The Cresset (Vol. LX, No. 8, Michaelmas)

Valparaiso University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholar.valpo.edu/cresset_archive

Part of the Arts and Humanities Commons, and the Public Affairs, Public Policy and Public Administration Commons

This Full Issue is brought to you for free and open access by ValpoScholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Cresset (archived issues) by an authorized administrator of ValpoScholar. For more information, please contact a ValpoScholar staff member at scholar@valpo.edu.
Contents

3  The Editor / in luce tua: living rooms
5  David Kehrer / confusing parables
8  Gary Fincke / subsidence, mine fire, the tomb of eve
11 Mike Heller / light comes from stones (verse)
12 Margaret Franson / from the chapel: varieties of gifts
14 Nancy G. Westerfield / light comes from stones (verse)
15 David Fagerberg / an academic horror story
18 William Snyder, Jr. / a visit in august (verse)
20 Tom Willadsen / letters from the front: "help me, rhonda . . ."
23 Arvid Sponberg / campus diary: visitors and visions
26 James Comb / letters from abroad: english odyssey
30 Fredrick Barton / film: the mouth that roared
35 William Snyder, Jr. / on the bending of light (verse)
36 book reviews / Davies on Marsh, Bethge (Bonhoeffer), and Shriver (Politics);
   Meilaender on Hooper (Lewis); Gildrie on Gausted (Jefferson)
41 Vincern Wixon / from the parlor (verse)
42 notes on poets, reviewers

THE CRESSET is published seven times during the academic year, September through June, by the Valparaiso University Press as a forum for ideas and informed opinion. The views expressed are those of the writers and do not necessarily reflect the preponderance of opinion at Valparaiso University. Manuscripts should be addressed to the Editor and accompanied by return postage. Letters to the Editor for publication are subject to editing for brevity. The Book Review Index and the American Humanities Index list Cresset reviews. Periodicals postage is paid at Valparaiso, Indiana. Regular Subscription rates: one year -- $8.50; two years--$14.75; Student subscription rates: one year -- $4; single copy -- $1.00. Entire contents copyrighted 1997 by the Valparaiso University Press, Valparaiso, Indiana 46383, without whose written permission reproduction in whole or in part for any purpose whatsoever is expressly forbidden.

THE CRESSET is published seven times during the academic year, September through June, by the Valparaiso University Press as a forum for ideas and informed opinion. The views expressed are those of the writers and do not necessarily reflect the preponderance of opinion at Valparaiso University. Manuscripts should be addressed to the Editor and accompanied by return postage. Letters to the Editor for publication are subject to editing for brevity. The Book Review Index and the American Humanities Index list Cresset reviews. Periodicals postage is paid at Valparaiso, Indiana. Regular Subscription rates: one year -- $8.50; two years--$14.75; Student subscription rates: one year -- $4; single copy -- $1.00. Entire contents copyrighted 1997 by the Valparaiso University Press, Valparaiso, Indiana 46383, without whose written permission reproduction in whole or in part for any purpose whatsoever is expressly forbidden.

Postmaster send address changes to The Cresset, #10 Huegli Hall, Valparaiso University, Valparaiso, IN 46383
For most of my early life, paintings were just around. All over everything. Till I was about thirteen, my father’s studio occupied the space in our house that other people called, in their houses, the “living room.” Our living was done in the spaces left over from the spaces occupied by easels, model stands, back cloths, shelves of paint and turpentine, jars of brushes, frames, and paintings. While we thought these last were nice enough, we were always praying to be rid of them, as in “Dear Lord, please let someone buy that mountain picture so that I can maybe have a real nylon crinoline instead of this old thing made of netting dipped in sugar water.” Paintings were always, from the earliest moments I can remember, commodity.

Yet of course that was only half of the meaning, even in my earliest memory. A painting was a costly product, the repository of something my father had “put into it,” something not entirely understandable, but nonetheless palpable in the household. Every day I saw him working, standing for hours at the easel, using eye and hand like any workman. Every evening he would clean up the palette, or ready it to be left overnight, blowing oil of clove onto it to preserve it for morning, and then engage in the systematic and beautifully monotonous task of cleaning the brushes, stirring each through the series of jars, the gentle “chink” of wooden brush handle on glass producing a calm, settling music like any nighttime, closing-up-shop kind of sound. At night, he would sit with us and sketch figure after figure on sheets of paper, and then, next day, those figures would appear in charcoal on the newly-primed board on the easel. For months, the painting would grow in color, and depth, and intensity, becoming more complex, more demanding. My father would make the painting, at the cost of his energy and attention, and when it was finished, we would admire it, and then we would hope that soon it would be gone—exchanged for our rent, music lessons, dog food, a carburetor, hair ribbons.

This summer, for one reason or another, I have seen a lot of paintings—Renoirs in Ottawa, Wyeths in Maine, a Van Eyk in Chicago, and now the exhibit we have all waited so eagerly for here in our own gallery at VU, the 27 paintings in an exhibit called “Old Masters Brought to Light.” Two of these paintings are on this issue’s covers, a small hint of the riches involved in this collection. Going to look at pictures has been a standard activity of mine since childhood, but only recently have I begun to be puzzled about why so many people do this. Why is it now the case that at Chicago’s Art Institute, even on an ordinary day, one sees Renoir’s jolly picnickers through such crowds of intently serious people? At big shows, where one stands in line, and reserves a ticket, and stands in line again, and jockeys for space with hundreds of people (many of whom are glazely fixed to their headsets), one hears the barely subdued roar of the excited devout experiencing a prolonged moment of exaltation. Outside the doors of the exhibition proper, there is regularly a kind of feeding frenzy, where Monet’s lilies are to be found on bridge tallies and wastebaskets, and people line up again to take home with them relics of their experience in the form of posters, raincoats, picture puzzles and refrigerator magnets.
I do not at all mean to belittle these picture-seekers, for I am one of them. Much less would I
belittle the fervor with which we seem to collect the experiences. It somehow matters that we have (or
have not) seen the Mackintosh tea rooms, or the Van Eyk “Annunciation,” or, as it was reverently
called, the Vermeer. Why? Is this phenomenon just another example of the commodification of nearly
everything? Do we go merely to say we have been, gettting our ticket punched at the culture monitor’s
window? Do we go because of the value or the size or the age of the pictures? What is it that sends
people into art museums with looks, not of tired resignation, as though they were engaging in a
necessary though tedious duty, but eagerly, with bounding steps, their faces flushed with anticipatory
pleasure? It is common to hear people boast about how long they stood in line to view the Monet or
the O’Keeffe; when did you last hear someone announce with satisfaction and delight that “church
services went fifteen minutes longer than usual today”? If the visit to the exhibition is a kind of contem­
porary pilgrimage, what is the object of veneration?

I suspect one would get several different answers, depending on who was asked. I have heard very
cynical explanations, and very erudite ones. Architects, who plan the spaces in which these encounters
take place, also pay a good deal of attention to the nature of this experience for which people are
willing to go to such trouble. But I wonder whether the studies of gallery-going take into account the
lessons I must have absorbed because of the extraordinary good fortune of growing up in an artist’s
household.

The painting, whatever its subject, contains so much meaning that merely looking at it—the
briefest of encounters—fills us up. Being with it is satisfying, in the sense that we cease to feel the
hunger that often characterizes human life. It bears the mind of the maker into our presence, and all
that that mind and hand have done to bring something into being. For a moment, the chaos of unor­
ganized space, of confused light, of unknowable darkness, is shaped and ordered by what is on the
painting’s plane, and there is scarcely a human being who fails to recognize the satisfaction of that
experience. Our mind may tell us that such order is fragile, momentary, easily lost. Yet a painting
contrives to convince us that order can be permanent without being rigid, and that we will gain by
ceasing to resist its view of reality. Whether we know it or not, we hear the soft chink of the brush being
cleaned, and hearing it we know that human eye and hand have produced this miracle in which the
physical elements have been transcended, and yet remain resolutely and hearteningly physical.

If the painting has been around a long time, it carries with it not only the weight of all that went
into its creation, but all of its own past. As object and possession, it has been a part of inventory and
catalogue, a piece of somebody’s assets, the subject of study, the occasion for the arts of care and
restoration. Each of these points can be learned about separately, and each exerts its own fascination.
But I suspect that something of all this—an expectation of a fullness of experience which can be had for
the mere looking—draws people in such numbers to seek out paintings. In an age of ephemera, where
we must teach ourselves not to give attention to the thousands of nearly meaningless objects and
messages that crowd our mental space every day, to be in the presence of paintings is to have the chance
to experience joy. And for even the chance, standing in line is no price at all. Without that chance, no
living room is worth the name.

Peace,

GME
E
everything was piled just about as high as it could be piled, indeed exceeding, to be honest, a
reasonable margin of safety. Crates, boxes, loose household goods, a few meager pieces of
furniture—all were stacked layer upon layer, held fast by two stout ropes thrown over the double-
bed mattress which crowned the heap, securing it to the bed of the little, rusty, blue, pickup truck.
The little, blue truck was as old as the inhabitants of the cab were young. Joe and Lisa, in their mid-
twenties, had been born about the time their vehicle had rolled off the assembly line of the Dodge
plant. The three little ones, of course, snuggled in the cab with them were very recent models.

Slowly, they drove along the dusty dirt roads, winding their way gently through shallow hills
and valleys, now plunging into the deep shadows then lifting up again into the bright, warm, mid-
autumn sun. At every crossroad they would stop and examine the way each direction, searching,
debating within and sometimes with each other, always seeking a very non-specific, even elusive
goal, yet certain they would recognize it when they found it.

The stout wooden post was quite firmly centered in the lawn about half-way between the
front porch of the house and the dusty road running by. The elderly gentleman nevertheless picked
up his sledge hammer again, and with amazingly strong arms and hands, gave the post a couple more
whacks. Whomp. Whomp. Then, he stepped around to view the two white-painted boards affixed
to the post, with their bold black lettering: “FOR LEASE.” He was checking its visibility from the
road when the little, rusty blue pickup rumbled by, squeaked to a stop, backed up, and turned into
the driveway.

“Well, Joe; well, Lisa,” the elderly gentleman said after showing them around the farm and
the house and after fetching fresh, cool water from the well for the children, as they sat on the front
porch of the house, “I’ll make you the same deal the former tenants had. You take care of the place,
spend what you need to keep it up, plant the crops, and bring in the harvest. End of the year I’ll send
someone by and we’ll split the profits.”

They were shaking hands on the deal, when Joe asked, “By the way, I didn’t catch your
name.”

“Oh, I’ve been called lots of things over the years. You can just call me Mr. G.”

“One other thing,” Joe ventured, as Mr. G was stepping down from the porch, “the place
seems pretty well kept up. What happened to the former tenants?”

“Oh,” said Mr. G, “they were such a disappointment. Kept the place up very well and
worked the land well. Problem was they never returned what was coming to me. I sent someone by
eyery year. Some years they came back beaten up. Sometimes I never saw them again. Finally, I sent
my son.” Mr. G’s eyes filled with tears and his lips trembled. He turned away, with a wave of his hand
cut off further conversation, and walked slowly off.

The years went by.

There were some difficult times at the start. Each year, however, after the harvest was in,
Joe and Lisa would balance the books, often not getting them finally checked until New Year’s Eve.
Each New Year’s Day an agent of Mr. G would stop by. They would sit down over coffee and look
over the books. They would split the profits and write a check. The agent would say, “I’ll just have a
look around on my way out. Have a good year.”
When the year had been a hard one, he would say, “Well, sometimes it is like that. Hope next year will be better.” And, as the years went by, things did get better and better.

“Looks like you’ve been adding on quite a bit of new acreage over the last few years.”

“Yes,” Joe said, “we try to pick up another piece whenever we can and the price is right. All in Mr. G’s name, of course.”

“And are those new barns and sheds?”

“Yes, that all goes with it. We’re the biggest spread in the valley, now.”

“Well, I’ll just look around a bit on my way out. Have a good year.”

The years went by.

“Looks like you’ve been laying on a lot of extra hands these last years.”

“That’s what it takes to keep things going, and labor comes cheap around these parts.”

“Looks like you have quite a turnover in help.”

“Well, you know how hard it is to keep good hands.”

“I’ll just look around a bit on my way out. Have a good year.”

And the years went by.

“My goodness, I don’t see your kids around anymore. They must be all grown up.”

“That’s right,” Lisa said, “they’re all off on their own now.”

“How time flies! Where they go off to?”

“Oh, you know how kids are. They go off to seek their fortune and forget to stay in touch. Don’t rightly know where they are.”

“Well, I’ll just take a look around on my way out. Have a good year.”

And the years went by.

“Wow! What a magnificent new house! Isn’t it kind of big for just the two of you?”

“Well, we decided it was our turn for something nice. It’s in Mr. G’s name, of course.”

“And look at those new cars.”

“Same thing with them,” Lisa said.

“I’ll just look around a bit on my way out. Have a good year.”

And the years went by.

It was late New Year’s Eve, and Joe and Lisa had just finished up the books on an unusually prosperous year and were looking forward to their meeting with the agent the next day. Suddenly, Joe noticed a strange light coming through the windows from outside. He went out to check. “The barn’s on fire,” he shouted to Lisa. “Call for help.”

Flames had already enveloped the entire barn and were spreading out of control into the equipment shed. Lisa came running out of the house. “The phone lines are dead. Oh, what about the cattle?”

“Don’t worry about the cattle. The fence is all down. God only knows where the cattle are all scattered. Jump in the car and drive somewhere to get help!”

