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ROUGHLY TWO MILLION AMERICANS WATCHED the first debates of the 2008 Presidential election cycle. I wasn't one of them. I'm a serious political junkie, but even I'm not ready yet for another election. Most Americans still have other things on their minds than presidential politics. For example, the night before the Republican debate on May 3, nearly twenty-nine million tuned in to American Idol. (I wasn't one of those either.)

It seems like elections never really end anymore. As soon as one campaign finishes, the next begins. And while, for the time being, the current campaign remains relatively tame, that won't last long. The nastiness will come later, closer to next winter's primaries.

These long, ugly campaigns have left many Americans frustrated, and voters express that frustration a number of ways. Turnout levels declined substantially in the last decades of the twentieth century, although they have rebounded somewhat more recently. Another sign of this frustration is voters' continual attraction to supposedly non-political candidates. Americans love the fresh face, the outsider unsullied by association with the system, politicians who don't sound like politicians.

Some of these fresh faces offer ideological purity, unsullied by compromises and backroom deals. They tell us who they are, what they believe, and they don't pull any punches. Howard Dean was in this mold. The former Vermont Governor was a breath of fresh air for liberal Democrats who had lost faith in the national Democratic Party. Dean proclaimed that he represented the "Democratic wing of the Democratic Party."

Sometimes the fresh faces eschew all ideology. Instead, they offer pragmatism. Ross Perot was the classic pragmatist candidate. He offered an alternative to the partisan gridlock that had paralyzed Washington and promised to use his real-world experience to "fix the problems" in government.

The latest fresh face is Senator Barack Obama. So far, Obama shrewdly has combined the two kinds of outsider candidacies—the purist and the pragmatist. To the Democratic base, he offers his opposition to the Iraq War and his voting record, which, although brief, places him comfortably in Dean's "Democratic wing." But while attractive to liberal purists, Obama as a candidate is in many ways more similar to Perot than Dean. Although superficially their personalities and campaign styles seem different, Obama and Perot have much in common. Like Perot, Obama uses scrupulously moderate and non-offensive rhetoric. His campaign mantra is "Bringing People Together," and you don't bring people together by taking well-defined stances on the issues. Instead, Obama, like Perot, is running on his feel-good biography and proven ability to "get things done." He pledges to bring us together for a new kind of politics, without being entirely clear about what exactly that new politics is supposed to accomplish.

So far, Obama's balancing act between purity and pragmatism is working. He presents a legitimate challenge to the front runner, Senator Clinton. Some polls show him with a wide league among independent voters and even some crossover support among Republicans. Will it keep working? That remains to be seen, but I have my doubts. As the campaign ramps up, it will be increasingly difficult for Obama to avoid defining himself on the issues, and his competitors will do everything they can to corner him during the numerous scheduled debates.

They also will try to tear down his image as a fresh face with integrity and new ideas. It seems unlikely that anyone who spent much time in Chicago politics could have avoided all association with unsavory characters, and oppositional researchers for the other candidates are, no doubt, looking for dirt to foul the reputation of Mr. Clean. You probably can see the ads coming already. A
grumbling, derisive narrator heaps scorn on the opponent while grainy, black-and-white photographs of the candidate flash on the screen. They finish with a snide tagline: “You can’t trust him.” “He’s desperate.” Or, my recent favorite, “What was she thinking?”

Negative campaigning is nothing new in American politics. In the election of 1800, John Adams’s Federalists famously called Jefferson a “…mean-spirited, low-lived fellow, the son of a half-breed Indian squaw, sired by a Virginia mulatto father.” While most of today’s attack ads are by comparison tame, the sheer number of them being pumped into the privacy of our living rooms and cars leaves many voters fed up and asking how our system has come to this.

The answer to their question is that our system has come to this because voters largely got what they wanted. During the twentieth century Americans asked for a political system that offered easy access to the primary ballot for all candidates, the opportunity for voters to split their tickets, and a choice for candidates to run on their own principles instead of hewing to a party line. Before these populist reforms, party nominees were selected by party bosses, who hammered out deals behind the scenes, presumably in smoke-filled rooms. These changes allowed new voices, independent of the bosses and machines, to win the party nomination and get elected.

In short, the American public made a conscious decision to make political parties largely irrelevant in elections. We have chosen a system in which political candidates function as independent operators, in which parties cannot require candidates or office holders to stick with the party line. These candidates can choose to support, oppose, or even ignore their party’s official platform. Many try to ignore them. Like Senator Obama, they recognize that every time they take a clear position on an issue, they might alienate as many people on one side of the issue as they gain on the other. It is much safer to run a campaign based on the types of things that don’t offend anyone: compelling biography, charismatic personality, and non-ideological pragmatism.

This is one reason why our campaigns rely so much on attack ads. When a candidate refuses to define herself, it falls to her opponents to do the job. If an opposing candidate refuses to take clear stands on issues, then it is rational to tell voters about the things she won’t discuss, such as votes against popular programs or in favor of always unpopular taxes. And if there isn’t enough information available to define an opponent ideologically, then it simply makes sense to attack the biography that serves as the rationale for her campaign. It’s not fun to watch, but this is what we should expect in an era of politics without parties.

And perhaps the most surprising thing about our election campaigns is how well they work. We live in an age dominated by electronic media. Information, advertising, and sheer noise constantly stream to each of us through televisions, cell phones, the Internet, and email. Political campaigns must find a way to cut through that noise. To do this they have to be loud, boisterous, and even sometimes ugly. If they weren’t, they wouldn’t get our attention. And when they do get our attention, they communicate useful information to us, information that will help us decide how to vote. Among those who study election campaigns, there is a consensus that campaigns still matter. With all their noise and ugliness, modern election campaigns get the job done. They pass on enough information about candidates and their beliefs, positions, and promises to help voters make rational decisions about whom they should support. (See Kathleen Hall Jamieson’s Everything You Think You Know about Politics... or Samuel L. Popkins’s classic, but controversial, The Reasoning Voter). Even negative ads, angry voiceovers and all, serve as valuable and efficient sources of information for voters with other things on their minds.

So get ready for another campaign. Get ready for the ads, the bumper stickers, and the yard signs. It’s loud, messy, and sometimes kind of annoying, but this is how we do politics in the United States today. It’s not perfect, but it works, so sit back and try to enjoy it. Or, even better, get out and join it. Make some noise of your own.

—JPO
Rembrandt, *The Slaughtered Ox*, 1655
(Paris, Louvre Museum).
Bloom

Rembrandt, Red Meat, and Remembering the Flesh

Lisa Deam

Dead flesh would not have been an unusual sight in the seventeenth-century Netherlands, when butchers routinely displayed their freshly slaughtered wares in the marketplace. Neither was it, by Rembrandt’s time, an uncommon motif in works of art. Nearly a century before Rembrandt’s ox appeared on the scene, the Flemish artist Pieter Aertsen inaugurated the painterly fascination with meat by depicting twenty-one square feet of glistening animal flesh in his monumental Meat Stall (cover image). Amidst the impressive display of sausages, haunches, and lungs, an ox carcass hangs in the right background. Over the next century, flayed oxen became a common motif in Netherlandish prints and paintings, especially those depicting the parable of the Prodigal Son and other moralizing themes. Many of these scenes teem not only with meat but also with human figures that showcase the less seemly side of life.

Rembrandt’s painting, in contrast to these crowded and occasionally rowdy scenes, exudes quiet and stillness. The artist has shown a profusion of neither meat nor people. Instead, he focuses all his attention—and ours—on a single creature, with no narrative content to explain or frame its presence. We are not even certain where Rembrandt’s ox hangs. At a butcher’s shop? In a room or shed of a domestic residence? A young woman peers out of a doorway in the background of the painting, her upper body parallel to and almost merging with that of the ox. She, too, appears uncertain, as if aware that she does not quite belong in the same room (or painting) as the animal. Looking at the ox from behind, this woman mirrors our own gaze at the giant carcass. Like us, she regards in wonder the flayed animal that Rembrandt has detailed with as much devotion as we might expect an artist to lavish on a flower in bloom.

But the term “bloom,” surprisingly enough, applies as much to Rembrandt’s side of beef as to

In his 1655 painting, *The Slaughtered Ox*, Rembrandt gives us a disturbing image. We come face to face with a giant ox carcass hanging from a cross beam, its hind legs splayed and skin flayed to reveal the bone, fat, and muscle beneath. The animal dominates the image space; the viewer can find virtually nowhere to look for relief. Even peripheral details, such as the wooden planks of the interior and the clothing of a woman in the background, take on the colors of the slaughtered animal; subdued browns, reds, and whites dominate. The painting belongs to the later, “impressionistic” part of Rembrandt’s career, as the rather loose brushstrokes indicate. But surely to segue into a discussion of *impasto* represents a thinly veiled attempt to divert attention from the reality of this image. There is no way to get around it: in his painting, Rembrandt offers not merely thick brushstrokes, but the convincing illusion of dead and soon-to-decay flesh.

I always have liked Rembrandt, but I never thought much about the *The Slaughtered Ox*. Certainly I never sought out this painting on my occasional visits to the Louvre, where it now hangs. With art history classics like Leonardo’s *Virgin of the Rocks* and Paolo Uccello’s *Battle of San Romano* in nearby galleries, why focus on an animal carcass? A few years ago, however, I found myself face to face with the kind of flesh that Rembrandt depicts. This time, my encounter took place not at a museum, but at the meat department of a large midwestern grocery warehouse. I had taken a job at the warehouse, called Roundy’s, where I sold all kinds of fresh and processed meat to grocery stores in a tri-state area. Suddenly, I was surrounded by the kinds of carcasses I previously had found so distasteful. In this most unlikely of situations, I discovered that Rembrandt and I—and his painted ox, too—had something in common.

But the term “bloom,” surprisingly enough, applies as much to Rembrandt’s side of beef as to
the most delicate rendering of a Dutch tulip. Indeed, the word refers not only to the bursting forth of floral life, but also to the process of animal death. It was, in fact, one of the first terms I learned at my job as a meat seller. “Bloom” indicates the bright red color that today’s consumers associate with fresh meat. As slaughtered animal meat becomes exposed to light and air, a protein pigment called myoglobin is transformed to oxymyoglobin, causing the meat to turn from a dark purple to a bright red hue. Rembrandt’s ox has been skinned and drained of blood but not yet cut up; I would hazard a guess that it remains in a pre-bloom stage.

And so, working at the grocery warehouse, did I. Or perhaps the better term would be “post-bloom.” I had previously been a college teacher turned writer until circumstances dictated that I find some sort of paying work; hence my job at Roundy’s. The dizzying change in my work life was marked by my altered vocabulary. In my role as professor, I’d used such terms as “still life,” “genre scene,” and “inverted morality picture” on a regular basis. As a writer, I learned “kill fee” and “query.” Now I had moved on to words like “bloom” and “wog.” (A wog is a whole chicken with giblets removed. It was a bit unfortunate that I had to use this term since, in British slang, it derogatorily refers to a person of African or Asian descent.) I learned to bandy about these terms, especially “bloom,” with impunity. Sometimes, for example, my customers would call and complain that a recent meat purchase was purple instead of the desired red hue. Patiently, as if teaching a class, I explained the blooming process. If the customer persisted, I’d put down the phone, walk into the meat manager’s office and say, with a roll of my eyes, “Bill at Country Market’s on the line. I tried to tell him to give the ground round a chance to bloom.”

Although my vocabulary blossomed at Roundy’s, my new line of work took the rosy hue right out of my cheeks. Never in my wildest dreams had I imagined taking a job that would require me to worry about wogs rather than words. But there I was, bright and early each morning, talking turkey with customers and peppering my boss with questions I never thought would escape my lips: What is the precise difference between choice and select beef? What exactly does the neck in “neck-off pork butts” refer to? Dealing on a daily basis with the ins (innards?) and outs of animal flesh, I became someone I almost didn’t recognize.

Certainly, none of my customers or coworkers recognized me—not in the way I used to garner recognition, anyway. Whereas I had been “doctor” and “professor” before, on the phone with my customers I was just “Lisa” (no last name) or sometimes “hon,” “doll,” and even “princess.” To my boss, I was one of the “phone sales girls.” Most disturbing of all, I no longer had reason to lay claim to the accomplishments that always had helped me to define myself—my higher degrees and record of publications meant little to meat cutters who needed fifteen cases of bottom round flats and needed them now.

One day, I recognized myself in a way that I did not expect. Coming home from work, I turned on my husband’s computer and started when I saw his screen saver. It featured a photograph of his paternal grandfather. In the picture, Granddad wears a white apron and stands behind a counter in the West Virginia mining store where he worked as a butcher. In fact, both my husband’s grandfathers were butchers. I never knew
Granddad Christian, but I remembered bits of his advice that my husband likes to repeat. “A sharp knife is safer than a dull one. Never cut against the grain.” Staring at the picture on the screen, my mind still full of my day’s work (Had I remembered to prebook Eric’s order for Oscar Mayer bacon? Did I hit a wrong key and accidentally send thirty cases of whole fryers to Anita’s Market?), I suddenly felt as though I were living in Rembrandt’s day, when trades like butchering were passed down from one generation to the next. Was it my destiny to, if not butcher meat, work alongside it?

I hoped not. Animal flesh may not have been uncommon in Rembrandt’s day or in my husband’s family, but dealing in flesh disturbed the rhythm of my own life. It derailed my ambitions, diminished my time to write, and threatened to decimate my sense of self. It would be no exaggeration to state that, at the warehouse, I felt as stripped of my outer layer, as bare and raw, as Rembrandt’s giant side of beef.

I sometimes wonder if Rembrandt, too, saw his Slaughtered Ox as a kind of self-portrait. Extrapolating from what we see on this panel, we should not be surprised to learn that he painted the ox during a particularly difficult time in his own life. Increasingly beset by debts that he could not pay, Rembrandt plunged ever deeper into financial difficulties in the early 1650s and finally, in July 1656, applied for voluntary bankruptcy. His house and all his possessions were sold, and he moved into a working-class neighborhood. Never again did he attain the popularity he had experienced earlier in his career.

Did Rembrandt feel stripped down and flayed when he painted the dead ox? Did this image represent a way for him to express the rawness of bankruptcy or the peeling away of his livelihood? Looking at reproductions of his ox in my old art history books, I felt a kind of kinship with the artist. Certainly he found himself in a far direr situation than did I when I went to work at Roundy’s; nevertheless, I could not help but feel an affinity for someone who, like me, turned to meat during a time of personal and financial turmoil.

It probably would have helped Rembrandt’s financial situation if he had sold The Slaughtered Ox. However, a painting of this subject appears in a 1656 inventory of his possessions, suggesting that he may have kept the panel, at least for a while. Rembrandt’s biographers speculate that it may have represented something more than financial flaying to the artist, something that he wanted to hold onto. For my part, I found it difficult to imagine that, beyond providing a regular paycheck, meat could mean anything significant to me.

To a number of modern historians, The Slaughtered Ox carries far more serious connotations than money woes. As they note, the painting falls clearly into the category of imagery called memento mori, or reminder of death (literally, the Latin phrase is rendered in the imperative and can be loosely translated, “remember, you too shall die”). Memento mori paintings, which usually are still lifes, often feature such objects as snuffed candles, clocks, and wilting flowers, all of which signify the passing of time. In a darker vein, skulls, plucked feathers, and rotting fruit could be added to refer to the decay of the flesh. Dutch memento mori still lifes often do not include animal flesh. But meat was a memento mori in the writings of seventeenth-century Reformed theologians in England. For these religious, eating meat served as a reminder of the inevitable corruption of all flesh. The Leicestershire divine John Moore wrote in 1617,

So in our meates (as in a looking glasse) we may learne our own mortality: for let us put our hand into the dish, and what doe we take, but the foode of a dead thing, which is either the flesh of beasts, or of birds, or of fishes, with which foode wee so long fill our bodies, until they themselves be meate for wormes? All this we see by experience, we feele it and we taste it daily: we see death (as it were) before our eyes: we feele it betwixt our teeth, and yet can wee not cast our accompt, that we must die. (Fudge, 74)

Rembrandt must have spent a good bit of time with the hunk of mortality that was his ox. I can’t help but wonder about the nature of his relationship with the dead creature he so lovingly painted. Did he take his sketch pad to the
butcher’s shop or did he cart the animal home? Did he study the ox while the butcher carved it up, or did he let it begin to rot in his studio? And, of course, the question I most want answered: did Rembrandt feel the ox—and so taste death—betwixt his teeth?

Whether or not the animal ended up on Rembrandt’s dinner table, painting the ox could have led to the same kind of somber ruminations as eating it. Perhaps, as he witnessed the creature’s slow decay, Rembrandt thought about the state of his own body. This seems likely given the fact that Rembrandt painted a self-portrait the same year he depicted the slaughtered ox. In this painting, he wears an artist’s smock and regards the viewer warily, light playing over the folds and pouches of his face in the same way that it reveals naked flesh and bone in his rendering of the unfortunate ox. I can easily imagine the artist turning from mirror to self-portrait to ox, “learning,” as the Reverend Moore might say, his “own mortality.”

The “meat as memento mori” tradition did not bode well, I thought, for my stint at Roundy’s. I was already grappling with issues of ambition and identity. Did I really need to deal with death as well? Apparently, I did. From day one at my new job, I found myself face to face with what we might call the warehouse version of the memento mori theme. Although I did not handle fresh and soon-to-decay meat, I was surrounded by disturbing animal imagery. On the wall of my office, a calendar with photographs of live steers hung across from paint-by-number pictures that divided animals into their various cuts of meat—a grim before and after sequence. A rubber stress chicken from Pilgrim’s Pride squatted atop my desk—I could squeeze it and pretend to wring its neck during moments of frustration.

Memento mori also seeped subtly but inevitably into our frantic efforts at preservation—and our attempts to deal with the consequences of selling perishable goods. Meat goes out of date. Even when packaged, injected, and refrigerated, it does not last forever (our country’s over-stocked warehouses and stores, where tons of expired goods are thrown out every year, could serve as a Netherlandish-style lesson, à la Brueghel, of the folly of hoarding). In the mornings, I sold meat, offering special deals on products that soon would pass their expiration date, and in the afternoons, I spent several hours writing credits for deliveries of meat that had gone out of code, that “felt slimy” or “smelled funny.” Sometimes our customers asked if we wanted the expired meat back. Talk about funny—I always wondered what they thought we would do with it. Perhaps they believed that we could perform some kind of magical transformation, enacting a resurrection of the dead.

As I learned from these experiences, copious amounts of flesh—especially the putrid kind—can easily darken one’s daydreams. Too many discussions of rank odors and slimy textures, and a person’s thoughts really do turn to her own mortality. Such thoughts occasionally have their purpose. Dealing in death, for example, certainly helped me to put my frustrated ambition in some kind of perspective. Working in a real-life memento mori, I began to ask the question that the Dutch masters posed in their paintings. What do accomplishments gain a person when life fades as
quickly as the smoke from a candle or a decaying hunk of beef? Every time I glanced at my wall calendar, I thought fleetingly of the grazing steers pictured there. Undoubtedly, I thought, the steers were dead by now, carved up and consumed by people who were themselves inching closer to death each day.

Sometimes, in fact, the warehouse engendered far too many parallels between animal flesh and human flesh. One morning, I learned that my customer Jack was not always on hand to give me his weekly order for veal (the meat of a calf—an animal that, some would say, died too soon) because he frequently had to take his wife to chemotherapy treatments (to prevent her from dying too soon). This discovery instigated a fresh barrage of guilt-ridden questions on the nature of life and ambition. What did my own desire for recognition matter when the people around me faced death on a daily basis? Was it not enough that I had a job, had food and shelter, had life? For me, these were not merely rhetorical questions. I really wanted to know.

The more I looked at memento mori paintings, the more their very existence seemed to embody the beginnings of an answer. These paintings speak as much about life as they do of death. After all, putting brush to canvas, even in order to paint a skull, is a stubborn statement of creation in the face of decay. Nor did the careers of these Dutch artists become snuffed out with their depictions of candles and clocks. Memento mori painters produced all kinds of imagery. They rendered cavernous skulls and decaying flesh and then went on to paint other subjects, including sumptuous banquets and airy landscapes. They did not lay their brushes down, despite the visions of death and destruction that populate some of their canvases.

Rembrandt, again, provides an object lesson. The artist may have glimpsed his own mortality in his slaughtered ox, but he also continued to paint more hopeful versions of himself. In his 1658 Self-Portrait in the Frick Collection, Rembrandt appears as a cross between a Renaissance artist and a magisterial king. Shown life-size, he grasps the arms of his “throne” and stares down the viewer as if deigning to grant her an audience. In the context of the Dutch memento mori theme, this painting suggests a reversal of the seemingly inevitable movement toward death and decay: renewal of the flesh is possible after all, the portrait seems to state. For me, this evidence of renewal held out hope. If Rembrandt could metamorphose from flayed ox to Renaissance master or even mighty king, surely I could effect some small change of my own. My ambitions were far humbler than the artist’s. I did not aspire to rulership; I merely wanted to see my own flesh transformed from meat seller into writer.

My customer Jack joined Rembrandt in encouraging my professional aspirations. Jack faced a desperate situation in his wife’s illness—and, as a meat cutter, he dealt with the memento mori aspects of decaying flesh far more than did I—yet he also had certain ambitions. Each day I checked his order to ensure that our warehouse could cover the product he needed, and I called him if I spotted any problems. Not every customer asked me to do this, but Jack did; he wanted to be well informed so that he could do his job well. When I told him one day of my eventual plans to pursue writing, he said, with feeling, “Go for it. Life is short.”
Thus, despite the vanitas lessons of the warehouse, I could not help but cling, as Rembrandt did and as Jack advised, to my ambitions and dreams. I held fast to the hope of returning to my writing, of producing words that actually would sell. Roundy's, I realized, was not merely a memento mori lesson; it was itself a passing stage in my life, as fleeting and ephemeral as a wisp of smoke. Standing back, I could watch it twist and curl. I realized that I was figured not only in the giant side of decaying beef in Rembrandt's painting, but also in the woman peering out of a doorway at the carcass. The woman and the carcass almost merge, but in the end their bodies remain distinct. The ox is dead, but the woman, for now anyway, will go on. Resolutely, she clings to life.

