escape, a grand paean to the Uprooted Self, a hymn—the hymn—to Elsewhere.

For Rushdie, the ending of *The Wizard of Oz*—“there’s no place like home”—is unsatisfying because the music, the imagery, and the colors of the movie all send a very different message—that leaving home is the way to fulfill your dreams.

In *Stranger Things* and Eleven’s journey over the course of “The Lost Sister,” we have a retelling of Dorothy’s story that provides a counternarrative to this celebration of leaving home, a retelling that shows viewers that there truly is no place like home, because that is the place that you choose to fight for. Some key differences between the two works help us recognize this dramatic shift from *The Wizard of Oz*; for starters, though key songs from both *The Wizard of Oz* and “The Lost Sister” both emphasize the act of leaving home, the music of *Stranger Things* points to a journey of growing up, rather than one that remains in childhood. In “Somewhere Over the Rainbow,” Dorothy yearns for the “land that I heard of, once in a lullaby.” Her invocation of childhood lullabies is significant here—the land that she dreams of is one that will allow her to remain an innocent child. The correlating song in “The Lost Sister” is Bon Jovi’s “Runaway,” which also speaks to the idea of leaving home, yet the tone and mood of this song is quite different than what Dorothy sings. Rather than an innocent, wistful song of yearning, “Runaway” is about a girl who has to grow up too quickly, a “Daddy’s girl” who “learned fast all the things he couldn’t say.” Not only does the very title of Bon Jovi’s song have negative connotations, but the music itself also has a driving, aggressive beat, a strong contrast to the soaring, lyrical melody of “Somewhere Over the Rainbow.”

This musical shift is also accompanied by a stark visual difference between the faraway lands Dorothy and Eleven each run away to. Dorothy’s destination is the lush, colorful Land of Oz, a stark contrast to the black and white imagery of Kansas. In *Stranger Things*, though, the visual depiction of Chicago shares a dark tonality with the images of Hawkins and the Upside Down that Eleven has just run from. Unlike Dorothy, who walks through Oz wide-eyed with wonder, Eleven shuts her eyes as she walks through the alleys of Chicago, trying to block out the reality of the poverty and troubled people that she is seeing. Recognizing this contrast between escaping to a magical world and running
away to a gritty reality can suggest that in the twenty-first century, society has shifted to expect more engagement with our problems, rather than avoidance. No longer can we simply yearn for a lost age of innocence, or hope that everything will return to the way it once was; rather, we must tackle the inequities, the divisions, and the problems we face head on.

Certainly, Dorothy faces problems in Oz as well, but the wicked witch that she faces looks remarkably similar to Miss Gulch back in Kansas, and Dorothy’s innocent pigtails and crisp white and blue dress remain unchanged throughout her journey. But for Eleven, our Dorothy of the twenty-first century, running away puts her in contact with social problems that she has not experienced in Hawkins and gives her the opportunity to develop her supernatural powers beyond what they had been. This confrontation with reality and experience of personal growth leads to Eleven’s transformation from a little girl wearing overalls to a “bitchin” teenager with slicked-back hair, smoky eye makeup, and a leather jacket. For Eleven, running away is much more in line with Joseph Campbell’s idea of the hero’s journey, or the German bildungsroman, where leaving home leads to maturation and growth, and ultimately enables the hero to return home and effect change.

It is in these depictions of facing the problems of society and maturing as a result that Stranger Things provides the most convincing response to Rushdie’s frustrations with Dorothy’s claim that “there’s no place like home,” for this process of growth empowers Eleven to return home and shape this home into what she wants it to be. As seen above in the way The Wizard of Oz and Stranger Things invoke the refrain of home, home for Dorothy is a single, fixed place, while for Eleven, home can and does change. More importantly, home can change based on the choices that Eleven makes. Rather than being subject to the whims of the Wizard of Oz, or the magic of Glinda, or even the accidental luck of killing not one, but two wicked witches, as Dorothy is, Eleven chooses where her home is. Not only that, but Eleven also chooses what she wants her home to be like. When describing the choices that she herself has made in life, Kali tells Eleven that Eleven is “now faced with the same choice...Go back into hiding and hope they don’t find you, [or] fight and face them again.” Kali is right—Eleven does have a choice. But her choice is not between returning home and fighting evil, as Kali suggests. Rather, Eleven rejects this false binary and chooses both. She chooses her home—not with her mother, not

Instead of being subject to other people’s ideas of home, or even the choices that others think she needs to make, Eleven has the agency to choose her own home and to consciously make it the home that she needs.

with her “sister,” but with Chief Hopper and her friends—and at the same time, she chooses to fight for this home, ultimately returning to Hawkins and using her power to defeat the shadow monster that has been looming over the town and to shut down the government research lab that has been haunting her. Eleven recognizes the control she has over the situation when, after Kali tells her that her friends can’t save her, she responds, “No. But I can save them.” Instead of being subject to other people’s ideas of home, or even the choices that others think she needs to make, Eleven has the agency to choose her own home and to
consciously make it the home that she needs.

Because of this, “The Lost Sister” episode is key to understanding Eleven's development as a character over the course of the second season of the show, development that takes her from being a passive child to a young woman who is fully in control of her own fate. Recognizing the contrast between Eleven’s journey and Dorothy’s can help us see just how dramatic and impressive this transformation is. Eleven wouldn’t have been content to return to the black and white world of Kansas; rather, she would have worked to bring the color of Oz back to the home she loved. The problems of the episode that were identified by fans and critics—that this episode takes viewers out of the action of the show—can even serve as a structural reinforce-

Eleven wouldn’t have been content to return to the black and white world of Kansas; rather, she would have worked to bring the color of Oz back to the home she loved.

that sends the message that when we choose to help, we can make the world what we want it to be. Not a world filled with rainbows, blue birds, and lemon drops, but a world where we can help the people we love. Whether we were born in the 1930s, the 1980s, or the twenty-first century, “The Lost Sister” episode of Stranger Things is a valuable reminder not only of the power of home, but of the power of ourselves to change our homes into the places we want them to be.

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Works Cited


ON BEING ASKED WHAT WOULD JESUS DO IN IKEA

He would, like any of us, begin by winding his way
through the labyrinthine displays. He would inspect the joinery
of bookcases and end-tables, casting a critical eye on the thin veneer
of wood-print laminate covering over
particle board—he was after all a carpenter first, a late-comer
to the career of savior.

He would move between couches declaring
both the fabric and leather cushion clean alike. In spare-furnished
economy rooms, he might speak
of husbands having dens and loveseats having fox throw pillows
where the son of man could lay his head.

