Not Just Whistling “Dixie”  
Martha Greene Eads

Still a Work in Progress  
Fredrick Barton

Stories for a Post-Christian Age  
David K. Weber

For Such a Time as This  
Lorraine S. Brugh

The Moral Perils and Opportunities of George R. R. Martin’s Fiction  
Ross Moret

Forty Million Leagues from Earth to Mars  
Jennifer Miller

VERSE

Suspension of (Dis)belief  
Aaron Brown

Exaltation  
John Estes

Something for Everything  
Stephen Kampa

VALPARAISO UNIVERSITY  
valparaiso.edu

Betty LaDuke is a prolific artist who uses innovative formats and techniques in her paintings and prints. She enjoyed a long and successful career as a professor of art at Southern Oregon University. She draws from her extensive travels to create works that explore specific faith traditions and cultures, as well as universal and mythological concepts. Rich in symbolism and reference, LaDuke's art celebrates spirituality in all its forms and history.

The Brauer Museum of Art will present a retrospective exhibition of LaDuke's work, curated by Associate Curator Gloria Ruff, from January 8 through April 3, 2016. The exhibition will include this painting, part of LaDuke's Oregon Harvest series. The series led the artist to produce a book titled Bountiful Harvest: From Land to Table that reproduces images of the pieces in the series; the proceeds from sales of the book benefit Southern Oregon farm workers and their families.

---

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

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

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

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

Submissions: We encourage authors and poets to refer to our online submissions management system at thecresset.submittable.com/submit.

The views presented are not thereby endorsed by Valparaiso University nor are they intended to represent the views of the faculty and staff of the university. Entire contents copyright 2015 by the Valparaiso University Press, Valparaiso, Indiana 46383-9998, without whose written permission reproduction in whole or in part for any purpose whatsoever is expressly forbidden.
ESSAYS

Martha Greene Eads  6  Not Just Whistling “Dixie”:
The Civil War’s Legacy in Ron Rash’s
The World Made Straight

Fredrick Barton  13  Still a Work in Progress:
Harper Lee’s Go Set A Watchman

David K. Weber  22  Stories for a Post-Christian Age:
Yuval Noah Harari’s Sapiens

Lorraine S. Brugh  29  For Such a Time as This

COLUMNS

Gregory Maher  38  Black Coffee and Papier-mâché:
Noir and the Second Season
of True Detective

Ross Moret  42  The Moral Perils and Opportunities
of George R. R. Martin's Fiction

Jennifer Miller  46  Forty Million Leagues from Earth to
Mars: Andy Weir’s The Martian

Peter Meilaender  50  A Twenty-First-Century Education:
On Having Too Much of a
Good Thing

Joseph Schattauer Paillé  53  A Catholic and Lutheran Agenda for
the Next Five Hundred Years

Gabriel Haley  56  The Reading Cure

DEPARTMENTS

IN LUCE TUA 5

ON THE POETS 59

VERSE

Aaron Brown
Suspension of (Dis)belief  21

John Estes
Exaltation  37

Stephen Kampa
Something for Everything  41

Catherine Abbey Hodges
Something to Fill  49

Albert Haley
A Paperclip  55

BOOKS REVIEWED

Andy Weir’s
The Martian  46

Rod Dreher’s
How Dante Can Save Your Life  56
whatever is **TRUE**

whatever is **NOBLE**

whatever is **RIGHT**

whatever is **PURE**

whatever is **LOVELY**

whatever is **ADMIRABLE**

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

*Philippians 4:8*
IN LUCE TUA
In Thy Light

The Power of Story

Throughout our whole lives, we tell stories, and we listen to them. We tell stories about where we are from, about things that have happened to us and choices we have made, and even stories about what the rest of our lives might be like. The stories we choose to tell form the grand narratives of our lives through which we define who we are. And we listen to the stories that our friends tell us about their lives in order to understand them, to find the moments where our stories intersect.

We also spend a lot of time reading stories. We read stories in books, quite simply, because we enjoy them, but we also read these stories because they help us understand our own better. In his essay, “Why Do We Read Fiction?” (1962), Robert Penn Warren wrote that our lives are shaped by their most problematic moments, situations of conflict that generate both energy and meaning, and we read fiction because the conflicts we experience in fiction can shape us in the same way. “We are in suspense about the story in fiction because we in suspense about another story far closer and more important to us—the story of our own life as we live it.” When we read fiction, we can test our own stories and experiment with new ones; fiction offers us “a heightened sense of being” from which we gain insight about our life as it is or hints about how our life story might turn out.

Many of the contributions to this Michaelmas issue of The Cresset address story and stories and how they shape our lives. In “Not Just Whistling ‘Dixie,’” Martha Greene Eads finds in Ron Rash’s 2006 novel The World Made Straight an account of how events of conflict and violence not only traumatize the immediate survivors, but also have lasting consequences on communities for genera-

In Rash’s sometimes disturbing story about the legacy of Civil War violence in present-day Appalachia, Eads finds a glimmer of hope for trauma survivors, a hope that is revealed through the story of the Gospel.

Fredrick Barton’s essay, “Still a Work in Progress,” reviews the recently-released Harper Lee novel, Go Set a Watchman, a book that retells the story of Lee’s famous To Kill a Mockingbird. While many readers will be frustrated, or even shocked, by the differences between the two books, Barton finds the story of Go Set a Watchman to be a more authentic portrait of race relations in the late-twentieth-century South.

In “Stories for a Post-Christian Age,” David K. Weber reflects on the story that Yuval Noah Harari tells in Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind. Harari argues that the species Homo sapiens has come to dominate the world precisely because of its ability to create and tell the kinds of stories that convince large groups of people to cooperate and work together. Although Weber finds Harari’s account “morally incoherent,” he recognizes the power that new kinds of stories will have in a world where the story of the Bible seems to be losing its cultural relevance.

Lorraine Brugh’s essay “For Such a Time as This” is about a different form of human expression; instead of story, the focus is on music. Brugh considers how distinctions between sacred and secular forms of music have blurred in recent decades, and she suggests that Lutherans, with their appreciation for the role of music in liturgy, are poised to lead the way as Christians explore robust and vibrant forms of worship appropriate to the diverse and ecumenical church of the twenty-first century.

Our lives might sometimes seem like an endless string of random events, most of them beyond our control. But through storytelling—by finding the narrative and choosing the words with which we tell our own story—we create meaning in our lives. Yet these stories are never finished; we rewrite them, and we retell them, and we search for the place they might have in the story that makes all others true, the story of the redemption and restoration of a fallen creation.

—JPO
Not Just Whistling "Dixie"

The Civil War's Legacy in Ron Rash's The World Made Straight

Martha Greene Eads

Appalachian poet and fiction-writer Ron Rash is emerging as an international literary superstar. Irish novelist Edna O'Brien's back-cover endorsement of his 2014 short story collection Nothing Gold Can Stay declares, "Like his great predecessors, Faulkner, Flannery O'Connor, and especially Eudora Welty, Ron Rash's stories are rooted in the American South and from that place and those people, he writes marvelously rich and compelling vignettes of life as he has seen and imagined it." In her assessment of Burning Bright (2010), an earlier volume of Rash short stories, Irish Times reviewer Eileen Battersby proclaims, "Magnificent is suddenly too small a word." Discussing his efforts to make his Appalachian characters accessible to readers outside the region, Rash noted in a July 2015 interview, "One thing that has pleased me is that my books are in, I think, eighteen languages now. I just got an e-mail from China, that the books are doing very well there, and the editor there was talking about the number of young Chinese writers who are reading [my work] and influenced by it.... I was in France a few years ago, and a woman said, 'You've told the story of my life'" (interview with the author).

While they wait for their copies of his newest novel, Above the Waterfall, to arrive, readers in France, China, and here in the US who are only now boarding the Rash bandwagon will find plenty to ponder in his earlier work. Just this year, the University of South Carolina Press issued a twentieth-anniversary edition of his MFA short-fiction project, The Night the New Jesus Fell to Earth (1994), featuring stories both heart-breaking and hilarious. Most of his subsequent work is far darker, chronicling instances of environmental, social, and personal devastation in the western North Carolina landscape where Rash grew up. His writing has gathered literary power over time, but his nearly ten-year-old, relatively underappreciated novel The World Made Straight (2006) demands our attention now. As hair-raising as any thriller on the best-seller lists, The World Made Straight transcends the pulp fiction genre to challenge readers to reconsider our perceptions of last summer's Confederate flag debate, as well as to reflect on the ways our cultural and personal histories can control us—or challenge us to overcome them.

As The World Made Straight opens on an August afternoon in 1978, Madison County, North Carolina native Travis Shelton has traded trout-fishing for pot-poaching. A skinny seventeen-year-old, Travis is already a knowledgeable outdoorsman, but he has no real vision for his future. He finds satisfaction in the physical labor of tobacco-farming, but he has watched his father's financial prospects dwindle as demand for his crop declines. Moreover, Travis's attempts to resist internalizing his father's contempt for him drive him to self-destructive acts of defiance: dropping out of school, driving too fast, drinking too much. As he fishes above a waterfall in the book's first scene, Travis relishes his own foolhardiness and remembers a characteristic assessment: "Nothing but a bother from the day he was born. Puny and sickly as a baby and nothing but trouble ever since. That's what his father had said to his junior high principal" (7). In light of this internal monologue, Travis's subsequent decision to steal and sell five marijuana plants he spies along the creek is hardly surprising.
The novel's tension rises when Travis returns not just once but even a second time to steal from Carlton and Hubert Toomey, whose reputations for violence would intimidate anyone with a grain of sense. Travis tells himself, however, that the father and son are too lazy to catch him:

Travis’s daddy claimed the Toomeys poached bears on national forest land. They cut off the paws and gutted out the gallbladders because folks in China paid good money to make potions from them. The Toomeys left the meat to rot, too sorry even to cut a few hams off the bears’ flanks. Anybody that trifling wouldn’t bother walking the hundred yards between farmhouse and creek to watch for trespassers. (8)

Travis is right about the Toomeys’ indolence, but he woefully underestimates the creativity with which they will keep watch over their cash crop.

On his second visit to the marijuana field, Travis battles a bit with his nerves: “When he came to where the plants were, he got on all fours and crawled up the bank, raising his head like a soldier in a trench. A Confederate flag brightened his tee-shirt, and he wished he’d had the good sense to wear something less visible. Might as well have a damn bull’s-eye on his chest” (25). Fortunately, the Toomeys don’t take aim at him on this occasion, and he successfully transports his load of plunder to a small-time drug dealer, Leonard Shuler.

The Confederate flag tee-shirt is not, however, lost on Leonard. After completing the drug transaction, he talks with Travis over beers. When Travis observes that Leonard’s house trailer is full of books, Leonard tells him, “Keeps me from being ignorant.” Travis retorts that some of his teachers have been too stupid to change their own cars’ oil, to which Leonard replies, “Stupidity and ignorance aren’t the same thing. You can’t cure someone of stupidity. Somebody like yourself that’s merely ignorant there might be hope for.”

Travis demands, “What reason you got to say I’m ignorant?”

“That tee-shirt you’re wearing, for one thing. If you’d worn it up here in the 1860s it could have gotten you killed, and by your own blood kin.” (28)

Thus begins Travis’s months-long history tutorial, which is also Rash’s readers’ 289-page tutorial on Appalachia’s complex Civil War legacy.

Travis, as Leonard deduces in their first encounter, is the descendant of Union-sympathizers killed by their Confederate neighbors in the 1863 massacre at Shelton Laurel. His wearing a Confederate tee-shirt truly does signal his ignorance of local and familial history. When Leonard asks him whether his family never talked about the massacre, Travis thinks hard and responds, “Sometimes my daddy and uncle talked about kin that got killed in Shelton Laurel during the war, but I always figured the Yankees had done it” (29). Travis immediately rejects the possibility of his family’s having been Yankees, and Leonard acknowledges that they were not, “at least not in the geographical sense.” But, he adds, “They had a side. Nobody had the luxury of staying out of it up here. Most places they’d fight a battle and move on, but once war came it didn’t leave Madison County” (29). The region, he explains, came to be known as Bloody Madison.

Thirty years later and far beyond Madison County, Travis has companions in confusion, as James W. Loewen contends in “Why Do People Believe Myths About the Confederacy? Because Our Textbooks and Monuments Are Wrong” (Washington Post, July 1, 2015). Loewen points out, for example, that even though only 35,000 Kentuckians fought for the South while 90,000 fought for the North, Confederate monuments there now outnumber Union ones seventy-two to two. Similarly, Frederick County, Maryland, has a Confederate memorial, and locals commemorate the Southern cause around Memorial Day even though Confederate officer Jubal Early demanded a $200,000 ransom from their forebears in 1864 (about $3 million in 2015 dollars) in order not to burn the town. Loewen asserts, “The Confederates won with the pen (and the noose) what they could not win on the battlefield…. We are still digging ourselves out from under the misinformation they spread, which has manifested in our public monuments and our history books.” Clearly, Rash shares Loewen’s concern.
In *The World Made Straight*, then, Rash helps clear up significant confusion regarding one Civil War event about which most Americans, even in the immediate vicinity, are misinformed if not totally unaware. Leonard Shuler, in contrast, may live in a rusty trailer; sell pot, pills, and beer to teenagers; and even be rumored to have killed someone, but he knows history. While trying in vain to forget his painful personal past, Leonard reads widely about painful political conflict: Hitler's and Stalin's atrocities (94); American Indian rivalries (181); and, of course, the US Civil War. The insights of Simone Weil have formed his thinking; he quotes her to Travis about halfway through the book: "Force is as pitiless to the man who possesses it, or thinks he does, as it is to its victims; the second it crushes, the first it intoxicates. Those who use it and those who endure it are turned to stone... a soul which has entered the province of force will not escape this except by a miracle" (162). Later, when he accompanies Travis and Travis's girlfriend Lori to the Shelton Laurel massacre site, Leonard remembers Weil's claim that "[t]he true object of war is the warrior's soul" (206). A drunkard and a contributor to the delinquency of minors, Leonard nevertheless proves to be a philosopher well-equipped to guide Travis from ignorance to a surprising form of wisdom.

In doing so, Leonard reclaims his own vocation. Coming from the same impoverished community as Travis, Leonard had studied his way out of Madison County into a scholarship at and a degree from UNC-Chapel Hill. Pressed by his wife Kera to move to an area where they could both find teaching jobs, she in English and he in history, Leonard had reluctantly re-located with her and their young daughter Emily to the Chicago area. The marriage, however, fell apart, with Kera repeatedly accusing Leonard of "living in the passive voice, letting others make choices so if things went wrong he didn't have to bear the blame" (54). Leonard developed a drinking problem and then plea-bargained when a vengeful student planted marijuana in his car and accused him of dealing. Leonard's acquiescence to pressure from school and legal authorities confirmed Kera's contemptuous assessment of him, and he subsequently lost his marriage, access to his daughter, and his job. Eventually, he made his way back to Madison County, justifying peddling dope and booze to self-destructive young people as "merely speeding up the process of natural selection" (74). Getting to know Travis, however, stirs Leonard's desire to teach and ultimately helps him emerge from his own darkness.

That darkness runs deep. Demoralized by Kera's verbal abuse and rejection, her subsequent departure with their child and a new husband to Australia, and his own unemployment, Leonard also has what he considers a legacy of "dark spells" from his mother. "She'd stayed in bed for days at a time;... left the bedroom only to whip Leonard and his sister for playing too loudly" (158). Moreover, he is haunted by accounts of the massacre at Shelton Laurel. Like Travis, he is a descendent of those involved in that conflict. Unlike Travis, however, he knows his family history all too well, and his side was complicit in the killing. Supplementing and correcting Leonard's textbooks' accounts of the Civil War is the sixteen-volume journal of his great-great grandfather, Joshua Candler, a physician conscripted into the Confederate regiment that slaughtered Travis's relatives.

Because his own last name is Shuler, Leonard is able to conceal his Candler connection from Travis for most of the book. In educating Travis about Shelton Laurel, he appears simply to be exposing the young man to both sides of the story for objectivity's sake. In response to Travis's incredulity about the Confederates' having killed his relative David Shelton, who was only twelve years old at the time, Leonard quotes a regiment member's having observed that "a nit makes a louse"—"kill the offspring before they get big enough to kill you" (75). When Travis questions further how the
Confederates could have killed their own neighbors, Leonard reminds him of World War II atrocities and notes that Confederate Colonel Lawrence Allen had convinced his men that Union-sympathizers were “bushwhackers,” criminals rather than legitimate military opponents who, if captured, would deserve execution rather than imprisonment as prisoners of war (94). (Although Rash does not elaborate, using language that casts others as vermin or criminals is common in situations of rising conflict among neighbors, as Nazi Germany’s treatment of Jews illustrates.) Later, when Travis responds angrily to an old library book’s account of the regiment’s having beaten an eighty-five-year-old woman, Leonard tells him, “I know. I’ve read this book. It’s got one big flaw as history, though. It fails to show the other side.”

“What other side?” Travis asked.

“How the Sixty-fourth [Confederate regiment] had been shot at for days. How miserable the weather was, how rough the terrain. They figured those women could tell where the snipers were and save them a lot of time and work. Save some of their own lives as well.”

“It was still wrong,” Travis said. “I wouldn’t have shot a twelve-year-old boy.”

“Saying that here and now is different than if you’d been there... Some soldiers didn’t want to shoot at first, but [Lieutenant] Keith told them if they didn’t they’d be killed as well. What if you had a wife and a child? It’s 1863 and they’re about starved to death as it is. The man giving the orders knows where your family lives. It’s no longer just about you. You’ve already seen an eighty-five-year-old woman being beaten, so you know he’d as likely do the same to your wife or daughter.” (161)

Having read and re-read his great-great-grandfather’s journal entries leading up to the massacre, Leonard understands the complexity of the situation, complexity that reverberates in recent news accounts of Irish, Balkan, Rwandan, Liberian, and Syrian atrocities.

Rash enriches readers’ experience by interspersing pages from Joshua Candler’s journal with the main narrative, enabling us to watch tension build in Madison County as war approaches and takes hold. Candler comments briefly on each day’s medical cases, beginning with farming injuries, fevers, and childbirth complications in the 1850s; branching out to a broken nose, bloody lips, and even gunshot wounds resulting from arguments over secession in 1861; and continuing with the horrific disemboweling of a Sixty-fourth regimental sentry by his Unionist neighbors who were hiding in the hills to avoid conscription. By providing this detail, Candler helps account for the Confederates’ subsequent brutality during the massacre, but he also reveals that he would have preferred not to serve as the Confederates’ doctor. When he treats Lawrence Allen for hoarseness on May 13, 1861, he editorializes far more than usual, “Would it be that not just Allen but Zeb Vance and his Raleigh firebrands would get aphonia to quite [sic] their braying about states [sic] rights” (102). Reporting on the county’s secession vote, he notes, “Final delegate vote: 28 for Secessionists, 144 Unionists. This folly may yet be prevented” (103). As Leonard studies these entries, he agonizes over his great-great-grandfather’s having witnessed and perhaps even participated in the massacre of his own former patients, particularly young David Shelton, with whom he had sat up all night when the boy had typhoid in 1859. Leonard muses, “[W]hat role for a man who’d been against secession yet had not fled to Tennessee with his first cousin to join the Union forces? A man who had not volunteered for the Confederate army but had been conscripted, evidently letting his allegiance be decided by which side first chose to place its claim on him” (206). How guilty was his ancestor, Leonard seems to be wondering, of living in the passive voice?