Ultimately, we cling to life because we have hope. In Rembrandt's painting the biggest sign of hope resides, paradoxically, in the dead ox itself. In the scholarly literature, this ox has been iconographically linked not only to death and decay but also and more monumentally to the Crucifixion of Christ. The ox is tied to a beam in much the same way that the soldiers lashed Jesus to his own tree, the peering woman (my alter ego) becoming a figure at the foot of the cross. Indeed, the majestic isolation of Rembrandt's carcass, complete with its own spotlight, prompts viewers to contemplate this earthy scene with as much reverence as they would a bona fide religious subject. Rembrandt's painting is thus far more than a memento mori; it is also a reminder of life. The great ox makes death "palatable"—a gruesome play on words that nevertheless retains validity given Christ's command to eat of his flesh.

Mimicking a meat cutter, Rembrandt becomes a kind of pastor. And so did another meat cutter I knew, my husband's maternal grandfather. During World War II, Granddad Byrne butchered meat for a mining company store in Pennsylvania, although this career was short lived. By the time I knew him, he had long since hung up his knives in favor of pastoring in the American Baptist church. In my mind, I picture him not wielding a cleaver or standing behind a counter but holding the Bible he carried with him nearly everywhere he went. I remember him not immersed in animal innards but officiating at the marriage of my husband's oldest brother. What connection did Granddad Byrne make between his earlier career and his pastorate, between a side of beef and the sacrament of marriage? Did he see meat as Rembrandt did? I wish I had thought to ask him before he died.

Meat and marriage are connected in my own mind, thanks to my experience at Roundy's. One of my best days at the warehouse began the morning that my fellow sales girl, Karen, met me with shining eyes and the announcement that she and her husband, Mark, were reconciling after several months of separation. Having been at Roundy's for some of those months, having watched Karen wilt and weep and try to pull herself together each day, I found this news especially joyous. The details intrigued me, too, particularly Karen's plan to convert to her husband's religion, Catholicism. I wondered, as she left to take a call from a customer who needed several cases of ground round, whether she would now refrain from eating meat on Fridays.

But the day of Karen and Mark's reconciliation was not a Friday. It became, for us, a day of celebration, a feast day. And what better way to mark a feast day than with platters of fresh meat? We were certainly in the right place. Looking back, I wish that we had dragged up all the cases of sausages and ham loaves hoarded in the warehouse basement. I wish that we had gorged ourselves until we resembled one of Brueghel's village kermisses, where the peasant folk dance and feast on the fat of the land. Unfortunately, raiding the pantry was not allowed at Roundy's. We settled instead for a modest celebration, with cokes and chips from the lunch room vending machines. Baked Lay's are a far cry from, say, a rack of ribs; nevertheless, our impromptu "feast" reminded me that I was not the only one holding on to hope in the face of disappointment and despair.

With Rembrandt on my mind, I thought how fitting it was that Karen's marriage should be celebrated at Roundy's, amidst all those pictures of sectioned-off cows that reminded me (iconographically if not artistically) of The Slaughtered Ox. Marriage is, after all, the symbol of Christ's union with the soul, a union that Christ accomplished by the sacrifice so poignantly figured forth in Rembrandt's side of beef. I don't know whether any of my coworkers also saw this con-
nection between meat, marriage, and the metamorphosis of the soul. Maybe, after years of working in the warehouse, they were sick of meat. Undoubtedly they tired of the brightly colored posters of dead animals that festooned their walls. These pictures were certainly no Rembrandts. But for me, even these crude images came to have new meaning. When eventually I left Roundy’s, I looked around my office for mementos to take with me. I chose my Pilgrim’s Pride stress chicken, an old order form from Jack, and, as my prized possession, a poster of one of those paint-by-number cows, now transformed in my mind from death into life.

I did not stay at Roundy’s long; perhaps ten months. But I stayed long enough to learn the essentials, to wit: we are all flesh and blood. Writers and sales girls, butchers and painters, we share the most elemental experiences of all living creatures: birth and, inevitably, death. Hopefully, we will experience more than our fair share of reconciliation in between.

Perhaps these commonalities help to explain why, even after leaving a job I did not particularly like, I missed Karen, Jack, and my other customers and coworkers. Finally alone, ensconced in my living room trying to write, I found myself worrying about Jack’s wife and rejoicing over Karen’s marriage. While working at Roundy’s, I had longed for solitude. When at last I had it, I could not depopulate my mind. Meat cutters and office mates, pigs, chickens, and steers—they were all there, grazing the recesses of my memory. My brain teemed with life.

It may not be my destiny, as it is was for my grandfathers and for some of my colleagues at Roundy’s, to work long years in the medium of meat. But it is certainly my lot to wonder and worry about flesh, sometimes to celebrate it, always to remember it. Even my short time at Roundy’s taught me what Rembrandt learned all those centuries ago: dealing in flesh can be a reminder of life and even a sign of hope. Or, to mix my metaphors, sometimes you have to be stripped as bare as an ox in order fully to bloom.

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Works Cited


NIGH ON HER KNEES

Women walk on their knees
and utter cries strange and shrill as birds.
They throw themselves on the graves
of their children and eat the freshly-dug dirt,
until the other mothers pull them away, weeping too;
for what mother has not buried some small hope or dream
or blessing and then been forced to walk away?
Night gathers her skirts above the tiny earthen mounds
and circles them on her own calloused knees.

Kelly D. Morris
Marilynne Robinson's Pulitizer-winning novel *Gilead* (2003) comes to us twenty-three years after the publication of her first work, *Housekeeping* (1980). *Gilead* is a long-waited masterpiece. From the first pages, Robinson draws the reader into the world of her protagonist, Reverend John Ames, who at the age of seventy-six remembers the past as he confronts the approach of death. Faced with a debilitating heart condition, Ames grapples with the reality that he must soon leave his family and begins to convey the memories that have shaped his life in a series of reflective letters, which he hopes his young son will read as a grown man. Set in a small Iowan town of Gilead in 1956, the novel is saturated with both personal and historical memory. The language, like that of the poet Robert Frost, is simple and direct, but, as in Frost's poetry, the simplicity and directness belie the complexity of emotion, the rich poetic imagination, and the startling metaphysical revelations.

*Gilead* is intensely preoccupied with how one should live fully in the present, with all of its obligations and joys, in the face of death. Beneath the serene beauty of the prose remains a question that recurs both explicitly and implicitly throughout the novel: “what relationship this present reality bears to an ultimate reality” (103). Ames attempts to answer this question, to locate the meaning of his life, as he faces the possibility of death. Robinson, however, never separates Ames’s philosophical quest from his aesthetic vision, the apprehension of life’s beauty revealed almost always in the concrete: in the face of his son, the image of his grandfather’s grave, the brilliance of the sunlight, the memory of his stillborn daughter, the tender voice of his second wife. The possibility of death leads Ames not only to question the nature of reality, but it also makes him acutely aware of his existence and being, to recognize that “existence is the essential thing, and the holy thing” (189). The novel examines the ways in which our life is intrinsically and inextricably linked with death, showing us that only when we confront the fact of our mortality can we best struggle with the deepest and most puzzling questions about our existence.

Death propels Ames to distill his life—his past, present, and future—leading him toward a concentrated look at existence. Ames knows that his failing health soon will take him away from the life he has led with his wife of ten years and the son who was born to him so late in life, at the age of seventy. This recognition becomes all the more poignant as we learn that when Ames was a young man, he had lost his first wife, Louisa, and their only child, Rebecca, during childbirth. For over forty years, he has led a quiet existence that seemed as settled as the succession of days and weeks marked by a pot of coffee and fried egg sandwiches, staticky reports of baseball games on a radio, and in between, baptizing infants, repairing leaky faucets, reading Karl Barth, admiring...
and, at times, envying the "blindingly beautiful" fortune of his best friend and fellow preacher, Robert Boughton, the father of eight children.

Thus, his second marriage, which comes to him in his late sixties, takes him by complete surprise. He marries a poor, uneducated woman in her thirties, who perhaps has felt life's loneliness more acutely than he has himself. Despite their shared suffering, or perhaps because of it, their courtship becomes as intense, tender, and, at times, humorous as youth's first love. Ames attempts to convey the shock of human love he experiences in meeting his second wife: "That was the first time I felt I could be snatched out of my character, my call, my reputation, as if they could just fall away like a dry husk"; "If we can be divinely blessed with a touch, then the terrible pleasure we find in a particular face can certainly instruct us in the nature of the very grandest love" (205, 204). This passionate love threatens and delights him simultaneously, and he seizes upon the language of Song of Solomon to express the intensity of his emotion in seeing the face of his beloved. "I am sick with love. It makes me laugh to remember this—As it was, the beauty of the poem just hurt my feelings" (207). If the depth of one's joy can be measured by the immensity of one's suffering, Ames's forty years in the desert of barrenness and loss prepare him for the fruitful joys of the promised land that would follow in his later life. But we also learn how tenuous his hope had remained throughout those forty years: "I've shepherded a good many people through their lives," he tells his son, "I've baptized babies by the hundred, and all that time I felt as though a great part of life was closed to me. Your mother says I was like Abraham. But I had no old wife and no promise of a child. I was just getting by on books and baseball and fried-egg sandwiches" (54). It is a life of longing, but one without the conviction and hope of fulfillment.

When fulfillment does finally arrive, however, Ames, like the great biblical patriarch, Abraham, sees the birth of his son in his old age as a kind of miracle, one that redeems his long, desolate years of lonely existence. He shares with his son the utter surprise and joy of fatherhood: "I'd never have believed I'd see a wife of mine doting on a child of mine. It still amazes me every time I think of it"; "Your existence is a delight to us. I hope you never have to long for a child as I did, but oh, what a splendid thing it had been that you came finally, and what a blessing to enjoy you for almost seven years" (52, 156). If the ending of Dante's Divine Comedy can be understood only in relation to the narrator's journey through the depths of hell, so Ames's unspeakable joy in becoming a father in his old age makes sense only in light of his years of waiting and longing without hope, his experience of loss and anguish. His second marriage and the birth of his son, in essence, become revelatory moments within which all of his past, his suffering and pain, and even his death are comprehended and given a new, redemptive meaning. He writes,

I can tell you this, that if I'd married some rosy dame and she had given me ten children and they had each given me ten grandchildren, I'd still leave them all, on Christmas Eve, on the coldest night of the world, and walk a thousand miles just for the sight of your face, and your mother's face. And if I never found you, my comfort would be in that hope, my lonely and singular hope, which could not exist in the whole of Creation except in my heart and in the heart of the Lord. That is just a way of saying I could never thank God sufficiently for the splendor He has... revealed to me in your sweetly ordinary face. (237)

Gilead offers us Ames's beatific vision, attained through his experience of dark, lonely days that make up most of his life. The approach of death intensifies this vision, his recognition of both the fragility and beauty of human life.

Robinson intricately weaves both pain and joy into the fabric of Ames's life. As Ames watches his son laughing in the sunlight, blowing bubbles at Soapy the cat, we, the audience, recognize that the father's experience of joy in this moment remains intimately connected to his earlier encounter with grief in losing his infant daughter, Rebecca, only minutes after her birth forty years ago, and we remember his failing heart that eventually will prevent him from seeing his son grow up to be a man. Ames himself recognizes that it is the experi-
ence of pain and awareness of death that propel him to embrace life's joys more fully.

Here I am trying to be wise, the way a father should be, the way an old pastor certainly should be. I don't know what to say except that the worst misfortune isn't only misfortune—and even as I write those words, I have that infant Rebecca in my mind, the way she looked while I held her, which I seem to remember, because every single time I have christened a baby I have thought of her again. That feeling of a baby's brow against the palm of your hand—how I have loved this life. (56)

It is this intense love of life we repeatedly see in Ames, and his letters express a passionate eagerness for all that life has to offer him.

Ames does not fear death. He imagines at one point that when he dies he would be reunited with his first wife, Louisa, and their daughter Rebecca after forty years of separation, and the famous words of John Donne—"One short sleep past, we wake eternally, / And death shall be no more; death, thou shalt die"—he remembers calmly and assuredly as he sips his morning coffee or as he shelves his books. Ames even thinks of death with a bit of humor. He imagines writing his own funeral sermon to save his best friend and the Presbyterian minister, Boughton, the trouble: "I can do a pretty good imitation of his style. He'll get a laugh out of that" (122). But even this lack of fear of death, or the hope of reunion with loved ones in the next life, does not diminish Ames's immense desire for this world. Robinson shows us the brutal honesty of her character's emotion. "I don't want to be old," Ames admits to his son candidly, "And I certainly don't want to be dead. I don't want to be the tremulous coot you barely remember. I bitterly wish you could know me as a young man... I was very strong, very sound" (141). Death reveals to Ames the infinite potential that life holds, but it also exposes him to the limitations of human existence—that, despite our best efforts and ardent protest, we cannot avoid the fact of our mortality.

When we see through the eyes of Ames's poetic vision, however, we come to understand more clearly why he does not want to give up this life, why he desires to hold on to it so passionately. The loveliness of this world, of persons as well as things, dazzles and captivates Ames.

I feel sometimes as if I were a child who opens its eyes on the world and sees amazing things it will never know any names for and then has to close its eyes again. I know this is all mere apparition compared to what awaits us, but it is only lovelier for that... And I can't believe that, when we have all been changed and put on incorruptibility, we will forget our fantastic condition of mortality and impermanence, the great big dream of procreating and perishing that meant the world to us. In eternity this world will be Troy, I believe, and all that has passed here will be the epic of the universe. (57)

Within Ames's purview, eternity is never afar, and yet, he is wholly present in and aware of the things of this world. It is the recognition of life's impermanence—the approach of death—that sharpens and illuminates Ames's vision of earth's loveliness.

At times Ames feels as if the present world is enough for him. He remembers the pagan heroes of old who confronted life head on, bravely, beautifully, without the hope of the next world, who embraced life passionately with a profound awareness of its impermanence: "I wish I can be one of the old Vikings. I'd have the deacons carry me in and lay me down... and then torch the old ship, and it and I would sail into eternity together" (133). Like the eponymous hero of the Old English poem, Beowulf, who minutes before his death from a fatal wound asks to see the treasures he has won for his people, and takes intense, almost childish delight in the bright, glittering cups and gold, so Ames takes delight in things of this world. "I have been so full of admiration for existence that I have hardly been able to enjoy it properly," he admits at one point (56). But enjoy he does, in the most ordinary moments, like the time he sees a young couple strolling along on a Sunday afternoon.

The sun had come up brilliantly after a heavy rain, and the trees were glistening and very wet. On some impulse, plain exuberance, I suppose, the fellow jumped
up and caught hold of a branch, and a
storm of luminous water came pouring
down on the two of them, and they
laughed and took off running, the girl
sweeping water off her hair and her
dress... It was a beautiful thing to see, like
something from a myth. (27-28)

The elements—light and water—and the sound of
human laughter transfigure themselves into a
sacred image within the landscape of Ames’s
imagination. Existence, for Ames, is the essential
thing, but it is also the holy thing, and the closeness
of death opens up for him, in more intense ways
than before, the sacramental possibilities of life. If
Ames apprehends the astonishing beauty and
mystery of human existence, he also possesses the

capacity to receive it as a gift, one that finally
apprehends and astonishes him.

In William Shakespeare’s play As You Like It, the
melancholic and philosophic character, Jacques,
sees the world as a stage upon which people per­
form: “All the world’s a stage, / And all the men and
women merely players.” Ames does as well, but he
presumes a divine audience. He reflects,

John Calvin says somewhere that each of
us is an actor on a stage and God is the
audience. That metaphor has always inter­
ested me, because it makes us artists of our
behavior, and the reaction of God to us
might be thought of as aesthetic rather than
morally judgmental in the ordinary sense.
How well do we understand our role?
With how much assurance do we perform
it? I suppose Calvin’s God was a
Frenchman, just as mine is a Middle
Westerner of New England extraction.

Well, we all bring such light to bear on
these great matters as we can. I do like
Calvin’s image, though, because it suggests
how God might actually enjoy us. I believe
we think about that far too little. (124)

Ames, through Calvin, offers us a vision of God
who, even as the radical other, remains deeply
invested and involved in the beauty of human
existence. For Shakespeare’s Jacques, the end of
human life is “second childishness and mere
oblivion,” and the world is an enclosed stage
upon which individuals merely strut and perform
without an audience to apprehend the final mean­
ing and telos of this performance. For Ames, how­
ever, the drama, the epic of the earth, would

Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there?
Why then has the health of my poor people not been restored?
O that my head were a spring of water and my eyes a
fountain of tears so that I might weep day and night
for the slain of my poor people.

continue in the next world, but he would under­
stand the succeeding saga only in relation to the
resplendent narrative that will have been
unfolded in this world.

As Ames distills his vision of life, he engages
in a dialogue—not only with his future son but
with his God. It is, in many ways, the face of the
other that allows Ames to understand the mean­
ing of his life most clearly. He comes to recognize
that he cannot know himself as a finished being
without the other, that he needs the face of
another to show him who he is. “I read some­
where,” he reflects, “that a thing that does not
exist in relation to anything else cannot itself be
said to exist” (47). Through this simple and intri­
cate sentence, the novel leads us to recognize that,
ultimately, meaning is revealed within a dialectic:
between past and present, between self and other,
between human beings and God, between time
and eternity, between life and death.
If Ames is pushed to contend with the visage of death, he is also compelled to confront the face of history. *Gilead*, while it is immersed in the particular story of Ames, is also embedded in the larger history of the United States, connecting one man's life with those of his forebears through a series of narratives that unfold the dramatic sweep of American history: the Second Great Awakening, the abolitionist movement, the bloody battle over Kansas foreshadowing the conflict between the North and the South, the Civil War itself, the Reconstruction and its bitter failures, the depression years of the 1890s, and the two world wars of the twentieth century. Ames acknowledges that human beings are ultimately mysterious creatures, but he also believes that they are essentially historical beings, that “we all do live in the ruins of the lives of other generations” (197). Robinson insists on pushing her character into the very centers of history, forcing him, in particular, to grapple with the legacy of the failed Reconstruction, the betrayals that followed the election of Rutherford B. Hayes in 1876, who pulled the Union troops out of the South and left the nation to struggle with the horrendous moral inconsistencies of the “separate but equal” dictum—the Jim Crow laws, the antimiscegenation acts—what historian David Blight has described as the tragic costs of ignoring the imperatives of justice to meet the demands of reunion. These events inexorably confront Ames as he is forced to contend with the painful dilemma of his namesake and the son of his best friend, Jack Boughton, who cannot marry the woman he loves because she is black. The issue of race is not explicitly articulated in the novel, but its imprint is clear, visible, and inescapable.

Ames, like his father, is a believer in peace, but near the end of the novel, he is left to confront the cost of putting the demands of peace above those of justice. The novel's culminating moment occurs when Ames hears the anguished story of his namesake Jack who cannot marry Della, an African American woman, and care for their child because of the bitter legacy of Jim Crow. Ames, in fact, is surprised when he finds out that Della is “colored,” and reflects, “I don’t know how his father would take all this. It surprised me to realize that. I think it is an issue we never discussed in all our years of discussing everything. It just didn’t come up” (221). The repressed memory of race, the racial injustice that both Ames and his father had failed to address in the name of peace, finally comes to haunt him at this moment. If Robinson’s protagonist affirms the profound beauty of human existence throughout the novel, he is, in hearing Jack’s narrative, also impelled to recognize, as did Karl Barth and John Calvin, the theologians Ames greatly admires, the “Gethsemane” of human history (244), the profound fallenness of the human condition. In many respects, Ames is forced to grapple with the tragic web of history in which individuals remain caught.

Robinson ultimately leaves us with hope, despite her character's recognition that he remains implicated in the historical tragedy that confronts his namesake. But it is a measured hope, one that is expressed through the love he feels for the land, one that holds both splendid and tragic memories of the past. Despite his older brother Edward's many attempts to persuade Ames to leave Gilead, he remains. The memory of the place, the beauty of the landscape, Ames cannot imagine leaving because they are part of him. “I love the prairie!” he tells his son.

So often I have seen the dawn come and the light flood over the land and everything turn radiant at once, that word “good” so profoundly affirmed in my soul that I am amazed I should be allowed to witness such a thing... Here on the prairie there is nothing to distract attention from the evening and the morning, nothing on the horizon to abbreviate or to delay. To me it seems rather Christlike to be as unadorned as this place is. (246)

It is a landscape shot through with memories of the past, memories that reveal Ames's fidelity to place. As he looks over the prairie, he hears the heroic and tragic narratives of both his father and grandfather, the ordinary suffering and joys of his parishioners, the voice of his wife, the laughter of his son, the anguished words of his namesake. And the landscape listens as Ames himself tells his own story. It is this beloved land, for
which he feels a physical longing and craving so strong that he writes, "I think sometimes of going into the ground here as a last wild gesture of love" (247). This landscape brings forth memories of the past, helping him to piece together the meaning of his life.

It is not only memory but also history that confronts Ames in Gilead, the brutal realities of the Civil War that divided his family, the legacies of the Reconstruction, the betrayals that have come down to haunt Jack Boughton in the year 1957. Ames's historical consciousness in many respects is linked inextricably to the healing that emerges near the end of the novel. Before Jack leaves for the unknown future, Ames blesses him, affirming his life even while acknowledging the depth of his namesake's pain, the anguish of longing for the family he cherishes but cannot have: "Lord bless John Ames Boughton, this beloved brother and son and husband and father" (241). Love and grief and hope are tenderly woven into these words, a blessing for which Ames admits he "would have gone through seminary and ordination and all the years intervening for that one moment" (242), a blessing uttered out of the depth of his own experience of pain, of longing for wife and child for which he had no hope most of his life.