He might make a joke in the dining room section, self-conscious,
about his disciples and him all sitting
posed on one side of an improbably long kitchen table,
dipping hands into a bowl of lingonberry jam.

He would study the iconography of swivel desk lamps and behold himself
in mirrors with particolored frames, seeing there
a face with nothing in it
to make us desirous of him. He could, of course,
multiply missing screws or dowel pegs if he wished
or heal the cast-off multitudes of scratch and dent items in the clearance section,
able, as God, to make each whole again, but reluctant
as man to show himself before his hour had come.

In the warehouse, he would move heavy loads on smooth silent casters
through aisles and aisles of disassembled parts
waiting for their day of becoming
when every design, whether good or bad,
will be brought to fruition, out into the parking lot,
enormous, yet with so few spaces for him.

Matthew Landrum
How to Hold on Loosely and Know When to Let Go

Thomas C. Willadsen

Oshkosh calls itself "Wisconsin's Event City." Oshkovites are quite proud of having hosted the Miss Wisconsin Pageant every June since the mid-1960s. Later in the summer, typically the last week in July, our airport becomes the busiest airport on earth when the Experimental Aircraft Association holds its annual fly-in there. (For aviation buffs, "Oshkosh" is practically synonymous with paradise.)

In addition to beauty pageants and fly-ins, we love a parade. The one on the Fourth of July seems right out of a Norman Rockwell painting, and each November we have a nighttime holiday parade. The annual Memorial Day procession leads walkers from the heart of downtown to the cemetery where many veterans are buried. This one is not a parade, but a procession. Parades celebrate; processions remember.

I would bet we lead the nation in the number of girls who take baton twirling, tumbling, and gymnastics. Every time masses of citizens gather along a curb to watch people pass by, there are oodles of shiny, bouncy, smiling little ones. "The well-trained students of today are the stars of tomorrow," announces a float that accompanies one dance studio’s troupe. (Oshkosh excels in other ways, too, some not directly related to parades, processions, or other events. We are, for instance, the reigning champs for per capita brandy consumption, and we rank in the Top 10 American cities for the variety of frozen pizza in our supermarkets.)

Sunday, the 24th of March, 2019, was a busy day for processions in Oshkosh. I found myself in four before 3:00 in the afternoon. While each marked a different occasion, their similarities were striking. Walking slowly in a single file line gave me time to examine our community’s penchant for such events.

My first stop that day was Christ Lutheran Church on Church Avenue. I arrived at about 9:15 a.m. for what was to be the congregation’s last worship service in this location. About 100 people were in attendance—an excellent turnout.

The church had been on Church Avenue since before the turn of the twentieth century. In 1955, the original building was moved about 300 yards to the north to make room for Oshkosh’s new city hall. It remains the largest building move in
Wisconsin history. In 1968, the congregation built an addition to house the sanctuary and offices. Back then, families were larger and people lived downtown. There was no need to think about parking; families walked to church.

Religious participation and denominational loyalty were at historic highs in the 1960s. Five decades on, many congregations find themselves in similar situations to Christ Lutheran, burdened with buildings that were built for their Golden Age. The challenges of maintaining the facility were making it impossible for Christ Lutheran to follow its mission of “Living Out the Love of Christ,” yet it was difficult for many members to even consider leaving their cherished home. When the bishop assigned Connie Weiss, a yet-to-be ordained, second-career pastor, to the congregation, she brought energy and vision. Pastor Connie helped the congregation take an honest look at itself, allowing them to dream about where the Holy Spirit might lead them.

Through that process, the congregation got over its Edifice Complex. The members realized that they would have the chance to thrive—not just survive—if only they could get out from under the burden of their building. They met, prayed, dreamed, imagined—and best of all, they found a buyer!

As the worshippers gathered that morning of March 24, they heard the bishop speak words of gratitude for their beloved building before it was decommissioned. Pastor Connie’s sermon was about new life, drawing on Jesus’s parable about giving a fig tree one more year to be productive. Prior to processing to the altar rail to receive Communion—the day’s first procession—worshippers were told that they could keep their glass communion cups as mementos, tangible connections to the old building of which they were letting go. We were given small Ziploc® bags for our cups.

At the conclusion of worship, the congregation processed out of the sanctuary—procession two—singing “On Our Way Rejoicing.” We got in our cars and the procession continued down Church Avenue, onto Main Street, and finally to the new worship space on Broad Street, about a mile from the former location and a stone’s throw from the Fox River. Members of other local Lutheran congregations held signs that read, “This way to the Promised Land” and “Welcome Home.” At first glance these well-wishers looked like protesters, but who would be protesting something in downtown Oshkosh on a Sunday morning? (I suppose in one sense they were—aren’t Lutherans the original Protestants?)

Prior to entering the new worship space, we gathered in the parking lot to commission the new joint. Then there was a potluck, because Lutherans.

The congregation got over its Edifice Complex. The members realized that they would have the chance to thrive—not just survive—if only they could get out from under the burden of their building.

Coinciding with Christ Lutheran’s move, Oshkosh was saying farewell to a group of monks from Drepung Loseling Monastery in India. The monks had spent a week in residence at the Paine Art Center and Gardens, where they put in hundreds of hours to construct a mandala.

The theme for this mandala was healing. Their visit began with a welcome ceremony led by leaders from six different religious traditions. The need for healing was not abstract; the world was still reeling in the wake of the shootings at mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, nine days earlier. Healing was exactly what we needed.

The monks regard the act of constructing the mandala as a type of meditation. The public was invited to watch as the monks put colored sand into small copper funnels and tapped the funnels gently in order to guide each grain of sand into the right place, creating a work of stunning beauty and complexity in the process. Then, after working on the mandala for seven days, they swept it away. The beauty of the mandala, like all things to Buddhists, was temporary.
Monks from the Drepung Loseling Monastery work on the mandala at the Paine Art Center in Oshkosh.

(For more enlightenment on Buddhism, here’s a joke: The Dalai Lama was asked whether it was acceptable for a Buddhist to use email. After meditating for several hours, he concluded, “Yes, as long as it is free of attachments.”)

We had been promised grains of sand to take with us, mementos of the impermanence of the mandala. Wait. What?

