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The cresset

SELLER COLLECTION VALPARAISO UNIVERSITY

CRESSET

A REVIEW OF LITERATURE, THE ARTS, AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS ADVENT-CHRISTMAS 2016

2016 Election Roundtable

Chris W. Bonneau

Geoffrey Bowden

Jennifer Hora

David Lott

We've Lost that Losing Feeling

Thomas C. Willadsen

Muriel Spark's
Theological Fiction

David Heddendorf

Bound by Grief: Writing through the Loss of a Child

Harold K. Bush

VERSE

A Prayer for Healing
Thom Caraway

Church on the March
Paul Willis

Detail of a Peacock
Jennifer Stewart Fueston



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On the front cover: Vaino (Vin) Hannell (1896-1964). *Winter Dune*, 1952. Oil on Masonite, 24 x 20 inches. Gift of John Cain. Used with permission of the Brauer Museum of Art.

Vin Hannell was a Chicago Modernist who moved to Porter County with his artist wife, Hazel Hannell (also well represented in the Brauer Museum's permanent collection). In their Furnessville studio, they created works that captured the Dunes landscape in all its aspects. This painting, a gift from noted arts professional John Cain, presents a wintry dune that is at once fanciful and familiar.

Winter Dune is part of the Brauer Museum's exhibition, *Sand and Steel: Visions of Our Indiana Shore*, on display from January 11, 2016, through April 2, 2017.

On the back cover: *Beautiful Peacock Feathers*, Photo by Rose Mendoza via Creative Commons. Original at flic.kr/p/dqBQM4



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whatever is **TRUE**

whatever is **NOBLE**

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whatever is **ADMIRABLE**

if anything is excellent or praiseworthy

—think about such things.

Philippians 4:8

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IN LUCE TUA

In Thy Light

What Are You Waiting For?

HOW ARE YOU AT WAITING? ARE YOU ABLE to take it in stride, or does it test your patience?

Several essays in this issue respond to recent long-awaited events. Starting on page 10, Chris W. Bonneau, Geoffrey Bowden, Jennifer Hora, and David Lott take a closer look at the outcome of the U.S. presidential election—the lead-up to which seemed never-ending.

But as long as the election season seemed, it paled in comparison to the wait endured by the Chicago Cubs for the title of World Series champions. On page 18, Thomas C. Willadsen reflects on what the win, 108 years in the making, means for the team's lifelong fans.

Whether or not you're a Cubs fan or a Trump enthusiast may be of little import. Regardless of what's going on in baseball or politics, the truth is that plenty of disappointments, imperfections, and limitations await you (if they are not already troubling you). They come as little, niggling frustrations—maybe, as Josh Langhoff reports in his column, not being able to find a particular Christmas album at your local Christian bookstore (page 38). Or they come as devastating thunderstrokes, as Harold K. Bush describes in his essay on the suffering of bereaved parents (page 28). Many hurts come in a form that's somewhere between the two extremes, such as the lonely emptiness that can descend in the cold, dark days and weeks after Christmas Day, as Cara Strickland mentions in her essay on the Twelfth Night of Christmas (page 24).

Sometimes we can do things that will improve the situation. Often our actions can usher in a new, better reality for ourselves and others. Joel Kurz touches on this in his review of A. Trevor Sutton's

book, *Being Lutheran* (page 42). Yet we know that not every problem can be solved; not every pain can be alleviated. In those instances, our most pressing task may be to wait, to reflect, and to long for what seems, in the moment, patently unattainable.

In his sermon for December 2, 1928, Dietrich Bonhoeffer preached, "Not all can wait—certainly not those who are satisfied, contented, and feel that they live in the best of all possible worlds! Those who learn to wait are uneasy about their way of life, but yet have seen a vision of greatness in the world of the future and are patiently expecting its fulfillment. The celebration of Advent is possible only to those who are troubled in soul, who know themselves to be poor and imperfect, and who look forward to something greater to come."

We are part of a long tradition of impoverished, imperfect, and troubled souls. As proof, take a look at O. P. Kretzmann's essay, "Bethlehem and 1941," which originally appeared in the *Cresset* seventy-five years ago, and which we are revisiting in this issue (page 54). Much of what Kretzmann writes could in fact have been written today: trains still pass through Valparaiso, the winds still blow, and the shocks of corn in the fields on the edge of town are again white with snow. But just as heart-breakingly current are his allusions to war, fear, hate, and despair. "I have no room and no sympathy for easy optimism now at Christmas, 1941," Kretzmann writes. "We come to the manger with less than we ever had before."

May our feelings of dissatisfaction and discontent push us closer to the manger this Christmas season than we have dared in years past. May our unease about our way of life and our recognition that we do not live in the best of all possible worlds kindle our desire for something greater to come. We can do many things to help achieve that vision. But we can also wait, in joyful hope, for the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ. ✝

—HGG

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Muriel Spark's Theological Fiction

David Heddendorf

MURIEL SPARK, WHO DIED IN 2006, HAS always resisted classification. Born in Edinburgh in 1918 to a Jewish father and a Gentile mother of, biographer Martin Stannard observes, “eclectic religious tastes” (2), she made her way, with no college education, through a brief unhappy marriage, a sojourn in Africa, a stint of wartime propaganda work, and a hand-to-mouth existence as a London woman of letters, before emerging in her 40s as a best-selling, critically acclaimed novelist. During the latter half of the twentieth century she made homes in New York, London, Rome, and Tuscany—“home” being mainly a place to write and throw parties. Photographs depict a bewildering array of women: the frumpy middle-aged Londoner straight out of Monty Python; the wry intellectual in a jaunty hat, stopping by her publisher’s office in New York; the glamorous celebrity musing in her Rome apartment. Spark cultivated an ever-changing “public image,” to borrow a phrase she incorporated into the title of a novel. One of her favorite words, a hallmark of her intellectual temperament, was “nevertheless.”

In 1961 *The New Yorker* magazine cemented Spark’s fame by publishing *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* in a single issue. Along with other brilliant novels like *Memento Mori* (1959), *The Bachelors* (1960), and *The Girls of Slender Means* (1963), and remarkable stories like “The Portobello Road,” “The Go-Away Bird,” and “The Dark Glasses,” *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* established Spark as one of the most compelling and intelligent fiction writers of her time. The cerebral innovation of *The Driver’s Seat* (1970) prompted critic Malcolm Bradbury to gush revealingly that “the practised devotee of novels is granted an extraordinary

professional joy” (193). As if retreating from that elitist image, Spark later turned out atmospheric renderings of postwar London in *Loitering with Intent* (1981) and *A Far Cry from Kensington* (1988). From sophisticated comedy to intense moral probing to stylish and bleak postmodernism, Spark could do it all, in masterful prose that fit whatever task came to hand.

A significant feature of Spark’s public image appears in the “Note About the Author” from her early books: “She entered the Roman Catholic Church in 1954.” As a Catholic novelist, Spark prompts inevitable comparisons to Evelyn Waugh and Graham Greene in Britain, and to Flannery O’Connor in the United States. She wrote consciously and explicitly as a Catholic Christian. Yet here too she eludes easy, conclusive definition. Not much for regular Mass attendance, she embraced the Church on her own terms, peppering interviews with heterodox asides. Her fiction, too, might disappoint religious readers’ expectations. Although a number of her characters, like the omniscient narrator of *Memento Mori*, speak the language of Catholic piety, Spark manages their fates in puzzling ways. *The Girls of Slender Means*, for instance, employs the New Testament image of the narrow door, only to leave troubling questions about who is saved and why.

Frank Kermode, one of Spark’s most astute critics, suggests that “although we have a special niche for certain religious novels, Mrs. Spark’s kind of religion seems bafflingly idiosyncratic. In fact she is a theological rather than a religious writer.” This formulation seems admirably suited to Spark’s independent-minded Catholicism and her sometimes exclusive appeal. Kermode notes further that in *The Mandelbaum Gate* (1965)

Spark dwells on “the intellectual aspects” of spiritual matters (10). But what else, exactly, does Kermodé’s distinction mean? What is the difference between religious and theological fiction? Two examples might help sharpen the contrast.

THE AMERICAN CATHOLIC WRITER RON Hansen is probably best known for *Mariette in Ecstasy* (1991), a novel about a young postulant who receives the stigmata. In 2009 Hansen published *Exiles*, an overtly Catholic novel combining the story of five nuns who drowned in a shipwreck with that of the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, who memorialized the nuns in “The Wreck of the Deutschland.” Between *Mariette in Ecstasy* and *Exiles* came *Atticus* (1996), a very different novel, tough to the brink of hard-boiled, about a Colorado oilman with two sons. The older son, Frank, is a state senator, colorless and conventional. Scott, the younger, is a 40-year-old misfit with a wasted flair for art and a weakness for alcohol and drugs. One day Atticus Cody gets a phone call with bad news about Scott. He departs for Mexico, where only a father’s persistent love can penetrate a wall of evasions and false appearances.

Atticus is obviously a recasting of the Prodigal Son parable, as the novel twice makes plain. Hansen creates in Atticus Cody an unsentimental portrayal of the loving, forgiving Father. What makes *Atticus* truly surprising, however, is the way its detective-story plot (too elaborate to summarize here, too enjoyable to spoil) ingeniously invokes not just the Prodigal Son story but the overarching theme of Christ’s substitutionary death. While avoiding simplistic, one-to-one correspondences, Hansen powerfully conveys the *scandal* of atonement: Scott Cody, selfish, brutal, and careless, seems utterly unworthy of redemption. With this clueless, hard-living reprobate, Hansen dramatizes the reach of divine grace, and inspires a reverent awe. In *Atticus* he achieves a truly exemplary religious novel.

Like *Atticus*, Spark’s 1984 novel *The Only Problem* draws upon a story from the Bible. Harvey Gotham, a wealthy man who can do as he likes, lives in a rundown cottage in the Vosges region of France, writing a study of the book of

Job. Separated from his beautiful wife, Effie, Harvey becomes involved with her sister Ruth, the wife of his old friend and fellow theology student, Edward. One morning while Harvey sits in

Spark cultivated an ever-changing “public image,” to borrow a phrase she incorporated into the title of a novel. One of her favorite words, a hallmark of her intellectual temperament, was “nevertheless.”

a museum, contemplating a painting of Job by Georges de La Tour, the police pick him up for questioning. They suspect Effie of belonging to a leftist terrorist gang that has been active in the area. Harvey knows nothing about Effie’s alleged crimes, but believes she might be capable of them. He undergoes a series of lengthy interrogations, broken up by talks with his lawyer and harassment by the press.

At some point the reader surmises that Harvey is not only studying Job—he is himself a modern-day Job, with the police, his lawyer, and the reporters standing in for Job’s friends Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. (In a preface to *The Only Problem*, Spark writes that Job’s uncomfortable talks with his comforters remind her of “a modern police-interrogation” (Spark, 2014: 191).) Harvey becomes an isolated figure at the heart of the crisis, eventually deserted by his sister-in-law Ruth as well as being estranged from Effie, confused by news reports of the violent gang, hounded and caricatured by the media. He appears increasingly anxious and upset.

Yet compared to the biblical Job—who loses his children and vast possessions, and is afflicted with terrible sores—the brooding Harvey “doesn’t,” as John Updike comments in his review of *The Only Problem*, “seem to suffer” (454). For all that Spark arranges Harvey and his comforters

in a *Job*-like configuration, a strange calm hangs over the proceedings. Whether or not Harvey's numbness constitutes an aesthetic fault, as Updike contends, the question of whether he suffers or not does pose an interpretive conundrum. How can a man whose affections wander vaguely between two women, who remains in good health, and who has plenty of money, be said to suffer in any meaningful sense?

Part of the detached feeling of *The Only Problem* stems from its narrative technique. Spark creates her narrators very deliberately, once remarking, "I have to decide what the author of the narrative is like. It's not me, it's a character" (Spark, 1992: 27). Compared to *Memento Mori* or *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, with their intrusive, authoritative narrators, *The Only Problem* seems hardly to have a narrator at all. Events unfold strictly from the characters' points of view, with a flat, toneless voice filling in the action. If anyone in the novel suffers, the laconic narrator, for one, will not insist on it. As Harvey himself says,

near the end, "I'm not even sure that I suffer, I only endure distress" (456). It's clear, then, that Spark is perfectly aware that Harvey's troubles don't rival Job's. With her curiously muted method and her enigmatic protagonist, she asks not so much why Harvey suffers as how suffering, in the late twentieth century, is experienced and defined.

Certainly Harvey's tangled love life contributes to his ennui. As the characters drift in and out of absent-minded affairs, no one seems particularly impassioned or heartbroken. It's hard to grieve over a spouse or lover you've barely acknowledged. Harvey's difficulties, moreover, come filtered by the media and the police. Where Job gets his evil tidings from a series of messengers, each using the refrain "I alone have escaped to tell you" (Job 1:13-18), Harvey must piece together Effie's doings and whereabouts from ambiguous photographs, grudging asides from interrogators, and lurid newspaper and radio accounts. Even in 1984, before the information onslaught occasioned by the internet, modern life



Library of Congress. Original at www.loc.gov/resource/pnmsca.42988/

Poster of Muriel Spark from the Time Reading Program's Great Author Series, 1965

interposed a deadening barrier between people and their misfortunes.

But Spark seems less interested in the degree to which Harvey suffers than in the peculiar nature of his suffering. Early in the novel, he tells Edward that Job “not only argued the problem of suffering, he suffered the problem of argument” (339). As Kermode notes, Spark is quoting from her own article of nearly thirty years earlier, “The Mystery of Job’s Suffering.” More than just a recycled witticism, the sentence encapsulates Harvey’s predicament. He suffers from thinking about suffering. “To study, to think, is to live and suffer painfully” (435), he tells himself late in the novel, and he proposes the same idea in a bizarre press conference, lecturing a roomful of reporters about Job: “Our limitations of knowledge make us puzzle over the cause of suffering, maybe it is the cause of suffering itself” (401). It doesn’t matter that Harvey remains physically sound, and seemingly ambivalent toward the chaos around him. His real suffering is inner, brought on by his theological questions.

If Harvey’s claim seems overstated or far-fetched, it at least has a noteworthy precedent in the history of philosophy. Stanley Cavell credits Wittgenstein with “discovering when and how to stop philosophizing,” thereby giving philosophy “peace” (269-70). Some questions cause so much trouble, and prove so fruitless, that the best solution, according to Cavell and Wittgenstein, is to figure out how to stop asking them. For Harvey, however, no such peace is possible. After telling Edward that Job suffered the problem of argument, he adds: “And that is incurable.” Once the theologian begins asking questions, there’s no stopping, no relief. Harvey’s suffering begins before his marriage falls apart, before the police and the press start dogging him. His suffering begins when he asks why the blameless suffer.

IN MURIEL SPARK’S FICTION, PEOPLE DON’T agonize about whether or not God exists. They simply believe, wearing their belief as matter-of-factly as the color of their eyes or hair. “Do you have any religion, William?” Nancy Hawkins asks her lover in *A Far Cry from Kensington*. To William’s “No, I don’t believe a damn thing,”

Nancy replies, “I can’t disbelieve” (164). There are no elaborate apologetics, no sweaty struggles with doubt. When Jean Taylor declares, in *Memento Mori*, that a good death “doesn’t reside in the dignity of bearing but in the disposition of the soul,” her cruel visitor in the nursing home snaps, “Prove it.” “Disprove it,” she [says] wearily” (167). Harvey Gotham, “tormented” by “the only problem,”—the problem of suffering (331)—wrestles with God, not whether or not to believe in God.

“Surely I would speak to the Almighty, and I desire to reason with God.” Job’s cry—Spark’s epigraph to *The Only Problem*—sums up the theological novelist’s purpose. Complacent unbelief is not available, so she confronts the paradoxes and absurdities of belief. How can the greatest of sinners be saints? Why do the wicked prosper? Why is death the only way to life? God, of course, replies from the whirlwind: “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?”

Yet while thus teetering on the verge of appearing dated, her books continue to raise urgent questions about God and good and evil, and remain as absorbing as ever, if not more provocative in an increasingly secular age.

(Job 38:2 ESV) It puts one in an uncomfortable spot, this open-eyed belief. You can’t avoid the hard questions, but the answers won’t come, and then you’re rebuked for asking. So your suffering remains incurable.