Lisa turned towards the garage, just as it nearly exploded in flames. Fire quickly engulfed the attached house as well. All Joe and Lisa could do was stand by and watch every thing they had built go up in smoke.

As the fires in the nearby house and barn burned out, they could look out across the valley and see other storage sheds in flame and even the orchards. Finally, scared and exhausted they sought shelter in the only place left, ironically the little, rusty, blue, pickup truck which had gotten parked far out back years before. It had twenty-five more years of rust on it, but the cab did shelter them from the chill of the night, and, in tears, they fell asleep.

They awakened in the early morning light to the sound of someone pounding on the door and a very old gentleman looking in through the window.
Joe pushed the pickup cab door open. “What in the world do you want?”

“Oh,” the old man said, “you don’t recognize me? You’ve changed a lot over the years, but I don’t think I have, really. I’m Mr. G.” He held out his hand. “Thought I’d come by myself this year and give my agent a holiday for a change.”

Joe’s heart sank. “All the books that we’ve kept so carefully over the years—they were all in the house. They’re all gone in the fire.”

“Yeh,” said Mr. G, “looks like you’ve got some problems on your hands.”

“I don’t understand how this could have happened,” Joe said. He and Lisa had gotten out of the cab of the pickup and stood surveying the smoldering landscape. “Unless it was some of the workers! We had a little labor dispute recently, but that was really no big deal.”

“Oh, you mean the thing about you requiring them to leave part of their wages in a Christmas fund, which you haven’t gotten around to giving back to them yet? Well, I could see how that might get a few people upset, but I don’t think it was them.

Perhaps it was that worker who you beat in front of his family after his children who were hungry stole some apples from the orchard. No, I don’t think so.

“Could it have been that fellow whose wife died because he couldn’t afford the medicine she needed? Hmm, no.

“It could have been your neighbors, though you really don’t have any now that this is the only farm left in the valley. Maybe it was some of the ones whose land you got by extortion or the ones whose mortgages you bought up so you could foreclose as soon as the going got rough. No, I really don’t think it was any of them.”

Joe and Lisa looked at each other.

“Yes,” Mr. G went on, “maybe it was one of your own children. You degraded, and abused, and brutalized them until they ran from you first chance they got. But, no, they are all too busy with their own healing to come back and get revenge.

Actually, it was none of those people. It was me. Yep, I burned down my barns. I burned down my house. I burned down my storage sheds. I broke down my fences. I burned up my orchard. Yep, I did it all in one night. Pretty good for an old man!”

“Oh,” Lisa was in tears, “how could you do that!”

“Well,” Mr. G said, “it was all mine. Am I not allowed to do with my own property what I want to do with it?”

“But that’s a different parable!” Lisa said. “You switched parables on us. That’s not fair!”

“Matter of fact, all the parables belong to me as well, so I can do with them what I wish. But, perhaps you have a point there.”

“You bet we have a point there,” Joe cut in. “This is supposed to be the parable Jesus told about the wicked tenants who refused to share their profits and got thrown out and about the new tenants who came in and gave the owner his due and they all were supposed to live happily ever after!”

“Hadn’t thought about that,” Mr. G said. “What makes you think you drove into that parable? This is actually the one Isaiah told long ago. You’re not familiar with it?

This is what I will do with my vineyard.
I will remove its hedge and it shall be devoured.
I will remove its wall, and it shall be trampled down.
I will make it a waste, and it shall not be pruned or hoed
and shall be overgrown with briars and thorns.
And I will command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.
For I expected justice, but saw bloodshed;
righteousness, but heard a cry!”

Dave Kehret,
Associate Pastor
at VU’s Chapel,
preaches there
regularly.

This piece is based
on
Matthew 21:33-43,
and on Isaiah 5:1-7
M y father tells me to turn up Spencer Lane, the first time I’ve taken this road in thirty years. “Why?” I could ask, but he’s sitting up so straight I know I don’t have long to wait.

“Look,” he says, after we make two right turns. The street is blocked by sawhorses with blinking lights. “Subsidence,” he says, “after all these years.” Road Closed is repeated on three signs and I keep driving, allowing him to direct me through a loop of roads to the back side of Stoneridge, the housing plan which covers the hillside near his house. “We can park here and walk without being a nuisance,” he says.

He lives less than half a mile away. We hiked all over this hillside and the woods just below us until the houses sprang up when I was in high school. “Where were the mines?” I say, and he smiles.

“They started at the bony pile you were afraid of,” he says. “The one you put in that poem.”

“I thought that was a strip mine,” I say, recalling the details of my humiliation, how I dropped to my knees on the high, narrow path and said NO to further climbing in front of 15 Boy Scouts and two leaders, one of whom was my father.

“It wasn’t big. I don’t know where else there were entrances, but it started in Fall Run and ran through the woods—almost a hundred years ago, and now it’s caving in.”

My father had led me back down the narrow trail. He’d walked in front of me without speaking until we reached the road, and nobody, not even the other Boy Scouts, had ever mentioned my failure again.

Now he leads me back toward the sawhorses and the blinking lights to walk the closed streets, and we pass mailboxes tipping toward sunken yards, houses with heavy equipment parked near the shrubbery, a sure sign of cracked foundations. The lights are out in every house; if anyone else is taking the tour, we don’t see them.

Fifteen minutes later, my father has me park in front of the fire hall, where a meeting has already begun with township officials and a set of engineering and mining experts. The hall is packed, every chair taken, a triple row of people I imagine are Stoneridge residents jammed along three walls. One by one, twenty-seven in all while we watch, the homeowners walk to the microphone in the center aisle and voice their protests. After each speech, limited, apparently, to two minutes, a round of applause, whether the speaker is loud or soft, profane or polite. And when the first engineer begins to deliver his assurances, my father nudges me toward the door.

“We don’t need to hear the rest,” he says.

“What’s this all about?” I ask as I drive.

“Common cause makes a neighborhood, doesn’t it?” he says. “Everybody on those streets was in that fire hall.”

“Seems like,” I say, the short drive already over.

“It goes way back to 1902. The Glenshaw Coal Company mined the whole area around here,”
my father announces when we get inside.

"I never heard of it."

"And neither did I until all this started."

"All those years when I was a kid hiking those woods and I never saw an air shaft. Where are they?"

"The closest one I know of is at the end of the street. Back when we had sewers put in, thirty-five years ago now, I thought they were kidding when they said they didn’t need to tap in because they dumped their sewage down a mine shaft. I thought they were cheap, but I never did see any sign of a septic tank, none of that telltale rich green you get from having one."

"The mines are that close?" I say.

"Maybe closer."

"How much closer?"

He tells me the township mailed him and the rest of his neighbors a map of the mines in question. If he had bought a lot on the other side of the street, he says, he thinks he would be in danger.

"The map doesn’t tell you for sure?"

"You can look," he says.

"It’s under the house?"

"I don’t think so."

"You have the map."

"It’s hard to read."

He starts to search for the map among stacks of old mail he’s piled on the dining room table. I’ve seen dates on those envelopes running back five years, and I have time to remember the high school where I had my first teaching job and the day the principal asked, over the PA, for everyone in our wing of the building to report to the gym. The students thought it was an assembly or a drug bust, depending on their lifestyle, but I thought gas leak or bomb threat, and it turned out none of us was right.

In the field outside the rooms across the hall an enormous sinkhole had suddenly opened, the earth dropping ten feet and forming a crater which spread to within a bad broad jump of the building.

Mine subsidence, the veteran teachers said to me. Everybody knows why the district got the land so cheap. The crater, measured at 200 feet across, spread no further; the school stayed structurally sound. "We weren’t fools when we built it," the contractor said. "We knew where the hollow spots were."

Which is more than my father can say, pretty sure the earth beneath us is solid, but not entirely certain. And my father, who misplaced his bifocals months ago, can’t read the map he finally fishes from stack #3.

The tunnels, according to the map, run along the back yards of the houses across the street. Something like that old high school which, nearly thirty years later, is still used. Not so lucky are the residents of Stoneridge, a large part of the plan built over a labyrinth of abandoned seams.

"I used to help deliver coal," my father says, and I let him tell me old coal stories, how, when the truck came, the driver dumped the coal in the alley behind their house. "The basement window was under the back porch," he says. "We had to shovel the coal into bushel baskets, and one of us boys had to get under that porch, take the basket, and hand it down to my father. You didn’t want to hear the coal had run out again for a long time after spending a Saturday afternoon under the porch breathing coal dust. We stuffed rags under the cellar door to keep the dust out of the house, so you can imagine the rest."

I remember visiting that house when I was small, how, because my father and his brothers had all moved away, only two rooms took heat from the coal furnace. The registers in the floor of the kitchen and dining room were open; the registers in the living room were closed, the room’s two doors shut to smother the draft. And upstairs was a camping trip, heavy quilts and thick comforters
because my grandfather only asked his sons to shovel coal once a year.

It could be worse, I say, and I tell my father about walking through Centralia, the town near where I live that has suffered an underground fire for over 33 years.

He thinks I am making it up, but I show him, on the map of Pennsylvania, the highway which is closed now because the fire passed underneath it, causing it to ripple and crack and most likely, if cars and trucks kept on it regardless, collapse.

The earth is so hot in some places you can start paper on fire. I stood with a friend, I tell him, and chose what we thought were the hottest places, shooting wads of newspapers like basketballs until, on our fifth try, the paper ball burst into flame.

We felt like schoolboys, but there were thousands of ruined acres, large stands of dead trees, their roots destroyed by heat. And the town itself, except for a few dozen diehards, is gone. Literally—the houses razed, the people moved elsewhere because that fire has decades of coal left to burn along the seams spidering beneath the earth.

"Material for another poem," my father says, and I tell him in one of the fields are rows of rusting vents. The area looks like an abandoned drive-in theater, only the speaker poles left behind, but nothing was ever broadcast there except the hope, twenty years ago, that the fire could be stopped by flushing it or smothering it.

"So many mines," my father says, "so many things under the ground we don't know what we have down there anymore."

I agree, but I don't bring up nuclear refuse, toxic medical waste, all of the plastic and such that will outlast us, most likely, by thousands of years.

Those Stoneridge residents who earlier had stood to ask questions were having their fortunes told by old coal, as if millions of years ago the prophecy of dying had foretold their futures: Here, coal formed. Here, it did not. The voice of such creation waited nearly an eternity to rise from its seams, and then only thirty years to give a different answer from its hollows, whether those engineers and politicians were willing to drop money or not into an evening of questions.

So I tell my father the story of the Tomb of Eve, how, for years, pilgrims came to Jedda, where they believed the Mother of Mankind was living beneath the earth and able to answer their questions.

"For a price, of course," my father says at once, and I nod.

The pilgrims were willing to spend a few coins, no worse than a church offering, and they dropped them into a slot and voiced their queries down the narrow shaft to the holy mother.

"What questions," my father says. "What answers?"

I don't know, but I tell him they were usually questions about dead loved ones or the future. And then I tell him the Mother of Mankind had a personal entrance, that there was more than one tunnel to the warren of secret wants.

"Thirty years," I say, "before she left for good when somebody finally worked their way through the labyrinth."

"Why would anybody believe that?" my father says. "As soon as you have to pay you know it's a racket."

"If it was free, what would you ask?"
"What do I pray for, you mean?"
"It doesn't have to be spiritual."
"I'd ask about Ruthy."
"You don't have to tell me," I say.
"I'd ask her if she still gets to do the things she loved. Your mother finished the newspaper's crossword puzzle the night she died; she rinsed out her juice glass and put it on the sideboard to dry before she went to bed. For her to be happy she'd have to keep everything tidy. There couldn't be any mess in heaven."

"Maybe there is so she can clean it up forever," I say.

Six months earlier I'd driven back to Pittsburgh to be with him after his quadruple bypass, but
this afternoon we'd played nine holes of golf before we'd had dinner and driven home through Stoneridge.

“Six or seven years, maybe, this retread will give me,” he said, using a tone that told me he'd researched the statistics, and I didn’t say anything about how something else could break down, that there was more than one threat under the surfaces of our lives.

All round my father had played best ball of two. Four, he'd recorded after sinking a thirty foot putt on the second try. Five, he'd written down after he'd driven his second tee shot down the middle instead of hooking it into the woods. By the ninth hole my father was a stroke ahead and beaming. While we waited for the foursome in front of us to play drop balls over the water, he showed me his scars, the lines and dots of surgery. “The human body can put up with most anything,” he said, and then he topped his first iron, watched it trickle into the pond, and then lofted his five iron onto the near-island of green to put himself into position for another par.

I slung his bag over my left shoulder and carried my own over my right, and he walked, to save his spikes and to protect his socks as well, barefoot across the parking lot. My father didn’t hurry. He didn’t act as if that asphalt were cooking the soles of his feet. “In the sun,” he said, “there’s a difference between asphalt and cement,” using a tone so placid I freed one hand, laid it to the summer surface and listened, like the deaf, for the music of the earth.

---

**LIGHT COMES FROM STONES**

*We ask God into our world,*  
*But we are already in God’s world.*  
*Ellen Hodge*

The words help us as visitors to these parts.  
What strange courage it takes to do  
what we do each day. Courage and cowardice  
connect us like our vision of shooting stars.  
Most meteors, I am told, are particles of dust.  
The largest are only golf-ball sized stones,  
travelling at God’s speed, disappearing into thin air.  
What brief, glorious light comes from stones,  
consumed in their own burning.