Leonard himself is certainly guilty, as is Travis. Each lets whim—his own or others’—carry him, and each makes excuses for his poor choices. While Rash does not justify these choices, the backstories he gives both men make their behavior understandable. Each has experienced beatings by a parent, and each has suffered ongoing verbal abuse by a family member. As Carolyn Yoder notes in The Little Book of Trauma Healing, domestic abuse survivors often both “act in,” experiencing high levels of depression and abusing substances, and “act out,” engaging in
high-risk and aggressive behaviors, committing criminal acts, and perpetuating domestic abuse themselves. Moreover, they typically battle apathy and low productivity, communication problems, either-or thinking, and inability to trust (33). Through expert exposition and painstaking plot development, Rash helps us understand why passivity plagues both Leonard and Travis.

Fascinatingly, Rash also suggests that Leonard's and Travis's individual family histories alone do not account for their plights. They are also survivors of what Yoder calls historical trauma. Drawing from the work of Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, Yoder defines historical trauma as "the cumulative emotional and psychological wounding over the lifespan and across generations emanating from massive group trauma" (13). The effects of historical trauma can last for generations, she explains, "even when the next generation is not told the trauma story, or knows it only in broad outline. A 'conspiracy of silence' surrounds events for which grieving and mourning have never taken place" (14). Leonard describes such a conspiracy when Travis asks him why people don't talk about the massacre: "The men who shot them were also from this county. Even after the war some folks got killed because of what happened that morning. People believed it was better not to talk about it" (93). Trauma studies scholars might look to the 1863 Shelton Laurel massacre as an unacknowledged but significant factor in the Candler and Shelton families' legacies of poverty, depression, and domestic abuse.

David Anderson Hooker and Amy Potter Czajkowski have extended Yoder's work on trauma in their *Transforming Historical Harms* manual, which offers an additional helpful lens for considering Rash's novel. While Hooker and Czajkowski's treatment of US historical trauma focuses primarily on the Coming to the Table project, in which descendants of slave-owning and enslaved people collaborate to address slavery's legacy and aftermath, their insights are also useful for reflecting on the Civil War's effects on Appalachia. Hooker and Czajkowski explain that while trauma certainly affects individuals, communities and even entire societies often develop shared struggles after traumagenic events. "Victors" and their descendants typically cultivate an "us-vs.-them" group identity alongside a "good-vs.-evil" narrative in which they de-humanize the enemy, come to regard violence as redemptive, and savor social pride in their triumph. (Loewen suggests that although they lost the war, those today who claim the Confederate legacy have adopted the victors' attitudes.) Survivors on the "losing" side often experience increased rates of depression, anxiety, self-abuse, and addiction; battle existential doubt and survivor guilt; and succumb to learned helplessness, hopelessness, and fatalism (23). Travis and Leonard, their parents, and many of their impoverished neighbors fall into that second group. These characteristics are, in fact, common even in other parts of Appalachia, where assaults by outsiders who plundered the region for its resources have been even more destructive than the Civil War was.

What hope, then, exists for historically traumatized people, in fiction or in real life? Strikingly, Rash takes Leonard and Travis through a restorative process remarkably similar to the Transforming Historical Harms (THH) framework Hooker and Czajkowski set forth in their manual. Those seeking healing, they recommend, should face history, make connections, heal wounds, and take action in order to "build a more truthful, just and connected society" (29). Facing history, they assert, must go beyond reviewing the "victors'" accounts that typically appear in history textbooks to uncover both the extent of the harms the victors committed and the traumagenic circumstances they faced (34).

In carefully combing through and reflecting on competing historical accounts of the Shelton Laurel massacre, Leonard and Travis face history in...
just this way. They make connections, most obviously with each other, but also with their forebears as they return to and reflect on the massacre site, even putting on young David Shelton’s eyeglasses to observe what he might have seen before his death. Much like the descendants of slaveholders and enslaved people in the Coming to the Table project, Leonard and Travis operate as surrogates for their forebears. The imaginative exercises they undertake during their site visits function as healing rituals, which Hooker and Czajkowski say should address a trauma’s “physiological, spiritual, emotional, and cognitive dimensions” (38). Finally, both Leonard and Travis take action. Although they do not tackle destructive, trauma-induced social and economic systems in the manner that Hooker and Czajkowski urge, each man breaks out of his pattern of passivity to liberate Dena, another character close to them who has been held captive, literally by the Toomeys and figuratively by her own self-abuse.

What enables them to do so? Love. In When Blood and Bones Cry Out (2010), John Paul Lederach and Angela Jill Lederach celebrate love’s mysterious capacity to heal historical trauma. Acknowledging that analyzing love “enters the slippery slope of the intangibles that lie outside the scientific endeavor,” they point to five recent studies in medicine, neurology, psychology, and sociology that examine love’s effects. In a sixth that they deem particularly noteworthy, A General Theory of Love (2001), three psychologists offer an account of “the impact and importance of love as a transformative component of healing and its impact on relationships” (231). While Lederach and Lederach’s ensuing argument may not convince all readers, Rash’s artistic treatment of the topic is irresistibly compelling. Leonard and Travis have formed a family of sorts with Dena, and in spite of each character’s struggle to trust, they love each other. Travis comes to relate to Leonard as a son to his father, and Leonard’s love for the young man motivates him to stop dealing drugs and drinking. Leonard’s love for his daughter Emily empowers him further, motivating him to take up honest work and save money to visit her in Australia. Even more importantly, the memory of his last interaction with Emily empowers Leonard to stand up to Carlton Toomey, and his hope of reunion with her enables him to meet his final, desperate challenge with dignity. Travis’s relationship with his girlfriend Lori also helps him develop a hopeful vision for his life, a vision he had been denied for his first seventeen years.

Some readers might charge that calling The World Made Straight a hopeful novel strains credulity. The final chapters’ cataclysmic encounters between the Toomeys and Leonard, Travis, and Dena are bloody and violent, and the ending is ambiguous, at best. For many Christian readers, however, the last paragraph will shine. Shortly before the narrative explodes in physical violence, Lori gives Travis a silver cross and chain, “to protect you when I’m not around” (233). Distraught over an agonizing encounter with his father, Travis takes his anger out on her, dismissing the gift, picking a quarrel with her, and pitching the necklace out his car window when she flees in tears. At the novel’s end, however, after a series of actions that demonstrate his courage and generosity, he goes to her. She may reject him, of course, but, then again, she may not. Rash concludes:

His life was beyond [the] fields, but Travis knew he would never forget this smell or the cool moist feel of broken ground. He inhaled deeply, held it in like a man savoring the taste of a last cigarette. The road curved briefly, then straightened as he began the long ascent north to Antioch. (289)

Antioch, North Carolina, where Lori lives in squalor with her millworker-mother, unmarried pregnant sister, and little brother, may be the poorest hamlet in Madison County, but readers who know their church history will recognize ancient Antioch as one of the primary launching points for the Gospel.

The World Made Straight will never show up in a Christian bookstore, and, in interviews, Rash is far readier to speak about wonder in general terms than about conventional religious faith. Lederach and Lederach identify experiences of wonder as powerful aids in trauma healing, and Leonard and Travis’s vast and shared capacity for wonder in nature is a key element in the novel (Lederach and Lederach, 133). Rash did, however, grow up Southern Baptist and expresses deep appreciation
for having been “saturated in the Bible” (interview, July 2, 2015). That he offers a hint of Christian hope in a book about the effects of historical trauma breathes life into Alan D. Falconer’s 1998 consideration of Irish political conflict in “The Reconciling Power of Forgiveness.” Falconer writes, “The sense of impotence in the face of the past is matched by an equally powerful sense of impotence to fashion the future.... Power to break the cycle, the impotence, is proclaimed to be the work of Jesus Christ, above all in making new and in freeing human-kind from the burden of the past and giving hope for the future” (177, 178). Drawing from Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s treatment of responsibility in Ethics, Falconer asserts that a robust understanding and application of the Gospel is profoundly relevant for historical trauma survivors.

Rash, too, looks to Bonhoeffer for inspiration. When asked in 2006 about his decision to write about Shelton Laurel, he replied:

I think it’s a meditation on violence. I’ve always been horrified and fascinated over people, who live in close proximity to each other, turning on one another. During Pol Pot’s reign in Cambodia. In Bosnia. Rwanda. It’s unsettling to see people fall back into a tribal mentality. To me it’s horrifying and one of the most depressing things humans can do to each other. The hope is that there will always be people who fight against it. People like Bonhoeffer in Germany. (Zacharias 2006)

More recently and closer to home, Rash might look also to the members of Charleston, South Carolina’s Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church, who chose to absorb through forgiveness the hatred of Dylann Roof, the murderer who cloaked himself in the Confederate flag for selfies. As James W. Loewen acknowledges in his lament about misinformation surrounding the Civil War, “De-Confederatizing the United States won’t end white supremacy, but it will be a momentous step in the right direction.” One novel can’t undo the massacre at Shelton Laurel or its effects, either, but Ron Rash’s exploration of its complexity in The World Made Straight offers hope not just to people in Appalachia but to historical trauma survivors all over the world.

Martha Greene Eads is Professor of English at Eastern Mennonite University.

Works Cited


Hooker, David Anderson and Amy Potter Czajkowski. Transforming Historical Harms. Harrisonburg, Virginia: Center for Justice and Peacebuilding, n.d.


Loewen, James W. “Why Do People Believe Myths About the Confederacy? Because Our


Still A Work in Progress

Harper Lee’s Go Set A Watchman

Fredrick Barton

The late Civil Rights activist and author Will D. Campbell, the only white man to participate in Martin Luther King Jr.’s founding of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), liked to tell about how white people, particularly prosperous white people, reacted to his message of racial equality and inclusiveness. In the late 1940s, when he was at Yale Divinity School, but still interacting with the people in his home region of rural Mississippi, and in the early 1950s, when he pastored a Baptist church in small-town Taylor, Louisiana, Campbell’s white associates and parishioners found his attitudes about race “endearing” and “charming.” They found it “cute” that Campbell cared so much about “darkies.” By the mid-1950s and throughout the 1960s, however, that patronizing but unthreatening reaction was replaced with one of menace. In 1956, Campbell was hounded out of his job as Director of Religious Life at the University of Mississippi for the affront of playing interracial ping pong in the student union. By the end of the 1950s, he was on the hit list of a resurgent Ku Klux Klan and warned that if he ever set foot in Mississippi again, he would not leave the state alive.

What accounted for this change? How was it that white people could find Campbell’s racial advocacy gently amusing in 1952 and a lynching offense only a few years later? The answer is the Brown v. Board of Education decision handed down by the United States Supreme Court on May 17, 1954. This landmark ruling reversed the legal premise, established by the court in 1896 in Plessy v. Ferguson, that racial segregation of public facilities was legal as long as the facilities were equal. In Brown, the court held that separate facilities were “inherently unequal.” Brown dealt with racially-segregated public schools in Topeka, Kansas, but the ruling’s sweeping implications for the continuation of American apartheid in its ubiquitous manifestations throughout the South were obvious to everyone on either side of the issue. Segregation would not disappear overnight, but it legally could no longer endure.

And hence the violent change in white attitudes. In the 1940s and early 1950s, segregation enjoyed established legal standing, and whites did not feel threatened by a powerless integrationist like Will Campbell. But after the decision in Brown, the forces in favor of racial equality had the law on their side, and even formerly “moderate” whites were infuriated. Will Campbell was just one target of the brutal mindset that overtook those elements of society devoted to the principle of white racial supremacy and privilege. Most of the victims of the violence that would rage over the next two decades were black: from Emmett Till to Medgar Evers to Martin Luther King Jr., but some were white too. Will Campbell managed to avoid injury, but Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman were murdered in 1964 while trying to register black Mississippi voters. Viola Liuzzo was murdered in 1965 while providing airport shuttle service to Selma voting rights marchers. Journalist Nicholas von Hoffman captured the atmosphere that seized the South after Brown. “There was a special molecule in the air:” he wrote, “...fear. Everyone watched, and everyone was watched.”
Reflecting on the divide that ripped time in two in the mid-1950s is the key to grasping, in significant part, what Harper Lee was wrestling with in her two published novels: the Pulitzer Prize-winning *To Kill a Mockingbird*, released in 1960, and *Go Set a Watchman*, written before *Mockingbird* but not published until the summer of 2015.

***

The release of *Go Set a Watchman*, fifty-five years after its companion novel, has been greeted by confusion and a cacophony of denunciation and hostile suspicion. *New York Times* columnist Joe Nocera decried *Watchman*’s publication as a “fraud” and sees it as a move of crass commercialism by Rupert Murdoch and his HarperCollins Publishing Company. Certain mysteries do continue. Lee’s acclaim was so great after *To Kill a Mockingbird* that her public clamored for a follow-up book, but she refused to deliver it and long denied that she ever would, despite having *Go Set a Watchman* in her desk drawer. Lee is now eighty-nine and residing in assisted living after suffering a stroke. As a result of her age and physical condition, many have questioned whether she made the decision to publish *Watchman* willingly or under duress from her aggressive attorney, Tonja Carter, who has given conflicting statements since coming forth with the manuscript she claims, variously, to have discovered in 2011 or 2014. Close friends, however, like fellow Pulitzer Prize-winner Diane McWhorter, defend Lee’s soundness of mind and assert her approval of the recent decision to publish *Watchman* at long last.

Adding to the brouhaha over the publication of *Go Set a Watchman* is the startling discovery that Atticus Finch, almost a sainted figure in the 1930s setting of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, is depicted in the 1950s setting of *Watchman* as an unapologetic bigot, a one-time member of the Ku Klux Klan, and the current chairman of his town’s White Citizens’ Council, an ugly, fiercely racist, segregationist organization that has justly been typified as the Klan without the robes. The pre-publication revelation that the Atticus we meet in the current book is not the Atticus we have loved for over a half century has led many fans of *To Kill a Mockingbird* to announce that they won’t read the new release. But figures close to the author, including Diane McWhorter, have commented that the book released this summer may contain the statements on race that Harper Lee wanted to make all along.

***

Whether or not Lee will ever comment on her long reluctance to bring *Watchman* into print remains to be seen (I doubt she will). Nonetheless, we know that *Watchman* was the first of the two books completed and was submitted for publication to editor Tay Hohoff at J. P. Lippincott in 1957. Hohoff did not reject the book out of hand, but neither did she accept it. Instead, obviously interested in the story’s narrative materials, Hohoff asked Lee to engage in a radical rewrite. *Watchman* is set in the 1950s and is told in the third person from the point of view of Jean Louise Finch, a twenty-six-year-old woman living in New York who has returned to her tiny Maycomb, Alabama, hometown to spend her vacation with her seventy-two-year-old lawyer father Atticus. The novel details how the adult daughter comes to realize and confront some distressing qualities about a father she always has idolized. The closeness of the parent/child relationship is established in flashbacks to when Jean
Louise, nicknamed Scout, is a child in the 1930s. Hohoff challenged Lee to set the entire novel in Scout's childhood, and the author labored over that project for two years, in the end producing *To Kill a Mockingbird*, which emerged as an entirely different book. Whatever its merits and failures, *Go Set a Watchman* cannot be appropriately characterized as *To Kill a Mockingbird*’s first draft.

For those who haven’t read *To Kill a Mockingbird*, or haven’t read it in a long while, the novel is narrated by the schoolchild Scout Finch from ages six to nine, circa 1933–1935. (The Oscar-winning 1962 movie directed by Robert Mulligan and starring Gregory Peck is so largely faithful to the novel that the film’s slight variations here and there don’t really warrant analysis or require specific comment.) Much of the story endeavors to depict life for a small-town Southern girl in the midst of the Great Depression. She goes to school, but she hates it. She goes to church faithfully, but without a lot of enthusiasm. And she plays with her friends, mostly her older brother Jem, and during summer vacations with Dill Harris, a boy who regularly visits his aunt who lives next door to the Finches. The central event that we have long most vividly associated with *Mockingbird*, Atticus’s defense of the black laborer Tom Robinson for the alleged rape of a white woman named Mayella Ewell, is not introduced until page eighty-three of my 309-page paperback.

From the beginning, Scout is close to her widowed father. Every night she curls up in his lap and he reads to her, in the process teaching her to read before she starts school. Scout loves Atticus, but at the novel’s outset she doesn’t regard him as a remarkable figure. She sees him as old and physically weak. That attitude changes radically across the years, first when Atticus reveals that he is a crack marksman willing to place himself in harm’s way to shoot down a rabid dog, and subsequently in a series of events arising out of Tom Robinson’s arrest and trial. Before court is convened, Atticus faces down a lynch mob (with Scout’s spunky assistance). And in the courtroom, Atticus proves himself a master legal tactician, proving Tom’s innocence beyond any conceivable doubt. Tom is nonetheless convicted by an all-white, all-male jury, as Atticus has warned his children will happen. But in standing up to the forces of prejudice, Atticus reveals himself a titan of human rectitude and decency. And when, at the trial’s end, all the black people in the courtroom balcony rise to honor his exit, the novel delivers its emotional roundhouse: “Stand up,” the genial black Reverend Sykes tells Scout. “Your father’s passing.”

Very much of what *To Kill a Mockingbird* wants to impart emerges from lessons Atticus teaches to his children. He banishes the word “nigger” from his children’s vocabulary and accepts the accusation that he’s a “nigger lover,” because, “I do my best to love everybody.” He states his defense of Tom as a matter of conscience, and explains, “I couldn’t go to church and worship God if I didn’t try to help that man.” He counsels Scout and Jem that “You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view.”

But though the book achieves this portrait, its core purpose is not the beatification of Atticus Finch. Rather, it seeks to paint a picture of Southern life in the Great Depression in all its complexity. It gives careful attention to two types of impoverished white people as represented by the proud, unctinting Cunninghams and the conniving, violent Ewells: Mayella who falsely accuses Tom, and her vile father Bob who has raped his own daughter and testifies against an innocent man for that crime.

Also, with very deft strokes, the author depicts black life at the time. Scout and Jem’s de facto mother is Calpurnia, a loving, strict, and wise caregiver. Calpurnia has enough education to guide Scout in speaking with proper grammar and pronunciation, but she earns her living as a cook and housekeeper. The black church in which Calpurnia worships is too poor to afford hymnals (which many of its parishioners would not be able to read), and so the music director has to speak the lyrics before the congregation sings them. And with tellingly incisive accuracy and profound impact, Lee establishes what it was like to be a black man in the 1930s South. At trial when Atticus asks Tom why he ran away
from Bob Ewell, Tom explains, "If you was a nigger like me, you'd be scared too." In the end, Tom seals his doom before the jury when he admits that he knew Mayella was being abused by her father and he helped her occasionally because he felt sorry for her. What unforgivably uppity effrontery! A black man who would dare feel sorry for a white woman. To make sure that we see the extent of the indictment of the Ewells and the ills they perpetrate on their neighbors, Lee pointedly associates them with the abiding emblem of the whitewashed South. Bob Ewell's full name is Robert E. Lee Ewell.

***

Though the two novels do not overlap narratively, they do share a number of elements in addition to characters and themes. When Lee was creating *Mockingbird*, she even cannibalized certain language word for word from *Watchman*, including an introductory passage about Scout's Aunt Alexandra and a description of Maycomb. Scout's feistiness as a child is rendered similarly in both books, although in different scenes, and the amused pleasure Atticus finds in his daughter appears in the texts of both. Similarly, Aunt Alexandra's high-handed superiority is depicted in both books. Each contains a scene of socializing women taking tea and holding forth on issues of the day. In *Mockingbird*, the occasion is a meeting of the Women's Missionary Society, where the self-righteous ladies celebrate culture-destroying Christian proselytizers as benevolent agents bringing "help" to black Africans, all the while sneering at the people of color who labor in their own houses. In *Watchman*, the adult Jean Louise joins Alexandra at a gathering of comparably-minded women, some of whom are Scout's own former high school classmates. The women sip their drinks and express such vicious desires as that for the entertainment of a "good nigger trial." One woman ridicules her maid for a simple instance of misunderstanding, taking the occasion to disparage her employee's lack of intelligence. When the conversation turns to recent actions by the NAACP, one woman explains that "The niggers up north who are running things are trying to do it like Gandhi did it. And you know what that is? Communism." Of course, these were the years in which US Senator Joe McCarthy claimed to have a list of 205 known Communists working in the State Department.