In the end, Ames searches for hope in the midst of life's profound tragedies, as did the prophet Jeremiah before him many years ago, who cried out in an anguished voice before the ruins of Israel:

Is there no balm in Gilead?  
Is there no physician there?  
Why then has the health of my poor people not been restored?  
O that my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears so that I might weep day and night for the slain of my poor people.  
(Jeremiah 8:22–9:1)

These words convey Jeremiah's sorrow and loss. It is, however, through the experience of mutual suffering with his people that Jeremiah can envision a possibility of hope and healing for Israel. Reverend Ames, like the prophet Jeremiah, recognizes the ruins of a divided nation in the year 1957, the tragic historical circumstance that divides Jack from his wife and son. But Robinson, through her character, leaves us with hope in spite of the tragic repercussions of history. It is this testament of hope that Ames bequeaths to his son, hope that is inscribed in the life he has lived and captured in the final words of his letters: "I'll pray that you grow up a brave man in a brave country. I will pray you find a way to be useful. I'll pray and then I'll sleep" (247).

*All quotations from Marilynne Robinson, Gilead  
(New York: Picador, 2006).

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Readers of this essay may well ask what an academic psychologist is doing invading territory normally reserved for scholars closer to C. S. Lewis’s own field of literary criticism or for theologians and philosophers. The short answer to that question is that Lewis had a lot to say over his lifetime about three topics of interest to me: science, social science, and gender. The longer answer to that question is more autobiographical.

In my Canadian Protestant childhood—as in C. S. Lewis’s, a generation earlier in Protestant Belfast—church was still a vehicle of respectability and upward mobility, perhaps especially for my parents, who were schoolteachers and first-generation urban transplants from humble rural backgrounds. In such a setting, it was expected that teenagers would be confirmed in the church, but it never was made very clear how seriously—other than as a rite of social passage—they should take the professions of faith they were urged to make. Predictably, this led to resistance and accusations of hypocrisy from some adolescents, including myself, as I vacillated between thinking that church membership would demand too much of me and suspecting that it would demand too little. But in the end, like the adolescent C. S. Lewis, “I allowed myself to be prepared for confirmation, and to make my first Communion... eating and drinking to my own condemnation” (Lewis 1955, 130), metaphorically crossing my fingers behind my back while going through the motions of professing faith.

You will not be surprised to learn that such superficial churchianity did not survive—either intellectually or morally—my transition from high school to an elite public university. I had wanted to study psychology ever since my middle-school days, but by the time I entered university in the early 1960s, academic psychology was suffering from what might be called a bad case of physics envy. If moral principles, along with everything else, are merely the result of random processes and purely
impersonal forces, then humans are no more morally accountable for their behaviors than a car is "morally accountable" for having a flat tire. Individuals have no reason to observe any moral strictures, if they can get away with doing otherwise and prefer to do so.

This is not to say that complete moral anarchy had descended on the North American scene by the early 1960s. In practice people are often better than their theories, especially when, from a degree of inertia, they are living off the moral capital of their past. And there was still some sense that even public universities should somehow act in loco parentis so students were not completely abandoned to the sexual meat market or to the binge-drinking and self-promoting ethos that pervades many campuses at the start of the twenty-first century. But things certainly were heading in that direction, and I was to some extent following along.

In the midst of all this, somewhere in my sophomore year, I was persuaded by a friend to read C. S. Lewis's autobiography, Surprised By Joy, and in it I found (among other things) Lewis's account of his own seduction by logical positivism a generation earlier as an Oxford undergraduate. He described how he and many of his unbelieving classmates had taken on an anti-romantic "New Look" and become physical realists, but how his friend Owen Barfield had then forced him to recognize the inconsistencies of such a stance:

[W]e accepted as rock-bottom reality the universe as revealed by the senses. But at the same time we continued to make for certain phenomena of consciousness all the claims that really went with a theistic or idealistic view. We maintained that abstract thought (if obedient to logical rules) gave indisputable truth, that our moral judgment was "valid" and our aesthetic experience not merely pleasing but "valuable"... Barfield convinced me that [this] was inconsistent. If thought were a purely subjective event, these claims would have to be abandoned.... I was therefore compelled to give up realism.... [I had to] admit that mind was no late-coming epiphenomenon, that the whole universe was, in the last resort, mental; that our logic was participation in a cosmic Logos. (Lewis 1955, 166-167)

This still sounds more like Platonic idealism than Christian theism, as Lewis would acknowledge. His fuller embrace of the latter would not occur until about a decade later. Nonetheless, in Surprised By Joy Lewis did expose a central inconsistency of logical positivism and its physicalist cousin, and his argument was to stay with me on some subliminal level for almost a decade, helping eventually to prod me into the embrace of Lewis's God.

The 3:16 Bait-and-Switch

So you can see that as a young person I had reasons, both personal and intellectual, to regard C. S. Lewis as a positive role model for a robust Christianity whose scope included the life of the mind as well as that of piety and individual morality. But I now need to point out that Lewis was also a major stumbling block to my acceptance of Christianity. This was because of the mixed messages he sent about the actual and ideal nature of women, men, and their relationships in his books I read as an undergraduate. One piece that brought me up short comes from Mere Christianity (1952). It is unfortunate that everything Lewis included in that volume was implied by the book's title to be part of "mere" Christianity, because it suggests that only a clear apostate from the faith would ever challenge any of its content. And in that volume Lewis made both an Aristotelian and a Freudian argument for male headship in marriage.

The relations of the family to the outer world—what might be called its foreign policy—must depend, in the last resort, upon the man because he always ought to be, and usually is, much more just to outsiders. A woman is primarily fighting for her own children against the rest of the world... She is the special trustee of their interests. The function of the husband is to see that this natural preference is not given its head. He had the last word in order to protect other people from the intense family patriotism of the wife. (Lewis 1952, 100)
Both Aristotle and Freud held that women were driven more by emotion and less by reason than men. For Aristotle (and his later Thomistic followers in medieval Christendom) all things exist in a hierarchical *scala naturae*, or “ladder of nature,” beginning with inanimate matter and proceeding through plants, animals, humans, and ultimately the “unmoved mover” that gives all objects their purpose. But on the human part of the ladder, women occupied a lower rung: in relation to men they were deemed less rational, unequal, and passive. For Freud also, “anatomy is destiny.” He saw women even in adulthood as having less-developed super-egos than men, and hence less capacity for a disinterested justice that extends beyond the family.

In *The Four Loves*, Lewis explicitly blended Aristotelian and Pagan/Jungian terms in his analysis of sexual activity. “In the act of love,” he wrote, “we are not merely ourselves... In us all the masculinity and femininity of the world, all that is assailant and responsive, are momentarily focused. The man does play the sky-father and the woman the earth-mother; he does play Form and she Matter” (Lewis 1960, 95). This archetypal play-acting—Lewis called it the “Pagan sacrament” of the sex act—was in his view quite harmless and wholesome provided that participants do not forget their first loyalty to God.

A woman who accepted as literally her own this extreme self-surrender would be an idolatress offering to a man what belongs only to God. And a man would have to be the coxcomb of all coxcombs, and indeed a blasphemer, if he arrogated to himself, as the mere person he is, the sort of sovereignty to which for a moment Venus exalts him. But what cannot be lawfully yielded or claimed can be lawfully enacted. Outside this ritual or drama he and she are two immortal souls, two free-born adults, two citizens...

But within this rite or drama they become a god and goddess between whom there is no equality—whose relations are asymmetrical. (Lewis 1960, 95–96)

For the Lewis of *The Four Loves*, this inequality also meant that men and women could come together in affection and erotic love, but not—or at least rarely at the same time—in friendship. The rightness of separate spheres—public and domestic—at least for middle-class men and women, once they are husbands and wives, he largely took for granted. It is bad enough, he wrote, when a leisured, culturally aspiring wife tries to make a down-to-earth, business-like husband share her artistic or literary tastes. It is even worse when a less-educated wife tries to horn in on the intellectual conversations her husband has with his male peers.

She can never really enter the circle because the circle ceases to be itself when she enters it... She may be quite as clever as the men whose evening she has spoiled, or cleverer. But she is not really interested in the same things, or mistress of the same methods... She does not realize that the husband she has succeeded from isolating from his own kind will not be very worth having; she has emasculated him... The sensible women... have other fish to fry. At a mixed party they gravitate to one end of the room and talk women’s talk to each other... It is only the riff-raff of each sex that wants to be incessantly hanging on to the other. (Lewis 1960, 70–72)

My own reaction as a young woman to these passages from some of Lewis’s best-selling works was to feel trapped in a version of what one of my colleagues (a scholar of rhetoric) was later to call “the 3:16 bait-and-switch.” She meant by this that many evangelistic preachers expend much effort first addressing their audiences, in a disarmingly generic fashion, by proclaiming the universal
good news of John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” Then, having successfully drawn women as well as men to Christian commitment by stressing how level the ground is before Christ’s cross, they proceed to emphasize Genesis 3:16: “To the woman [God] said, I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you” (Sterk 184-221).

Though certainly less inclined to such crude proof-texting, it still seemed that what Lewis gave with one hand—the possibility of a Christian intellectual life with like-minded believers—he took away with the other. My mind was almost certainly unfitted for such fellowship by virtue of my sex, according to him, and if it wasn’t, marriage would soon probably even put an end to any intellectual pretensions I might have as one of the fortunate females to have gone on to higher education.

A Residual Platonism

Years later, when I returned to Lewis’s works as a young Christian academic, I confirmed that for much of his life he did indeed promote both an essentialist and a hierarchical view of gender. He regarded stereotypical masculinity and femininity as timeless, metaphysical archetypes, deeper even than biological sex and apparently more significant for the right organization of social life than any “mere humanity” shared by women and men. Moreover, especially in his Preface to Paradise Lost (1942) and in Perelandra (1942) and That Hideous Strength (1945), the second and third novels respectively of his space trilogy, he portrayed God as representing the highest ideal, or form, of masculinity. For the Lewis of the 1940s, humans were so inescapably gendered—in their creation, their fallenness, and the implications of their redemption—that man and woman were almost different species. They were metaphysically opposite sexes, not the “neighboring sexes” that his contemporary, Dorothy L. Sayers, proposed in one of her own essays in the 1940s (Sayers 1975, 37).

Thus in his 1945 science fiction novel, That Hideous Strength, Lewis (speaking through the trilogy’s hero, Elwyn Ransom) asserted that:

Gender is a reality, and a more fundamental reality than sex. Sex is, in fact, merely the adaptation to organic life of a fundamental polarity which divides all created beings. Female sex is simply one of the things that have feminine gender; there are many others. Masculine and feminine meet us on a plane of reality where male and female would be simply meaningless. Masculine is not attenuated male, nor feminine attenuated female. On the contrary, the male and female of organic creatures are rather faint and blurred reflections of masculine and feminine (Lewis 1945, 314-315).

Lewis’s residual Platonism is very evident here. He regarded the eternal, metaphysical “forms” of masculinity and femininity as higher spiritual realities of which material maleness and female-ness are mere “shadows,” a Platonic term Lewis used often to describe the earthly in comparison to the heavenly. And for the younger Lewis, these polarized forms were not merely Platonic opposites; they were also hierarchically ordered.

In his 1948 essay arguing against opening the Anglican priesthood to women, Lewis wrote that a woman can be a competent pastoral visitor, church administrator, or even a preacher. It is not the case that she is “necessarily or even probably
stupider than a man” (Lewis 1970a, 235). What she cannot do, wearing the “feminine uniform,” is sacramentally represent the people of God at the Eucharistic altar, because God represents ultimate masculinity, beside whom everything and everyone is less masculine and more feminine by contrast. Lewis wrote:

To say that men and women are equally eligible for a certain profession is to say that for purposes of that profession their sex is irrelevant... This may be inevitable for our secular life. But in our Christian life we must return to reality... the kind of equality which implies that equals are interchangeable (like counters or identical machines) is, among humans, a legal fiction. It may be a useful legal fiction. But in the church we turn our backs on fictions. One of the ends for which sex was created was to symbolize for us the hidden things of God... [Thus] only one wearing the masculine uniform can... represent the Lord to the Church; for we are all, corporately and individually, feminine to Him. (Lewis 1970a, 237-38)

Here we also see that Lewis’s theology of gender relations was complexly intertwined with a creation theology that, from a Calvinist point of view, is very questionable. From the time of the Protestant Reformation, Lutherans and Calvinists have shared the view that human work—in whatever station—neither debases us to the level of animals nor elevates us to the status of gods. On the contrary, God uses human work both providentially (as God’s means for caring for the earth and each other) and redemptively (as in its challenges and sometimes its burdens we imitate Christ’s suffering in a small way). Calvinists and Lutherans may differ in their views as to how fallen—and therefore how reformable—the various God-ordained spheres of culture and society are: the academy, the marketplace, the political forum, and so on. But both reject the kind of sacred/secular dualism that regards some kinds of occupations as holier than others.

Lewis, despite his Oxford donship and his early history of romantic pastoralism, turns out to be just such a dualist. He drew a sharp line between “secular” and “church” life and was disinclined to give any creational status to what we today would call the structures of civil society, including economics and government. Unlike turn-of-the-century neo-Calvinists such as Abraham Kuyper, and indeed unlike some British Anglicans of the nineteenth century who viewed these arenas of human activity as rooted in creation and no more or less fallen than any other, Lewis saw them mainly as products of the fall. If “secular” arenas of life are at best secondary goods and at worst products of the fall that merely restrain evil rather than accomplish anything positive, Christians should ignore as much as possible those social institutions that we do not find ourselves working in (as Lewis so proudly claimed to ignore politics by valuing nothing in newspapers except the crossword puzzle), bloom where we are planted, with however much suffering that station entails, and urge others to do the same. That, for Lewis, was how Christians achieve sanctification and practice agapic love.

Escaping the Sword between the Sexes

Lewis’s views on gender and class relations certainly were not unique for his era, even though they were packaged and popularized as “merely” Christian more successfully than most. And yet those views changed as he grew older, and those changes are visible not only in his letters but in his later and much less-read works. In the 1950s, Lewis ruefully acknowledged what he called his “expository demon”—that is, his tendency to make characters in his earlier adult fiction sound like C. S. Lewis delivering a sermon—and he hoped that writing children’s stories would discipline him against this temptation (Lewis 1975, 22–34). In Till We Have Faces (1956), the expository demon is likewise subdued. Even more, “the misogyny of some of Lewis’s earlier works seems to be reversed in this novel told from a woman’s perspective” (Hannay 216). Its story is a recasting of the classical myth of Cupid and Psyche which, in Lewis’s adaptation, focuses on the strong woman ruler of a small nation. She is a person struggling against idolatry and toward belief in a way that parallels Lewis’s own faith journey and the resentment it inspired in some of his colleagues and family members.
This period also coincided with Lewis's work on *The Discarded Image* (1964), an introduction to medieval and Renaissance literature. It is an engaging, detailed portrait of the medieval worldview and one that clearly illustrates its hierarchical cosmology, but with one significant difference. In a volume where one would expect Lewis, given his earlier writings, to include an exposition of gender hierarchy in the Aristotelian ladder of nature and its descendent, the medieval "great chain of being," there is not a word on this topic. Indeed, his only explicit mention of gender relations was a leveling one, when he challenged the modern illusion that medieval persons of both sexes led static lives. On the contrary, Lewis wrote, "Kings, armies, prelates, diplomats, merchants and wandering scholars were continually on the move. Thanks to the popularity of pilgrimages, even women, and women of the middle class, went far afield; witness the Wife of Bath [in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*] and Margery Kempe" (Lewis 1964, 143). Kempe was a fifteenth-century religious mystic who was also married and the mother of fourteen children.

Most telling is his reflection on his wife's death, *A Grief Observed* (1961). It was written when Joy Davidman—an award-winning American poet and writer—died of cancer in 1960 after just four years of marriage to Lewis. The start of Lewis's friendship with Davidman (in the early days of which he once referred to her as "our queer, Jewish, ex-Communist American convert..."

In Lewis 2007, 450) coincided with his 1954 move from Oxford to a professorial chair at Cambridge. This move coincided with his first serious bout of writer's block. It was due largely to Joy Davidman's help and inspiration that he eventually wrote *Till We Have Faces*, which he then dedicated to her. Lewis's biographer and former student, George Sayer, who knew them both well, noted that "[h]er part in the book, and there is so much that she can almost be called its joint author, put him very much in her debt. She stimulated and helped him to such an extent that he began to feel that he could hardly write without her" (Sayer 220).

"There is," Lewis wrote in *A Grief Observed*, "hidden or flaunted, a sword between the sexes till an entire marriage reconciles them" (Lewis 1961, 40). In a pointed rejection of his earlier insistence that gender, as a spiritual ideal, is a more fundamental reality than sex, Lewis concluded:

> It is arrogance in us [men] to call frankness, fairness and chivalry "masculine" when we see them in a woman; it is arrogance in them [women] to describe a man's sensitiveness or tact or tenderness as "feminine." But also what poor, warped fragments of humanity most mere men and mere women must be to make the implications of that arrogance plausible. Marriage heals this. Jointly the two become fully human. "In the image of God created he them." Thus, by a paradox, this carnival of sexuality leads us out beyond our sexes. (Lewis 1961, 40–41).

As he struggled with his grief and reflected on what he had learned from his short-lived marriage, Lewis reversed his earlier assumptions about gender hierarchy as well as his view that women and men could not be both friends and lovers at the same time:

> A good wife contains so many persons in herself. What was [Joy] not to me? She was my daughter and my mother, my pupil and my teacher, my subject and my sovereign; and always, holding these all in solution, my trusty comrade, friend, shipmate, fellow soldier. My mistress, but at the same time all that any man friend (and I have had good ones) has ever been to
me... Solomon calls his bride Sister. Could a woman be a complete wife unless, for a moment, in one particular mood, a man felt almost inclined to call her Brother? (Lewis 1961, 39-40)

Clearly Lewis's marriage in his mid-fifties to a gifted and feisty woman helped to advance changes in his thinking about gender relations. And, in fact, Lewis was always a better man than his theories in his actual relationships with women, especially those who, like himself, were intellectuals and serious Christians. I note in passing his long association with Stella Aldwicke, pastoral advisor to the women students of Somerville College. He also corresponded for twenty-five years with an Anglo-Catholic nun, the theologian Sister Penelope Lawson (whom he referred to as his "elder sister" in the faith), and for the last fifteen years of his life had a mutually-mentoring relationship with the celebrated and much-honored English poet Ruth Pitter.

C. S. Lewis and Dorothy Sayers

But Lewis had an equally long relationship with a woman colleague who was even closer to him in terms of age, background, education, intellectual interests, and Christian writing projects. That woman was Dorothy Leigh Sayers, whom Lewis once described as "the first person of importance who ever wrote me a fan-letter" (Lewis 2007, 1400). Sayers, like Lewis, grew up in the shadow of an Anglican rectory. By the time of their first correspondence in 1942 she was, like Lewis, an Oxford MA. Both had won scholarships to Oxford as undergraduates: Sayers to Somerville College in 1912, and Lewis to University College in 1916. She was also, like Lewis, a published poet, author of several novels in a popular new genre (detective novels in her case, science fiction in Lewis's), and a BBC broadcaster recruited to help strengthen Christian faith in the dark days of World War Two (doing radio drama in her case, popular theological talks in Lewis's). Sayers also had written and directed two plays for the Canterbury Cathedral arts festival, published essays on Christian doctrine and creativity, and was soon to become a distinguished translator of Dante's Divine Comedy from Italian into English verse.

Though most of their correspondence was of a scholarly, literary-critical nature, some of it also concerned gender relations. For example, in 1948, when Lewis became exercised about the possible ordination of women in the Anglican church, he tried to persuade Sayers—a well-known Christian author of longer standing than he—to join him in protest (Lewis 2004b, 860). However, Lewis's attempt to co-opt this famous woman writer backfired. Though Sayers was, if anything, even more Anglo-Catholic in her leanings than Lewis, she politely declined to "give tongue" in the debate over women's ordination. She agreed that it might "erect a new and totally unnecessary barrier between [Anglicans] and the rest of Catholic Christendom," but she pointed out that it would also decrease differences with those Protestant free churches that emphasized preaching more than the sacrament of communion (Sayers quoted in Reynolds 359).

In some ways it would be too simple to call Sayers a feminist. Like Lewis, she had too robust a view of the human capacity for sin to romanticize any class or gender group just because it had a history of marginalization. But unlike the Lewis of the 1940s, she believed gender was an incidental, not an essential trait, and that women and men's common humanity was more fundamental than any differences between them. Moreover, despite sharing a common background with Lewis in terms of class and intellectual brilliance, Sayers went through a species of baptism by fire at Oxford that Lewis, as a privileged male student and later an Oxford don, was quite incapable of understanding at the time. It was only two years before Sayers went to Oxford in 1912 that the university officially had recognized the presence of women in its midst. When Sayers arrived in 1912, women still could not receive Oxford degrees, even after meeting all the qualifications and (not infrequently) outperforming men in the same programs. Only in 1920, when Oxford degrees were retrospectively opened up to females, did Dorothy Sayers and several hundred other women return to the university to receive their long-denied degrees.