Like a painting by Rembrandt or Caravaggio, Hansen’s *Atticus* might strengthen a believer’s faith. The religious purport is unmistakable, the devotional response almost involuntary. In a novel like *The Only Problem*, events tend less toward affirmation than implication and inquiry. Off balance, the reader must derive meaningful questions from seemingly disconnected elements, as in those maddening story problems from grade-

school math class. *Atticus*, in short, might make you weep; *The Only Problem* makes you think.

Spark's *The Ballad of Peckham Rye* (1960) ends with the famous sentence: "But it was a sunny day for November, and, as he drove swiftly past the Rye, he saw the children playing there and the women coming home from work with their shopping-bags, the Rye for an instant looking like a cloud of green and gold, the people seeming to ride upon it, as you might say there was another world than this" (375-76). Like Harry Angstrom's ecstatic moments in John Updike's *Rabbit* novels, or like the mysterious themes and images in the novels of Alice Thomas Ellis, such a sentence hints at a supernatural realm behind appearances. The sudden glimpse doesn't specify a religious point of view, or even provide much means of speculating on one. It conveys the merest trace of the divine. "The Portobello Road," *Memento Mori*, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, and *The Girls of Slender Means* go further. Leading the reader from one tantalizing, puzzling circumstance to the next, they create the conditions for asking theological questions. In *The Only Problem* the narrative ultimately questions questioning itself.

Literary art of this kind might sound cold and clinical, and in fact some of Spark's novels emulate the *nouveau roman*, an experimental style that emerged in 1950s France. Other works, such as the Watergate-inspired *The Abbess of Crewe* (1974), reflect a preoccupation with not-so-current events. Yet while thus teetering on the verge of appearing dated, her books continue to raise urgent questions about God and good and evil, and remain as absorbing as ever, if not more provocative in an increasingly secular age. At its best her work is both intellectually exhilarating and spiritually profound. In Muriel Spark's theological fiction, faith pauses on its way toward submissive piety, toward the dust and ashes of the chastened Job. Stopping just inside the cathedral door, it casts a critical eye at the stained glass, the vaulting, the tracery, before entering the nave and falling to its knees. ✦

David Heddendorf lives in Ames, Iowa. His writing has appeared frequently in *The Southern Review* and *Sewanee Review*.

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A PRAYER FOR HEALING

Red earth land and evergreens
Pinon, Douglas fir, desert willow.
Red dust air valley golding at sunset.
Far down the hill is creek and sage.
In another time zone, my wife burns
her hand blister-bright.

The wash-out cut bank strands
a Fremont cottonwood, half-exposed roots,
dead upper branches. Cicada-killer wasps
burrow red sand, lay eggs, and fly
to search out food. At night,
the moon bleeds rose quartz.

Surely one of these plants
could salve her palm. I find
prickly pear, Cholla cactus,
lilies in bloom, large bells open white.
Run-off cuts new channels
with each blessed rain, a landscape
of abundance as Washington burns,
air smoke-thick, choking and blind.

My wife burns her hand,
and I learn the sharp cadence of high desert
mountains. I cut a leather-thick leaf
from a tree I don't know, pack it to bring home.

Thom Caraway

2016 Election Roundtable

Chris W. Bonneau, Jennifer Hora, David Lott, & Geoffrey Bowden

2016: The Year We Knew Nothing *Chris W. Bonneau*

A QUOTE FROM A DRAFT OF THIS ESSAY written two days before the election: “What is really interesting to me is that we have had a dumpster fire in an election that was not ever particularly close. Secretary Clinton had a lead over Donald Trump pretty much from the outset, and while the size of that lead fluctuated, it never went away. The same is true with polling in states: they were pretty consistent over the course of the election. So, while there was a lot of noise surrounding the campaign, few voters were actually swayed.” Oops.

I have been a professional political scientist since 2002. I study American politics from a quantitative perspective, which means I deal exclusively with data, not “momentum,” “feelings,” etc. And in the early hours of November 9, 2016, much about elections I thought I knew I discovered I did not.

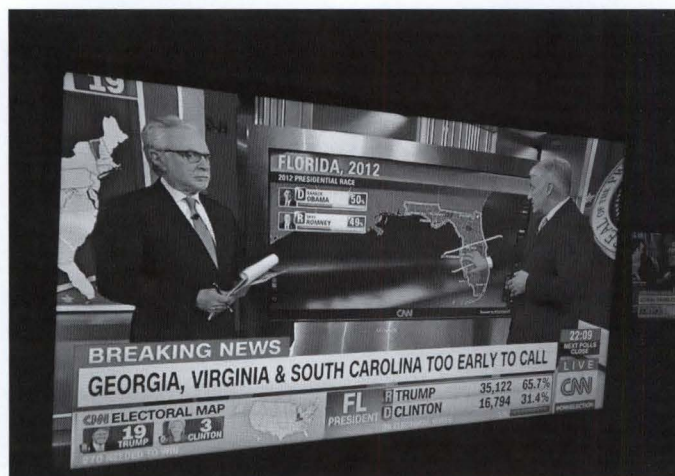
In some ways, it’s not surprising that in an election full of unexpected twists and turns, the biggest shock of all would come on election night. Regardless of how we personally feel about the results—and many people feel strongly—scholars

and pundits need to begin the hard task of figuring out how almost every poll in key states was wrong.

Just how wrong were they? Exactly zero pre-election polls listed President-elect Trump ahead in Wisconsin and Michigan. The last time polls showed Trump ahead in Pennsylvania? June. While every poll has a margin of error, I cannot remember the last time we witnessed such a massive failure of scientific polls to predict the election. It is important to note that forecasts made by political scientists that focused on such things as economic indicators largely got the popular vote correct, and two models did predict a Trump victory (though these models were widely derided by others). But these models are separate from the polls (which rely wholly on weighted survey data), even though in the past they have largely converged.

So, what happened? It is too soon to make a definitive statement, and scholars want to be careful of making hasty conclusions. That said, here are some things that stand out to me. (Full disclosure: I’ve been wrong about this election for months, so I wouldn’t be surprised if I am wrong about this, too.)

First, doing social science is hard. Unlike the physical sciences, we deal with people, and people



CNN's election night coverage

Helen Benjamin via Creative Commons, flickr/p/NSGRRS

sometimes do unpredictable things. For example, on election night, Trump won white college-educated men even though Clinton had led in that demographic for months. Trump also won among white women. Did the polls somehow fail? If so, how? Or did people change their views when it came time to decide? And if people changed their minds, what caused this kind of shift? Was it simply partisanship or something more?

Second, it appears the turnout was a major issue for the Democrats. Consider this: In 2012, Mitt Romney received more votes than Donald Trump did in 2016 (they are still counting as I write this, but best case scenario is that they are equivalent). Perhaps this is where the high unfavorability ratings of both candidates came into play. After the conventions, Clinton's unfavorable number was at 56 percent and Trump was at 63 percent. Indeed, a week before the election, Clinton was at 60 percent and Trump was at 58 percent. These numbers are an indication of how polarizing these two candidates are, each having very little crossover appeal in the electorate. Given this, perhaps voters who disliked both candidates decided to vote for something new. In the words of Trump, "What have you got to lose?" Third, we always talk about racial and ethnic groups voting together, as well as women. In this election, whites (especially working class whites) voted as an ethnic group, and this significantly helped Trump. Additionally, early data indicates that Trump outperformed Romney with Hispanics and African Americans despite some of Trump's rhetoric and his position on immigration.

The reason why scholars and pundits were so wrong in their predictions is some combination of the above factors, and likely others as well. We have a lot of work to do to figure out how to improve the science of polling. I hasten to add that we should not view this election as an indictment of the entire polling enterprise: presidential elections occur once every four years, and given their rarity, we know less about their dynamics than those of other elections. However, given their salience, it makes any miss an important miss.

So, what happens next? Anyone who says they know is lying. Trump needs to unify not only the country, but also his own party. There were several

Republican members of Congress who refused to endorse Trump, and now he has to work with them. It's anyone's guess how someone with no governing experience will do so; governing is not the same as running a business. Will the wall get built? Will Obamacare be repealed? Will we back out of existing trade deals? Fasten your seatbelt and get ready for a bumpy ride.

I'll close with a note of hope for those who supported Clinton or who opposed Trump. She won the popular vote. Thus, for the second time since 2000, a presidential candidate will have won the popular vote but lost the electoral college, which over-represents small states and rural areas. In fact, the Democratic Party has not lost the popular vote since 2004, and the last time before that was 1988. So, all is not lost for supporters of progressive causes and policies. Many Americans feel the same way, even if the results of this particular election are disappointing. ♣

The Post-Election Transition to Governing

Jennifer Hora

THE 2016 ELECTION IS IN THE BOOKS. Protestors are in the streets. Commentators are commentating. Political scientists are trying to separate themselves from the pundits, parse out who made wrong predictions, and why. Analysis abounds.

But as a political scientist, I do not study elections or voter behavior, media or theory. I study institutions and governing. Much as the president-elect must do, I turn now, on November 14, to look at this post-election transition to governing. In comparison to the 2000 transition, which was shortened by 42 days as the courts decided who would be president, the 2016 transition should be smoother. But the "simple" process facing President-elect Trump and his transition team has its own distinctive challenges.

A president controls approximately 4,000 appointments, with one quarter of those requiring congressional approval. Each appointee must complete at least three forms: a White House

Personal Data Statement, an FBI SF86 (background check), and an Office of United States Government Ethics SF 278 Financial Disclosure Statement. Those facing congressional approval must complete a fourth form unique to the committee they will face. Failure to fill out these forms to standard was enough reason for Supreme Court nominee Harriet Miers to be withdrawn from consideration in 2005.

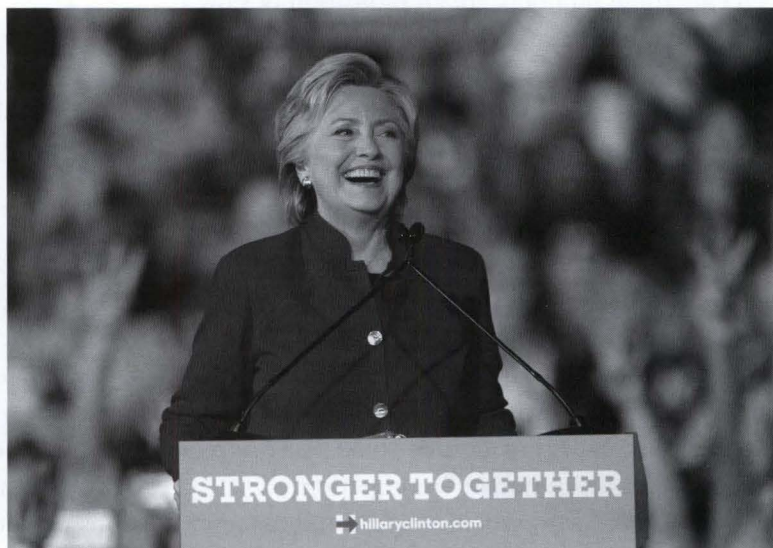
One seemingly straightforward set of questions focuses on previous housing: List every address where you have ever lived. Give contact information for at least one person who knew you at that address and point in time. A normal appointee has seen these or similar forms before, and has staff in place (at minimum, a lawyer) to compile accurate information quickly. Many presidential candidates have filled these out themselves for various government jobs. A typical incoming president-elect draws heavily from previous same-party administrations, but Candidate Trump indicated he would reach outside normal politics for key information and decision-making. That means a large number of potential appointees may be unfamiliar with the process and significance of filling out these forms. Additionally, the Trump campaign acknowledged it did not put extensive resources into a transition team (as has been the standard since Jimmy Carter in 1976). The “simple” process mechanics of getting people into place by January 2017 will rival the 2000 shortened transition in terms of chaos, and may quite possibly be worse. A normal transition typically has one to two prominent nominees withdrawn for various political or personal reasons. The Trump transition could set a record high.

Clay Johnson III, who helped with President George W. Bush’s transition, described the task of staffing the White House in the time between the election and the inauguration as “trying to take a drink of water from a fire hose”—and

Johnson had previously served in similar positions for a governor. We have a president-elect who, to continue Johnson’s analogy, has never seen a fire hose, let alone handled one. Trump will be the first US president ever without previous elected or bureaucratic experience, and the first without elected office experience since General Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1952.

Beyond the “simple” process described above, the media will be paying far more attention to the precise individuals Trump is announcing for key positions in the Cabinet and the White House. While the media often covers these announcements in a manner befitting a horserace (will the nominee receive an up or down vote in the Senate?), the important aspects to consider are the skills and resources these individuals bring.

Politics is one of the few realms where having experience is routinely seen as a negative trait. Yet governing is a job where experience is necessary



Cage Skidmore via Creative Commons, jfckr/p/MU2m2

for success. Research shows that when term-limits are enacted, it is not the citizenry who experience a growth in power and control, but interest groups.

A handful of appointees without governing experience could arguably bring innovation and creative approaches to problem-solving. But numerous appointees without governing experience spread across a majority of executive departments should expect to be leveled by players with more institutional knowledge. Passing laws is more complicated than *Schoolhouse Rock*’s “I’m Just



Gage Skidmore via Creative Commons, flickr/p/Hudhbc

This page: Donald Trump speaks at a campaign rally at Veterans Memorial Coliseum in Phoenix, Arizona.

Opposite page: Hillary Clinton speaks at a rally at Arizona State University days before the election.

a Bill.” Foreign policy is more nuanced than Jack Bauer’s version from 24. The persons nominated for the Inner Cabinet (Defense, State, Treasury, and Justice) as well as key liaison positions (Chief of Staff, Congressional Liaison) will make or break the start of the Trump Administration.

One final, personal note. Over the years I have given post-election interviews to campus, local, regional, and even national news organizations. I have written commentaries and delivered talks on the subject. This is the first instance in my professional career I have considered declining this type of work for any reason other than lack of time. That is because the situation is different in post-election 2016. I have friends who have received hate mail from Trump voters for simply stating facts to reporters (“It appears Clinton won the popular vote.”). Other friends, in light of events at their workplace where Trump supporters have tormented minority coworkers, are researching the protections provided through their office of human resources and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. I myself was heckled by Trump supporters for wearing what they perceived as a political statement (a pantsuit, to a work event).

I have been a political scientist for 20 years. The editor of this journal almost received an “I’m sorry, I am going to cancel” e-mail this week (six days post-election) as I pondered the ramifications of making any commentary. This is uncharted territory for me, and seemingly, for the country. ♣

A City on Edge

David Lott

MY FIRST PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION AFTER moving to Washington, DC, was the contested race between George W. Bush and Al Gore in 2000. For weeks, as the Florida ballots were recounted and lawsuits made their way through the courts, the city seemed to be in a perpetual state of anxiety. This wasn’t just a matter of partisan politics, but the palpable collective stress of thousands of people whose lives had been placed on unending hold, waiting to find out to whom they might be reporting—if they still had jobs at all—under the new administration, and whether they would have to uproot themselves and their families on even shorter notice than usual after an election.

As I walked through the city after Donald Trump’s upset victory over Hillary Clinton, a similar atmosphere seemed to hang over those I encountered (an effect exacerbated by the day’s gray skies and cool, damp air). Every car and person appeared to be moving a bit more slowly; the streets were markedly quieter than on a usual weekday. The few conversations I heard felt like unwelcome disruptions in a city alone in its thoughts and apprehensions. The temporary uncertainty people here experienced sixteen years ago seems bound to last for at least four years, if not far longer.

Hundreds of students from DC-area schools marched to the Lincoln Memorial on November 15, 2016, to protest the election of Donald Trump.



Lorie Shaull via Creative Commons, flic.kr/p/P9vzQ

Elections are probably more disruptive to the DC region than to anywhere else in the country, and Trump's ascension to the presidency promises to be more distressing than any in memory. While Washington has long since shed its nickname of "Chocolate City," from a time when African Americans constituted over 70 percent of the population, still today over 60 percent of DC citizens identify as non-white, including growing Latino, Asian, and multiracial constituencies. Moreover, Washington is estimated to have more LGBTQ-identified persons than any other major American city, as well as thousands of international citizens and guests—people of all races and religions who call the city home.