The mandala, though temporary, was the sum of the concentration and prayer that the monks had put into its creation. Its end was really more like a continuation—the monks swept the sand into special containers, mixing all the colors together, creating a dusty, drab blue. (It reminded me of the time someone made a punch by adding rainbow sherbet to ginger ale at my son’s preschool Christmas party. The punch tasted fine, but had a sort of battleship gray color that made it unappetizing.) The monks processed with the containers to a dock on the Fox River, and, with prayer and music, released the sand into the moving water. From the dock, the grains would be swept away by the river’s current, heading up the Fox River, past Christ Lutheran’s new location, eventually into Green Bay and then Lake Michigan. Because all moving water ultimately finds its way to the ocean, the prayers and blessings of each grain of sand—the global desire for healing—would surround the earth.

The fourth procession was the most interesting. Spectators who had walked from the museum to the riverside returned to the museum. We had been promised grains of sand to take with us, mementos of the impermanence of the mandala. Wait. What?

The table in the center of the room where the mandala had been constructed still held a small amount of sand. As spectators returned to that room, it was not clear where the line began. It was not exactly chaotic, but it was confusing. I found myself in the last group to process past the table to get my souvenir. It took forty-five minutes—the longest, slowest procession of the day. Aside from some quiet muttering that we had chosen
the wrong line, no one really complained. People near me exuded a serene patience. Perhaps the mandala had its intended effect on the citizens of Oshkosh.

I smiled as I bowed and thanked the monk for the day's second memento, this one also stored in a Ziploc® bag. Walking to my car, I mused that four processions is a lot for one day, even for Wisconsin's Event City.

Once I was back home following my day of processions, I was left with two lingering questions: What does one do with a communion cup from a church one visited only once? And what does one do with a packet of sand, each grain of which conveys a wish for world healing?

I put the cup and sand packet in my personal junk drawer. They joined my office key, some extra square-head screws for the braces to the garage door, a token for a free cone from Culver's, thirty-seven paper clips, a pretty bit of shell I picked up from the shore in Michigan's Upper Peninsula in 2001, the notebooks where I record my exercise minutes and books I've read, four tubes of lip balm, box tops I'm saving for the local grade school, thirteen pens, and forty-six pen parts that have somehow detached from their pens of origin.

My new mementos also joined the pouch my mom gave me in 1986 to organize coupons, the matchbox car that is precisely the color blue of my favorite necktie, a flier listing hours for the recycling center, three fortune cookie fortunes, a scrap of paper on which I wrote the dimensions for...something, two marbles, the rewards card from the Nebraska gas station where I stopped for coffee last summer, the St. Christopher medal I found at a nearby playground, a cartoon I clipped out of the newspaper for my brother, the postcard reminding me to get my oil changed, four deposit tickets for my son's checking account, three open packages of hearing aid batteries, the South Korean coin that looked like a penny when I picked it up in the library parking lot, two combs, and the riddle from last year's Christmas cracker.

Ecclesiastes tells us there is “a time to keep, and a time to throw away.”

Like most things in life, the trick is knowing when.

As I conducted this partial inventory, I found myself meditating on a kind of koan: What is the sound of grape juice fermenting in a souvenir communion cup?

Ecclesiastes tells us there is “a time to keep, and a time to throw away.” Like most things in life, the trick is knowing when. If Christ Lutheran's first month in the new location is any indication, it appears they seized the right moment. Like the fig tree that got a one-year reprieve, they now look to be blossoming. I visited on Easter and found a packed, joy-filled worship service. The communionware was plastic, but the grace was real.

In addition to the Bible, I frequently draw wisdom from other, less obvious sources. Here's one of those. Back in my high school days, .38 Special was an average rock band, the sort that played the free grandstand shows at county fairs. They were more likely to be an opening act than the headliner. Yet my mind goes back to one of their songs from years ago, “Hold on Loosely.” The chorus went like this:

Just hold on loosely,
But don’t let go
If you cling too tightly
You're gonna lose control
Your baby needs someone to believe in
And a whole lot of space to breathe in ...

Everything I learned about Family Systems Theory is encapsulated in those words. I have used those words in counseling sessions. Relationships—even our relationships with our possessions—are all about finding just how hard to hold on, and knowing when it's best to let go.

In the case of my packet of sand, I did not have to choose to let go. After spending a month in the junk drawer mingled with other treasures, all the sand had spilled out of its Ziploc bag. The communion cup was empty, too. Perhaps healing has come, at last, to my drawer. It's a start.

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ANY TREE, INCREDIBLY

A person can instantly grasp a group's count, up to nine members or so. Past that is counting.

The problem with counting is that things, approximately, are infinite in both directions.

I can neither count the leaves on a tree nor the cells in a leaf.

Feel this leaf. Touch it, smell it. Imagine its thinness. Know the lifetimes here swaddled. Know the sights adorned, the sustenance provided, the life participated.

Circumscribe the unknown with a thin, shaky line.

(Realizing, of course, that the unknown is three-dimensional or more.)

Think on the caverns between leaves, between cells, between molecules, atoms, particles, quarks, between that which is and that which was almost.

And how many leaves are on the tree.

They clap their hands and serenade the moon. They stretch their lungs and feed the earth.

Between what I know and what I know is wonder, I suspect, given its size and its faint intimations of beauty.

Beauty that here, in this leaf, contains everything. And how many leaves are on the tree.

Jacob Walhout
In Memoriam, Alma Mater

George C. Heider

At its year-end dinner this past May, the Theology Department of Valparaiso University took kind note of my impending retirement from active service. Among the speakers was James Albers, who had retired several years previously. Albers is a historian of American Lutheranism, and he went to considerable effort to point out that he and I form a set of bookends around one of the most extraordinary institutions of pastoral education in the history of his field, Concordia Senior College in Fort Wayne, Indiana. Given his last name, he said that he was the very first to receive a degree from “CSC” or “The Fort,” as its students called the place. For my part, I was student body president of the last class to graduate before the 1975 Anaheim convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) resolved to close the college (two additional classes graduated after the decision). Professor Albers opined that we may well have received a pre-seminary education qualitatively above and apart from anything offered before or since, and that with my retirement, the several decades of the college’s influence on the ministry of the church has symbolically ended. Ere long, all CSC graduates will be retired (or with their Lord).

To be sure, that influence has been waning for some time. Ever since 1977, the seminaries of the LCMS have had no CSC alumni to enroll, and even the classical seminary in St. Louis had been admitting graduates of other colleges and universities, both public and private, long before that. Still, as I step away from active faculty service, it seems an appropriate moment to pause and say a word in memoriam, while still, to paraphrase Lord Lindsay in my favorite movie, Chariots of Fire, there are those of us who can close our eyes and see firsthand what it was to spend our junior and senior years of college at an institution that I have regularly characterized in my Valparaiso context as “Christ College [Valpo’s honors college] on steroids.”