Meteors come in, both seen and unseen.  
I wish for courage to say the simple things.  
The words help us to be at home as we pass thro...
Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; 
and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; 
and there are varieties of activities,
but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, 
and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, 
to another faith by the same Spirit, 
to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 
to another the working of miracles, 
to another prophecy, 
to another the discernment of spirits, 
to another various kinds of tongues, 
to another the interpretation of tongues.

All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

I Corinthians 12: 4-11

Do you know that the second dictionary definition of the word homily is “a tedious, moralizing lecture or admonition”? The first definition, however, is “a sermon to edify a congregation on a practical matter.” I think I’ll go with that one.

Practical matters are, after all, a big part of my work at Valparaiso University. When I teach for the Department of English, my subject is usually professional writing or business communication—pretty practical stuff.

I’ve taught a freshman seminar called “Working Men, Working Women.” I sit on the Career Center Advisory Board. What’s more practical than thinking about working?

I serve as an academic advisor to 200 students whose curricular lives are often dizzyingly complicated by multiple majors and minors, internship and co-op requirements, international study options, demanding honors projects, and co-curricular activities that should probably be listed in our catalog as majors and minors.

Sometimes I help students choose their majors. One of my advisees holds the University’s
record for remaining “exploratory” until about 20 minutes before commencement, but she did get there.

At this time of year I often find myself helping students prepare resumes, job objectives, and graduate school application essays that reveal what they hope to do with their lives, and that explain in the most persuasive ways how and why they are suited to the careers they are preparing for.

Or put another way: how they wish to use their gifts—gifts that Saint Paul reminds us in this passage from First Corinthians, come in many varieties, but through one Lord for the common good. Paul is speaking here mainly about spiritual gifts and their use for the common good of the church. He’s not talking about gifts for chemistry or accounting, for theatre or Spanish, for engineering or political science, for meteorology or East Asian studies.

Or is he?

Is it possible? is it practical? is it a good idea to distinguish our spiritual gifts from our gifts of intellect or talent?

Many of us in this community—this Athens—believe that we are meant or called or even commanded to use all the particular gifts and talents, skills, and abilities that the Spirit has given us to glorify God and to serve humankind in church and society.

I continually hope and pray that I am recognizing and using my own gifts rightly. Like many professional academic advisors, I’ve deliberately turned some of my gifts toward helping others to recognize their gifts and to find their ways to serve. I continually hope and pray that this truly is a valuable contribution to my students, to the wider communities I’m helping send them into, and to God’s work on earth.

I do know that it is not always easy to recognize the gifts we have been given, or to know what to do with them that will support us, satisfy us, and give us some measures of joy and self-worth, let alone please God. In college most students feel acutely the pressure of taking on in earnest the enormously important task of deciding what plans and commitments they will make toward establishing their life’s work. A few come with precise 124-credit four-year plans, and clear career objectives. They do well in school, find good jobs, make satisfying lives, and never have a moment’s hesitation about what they are meant to do.

But for many, the discernment of intellectual strengths, vocational aptitudes, and spiritual gifts remains maddeningly elusive well into full adulthood, middle age, and even our later years. I know that for some of you the setting of a career path is painful, hard, scary. It was and still is for a lot of us. More than you might imagine.

Our birth certificates don’t list occupations after our names. I checked. Mine does not say “Margaret Lee Franson, 6 lbs, 3 oz: English Professor, Assistant Dean.” My father would have crossed that out anyway. He was hoping for a doctor. I let him down in that regard, but I know he loved me anyway.

Perhaps our baptismal certificates get a little closer to career counseling: “Baptized in the name of the Spirit and called to do God’s work on earth.” As Paul reminds us in this letter to the people of Corinth, God outfits each of us differently for that work, in part so that we can live interdependently in societies of mutual support. We don’t all have the same gifts and we don’t have them in equal measures. Thank goodness.

As your teachers and counselors—people you’ve trusted to evaluate certain of your gifts—we sometimes have to tell you that you are not really very good at something you hoped to do professionally. How we tell you may be by a low grade, or by suggesting that you drop a class, or by counseling you into a different major.

Probably less frequently, we tell you that we think you should go on in a particular area of study or occupation because we’ve observed you shining in academic performance, or aglow in co-curricular accomplishments, or radiant in interpersonal settings (or could that be uttering wisdom, healing, or being faithful?) We teachers and counselors probably do not tell you what gifts we do discern in you nearly often enough.

Last week I cut out a cartoon from the New Yorker magazine drawn by Bruce Eric Kaplan
Margaret Franson is the Assistant Dean of Christ College.

(January 13, 1997). The setting is the workplace—an office of some kind. A balding, stern-looking boss is sitting behind his desk. An animated, eager young employee, papers in hand, is standing a few feet away.

This young employee looks as if he has just approached the boss with an exciting new idea about the work he is doing.

The boss is unimpressed. He says to the young employee: “Just do the work. No one cares if you get goose bumps”

“Just do the work. No one cares if you get goose bumps.”

We who are privileged to teach and advise, we who often see the richness and varieties of your gifts more clearly than you do, we who understand our vocations to be to help you open your minds to knowledge, your hearts to charity, and your souls to the Spirit, do care if your work gives you goose bumps.

And I trust that Saint Paul would, too.

SIDEWALK SIGNATURES

Less formal than the sculptured names
And dates on the gravestones now somewhere
Marking summertime for the signers: these
Initials and handprints pressed into wet
Cement were once summer’s children, kneeling
At freshly poured writing—slates that invited
Besides the maker’s stamp, the scratch of JEFF
And MIKE. Mickey the faithful, hugely
Labradorian, was lifted and planted
Firmly where tree roots now crack the walk,
Splitting his bumble of footwork; and just
Before climbing the steps, a circlet
Of seedpearls marks the forepaw of Hecate,
Whose only memorial is her print.
Oh, you who walk this way: underfoot,
Signatures in these neighborhood blocks document
Small summer lives, like your own, insignificant.

Nancy G. Westerfield
An Academic Horror Story

David W. Fagerberg

Lest any readers say they were unprepared, let them be warned at the outset that this is a horror story. It is an account of how an academic confronts death. And lest I be unprepared, let me remind myself that everyone to whom I have so far told this story, laughs.

Although there is no place for it on the IRS form, I sometimes say that I read for a living. As with every profession, there are certain required tools of the trade, in this case, four in number. First, a level desk and a firm chair in order to keep the spine of the book flat and the spine of the reader upright. No couch slouching. Second, two pens: one dedicated exclusively to underlining, and another for scribing in the margins. Third, a straight-edge to guide the underlining pen so that one’s underlining is straight and crisp, not erratic like an EKG report. My preferred canon is a protractor of clear plastic which allows seeing upcoming text. Finally, marking up a book in this manner requires that one own it, since librarians disapprove of exercising this sort of professional reading upon borrowed books. One must own the book. To my way of thinking, if a book is worth reading, it’s worth owning; if it’s not worth owning, then it’s not worth reading.

One day, a day which began like any other day, I came upon a quote from Moses Maimonides’ Mishneh Torah in the course of working on something or another. It was a beautiful quote. It was the kind of quote which incited an immediate resolve to read more by Maimonides, which would call for acquiring a copy of his book, for reasons I have explained. But at that moment a faint recollection came over me. Didn’t I have something by Maimonides somewhere? Yes, a search of the shelves revealed a one-volume abridgment of his Mishneh Torah. Now, where had that come from? Remembering farther, I connected it back to a course in Judaism in college which both Elizabeth and I had attended, so maybe she had bought the book and one day I quietly transplanted it from home to the office. (This has been known to happen.)

Thrilled at my good fortune of already owning Maimonides, I thumbed through the pages and, yes, there was Elizabeth’s hand in the margins, and her scrawly underlining in the text (she also marks her books, but does not subscribe to my protractor theory). But what was this? Something stood out to my eyes with all the startlingness which Robinson Crusoe must have felt upon discovering footprints in the sand of what he thought was a deserted island. Only in this case they weren’t the footprints of a stranger, but the tracks of my own Birkenstocks: there was my handwriting. Perhaps just that page, I thought with a panic...but as I thumbed from cover to cover, my neat protractor lines and marginalia appeared on page after page. I had not only forgotten what I had read in that book, I had forgotten that I had read the book.

That is how an academic experiences the power of death.

Most of the time, when we speak about the Christian victory over death we probably envisage the parousia, but this episode of transitoriness made me face another manifestation of death, and makes me think about another type of victory. The curse of death does not merely, suddenly show up at the end of life. It affects not only the end point, but also the lifeline leading up to that end. In
addition to the sudden stop at the end, death is the scoffing whisper in our ear along the way that it was all for nothing. Christian tradition clearly affirms that mortality is a consequence of sin, but the sheer act of dying does not quite cover all of sin’s mortal consequences. We also live in death. And living in death is like filling a colander with water: water must be poured in the top faster than it can run out the bottom. It doesn’t matter exactly what is being poured in—for an academic it is knowledge, but for others it may be pleasures and accomplishments, tastes, sights, desires, or friendships—when one becomes aware that one’s days are filled with what will not last, one experiences death’s apertures. We are damaged receptacles.

St. Gregory of Nyssa likened this condition to the Hebrew slaves in the mudpits of Egypt. He observed that our “receptacles for pleasure” can be filled, but they’re always emptied again before the next pouring. “As soon as a person satisfies his desire by obtaining what he wants, he starts to desire something else and finds himself empty again; and if he satisfies his desire with this, he becomes empty once again and ready for another”(87). We may enjoy finite pleasures repetitively, but every finite pleasure is subject to the power of death. Cyclical experiences flow into the soul like rivers empty into the sea, Gregory says, only the sea grows no larger. “What is the purpose of this passage of water constantly filling what is already filled? Why does the sea continue to receive this stream of water without being increased by the addition?”(84). What is the purpose of streams of experience which do not raise the sea-level of our souls a quarter of an inch? The sting of death is felt when our souls are not increased by the inflow. Meaninglessness is the real power of death.

The Russian philosopher Vladimir Solovyof argued that a pleasure lasts only for the moment one is experiencing it, and after that it’s no longer a pleasure, it is a memory. Just as one cannot remember pain, only having been in pain, so one cannot remember pleasure, only having had a pleasure. “All pleasures when they are over cease to be pleasures, and we know this beforehand. Hence the idea of a sum of pleasures is meaningless: the sum of zeros is not any larger than a simple zero”(123). It does not overcome meaninglessness to stack up a collection of pleasurable moments.

In order to make good on their claim that Christ has overcome death, not simply death as the end of life but the power of death of which we are speaking here, Christians would have to know something that increases the size of their souls incrementally, something that doesn’t just contribute to a sum of nothing. This, the Gospel submits, would be love. Love overcomes death by giving eternal value to the moment. Not a single finite pleasure will escape death’s zero-sum game, but there is an infinite happiness to be had. Our mortal receptacles, because bound to death, will be empty before the next pouring; but our capacity for immortal things will be increased until we can contain the beatitude for which God created us. We are made for immortal happiness—and I do not mean by the modifier how long the happiness will last, but from whom it must come. Only the Immortal One can satisfy us, and happiness will elude us until we stand aright in our vocation as eternal beings.

Already, one can participate in this eternal dimension. There is an entity, called the Church, which God has brought into existence and is bringing to completion. Its charter is the incarnation of Jesus, in whom the divine and human mingled, and who is the firstborn of many brothers and sisters with whom he shares his life. Liturgical life is participation in Christ’s life in the Father. It is enjoying by means of Holy Spirit the relationship Christ has with God. Liturgical life unravels death’s shroud. Christian liturgists are formed by baptism, which was called a return to Paradise where death has no dominion; baptistries were decorated like the Garden of Eden. Liturgists are fed at the Eucharist, which antidote to death was called the ‘medicine of immortality.’ And Christian liturgists are disciplined in spiritual asceticism as a sort of preemptive mortification. Asceticism turns our allegiance away from the fading goods of the flesh to eternal goods of the spirit, not because the former are not good but because they fade. In fact, liturgical asceticism consists of nothing but overcoming death by death, and being capacitated to contain the glory of God. Though space, time, and matter will evanescce, they are capable of being made into a three-sided liturgical loom on which eternal life is woven, one day to be gently lifted off by the master weaver, without dropping a stitch, and fitted into his own radiant garment. The sepulcher becomes a birth canal.
To celebrate the eternal in time: this is our mystery and our marvel. We are made of such a nature that our receptacles for happiness can be capacitated to contain the Eternal One. Do you realize, Gregory asks, "how much your Creator has honored you above all creatures? He did not make the heavens in his image, nor the moon, the sun, the beauty of the stars, nor anything else which you can see in the created universe. You alone are made in the likeness of that nature...you alone are a similitude of eternal beauty, a receptacle of happiness...Nothing in all creation can equal your grandeur. All the heavens fit into the palm of God's hand. And though He is so great that He can grasp all creation in His palm, you can wholly embrace Him; He dwells within you, nor is He cramped as he pervades your entire being"(162). Divine nature mingled with human nature made a new thing. This thing would reshape the receptacle to fit it, if we would, enlarging us so that instead of filling and emptying ourselves, we could be filled with the fullness of life. To realize that we were made for eternity radically reorientates priorities, as the saints have always witnessed. "If you realize this you will not allow your eye to rest on anything of this world. Indeed, you will no longer marvel even at the heavens. For how can you admire the heavens, my [child], when you see that you are more permanent than thee. For the heavens pass away, but you will abide for all eternity with Him who is forever"(163). Liturgical asceticism is the attitude toward the world which results from seeing the world in an eschatological light.

