Christianity Is a Spirituality
*Thomas Cathcart*

The 1998 North-Central Iowa Spring Break Blizzard Tour
*Nathaniel Lee Hansen*

A Seed of Life
*Joel Kurz*

A Short History of Hair
*Gary Fincke*

Courageous Leadership
*Peter Kerry Powers*

VERSE

Radio Time
*J. T. Ledbetter*

Thanks
*Joe Martin Ricke*

Civility
*Brett Foster*

VALPARAISO UNIVERSITY
thecresset.org
Vol. 79, No. 2

Kiyoshi Nagai was a Japanese artist whose vibrant prints in the sosaku-hanga style used highly abstracted subjects to create works full of joy and life. The red blanket in this piece unites mother and child in a wonderful, heartwarming way, while the blue of the bird optically vibrates against the red background. This fine example of the artist’s work was a gift from Ruth A. Ruege who has given the Brauer Museum of Art her vast and varied collection of Japanese prints, greatly enhancing the overall permanent collection.

---

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.
ESAYS

Thomas Cathcart  6  Christianity Is a Spirituality
Nathaniel Lee Hansen  11  The 1998 North-Central Iowa Spring Break Blizzard Tour
Joel Kurz  15  A Seed of Life: The Legacy of Hugo Curran
Gary Fincke  21  A Short History of Hair

COLUMNS

Peter Kerry Powers  26  Courageous Leadership: A Meditation for Epiphany
Josh Langhoff  30  Copiers and Copyrights: Renewing Worship's Music
Dyana Herron  34  The Tricks of Thieves, Witches, and Poets: Hannah Faith Notess's The Multitude
Charles Andrews  37  Learning to Live with Ghosts: Vera Brittain's Testament of Youth on Film
Jennifer Forness  41  Finally the Star: Introducing Darlene Love
Rev. Thomas C. Willadsen  45  The Joyful Task of Teaching
Albert Louis Zambone  47  On and Off the Shadow Campus
H. David Baer  52  A Tale of Two World Views
Harold K. Bush  54  What's So "Personal" About the Essay?

BOOKS REVIEWED

Joseph Epstein's A Literary Education  54
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

On Feasting and Filling

As I write this—a few days before Thanksgiving with the season’s first snow falling outside—I feel unready for what is coming: “The Holidays,” our annual ritual of feasting and filling ourselves, a time to gather with family and friends and exchange gifts, to enjoy office parties and winter carnivals. It is a good time, all of it. It brings much needed joy and light to these grim days of early winter.

As much as I enjoy this season, every year it leaves me unsettled. There is so much to do, but so little time to take it all in. There is always another present to buy and wrap, another party to get ready for, another cookie to eat. In the few moments when I am not either too busy or too exhausted to think about such things, I find myself wondering whatever happened to Advent, the Christian season of penitence and fasting.

Christians know that this season is about so much more or, perhaps more accurately, so much less. The season of Advent is the time to prepare for the Nativity, the birth of the Christ Child, the gift of God’s son who takes on human form to bring joy and light everlasting into our world. And the Gospel that comes into the world with the Christ Child is not one of feasting and filling. As Thomas Cathcart writes in “Christianity Is a Spirituality,” Jesus does not teach us to fill ourselves with things of the world; instead, he calls us to empty ourselves, to have faith in a good beyond ourselves, to perform acts of love, generosity, and forgiveness. The Savior who comes to us in the Nativity is not the anticipated conquering king but a frail and needy newborn child. He comes not to give us what we want in life or to satisfy our every desire, but to show us our own frailty and neediness.

There is no more basic human experience than to take measure of our lives: to ask what we are living for, how what we are accomplishing in life is significant. But the coming of a savior who teaches “…the last will be first, and the first will be last” (Matt. 20:16) stands our answers to these questions on their heads. This changes everything: the values by which we measure ourselves, the goals for which we strive. Two contributors to this issue share stories about the experience of having our ideas about who we are and what we want out of life upended. In “The 1998 North-Central Iowa Spring Break Blizzard Tour,” Nathaniel Lee Hansen describes what sometimes happens to young people who start to feel pious and self-important. And in “A Short History of Hair,” Gary Fincke tells us about a young man learning how to live a life that is worth something, both in his own eyes and in those of his elders. So how then are we to live? In “A Seed of Life,” Joel Kurz offers memories of his friend Hugo Curran, a forester who learned that his task was not to dominate and control but to serve and sustain. Likewise, we must follow Jesus’ call to empty ourselves, to stop worrying about our own accomplishments, to live our lives as servants.

So enjoy this year’s holidays. Treasure the time together with your loved ones, and go ahead and let yourself have just one more cookie. But remember, this child who comes at Christmas changes everything. And we are not ready for what is coming. Prepare ye the way.

—JPO

Editor’s Note: We at The Cresset were saddened to hear of the passing of Wheaton College’s Brett Foster who recently lost his fight with cancer. In recent years, Brett has become a frequent contributor to our pages, and for many years before that he has been a friend and mentor to our poetry editor Marci Rae Johnson. Just a few weeks ago, we were pleased to accept another of the many beautiful poems he has generously shared with us, and now we are honored to publish it in this issue. Please be sure to read “Civility” on page twenty-five and to remember Brett’s family, friends, and colleagues in your prayers.
Christianity Is a Spirituality

Thomas Cathcart

Before there were Christian “beliefs,” there was Christian spirituality. Before the council of bishops at Nicea decided that Jesus Christ is the second person of the Trinity, there was Christian spirituality. Before the Council of Chalcedon decided that Jesus Christ has two natures, divine and human, there was Christian spirituality. Indeed, before the title “Son of God” was ascribed to Jesus of Nazareth, there was Christian spirituality.

On that first Easter, the extraordinary experiences of Jesus’s followers were spiritual experiences. Apart from how any of them chose to put it into words, the experience itself was a spiritual “shaking of the foundations,” not an empirical observation or a metaphysical theory.

Because the church dates Christianity from Pentecost, it would be anachronistic to call Jesus’s own spirituality, or that of his earliest followers, “Christian,” but the spirituality on view in the oldest strands of the first three gospels is at the very least proto-Christian spirituality; it too is at the heart of the Gospel.

If we are to come to terms with Christianity, it is crucial to understand that it was first—and is foremost—a spirituality. Otherwise, it is impossible to make sense of the experience and commitment of the first followers, years before there were “beliefs” about Jesus. Likewise, without a grasp of the radical spirituality of Christianity, it is impossible to make sense of how, in our skeptical age, people can still feel their lives turned upside down by the power of the Gospel.

There are many who would say, “On the contrary, the explanation is simple: there is no sense to be made. Religion is nonsense.” This reduces Christians to subrational creatures and chalks up their odd behavior to primitive strivings for certainty or divine handholding or a desperate desire for immortality. No doubt, there are people who partially fit that description, and perhaps most of us fit it sometimes, but a few weeks spent in nearly any church in the world would expose the silliness of this stereotype as a universal explanation for Christian commitment. An anthropologist who made such a visit would see people spiritually centered in prayer or sacrament, spiritually aroused by preaching or the reading of scripture, spiritually expressive in song and litany and fellowship.

The recognition that Christianity is a spirituality dissolves many of the questions that have plagued us—adherents and non-adherents alike—since at least the Enlightenment. It provides a common universe of discourse that enables us all to talk to each other, instead of past each other. It allows us to accept and affirm the totality of science. And probably, most importantly for the peace and survival of our species, it gives us a non-tribal basis of identity.

People do not generally have their lives changed by “beliefs,” except in the sense that these beliefs become the dangerous foundation of tribal identification and exclusion. Critics like Christopher Hitchens and Sam Harris are right about the enormity of that danger. But, tribalism aside, we do not generally develop radically new attitudes toward other people or toward
ourselves or toward our own mortality because of theological argument or ethical doctrine. Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism are not primarily belief systems. They are visions of a path, a way of being-in-the-world. And, more than that, they are described by their adherents as sources of spiritual empowerment that have transformed them so that they can (sometimes) follow that path and can (sometimes) "put on" that way of being-in-the-world.

The late cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz defined a religion as "(1) a set of symbols (2) which acts to establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men [sic] (3) by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic" (Geertz 1973, 90). When Geertz looked at the religion of Native Americans, for example, he saw first a spirituality—moods and motivations—centered on their experience of the ways of nature, with a secondary conceptual structure that expresses and supports that spirituality. It is my contention that Christians would profit from looking at Christianity in the same way.

Spirituality is often misunderstood. It is not something that some people (for example, Christians or Jews or Buddhists) have and other people (for example, logical positivists or atheists) do not. Everyone has a spirituality, a way of seeing the world and being in the world. Everyone has "powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations," and everyone has a "conception of a general order of existence," perhaps articulated, perhaps not—a basic worldview or stance from which he or she sees reality. Why, for example, is it important to some atheists to critique Christianity? It is not generally because they are nihilists. It is more likely that they are motivated by a very positive spirit. They find Christianity contrary to that spirit, and they are understandably offended. Perhaps they are motivated by the spirit of love of objective truth or the spirit of honoring empirical evidence or the spirit of unmasking hypocrisy or the spirit of ridding the world of outdated metaphysics. Whatever it is that motivates them, the fact is something does. Spirituality is simply another word for what motivates or animates us.

To be Christian is simply to say, “What animates me is life in Christ.” Every Christian knows this at some level. We may argue about fine points of theology or ethics or become defensive with other Christians or non-Christians about our beliefs, but every Christian knows down deep that anyone who says, “What animates me is life in Christ,” is his Christian brother or sister, and all the rest is footnotes. And every Christian knows, or should know, that there are non-Christians in the world who are animated by a kindred spirit, even though they may not identify it as having anything to do with Jesus of Nazareth, and that this spirit too must be honored.

This is not to dismiss all theology or all doctrine. The motive for much theology is the conviction that someone else got it wrong in a way that distorts or distracts from the real spirit of the Gospel. The Nicene Creed, for example, came about because the bishops saw that Arius’s teaching of the ontological gap between God and Christ made worship of Christ idolatrous. The twentieth-century theologian Paul Tillich has modestly said that the value of apologetic theology is that it may remove a barrier to faith, presumably one created by other (perhaps tacit) theology. But theology—or belief, if you will—is not the essence of Christianity. The essence is being grasped and animated by the spirit of Christ.

Theology has its place. In Geertz’s language, the "conception of a general order of existence," a Weltanschauung or world-outlook, embodies and expresses our spirituality. Because it is the
framework that determines how we think about everything else, we had best not get it wrong. Still, if we only "get it right" and lose the spirit, we will have become noisy gongs and clanging cymbals.

Some would say that Christianity is at bottom an ethical philosophy that can stand on its own, supported by reason, without spiritual trappings. That is wrong on two counts. First, loving your enemies is contrary to reason. Secondly, as a free-standing ethical imperative, it is impossible to follow. "No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit; for each tree is known by its own fruit. Figs are not gathered from thorns, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. The good person out of the good treasure of the heart produces good, and the evil person out of evil treasure produces evil; for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks" (Lk. 6: 43-45, NRSV).

The church is becoming increasingly aware that Christian growth occurs via spiritual "formation," not catechetics. Just as literary theory is no substitute for literature and cultural studies are no substitute for culture, "beliefs" are no substitute for the transformation that occurs when one is grasped by the spirit. And yet for some reason most public dialogue is about what we "believe." We divide people into believers and non-believers, rather than lovers and non-lovers or forgivers and non-forgivers. As Tillich said, Jesus is accepted as the Christ because—and only because—he brings the "New Being." Period (Tillich 1957, 118ff.). The other Paul put it this way: "If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" (2 Cor 5:17, NRSV)

**Kenosis**

At the very heart of Christian spirituality is *kenosis*, the New Testament Greek term for emptying. Paul uses a cognate of the word *kenosis* in his letter to the Philippians: Christ Jesus "emptied himself, taking the form of a slave... and humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross" (Phil. 2: 7-8, NRSV). In a world that then and now prizes filling ourselves—with our accomplishments, our power, our self-esteem, our shrewdness, our possessions, our learning, our piety, our number of Facebook friends—Jesus espoused a spirituality of emptying ourselves. Paul says that he too had once filled himself with all these things—especially his own righteousness and zealotry—but now "I regard them as rubbish" (Phil. 3:8, NRSV).

This point of view was radical and countercultural then, and it remains so today. It made Friedrich Nietzsche understandably furious. He called it a transvaluation of all values, a sellout of all the noble values of the ancient world, a despicable dismissal of the natural human striving for greatness. Worse, he attributed the appeal of Christianity to petty resentment of the strong and noble by the weak and pathetic. Too small-minded and cowardly to compete with their superiors, the weak can feel good about themselves only by labeling the strong "bad" and themselves "good."

Of all the critics of Christianity, Nietzsche deserves the greatest respect, because he "gets" Christianity. He understands that Christianity is primarily a spirituality, not a metaphysic. More specifically, he understands that Christianity is a spirituality of *kenosis*, and he despises it for precisely that reason. Christians have nothing to say to Nietzsche other than to say that sometimes our motives for self-surrender are as he describes, but sometimes they are not.

Of the nine blessings that introduce Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, at least six of them are about *kenosis*. "Blessed are the poor in spirit." "Blessed are the meek." "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.” “Blessed are the merciful.” “Blessed are the pure in heart.” “Blessed are the peacemakers.” It is unclear whether a seventh, "Blessed are those who mourn," is about adopting a spirit of *kenosis* or simply a prophecy that those who in fact are mourning now will no longer be mourning "at the end of the age" (Matt. 5: 3–12, NRSV).

All of the ethical demands of Christianity are grounded in the spirit of *kenosis*. Agape, selfless love, is an emptying, as is forgiveness. Generosity stems from *kenosis*, as does gratitude. The prayer,
"Thy kingdom come," is kenosis, and so is the prayer, "Not my will but thine be done."

Psychologist Richard Beck attributes our human desire to fill ourselves up to our terror of death, which is the ultimate emptying. Given our mortality, we are driven to "make something" of ourselves, to enhance our self-esteem, to succeed at something, to make our lives "count" (Beck 2014). Beck revives Ernest Becker's notion that the purpose of a culture is to create "immortality systems," ways of being that give us the illusion of immortality (Becker 1973). There are groups to join, cultural attitudes to adopt, positions to be taken, all of which insulate us, with greater or lesser success, from the threat of meaninglessness. Meaninglessness, in turn, owes its power and urgency to our fear of death.

It is fascinating that Becker's critique of culture is precisely the critique we often hear of Christianity: namely, that it is an irrational immortality system, a wish-fulfillment strategy driven by our fear of meaninglessness and death. Becker, and I would suppose Beck, would partially agree with that assessment—insofar as Christianity is often a "filling up" (with dogma, self-righteousness, self-esteem) rather than an emptying of ourselves.

For Beck and Becker, this human striving for self-esteem is ultimately self-defeating. In the end, we will all die, regardless of our ego strategies, and this death will be totally meaningless, at least in the usual terms of accounting. So why does kenosis offer any advantage? Isn't emptying ourselves to confront the final emptiness of death a bit like practicing breathing water to avoid drowning? Why is it not just another act of bad faith, another self-deluding attempt to provide meaning in a meaningless universe? Christianity says that the answer is that at the heart of kenosis lies affirmation of an alternative reality, symbolized variously as resurrection, new life, the "kingdom of God" or the "will of God." No amount of philosophy or theology or belief, however, can produce that affirmation. As Tillich says, we cannot grasp it. It must grasp us.

Resurrection is not primarily a doctrine or belief. It is a spiritual reality for you or me, or it is not. Tillich used to tell his classes, "Don't ask what the New York Times photographer would have captured on that first Easter; it is beside the point." He meant that, if Christ is alive for you now, it doesn't matter what the photographer's camera would have revealed; and, if Christ is not alive for you now, it doesn't matter either. We cannot grasp the power of the resurrection in a belief or a doctrine or, God forbid, as a scientific fact. It must grasp us.

**If Christ is alive for you now, it doesn't matter what the photographer's camera would have revealed; and, if Christ is not alive for you now, it doesn't matter either.**

**Santayana: A Philosopher for Our Time**

"Thus every living and healthy religion has a marked idiosyncrasy. Its power consists in its special and surprising message and in the bias which that revelation gives to life. The vistas it opens and the mysteries it propounds are another world to live in; and another world to live in—whether we expect ever to pass wholly over into it or no—is what we mean by having a religion" (Santayana 1905, 5).

George Santayana wrote *Reason in Religion* over a hundred years ago, but its moment may be imminent. In a time when religion, taken literally, has become easy sport for satirists, Santayana's work may help us see the proper role of religion in relation to life.

Santayana described himself as an atheist, at least in the usual sense, and has been described by others as an "aesthetic Catholic," who rejects the dogma and moralizing of the church, but loves the poetic power that "vitalizes the mind." He calls Protestants "northern barbarians" and holds them chiefly responsible for the literalism of Christian beliefs and the destruction of Christianity's poetry. But Santayana is more than an "aesthetic Catholic," if by that we mean someone who derives superficial pleasure from the
poetry of Christianity. He is an aesthetic Catholic in the sense that he sees both art and religion as central to life and calls them both humanizing forms of reason. He thought that religion loses its way, however, “whenever its symbolic rightness is taken for scientific truth” (Santayana 1905, 8).