Why is this important? Because Washington is now required to host a presidential administration and Congress that was swept into power in part by the forces of white nationalists and the so-called alt-right, led by a businessman who often echoed their racist, misogynist, xenophobic, anti-Muslim, anti-gay, and anti-Semitic sentiments with seeming impunity. A man who received only 4 percent of the DC presidential vote. His supporters feel called to relieve the city of its perceived privilege, even as its federal tax-paying citizens have no voting representation in Congress and little voice in the policies and practices that affect our day-to-day lives. The conservative cries to "drain the swamp" ignore the fact that we aren't the swamp—the swamp is being, and always has been, sent to us.

The atmosphere in DC following President Obama's election in 2008 was very different. The

election of our first African American president seemed as unthinkable as Trump's election seems today, but spurred far more jubilation than dismay. Barack and Michelle Obama championed the city in many different ways, from visiting DC's struggling public schools to delighting in the city's burgeoning restaurant scene. Their support for the city was surely a factor in its resurgence, drawing back empty nesters who had decamped for the suburbs when DC was named the nation's "murder capital," as well as attracting millennials whose presence led *Forbes* magazine to name it "America's coolest city" (a moniker once nearly as unthinkable as the election of Obama or Trump).

The welcome the city of Washington gave to Obama was not matched by the Republican-led Congress with which he had to share power. From the get-go, Republicans seemed determined to regard his presidency as illegitimate, and maneuvered to undercut him at every turn, abetted by Trump leading the "birther" movement that challenged Obama's citizenship. Somehow, Obama was able to stave off many of those efforts, sometimes with the help of the Supreme Court, which delivered decisions on Obamacare and marriage equality that should help sustain his legacy. Finding themselves largely unable to delegitimize him directly, however, the Republicans decided to do so indirectly, by attacking the legitimacy of his would-be successor, Hillary Clinton, through endless congressional hearings and throwing their (sometimes uneasy) support behind Trump, who seems Obama's polar opposite in almost every

way, as the one best poised to destroy that legacy.

Racism and misogyny account at least in part for these attacks upon Obama and Clinton, and they contributed to Trump's election. How much so is a debate that will continue for years. Meanwhile, this most diverse of American cities has to figure out how to share space with a president who has demonstrated hostility to many of its citizens in his campaign and who appears uniquely unversed not just in basic civics, but in basic civility. Respect for the office of the presidency has been key to overcoming the sometimes tenuous relationship between presidential administrations and the city of Washington. That tradition will surely continue, even as we grapple with the *personality* who holds that office. For, throughout his candidacy and career, Trump has presented himself more as a personality than as a person, a brand name rather than a concerned citizen. His impending presidency threatens to empower those who would wield their own toxic personalities against all who have long sought respect for their personhood. Thus, the angst now hanging over Washington. It seems unlikely to lift anytime soon. ✦

Standing for the Politics of God

Geoffrey Bowden

THE TEMPTATIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN AND the church in the face of politics exist at two extremes: either government and political activity is ascribed too much importance and eclipses the priority of the Kingdom of God in our lives, or politics is deemed irrelevant to the spiritual existence of Christians and ignored all together. The task of finding the middle ground takes vigilance, a task in which disciples of Christ love other people by encouraging the governments of the world to seek the good of all people, while robustly proclaiming the submission of those institutions to the Lordship of Christ, the Prince of Peace, the warring Lamb who takes away the sin of the world. Governments can have profound effects on the lives of people that God loves unconditionally, and that is why He ordained that they exist. And that is also why Christians cannot

ignore their activity. But our witness to and often against the activity of government must always be firmly rooted in the conviction that worldly politics has but a limited role to play in this world. This is God's world and He is ruling it through His son, Jesus Christ, who has outlined a politics of his own in the Sermon on the Mount, among other places. It is this middle ground that we must inhabit.

So what to say about President-elect Donald Trump? He was created in the image of God, and we are commanded to pray for him as leader of our government. Given what we know about him from his life as an entrepreneur and presidential candidate, Mr. Trump is profoundly sinful, willing to denigrate entire classes and races of people to enhance his own interests. He craves attention as a method of bolstering his self-image, a craving that has reached astronomical heights and appears insatiable. Mr. Trump possesses little knowledge of the details of policy, resulting in impulsive and reckless proposals intended to solidify his image as tough and commanding, anxious to wield power for spectacle. The cardinal virtues elude him, so I can only characterize him as vicious, a slave to his own desires. As he forms an administration, the church must prepare, if not already so postured, to stand as a faithful presence for the politics of God, embodied most fully in the command to love one another as Christ has loved us. This stand will at times require being quite vocal, but it must always be clear and unambiguous, aligned with God's rule in the cross. The poor, the imprisoned, the stranger, the widowed, and the orphaned need us. We have been empowered by the Holy Spirit. May the Spirit refuse to give us rest until we are completely resting in the justice and mercy of God for all people that we encounter.

A word about the Democratic Party and their candidate, Mrs. Clinton. America tires of their staid politics, and the Christian church should reject their economic conception of people. The neoliberalism that has characterized Democratic policy (and Republican policy, too) for decades is an affront to human beings, God's very good creation. As long as we continue to view people as cogs in an economic machine, workers and consumers to be manipulated in the service of an economy, the economy will always be a power that

the church has to fend off. At a political science conference I attended yesterday (four days after the election), a panel of committed left-leaning political science professors outlined what must happen politically for higher education if American students are going to be able to “compete globally.” Think about that for a minute. These professors

The most profound witness of the church to our present circumstances is to be a consistent, vocal presence by loving all of the people God has created in their fullness, not just as economic slaves.

were not arguing that we offer students an opportunity to experience the world and all the good things it has to offer. The claim was much more sinister: our students must understand themselves to be embroiled in a competition, a battle for their own survival, the theatre of which spans the entire planet. How daunting! But this projected life-path is foisted upon 18-22 year olds in no small measure because our politics assesses their value in strictly economic terms, by Democrats no less than Republicans. While the church must prepare to address the more immediate (and as yet potential) assaults on justice by the Trump administration, the larger and more menacing threat posed to the witness of the church is the truncated and monstrous vision of human life as economic and competitive. Political scientist and Reformed Christian Scott Waalkes beautifully suggests that our politics has taught us that we live in a world of scarcity, but the Kingdom of God is a rule of abundance. We fear what American politics offers us every four years because we consistently reinforce our commitment to a politics of scarcity and its concomitant notion of human consumers in a global economic battle. The most profound witness of the church to our present circumstances is to be a consistent and vocal presence by loving all

of the people God has created in their fullness, not just as economic slaves.

I do not anticipate that Mr. Trump will lead America down the path of loving people, so our mode will be resistance. The point is not “to resist.” The point is to love. The world will reject this, so we must be prepared to suffer for our witness, not to become like those we resist. My prayer is that the church is prepared, prepared by millennia of worship and praxis, guided by the Spirit. It should not be hard. It should be our natural disposition. If it isn't, it is time that it become so. Let us continue the long-standing tradition of moral formation, teaching each other what it means to take up one's cross and follow the Lord. If we have failed in the task of moral formation in recent generations, the church will surely be exposed as unfaithful in the face of worldly power. But our response should be to re-constitute moral formation and rekindle moral imagination to become what God desires for us, not to yield to our own failings. God makes no peace with oppression, and He has already overcome our failings. ✝

Roundtable Authors

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CHURCH ON THE MARCH

—after E. L. Doctorow

When Sherman stopped to rest in Savannah,
and when he paused in Fayetteville,
on the Sabbath his soldiers packed
into the churches, squeezed themselves
into the pews with mothers and children
of those they had slaughtered, those
who had slaughtered them in return.

The almost empty offering plates
passed waveringly from hand to hand,
each withholding what was left,
or wanting to. Was there a minister
here or there who dared to preach
from Matthew's Sermon, the loving
of enemies, turning of cheeks?

There were, I imagine, more than a few
boys in blue who turned their cheeks
to look at those of the somewhat ill-clad
daughters of the Confederacy, but what of that?
And some of those daughters, in spite
of themselves, were glad to be so looked upon.

Love must start somewhere, and why not
the volleys of eyes, the beautiful lips
launching hymns in unison?

Paul Willis

We've Lost that Losing Feeling

A Response to the 2016 Chicago Cubs Season

Thomas C. Willadsen

SINCE MANY HAVE UNDERTAKEN TO SET down an orderly account of the Chicago Cubs' most recent campaign, I too decided, after investigating the matter carefully, to write an account to you, Baseballphile, so that you may know the Truth. The stunning, earth-shattering truth that Cubs fans have been lifted out of darkness into the light and peace of a World Series championship. Far more than Hope, our faith is in the evidence of things that are now at last seen, such as a pennant flying on the North Side of Chicago for the first time since before the Cold War,

and a championship banner atop the centerfield scoreboard for the first time since the Roosevelt Administration. (The *Theodore* Roosevelt Administration, for those of you keeping score at home.)

While the Cubs are considered "cursed" and their fans "long-suffering," my first opinion of them was that they were a very strong team. When I started collecting baseball cards and rooting for them in 1969, they had three All-Stars and four future Hall of Famers in their lineup. Pulling for the Cubs between 1968 and 1973 was not the hopeless black hole of despair that it would turn into. Sure, they hadn't won the National League

pennant since 1945—even then it was the longest pennant drought in Major League Baseball—but they fielded very strong teams.

Very strong teams that always, always found ways to not quite win. I remember the jokes:



The Chicago Cubs, 1908 World Series champs.

Creative Commons

Why can't the Cubs cut the mustard?

They always play ketchup ball.

Did you hear that the Cubs are moving to the Philippines?

Really?

Yep. They'll be called the Manila Folders!

The Chicago Cubs have been one of three constants in my life, along with my family and the Presbyterian Church. I have remained loyal. Through thin and thin I have endured and waited for the plot twist. Each summer since moving to Oshkosh, Wisconsin, at least one of my sons has accompanied me to a game at "the ivy-covered burial ground." Some years my nine have shown promise; other years, less so. But I remained loyal.

Heaven knows I had chances to stray. Just six weeks after I moved to New York City, the Mets won their second World Series. I did not become a fan.

At the last church I served, in suburban Baltimore, there was a member who prayed that I would root for the Orioles. The Orioles even offered Clergy Passes. Really. I could show my pass at a special gate and attend any game I wanted, free. But neither prayers nor free games swayed my allegiance.

Six months after moving to Minnesota, the Twins won the World Series. A member of that

A lot of baseball fans were predicting that 2016 might be, at last, the year the Cubs reached the World Series. I did not climb onto this bandwagon.

congregation pointed out that I should consider rooting for the local club, because at least they won once in a while.

“Do you love your children more when they get straight A’s?” I asked.

“Yes, I do.”

“Fine, you can root for the Yankees for all I care. Mercenary!”

The 2016 season began with high hopes. The Cubs had ended the prior year with the third best record in the National League’s Central Division—which was also the third best record in baseball. They faced the St. Louis Cardinals in the next round. This was huge. I grew up a Cubs fan in central Illinois. Between April and October there are two religions in central Illinois: Cubs and Cardinals. The rivalry is intense.

These two teams, who have competed in the National League since 1892, had never faced each other in the postseason. (It has only been possible for them to do so since 1995, but still.) The Cubs defeated the Cardinals in last year’s best-of-five series three games to one. It was the first time that the Cubs had won a postseason series at home. In their history, they have only won three postseason series: the 1907 and 1908 World Series and the first round of the 2003 National League playoffs.

The Cubs lost the 2015 League Championship Series to the New York Mets (just one more in a long history of disappointment) but they had beaten the mighty Cardinals on the way there. Wow.

A LOT OF BASEBALL FANS WERE PREDICTING that 2016 might be, at last, the year the Cubs reached the World Series. I did not climb onto this bandwagon.

In January when my barber told me he thought the Cubs would be even better than last year, I pointed out that no one can expect a team to improve on a 97-win season. That’s just greedy. Furthermore, Jake Arrieta could not be the most dominant pitcher ever over a half season again, as he had been. Besides, the Cubs won their last eight games against weak competition. Nope, I was keeping my expectations realistic.

I have had my heart broken too many times to get my hopes up during Spring Training. I have written in these very pages (“In the Big Inning,” Lent 1998, and “It Could Be Worse: A Midwestern Theology,” Michaelmas 2001) about the tenuous, fragile hopes of Cubs fans. We all have our stories. We remember where we were when the black cat sauntered through a Cubs-Mets game in 1969. We can relive each painful moment of Game 5 of the 1984 National League Championship Series when first baseman Leon Durham muffed a routine ground ball, permitting the Padres to advance to their first World Series, a contest that could have been a rematch of the 1945 World Series. Cubs fans know that a Chicago tavern owner was forbidden from bringing his goat to that Series and cursed the Cubs.

2003 brought us “The Bartman Game.” It is most unfortunate that the name Steve Bartman is remembered more readily than left fielder Moises Alou. Bartman is the fan who kept Alou from catching what would have been the second out in the eighth inning, when the Cubs were five outs away from advancing the World Series. They held a three run lead, and their ace, Mark Prior, was on the mound. The wheels came off, and the Cubs ended up losing 8-3. The next night the Florida Marlins defeated them in Game 7 and advanced to the World Series.

I remember the sick feeling in the pit of my stomach. I had imagined waking up my seven-year-old to whisper, "The Cubs won the pennant." But it was not to be.

The Cubs had some success a few years later. In 2007 they won their division, before being swept in the first round by the Arizona Diamondbacks. In 2008 they had the best record in the National League and were swept by the Los Angeles Dodgers.

Shortly after the 2008 season ended, I remember thinking, "I could live a long life and never see the Cubs in the World Series." I wasn't sad about that, just realistic. I was forty-four years old, and it had been sixty-three years. I was no less loyal, but I lowered my expectations.

I also drew a line in the sand: I would not buy another T-shirt until my boys appeared in the Fall Classic.

After the 2016 season began, I started seeing signs and sensing omens that could indicate, in some settings, by rational people, that this really, really could be The Year.

Shortly after Easter, the mother of a third grader in our Sunday school told me that when

her daughter, Addison Grace, heard Cubs' first baseman Anthony Rizzo's name announced, she shouted "He is Rizzo indeed!"

I was thrilled. Each Easter the call to worship is Christ is risen.

He is risen indeed.

Christ Is Risen.

He Is Risen Indeed.

CHRIST IS RISEN!

HE IS RISEN INDEED!!

For the rest of the Easter Season I began worship with those three words.

(Those of you who are not part of Cubs Nation should know that Wrigley Field sits at 1060 W. Addison, and Mark Grace was the starting first baseman for the Cubs between 1988 and 2000.)

In June I sent an email to a college friend, a native of Cleveland. The Cavaliers were in the NBA finals and looked like they might end that city's major sports champion drought. Howard replied, in part, "Speaking of unfathomably long championship droughts, could this really be the Cubbies' year?"

I responded:

"Of course it could be the Cubbies' year.

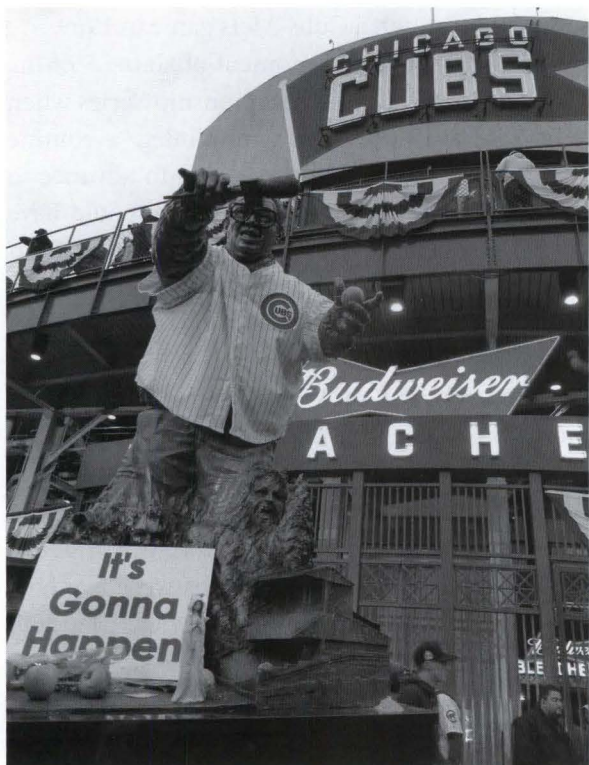
'It's June 2.'