***

One conclusion with which I suspect all who read both of these books will agree is that *To Kill a Mockingbird* is by far the better crafted book. Lee's control of point of view in the 1960 volume is a prime example. *Watchman*, in contrast, is far messier in its point of view. Mostly, the narrative employs third person, limited to Scout's point of view. But not always. Sometimes it wanders into first and even second person. Sometimes, if only briefly, it slides into another character's point of view. And some scenes tell us, clumsily, explicitly, what Scout cannot see and cannot know. Another example concerns material selection and inclusion. *To Kill a Mockingbird* ends when Scout is still a child. But if the story had demanded that Scout be followed into her early teens, I doubt Lee would have included scenes we get in *Go Set a Watchman* that concern Scout's first menstruation, her disastrous decision to stuff her adolescent bra with falsies, and her unconvincing ignorance about pregnancy. These are pretty standard coming-of-age scenes and appear repeatedly in various renditions in teen-oriented movies, but they are not relevant to the through story of Jean Louise's having her eyes opened to her revered father's true nature.

Of course, I hasten to observe that some of the complaints, like those above, that I have about *Go Set a Watchman* might have been addressed had Lee's current literary team not decided to publish the book without a fresh edit. This book has the novelty of being the book that Tay Hohoff turned down, but Hohoff's long-ago rejection alone should have suggested a skilled editorial hand on the book as something to be published. *Mockingbird* was edited; *Watchman* should have been too. That would have helped with clunky dialogue, which never appears in *Mockingbird*. It would have eliminated an entire chapter mysteriously devoted to the choice of hymns at the Maycomb Methodist Church. And a firm edit
would have insisted on some clarity that the current version needlessly lacks. We do not, for instance, know precisely when we are. Atticus and Scout discuss an important Supreme Court case that has altered (Atticus would say gravely damaged) race relations throughout the South. This case would almost certainly have to be Brown vs. Board of Education, and that would place Jean Louise's vacation at home some time during or after the summer of 1954. Such dating would at least account for Atticus's being the chairman of a Citizens' Council that wasn't founded until July of 1954, after the Brown ruling in May. But the case is never named. And those readers with a memory of Scout's being nine years old in 1935 and noting that she is twenty-six in Watchman will place the action in 1952, two aggravating years before Brown was adjudicated. An editor with even limited discretion could just have made Watchman's Jean Louise twenty-eight or twenty-nine.

Moreover, a sympathetic edit could have addressed the persistence here of other nettling inconsistencies between the two texts. Many concern the trial of Tom Robinson, which is minor enough in Watchman that its mention could almost be eliminated. Tom is referred to Atticus by Judge Taylor in Mockingbird, but by the maid Calpurnia in Watchman. And Tom is found guilty in Mockingbird but acquitted in Watchman. And at least one "uncorrected" discrepancy seems distressingly unwise. In Mockingbird, Tom is accused of raping a grown woman, and he is entirely innocent, though found guilty. In Watchman, Tom is accused of raping a fourteen-year-old girl, and he is found not guilty because Atticus is able to prove (and this seems highly unlikely to me) that the sex was consensual. As the text itself points out, had Tom been charged with statutory rape, he would have been found guilty. The best we can say about these details in Watchman is that they give us insight into the degree to which Lee rethought matters as she wrote To Kill a Mockingbird.

***

But my editorial concerns aside, I want to emphasize that I think Diane McWhorter is correct to suspect that the overall consideration of issues in Go Set a Watchman may have been more relevant to the world of 1960 than those in Mockingbird. In addition, I think those issues remain more pertinent to the world of 2015. I don't think we can settle any debate about whether the wise, philosophical Atticus of 1935 could have evolved into the ugly racist of the mid-1950s. (Interestingly, Harper Lee biographer Charles J. Shields has argued that her father

The gentle Atticus of Mockingbird is an inspirational ideal; the angry Atticus of Watchman is a portrait of the real white men who ruled the South through the 1950s and beyond.

Amasa Coleman Lee made the journey in the opposite direction, from moderate segregationist in the 1930s to pro-integration by the time Mockingbird was released.) But there were, sadly and certainly, a lot more small-town Southern white lawyers like the Atticus of the 1950s than there were self-branded "nigger lover" white lawyers in the 1930s South. In short, the gentle Atticus of Mockingbird is an inspirational ideal; the angry Atticus of Watchman is a portrait of the real white men who ruled the South through the 1950s and beyond.

It is wonderful to want to believe that there were benevolent white figures in the South of 1935 when, in addition to the injustice they met before all-white juries, eighteen black men were murdered by lynch mobs. Certainly not all whites were monsters; not all approved of the lynchman's noose. My maternal grandfather, who was nearly forty in 1935, was not a man who would have condoned violence, and in his own way, he treated his black Louisiana neighbors and customers (he owned a jewelry store) with a modicum of decency. But he was an out-and-out bigot and a fierce defender of white supremacy
and racial segregation throughout his entire life. My grandfather seems a far more accurate example of a "benevolent" white Southerner of the era than such paternalistic liberals as Atticus, Sheriff Tate, and Judge Taylor, as depicted and saluted in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. About the last of these, one must note that Judge Taylor does not exhibit the courage that the real Alabama Judge James Edwin Horton showed in 1934 when he set aside a guilty verdict and death penalty by an all-white jury in the infamous rape case against the Scottsboro Boys. I have always wondered if Horton was Harper Lee's model, not for Judge Taylor, but for the Atticus of *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

**Go Set a Watchman** is a truer portrait of Southern intransigence on race than is *Mockingbird*.

In short, *Go Set a Watchman* is a truer portrait of Southern intransigence on race than is *Mockingbird*. *Watchman* uses Jean Louise's long simmering romance with a former schoolmate, Henry Clinton, who is now Atticus's young law partner, as an apt metaphor for the position in which Jean Louise finds herself in her twenties. Henry has worked hard, and he has pulled himself up out of poverty. Jean Louise admires and cares for him. Henry is tied to Maycomb. He wants to marry Jean Louise, and he wants her to make a life with him where the two of them grew up. But for Jean Louise to choose Henry, to choose again her Southern hometown, is to turn a blind eye to the cruel attitudes all her loved ones hold and continue to hold so fiercely. For just as she discovers with her father, she learns that Henry holds reprehensible views. It is Henry who reveals that Atticus once joined the Ku Klux Klan, explaining, "A long time ago, the Klan was respectable, like the Masons. Almost every man of any promise was a member." Balderdash, of course. The very *raison d'être* of the Klan was to intimidate black people through the threat of violence. Jean Louise summarizes her frustration at being both attracted to and repelled by her home, as represented by Henry, when she complains sarcastically to Henry, when she complains sarcastically to Atticus for not raising her as a "nice dim-witted Southern lady, a mealy-mouthed magnolia type, who bats her eyelashes and lives for nothing but her lil' ole husband."

Discouragingly, Jean Louise's entire family, her Uncle Jack and her Aunt Alexandra, in addition to Atticus, are arrogant racists and inflexible segregationists. They see their rights and deserved privileges in the aftermath of the decision in the unnamed *Brown* case as being torn away from them by undeserving, ungrateful, and ignorant black people. Alexandra complains that the black citizens of Maycomb possess "a veneer of civilization so thin that a bunch of uppity Yankee Negroes can shatter a hundred years of progress." One can only imagine the puzzled question on the lips of her black neighbors: "What hundred years of progress?" Jack defends the South's starting the Civil War as a people just trying to protect their identity as separate from that of the North. This is clumsy code for defending the institution of slavery by calling it a "way of life." Certain Southern loyalists to this day deny that the Civil War even involved a fight over slavery. Jack claims merely to believe in small government (an argument still raging in our own time), but he is a doctor so rich that he retired before middle age, so when he engages in a long rant about Social Security, we tend to notice the complaint line that the law gives the have-nots "more than their due," while "the haves are restricted from getting more." Another episode that echoes into our time.

But *Watchman*’s Atticus is the real bigot, and how he evolved from the father in *Mockingbird* who believed in "equal rights for all; special privileges for none" the text of the current novel does not explore. But by the mid-1950s, Atticus chides Jean Louise's idealism by sneering, "Have you ever considered that you can't have a set of backward people living among people advanced in... civilization? You realize that our Negro population is backward, don't you? You realize that the vast majority of them here in the South are unable to share fully in the responsibilities of citizenship?" Atticus sees his town and region as standing on the doorstep of doom. Black people cannot be allowed to vote because "When they vote, they..."
vote in blocs," and thus the day was coming when you'd have "Negroes in every office." Black people cannot be allowed equal rights because then, Atticus taunts his daughter, the South would have "Negroes by the carloads in our schools and churches and theaters."

Atticus is so obsessed by the specter of apocalypse in racial equality that he stoops to defending the corrupt political operation of his own beloved hometown. Maycomb, the novel tells us early on, is run by a typical Southern Big Man, a fixer with the power of a mob godfather. Maycomb's ruler is William Willoughby, and he controls everyone's vote and every public office in the county. Nothing happens in Maycomb without William Willoughby's permission. But in denouncing the prospect of black people at the ballot box Atticus says, "Willoughby's a crook, we know that, but do you know of any Negro who knows as much as Willoughby? The Negroes are still in their childhood as a people."

Jean Louise is horrified by all that Atticus reveals to her. She argues back with him, speaking, presumably, of her childhood, "You neglected to tell me that we were naturally better than the Negroes, that we were able to go so far but so far only." She reminds her father of his more appealing habits: "I've never in my life seen you give that insolent, back-of-the-hand treatment half the white people down here give Negroes just when they're talking to them." And she chides him in anguish in the middle of his fury over abridged states' rights and his racist rant about black inferiority and their lack of ability to embrace the mantle of full citizenship: "Has anybody, in all the wrangling and high words about what kind of government we should have, thought about helping the Negroes?"

But Atticus will surrender no ground, and Jean Louise finally attacks him: "You're a coward," she says, "as well as a snob and a tyrant." A while later, in the same vein, she says, "I'll never believe a word you say to me again. I despise you and everything you stand for." Important as this rejection of her father's disgusting ideas is, as elsewhere in Go Set a Watchman (yet again my yearning for the assistance of a sympathetic editor), I found the exchange too bald, too "on the nose" as we say in creative writing classes, and therefore not quite believable. Jean Louise has spent a lifetime loving and admiring her father. She is furious with him. Her whole idea of him has been seriously undermined. But she doesn't despise him, and her acutely saying so in such a direct fashion inadequately captures the certain anguish her character must feel. Nonetheless, and in counterpoint, the surprising rapprochement the novel executes in its final pages seems unearned and not a little disconcerting.

I should register some other concerns as well. When Atticus and Jean Louise discuss the unnamed Supreme Court decision that seems central to everyone involved, Jean Louise attacks it for violating the Tenth Amendment, that last of our Bill of Rights that reserves unspecified powers not granted to the federal government "to the States respectively or to the people." She argues, in sum, that she approves of the decision, presumably to end legal segregation, but doesn't think the Supreme Court should have been the body to do it. I am sure people made just this argument. I don't believe that one of them was Jean Louise Finch. Elsewhere in discussion with Atticus, Jean Louise seems to give credence to the idea that the activists of the NAACP were just a bunch of troublemakers who were, to invoke a popular premise of the time, just "stirring up" otherwise content Southern black people. The novel itself can be read to agree, and that is a problem from this vantage point for sure. Had the brave soldiers of the NAACP, Martin Luther King Jr.'s SCLC, the Congress of Racial Equality, and other civil rights organizations not kept pushing for the rights enunciated in Brown, those rights might not yet have come to exist in the daily life of our nation.

As any of us who follow the news is well aware, we remain in 2015 a racially-divided nation. Black men occupy our prisons in far greater numbers than their proportion in the population. The shooting of unarmed black people by white law officers is an outrage we can't seem to end. How tragic that Tom Robinson's words about the fear he feels because of the color of his skin still speak so clearly to the condition
people of color often characterize as “driving while black.” Meanwhile, the recent murder of black people in their Charleston, South Carolina, house of worship, an atrocity so common in the era of Go Set a Watchman, is emblematic of a disease of heart and mind that is not yet cured. We can point to positive developments, of course. I was born before Brown vs. Board of Education, before Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on that Montgomery bus, before black people could dine in most restaurants in the South or use the “white” restroom or water fountain in any public building, before the Voting Rights Act of 1965 finally enforced citizenship rights for black people granted in the Fourteenth Amendment and denied for a century thereafter, before the election of a black man as our nation’s president. And I have lived to see Atticus’s fear that black people would vote only on the basis of color proven wrong, for I live in New Orleans, a black majority city that has twice in a row elected a white mayor.

But as a democratic people, we remain a work in progress, and the elections of President Obama and Mayor Mitch Landrieu in New Orleans do not mean the battle for equal justice is won or that racial tensions have ceased to exist. And in this regard, as contrasted with To Kill a Mockingbird, the world depicted in Go Set a Watchman is a better reflection of the distance we have yet to travel. ✠

Fredrick Barton is Writer-in-Residence at the University of New Orleans. He is the author of the volume of essays Rowing to Sweden and the novels The El Cholo Feeling Passes, Courting Pandemonium, Black and White on the Rocks and A House Divided. His most recent novel, In the Wake of the Flagship, is a black comedy about an unlikely college president trying to save his beleaguered institution in the aftermath of a devastating hurricane.
SUSPENSION OF (DIS)BELIEF

And no this is not abandonment
as in forgetting the way in which
you were raised, as in forsaking
every good word you’ve read
in the Good Book—as if your
actions now would be reactions.

This is something else entirely,
more like the feeling a butterfly
must have when breaking from
its spit-wad nest, first freeing
a technicolor wing and then
another, first the twisting
and breaking before the flutter—

more like the prominence
of an art display at a museum
when you first walk in: you have
no option but to confront it.

Suspension involves something
else pulling the weight, like
the ten-story-tall crane you see
on your way to work every day:
swiveling and lifting steel like
a toothpick. Yet suspension
is something asked of you
before you ask of it: the feeling
a hang-glider must have
when running to a cliff edge,
not knowing if the wind
will carry him to the horizon's end
or suspend its given gust.

Before suspension, there
must be belief undeniably
in the things that are, belief
that another sits somewhere
watching over, pulling strings.

Aaron Brown
Stories for a Post-Christian Age

Yuval Noah Harari’s Sapiens

David K. Weber

“What is man?” to ask an old question in an old way. Yuval Noah Harari’s Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind is a new answer to the old question. The first thing to say about this book is that it is not as boring as the title suggests. The book began as a university course that promised students an explanation of everything, “from the Stone Age to the age of capitalism and genetic engineering” (Harari, “Syllabus...”). Given the large swath of history and ideas it covers, the book is necessarily a catalogue of very interesting oversimplifications. Its aim is to help us envision a new kind of wisdom because, “The very future of life on Earth depends on the ideas and behavior of our species” (“Syllabus...”). The class is the kind of undergraduate course I would have enjoyed taking and the kind of class I would enjoy teaching had I Harari’s guts and gifts.

I gave a good part of my summer to engaging Sapiens not because I share Harari’s anxiety about the post-human future, but because Harari’s thinking about the post-human is so comfortably post-Christian. There is no trace of Dawkins’s or Hitchens’s anti-Christian animus. Harari’s approach is more like that of Gilfoyle, the Satanist, anarchist computer programmer in HBO’s Silicon Valley who announces that “Owning a pot-bellied pig is frowned upon almost as much as being a Christian.” Being a Christian and having a pot-bellied pig are unfashionable. Harari presumes that Christianity is a failed myth which means it can be treated as an interesting artifact. Christianity was once upon a time a successful myth which means that on the inter-subjective level—person to person—Christianity told a story that successfully sustained culturally significant beliefs. These beliefs ranged from thinking that medicine ought to be merciful and focused on healing the ill to recognizing that an abstraction like equality cannot but reflect the Christian belief in the relationship of persons within the Trinity who was creation’s (formal) cause.

Harari is a number-crunching game-theorist who thinks that the only things that count are those that can be counted and calculated. Everything else—religion, money, corporations, laws, principles etc.—are literally make-believe. Once we recognize that the squishy sides of existence—like moral values—are not facts but make-believe, we can get on with counting the things that yield to calculation and, in good conscience, treating everything else as creative fiction. Harari’s history is interesting because it seamlessly uses countable facts in spinning out his fictional account.
This post-Christian story of the post-human reflects Robert Jenson's 1993 essay "How the World Lost Its Story," in which he argued that the Christian story is now lost along with the Western values it, in large part, generated and sustained. This lost story creates a vacuum which will be filled with rival stories vying to interpret the post-Christian experience. *Sapiens* is not one of the stories, but rather an early indicator of the kind of story or stories that will replace the Christian story of creation: redemption and a happy culmination on the far side of history.

The moniker "Sapiens," as Harari refers to the species, suggests the difference between the Christian and post-Christian stories. Sapiens—derived from the Latin word for wisdom—is a rather more happy and hopeful term than "human" or "mortal." In *Genesis*, we are creatures who were created *ex nihil*. As such, the divinely designed trajectory is the natural movement from nothing to something; from emptiness to fullness. Creatures who are sinners follow the unnatural *an nihilus* arc, unable to shake free of the gravitational pull to annihilation. Human to *humus*, and mortal to *mortus*. Who wouldn't prefer being called the *wise* rather than *dirt or death*?

This happy contrast is evident in the view that for Sapiens, "death is optional" (Harari and Kahneman 2015). For the first time it seems, the "Gilgamesh Project" to defeat death is within reach. Now we can imagine not believing the religious belief that disease and death are "metaphysical problems," that are "something fundamental to what defines humans, what defines the human condition and reality." Once the Angel of Death decided the limits of life saying, "Come. Your time has come." Before, all we could say was, "No, no, no. Give me some more time." There was no bargaining with death, and so it cast its dark shadow over all of life. But what if the Angel of Death dies? Then the causes of death are not uncontrollable forces outside human experience; rather, the causes of death are that the heart stops pumping, an artery is clogged, or the cancer has spread. Once death ceases to be a religious or moral issue, it becomes a technical problem awaiting technical solutions. To seize this moment however, we need to expand our "field of vision" so that we can wisely accept the new conditions required to realize our potential.

One such condition is the revaluation of medicine. "Medicine in the 20th century," asserts Harari, "focused on healing the sick, now it is more and more focused on upgrading the healthy, which is... a fundamentally different project." For one, "there is no norm that can be applicable to everybody." Don't expect hospitals in the future to have "mercy" in their name, Harari explains. When the Biblical anthropology informed medicine, it was "an egalitarian project" of "healing the sick." Creatures made in God's image were naturally whole and healthy. This meant that it was mortals' moral duty to care for "anybody that falls below the norm." Once medicine makes the shift from healing the ill to enhancing the healthy it becomes "by definition an elitist project." This understanding has been for some time "dominant in scientific circles." Now the ultra-rich have adopted this view, while reasoning, "Wait a minute, something is happening here. For the first time in history, if I'm rich enough, maybe I don't have to die" (Harari and Kahneman).