In 1927 the faculty and administrators at Oxford voted to limit indefinitely the number of women students who could be admitted and to prohibit the establishment of any more women's
colleges. Lewis supported this proposal (Lewis 2004a, 702-3). Though Lewis and Sayers did not know each other at this time, her reaction to Oxford's retrograde move was pretty clear. Her most complex detective novel (and her own favorite) was *Gaudy Night*, which she set in a fictitious Oxford women's college in the mid-1930s. The plot of the novel turns on the resentment that tradition-bound male academics—and their female supporters—harbor towards women scholars whose commitment to intellectual integrity will not be compromised by submission to social norms about women's "natural calling" to support and defer to men, no matter what they do (Sayers 1935). Later, in her 1946 essay "The Human-Not-Quite-Human," she mocked the view (going as far back as Aristotle) that women are not complete persons:

[People believe women] lie when they say they have human needs: warm and decent clothing; comfort on the bus; interests directed immediately to God and his universe, not intermediately through any child of man. They are [either] far above man to inspire him, far beneath him to corrupt him; they have feminine minds and feminine natures, but their mind is not one with their nature like the minds of men; they have no human mind and no human nature... They are "the opposite sex"—(though why 'opposite' I do not know; what is the 'neighbouring sex'?). (Sayers 1975, 32)

"I do not know what women as women want," Sayers declared in a 1938 lecture. "But as human beings they want, my good man, exactly what you want yourselves: interesting occupation, reasonable freedom for their pleasures, and a sufficient emotional outlet. What form the occupation, the pleasures, the emotional outlet may take depends entirely on the individual. You know that this is so with yourselves—why will you not believe that it is so with us?" (Sayers 1975, 17-36, quotation 32).

**Gender and Modern Social Science**

C. S. Lewis was no fan of the emerging social sciences. He saw practitioners of the social sciences mainly as lackeys of technologically-minded natural scientists, bent on reducing individual freedom and moral accountability to mere epiphenomena of natural processes (See Lewis 1943 and 1970b). And not surprisingly (given his passion for gender-essentialist archetypes), aside from a qualified appreciation of some aspects of Freudian psychoanalysis (See Lewis 1952 (Book III, Chapter 4) and 1969). "Carl Jung was the only philosopher [sic] of the Viennese school for whose work [Lewis] had much respect" (Sayer 102).

But the social sciences concerned with the psychology of gender have since shown that Sayers was right, and Lewis and Jung were wrong: women and men are not opposite sexes but neighboring sexes—and very close neighbors indeed. There are, it turns out, virtually no large, consistent sex differences in any psychological traits and behaviors, even when we consider the usual stereotypical suspects: that men are more aggressive, or just, or rational than women, and women are more empathic, verbal, or nurturing than men. When differences are found, they are always average—not absolute—differences. And in virtually all cases the small, average—and often decreasing—difference between the sexes is greatly exceeded by the amount of variability on that trait within members of each sex. Most of the "bell curves" for
women and men (showing the distribution of a given psychological trait or behavior) overlap almost completely. So it is naïve at best (and deceptive at worst) to make even average—let alone absolute—pronouncements about essential archetypes in either sex when there is much more variability within than between the sexes on all the trait and behavior measures for which we have abundant data. This criticism applies as much to C. S. Lewis and Carl Jung as it does to their currently most visible descendents, John Gray, who continues to claim (with no systematic empirical warrant) that men are from Mars and women are from Venus (Gray 1992).

And what about Lewis’s claims about the overriding masculinity of God? Even the late Carl Henry (a theologian with impeccable credentials as a conservative evangelical) noted a quarter of a century ago that:

Masculine and feminine elements are excluded from both the Old Testament and New Testament doctrine of deity. The God of the Bible is a sexless God. When Scripture speaks of God as “he” the pronoun is primarily personal (generic) rather than masculine (specific); it emphasizes God’s personal nature—and, in turn, that of the Father, Son and Spirit as Trinitarian distinctions in contrast to impersonal entities... Biblical religion is quite uninterested in any discussion of God’s masculinity or femininity... Scripture does not depict God either as ontologically masculine or feminine. (Henry 1982, 159–60)

However well-intentioned, attempts to read a kind of mystical gendering into God—whether stereotypically masculine, feminine, or both—reflect not so much careful biblical theology as “the long arm of Paganism” (Martin 11). For it is pagan worldviews, the Jewish commentator Nahum Sarna reminds us, that are “unable to conceive of any primal creative force other than in terms of sex... [In Paganism] the sex element existed before the cosmos came into being and all the gods themselves were creatures of sex. On the other hand, the Creator in Genesis is uniquely without any female counterpart, and the very association of sex with God is utterly alien to the religion of the Bible” (Sarna 76).

And if the God of creation does not privilege maleness or stereotypical masculinity, neither did the Lord of redemption. Sayers’s response to the cultural assumption that women were human-not-quite-human has become rightly famous:

Perhaps it is no wonder that women were first at the Cradle and last at the Cross. They had never known a man like this Man—there never has been such another. A prophet and teacher who never nagged at them, never flattered or coaxed or patronised; who never made arch jokes about them, never treated them either as “The women, God help us!” or “The ladies, God bless them!; who rebuked without querulousness and praised without condescension; who took their questions and arguments seriously; who never mapped out their sphere for them, never urged them to be feminine or jeered at them for being female; who had no axe to grind or no uneasy male dignity to defend; who took them as he found them and was completely unself-conscious. There is not act, no sermon, no parable in the whole Gospel which borrows its pungency from female perversity; nobody could possibly guess from the words and deeds of Jesus that there was anything “funny” about women’s nature. (Sayers 1975, 46)

It is quite likely that Lewis’s changing views on gender owed something to the intellectual and Christian ties that he forged with Dorothy L. Sayers. And indeed, in 1955—two years before her death, Lewis confessed to Sayers that he had only “dimly realised that the old-fashioned way... of talking to all young women was [very] like an adult way of talking to young boys. It explains,” he wrote, “not only why some women grew up vapid, but also why others grew us (if we may coin the word) viricidal [i.e., wanting to kill men]” (Lewis 2007, 676; Lewis’s emphasis). The Lewis who in his younger years so adamantly had defended the doctrine of gender essentialism was beginning to acknowledge the extent to which
gendered behavior is socially conditioned. In another letter that same year, he expressed a concern to Sayers that some of the first illustrations for the *Narnia Chronicles* were a bit too effeminate. "I don't like either the ultra feminine or the ultra masculine," he added. "I prefer people" (Lewis 2007, 639; Lewis's emphasis).

Dorothy Sayers surely must have rejoiced to read this declaration. Many of Lewis's later readers, including myself, wish that his shift on this issue had occurred earlier and found its way into his better-selling apologetic works and his novels for children and adults. But better late than never. And it would be better still if those who keep trying to turn C. S. Lewis into an icon for traditionalist views on gender essentialism and gender hierarchy would stop mining his earlier works for isolated proof-texts and instead read what he wrote at every stage of his life.

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SEVEN MORE PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM

The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure buried in a field.

The Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant searching.

The Kingdom of Heaven is like a net thrown into the sea.

(Matthew 13:44-46)

The Kingdom of Heaven is like the room in your dream and outside is a lake so blue and cold you know something big is about to happen. Then you wake up and have your coffee and don’t think about the dream again.

*

The Kingdom of Heaven is like writing fast and not leaving anything out and the same idea that always forms starts to form again. You know it’s just an idea, you know you’re just floating on the surface of Reason, but underneath the sentences you feel something big pushing up from the dark.

*

The Kingdom of Heaven is like when you’re walking on the docks and your best friend from high school sees you a hundred yards away and even after all these years knows it’s you. You have the same walk, he says. You lean the same way. All this time this man was alive and you were, too, and you didn’t think about each other for decades, and now he takes you in his boat to the other side of the lake and his wife is making jello and the cabin is full of pots and pans and dog-eared books he has read and reread just like you. All those cabins in the trees! All those roads winding out to highways and cities you’ve never been to, with offices and neighborhoods and parks where kids are throwing footballs.
The Kingdom of Heaven is like the spine, which you also never think of. Most of the time you don’t even know you have one, until one day the doctor explains how discs darken as you get further down what for all the world looks like a lobster tail. Segmented. Curving left. And though the evidence is blurry and gray, like those fuzzy photographs of UFO’s that always turn out to be dishes, suddenly you know without a doubt this one is true. This is what you carry, this slippery fulcrum, this meaty device.

Walking up the little valley. Morning. Heavy dew. Suddenly a field of spiders, a field of webs, every thistle strung like a racket.

The Kingdom of Heaven is like the ecology of your yard. All these animals are scurrying around and building nests and entering into all these conflicts and alliances just like in a Walt Disney movie or a book by E. B. White. And you never see them usually, maybe a squirrel now and then, a bird, but you never give them a moment’s thought, never think about them at all, until one morning you walk out the door to get the paper and nearly step on a headless mouse, eviscerated, heart and lungs spilling from the breast. Another gift from the cats, another sign of prowess.

Those shiny viscera on the welcome mat. Those intricate systems, inside out. That dark red heart, like a coat of arms.

Christopher Anderson
film

Your Enemy, Yourself

When will we ever learn?

Pete Seeger
“Where Have All the Flowers Gone?”

As I write, the dying continues in Iraq at an accelerated pace. President George W. Bush’s advisors carefully chose their word “surge” as an alternative to the widely employed and ultimately futile “escalation” of the War in Vietnam in the mid and late 1960s. But the term “surge” now drips with unintended irony as the security for civilian and soldier alike has retreated and the dying has increased. Nearly 3,600 Americans have died since the American invasion in March of 2003, at a rate through the first four months of 2007 fifty-three percent higher than 2006. The death toll in the first two months of the war’s fifth year has registered at a pace that would make year five the bloodiest yet.

In the run up to the war, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and Vice President Dick Cheney told us we would be greeted as liberators, that our mission, in addition to defusing non-existent weapons of mass destruction, was to bring freedom to the Iraqi people. What we have brought, more certainly, is death in staggering numbers. In response to the attacks of September 11, 2001, the Bush administration launched a “war on terror.” Some three thousand innocent Americans died on 9/11. The Old Testament formula of “an eye for an eye” was invoked precisely to prevent what has happened in Iraq. Estimates of civilian deaths in Iraq vary greatly. Our president admits to “perhaps thirty thousand” (ten eyes for an eye). Outside his administration, conservative figures suggest at least twice that number, and some calculations place the number at well over a half million.

Historians debate the necessity of individual wars, and in such analysis, for instance, the American Civil War finds more justification than the Spanish American War. World War I was inexcusable folly while the unavoidable World War II is widely judged “the good war.” Wars are won and lost in the aggregate and not always as a direct result of the fighting within them. The individual battle and all the blood shed within it are seldom pivotal, Gettysburg perhaps excepted along most certainly with Stalingrad and the Normandy invasion on D-Day. But however wars and their battles are assessed, they have in common the horror and, as Joseph Heller railed against in Catch 22, the randomness of the dying. The individual death seldom accomplishes much of anything save the waste of something inexpressibly precious. In short, though wars are justified in most every way imaginable, what they bring about most reliably is death—death even among those in uniform we are entirely right to term innocent.

And that’s just the point Clint Eastwood has endeavored to make in his two most recent films released within months of each other late last year. In fact, though they were written by different screenwriters and performed in different languages, because Flags of Our Fathers and Letters from Iwo Jima employ overlapping footage of the same scenes and a purposefully comparable washed out visual style approaching black and white, they might well be regarded not as two separate films but rather as one divided in two, the same story told from different vantage points. This strategy of insisting on the humanity of the men on both sides of the firing line is not unique. Randall Wallace’s We Were Soldiers attempts something similar with regard to the first major American battle in Vietnam, as does Christian Carion’s Joyeux Noel, an account of a Christmas ceasefire on the Western Front during World War I. But I know of nothing else that approaches the sweep of what Eastwood accomplishes in these two sobering, heartbreaking, and enduringly instructive films.
Pawns of War

It is unfortunate that the publicity team promoting *Flags of Our Fathers* seized a bite of dialogue for the film’s catchphrase. The trailers told us that, sometimes, a single photograph can win or lose a war. That line is uttered early on in this sad, searing, brutal film, but it isn’t ever convincing and it barely registers among the film’s concerns. The specific photograph at issue is Joe Rosenthal’s Pulitzer-Prize-winning shot of six American service men raising the Stars and Stripes over Iwo Jima’s blood-soaked Mt. Suribachi on 23 February 1945. That image was used subsequently in recruiting and fund-raising campaigns and memorialized in marble statues. But Eastwood is at considerable pains to remind us that no picture won World War II or any battle within it. Science, technology, and industrial might made Americans victorious in World War II. But victory in the individual battles was purchased with the blood of the men who fought them, almost always young men barely out of high school, who gave up their lives or their limbs or their life-long peace of mind for terribly complicated reasons including duty and honor and patriotism but extensively having to do with obedience. They stormed onto beaches or rushed up mountains into harm’s way because they were told to do so by someone in authority, someone who infrequently took a comparable personal risk.

Written by William Broyles Jr. and Paul Haggis and based on the book by James Bradley and Ron Powers, *Flags of Our Fathers* is the story of the men in Rosenthal’s photograph and what happened to them after the click of a shutter preserved their faceless images for the propaganda machine of their own time and the history books to come. War machines need heroes, and as the travesty of official lies concerning the “friendly-fire” death of former National Football League star Pat Tillman in Afghanistan illustrates, war machine propaganda will create heroes if neces-
sary. And manipulative propaganda is a central concern in this film. Though rumors that Rosenthal's snapshot was staged are unfounded, almost everything the photo appears to communicate is tinged with irony. The picture would seem to represent victory and undaunted courage, but it actually captured neither. It was taken on the fifth day of a battle for Iwo Jima that would continue on for another grisly five weeks. And the flag the soldiers planted was the second, a reenactment, a replacement for the original, which was ordered taken down as a souvenir for a ranking officer who had little to do with its planting. The men were not under fire at the time either flag was flown. But neither was victory at hand, and three of the six soldiers would lay down their lives in the weeks immediately ahead. The other three were whisked home to spearhead a publicity campaign arising out of the photograph, but all felt uncomfortable about being utilized in this fashion, each suffering some survivor's guilt and embarrassment over finding themselves in the rear when the men with whom they served were still facing the enemy in the field.

The three survivors were navy medical corpsman John "Doc" Bradley (Ryan Phillippe) and marines Rene Gagnon (Jesse Bradford) and Ira Hayes (Adam Beach). In the film, this trio is subjected to a series of indignities as they go about their assignment of helping promote investment in war bonds. Gagnon adapts to the role most comfortably. Bradley does his duty with the resolve of Sisyphus rolling his rock up hill. But Hayes falls apart and spends most of his time in a teary, alcoholic fog. Though Bradley's story is the focal one, Hayes's is the more unsettling and traumatic (and the subject of the 1961 film The Outsider, starring Tony Curtis). A Pima Indian, Hayes was forced to endure racial stereotyping and discrimination, even while being hailed as a hero.

Stateside, all these young men are asked to dress once again in battle gear and climb a papier-mâché "mountain" to reenact their famous flag-planting "heroics" before screaming fans at a Soldier's Field football game in Chicago, or to speak at a banquet where dessert is an ice-cream sculpture in the shape of Rosenthal's photograph. The experience is so dispiriting that the soldiers never speak of it afterwards. Doc Bradley's son James (Tom McCarthy) learns what his father went through only after his father's death five decades later.

Flags of Our Fathers is structured as a montage. The film cuts back and forth in time from the three survivors on their fundraising tour to the withering fight for Iwo Jima with scenes of appalling violence reminiscent of those in Steven Spielberg's Saving Private Ryan. As did Spielberg's, Eastwood's camera emphasizes the arbitrary nature of the dying. The machine gunners spray the beaches with their bullets and who is hit and who is missed has nothing to do with the attacking soldiers' actions. The brave and the swift are just as likely to die as the terrified and the slow. The dead and the wounded and the unharmed all do exactly the same thing.
before the bullets destroy their lives, maim them, or fortunately fly by, most likely to strike someone else.

Eventually, due to superior firepower from the armada offshore and a nearly four to one American numerical advantage (seventy-seven thousand to about twenty-two thousand), first Mt. Suribachi and eventually the entire seven square mile island is taken. And in that process, though they both resolutely reject being designated "heroes," Bradley and Hayes, in particular, really do exhibit courage under fire. Though like all the men in the Iwo Jima assault and, in fact, all the men sent into the front lines of wars throughout history, they are mere human cogs in a massive military machine. They may have families who love them and girlfriends or wives waiting for them back home, but to those who command them they are pawns in a live chess match. They are expendable in the service of a greater objective. Eastwood drives this point home repeatedly. Using young, not-well-known actors, he makes his characters barely distinguishable, one from the next. Early on, when a marine falls overboard as the American armada sails toward Iwo Jima's black sands, no ship slows or circles back, no lifeboat is dispatched to rescue him. The navy has more important concerns than one man desperately treading water in the Pacific brine.

Flags of Our Fathers is not an antiwar film in the direct political way Apocalypse Now is an antiwar film. In fact, Flags of Our Fathers doesn't address the larger politics of war at all. It doesn't invoke Pearl Harbor or the Bataan Death March. It pointedly does, however, take a very jaundiced view of how soldiers are regarded by the military institutions they serve. The film doesn't suggest that it might actually be otherwise, but it does insist that the dignity and even the survival of its individual troops are low among military priorities. And that's something for us all to bear in mind on any occasion that as a nation we ask our sons, and now our daughters too, to take up arms on our behalf.

Negative Image

In war as captured by the live camera or staged for a cinematic reenactment, men dig trenches or fox holes, set up defense perimeters, string camouflage, and check their weapons. When the time comes, they advance on their enemy, firing round after round and lobbing grenades, or they hold their position when advanced upon, strafing their attackers with machine-gun fire or pounding them with mortar shells. Everywhere they die: ripped apart by bullets or shrapnel, blown up by explosions, seared with engulfing flame.

Such is war as humankind has practiced it in one form or another for 150 years, and such is the action of war cinema as we commonly encounter it, almost always told from "our" point of view, our American point of view in American movies. But in Letters from Iwo Jima, written by Iris Yamashita, Eastwood has dared to make a war movie that situates us with "them" and shows us war from the other side, where, surprise, it is just as horrible, just as heartbreaking, and ever so damned pointless. By the time the Americans invaded the tiny barren island in February 1945, the outcome of World War II was no longer really in doubt. The Japanese fought on, but they did so out of the suicidal national pride of their leaders, not, at least for the honest and realistic among them, in continuing hopes of victory. The Americans wanted Iwo Jima as an airbase for bombing raids on the Japanese mainland, but the war would not have turned out differently had the Americans opted for some other strategy. Meanwhile, the Japanese commanders on Iwo Jima had little expectation of repelling the invaders, and had they simply surrendered without firing a shot they barely would have hastened their nation's ultimate defeat. Instead, the Japanese fought fiercely and extracted an enormous price in American blood. The invasion cost the lives of seven thousand marines, one-third of all marines who died in both theaters of World War II. The Japanese defenders, of course, fighting without air support or the slimmest hopes of reinforcement, paid dearly. Their orders from Tokyo were to fight to the death, and they did. Less than five percent of their troops, approximately one thousand men, mostly wounded, survived.

History, of course, is written by the victors. Had Japan won the war, the ferocious defenders of Iwo Jima would have been regarded as heroes akin to the Spartans at Thermopylae. Instead, gen-
eral American history has painted the Japanese defenders as fanatical adherents to a nationalistic cult that expected death as a requisite of defeat. Such elements certainly existed within Japanese culture at the time, as exemplified by the Kamikaze and the hari-kari practiced by certain defeated military commanders. And in *Letters from Iwo Jima*, this attitude is portrayed by Colonel Adachi (Toshi Toda) who orders his men to grenade themselves when they cannot hold Mt. Suribachi in the early days of the battle.

But Eastwood’s overall depiction of the Japanese defenders is appropriately multidimensional. Though they may be treated as pawns, armies made up of human beings who emerge from families and are cared for by loved ones and friends. We meet an array of such individuals here. Most endearing is Saigo (Kazunari Ninomiya), a baker with a cherished wife and a baby daughter he’s never seen. Saigo is a simple man proud of his profession and devoted to his family. He wants nothing but to grow old with his wife and enjoy the rearing of his progeny. Saigo resents that he has been sent to a desolate island to toil on doomed fortifications, then to kill Americans with whom he has no quarrel and ultimately to die at their hands or surviving that, should he refuse to take his own life, from the bullet of a Japanese superior.

The nobleman Colonel Nishi (Tsuyoshi Ihara) offers a dramatic contrast to Saigo. Nishi’s family is wealthy and well-connected. He has traveled widely and won a medal in the 1932 Olympics in Los Angeles. He counts Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks among his acquaintances. And when the platoon he leads captures an American GI, he insists that the man be treated humanely. Unlike Saigo, Nishi could have avoided service at Iwo Jima. He wasn’t drafted; he volunteered. And he did so knowing his command there likely would take his life.

Private Shimizu (Ryo Kase) provides another contrast still. Shimizu was trained in the stern Kempeitai, the military police corps, but eventually was kicked out for having too soft a heart. Saigo thinks Shimizu is a spy sent to inform on men who complain of their circumstances and fate. And such is the indoctrination Shimizu has endured that he thinks he *should* be such a man, but such is his instinctive resistance to his training that he can’t bring himself to be the kind of man his superiors desire.

For the most complex of the characters we encounter is the island’s chief commander General Kuribayashi (Ken Watanabe). Like Saigo, Kuribayashi is devoted to his wife and family, and he suffers touchingly mundane regrets over such issues as failing to finish a kitchen remodeling project before leaving for Iwo Jima. Like Saigo, Kuribayashi writes letters to his wife almost every day, even when little likelihood remains that they ever will be delivered. But the general is a man endowed with the power of command. He is a career officer who trained for a time with the American cavalry, and he is a brilliant military strategist. He is also a modern man, appalled by cruel military authority that treats its infantry like draft animals to be whipped into obedience rather than inspired and led. Like Saigo and Nishi, he feels affection rather than animosity toward the Americans.