A question for our time is whether the church can disentangle itself from its literalistic and moralistic past and become more open to the Spirit, which “blows where it chooses, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes” (John 3:8, NRSV). It is not an easy question. As Tillich has said, we cannot simply leap back over two thousand years of Christian thought to become contemporary with Christ, as Kierkegaard imagined. The very language in which we think has been formed by those two thousand years of history (Tillich 1967, 471). What we can do is to always listen for the Spirit and be open to its word. In the end, we will necessarily make concrete judgements about how to think and how to act, but perhaps we can come to those judgements by trying to discern which way the Spirit is blowing. Perhaps we can even come to realize that all our judgements are provisional and that they are always open to correction by the Spirit. Perhaps we can recover the truth that Christianity is at bottom a spirituality.

Thomas Cathcart is a Lutheran layman in Red Hook, New York. He studied philosophy at Harvard College and theology at the University of Chicago, Bangor Theological Seminary, Boston College, and McCormick Theological Seminary. He is the co-author, with Daniel Klein, of the New York Times best-seller Plato and a Platypus Walk into a Bar: Understanding Philosophy through Jokes (2007). His essays have appeared in The Cresset and Theology Today.

Works Cited


Santayana, George. Reason in Religion [1905]. In Works of George Santayana, Volume VII,
The 1998 North-Central Iowa Spring Break Blizzard Tour

Nathaniel Lee Hansen

One way to describe the tour is like this: almost everything went wrong, almost nothing went right. If we had been seeking a sign from the Lord as to whether this Christian rock band was, in fact, His calling on our lives, we would have observed that the events of these three days created an eight-foot snow bank that featured an ALL CAPS, bold-faced, underlined, italicized, red NO spray painted against the white pile.

But we weren't looking for any kind of sign, at least I wasn't. The offer of the tour was the sign. While other college students in Minnesota and across the country plotted balmy debauchery and revelry, the four of us in Incarnate Son (Mike, Matt, Jen, and me) were going on tour. For the Lord! We weren't traveling just anywhere to win the lost; we were booked to play two shows in North-Central Iowa towns of 4,000 and 2,000 people, respectively. What better spring-break destination than these sub-tropical hot spots in mid-March? Three nights at a bed and breakfast, meals, and $200 in exchange for playing a Sunday-night show at a local high school and a Monday-night show at a newly created teen center. We had hit the big time.

On that Friday afternoon as spring break begins, Jen (our keyboard player and other vocalist) and I make several trips across the Southwestern Minnesota campus to my station wagon, hauling guitar cases, amps, mic stands, equipment bags, and a keyboard. I suspect others see a holy aura around us. I feel self-important because I am important. I am beginning to live my dream. This is a foretaste of the feast to come.

I imagine the conversations that might transpire once classes resume:

Other student: So how was your break, what do you do? Was it sunny?
Me: I went on tour with my band, Incarnate Son. We played two shows to two packed houses.
Other student: I just lay on the beach at Corpus Christi for a week.
Me: We really ministered to the communities. We saw lives changed, and people were set free. It was awesome!
Other student: I drank so much beer and had some casual sex, but now just hearing about your ministry makes me want to repent of those things and kneel down right here in this snowbank and accept Christ. Will you pray with me?
I hope the weekend's shows will lead to more shows, to more opportunities. We must play more gigs, play in more places if we want this Christian rock band to gather enough runway speed to take off, so that the layovers between gigs won't be weeks or months. I would be delighted to play shows every weekend, so I view this tour (to switch the metaphor) as a watershed moment, a moment when the water's momentum will (ideally) wash us up to higher ground.

On Friday evening, the four of us gathered at Mike's parents' country house (our usual rehearsal space since high school), and we are forced to acknowledge the first potential problem. There is talk of a winter storm, March being the worst month for blizzards in the upper Midwest. We are nervous, memories surfacing of our two-gig weekend in November 1996 when we drove three hours in an ice storm that ended up being one of
the worst in Minnesota’s history. We run through song after song, afterward attempting to relax by playing pool, taking our minds off the weather (as much as we can). Jen says she isn’t feeling well, but in the bluntness required for being in a group with three guys says, “Don’t worry, it’s just my period. I’ll be better by tomorrow night.” We call it good at 10:30 (early for us) and agree to meet back at nine on Saturday morning to final-

He tells me about the promotion: the posters around the communities, the write-ups in the local newspapers, even a mention on an area radio station. More than that, souls are at stake.

ize the set list, run through each song once, and load the vehicles. That night, I doubt any of us sleeps very well.

On Saturday morning, I pick up Matt from his parent’s house (just two blocks from my folks’ place), and as we drive the quiet three miles out to Mike’s house, our duffle bags packed and ready for the trip, the sky is the heavy, low-hanging gray we fear. None of us drinks coffee yet, so we rely on cans of Cherry Coke and Mountain Dew. I use a spiral notebook, and we hash out Sunday night’s setlist, arranging ten songs in the first set and six in the second. Tim Rogan will preach between our two sets. We run through each song, in order, while trying to ignore the obvious changes in the weather. By the time we finish, and we are reviewing transitions between songs, the snow falls steadily against the backdrop of barren trees that line the hill descending down to the river valley. We are native Minnesotans, so snow, by default, should not necessarily prevent the show from going on.

But now the second problem surfaces, a problem directly related to the first. While Matt and I begin unplugging cables, Mike leaves for a few minutes and then returns. His shoulder-length hair sways as he shakes his head. “Mom and Dad say I can’t go.”

“Why?” I ask in a voice too loud and too accusatory, but I know the answer: the weather. He is driving one of their vehicles. I also think, we all have to go, or we can’t go at all. Before I attempt to strong-arm the situation, I announce that I’m going to call Dave, the promoter.

Mike says to go ahead, but that it probably won’t do any good.

“How’s the weather down there?” I begin, unsure about how this conversation will proceed.

“Fine. Why?”

“It’s snowing here. There’s talk about a blizzard. We’re not sure if we should leave.”

“Well, it’s not snowing here,” he says, his reply so quick that I don’t expect it, that I am not prepared with what I’ll say next. “It’s fine,” he adds.

“Here’s the thing.” And I inform him that Mike’s parents might not let him go.

Dave chuckles, yet only for a moment.

It sounds ridiculous, I’m sure. A drummer in a band not being allowed to go to a gig. Dave keeps circling back to the fact that the weather is fine there. “And Tim Rogan is coming from Ireland. This is a big outreach to the area and especially to the youth.” He tells me about the promotion: the posters around the communities, the write-ups in the local newspapers, even a mention on an area radio station. More than that, souls are at stake. I know this. We know this. We have an agreement, but we haven’t signed anything; there isn’t even a contract.

I am conflicted and tell him I’ll call back soon.

I hand up the ivory-colored phone and stare at my three bandmates as they sit in the basement rec room, walls lined with VHS tapes and Nintendo games. There is no discernable joy or excitement in their faces. Another obvious sign to which I am oblivious.

“He says it’s fine there. That we shouldn’t have any problem getting there.” It is only a two-hour drive.

“We should just cancel,” Mike says, sullen.

“No way,” I say. “We have two shows. This is a big chance.”
Matt is quiet as always, and Jen doesn't speak. This is a battle of wills between Mike and me, and I am trying to get my way. The show must go on.

"Fine. I'll try talking to my folks again." Mike's frustration and lack of interest should be another sign to me, but it isn't, because I want to win the battle.

"Tell them it's fine there."

He leaves the room to negotiate. And now I wonder what his parents said to him before, what they say to him now.

An hour later, however, we are loaded up in two vehicles and trekking to North-Central Iowa.

The storm lands Saturday night while we are holed up in a bed and breakfast that resembles a Thomas Kinkade painting. Sunday morning it is a challenge to travel to the little storefront church that is sponsoring us and which Dave attends.

The prayers from the people after church and before the pot-luck lunch:

"Lord, we just know you're going to do amazing things tonight."

From a teenage boy: "Lord, we know that there will be many salvations tonight. I believe, Lord, you're telling me that twelve people are going to be saved."

From a middle-aged woman: "Lord, we're praying that lives will be transformed."

From the pastor's wife: "We pray that the devil wouldn't allow this weather to keep people from the evening."

I am all for being optimistic, but the snow continues through the afternoon. The show must go on, the saying goes, in the midst of foolishness and futility.

At show time, as we stroll onto the high school auditorium stage, the lights dim, but we see maybe three dozen people, all of them from the church. Mike counts us off on the sticks, and we launch into the chunky opening riff of "Exodus," a riff which is essentially a rip-off of "The Mirror" by Dream Theater, one of our favorite bands. The sound is loud, as it should be, and I am playing the bass line through Dave's bass cabinet, complete with four ten-inch speakers. With the sound system, with floor monitors (a luxury we are not accustomed to in our typical primitive setups), we have more power and volume propelling us forward. Matt's electric is loud and thick. Mike is a frenzy of energy and double-kick fills. My voice feels good and full, the floor monitors helping, and Jen locks in her harmony vocals with my leads. For the first time on the trip, I am enjoying myself.

The people respond in kind. The high-school kids, the moms, all of them move their bodies to the rock and metal that we offer. We travel from song to song, riding along with the energy they give us, until we have finished the first set—all ten songs—and we have done what we have come for. Now it is time for Tim Rogan to deliver what he came from Ireland to deliver.

We exit the stage, climb the stairs to the balcony, and sit in a row. The suit-clad evangelist clips on his lapel mic, and then he is off. Fire and brimstone delivered from a bare-headed tall man with a thick Irish accent. His text is from Paul's letter to the Romans about how those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. He pummels his way through the list, hammering on each in his brogue. We squirm in our chairs. He implores us to repent, to come forward, but no one in the entire gym stirs. I think that maybe one of us should get up, just to give him some sense of accomplishment, that the task he has been invited to perform yields something besides a stunned small audience. But his invitation is also our cue to return to the stage and play our song, "I Give You My Life," an altar call song if there ever was one. "I give you my life / I surrender myself, / Do with me what you will, Lord," I sing in the chorus.

While we play, no one walks forward. No one runs forward. No one escorts anyone to the front. No arms around the shaking body of a friend. Our music doesn't need to cover up the voices of those praying, the voices of the saved and the newly saved, the sobs of joy as people are being undone, the silent sobs of relief that someone came forward to "accept Christ" and "be saved." We play the outro of the song, and there stands Tim Rogan, his arms outstretched, Bible in one hand.

We launch into five more driving songs to finish out the concert, ending with a blues tune:
“God Don't Lie.” People clap, and there is a genuine sense of joy. Our wall of sound stops, and the house lights blast on in full brightness. We have played well, no major missteps or missed cues, a chemistry born, perhaps, of desperation and freedom (seeing as there is no one we really know in the audience). From an evangelistic standpoint, of course, the evening is a roadside accident scene.

I find myself wondering how much Tim Rogan was paid to do what he did.

While church members help us strike the stage, Mike is demonstrating (to a kid who asks) a drum fill he used on one song. He's not even playing his nine-piece kit, just air-drumming, and I'm seeing all of this out of the corner of my eye, half paying attention because I'm packing up my bass. Mike inadvertently hits his hand on the side of his leg, as though he's mimicking hitting the floor tom. He winces, but I don't think anything of it. Mike is, after all, the biggest comedian of the bunch, the guy who wears a black t-shirt with the image of “Animal” (from The Muppets) playing drums.

Monday is a blizzard of other disasters. All the area schools are canceled. Over a foot of snow and counting, the wind still blowing out of the north at a steady clip of twenty miles-per-hour. Mike's hand is swollen, stiff, and sore; there is no way he can play drums. The pain reliever he took Sunday night and Monday morning hasn't helped. Jen announces that she no longer wants to be in the band, that she wants to focus on her own songwriting and acoustic style. Mike then decides to head back to his parents' house, something the three of us wish we could do too, and an awkward scene occurs at lunch wherein Dave practically demands that his church's drummer fill in for Mike at tonight's gig. But I stay my ground, say out of respect for Mike that we don't have another drummer, won't have another drummer. Instead we play a stripped down "unplugged"-style show, Jen playing acoustic guitar, Matt playing his electric, and me playing Steve's twelve-string. All to Dave's disappointment. Again, there are, at most, thirty people in a partially remodeled basement with Bible verses painted on the white walls. And again, Tim Rogan delivers his fiery exhortations, and again, no one comes forward.

When the wreck of Monday evening is over, we don't even stay the third night, though the B&B is paid for, as Dave reminds us when we thank him and tell him we are leaving, the snow having finally stopped earlier that evening. He must think us an impulsive and immature lot. Matt rides back to parents' house with his girlfriend, Liz, who has made the trip with a few college friends. Jen and I drive back to our college, not returning to the deserted campus until past two in the morning, both of us exhausted, barely awake.

We survive, but barely. And it is ten months until our next show.

Nathaniel Lee Hansen is the author of the chapbook, Four Seasons West of the 95th Meridian: Poems (Spoon River Poetry Press, 2014). He teaches creative writing, literature, and composition at the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor where he also serves as editor of Windhover: A Journal of Christian Literature and director of the annual Windhover Writers' Festival.
A Seed of Life

The Legacy of Hugo Curran

Joel Kurz

I reveled in his presence as a child. His lips, surrounded by amber-stained silver hairs, often parted with the undulating rhythms of his rhymes. His were inviting words, replete with imaged echoes. To look into his eyes was to see a mystic's intensity and restraint, to see that he was a man both quiet and ecstatic, one mindful of his vision and ever bearing witness.

I knew him simply as Uncle Hugo, even though he was more of a grandfather and bore no blood relation. Born to an accomplished forester and his wife in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in September of 1913, he was named Hugh McCollum Curran, Jr. When he was fifteen, his father took a position with the Philippine Bureau of Forestry and moved the family to the island of Luzon. Hugh Sr. taught at the College of Forestry in Los Baños, a town on the southernmost rim of the archipelago's largest lake, and oversaw the three thousand acres of virgin forest known as the Makiling Arboretum. The exploration of those woodlands captivated Hugo's adolescent enthusiasm and shaped the course of his life.

Hugo Curran holding a slender cluster palm, c1940.

In his youth, Hugo accompanied his father in the jungle and the classroom. By 1938, he had received his degree in forestry, and he stayed on at the college to work with his father. Then in 1941, Hugo decided to take a position as the supervisor of pineapple research for the Philippine Packing Company, a subsidiary of Del Monte which had an eight thousand hectare crop-plant station on the island of Mindanao. But all was not blissful for long. The Japanese invasion and occupation of the islands meant the seizure of the plantation and the imprisonment of the staff. Hugo and others were moved to an internment camp in central Mindanao. Three months later they were taken to a large concentration camp of British and American captives in the southern port-city of Davao. There, Hugo met an American missionary nurse named Marie who had arrived recently from Vietnam. Marie had relative freedom of movement in caring for the sick among her fellow prisoners, and she soon found herself taking special pity on and liking to the emaciated Hugo. Her knowledge of edible native plants enabled her to make extra meals from what grew
at the camp, and she saw to it that Hugo's meager rations were supplemented by the grub-worms which kept him alive. Hugo grew concerned about Marie's safety as a single woman and decided to marry her. The captors allowed Hugo to make a thatch hut for the first few days of their marriage.

With US forces under MacArthur encroaching on the islands in December of 1944, the Japanese decided to concentrate all of their prisoners in the city of Manila on Luzon. When Hugo and Marie arrived on Luzon, however, they found that the main camp had splintered off several smaller ones in the immediate region. They spent three months in the Manila Santo Tomás camp before requesting a transfer to the one established at the university in Los Baños, where they joined Hugo's family and remained until the liberation.

Following the war, Hugo returned for a time to his employment with Philippine Packing and before long was promoted to assistant plantation manager, but he disliked the routine tasks of administration and longed to return to research. Some friends had bought a coconut plantation in southern Davao, and in 1949 they managed to lure him away with the promise of his own research department. The years that followed were filled with numerous consulting jobs for coconut and cassava plantations before Hugo finally returned to his forestry-related work with the Philippine Match Company. It was during those latter years that my life met his.

In 1970, when I was an infant of six months, my parents left their Tennessee home of two years to return to the island of Mindanao, where they had lived previously for five years. A missionary pastor, my father this time was assigned to the northern city of Butuan where Hugo and Marie became their first acquaintances. My parents soon formed a close and trusted bond with the somewhat eccentric older couple. They gained great admiration for their devout faith, observant wisdom, and lived experience. For us children, the couple became fond surrogate grandparents. After a year and a half in Butuan, my family moved further north to the island of Cebu. Hugo and Marie came and went as opportunities arose and always filled our city lives with tales of farmland and forest.

In the 1960s, the International Rice Research Institute in Los Baños—a US-funded center—advocated high-yielding seeds, new crop methods, and chemical fertilizer and pesticide use. This was part of the "Green Revolution" sweeping through the Philippines and other Asian countries, a movement that worked to alleviate hunger and poverty by encouraging the implementation of new agricultural technologies. Hugo, however, already had found his hope elsewhere; he was now the ardent apostle of a wonder tree called the Ipil-ipil. Hugo was inseparable from the tree's abundant seeds, and wherever he went his hands delved into pockets to emerge with those unassuming ovals. With rapt amazement Hugo talked about the Ipil-ipil's tremendous ability to restore soil fertility through its nitrogen-enriching taproot and frequent defoliation, its need for little water, and, when regularly pruned, its rapid growth as a reliable source of fuel-wood. From the moment of his first encounter with it, he was convinced that this was the tree of life for deforested, degraded, and dying land; its seeds were nothing short of miraculous.