C.S. Lewis observed that people in the process of becoming holy "usually have a lot of time; you will wonder where it comes from"(65). When death has been baffled, even the flow of time can be harnessed. When moments are seasoned with love, even cyclical time can become a progression and growth of the eternal soul. So asceticism is not spurning a fluctuating world, it is properly ordering our passions so that even repetitive, cyclical finitude may give birth to the glory of God. Like a piece of driftwood floating on the circular, cyclical motion of repeatedly rising and falling waves, the soul can be carried forward as it rises and falls on seasons, days, years, repetitive acts, and recurring appetites. But only if it is light enough to float. The asceticism created by the liturgical life, then, is not a solemn, grave thing: it teaches us to lighten up.

works cited


David Fagerberg
 teaches in the religion department at Concordia College, Moorhead, Minnesota. In the spring of 1998, University of Notre Dame Press will publish his book on G.K. Chesterton.
A VISIT IN AUGUST

I help my mother from the car—my hand gathering flesh to bone. She catches her breath, sits in the chair and I fold the footrests down and she places each foot, slowly, on them. I wheel her in, the portable oxygen between her knees, the thin, clear tube spiraling up to her nose. Patients watch quietly, unselfconsciously—watch me, watch my mother—the breathing in, the invisible air.

Home now, and the TV on, the AC on high, the permanent tank of oxygen on. “Don’t fill the trays too full,” she says, “just halfway.” I fill the ice trays halfway.

Later, and the apartment so cold I need a blanket to sleep. She lies awake with Leno, C-Span, club dance, two remotes like cigarette packs handy, and her plastic cup of ice, the plastic cup I hate to touch, to fill.
Everything seems unclean, unsafe, undeniable:
the plastic tube, the remote controls, the fear.
The doctor’s reassurances. And the weight, her body
losing weight—arm, flesh, bone.
And the struggle, this: to lift one foot, to lift
two feet to the wheelchair rests.

I want to spit, there, beneath the blanket. I want
to wash my hands. I want to burrow into warmth,
into mother as she reads me the Bobbsey Twins
or Heidi on a cold, clear day, a milk shake
at my side on the blanket, handy,
and some buttered toast and I’m home from school
with flu or throat or something and almost asleep.

William Snyder, Jr.
“help me Rhonda, yeah, to form relationships which will enable me to use my latent inner resources better”

Tom Willadsen

A recent New Yorker cartoon shows Lassie lying on her analyst’s couch saying something like, “Once when I was a puppy . . .” the caption reads “Lassie gets help.” Of course this is probably not the kind of help Lassie’s master, pinned under the tractor, had in mind, but it does reflect some of our culture’s confusion and ambivalence about what help is.

There is a sign at a defunct service station near my house that asks, “How can we help you today?” (“Defunct” is one of those negative terms that has no apparent positive. We never say, “Dairy Queen was finally funct after six months of remodelling.” But maybe we should.) Presumably the sign indicates this business’s erstwhile willingness to repair my car or sell me gasoline, but I can’t bring myself to think of those activities as help. Lending a hand with a stubborn lug nut would be helpful, for example, but when it comes to installing a new set of brakes, I’d prefer that you just did it rather than “helping” me.

I know an African-American woman who sometimes turns to the department store employees who often hover around her while shopping and asks, “May I help you?” After she shared that anecdote I thought of all the times I’ve been asked that same question. Usually its intended meaning is “Stop pushing all the buttons” or “I’m watching you” or “You don’t belong here.” I’ve said it myself when I’ve found unfamiliar people wandering through my church. The kind of help I intend to offer these people I once saw on a t-shirt: “I’d like to help you out, which way did you come in?”

Help used to be something we did for other people, now it’s a transaction. When someone says, “Get help,” there’s always an implicit “from someone else” tagged at the end. Help is something we “get” from professionals. And the help that we seek has a price. It also has a cost.

In The Careless Society: Community and Its Counterfeits (reviewed in the Chicago Tribune of March 31, 1996, by Clarence Petersen) John McKnight writes of what happened in Sauk County, Wisconsin when bereavement counselors, armed with skills “forged at the great state university. . .to meet the needs of those experiencing the death of a loved one, a tool that can ‘process’ the grief of the people who now live on the Prairie of Sauk” arrived on the scene. People no longer gathered to grieve and support those grieving as they had traditionally.

In about a generation traditional practices die. In the end, McKnight writes “one day the aged father of a local woman will die. And the next door neighbor will not drop by because he doesn’t want to interrupt the bereavement counselor.”

When help is expert only experts will help.

The price we pay for this professionalizing of help is the taxes we pay to support it. The cost is isolation and the destruction of the fibers that hold communities together.

Popular music doesn’t offer much assistance in defining help either. Since 1955 there have been two number one hits on the Billboard chart whose titles have begun with “help:” “Help Me, Rhonda” by the Beach Boys and the Beatles’ “Help!” Both hit the top in 1965, apparently it was a good year to sing about help. The Four Tops had a number one hit that year with “I Can’t Help Myself.” Apparently the Beach Boys couldn’t help themselves either as they pleaded with Rhonda to “help me get her outta my heart.” Help in their
case was the palliative effect of another, presumably equally dysfunctional, relationship. The Beatles showed a little more maturity as they sang, acknowledging that before they “never needed anybody’s help in any way.” But age has brought them the ability to be vulnerable. The honesty of “Help me if you can / I’m feeling down...help me get my feet back on the ground” is still moving thirty years later.

I struggle with what help is and what it is not every day, as a member of a “helping profession.” (I love that euphemism, the only one that strikes me funnier is “benefit of clergy,” I’ve been clergy over six years now—show me the benefit!) There are two kinds of help I’m asked to provide: help for indigent people who come to my church looking for money, food, shelter, etc.: and counselling for members of my congregation. I have received minimal training in both of these kinds of helping.

When dealing with people asking for a handout I always sense two things: they’re not telling me the truth and the truth is worse than what they’re telling me. To really help would require a lot of time and expertise. I see the shut off notice from the power company, but I don’t see every other factor that makes paying the bill difficult.

In my community the churches started an assistance center about ten years ago. Essentially the participating churches have “outsourced” this part of their ministry to the assistance center. This keeps people from going from church to church and getting help repeatedly for the same shut off notice. When people ask me for material help I tell them how to get to the assistance center. If the center is closed or for some reason the person is unwilling to go there I give them gift certificates to McDonald’s. We’re also considering buying a supply of bus tokens to help people get where they need to go. Frankly, I see both of these measures as the price I have to pay to get the people to leave. Is it really helping a person to give them enough food so they can hitchhike to Aberdeen? I am nearly certain that it is not, but to really help, to make a real difference, would require an investment in time that I simply cannot make and expertise that I do not have.

Speaking of expertise I do not have, there’s pastoral counseling. I have taken exactly one counseling class. It did not make me a counselor, just as my one civil engineering class in college did not make me a city planner. I am quick to refer people with serious problems, because of the fragility and vulnerability of people who need professional help. Still, I do get requests for garden variety pastoral counseling. Originally I tried to be a nonanxious presence; I was taught this in Clinical Pastoral Education. Having a bland reaction to whatever someone confesses or feels is a way to build trust and help people to help themselves; it’s also really boring and, at times, makes both the counselor and counselee feel like they’re spinning their wheels. A person can only say, “Mmhmm,” “Is that right?” and “How did that make you feel?” so many times. It’s really, really, really boring.

A few years ago I heard of a different model for pastoral counselling: the stressing presence. It’s a lot like being a non-anxious presence, in that I sit back and listen. But it’s much more interesting because after a while I start to put things together like puzzle pieces and ask questions that stress the system the counselee has described. Generally I think it’s a little more helpful to be a stressing presence. It’s certainly more fun. But maybe they aren’t all that different—no one ever comes back for a second session. Hmm, how do I feel about that?

A roommate of mine from college writes about every other month from a Latin American country where he is teaching health care to peasants. At least that’s what I call it. He doesn’t disagree with that description, but prefers to see what he’s doing as community organizing, facilitating and empowering. He’s part of an ongoing mission effort there. He is succeeding a team which provided services to the members of the community where he lives, “which I sure want to get away from,” he writes. Later he clarified what he meant

“The agency” undermines local initiative by doing work for local people rather than empowering local leaders. By visiting homes without community health leaders, we effectively communicate that these leaders aren’t needed...And that canned milk we distribute? It’s not appropriate for infants. More importantly, such handouts are counter-productive to finding real solutions to malnutrition. It communicates to mothers that the way to combat malnutrition is to
use an expensive, otherwise unavailable canned formula, rather than realistic, sustainable methods.

This kind of help is not at all helpful; it creates passivity. Why should I worry about the dirty water coming from my well if a gringo is going to come and take care of it for me?

But this kind of help is so easy. Which would take longer, to construct a well or to build and train a coalition of members of a different culture, across a language barrier, to construct a well? Which is cheaper? Which makes the doer feel better? In all ways just getting the job done seems better, except that it can teach a community to be so helpless it dies, or stops living, which is worse. When that happens, just call the bereavement counsellor.

This year our nation has begun to end “welfare as we know it.” What policymakers knew of welfare was that it “fostered dependency,” dependency that was passed from generation to generation, “creating a culture of entitlement.” But it was so easy to create programs that gave away everything that one needs for the price of one’s initiative. We have not yet begun to understand how difficult it will be to give initiative, power, autonomy, whatever you call it, back.

It is difficult, awkward, and time-consuming to be truly helpful. Most of us, including helping professionals, I believe, simply do not have the time and energy to be of help most of the time. Forty years ago Carl Rogers argued that help, real help, is not based on skills. “It has gradually been driven home to me that I cannot be of help to this troubled person by means of any intellectual or training procedure.” Real help is grounded in relationships, and potentially all relationships can be helping relationships. “. . .[A] helping relationship might be defined as one in which one of the participants intends that there should come about . . .more appreciation of, more expression of, more functional use of the latent inner resources of the individual.” (from On Becoming a Person, 1962, pp.32, 40) Relationships take lots of time and genuine effort. And the change they make possible is slow. Which reminds me of a joke: How many Rogerians does it take to change a light bulb? One, but it has to really want to change. (And be willing to read very long sentences with lots of commas.)

Rogers makes me wonder about the kind of relationship I’m building with Peter, my eighteen month old son. When Peter wants to join me on the couch he leans over the cushion and says, “hep mih!” This week he also points at things and says “hep mih!” which I think means. “Daddy, tell me what you call that!”

“Hep mih!” point.
“Peter’s dump truck.”
“Hep mih!” point
“Momma’s phlox.”
“Hep mih!” point.
“Charlie’s tomatoes, dammit, Peter, stop picking Charlie’s tomatoes!”

He’s also started standing at the top of the stairs and the edge of his sandbox with his hand out. Hoping for? Expecting? Demanding? the stabilizing presence of Daddy’s finger so he can raise and lower his little legs one at a time and get where he wants to go. He doesn’t say anything. He doesn’t even look for me. He just reaches out, trusting that I’ll be there to help him.

I can’t think of a greater compliment. ♪
visitors and visions

Arvid Sponberg

In the last century, the Harvard University Board of Overseers used to organize itself into teams of Visitors, each team being assigned to a different academic department. The team would "visit" with the faculty of the department once each year to review the curriculum and staffing needs. This pastoral custom vanished sometime early in this century, an artifact of an era less riven by specialization and expertise. Eventually, even in the humanities, the curriculum and the faculty became too complex for non-specialists to discuss, let alone evaluate. Those tasks became the province of layers of department chairs, deans, vice-presidents, provosts, and presidents.

However, the notion of university board members and faculty members visiting regularly hasn't entirely gone the way of buggy whips, though the format has changed. At our place there are a couple of "liaison committees" that meet annually to talk about matters of common concern. Furthermore, the notion of the university as a place for visiting is stronger than ever. You can tell something about a university by the people its students, faculty, and administration decide to host.

It may be lightheartedness induced by my recent parole from department chairing—over the summer my axons unclenched one by one and have nearly resumed their 'normal' configuration—but the variety and quality of recent and prospective visitors seems to be more noteworthy than usual. Capsule comments about them might convey some idea of things we think about around here.

Richard Tillinghast—poet—University of Michigan—Computer-mounted lecture on the poetry of the Beat Generation. Fascinating for both the subject and the manner of presentation—using Powerpoint—adapting business software to integrating sounds, images, and texts of Ginsberg, Kerouac, and Burroughs. How would the poets have felt about being pixel-ated by Tillinghast? Oh—they'd probably HOWL! and get ON THE ROAD out of here as fast as they could. The students liked it fine, though. Inspired one of my intermediate comp students to write two essays about the Beats. Gonna have to do my modern drama course like this—or parts of it. Gotta getta grant...gotta getta grant...gotta...

Kimberly Blaser—storyteller, essayist—University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and the White Earth Reservation. Native American—Anishnaabeg (that's Ojibwa to us Anglos). Recommended: Marilou Awa'skta's Selu: Seeking the Corn Mother's Wisdom: I might use that as a text in my advanced composition class.

Michael Ocksenberg—scholar, diplomat—Stanford University—keynoter for a month-long series of lectures, panels, and other events about China's place in the world. Substance: Must resist our Cold War habit of demonizing China. One fifth of humanity slowly working its way toward a more democratic social order. A global drama for the long haul and there will be many setbacks along the way. Most hopeful sign—recent honest elections of local officials. Style: A model presentation—substantial, concise, clear, authoritative, accessible, fluent—a grand tour of Chinese history, culture, politics, and foreign policy illuminatingly set in the global context and supported in depth with apt stories and data. I'm glad that MO's host, Dr. Keith Schoppa, taped the presentation. Every citizen—every professor should reflect on MO's skilled performance.