But Kuribayashi’s sense of military duty requires that he carry out his orders to the best of his ability. Shortly after taking command, he concludes that he cannot hold Iwo Jima against the kind of attack the Americans are sure to mount. His troops cannot win. But perhaps if he plans carefully enough and if his men fight hard enough, he can extract so heavy a price that the Americans will lose heart before invading his homeland. Eastwood nowhere raises this issue—the Americans’ conviction that on their own soil the Japanese will fight them street to street, house to house—but those familiar with what comes next can’t help but connect the stand at Iwo Jima first to the devastating firebombing campaign that, as Errol Morris points out in *Fog of War*, wiped out a majority of the civilian populations in sixty-seven cities, many as large as Cleveland,
Hiroshima and Nagasaki, two doomed places that in eye blinks of fire surrendered more than two-hundred thousand souls to atomic weapons.

Thus in Kuribayashi, Eastwood finds a tragic paradox. The general is a good man who has devoted his life to a sorry business. He is smart, and he is brave. He is loyal and kind. He is a visionary. And he is utterly blind. He sustains a battle he cannot win in a war he knows his country will surely lose. He stops the insane process of having men kill themselves rather than endure defeat. But he leads his men to certain death in service of an unexamined ideal. Eastwood is attracted to the valor and honor of men like Kuribayashi who are willing to sacrifice for things greater than self, but in the service of war, they waste the very qualities he admires.

The Lessons of War

These are attitudes, one gathers, that Clint Eastwood applies to the current president of the United States. Eastwood’s politics are fascinating to anyone who has interviewed him or read his public commentary. Though he denounces all efforts to read a social or political agenda into any of his pictures, for the last two decades his films have won more plaudits from the left than from the right. Earlier, however, he was excoriated by liberals as fascistic for his violent and vengeful Dirty Harry movies of the 1970s and 1980s. And he remains a registered Republican and a fan of Ronald Reagan. He says he admires George W. Bush’s determination to govern by principle rather than by poll. But he has opposed the war in Iraq from the outset.

Eastwood acknowledges that Flags of Our Fathers and Letters from Iwo Jima are antiwar films, though he argues they both proceeded from his interest in character rather than overarching theme. And that, presumably, is why Eastwood has opposed the war in Iraq. People interest him, and wars are very bad for the people involved in them. The Bush administration could learn a great deal from the way Eastwood looks at the world in these two films. We invaded Iraq with very little understanding of the people who live there. Many in the Bush administration were ignorant of the fundamentals of Islam and the deep animosities harbored toward one another by the Sunnis and the Shiites. This is all the more mysterious because the fear of intractable civil war is exactly what kept the first President Bush from toppling Saddam Hussein in 1991.

Unlike his father, the current President Bush seemed to believe that defeating Saddam’s army and taking Baghdad meant the end of hostilities, and thus his 2 May 2003, speech announcing mission accomplished and the end of “major combat operations.” But Bush did not know his enemy, did not know his enemy’s culture, and has squandered his presidency as a result of this ignorance. Since Bush’s victory speech, more than 3,400 American soldiers and at least twenty times (maybe two hundred times) as many Iraqis have died in the Second Gulf War, a war America started without provocation and ultimately without excuse. Eastwood’s assessment of General Kuribayashi should be instructive. The general can be praised for his loyalty and honor, but history can judge him only as lacking the courage to save the lives of his men and those who opposed them. They died for no purpose whatsoever. Bush’s loyalty is beyond question, but even if we grant him honor we cannot imagine a historical judgment any more positive than Kuribayashi’s. He doesn’t seem to know what Eastwood does, that the fallen in Iraq aren’t simply numbers on a disappointing chart chronicling a foreign policy gone awry; they are once full, robust lives thrown away for a poor idea. They are his legacy. They are his eternal shame.

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THE FLAG
—Yu Chiwhan

Silent hubbub,
Hanky of permanent longing
Being waved toward the green sea,
A pure heart rippling like a brook in the breeze—
O crown of that straight upright flagpole called ideology,
Captive egret wings flapping against the stake,
Who was the first one
Who hung our sad, anguished soul
Against the sky?

Duane Vorhees
rereading old books
Tom Brokaw’s *The Greatest Generation*

Back in the mid-1990s, during an academic year in Kobe, Japan, one of my tasks was teaching a course on American literature of World War II. We managed to couple a reading of John Hersey’s *Hiroshima* with a field trip to Hiroshima’s majestic Peace Park, the location of the detonation of the first atomic weapon deployed in warfare. I had read many things about this event and knew quite a lot about it but somehow had never managed to visit the park. I did not expect the visit to be very emotional, knowing as much about the facts as I did. I would simply deliver a brief talk at the site and we would move on to other things.

My experience at Peace Park was much different than I expected. A solemn attitude pervaded the site. Japanese schoolchildren, wearing their white and blue school uniforms, paraded silently through the park in large groups of fifty or a hundred. It reminded me that on a certain Monday morning in August 1945, many thousands of schoolchildren much like them were also walking the streets of Hiroshima. At certain sites within the park, strings of thousands of paper cranes were layered one upon the other in huge, colorful piles, most brought to the park by those schoolchildren. They had constructed the cranes themselves, by hand, as memorials for those killed fifty years earlier in the explosions. Peering down over the entire park was the skeleton of the one lone building that survived the blast. The museum was filled with memorabilia and historical facts, but to this day it is the simplest reminders, such as charred shoes or twisted bicycles recovered from the bomb blast, that I recall the most.

Needless to say, despite my initially “rational” approach to the visit with my students, I found myself quite overwhelmed by the powerful spirits hovering around Peace Park in Hiroshima.

Even much more dramatically, Tom Brokaw’s life changed forever, he claims, when in 1984 he covered the fortieth anniversary of the Allied invasion of France. “As I walked the beaches with the American veterans who had returned for this anniversary, men in their sixties and seventies, and listened to their stories, I was deeply moved and profoundly grateful for all they had done,” Brokaw writes in his book. “Ten years later, I returned to Normandy for the fiftieth anniversary of the invasion, and by then I had come to understand what this generation of Americans meant to history.... It is, I believe, the greatest generation any society has ever produced.”

The bestseller that emerged from this life-changing experience, *The Greatest Generation* (1999), makes a case for the American veterans of the World War II era as just that—the greatest generation, perhaps of human history. Brokaw admits that it is an audacious and perhaps even arrogant claim, but he sticks to his idea and proceeds to narrate story after story about the heroics of the normal GI Joe and Jane of that period. Much like the powerful opening sequence of Steven Spielberg’s *Saving Private Ryan*, Brokaw’s book begins on the beaches of Normandy, site of the D-Day invasion. Brokaw, a weathered journalist who thought he had seen it all, was not expecting much of an emotional impact, but was surprised and overwhelmed by the feelings he had on that occasion. He recounts sitting for hours in cafes listening to the tales of the veterans of those early hours on the beaches and admits to being overcome with pathos and thankfulness for their exploits. Brokaw also goes to great lengths to describe how so many of the adults of his youth turned out to have been great war heroes who almost never spoke of their war experiences.

Brokaw probably did not specifically intend to draw upon mythic themes, but his powerful book does so in several ways. First of all, the book...
clearly depicts ordinary young adults from the Great Plains, the South, and other rural regions of America, suddenly and irrevocably drawn into events of massive proportion. This motif is one of the most common ways to begin a mythic story. The key participants, indeed the heroes, are most often just normal, everyday folks, going about their business when some sort of cataclysmic event changes everything.

In one of the most popular myths of our time, the Star Wars film series, Luke Skywalker has similar roots: a farm lad on a desert-like planet, an orphan working hard with his aunt and uncle to make a living, far from cities and cosmopolitan sophistication but yearning to get out someday and explore the universe. Luke, daydreaming out in the middle of nowhere, has much in common with the young men of the South Dakota prairies in The Greatest Generation. Brokaw’s heroes begin as simple mechanics or postal agents, cooks or bankers. Many of his heroes go on to much greater things. Some become captains of industry or US Senators or international celebrities from the arts or media. But they did not start out that way.

Brokaw has remarked that today America is filled with thousands of gray-haired heroes who once “answered the call to save the world from the two most powerful and ruthless military machines ever assembled.” The function of such a mythic beginning is to emphasize that it is completely within each of us to parlay our abilities and become heroic figures whose lives and decisions may change or perhaps even save the world.

Another mythic aspect of Brokaw’s account is the power of what we might call watershed moments. The people he describes may be just ordinary Americans, but they share the experience of a moment after which history is forever changed. Often in mythic tales there is some cataclysmic event after which the characters’ lives are never the same. Many times this moment becomes a marker for the character’s sense of identity: what she is like before the event and what she ultimately becomes after it. In Star Wars the moment of decisive change is when Luke discovers a hidden message implanted into an android he has purchased; he meets Obi-wan Kenobi and the evil forces of the empire murder his family and burn down the farm. After those moments of grief and anger, Luke understands that there is no going back and that everything he knew about the future has changed.

In the case of Brokaw’s book, the marker is the one that has come to symbolize the commencement of the war, at least for Americans: 7 December 1941, a quiet Sunday morning when Americans learned from their radios about the attack on Pearl Harbor and knew that the world had changed forever. Suddenly the nation had been drawn into an apocalyptic scenario, and ordinary citizens became players in extraordinary circumstances. In fact, “ordinariness” is a common thematic element of accounts of that day: “it was just an ordinary Sunday morning.”

The ordinariness of days on which tragedies strike is a commonplace of human experience—and of human myth. Joan Didion, in her recent memoir The Year of Magical Thinking, in which she describes the sudden death of her husband, repeats over and over the lines, “Life changes in the instant. You sit down to dinner and life as you know it ends.” Didion emphasizes the mundane timing of most tragedies, such as the sunny Tuesday morning in September 2001 on which all hell broke loose in New York City. Didion notes as well that “confronted with sudden disaster we all focus on how unremarkable the circumstances were in which the unthinkable occurred.” In this regard, she invokes Pearl Harbor, and her countless interviews with people who were living in Honolulu on that fateful day in 1941: “without exception, those people began their accounts of Pearl Harbor by telling me what an ‘ordinary Sunday morning’ it had been.” And she also tells us that the 9/11 Commission begins its report on this “dumbstruck” note: “Tuesday, September 11, 2001, dawned temperate and nearly cloudless in the eastern United States.”

In story after story, Americans have recounted precisely where they were when they heard the fateful news of Pearl Harbor, the Kennedy assassination, or of the jets exploding into the World Trade Center. These were ordinary days that became extraordinary. Likewise the more localized tragedies of our lives: “Life changes in the instant. You sit down to dinner and life as you know it ends.” We recall with precision where we
were, the angle of our vision, perhaps the clothes we were wearing, the car we were driving, the weather, and what we were doing, and with whom. We are caught unawares, and we are dumbstruck. Accounts of Japanese Americans, such as in John Okada’s novel No-No Boy or Monica Sone’s autobiography Nisei Daughter, provide detailed versions of their personal experiences on 7 December, for obvious reasons. These mythic moments serve as the crucial markers of our lives. For Japanese Americans, the effects of Pearl Harbor were devastating beyond anything most of them could have imagined on that Sunday morning. For everyone else, including the American heroes of World War II, without the transformative events of Pearl Harbor, there may have never been the bloody duties of D-Day.

Finally, Brokaw’s account is convincing in its depiction of the mythic power that emanates from the location of key events. There is a sacred element at certain sites, which mysteriously redound with mythic qualities. Clint Eastwood, in his somber masterpiece, Letters from Iwo Jima, captures some of this numinous quality in the grainy shots of Mt. Suribachi and the surrounding beaches. Brokaw’s experience in Normandy is similar to Belden Lane’s at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, which he has explained in his brilliant work Landscapes of the Sacred. “It is readily perceivable as different, set apart from all the other places on the Mall.... People, especially of my generation, do not have to be told to be silent as they walk through the trees and across the grass to where a wall of black granite rises from the earth. The ground itself seems to cry out with the silent voices of the dead.” Lane’s sense that the Vietnam Memorial is particularly resonant for people of his generation speaks to the cultural and historical significance of the events and people to which the Memorial is pointing. Thus, our sense of a place’s sacredness is often steeped in not only the ideals and the human sacrifice of a place. Sometimes a place invokes the cultural antagonisms and debate associated with it. But there is not much debate about the Allied invasion of Europe in 1944. Omaha Beach, says Brokaw, still retains the spirit of those fateful events. As such, these historic sites become mythic memorials for the lessons to be learned from the events they symbolize. But the cultural and historical meanings must be passed on socially: as Lane states, even though most people “do not have to be told to be silent,” this observation implies that there are indeed some who do need to be instructed in respect. It is the work of the survivors, the older generations, to pass on to the young this silence, this sensibility that somehow combines awe with horror.

The merit of Tom Brokaw’s claim that the World War II generation is the greatest in American history depends upon the mythic content of their achievements. His vision of America’s greatness relies on the vision of America as expressed and embodied by those heroic Americans he describes. We might ask, what are the attributes of this greatness? Does such greatness somehow help us to define what America meant to this generation? How did these common Americans rise to the challenge of embodying the great virtues and values of America? Or what was it exactly that those Americans of Brokaw’s “greatest generation” actually believed they were fighting for? I am certain that many academics and cultural critics have dismissed Brokaw’s basic ideas as little more than patriotic claptrap or at least highly romanticized and one-sided versions of the war and its veterans. Obviously, it would not be very hard to join the chorus in trying to deconstruct such a mythic tale.

But Brokaw’s book is one of the biggest best-sellers of recent years, and it must somehow contain information, or some amount of mythic power, that Americans both prize and need in the times of trial we now are facing. Indeed, my major fascination with Brokaw’s work is how its stories are able to inspire Americans with a renewed sense of hope and possibility. Whether or not we agree with Brokaw that it truly was the “Greatest Generation,” we at least should be able to agree that hope and possibility are commodities America can use a little more of in these postmodern days.  

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Don’t You Know Who They Think They Are?

J. D. Buhl with Tiffany Mitchell

"HUM HALLELUJAH," sings FALL OUT BOY IN their new album, Infinity on High. This pop/punk/emo band from Chicago once again has managed to come up with an album almost entirely different from their last. It was the spring of 2005 when Fall Out Boy—Peter Wentz (lyrics/bass/vocals), Patrick Stump (lead vocals/guitar), Joe Trohman (guitar/vocals) and Andy Hurley (drums)—became popular with their single “Sugar, We’re Going Down,” and then “Dance, Dance.” Now, FOB is gracing magazine covers, selling out large-venue concerts, and grabbing the attention of anyone who cares about popular music.

Infinity opens with “Thriller,” its Michael Jackson allusion intended. In January of 2006, on the Friends or Enemies Tour, FOB introduced this song, saying it was about rumors. At the beginning of the album, hip-hop legend Jay-Z says:

Yeah, what you critics said would never happen.
We dedicate this album to anybody people said couldn’t make it.
To the fans that held us down till everybody came around.
Welcome. It’s here.

This line introduces the album’s theme: Fall Out Boy is doing what they’re doing; and for all the people who said they weren’t good enough, or put them down, they’re going to prove them wrong.

As Jay-Z’s involvement suggests, Infinity appeals across genres. “This Ain’t a Scene, It’s an Arm’s Race,” with its dance floor motif, is a song about what’s going on in the world today. This is different from Wentz’s usual approach. The song is less about feelings and emotions than actual stuff that affects people beyond the band’s core audience.

There is also on occasion a reconciliatory tone. “I’m a stitch away from making it! And a scar away from falling apart” is a piece of “The (After) Life of the Party,” a song that is, to me, about Wentz trying to make things better. Scars normally represent something memorable, good or bad. Stitches are also memorable, but they can represent someone trying to heal or willing to make an effort to fix something. When Wentz says that he’s “a stitch away from making it,” he means he’s almost there, he just needs more time; when he says he’s “a scar away from falling apart,” he means there’s something from the past that he can’t forget, and that’s what’s holding him back. This interpretation relates to another song on Infinity on High, “Thnks Fr Th Mmrs.” Here the caustic refrain, “Thanks for the memories / even though they weren’t so great,” is followed by a painful memory of something someone said: “He tastes like you, only sweeter.” Maybe it’s that quote—like those that “put love on hold” in “The (After) Life”—that is complicating his recovery.

From its hip-hop/R&B influences to its edgy guitar riffs, Infinity on High is an invitational album, more open in its approach, and open to all.

— Tiffany Mitchell

CLEVERNESS IS THE BEST REVENGE. IT IS HARD TO interest young people in honesty, chastity, and fair play when having the last word can sound so delicious—to one’s own ears. If their new album does not quite provide the cure to growing up they promised, the band that brought us “I Slept with Someone in Fall Out Boy and All I Got Was This Stupid Song Written about Me” does present fourteen more sonic soliloquies on hearts, lies, and friends that leave no doubt as to who’s closing argument wins.

The voices that deliver them are keen and intriguingly unique, their settings shiny and sharp. The thrills here are found in the grunge-free production with an ‘80s sheen, the empty frame hung on a wall of words.

While singer Patrick Stump admits to “a world outside of my front door that gets off on being down,” Infinity on High rarely steps outside that
front door. It deals mostly in the nasty aftermath of love—or sex—holding out the promise that one can live “happily ever after below the waist.” Still, the prospect of being “broken down on Memory Lane” is a real one if you’ve spent too much time cruising its rutted surface, and the snarled question “wouldn’t you rather be a widow than a divorcée,” will draw a wince from anyone. It always has been the peculiar provenance of pop singers to make pain sound as sweet as pleasure. Though undoubtedly sweet, the pain here is implied, not expressed, as the album eloquently sums up what always has passed for love: “I’m addicted to the way I feel when I think of you.”

Ultimately, though, Infinity is about being a band—a particular band—and what it is to be loved by one’s particular fans. “We only want to sing you to sleep in your bedroom speakers,” they offer. The gift of being known, of being accepted, is the greatest and most enduring in music. Beneath the disc’s shiny surface, its smart-aleck puns, there is a reassuring sense of the lives, the aloneness, of “the car-crash hearts,” those for whom the Golden Rule is suspended “when the lives [they’ve] lived are only golden plated.” A band is never just a band; it’s a community.

There is something creepy about this particular community, however. In “Fame < Infamy,” the songwriters wonder aloud why God would bless them with such wit and leave them without a conscience. Earlier a refrain begins, “we’re so miserable and stunning / love songs for the genuinely cunning.”

And they are genuinely cunning. Every song here contains some ironic reminder that the band feeds off the misery of its audience, while the audience learns how to express its misery through the band: “We keep the beat with your blistered feet.” On the hit single “This Ain’t a Scene, It’s an Arms Race,” Stump sings: “I am an arms dealer fitting you with weapons in the form of words.” Like no one, perhaps, since Jagger as His Satanic Majesty, he is convincing in his role as he shrugs, “[I] don’t really care which side wins as long as the room keeps singing, that’s just the business I’m in.” One such observation is amusing—and correct; a whole album of them is nearly too arch to take.

If Infinity were merely self-referential, it would be like turning someone on to the Clash with Give ‘Em Enough Rope instead of London Calling. That sense of imminent importance is here from the beginning, with Jay-Z’s portentous intro disissing critics and welcoming customers to an album dedicated to “anybody who people said couldn’t make it.” Before their masterpiece, the Clash saw themselves in a historical context, on the verge of becoming as big as the Beatles—and ready to take on the responsibilities that come with such status. Fall Out Boy appears on the verge of getting laid. You won’t find this band name-dropping Little Richard and Woody Guthrie while “standing at the gates of the West”—they name-drop themselves. But FOB does cop Leonard Cohen, turning the broken lilt of “Hallelujah” into a drum-pounding chant. One experiences not the humbling exaltation of the original, however, but a singer’s taunts, “I could write it better than you ever felt it.”

Under “soliloquy” in Beckson and Ganz’s dictionary of literary terms, a character alone onstage expresses his thoughts and, “since he is by himself, what he says is presumed to be true, or at least sincere.” The confusion of truth and sincerity at the heart of pop music is the weapon beheld in Infinity’s soliloquies. “I’m a leading man,” they say, “and the lies I weave are oh so intricate.” While disarmed finally on the last track, Stump swooning through his most Beatlesque melody that “the truth hurts worse than anything I could bring myself to do to you,” they appear incapable of delivering their vulnerability without enveloping it in acute self-consciousness and sarcasm. Any song that says “this is a love song” is not a love song, Strummer and Jones’s self-reflection on Rope proved to be a necessary pause before taking on greater concerns. Fall Out Boy could become the next “Only Band That Matters.” For the moment, however, they are too impressed with themselves to see much should they make it to that mountaintop. ♦

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Recently two events came together that inspired me to teach Luther’s Small Catechism. Not that I especially needed such inspiration, since I have been teaching that catechism to young and old for some time now, but when working with a theological masterpiece new revelations are always enjoyed—and expected. One event was the recent publication of Robin Leaver’s book, *Luther’s Liturgical Music* (Eerdmans), a section of which is dedicated to the hymns Luther wrote to teach the catechism through music. We ought to use the occasion of this book to recover catechism in homes and churches through great music. The second occasion was the use of J. S. Bach’s organ mass in *Clavier Übung III*, a capstone degree project offered by one of Luther Seminary’s masters of sacred music candidates. Ivana Sabanosova, organist from the Lutheran Church in Slovakia, set to work on playing the Mass and asked if I would preach. I would like to give you a sense of how it went.

Bach’s service is set out with a Kyrie and Gloria followed by a series of organ preludes for each of Luther’s catechism chorales: These are the Ten Holy Commandments, We All Believe in One True God, Our Father in Heaven, To Jordan Came Our Lord the Christ, Out of the Depths I Cry to Thee, and Jesus Christ Our Blessed Savior. We added the other parts of the mass, including the singing of the catechism hymns, *Lord Keep Us Steadfast in Thy Word*, and concluded with *Dear Christians One and All Rejoice*. Putting Bach and Luther together unleashes the pent-up power of the gospel in what appears to be a set of children’s exercises in religion and music. Mastery of something like faith or the keyboard normally is understood by an old illustration of life: a journey taken by a pupil with beginning, middle, and end. But if we listen to Luther and Bach together, they teach a different tale of how it is that beginning is always beginning again. The “goal” of life is not to get anywhere. Since asserting this always seems unnerving, especially to aspiring students, we ought to let Bach have his say.