While wandering through the southern part of Mindanao in the early 1960s, Hugo visited a coffee plantation that had imported the seeds of a giant legume (originally from Central and northern South America) to provide shade for their nursery. He saw the trees and thought they looked like the native Ipil-ipil, only much larger. Hugo was given permission to gather as many of the seeds as he wanted and began distributing them on his travels with the encouragement, "This looks like a fantastic mutation of our native Leucaena, Ipil-ipil. Won't you please give it a try?"

President Marcos declared martial law in 1972. Succeeding years brought revolutionary insurgencies and escalated unrest and outrage at the regime. Fearing for our safety and thinking of their aging mothers in the US,
parents decided to leave the Philippines in 1977. Hugo and Marie could not think of leaving and knew no other decision but to wait for the hand of fate. Hugo retired from the Philippine Match Company in 1979. At sixty-six and seventy-three, his and Marie's options were few. Hugo never really cared for money, and although paid reasonably well for his work, he wound up giving away much of what he had earned. Marie's resourcefulness was extraordinary, but she knew their choices were sparse. Both found the ways of the West unnerving and felt that "the East island world" was the only place where they could feel at home for the remainder of their days. Although still citizens, the prospect of living in the United States was financially and emotionally daunting.

They decided to enroll as Peace Corps volunteers and stay in the Philippines. Following the completion of their two-year term, they sought re-enrollment but were denied due to Hugo's "non-conformance to mutually agreed-upon program directives." Hugo was a principled man concerned foremost with ecological and social well-being; he refused to neglect the right and made sure to address the wrong. Marie was well-acquainted with the "dark angels" that plagued Hugo's work and knew, as did few others, the intense traumas that had left deep scars in his life.

Not wishing to get caught up in another war, especially in their advanced years, Hugo and Marie felt they had no other choice but to move to the United States. Not only was it hard to adjust to the cold winter climate after all those decades in the tropics, but they were also painfully aware that they were strangers in a strange land.

After some initial uncertainty and the apparent realization that no steady job would materialize in Hawaii or on the West Coast, they settled in the northern Ohio town which had been Marie's girlhood home. Hugo worked as a crossing guard and sidewalk inspector, as well as taking occasional consulting jobs for the USDA. My family enjoyed some visits from them at first, but then regular telephone conversations became the norm. Marie's death in 1990 was palpable for us all. Hugo died in April of 1995.

In Hugo's absence, I took solace mostly in my sole physical link to him, the worn and weathered rice paddy hat he had given me when I was fourteen. He wanted me to have this hat once worn by "a famous explorer." The woven palm and bamboo fibers which often rested on his head conjure up his image and ensuing memories like no other. But there was one memory that propelled me on: the vague recollection of a book he showed me that last time we were together, a blue volume with pictures of him as a young man on a tropical expedition. All that managed to stay with me of the title during the passage of years was a single word: Garden.

On moving to Ohio a couple of years after Hugo's death, I paid a visit to his and Marie's grave. I went to Woodlawn Cemetery on a glorious spring Saturday as redbuds filled the sky with color and dandelions dotted the new-grown grass with bursting flowers. While pausing by an old and leafing maple, I saw the flapping blue ribbon marking their grave. There, on a small gray slab, were their names and dates and a solitary word centered on the stone: Hallelujah. Those moments at their grave gave a sense of completion, a tribute of gratitude at their resting place.

I often wondered what had happened to the Ipil-ipil seeds from his final visit, but while sorting through things a few months later I
came across a small beige envelope with a familiar rattle. I traveled in my mind to the time I took him to meet the high school horticulture teacher and watched as he disappeared into the greenhouse, his hands producing the seeds his lips profusely praised.

Several years later, while culling through a sheaf of cards and letters with my mother, I stumbled on a yellowed scrap of paper with these words written in pencil: "Garden Islands of the Great East—David Fairchild." I knew immediately that this was the elusive blue volume. The book, a treasure on my shelf for years now, was published in 1943 and contains the account of the Fairchild Garden Expedition through the Philippine and Malay archipelagos during the first six months of 1940, an adventure for which Hugo served as the plant and seed collector.

Fairchild was an impressive figure with a long and illustrious career. In addition to overseeing the acquisition and planting of the flowering Japanese cherries that have been a Washington landmark since 1912, Fairchild came into his own by establishing the Office of Foreign Plant Introduction for the USDA. Fairchild led several expeditions, most notably the Allison V. Armour Expedition which traversed the globe searching for diverse species from 1925–1927, as chronicled in Exploring for Plants (1930) and in his autobiography The World Was My Garden: Travels of a Plant Explorer (1939). Many of the exotic crops now considered quite commonplace in this country are the offspring of his labors. Wherever he went, he was an insightful observer of traditional cultures, agricultural methods, and the crops which not only sustained lives but fostered sound ecological health.

In his later years, Fairchild became acquainted with amateur botanist Anne Archbold, whose family owned the Esso Corporation. During her visits to the Fairchilds in Florida, Archbold became fascinated with David's reminiscences of his expeditions through the Malay Archipelago. Fairchild often entertained the notion of one last trip through the "Spice Islands" which he had first heard of as a boy from house-guest Alfred Russell Wallace, the celebrated naturalist and explorer. Archbold's ambition soon matched his, and she commissioned the building of a sea-going junk, christened the Chêng Ho. The purpose of the expedition was to gather seeds, cuttings, tubers, and live plants for propagation in the newly established eighty-three acres of Coral Gables, Florida, donated and designated by Colonel Robert Montgomery as Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden.

The Fairchilds, both in their seventh decades, went to Japan and then on to Hong Kong where they met up with Archbold and the junk's builder/captain, Thomas Kilkenny. While the Chêng Ho was being completed, the Fairchilds steamed over to Manila for some preliminary exploration in the Philippines. On arrival, they were greeted by their old friend Hugh Curran and his son, Hugo. Fairchild expressed his desperate need for an experienced plant collector, and Hugh said none better could be found than Hugo. At twenty-six, Hugo was not a bit dissuaded that the position provided no pay but adventure.

The Fairchilds accompanied the Currans back to Los Baños, and there, surrounded by the Makiling Arboretum's expansive forest, Hugo and the Fairchilds cleaned, labeled, and packaged seeds from the numerous cuttings that Hugo and colleagues piled daily on the porch. Fairchild accompanied Hugo and Florencio Tamesis, the chief of the forest service, to various regions of Luzon during those days and returned with prized specimens and seeds of sought-after palms before the expedition officially started.

The journey of the Chêng Ho began in Manila on January 8, 1940. Along the way, surveying the evident scars of deforestation on the island of Celebes, Hugo wrote this telling lament:

Woe, woe unto mountain land that is desired of man, for he will strip her of her beautiful raiment, caress her but
for a while, and then abandon her to the forces of nature. Rains wash away her fertile soils, while a merciless sun scorches her by day and night chills her to the bone. Her once proud mantle of majestic trees is replaced by one of lowly weeds and grasses, ravished yearly by raging fires and affording shelter to none but the scrubbliest of trees. Put not your trust in man, o mountain land! (March 8, 1940 letter to David Fairchild)

The expedition ended prematurely on July 16 due to tensions that the German invasion of Holland created in those colonial territories. In all, the Fairchild Garden Expedition gathered over five hundred species: more than ninety types of palms along with other trees, vines, flowers, and fruits.

While writing Garden Islands three years after the expedition, Fairchild merely had to look around him for reminders of Hugo; there they were in the thriving saplings, vines, and blossoming flowers. Knowing of the war that had enveloped Hugo and his family, Fairchild could only hope that they were safe somewhere in the Philippines’ mountain forests.

Hugo and Marie visited the Fairchilds in 1945 after their release from captivity. Fairchild’s book The World Grows Round My Door (1947) shows Hugo standing in the Bailey Palm Glade beside the Tarau palm he had collected on Luzon in 1939, amid the abundant foliage of a ficus he gathered as seed on Celebes in 1940, and with Marie next to a flourishing antidesma tree from Los Baños which made Hugo recall the famished prisoners who tore the branches off the parent tree to get at the precious fruit.

Hugo visited Fairchild and the garden again in 1952, the year before Fairchild’s death. How the growth of the preceding years must have pleased them both and taken them back in memory to that expedition. To my knowledge, Hugo didn’t return again until 1984—the year after I last saw him—when he went there to give an interview about the Chêng Ho expedition. He must have stood amazed at the life-teeming growth which had sprung from the seeds, stems, and roots his hands had gathered. He must have traveled back in memory to those forest wilds not planned or planted by human mind or hand.

When finally visiting the garden and the Fairchild’s home a few years back, I stood in awe of the living legacies Hugo had left: here

Hugo perceived, as did his Christ, that a seed not falling to the earth remains unchanged, barred from fulfilling a greater good beyond itself.
unchanged, barred from fulfilling a greater good beyond itself. His sight was never limited to the moment. He saw every plant and tree growing slowly upward from the soil in stages of continuity. He knew that earth is ever reaching toward the heavens as heaven is ever giving of itself to earth.

Forever etched into my mind is the time my father and I took Hugo to a nearby forest preserve. As we walked the winding trail through the dense woods that late autumn day, I looked up to the emptied canopy and smelled the faint scent of decay beneath my feet. Often have I thought about those moments and traveled the path connecting humus, humanity, humility, and Hugh, "the lofty one."

"The very earth itself is a granary and a seminary, so that to some minds its surface is regarded as the cuticle of one great living creature," wrote Thoreau, who also declared: "I have great faith in a seed. Convince me that you have a seed there, and I am prepared to expect wonders." Hugo knew that magnificence which encompassed him. His silence, speech, and work have taught me that leafing crowns come only long after periods of sprouting in darkness, expending every last reserve for a bold new endeavor. The soil holds seeds and hosts roots which span the hidden depths. The soil ensures growth and grants sustenance as a gift divine.

Joel Kurz is pastor of Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Warrensburg, Missouri and a contributor to The Center for the Care of Creation (www.togetherwithallcreatures.org).
A Short History of Hair

Gary Fincke

Near the end of May 1965, with just a week of final exams left in my sophomore year of college, I spent a Saturday afternoon bleaching my hair.

I had help—my roommate and another fraternity brother who claimed he knew just how much hydrogen peroxide would make us blond. After a few beers, I believed him.

My brown hair had grown past my collar, a length that drew suspicion even on campus. My roommate's light-brown hair was clipped short; the other guy still slicked his black hair back like Elvis.

The three of us soaked our hair and, satisfied that we were about to be transformed, we went outside to lie in the sun, drink beer, and wait for blandness to arrive. We checked every half hour, looking in the bathroom's mirrors. In between visits, we evaluated the color of the hair we could see and shared assessments. By the end of the afternoon, my roommate was solidly blond.

I was blond with streaks of orange. The other guy's hair turned an unsettling, alien shade of orange.

His older daughter chimed in. "I think it's cute. He looks like one of the Beach Boys. Like a surfer."

My uncle frowned. "We don't need surfers at Heinz."

The next afternoon I cut the grass, my father welcoming me home for that particular job. My blond hair stuck to my neck and shoulders. I was shirtless, sweat forming quickly. Our neighbor Mr. Ratliff nodded my way as he stood smoking on his back porch. It wasn't a friendly nod. It was the sort of nod that might ID a criminal in a lineup. He was a union man, a teamster. His son, a year younger than me, was in Vietnam, volunteering for the Navy fresh out of high school.

My mother was waiting in the kitchen when I came inside. "Your father will be happy you went straight out and took care of the grass," she said.

"I've been doing it for years," I said, but she placed a hand on my arm as if she needed my attention. "Your father won't say it, but he's worried that you'll let your hair make you miss your chance."

"Chance at what?"

"Real work," she said, drawing her hand away. "Being useful."

"Somebody he can be proud of," I said, letting bitterness seep into my voice.

"Yes," she said, but she looked stricken, her lips pressing together as if she'd revealed too much of a long-held secret. She opened her left hand, the one that she'd kept at her side, and showed me a five dollar bill. "If there's change,"
she said, "you can keep it. Just do what needs to be done."

I took that tiny bribe and knew she'd call her brother before I got home. All I had to do was endure the barber's jokes. He'd cut my hair since elementary school, half of those years just trimming down my flat top and selling me occasional tubes of gunk that kept it stiff. "I bet your old man told you to get in this chair pronto," he said right off, but what he settled on discussing was the shade of my hair.

The interview seemed so routine that when he reached the phrase "We'll contact you if anything opens up," I felt like Samson wishing for my hair back.

"You do a bleach job on yourself?" he said, and when I nodded, he added, "You looking to stay blond? You want a dye job?"

A man my father's age, reading a Life magazine, laughed, which seemed to inspire the barber. "Bleaching your hair like that makes you go bald faster," he said. "I bet you that makes you think twice about keeping yourself blond." More laughter from behind the Life. A few minutes later, I used the change to buy two slices of pepperoni and anchovy pizza.

After I arrived home and washed the grease from my hands, my mother told me I already had an interview at 9:00 AM sharp two days from then.

By 9:15 I had filled out an application and handed it to a secretary, who passed it along to a man in a suit and tie. I was wearing a similar outfit, sport coat and tie, but when he called me into his office, the interview seemed so routine that when he reached the phrase "We'll contact you if anything opens up," I felt like Samson wishing for my hair back.

I waited to hear if there was anything else that might signal opportunity, and then, just as I resigned myself to standing, my uncle appeared.

"Glen," he said, extending his hand, "I see you've already met my nephew."

This time, when I reached home, my mother told me that Heinz had called. I was to report for work Monday morning at 7:45. I needed to be there at 7:30 so I could get my uniform and punch in before 7:45. The rest I'd find out. "See?" she said. "See how just a little bit of compromise goes a long way?"

Sunday night I went to a series of high school graduation parties with RuthAnn McIntyre, a girl I'd been going out with during breaks from college. My mother dropped me off at the apartment where the first party was happening. "Why does she have to be Catholic?" was her only anxiety. "We sent you to a Lutheran college." I had to find my own ride home.

RuthAnn said she loved my blond hair, but why was it so streaked? "I didn't know what I was doing" was my quick explanation. "I probably didn't soak my head evenly or something."

"You know what I heard about how the Romans used to do that way back when?"

"No idea," I said. I wanted to get my hands on one of the bottles of beer soaking in a tub of ice.

"Pigeon poop."

"Who told you that?"

"I go to an all girls' school," she said. "Hair is a big deal." And then she forgot about my hair, and we settled into having a few beers before somebody gave us a ride to a house with a large, finished basement that featured an enormous stereo. The first thing I heard there, besides The Supremes, was some high school kid observing that the only people he knew who bleached their hair were girls and queers.

It was just after 3:00 AM when that same boy dropped me off, but not before he spent seven miles of the eight-mile trip bragging about how well he could drive drunk. I didn't argue his sociology or his driving skill. By that hour of the morning, my mother's 6:15 wake-up call was as threatening as a funnel cloud.

It was just after 3:00 AM when that same boy dropped me off, but not before he spent seven miles of the eight-mile trip bragging about how well he could drive drunk. I didn't argue his sociology or his driving skill. By that hour of the morning, my mother's 6:15 wake-up call was as threatening as a funnel cloud.

At 6:30, as promised, she served me eggs I could barely finish. I nibbled at toast to settle my stomach and grimaced at the orange juice. She drove me into Pittsburgh and dropped me...
off at the entrance at 7:25. "You're on your own now," she said. "All grown up."

The equipment man had my name. He handed me a pair of pin-striped blue and white pants, a couple of white t-shirts and several paper hats. I punched in at 7:43 and found my way to where unlabeled institution-sized cans were entering a room on three conveyor belts, each of them with a man clearing them onto metal trays that were eight deep and raised to be filled, one by one, by lever. The work was simple. All it took was the ability not to be distracted by dreams of the day ending.

A half hour in, as if someone had just realized I needed to pass a physical before something happened and the company was liable, I was hustled to the medical center. A nurse ran me through a cursory exam. She told me I needed a tuberculosis test and punctured my upper left arm. Nothing to it, except when I stood, I fainted and fell onto her, dragging her to the floor. Her screams quickly snapped me back. I crawled off as the doctor appeared.

"You stay out late last night and barely eat this morning?" he asked. When I nodded, he began to regale me with stories of his own college days full of hangovers. I was happy to sit through them. He was more entertaining than a line of identical, unlabeled cans.

4:30 arrived. I was cursed in chorus at the time clock because I didn't have my card ready when I reached the front of the line. I stored that prompt for the next sixty days of exits.

I had to ride the bus home. Our family had one car, and now we had three members working. I could handle a few bus rides, couldn't I?

When I got on, I heard "Hi, Gary" from a mid-bus seat. "What are you doing on here?" Roseanne Ratliff said. She was a year older than me and a lot friendlier than her father. A secretary now. Used to riding back and forth. "My Dad said you looked like something the cat dragged in. I guess you got a haircut since he saw you."