In the old story, Icarus, Golem, and Babel characterize human hubris, but in the new story they show the way wisdom must proceed. The defeat of death is within our scientific/technological grasp only if we accept the fact that humans "will soon disappear." Natural selection has endowed Sapiens with the means of "breaking free of their biologically determined limits" (397) imposed by natural selection. Until now, "intelligent design" was a make-believe concept predicated on religious superstition. "There was no intelligence which could design things" until "an insignificant ape" changed "into the master of the world" (403). Now we can imagine radical changes by means of "biological engineering, cyborg engineering (cyborgs are beings that combine organic with non-organic parts) or the engineering of inorganic life" (399). If the moral limits are swept aside, every indicator suggests that the technological limits will steadily be overcome. But first we must rid ourselves of the moral residue still lingering from the unfashionable Christian fable. These "obstacles" of "ethical and political objections" have done nothing but "slowed down research on humans" (403).
If it is enhancement we desire, then medicine and
technology cannot be distracted by ethics and reli-
gion (413), which play on the fear that designer
beings will be Frankenstein monsters. “We have
become gods” (“Syllabus...”) and so are responsi-
ble for intelligently re-designing ourselves. Harari,
with equal portions of deft and delight, tells us
how we got here.

The Story of Conquest/
The Conquest of Story

Sapiens announces that the world’s story is not
of paradise lost but of possibilities grasped. Ours

Truth is for Harari the
temporary rhetorical triumph
of an imaginative story
effectively making conquest by
cooperation possible.

is, so far, a success story of effectively controlling
“so many distant and ecologically different habi-
tats.” Sapiens’s success is not synonymous with
strength but with effectiveness, as evidenced in
the way the weaker Sapiens drove “the strong,
brainy, cold-proof Neanderthals into oblivion.”
This success was due, in a word, to words: “Homo
sapiens conquered the world thanks above all to
its unique language” (19). The first revolution was
a “cognitive revolution” caused by the discovery of
a language that made gossip possible. Neanderthal
language was fixed in the practical, giving use-
ful information on “the whereabouts of lions
and bison.” What Sapiens discovered is another,
less concrete way of knowing. If we know “who
in their band hates whom, who is sleeping with
whom, who is honest, and who is a cheat” (23) we
become capable of developing “tighter and more
sophisticated types of cooperation” (24).

Gossip has its limits; it is useful in small com-
munities of no more than about 150 members.

When a polis or tribe exceeds this size, gossip fails
as a social glue and must be replaced by faith “in
common myths” (27). Created myths make for
common cause. Catholic strangers are united by
the belief that God is Triune, citizens are united
by their faith in the nation, and lawyers by their
trust in the happy coincidence that the rule of law
can be purchased with “money paid out in fees”
(28). Stories are not true or false: they are effec-
tive in bridge-building, until they are not. French
citizens once believed in the divine right of kings,
until, rather suddenly, they believed in “the sov-
eignty of the people” (33). “What is truth?” to
ask a crucial biblical question. It is for Harari the
temporary rhetorical triumph of an imaginative
story effectively making conquest by cooperation
possible. These stories “are not evil conspiracies
or useless mirages... they are the only way large
numbers of humans can cooperate effectively.”

Harari takes the American Declaration of
Independence as his example: “We hold these
truths to be self-evident, that all men are created
equal, that they are endowed by their Creator
with certain unalienable rights, that among
these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happi-
ess.” (Emphasis his.) This American myth was
once effective but always false. It was effective in
that it generated unparalleled prosperity, but false
because it was founded on the patently false claim
of self-evident truths. We “were not ‘created’” we
evolved. There is no equality in either the genetic
code or in environmental influences. Equality is
a make-believe construct which worked because
it was “inextricably intertwined with the idea of
creation” where individuals were “souls (who)
are equal before God” (109). God is dead, and so
our view of the individual must change. We are
not creatures endowed with rights but a collect-
ion of “organs, abilities and characteristics” that
“evolved differently” (109). Again, asserts Harari,
“There are no such things as rights in biology”
(109), which means, “There is no justice in his-
tory” (133). There are make-believe schemes,
advanced by make-believe stories, which endor-
sed the view that make-believe gods “rigged” things
for history’s victors through make-believe “legal
restrictions and unofficial glass ceilings” (137).
Do not think that Harari is disparaging the
make-believe. On the contrary, he is nothing but impressed with the Sapiens's capacity to make up stuff that gets “large numbers of strangers to cooperate effectively” (32).

So if we have reached the end of the usefulness of abstractions like equality, liberty and—to put an old concept in an old way—fraternity, then they ought to be swept into the myth-bin of history. Of course, no one likes to be told “that the order governing their lives is imaginary” (114) or that myths like “Christianity, democracy or capitalism” have lost their persuasive power, but don’t panic… yet! Myths are not objective like radioactivity, which always kills whether one is conscious of it or not. Nor are they merely subjective, like an imaginary friend. Myths are inter-subjective interpretations of life that work because the make-believe has made enough believers and will stop working when the myth proves useless.

Myths work like a game of basketball. Once we accept basketball’s make-believe construction of time, goals, tribes, boundaries, and rules, we can enjoy, in any part of the world, the fun of a competitive and cooperative venture. Evolution did not think up basketball. It is not in the fabric of creation. We thought of it, and if we can do this kind of thinking with games, why not broaden the boundaries, rules, time, tribes, and goals to life. Of course, game theorizing can be done in better and worse ways, and science has taught us the best way, by showing us how a revolution in knowledge can happen by accepting the revolutionary importance “of ignorance.” We do not need to know the future. We merely need to know “that humans do not know the answers to their most important questions” (251), and then we can start throwing around creative stories and see which ones stick. (The difference between the objective and inter-subjective does not seem to present a problem.)

The species Sapiens is wise and clever. Voltaire argued that equality, liberty, and fraternity were secular values, while prudently recognizing that “there is no God, but don’t tell that to my servant, lest he murder me at night” (111). Stories are valued for their usefulness. This may explain why, suggests Harari in passing, the humanities are dying. The humanities (and social sciences), are academic make-believe myths that once effectively sustained the belief that an “imagined order” like liberty was actually “woven into the tapestry of life” (113) and was evident to those with specialized methods of discernment. Once the myth is deconstructed, liberty is recognized as “something that people invented and that exists only in their imagination” (110). The kind of knowing that is not imaginary is mathematics, which promises the “acquisition of new powers” (251) by learning “to speak in numbers” (131). Harari expects that this realization of the force in numbers is reflected in the way that liberal learning is becoming as unfashionable as potbelly pigs. Moreover, once we crunch the numbers, we will recognize that efficient cooperation is more valuable to Sapiens’s survival than the hard to manage and harmonize concepts of liberty and equality.

Said another way, we are now ready to welcome empire because we are exhausted by the moral demands required by the pursuit of a Christian/Aristotelean happiness. Once a few more of us recognize that morality is make-believe, then we can give no good reasons to make sacrifices. How will this change the pursuit of happiness? Already Harari says that we see happiness less in terms of liberty and equality and more in terms of pleasure and prosperity. “Bread and circuses,” was the Latin satirist Juvenal’s way of describing the enervating effect of valuing pleasure over duty. And, he observed, the elites paid for these excesses because they recognized it was the most effective means to manage the masses. Today’s bread and circuses are “a combination of drugs and computer games” (Harari and Kahneman), and shopping (347). Contemporary character is determined by consumption, because we have accepted the seemingly harmless invitation to “Become individuals.” This meant, “Marry whomever you desire, without asking permission from your parents... ‘Take up whatever job suits you’... ‘Live wherever you wish’” (359). That individual, no longer being defined by family and community, is defined by “the state and the market,” which promise to take care of us—though we may be wise to discern if “take care” is meant in a godly or a gangster way.

And so we come to a class divisions among Sapiens. Elites in Harari’s make-believe history are death-defying while commoners
entertain themselves with gaming, shopping, and recreational-drug using. This class distinction must be maintained but not disclosed because elites recognize that their death-defying project requires funding by distracted consumers and passive taxpayers.

**Eating, Art, and Gluten Intolerance**

For Harari, obesity is a concrete problem that suggests Sapiens needs to rethink personal liberty. Sapiens is—at least for now—a biological animal, which means, as reflected in the 15,000-year-old Lascaux Cave paintings, that eating is at the core of culture. Whatever else can be said about these paintings is, according to Harari, mere speculation. G. K. Chesterton famously speculated that these cave paintings were, in a word, paintings, and that they were painted by persons we call artists. Speculating further he claimed that art back then expressed what art now expresses, which is the longing for a life that is neither dominated nor determined by utility. As such, art was and is an expression of the human longing for the eternal. By necessity they hunted to fuel the body, but they painted to make that need for food expressive of the sacramental desire to have our eternal hopes fulfilled in a way analogous to having our stomachs filled. For Chesterton, the useful is an icon of the beautiful. Make-believe nonsense, asserts Harari. All the "speech, song, dance and ceremony" we mystically associate with eating merely disguise the one cause of our actions: we are "hard-wired" to act and think in predetermined ways which means to be good hosts for DNA (41). We are not hardwired to think up basketball, but we are hardwired to play the game with moneyball efficiency to get the most out of existence. And this is a story told in the history of eating.

Once upon a time, there was the "agricultural revolution" which turned out to be "history's biggest fraud" (79). Once upon a time, we were happy foragers who chose to become unhappy farmers. This happened because Sapiens proved to be dumber than wheat, and this mistake may mean that we are toast. Farmers thought they were domesticating wheat, when, in fact, wheat, "domesticated us" (81). Religion taught Sapiens to think that it is not at home in this world, even though it had no knowledge or experience of any other world. And so, as an act of religious defiance, they aimed to stabilize existence by growing domestic roots. Wheat fed this fancy for stability by making farming seem more predictable than foraging with a fraudulent sense that farmers have control over the unpredictable environment. The proof of the fraud is in the obesity producing pudding.

The path to obesity began with the desire for wheat requiring geographically fixed homes. This, in turn, generated the desire for property and the overvaluation of surplus possessions. This poisoned the social wells, which sawed off the branch of cooperation upon which Sapiens's success sat from the start of the cognitive revolution. Now we find ourselves in "the throes of a plague of obesity" as we gorge and binge on "the sweetest and greasiest food we can find" (40-41). Starvation does not threaten us, as "more people are in danger of dying from obesity" (266). This threatening gluttony demands accepting some serious gluten intolerance.

Wheat is a double problem. It gave us too much to eat and prompted us to procreate too many new mouths to feed. Abundant food stabilized homes and "enabled Homo sapiens to multiply exponentially" (83). Nomadic foragers limit their DNA reproduction because "Babies and small children... were a burden..." (84). The fraudulence of farming is its miscalculation of happiness. If a loaf of bread gives x units of happiness, then ten loaves must yield x times ten. The logic fails to recognize the law of diminishing returns which Harari calls the "luxury trap." His example is the "many young college graduates who have taken demanding jobs... vowing that they will work hard to earn money to... pursue their real interests." There is no such thing as truth, but there are, even in make-believe history, a "few iron laws," one of which "is that luxuries tend to become necessities and to spawn new obligations" (87). At the "advent of agriculture, worries about the future became major players in the theatre of the human mind" (101). The "stress of farming" incited Sapiens to seek the false security of corrupting systems like "politics, war, art, philosophy," and in the construction of "palaces, forts,
monuments, and temples” (101), all of which have been inimical to Sapiens's happiness.

The corruption evident in obesity is sustained by a system of callousness and cruelty. Callousness in that “each year the US population spends more money on diets than the amount needed to feed the hungry people of the world” (348). Cruelty in the willingness to give up on traditional affection, the kind that the shepherd had for the sheep and which the Twenty-third Psalm draws on to express divine love. In place of the pasture, we maximize industrial efficiency by thrusting animals into short and miserable existence “inside a tiny box” (97). But the system is efficient, and so, I presume, needs stories so that we don’t get sidetracked by squishy distracting thoughts of animal cruelty.

It may be that thinking like Bacon will save us from eating like pigs. Francis Bacon recognized that knowledge is power and that rationality’s “real test is utility” (259). If free individuals freely choose to eat their way into the unhappiness of obesity, then maybe we should rethink liberty and increase happiness by limiting diet. And if equality proves too inefficient, why not consider giving different spins to old stories like Brave New World or Animal Farm? Maybe we should return to the early formula of Sapiens’s success and focus on fraternity, that is cooperation, which, if we are honest “is not always voluntary and seldom egalitarian” (104). Empire is efficient, and there is no reason to think empires must be evil, just because they do not value the “right to self-determination” (191). The history of food and farming tells us what Sapiens does with self-determination. Maybe it would be happier under the “very stable form of government” (191) empire affords. Harari knows a lot about a lot of empires. Being imaginative and articulate, he can generate a make-believe history of world cooperation without the scary totalitarian bits. The truth is, we don’t have to imagine empire because “the global empire (is) being forged before our eyes... ruled by a multi-ethnic elite, and is held together by a common culture and common interests.” Our choice is not for or against empire, but freely joining now or necessarily joining later (208).

And what about happiness? Aldous Huxley’s Brave New World, spoke of a chemically (soma) induced state of happiness that “seems monstrous to most readers, but it is hard to explain why.” What is so dystopic about “Everybody” being “happy all the time... what could be wrong with that” (390)? Lots, some of which Harari considers when he says that we must rethink our “definition of happiness.” Scientifically speaking, says Harari, happiness means “synchronizing one’s personal delusions of meaning with prevailing collective delusions” (392). No one, not even scientists, think happiness is remotely reflected in his definition. The word happiness, try as we will, cannot mean anything different than what Aristotle said it meant; that is, human happiness is the fulfillment of human ends, desires, goals, and purposes.

Harari wants us to do better but has laid waste to the foundation upon which a better way can be constructed.

Harari is mostly dismissive of such thinking until we come to the end of the book where he recognizes that “the Sapiens regime,” praised for its imaginative efficiency, “has so far produced little that we can be proud of.” Tersely put, our overvaluation of “comfort and amusement” is “wreaking havoc on our fellow animals and... ecosystem.” Harari wants us to do better but has laid waste to the foundation upon which a better way can be constructed, as when he says that we should see through such squishy pronouncements like saying the Great War was won by the immeasurable courage of the Allies when, in fact, victory owed itself to the very measurable quality and quantity of Allied tanks (261). Happiness is not algebraic; it is transcendental. Measurable facts never get us to the unmeasurable happiness that embraces things like courage and the willingness to sacrifice for others. Harari can assert that everything turns on happiness, but he cannot say what happiness turns on. This is troubling to Harari because Sapiens now wields a power so sweeping that earlier generations, not far removed from us, would have said we have become like gods. “History began,” states Harari, “when humans invented gods—and will
end when humans become gods" ("Syllabus..."). And, Harari concludes, there is nothing "more dangerous than dissatisfied and irresponsible gods who don't know what they want" (416). And whom will they consult to know what they want? Not academics because, "The better you know a particular historical period, the harder it becomes to explain why things happened one way and not another... In fact, the people who knew the period best—those alive at the time—were the most clueless of all."

What can we say about Sapiens? The species is, like Homer Simpson's view of alcohol, "the cause of and solution to all of life's problems." Harari enthusiastically endorses the first proposition; he is not so sure of the second. From my unfashionable Christian perspective, the book is morally incoherent which added to my enjoyment in trying to keep up with Harari's gallop through life, the universe, and everything. As for the moral impasse he comes to with the lacuna of happiness (to mash up some metaphors), C. S. Lewis saw it coming a long time ago. "We laugh at honour, wrote Lewis in The Abolition of Man, "and are shocked to find traitors in our midst. We castrate and bid the geldings be fruitful." And, we might add, we deconstruct the hope of eternity, then bid each other to not worry and be happy.

As I mentioned earlier, Robert Jensen's 1993 essay, "How the World Lost Its Story," effectively argues that the power of the Bible's story to interpret human experience has lost its cultural relevance. The question is what kind of post-Christian story or stories will fill this vacuum, telling us who we are, how we relate to one another, and in what direction we shall choose. Sapiens is not a story, but indicates the kind of story that a data driven, game theorizing, calculating culture would find canonical. If we insist that transcendent truth and goodness are delusions, then we should expect things to get ugly. If all are gods, then, as I understand the polytheistic pantheon, the big gods find their happiness in eating the little ones. This is not a new story but the actual story of fallen humanity. Except now the eaten—the victim—no longer has the consolation of believing that when they cried out, "You are wrong" they were saying something true, solid, and eternal. It is hard for me to fathom what it will be like to be a little god without that consolation.

David K. Weber is Lecturer in Theology at Valparaiso University.

Works Cited


For Such a Time as This

Lorraine S. Brugh

Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, “Do not think that in the king’s palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. For if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your father’s family will perish. Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this.”

Esther 4:13–14

In ways writ both small and large, the landscape of North American worship renewal has just passed an important milestone. The year 2013 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the promulgation of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy of the Second Vatican Council, whose reforms opened the way to renovations and innovations in Roman Catholic worship. Primary among those reforms was the translation of the mass into the languages of the people who worshiped.

The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Sacrosanctum Concilium) was followed by its accompanying instructional document to guide the reforms’ implementation, Musicam Sacram (MS). Along with laying out the principles for translating liturgical texts from Latin into local languages, this and other documents encouraged participation of the whole assembly and invited the use of a variety of musical instruments and forms. With these publications came an urgency to find suitable music for worship that allowed for “full, conscious, and active participation” (MS, Art. 9) of the whole people. This opened the windows of the church, as Pope John XXIII described it, to new and authentic expressions of music for worship.

Here in the United States, these documents prompted Roman Catholic leaders, as early as the late 1960s, to invite ecumenical churches to join them in discovering what those reforms would mean for English speakers. Roman Catholic scholars formed the International Consultation on English Texts (ICET) in 1969. The group was ecumenical from its inception and included Lutherans. Rev. Hans Boehringer, Valparaiso University faculty member and director of the Institute of Liturgical Studies from 1962–1974, was a founding member of the group and served at one point as the chair. ICET’s vision for shared texts among North American Roman Catholic and Protestant churches is made clear in the title of its 1975 publication Prayers We Have in Common. It included the English versions of the Apostles’, Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds and the Lord’s Prayer, all still in wide, common use by English-speaking Christians today.

Lutherans played a prominent role in these post-Vatican II initiatives. In fact, Valparaiso University’s connection and commitment to liturgical renewal far precedes the reforms of the Second Vatican Council and has had multiple intersections and parallels with this movement. In the 1930s, Kretzmann brothers O. P., A. R., and Martin, were part of an influential group of pastors in and around New York. Named the St. James Society, their aim was to return American Lutheranism to its more liturgical roots and away from the low-church Protestant
milieu toward which it had drifted. When O. P. moved from New York to the Midwest town of Valparaiso, he brought with him the St. James Society and his own vision for Lutheran liturgical renewal.

In 1948, then President O. P. Kretzmann wrote to four Valparaiso University faculty members:

For some time there has been an insistent demand that the University arrange something in the field of liturgical studies during the summer session each year. A few days ago I received a communication from Pastor Lang of California in which he expressed the opinion that the University should take the lead in the study of liturgical history and practice. Since this is one of the most important areas in the life of the church, I feel that something definite should be done during the summer of 1949. May I therefore ask you, whose names appear on this letter, to serve as a Committee to submit plans for "An Institute of Liturgical Studies" to be conducted on our campus next summer. I think you will see the value of such an institute. I believe, too, that it can be of real value to the life of the Church. (Institute of Liturgical Studies)

One of those four professors, Van Kussrow, explained Kretzmann's intentions.

Dr. Kretzmann realized that the Liturgical Movement was something the Church needed. Recognizing also the fact that in the Anglican Church the Movement had its beginnings in a university situation and that he felt somewhat akin to this and saw the University itself as being the ground out of which the Liturgical Movement could grow and flourish. Therefore it was his idea that the Institute for Liturgical Studies should be formed at the University and the Society of Saint James be phased out or, rather, become the cornerstone for the Institute for Liturgical Studies while losing its own identity. (Ibid.)