Concordia Senior College was founded in the mid-1950s to provide upper-level undergraduate education to LCMS pre-seminary students who had, by and large, spent their first two years at another Concordia school (in my case, the one in Bronxville, New York). It was located on a campus designed in the style of a Scandinavian village by the noted architect Eero Saarinen. Among its most remarkable features was that every member of the faculty was an LCMS pastor who had gone on to earn a graduate degree—almost all doctorates—in one of the liberal arts. (At the time I was a student, there was one exception to the “pastor rule”: the choir director, Herb Nuechterlein. But, as he said, “I’m from Frankenmuth [an LCMS stronghold], and that’s just as good.” He was right.)

The curriculum was devised to provide broad exposure to the humanities and, to a lesser extent, to the social sciences, with special emphasis on the biblical languages of Greek and Hebrew, so that graduates could take their seminary exegetical courses with these tools already in hand. (We actually received little instruction in theology, as it would be our focus in seminary.) Because the curriculum required students to take courses in such a wide range of fields, there were no majors. Rather, each student chose one or more “concentrations,” a three-course sequence taken in the senior year (in my case, Hebrew and philosophy).

At the same time, given that the campus was well outside of metropolitan Fort Wayne, it had something of a monastic feel. Daily chapel and nightly devotions in the dormitories were well-attended, albeit not required. Given the nature of the faculty, it should come as no surprise that formation of students as “Able Ministers of the New Testament” (to cite the title of an influential LCMS
study that helped shape the curriculum) was very nearly as significant an objective as academic excellence. Yet the latter was surely present. By and large, the faculty were not widely published, but they were learned and taught their classes with rigor and skill. Above all, as several regional accrediting visits reported, there was absolute clarity and unity of mission among all involved.

By the time I arrived at the Senior College in 1973, clouds had already started gathering with respect to the institution's future. More and more of the two-year Concordia Colleges that had supplied students to CSC (including my own alma mater in Bronxville) were attaining four-year status, and they were not eager to encourage some of their best students to go elsewhere for their final two years. Overall, the number of pre-seminary students in the LCMS was decreasing (so that, by the time of its end, even though CSC was enrolling a higher percentage of upper-level LCMS pre-seminary students than earlier, the campus was still underused). No doubt, this decrease was in some ways a direct function of the increasing tensions within the LCMS: the summer of 1973 had witnessed the “Battle of New Orleans,” a convention in which traditionalist forces narrowly succeeded in enacting their views of the theological position of the LCMS, with special attention to seminary education. The long and short of it was that my two years at CSC were in many respects dominated by the conflict that eventuated in the walkout or exile (depending on one's perspective) in February 1974 of all but five of the professors at the seminary in St. Louis that all but a handful of CSC students had been preparing to attend. As will be seen presently, this conflict played a significant role in the demise of the Senior College.

Yet before I recount that portion of the tale, I would say a bit more about my alma mater as I knew it, both in its strengths and its weaknesses. The soul of the place was its utterly committed faculty. For a student body of about 300, the faculty was stunningly deep, especially in fields of institutional emphasis. I had the benefit of four professors in Hebrew/Old Testament: one had earned his doctorate at Harvard; two held doctorates from Michigan (one of those also had a master's from Johns Hopkins); and another had...
a ThD from Concordia Seminary. Faculty were regularly present (by invitation) in the dorms, and their influence on the hearts and minds of their students was palpable. Worship in Kramer Chapel (named after the family that had donated the land for the campus) was itself an education in varieties of liturgy, gifted preaching, and glorious music. Athletics was in its proper place, given the mission: if anything, intramurals generated more interest than the few intercollegiate teams.

On the other hand, there were built-in weaknesses (at least from the perspective of nearly forty-five years' hindsight). The curriculum provided minimal exposure to the natural sciences; the closest that I got was a course in the history and philosophy of science. While having so many of the Synod's future pastors living and studying together had notable advantages, including a thorough knowledge of one another in later service, the downside of this quasi-monastic existence was a lack of daily interaction with women and therefore a lack of development of social skills by many.

The soul of the place was its utterly committed faculty. For a student body of about 300, the faculty was stunningly deep, especially in fields of institutional emphasis.

(This was true even in my time there, although a dorm of eighteen brave women were by then students, taking advantage of the college's liberal arts offerings.) Indeed, a shared vocational sense did not prevent a campus full of young adult males from living up—or down—to stereotype. For example, there were clever pranks (like the guys who used surgical tubing to lob water balloons from their dorm across the lake to the chapel steps), but also juvenile and even dangerous ones (like the one in my dorm, when some guys set off a cherry bomb in a cardboard cylinder containing flour; yes, the dorm lounge got powdered, but the entire dorm could have blown up).

But it was not to last. Others have written on the subject from their own perspectives. What I can do is offer eyewitness testimony. I was deeply involved in the college's efforts during the 1974-75 academic year to make the case for its continuance, and I was present by invitation of LCMS President J. A. O. Preus as a "student delegate" at the Anaheim convention. In brief, what led to the demise of the Senior College at that convention were three factors, plus a historical-political reality. The latter is that the college had not been around long enough for any of its graduates to have become an LCMS district president. The Council of Presidents played an enormous role in the Synod at the time, in large part because its members were elected by local congregations, the heart of the Synod. But not a single member of the council was yet an alumnus of CSC, and none (again in my fallible opinion) really understood what was at stake.

As for the aforementioned three causes for the college's termination, the ostensible argument offered at the convention were the expense of maintaining the college in the face of decreasing enrollments and the expansion of the other Concordias. But close under the surface was the aforementioned Synodical civil war: not a single delegate who spoke with me wanted to talk about finances or enrollments; they all wanted to know whether the Senior College was a supporter and supplier of students to Seminex (the seminary formed by the faculty who had departed or been expelled from Concordia in St. Louis). Indeed, members of CSC's 1974 class, who had to choose a seminary less than six months after the explosion in St. Louis, had elected by a large majority to attend Seminex. My 1975 class would prove a very different story, with roughly a 50/50 split between Seminex and the "official" seminary at the St. Louis campus (but that was after the convention). In the end, it was clear that among the highest priorities of the traditionalist forces in Anaheim was to choke off the supply of students to Seminex and to delegitimize any claim it had to be producing "able ministers" for the LCMS.