"I had to. The job," I said.

"But you're so blond. That's cool. And anyway, my Dad is probably jealous; him and his chrome dome since I can remember. I bet my little brother doesn't stand a chance."

"He didn't look jealous. He looked like he wanted to come over and slap me."

Roseanne smiled. "You want to know a secret?" she said. "My Dad said you didn't look like anybody who was worth a good god damn."

I managed a week with the cans, keeping up with the line in a way that got the foreman to relax. I traded in my pants and shirts on Friday and got a new supply. On Saturday, I went out shirtless to cut grass again and right away noticed several cars parked along the street in front of our neighbor's house. Roseanne was nowhere to be seen. More cars arrived before I finished.

Inside, my mother stopped me before I unplugged the radio to carry outside. "Tommy Ratliff has been killed," my mother said. "The word has been getting around all morning."

Instead of lying out in the sun with the radio, I took a shower. Tommy had joined the Navy, seemingly out of danger. I didn't know anybody who'd been killed in Vietnam. I could barely find it on a map. The casualty counts were like the numbers for exotic faraway diseases like elephantiasis or yaws. A few dozen per week, sometimes less. It occurred to me that Tommy Ratliff might have been the only Navy casualty in the entire month of June.

It seemed more dangerous to ride in cars with my friends. Speed was mandatory. Drinking was too. Nobody wore a seat belt. And maximum AM rock radio volume. Last weekend I'd screamed along with a friend to "Wooly Bully" and cranked up "Satisfaction," absorbing every perfect note. I was still blond, hoping to turn some female heads.

I turned on the news and listened to a report on the battle of Dong Xoai; the number of dead Americans was tentative, but it seemed as if nineteen US soldiers had been killed there in the past four days. Hundreds of Viet Cong were announced dead. Wasn't that a major victory? Somehow it didn't sound that way, and now General Westmoreland was asking for a big run up of additional troops.

I went out with RuthAnn. We played mini-golf, a game I'd loved ten years earlier. We
watched a movie on her parents’ television and didn’t touch each other until she followed me to the car I was able to borrow on a Saturday night because no one in my family worked then. “You don’t have to worry,” she said. “You’re in college. Two years from now this will all be over.”

She was right, I thought. The Cold War was the big deal. The space race. The United States had Gemini 4 in space orbiting over and over. One of the astronauts had even gone outside the ship.

Meanwhile, the Soviet Union had aimed a rocket at the moon—Luna 6—and everybody had acted as if we’d suffered another science defeat until it missed the moon by 99,000 miles and became a joke.

On Monday, I was working in another department—sterilizing. The shift was 3:15 to midnight. Somebody would have to pick me up at 12:15 because the bus didn’t run that late.

I’d walked through the sterilizing room on my way to lunch one day the week before. Huge pressure cookers, row upon row of cans shelved and installed in rounded boxcars that ran along tracks and were guided into the sterilizers by three or four men at a time because of the weight. “Sterilizing?” my uncle said when he saw me in church on Sunday. “You’ll find out what work is, that’s for sure.”

I came home sober. I was ready on time for church the following morning.

Afterward, still wearing a sport coat and tie, I walked to our mailbox to retrieve the Sunday paper. I hoped Mr. Ratliff saw that my hair was cut, that Roseanne had told him I was doing full-time blue collar work and, after thirty days, I’d be a dues paying member of the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen of America. A union man like he was. Somebody worth a good god damn.

Gary Fincke is the Charles B. Degenstein Professor of English and Creative Writing and Director of the Writers Institute at Susquehanna University.
CIVILITY

Not managing fairly well or keeping
the bare minimum of a promise,

but biting deeply into the marrow
of what's kind, hitting bulls-eyed rightness,

as with the window washers at work
at the children's hospital, who repel

across the upper floors dressed up
as super heroes, or the work email

received just before the ice storm,
sent by the public-facilities office.

It warned of dangerous sidewalks,
offered to walk employees to their cars.

At the edge of a levee along the Lower
Mississippi, there is a leprosy hospital

where there is not yet enough love
and compassion among the claw hands,

comfort for severest discolorations.
Here too (we must believe), it's only

a matter of time before maintenance
gives way to something far better,

until commendable but begrudging
function glitters with gaudy excess.

Brett Foster
Epiphany is a season of hope and newness, a celebration of the light of God's revelation in human form, not only so we could see and touch the divine in our own bodies, but also so that we could know that God is with us and knows us as we are. The wise men, Simeon blessing the Christ child in the temple, the baptism, the first miracles of Jesus: all of these speak to us of the excitement of new beginnings and the promise of fulfillment. Perhaps too, these images suffer from the curse of their familiarity. In our rehearsals of revelation, we forget just how countercultural, even radical, the upside down images of Epiphany really are. We see in them the promise of future triumph and forget that Christ's kingship in the world takes many forms; last of all does it take the form of any kingship with which we are familiar.

Last year during the season of Epiphany, I was asked to speak on the topic “Courageous Leadership” to a meeting of our Board of Trustees at Messiah College. Leadership is in vogue. New programs promising to teach everyone to be the leader they were meant to be are spreading like kudzu across the landscape of higher education. Programs in the liberal arts sell the fact that they build leaders for tomorrow, and summer camps teach leadership to thirteen-year-olds. Although the virtue of courage seems somewhat more quaint and Victorian, something better left to the poems of Tennyson, the idea of “courageous leadership” has also been enjoying a vogue. Among Christians, perhaps this is a result of Bill Hybels's 2002 book by that name; among business leaders, perhaps because of the continuing trauma of the financial meltdown and recession; and among those of us in higher education, because of our pressing sense that we are in a perpetual crisis of reinvention, if not dissolution. When times are bad—either for a religion that worries it may be in retreat, or for a college fighting to convince constituencies of its value proposition—we feel the need for both courage and leadership. Indeed, the term “courageous leadership” seems somewhat tied to times of crisis, if Google's Ngram viewer can be counted on for anything. Barely registering prior to the turn of the twentieth century, it began an ascent during World War I and reached dizzying heights of attention during and immediately after World War II. Crisis calls, it seems, for courageous leadership.

About the time I was asked to speak, I was given other reasons to think on courage, how it is manifested in our lives, and perhaps what it might mean for us as Christians and for colleges worried about their own survival. On December 28, 2014, my first grandnephew was born to my nephew John and his wife Kathryn, born preterm at twenty-four weeks, five days. For several months, he lived in an intensive care unit at the University of Oklahoma. A day after his birth, I received this email from John:

My son is named James Courage Powers. He was named so, not because we thought he'd need it so soon, but simply because I've been reading a lot of Puritans these days and Courage seemed like a wonderful quality in the form of a Puritan name. Being a somewhat timid person, I thought I would like to give my son some encouragement in the form of a good Puritan name that was a noun, but not a proper noun! It seems destined now. He was born at 24 weeks and 5 days. Entirely too early for a human to be outside his
mother. He will need courage because with this kind of start, nothing can be assumed about the future, even an hour from now.

Nothing can be assumed about the future, even an hour from now. In that realization, James Courage and his family have come to incarnate courage for me over this past year, as I have wondered what it must be to exercise courage even before this child could know or respond.

In the season of Ephiphany we celebrate stories and images that suggest God’s understanding of leadership and fulfillment is very different from our own.

to his own name, as the family continues to face a still uncertain future. I have wondered what this courage, the courage of a child struggling for breath, a child no bigger than the palm of his father’s hand, might mean for me or for us.

I am easily drawn, I admit, to images of courage and of leadership that are in the heroic masculine style. As a kid, I loved biographies of great historical figures, most of them written to reflect the “Great Man” theory of history. In pop culture, I have no interest in being a Hobbit but am more drawn to characters like Aragorn and Gandalf, astride a horse and charging fearlessly into battle. I love Westerns like The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance, where the lone man of virtue resists evil and saves the day. I grew up on the portentous Sunday afternoon recaps of NFL legends narrated by John Facenda for NFL films, a man described by peers as “The Voice of God.” Indeed, I suspect an entire generation of men came of age like me, narrating our life stories in Facenda’s sonorous baritone, the music of Sam Spence’s “The Power and The Glory” pulsing in the background as we attacked our keyboards and conquered our cubicles.

Yet, looking at our Christian stories and at the example of my grandnephew James Courage, I wonder if this is the kind of courage that God appears most ready and eager to use in furthering his purposes. Indeed, the Bible seems filled with leaders who are singularly unheroic, misguided, and mistake prone. King David was the least likely prospect for leadership among his brothers, and while we remember his slain ten thousands, among those thousands was Uriah the Hittite, the husband of Bathsheba. My namesake, Peter, was a rock, but less admirable is his failure in the courtyard while Jesus was mocked and beaten, and his efforts to placate traditionalists in the earliest moments of the church’s evangelism were rebuked by the apostle Paul. The apostles quaked in the upper room. Thomas doubted. From Noah to Abraham to the Apostle Paul, we look at Biblical leaders and are mostly impressed by what a motley crew they really were. We aspire after their successes. Aspire to be as they were. But perhaps in our hearts we know that in their doubts and in their sins, in their half-heartedness, they were as we are.

The word “courage” is related in English to the word “core,” and both words trace their roots to the Latin word “cor,” meaning “heart,” thus the English colloquialism, “take heart.” The Latin Vulgate translates Acts 1:22 with the term “cor meum” to describe David as a man after God’s own heart. Latin has other possibilities. The word “robus” also means heart and is at the root of our word robust. In Latin, “robus” speaks to military prowess and physical strength; it connotes hardness or firmness, things we certainly associate with courage. By contrast, the word “cor” connotes terms such as “mind,” “soul,” or “spirit,” as well as terms like “intellect” and “judgment.” My favorite: in some Latin texts the term could be translated as the rough equivalent of our term “sweetheart,” a term of dear and intimate affection. When we hear God saying that David was a man after God’s own heart, we are hearing, in the distant echoing way that only poetry can achieve, that David is a man whom God loves and in whom God delights. David is God’s sweetheart, his...
intimate, a man held at God's center, and there could surely be no higher name.

This is the season of Epiphany, and in this season we celebrate the revelation of Jesus as the Son of God. We also celebrate stories and images that suggest God's understanding of leadership and fulfillment is very different from our own. The three sages saw their king in a little child, not in powerful Herod. John the Baptist submitted his own leadership to Jesus, and Jesus submitted to the baptism of John. Samuel is anointed as a prophet displacing Eli. If you are in a liturgical church, one of the principal feasts of this season is that of the Presentation, where we celebrate the recognition of Jesus by Simeon and by the prophet Anna who had waited for him their entire lives. From Luke Chapter 2:

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, “Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.”

We affirm as Christians with Isaiah that

The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them.

But perhaps we don’t believe this vision fully applies to us, something we reserve for another day, a future of God’s making. Yet in the temple in Jerusalem, Jesus resting in the arms and next to the heart of his mother Mary, was fully God and fully human. And as he was taken into the arms and rested next to the heart of Simeon, recognized as God’s salvation, not in some future tense, but in the present, he was fully God and fully human. In this child, in his vulnerability and in his weakness we recognize the one whom we follow, our perfection, and our hearts deepest desire.

So it may be that like David, we are courageous not by our great deeds or by the perfection of our strategies and policies, certainly not by the perfection of our virtues, and perhaps not even by our bravery, at least not as we usually conceive of it. Rather, to be courageous is to be in love. To be courageous is to be God’s intimate with all the vulnerability and need that can imply, like my grandnephew James Courage resting in his father’s palm. To be courageous is not, for the Christian, to ride outward with spiritual swords drawn to confront enemies both real and imagined. To be courageous is to ride inward toward God’s love for us and all living beings.

To be courageous, to be full of heart, is to begin by finding ourselves in the palm of God’s hand, drawn close to the center of God’s love for us. Returning to that center, we find that our courage is not in our sufficiency but in our need and vulnerability, fulfilled only in the love that God has for us. May it be our prayer this day and every day that our courage will not be the courage of heroes defending the keep, but that it will be the courage of Christ, who did not consider equality with God something to be grasped but came to us not as a hero but as a child.

Amen.

Peter Kerry Powers is Dean of the School of the Humanities at Messiah College.
RADIO TIME

-for Dennis Bartel

They listened to the voice on the radio, thinking, “My Gawd, the man has a voice!” Down the street those with a Philco gathered round and opened folding chairs and sat on the floor until the man said “Shhhh...” and it was quiet, hearts slowed, mouths chewed air and hands unclenched: it was Radio Time.

His voice was there and there—and over there in the town where a murderer once lived and up Mill Hill where deer walked among the gravestones where widows wept. Nothing like that lives now, they say, then someone says yes it does—the voice lives, like we do in pants and straw hats and dresses that billow out on summery nights when children find they are something other, not babies and not grownups, half-human, half sprite and a hidden percentage of stardust out of God’s eyes.

“Nothing comes out like that man’s voice, nothing like that now,” says my grandmother, and draws her shawl over her shoulders.

“Yes it does,” says Cousin Rose from Cincinnati. “Remember when we gathered round Grandfather’s Philco and got comfortable with popcorn, sort of sucking on it so’s not to make noise when that voice came out and over and through us with news or weather and now and then a meditation life centered around corn and hogs and taxes and what it meant to be an American family gathered close when that voice came on and the world slowed and autumn leaves swirled and curled down like old pictures falling out of albums onto rivers we heard and felt running down their muddy banks to the great Mississippi going south to that wondrous place where rivers and memories meet, spilling over like a rain barrel into space’s voice, knowing it’s our voice and that it has always been our voice, the River still running and folks still hoping for a voice and...”

“...HUSH TALKING,” somebody says... “here it comes...”

J. T. Ledbetter
Copiers and Copyrights
Renewing Worship's Music
Josh Langhoff

In 2003, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America began creating a new hymnal. As part of a process called “Renewing Worship,” a national committee of experts combed through thousands of new and uncollected hymns, from which they compiled and issued test songbooks. At local parishes, our job was to try out the new songs in worship and report back on whether they were useful and theologically sound. The Renewing Worship team used our feedback to create the current official hymnal, Evangelical Lutheran Worship, a collection of 743 old and new hymns published by Augsburg Fortress in 2006.

My favorite test song was called “A Place at the Table,” a text by Shirley Erena Murray set to a lilt­ting, Celtic-like tune by Lori True. My congregation liked it too. As you might guess from its title, the song calls for the Church to be radically inclusive: “For everyone born, a place at the table,” begins the first verse, with subsequent verses demanding places at the table “for woman and man,” “for young and for old,” and “for just and unjust.” The lyric read like a challenge, but to us relative liberals in the ELCA, it felt like a pat on the back. The women in the choir got a special kick out of the line, “For woman and man, a place at the table I Revising the roles, deciding the share.” Our denomination had ordained women for years; we were already revising the roles. Surely this hymn was a shoo-in for the new hymnal.

Nope; when the hymnals were issued, “A Place at the Table” was no place to be found, expunged from the record, as though it had never existed! What had happened to it?

Then one day at another ELCA parish I serve, a member told me she took offense at “A Place at the Table.” I was confused, especially since this parish is very welcoming: they have an official “Reconciling in Christ” status, meaning they publicly welcome lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender believers, offering all people (wait for it...) a place at the table. She pointed to a lyric I always had considered powerful but, to my shame, had never really considered: “For just and unjust, a place at the table / Abuser, abused, with need to forgive.” From a theological standpoint, the line is true: nobody’s sin, not even the abuser’s, places them beyond God’s reach. But putting these words into the mouths of worshiping people is a heavier matter. The hymn forces the members of a congregation, some of whom have probably suffered abuse, to sing words that could dredge up old traumas or, worse, convince them to keep silent about ongoing assault. At the very least, the song requires a preamble and a trigger warning from any worship leader forcing people to sing it.

Members of the Renewing Worship hymn selection committee are reluctant to say publicly why this or any other hymn didn’t make the cut. But since the selection process did take place in 2003, when the news was full of stories about clergy abusing children, endorsing this line might have seemed tone deaf at best. The song’s text remains controversial; with a different tune, it found its way into the latest Presbyterian hymnal, sparking discussion on the Presbyterian social justice website, with the headline, “Can Inclusion Go Too Far?” (Bairby). If you belong to a Mainline Protestant denomination, ask yourself how their official hymnal selection committee would answer that question. Their answer might determine whether you will ever sing “A Place at the Table” in worship; unless, oddly enough, your local parish sings contemporary praise and worship music.

In that case, you probably use the online service SongSelect, run by a company called Christian Copyright Licensing International, or CCLI. Although some Mainline parishes, includ-
ing both of the ones I serve, subscribe, CCLI is more the domain of charismatic, evangelical, and nondenominational congregations. These less hierarchical church bodies have access to "A Place at the Table," along with lots and lots of other songs; the CCLI website says over three hundred thousand, roughly one hundred times the number found in all of the ELCA's officially sanctioned hymnals put together. God's gift of song abounds! Nevertheless, to anyone following the popular music industry in recent decades, the causes of this particular abundance will look familiar and earthly: evolving technology and audience demand for more choices.