Callouses. I had callouses around my heart.

In the middle of the summer I decided to start exercising again. I had sunk into a depression, and exercise helped. Once I got up to a good clip on the NordicTrac, a four syllable pattern emerged: duh, Duh, duh, DUH. Soon I found myself chanting, "Tom is depressed, Tom is depressed," so I sought a more uplifting phrase for my morning workouts. I arrived at "Pennant for Cubs, pennant for Cubs." I knew it was wishful thinking, an idle tale, a pipe dream, but I was Walter Mitty down in the basement anyway. I let myself dream.

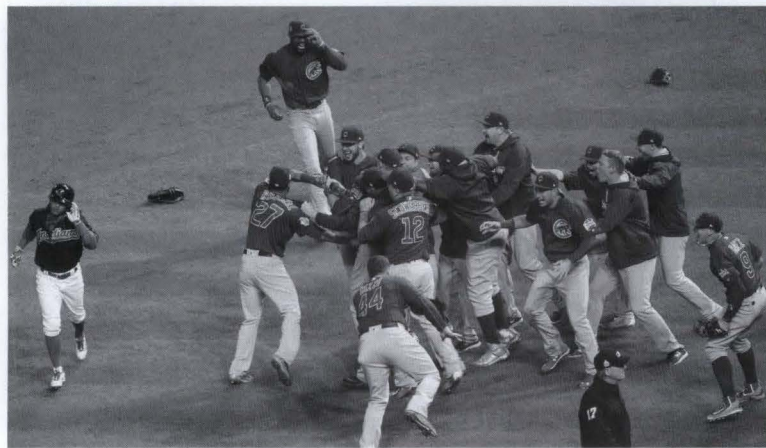
As the 2016 season entered September it seemed like every day the Cubs reached another milestone: they clinched a playoff spot, the division title, home-field advantage in the first round of the playoffs, and finally home field advantage throughout the National League playoffs. They became the first Cubs team to win more than 100 games since 1935.

At the end of September, my brother asked



Good luck objects placed by Cubs fans at the foot of the Harry Caray statue outside Wrigley Field

what I was doing on Friday, October 7. It was mom's eightieth birthday, and he had gotten three tickets to the Cubs' first playoff game against the Giants. The three of us planned to meet outside the ballpark, and he would give me my ticket then. "Too much could go wrong with the mail," I had emailed him. "If I don't make it, sell it and send my niece to college. If you don't make it, live with my bitterness until one of us dies."



The Cubs celebrate after winning the 2016 World Series.

Arturo Pardavila III via Creative Commons flickr/p/9Hkcxdk

Mom was on cloud nine at the ballpark that night. She told everyone we met, "I went to my first Cubs game in 1949. Today's my eightieth birthday!" I was happy to see my family, but a gray cloud of dread surrounded me.

Half an hour before the game started my son phoned me. He wished his grandmother a happy birthday, and we talked about the game that was about to start. I suddenly said to him, "Hey, the Cubs could win this game." In all honesty that thought had not occurred to me until then. I had been steeling myself for disappointment.

The game was a classic pitchers' duel. As the eighth inning began I started passing the peanuts I'd brought from Wisconsin through Section 525. I turned to my brother and said, "You know, one run is going to win this game."

In the bottom of the eighth inning, Cubs second baseman Javier Baez lofted a fly to left...that landed in the basket for a home run. The Cubs held on.

I had attended a postseason win at Wrigley Field, on my mother's eightieth birthday. It could not have been better.

Before I went to bed that night I texted my brother, "Why didn't we think to bring Mom to a postseason game on her eightieth birthday years ago?"

The Cubs won their series against the Giants three games to one. They moved on to face the Los Angeles Dodgers for the National League pennant. I was cautiously, tentatively optimistic. I was starting to trust that maybe, just maybe, this Cubs team was different.

When Game 4 of this series started, the Cubs were behind two games to one, and had been shut out by the Dodgers in the last two games. They were looking listless. They were hitless through the first three innings, then the clean-up hitter, Ben Zobrist, bunted for a single. It was as though they had woken up; they scored four runs that inning and they regained their mid-season swagger. I was rooting for a Cubs team that had swagger! They went on to win 10-2. They never trailed again in the series.

Game 6 was held at Wrigley Field, Saturday, October 22. By extraordinary good luck, I was scheduled to be in Chicago that weekend for homecoming weekend and a continuing education event starting the following Monday.

I would be in Chicago the day the Cubs could win their first pennant in 71 years!

I had to go to Wrigley Field. I had to touch the outer wall for luck. I had done this in 1984, when the Cubs played their first postseason game since 1945. I skipped "Masterpieces of French Literature" that day and took the el into the city. I planned to buy a souvenir for my mom for her birthday. I arrived after the game had started. The streets around the stadium were deserted. I touched the wall, walked around the stadium and found a vendor to sell me a painter's cap to give to my mother. As I headed to the el I heard the loudest noise in my life. Cubs starting pitcher Rick Sutcliffe hit a home run in the third inning. The Cubs went on to win 13-0.

I told the friend whose couch I was sleeping on that I had to go touch the ballpark. I was taking

the el, in case he wanted to come along. I knew it was irrational, delusional...but why take a chance?

We drove in his new, tiny car instead. We parked a few blocks east of the ballpark and joined the throng of people streaming toward the yard. We touched the wall on Sheffield Avenue. We walked around the park. We drove to a restaurant for supper and watched the game on TV. The Cubs scored twice in the first inning, and I was almost certain that they would win.

They did.

The next day I attended the church in the Lincoln Park neighborhood where I had been a seminary intern. A few people recognized me. I introduced myself as "Seminary Intern, Emeritus." After worship I walked about fifteen blocks to Wrigley Field, repeating, "The Cubs won the pennant. The Cubs won the pennant." I phoned my mother and asked if she wanted me to buy her a shirt. The pennant had ended my embargo. She told me she'd wait until they won the World Series. Where did she get that confidence?

The Cubs faced the Cleveland Indians in the World Series. Cleveland had not won the series since 1948, the longest drought in the American League. I emailed Howard and pointed out, "One of these teams has to win."

I was completely content just to see the Cubs in the World Series.

Then I hoped that they didn't get swept. What relief they won the second game.

They went behind three games to one, and I hoped they didn't lose the series in Chicago. They won Game 5 before returning to Cleveland. Their swagger was back. This team felt different. They had the best record in baseball, and they were playing like the best team in baseball. I felt something like confidence, I think, as they began Game 6. They scored three times in the first inning, and I just knew they would win. I didn't even bother watching.

They took a 5-1 lead in Game 7, but ominous signs appeared. The Indians scored two runs on a wild pitch that temporarily dazed catcher David Ross. This felt familiar.

In the bottom of the eighth inning, the radio announcer was counting down the outs to a championship as the Cubs held a 6-3 lead. "Don't do that," I communicated to him telepathically, "They were five outs away from the pennant in 2003!"

The Indians tied the game. I felt the same sick,

dejection in my stomach I had felt in 2003. When the rain delay started I went to bed. They could lose without my wasting two hours, staying up too late to hear the bitter end.

Wait. It didn't end bitterly. My son phoned and urged me to turn on the game. I did.

They won.

And now an army of fans are on terra incognita. We've lost that losing feeling. Personally, I don't miss it. But I'm 52 years old, and I'm not sure I know how to swagger. We've lost losing. Now what?

A cryptic record of the years of losing appears on a building across Sheffield Avenue from Wrigley Field. A sign reads "EAMUS CATULI! AC 0000000." My Jesuit friend tells me this means "Go Cubs!" in Latin. The digits following are for the number of years since the Cubs won their division, appeared in the World Series and won the World Series. On Wednesday, November 2, about 11:45 p.m. Central Daylight Time, someone reset the sign. No more 08, 71, 108. It is finished. ♣

The Reverend Doctor Thomas C. Willadsen is pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Oshkosh, Wisconsin.



The sign at the Lakeview Baseball Club across the street from Wrigley Field, as it looked in 2011.

Niklus Hellerstedt via Creative Commons. flickr/p9MwD7c

BEGINNING

In the beginning the Word already was.

Pops just sat in the corner when the Roman guy came by. The Roman guy said he'd already sold the story; I just needed to write it. *You have the ending, kid*, he said. *You just need to bang out a beginning.* The Roman guy thought it could be turned into a play. The Roman guy thought he could get an imperial sponsor. The Roman guy was going to talk to artisans—a whole product line, he was thinking. Pops poured himself another cup.

We used to joke that Pops was tied up in *nots*. The locusts not eaten, the hairshirts not worn, the gospels not written. Pops said he was close enough to touch John. Pops said that if he would have been baptized, he never would have left his side. But when Pops took one last look at Mom, he waded back to the river's edge. In the dust of home, they made a family and tended flock.

Steve Werkmeister

On the Twelfth Night of Christmas

Cara Strickland

I WAITED WITH GREAT ANTICIPATION FOR THE cake to be cut. Inside, I knew, were all of the members of the nativity story, small wooden figures suspended inside the chocolate cake. I couldn't wait to get my piece and see who might be inside. If it was baby Jesus, I knew I would get a prize.

I did not find Jesus in my piece of cake that night so many years ago, but it was my first exposure to Twelfth Night cake, which is traditionally served on January fifth, the final day of the season of Christmas.

That nativity-laden cake was part of a celebration practiced by friends of my family, the Orrs. Each Christmas they would celebrate for all twelve days. In the evenings they would have parties, inviting their friends to come and sing Christmas carols, play games, and drink hot chocolate. Some years my family and I would come more than once, enjoying the festive glow, the reason to continue to celebrate. We were far from our extended family, and these parties gave us a chance to belong somewhere for a little while.

All I knew then about the twelve days of Christmas came from the song (which we always sang at least once at each of those parties, racing through it at full speed). Much later, I discovered that my friends were onto something historical and liturgical: a season of Christmas to be savored over time.

Last year I called Stephanie Orr, the family matriarch, to learn more about their twelve days of celebration. When her children were young, she stumbled across a book on the history of Christmas celebrations, and it launched

her on a research quest. Inspired by her reading, she and her husband decided to try a new protocol for opening Christmas presents that year. On Christmas Day, they only opened their stockings. On each of the following days of Christmas, they each opened one present. As they did this, Orr noted, something changed. Instead of breezing by a gift before moving on to the next, there was time to linger. "Everybody's present counted," said Orr. "Every present was big enough for the day."

Once they'd started celebrating Christmas that way, she says, the parties quickly followed. Soon they were sending out invitations that read: "If the wreath is on the door, come on in." People responded with enthusiasm. "So many of our friends would talk about how low they would get right after Christmas," she said. "We started being the place where they would make plans to come." In the Orr home, there was plenty of Christmas to go around, long after December twenty-fifth.

Stephanie was just a child the first time she found a treasure within a cake—but it was for a birthday party where coins were baked inside, and whoever got one received a prize. When she read about Twelfth Night cake, she made the tradition her own. She used her family birthday cake recipe, passed down from her Volga German grandmother, and added her wooden nativity set to the batter as a way to celebrate Jesus's birthday.

"The first time I did it, I just threw them in the cake batter," she said. "That did not work well. They all floated to the same area. The second time I did it I baked it first and then cut little slits in the top and pushed the pieces down into the cake so I could space them. When I put icing on the cake,



Hablot Knight Browne/Phiz via Creative Commons. bit.ly/2i6BbPW

"Twelfth Night Merry-Making in Farmer Shakeshaft's Barn," circa 1805.

you couldn't tell where they were."

"At first we served it on Christmas Day," Stephanie said. "But the more I learned about Epiphany, the more it became clear that it was the culmination." Twelfth Night, and its cake, helped usher in Epiphany the next day.

Twelfth Night is "usually considered to be a day of social subversion," said Ken Albala, an historian and director of food studies at the University of the Pacific. "Things would normally go a certain way, [but] this is one day that they are turned upside down... it's one day when the person who's the lowest gets to be the highest."

Historians don't know exactly when the first Twelfth Night cake was baked (or consumed), but the tradition extends back centuries. In 1853, Alexis Soyer, sometimes said to be the first celebrity chef, published a book on the history of food, tracing the "famous" Twelfth Night cake back at least to the Middle Ages "almost all over Europe."

Early Twelfth Night cakes were fruitcakes, but not the kind we think of today. "When we think of fruitcake as a Christmasy thing soaked with alcohol, that's really from the nineteenth century,"

Albala said. Instead, "They were usually [made with] a sort of egg-based batter that has fruit in it—something close to panettone—but there are versions all over the place."

Beyond the standard cake ingredients, Twelfth Night cakes classically included a dried bean and pea. The person who found the bean would be the king, and the pea, the queen. Although these are traditional, now the options are unlimited. "In some places it's a ceramic baby doll figure, which obviously refers back to the nativity. Sometimes it's a bean, sometimes it's a threepenny bit. It can be anything," says Albala.

The responsibilities of the king and queen vary somewhat by time period and company. Sometimes the king would have to host the Twelfth Night party the following year, and the queen would have to bake the cake. Sometimes they would act their royal roles out more theatrically, ordering their fellow partygoers to do ridiculous things. This was often accompanied by immoderate amounts of drinking and revelry. In nineteenth century England, you could purchase a Twelfth Night cake complete with bean and pea

and a deck of cards with a part for each person who didn't receive a royal role. Early characters were from well-known folklore or stories, but eventually, a whole cast of characters unique to the ritual were created.

Soon they were sending out invitations that read: "If the wreath is on the door, come on in."

In English great houses during the Regency period, according to the Jane Austen Centre, ladies and gentlemen were served from separate sides of the cake to ensure that the king and queen would be of the opposite gender. However, in smaller houses, only a bean was baked into the cake, and the recipient was supposed to be a sort of guardian to the family throughout the year.

If any of this sounds a bit familiar, it could be because of a similar cake baked in New Orleans

for Mardi Gras, another season based on revelry and celebration before the penitent season of Lent. The American version is called King Cake, and often comes with a small figure of a baby hidden inside, ready to choose a king.

LAST CHRISTMAS STEPHANIE ORR DECIDED to have a party on one of the twelve days of Christmas. She and her husband began to spread the word that the wreath was once again on the door.

I put on my party clothes and stepped into a swirl of childhood memories. This party was in a different house—they had sold the other one after their children had grown and left home. Even though it had been several years since the last party, people filtered into the living room as if no time had passed.

I recognized many familiar faces coming in with pink cheeks, bottles of wine, and plates of cookies. These same people had faithfully attended

Grandma Alyce's Chocolate Cake

The following recipe is the one passed down from Stephanie Orr's grandmother. She uses it for her Twelfth Night cake.

Ingredients

2 cups flour
1 ½ cups sugar
2 teaspoons baking soda
½ cup cocoa powder
1 teaspoons salt
1 egg
1 cup cooking oil (mild tasting)
1 cup buttermilk
1 teaspoons vanilla
1 cup boiling water

Directions

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

Mix dry ingredients and sift. Mix wet ingredients, and then mix with dry mixture.

Grease two round cake pans, or one 9x13 rectangular pan. Sprinkle pan with cocoa. Pour batter into the pans.

Bake for 45 minutes. Cool and remove from pans.

While the cake cools, make the frosting:

Ingredients

4 oz. chocolate pudding mix (not instant)
1 ¼ cups milk
½ cup softened butter
1 teaspoon vanilla
¼ teaspoon salt
1 cup icing (powdered) sugar

Directions

Mix in a pan over low heat. Continue stirring until thickened. Transfer to bowl and cool before frosting the cake.

After the cake has cooled, cut slits in the top and push nativity set figures into the cake, spaced evenly. Frost cake and serve.

these parties for years. When I introduced myself, they remembered me, too, as one of the little ones running around, taking in all of the excitement.

We ate and talked, and then it was time to sing, as we always did. In the old days, the Orrs had large songbooks with song titles organized alphabetically for everyone, but this year they had printed out just a few favorites. With a guitar accompaniment, we sang carols of hope and celebration: *O Holy Night*, *O Come, O Come Emmanuel*, and *The Twelve Days of Christmas*. When the songs finished, the words hung in the air. No one wanted to stop. I looked around at people eager to connect in the cold darkness of the Northwest winter, thankful that Christmas was not yet over. It was still going on, at least in this warm house.