Scott Waara—actor, singer—played the...
lead, Chauntecleer, in the premier of the musical version of Walter Wangerin's story — *The Book of the Dun Cow*. Warra won a Tony a couple of years ago. As the bedevilled Rooster, battling to save his coop and the world from destruction, Warra gave a performance that will be long remembered by VU theater audiences. It almost perfectly blended Rooster and Human, delighting Chauntecleer's creator who also took the part of narrator. This production probably marks a high point in faculty-student-visiting artists collaborations. All the other characters in the large cast were played by VU students. The demanding technical production supervised by Alan Stalmah, Assistant Professor of Theatre Design; orchestration by Dennis Friesen-Carper, and conducting by Jeffrey Doebler, both Assistant Professors of Music; overall direction was by John Steven Paul; the book and lyrics were by award-winning Mark St. Germain and Randy Courts.

The spring term drew to a glorious conclusion with the Brahms' *German Requiem*, performed by the University Chorus, and the university/civic orchestra under the direction of Dennis Friesen-Carper.

Almost as interesting as the natural-born visitors are the hand-made ones: The Richard Brauer Art Museum exhibited a collection of works from the collection of Jerry Evinrud exploring the theme of the Prodigal Son. Etchings, engravings, sculpture, pottery, oil and water paintings. Artists from many different countries and times rendered the emotions aroused and the lessons taught by Jesus' parable.

Phyllis Buehner Duesenberg and her husband, Richard, probably do not think of themselves as visitors. They are alumni of VU. But most of us do not see them every day; they're on campus for meetings and for special occasions like the one for which they are responsible: the addition to the University's art collection of the 1850 oil painting "Classic Composition" by Asher B. Durand, a leading American landscape artist of the 19th century.

From September 6 to October 26, the Brauer museum will premier an exhibit called "Old Masters Brought to Light: European Paintings from the National Museum of Art of Romania." El Greco, Tintoretto, Rembrandt, Veneziano, Jordaens, and twenty-two other Renaissance and Baroque artists will attract visitors from all over the country. These paintings have never been seen before in the United States and the Brauer Museum is the only site east of the Mississippi that will show them. After they leave VU, they will travel to the Denver Art Museum, the Joslyn Art Museum in Omaha, the Philbrook Museum of Art in Tulsa, and the San Diego Museum of Art. The curator of the exhibit is Dr. Diane De Grazia of the Cleveland Museum of Art who is also a native of Valparaiso.

And these events could not be timed better for another group of visitors: the Association of Lutheran College Faculty will meet here during the first weekend in October. The theme is "The Role of the Artist in the Lutheran University."

And speaking of conferences, last April another alumnus, and former student of mine, Eric Vaandering, came visiting the Physics department's weekly colloquium to explain his work at Fermilab. As a result, I finally heard an understandable explanation of quarks. It made me think that the faculty ought to sponsor a conference every two or three years to which we invite our former students so that they can explain to us what they're doing. That would be a good way to stay on top of things in the big world. (Style tip to alumni, faculty, administrators: Avoid referring to existence outside the academy as the "real" world. Doing so undervalues the academy and overvalues the marketplace. We all live in the same world. The market has no monopoly on mindless expenditure and the academy has not cornered the market on soulless theorizing).

I ought to comment on one other facet of this theme: people who have become visitors. We note the retirements of Richard Lee, former editor of this magazine and Professor of Humanities in Christ College; Lee Carlson, professor of Mathematics; and James Startt, Professor of History who will henceforth be styled as Senior Research Professor. Betty DeBerg left the department of theology to become head of the department of religious studies at the University of Northern Iowa. And Martin Jean, Professor of Music, moved to Yale University.

All of these people we have been used to speaking to every day. With them we have
plotted, produced, and reviewed the events that give texture and rhythm to our daily lives. From now on, our encounters with them will be more tangential, less integral. All these visitors—actual or potential—were invited here, or came here, because they had visions they wanted to realize. As have the rest of us, all of them failed. If we asked any of them whether the results matched their visions, would we be more surprised if they said “yes” or “no”? The post-mortems of Dun Cow continue, for example, the toughest criticisms being rendered by Wangerin and Company. Friesen-Carper’s thoughts about the Requiem are not for publication but no doubt he heard much that we in the audience could not because we were adrift in Brahms’s universe. Durand cannot speak about the shortcomings of “Classic Composition.” They probably shortened his life, but we’ll never see them. On their way to failure these visitors with their visions inspired the rest of us.

This sampling of visitors and visions, and the responses they evoked, may help explain my muted interest in the revelation last Spring of a University Master Plan. Many visitors have been involved in this project, too, and many members of the faculty, staff, and administration. It’s a wonderful plan. It simplifies the geography of the campus while it honors the University’s complex mission. It requires impressive changes in the relations among the university’s functions and buildings. It’s almost pointless to try to explain a vision that is expressed best in a map, so I’ll briefly describe only two of the plan’s most notable features. First, it groups the functions of the university in concentric rings: faith and learning (Chapel, library, classroom buildings) in the center ring; living and recreation (residence halls and athletic fields) in the middle ring; service and utilities (physical plant, housekeeping, powerhouse) in an outer ring. Second, it moves the main entrance of the university from the east to the south, confines all vehicle traffic to a ring road, and turns us all into peripatetic scholars.

The extent to which this plan affects the character of the university—if it doesn’t just flitter the way of most such plans—will be the result not only of the way in which we realize it but in the ways in which we fail to realize it. As we’ve already been taught by our other visitors, reality comes into existence in the gap between where we are now and where we imagine ourselves going. Reality is the residue in part of the failure to achieve our vision. We can always project visions, but we seldom foresee the ways in which we will fall short of, or change, the vision. We do know, however, where to look for the sources of those changes. We may say that the sources exist at the level of “capillary action.” To explain that idea, I’m going to launch a rather extended metaphor. It will probably break down before I get to the end of it, but bear with me.

In his new book, The Perfect Storm, Sebastian Junker describes an unexpected side effect of tighter environmental regulation: bigger waves. For the wind to make waves, it has to “get a grip” on the water. Junker says that the “grip” occurs at the level of “capillary waves.” These smallest of waves—the tiniest of ripples, actually—form a roughened surface which the wind catches to begin piling up bigger and bigger waves. Not too long ago, when oil tankers leaked more easily and were allowed to flush their tanks into the ocean, the molecules-thin layer of oil on the surface eliminated capillary waves across vast areas of ocean. Nowadays, stricter regulations on tankers mean less oil on the ocean. Less oil means more capillary waves for winds to grip. The result? More big waves—up to 25% more, according to Junker. Data buoys monitor wave heights around the world so, apparently, we have reliable statistics to support this claim.

Junker’s description of the wind not getting a grip on the water makes me think of master plans and their not getting a grip on the capillary waves of every day life. There are somethings that keep plans from complete realization—call it leakage, a molecules-thin film of disappointments and distrust and discouragements and disrespect and dismissals. These seem to be inevitable in the life of any human institution, but especially in universities where planning, teaching, performing, and assessment occur continuously at every level. Visitors seem to dissolve that film, disperse it, for a while, and let the wind get a grip on the water. They make waves, and the waves cleanse our vision so that we can perceive the tides and currents—technology, diversity, globalization, creativity, community, and faith—that shape our lives in
England in the spring of 1997 was a wonderful place to visit. The weather was the most glorious in memory, and there was a widespread sense of a new confidence, heralded by the triumph of New Labour in the election and a relatively robust economy. The British were in the unusual position of having reason to feel good about themselves, although as usual they had to be coaxed. After long periods of feeling bad about themselves (in one recent poll, large numbers of Brits said they would rather live elsewhere), now they were told they were the titular political leader of Europe, the financial center of the new European union, and perhaps even the cultural center of the world. Pretty heady stuff to mull over at tea or in the pubs. (And not entirely true: the Germans still throw their Kohlian weight around, and some literati think the current center of Western writing is not London but Toronto.) All this time the English thought that their finest hour was long past, that they were relegated to the status of a minor power whose future was behind them, and now were regarded as quaint and charming at best, or a shabby and pathetic anachronism at worst. The ceremonies at the end of British rule of Hong Kong reminded many observers of the British gift for proper decorum on such occasions, and also that the political empire recedes with dignified departing (with the exception of the Falklands, not exactly a fine hour).

Traveling around England does give the auslander the chance to take the long view that the British themselves, dealing with their new and suddenly hopeful present, cannot. Perhaps it is too obvious for the natives to see it, but England is indeed old, and the visitor takes away the sense of a long past—the Stone Age road of Ridgeway, the white horse carved into the hillside at Uffington, the stone monuments at Avebury, the Roman baths at Bath, the wondrous cathedrals at Salisbury and St. Albans, the universities and country estates and church graveyards. Those who live in England at the moment are like everyone elsewhere involved in the needs and wants of now, but certainly they must be aware of what is usually called their “heritage.” The presence of such a past can make you feel pretty small and temporary. I went to a choral service at Westminster Abbey, and was acutely aware of both metaphysical and national heritage, estates of which I was clearly an infinitesimal and meek part. Tourists by the millions come to look at this wondrous past, to glimpse a bit of British life in the present, but all too often treat England as something of a museum and theme park—everything from the Lake District to Blenheim Palace to pub food seems preserved so that visitors could see what the English did. (They still can’t cook carrots.) And now, lo and behold, England seems to its own immense surprise to have a future as well as a past.

And why shouldn’t they? If you look at England in terms of the development of expression and communication, they may well be the most influential society of modern history. (I hasten to note that I am no ardent Anglophile, nor phobe either: I think Italian cooking is far superior, the American martini the perfect drink, and Greek women the most beautiful, but I can appreciate the delights of British beef, real ale, and Kate Winslet.) This thought gestated when I bestrode the zero longitude line at Greenwich. Civilizations, I mused, seem in their ascendant phase to have an
omphalos, a “center of the world” based in some form of knowledge guarded by a priesthood. In the ancient world, that center was at Delphi, to which even Alexander the Great came to pay homage to the mystique of sanctioned wisdom. Rome might have been derivative, but the mystique of empire based in knowledge remained. In the medieval period, the center of the world came to be the Vatican, which sanctioned imperial power from the Carolingians to the enduring myth of the Holy Roman Empire. In the modern world, it seems to me, London is now the Eternal City, and Greenwich the center of the world wherein scientific knowledge gave epistemic force to the spread of empire. Washington may be the derivative empire, but in the late modern age, England is the center of Western civilization, perhaps even of world civilization. Although a world civilization would clearly be an amalgam of values and peoples, the British stamp on it is going to be recognizable. This will be so not only because of the far-flung empire and commonwealth experience of England. Rather, English influence ultimately can be traced to the fact of their gift for articulation and adroit use of every form of communication and mediation. At base, I suspect their universal influence derives from their greatest creation, the English language. English has become the esperanto of the world, the language of international travel and flight, the language of space exploration, the language of the Internet, and the language of popular culture. Ambitious German or Swedish rock groups always record a version in English, hoping to crack the English-language market and thus literary fame and fortune. The five leading newspapers in New Delhi are in English, and everywhere English is a business necessity. Chinese and Japanese and Russian children all take years of English, making it virtually everyone’s second language, and in many places, to the great fear of native cultures such as the Québeçois in Canada, English is simply overwhelming local linguistic habits, and by extension, cultural identity. But in the global economy and culture and politics, working knowledge of English is a necessity and a pleasure. Business and political people find common ground through using English, and the world’s culture is enjoyed—and exploited—most by those who can read, write, and speak English. It is hard to imagine another lingua franca on the horizon to supersede English, so we can watch with fascination what happens in cultures like China: will the influx of English through Hong Kong and international trade and travel bring with it attendant values and practices that change the indigenous culture? Languages, the linguists tell us, bring with them connotations, valutational meanings and habitual preferences, that suggest ways of living perhaps different from the way things have been done in Peking and Moscow and Cairo. With the spread of English comes the inevitable symbolic baggage of such an ancient and enriched tongue—the example of British history, the development of the British constitution, the ideals of British liberty and social justice, the inspiration of British fortitude and resolve, the high standards of British culture, from Shakespeare to Austen to the Beatles and Masterpiece Theatre. The sun sat on the British political empire, but in the twenty-first century when you are communicating with a business associate in Nairobi on the Net, booking a Spice Girls concert in Budapest, or ordering in a restaurant in Fiji, recall that the empire of English dominates the babel of talk everywhere. (Even the international community of opera is yielding, with the “subtitle” above the stage in English.)

It is often said that in the contemporary media world there is no center, no location of self and society and value, just the endless and restless transmission of messages in the world’s gigantic conversation. In many ways, that is true as the world becomes increasingly wired. But the triumph of English constantly reminds people everywhere that the symbolic society of modern civilization is England. Like Athens and the Vatican before, London is now the center of the emerging world civilization, the place that symbolizes to the rest of the world the norms of civilized and mature expression. The “location” of England is in our symbolic maps—the symbolic geography of literature and fashion and theatre, the symbolic history of progress towards democracy and a decent society, the symbolic politics of ritualized and civil discourse that makes for their remarkable political stability. The rest of the world believes the British have mastered the gifts of articulation,
that they can write and speak and orate and act better than anyone. (These talents are likely enhanced by the fact that in a visual age they still read: on the London tube, lots of people are reading serious stuff on the way to and from work, and every little town seems to be able to support at least one elaborate bookstore.) Many Americans think them not only more articulate than us, but also more civilized (they don’t murder each other at the alarming rate we do), and perhaps even smarter.