When I was a kid and my Lutheran congregation wanted to know which song to sing, we looked up. At the front of the sanctuary was a hymn board with sliding numbers; we figured out which three-digit number we were singing, found the hymn with the corresponding number in our hymnals, and sang. For a local parish, these hymnals were a sizable investment of at least a couple thousand dollars. They were purchased from the church body's publishing house, usually a non-profit corporation like Augsburg Fortress, using either money from the general budget or targeted donations. A Mainline Christian denomination could reliably expect to sell a few million of these hymnals over several years, funding a large portion of the publishing house's operations for the next two decades or so, until they created the next edition of the hymnal. With few exceptions, if a song wasn't in the hymnal, we wouldn't sing it in church.

The photocopier changed hymn selection practices just as the cassette tape changed music listeners' buying and discovering habits, although since the change occurred in the church, it was slower and less drastic. After the advent of the affordable photocopier in the late 1970s, parishes could distribute the words and music for songs that weren't in the hymnal as inserts in the weekly bulletins. If the pastor found a new song at a conference or the youth learned a song at a youth gathering, the song was fair game. Usually nobody sought permission from the song's copyright holder when they did this; often nobody knew they were supposed to get permission. Soon enough, churches began hearing from concerned copyright holders, sometimes in the form of lawsuits, and helpful for-profit services began stepping in to make the process easier for everyone (Miller).

The biggest of these is CCLI. In 1985, company founder Howard Rachinski was working as the music director at the non-denominational Bible Temple in Portland, Oregon. (Now a mega-congregation of 7,000, it goes by the name City Bible Church.) When the people of Bible Temple wanted to know which song to sing, they also looked up, at a screen. Rachinski had been projecting song lyrics of dubious legality until he heard the Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago had lost a copyright infringement lawsuit. Realizing that requesting individual copyright permissions could be a full-time job, he organized CCLI, which now sells annual licenses to local churches for anywhere from fifty-five dollars to thousands of dollars a year, based on the size of membership. A license lets a parish print or project any of the hundreds of thousands of songs in the CCLI database. CCLI surveys its client parishes throughout the year to determine which songs they use, like a Nielsen survey, and then apportions the money it collects, like performance rights organizations (ASCAP, BMI) and streaming services (Spotify, Apple) do with pop songs.

How much money? In 2012, reports CNN, CCLI paid out $40 million to copyright holders (Marrapodi). A chunk of that went to Chris Tomlin, the "How Great Is Our God" composer.
who regularly places several songs in CCLI's top twenty-five. Rachinski told CNN, "Our best guess would be in the United States on any given Sunday, 20 to 30 million people would be singing Chris Tomlin's songs." The article goes on to compare Tomlin's numbers to those of pop superstar Katy Perry. Not only does this praise music take its musical cues from pop; its primary purveyor, CCLI, has also adopted pop's accounting and charting practices.

SongSelect's top 100 listing does serve a practical function; after all, sorting through 300,000 songs is hard work. For every smash hit like "How Great Is Our God," an anodyne song that nevertheless moves its singers to genuine worship, CCLI contains a long list of songs far more troubling than "A Place at the Table." Sometimes these songs indulge in faulty musical theology: "Another Drink" misquotes Ephesians ("Lord make me drunk with your Holy Spirit"), and "The Lord Reigns" sets Psalm 97 to a peppy, fist-pumping melody, including the line, "A fire goes before him! And burns up all his enemies!" Sometimes the songs' politics distract from the noble task of adoration. No matter where your congregation stands on the balanced budget amendment, if they try to sing "Return to Righteousness America," they will need divine assistance to scan the line, "Stop spending the inheritance of your children / And return to living your life within your means." The song "Abortion is Wrong" demonstrates conclusively that there is no good theological use for the word "blob."

Granted, worship leaders hardly ever use some of these songs. But I could! As long as my parish maintains its CCLI license, I can lead these songs in worship whenever I want. I might not keep my job for very long, but I could go down swinging. To reach worshipers, "Another Drink" faced no official church selection committees; its only hurdle was belonging to a copyright holder covered by CCLI.

Even in Mainline denominations, the top-down model of hymn selection is eroding along with our weekly attendance numbers. Perhaps the ELCA's most recent hymnal will be our last, to be replaced by our own online database. (We already have one, but it includes little beyond our official hymnals.) Partly this comes down to money; more parishes have forgone the expense of new pew hymnals, opting instead for the smaller annual fees and larger repertoires offered by subscription services. In one sense, this parallels a recent shift in popular music consumption: listeners are replacing à la carte album purchases with monthly subscription fees to streaming services like Spotify, placing much of recorded history at our fingertips.

This analogy breaks down, though, when we consider the different ways consumers and worshippers track their money. For pop listeners, the streaming revolution has led to less visibility in artist pay, sometimes bolstering the expectation that music should be free, or at least very cheap. Many streaming customers, who might previously have saved their money for specific artists' albums, now see a small monthly charge on their bank statement and gorge on whatever music they want. Local parishes have almost always ceded the task of securing copyright permissions to publishing houses, so databases like SongSelect have the opposite effect: they make local parishes more aware of where our money goes. Hymnals themselves have always cost money, but as far as most people in the parishes knew, the hymns themselves were free. CCLI licenses render the flow of copyright money transparent to anyone who votes for their annual church budget.

As with every worship tool since polyphonic singing, the licensing model requires the discern-
ment of worship leaders working with specific congregations. For every advantage hymn databases offer over hymnals—more choices, easy transposition, quick access to new songs—challenges arise. By assigning the church’s song an explicit price, however small, do we leave it vulnerable to the parsimony of congregations facing budget shortfalls? Do CCLI’s popularity charts help create a “rock star” culture of hero worship among praise composers? Whether shaped by committees or commerce, text or technology, worship’s renewal continues apace; our job is to make sure the tool does not overshadow its task.

Josh Langhoff is a church musician living in the Chicago area.

Works Cited


WATERFUL

My dreams are dreary as a whole.
She sometimes has to wake me up
to shake me from the screams.

This time the beauty should’ve startled
me awake. I turn a corner, going
nowhere. There it is, a lake or something

I have never seen. A surge of hope—
I can’t believe my eyes. The water floods
inside my parchment skin. I turn aside.

I want to feel the thrill again.
Of course the serendipity is gone:
a withered aqua-blue hydrangea,

falling lost from someone else’s sleep.

John Hollembeak
Hannah Faith Notess is a cunning poet, but her guile is accomplished directly and in the open: she is like an art thief who, even after the authorities have been tipped off, walks into a museum at midday through the front door and exits the same way fifteen minutes later without arousing suspicion, because who would ever expect that approach?

This means that we readers are left in the aftermath scratching our heads and wondering what just happened—which is saying something, because poetry fans are no fools. In fact, while maybe it is going too far to say that most of us read poetry suspiciously, like officers scrutinizing security footage for someone who looks fishy, maybe it is not. Poets are mysterious characters with many powerful tricks at their disposal, so we readers want to know as soon as possible what they are up to and whether we can trust them. One whiff of a too-sentimental phrase, a quip that sacrifices integrity for cleverness, or a cloying closing line, and we are on guard, wondering why that blonde woman is wearing sunglasses after nightfall, or what she is clapping so tightly in her leather clutch.

In The Multitude, Notess’s first full-length book of poetry, directness is accomplished through diction that is graceful but uncomplicated, images that are complex but not obscure, and a wit that is sharp but points away from itself. While some poems in this volume function as extended metaphors, they aren’t puzzles: often the titles themselves (“To the Body Carried Out of the Apartment Across the Street,” “To the Girl Playing Mario Kart in the Botticelli Room,” “To the Ghost Who Put His Arm around Me at the Camp Meeting”) direct readers to a subject, draw attention to that subject’s action, and locate us in a specific place, all before the first line.

Sometimes, the place where the poems locate us is domestic, as in “Burlington, Northern Apocalypse,” set in Burlington, Washington:

...cloud-swamped scrap of a town
swept so clean by God’s broom

all that’s left is a shuttered hardware
store
and the diminished chord that rides
the Doppler down
then slinks away to die in a rusted out-railyard.

At other times it is international, like the “brown bookshop on Mirza Ghalib road” in Calcutta,
where “women decorate Mother Teresa's tomb / with marigolds because it is white and bare.” In still other poems, the place is virtual, as in “St. Augustine Enters the World’s Largest Pac-Man Maze.” The trope is both hilarious and haunting, evidenced in lines like, “I seek you, my Creator, / yet pursued by heresies / and ghosts of heresies;” and, “What does the cornered / soul devour? What fruit / revives it?”

It is important to note that the settings in this latter category of poems—which also includes “Mario World” and “Yoshi (A Pastoral)” — may be virtual, but they are not vacuous. While other authors might use video games as a metaphor for contemporary disconnection or spiritual barrenness, Notess’s gamescapes are verdant with meaning. Complex relationships are playing out within them. In “Street Fighter II for a Broken Sega Genesis,” one player addresses the other:

And though I jump in one direction only, no longer master of the lightning kick, simplicity

makes our quarrel beautiful. My adversary, my beloved, fight me, fight on with your one good claw.

The most affecting poems in the book are, like this one, expressions of devotion from narrator to beloved, whether it is brother or lover. In “On the Drill Field at Virginia Tech,” young siblings watch a marching band appear on the horizon, “a distance mass of white / uniforms.... / the folding lacework / of waves at the sea’s edge.” We know, even before the narrator leads us into the future, that the children cannot remain together in this moment of joy and sound; they will grow and change, and other events unfold like dark storms across this place.

Contrast this tender reflection with the immediacy of desire in “Haight Street, Halloween,” in which the heat we are blasted with in the opening lines (“Over and over, the air blazed, / incinerated / itself. We were not yet in love....”) continues to build to the end:

How many times

has the thing I wanted stayed hidden from me, obscured by my longing?

Turn, oh turn to me, I said, without opening my mouth.

These passionate moments are keenly observed by a dispassionate—which is not to say distant—gaze, as if by someone who is in the habit of kissing with her eyes open. This capacity is exercised with even greater intensity in a series of poems sprinkled throughout the volume about “the witch,” who does things we are accustomed to witches doing: she conjures, she spells, she turns children’s bones to knives. But she also brings dead men back to life in order to sleep with them, her carnality achieved through incantation, the body reached only through words. And the efficacy of spells, we all know, is dependent not only upon words but on exact words, spoken in an exact order—one mistaken syllable and things could go horribly awry. In this way, spellmaking is not so different than poem making; both witch and poet are serious craftspeople.

But yet another woman appears throughout The Multitude: the Blessed Virgin, in some ways opposite of the witch. Instead of reaching the body through words, she produced the Word through her body. But both she and the witch are treated with such care that while they do not meet in a single poem in this volume, we suspect that if they did they might get along just fine. Maybe that will happen in Notess’s next book.

Yes, The Multitude is populated by—dare I say it?—a multitude of places, ideas, themes,
and people. Art and love and grief are there, in physical settings and virtual ones, along with history and myth, the carnal and the holy, faith and doubt, the living and the dead. Notess blurs the lines between each set, which feels, maybe contradictorily, like a clearer presentation of what it is like to live in this world.

A space is made for all of it, all of our experience, nothing excluded, the same gaze extended to that which is high and that which is low. While this is true for the book as a whole, the best example contained in an individual poem is “The Rain Falls on the Just and the Unjust,” which includes “the brown leaves and the green leaves,” the “skinny girls and the fat girls,” and “the place where we made love in the woods and the place right next to it / where we did not make love.” Notess isn’t trying to redeem anything; she blesses everything by seeing it and reflecting it back to us.

By the time we reach the title poem, which is also the final poem in the volume, we are ready to hear these lines, the authorial directness present again: “Listen, if Christ arrives to feed the multitude, / it won’t be the kind of miracle you expect.” Neither is this book; it is a different kind of miracle. Lucky for us, Notess isn’t an art thief: she is an artmaker, which is not without its own element of subterfuge. But instead of taking something away like a thief, or turning one thing into another like a witch, she presents us with a view of the thing in a way that makes it transform, before our eyes, into a truer version of itself. It is the opposite of the old magician’s trick of diversion; instead of asking us to look away, she asks us to look more deeply at what is there.

And by the time we look up, she is long gone, perhaps speeding away in getaway car or on broomstick, but more likely—and more hopefully—strolling down a side street, filling her pockets with items she will bring back to show us later.

Dyana Herron is a writer and teacher living in Seattle who works at Seattle Pacific University.
Learning to Live With Ghosts
Vera Brittain’s Testament of Youth on Film
Charles Andrews

One of the hottest booms in literary publishing during the late 1920s and early 1930s were the so-called “War Books.” For ten years following the Armistice in 1918, the North American and European reading publics seemed to have little appetite for stories about the First World War. But by the end of the 1920s, novels and memoirs by former combatants like Siegfried Sassoon, Erich Maria Remarque, Edmund Blunden, and Robert Graves were captivating the public imagination. Gritty accounts of battle horrors and sardonic portrayals of politicians, generals, preachers, and other jingoistic noncombatants gave rise to a widespread sense of disillusionment about national pride and militarism.

Scholarship on this period has called into question many of the early assumptions about the War Books, especially their supposed “anti-war” sentiments and their tendency to privilege the views of educated, artistically-inclined officers over working-class enlisted men. Equally crucial has been the recovery of women’s voices obscured by the wave of combat narratives written by men. This recovery work has shown that women’s stories about the homefront—Virginia Woolf’s To the Lighthouse, for instance—tell us just as much about wartime experience as men’s tales of trench life. But another dimension of this recovery pertains to the many women who had close encounters with combatants in a sometimes forgotten space of the war: the military hospital. Literally tens of thousands of women and girls served with the Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) in Britain, caring for wounded soldiers in hospitals and driving ambulances in combat zones. Of the many women who wrote memoirs and fiction about these experiences, no writer has remained as popular as the VAD nurse turned anti-war activist Vera Brittain.

Brittain’s renown was secured by the blockbuster success of her first memoir Testament of Youth, published to great acclaim in 1933. By 1939, it had sold 120,000 copies, and it has remained continually in print. It experienced a resurgence in the late 1970s when it was republished by Virago, the British press that has for four decades championed neglected writing by women, and it became a BBC mini-series. I suspect, however, that Vera Brittain’s name is still better known today in the UK than the US, partly due to the perennial appearance of Testament of Youth in GCSE exams and partly because of the enduring legacy of the First World War in British popular culture. Now, for the first time, a feature-length film version of Testament of Youth, with rising star Alicia Vikander playing Vera Brittain, arrives in step with the much-anticipated four year commemoration of the First World War’s centennial.

The depiction of the war in Testament of Youth, conveyed with great force in James Kent’s film, is one of total waste and immense cost to individual combatants and their families. Five friends join England’s surge against “the Hun”: Brittain’s brother Edward (Taron Egerton), her fiancée Roland Leighton (Kit Harrington) and their two mates Geoffrey Thurlow (Jonathan Bailey) and Victor Richardson (Colin Morgan). Edward, reluctant to leave home, is urged by his sister to do his patriotic duty. The other men similarly feel the tug of social obligation and take up arms on the Western Front. Pledging love for one another, the friends separate, and all but Vera meet agonizing deaths. She, being far from squeamish and equally touched by the patriotic call to service, becomes a VAD nurse and learns...
of her friends' and brother's deaths while cleaning the wounds of other dying soldiers. Brittain's story, in basic outline, has operatic potential. But it is a tragedy with a coda: Vera turns her pain into a successful literary career and her anger into stalwart anti-war activism that will last through the next world war and into the nuclear age.

The turning point in Vera's thinking about war came not from the loss of her friends and family, as one might expect. Mark Bostridge, Brittain's literary executor and foremost biographer, has shown that the deaths of her loved ones reinvigorated her sense of "heroism in the abstract" and created models of self-sacrifice that inspired her own service (80). Instead, her conversion began while experiencing the absurdities of war when nursing its victims. Portrayed in one moving sequence of Kent's film, the first major blow to Brittain's patriotic zeal came in 1917 while she was working in a hospital in Étaples where she was assigned to care for injured German soldiers. She recorded initially that this was "a slightly alarming experience," but found herself unable to hate these supposed enemies as she tended their battle wounds and amputations (95). In the film, the scene is played in sunlight and rain, with lens flares and handheld camerawork giving visual shorthand to urgency and momentousness. A nurse cheerily tells Vera, "I had to saw this chappy's arm off myself yesterday!" and then informs her that these men are all Huns. Men clutching severed limbs, writhing in lung-stricken fits, and shaking with shellshock fill the background. In the foreground, Vera holds a dying man and speaks a few words in German to console him as his eyes grow dim. In voiceover, one of Brittain's letters to Edward tells him that she is beginning to wonder about the absurdity of saving the very lives that he is risking his own to kill.

It is, of course, a cliché in discussions of literary adaptations to protest that the film pales compared with the book, but a few cavils of that sort seem nonetheless necessary here. The first has to do with the overall tone of the film, which leans into the tragic dimension of the narrative at the expense of Brittain's own wry and caustic prose. While the film begins with a severe and sorrowful Vera on Armistice Day in 1918, isolated from the cheering crowds by her sense of grief, Brittain's own first chapter starts more wittily: "When the Great War broke out, it came to me not as a superlative tragedy, but as an interruption of the most exasperating kind to my personal plans" (17). Self-deprecating and slightly ironic, the Vera we meet in Brittain's memoir conveys her personal loss as a form of political advocacy. She shows us what happened in her own life and family because of this war and embeds that narrative in a pacifist indictment of all wars. The Vera who emerges in Kent's film inhabits a world of great beauty, full of lush green countryside and sun-blown manor houses shot with all the detailed care and capacious lighting of Kubrick's Barry Lyndon. But little of Brittain's wry humor is salvaged in the transfer to screen.