Yet even the Seminex quarrel was not what finally undid this extraordinary experiment in pre-seminary education. Rather, it was the desire
of the new president of the Synod's second, "practical" seminary in Springfield, Illinois, to acquire a more winsome campus. There had long been a rivalry between the two seminaries—Springfield, known for its emphasis on practical ministerial training; and St. Louis, known for its academic focus—and the near-death experience of the St. Louis seminary presented the Springfield seminary with an unparalleled opportunity to achieve parity, if not superiority, in Synodical hearts and minds. Again, I saw what I saw, such as the possibly innocuous dinner shared by the Springfield seminary president and the chair of the convention's floor committee on higher education on the evening before the vote. What sealed the causal case for me came only later: the new president of the "official" St. Louis seminary where I enrolled that fall, Ralph Bohlmann, told me that the Springfield seminary president "controlled more delegates than [his brother] Jack [the LCMS president] at Anaheim" and that the same seminary president had reiterated to his floor managers repeatedly in Bohlmann's presence, "The move goes through."

Enough: the move went through. The effect on me was devastating. I felt more than disappointed—I felt betrayed. I was a fifth generation member of the LCMS, who had for his entire life intended to serve as a pastor. Yet the source of the finest academic and spiritual experiences of my life had just been terminated with extreme prejudice. I now recognize it as my life's first real trauma, which I have come to understand as an event that you never get over but must get past, if you are to be mentally healthy thereafter. Ironically, I have heard talk in recent years about the need to establish a new Senior College, perhaps even on the campus at Fort Wayne, given that it is underutilized at present. But the reality is that, as Valpo's former president Alan Harre (also a CSC alum) regularly observed, not many LCMS pastors go on to get doctorates in fields besides theology these days. To reconstruct the faculty that was built for Concordia Senior College would be, so far as I can tell, a non-starter. In any event, such ideas are now well beyond my influence or capacity to effect.

It is, to be sure, fair to ask a counterfactual question: would the Senior College have been able to endure in the long-term as a single-purpose institution, absent the political forces that terminated it? As well as I can determine, probably not. There was, in fact, a proposal developed by the CSC faculty (way, way too late) to offer a three-year accelerated BA program for capable students, and to the best of my recollection, the program was not to be restricted to pre-seminary education. Had the college had the chance to implement such an option, its effect on the historic unity of purpose and mission is unknowable. What I do know is that I remain deeply grateful for the college experience afforded to me and my classmates in our time. To that college I can bear witness, even if, as my colleague averred, I represent the bookend at the end of an era. Ave atque vale, alma mater!

George C. Heider is a senior research professor of theology at Valparaiso University. This essay is dedicated to the memory of the faculty of Concordia Senior College, who modeled faithful ministry and paid its price.

For Further Reading


I MAY NOT LOOK ANXIOUS

Bad days fester under bright scarves and jokes.
Unless I’m sleeping, I’m swinging invisible
Trapezes over a pool of adrenaline and grief.

I stack my many crowns of Keeping Calm.
My outer chill knows no frozen bounds.

*Fluoxetine? How about prayer, omega-3, mindful breath?*
All of the above, you smug-lipped,
Lavender-slinging twits. You can’t know how much I’d
Love to wake up to an empty mind, my gnarled
Intestines flat-ironed to a state of intoxicating
Numbness. But I have to keep
Galumphing on, even when the cartoon

Anvil drops on my head and the whirling
Planets and stars sling me to the black brink.
Anything you can do, you ask? Sure: let me
Reel a moment. Then rip me from my body,
Tie me to a balloon, and watch it lurch away.

Tania Runyan
Drumming Toward Spiritual Unity: Mark Lomax II’s 400: An Afrikan Epic

Josh Langhoff

It all starts and ends with drums.

The new musical work 400: An Afrikan Epic is an ambitious... suite? Cycle? What’s the word for twelve albums of jazz, currently available only as a complete eighty-dollar download, commemorating the 400th anniversary of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and its aftermath? “Epic” may have to do. Representing three years’ work by Dr. Mark Lomax II, a jazz drummer, composer, and lecturer at the Ohio State University, and funded by his residency at the university’s Wexner Center for the Arts, 400 seeks to convey the story of Black America with scope and heft to match its subject.

Its jumping-off point is the year 1619, when Englishmen first brought kidnapped Angolan slaves to Jamestown, Virginia. This event began the Ma’afa, Swahili for “terrible occurrence,” whose trauma is still deeply embedded in American life. Lomax originally conceived 400 as a symphony, and maintained that three-movement structure as the piece grew. The first four albums depict life in West Africa before the Ma’afa, the central four deal with slavery’s repercussions in the U.S., and the closing four-album “movement” is an Afro-futuristic vision of unity.

Despite this heavy throughline, 400 is one of the most sheerly enjoyable jazz sets of 2019. It covers as much stylistic territory as drummer Alison Miller’s eclectic Glitter Wolf (to add to your rhythmic jazz shopping list), and when it swings, it swings as hard as the debut album from percussive call-and-response combo ¿Que Vola?. When you consider it’s twelve times the length of either, eighty bucks seems like a bargain.

How epic is this epic? The 400 cycle includes, but is not limited to:

• An album of cello quartets (Four Women) dedicated to powerful black women;
• A five-part suite (Blues in August) for quartet and strings, based on playwright August Wilson’s The Pittsburgh Cycle, itself a sweeping chronicle of African-American experience;
• A three-part suite based on Daniel Black’s novel The Coming, including excerpts read by the author;
• And, as mentioned earlier, opening and closing albums (First Ankheestor and Afrika United) for drums alone.

Those opening and closing gestures signify spiritually as well as musically. “Afrikan cosmology... teaches us that the Drum is the first Ancestor,” Lomax has said. “The cycle begins with the Drum because it represents the first vibration; a time when we were last happy, healthy, and whole.” It ends with the drum because “we must return to the original vibration for healing from the trauma of the Ma’afa” (Bayley). Listen to 400 once and it’s nearly a palindrome. Listen again, and the ending leads back to the beginning, Finnegans Wake-style, giving the early chapters new depth.

Anyone who’s spent time with a degenerate high school percussion section might dispute Lomax’s lofty cosmology, but his idea of cyclical history is common in art. It’s useful as both structural device and metaphor. Literature and music are littered with returns to divine governance, if not to Eden itself. Joni Mitchell knew all about it: “We are stardust, we are golden / And we’ve got to get ourselves back to the garden.” The closing essay of Amiri Baraka’s 1968 critical anthology Black Music prophesied Lomax’s aesthetic trip. “[W]hat will come will be Unity Music,” wrote Baraka. “The Black Music which is jazz and blues, religious and secular.” Unity Music would “include all the resources, all the rhythms, all the yells and...
cries, all that information about the world, the Black ommmmommmmommmmommmm, opening and entering."