THIS YEAR, I'M GOING TO INVITE PEOPLE TO gather in my home during the Christmas season, perhaps on Twelfth Night. I will use the recipe that Stephanie Orr gave me, the one from her grandmother, and invite one of my baker friends over to prevent culinary disaster.

Though I don't plan to elect a king and queen this year, or host a drunken gathering, I will think

about what it means for the last to be first and the first, last—not just for a single day, once a year, but every day in the Kingdom of God. Twelfth Night was a topsy-turvy day, and it mirrors an upside down Kingdom, however inadequately.

I think my favorite version of Twelfth Night cake is still my very first: chocolate, with the whole nativity scene hidden inside. I don't need to think about it long to find theology here, along with flour and sugar. Jesus is concealed within chocolate goodness. He is buried, only to be found and rejoiced over, coming into the light once more. He is a reason to gather, to share a meal, to connect.

In her book, *Still*, Lauren Winner quotes St. Francis of Assisi about the Eucharist: “for our salvation, Jesus hides in a piece of bread.” I think perhaps, on Twelfth Night, Jesus hides within a slice of cake, for the same reason. ✝

Cara Strickland is a freelance writer based in Washington State. You can find more of her work at carastrickland.com.

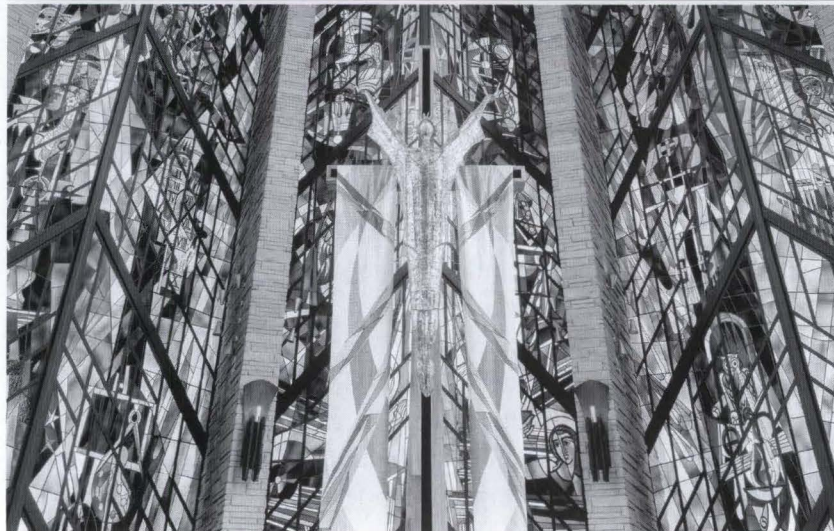


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Bound by Grief

Writing through the Loss of a Child

Harold K. Bush

HARRIET BEECHER STOWE, ABRAHAM Lincoln, Mark Twain, and W. E. B. Du Bois all shared one harrowing experience that shaped their writing and careers in profound ways, yet few readers know this fact. These great nineteenth-century American figures all wrote in the context of their suffering as bereaved parents. They found themselves inducted into a club that nobody wants to join, yet somehow each of them found constructive ways to remember their beloved dead.

I got to know these four authors more fully as I worked on my recent book, *Continuing Bonds with the Dead: Parental Grief and*

Nineteenth Century American Authors (University of Alabama, 2016). I discovered that their experiences of grief over the loss of a child bore redemptive results. Each of them found ways to make their child's legacy meaningful for those who survived them.

The more I learned about my subjects, as you might imagine, the less my book was simply an academic endeavor. I chose the topic in part out of a deep appreciation for these individuals, and focusing on their experiences as bereaved parents

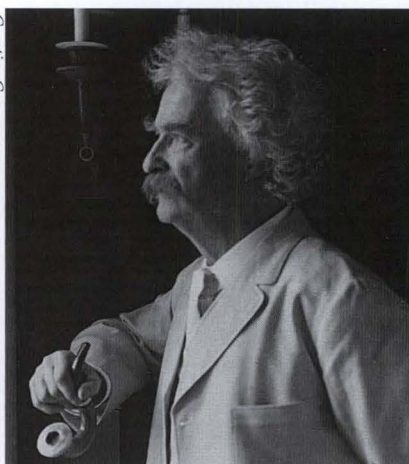
was opportunity to learn about them in a new light. But in truth, this book was never simply an academic endeavor.

Before I chose the topic, the topic chose me. Like my subjects, I, too, am a member of the club, and it was my own experience as a bereaved parent that led me to take up this topic. This book is not just history. The truths I'm trying to express are important for me personally. I yearn to commune

with, and listen to, what Stowe called "those hovering spirits"; the "cloud of witnesses" that is said to surround me (Hebrews 12). In particular:



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Susy Clemens and her father, Mark Twain.

my bonds with my own deceased son Daniel, to whom the book is a tribute in so many ways.

Daniel's death in the summer of 1999, at the age of six and a half, was the classic before and after moment for me and my wife, Hiroko. At the time when my own tragedy struck, I had been researching the life and times of Mark Twain for the better part of a decade. The day that changed everything came in early summer after my first year on the tenure track at Saint Louis University, a Jesuit institution featuring a warm and friendly

environment for my own budding, religiously-inflected research and career. (I know that dramatic language such as “the day that changed everything” seems loaded; however, as my subsequent research would reveal, it’s a very common way of thinking about that moment.) Oddly, in all my reading about Twain, it had never occurred to me how the deaths of his own children (three of four) had affected him. Evidently it had not seemed important to almost any of the other hundreds of Twain scholars, either, as I found very little written on that aspect of his life.

WHAT FASCINATED AND HORRIFIED ME initially, during my own descent into what felt like near-madness, was the discovery at some point of comments Twain had written soon after the death of his lovely, intelligent, adult daughter Susy in 1896. They are some of the most accurate words I’ve ever read about the emotionally numbing first encounter with disaster: “It is one of the mysteries of our nature that a man, all unprepared, can receive a thunderstroke like that and live. There is but one reasonable explanation of it. The intellect is stunned by the shock and but gropingly gathers the meaning of the words. The power to realize their full import is mercifully wanting. The mind has a dumb sense of vast loss—that is all. It will take mind and memory months, and possibly years, to gather together the details and thus learn and know the whole extent of the loss.”¹

It took me years, that much is certain. Somehow I managed to keep it together enough those first few years to continue getting up every morning and going to work. I lost my scholarly motivations for a good length of time, but as the tenure clock kept ticking away I understood that I needed to produce, so the ingrained habits of mind and body helped me plod along for a while. Work was therapeutic—as it was, I later discovered, for the grieving Mark Twain, and for many other bereaved authors. Despite feeling underwater and disconnected much of the time, I managed, somehow, to get research of varying degrees of import and originality published.

Even so, I found myself wandering around in a haze, almost a trance, for the first couple of years,

if not longer. I taught classes and graded papers, went to church even, but somehow felt as if none of it mattered very much. Days and weeks, and then months, went around and around like a carousel, going nowhere. That’s not to say that I didn’t descend to the lower levels of hell: I did. I’ve often wondered since those days how much my colleagues and students perceived my struggles and

[Twain wrote] some of the most accurate words I’ve ever read about the emotionally numbing first encounter with disaster: “It is one of the mysteries of our nature that a man, all unprepared, can receive a thunderstroke like that and live.”

daily trials. As a result of my experiences, I now firmly believe that a true account of this subject must begin with that aspect: the sheer torture of losing a child, and a resulting view of life to come as hopeless and horrible, all summarized in what Mark Twain memorably described elsewhere as “this odious world.”

After a couple of years I began seriously considering the possibility that I was losing my mind. I certainly did not seem to be getting any better. So, like any decent scholar, I began by digging around into the research about parental grief—for the personal reason that I actually wanted to know if it were true, that my mind was going south. I discovered, in fact, that many parents never do seem to “recover”—at least not fully. One of the first and most disturbing clinical studies I came upon showed that this psychological state of “overwhelming life meaninglessness” does not necessarily change with time; or if it does, it takes many years. In other words, there is clinical evidence that the old adage “Time heals all wounds” does not easily fit parental bereavement. (I was also beginning to realize that “healing” from grief

is itself a metaphor based upon the mistaken idea of grief as illness, a Freudian concept that was at the heart of twentieth-century approaches to grief counseling.) However, clinical experience showed that a model of healing an illness did not seem accurate for parental grief, and that many parents did not recover within the year or so that seemed adequate for other types of grief. Rather, the opposite seemed more accurate: pain commonly intensifies, especially in the third or fourth year after the loss of a child. Most studies show that parental grief often gets worse with time, at least in the initial years, and that a growing sense of meaninglessness often accompanies it as well. I discovered that stunner near the end of the second year, and it was depressing to realize that I might not have even bottomed out by that point. But at least my experience was predictable. Maybe I was not losing it, after all.

Steadied somewhat, I plunged ahead, genuinely curious as to how Stowe, Lincoln, Twain, and Du Bois managed their own pain. My first serious attempt to apply what I was learning to a literary life focused on Twain, for two reasons. First, I knew the terrain well: I was already familiar with Twain's life, his writings, and the scholarship on him. Second, I identified closely with his travails, and I admired his sense of humor in the face of life's greatest tragedies. I had once heard about a study of longevity and mental health that determined that humor was one of the most influential traits of hardy, well-balanced individuals who live long. Well, Mark Twain always has made me laugh—and laughter was something I needed to rediscover, as much and as soon as possible.

I learned three things from Twain: first, he experienced the deepest and most profound versions of hell on earth, and he wrote about that hell in a compelling manner that resonated deeply

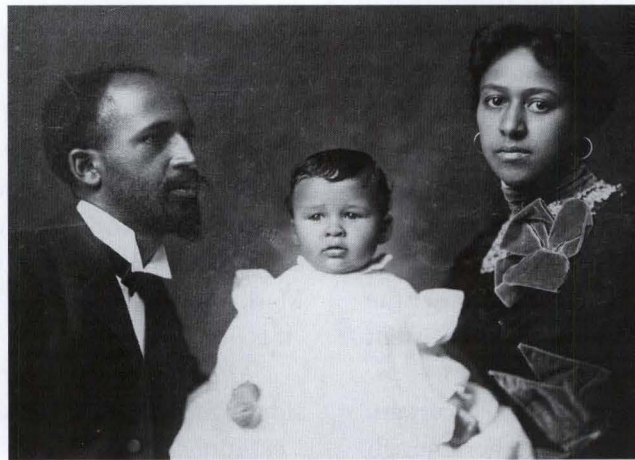
with me. Second, like almost all bereaved parents, Twain confronted a profound crisis of meaning. Losing a child challenges one's view of the world, leading frequently into a kind of despair and hopelessness. A child evokes a connection with the past, an investment in the future, and an extension of self. To say it another way, a child is a concrete expression of hope in the future, and when a child dies, much of a person's hope dies as well. Since Daniel was our only child, Hiroko and I felt forlorn in not having a legacy for the future. Our loss challenged previous assumptions about the purpose and meaning of life—and about God and the life of faith.

Finally, Twain's continuing bonds with his beloved daughter Susy haunted him for the remaining fourteen years of his life. Some of that connection bore good fruit—it softened his own heart in certain ways, even as it hardened it in other ways. Most importantly, the loss of Susy tended to exacerbate Twain's sense of moral out-

rage, helping to inspire some of the finest social criticism of his long career—and, indeed, some of the finest ever to be written by an American. Imperialism and lynching became favorite targets of his rage—as did sour, hypocritical religion and arro-

gant, idiotic politicians.

Like many survivors of a child's death, Twain grew more tender toward those disenfranchised and wrongly treated people he met in his travels and at his readings. He also became a sort of pastoral counselor to others who came after him on the road of grief. He wrote kindhearted letters filled with sentiment and wisdom to bereaved parents and spouses. Finally, he became for many years a trusted and merciful caregiver to his wife, Livy, who in some ways never did fully recover from Susy's death. He was loyal to her until the



W. E. B. Du Bois with son Burghardt and wife Nina, 1898.

W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312) Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst

end, often tended to her daily needs himself, and played a piano and sang Negro spirituals from the next room as she slowly passed away in 1904. In a peculiar way, the death of a child can cement even more strongly a relationship between parents, for these bereaved individuals feel that no one else on earth can possibly understand their loss—only each other.

IT'S HARD TO SUMMARIZE all the redemptive aspects that might emerge from different individuals' pain and suffering; for that I will suggest that

you read the book. I will simply say that my own journey indicates that there truly is redemption in the universe. Some readers may find redemption to be a stodgy, abstract concept; others may think that speaking of such a death as "redemptive" smacks of an offensive arrogance, a trite superficiality. I know just how trite such a statement can sound, as it often did to me in those early years after Daniel died. But looking back, I'm reminded of a quote from C. S. Lewis: "I am only trying to show that the old Christian doctrine of being made 'perfect through suffering' is not incredible."²

For me, as it turns out, redemption from suffering has proven to be true, and deeply meaningful, though it certainly does not diminish the pain. But it's a hidden wisdom, and mourners should resist the impulse that appeals to redemption will somehow, magically, suffice. Though such superficialities seem well-intentioned, in fact one would almost have to be a "moral cretin," as David Bentley Hart memorably puts it in his brief study *The Doors of the Sea*, to mumble something about redemption or God's will to bereaved parents during the early stages of grieving a dead child. Yes,



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time does offer consolation—but usually quite a long time. First, one must confront the sheer horror and even scandal of the death. To repeat Twain's uncanny quote: "It is one of the mysteries of our nature that a man, all unprepared, can receive a thunderstroke like that and live."

But Christians do claim to believe that redemption is woven into the fabric of our universe. Even today one often hears survivors describe their stubborn resistance to the idea that their child has "died in vain." This concept, lifted from I Corinthians 15 and elsewhere, was also a

catch phrase in nineteenth-century America. The mystery of redemption, that our labor is "not in vain" (I Cor. 15:58), was captured for all time at Gettysburg by our martyr president in the fall of 1863. A century and a half later, President Obama, speaking in July 2016 at the memorial for the

For me, as it turns out, redemption from suffering has proven to be true, and deeply meaningful, though it certainly does not diminish the pain.

slain Dallas police officers, made similar remarks: "My faith tells me that they did not die in vain. I believe our sorrow can make us a better country." Just days later, my wife and I watched as a poignant group of speakers walked on stage at the Democratic National Convention: they were the bereaved mothers of Trayvon Martin, Michael

Brown, Eric Garner, Sandra Bland, and others. These women pleaded with the audience to do something productive in light of their children's untimely deaths. On the same stage two days later, Khizr Khan gave a poignant appeal on behalf of his son, Capt. Humayun Khan, a slain Muslim American soldier. The prominence of these moments during the convention speaks to the lingering power of the dead child in the lives of their surviving parents, the respect of the public for those survivors, and the hope that the suffering caused by these deaths may somehow find constructive fruit, so that they will not have "died in vain."

Mark Twain was often labeled a heretic or even an atheist, but even he could never shake those immortal implications, either. He remembered his daughter Susy in redemptive ways for the remainder of his life. And like Twain, I still sense that cloud of witnesses surrounding me—and I predict that my own bonds with the dead will continue, as well, so that Daniel's death may not be in vain, either. Perhaps my volume, featuring "Continuing Bonds" in the title, is one more example of how the continuing bonds with the dead can bear constructive and beneficial consequences—the "peaceable fruits of righteousness"—in the lives of others. Thus do I hope, just like all grieving parents hope: that our dead children did not "die in vain."

Lezley McSpadden, Michael Brown's overwhelmed mother, said publicly in the aftermath

The untimely deaths of children cannot deny the ongoing legacy of their lives—as long as we remember them, some mysterious "bigger purpose" can be realized.



Post-mortem portrait of Samuel Charles Stowe, 1849.

Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University

of his death in 2012, "My son's life and death has a bigger purpose on it. He was too good for this wicked world, so God picked the rose too soon." Her words echo the sentiments of countless survivors of parental grief: the untimely deaths of children cannot deny the ongoing legacy of their lives—as long as we remember them, some mysterious "bigger purpose" can be realized.