Alfred Bichsel, another of the four, noted that the planning meeting of March 1949 revealed how far the Institute had evolved from the thinking of the pre-war convocations of the Saint James Society with its emphasis on historical study, to the Institute's plans for a daily Eucharist, broader ecumenicity, and practical application (Ibid.).

Since that time, the Institute of Liturgical Studies has continued that vision of liturgical renewal, while also widening the ecumenical scope of the early Institutes. From the beginning, the Institute was pan-Lutheran, and allowed for non-Missouri Synod Lutherans to commune at the Institute’s Eucharists. The Institute’s Advisory Council today includes members of both the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA.) This ecumenical vision was unique in 1949, and in different circumstances today, maintains an unusual place of cooperation between Lutheran churches and the broader ecumenical church.

The liturgical reforms that engaged Lutherans during those latter decades of the twentieth century, led by Valparaiso University and its Institute were:

- the restoration of weekly communion as regular practice
- introduction of lay ministers into the leadership on Sunday morning
- the centrality of baptism as public, not private, entry into the assembly.

The reforms of Vatican II of those same years were of a different sort, but brought Lutherans and Roman Catholics to the table together. For Catholics, the emphasis was on:

- the use of English as the standard liturgical language
- the introduction of musical styles other than Gregorian chant for liturgical use
• the introduction of a variety of musical instruments into liturgical leadership.

Taken together, these changes on both sides of the church created heretofore unknown common ground. Now Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and Episcopalians were able to talk about sharing liturgical texts and liturgical music with the assumption of weekly communion on Sunday morning in a way that had never before been possible.

Roman Catholic liturgical scholars, having found common ground with these church bodies in the formation of the consultation on English texts, a very few years later again turned to ecumenical, and also this time, interfaith liturgists to form the North American Academy of Liturgy. The Academy’s origins date to December 1973, ten years after the beginning of the Second Vatican Council. Two Jesuits organized a group of fifty American experts in liturgy to meet to discuss the principal opportunities, needs, and problems of liturgical renewal.

Again, Lutheran scholars were in on the ground floor. This was evident already in 1975, the year of the Academy’s first annual meeting. Hans Boehringer, then Director of the Institute for Liturgical Studies and a Valparaiso University theology professor, gave a plenary presentation at the Academy. Since that time, there have been numerous Catholic theologians presenting at the Institute, and large numbers of Lutheran scholars in leadership positions in the Academy. David Truemper, chair of the Valparaiso University Theology Department, and Director of the Institute from 1984–2004, also served for a time as treasurer of the Academy. Three of the past four presidents of the Academy have been Lutheran. All of these have also been directly involved in the Institute.

In his book on Roman Catholic liturgical reforms, Dr. Massimo Faggioli wrote, “Vatican II reformed liturgy on the solid basis of an international liturgical movement, a profound stream of theological ressourcement, and ecumenical hope” (2012, 137). But this ecumenical and common work recently has taken a curious turn. By the late 1980s, many of the new English translations of liturgical texts were met with criticism by Roman Catholic traditionalists for their use of inclusive language as well as language that seemed flat and uninspiring. Much of this criticism came from the Vatican’s Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, the office that oversees liturgical practices. In 2001, the Congregation for Divine Worship published Liturgiam Authenticam, a set of guidelines for translations of liturgical texts that required a strict, word-for-word literalism. It also appeared to rule out further ecumenical cooperation in the process of liturgical translation (Wilkins 2005). In July 2007, Pope Benedict issued Summorum Pontificum, which allowed wider use of the pre-Vatican II Latin mass. After a return to repristinated English language for the translation of the mass formally adopted in 2011, many have concluded that the reforms of Vatican II have essentially halted inside the Roman Catholic Church. For Roman Catholic liturgists and musicians this has necessitated directing their focus and attention toward developing musical resources for these newly authorized texts. It is not yet clear whether Pope Francis will recover the work of the Second Vatican Council and continue its work.

So from the converging paths Catholics and Lutherans shared from 1973 until 2007, now we find ourselves on diverging paths. It is now only officially possible to carry forward Vatican II’s projects outside of Roman Catholicism. While an odd circumstance, it is not out of character with the reforms themselves. Intrinsc to these liturgical reforms is a fundamental international and ecumenical hope which was expressed in its language (Faggioli, 137). Much more than just an opening to the vernacular, Sacrosanctum Concilium reached outward to express openness to cultural and contextual liturgical expression that would express the unity of the church while developing linguistic and cultural specificity.

With the 1994 publication of Varietates legittimae (“Inculturation and the Roman Liturgy”), the Vatican began adapting the liturgy to cultural contexts, but inculturation today remains one of the unfinished projects of Vatican II. Inculturation
is the process of integrating pertinent elements of a local culture into local worship (Chupungco 2014, 262–63). Roman Catholic scholars, most notably Don Anscar Chupungco, a native Filipino and Benedictine monk, helped liturgists introduce indigenous materials into worship. His work opened up the use of new worship forms that integrated customs and traditions from the culture where the assembly gathers. He wrote, “inculturation should aim to deepen the spiritual life of the assembly through a fuller experience of Christ. If it does not do this, it remains a futile exercise” (263).

Coupled with his assertion that music is a part of God’s creation, and therefore good, Luther’s teaching affirms music’s centrality, in all its diversity, for use in worship.

In 2003 Chupungco was to be a plenary speaker at Valparaiso’s Institute. At the last moment, he was not allowed a visa and could not travel out of the Philippines. He sent his two manuscripts, which Dr. David Truemper read to the conference. In them, he suggested two methods for liturgical renewal as most useful for North American Lutherans: “creative assimilation” and “dynamic equivalence.”

Creative assimilation involves finding similarities between liturgical rites and one’s own cultural rites. Chupungco pointed out that Lutherans have the advantage of decentralized, already nationalized churches, whose leadership is already immersed in the language and culture of its church body (2006, 250). Creative assimilation allows for a local culture to introduce elements of its own experience into worship. This could be as simple as naming local geography in prayers for creation or as complicated as creating liturgical rites for gay marriage.

Dynamic equivalence, on the other hand, expresses liturgy with something of equal value or meaning in the local culture. How a culture expresses hospitality, for example, differs widely from one culture to another. North Americans are currently busy adding spaces to gather before entering into worship to their buildings, highlighting the importance of communal gathering. This is where guests are welcomed and members greet one another, rituals of gathering before proceeding to the sanctuary.

Dynamic equivalence allows each culture to determine what hospitality looks like. Sharing the peace is another place where this would apply. One culture shakes hands, another bows with folded hands, another exchanges a kiss. Each culture decides what, for them, expresses an expression of reconciliation, according to their own cultural norms and boundaries. We certainly wouldn’t want Lutherans to know it is really supposed to be a kiss of peace!

While, as Chupungco notes, Lutherans have an advantage in being able to work out these solutions at more national and local levels than Romans Catholics, Lutherans also have customs and traditions from our own heritage to expand liturgy’s inculturation. Central to Luther’s reforms were the notions of both freedom and essence in the liturgy. The essence of liturgy is the reading of the Word and celebrating the Meal. Just about everything else is adiaphora, a term that refers to liturgical elements that may be beneficial but are not essential to the actual rite. Simplicity, sifting through the unnecessary, would be another way to understand Luther’s reforms. The concept of adiaphora allows for tremendous freedom in exploring any culture’s liturgical expressions.

I first encountered Lutheranism in my second church job when I was twenty-five. Learning about Luther then as a young adult, I found his understanding that music bears the Word, the oral proclamation, into the assembly to be unique among the Reformers. Coupled with his assertion that music is a part of God’s creation, and therefore good, Luther’s teaching affirms music’s centrality, in all its diversity, for use in worship.

Already a practicing church musician by then, I found that Luther confirmed some suspicions I
had long harbored about the difference between sacred and secular music. Growing up in a family with two older brothers and a pattern of attending church each week, I could spot the difference between sacred and secular music by the time I was five. The Isley Brothers and Elvis coming from my brothers’ hi-fi player, my Dad’s jazz-inspired improvisation, and the preludes and hymns from our Methodist church formed a contiguous, uninterrupted musical life throughout my childhood. I could tell you which music was which, where each belonged, and what my favorites were. Sometimes a bit bolder than my knowledge deserved, I once raised my hand to request a hymn at our church’s potluck supper and hymn sing. When my parents asked me later why I chose “Are ye able, said the Master,” I answered them it was because of the line “a beacon to God, to love and loyalty.” Our local newspaper was the Aurora Beacon News, and I appreciated the reference to our local news.

This seamless contiguity between the sacred and secular continued in my college life. By then, I was a student of classical music specializing in organ performance. My formal studies included both sacred and secular music, but mostly sacred. In my freshman dorm, though, and later in the sorority house, it was all secular. There we listened all day and all night to the Beatles, the Jackson 5, the Rolling Stones, and the Dave Clark Five, and later to the “new” groups like Chicago and Santana. Since we all listened to the same station on radios that actually emitted sound, the song playing in our room continued as we went down the hallway into the bathrooms and showered, got dressed, and headed to class. We knew all the words to all of the songs, all of the time, and they were decidedly secular. Except some weren’t. Like “Turn, Turn, Turn” by the Byrds, which used Ecclesiastes as its text, and later Bob Dylan songs which explored Genesis, the Psalms, and other biblical material. Without knowing it, the sacred and secular worlds were beginning to blur and overlap a bit.

The music history classroom kept these two worlds more distinct. There were chapters which traced the course of secular music and others which outlined sacred music history. We bought our music at stores where we could browse actual copies of music, all sorted and separated into sacred and secular bins. I bought mostly sacred, of course, as I built my organ library, but I did sometimes wonder if the music in the secular bins was better or worse.

Then the music history classes got a little blurrier too. I learned that Bach wrote music for sacred use, but then at times, repurposed it for a secular use. Had it, in that moment of repurposing, been transmuted from sacred to secular music? Or even a bit more scandalous for me, Handel did the reverse, taking music from his secular oratorios and retrofitted them with sacred words. All of a sudden they jumped over into the sacred music chapters. Weren’t they imposters there? How did that happen?

I admired the Beatles’ foray into Eastern music during these years, and noted their collaboration with and learning from Ravi Shankar. They were clearly changed by this exposure, and while I thought it had nothing to do with me, I did realize there were other musical languages out there besides the one I was studying. Around that time my husband, Gary, outfitted his car with the latest in audio development, quadraphonic sound. Listening to Stravinsky’s Firebird Suite, Deep Purple, Chicago, and Santana in that car brought life to these works in an overwhelming listening event I had never known. In this same year, I likely first sang Stravinsky’s spare setting of the Lord’s Prayer and wondered how a mind created such divergent music.

While I couldn’t articulate it then, I was no longer buying the distinction between the sacred and secular in music. If it was only by function that we could determine whether a piece of music was sacred or secular, then the music itself defied classification. By this time, I also knew that music was a place where I could communicate things that I didn’t know how to verbalize. It was a place where I could say things that were sub-articulate, at least for me. I think I always knew that as sacred space, regardless of the musical classification.

It never seemed a stretch to me to admit folk music into worship. As a parish music director in my mid-twenties, it was an easy step to teach high schoolers how to lead a congregation in this music. Vatican II had opened the windows to
vernacular texts and music by then, and Roman Catholic composers led the way with music by the Weston Priory, St. Louis Jesuits, and many others. This music was singable, accessible, and likable to a large range of parishioners. It didn’t have the musical sophistication of the best of Rock ‘n Roll, but it was good and serviceable music for the liturgy. It was *Gebrauchsmusik*, useful for its time and place, quite able to carry God’s praises in worship, yet not necessarily of enduring value.

**Music had its own, and essential, function, forming the assembly to become the bearers of God’s Word in its midst.**

Serving in a Lutheran church, I realized the high esteem in which music was held. Here all music in worship had a function, and as I gradually learned, a very important one. In Orthodox Christianity, Mary is the Theotokos, the God-bearer of Jesus into the world. Luther believed that music could also be that God-bearer, bringing the Word of God, Jesus, into the gathered assembly. This was a profound insight to me, and one that inspired my own understanding of music’s purpose. I appreciated that there was no “traveling music” in the Lutheran liturgy, music that covered the time of something, or more often, someone else. Music had its own, and essential, function, forming the assembly to become the bearers of God’s Word in its midst.

This led me to again question the notion of sacred and secular music. If music in worship is identified by its use, is any style of music then admissible and permissible in worship? I understand Luther to be saying: potentially yes. Music’s origin comes from outside of us: it already exists in creation. We can uncover and explore this piece of creation, just like an ornithologist continues to look for and catalogue new species of birds. That is what composers and ornithologists do. Anything found or composed exists because God put it there for our finding and incorporation. What we do with it is where human creativity enters.

To say it another way, I suggest that music is a material in creation, similar to clay. A potter sculpts a vase. The potter indeed creates a vase, but only because there was clay to begin with. So for music: composers can only compose because sounds and rhythms are already present in creation. If this is the case, there may be any number of sonic elements yet to be uncovered by composers. It would be preposterous for us to say that we won’t admit any new species of birds to our catalogue of species because it is already complete. So it is equally preposterous for us to limit what kinds of music there are yet to be uncovered by future musicians and composers. When they do emerge, then they can be designated and used for sacred purpose. It is not our call to determine sacred and secular music. That already has been done for us. There are no more sacred and secular birds than there are sacred and secular musics. They are all part and parcel of God’s gift of creation, and God called it good. We do best to leave that alone.

In Chupungco’s work of inculturation, the question becomes one of music’s ability to add to the spiritual depth of any culture’s worship. This turns the question of musical choice to its ability to "sound" in a worshipping assembly. If it is able to carry God’s Word, or our authentic voice in worship, then it can find a place.

Over the past fifty years, just about every form, style, and instrumentation has found its way into North American worship. To some today, the field looks to be in great disarray. To others it seems like a battlefield where the traditionalists, especially organists, are losing local skirmishes, and maybe the whole battle. (In fact, the organ department of my own alma mater, Northwestern University, has closed down). To others, it seems there has been a great divide between “traditional” and “contemporary,” two terms which have been mostly vacated of meaning. While I don’t deny that any of these views exist, I do see things differently. I see the Lutheran position bringing a welcome corrective, especially to the North American church.

Church music these fifteen years into the twenty-first century has become a rich and diverse...
field. We have at our fingertips hymns from the twentieth-century hymn explosion which produced thousands of substantial new texts and tunes. We have texts and tunes and much liturgical music that resulted from the Vatican II reforms. We have praise choruses, praise songs, a few of which I expect will endure as substantial songs of the church. We have hymns from around the globe, places where Christianity is growing and vibrant, which just might shore up some of our ailing and dying churches. We have talented composers, text writers, and young musicians who are eager to share their gifts. A Lutheran understanding of this diversifying of the church's music, I believe, sees potential for a more robust and vibrant expression in worship.

It is music's ability to be useful in worship that deems it sacred. Just as ordinary bread and wine are Christ's body and blood when shared in the Christian assembly, so music which bears God's Word is sacred in the mouths of those who sing and play. There is no preferential musical form or style, any more than any certain kind of bread makes communion efficacious. Rather, these things become holy in the presence of the assembly who gathers around them.

When we overlay Luther's understanding of music with Chupungco's notions of inculturation, we have a new, rich, and fertile field for mining the church's future music. It seems to me that we needn't worry any more about whether the music we choose is sacred. Rather, we believe that music is sacred and just might be useful for the things that we humans do, like worship, dance, and sing.

Music is not the only area in which Lutherans are poised to continue the work of the 1964 Council. While music remains a strong suit, it behooves us to consider some of our weaker suits, whose vision remains largely unrealized yet today. One of those areas is the connection between liturgy and justice, praying and doing. It is intrinsic to the spirit of Vatican II that the church's liturgy, in whatever context it exists, be an authentic expression of the gathered assembly, rooted in Christ's love, seeking justice in God's eyes through the human community. So we raise current questions like "Who is welcome at the meal?" and "What about people who are communing and have never been baptized?" The Institute of Liturgical Studies is at the forefront of raising these questions for the wider church and engaging in discussion as our churches grapple with their own doctrinal guidelines.

The Institute's theme for 2015, "The Cosmos in Praise and Lament," was an attempt to raise the questions that surround our use of earth's resources. The biblical command in Genesis to have dominion over creation has, in large part, led Christians to justify dominating creation. Knowing now our ability to overuse and damage creation challenges Christians especially to re-examine what God intended in creating an interrelated cosmos. As we confess the ways we have used dominion to our advantage, upsetting the delicate eco-balance, we also take responsibility for developing a new relationship with creation.

Yearning for the peaceable kingdom, which Isaiah envisions, raises for us our relationship to all that is not yet peaceable. How can our liturgies acknowledge the reality of brokenness, oppression, and violence around us, without drawing us into despair? What biblical models can we raise in our liturgies which lead us to honestly recognize the brokenness inside and outside our churches? How can our liturgies lead us back out into the world to work for justice and peace for all people?

These are a few of the yet underdeveloped areas of liturgical reform. As Lutherans with a unique contribution, we can offer an accent to the ecumenical church. While these may not be areas where Lutherans have always been in the forefront, they might be places that stimulate our own growth. Remember that Luther himself had no interest in developing a separate Lutheran liturgy, Lutheran music, or a Lutheran church, for that matter. Rather, he worked squarely in the Western catholic tradition, mildly reforming it, but never intending to leave it. So it is a very interesting time for Lutherans to consider what our place might be in the musical and liturgical renewal of the wider ecumenical and global church. Our long tradition of liturgical renewal and musical innovation unhindered by ecclesial authority has allowed us to be leaders for ourselves, and for the
wider church, ecumenically and globally. Now, it is the turn of other churches to step in and continue the work that Catholics have begun. This is work on behalf of the whole church.

As the early vision of O. P. Kretzmann and Hans Boehringer placed Valparaiso University at the forefront of North American liturgical renewal before Vatican II, it is important to continue this work of renewing the church’s liturgy today: for those of us here at Valparaiso University, undoubtedly, for the Lutheran church bodies that are in the fabric of this university and rely on this place to provide new leaders for the church, and also for the wider church who may rely on us to carry these projects forward.

Ten years ago, on the fortieth anniversary of Vatican II, Chupungco remarked, “Forty years have passed, but it is never too late to start” (2014, 286). Now, at the fiftieth anniversary, we might add: we Lutherans are sure more comfortable in the background, in the back pew, on the side street of town, but perhaps it is time to recognize how we can contribute to a wider church in need of our leadership at this critical new decade of North American liturgical reform.

Lorraine S. Brugh is Professor of Music and University Organist at Valparaiso University and Director of Chapel Music at the Chapel of the Resurrection. This essay was originally presented on March 19, 2015 on the occasion of her promotion to full professor.

Works Cited


EXALTATION

So in this dream I’m falling and falling and thinking
for some reason about the bleeding
woman who went flat broke trying to fix
her issue. Passing through the cirrocumulus
then a skein of geese, starting to panic;
Imagine the mess, the strain, the shaming weakness
full-time hemorrhaging brings, costs
without benefits. Starting to wonder about
what’s coming, I’ve heard if you hit the ground
before waking, you die. She fixed her flow
lunging in a crowd for the—what?—lucked out,
hit the hem, bleeding stemmed.
Wish I could remember if they count that story
literature or history, or whether they know
if that day was this sunny or if she
ever complained again about the price of medicine.
Trees and swimming pools come into focus
but I’m suddenly ambivalent about
the endgame here, my dearth of options beyond
taking what’s being offered,
not resisting the ground gravity prepares
me to manure. Thinking of that old zen dictum
that says keep your eyes open, be willing
to take the cane so that, by the time your
awakening arrives, you’re supple enough to greet it.