Also clunky in this adaptation is the handling of brief scenes with two of the vital figures in Brittain's life, her close friend Winnifred Holtby and her eventual husband George Catlin. These people also appear in Brittain's memoirs, and they bulk large in biographies about her. But in this film, only the initiate could really appreciate the cameos given to these figures. Holtby appears in the last ten minutes when Brittain has resumed her studies at Oxford, and she announces that she intends to be a writer. It is a bit like one of those moments in Shakespeare in Love, where Will, our struggling playwright, meets a nasty little boy who announces himself
to be John Webster (the future author of bloody Jacobean revenge tragedies like The Duchess of Malfi). In that film, Tom Stoppard and company played those cameos for laughs, relying on the audience’s period knowledge to catch in-jokes about “Kit” Marlowe drinking in pubs or Queen Elizabeth requesting Will’s next play be something comedic for Twelfth Night. But played straight, as the cameos are in Testament of Youth, they seem confined to a rarefied audience who knows about Brittain’s personal life. Rather than introducing a viewer to Testament of Youth, the film relies on some amount of prior knowledge.

What the scenes with Winifred Holtby do provide is the beginning of Vera’s emergence from her postwar despair. Like Brittain, she had lost loved ones in the war, and as she puts it in the film: “All of us are surrounded by ghosts. Now we must learn how to live with them.” Though somewhat awkwardly appearing like a deus ex machina, this encouragement to learn to live with ghosts offers the path that Brittain will take, becoming a politically engaged writer whose literature and activism memorialize her loss. In the foreword to her memoir, Brittain wrote that she attempted a “history in terms of personal life” which could “rescue something that might be of value, some element of truth and hope and usefulness, from the smashing up of my own youth by the War” (11). Kent’s film, though certainly not a betrayal of that mission statement, may do its best service by sending new audiences back to Brittain’s own prose, to see how truth, hope, and usefulness arise from learning to live with ghosts.

Charles Andrews is Associate Professor of English at Whitworth University

Works Cited


THE BIG OYSTER

Creation is problematic in the city
The court of its paternity must entertain so many claimants,
human and otherwise

Fleeing the grove of nonexistence,
the Pharaohs of midtown spent their lives entombing themselves
in a city like the logos made of legos

The skyline they leave is the lower jaw
of an omnivore mouth,
canine office spires and residential molars

Like any mouth,
it is erotic and threatening, inviting and treacherous
It smells dubious

Between the spires and apartment blocks
is an accretion, like an oyster’s approximation
of its own aggravation

We live in this approximation of what’s within us
The gutterpunks in the park making plans to meet again
The subway stairs, slowed by walkers and strollers
The summer cooking garbage to an odor like a rat’s delirium
The men arguing about ritual
who are actually arguing about Ridgewood

And the elevated train ride looks like a gritty crime movie,
the scene of repose between bad things happening
But it’s our latest and most complete vision of beauty
That’s why, despite obvious reasons,
we cannot turn from its face

Colin Dodds
Darlene Love has been in the music business for over fifty years, and Rolling Stone counts her among the top one hundred singers of all time. When Bette Midler inducted Love into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, she said Love “changed my view of the world, listening to those songs, you had to dance, you had to move, you had to keep looking for the rebel boy.” Love sang on some of the biggest hits of the 1960s and has worked with Elvis Presley, Sam Cooke, Aretha Franklin, Dionne Warwick, and Bruce Springsteen. For many people, Christmas did not begin until Love sang “Christmas (Baby Please Come Home)” on the Late Show with David Letterman. Yet despite all of these accolades, the seventy-four-year-old Love just released a solo album entitled Introducing Darlene Love. Why would someone with such an impressive resume need to introduce herself to the world?

One answer is that Darlene Love was one of the most important backup singers of the 1960s. Producer Phil Spector used Love’s girl group, The Blossoms, as backup singers on many of his albums. Spector had The Blossoms record “He’s a Rebel” with Love singing lead vocals. Spector then credited his girl group, The Crystals, with the song, and it hit number one on the Billboard Hot 100 Chart. Spector also used The Blossoms on recordings of The Crystals’ “Da Doo Ron Ron” and The Ronettes’ “Be My Baby.” The Blossoms contributed backup vocals to Bobby “Boris” Pickett’s “Monster Mash” and Frank Sinatra’s “That’s Life.” Unfortunately, Love and The Blossoms were only credited as session musicians. Although their voices provide a soundtrack to some of the most iconic girl group recordings of the 1960s, they never achieved star status.

After leaving the music industry to raise a family, Love decided to get back in the business in the 1980s. Bruce Springsteen and his E Street Band collaborator Stevie Van Zandt saw her show, while she was working at a club in Los Angeles. At Van Zandt’s urging, she moved to New York and began touring with Springsteen. She starred in the Broadway musicals “Leader of the Pack” and “Hairspray” and began her Christmas tradition of singing on the Letterman Show. In 2013, Love was featured in the Oscar-winning documentary “20 Feet From Stardom.” The documentary propelled Love into the spotlight, and Van Zandt finally honored a long-time promise to Love to produce an album, Introducing Darlene Love, which was released on September 18.

In an interview with the Los Angeles Times, Van Zandt explains that the title of the album is a bit of a joke. Love’s career should require no
introduction, but Van Zandt felt the need to connect the person with the voice that people have heard for fifty years. *Introducing Darlene Love* is an ebullient celebration of Love and her voice. Rather than a somber, reflective album dispensing wisdom from a seventy-four-year-old venerated musician, *Introducing* demonstrates that Love is still in the prime of her career. Love doesn't want to step back and reflect on her past; rather, she demands respect as a solo singer. Van

This is a loud and proud album that acknowledges the pop, rock, and gospel music that has influenced and shaped Love.

Zandt got some of Love's admirers to write songs for the album, including Bruce Springsteen, Elvis Costello, Jimmy Webb, Joan Jett, Barry Mann, and Cynthia Weil. This is a loud and proud album that acknowledges the pop, rock, and gospel music that has influenced and shaped Love. As Van Zandt said in an interview with Billboard, "I tried to capture the breadth of her talent. But we didn't want to do survivor-type songs. It’s romance, adventure with a spiritual foundation; blues, R&B, Motown, girl groups, rock and roll—it's all on there. It's about connecting the continuum." Romance provides the inspiration for many songs on the album.

Love and Van Zandt released “Forbidden Nights” by Elvis Costello, as a single before the album debuted. It is a send-up of the girl group sound that first made Love in demand as a singer. It opens with the backup vocalists singing “Sha la la la la,” and its triple meter is reminiscent of 1960s beach songs. It is a romance song that celebrates having fun on a “forbidden night.” Love's strong vocals clearly indicate that she is not too old to have a little fun. The element of play is emphasized in the music video for the song. Love cruises around Asbury Park, New Jersey in a convertible seeing various friends on the way, including Springsteen, Van Zandt, Costello, Joan Jett, Patty Sciafa, Paul Shaffer, Bill Murray, and David Letterman. Love enjoys life and has no intentions of slowing down or stopping soon.

“Forbidden Nights” is also the first of the many songs on the album that deal with love. "Love Kept Us Foolin' Around" is a Motown-style song that acknowledges that "Love keeps you falling, leaving you warning, with never enough... Love kept us foolin' around." “Still Too Soon to Know" is a ballad with Love's friend Bill Medley that asks “Should I stay or should I go?” when infidelity occurs. Joan Jett and Desmond Child's “Little Liar” is an angry rock song that answers the previous question, “You want to speak with me but hey that's tough / Why don't you call me when you're all grown up.” In the guitar-heavy song, Love explains that she has been around long enough to know when someone is lying, but that she still “believes in you.” Her mature voice lends heft to the song without lecturing the listener. In “Painkiller,” Love acknowledges that she has made poor choices in her love life. “I was hurting so bad / I was a big fat liar but you took me higher / You're my painkiller.” This fast-paced blues rock demonstrates Love's versatility as a singer as she belts out her thanks to her painkiller.

Romance is the predominant theme on the album, but Van Zandt and Love do make references to her wisdom and maturity. The opening track of the album, “Among the Believers,” exhorts her listeners to make a change for the better. The Springsteen lyrics explain, “We are the rebels who carry your names / We learn from your history and bury your pain / Please wait for us; it's not too late for us / I remain among the believers.” This fast-paced pop song, complete with a full horn section, encourages the listener to remain positive. While the lyrics refer to change in the world, it is easy to remain among the believers of Love's powerful voice. Jimmy Webb’s “Who Under Heaven” asks similar questions of the listener. “Who under heaven are we saving it for? / If this is not the time then when is? / Only love can ever open the door / End all the war.” The slower vocal sections of the song provide Love with an opportunity to display her mature and nuanced voice. That voice is also fea-
tured in Van Zandt's "Last Time," one of the few songs on the album to acknowledge Love's long journey. "Listen baby, I didn't get here by complaining / And I'll be leaving the same way that I came / In you I saw myself and for that I'm grateful / I'm going to make sure you remember my name."

Van Zandt pays tribute in the album to the Phil Spector "Wall of Sound," that Love helped to make famous. The decision to include a cover of Spector's "River Deep, Mountain High" is an acknowledgement of Spector's impact on Love's career and an assertion that the song belongs to her. Spector originally taught Love the song in 1966 but had Tina Turner record the lead vocals, with Love only recording backup vocals. The song eventually became a huge hit for Ike and Tina Turner. Love has since claimed "River Deep, Mountain High" as her own and has performed it in her live shows for years. Van Zandt opted for a "wall of clarity" versus a "wall of sound" on this recording. Rather than a mass of sound, you can hear strings, horns, percussion, and guitars that complement, without drowning out, Love's commanding voice.

The album also acknowledges the strong influence of gospel music in Love's life. Her father was a pastor and the church played an important role in her musical upbringing. Walter Hawkin's gospel classic "Marvelous" allows Love to thank God for providing her with an instrument and career. "Jesus is the Rock (That Keeps Me Rollin')" is a surprising gospel contribution by Van Zandt himself. It is a rollicking gospel tune that ends the album on an energetic high note with Love proclaiming her inspiration in Jesus.

In creating such a high-energy album, Van Zandt unfortunately does not give the listener a chance to rest. It is exciting to hear a seventy-four-year-old sing with so much power, but the album leaves the listener longing for a softer side of Love. Even the ballads build to a loud climax, with Love proclaiming her strength. You almost need to divide the album in sections in order to avoid fatigue from Love's unbounded energy. The various musical styles on the album help to break up the loudness of sound, but the album does not provide Love the opportunity fully to demonstrate the range of her abilities.

Introducing Darlene Love is an album that celebrates life. Love does not sing from the position of a wise grandmother but as a fellow traveler in the journey of love and life. The album is not a greatest hits compilation of Love's fifty-year career but a statement of her intent to keep making new music. This refreshing album provides an opportunity for the public to connect Love's passion for music with the iconic songs she recorded in the 1960s. After listening to this album, I, too, can be counted "among the believers" of Darlene Love.

Jennifer Forness is on a leave of absence from her position as a music teacher in Ewing, New Jersey, while she and her family are living in Munich, Germany for the 2015-2016 academic year.
THANKS

days like this
you cannot eat
not at least egg or bread or avocado

I swallowed air for an hour straight
I'm drinking the songs of birds
And teaching the deer how to sing them

slurping the mud down by the scummy pond
practicing my bear hugs till the trees
forget the fall

finding honey everylovelywhere
and making more Jackson Pollock messes
on the surface of this strangely warm December day

and after all this fasting feast
you burp thank and thanks and thank you to the wind
remembering how sweet hunger is.

Joe Martin Ricke
I was asked to teach at the local university recently. A unique combination of their desperation and my availability brought me to the land of Academia, for the first time as a provider, rather than as a consumer, of knowledge.

The course was Contemporary Urban Issues. This was the career path I did not take; instead, I followed a call to ordained ministry. I was delighted to rekindle my love affair with cities. I had visions of teaching my forty undergrads the intricacies of Tax Increment Financing, and the impact of zoning codes on America’s built environment and waistlines. I was determined to show the students how urban issues are manifest in our community.

I also wanted them to get off campus and participate in the wider community. I asked the class to bring their student ID’s and to wear comfortable shoes to the second day of class. I took them on a field trip through downtown Oshkosh. Just off campus we stopped in front of an apartment house.

“Who lives here?” I asked.
“Students.”
“How do you know?”
“There’s three bikes chained to the porch railing, two hibachis under the porch, and beer cans everywhere.”

“See, you know a lot about a place, just by looking at it. I want you to start to really see the world around you.” We stopped in front of the next house, a well-maintained, single-family dwelling, with a freshly cut and edged yard. “Who lives here?” I asked again.

“People,” was the response from a brave soul in the back.

We wound our way through the city. Then we stopped in front of a true Oshkosh landmark, the Grand Opera House. It is on the National Register of Historic Places, the only such building which also once housed a pornographic movie house. In a small city, one takes distinction where one finds it.

We ended our field trip at the city bus center, and after showing our ID’s boarded the bus. We took the bus a little less than a mile back to campus. I was pleased that only a handful of them had ever ridden public transportation before. Ninety percent of them came from Wisconsin, many from small towns. I could see their horizons expanding.

The third day of class I had them share their hometowns. As a fourth-generation resident of Peoria, Illinois, I understand being a little sensitive and defensive about one’s hometown. I wanted to model respect for all places, even the smallest hamlet. One boy, I’ll call him Kyle (I’m pretty sure every boy on campus was named Kyle that year; and all the girls were named Ashley), was from Wild Rose, a settlement of seven hundred souls, about forty miles west of Oshkosh. I seized the teachable moment.

“Kyle,” I asked, “Why are taxes in Waushara County so much lower than taxes here in Winnebago County?”

“Dunno.”

“What do you do with your garbage back home?”

“Take it to the dump.”

“Right. So you don’t have to pay for garbage collectors, garbage trucks, workers’ comp for garbage collectors. What kind of plastic can you recycle in Waushara County?”

“All kinds, I guess.”

“That’s right. Even though you live in a rural county, you can recycle plastics 1 through 6 in Waushara County.”
I turned to the rest of the class. "What kind of plastic can we recycle here, in big, urban Winnebago County?"

No one knew. This is the greenest generation? I was stunned. I've got forty young people, all of them drinking bottled water or Mountain Dew out of plastic, and they do not even know how to dispose of their bottles in the county where they live? Just for a minute, I became the fanatical, single-issue zealot professor that students imitate for years.

"1 and 2! 1 and 2! In Winnebago County we can only recycle two kinds of plastic. In Waushara County, even though they do not have garbage pickup they can recycle 1 through 6! You should know this! You all live in this county now!" I am getting only blanks stares at this point.

"I'm putting that on the midterm!" I shouted. And with the choreography of a Michael Jackson video, every head bowed over a notebook writing "Recycle 1 and 2 for midterm."

I have never felt such power.

For the rest of the semester, anytime I felt their attention fading, I would say, "I'm putting that on the midterm/final." My exams wrote themselves.

As a teacher I had a lot to learn.

In an effort to get the students off campus, I let them make up missed classes by attending off-campus events: going to the farmers' market, visiting the downtown merchants' monthly Gallery Walk, giving blood. One student went to a publicity stunt that the local food pantry held. In an effort to gather paper products for needy people, they tried to build the world's largest toilet paper pyramid. The student took a picture of himself at the event, with the caption "This is how I roll."

One day Ashley approached me after class. "Um... Mr. Willadsen, you know how you said we'd get attendance credit for doing things off campus?"

"Yes."

"Well, I missed class Tuesday because I was placing a restraining order on my roommate."

"I see."

"So do I get credit for a make-up?"

"Ashley, maybe getting to Contemporary Urban Issues isn't your biggest problem. But OK, I'll give you the make up."

About halfway into the semester I asked whether students were taking the bus. "It's free! Just show your ID!" Having been raised by a survivor of the Depression, something being free is all the motivation I ever need to use it.

"Mr. Willadsen, the bus never stops when I want it to."

"Do you pull the cord?"

"What cord?"

"The cord that makes the bell ring, and the lighted sign come on that says 'Stop requested.'"

"You can do that?"

"Sure! The bus drivers want to drop you off where you want to get off. And they'll even stop for just one person." I head to the chalk board and draw a crude picture of the inside of the bus and where cords can be found to signal the driver. "Guess I'll put this on the final," I added, just for the illusion of power this comment gave me.

At the end of a long semester, I found myself grading final exams. This was not the joyful task I imagined it to be. I was more disappointed in what my students had not learned than I was pleased at what they had. Toward the bottom of the pile was Ashley's final. In a fit of desperation she defined "TIF" as "Think I'm failing." I laughed out loud and that was a huge gift. I gave her credit for a correct answer. Besides, she now knew how to signal the bus driver to request a stop. Maybe she had the tools to explore the city on her own, I reasoned.

As a teacher, I had learned a lot.