In retrospect, that's also the main reason why I wrote the book. If anything I wrote becomes helpful or encouraging to anyone suffering similar loss, then I would count it a great success—and a legacy of my son, as well. 🌹

Harold K. Bush is professor of English at Saint Louis University and is the author of *Lincoln in His Own Time*, *Mark Twain and the Spiritual Crisis of His Age*, and *American Declarations: Rebellion and Repentance in American Cultural History*.

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DETAIL OF A PEACOCK

Nestling in the niche between the chapel's crumbling arches, his long blue neck plucks nibbles of tessera.

He wanders through mosaic parables like something risen out of time, wearing fashion all wrong for Byzantium—

a jaunty tri-plume hat in an age of halos. You presume at first this must have been a gold-leaf sermon contra

vanity, or like those tapestry-arrested unicorns, an attempt to tame our lusts of flesh. His sumptuous blue

feathers with their knowing eyes seem destined for a harem girl's accessory, so what are they doing here?

What Augustine wrote at Carthage, though, unveils the peacock's changing reputation, that before

its current turn as vain pretender, or the empty suit, the Church discovered peacock flesh does not decay.

So poke at any early Christian tomb and there they preen, depictions of life that does not die, the

incorruption of brief bodies made eternal. How every year a feather's molt returns brighter and more beautiful.

This long-necked fellow settles into tessellation, his plumage not quite all unfurled

so not to draw too much attention, but whispers that he's hiding here for now, a creature caught

in colored bits of glass, waiting till these ruins are restored to make his move.

Jennifer Stewart Fueston

Playfulness and Profundity

A Review of Luci Shaw's *Sea Glass*

Katie Manning

FOR PEOPLE COMING TO LUCI SHAW'S poetry for the first time, *Sea Glass: New & Selected Poems* will serve as a useful gateway into this prolific poet's work. For those familiar with Luci Shaw's lifetime of writing—not only her fourteen poetry collections, but also many books of nonfiction, co-authored books with Madeleine L'Engle, edited anthologies, and more—the thirty-eight new poems in her fifteenth poetry collection strike the balance that most of us hope to find in a beloved musician's new album: it's recognizably related to the work that's come before, but it doesn't feel like simply more of the same. Shaw finds new ways to explore unexpected beauty in this broken world.

The collection's title refers to broken glass that has been transformed by its time in salt water, resulting in bits of smooth, frosted glass that wash up on the shore and delight collectors. In the poem "Witnessing," Shaw explores the symbolic possibilities of this glass:

Gems known as Mermaid Tears
plucked from what used to be a Ft. Bragg
dump—
the broken glass worn by waves to amber,
cobalt blue and
jade. Evidence everywhere. Communities
of witness.

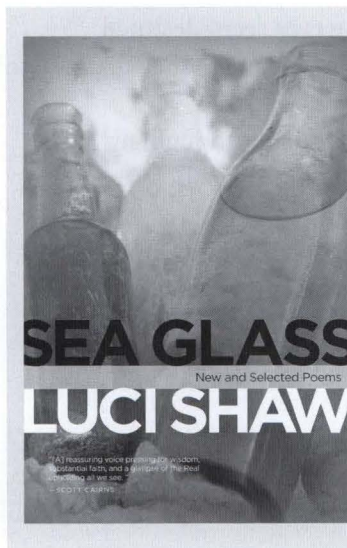
Memory a hoarder, always gathering
clues.

In a similar move of gathering small details as evidence, Shaw's poem "The Generosity" concludes, "And today, a raven feather on / the sidewalk and wings in the sky, / memos from heaven everywhere." Throughout these new poems, there is indeed a sense of piecing together clues from memory and observation, and these clues always seem to point to God.

It's not only the beautiful clues that point Shaw to God, but also the uncomfortable, less lovely details of life. In "Echocardiogram," Shaw's imagery and diction allow readers to experience the discomfort of the medical procedure:

I am laid on a table, half-naked and uneasy,
a supplicant for truth. Tethered in place with
electrodes, flipped on my side, my left breast
smeared with cool gel, my torso penetrated by
a seeing eye at the end of an intelligent probe.

Yet even in this "uneasy" and "tethered" state, the speaker hears the "harsh gulps" of her physical heart and moves into questions about God: "What of my other heart, prone to / fibrillations of impatience or inconstancy? What kind of / surgery do I pray for? In what operating theater? / What



SEA GLASS: NEW & SELECTED POEMS

by Luci Shaw

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239 pages

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Reviewed by
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cardiologist God, wearing scrubs?” With lines like this, Shaw joins poets like William Blake—whose poem “The Tyger” depicts God forging a fierce animal with fire, hammer, and anvil—in exploring the nature of God by blending theological questions with surprising images.

Shaw also joins Blake in using animals as a parallel for humans and as a potential key to understanding ourselves. In “What to Sing,” the speaker juxtaposes herself waiting on a bench with a bird on a branch above “singing exactly what / my heart had heard. // She sang, *It’s simple, / Just open your throat. / The air will carry it.*” In “Robin in the Late Afternoon,” the speaker is beckoned like a worm from the ground by a robin’s song and finds “fresh hopefulness” in the sound. In “Water,” the speaker imagines herself floating after a swim, “making / my own shape in the surface that bears me / on its body like an insect.” Another poem, “Environmental Art,” seems to offer an explanation for all of these human-animal connections: “My surroundings answer my scrutiny, glance / back, see in me a mirror, // as if we are partners in dialog about what / to make of the world.” Shaw often brings us into the peace of finding ourselves mirrored in the rest of God’s creation.

One of Shaw’s new poems, however, offers a human-animal connection that makes me intensely uncomfortable. In “Veterans,” the speaker stands beside her grandchildren and observes a squirrel, which she calls “our young neighbor,” using a bird feeder. She describes the squirrel’s “lopped off” tail, missing toe nails, and missing left paw, and she speculates about “his history—Trap? / Cat attack? Pellet gun? Whatever, amputation / hasn’t slowed him one bit.” The squirrel polishes off the seeds and comes back the following day. This lengthy stanza is followed by a much shorter stanza:

Today at church we met a homeless army
vet, limping
and hungry. The good breakfast he
got sent him on his way,
grateful for nutrients as welcome as
bird seed.
We hope he comes back for more.

What is it about this juxtaposition of injured squirrel and injured man that makes me so uncomfortable as a reader? Is it that the speaker is comparing someone other than herself to an animal? Is it the potential de-humanizing of a person who is homeless and/or disabled? Is it the way this man is left out of the “we” of the church community in that final line? I’m still wrestling with this poem’s implications and with my own complicity as one of the “we.”

I also found myself usefully uncomfortable with the poem “Total Recall,” which describes one man’s reality of being able to remember everything, “so that with a mere twitch of neurons / he could deliver every detail // into the present.” The poem delights me with the procession of details that follows, from “the belch and / roar of a London bus” to “A chestnut // freshly brought forth from its / spiky green shell.” Then comes the turn: this man finds his memory intolerable. The speaker asks, “Who / would lust for the clutter // of all those marching minutes, / the trivia of an infinite number / of days?” This leads to the final moment, less shocking than E. A. Robinson’s “Richard Cory” perhaps, but startling nonetheless: “In the end the smothered mind / took the body with it, and the thick / air around him clarified suddenly.” This poem is beautifully written, and sympathizing with another human’s experience is always valuable. At the same time, I feel uncomfortable with my position as reader/voyeur of what I interpret as a suicide, and that leaves me thinking and questioning myself long after I’ve read the poem.

While Shaw’s new poems focus on the beauty of broken things and broken people, they also contain a good deal of humor. There’s a language-level playfulness that comes out in poems like “Fugitive,” in which the speaker tries to recall a word that she can’t quite remember, and “The Life of I,” which is an ode to the letter “I” that also alludes to God as “I am.” Shaw also occasionally reveals an irreverent sense of humor. In “Peeling the Onion,” the speaker says, “your sharp essence clings to my hands like / a reputation.” In “Witnessing,” the speaker describes her office décor from around the world: “a twining of dried kelp, / seed pods intact, hangs tastefully. If asked I’ll tell you / it’s my gastric

and reproductive system, with ovaries.” The title of the poem “Jesus Checks in for the Flight Home” is humorous, but it moves between humor and darker imagery that is fitting for its Holy Week setting: “One by one we go through the scanner. Jesus stands firm, / lifts, spreads his arms over his head in the posture / I recognize from centuries of sacred art. / The machine strips him naked as a shorn lamb. [...] His body is declared flawless but for some nail holes...” Throughout these new poems, Shaw captures so well how humor can creep into unexpected situations, and her often playful perspective makes these new poems a joy to read.

This wonderful blend of playfulness with profundity is not limited to Shaw’s new poems, as longtime readers of her work will know. One of my all-time favorite poems from her selected work is “No, I’m Not Hildegard” from *Harvesting Fog*. The poem opens, “I’m merely a floater in the eye of God...” This title and first line make me smile every time I read them, but that opening image also functions as a powerful reminder of how small each of us is compared to the vastness of God (a simultaneously terrifying and comforting thought) and how small many people feel, along with the poem’s speaker, because we are not Hildegard, St. Catherine, or some other seemingly more significant person. Yet even in the midst of self-deprecation, there is a pervasive sense of God’s love.

When I was sitting beside a dying relative in the ICU a few months ago, this was the book I carried with me to the hospital every day. I found these poems to be thought provoking, comforting, and uplifting during one of the darkest times of my life. I am grateful for Luci Shaw’s work. ✝

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Bass, Dorothy, ed. *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997.

Wright, Basil. “Filming in Ceylon.” *Cinema Quarterly*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (1943): 231–32.

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POMEGRANATE

Beneath the leathery crown are clusters
like caviar nestled in crevices
of coral reefs. Break the body open
in water and its seeds will separate
from inner layers of snake skins and sink
unashamed. The Greek underworld confined
Persephone once the fruit stained her lips
with rouge, and her mother's fields of bright pink
crocuses, irises and hyacinths
ceased to bloom over earth. Middle Eastern
mothers clung like shadows, painting unfurled
branches of crisp, uncut pomegranates
curving a border around their daughters
marriage *ketubahs*. The fruit must be whole
for its blessing to retain any juice.

Julia Friedman

No Room at the Bookstore

Rethinking the Contemporary Christian Label

Josh Langhoff

ANOTHER CHRISTMAS ALBUM? THAT WAS my first uncharitable thought upon learning that Amy Grant had released her fourth album of holiday music, *Tennessee Christmas*. Grant remains a living legend in the industry of Contemporary Christian Music (CCM) after she peaked in popularity 25 years ago. Beloved by several generations of musicians and fans, not all of whom share her faith, she has written some of popular music's deepest and most forward-thinking songs about that faith. Besides that, Grant seems to have an unfailingly gracious demeanor—she would never, for example, publicly gripe that someone had recorded too many Christmas albums.

Since releasing her 1991 crossover album *Heart in Motion*, Grant has transcended the genre of CCM so well she might have rendered it unnecessary. Believers from Mumford & Sons to Mandisa now regularly score general market hits alluding to their faith, and “Feel Invincible,” by the Christian hard rock band Skillet, was recently the most played song on mainstream rock radio, normally the province of heathens like Metallica and Five Finger Death Punch. While a market for explicitly Christian music still exists, even those artists frequently appear in secular settings and place their songs in commercials. These crossover musicians all owe a debt to *Heart in Motion*, the smash hit that taught CCM how to capture the public's attention. With

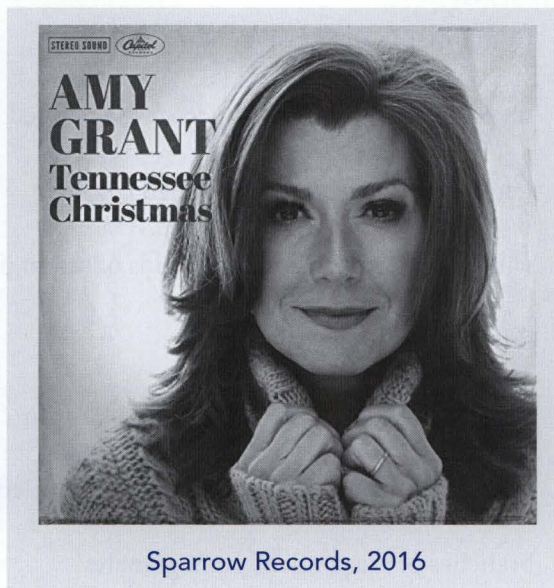
its songs about romance, multitasking, recovering from abuse, and Jesus, the album presented a portrait of Christian life in all its fullness.

At least since the days of Elvis Presley, many pop musicians have followed their smash hits with collections of Christmas music. Maybe they want to alleviate the pressure of replicating their success; maybe they just really like singing Christmas songs. And so in 1992

Grant released *Home for Christmas*, an elaborate affair that included new songs, Christian and secular carols, the London Studio Orchestra, and the American Boychoir. It quickly became one of the best-selling Christmas albums of all time. *Home* was Grant's second Christmas record; her first, 1983's humbler *A Christmas Album*, used prominent synthesizers along with strings, choirs, and carols. Its best original

songs, “Emmanuel” and “Little Town,” still sound fresh. (With their mixed meters and relentless syncopation, I can also attest they're hard to teach the church praise band.) But the first track on *A Christmas Album* might prove its most enduring: “Tennessee Christmas” lends its title to Grant's new album, which opens with a remake of the song.

Written by Grant with her husband at the time, Gary Chapman, “Tennessee” is lovely and thoroughly godless, in that it doesn't mention the birth of Jesus. Rather, the song is an ode to Goldilocks-style holiday moderation: Colorado might have



more snow, L.A. more sun, but Tennessee is just right. Like the rest of the songs, this new version of “Tennessee” was played by a small, subtle band and recorded at Grant’s Nashville house. It sets the tone for an album where coziness is a high ideal, not easily attained. Noisy children and rueful parents populate several new songs about the messy glow of family life; they also show up in a cringe-inducing remake of the Chipmunks’ “Christmas Don’t Be Late.” But in other, stiller lyrics, Grant’s profound compassion covers listeners like a shawl. “Our painted old nativity is fragile like the lives we lead, silently reminding me God is with us,” she sings in “Another Merry Christmas,” which is not merry at all. (Even Grant’s irony sounds like a hug.) This has always been her great subject, or at least her subject most likely to make me cry: faith through hardship, seeing God most clearly in life’s pain. Whether they mention God or not, older Grant songs like “Lead Me On,” “How Can We See That Far,” and “Better Than a Hallelujah” all feel of a piece with these new Christmas songs and with Grant’s public persona. Littered with family photos and corny spoken asides, the *Tennessee Christmas* album also offers another portrait of a full Christian life—it just limits its scope to a single holiday.

Such a portrait was apparently not enough for LifeWay Christian Resources, a bookstore chain that, despite carrying Grant’s previous albums, will not be carrying *Tennessee Christmas*. The company has offered no reasons for their decision beyond a statement that hints they might be running out of shelf space: “We don’t discuss why we make product decisions... There are hundreds of thousands of products that we could carry online or in our stores. We’re only able to carry a few thousand.” For longtime Grant fans, though, the LifeWay decision recalls other controversies that have followed the artist throughout her career:

- In an op-ed for the *Washington Post*, Grant’s manager, Jennifer Cooke, remembers the time in 1991 when the song “Baby Baby” was on its way to becoming a #1 pop hit. “I had the unique experience of being at work during the day,” Cooke writes, “where in the midst of the excitement and busyness of working on a hit pop

record, I would field a few angry calls about Amy Grant’s ‘selling out.’”

- Around the same time, a concerned reader wrote to *CCM magazine*, “Does Amy Grant thrive on this crossover controversy? I heard her new song ‘Baby, Baby’ and have a hard time believing that the unsaved will take her witness seriously. I really do like her music, but I don’t plan on supporting this album.”

- Another letter to *CCM* read, “Is the man in Amy Grant’s ‘Baby Baby’ video her husband, Gary Chapman? I’ve heard that it is not, and I think with her beliefs that she should not be in a video with someone besides Gary.” This reader had keen eyes; in the scandalous video, Grant danced and acted out an unbearably cute romance with the model Jme Stein.

- Then in 1997, Grant released the fine album *Behind the Eyes*. Critics praised its painful honesty, while a music buyer for an unnamed religious chain told *Christianity Today*, “It’s not a Christian album. A Christian album should be clear on the person of Christ, and these lyrics are not.”