Complex but simple, teeming with ideas but irreducible like the rush of wind, everyone speaking in different tongues but all understood: Isn’t that the way of the Spirit?

In the 1960s, instrumental jazz of the freer, noisier sort invented new ways of sounding religious. John Coltrane’s modal “sheets of sound,” Albert Ayler’s insistently praise wails, Pharoah Sanders’s shrieking in tongues—these saxmen all sounded Baraka’s Black ommmmommmmommmmommmm, distinguishing themselves from the more worldly avant-gardes of Cecil Taylor and Ornette Coleman. Lomax and Bayard work a similar devotional tradition. The titles on 400 do some of the heavy lifting for them. No one would be surprised to find tracks called “Rapture” or “Blessing of the Agon” filling one side of a Pharoah Sanders LP, and Lomax might have nicked some of his titles from jazz gurus like Ayler (“ Spirits”) and the swami Alice Coltrane (“ Transcendence”). But even if he’d named every tune “ Lomax Leaps In,” his music would bear unmistakable marks of religiosity, like flames dancing on foreheads.

One such mark is rhythmic. Lomax performs the opening album, First Arkhcestor, with a liturgical drum ensemble. The Ngoma Lungunda drummers play at First African Presbyterian Church, founded by Lomax’s father in Lithonia, Georgia. (The Rev. Dr. Mark Lomax incorporates traditional African practices into his Presbyterian liturgies, which also boast compelling sermon series like “ Yeshua: Our Afrikan Messiah.”) With the younger Lomax, the drummers create buoyant beds of rhythm, indifferent to the demands of linear time. Songs like “Talking Drums” don’t do anything so gauche as “develop.” They gallop along steadily with patterns of three and five nested against patterns of four. Soloists periodically rise from the textures, make themselves known, and dissolve away again. These pieces range in length from four to ten minutes, but it’s hard to gauge their length while they’re playing. They suggest slices of eternity, windows onto enormously flexible fields of play where any event would feel equally welcome.

Lomax has likened this flexibility of groove, “the cyclical thing,” to Elvin Jones’s drum technique (Sanford). Jones’s floating sense of time was crucial to Coltrane’s landmark of jazz spirituality, 1964’s A Love Supreme—which, after half a century, remains a singular work of emotional generosity, a giant embrace that draws listeners to a higher place. The Coltrane quartet played like they “saw a version of you that was superior to the version you saw of yourself,” to borrow a phrase from the novelist Lauren Wilkinson. Besides the rhythms, the band got this sound by using modes, pentatonic scales, and the telltale piano voicings of McCoy Tyner, heavy on perfect fourths and fifths, all of which opened the music to new realms of ravishing harmonic ambiguity.

If Coltrane realized a vision, Lomax pins it down into a theology. That oversimplifies the matter somewhat—after all, Coltrane built his music atop countless hours of careful thought, and Lomax’s bands can sound plenty inspired. But Lomax is most convincing when he reshapes the work of his forebears into new rhetorical gestures. His quartet tunes draw heavily on the Supreme musical syntax, with Bayard blowing his themes...
into flurries and squawks while pianist William Menefield maintains an expansive calm. This is especially true on The Coming, set just before the Ma’afa, and on Tales of the Black Experience, where the quartet re-records Lomax’s first commissioned pieces from 1998. The work of a 20-year-old, Tales is the most derivative album here, but the band’s authoritative playing makes it fit right in.

Among other things, Lomax is a collage artist. But then, collage artists and synthetic theologians are two sides of the same coin, and Lomax the theologian finds other visions to work with. Four long, mostly improvised trio cuts (Up South and Ankh & the Tree of Life) are intermittently thrilling and boring, not unlike worship services or those album-side-filling Sanders meditations. The simple call-and-response bops on Song of the Dogon are simply thrilling, Sonny Rollins calypsos shorn into playground taunts, their repetitions punctuated by thunderous tom-tom rolls.

Lomax’s compositions tend to sound like those of other writers, but his drumming style belongs to him. He spends a lot of time on his tuned toms, so much that on several tunes (“LEB,” “Oshoshi”) his drums are able to carry the melodies. Besides that sonic thumbprint, he’s got a rock-solid sense of groove. He and bassist Dean Hulett morph from strict time to nebulous pulse on a dime. He told one interviewer his next ambition is to make his Western drum set talk: “a recitation of poetry where the drums are playing the poem. I’m trying to figure out a notation that makes sense, it can’t be standard because you’re dealing with different inflections” (Sanford). This sounds like the time Jason Moran transcribed an Afrika Bambaataa rap for piano. Listening to Lomax’s expressive tom work, it’s easy to believe he could pull off something similar.

Nobody makes twelve perfect albums, and 400 has its share of blank spots, moments where the music could be more inspired or the writing tighter. In particular, Lomax’s compositions for string ensembles make for a mixed bag. The string-plus-jazz numbers comprising Blues In August are joys to hear, from the swagger of “Fences” to the expressionism of “Gem of the Ocean,” but the cello writing of Four Women meanders from theme to theme, unwilling to commit to either nonstop invention or more austere minimalism. But then, nobody has time to listen to twelve albums straight through. Fortunately, 400 works as an epic for the age of shuffle. Hear one of those cello quartets followed by a dancing Dogon song, chased by a blazing jam for sax and drums, and then by a movement from the Ma’afa ballet (did I mention Lomax included a ballet?), with the bass creaking like a ship’s hull, and you may think: Today Amiri Baraka’s scripture has been fulfilled in my hearing. All the resources; all the rhythms; all the yells and cries—they add up to a liturgical epic of the first order.