We all know that God made J. S. Bach the greatest of all musicians. The fifth evangelist. The king of the king of instruments. God inspired the man by the Holy Spirit, fingers and all. Then what did God do once He had made this musician without peer? God sent Bach to teach confirmation. Every Saturday morning Bach the magnificent taught from Luther’s *Small Catechism* to the undeserving and unwitting (and probably unhappy) Leipzig kids with runny noses and raging hormones. What a waste of time. Could God not have spared this one man the scourge of Lutheran pastors and teachers throughout the centuries? Would we not have gotten something much more worthwhile for the life of the world, say another cantata or trio sonata, if God had excused Bach from catechism?

Yet Bach understood the art of the *basic exercise*. For centuries a Lutheran household practiced certain “exercises” after dinner. Parents took the Small Catechism and had their children exercise their faith by memorizing the commands and promises of Scripture and their “meanings”:

The first commandment says “Thou shalt have no other gods”

And what does this mean for us?

“We are to fear, love and trust God above anything else.”

Bach took this after-dinner exercise and added a second—to exercise the fingers at the keyboard. Then he thought, why not do both at once? Learn your *Small Catechism* and your fingerings and scales together, since as Luther taught, music is not to be feared for stirring up concupiscence but rather has the power to take

Steven D. Paulson

**Bach’s Exercises for Fingers and Faith**

*The Cresset Trinity* | 2007
the external Word from the ear into the heart. So over a long stretch of years Bach perfected his Clavier Übung III that exercised children at the keyboard and in faith at once.

When we take up the matter of “exercises,” we immediately come upon a theological problem. The longstanding use of exercises comes to us from Aristotle, particularly in the ethics. There the secret was to begin with the basics in order to get beyond them. Exercises were preliminary, preparatory as one sought higher goals. So Aristotle thought of life as a ladder. The ladder’s lower rungs involve childish exercises that enabled the mature person to climb higher by aiming at things not yet achieved. Aristotle loved to think of athletes this way: getting ready to throw the discus by going through the basic steps, then exercising until exercise became habit, habit character, and character finally fulfills an essence. We call this ad modum Aristoteles. It seeks to make of life an actualizing of potential, so that the final act is the real thing.

Bach learned a different sense of exercise from Luther in the Small Catechism. For Luther, one never could get beyond the catechism for the same reason that one never progressed beyond faith. This is because justification is a divine gift, not a potential actualized by deed. From the first sinner to the last, the attempt has been to progress beyond the most basic matter, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. Sin is therefore always this desire to add to Christ, to sanctify a justification, to add work to faith, to escape the world of creatures into the realm of ideas, to become an immaterial spirit that knows neither birth nor death. That is, to climb a ladder out of this world into a disembodied, Gnostic dream of pure thought. Instead, as Luther learned, God came down, born of a woman, born under the law, and so has come to redeem the lost. Faith is not active, but passive. It does not take or possess; it receives. This way of thinking rejects substance and embraces a relational and utterly new way of living. Life is what the philosophers more recently have dreamed it was, but in reverse—not a ladder up to God, but Christ the ladder from God down to us—a new and unheard of dialectical materialism based on the incarnation of Christ. Exercises in faith are not a ladder to the beyond; they are the way of locating us in this very world of God’s own making as a creature of our loving Creator. Exercises teach us to stay planted here, in this place of God’s own making, thus they go in, not above, and always deepen life rather than elongate it. Such exercises are not ad modum Aristoteles, but rather ad modum Scripturae. One takes a teacher; the other a preacher.

The reason the great Bach could teach catechism and keyboard exercises throughout his life is the very reason Luther never got beyond the catechism. They both kept going deeper, deeper, and deeper in. There in the midst of life they found the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit at work in creatures to make them righteous, new, just—in short able to fear, love, and trust God above anything else. Pastors, organists, musicians, confirmation teachers, parents—please take note. When teaching becomes tedious, think of Bach with his little Leipzig confirmands, restless and
immature as in any age, telling them what they
are not yet able to hear:

Arise you lads of Leipzig! Do you not know
what Christ has made you by his Word? You are
a Royal Priesthood, Lord’s of all, subject to none!
Indeed, you are heirs of a new kingdom in which
sin, sorrow, and death are banished and right­
eousness, joy, and life eternal arrive.

HEN BACH SET HIS EXERCISES IN THE FORM
of a Mass, he also understood the basic
setting of Luther’s Small Catechism.
There we find the cantus firmus of true worship in
the form of a dialog in which God speaks to us in
the form of commands and promises, and we respond
in prayer and thanksgiving. Thus an invocation
names the God who speaks and to whom we pray as
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Bach’s Kyrie uses
three preludes, each identifying a person of the
Trinity. The Father is first, put in the high voice and
royal court setting, whose mercy creates all. The Son
follows in the tenor voice as Mediator between
Creator and creatures whose job it is to make trust
where there is none—coming down deep in the
flesh (Immanuel). But instead of picturing the
Holy Spirit as the one who takes us up aloft, as if
we were freed from the confines of bodies and
allowed to float as pure spirit, the Holy Spirit is
put in the deep bass voice, grounding us, locating
us, keeping us from such poverty to think that
being a creature is our problem in life. Bach ends
the Kyrie with discordant notes, since the work of
the Holy Spirit is first to bring down, before lifting
up, to kill before making alive. The allure of thinking
that God’s grace preserves our inner goodness,
nurtures it, and finally brings it to completion by
making us righteous in our own selves is the
nature of original sin—enthusiasm. Instead God’s
work with us is death and resurrection. This is
why there is nothing but beginning again.

Immediately Bach moved to the next Mass
prayer, the Gloria, or Song of the Angels at Jesus’
Birth. This is a prelude in three settings for what
became the normal Lutheran song at this place:
All Glory Be to God on High. The flutter of angels’
wings is heard at first, but angels are not prima­
riely winged beings, they are messengers, and
their message is that “whatever Satan’s host may
try; God fails their dark endeavor.” They bring
hope amid suffering. Bach’s exercise ends in
three sharps and a series of staccatos since it was
to the angels both wonder and horror that Jesus
not only became a man but also took your sins
upon Him. Such incarnation and death went
against angelic reasoning that the Son would
become a sinner, the greatest of sinners, and even
sin itself in order to take

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Immediately Bach moved to the next Mass
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who the Creator is. Creatures are made first and foremost to get along with their Creator. Creator and creature actually fit together. It is not natural to be on a spiritual search for your life source or to locate some place to put your trust. Strange to think that we need to be taught the basics of relationship this way—which are not only obscure to us but have become frightening as if they cause the death of my spirit-self! Bach puts his prelude on the Ten Commandments in the form of a canon with two voices speaking to one another. He helps us lay out our basic pattern for teaching the commandments: the Creator bestows life; creatures receive life.

The tune Bach uses is a gigue, a lively dance, since this is the way God created us to be with Him. But we have become embarrasing on the dance floor. The Bestower and Giver of life is also jealous, “I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God...” Love is always jealous, after all. Unjealous love is no love. This kind of divine lover shares everything with you, but He won't share you with any other God. So God tells us in his words: This is how to live! “You are to fear, love, and trust this Creator above all else.” Then, as in the fifth commandment: “You shall not kill,” Luther lays out the pattern of living well with others: “we are to fear and love God so that we do not hurt our neighbor in any way, but help him in all his physical needs.”

What starts as a jaunty tune, ends by going chromatic as Bach recognized the double effect of these words from God. The Ten Commandments came late in God’s creation, indeed late in His dealings with Israel. Paul reminds us they came 430 years after the promise made to Abraham. The commandments become not simply descriptions of Creator and creature in coordination but revealers of the truth—“You shall not have” increasingly warns and threatens us. Yet hiding behind the unsteady grammar of command or at least something indicative is also a promise: “You shall not have” is not only a threat to us who have wandered but hides a promise that one day you really will not have any other gods, and Creator and creature will fit again.

Thus comes the second part of the catechism: the Creed. How are you doing at life? Over time, law magnifies the sin: “Our own work is a hopeless thing” says the last line of Luther’s hymn on the commandments. Now Bach picks up the creedal hymn, We all believe in One True God. If the commandments tell us what we are to do, the creed tells us what God does. Bach does a strange thing here; he keeps the melody of Luther’s hymn hidden until the very last line. This tells us our basic situation with God, who hides from us not because He is seeking to tease out a spiritual search but because we won’t have it any other way. The Father first gave Himself to us His creatures in the very things of creation—from the stars above to the fallen leaf below. But we would not have Him there. So He gave Himself again to us in His only begotten Son—who came as a forger of sins, but we did not want to have our Creator that way either. Thus God comes to us again in the Holy Spirit, first through the prophets, whom we did not want, and finally by His preachers who bestow the promises of Christ.

Right here, Luther gave one of the most well-known phrases of the catechism: “I believe I cannot by my own understanding or effort believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to Him.” Since we demonstrate repeatedly we do not want an all-the-way God who gives Himself wholly and completely, withholding nothing, how is it that God can make trust anyway, despite our contrary will? Here Bach sets the creed prelude in the form of a great cosmic battle, with the enemy of God constantly encroaching and beaten back. The pedal of the organ in its deep, low, and menacing ostinato lays out the problem. The devil is like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. The upward interval of the pedal traces his menacing steps toward his prey, but each time he encroaches, he falls back. This reminds us of Luther’s constant refrain that Christ is a mighty warrior who fights on our side, and with Satan, “one little word will fell him.” Even when the devil’s tune breaks out of the pedal and into the hands of the organist, salvation is no less certain. That is, Bach knows what Luther meant in the second article of the creed, “He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, saved me at great cost...” What costs us nothing costs Christ much. But there Bach lets the tenor voice finally break out with the creed’s melody in the words “All things are ruled by His might.”
Such is faith in the midst of suffering and death, and this leads Bach to the third part of the catechism, the Lord's Prayer. Where are you located in this great cosmic battle between Christ and Satan? In the midst of death, we are already in life. Bach's prelude to the chorale Our Father Who Art in Heaven appears in canon again, reminding us that God is the Giver, and we the receiver. The rhythm here is twisted, irregular, contorted, and the tune is unresolved until the very final long note is held. The Lord's Prayer teaches us to pray against ourselves, against our feelings at any moment in life. The first run of descending notes in the piece reminds us of the second petition of the prayer: "Thy kingdom come." After all, in whatever circumstance we find ourselves, it is not we who are progressing or failing that matters. Instead it is the progress of the kingdom itself: "God's kingdom comes indeed without our praying for it, but we ask in this prayer that it may come also to us." God gives, and that in plentiful ways, even in the midst of your own death. How long will suffering last? Bach's prelude is brief, telling us: not long.

As Luther's explanation of the Creed says: "All this he has done that I may be His own!" What is left to teach in catechism? What remains to be done after the Cross of Christ has won all good things and defeated the devil? Only the bestowal of the gifts remains, and so we take up baptism, absolution, and the Lord's Supper as the means for electing you. What is baptism? "Baptism is not water only, but water used together with God's Word and by His command." Bach made the pedal hold the melody that flows just like water in a brook. On top of this, the organist's right hand holds a conversation between two upper voices—that famous conversation of John the Baptist and Jesus at the Jordan. John must decrease so that Christ can increase, since Christ is the One on whom the Spirit descends and remains. The one with the Spirit speaks, as the other Gospels attest, for the heaven is ripped open, and the Father said, "Behold my Son with whom I am well pleased, listen to Him." What did Christ say? "He who believes and is baptized shall be saved." So Luther's hymn puts it: "Christ our Lord came to Jordan to do His Father's willing: The baptism given by Saint John, who consecrated the bath to wash us from sin!" That is not to wash sin from us (John's baptism), as if we just needed a cleaning, but to take us away from sin once and for all (Christ's baptism). At the end of the piece the inversions and tight fugue with subject and countersubject finally come together as the word goes into the water and by this means Christ gives us something to believe in, allowing Himself to be grasped by faith itself once and for all.

What horror to find that after baptism sin remains in me. Did it fail? Christ alone is my righteousness, and I never do become owner of that righteousness myself. Bach used Luther's hymn on Psalm 130, Out of the Depths, to give us the meaning of confession and the promise of absolution. The catechism says: "Our sinful self, with all of its evil deeds and desires should be drowned through daily repentance and that day after day a new self should arise." That is a lot of new selves! Bach used everything the organist has here, a fugue in six voices. The chorale melody is in the top voice: "If you counted sin, Lord, who could stand?" He chooses the sad, somber Phrygian mode that tells you to wait upon the Lord, not to trust what is felt and seen in yourself but rather to trust Christ's external word and what it calls you. Confession of sin knows this and agrees with it, but as Bach notes by changing rhythm and mood by the end of the piece, the real thing in confession is the declared forgiveness. What is the office of the keys? Luther wrote: "The authority Christ gave to the church to forgive sins of those who repent." And does anyone repent unless we are repented by Christ Himself, turned around and made new—daily? Right at the end of the prelude, where the preacher absolves the sinner, Bach sneaks in the creed melody on the downbeats to assure us, "He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, saved me at great cost from sin, death, and the power of the devil." Therefore we ought to use this key wherever we can.

Likewise by the Lord's Supper Christ bestows his benefits, not once and for all but repeatedly. So the hymn used by this prelude Jesus Christ Our Savior states that "Jesus Christ our Savior turned
back God's wrath upon us; through His bitter passion saved us out of hell's pain." Bach depicts Christ here as a kind of levee against which the flood of the world's sin, death, and devil break. It is set as a trio with the melody in the organ's pedal, while the two hands come up against it like waves. This sacrament, the catechism declares, is not for the well but the sick. Are you well? Go elsewhere. But here in this Lord's Supper, the very present Christ is not only host but gift. The gift teaches you to take and eat, take and drink, and thus “this cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you, and for many, for the forgiveness of sins.” That person is prepared for this who believes these words “given for you, for the forgiveness of sins.” This is no less than the New Testament that is Christ's last will and testament that takes a betrayer and makes her an heir of Christ. Imagine that. You are named in the reading of Christ's last Will and Testament, which cannot be altered after the death of the Will maker. The hymn makes clear that your proof of the inheritance is in the eating of the bread and wine themselves—hidden in not hidden behind these things: “So that you will never forget, He gave His body for us to eat; hidden in a little piece of bread, and gave His blood in the wine to drink." The last note of Bach's prelude ends with joyous force: Take!

It is no mistake that Bach concludes this exercise for the fingers and of faith by making the Postlude a real dismissal and sending. Lutherans always have understood that the two great teachings are justification by faith alone and what it means to be freed for real vocations in life. The postlude is a triple fugue, in which Bach makes the sign of the cross in musical chiasm and then leads into a profound declaration of the Trinity. The first fugue with the Father in stately voice, the second with the Son, whose melody uses no pedal (since He did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself taking on the form of a servant). But Bach brings back the melody of the divine Father and lets the fugue play with the two natures of Christ to convey the *communicatio idiomatum*, the interpenetrating of the two natures so as not to confuse or divide them, but let them communicate the Creator to the creature again. The third fugue gives the Holy Spirit in the form of preaching, who proceeds from the Father and the Son since the Holy Spirit always witnesses to Christ Himself and alone. Christ's communication extends now through His little christ's who move out into the world and take up their work for their neighbors' sakes. Enjoy, then, your exercises and the life of getting nowhere.

Steven D. Paulson is Professor of Systematic Theology at Luther Seminary.
I have been adjusting to a new computer this month, sending emails to friends and colleagues from this new machine.

“What did you get?” many ask.

“It’s a laptop,” I respond.

This is not the information they seek. Some push harder, “What are you running?”

“Haven’t gotten back to it since my surgery, thanks for asking,” I respond.

Now that I’m sitting at it, I can read “Acer TravelMate 4220” on the case. When I pass this information on to the excessively curious they stop badgering me. In my opinion, it’s a computer, not a way of life.

Still, I cannot deny that changing tools changes the tasks I perform and changing this particular tool changes the way I interact with the world. Tools have been shaping our lives since humanity discovered that rocks can be weapons. Lately I have noticed how the Christian ministry, and my practice of it, has been and is being shaped by the machines and tools I use.

In January, I attended a class with a dozen other ministers. On the second day the secretary walked tentatively to the front of the room and asked, “Is Tom Willadsen here? I’ve got a message for you to call your office.”

Fifteen years ago this was a routine occurrence whenever there was a room full of ministers. The summoned clergy person would excuse himself, follow the secretary to the office, place the call, and then return in a few minutes. At this point, he would either hurriedly gather his papers and explain that there was an emergency he had to attend to, or he’d make a joke about how the secretary was checking whether we should “accept” or “except” God’s grace—she was proofing the newsletter.

One does not see tentative secretaries at gatherings of ministers anymore. Today ministers have cell phones.

Back in 1994 a colleague in my weekly text study group got email and raved about how he could share insights on the week’s lectionary passages with people in Australia! That he did exactly the same thing, face to face, with colleagues every week who walked two blocks simply was not the same.

“Dude,” I observed, “Every minute you’re on your computer is a minute you’re not available to your secretary or family.”

Roger responded with the classic Midwestern rejoinder, “Yah, but,” he began, “I’m really getting
good illustrations from this Lutheran Down Under. My sermons are better!"

I see the wisdom of that great twentieth century theologian, Judy Collins, who famously sang of “both sides” of clouds and love. I’ve looked at email from both sides now, and Judy’s right. “Something’s lost and something’s gained” in every technological advance.

This morning I performed the low-tech task of packing my sons’ lunches for school. Back in the day, my mother packed a nickel into my Metal Age lunch box for milk. One day the nickel migrated into my sandwich and I could not find it! Only after I had started to eat, and the milk monitor was packing up, did I race to buy my half pint of chocolate milk. Today my five-year old will enter his PIN in the lunch room and his account will be debited. A savvy parent could go online and check his account to see whether he really purchased milk. Forty years from now he will not have a story to tell about finding a nickel between slices of cheese and baloney and racing across the gymnasium.

I cannot begin to determine whether this is better or worse. It’s just different and big whoop.

A FEW YEARS AGO I WAS AT A BOWLING PARTY and spotted someone I did not know; I assumed he was a friend of the host. No, he had been hired by the club to keep score. This was a small alley catering to private parties; the owner could not afford automatic computer scoring so he hired people to keep score. We could lament that no one knows how to keep a bowling score anymore. Or, we could celebrate that here’s a guy who can pick up a few bucks a couple times a week because he possesses an increasingly rare skill.

Years ago I heard someone rage that “Kids don’t know how to tie shoes anymore!” Someone else quickly pointed out that because kids fasten their shoes with Velcro, there is no reason for them to know how to tie laces. It’s like complaining that there’s no blacksmith at the Nike factory.

Twenty years later, I am the blacksmith at the Nike factory.

The bowling scorer observed to me, “Technology makes us stupider.” I disagree. Technology changes us and forces us to learn new ways of doing old tasks and frees us to do tasks that we could not do—or could not imagine doing—a few years before. Something’s lost and something’s gained....

I HAVE EMAIL LISTS OF PEOPLE WHO SHARE MY INTERESTS. Sometimes for laughs I send out trivia questions to my baseball fan list. The last one was, “Name the members of the San Francisco Giants who have led the National League in home runs.” One friend responded to my challenge by hitting “respond” and writing this:

“I sat next to Martin Marty at a conference last week and told him that I knew one of his former students, you. He said, ‘I see his stuff in The Cresset, he should keep up his writing.’”

I hit respond and wrote, “I knew you’d forget Orlando Cepeda!”

This kind of exchange can only happen with the technology of email, and it breaks me up! Who can say that technology is a bad thing when it enables a person to juxtapose his former professor, the nation’s most respected historian of Christianity with a Puerto Rican-born member of baseball’s Hall of Fame?

Admit it, you’re wondering what Marty would look like on a baseball card, right now, aren’t you? Isn’t your life richer for the image?

LAST MONTH ONE OF THE STUDENTS IN MY HIGH SCHOOL Sunday school class, reached into her purse and pulled out a small device. She said, “You guys go on talking, I need to reply to this.”

When she finished, I asked what the message had been.

“Oh, my friend wanted to know if I can see the 1:00 movie.”

In her mind she was being polite by responding quickly, giving us leave to continue without her, and putting the device away when she finished. Initially I thought, “Rude” is the new ‘polite.” Then the conversation turned to technology. I told the story about being the last minister in America without a cell phone.

A boy in the class said, “For me, leaving the house without my cell phone is like forgetting my pants.”

I’ve had that dream.
I am puzzled and fascinated by this. I respect the young people in my class way too much to dismiss their thoughts and opinions. They insist to me, “You can't say it's bad! I text my mother and say, 'I love you' or 'I'm thinking of you.' That's a good thing, isn't it?”

I am not about to deny the value of cell phones. One of my students saw someone get hit by a car, phoned 911, and stayed with the person until the ambulance arrived. He was late for school and was punished for being late. Yet he and his cell phone helped to get medical attention to an injured person much more quickly. I am certain that he uses his cell phone responsibly. It's different from when I was in high school, is all.

I used to date a girl whose father would give her a quarter as she was leaving with me. He knew, she knew, and I knew that the quarter was for Wendy to use in a payphone anytime she needed to call home. There was a clear warning in that quarter.

Today, I suppose fathers say, “Keep your cell phone with you, sweetheart,” as their daughters walk out the door. They are probably safer today, but do teenage boys feel the same kind of menace that Mr. Collins made me feel?

At my office the computer change has been slow and frustrating. Still, we're holding up pretty well. We have a couple members who are competent with installing computers, so we have several places to go with our questions. One of them said before we started installing anything, “Problems come bundled with every new system.” It was the most helpful thing I could have heard. That sentence made my expectations realistic. What I wanted was for the new system to operate exactly like the old one, but faster. Knowing to expect the problems that are part of any change reduced my frustration when they occurred. Now instead of wanting to drop-kick this Acer TravelMate 4220 out the window I realize there's something I need to learn about it.