One key difference (despite Cockney) is the widespread use of good grammar and diction. On returning to the United States, you realize how well ordinary English people speak and how poorly Americans do. If, as Orwell argued, how people write and speak corrupts how they think, then American English teachers have a daunting task. (Compare, if you will, a segment of C-SPAN’s coverage of the House of Representatives with a Q & A segment from the House of Commons.) We also tend to think them more mature and dignified. American politics and political media are dominated, some argue, by overgrown and immature adolescents with boy’s names (Bill and Newt and Dick and Tom and Dan) and boy’s frat pranks and high spirits (Rush and Don and Howard and Jerry) complemented by dreadful aging ingénues (Kay and Arianna and Cokie and Lynn and Christie), all purveyors of the big talk of a politics of puerility, the big—and very self-important and self-promoting men and women of our juvenile campus politics. (A wag has noted that Samuel Johnson’s group were a collection of big men who enjoyed small talk, while American politicos on TV are small men and women who engage in big talk.) Sitting in on a session of Commons reveals politicians who are usually articulate, humorous, and able to think on their feet in the spirited give-and-take of political debate. They are adults who conduct themselves with mature decorum, and seem to avoid the dreary harangues and childish disputes of the American campaign trail or the barroom shouting matches of media punditry. A politics of civility and grace is conducted by grown-ups for an electorate who are themselves adults and thus do not expect to be treated like children.

In any case, the historical experience and influential culture of England reminds us that “the media” have a history, and that the English past is crucial to understanding the development of the forms and mediums of communicating. Media and popular cultural studies often seem shockingly ahistorical, with little sense of the specific historical circumstances and individuals who made the world of mediation. Visiting England gives the curious visitor a sense of the past: that troubadours were the medieval precursor of tabloid news, with their memorized gossip about royals; of how the traders of Cheapside learned how to enumerate and make contracts and created the seeds of capitalism; of how the Normans, desperate to rule as strangers in a strange land, codified Saxon law and custom and in the process of hanging on created the English constitution, common law, and the “King’s English”; of how smoking clubs created the first newspapers and eventually Fleet Street; of how the invention of cheap print brought about the spread of the “broadside” pamphlets that fueled the Puritan Revolution and the development of the novel; how the game of cricket became a metaphor for civilized political procedure and the informal rules of the political game; and so on. The famous British gift for resilience and persistence through adversity can be observed in their adroit use of media—Churchill’s dramatic use of radio during World War II, Hitchcock’s mastery of the medium of film, the Beatles’ refinement of rock music, the British domination of quality television programming and motion pictures (who would have thought that Shakespeare and Jane Austen would be the hottest pop properties since the demise of gangsta rap?)

A sense of media history with England as a central player in the process leads inevitably to place such inquiry in the context of the largest category of human studies, attempting to understand the origin and processes and changes in civilization. Looking at media history and the rise of popular culture should be part of what sociologist Stanford Lyman calls a “civilizational analytic.” At this juncture of the state of civilization, England becomes critical to analyze, both for her mentoring history and for the fact that she is now faced with becoming a center of world civilization and an exemplar of the kind of multicultural and multiracial society that countries everywhere are being transformed into. (The United States, if it stays united in the
twenty-first century, is no exception: there are now more Moslems in the U.S. than Episcopalians; Hispanics will soon be the largest single group in the country; in many large city school districts, the schoolchildren speak fifty to sixty different languages; interracial marriages have increased manyfold; and the defensive and reactionary rule of old rich white males seems more and more comical, with such Canutean gestures as making English the “official” language and ending affirmative action in places where “people of color” are the majority). England now is being put to a similar historical test, and we shall see if she adapts to such a future with the same good grace and ability to absorb and civilize change as she has in the past.

This includes England’s role in adapting and civilizing popular culture. By knighting Paul McCartney, a popular artist is given social status that legitimizes a form of music once thought rebellious and inferior. Social change and popular feelings are incorporated into the mythos of national continuity, that there will always be an England to honor great figures, from Chaucer to Lennon. This gift of civil adaptability to popular emotions was never more clear than in the death and apotheosis of Princess Diana. The royal family and political establishment clearly understood that Diana—the most popular celebrity in the world and an innovative member of world elite culture—had to be properly celebrated by that ultimate British class act, burying somebody important with what we in rural Virginia might call a hoot and a holler. Political and cultural continuity are enhanced by such emotionally satisfying acts that communicate civility and good will, getting the British, and now the world, through a sad and wrenching experience.

Americans took to Marshall McLuhan’s famous metaphor of the world becoming a “global village,” since we liked the idea of global imperial reach while remaining holy innocents in a local village of mythic yore like Hope or Dixon or Plains or Whittier. But McLuhan, educated at Cambridge, in his later years argued that the global village should mature into a global city, what philosopher Stephen Toulmin calls cosmopolis. The modern ideal in this light are those places that can adapt to the new millennium and the conditions of universal culture and economics while retaining some local sense of proportion and value. The fate of the cosmopolitan culture of England, and the global city of London, will be more than merely interesting to watch. For if the best of Western ideals can be integrated with the diversity of the new population emerging everywhere, then we may expect that English influence will extend well into the twenty-first century, and that the great British virtues—pragmatism, toleration, and respect for tradition, in short the cosmopolitan ideals—may serve them and the rest of us well. Popular democracy and culture in the future could in the best historical outcome demonstrate British leadership and aplomb in adapting to the new circumstances of a new time while retaining control of their own national identity and destiny, not an easy task given the magnitude of the changes to come. But if they do, then visitors there in 2050 may well conclude that one never tires of life in London, whatever the hue of the inhabitants, and that there will indeed always be an England, whatever the state of the rest of the world. England’s mentoring status will then be there for the rest of us to admire and envy, and give people elsewhere reason enough to yearn themselves for the civilized triumph of hope and glory.
Fredrick Barton, Professor of English and Creative Writing at the University of New Orleans, where he also serves as Associate Dean of Liberal Arts. He is the author of several novels, and his film commentary appears in the newsweekly Gambit and on WYES-TV, New Orleans.

Youth loves iconoclasts. I remind myself of that fact every time Chicago Bull rainbow head Dennis Rodman does something else outrageous and further endears himself to America’s young people. Rodman is a pest, but he’s probably not quite the monster the media sometimes portray him. Still, if youth is to find a rebellious hero, we could all wish for someone with greater substance, with a message that transcends the joys of hair dyeing, tattoos and body piercing. I hesitate to plunge on from here, we boomers always feeling so superior to the generation following our own. But a Gen-X student of mine probably got it pretty close to right when he responded to my unsolicited criticism of what I termed his age group’s “lack of focus.” The difference between his generation and mine, he explained, was that the students of the sixties “had some pretty straightforward things to be against.”

I think the boomers should probably remember, however, that some of our heroes grew into the job a while after we had become their fans. The Beatles went on to write great, complex music that commented with fervor and insight on social and political issues. But when we first fell in love with them they were mostly proclaiming, “Yeah, yeah, yeah” and “twist and shout,” in the universal advocacy of men combing their hair forward toward their eyebrows instead of backwards off their foreheads. Comparably, when a lot of us first fell in love with Cassius Clay, long before he became Muhammad Ali, his primary pronouncements were, “I am the prettiest man I ever met,” and, of course, “I am the greatest.”

All of this is a way of introducing the topic of Leon Gast’s terrific documentary When We Were Kings, a behind the scenes account of the world title heavyweight boxing match between Muhammad Ali and George Foreman in November of 1974, the storied “Rumble in the Jungle.” Gast took twenty-three years getting this film to the screen. It took him that long to raise enough money to edit hundreds of hours of film into a single feature. Part sociological treatise, part dynamic sports flick, the movie chronicles a championship, a champion and an era of transformation. When We Were Kings won the 1997 Oscar for best documentary and thoroughly deserved it.

why boxing?

Admitting to being a boxing fan is hardly politically correct, all the less so in the aftermath of Mike Tyson’s barbarous ear biting in his recent championship bout against Evander Holyfield. And I’ll quickly concede that the sport is brutal and subject to disheartening corruption. Promoters with the questionable ethics of Don King get rich. Boxers like Joe Louis and Muhammad Ali get brain damage. Head cases like Mike Tyson continue getting championship fights when what they need is psychiatric.
treatment. But all that admitted, I'll own up to being a boxing fan. It is the most primal of sports, one man alone against another, each figuratively (and almost literally) naked except for his skill, conditioning, cunning and will. Yes, it is sometimes the circumstance of gruesome violence, but at its best it is also terrific theater and the occasion of astonishing courage. In addition, throughout the twentieth century, the boxing ring has provided an arena for a series of morality plays, until the retirement of Rocky Marciano in 1956, many of them having directly to do with race, white versus black. A decade before Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in major league baseball, few African Americans failed to thrill at the dozen-year reign of heavyweight boxing champion Joe Louis.

After Marciano's retirement, the only Caucasian to hold the heavyweight crown was a Swede named Ingemar Johansson who reigned as champion for a year in 1959 and 1960. Black-white struggles were relentless in the popular middleweight division, however, and I grew up fascinated by the battles of six-time middleweight champion Sugar Ray Robinson who won and lost a series of title bouts against such white opponents as Jake LaMotta, Bobo Olson, Carmen Basilio and Gene Fulmer. In my liberal household, we rooted for Robinson.

I think the first thing that attracted me to Cassius Clay was his early pronouncement that he was going to bring the boxing style of Ray Robinson to the heavyweight arena. Heavyweights were traditionally sluggers who stood in the middle of the ring and pounded each other until one fell over, usually in the early rounds. But Clay promised to "float like a butterfly and sting like a bee." He promised to meet brute force with athletic grace. And he made good on that promise for nearly two decades. As he liked to say about his repeated declarations of self-praise, "it ain't bragging if it's true."

**Hitting and Catching**

Cassius Clay made his first appearance on the world athletic stage in 1960 at the Olympic Games in Rome where he won the gold medal as a light-heavyweight. Several weeks later when he was refused service in a diner in his hometown of Louisville, Kentucky, an outraged Clay threw his medal into the Ohio River (he was given a replica at the 1996 games in Atlanta). Clay came to prominence at a time athletes were supposed to be modest about their accomplishments. But the boxer figured that self-promotion was the fastest way to open doors for himself. He talked so much, so fast, so articulately and so outrageously that he was dubbed the Louisville Lip.

And indeed, when he landed his first heavyweight title fight against Sonny Liston in February of 1964, many boxing experts felt that he'd gotten his shot at a championship not by earning it in the ring (he was undefeated, but his list of conquered opponents was suspect) but by annoying people who were anxious to see the ferocious Liston teach him some manners.

The civil rights movement was at its height in 1964, the year Martin Luther King would win the Nobel Peace Prize. And the majority of white America, either indifferent or overtly hostile to an increasingly assertive black America, found itself without a clear favorite in the Clay-Liston fight. Liston was a convicted felon who had done jail time and had twice destroyed the polite and popular Floyd Patterson with devastating first-round knockouts, first to take Patterson's crown in 1962 and again in a 1963 rematch. White America thought of Liston as a thug and hungered for somebody to beat him, somebody white preferably, but in the absence of proper skin color, somebody nice (like Patterson who was clearly not up to the assignment) but absolutely not somebody like Cassius Clay who was an obnoxious blowhard, the very kind of pushy Negro that was causing such trouble at bus stations, lunch counters and voter registration desks.

Critically, though, no one gave Clay a chance. Liston was considered unbeatable. He had immense strength. He was a crushing puncher. And Clay had just talked himself into a fight he didn't deserve. The experts disagreed only about how long it would take Liston to knock Clay out. There can be no question that Sonny Liston was a fearsome slugger, but as Cassius Clay pointed out, "you can't hit what you can't catch." The fight itself was nothing short of astonishing. Clay came out in the first round doing his famous "shuffle," moving backwards, circling away, usually to his left. Taunting Liston as "a big ugly bear," Clay did not even raise his own
gloves, holding his hands below his waist for the entire round. He threw no punches. He simply defied Liston to hit him. Liston was infuriated. He stalked forward unloading one thunderous roundhouse after another, but he managed to hit only air.

Clay began to box after the first round, sticking Liston repeatedly with his lightning quick left jab. But the fight was decided in the first round. The crucial psychological battle was already over. The invincible Sonny Liston had been embarrassed. Mentally humiliated, physically exhausted, he refused to come out for the seventh round. Cassius Clay was heavyweight champion of the world. And then Clay delivered a knockout blow to white America. He announced that he was a disciple of Malcolm X, the nation's angriest black leader and a minister in the separatist Nation of Islam. Henceforth Clay would be called Muhammad Ali, a name, the boxer explained, that meant "worthy of praise."

The country didn't know what to make of Muhammad Ali in 1964. Many in white America dismissed Ali's victory over Liston as the result of a fix. Many thought his name change and association with the Black Muslims was just another in a long series of publicity stunts, another instance of his defiling the rules of polite behavior. The nation was slow to learn that Muhammad Ali was a man of his word. In boxing terms, he was the greatest indeed. From 1964 to 1967 no boxer approached his skills. He fought and defeated all comers.