John Estes
Black Coffee and Papier-mâché
Noir and the Second Season of True Detective

Gregory Maher

A suave, sad trumpet plays us into scenes, past thick forest crowns, factories drowned in dust and gravel, and all laced through with the tangles of Southern California freeways. A tracking shot pans across a dark city, through sunset glass, and into a bedroom where local mob boss Frank Semyon (Vince Vaughn) sits with his dark thoughts. Eyes roving over the white-walled perfection of his modernist house, he fixates on a ceiling leak, a spot of weakness. Sighing to his wife beside him, Frank laments: "It's like everything's made of papier-mâché." And so, seemingly, are the characters of True Detective's cryptic second season: hard-shelled vigilantes each with their own twist. For this is a detective story told through the chiaroscuro filters of noir.

The second season of HBO's True Detective, like the first, is instigated by a murder, but this season we have an entirely new plot and a new setting almost 2,000 miles to the west of Louisiana. Fans of the series are holding up the second season to the gold standard set by the first; by most accounts, it falls short. This is, perhaps, to be expected. With an entirely new cast and script, this season is different—entirely different—but it is well worth the time to follow as the contemporary detective genre is turned back to the essence of noir, a plot which in no way leads you to expect a happy ending. We see the characters through the familiar haze that distinguishes True Detective, yet we are offered brief glimpses of the truth. Though each character shows a social mask to the world—and viewer—the music and production design suggest what lies behind it.

Serving as the locale for much of the second season, the fictional city of Vinci plays stand-in for the very real city of Vernon, California, a dismal municipality just south of Los Angeles. Founded in 1905, the city—whose very motto reads "Exclusively industrial!"—arose from a merchants' scheme to capitalize on the railroad line leading to Los Angeles. Railroad spurs built along the town's dusty main track transformed the town into an exclusive industrial corridor. Decades of corruption and mafia-like nepotism shaded the local government, a potent parallel to the show in its present iteration. Yet in the Vinci with which True Detective acquaints us, we see not merely the dry, gravel lots of aching factories, but sunlit fruit orchards, deep, rich redwood groves, and the winding roads which follow California's Pacific coast. In the season's opening episode, traffic cop Paul Woodrugh (Taylor Kitsch) finds his victim while speeding down one such road. His headlight cuts around a bend and illuminates a well-dressed man seated at a scenic overlook; only, he is dead.

So begins a complicated investigation, one in which state, county, and local authorities work together to solve the murder of Ben Caspere, Vinci's city accountant with mysterious ties that unravel as the season goes on. Among our main players are the three detectives who form the State Attorney's Special Investigation: Paul Woodrugh, Ray Velcoro (Colin Farrell), and Antigone "Ani" Bezzerides (Rachel McAdams). Like Vernon, which achieved prosperity through its rail line, True Detective's Vinci holds exclusive placement along a transit rail under development. It turns out that this rail line is tied up with a considerable amount of speculative investments, investments suddenly voided by Caspere's death. Vaughn's Frank Semyon loses out big, having bet on the land where the rail would be built, and he takes it as a blow not only to his finances, but to his entire sense of self-worth. His actions from...
here on serve only to help him “get back on top,” yet there are moments when his humanity—his empathy—make us forget that he is a villain.

In him we see the dying kingpin, the desperation of being on the edge between perceived mediocrity (his “day job” as a casino owner and manager) and a persistent feeling of being trapped, held down from his own ambition. “Where I am exists contingent on human desire,” proclaims Frank as his wife accuses him of being nothing more than a gangster. He is, of course, a gangster, but his moral compass allows only the otherization of the term; he distances himself from the gang who runs drugs through his club: “Those people would be doing this anyway.” He obviously profits from the arrangement, and power plays—how to appear, and thus be, the more powerful man—are ever on his mind, whether in a swift takedown, a shot of a pistol, or a smirking threat of extortion. What is surprising is how quickly he can shift to being a gentle man: one who loves his wife and supports her through failed attempts at in-vitro fertilization, or comforts the grieving son of one of his murdered partners. This is a character I have never seen, the villain trying to have a baby.

Part of what makes the series so interesting is the oddly close relationship between Farrell’s Ray, a police detective, and Vaughn’s Frank, a mob boss. Their meetings invariably take place in the same bar. Ray’s response to Frank’s surprised query at one such meeting—“what’s with the water?”—makes me think back to Clint Eastwood’s Detective Harry Callahan in Dirty Harry. “Booze tends to take the edge off; I want to stay angry,” drawls Ray—like Eastwood—whose slow anger at “the system” and the higher-ups who control it always seems at the point of boiling over. Callahan seems reborn through Colin Farrell’s Ray, but closer, with greater despair.

Velcoro is heir to a cop father who watches old black-and-white crime dramas, holding on to the soft justice of television. In one poignant scene, the elder Velcoro laments the decline of the police force. Ray sighs, yet still holds his father’s badge like a totem of honor (after pulling it from his father’s waste-bin). It is simultaneously a tender moment of connection and one of deep disconnect, as Ray realizes the kind of denial that faces a lifetime of unsettled justice. How do you come to a personal understanding of “justice” after seeing so much uncertain, upturned, corrupted? But our detective has a son and thus a reason to represent the badge his father now finds meaningless. Unlike the hermetic figure of Callahan, Ray feels a need to provide for both his father and son, even when they don’t seem to need or want his involvement. Seemingly, the badge is the only thing which connects the Velcoro men.

Frank’s office overlooks the floor of his casino, one-way glass facing the tables stretching along the expanse. The walls within are yellow, a dull golden hue decorated with an illustrated scroll. On it, a crocodile clenched in mortal coil with a black-and-red banded snake; equal in virility, the two approach death together. The sixth episode of the season provides a terrifying analog, as Ray goes to Frank’s home to confront him about false information he was given. Frank is soft, accommodating, offering a mug of coffee as the two sit at his dining table. The composition is mirrored, each sitting opposite the other, black coffee in a black mug at their right. Each one’s left hand is flat and relaxed on the table, while both right hands are hidden beneath, fingering guns pointed at the other. The side-facing
camera reveals the entire scene, perfect framing as small talk and wafts of steam from the coffee barely mask the underlying tension and potential for violence. Finally, Frank defers, and puts his gun on the table. They both share a glance, a pause, and a realization of the humanness of the other, and the familiar despair which racks each of them. They both reach for their coffee.

“I hardly recognize this face I wear” the series’s tormented singer lilts in the bar at which so many of Frank and Ray’s meetings occur. Her

The second season of True Detective achieves a tenderness and fragility in its characters unexpected given the violence of its action.

character establishes atmosphere and builds scenes through the mood of her haunting songs. Americana singer and songwriter Lera Lynn plays the bar’s musician, with heavy-lidded eyes and lips, and music sung like each phrase was her last. In one scene, “My Least Favorite Life” aptly scores a vital conversation between Frank and Ray. Their hard masks, spotlight so the lines of the face and circles below the eyes shade black, seem inscrutable. Yet from the songs, glimmers of fear, desolation, and brokenness pass through the barroom haze to wreath the two figures, and we know that there is more to be said.

In viewing True Detective, we might begin to forget that we have entered a world of irrevocable violence as the heavy, warm camera filters seep amber-like into our subconscious. Yet the second season, unlike the first, does not let us forget the bodies left behind. A striking choice on the part of writer and showrunner Nick Pizzolato is to zero in on the moments immediately following acts of violence—Ani infilrating a party of corrupt officials and businessmen that turns sour—to confront the viewer with the horror which follows such trauma. Ani must spend her life training to protect herself from violence from a man, and this fear and its pervasive influence controls her character. Unfortunately, as is typical with noir, the women in the show (except those with a badge) are helpless, victimized by the actions of the men around them. Ani cannot escape the system which victimizes her, but plays her character with a rare strength. Her trauma is spoken as a moonlit soliloquy, a story retold a hundredfold times at night to herself. It is the acceptance of death, the resulting shock, the memory replayed—indeed branded—in her head as the comfortable world is sleeping. We are led to see that these cops are not invincible, nor too hard-boiled to realize their own fragility and its effects.

The second season of True Detective achieves a tenderness and fragility in its characters unexpected given the violence of its action. There is, for instance, something lovely—as if occurring in its own world—about Ray recording voice messages to his son. In the still enclosure of the vehicle (in which so much of Season 1’s moral debate transpired), Ray drives along moonless desert highways, voice low and face almost soft in the glow of his dashboard lights. The moment is timeless, and these scenes focus us on the intense emotion of his relationship with his son. We might see Ray through his bloodied fists or the wan haggardness of his drinking, but Ray becomes immutable; his tenacity—like that of Ani, Paul, and Frank—carries him through the turbidities of the season. This is the drama that makes it all worth watching: the dual fragility and doggedness which make us human and lets us see past the violence and trauma toward the image of those we love.

Gregory Maher is a writer living in Chicago and contributor to KNSTRCT and Newcity magazines.
SOMETHING FOR EVERYTHING

Adam sat naming everything he'd miss.
   He couldn't quite explain
   Why he was doing this
Or how he drew such pleasure from the pain

Of his enumerations: snowdrops twice
   As vibrant from the view
   Outside of paradise,
And paradisiacal birds with curlicue

Tail feathers drooping in foreboding loops,
   And howler monkeys calling
   To other howler troops,
The shade trees and the footpaths and the falling

Fruit, unforbidden, he was meant to eat—
   To think of losing it
   Made every bite more sweet,
So he indulged such thinking as he bit,

Grateful that loss was merely nomenclature,
   A term to understand,
   And reveled in his nature
As Eve approached him, something in her hand.

Stephen Kampa
The Moral Perils and Opportunities of George R. R. Martin’s Fiction

Ross Moret

Every movement of the theater, by a skillful poet, is communicated, as it were by magic, to the spectators; who weep, tremble, resent, rejoice, and are inflamed with all the variety of passions, which actuate the several personages of the drama.

David Hume

Enquiry Concerning the Principle of Morals, 5.2.26

The difference between George R. R. Martin’s *A Song of Ice and Fire* novels and the many science fiction and fantasy stories that have dominated American pop culture in recent decades is captured by the juxtaposition of two characters from different fictional universes, both small in stature, each of whom completes the unlikely task of passing through the back of a wardrobe. Many readers, I trust, can recall the sense of joy and wonder they felt the first time they read C. S. Lewis’s *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, particularly the moment when the delightfully innocent little girl, Lucy Pevensie, unwittingly stumbles into a magical new world through the back of an old wardrobe during a game of hide and seek.

Contrast this with a scene from Martin’s *A Clash of Kings*, the second novel in the series. Tyrion Lannister, son of the richest man in the Seven Kingdoms, also approaches a wardrobe, but in a very different form of hide and seek. While not without his virtues, Tyrion is far from innocent. He is hated by his immensely powerful father, both because he is a dwarf and because his mother died in bringing him into the world. As a result, Tyrion has become a worldly fellow, drinking and consorting with prostitutes to escape the many horrors of life. In contrast to the innocence and native goodness not only of Lucy Pevensie but of Tolkien’s hobbits as well, Tyrion compensates for his small stature by using his wits to outmaneuver his many enemies. Indeed, the wardrobe that Tyrion approaches is found in a brothel and its false back leads to a dark tunnel that ends at a smelly stable. There a secretive and well-informed eunuch dresses Tyrion in child’s clothes and mounts him on a small horse, which he rides to a part of town where he keeps his true, although forbidden, love interest, a prostitute of whom he has grown particularly fond. Tyrion thus does not pass innocently to an enchanted world that goodness is bound to conquer, but through cunning and deception, from one sordid scene to the next. The goodness and innocence which protect the Pevensie children and which allow Tolkien’s hobbits to become heroes constitute grave dangers in Martin’s novels. To survive in Tyrion’s world, especially as a dwarf, one must be ruthless.

The gritty nature of Martin’s novels is carried into and sometimes further sensationalized in the related HBO television series *Game of Thrones*. The nudity in particular, along with depictions of sexual violence, has garnered a good deal of criticism from a diverse set of pundits who urge their readers to avoid the show. Conservative Baptist pastor and theologian John Piper, for example, is concerned that viewing the show will compromise one’s holiness, even going so far as to suggest that doing so is a form of “recrucifying Christ.” Feminists likewise have denounced the show, usually because of its several depictions of sexual violence, some of which diverge from the books in disturbing ways (Pantozzi 2015; Silman 2015). I have no interest in countering the claims of some Christians concerned with how the show or the novels might harm their efforts toward personal holiness, nor do I want to minimize or explain away worries
regarding depictions of violence against women. Although I share some of these critics’ concerns, I want to argue that Martin’s fiction, and his critique of much popular fantasy and science fiction, highlights the great moral ambiguity of real-world politics and war and offers a constructive ethical challenge by pressing readers and viewers to reconsider how we effortlessly draw lines between good and evil. This critique is worked out by shifting the point of view through which the stories are told (a technique that is largely carried through to the televised version of *Game of Thrones*), such that one chapter is experienced from the viewpoint of a young boy, the next from that of the patriarch of a rich and powerful family, and so forth. The narrative is thus slowly teased out in a piece-meal fashion that includes many twists and turns. The upshot of this narrative structure is that readers, and to a large extent viewers, of *Game of Thrones*, develop notions about who deserves what rewards or punishments, notions that are often complicated or undermined later in the story, either because new information is introduced or because what seemed like sweet justice in theory becomes bitter when it is actualized in all its brutality.

The chief target of Martin’s critique is the moral simplicity that has dominated fantasy and science fiction since at least the time of *The Lord of the Rings*: the “endless series of dark lords and their evil minions who are all very ugly and wear black clothes” (Martin 2014) in popular superhero stories or works such as *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *Star Wars*, and the Harry Potter books. These stories tend to deal with conflict, and indeed war, as though most conflicts include readily identifiable heroes and villains. In Martin’s view, people are rarely true heroes or true villains, but almost always embody both regrettable and praiseworthy aspects, with the potential to do both good and evil. And often, Martin argues, wars leave us asking whether the fighting was worth the costs.

Martin executes his critique of popular fiction largely by deconstructing the basic medieval archetypes that inform many classic fairytales. For example, he calls into question the assumption that the authority of a good ruler is all that is needed to establish a just and peaceful society. As Martin states in an interview with *Rolling Stone*, his view is much more complicated:

Ruling is hard. This was maybe my answer to Tolkien, whom, as much as I admire him, I do quibble with. *Lord of the Rings* had a very medieval philosophy: that if the king was a good man, the land would prosper. We look at real history and it’s not that simple. Tolkien can say that Aragorn became king and reigned for a hundred years, and he was wise and good. But Tolkien doesn’t ask the question: What was Aragorn’s tax policy? Did he maintain a standing army? What did he do in times of flood and famine? And what about all these orcs? By the end of the war, Sauron is gone but all of the orcs aren’t gone—they’re in the mountains. Did Aragorn pursue a policy of systematic genocide and kill them? Even the little baby orcs, in their little orc cradles? (Martin 2014)

Martin’s stories, then, are filled with intelligent, well-meaning characters who are forced to confront terrific problems when they achieve (or are drafted into) places of power. Indeed, many of Martin’s characters face tremendous difficulties because they attempt to move beyond political expediency to be good rulers (e.g. Eddard Stark, Tyrion Lannister, Daenerys Targaryen, and Jon Snow).

Martin’s critique of medieval archetypes extends to the idealization of knightly virtue and courtly love. The first viewpoint chapter of the first book, for example, is told from the eyes of Bran Stark, a boy of seven with whom the reader...
immediately sympathizes. Bran’s dream is to become a great knight. Unfortunately, he soon overhears the treasonous plotting of the king’s wife and her twin brother, Cersei and Jaimie Lannister, who between words are locked in an incestuous embrace. Before he can leave, however, Bran is spotted by the couple and thrown from a tower by Jaimie, one of the premiere knights of the realm. Likewise Sansa Stark, Bran’s sister, dreams of being swept away into the life of courtly love. Such visions are only deepened when she is betrothed to the handsome future king, Joffrey Baratheon (secretly the son of Cersei and Jaimie), and brought to the capital, where she is awarded a red rose by the dashing victor of a great jousting championship. But Sansa’s naïveté plays an important part in the death of her father, who is named a traitor and duplicitously ordered to be beheaded by Joffrey, the first of many tortures she suffers at the hands of her betrothed. Bran’s knightly ideals are shattered along with his body: Sansa’s dream of courtly love becomes a dreadful nightmare.

The critiques discussed thus far are largely structural in nature and bring to mind Reinhold Niebuhr’s devastating indictment of the misplaced optimism of the so-called “children of light” (1944), but Martin’s criticism extends to individual characters as well. Many of the characters that one might describe as heroes have significant moral flaws. Others start out good but, through a series of tragedies, end up becoming nihilistically vengeful. More interesting in my mind, however, are the villains. While Martin certainly includes some thoroughgoing villains in his stories, he also works to complicate the notion of “villain” as a stock category. And it is here that Martin’s use of viewpoint storytelling is the most effective at offering an ethical challenge to the reader/viewer. For it is here that Martin uses our tendency to sympathize with the point of view through which the story is told to move us to strongly dislike, even hate, certain characters and to desire that they be brought to justice. At this point, however, Martin typically introduces two narrative devices, which may exist alone or in concert, with symmetrical or asymmetrical intensity. Sometimes we are presented with new information that makes the villainous character more sympathetic, a move which gains considerable intensity when chapters are later told from the viewpoint of erstwhile villains (e.g. Cersei and Jaimie Lannister). Other times we are “rewarded,” so to speak, by allowing a particular villain to suffer her or his seemingly just comeuppance, but in such a brutal and prolonged manner that what seemed like justice becomes a kind of mirage or, perhaps worse, a kind of bitter water. Jamie Lannister’s sword hand is cut off and tied around his neck, where it is left to decompose. Cersei Lannister is forced by religious fanatics to walk naked through the streets of the capital, where she is pummeled with insults as well as rotten produce. A traitor to the Starks, Theon Greyjoy, is captured, maimed, and subjected to prolonged torture. There are more examples. The point, however, is that in nearly every instance one’s thirst for revenge is not satiated, but turned bitter by the fact that if we are to continue the story we must confront the gruesomeness of the logical conclusion of the indulgence of our own desires.

Some may worry that taking Martin’s critique leads to a kind of moral cynicism or paralysis,
such that the moral “grayness” of the stories encourages inaction or perhaps even the rejection of moral distinctions altogether. Others may fear that narrating ethically suspect actions from the perpetrator’s point of view may work to cause the audience to codify such problematic actions as “good.” I find the first concern to be unrealistic; precious few react to Martin’s stories with a Rortian shrug of the shoulders. The second has greater merit and speaks to the fact that some people ought not to be exposed to either the novels or the television show (especially adolescents or others who are particularly impressionable).

Such dangers, however, also produce a constructive opportunity for those of us who are willing to entertain a degree of introspection. One of the most interesting aspects of watching Game of Thrones, or especially of reading A Song of Ice and Fire, is the experience of entering the story from multiple points of view. This is not a merely intellectual exercise. As Hume says, we “weep, tremble, resent, rejoice, and are inflamed with all the variety of passions, which actuate the several personages of the drama.” And when Martin’s execution of the shifting viewpoint is combined with the complicated nature of good and evil that his stories present, a difficult yet realistic view of the world and its politics emerges. Indeed, if it is not asking too much of the genre, Martin may even challenge us to pause to question the universal applicability of our own institutions or experiences when considering issues such as the policies of exporting democracy or the relationship between race and police brutality. For when we recognize the fact that we instinctually sympathize with the characters whose points of view we adopt in stories, we might also recognize our tendency to shape moral facts to our own advantage in our everyday lives. The vicarious nature of drama, particularly this form of drama, helps us not only to conceptualize but causes us to experience the great and problematic incurvatus in se of point of view in a way that would otherwise be very difficult, perhaps impossible. 