Part of our computer change brought us DSL. I do not know what DSL stands for, but I know it kicks! Especially compared to dial up!

Before we got DSL, I often would call my office and say to the bookkeeper, “I'm running late, could you turn on my computer and start downloading my email so it'll be in when I arrive in half an hour?” This call accomplished three things:

First, it got my computer on and email downloaded;

Second, it told the bookkeeper to get off the dial up connection because I had a lot to do; and

Third, sometimes during the course of this call, she would tell me something like, “The hospital just called and Mr. Jones is in Room 203.” I would not get this information until I arrived at the office otherwise, which would be soon enough, but knowing this bit of information might prove very helpful as I planned my day. So a surprising effect of getting faster computers, computers that enable more than one staff member to access email at a time, is that our incidental communication is less.

Something's lost and something's gained....

No, I do not wish for an instant that I had dial up again, but changing to a faster computer has affected other aspects of my job in ways that no one could foresee. I still embrace my reluctance to embrace new machines. I love to laugh at my technical indifference and incompetence. And I keep marveling at the ways that tools shape our lives and vocations.

The Reverend Thomas C. Willadsen is pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Oshkosh, Wisconsin.
Always my favorite uncle, Curtis was Dad's next brother up and the only one who looked like him. Uncle Curtis was blond and ever-ebullient, while Berl and Olin and Macon were dark-haired and, although kindly, subdued. Oren, the oldest of all, was like the other dark-haired, older brothers: swarthy in the few photographs we had of him and quiet in his grave, which we sometimes visited on summer Sunday afternoons. We would drive partway down the mountain to the cemetery at Stony Fork Baptist Church, where we would pause at Uncle Oren's grave; and at that of his infant twins; and at Aunt Arlene's, who had died, aged four, when Dad was still a baby himself; and at Grandma and Grandpa Greene's, whose broader headstone, with its chiseled pair of sweethearts and the phrase "Beyond the Sunset," honored their romance. From there we would pile back in the Pontiac, pensive at first but then eager as we approached Uncle Curtis and Aunt Charlotte's house farther down the mountain in Purlear.

"When will we be there?" one of my brothers or I would ask at the final bend in the road.

"In two shakes of a lamb's tail!" Dad would declare.

And there we would be, knocking on their door, welcomed with hugs and glasses of Coca-Cola and Rice Krispie treats. Uncle Curtis would swing me up in his arms and tell me jokes, sometimes elbowing Dad (shorter and stockier than he) and saying, "I grew up while your daddy grew out!"

I had stayed with Uncle Curtis and Aunt Charlotte and their two nearly grown girls when my twin brothers were born, and perhaps that visit helped account for the particular affection I held for them. As much as I dreaded trips to the dentist's office down the mountain in North Wilkesboro, I loved stopping afterward at Greene Brothers, the furniture plant Uncle Curtis ran with Martha Eads

Uncle Olin. One of them would walk us around the shop, where we would visit for a bit with framers and upholsterers—with dead Uncle Oren's son Bryce and neighbors with whom Dad had grown up. And then Uncle Curtis would feed the old Coke machine a dime, pull open its narrow door, and present me with an Orange Crush for the road.

We were probably at Greene Brothers when he gave me the Gideon Bible. I would have been older then, nearly seventeen in 1982, and getting ready for a summer American Field Service exchange program journey to Japan. I knew that my host family had Buddhist and Shinto convictions, and I wanted to prepare to share the gospel with them. If all went well, they would become Christians during my stay. A member of Gideons, International, Uncle Curtis equipped me with a New Testament that had parallel columns in English and Japanese.

My summer with the Suzukis of Mori-Machi, Japan, was intensely enjoyable and immensely enriching, but I came home feeling as if I had failed. No one in the family had converted. My host father, Hayao, an intellectually curious and generous man, had seemed to enjoy discussing religion as well as politics with me, and we had spent several evenings poring over the Gideon New Testament and a Japanese/English dictionary. On one such night near the end of my stay, he said, "Jesus lives in my heart with Buddha." Although it moved me, his declaration was not, I feared, a satisfactory profession of faith in Christ.

When I got home, I described the exchange to Uncle Curtis during a stop at Greene Brothers. "I'm worried," I confided, "that I won't see him in heaven." Uncle Curtis's reaction surprised me. With a twinkle in his eye, he said, "You never know. You might just get there, turn around, and say, 'Hello!'" His expression was one of delight and mock surprise.
Uncle Curtis's hopeful openness to possibility has stayed with me over the years and was especially meaningful to me last May when I visited the Suzuki family for the first time in twenty-four years. As far as I could tell, given my limited Japanese and their limited English, no one has professed faith in Christ yet. Still, being with them blessed me, and I hope my presence in their home blessed them in some way. We weren't able to converse at a deep level, but the bonds of affection still run as deep as tears.

With help from my host mother's sister and brother-in-law, who had lived in the United States during and after my own first visit to Japan, I was able to explain to the Suzukis that I now work for a Christian university in the Mennonite tradition. I gave them a pamphlet in Japanese about Mennonite beliefs, feeling proud to represent a peace-church institution. I knew that my host father would appreciate the Mennonites' commitment to opposing war. During one of our talks back in 1982, on the anniversary of the bombing of either Hiroshima or Nagasaki, he had sketched a picture of a mushroom cloud, drawn an “x” through it, and said, “No more.” His conviction influenced me deeply, as my answers to an American Field Service program debriefing questionnaire show. In response to the prompt “An attitude or value that I had rejected or never considered before I left home, but that I now hold as my own is...”, I wrote, “Nuclear arms limitations in the US.”

I suspect that one reason for my previous unwillingness to consider any kind of limitations on the United States military would have been my admiration for Uncle Curtis. Although he avoided discussing it, he had served in the Army Air Corps during World War II and spent seven months in a German prisoner-of-war camp. As tall as he was, his weight had dropped to 105 pounds by the time he was liberated. He had suffered to help defeat Hitler and the Nazis and his sacrifice commanded my deep respect.

My vexed view of the relationship between military action and the pursuit of justice later contributed to my desire to teach at Eastern Mennonite University. Having lived among and loved people who would have been Uncle Curtis’s and my own parents’ enemies forty years earlier, I hardly can bear the thought of our being at war. At the same time, I believe that Christians must pursue justice actively. Those who are skeptical about pacifism, including my own father, ask, “What about Hitler?” I ask that question, too. My best answer is to point to my Mennonite colleagues, their parents, and our students who share the gospel while working to improve living conditions worldwide, hoping that people will be less likely to follow the lead of a Hitler or a Hirohito. (Some of my colleagues have noted that if all who professed Christian faith during World War II had refused to fight, Hitler, at least, would not have gotten very far.) I was eager to share this perspective with Masayuki Sawa, a Japanese pastor-friend with whom I also enjoyed a reunion during my May 2006 trip. He interpreted while I spoke to a group in his church who wanted to know why American Christians are so militaristic. Not all American Christians are, I tried to explain.

Still, this situation is remarkably complex. I came to recognize more of its complexity as I taught a community-learning composition course at EMU the same semester I returned to Japan. My students interviewed World War II conscientious objectors, several of whom live in the Mennonite retirement community a short walk from our campus. In an effort to broaden my pacifist students’ exposure to ideas and honor the perspectives of the non-pacifists in the class, I also had them read Dutch resistance worker Diet Eman’s memoir Things We Couldn’t Say, visit the National Holocaust Memorial Museum and the Veterans’ History Project office at the Library of Congress, and watch a videotape of Uncle Curtis discussing his World War II experience.

Once again, all these years later, Uncle Curtis surprised me. Although he had given only the briefest accounts of his war-time service to family members, he spoke at length to an interviewer at a military museum he visited near the end of his life. On tape, he told her about his Army training, his base assignment in England, the conditions for the flight during which his plane was shot down, and his capture and interrogation. He had taken comfort, he said, in his Christian faith and in the Bible he had carried—a Bible Uncle Macon had given him. During one interrogation, he recounted, a German officer whose wife and child had been
killed in an American bombing raid waved that Bible in front of him. "You say you are a Christian and you come here to kill us?" the German officer challenged him. Softly, Uncle Curtis told his interviewer, "If my wife and child had been killed, I probably would have felt the same way."

Toward the end of the interview, Uncle Curtis revealed another secret that he previously had shared only with Aunt Charlotte. After his imprisonment, the arduous trek from the POW camp in the spring of 1945, and his recovery, Uncle Curtis had been assigned to a military base desk job. One day he found himself nearly overpowered by an irrational impulse to strike his supervisor. Bewildered, he reported to the base clinic. The doctor there was troubled, Uncle Curtis said, telling him that he would have preferred to see him show up with pneumonia—something easier to treat than what would likely be diagnosed today as post-traumatic stress disorder. "He gave me some pills—I call them my nerve pills," Uncle Curtis told the interviewer, "and I've had to take them ever since."

Probably because Uncle Curtis always seemed so joyful, so funny, so loving—this revelation about his impulse toward violence shocked me and haunts me still. We knew his wartime memories must have been burdensome, otherwise he would have been willing to discuss them, but not even his brothers had known that he had needed medical help to carry them. He had confided in Dad a few months before he died that he was taking antidepressants, but Dad thought his toughest struggle was to care for Aunt Charlotte, advancing through Alzheimer's disease. Having watched the video interview, I can't help but think that the past, not the present, was the source of Uncle Curtis's greatest pain.

I can't know for sure, but I suspect he still had few, if any, regrets about his military service. He paid a high price for it, but he believed service was his duty—even his Christian duty—to his country and to the world. I don't know what he thought about my working within a tradition that discourages its members from doing that kind of duty; we never discussed the matter. Whatever my Southern Baptist, Army-veteran uncle thought and might have wanted to say, he deserves a generous share of credit—or blame—for my having come to work and live among Mennonite pacifists. Thanks to Uncle Curtis, I envision and long for a heaven where even "enemies" will spot each other and shout, "Well, hel-lo!" in delight and surprise.

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IT HAS BEEN TEMPTING TO WONDER IN RECENT YEARS whether gay marriage might provide the impetus to turn the tide of the culture wars. Here, it seems, is a values issue about which significant majorities of American feel strongly. In the 2006 elections, seven states passed referenda banning gay marriage; only one (Arizona) rejected a similar ballot measure, in that case because it overreached by attempting to forbid granting same-sex couples not only marriage but any legal status whatsoever. Two years earlier, in 2004, all eleven states with referenda banning gay marriage had passed them. In all, forty-four states have either a statutory definition of marriage as a union between a man and woman or a constitutional provision to the same effect. Despite the significant factors eroding the place of marriage in American society—divorce, cohabitation, illegitimacy—these numbers suggest that perhaps Americans are not prepared to give up on traditional marriage without a fight.

Though a lifelong Democrat and thus not a typical culture warrior, David Blankenhorn, president of the Institute for American Values, shares the hope that American marriage has some life left in it. In his new book *The Future of Marriage* (Encounter, 2007), Blankenhorn argues extensively against gay marriage by locating that controversy within a much larger social debate about marriage in general. Marriage, writes Blankenhorn, far from being merely (as we are often told) a private emotional commitment between two adults, is also a social institution, that is, a pattern of shared norms, rules, and structures that shapes who we are, confronts us with various social expectations, and attaches public meaning to our actions, all in order to achieve some broad set of social purposes. He defines marriage as “socially approved sexual intercourse between a woman and a man, conceived both as a personal relationship and as an institution, primarily such that any children resulting from the union are—and are understood by the society to be—emotionally, morally, practically, and legally affiliated with both of the parents.” The key features of this definition, in Blankenhorn’s elaboration, are that marriage involves two people, one man and one woman, who engage in socially sanctioned sexual intercourse. Marriage’s chief social purpose—the reason it has developed along broadly similar lines the world over and throughout human history—is to ensure that the children produced by this relationship enjoy the benefits of a secure and stable upbringing with both of their parents. As Blankenhorn says, “For every child, a mother and a father. To meet this fundamental human need, marriage.”

The chief threat against which Blankenhorn argues is the “deinstitutionalization” of marriage, the weakening of the norms, rules, and structures that underpin it as a social institution. Gay marriage achieves this by undermining the essential components of marriage: its joining of the sexes and its link to procreation. In doing so, gay marriage simultaneously erodes the chief rationale for limiting the marital unit to two persons. Blankenhorn points out that his argument against gay marriage is also an argument for exploring other avenues for “reinstitutionalizing” marriage, such as financial incentives for premarital marriage education or increased waiting periods for divorce. He ends with the hopeful insistence that it is not too late to reinstitutionalize marriage, if only we have the will to do so.

Blankenhorn’s arguments are compelling and at times even eloquent, not to mention remarkably irenic, given his subject. His claims about the meaning of marriage and its role as a social institution seem to me correct, as does his explanation of the ways in which legalizing gay marriage would contribute substantially to the deinstitutionalization of marriage. I cannot entirely share his concluding optimism, however, because he overlooks
a crucial social phenomenon that, for reasons suggested by his own argument, makes ultimate acceptance of gay marriage extremely likely.

According to the US Census Bureau report "Married-Couple and Unmarried-Partner Households: 2000," there are approximately six-hundred thousand same-sex partner households in the United States. (This is approximately one percent of the total number of coupled households in the country.) Of these, slightly over twenty percent of male-partner and over thirty percent of female-partner households have children living with them, for a total of over one-hundred-sixty thousand same-sex households with children.

These households arise in a variety of ways, on only one of which I intend to focus here: adoption of children into homosexual families. According to information available from the Human Rights Campaign (www.hrc.org), a national activist organization working for gay and lesbian equality, a significant number of states permit homosexual couples or individuals to adopt children. Only one state, Florida, explicitly prohibits adoption by homosexual individuals and couples. Mississippi and Utah also prohibit same-sex couples (though not homosexual individuals) from adopting.

Beyond that, the picture is somewhat complicated, both because the law itself is in flux and also because actual adoption decisions are typically made by individual county judges based on their own understanding of the best interests of the child concerned, with the result that in many states some jurisdictions permit same-sex adoption while others do not. Still, the following appears to be a fair summary of the current situation:

Practically all states permit homosexual individuals to adopt children, even if they do not permit adoption by same-sex couples. In effect, of course, some number of these children will enter households in which their adoptive parent is in a homosexual relationship and thus will have same-sex parents.

Eight states and the District of Columbia allow what is called "second-parent adoption." Under this procedure, a person who is not a legal parent to a partner's child can become one by adopting the child, without the first parent's losing any parental rights. Second-parent adoption thus permits both members of a same-sex couple to hold legal parental rights with respect to their child.

An additional eighteen states have permitted second-parent adoptions in at least some jurisdictions.

Blankenhorn devotes very little attention in his book to the phenomenon of homosexual adoption of children. Yet it is, I suggest, of crucial importance to the future of marriage. For reasons both philosophical and, especially, political, permitting same-sex persons to adopt children almost surely will result in widespread acceptance of same-sex marriage within roughly a generation.

Philosophically, homosexual adoption promotes same-sex marriage by chipping away at precisely those elements that Blankenhorn identifies as essential to marriage as a social institution: its joining of the sexes by unifying a man with a woman and its connection to procreation. Blankenhorn claims that "marriage is above all a procreative institution" (his emphasis). Homosexual adoption may not undermine this norm directly, for two reasons: first, because we readily can imagine situations in which we would have no special qualms about granting custody of a child to someone not in a procreative union, such as the widowed grandmother of an orphan; second, because, as Blankenhorn points out in a different context, we readily understand adoption as "a derivative and compensatory institution," one that by its very attempt to make up for their loss "presupposes the importance of natural parents." Because adoption is not regarded as the normative arrangement to begin with, permitting it by those who will not procreate, be they widowed grandmothers or same-sex couples, does not necessarily undercut the norm of marriage as a procreative union between a man and a woman. On the other hand, perhaps no public act (short of marriage itself) so strikingly gives to same-sex couples the social stamp of approval as a legitimate family unit as does the decision to place in their hands the
legal custody of a child. The powerful symbolism of that act is clearly at odds with the institution of marriage as Blankenhorn describes it, and even if it does not directly undermine the procreative marital norm, it surely does so indirectly.

Far more decisive, however, are the straightforward political dynamics that homosexual adoption generates. Recall the census numbers: as of 2000, approximately one-hundred-sixty thousand same-sex households included children. Since some of those households may contain more than one child, and since social acceptance of homosexuality has continued to grow during the intervening years, it seems likely that roughly two-hundred thousand children are currently being raised in same-sex households. Permitting homosexual adoption ensures that this number will continue to grow. So peer into your political crystal ball and look some twenty or thirty years into the future, when those current two-hundred thousand children are voting adults, involved members of their communities, and almost surely looking pretty much just like all their fellow Americans who had been raised by legally married, opposite-sex couples. Does anyone seriously think that these adults would not experience as deeply offensive and stigmatizing society's refusal to recognize their parents as married and thus their family as a family? And does anyone seriously believe that their fellow Americans, knowing this, would have the stomach to impose that offensive stigma upon them, consciously and deliberately? Surely not. Blankenhorn strives mightily to suggest that we can defend traditional views of marriage without stigmatizing homosexuals. He may be right. But what about the stigma that their children—the children who are already among us—certainly will feel if they discover that society refuses to recognize their "parents" as married? For feel it they will, at least if marriage remains the meaningful institution that Blankenhorn wants to resuscitate. Marriage and those children are on a collision course.

In his Memoir on Pauperism, Alexis de Tocqueville offered a remarkably contemporary-sounding analysis of the problem of pauperism in England. Industrialization and economic expansion were sufficiently destabilizing to create a class of paupers. They also, fortunately, created enough additional wealth to provide for this new class of the poor, but offering such public provision, unfortunately, exacerbated the problem it was meant to cure by removing incentives for work and encouraging idleness. The logical conclusion, of course, would be to cease providing public welfare for the poor. Yet Tocqueville poignantly asks whether such a response is really even thinkable: "Who would dare to let a poor man die of hunger because it's his own fault that he is dying? Who will hear his cries and reason about his vices?"

Twenty-first century Americans are not, I think, less compassionate than the nineteenth-century British or French of whom Tocqueville was thinking. And his question about welfare policy perfectly describes the situation in which we now find ourselves with respect to gay marriage. We might rephrase it slightly, thinking of those two-hundred thousand (and counting) future adult citizens, and ask, "Who will hear their cries and reason about their parents' vices?"

Blankenhorn is almost certainly correct that—as its supporters hope and its opponents fear—gay marriage will contribute decisively to the overall deinstitutionalization of marriage. Yet the trends described here are generating future political dynamics that will make gay marriage almost impossible to resist. (Indeed, by focusing solely on adoption, and not on the other vital means by which same-sex couples acquire children—assisted reproductive technology, sperm and egg donation—I have if anything underestimated the strength of those dynamics.) Unless, that is, we act now to restrict child-rearing by same-sex couples by, for example, following Florida's example and prohibiting adoption by homosexuals.

Is contemporary America likely to do any such thing? It seems extremely doubtful. Which is why, at least for now, same-sex marriage—despite the best efforts of Blankenhorn and his colleagues in the marriage movement, whose goals I share—appears to me a fait accompli.

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Defending an Integrated Life

Jeanne Heffernan Schindler

of the traditional Lenten disciplines: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. The first two practices make clear that following Christ involves our whole selves, body and soul. The third reminds us that the life of discipleship is intrinsically social. Our profession of faith is instantiated in provision for the poor.

While Professor Fish might not venture an opinion on the merits of prayer and fasting, he likely would applaud almsgiving as a worthy social action. What he would fail to appreciate, however, is that the Christian believer inhabits an identity, not a role, and that this identity inspires both the corporal works of mercy Fish would celebrate and the public interventions he rejects as "imperialist." For the Christian to do one but not the other would be to betray the full implications of gospel love.

Stanley Fish does not perceive how high the stakes are. What else can account for his patronizing observation that with respect to "reproductive rights," for instance, the savvy politician "isn't going to feel boxed in by a little religious dogma"? That one could dismiss an ancient Christian teaching on the sanctity of unborn life as "a little religious dogma" proves that Fish neither understands the particular position nor what it means to be a Christian. To split one's identity, as he recommends, to be one person in the sanctuary of the church and another when I venture out into the world? The liberal state answers, Yes." Fish concurs.

Professor Fish's editorial appeared just before Ash Wednesday, which was fortuitous, for the liturgical season of Lent offers a dramatic counterpoint to postmodern fragmentation. Perhaps more than at any other time in the church year, we are prompted to consider the radically comprehensive and integrated character of the Christian life. Think
must inform his role, not the other way around. He could not be one person in his political office and another at home and at prayer.

For Thomas More, there was a basic seamlessness between his public office and his Christian convictions. He recognized that to forsake his deepest beliefs in the interest of the public good would, in fact, be to undermine the public good itself. In Robert Bolt’s play The Man for All Seasons, an unforgettable portrayal of More, the protagonist puts it thus: “I believe, when statesmen forsake their own private conscience for the sake of their public duties... they lead their country by a short route to chaos.” When those appointed to uphold justice subordinate what they know to be true and good for apparent practical advantage, they introduce a fissure into the polity’s foundation, a crack that may expand over time to become a fault line of geologic proportions. Arguably America’s constitutional compromise with slavery was one such division.

This is not to say that Thomas More was a moral crusader or that he thought the law should demand perfect virtue from the citizenry. Rather, he had a keen sense of prudence, that is, of how to do the good at this time and in these circumstances. For More, prudence demanded at a minimum that one not actively perpetuate an evil, hence his refusal to take the Oath of Supremacy and swear allegiance to Henry VIII as head of the Church of England. In our time, prudence demands at a minimum that Christian politicians refuse to support what Fish euphemistically terms “reproductive rights.” Yes, remaining true to Christian principles on this question may imperil one’s election bid. Political strategists may counsel a little “compartmentalization” on this score. Liberal theorists arguing for an ostensibly neutral public square would do likewise. But, as Michael Sandel astutely observes, the argument for freedom of choice—whether the choice in question is abortion in our day or slavery in another—presupposes “an answer to the moral and religious questions it purports to bracket” (Democracy’s Discontent, 23). In short, Stanley Fish can counsel the moral and religious compartmentalization of one’s life only because he does not consider religious identity or the moral opposition to abortion gravely serious issues.