Meanwhile, uncomfortable as he made middle-class white America, Ali was achieving a spectacular popularity. His iconoclasm had already made him attractive to the youth of the sixties. But in 1967 he became one of the era's great heroes when he refused induction to serve in the United States army in Vietnam. The anti-war movement was just gathering momentum, and Muhammad Ali was in its forefront declaring, "Keep asking me no matter how long/ On the war in Vietnam I sing this song/ I ain't got no quarrel with the Viet Cong." Asked how he could express such an attitude about America's enemy, Ali added, "No Viet Cong ever called me 'nigger.'"

Ali was beloved of the thousands of young Americans opposed to the war in Vietnam. More than that, he became a hero to people all over the world who resented the American government's ham-handed approach to international relations in the decades after World War II. Ill-at-ease white Americans tried to characterize Muhammad Ali as a clown. They discovered he was a man of principle. But his athletic standing paid a heavy price for those principles. He was indicted and convicted for draft evasion by an all-white jury, and his heavyweight title was stripped by the professional boxing commissioners. Denied the opportunity to earn his living in the ring, he supported himself for three years making speeches on college campuses. He was not allowed to box again until the U.S. Supreme Court overturned his conviction in 1970.

Before trying to regain his heavyweight title, Ali quickly fought several warm-up bouts against over-matched opponents. Then in March of 1971 he faced the reigning champion, Joe Frazier, in a fifteen-round championship fight. But he fought too soon, he was still rusty from his three-year layoff, and those of us who loved him were crushed when the unanimous decision went against him. The fight was competitive and went the distance, and unlike so many beaten fighters, Ali accepted his defeat gracefully. When he subsequently lost to Ken Norton and suffered a broken jaw in the process, the experts maintained that he was finished and should retire.

Meanwhile in January of 1973, George Foreman knocked out Joe Frazier, hitting Frazier so hard with a second-round upper cut that he actually lifted Frazier off the mat. After that Foreman beat Ken Norton just as badly and just as quickly. Foreman was like Sonny Liston reincarnated. He was huge, and he was devastating. Boxers were actually afraid to get into the ring with a man so powerful. And boxing authorities were skeptical that anyone could make a decent appearance against Foreman. Surely no one could beat him. And certainly not the aging Ali. When people talked of Ali facing Foreman, just as had been true ten years previously, the only thing the pundits disagreed about was how long Ali could last against the most fearsome fighter in the world. The experts conceded now that Ali had been a great champion in the 1960s, but everybody presumed he could never recover his former glory. Boxing promoters across America
figured the fight would never take place.

promotion

Enter a dark-haired, fast-talking, still youthful Don King. King offered Foreman and Ali five million dollars each to fight, immense sums for the time. All King needed was the money, which he didn't have. He couldn't find it, moreover, anywhere in the United States where everyone deemed Ali washed up. So King peddled the fight not to a promoter but to a president, to Mobutu Sese Seko, the reigning dictator of Zaire. Defending Mobutu's investment, Ali argued, "Countries go to war to put their names on the map, and wars cost a lot more than ten million dollars."

The fight was scheduled for late September of 1974, and King arranged that it be accompanied by a huge music festival featuring James Brown and B.B. King, among others. When We Were Kings director Gast landed a contract with King to make a documentary of the festival, as he envisioned it, a kind of African Woodstock. But Foreman was injured in training and the fight was delayed for six weeks, during which time Gast shot thousands of feet of film with Ali. The
result is a documentary focusing on Ali and the fight.

As the fighters and their entourages gathered for the fight in Kinshasa, a host of things were at stake, of which the heavyweight crown was only the most immediately obvious. At age 32, clearly on the downslope of his career, Ali remained one of the most controversial athletes in America and one of the most popular figures in the world. He was particularly popular in Africa because of his connection to Islam.

George Foreman, meanwhile, though champion, was not widely known outside of the United States. And those abroad who did know him didn’t like him. Whereas Ali’s anti-war stance was celebrated outside the United States and by peace activists at home, Foreman was remembered as the man who waved little American flags after winning a gold medal in the turbulent Olympics at Mexico City. His patriotic gesture may have pleased some at home, but it angered millions overseas.

American African

Spike Lee reminds us in When We Were Kings that there was a time not so long ago in our country when a black American was insulted to be identified as African. That attitude had changed in the late 1960s and early 1970s when the term “Afro-American” enjoyed a passage of popularity in the black community. And if the film’s seeming implication that the Rumble in the Jungle transformed black America’s attitudes toward Africa is too strong, the fight and the charismatic performance of Ali certainly gave a popular boost to Afrocentrism.

From the beginning of the fight promotion through the celebration of his victory, Ali continually identified himself with the African people. And they loved him. He was a black hero who had defied the American government and made common cause with people of color around the globe. Throughout his training, wherever he went in Zaire, Ali was greeted with chants of “Ali, Bomaye” which translated, “Ali, kill him.” Throughout Africa, many indigenous people thought George Foreman was a white man. Foreman was hurt and confused by all this, but that made him all the more determined to punish Ali in the ring.

Muhammad Ali was a great boxing champion, quite probably the best who ever laced on a pair of gloves. But there’s no question his skill had diminished by the time he fought George Foreman at 4 a.m. (for the benefit of American closed-circuit television) in Kinshasa. Legend has it that Foreman took Ali lightly and that Ali planned his famed “rope-a-dope” strategy for weeks. When We Were Kings gives the lie to both those notions. Ali knocked George Foreman out with his fists, but he beat him with his brains. Foreman was not only a devastating puncher, perhaps the most powerful of all time, he also was a superior ring tactician with excellent footwork, not merely a lumbering strong man like Sonny Liston. Ali promised to stick and move, “to dance like I got ants in my pants” and Foreman painstakingly trained to cut off his avenues of retreat, to corner and pummel him. If Ali hadn’t outsmarted him, Foreman almost surely would have won, and Ali knew that better than anyone else.

Ali’s long-time advocate Howard Cosell editorialized that to win Ali needed “a miracle.” In the film Norman Mailer explains with brilliant clarity how Ali obviously felt that to win he had to knock Foreman out in the fight’s opening minutes. To that end Ali repeatedly threw the right-hand lead, a punch considered incredibly dangerous because it left him so wide open for a left hook counter. Professional boxers simply don’t throw the right-hand lead. But Ali figured such an unconventional strategy was perhaps his one chance, to hit Foreman with a punch Foreman would never expect. Ali threw the right-hand lead twelve times in the first round, many of them catching Foreman flush in the jaw. But to Ali’s astonishment and dismay his punches landed on Foreman’s face without noticeable effect. Only then, only having failed in what he had devised as his one best hope, did Ali make up something else, the “rope-a-dope.” He lay on the ropes, leaning as far out of the ring as possible to protect against a powerful blow to the head and allowed Foreman to flail away, taunting Foreman all the while, until the bigger, stronger, younger man had worn himself out.

This was not a strategy but an innovation. It was like Bobby Fischer moving a knight to an outside file. It was contrary to all that was considered wisdom about the sport. And it was an
act of genius. Ali took blows on his arms and elbows, but Foreman couldn’t reach him to knock him out. And by the eighth round Foreman was spent. Sensing it, Ali sprung off the ropes and hammered him with a combination that ended with a punishing right to the head. As Foreman started down, Ali cocked another right that he never threw. Foreman tumbled to the canvas and into a depression that lasted for two years and spawned a premature retirement. When he reemerged on the American public scene a decade later, he was an entirely new person. He had won a fight with himself that was greater even than his fight against Ali. And if I could ask one thing of When We Were Kings that it does not deliver, it would be footage exhibiting the charm and humor Foreman found within himself when he came to understand that losing to Muhammad Ali was nothing to be ashamed of.

When We Were Kings does not restrict itself to boxing. It shows us touching footage of Ali interacting with African children, many of whom could not conceivably understand who he was. And it establishes beyond dispute Ali’s obvious liking for his fellow man. Still, as pure sports theater, the documentary is nothing short of thrilling. In 1974, as Ali pirouetted around the falling Foreman, holding a punch he might have thrown but never did, he ascended to the rank of legend, his fascinating personality and supreme athletic skills placing him in the company of Jackie Robinson as a man who merged the worlds of sport and sociology. The amazing thing to me about Ali is how affable he remained despite his self-promoting bombast. His bragging was always done with a wink. Meanwhile, he took serious stands on serious issues. He spoke his mind with uncommon honesty and candor. But he never gave in to anger. He exhibited astounding courage in enduring the thieving of his youth. And he did so without ever resorting to hatred. He stands in the first rank of the heroes my generation has every reason to remain proud of. As George Plimpton says about him in the film’s benediction, “What a fighter. What a man.”

ON THE BENDING OF LIGHT

It is almost quiet. A woman calls—faint, unperturbed—for her child perhaps, her husband. A clock in the room below strikes three. Now answering bells outside. We feel a sense of luxury here.

This is not luxury—but it is enough—this room, narrow window open to the street, pale, moire curtains shifting in and out, and the light—shaping, reshaping the wooden drawers, the tiny white basin, the faded blue tiles. And our skin—

Toes to lips. On these thin sheets we return to ourselves, searching hands and mouths for textures there of memory—and to acknowledge for luxury of things. This almost quiet.

William Snyder, Jr.
Books


CEUTA, August 17 1991. We are in a long hot line waiting to cross the border from Morocco to Spanish territory on the North African mainland. We are scheduled to hydrofoil across the Strait of Gibraltar to Algeciras, and then ride a bus home to Sevilla. I am planning to leave my friend there and make a slow, random return to Madrid.

The line moves slowly. Everyone is interviewed and searched at this crossing, so I have plenty of time to languish and reflect. There are very few Americans at Ceuta. Tangiers and Casablanca are more popular destinations, with airports. Crossing a border on foot is something of a novel experience. One sees what borders can mean. Most of the people waiting in line at Ceuta are not tourists leaving for the Spanish mainland. They are hoping for permission to cross into Ceuta to see family or friends who live on the other side of the border, just on the other side of this building with its long counters and its reserved, official border police. Many of these people are denied permission to cross. It is safer to let people into Morocco than it is to let them out. I am surrounded by faces full of disappointment and sadness.

I reflect on the accident that brought me into this world as an American woman and not a Moroccan one. It can only be an accident that I carry all the advantages of the most coveted passport on the planet. I will not be denied permission to cross this border. I even doubt my interview will last more than a few seconds, since I have been traveling for some time and my bag is emitting a stench guaranteed to deter the guards from any but the most cursory search.

But I’m wrong. My friend, whom I met some years before when we were students together at Union Theological Seminary, had brought along something to read. The guards have removed his copy of Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s *Letter and Papers from Prison* from his backpack, and are regarding it with deep suspicion. You can see what they are thinking: anyone who has been in prison is obviously a subversive. They confer amongst themselves. They find the colonel, and consult with him. My friend and I are concerned, of course. No one that we know has ever had a pleasant story to tell of an interrogation by Moroccan security forces.

For whatever reason, and without a word, the book is returned to my friend’s backpack, our passports are stamped, and we walk the 20-yard corridor to Spain. I really am relieved. For all of Morocco’s charms, I am relieved to return to a world where most ordinary citizens are not judged, or placed under threat, by what they read.

We need ethics because we lack wisdom. In a world of wisdom, any book would be read in the open, families would meet when and where they liked, and no passport would be more coveted than another, because no accident of birth would bring greater privileges or freedoms than another. Dietrich Bonhoeffer left us a legacy of such wisdom, and even the instincts of the Moroccan security guards alert us that this legacy is dangerous, that it may lead to a world in which borders are not barriers, and all of us are free to wander and explore at will, without fear.

Each of the books reviewed here is an extension of Bonhoeffer’s influence and dedication. Charles
Marsh (Reclaiming Dietrich Bonhoeffer) examines the prodigious strengths of Bonhoeffer the philosopher to shed new light on Christ's "being-in-community." Donald Shriver (An Ethic for Enemies) argues that a political confrontation with forgiveness is the essential ingredient to constructing lasting peace on earth. Eberhard Bethge (Friendship and Resistance) shares stories and reflections which may help us better understand how we can live with ourselves and each other in the wake of holocaust and hell.

Charles Marsh seems to think something is missing in contemporary theological uses of Bonhoeffer, perhaps Bonhoeffer himself. His task is to correct that, and to "reclaim" or "reinvigorate" Bonhoeffer's theology by providing substantial analysis of Bonhoeffer's interest in German philosophers Hegel and Heidegger. His thesis is that Bonhoeffer's simultaneous engagement with German philosophy and Barth's christology resulted in the famous theology of Christ's "being-in-the-world" as a community of others.

Marsh is a stimulating thinker, and the book is truly a pleasure to read. He recreates the debate between Barth and von Hamack on theology's central task, and gives a fresh version of the exchange between Barth and Bonhoeffer, which he handles like an adept. Other discussions are no less interesting, although perhaps less satisfying. For example, his statement of the problem of alterity neglects the problem of violence, and Bonhoeffer's solution to the problem, Christ, is only possibly interesting to Christian theologians. The same problem occurs with what is perhaps the most promising discussion, that of Heidegger's existentialism. Marsh claims that Bonhoeffer's critique of Heidegger results in an existentialism with ethical content, the lack of which has been a deep post-Holocaust concern in philosophy. But what is the ethical content? Again, only the very narrowly-relevant Christ.