Following his semester as a lecturer at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, the Reverend Thomas C. Willadsen returned full time to serving as the pastor of First Presbyterian Church, where the congregation never mimics the choreography of a Michael Jackson video.
On and Off the Shadow Campus

Albert Louis Zambone

I

The night of November 12, 1840 was much like the preceding five November 12ths at the University of Virginia: there was a riot. University of Virginia students liked to riot, prized their "uprisings." This riot was actually an annual celebration of an 1836 riot that the students regarded as a victory over university professors.

At Virginia, students and professors lived directly next to each other, around the central Lawn. Thomas Jefferson had designed buildings, landscape, and curriculum to represent the apex of rationalism and enlightenment. The Lawn was not fully enclosed but open at one end, facing out to the horizon—an architectural manifestation of the creed of the unfettered reach of reason. Yet Virginia's students refused to get with Mr. Jefferson's enlightened program. Rather than proving young Southern gentlemen to be genteel aspirants to the mantle of learning, they exemplified the worst aspects of tyrannical young slave masters, accustomed to their whims being gratified and apt to be violent when they were not. "They drank, gambled, rioted and vandalized property"—and that while Jefferson was alive.

The November 12, 1840 riot was too much for John A. G. Davis, professor of law at Virginia since 1830, and he stalked outside to put an end to the nonsense. He saw at least two students wearing masks and firing guns. When he approached one of them, reaching out to unmask him, the student shot him in the belly. Davis died two days later. The student was tracked down by stunned and chastened classmates; later, he jumped bail and committed suicide.

II

The university—in any recognizable form—is an invention of the Middle Ages, and therefore so is the university riot. Medieval riots were often more akin to insurrections and uprisings, usually by students, sometimes even by the "masters" of a university's colleges, and directed, depending upon the group, at either the ruling power of the university or the town in which the university was located. The university in Bologna was founded by the collections of students who grouped themselves vaguely by origin, called "nations" in Bologna and other medieval universities. These student unions were created to secure favorable legal and financial treatment from the government of the city and to hire teachers to educate them. By creating this joint corporation, students suddenly gained power. In the medieval university, threatening a riot established a bargaining position.

Since most student-run organizations are at best chaotic works in progress, numerous groups of students tired of the Bologna experience and left for another city to found their own university. Teachers grown tired of obeying the dikta of students also abandoned Bologna and founded universities run by what they considered a more sophisticated management: themselves.

Even these teacher-led universities were marked by student uprisings and occasionally by a faculty revolt. In 1209, a dispute between the masters running the University of Oxford and the town government over the punishment of students provoked the masters to pick up and leave town—some for Reading just down the River Thames, others for Paris, and others eventually to East Anglia to found the University of Cambridge. In 1229, a Fat Tuesday dispute between students and citizens of Paris led to an Ash Wednesday riot so spectacular that the university was subsequently shut for two years.

Violence was common in the medieval university. Rules at Oxford laid down that students should not have swords or longbows, indicating that, of
course, many did. The different “nations” of each university were often literally at each other’s throats. Town-and-gown violence was common, but murder of fellow students seems to have been even more common.

III

Violence, uprisings, and riots, then and now, are a manifestation of the shadow campus that has always existed, below and behind the professional campus visible to the professorial and professional eye. To that contented, benign gaze, the modern campus consists of classrooms, offices, seminar rooms, libraries, and perhaps a college center. To professors, the existence of dormitories, clubs, video consoles, clubs, drugs, and fraternities is known, of course, and accepted, in much the same way that we might accept the existence of Pluto. It exists, but it is not so very important to what is really going on in the warm and bright part of the solar system.

When a professor notes that many of his students seem tired, he often does not realize that it is because it is pledge week. Another professor, helping an advisee keep a time diary, is stunned to discover how much time is spent playing immersive online video games and binge-watching Netflix. As historian and educator Mark Carnes observes in Minds on Fire (2014), the shadow campus is focused upon play and competition. Play is not something undergraduates often find in the classroom, unless they are the few and unusual destined to become professional academics. Yet competition and challenge have often been there in abundance. Given however that only about 50 percent of undergraduates in the most recent National Survey of Student Engagement self-report that they have been challenged by classwork, it is only inevitable that undergraduates spend ever more time in play and competition in the shadow campus than in the professional, visible campus.

Not all parts of the shadow campus are as benign as a Netflix binge. The shadow campus is most visible—becomes the official campus—when millions of Americans watch the most visible representation of higher education: football and basketball. This shadow campus becomes both visible and destructive when the university wins, or loses, a championship, or a coach is fired, and suddenly thousands of students appear from nowhere to burn cars and weep and curse. As tourists pick their way gingerly between pools of vomit on a Sunday morning, as one can do on High Street in Columbus, Ohio, or The Corner, near the University of Virginia, they can smell the shadow campus, if not see it. In an age of alumni payments to students, coaches securing prostitutes for players, administrators resigning or going on trial, few can doubt the power of the shadow campus or the depth of its darkest places.

As Carnes shows, the shadow campus has always existed and, throughout its existence, has assumed numerous guises in response to the stimulus of college authorities. When Jefferson founded his university, the student organization into which students could escape from the panoptic gaze of their professors was the “Literary Society.” The College of New Jersey had two on the eve of the Revolution, the Cliosophic and the Whig. These societies served both as what their sobriquet indicated (some soon had larger libraries than the colleges where they were located) and also as drinking groups. When colleges began to lean upon or suppress literary societies, the American fraternity emerged. Some places—among them the University of Virginia—soon had both. Nineteenth-century Princeton added its own variation, its quintessentially Princetonian eating clubs, which soon became an evermore visible shadow campus that existed apart from the professional and public campus.

Nearly every attempt, as Carnes demonstrates, to destroy the shadow campus has failed. When Woodrow Wilson tried to eliminate Princeton’s eat-
ing clubs, undergraduates and alumni so frustrated his plans he found it easier to be elected Governor of New Jersey. Attempts to end intercollegiate football have, since shortly after the sport began, encountered the unstoppable triumvirate of enthusiastic undergraduates, nostalgic alumni, and unsentimental gamblers. In the modern age, any member of the administrative nomenklatura who actually wants to do something about drinking on campus has to face not only the deeply engrained culture of the shadow campus, but also the combined marketing firepower of the American alcohol industry (in the 1980s Anheuser-Busch launched a forty-seven-city marketing campaign by distributing beer pong to fraternities and college bars) and the possibility of a spectacular riot (such as when Washington State banned on-campus drinking in 1998, resulting in a riot involving about five hundred students; a block party gone badly wrong at Kent State in 2012 had a thousand more protesters than the more famous protest at Kent State in 1970). A Dean of Students launching a sobriety initiative is bringing a knife to a gunfight. In the story of American higher education, it is the exceptions—such as the University of Chicago ending its football program in 1939—that prove the rule.

**IV**

Yet the shadow campus has proven, over the centuries, to be an unintentional incubator of reform. Alumni and professorial discontent has, not only in the Middle Ages, led to the creation of competing institutions; Jefferson's university was his alternative to his own alma mater, William and Mary. Yet his utopian visions of a rational learning community proved to be fanciful dreams. When a chastened student body at the University of Virginia finally came to its senses, following the murder of Professor Davis, they and the university's overseers sought the consolations of evangelical religion. This resulted in the 1845 hiring of William Holmes McGuffey, the strict Calvinist author of the eponymous McGuffey Readers, as professor of moral philosophy. Mr. Jefferson would not have been amused, but McGuffey seems to have been a man of considerable presence, the kind of teacher who simply by that presence (and that of just a few oth-

ers) alter the course of an institution. The future Confederate guerrilla Col. John Singleton Mosby had been one of UVa's failures, expelled for shooting a town tough-guy in the neck in 1833 (violence did not exactly disappear at UVa after 1840). But when he was on the run from Federal authorities after the end of the Civil War, having refused to surrender, the atheist Mosby took the chance to ride into Charlottesville to visit with the Reverend McGuffey. That is a fair indication of professorial charisma.

One or two professors like McGuffey can change an institution, but they are rare. The normal procedure has been, as in the Middle Ages or in Jefferson's Virginia, to found a new institution. The Revolutionary era in the South saw the creation of numerous colleges, or if not colleges, than the academies that were colleges in embryo, like Liberty Hall in Lexington, Virginia (now Washington and Lee) and Hampden-Sydney Academy, soon to replace the last word with "College." Jefferson undoubtedly scorned their religious passions, but they proved to be as creative and certainly more reproducible than his own intellectual child.

Discontent with the riotous state of higher education in the first half of the nineteenth century led to a further burst of institution building. Given the troubles at Jefferson's university and other southern schools, it is surely no accident that the 1830s and 40s saw the creation of both the Virginia Military Institute and the South Carolina Military Academy. Like helpless parents before and since, southerners in the 1830s seem to have thought that military discipline might make men of their little demons.

Nor were these problems and solutions limited to the South. Numerous New England colleges were established to deal with what their founders saw as the rot in established colleges. As Kenneth Nivison has shown (2000, 283), Williams, Bowdoin, Middlebury, Waterville, and Amherst were founded as answers to the problems and needs of the developing liberal society of the United States. Their founders' solution was to offer a classical liberal education, which they saw as important not first for its intellectual content, but for its ability to transform students' characters.

This transformation led to further rebellions, as students rejected what they were taught and rebelled against the molds intended to form them. Yet other
students accepted and adapted, in the process creating a model of what it meant to be a scholar and a gentleman—and should one not like the emphasis on gentlemen, one could always found a co-educational Oberlin, or Olivet, or Knox, or Wheaton.

Whatever aspect they adopted—a transformed University of Virginia (complete with a new chapel); New England liberal arts colleges; Presbyterian academies; or coeducational colleges in the Midwest—all of these reform movements took the shadow campus seriously. Arguably, so did some of those research institutions founded in the late nineteenth century, if only by eliminating undergraduate education altogether.

V

Arguably, today—even after generations of reform movements, and the hiring of numerous staff and administrators to deal with its problems—the shadow campus remains as visible and as destructive as ever. Sexual assault has seemingly become an ever more serious problem. Binge drinking continues, and it is complemented by ever more creatively-designed drugs. Some fraternities survive on campuses even when they are known to endanger the lives of their members, usually propped up by national networks and proud, slightly addled alumni. And intercollegiate sports continue to dominate many NCAA member-school campuses. In fact, most of the large college riots since 2000 have erupted over victories or losses by sports teams or occasionally for no particular reason at all (viz., the blackout riot at the University of Washington in 2010), rather than over racism, wars, or any concern of conscience, as Boomer historians of the 1960s have noted with some regret. At times, it seems that even professors might begin to take notice of what is going on outside the classroom.

What then—as Vladimir Lenin would have said were he a provost—is to be done?

Mark Carnes suggests adapting new pedagogies that draw upon play. The creation of new pedagogies that actually recognize the existence of the shadow campus is a start, a very important one, but it is not sufficient. What is now needed is what has always been done since the very beginning of the university: start a new campus. Problems of one type of university model have always led to the creation of new models, and nowhere has this crisis-driven creativity flourished with greater vigor than in the United States. Only rarely have universities been able to reform themselves completely without a great incentive—like, say, the murder of a professor. But creating new types of universities—building new colleges—has often proven easier than reforming an existing institution. It is curious that despite many cyber-enthusiasms that have so far turned out to be little more than vaporware, there have been few well-funded or supported attempts to create new physical institutions that will simultaneously address the pressing question of higher education's costs and the problems of the shadow campus. We have all the institutional and cultural problems that have always created new models of higher education, and yet as far as the eye can see across the landscape there are no great entrepreneurial alternatives. If there was ever a moment when we needed those entrepreneurs, and those reformers, that have been so seminal in past centuries, it is now. A culture in great need awaits not only its McGuffeys but its Jeffersons.

Albert Louis Zambone is Visiting Assistant Professor of History at Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois.

Works Cited


LOSING HIS RELIGION

*with thanks to Meister Eckhart*

He takes up his four bibles,
seeing already the dumpster in the parking lot,
the layers of brown inside like old friends
disliked, inevitable. A door
opens. He wonders if his education brought him here:
maybe Surrealism or Dada replaced his glasses
one night, having found a path of roses
through the walls... the door closes and the 111 degree weather
pounces. The English sparrows divide
the heat. He sees his car in its allotted space,
the neighbor’s, not. Sound of children splashing
in the pool, crying out, lossless. He shifts the weight
of the Good Books to one hand, and with the other
he opens the dumpster’s heavy lid. Summer reclines
on its throne of grime. Flies attend with their one
day, their two. Each toss allows
God to rid him of God. Light
everywhere, heat. His eyes move rapidly,
testing his world. He touches the stucco wall
with both hands, listens
for laughter as mercy’s
twin walks the double
path of his arms to somewhere
near gone.

Michael Schmidt
President Obama, speaking recently to the press, dismissed all criticism of his foreign policy as “half baked” “mumbo jumbo” (“Press Conference by the President,” October 2, 2015, www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/10/02/press-conference-president). This strong declamation, coming from a President many think weak and indecisive, hardly persuaded the critics, who find Obama’s handling of international affairs rather confusing. From the Arab Spring, to Ukraine, to Syria and ISIS, Obama’s response to the string of global crises punctuating his second term has been, at best, determinedly tentative. Perhaps his reluctance to act originates in an impulse to overcorrect for the errors of his predecessor. If President Bush relied too exclusively on force to pursue unrealistic political goals, President Obama dreams unrealistically about the effectiveness of international law and institutions so as not to deploy force. Ironically, the Bush and Obama approaches to foreign policy, while diametrically opposed, have worked together to weaken international order and jeopardize global peace and security. That both approaches have failed suggests the need for a major refraction of America’s global vision.

Consider first the causes of US failure in Iraq. Some say these are to be found in the poor execution of a fundamentally sound strategy. To hold this view, however, one must believe that the goal of transforming the Middle East by force and manufacturing democracy in Iraq was realistic. To succeed in this enormous endeavor, the United States would need to hold intact a country with artificial borders dating from the British Mandate, populated by ethnic and religious groups with historic animosities, lacking substantial traditions of self-government, who had been living under an oppressive totalitarian regime for more than twenty years. The military campaign, moreover, was to be carried out without the support of existing international institutions such as the United Nations and in the face of widespread global opposition, thereby leaving the United States alone to carry out the colossal task of nation building. Even in the best case scenario, a new Iraqi state would be fragile for the considerable future, a fact which would upset the regional balance of power and clear the path for emerging Iranian hegemony.

The failures in Iraq, therefore, were rooted in an exaggerated confidence in the ability of military power to produce political solutions. Force can only be effective when employed in the service of well-defined and realistically-conceived political objectives. The Bush Administration’s plan was to transform the Middle East simply by upending the regional dynamics of power. But despite its ability to use overwhelming force, the United States lacked the power necessary to establish a new regional order among the forces it had unleashed. The Bush Administration had no plan for peace, because it believed altering the regional configurations of power would by itself be sufficient to produce the kind of peace it was wishing for. Without a concrete plan for peace, its use of power lacked a clear political objective. Because it placed power before politics, the policy in Iraq was bound to fail.

Clear about the errors of the Bush Administration, President Obama entered office determined to alter the trajectory of American foreign policy. He intended to replace the Bush doctrine with one of his own: America would henceforth “lead from behind.” Although never articulated clearly, the “Obama doctrine” centers on soft power and frequent invocations of international law and universal values. Threats to global peace can be handled best not with force, but by applying pressure on bad actors through international institutions. Democracy is so obviously attractive, the
thinking goes, that given the chance everyone will want to join the club. Those who are hesitant about joining can be induced by moral censure and economic sanctions, because globalization means even the bad guys have an interest in falling into line. In the new world order, those who lead from behind will create the incentives and sanctions necessary to inspire the rest of the world to be civilized.

Yet the effectiveness of this kind of strategy depends upon an international system that is functioning well. Those who employ soft power are making moves within a geopolitical game resting on a more fundamental order of power. Shifts in the order of power alter the rules of the game, which changes the effectiveness of particular moves. Censure and sanction are not likely to be effective, for example, if those excluded from the “community of civilized nations” are building a parallel set of international institutions with its own set of rules. Thus Russia is working to build a Eurasian Union to compete with the European Union, and China is working to build up the Asian Infrastructure Bank in order to undermine the World Bank and IMF. Even existing international institutions can be compromised as bad actors gain influence within them. When Saudi Arabia leads a United Nations Human Rights Council panel, as is currently the case, one should not expect that body to censure states seriously for abusing human rights. Thus, if one hopes to use soft power effectively, one must also defend the international legal order and attend to the shifting dynamics of power which constantly threaten it. But more often than not, defense and balancing are tasks for hard power.

The truth is that “soft” and “hard” power are only different aspects of political power in general. Whether soft or hard, power’s purpose is to advance interests through persuasion in a game of claim and counterclaim. Political persuasion, of course, is inherently coercive. States persuade each other by applying pressure, sometimes through censure and sanction, sometimes through the direct application of force. Selecting the method of persuasion most suitable for the moment depends, among other things, upon a clear understanding of what one’s interests are and how they are threatened. Different threats call for different uses of power. Thus any single “doctrine” concerning the use of force is likely to be ideologically constrained in ways that obscure the ability to perceive the whole of reality. Over the past four years, President Obama has been increasingly constrained by his ideological commitment to a world order shaped by international law. Like George W. Bush, his doctrine of power precedes his definition of political purpose.