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Works Cited


You can buy 400 and listen to excerpts of all 58 tracks at www.marklomaxii.com.
POND DREAM

the heron clothed in reeds stands knee-deep in the water
his shadow pricked by fish one black eye watching the rippled water
the heron is still/part bird/reeds/sunlight and shadow/
patient as space/his stiletto bill clamped to his long leathery face

frogs wake from their pebbly dreams to grunt and belch
dragonflies perform sexual *pas de deux* across the pond
and the beak flashes out of the reeds into the water
the arched neck uncoiling/ the fish dripping pond scum
slides whole and alive down his gullet

the heron moves through the pussy willows like wind/
his thin knobby knees/ his splay feet probing the bottom /
one black eye taking in the curvature of the world
moving god-like across the face of our dreams

J. T. Ledbetter
Few people would dispute that Joel and Ethan Coen are among the greatest filmmakers working today. Some, however, might be less certain of what their films are actually all about. The brothers’ twenty-some films—from Blood Simple (1984) to their most recent, The Ballad of Buster Scruggs (2018)—provoke a variety of reactions. Critics frequently characterize their work as absurdist, existentialist, even nihilist, while viewers are often left disoriented by scenes that juxtapose the best and worst of humanity, veering from shocking evil to sentimental, even campy, decency. Acts of horrible violence are frequently tempered with slapstick comedy (the wood chipper scene in Fargo). Moments of beauty and tenderness reliably collapse into vulgarity and hypocrisy (the anti-climactic mermaid ballet of Hail, Caesar!). These sudden swings can be both wonderful and troubling, and even though these scenes often hint that there is a message behind all this madness, the Coens have been unwilling to clarify what that message might be. They rarely give interviews, and when they do, they refuse to engage with suggestions of any philosophy that might inspire their creative work.

In their recent volume from Lexington Books, Sara MacDonald and Barry Craig attempt to solve this mystery. They argue in this slim but valuable study that the Coens’ films (at least some of them) articulate thoughtful critiques of contemporary political culture and demonstrate a profound moral vision. MacDonald and Craig argue that the Coens’ films tell stories about flawed and limited characters who are doing their best to seek the good. “Although sometimes dark in their humor or screwball in their antics, in their comedies the Coens reveal individuals who seek goodness even when discerning what constitutes the good is difficult and achieving it is in distinct opposition to an individual’s immediate self-interest” (xiv-xv). The book is divided into essays focusing on five films—Raising Arizona (1987), Fargo (1996), The Big Lebowski (1998), O Brother, Where Art Thou? (2000), and Hail, Caesar! (2016)—but the essays are unified by a few themes that the authors believe are present in all of these films. These themes include a demonstration of how the pursuit of narrow self-interest is corrosive to contemporary political culture; an exploration of how characters in the films move beyond selfishness to a recognition that their own happiness depends on the happiness of others; and a reaffirmation of the freedom that the American regime affords its citizens to find their own way toward the good.

MacDonald and Craig begin by exploring how the Coens’ films, and Raising Arizona in particular, challenge Americans’ understanding of themselves as a nation of heroic and self-reliant individuals. Raising Arizona’s protagonist, Hi McDunnough, is a life-long petty criminal who robs convenience stores, at least until his friends...
convince him to get more ambitious and start robbing banks. He is an overgrown child who punches his boss in the face in a fit of temper, and he is not alone in his selfishness. When Hi and his wife discover that they cannot have children, they decide to kidnap one of the newly-born “Arizona” quintuplets. The wealthy Arizona family’s patriarch, Nathan Arizona, is a classic caricature of a cold-hearted businessman who cheats his customers and abuses his staff. With a cast of appallingly selfish (but extremely funny) characters who refuse to accept the normal boundaries of decent society, Raising Arizona has a “Wild West” feel to it that is superficially appropriate to its western setting.

The films suggest that this narrow form of individualism is the source of many of contemporary American culture’s worst aspects: its crass commercialism and materialism, its obsession with imperialistic power, and even the political apathy of its citizens.

but the characters’ childish states of mind demonstrate that their behavior has no place in a mature political order. Although an emphasis on self-preservation and the pursuit of profit were useful virtues in a young nation, they are less appropriate in a stable and prosperous political order.

This extreme selfishness also appears in the other films studied in this book. Each of the criminals in Fargo “seek to manipulate the external world and the people within it to suit his desires” (35), and in The Big Lebowski, the character Walter goes on a “quest for justice” motivated by “a narrowly defined self-interest, such as one might take from John Locke’s account of the state of nature” (50). The films suggest that this narrow form of individualism is the source of many of contemporary American culture’s worst aspects: its crass commercialism and materialism, its obsession with imperialistic power, and even the political apathy of its citizens.

The films, however, also depict Americans who transcend this selfish individualism. One way that Americans can achieve a broader understanding of their own self-interest is through cooperation with others in civic associations, such as Jeffrey “The Dude” Lebowski’s bowling league. “People of different genders, races, and cultures are all joined by a common pursuit: bowling a great game” (48–49). Membership in civic associations requires that we abide by a set of agreed upon rules and teaches us that we must treat others with at least a minimum level of respect. While individuals remain self-interested, they can come to a better understanding of the desires of others and the reasonable limits of their own selfishness.

This cultivation of “enlightened self-interest” is a necessary first step; however, citizens of a mature regime must do better than thinking of others as simply means to their own ends; they must come to genuinely care about the well-being of others as intimately connected to their own happiness. In a Coen brothers film, this sort of growth usually happens through the love its characters experience for family members and friends. The Dude in The Big Lebowski at first is only out for his own good; he awakens from his drug-induced stupor only to protect himself from criminals who have dragged him into a poorly executed extortion scheme. But as his affection for Maude grows, he learns from her that his “task is not merely to take care of himself, but to seek justice for others even when there is no specific benefit that he might gain” (51). The three escaped convicts in O Brother start out working together only out of necessity, literally bound together by ankle chains. But as their friendship grows, so does their sense of justice. “A sense of loyalty and friendship toward Pete moves Everett out of the narrow self-absorption that he has displayed” (73). In Fargo, “[Marge’s] love for Norm and their unborn child, and her quest to create a just and secure community, indicate to her that there are principles beyond the finite world to which one should aspire” (36). Ultimately, our concern for the well-being of those we love points
us toward a good that exists beyond ourselves and perhaps even beyond the limits of any political community.

The Coen brothers' films depict individuals whose desires are disordered, and who are in the process of re-ordering these desires, but the Coens' call for reform does not lead toward the kind of social control exhibited in Plato's Republic. In fact, their films suggest that only when individuals are afforded the freedom to pursue their particular interests will they discover the good that unites them with their community. The authors write,

[I]n both Fargo and The Big Lebowski, it is the free pursuit of their particular interests, a happy marriage, a safe community for one's child, and winning a bowling tournament, that lead these characters to seek the good of the broader communities of which they are a part. The political point that pervades the Coen brothers' comedies is founded on an understanding that freedom is essential to the attainment of justice" (xv).