As fascinating as this book is, it is not useful in any meaningful way. One reads it and finds oneself drawn nostalgically backward to a world in which meaning and identity were natural assumptions whose source and purpose were debated by those with the leisure to do so. But for the contemporary theologian, the postmodern trajectory is a reality in which meaning and identity are elusive, and suspiciously fascistic. I have always read Bonhoeffer as a bridge to this scary and promising new epoch. Although Marsh acknowledges Bonhoeffer's thought as fractured and broken (33), Marsh himself is unable to grasp the postmodern (see, for example, his completely unnecessary aside in which he fails to grasp Derrida's analysis of Mandela, 58). As a result, the Bonhoeffer reclaimed in this book is not a companion on the journey, but a progenitor, an ancestor.

Donald Shriver wonders whether we can all live on this planet together without killing each other. The sheer numbers of war dead in the 20th century (100 million) makes this question, in his view, the most urgent and practical of all questions in politics. If we are to live and not die, he argues, politics must come to encompass forgiveness between enemies. Therefore, he sets out to construct an ethical analysis of forgiveness which will be relevant in secular as well as religious terms. Shriver insists that his model of forgiveness in politics rests on an understanding of politics not as aggressive defense of self-interest, but rather the work of constructing a commonly shared purpose, and shared power. After laying his political ethical groundwork in a few brief opening chapters, Shriver spends the bulk of the book illustrating his concept in three case studies: American political relations with Germany, with Japan, and the United States' own problems with race relations. The choice of a focus on case studies is a welcome one, since the reader wants to see how Shriver's view of forgiveness works.


The only problem a reader may encounter is in Shriver's decision to change the focus of political ethics from justice to forgiveness, which he calls the "essential servant of justice" (6). Clearly the project of forgiveness is superficial if, in the end, the poor must return to their camps, ghettos, shantytowns, or doorways. But I believe Shriver would acknowledge that the project of material justice cannot be abandoned in the search for peace. And for those who long for peace, Shriver's idealism speaks to the spiritual realities which we suspect are no less practical than the economic ones.
Eberhard Bethge’s collection of seven essays on the life, thought, and influence of his friend Dietrich Bonhoeffer add fascinating detail to our knowledge of Bonhoeffer, including Bonhoeffer and Kristallnacht, and how the letters from Tegel prison survived. The essays add to our understanding of what we can only know in a fragmented way: a theology which makes resistance possible and necessary. Perhaps most touching is the text of the 1993 speech Bethge gave at the founding of the association “Gegen Vergessen—für Demokratie” (chapter 8). In it, Bethge gives an account of the struggle of his life, and the task of the association: the never-ending struggle “against forgetting.” The association promotes a threefold project of research, mediation and commemoration which encompasses practical and humble activity, which involves all ordinary Germans, and which strengthens our hope in the truth of the slogan, “Never Again.”

We may be persuaded to believe that the goal of living for and with others is hopelessly out of reach. One doesn’t need the examples of Bosnia, Rwanda, or South Lebanon to be convinced. One need only stand in a hot dusty line in anonymous Ceuta to feel those fears grow. But to see Bonhoeffer’s influence on these three writers is enough to let doubt grow the other way. We may begin to doubt that life with others is as intangible as we believed, as we begin to discover that regardless of the barriers which some so rigorously maintain, our neighbors want life with us as much as we want life with them.

Beth Davies


The year 1998 will mark the centenary of the birth of C.S. Lewis, surely one of the most widely read and most gifted Christian thinkers of this century. It is a curious but obvious fact that, although Lewis himself did not think an author’s biography was particularly relevant not only in the writings but also in the man, and they actively seek information about his life. And it is likely, of course, that the centenary year will only increase this interest. One long awaited book with information about both the writings and the life is Hooper’s “Companion and Guide.” It manages to be both very useful and very peculiar at the same time.

C.S. Lewis died on November 22, 1963 (the same day that John F. Kennedy was shot). Walter Hooper, at that time teaching at the University of Kentucky, had gone to England and met Lewis just a few months earlier, in June of 1963. Until he returned to this country in August of that year, Hooper served in a secretarial capacity for Lewis, handling his correspondence. (Lewis’s brother Warren had generally done this, but he was elsewhere that summer). After Lewis’s death, Hooper returned to England and began editing some of Lewis’s unpublished works. His life since then has been devoted to and dependent upon that literary estate, editing many posthumous Lewis publications (often with introductions by Hooper), editing an important volume of Lewis’s correspondence with Arthur Greeves, and co-authoring (with Roger Lancelyn Green) a biography of Lewis. In short, Lewis’s work has been his life, and this “Companion and Guide” is, no doubt, the culmination of that effort.

This is not the sort of book one is likely just to read from beginning to end. It is more the sort of book to be consulted on various occasions. Along with a chronology of Lewis’s life and a bibliography of his writings, there are five main sections in the book: (1) a “Life of C.S. Lewis”; (2) “Writings”; (3) “Key Ideas”; (4) “Who’s Who”; and (5) “What’s What.” In my view, the last two of these are likely to be the most useful, but each section has its virtues and its peculiarities.

The “Life” provides a helpful review of the contours of Lewis’s life, although it is heavily weighted toward the last decade or so. One might have welcomed more information (besides what is generally known by many people about the Inklings) of Lewis’s Oxford years. But Hooper does give much detail about Lewis’s marriage late in life to Joy Davidman Gresham, and that is a topic about which readers are often curious.

The section on Lewis’s writings is by far the longest of the book, and it might well have been shorter. What is most valuable here is the publication history that Hooper provides for each book. But, in addition to that, he also discusses the book’s background and gives a summary of its contents. The summaries, often chapter by chapter, seem unnecessary, and most readers will skip them. The backgrounds are useful on occasion, but they seldom open up issues in Lewis’s thought that need exploration. Thus, for example, the background discussion of The Abolition of Man mentions an earlier treatment of natural law in Mere Christianity, but without noting that Lewis’s understanding of
the natural law (and how it is known) is not at all the same in these two works.

“Key Ideas” is a rather puzzling section. It has some excellent entries—as, for example, a long discussion of Lewis’s understanding of the imagination. But other ideas are included here—e.g., the humanitarian theory of punishment, or church unity—which could scarcely be considered among his key ideas.

Most helpful, I think, will be “Who’s Who” and “What’s What.” In these sections appear all the little details—many of them admittedly trivial—to the recording of which Hooper has devoted his life. Thus, for example, if having read a little of Lewis one is curious to know more about his friend Dom Bede Griffiths, Hooper provides the information. If one is curious about the relation between Lewis and a literary giant of our century such as T.S. Eliot, an entry will tell what is known. If one wonders whether Lewis can possibly have fairly described (in Surprised by Joy) the Headmaster of the school he calls “Belsen,” the information given about Robert Capron provides the details. If one wants to know about the Inklings-Gesellschaft, a German society, or about the many other societies and publications devoted to Lewis’s thought, Hooper provides the relevant information. Of course, one sometimes wonders why. Thus, for example, in an entry on Austin Farrer, the well known Anglican philosopher and theologian who was a friend of Lewis, Hooper mentions Farrer’s wife Katharine. Noting that the two of them were always eager to welcome visitors, Hooper writes: “No one could forget the pleasure of being with them. Their sophisticated conversation over 4:15 tea (Mrs. Farrer always served Lapsang Souchong) was immensely civilizing.” This is too precious by far and more than a little self-indulgent and complacent. But, quibbles aside, these two sections offer much to delight those who are interested in the details of Lewis’s life.

There is, however, one huge omission in this volume. Readers unfamiliar with the work that has been done on Lewis would never learn from Hooper’s “Companion and Guide” that, for better than a decade, Kathryn Lindskoog has been questioning in print (cf. her Light in the Shadowlands) the trustworthiness of Hooper’s work for the Lewis literary estate. That Hooper can hardly have been as intimate with Lewis as he has often implied can no longer be doubted. Lindskoog’s claims extend much farther, however. She has argued that several posthumous Lewis publications (most especially The Dark Tower) are forgeries. She may, of course, be wrong about some or all of these charges, but a reliable guide to Lewis’s writings should not ignore serious claims that are strong enough to have received support from some other Lewis scholars and that require one always to note whether the Lewis work one is reading bears a publication date before or after 1963.

Still, there is much here both to inform and delight. Thus, for example, we might wish to reflect upon the wise attitude toward life reflected in two sentences of a letter from Lewis to Tolkien, cited by Hooper: “All my philosophy of history hangs upon a sentence of your own ‘Deeds were done which were not wholly in vain.’”

Gilbert Meilaender


The combination of Thomas Jefferson’s religious thought as a topic and Edwin Gaustad as the author has irresistible charm for many of us interested in the intellectual and religious history of the United States. Mark A. Noll and Nathan O. Hatch, editors of the Library of Religious Biography, are to be congratulated for creating that pairing. Jefferson’s crucial role in formulating America’s civil religion has long been recognized by scholars and public alike but rarely have Jefferson’s opinions and actions on that subject been explored as thoroughly and sensitively as in this deftly organized and written work.

In his preface the author emphasizes that importance by making four claims (p. xiii):

First, Thomas Jefferson was the most self-consciously theological of all America’s presidents. Second, he dedicated himself more deliberately and diligently to the reform of religion than any other president. Third, in partnership with James Madison, he did more to root religious liberty in the American tradition than any predecessor or successor in the White House. And fourth, in succeeding centuries, no other president has been appealed to more frequently or more fervently in religious matters than Jefferson... 

These are large claims indeed. One might argue, for instance, that Lincoln was as “self-consciously theological” in his approach to social ethics and public policy as Jefferson and perhaps even more profound. Yet, on the whole, Professor Gaustad is right to stress Jefferson’s enormous influence, especially on the continuing debate on the rela-
relationship of religion to civic life.

As an informed reader would expect, there are discussions of such vital episodes as the long battle to pass the Statute for Religious Liberty in Virginia, the religious smears directed against Jefferson during the 1800 Presidential campaign, the circumstances behind the famous “wall of separation” letter of 1802, so often cited that many believe the phrase is actually in the Bill of Rights, and the religious aspects of the debate over the founding of the University of Virginia. These topics are handled with uncommon lucidity.

Of even greater interest is Gaustad’s exploration of Jefferson’s deism in its Enlightenment context. During an excellent discussion of “Reason” and “Nature” in eighteenth-century discourse, Gaustad connects Jefferson with the era’s quest to redefine Christianity as “a reasonable religion—yes, even a natural religion” (p.24). The God Jefferson encounters in Nature and through Reason is something more than an abstract Creator, necessary to explain an orderly Cosmos but rather an active principle within and beyond that universe.

In describing this “warm” deistic piety, Gaustad makes a most challenging interpretive connection: “New England’s great philosopher/theologian, Jonathan Edwards, shared this Jeffersonian understanding of God’s presence in the world as being continuous, creative, benevolent” (p. 37). Even if there were no other observations made in this book, that thought alone would make the book well worth reading. It breaks through many of the sterile categories that govern much of our thought about eighteenth-century Anglo-American culture.

Jefferson’s ethical theory, which underlay much of his drive for educational reform and for his version of separation of church and state, was rooted in the Moral Sense philosophy of the Scots Enlightenment. This sense, while “natural,” still needed development by learning and experimentation. Virtue, in short, required cultivation. Hence, in Gaustad’s view, Jefferson’s dedication to religious freedom did not arise out of indifference or even hostility to “corrupt priestcraft” but rather to the quest for morality: “The royal road to virtue turned out to be liberty, not conformity” (p.23). To Gaustad’s mind, that is the sense of Jefferson’s famous statement used to title this book, “For I have sworn on the altar of God eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man” (p. 181). This is another interesting and unusual interpretation. In conclusion, this book deserves to be carefully read and considered.

Richard P. Gildrie
FROM THE PARLOR

The colors have faded from the wallpaper.  
The little bouquets look like grey  
silhouettes of women who sat in the parlor  
balancing plates of angel food cake on their knees,  
talking about the heat and the drive  
for a new organ at the Methodist Church.

The framed print has faded, too,  
Stone City, Iowa, blending into the hills,  
the church steeple disappearing  
into the murky summer sky.  
Behind the frame bouquets cry out  
in blues and pinks, startling  
as the day they were hung,  
the weaving of their little baskets clear.

Below the print an oil spot—spreading  
over the years—has smothered  
bouquets above the couch.  
After a nap a woman lifts her face  
from the faded pillow and pushes  
down the afghan. She sits up groggy,  
and leans her head back on the wall.

She sits there now, eyes open,  
gathering her strength, thinking  
of her grandmother’s rose beyond the wall,  
folded over for the winter, covered  
with straw and, now, snow, where  
it dreams of turning to the sun and climbing  
the trellis, creamy yellow blossoms paler  
than the first blooms sixty years before.

Vincent Wixon
on poets—

Mike Heller
chairs the English department at Roanoke College where he teaches literature and writing. He is editing a collection of essays on John Woolman, the eighteenth-century Quaker.

Nancy G. Westerfield

William Snyder, Jr.
teaches creative and first year writing as well as literature at Concordia College—Moorhead, Minnesota. He has published in Southern Humanities Review, Cape Rock, Boston Phoenix and The Dalhousie Review.

Vincent Wixon
teaches English in Ashland, Oregon. His work on the poems and papers of William Stafford includes two films and a forthcoming volume of his collected works. His own poems have appeared in sundry journals and his own book Seed (1993).

On book reviewers—

Beth Davies
is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Toronto. During the past academic year, she taught in the Department of Theology at VU.

Gilbert Meilaender
is the Board of Directors Chair of Christian Ethics at VU where he teaches courses on bio-ethics and C.S. Lewis. Away from campus, he regularly contributes to ethical discussions of national concern, most recently including his forthcoming appearance on the PBS program Innovations.

Richard P. Gildrie