THE QUESTIONS RAISED BY THESE ARGUMENTS are older than the CCM industry: What constitutes Christian art, what is its purpose, and who is its proper audience? These questions haven’t been settled yet. Notably, the people listed above disagreed why the questions were important in the first place. For the anonymous buyer, the issue was purely taxonomic: a Christian album is clear on the person of Christ. The letter writers made the issue about Grant’s witness: her music was good but it wouldn’t win any souls, and it might lead people into sin. Cooke’s angry callers felt betrayed because Grant had been their artist, and all of a sudden she belonged to everyone—she had “sold out” to the wrong audience.

Those callers might not have known about Grant’s long-term crossover strategy. Way back in 1983 she told *People* magazine, “It’s like there’s a huge mountain called the music business, and this thing next to it, a little bitty saltshaker—that’s the Christian music business. My question is, how can I sing to that mountain of people out there?” When, in 1991, she finally found a way to bring her message to the world, most of her fans supported

her, but a noisy few objected that the core of her message, Jesus, had disappeared. Where Grant saw herself simply reaching more people, these fans saw a craven sell-out move—much as later that year, some hardcore Metallica fans objected to the band’s radio-friendly “Black Album,” claiming the band was abandoning the thrash metal style they

Way back in 1983 she told *People* magazine, “It’s like there’s a huge mountain called the music business, and this thing next to it, a little bitty saltshaker—that’s the Christian music business. My question is, how can I sing to that mountain of people out there?”

had helped create. True believers die hard, no matter what kind of music they listen to.

Taken as a whole, *Tennessee Christmas* is only a decent Christmas album, worth hearing once a year, but it could pass any “Christian art” test you could throw at it. Grant’s quiet rendition of “Joy to the World” is “clear on the person of Christ,” and the empathy of her new song “Melancholy Christmas” could serve as a witness to people who are hurting during the holiday season. I can,

however, imagine certain devout listeners taking offense at her version of Frank Loesser’s Oscar-winning chestnut, “Baby, It’s Cold Outside,” and not just because the song has been covered to death in recent years. Grant sings the duet with her second husband, country star Vince Gill. (She and Chapman divorced in 1999, and some listeners still haven’t forgiven her.) As they sing their way through a fireside seduction, complete with drinks and extramarital kisses, the concerned letters pretty much write themselves. Whether this song dissuaded LifeWay from carrying the album is anyone’s guess. In any case, other products not carried by the book chain include the music of J. S. Bach and gospel pioneer Andrae Crouch, and the writings of Marilynne Robinson and Paul Tillich. *Tennessee Christmas* is in good company.

True to form, Grant has handled all these controversies with thoughtful grace. Her response to LifeWay’s statement reads, in part, “Let’s all move on from that decision without arguing about it. But let’s not stop asking the questions about what it means to live in faith and reflect love to the world around us...” Where some people offer black and white doctrines, Grant asks more questions—just as where some people hear an annoying song sung by chipmunks, Grant hears a song about family and home. ♣

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TURNING THIRTY

The last licks of summer sun hunger
for more horizon. Hope is not as passive,
doesn't burn with a mild, unfurled light.

I want another baby, a house with a fence.
I want the sun in increments, with its endless
beating against the earth.

*So you say, let's have another
this year, let's build a fence
around what we have.*

In Tennessee, we'd have nights
with fewer mosquitos—if we settle
somewhere nice, like Franklin
or Cool Springs. In Arkansas:
better churches, or at least more to pick from.

I used to think you were afraid, stubborn,
but now I see what you have as a gift—
taking whatever is placed in your hands
and making rough music from it.

It's tempting on both ends—to pick up and see
what's out there or to stake it out, as you do with me,
working this root-matted gravel, this redclay dirt.

Renee Emerson

Why Being Lutheran Matters Today

A Review of A. Trevor Sutton's *Being Lutheran*

A PART FROM THE OBVIOUS—THAT 2017 marks the 500th anniversary of Luther's 95 Theses and the Reformation they sparked—why bother exploring what it means to be a Lutheran today? Isn't Lutheranism a vaguely outmoded way of thinking, believing, and behaving? What relevance could it have for those habituated toward the latest viral video or breaking stories of tragedy and scandal? Amid those questions and observations, A. Trevor Sutton posits the answer that is *Being Lutheran: Living in the Faith You Have Received*—for 2016, 2017, and beyond.

While one can't judge a book by its cover, a well-chosen cover can convey the content.

While one might expect to see Luther's seal on the front of a book about Lutheranism, the crown of thorns encircling it here points beyond the inviting white rose to the agony and scandal of Christ's black cross in the center of the red, beating heart. That image suggests that being Lutheran has little to do with Luther himself but everything to do with the Crucified and Risen One who meets us in our humanity.

At the outset, Sutton explains that he's concerned with *being* Lutheran; *thinking* and *acting* are not disparate realities but two modes that merge

and collide in life (xvii-xviii). While the historical details and theological tenets of Lutheranism are addressed in the book, they are placed within the unfolding context of life and complemented with vignettes of individual Lutherans who embody and exemplify each aspect.

Comprised of two parts, the book approaches Lutheranism through the lenses of "What We

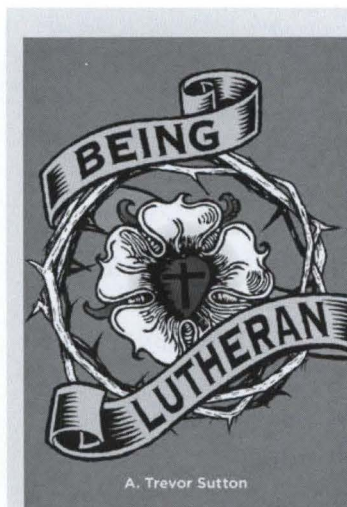
Challenge" and "What We Cherish."

Each part has five chapters, and each chapter focuses on a particular adjective. On the "challenge" side are chapters entitled "Closed," "Lukewarm," "Confused," "Lazy," and "Pastel."

Although it would have been easy to launch forth on Lutheranism's rightness "against the

world," Sutton instead embarks upon the fields of brokenness, isolation, and complacency that affect and infect humankind as well as the Church. And while one might expect "What We Cherish" to rise in a triumphalist celebration of Lutheranism's tight theological system, the author instead praises the paradoxical: "New," "Ordinary," "Unresolved," "Purpose," and "Local"—reminding readers that Christ uses the humble and works in unexpected ways.

It matters that Sutton begins in the surprising place of a paean to the concept of "open source."



BEING LUTHERAN A. Trevor Sutton

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2016

291 pages

\$14.99

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Software is “open source” when the original source code is made freely available and may be redistributed and modified. Sutton points out many cultural applications of the term and addresses how *closed* life is in our world and its particular societies, whether due to lack of electricity, technology, financial resources, racial harmony, or any number of barriers. Sin—the ultimate barrier—is our default position. “The urge to be closed dwells deep in our bones” (5) and cuts us off from God and one another. But this is the ancient human predicament that Jesus came to undo. Given this context and Luther’s opposition to the barriers the pre-Reformation church had put around the Gospel, Sutton sees that “open access to God’s grace is at the heart of being Lutheran” (9).

Lutherans struggle as much as anyone with a close-mindedness that favors apathy and indifference over the active righteousness that serves God by serving the needs of our neighbor. As an example, Sutton highlights the stark contrast between the German Evangelical Church of Hitler’s regime and the Confessing Church represented by Dietrich Bonhoeffer (45-49).

In the chapter titled “Confused,” Sutton juxtaposes our erroneous intellectual traditions and cultural practices with the authority of truth as embodied in Jesus. In so doing, it becomes clear that Luther’s disagreement with the establishment church centered on the concern for biblical truth and the faith handed down since the apostles.

Sutton contrasts our desire for amusement and escapism—being lazy—with the incarnate work of Jesus and the transformation it effects in his followers. Contrary to the idea that the finished work of Jesus makes Christians, especially Lutherans, exempt from doing anything, Sutton asserts that “made new in Christ, our labor is now directed at the well-being of others” (87). Being Lutheran means doing good works to serve others in faith—not to earn salvation.

In “Pastel,” Sutton focuses on the danger that comes from blending in too much, or having norms that are indistinct from cultural norms. Luther held that Christ is the “form” that adorns our faith like a color or light adorns a wall (106). If anything, Lutherans have license for cultural disobedience in conformity with Jesus himself, who

clashed boldly with the entrenched distortions of religion and life.

The second part of *Being Lutheran* (“What We Cherish”) begins with “New”: the essential reality of Christ’s resurrection and the eternal new hope it brings. If Jesus Christ truly is “the harbinger of the new creation” (132), then we cannot simply continue to behave as if all is still broken and nothing has changed.

In the chapter “Ordinary,” Sutton discusses how study and teaching of scripture enabled Luther to behold the all-sufficient Christ who died and rose to conquer sin and give new life. Because the new has broken into the old, the *ordinary* has been transformed. Even the materials that the incarnate Christ used to carry out his work were ordinary: soil and spit, water and word, bread and wine, wood and nails. Recognizing that provides insight into why Luther ridiculed and condemned the medieval church’s “holy relic” obsession that drove the Crusades. Still, Sutton points out, there continue to be Christians who “chase after extravagant and expensive, glitzy and glamorous objects” (156). In contrast, Lutheranism values the sacramental—the holy gifts of Christ himself.

Continuing in that vein where ordinary and extraordinary coexist, Sutton writes in the “Unresolved” chapter that Jesus never resolved every question but always affirmed God’s wisdom. This, too, fed Luther’s theology and led him to break with philosophically and logically inclined theologians—from Aquinas and Erasmus to Calvin and Zwingli—on matters from freedom of the will to Christ’s presence in the Lord’s Supper to how we can be saint and sinner at the same time. Rather than embracing the purely logical, Luther settled for the biblical. He left the tension unresolved, the mysteries of God intact (185).

If certain things are beyond figuring out, and if God meets us in daily life, then everything matters and nothing is insignificant. This is the focus of the chapter “Purpose.” Luther knew it was wrong to elevate only those with holy or “religious” vocations while relegating as inferior those who farm and feed, those who make and marry. For Luther, one’s vocation was not a way to earn salvation or privileged status but the way through which God sustains and serves his Creation; they are “the

masks of God, behind which He wants to remain concealed and do all things” (213).

With that acknowledgement in mind, Sutton reminds his readers that the global is nothing but the sum of the local. And lest we think of Jesus as “out there somewhere,” it is grounding to see that “Jesus is the local embodiment of the global Creator” (228). Congregations gathered in worship through Word and Sacrament are therefore places of people in which the Lord is really and locally present.

Sutton’s goal for this book was to posit the theological designation “Lutheran” in the nexus between thinking and acting, being and believing. *Being Lutheran* is a highly readable, accessible encounter with the distinct content and character of the faith. In addition to the personal vignettes and points of daily life application at the end of each chapter, the book includes a Leader Guide to help facilitate individual or group study.

Ninety years ago, shortly after World War I ended, Swedish Archbishop Nathan Söderblom, a pioneer of Christian ecumenism, wrote a chapter titled “Why I Am a Lutheran.” He asked why anyone would want to uphold denominational division in a time when millions of Christians from different confessions and nationalities had fought and killed each other. Like Sutton, Söderblom asked why someone should identify as a Lutheran when Martin Luther himself “vehemently forbade his friends to call themselves after him, whose body would soon become a sack of worms” (73). Söderblom found his answer in realizing that the gift and understanding of Baptism which he received, the hymns and worship with which he was raised, the grandeur and knowledge of the Bible, and the rigorous theological discipline rooted in biblical scholarship which he so prized were all due to Luther and the Reformation.

That same year, 1926, my paternal grandfather left the pastorate of the German Evangelical Synod (the Lutheran-Calvinist hybrid that eventually became the United Church of Christ) and became a pastor in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, the denomination in which I serve and whose publishing house has brought us Sutton’s *Being Lutheran*. Even though my grandfather was a lifelong member of that previous church body

known for Reinhold and H. Richard Niebuhr (and their father, with whom my grandfather served for a time), he left due to unease at growing mergers with the Reformed, but also due to the increasing departure from the German language. Theological ties are never purely exempt from cultural identity and expression.

Quite different from my grandfather, my first memory of Lutheranism was as a child growing up as the son of a missionary pastor in the predominantly Roman Catholic Philippines. I identified as a Filipino even though I was an American of German heritage, but I knew that I was a Lutheran because of what was cultivated at home and in worship. When I am with Lutheran brothers and sisters from anywhere in the world, there is a link that goes beyond language and culture—Christ Jesus, the Son of the Father, sealed by the Spirit, who unites in faith.

So, why focus on *being* Lutheran now, amid all the turmoil and tumult in the world? Because Lutheranism is a vibrant expression of faith and life within the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. It is not a “cultural inheritance” (252) but a vital way of believing and living in Christ the Crucified and Risen One, whose grace given and received is ours to share for the life of the world. ✠

Joel Kurz is pastor of Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Warrensburg, Missouri, and a contributor to The Center for the Care of Creation.

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DISORDERLY ABECEDARIAN 6: HIDDEN

Matter of course—the bandaging
water performs for itself, as
jitter of light across its face.

Natter on, says the sand to the waves. We're your
xylophone and no
knotter can tie us together. We're your
zither, say clouds to wind, your
plotters of courses, your
tethers, tenders, traders.
Hotter by the grains of sand, we burn the soles of your
daughter. She'll stay back,
even unthirsty, or unwound. Waves
chatter—messages foam each to each,
uttering what they know, like candles
guttering, burnt-ended, like any
yearning they believe
rather than breaking. They
quiver rather than swimming, caught by each
other at the edge, at the edges, which
bother the shores and the banks, which
shatter whatever we know of place, of land. They curl, fall,
lather against what can't be pure, one nature.

Vector of fruit, ice, fish, grain, pulling water up, each
another tideline, where the people bathe and fall. Water
interred between grains of shell, glass, bones, coral, crystal.
Father, this is where I have hidden the skins.

Devon Miller-Duggan

The Irony of Success

A Review of Angela Duckworth's *Grit*

Todd C. Ream

INTENTIONAL OR NOT, THE IRONY IS COMPELLING. THE signature philanthropic endeavor of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation is popularly referred to as the “genius grant.” Shrouded in some measure of mystery, “You don’t apply for the MacArthur. You don’t ask your friends or colleagues to nominate you. Instead, a secret committee that includes the top people in your field decides you’re doing important and creative work” (xiii). Angela Duckworth was a MacArthur fellow in 2013, and the core argument that garnered her that distinction is “Grit may matter more than talent” (p. xv).

In many ways, that very argument runs counter to the popular perception of the program now funding its advancement. Inborn talent is the fertile soil from which genius is traditionally believed to bloom. In essence, a chosen few have it while the rest of us do not. Try as I might, for example, I cannot throw a 102 mph fastball, paint a landscape worthy of critical acclaim, or multiply sets of six-digit numbers in my head (or, let’s be honest, sets of three-digit numbers). In some cases, Duckworth would suggest my rationale for those deficiencies might be correct. However, she would likely argue that in most cases, I just failed to apply myself in a manner that would yield such results.

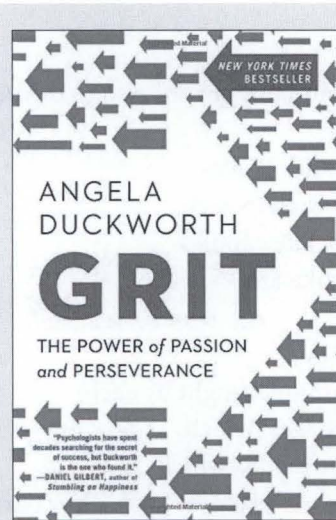
In *Grit: The Power of Passion and*

Perseverance (Scribner, 2016), Duckworth contends “no matter the domain, the highly successful had a kind of ferocious determination that played out in two ways. First, these exemplars were unusually resilient and hardworking. Second, they knew in a very, very deep way what it was they wanted” (p. 8). When it comes to throwing a fastball, painting a landscape, or doing multiplication of any complexity, Duckworth would argue I lack the needed determination. More specifically, I lack a

vision and a will. The sluggard in me prefers the idea that a lack of talent is my problem. Fortunately for me, the results of Duckworth’s genius-grant-funded research indicate I am not alone.