This freedom allows the Coens' characters to develop virtues that are appropriate for citizens of a democratic order. The trio of escaped convicts in O Brother have democratic aspirations. "They yearn for property, a job, and a family life" (69). In common pursuit of these interests, they learn to trust and respect one another, and they even add a new member to their fellowship, an African-American guitarist named Tommy. They learn to "function as an equal society. All hierarchy is removed, racial distinction is negated, and particular virtue is not required to be a member of this group. They are friends and mutual goodwill is the foundation of their society" (75). These are not virtuous heroes in any classical sense, but as a mutually dependent group of friends who feel a strong sense of obligation to one another, they present a model of democratic political order.

In the book's final chapter, MacDonald and Craig consider Hail, Caesar!, a recent film about the Hollywood movie studios of the 1950s, and find in it a reflection on the role that film can play in a democratic society. Film can be merely entertaining and aesthetically pleasing, but it also can serve as a corrective to modern cynicism by upholding examples of virtue and beauty. Even in their silliest, simplest characters, like Delmar from O Brother or Hobie from Hail, Caesar!, the Coens' films extol the virtues that democracy needs most.

The Coen brothers' films depict individuals whose desires are disordered, and who are in the process of re-ordering these desires, but the Coens' call for reform does not lead toward the kind of social control exhibited in Plato's Republic.

At its best, film can even suggest a reality beyond itself. While the Coens never presume to claim that film itself offers a glimpse of the divine (careful viewers of Hail, Caesar! noticed a line in the final credits reading, "This motion picture contains no visual depictions of the godhead."), their films do show us how images on the big screen can point in that direction by celebrating virtue and beauty in a society that has become overly skeptical of such things. And for those of us who have enjoyed and been confused by the Coen brothers' films for many years, MacDonald and Craig's thoughtful study shows us that in our enjoyment and confusion we share something with their characters, who are sometimes selfish and sometimes gracious, but who are all on a search for meaning, even if it is hard to find.

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NIGHT HOLDS ITS BREATH

-Randall Jarrell: Cento*

He calls out: Mother
And the night holds its breath
She serves a symbol for this world
Clothed with the wind, light in the light
Her body is incandescent with rainbows
And all at once the garden is lighted
I am floating here in light
Children, come to my knee
She said to them tenderly. And they
And we start home. Now I am good
The maid lets fall her mystery
And I felt a pang of such joy
With the songs of the world where no one dies
Into the innocent world of light
Here is knowledge, is wisdom—see! see!

The things you don't know. . .

Kathleen Gunton

*Each line is drawn from a different poem
All in the Cards

Rebekah Curtis

Card games are a regional phenomenon. In the Chicago exurbs where I grew up, the game was Euchre. My mom, only as far removed as Rockford, is a four-point Pitch player. Great-grandma from Wisconsin was committed to Canasta; old-timey people in English drawing rooms played Whist; Lutherans still conflate region with religion and play Schafskopf. Children, another non-geographical region, play War. I had to learn ten-point Pitch to marry a Nebraskan. Southern Illinois, where I now live, is Pinochle territory.

My neighbors tutor me in Pinochle with the same forbearance they show as I try to remember how they are all related to each other. Our town is small and, like Jerusalem, quartered by religious identity. We and our church inhabit what the rest of the town calls the "Dutch" side (apparently Dutch is Scotch-Irish for German). The names here have been the same for most of a century: Blotevogel, Emrich, Behme, Schien. The branches of the parish tree expand and contract with the marriages. An outsider is never past being dumbfounded to learn that Carrie and Harold are cousins, but the Klenke/Schreiber alliance is due solely to ancient friendship.

Pinochle is the natural game of this people. The play is not terribly complex, but there is a lot to remember. There are two scoring systems, meld and power. Power is, essentially, War. Higher cards win the tricks. But meld precedes power. Before any cards are played, they are all scored. Different sequences and combinations (melds) of cards get points. The jack of diamonds and the queen of spades together earn the holder a Pinochle. The nine of trumps wins an unlikely pittance. In Pinochle, a card doesn't have to be a trick-taker to have value.

The cards, like the players, are a community living within the prosperity or lack its membership allows. They may ally themselves with each other, or merely get by through vacancies. They marry, become business partners, barter, or they cannot. But when one does not meld, she has her place in the power. When one is not powerful, he may meld to complete a sequence or alliance. From one generation, one hand to the next, there is no question of value. Everybody did something. We wish we'd had the queen. We wish Bonnie hadn't gone. We're still shaking our heads over the Daube boys and the Schien girls pulling that live action double pinochle.

We had to learn to play cards somewhere. It was probably at War. War is a child's necessary introduction to card playing. Each card is nothing more than its rank. The Joker doesn't even act like himself, diverting the players by subverting their play. He just steps into the order and goes through the drills. The only interesting thing that happens is a war, in which two cards . . . but we know, and it's boring, and whoever has the Joker wins the game, and then you can say you've done right by your five-year-old today.

We all stop playing War because there are better games.

Ten-point Pitch is a game of personalities. The cards are members of a family, or a group of friends. Tricks are taken by traditional order, but players must be careful. The Joker doesn't even act like himself, diverting the players by subverting their play. He just steps into the order and goes through the drills. The only interesting thing that happens is a war, in which two cards . . . but we know, and it's boring, and whoever has the Joker wins the game, and then you can say you've done right by your five-year-old today.

We all stop playing War because there are better games.
Ten, Three: ten points.

Who is greatest in the kingdom of Pitch? There sits the mighty ace, the paterfamilias, grumping at our attacks upon the fine gin his lifetime of work has provided. The two affords the holder certain protections: the aunt too skittery to bid the potential of her hand, but who never goes set. Or is it better to have a handful of middlers? The weisenheimer nephew, wearing a Data-style visor; the dad still hassling middle-aged sisters? No less can we cherish the helpless, expensive three: the toddler who keeps her mother from play altogether, and whose tiny person is the promise that Pitch will go on, world without end.

War cannot account for families, friends, or communities, with their inscrutable applications of personal diversity to historical fact. In War there

War cannot countenance the ways aptitude, genius, virtue, and confounding love interact with chance and circumstance in each generation. It does not have time to learn of complications like bowers and trumps. It cannot afford to shoot the moon or declare out. War-players are too busy being angry that someone sat out the game to make nachos for the family she loves; too offended that the queen is lower than the king and that no one likes clubs. They are too sick of always doing all the work around here to keep track of bids, points, and where the box got to, so that we can all be happy together.

If we lived at war, we'd be home by now.

But while nations rage, we live in realer places: families, communities, regions of geography or affinity. We play the hands we are dealt. We meld and see who comes of it. We convince Grandma to let us deal her in this game. We watch this round so someone else can have a turn. We let the outsider keep her cheat sheet.

We only play War until the kids are big enough to learn what we play here.

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