Thomas More’s example is again instructive here, and Robert Bolt brilliantly brings to life the kind of conflict at issue. In one of the play’s most memorable exchanges, the Duke of Norfolk attempts to persuade More to bracket the dictates of his conscience and swear the Oath of Supremacy. All of the other nobility, Norfolk points out, already have done so. Why doesn’t More do likewise? More sharply rebukes him, insisting, “Hear me out. You and your class have ‘given in’—as you rightly call it—because the religion of this country means nothing to you one way or the other.” If Norfolk took Catholicism seriously, he would be in the same vexed position as More, but he does not, and so he redoubles his efforts of persuasion. Pointing to the list of prominent men who have signed the Oath, Norfolk exclaims, “Damn it, Thomas, look at those names... You know those men! Can’t you do what I did, and come with us, for fellowship?” To which More poignantly replies, “And when we stand before God, and you are sent to Paradise for doing according to your conscience, and I am damned for not doing according to mine, will you come with me, for fellowship?” One might pose the same question to Professor Fish.

Or if the prospect of divine judgment fails to stir his empathy, we might set our rhetorical sights a bit lower and ask him to consider two things. First, that lawmaking inevitably embodies value judgments—liberal or conservative—that are “imposed” upon the citizenry, whether they assent to the values in question or not, and second, that when secular activists lobby for such policies as same-sex marriage and abortion rights (the two categories Fish highlights), they are attempting to enshrine in law their deepest convictions about human nature, freedom, sexuality, love, and, by implication, God. Fish has not asked them to cordon off these beliefs in favor of toleration. They are not required to be one person at an advocacy meeting and another in the legislature. But if the integrity of personal identity is guaranteed for some, it must be guaranteed for all. Let the Thomas Mores and the Norfolks speak their minds, make their arguments, and come before the bar of public judgment as whole people.

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NOW

Sw eet Briar , VA

the hills turn lavender, the sun's last light
pink and gold behind them. A few weeks from
solstice, and the lights go on early. Matthew
wrote, the eye is the lamp of the body,
and I am trying to keep mine open, not succumb
to late afternoon sun and the drone of bees. Now
twilight covers the earth like a blanket. I've been
thinking all day about that line of Rumi's: the moon
won't use the door, only the window, and I'm trying
to keep mine open, wide.

Now

it's morning, and outside my window, there's a blue jay,
now there's a bird in need of a good oiling. I'm trying
to bring this poem to some conclusion, but Michelangelo
reminds me about the beauty of the non finito, the unfinished.
Each day has flown by so quickly, on rapid blue wings;
the shadows are gathering, there's only
now

Barbara Crooker
What Books Are Good For


I’ve spent a lot of time in airports lately—Minneapolis/St. Paul, O’Hare, BWI, JFK—and the one thing they all have in common, besides long security lines full of people unable to understand that liquid soap is, in fact, liquid and that everyone must remove their shoes before passing through the metal detector, is reading. Bookstores and newsstands supply endless copies of bestsellers, magazines, and newspapers, and practically everyone without a cell phone glued to his ear or a laptop balanced on her knees has their noses buried in some kind of printed material.

This shouldn’t seem remarkable, considering the ubiquity of Barnes and Noble and Borders, but as the National Endowment for the Arts reported several years ago, only 56.6% of American adults read books and less than half of the total adult population reads literature (*Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America*. Washington: NEA, 2004), so even though my fellow travelers’ tastes leaned towards James Patterson and Nora Roberts, I couldn’t help feeling buoyed by the intensity with which they devoured their books of choice. Still, a trip to any chain bookstore, and many independent ones as well, shows the publishing world’s response to the NEA’s findings: the amount of space devoted to “literary” works is eroding faster than the California coastline.

This trend is evident in print media itself, as newspapers like the *Dallas Morning News* have cut the pages devoted to books in recent months and even *The New York Times Book Review* has leaned toward covering short-shelf-life current events books. All may not be lost for the reader of literary fiction, however, based on the release of three new books—John Sutherland’s *How to Read a Novel*, Francine Prose’s *Reading Like a Writer*, and Edward Mendelson’s *The Things That Matter*. These books, all from major publishing houses, present compelling arguments for reading literary novels and examples of how to read them. At the very least, these books show that reading won’t go down without a fight.

Matthew Duffus

When I worked in a bookstore a few years ago, the question I heard most often, after, “Do you carry *The Da Vinci Code*?” was “How do you know what to read?” This from teens looking to augment their school-assigned booklists, professionals on their lunch breaks from the surrounding office buildings, and people serving jury duty at the nearby courthouse, all overwhelmed by aisles and aisles of options when they only wanted something to help them survive the tedium of a week in court or the rush-hour bus ride home.

While talking with these people, I attempted to tease out their interests, offered suggestions, and, more often than not, left them just as confused as they’d been in the first place. If only I’d had John Sutherland’s *How to Read a Novel* at my disposal. Sutherland has quite a pedigree—Emeritus Lord Northcliffe Professor of Modern English Literature at University College London, columnist for *The Guardian*, committee chairman for the 2005 Man Booker Prize—and his book benefits from these experiences. He is comfortable with a range of references and authors, everyone from Tolstoy and Thackeray to Nick Hornby and Helen Fielding, yet he eschews literary criticism in...
favor of a more practical, and personal, approach to reading.

The book’s subtitle, “A User’s Guide,” says it all, though it might be more apt if called “A Buyer’s Guide” or “I’m in a Bookstore, Now What?,” because Sutherland’s work is designed to help readers perform literary triage in the face of the thousands of titles available in any bookstore. As he writes, “[t]he modern reader is like an explorer cutting his way through the jungle with a machete—slashing a path to that single volume which is, just now, wanted” (7). The problem with finding that “single volume” is that more than ten thousand new novels are published each year (12), and as a result the average reader is forced to allow bookstores and publishing companies to do the selecting in the form of advertisements, blurbs, and discounts and sales promotions, not to mention movie tie-ins and the gold standard, the Oprah Book Club seal.

Sutherland jumps into the fray, offering himself as a guide through this foreign terrain. After a few introductory chapters, including the wonderfully concise “Fiction—A Four-Minute History,” he takes the reader step-by-step through the process, starting with “Titles” and following all the way through “Epigraphs, forwards and afterwards,” before addressing a number of other issues, like hard- versus paperback, book reviews, and the effect of prizes and awards on sales. He does everything but select the book for you, though his ten page bibliography isn’t a bad place to start. And while each chapter has its own structure, Sutherland is careful to place the topic in historical perspective, as in “Titles,” where he discusses the relatively late emergence of titles, the use of synoptic summaries in Richardson’s Clarissa, and chapter titles, not to mention misleading and enigmatic titles. He even finds space for a quiz on the references imbedded in five Aldous Huxley titles. His knack for approaching seemingly-mundane topics from fresh and witty perspectives ensures that seasoned readers will enjoy the book as much as the novices he purports to address.

Sutherland’s learnedness comes in handy most in the chapter “Read One, You’ve Read Them All: Intertextuality.” After a brief explanation of the term intertextuality and its origin in Julia Kristeva’s scholarship, he focuses on four novels short-listed for the Man Booker Prize in 2005—Zadie Smith’s On Beauty, John Banville’s The Sea, Ali Smith’s The Accidental, and Julian Barnes’s Arthur and George—explaining what they owe to their forbears, including E. M. Forster, Iris Murdoch and James Joyce, the filmmaker Pasolini, and Emile Zola. This discussion points to one of reading’s greatest joys: the discovery of connections between authors and works. Sutherland doesn’t follow this line as far as he could, mainly because he intends the chapter as an introduction, but as he concludes, “for the ‘user’ the message is simple. The more fiction you read, and the more intelligently you do so, the richer your experience will be. Those readers who read most get most out of it” (130).

Ultimately, Sutherland moves beyond the simple joys of reading for its own sake to address the question that looms over most supposedly non-essential pursuits in our hectic existence: Why bother? As always, he takes the broadest possible view. He begins tongue-in-cheek, with a British poisoner inspired by Agatha Christie and with Timothy McVeigh, who learned about explosives from The Turner Diaries, and then moves on to the nineteenth-century notion of novels as “middle-class manual[s] of conduct,” as evidenced in the work of Jane Austen (239). He asserts that novels still “have a socio-educational value” and that “[i]n a technological age, for example, it is important that the population should know something about how the machinery that makes modern life possible works” (240). Michael Crichton’s success, for example, can be attributed in part to this idea—The Andromeda Strain, published in 1969, benefited from the real-life events of the space program, and Jurassic Park helped common readers understand the complexities of Watson and Crick’s work with DNA. Sutherland mentions a number of recent offerings as well, novels related to Chernobyl and nuclear-generated fuel and the US court system’s treatment of death row inmates, in an attempt to refute the notion that
books are written in artistic bubbles, free from the concerns of every day life.

Referencing D. H. Lawrence, Sutherland concludes, “at their highest pitch of achievement, novels can indeed be the one bright book of life. The trick is finding which, among the millions now accessible, fits that bill” (243). While he sets out to guide readers through the book-selection process, helping them become better informed about all aspects of publishing, he also defends the notion that it is all right to mix the “high” and “low,” the Lawrences and the Crichtons. Sutherland wants readers to select the right book for them, specifically, not what the bestseller lists or book clubs or prize committees think we should be reading.

WHERE SUTHERLAND WANTS to assist the average reader in making her selection, Francine Prose, in Reading Like a Writer, focuses on a particular subset: creative writing, which she has taught for more than twenty years. The proliferation of programs, colonies, and conferences for writers helps explain not only the impetus for her book but also its place of honor among the New Releases display at my nearby chain bookstore (an expensive position, marketing-wise, as Sutherland points out). Prose offers a lesson in close reading, an essential tool for young writers, though one that often manifests itself only in identifying flaws in student work, not in studying enduring works from the past. She argues that “a close-reading course should be at least a companion, if not an alternative, to the writing workshop…. reading a masterpiece can inspire us by showing us how a writer does something brilliantly” (11). Prose provides such elucidation in chapters that focus on words, sentences, and paragraphs, as well as broader concepts like narration, character, and gesture, all the while demonstrating the refined eye that is an essential tool for writers.

Prose is at her best when she is most specific and methodical, as in the chapter on words, where she spends almost three pages analyzing the opening paragraph of Flannery O’Connor’s “A Good Man Is Hard to Find.” As she states, “[o]ne way to compel yourself to slow down and stop at every word is to ask yourself what sort of information each word—each word choice—is conveying” (16). So we learn the significance of character names, the “psychic distance” achieved by leaving the grandmother unnamed, and the importance of a strong verb like “seizing,” as opposed to the pedestrian “taking,” not to mention how the choice of “aloose” “conveys the rhythm and flavor of a local dialect without subjecting us to the annoying apostrophes, dropped g’s, the shootin’ and talkin’ and cussin’, and the bad grammar with which other authors attempt to transcribe regional speech” (18). Prose shows us how important each word is to the whole and how the choices O’Connor makes in the opening paragraph echo and foreshadow the story’s ending.

Once she has covered the essentials, Prose turns to reading Chekhov as a case-study in putting everything together. Her description of the pleasure she found in reading his stories during two-and-a-half-hour bus rides to the school where she taught provides the perfect support for Sutherland’s emphasis on finding the right book at the right time: “[r]ead­ing Chekhov, I felt not happy, exactly, but as close to happiness as I knew I was likely to come. And it occurred to me that this was the pleasure and mystery of reading, as well as the answer to those who say that books will disappear. For now, books are still the best way of taking great art and its consolations along with us on a bus” (235). Almost without fail, Chekhov’s stories contradicted the advice she gave her students, everything from avoiding similar-sounding names to sticking with one point-of-view to not killing off the main character at the end of the story. Thinking about these contradictions made her re-evaluate her methods, leading her to realize that “Chekhov was teaching me how to teach” (241). His stories contain just as many contradictions themselves, which is why, Prose argues, “Chekhov’s stories should not be read singly but as separate parts of a whole. For like life, they present contradic­tory views, opposing visions. Reading them, we think: How broad life is! How many ways there are to live!” (247).
Edward Mendelson's The Things That Matter is the most challenging of the three works and the most carefully focused, but it also offers the strongest defense for reading: novelists, great ones at least, can teach us about ourselves and offer a lens through which we can view our experiences. The book's subtitle, "What Seven Classic Novels Have to Say about the Stages of Life," explains Mendelson's overarching structure, though to his credit he does not limit his discussions of the books—Frankenstein, Wuthering Heights, Jane Eyre, Middlemarch, Mrs. Dalloway, To the Lighthouse, and Between the Acts—to the particular stages. He also offers connections among the seven, relevant biographical information, and acute close readings that will make the reader want to return to each, no matter how many times one has read them. Mendelson's structure is doubly chronological, the chapters progress from birth to death and from earliest work, Frankenstein, to most recent, Between the Acts, and he explains his design as "a brief (extremely brief) history of the emotional and moral life of the past two centuries, an inner biography of the world of thought and feeling that came into being in the romantic era of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries" (xi-xii). He sets a daunting task, for both himself and the seven novels, when he asserts that "[t]his book is written for all readers, of any age, who are still deciding how to live their lives" (xii-xiii).

In discussing childhood and Wuthering Heights, for instance, Mendelson shows how Emily Brontë overturned traditional notions of childhood and adulthood: "[c]hildhood, in this novel, is a state of titanic intensity, adulthood a state of trivial weakness" (47). This is why Catherine and Heathcliff cannot recapture their childhood connection in adulthood. For adults, the strongest bond between two people is found in marriage, and therefore sex, but Catherine and Heathcliff's relationship has nothing to do with these things, and the introduction of such concerns forces them farther apart, as "[t]hey are divided both by their separation into man and woman and by the social distinctions that bar the questionable upstart Heathcliff from Catherine the landed body" (48).

To demonstrate Brontë's concern with childhood, Mendelson relies on biography, textual analysis of Catherine and Heathcliff's story, and a brief history of ideas about childhood and nature. This multi-faceted approach is representative of every chapter. To show how misguided Casaubon's enterprise is in Middlemarch, for example, Mendelson uses George Eliot's translation of David Friedrich Strauss's The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined, and he points to Jung, Yeats, and T. S. Eliot as influences on Virginia Woolf's use of archetype in Mrs. Dalloway. Ultimately, however, Mendelson allows the authors' words to speak for themselves. He quotes liberally and applies the kind of close reading Francine Prose taught. He eschews literary theory and its attendant terminology in favor of practical criticism that requires only the reader's careful attention to these seven books, and his discussion of each makes it clear that these novels have endured not only for artistic reasons but also because they offer "models or examples of the kinds of life that a reader might or might not choose to live" (xii). Even though Catherine and Heathcliff's need to regain their lost connection leads to their deaths, Mendelson shows readers that "the power of Wuthering Heights derives from [Bronte's] understanding of the impulse, more or less hidden in everyone, to find a refuge against time and change, and her understanding of the price you pay for having that impulse even if you never yield to it" (78).

In his introduction, Mendelson argues that "behind the scenes, unheard by the charac-
ters, the author's inner voices are also arguing with each other over which story to tell and how to tell it... The authors refuse to be satisfied by simple or straightforward explanations of complex things, and they repeatedly correct the flaws of one explanation by exploring a different one" (xiv). This creates a dialogue between the works that serves as an elaborate form of intertextuality—the more we read these authors, the better we understand their complexities and the clearer the richness and variety of their ideas becomes. In this light, Woolf's view of nature as "prime and archaic impulses" (238) in Between the Acts can be seen both within its specific context (her final work, completed shortly before her suicide and the start of World War II) and within its place opposite Mary Shelley's and Emily Brontë's more hopeful, Romantic conceptions of nature. Mendelson points out that Woolf even argues with her earlier self, critiquing the "virtuosity and depth of her verbal artistry" (236). Mendelson presents these contradictory ideas, within each writer's work and from writer-to-writer, without keeping score or arguing for one interpretation over another. Instead, he revels with a contagious passion in the variety of ideas and experiences these books contain. Like all great books, these seven novels truly do contain The Things That Matter. What better defense of reading could there be? ♠
Dear Editor,

I suppose you will be going to St. Paul for the convention, too, in which case I would like for you to keep an evening free so that I can get together with you on a matter that I would like to talk over with somebody who is an expert on sin. You probably wonder why I am all of a sudden worried about sin, so I will tell you. We are trying to organize some adult Bible classes in the congregation and since we have never had much luck with Bible classes here we figured that we would have to build up some interest by starting off with some real hot stuff. Rev. Zeitgeist wanted to start off with a series of discussions on the Epistle to the Romans which, if you ask me, would have fallen flatter than a pancake seeing as how even I have never been able to read it through except at family devotions. Some of the other members of the committee wanted to study the lives of some of the great Bible characters like Samson and Ruth and Solomon. Finally I suggested that we might start off by discussing the one thing we all know most about, since we can see it all around us every day, which would be sin, and the committee agreed.

For a couple of weeks now I have been trying to set up a series of topics dealing with the most common sins and I have run into some problems. Our committee agreed that there was no point to discussing the sins that no Christian commits any way, like idolatry and adultery and stealing and cursing and swearing. We were in agreement also on certain sins that we all know are wrong but that Christians sometimes fall into, like unionism and missing church on Sunday and carrying a grudge, but we felt that there was no point to discussing these sins because there is no argument about them.

We finally agreed on four topics that we feel need discussing because different people seem to have different ideas on them. These topics are: smoking, drinking, gambling, and dancing.

Now what I would like for you to be thinking about is whether these four things are wrong in themselves, whether certain forms of them are wrong and others OK, whether certain of them may be wrong for some people and all right for others, and under what conditions a person who is guilty of any of them could be excommunicated. I would also greatly appreciate it if you would dig out the Bible passages that pertain to the questions I have listed.

The reason I am asking this is that a funny thing has happened just in our committee discussions. Just as an example, take the matter of smoking. We all started out agreeing that it probably didn't do anybody any good. But pretty soon you could see that we weren't as down on pipe smoking as we were on cigarette smoking, and we didn't disapprove of men smoking as much as we did of women smoking. The trouble is that none of us can explain exactly why we make these distinctions, even though we all feel in our bones that they are important distinctions. Maybe you could help us out.

We had the same problem with drinking. When we got to discussing it, we discovered that all of us like our glass of beer now and then, but every single one of us felt that there is something not quite right about drinking mixed drinks. We tried to analyze why a bunch of Christian beer drinkers would turn thumbs down on Martinis and we just couldn't come up with any reason that sounded logical. We would appreciate whatever guidance you could give us.
On gambling we were pretty well agreed. One of the farmers on the committee had to get in a dig at us businessmen by asking what the difference is between gambling and investment but his old man was a Populist and out in these parts you have to learn to tolerate people like that. We did run into a bigger question, though. We went all through the concordance and the catechism and we couldn’t find a single Bible passage that forbids gambling. I would appreciate it if you would jot down a text or two for me.

Our biggest argument came on dancing. Two of the members of the committee are against all kinds of dancing. Me and another member claim that dancing itself is OK but that what makes it wrong is mixing it with drinking and necking. The teacher made a distinction that I couldn’t quite follow, between ballroom dancing and square dancing. So obviously we are going to have to get this straightened out among ourselves before we can go condemning it in Bible class.

Well, these are the problems I would like to talk over with you. I hope you won’t mind taking the time to talk them over. We’re trying to bring religion down to the practical level of everyday living and we think that our general idea is sound, even though it may be hard to work out.

Regards,

G. G.
on the cover—

*Meat Stall with Holy Family Giving Alms*, by the Dutch painter Pieter Aertsen (1507–1575), is a classic example of the "inverted still-life" technique. The foreground is dominated by a lavish banquet of freshly butchered meats: fish, poultry, sausage links, a skinned ox head, and various parts of a slaughtered pig. Each piece of dead flesh is surprisingly life-like, rendered in reds and browns with careful attention to details such as dripping viscera and the ox's haunting eye. The narrative elements in this work are relegated to the background and are noticed only after more careful study. In the left background, a man fills a water jug, and behind him a freshly slaughtered carcass hangs. The limbs of this beast are spread out and lashed to a horizontal beam, suggesting a crucifixion. In the center-right background, another scene unfolds. Here we are surprised to find the Holy Family. Joseph leads a donkey carrying Mary who holds baby Jesus in one hand and offers alms to a beggar boy with the other. The juxtaposition between the charity and self-sacrifice suggested in the background and the opulence and self-indulgence in the foreground leads us to ask ourselves which we value more.

on reviewers—

Matthew Duffus

on poets—

Kelly D. Morris
is a former social worker now working as a freelance writer. Her work has appeared in *Cider Press Review*, *Transcendent Visions*, and *Nature Friend*.

Christopher Anderson
is a Professor of English at Oregon State University and the author of a number of books, including a recent book of poetry, *My Problem with the Truth* (Cloudbank 2005). He is also a Catholic deacon.

Duane Vorhees
lives in Korea, where he teaches American Literature and History to American Gls. He is an active founding member of the Seoul Artist Network, and his work has appeared in numerous periodicals on three continents.

Barbara Crooker
The Cresset congratulates its award-winning contributors.

Devotional/Inspirational: Long Format—Award of Excellence
Feature Article: Ecumenical Magazine—Honorable Mention

Theological or Scholarly Article—Award of Excellence

Theme Section: Magazine—Honorable Mention

Editorial or Opinion Piece: Magazine—Honorable Mention

Poetry—Honorable Mention