Ross Moret is a PhD candidate at Florida State University, studying ethics.

Works Cited


Silman, Anna. “Here’s why people are so upset about the latest Game of Thrones rape: so cheap such an obvious choice I felt offended as a fan.” Salon.com. (May 18, 2015). http://www.salon.com/2015/05/18/heres_why_people_are_so_upset_about_the_latest_game_of_thrones_rape_so_cheap_such_an_obvious_choice_i_felt_offended_as_a_fan.
In 1870, French author Jules Verne published 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea, the story of the mysterious Captain Nemo and his crew who pilot a technologically amazing submarine named the Nautilus to the farthest reaches of the ocean. The novel is narrated by French marine biologist Professor Pierre Aronnax, who, along with two companions, is saved from drowning by Captain Nemo and then accompanies him on his fantastic journeys throughout the rest of the novel.

20,000 Leagues Under the Sea is often described as one of the first works of science fiction. Verne's novel is filled with technological wonders as well as with speculation about where that technology could lead. From the very first chapter, the story makes it clear that this is a tale that hangs on the border between fact and fantasy. As Aronnax describes the general reaction to sightings of the Nautilus (thought to be a giant sea creature), he writes, “seeing that the human mind is always hankering after something to marvel at, the stir created throughout the world by this supernatural apparition will be well understood. As for relegating it to the realm of fable, that was out of the question” (2). In two sentences, Verne both describes the Nautilus as supernatural and dismisses the possibility that it is fable, an apt description of works of science fiction, which exist on the border between the possible and the impossible.

This reading of 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea as science fiction is further supported by later authors of science fiction who point to Verne's novel as a key influence on them. Nemo appears directly in works such as Alan Moore and Kevin O'Neill's The League of Extraordinary Gentleman; the novel is alluded to in films like The Neverending Story and Back to the Future Part III; and authors like H. G. Wells were inspired by Verne's work in creating their own speculations about technology and humanity. In his preface to Seven Famous Novels (a collection of his classic works), Wells writes, “In The First Men in the Moon I tried an improvement on Jules Verne's shot, in order to look at mankind from a distance.” As these examples show, the imaginative ideas and attitude toward technology found in Verne's work helped to lay the foundation for the development of science fiction as a genre.

And now, there is yet another novel that is indebted to Verne's work: Andy Weir's self-published 2011 novel The Martian. Weir's novel (which will be released as a movie in October 2015) tells the story of Mark Watney, an American astronaut who accidentally gets left on Mars by the rest of his team and has to push the limits of his creativity, using whatever resources he has in order to survive. (Note: spoilers about the novel follow.)

Watney is part of the third manned mission to Mars; his expertise is in botany which would be useful in conducting experiments on growing plants in zero-gravity and on the surface of Mars. Six days into the mission, a dust storm threatens to tip over the ascent vehicle that would return the crew to their ship, Hermes. The team decides to depart from the surface before that can happen, and in the chaos of getting to the ascent vehicle Watney falls over and is knocked unconscious. In the fall, the biometric computer on his spacesuit is destroyed, making it appear as if he were dead, and so the rest of the crew makes the agonizing decision to leave his body behind, rather than risk all of their lives going back into the storm for him. Watney is then forced to rely on a temporary inflatable habitat (nicknamed "the Hab") to keep him alive as he works to stretch his resources, find a way to communicate with Earth, and ultimately, survive long enough to find a way home.

In terms of simple storytelling, there are some very basic similarities between Weir's novel and
Verne’s classic tale. Both novels are works that speculate about the possibility of traveling to unexplored places using technology that is only on the verge of being viable. As Stephen Baxter notes in his introduction to 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea, submarine technology was very new at the end of the nineteenth century; several experimental craft had been created, including one by the Confederacy during the American Civil War, but submarines were by no means common. Similarly, the ion engines used to power Hermes, the ship used to take Watney and his crew to Mars in The Martian, are a technology that does exist, but so far have been used by NASA only with unmanned spacecraft such as Deep Space 1 and Dawn, both of which explored small objects such as asteroids, comets, and protoplanets.

Weir and Verne show similar attention to detail throughout their novels as well. So much of 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea simply catalogues the undersea wonders that Aronnax observes, including lists of aquatic plants, types of whales, and shellfish. The description of the Nautilus is conducted with similar precision, both in terms of the physical dimensions of the ship as well as how quickly it can travel through the water. Readers learn that the Nautilus is seventy meters in length, with a first hull that weighs 294.96 metric tons and a second hull that weighs 62 metric tons (90–91). We learn where its parts were made, how it is powered, and what kind of pressure it can withstand. Together, these details provide a very comprehensive picture of the entire undersea adventure.

While Weir does not provide lists of Martian flora and fauna in his novel the way Verne does (obviously), he still provides meticulous technical details to support the plausibility of his tale. Near the end of Watney’s journal entry for Sol 14 for instance, he works through calculations for how much soil he will need to grow the potatoes that will keep him alive. He notes that the “total floor space of the Hab is about 92 square meters... It’ll be a lot of work, but I’m going to need to cover the entire floor to a depth of 10 centimeters. That means I’ll have to transport 9.2 cubic meters of Martian soil into the Hab.” This inclusion of figures and mathematical calculations throughout the narrative functions very similarly to the details in Verne’s novel; it suggests to the reader that this adventure could actually have taken place.

But perhaps the most intriguing similarity between these two works is the parallel between the central figures of each novel, Commander Nemo and Mark Watney, respectively. Captain Nemo’s name means “nobody” or “no man” in Latin, as Aronnax’s servant Conseil points out in Chapter 20. Throughout the novel, Aronnax continues to emphasize how mysterious Nemo is: "Would I ever know the nationality of this strange man who boasted that he belonged to no nation? Who or what had provoked his hatred against humanity?... Was he one of those frustrated scientists—one of those geniuses whose work had been spurned...?" (99). These questions persist until the very end of the novel. After Aronnax escapes the maelstrom into which Nemo sends his vessel, he is left with questions, not just what happened to the Nautilus and Captain Nemo, but even after the thousands of miles traveled, simply who Captain Nemo truly was. A later work by Verne, entitled The Mysterious Island, provides more information about who Nemo is, but the lasting legacy of Nemo is as the enigma at the center of an amazing undersea voyage.

Mark Watney is similarly enigmatic. Although we do know his real name, we learn surprisingly little about him over the course of the novel. This is most apparent in what we learn about the personal items brought along by the crew. Every crew member who was part of Watney’s Mars mission brought with them from Earth a personal data drive containing reading material, music, movies, and the like. In
many ways, these data drives serve as metonyms—as stand-ins—for the absent crew members. As Watney looks on each of his colleagues' data drives in search of material to stave off boredom, we learn bits about them. Commander Lewis brought disco music and 1970s television shows like *Three's Company*, Johanssen brought mystery novels and Beatles' albums, and Beck brought medical journals. Even Martinez, who didn't bring a data drive, brought pictures of his children and a crucifix. But we never learn anything about what Watney himself brought. His own personal data drive is conspicuously absent.

As a result, even though we gather token bits of information about Watney, including that he is from Chicago and he majored in botany, in many ways he remains as much of a mystery as Nemo does. We learn that he has parents, but who doesn't? Other crew members talk about their families in greater detail, mentioning spouses and even children. With Watney, we don't know anything; even at the end of the novel, we only see Watney reuniting with the crew of *Hermes*. There is no joyful reunion with his family and friends back on Earth. Like his data drive, the specifics of Watney's personal life are simply not there.

And yet, in spite of both men being enigmas, our interpretation of this mystery is strongly affected by the different narrative perspectives of the two novels. Both novels are narrated in the first person, but it is Professor Aronnax who narrates *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, not Captain Nemo, while Watney is the narrator of his own tale. Because we are reading Watney's journal, his thoughts are literally an open book. And the thoughts he conveys have personality. He uses parenthetical asides and questions to his imagined reader to imbue his journal with a sense of sarcasm and humor. As a result, Watney begins to feel familiar to the reader of *The Martian*; we learn his voice, his fears, his dreams. Even though the title of Weir's novel—*The Martian*—associates Watney with the otherness of "little green men," the truth is that the first-person narration of the novel aligns the reader with Watney, while Nemo remains an inscrutable cipher.

This difference in narrative perspective ultimately has a significant impact on the overall impression each novel creates about humanity as a whole. In Verne's *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, the tale of Captain Nemo is about someone who has "broken with humanity" (67), someone who is positioned in opposition to the reader and the rest of the world. It is a novel about a world in which groups of people strive against each other, a world where the strong oppress the weak. Nemo makes this clear time and time again in his rejection of inhabited land: "I am the oppressed, and there is the oppressor!" (408). Nemo's alienation emphasizes the consequences of inequality and social injustice, but the mystery surrounding his character also makes it much more difficult to empathize with him, thus reinforcing the great divide between us and him.

In *The Martian*, because the first-person narration aligns the reader with Watney, Weir's novel sends a much different message about humanity. The lack of personal information about Watney becomes not a mystery that divides, but a place in the narrative into which we as readers can insert ourselves, bringing us closer to the struggles of the central character, rather than pushing us further away. As a result, Watney's words of unity at the end of the novel are words in which we see ourselves. When he asks why everyone worked so hard to rescue him, he speculates that it is because of what he stands for: "progress, science, and the interplanetary future we've dreamed of for centuries." Then he continues, "But really, they did it because every human being has a basic instinct to help each other out." These are words that the reader can feel a part
of, not only because Watney uses the word “we,” but because our reading of the novel makes us active participants in his rescue, part of a larger endeavor of all humanity.

While there is no denying that Verne’s novel remains a classic work of science fiction, maybe it is Weir’s view of humanity that is even more needed today, at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Works of science fiction like The Martian remind us of what brings us together, showing us how we as a species can work together to fix problems, be they technological or social, ever pushing past the limits of what seems impossible to what lies beyond.

Jennifer Miller teaches English at Normandale Community College in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Works Cited


SOMETHING TO FILL

Then said Jesus unto him,
"Except ye see signs and wonders,
ye will not believe."

John 4:48

I sat in the grass
bent over words
when slap into the stillness
flapped a mockingbird,

proclaimed the cherries ripe
by falling to.
That bird has an eye
for the delicious,

the signed and wondrous
moment that’s gone
even as it arrives.
I spilled my pages, ran

for a bucket, a bowl,
something to fill.

Catherine Abbey Hodges
A Twenty-First-Century Education
On Having Too Much of a Good Thing

Peter Meilaender

One of the dangers of democratic politics in any age, but perhaps especially in the media age we inhabit, is the ease with which ideas, if repeated sufficiently often, can come to be taken for granted without careful reflection on their meaning or consequences. This is especially true in the realm of education. Everyone knows, after all, that “education” is a good thing, so it is difficult to object to anything advertised as promoting “more education.” Furthermore, educational proposals can always be cast as being “for the children,” an almost irresistible rhetorical trope. A century ago, discussing education in his book What’s Wrong With the World, G. K. Chesterton already had noticed this phenomenon:

There has arisen in this connection a foolish and wicked cry typical of the confusion [about education]. I mean the cry, “Save the children.” It is, of course, part of that modern morbidity that insists on treating the State (which is the home of man) as a sort of desperate expedient in time of panic. This terrified opportunism is also the origin of the Socialist and other schemes. Just as they would collect and share all the food as men do in a famine, so they would divide the children from their fathers, as men do in a shipwreck. That a human community might conceivably not be in a condition of famine or shipwreck never seems to cross their minds. (1994, 139)

Apparently the appeal of fixing education for the sake of the children has been familiar to politicians and reformers for quite some time. The conclusion of Chesterton’s comment may nevertheless not seem apropos, since in fact some of our communities do indeed seem to be in a condition resembling shipwreck, and many people regard the American educational system as failing in important respects. This worry continues to spark a number of reform proposals for improving education, from the lowest to the highest levels. Because they are intended to “save the children,” these proposals, even when they are controversial, are seldom questioned in a fundamental way; that is to say, while critics may worry that the reforms could be too expensive or too complex to implement, they rarely question whether these new ideas are well-intentioned and could indeed be helpful, if only we could afford them or overcome the various practical obstacles to their implementation.

Precisely because ideas, too often repeated, quickly become accepted as true, it can be helpful to throw light on them from an unexpected perspective, hoping to illuminate features that would otherwise remain concealed among the shadows. My goal here is to attempt precisely that with three popular education reform ideas, sketched here only briefly, all of which have garnered significant national attention within the last couple of years, and upon which a classic of the Western canon may shed some unanticipated light.

Universal Preschool

The idea of universal pre-kindergarten education is not entirely new. Oklahoma, for example, has a universal preschool program with very high enrollment levels. Such programs are also common in many foreign countries. Alia Wong, writing in The Atlantic, notes, “Many countries—including Japan, the United Kingdom, Mexico, and France—enroll nearly 100 percent of their 4-year-olds in preschool.” But the idea has received renewed attention in this country recently because of Mayor Bill de Blasio’s push to introduce universal pre-kindergarten in New York City. (As is typical, the program is voluntary, not mandatory.) In his
2013 State of the Union address, President Obama, called for making $75 billion available over ten years in order to provide preschool for all. Shortly thereafter, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, writing in the Washington Post in support of the president’s proposal, asserted, “If the United States is to remain a global economic leader, high-quality preschool must become the norm.” While evidence on the long-term effectiveness of early-learning programs remains inconclusive, defenders of such programs argue that poor and disadvantaged children, as well as those for whom English is a second language, are especially likely to benefit from them. Children in high-quality preschool programs, it is claimed, gain access to the more stimulating learning environments, with richer vocabularies and language skills, that wealthier and more privileged children may be able to take for granted.

Community College for All

At the opposite end of the educational ladder, President Obama has called on states to make two years of community college education available for free. The White House website describes the “America’s College Promise” proposal as a plan “to make two years of community college free for responsible students, letting students earn the first half of a bachelor’s degree and earn skills needed in the workforce at no cost” (White House). States such as Tennessee and Oregon have taken the lead with programs of their own, and Democrats in Congress have introduced a bill to make $90 billion available to the states to help pay for the president’s proposal. This reform is obviously motivated by a pair of twin concerns: the high cost of college education, increasingly seen as out of reach for many families, and the increase in the number of jobs requiring a college degree. If universal pre-kindergarten is supposed to give children a head start on their education, free community college should ensure that they finish up with the qualifications they need for success in the marketplace.

Year-Round Schooling

As its name suggests, year-round schooling programs arrange for students to attend school across the entire year, dividing up the same number of schooldays into sessions spread throughout the year. The most common arrangement is called a 45-15 plan, in which students attend school for nine weeks, followed by a three-week break. With ever fewer students needed at home on the farm, there is less pressure to accommodate agricultural interests with long summer breaks, and school districts are better able to consider alternative schedules. While year-round schooling is not as prominent in the news as either universal pre-kindergarten or free community college, a number of school districts around the country—including districts in North Carolina, Oregon, and Michigan—have experimented with it. The chief educational benefits of year-round schooling are supposed to be students’ increased retention of what they have learned, thanks to shorter times off from school, and greater ability to supply remedial education when it is most needed. As with universal pre-kindergarten, these benefits are thought to be especially advantageous for students from poor or disadvantaged backgrounds.

For a moment, consider these three reforms as a unit. There is no reason, of course, why a proponent of any one of these need necessarily adopt the other two. Taken together, however, they provide an indication of which way the educational winds are blowing and the kinds of ideas likely to become received wisdom. Collectively these proposals present a composite vision that is striking. For if we start with the currently existing public school system, and then add onto it this trio of reforms, we get a somewhat remarkable result: a world in which children, starting at three or four years of age and extending until they are twenty-two or twenty-three, are removed from the home and placed in the care of a state institution on an almost year-round basis. Save the children, indeed! As Chesterton went on to say: “This cry of ‘Save the children’ has in it the hateful implication that it is impossible to save the fathers” (139). This trio of proposals implies, of course, that the current state of affairs is so dismal that we must now spread out our children’s education over the entire year and add roughly four years to it, almost a quarter of its current length. This, however, does not especially interest me here. Rather, I want to dwell on this image of children
receiving instruction from the state for twenty years or so, until they are old enough to be released into the adult world of work and citizenship.

When one teaches political theory, as I do, for a number of years, one gradually realizes that students will respond in particular ways to certain texts. No such response is more predictable than that to Socrates’ proposals in Plato’s *Republic* for the abolition of the family and the communal education of children, a political program that students invariably regard as preposterous. In his ideal city, Socrates says that citizens, in the process of their education, “must be watched at every age to see if they are skillful guardians of this conviction” about what is “advantageous to the city” (Plato, 92). Therefore “we must watch them straight from childhood by setting them at tasks in which a man would most likely forget and be deceived out of such a conviction” (92). Later, describing the “second wave” of reform that the ideal city will need, he elaborates: “[T]he children, in their turn, will be in common, and neither will a parent know his own offspring, nor a child his parent” (136). From the youngest age, these citizens will all receive an education in common: “And as the offspring are born, won’t they be taken over by the officers established for this purpose... [and brought] into the pen to certain nurses who live apart in a certain section of the city” (139)?

This is, I suppose, the first proposal for universal preschool. In thus pointing toward the educational reforms of the *Republic*, I certainly do not mean to suggest that proponents of universal preschool, or free community college, or year-round schooling—or even all three—are intentionally setting out to remove children from their families or remake them in the way that Socrates describes, as a kind of mass socialization effort. Obviously, that is not the goal of most educational reformers. Nor do I wish to pretend that if only we left children in their homes instead of sending them off to school, then everything would be fine. Nevertheless, it is worth letting ourselves be brought up short for a moment by this unexpected resemblance. Surely it says something interesting about our age that a set of familiar, widely-shared educational proposals should turn out to display such a striking likeness to the scheme that my students have routinely regarded (at least until now) as outrageous, a scheme that even led the philosopher Karl Popper famously to place Plato among the enemies of the open society.

It is, of course, the danger of received wisdom, of ideas that get repeated over and over until we take them for granted, that we become blind to certain aspects of them and less able to see them in another light. Those received opinions are—to borrow from Plato again—the shadows on the walls of our own cave. The *Republic* illuminates that cave in this instance by the shock of recognition it provides, by suddenly allowing us to see familiar ideas for something quite different, and perhaps less appealing, than we imagined them to be. Even our best intentions and noblest motives do not always produce the desired outcomes; and even when they do, those outcomes sometimes turn out not to have been truly worth desiring in the first place. *What’s Wrong With the World* (originally published in 1910) contains a chapter entitled “The Outlawed Parent.” In it, Chesterton complains that “[t]he only persons who seem to have nothing to do with the education of the children are the parents” (170). One hopes that in our efforts to save the children, we do not arrive at that point without having ever understood the destination toward which our steps were heading.

**Peter Meilaender** is Professor of Political Science at Houghton College.

**Works Cited**


A Catholic and Lutheran Agenda for the Next Five Hundred Years

Joseph Schattauer Paillé

WE AREN'T SURE WHAT TO CALL IT. A celebration? A commemoration? Regardless, Lutherans and Catholics will mark the five-hundredth anniversary of the Reformation in 2017. Our uncertainty of what to call this year has not slowed down our event planning. Countless lectures, readings, and conferences are being planned across the United States and Germany. For Lutherans and Catholics alike, it promises to be an engaging and inspiring year. Yet a greater question remains: where will we go in 2018?