The major geopolitical challenges confronting America today are threats to the prevailing international order. That international order is fundamentally liberal: protective of human rights, supportive of democratic development, and shaped by the ideal of international law. But all such aspirations travel through the dynamics of power; they do not replace it. Nor is today’s liberal world order inevitable. It was constructed deliberately out of the ashes of World War II and developed intentionally throughout the Cold War with US leadership. Many contemporary strains on the current order are a consequence, to be sure, of mistaken US policies, but the greatest stresses are due to unavoidable shifts in geopolitics. Growing fissures in the EU coupled with the return of an aggressive Russia, the collapse of long-standing geopolitical arrangements in the Middle East and North Africa, the rise of China, and the shift toward multipolar power dynamics all have put the global order in flux in ways unfriendly to the “universal” liberal values Obama likes to invoke. Defending liberal values means protecting the international order on which they depend. To do that successfully takes strategic vision, a vision that gives purpose to power. Since shifts in international order are inevitable, which among the potential array of shifts will be most conducive to liberal values and American interests? And what means are at our disposal to direct the inevitable flow of events in a direction amenable to the world order we would like to see? Only after answering strategic questions like these can one deliberate intelligently about when and whether to employ hard or soft power. Without a strategic vision, every use of American power is bound to remain ineffective.

H. David Baer is Professor of Theology and Philosophy at Texas Lutheran University.
Reviewed in this issue...

Joseph Epstein’s A Literary Education
and Other Essays

What’s So “Personal” About the Essay?

W hat ever happened to the essay, and where do we turn today to discover the gifted essayist? While it is true to say that the essay is alive and well in any number of venues, some print and others online, it is also true that our new digital universe is, at present, shaping the very nature of this elusive mode of expression called “the essay.” Although it may be too early in this new, emerging era of literacy to say precisely how the form is changing, most intelligent readers sense that something is going on. And they may be alarmed by what they are seeing.

Indeed, what is an essay? According to our contemporary arbiter of meaning (Wikipedia), essays are “generally scholarly pieces of writing giving the author’s own argument, but the definition is vague, overlapping with those of an article, a pamphlet and a short story.” Essays overlap with short stories—really? Not so much. Generally scholarly—really? I would argue the opposite: the best essays are decidedly unscholarly, yet manifestly intelligent and beautifully written. Does an essay give an author’s argument? Well, two thoughts: often, the best essays simply ask good questions without providing clear answers; and second: many essays provide multiple, conflicting answers, and thus arguments, to these questions. At least the wiki-folk got one part correct: “the definition is vague.”

Great essays, and their composers, are like great athletic performances: I don’t have a clue how an athlete pulls it off, but then again I know excellence and beauty when I see it. Some students assure me that “beauty is in the eye of the beholder,” but I like to assure them right back that beholders need some training. I assume that all prolific readers can make a list of their favorite essayists, even if they are unable to “define” precisely what it is about the literary performances that they find most compelling. George Orwell, for instance: how easily he disrupts our expectations, as in “Politics and the English Language,” where he shows us how bad political argument often consists precisely of the concealment of true purpose. Or Annie Dillard: how gracefully she broaches issues of Providence and theodicy, as she does in her volume Pilgrim at Tinker Creek, by sketching briefly a frog being sucked dry by a giant water bug. Or Mark Twain: his account

A LITERARY EDUCATION
Joseph Epstein
Axios Press, 2014
$24.00
537 pages
Reviewed by
Harold K. Bush
Saint Louis University
of lynching is still devastating, especially as an argument against foreign missions in favor of more focus on “saving” America (and in particular his home state of Missouri) in an essay that remained unpublished during his lifetime called “The United States of Lyncherdom.” Or Henry Thoreau: how I aspire to reconnect to my own “wildness,” after reading his brilliant account of “Walking”; it literally redefines the act, and can make a reader want to get up right now and start walking due west. Or Susan Sontag’s brief, hypnotic performance in “Against Interpretation”: an important 1960s document which I love to assign to my upper-level students because it is provocatively composed, seriously flawed, and thus deeply unsettling for the uninitiated. (Oddly, I still assign it, even though I have major disagreements with her conclusions.)

I could probably go through each of these creative compositions, outline the arguments, and analyze the style and content (if there even is “content,” as Sontag might intervene here). Somehow, though, like when I watch an Olympian delivering the bravura performance of a lifetime or a master delivering a fine piece of music, I often prefer simply to watch and listen. One mark of a good essayist is that you can read the sentences out loud, to yourself. And every great essay sounds pretty good out loud.

All of this is by way of introduction to what I consider to be an outstanding new volume of essays representing many years of publication by the long-time editor of The American Scholar, Joseph Epstein. At the heart of this wonderful collection is an all-important meditation on the nature and purpose of what he calls the “personal essay.” We might begin by considering some of the wisdom gained over decades of sifting through hundreds of submissions to one of America’s great venues for the art form called the essay. In fact, an important element of my review here is to suggest that, not only does Epstein give us a quirky and highly enjoyable account of the personal essay, but he also illustrates the form elsewhere in the volume, at a very high level of achievement.

Above all, Epstein’s writing shares something crucial with the similar achievements by the likes of Orwell, Dillard, Twain, Thoreau, and Sontag. The personal essay reveals much treasure about the person writing; it rings with autobiographical music. He writes,

Whatever the ostensible subject of a personal essay, at bottom the true subject is the author of the essay. In all serious writing, no matter how strenuous the attempt to attain objectivity, the author leaves his or her fingerprints. But in the personal essay, all claims to objectivity are dropped at the outset, all masks removed, and the essayist proceeds with shameless subjectivity. This direct presentation of the self, when it comes off, gives the personal essay both its charm and its intimacy.

Here we have its essence, according to Epstein: a great personal essay, he argues, is secretly about its author. Thus do we come away as we might from a riveting conversation with a friend at a coffee shop or pub. And thus I feel when reading just about any of these warm essays that I am encountering their author. As Walt Whitman once wrote of Leaves of Grass: “this is no book, / who touches this, touches a man.”

But there is so much more insight in Epstein’s essay about the personal essay. Consider some of these suggestive passages: “I have called the personal essay ‘a happy accident,’ and invoked the word happy because it is free, the freest form in all of literature. A form that is itself intrinsically formless, the personal essay is able to take off on any tack it wishes, building its own structure as it moves along, rebuilding and remaking itself—and its author—each time out” (377). Here Epstein concedes the impossibility of constraint for this form. As for the voice he is aiming to create: “The personal essay has this single quality of difference from fiction: it is bounded—some might say grounded—by reality. There are no unreliable narrators in personal essays; in a personal essay

Advent-Christmas 2015  55
an unreliable narrator is just another name for a bad writer. We believe—we have to believe—what the writer tells us, though we are of course at liberty not to be persuaded by the way he tells it. We believe, too, in the facts in his essay as facts that have an existence in reality...” (380). Thus do we read, and feel, a certain authenticity and truthfulness: we trust the author’s vision. And we enjoy going along for the ride, with a good writer: “The personal essay is, in my experience, a form of discovery. What one discovers in writing such essays is where one stands on complex issues, problems, questions, subjects. In writing the essay, one tests one’s feelings, instincts, and thoughts in the crucible of composition” (381). This curiosity cannot be overstated. Indeed, my most well-worn advice for student writers is just that: “get curious about something.” Epstein: “My idea of a writer, Susan Sontag has written, is ‘someone who is interested in everything;’ and it is true that the field of subjects available to the essayist is as wide as life itself” (383).

This volume showcases Epstein’s wide and deep curiosity. The book’s title, A Literary Education, reveals his two major themes: the “literary,” and the nature of an “education.” Generally, this book will appeal most to readers who are immersed in literary culture and in the higher education industry. Epstein has much experience with both, having taught at Northwestern University for many years. He knows English departments inside and out, for better or worse (mostly worse, about which more below, so fasten your seatbelts). When reading through these sections, I often discovered Epstein putting into words some of my own thoughts and considerations, ones that I had not yet even managed to express in language—an exhilarating experience, and in my experience one of the hallmarks of the great essayists. Our thoughts can return to us, as Emerson once put it, in “alienated majesty.” Or as Epstein writes: “Two of the chief ways an essayist can prove interesting are, first, by telling readers things they already know in their hearts but have never been able to formulate for themselves; and, second, by telling them things they do not know and perhaps have never even imagined” (385). While it is true that much of this book consists of many things I did not know already, I would say that much of the delight I discovered here was in those forceful and deeply-felt expressions of things I “already knew in my heart.”

This latter phenomenon, I am happy to say, is easily illustrated with numerous poignant and often hilarious examples. His fine, at times wicked humor is often in the context of very serious and challenging topics. For instance, in a witty yet wise essay on what he calls “The Kindergarchy,” Epstein analyzes the strong tendencies toward entitlement among today’s college students. He wisecracks that he often would like to write on their paper assignments, “D-, Too much love in the home” (132). But is it fully a wisecrack? Underneath the laughter, Epstein disparages the churlish complaints of some students against his harsh criticisms of their work. He also resents the highly therapeutic elements of child rearing these days: “I knew where they came by their sense of their own deep significance and that this sense was utterly false to any conceivable reality. Despite what their parents had been telling them from the very outset of their lives, they were not significant. Significance has to be earned, and it is earned only through achievement” (132). The reader may be shocked by such unqualified assertions, but they are pure Epstein, and they will ring both true and false for a lot of teachers in today’s university, including this one. Can there be “too much love in the home”? Are students deceived about their own inherent “sig-
nificance”? Yes and no: but the great value of an essay like this is that it can begin to generate a useful and potentially searching reevaluation of how we think about our teaching, our students, and even our own child-rearing habits.

Another example comes in the form of an amazingly frank analysis of my institutional home for the past two decades: the humanities, especially that space reserved for some professors who like to imagine that they are perhaps the most humane of all, the English Department. Epstein signals his amusement—and his horror—in the title of one of the best chapters: “The Academic Zoo: Theory—in Practice.” One absolutely spot-on anecdote is his description of that rite of passage that many of us know so well: the lecture by the Famous Theorist that turns out to be both incomprehensible and enervating. I will not name the world-renowned speaker who is his particular focus; nor will I mention the similarly famous “expert” who provided me, in graduate school, with the eerily identical set of observations and responses. But something sinister inside makes me want to name them both. Here I will simply allow Epstein to sketch the scene:

I was astonished by the rapt reception his almost passionately boring, nearly frame-by-frame analysis of a delightfully lightweight little movie received on the part of graduate students and teachers in the standing-room-only audience. Professor ___ ran past the normal lecturer’s hour, which is probably longer than Ben Hecht and Charles Lederer spent on composing the screenplay for the movie but which to me felt longer than a bad fiscal quarter. I was the only one to leave the room at hour’s end. The rest of the crowd remained, slack-jawed and agog, no doubt making innumerable intellectual discoveries that were clearly not available to me. This was the first but it would not be the last time that people putatively interested in the same things I was interested in would discover treasure where I found none buried. (309)

Please note the care and craft of this fine passage. For one thing, it is a funny exaggeration: to think that a theorist might wax on about a “text” for even longer than it took some harried writers to compose it. But perhaps most importantly, he ends his testimony of this episode with a proverb, one that, at least for me, rings perfectly true. Epstein announces a set of feelings that I have myself often felt, but have never quite been able to put my finger on, and he does so with both wonder and aplomb. Unapologetically, he confesses his inferiority to other professors (or is his apology ironic?), who all seem willing and able to locate truth and beauty in something that he considers insipid, “almost passionately boring.” Personally, I have felt the pang of inferiority in just this situation; I have wondered if I might just be the dullest listener in the room. Epstein’s humor, devilish and appropriate, helps me locate my truest feelings: maybe I am one of the only listeners able to discern—or willing to admit openly—that the professor’s lecture is alienating, obtuse, condescending, off-putting, or all of the above.

Which brings me to one large theme that pops up over and over in this collection: the powerful sense that there is something tragically gone amiss in the study of literature (or in the humanities, or in the art world, or in the writing of poetry, or in creative writing programs, or in scholarly accounts of “the canon,” or in the way we interact with our students, or in many other areas). Epstein is certainly not only a firebrand in his writings; he is also very much a reactionary. This general sensibility, and even to some extent nostalgic desire for the past, is set up by the book’s title, which comes from the first, and longest, essay in the collection: “A Literary Education: On Being Well-Versed in Literature.” There, we recognize that he yearns for those clearer and purer days of yesteryear, when students mostly read thick books and such highbrow journals as The Partisan Review, much of it above and beyond their regular assignments.

But sometimes he even critiques those yesteryears, as in his devastating, yet oddly warm, unveiling of the late, great Walter Cronkite—with warts and all. Again, Epstein notices things
about Cronkite that are easily overlooked, or lain away on the ash heap of history, in favor of the myth. Similarly he chastens our cultural memory of the 1950s, asking how it is we so quickly rely on cliché to describe an entire ten-year span of time. His meditation on the 1950s arises within an intriguing book review of David Halberstam, whose achievements are dismissed as the work of a mere reader of newspapers. In effect, Epstein often pits his own experiences against the shared and now inherited wisdom of a generation. And among the béte noirs of the book is certainly another abstraction: “the 60s,” which for Epstein remains a period of terrifying, long-term consequences. This conceit is most on display when he analyzes his own early review of Paul Goodman, an exercise that is deeply moving in a poignant sort of way. Epstein’s “Retrospect” on Goodman consists of an account of how a liberatory icon of his generation has by now become a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy of all the bad things to come, even though there remains something magical about Goodman. These and other essays about the past reveal an observer deeply torn, so it is incorrect to suggest that he comes off as a dew-eyed Romantic venerating all things past. Generally, however, one leaves the volume feeling nostalgic for the old days, when young students read voraciously and respected the knowledge gained by their elders over long decades of work and experience.

I must end by admitting, that, in many cases, I am unwilling to go as far into the territory of the acute reactionary as Epstein wishes to take me. We all have our limits, and the PC Police will certainly want to pull him over for questioning, on several accounts. But I sympathize. I love the title, “Academic Zoo,” referring to university humanities departments and their pet theories, but then again I guess that makes me one of the animals imprisoned there. Nevertheless, I certainly recognize many of the diseases being diagnosed by Dr. Epstein.

Certainly, for me, there is something deeply personal about my engagement with these essays. Epstein succeeds at displaying excellence in the very form he set out to define, the personal essay: “at bottom the true subject is the author of the essay.” I learned some great ways to think about many subjects, but I came away from the book feeling as if I had spent time with an astute, but always whimsical, observer of contemporary culture, especially of the university. I am also encouraged to reach even higher, in my own attempts to write a decent essay. In this way, Epstein has done for me precisely what I would hope to do for my best students: he challenges me to be ruthless about my prose and to accomplish even greater things than I think I am capable of accomplishing. Plus, he has made me rethink what it is we are really doing, as teachers in the humanities. Those are venerable accomplishments.

Other readers might be less willing to grant him such latitude. As Flannery O’Connor famously put it, sometimes for the hard of hearing, you must shout, and for the almost-blind, you draw large and startling figures. Epstein is truly a master of such startling figures. Amazingly enough, as we confront many of our culture’s most shattering horrors, he allows us to laugh at them too, even while rethinking them. It seems to me, a veteran of the guild for some decades now, that a little self-deprecating humor in the service of outcomes assessment might be a rather good thing just about now, in these confusing and darkening days of American higher education.

Harold K. Bush is Professor of English at Saint Louis University. His book, Continuing Bonds with the Dead: Parental Grief and Nineteenth-Century American Authors, will be published in spring 2016 by the University of Alabama Press.
Submission 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 or submitted online at thecresset.submittable.com. 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

Brett Foster taught Renaissance literature and creative writing at Wheaton College. He authored two poetry collections, The Garbage Eater (Triquarterly/ Northwestern University Press, 2011) and Fall Run Road (Finishing Line Press, 2012), which was awarded Finishing Line Press’s Open Chapbook Award in 2011.

J. T. Ledbetter is Professor of English, Emeritus at California Lutheran University and author of the poetry collections Old and Lost Rivers (Lost Horse Press, 2012) and Underlying Premises (Lewis Clark Press, 2010).

John Hollembeak is a retired adjunct professor of psychology and psychotherapist, and former Presbyterian pastor. Married for nearly fifty years, John and his wife Demaris have two daughters and five grandchildren. They created a performing-arts “road show called “Mirth & Musin.”

Colin Dodds is the author of several novels, including Windfall and The Last Bad Job. His poetry has appeared in more than one hundred eighty publications, and has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize.

Joe Martin Rice’s previous work has appeared in Ruminator, Rolling Coulter, Eudaimonia Poetry Review, Assisi Journal, and elsewhere. He remembers dunking a basketball. He has four amazing children and lives in Indiana (these are not coincidences).

Michael Schmidt is an MFA candidate at Eastern Washington University. He is grateful to be alive. He misses the ocean.
In Their Own Language: Toward a Receptive Ecumenism in Christian Higher Education

Richard Ray

Broken Bell:
Thoughts on Parenting and Poetry

Kjerstin Anne Kauffman

Gumdrops

Paul J. Willis