Over the past five decades, Lutherans and Catholics have made significant ecumenical advances. Our greatest success, The Joint Declaration on Justification, voiced agreement on the theological question which sparked the Reformation and was adopted by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the Lutheran World Federation in 1999. Next year will see the American publication of From Conflict to Communion, the latest product of Lutheran-Catholic dialogue. Yet the anniversary of the Reformation comes at a time of transition for the institutional ecumenical movement. While great progress is being made among theologians and church leaders, ecumenical institutions no longer enjoy the same influence they once had. Many in the pews wonder what another statement can accomplish.

The ecumenical movement is strongest not when issuing statements of theological accord but when engaging in a shared commitment to mission. Ecumenical statements are necessary but not sufficient for true church unity. Indeed, we would be wise to remember that the ecumenical movement is rooted in the missionary project of the nineteenth century, coming into its modern form out of Edinburgh's World Missionary Conference in 1910. While some think that the ecumenical progress of that era was no more than a logistical compromise to make missions more efficient or convenient, it actually came from a deeper conviction that a divided church betrayed the gospel of reconciliation that the missionaries preached. Missionaries could not preach that God had reconciled humanity to one another if they hadn't even been reconciled to their own Christian brothers and sisters. A shared commitment to mission made ecumenical unity a necessity.

Some may say that this “scandal of disunity” is no longer a burden on the church. We have become so used to denominationalism and disunity, they argue, that they are no longer a stumbling block to anyone. Some even claim that the shift of the church’s center of gravity toward the Global South proves that there is no need for mission. To make matters worse, mission has become akin to a four-letter word in many of our churches, something enlightened Christians don't do anymore. Yet the truth remains that our desperately needed ecumenical agreements will not bring Lutherans and Catholics into greater unity without a renewed attention to common mission.

For inspiration on how Lutherans and Catholics can engage in mission together, we would be well served by looking outside our own churches to the life and work of Presbyterian theologian, missionary, and bishop Lesslie Newbigin. In 1936, a young Newbigin was sent to Madras, India to serve as a missionary for the Church of Scotland. It soon became clear to Newbigin that the disunity of the church was stunting its ability to engage in mission. Reflecting on this experience in a series of lectures given in Glasgow in 1952, Newbigin noted that “when the Church
ceases to be one, or ceases to be missionary, it
contradicts its own nature.” Newbigin envisioned
a church that went beyond de facto denomina­tionalism toward a deeper organic unity. Seeking
a better way forward, Newbigin was integral in
the formation of the Church of South India, a
new church comprised of Anglican, Methodist,
Congregational, and Presbyterian churches.
After intense debate, particularly around the
role of bishops, the Church of South India was
founded in 1947, mere weeks after India gained

Lesslie Newbigin advocated for a
more eschatological understanding
of the church, emphasizing the
church’s calling to serve as a sign,
foretaste, and instrument of the
kingdom of God.

its independence. Newbigin served as one of the
Church of South India’s first bishops, a sign of
the ecumenical progress that had been made
within the Church of South India itself. Far from
being a mere ecumenical triumph, the Church of
South India has also been a success in its mis­
tion. Today it has over five million members and
is the second largest church in India, second only
to the Catholic Church.

The success of the Church of South India
would be enough to cement Newbigin’s legacy
as one of the twentieth century’s most important
missionaries and theologians, yet what happened
after he left India may be the most instructive for
Lutherans and Catholics today. In the mid-1970s,
Newbigin served as a professor of missiology and
ecumenism at Birmingham’s Selly Oaks Colleges.
After teaching for five years, Newbigin served
Winson Green United Reformed Church, a small
parish of twenty members in a derelict section of
Birmingham. In returning to England, Newbigin
was startled to find how the culture he had left
in the 1930s had become increasingly hostile to
the Christian faith. He found that the mission
field was no longer an ocean away but outside his
door. Newbigin analyzed and responded to this
new situation in Foolishness to the Greeks (1986)
criticized the attempt to create a more “reason­
able Christianity,” advocating instead for a more
eschatological understanding of the church,
emphasizing the church’s calling to serve as a
sign, foretaste, and instrument of the kingdom
of God.

These concerns were not limited to Newbigin’s
writing; they also manifested themselves in his
work as a pastor. Geoffrey Wainwright’s Lesslie
Newbigin: A Theological Life (2000) recalls how
Newbigin responded with the same zeal for cre­
tative proclamation that he had shown fifty years
earlier in India. Though church institutions were
too engrained to be realigned, Newbigin was
able to foster ecumenical partnership among
Pentecostal and black churches aimed at ask­
ing what the unity of the church meant for the
community of Winson Green. After race riots in
nearby Handsworth, for example, Newbigin orga­
nized church, municipal, and law enforcement
officials in community meetings. Newbigin’s
presence became so vital in the neighborhood
that even ten years after he left Winson Green
people who had never worshipped at his church
were still asking the church secretary about his
health.

Reflecting on the mission of the church,
Newbigin once noted that “the world provided
the agenda.” When the five-hundredth anniver­
sary of the Reformation is over, Lutherans and
Catholics will have to figure out what direction
our life together will take. The next five hun­
dred years have great potential for Catholic and
Lutheran unity, but our ecumenical progress
will only reach its potential when we commit
to greater mission together. It is time to let the
world write our agenda. ♦

Joseph Schattauer Paillé is a candidate
for ordination in the Evangelical Lutheran
Church in America and lives in New York City.
A PAPERCLIP

is like unto life itself,
any old mystic
tucked up in a bell tower
praying with chapped lips
and shuttered eyes can affirm

the sweet necessity to reach
out in order to be grasped by
something greater so as to
bind the pages of our days
together, the real power
coming from fashioned

curves and redirections, not
brute strength, the gentle tensed
kisses that keep all of us
from flying off the desk, the shelf,
becoming lost in the shuffle,

separated from one another
and blown into the valley below.

Albert Haley
Reviewed in this issue...

Rod Dreher’s How Dante Can Save Your Life

The Reading Cure

More works of literary criticism should be written with the kind of moral imagination exercised in Rod Dreher’s How Dante Can Save Your Life (Regan Arts, 2015). Dreher himself balks at calling his book “literary criticism,” preferring to use medically inspired terminology; words like “bibliotherapy” and “self-help” spring up throughout the book as self-identifying markers. Such therapeutic language translates for the contemporary reader the complicated, you might say medieval, act of reading on display throughout the book. In other words, Dreher practices an interactive reading of which Dante himself would have approved.

The striking title is meant to be taken literally. Heavily biographical, the book follows Dreher’s path from a potentially life threatening, stress-related condition to the way of wellness offered by Dante. In brief, an Epstein-Barr virus aggravated by stress incapacitated Dreher with chronic mononucleosis, a condition that makes the sufferer 33 percent more likely to contract lymphoma. Remarkably, the act of reading Dante’s masterwork, known in English as The Divine Comedy, proves to be his needed remedy.

The recovery comes not simply from an extended act of meditation, for which any long work of poetry or reflective prose might have served. No, Dreher needs Dante specifically, since reading Dante means direct application of Dante’s content to Dreher’s own life circumstances. The fact that The Divine Comedy charts an imagined journey through hell, purgatory, and heaven does not dissuade Dreher from finding parallels with his own life. Indeed, the otherworldly setting might make it easier for him to relate. Dante’s book works like a pebble dropped in a pond, sending ripples through Dreher’s day-to-day experiences. Beyond mere entertainment on the one hand or mere “how-to” on the other, reading Dante becomes a fully immersive, life-changing act for him.

Dreher is known as a proponent of local, intentional living, so medieval Italian poetry is not his usual stomping grounds. In previous writings like Crunchy Cons (2006) and The Little Way of Ruthie Leming (2013), he championed the virtues of family and community, and his writing style reflects this disposition. An amiable and conversational prose characterizes this new book as it limns Southern life and family with a raconteur’s love for the idiosyncratic. How Dante is premised on Dreher’s own attempts to live locally. In the course of his career as a student and as a journalist, Dreher had separated himself from his Louisiana upbringing. Due in large part to the untimely death of his sister, Dreher relocated in 2011 to his birthplace of West Feliciana, Louisiana, in order to be closer to family. Only after the move, and contrary to his intentions, does Dreher discover that living around family has an acute effect upon his health.

As much as this book is about Dreher’s personal story, it is also a book about the value of storytell-
ing, and how stories affect the way we live. Upon returning home, Dreher had placed himself in the role of the prodigal son. Yet, unlike in the parable, tension continues to mount between him and his family, particularly with his father, which frustrates Dreher's self-narrative. He does not receive a lavish welcome; there is no fatted calf. Instead of a jovial feast, he meets with illness. This is where Dante enters the scene, where Dreher discovers that his case demands a new narrative.

A reader who has never experienced the decentering influence of a book might well wonder at such a turn of events: How can a seven-hundred-year-old poem have such a profound effect on a twenty-first-century reader? Dante's *Divine Comedy* is, among other things, a work of speculative fiction. Like today's speculative genres, it speaks more about the conditions of the present than about the future, since it extrapolates present concerns forward in time. Because Dante's vision of the future is of the afterlife, its present conditions have the potential to encompass times outside of Dante's own day and age. Unlike, say, a future set in 1984, a year that came and went, Dante's future is set perpetually before the living. Dreher finds in Dante a kindred spirit because Dante means to speak universally about "our life."

As Dreher journeys with Dante, he employs the language of therapy to explain his act of reading, because he wants other pilgrims to join him. The concept of bibliotherapy might offer readers some understanding of what Dante means to Dreher, but the concept nevertheless remains limited. Therapy speaks to the way a text can lead to wellness, but it does not necessarily indicate the moral stakes involved. Dreher's illness required treatment of the will, not just the mind. In a letter most likely written by Dante himself, we find another means of understanding Dreher's method of reading:

> It should be understood that there is not just a single sense in *[The Divine Comedy]*: it might rather be called polysemous, that is, having several senses. For the first sense is that which is contained in the letter, while there is another which is contained in what is signified by the letter. The first is called literal, the second called allegorical, or moral or anagogical. (trans., Robert Haller)

By applying Dante's journey to his own life circumstances, Dreher intuits that a literal reading of Dante must entail another kind of reading, an allegorical reading, which includes a moral reading. Medieval exegetes called the attempt to draw moral direction from the Bible "tropology," assuming that a proper interpretation of scripture will provoke formative change in the reader, and Dante famously encouraged this hermeneutic for reading his own writings. This is certainly an audacious claim, but for hundreds of years readers have borne witness to its legitimacy.

As Dreher journeys with Dante, he employs the language of therapy to explain his act of reading, because he wants other pilgrims to join him.

Moral, or tropological, readings may be lost in the larger category of allegory, as most attention to Dante's work has dwelled on allegory in either positive or negative ways. What Dreher offers is a specifically tropological reaction. Contemplating hell, purgatory, and heaven, he repeatedly applies Dante's text to his own moral actions, often prompting acts of confession. When Dante meets two rival Epicureans, Farinata degli Uberti and Cavalcante de' Cavalcanti, in the circle of hell assigned to heretics, Dreher reflects on the similar tensions existing between him and his father. The two Epicureans, related by the marriage of their children, dwell forever in mutual derision in the same sepulcher, thinking exclusively of their own family's worth. Faranata's first question to Dante reveals the self-importance both Epicureans display: "Who were your ancestors?" The irony, of course, is that Faranata holds on to the belief that only ancestry bequeaths dignity, all the while burning within a
tomb. To Dreher’s shock, it was the prioritizing of family over greater goods that became part of the heretics’ torment. Dreher sees the same misplaced priorities within his family: “We loved good things—family and place—too much,” and only after seeing his condition displayed by the damned does he recognize the need to alter his behavior.

Such an emphasis on the proper ordering of goods structures Dante’s entire vision of the afterlife, and Dreher finds various applications to his life in the whole gamut of sins on display in *Inferno*, even in the deepest pits of hell. Reading through the *Divine Comedy*, Dreher thus performs the ascetic practice of *kenosis*, of emptying one’s self. Only after complete humility is his life ready to be rebuilt, a task which he admits is ongoing. In the next stage of Dante’s journey, *Purgatorio*, Dreher skirts debate about the theology of purgatory, focusing instead on the trials of everyday life. He attempts, along with the penitent sinners being purged, to reshape the disordered goods in his life. In *Paradiso*, he glimpses the completion of this life’s journey, in which all things are ordered toward God, who, in Dreher’s self-scrutinizing words, is “the only safe harbor and our only true home.”

The resulting narrative is undoubtedly told from the standpoint of Dreher’s faith, yet he seeks to be as ecumenical as possible. He reads a medieval Roman Catholic text, he is Eastern Orthodox, raised Methodist, and his therapeutic language attempts to secularize the moral understanding he receives. Accordingly, Dante’s wide vision of the afterlife offers the hope of a future community where those separated by divisions may be united. Looking forward beyond present divisions, seeing wholeness as a future condition rather than a present one, becomes part of Dreher’s understanding.

An important implication of Dreher’s book is that great literature can offer this road to wellness when other avenues may be less effective. His reading of Dante works in concert with visits to a therapist and to his Orthodox priest, yet his progress is articulated by what he learns from Dante. The psychological and spiritual benefits presented by therapy and religious instruction are made more accessible to Dreher through the images and ideas dramatized by Dante’s narrative. In *On Beauty and Being Just* (2001), the literary theorist Elaine Scarry makes a similar case, that beauty in literature can reorder our passions by displacing the ego. *How Dante* enlivens theory with personal experience, while at the same time presenting a specifically Christian trajectory to life’s fulfillment.

If this use of literature risks sounding utilitarian, it becomes useful only inasmuch as one is able to avoid treating literature as a tool. Only in merging with Dante’s journey does Dreher gradually move toward wellness. The understanding of literature that best fits Dreher’s experience is one of the oldest: that literature’s function is to teach and to delight. The truths that Dreher uncovers about himself, his family, and God are taught simultaneously with the complex enjoyments of a poetic story.

Again and again, the book highlights the power of narrative to provoke action, and it is perhaps weakest when it attempts to look like a self-help book (for example, the takeaway boxes provided at the end of each chapter). It is in its storytelling and in its appreciation of Dante’s storytelling that the book shines. Just as Dreher’s personal story gradually unfolds over the course of reading Dante, so his language of genre develops away from the vague domains of self-help. Near the end of his reading of the *Inferno*, Dreher offers a distinction emphasized in the Orthodox faith. He explains the difference between the idol and the icon: an idol becomes a god in itself, pointing no further, while icons point to a good beyond themselves. More so than the language of therapy, this terminology suits how Dreher understands Dante, how he wants Dante to be understood. In Dreher’s understanding, *The Divine Comedy* is iconic.

Dreher’s book is a fascinating example of how life-changing a good story can be. But dwelling too long on the theoretical implications of the book risks forgetting that, with works of literary art, the teaching should not be disassociated from the delight. If a reader were to approach Dante only as palliative medicine, Dreher’s point would have been lost. In an age of therapies, one must sometimes learn to enjoy what is good. Dreher’s book offers this guidance.

**Gabriel Haley** is Assistant Professor of English at Concordia University, Nebraska.

In the Brauer Museum's current groundbreaking exhibition of Japanese Friendship Dolls, featuring original scholarship and an accompanying full color publication, curator Terry Kita presents the incredible story of the Friendship Dolls from Japan of the 1920s, created as part of a cultural exchange between Japan and the United States. The exchange of dolls at that time between Japan and the US was largely initiated by missionary Sidney Gulick, whose grandson Denny was a consultant and lender to the exhibition; in addition, Denny and his wife Frances donated Miss Chosen to the Brauer’s collection. Five of these beautiful dolls are on view, with four of them on loan from other US museums. Also included in the exhibition are supporting materials drawn from the collection of Ruth Ruege and pressed wood, glass eyes, human hair, silk kimono and split-toed socks (tabi), brocade belt (obi). Gift of Denny and Frances Gulick. Brauer Museum of Art, 2013.03.

Miss Chosen has a label on her back that establishes her maker as Hōryūsai and a photograph taken in Tokyo in 1927 that establishes her identity as the doll representing Korea. Miss Chosen wears a long-sleeved (furisode) kimono of the sort suitable for the Seven-Five-Three Festival (shichi-go-san), which celebrates children reaching those ages. Miss Chosen has high clogs (pokkuri geta), which have a small brass bell in a hollow inside to ward off evil by ringing when walking.

Submissions Guidelines

What We Publish: The Cresset publishes essays, reviews, and poetry, not fiction. Essays that we publish generally are not opinion pieces but expository, personal, or exploratory essays. We will, on occasion, consider interviews or selected other genres. Almost any subject is possible. We are highly selective about personal essays of faith experience and about homilies. The editor reviews all manuscripts and, when necessary, solicits opinions from members of an Editorial Board, consisting of faculty members at Valparaiso University.

Guidelines for Authors: 1. Our readership is educated, most with some church connection, most frequently Lutheran. Articles should be aimed at general readers interested in religious matters. 2. The Cresset is not a theological journal, but a journal addressing matters of import to those with some degree of theological interest and commitment. Authors are encouraged to reflect upon the religious implications of their subject. 3. Style and spelling are governed, in most cases, by The Chicago Manual of Style and Webster's New International Dictionary. 4. We do accept unsolicited manuscripts; however, before submitting a manuscript, you may want to contact the editor at cresset@valpo.edu about the suitability of your topic for the journal. Our review columns (film, popular culture, music, and so forth) are usually supplied by regular columnists. 5. The preferred method of submission is in Microsoft Word for Windows format. Email your file to cresset@valpo.edu. Or you may send your manuscript via USPS to: The Editor, The Cresset, Valparaiso University, 1300 Chapel Drive, Valparaiso, IN 46383. 6. Poetry submissions should be sent via USPS. Poetry submissions via email will not be accepted. 7. The use of notes is discouraged. Notes of supporting citations should be placed in parentheses in the text, listing: last name of the author, year of publication, and page numbers where appropriate, e.g., (Wright 1934, 232). 8. In a separate section entitled "Works Cited," list alphabetically by author (and, within author, by year of publication) all items that are cited in the text. Provide complete bibliographical information, including author's first name, publisher, and place and date of publication. Examples:


On the Poets

Aaron Brown is the author of the poetry chapbook Winnower (2013), as well as the novella Bound (2012), both published by Wipf and Stock. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in Tupelo Quarterly, Literary Bohemian, Ruminant, and Dappled Things, among others.

John Estes is author of Kingdom Come (C&R Press, 2011) and two chapbooks: Breakfast with Blake at the Laocoön (Finishing Line Press, 2007) and Swerve (Poetry Society of America, 2009). His work has appeared in Tin House, Gettysburg Review, Southern Review, and elsewhere.

Stephen Kampa's first book, Cracks in the Invisible, won the 2010 Hollis Summers Poetry Prize and the 2011 Gold Medal in Poetry from the Florida Book Awards. His poems have also been awarded the Theodore Roethke Prize, first place in the River Styx International Poetry Contest, and four Pushcart nominations.

Albert Haley is writer in residence and Professor of English at Abilene Christian University in Abilene, Texas. His poems have appeared in Rattle, Rock and Sling, Christianity and Literature, and other publications, and have twice been nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

Catherine Abbey Hodges's work has appeared or is forthcoming in The Southern Review, Christian Century, Rock and Sling, and Verse Daily; her chapbook All the While was published by Finishing Line Press, and she is finishing work on a full-length collection, Instead of Sadness.
Curated by Terry Kita, PhD

In this groundbreaking exhibition featuring original scholarship and a full color publication, Curator Kita presents the incredible story of the Friendship Dolls from Japan of the early 1920s. Five of these beautiful dolls are on view, including the Brauer Museum of Art's own doll, Miss Chosen. Also included in the exhibition are supporting materials drawn from the collection of Ruth Ruege and Denny and Frances Gulick.

Wehling and McGill Galleries

August 18 – December 13, 2015

The Brauer Museum of Art
VALPARAISO UNIVERSITY