Duckworth serves on the psychology faculty at the University of

Pennsylvania, and her research into talent, grit, and what yields success contains an autobiographical thread—a thread also laced with irony. At the beginning of her book, Duckworth recounts how, when she was growing up, her father repeatedly reminded her and her siblings that none of them were geniuses. In a culture in which every impulse of a child seems to demand affirmation, such a message might sound troubling or, to some, abusive. Duckworth does not indicate that her father’s remarks were problematic. Instead, growing up with the understanding that she was not a genius



GRIT: THE POWER AND
PASSION OF PERSEVERANCE

Angela Duckworth

Scribner, 2016

333 pages

\$28.00

Reviewed by

Todd C. Ream

Taylor University

motivated her not only to work hard, but to work hard at knowing how one becomes a genius.

The irony continues. One of her earliest professional positions was with an organization known for recruiting talent—McKinsey & Company. Later, she took a job teaching high school and became intrigued by why some of her students succeeded while others failed. She dug deep into this question when she returned to graduate school and sought to explain why some of West Point's incoming cadets made it through the summer training session (known as "Beast Barracks") while others did not. The results of that research yielded what she came to refer to as "the Grit Scale—a test that, when taken honestly, measures the extent to which you approach life with grit" (p. 9). In the end, she discovered that "how talented a cadet was said nothing about their grit, and vice versa" (p. 9). More than talent, grit was the better indicator of who showed up day in and day out. Grit ultimately determined success.

After dismissing the common perception that inborn talent is necessary for success and, in turn, affirming "that a high level of performance is, in fact, an accretion of mundane acts" (p. 38), Duckworth unveils the details of her "Grit Scale" and the foundation upon which the rest of her book is based. As she notes in the title, "Grit has two components: passion and perseverance" (p. 56), so people need to have a deep love for what they do. In Duckworth's terms, however, falling in love may be the easy part as infatuation quickly fades. The challenge comes with staying in love, or persevering. More directly stated, "Enthusiasm is common. Endurance is rare" (58). The purpose of the Grit Scale is to measure both.

Although the Grit Scale is a sophisticated instrument, Duckworth will likely leave her fellow behavioral scientists wanting at this point of her book. Beyond the ironic truth that her work demonstrates, part of its value is its sheer accessibility. Most readers who pick up Duckworth's book will understand what she is arguing. Her prose is clear, her narrative examples are insightful, and the ramifications of her research in a wide range of situations are evident. The hard part about Duckworth's research does not come in working through it but in working out the details in every-

day life. For many of us, the belief (and the hope) in talent dies hard. Personally, while I might want to pitch in the major leagues, I also lack the will to do what is needed.

The accessibility of Duckworth's research is due in part to the book's organization. Part One is comprised of five chapters that work together to dispel common myths, propose definitions, and clear the ground necessary for the cultivation of grit. For example, in Chapter Five, Duckworth writes, "A good place to start is to understand where you are today. If you're not as gritty as you want to be, ask yourself *why*" (89). If grit is the result of repeated practice, then it's not surprising to learn that grit is generally learned over time

The hard part about Duckworth's research does not come in working through it but in working out the details in everyday life.

For many of us, the belief (and the hope) in talent dies hard.

and is thus more the province of the old than the young.

Part Two, or "Growing Grit from the Inside Out," includes four chapters that focus more deeply on qualities that cultivate grit. These chapters and the qualities they detail—interest, practice, and purpose—culminate in the virtue of hope. Aristotelians will undoubtedly be disappointed by the low level of philosophical detail in the chapters on practice and purpose. The tradeoff, however, is reader-friendly clarity. Those chapters lead into a discussion of hope, or "optimistic ways of explaining adversity, and that, in turn, leads to perseverance and seeking out new challenges that will ultimately make you even stronger" (p. 192).

Duckworth closes her volume with four chapters that discuss "Growing Grit from the Outside In." Those chapters consider social institutions that can benefit from her research. For example, the first chapter in this section addresses the

family and what parents, in particular, can do to nurture grit in their children. Duckworth is quick to note her research to date has not fully explored this topic to the level that her social scientist inclinations find great comfort.

If academic leaders and parents are interested in cultivating grit, Duckworth would likely recommend holding onto the orchestra, theater, or ceramics program.

Regardless, she offers some underlying principles that are recognizable. In particular, Duckworth contends “When our parents are loving, respectful, and demanding, we not only follow their example, we revere it” (p. 215). She then weaves variations of that argument into the remaining chapters to explain how other institutions, such as schools, can do the same. In particular, she highlights how schools’ co-curricular activities, such as fine arts and athletic programs, provide a space for young people to develop grit.

One other thread of irony woven into Duckworth’s book is that the very contexts in which young people cultivate grit are often the first to be cut in difficult financial times (i.e., fine arts programs) or are among the most misappropriated (i.e., athletic teams). If academic leaders and parents are interested in cultivating grit, Duckworth would likely recommend holding onto the orchestra, theater, or ceramics program. She may then lobby, especially to parents, that athletic programs are means to cultivate grit, not ends measured merely by wins and losses. In fact, Duckworth’s research suggests that a loss may cultivate grit more than a win.

Even if all her work does is dispel the myths that keep us from those lines of thinking, the irony is that achievement alone would constitute success. Here’s hoping it goes further. ✦

Todd C. Ream serves on the faculty at Taylor University and as a distinguished fellow with Excelsia College (New South Wales). His most recent book, *Restoring the Soul of the University* (with Perry L. Glanzer and Nathan Alleman), is scheduled for release in March by InterVarsity Press.

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Created for Creativity
Steven R. Guthrie

ate last September, a week or so before the conference that gave rise to this essay, I was lying in bed, desperate—thinking about the talk I was to give, how quickly it was coming up, and how very far it was from being written. As I lay there, I offered up a sleepy prayer that went something like: “Oh God, please give me words and ideas for this presentation.” I answered that prayer in particular! A much more interesting question, however, is how we should think

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POSSESSION

—after Maggie Smith

The night hears you,
what you pretend not to ask,
and the angel slips through
the bars of your fingers and into your body.

If you must incarcerate her,
at least sing unashamed.
If the words form a hymn,
allow your walls to reverberate.

You were nothing once
but a clutch of steel and bones,
a rusty silhouette passing
itself off as a body.

Now you are a sheet of evening air
billowed by her wings.
Even in her sleep, her breath
is enough for your skin.

The people watch your body
for omens, and sailors navigate
the ancient scars that hold your hide
but the lines of the constellations have changed.

The moon hones its sickle
against your shoulder blades.
You are the darkest breeze, and there's no telling
what the wind might blow home.

Joshua Gage

Sins of the Parents

Derek Cianfrance's *The Light Between Oceans*

Charles Andrews

GEORGE ELIOT'S NOVELLA *SILAS MARNER: The Weaver of Raveloe*, first published in 1861, tells of a man with a checkered past, run out of his hometown after being betrayed by his best friend and falsely accused of thievery. Marner settles in a new village where he sets up a successful lacemaking trade and for twenty years lives alone, isolated and rich. One day, the degenerate son of the local Lord slips into Marner's cottage, steals his gold, and disappears. Coincidentally, a small girl with golden curls is abandoned on Marner's doorstep, and the similarity between the money and the girl's hair is obvious enough that even the narrator finds it a bit twee. Through the course of the novella, Marner the wealthy recluse becomes Marner the dutiful father who loses his prized possessions but gains family and community. We, the readers, are morally enriched.

For Eliot and her Victorian readership, the coincidences, moralizing, and blatant sentimentalism were not flaws but rather genre expectations. To read literature of this sort was to gain an emotional experience plus ethical enrichment. These qualities in *Silas Marner*, as I can attest from many years teaching this book, are much less congenial to twenty-first century readers. That these elements of Victorian fiction are reproduced without irony in Derek Cianfrance's latest film, *The Light Between Oceans*, is perhaps its boldest move—and likely the reason it has received such mixed reviews. Like his two previous features—*Blue Valentine* (2010) and *The Place Beyond the Pines* (2012)—Cianfrance's new film strives to be a tearjerker with grand themes about family, forgiveness, and redemption. Fresh for his latest outing is a period setting in the first half of the twentieth century and an Australian locale.

With his three recent features, Cianfrance has shown himself to be deeply interested in filmmaking driven by storytelling. To fully summarize any of these works would be to damage the experience somewhat for the uninitiated viewer, since part of the viewing pleasure arises from wondering whether anything good might evolve from the characters' circumstances or whether the narrative will plunge headlong into unrelenting tragedy. Few directors working today seem as committed as Cianfrance to unfurling storylines that cross decades and generations. This narrative style can be enchanting and surprising, but it also has made his films difficult to market to audiences accustomed to being sold quickly encapsulated premises and scenarios. The famous, and much parodied, movie trailer tagline, "In a world, where..." that accommodates innumerable action/sci-fi/rom-com stories is evidence of this quick-sell based on setting and scenario.

Reduced to its premise, *The Light Between Oceans* begins in a world where a generation of traumatized ex-soldiers are returning from France after the Great War. Tom Sherbourne (Michael Fassbender), a former officer suffering from PTSD, takes a position as a lighthouse keeper on an island off the Australian coast. The enforced solitude suits his postwar state of mind, but he strikes up an epistolary romance with a vibrant young woman called Isabel Graysmark (Alicia Vikander), who draws him out of his emotional numbness and into passionate marriage. All is well for a time, and the early lighthouse days are full of meaningful looks between the photogenic leads and sun-drenched kisses haloed in lens flares. But a series of miscarriages sends Isabel into a traumatic state of her own, as her lost children join the dead combatants who haunt Tom and launch



Touchstone Pictures

Would-be parents Isabel (Alicia Vikander) and Tom (Michael Fassbender) in *The Light Between Oceans*

her into a hyper-state of self-protection. The first in a series of wild coincidences occurs when a dinghy washes ashore carrying a dead man and a crying baby—one of the film's clearest echoes of George Eliot. Instead of Silas Marner's selfless turn toward fatherhood, the Sherbournes become ethical wrecks. Tom immediately feels compelled by duty to alert proper authorities, but Isabel insists that they keep the baby, bury the man's body, and remove the grave marker for their second child to pass off the foundling as their own. Tom's love for Isabel overcomes his conscience, and the relatively staid first half of the film shifts gears drastically with an influx of new characters, moral dilemmas, and even a tense subplot involving a police procedural and a courtroom drama.

This plot structure feels like an avalanche gathering momentum, and many critics have ridiculed the contrivances and implausibilities that enable the storyline. These narrative twists do indeed strain credulity when measured against twenty-first century expectations about "realism," but *The Light Between Oceans* may be better understood as a throwback to Victorian storytelling, where, for instance, the chance meeting of vital characters separated by miles and years does not undermine the narrative pleasures and moralistic themes in

a Dickens novel. That Tom and Isabel become closely entangled with Hannah Roennfeldt (Rachel Weisz) for the last half of the film requires some suspension of disbelief but is a crucial part of the ethical quagmire Cianfrance creates. With every twist in the plot, heartbreaking tragedy threatens to devour, and with each contrived escape Cianfrance ratchets up the pathos. Marketing for the film has alluded to this late development, but mostly *The Light Between Oceans* has been billed for its high romanticism, augmented by the fact that Fassbender and Vikander became a real-life couple during the shoot. Though possibly unsatisfying as a romantic star vehicle, *The Light Between Oceans* may very well have a second life in college ethics courses or church small groups where discussion of the characters' choices seems ready-made by the blatant themes of loss, grace, sacrifice, and atonement.

CIANFRANCE'S PREVIOUS FILM *THE PLACE Beyond the Pines* was also notable for its surprisingly expansive plotting, including a narrative twist so shocking that critics vowed secrecy and many audiences felt betrayed. Beneath its profanity-laden script and gritty characters, such as a facially tattooed Ryan Gosling,

The Place Beyond the Pines was also a Victorian-style morality tale, covering multiple generations to explore the “sins of the fathers” motif. Rachel Weisz in *The Light Between Oceans* functions much like Bradley Cooper in *The Place Beyond the Pines*, a big name in the credits who only becomes important late in the film. Likewise, Cianfrance’s first major feature, *Blue Valentine*,

The surprising coda to *The Light Between Oceans* gives a glimpse of characters in old age and children grown up, and through time’s passage we witness the absolution of the parents’ sins.

though far more sexually graphic and emotionally cruel than *The Light Between Oceans*, is at heart a moralizing story about the challenges of marriage. *Blue Valentine* and *The Place Beyond the Pines* feature Ryan Gosling at his most doe-eyed and self-lacerating, and Michael Fassbender steps into this same type but with slightly more ethical backbone.

At the risk of giving too much away, it is worth noting that for all of his dwelling in dark human tragedies, Cianfrance remains a strikingly optimistic filmmaker. Some of his optimism, evident in the ways that certain characters manage to snatch victory from defeat, compounds the sense of “unrealism” and Victorian quaintness. Cianfrance’s sprawling approach to chronology is a major factor in this blend of buoyancy and wretchedness. The island setting of *The Light*

Between Oceans is heavy-handedly called “Janus,” and Tom observes to Isabel that Janus is the god for whom we named “January, which looks forward to the new year and backward to the old.” In addition, the lighthouse shines out between two oceans, emphasizing the split vision of all the characters. This dual focus on past and future guides much of the film’s narrative. Cianfrance has a penchant for springing forward through several decades of a character’s life and revealing the effects of one set of choices upon a later generation. This generous timespan allows him to demonstrate the power of parental sin and its turmoil for the young, but it also opens unexpected moments of relief after lifetimes of suffering. The surprising coda to *The Light Between Oceans* gives a glimpse of characters in old age and children grown up, and through time’s passage we witness the absolution of the parents’ sins.

Silas Marner concludes with Marner’s adopted daughter grown and married exclaiming, “O father...I think nobody could be happier than we are.” For George Eliot, the measure of success in her fiction came not from supposed literary virtues like consistency, plausibility, and subtlety, but from bettering her audience through moral teaching, sage wisdom, and ethical modeling. Her happy conclusion emphasizes the just rewards of righteous actions. That Cianfrance has attempted something similar in his story of complicated parenting, sins redeemed, and audience enrichment—even despite imperfect results—is a testament to artistic bravery. ♣

Charles Andrews is an associate professor of English at Whitworth University.

Adding Up the Riches of Community

Lara Pudwell

I AM A CHRISTIAN AND A MATHEMATICIAN. How are those two things related? The fact that two plus two equals four doesn't change depending on one's religion, so it's tempting to think that the work I do in my classroom isn't related to the life of faith at all.

However, the longer I've been both "mathematician" and "Christian," the more I am convinced they have something very important in common. Both make me ask time and again: "What is true?"

As Christians, we look for and hold onto truth about who God is, what God is doing in the world, and how God is calling us to follow Him.

As a mathematician, I look for a different kind of truth. Many people are surprised to find out that there are countless math problems we don't even have a strategy to solve yet. Part of my job is to work on those problems and prove new theorems. It's a lot of work, but it can also be a lot of fun. Here's the thing about the mathematical search for truth: it's always done in the context of a community.

I realize most people reading this are not mathematicians, so let me tell you some of the things I've come to appreciate most from living within a mathematical community. In my experience, the community has three important jobs when I'm on a search for truth.

First, the community gives inspiration. I can't figure out which math problems are unsolved unless I read journal articles or I show up to conferences and interact with people. The community helps me find interesting new problems where there's still work to be done.

Second, the community provides encouragement. The kind of math problems I try to solve in my research are not things you can figure out in an hour or an afternoon; they may take weeks, months, or years to figure out. When I've tried a dozen different approaches and nothing seems to

work, it's easy to get frustrated. That's why I, and almost all the mathematicians I know, tend to work collaboratively. That way, when one person gets discouraged, someone else can provide a new perspective and remind them of why they were interested in the problem in the first place.

Third, the community provides accountability. When I think I've solved a math problem I've been working on for a year, that's exciting! In fact, it's too exciting to keep to myself. The next step is to share it wherever I can: at conferences or in journals. If I've done good work, the community affirms it. If there are details that aren't quite right, members of the community call me out on it. The community holds me accountable for doing work that is consistent with the rest of mathematics.

Inspiration, encouragement, and accountability make for a healthy mathematical community. But I hope that these ideas feel familiar in your walk as a Christian truth seeker, as well. I, for one, can't count the number of times a homily or a discussion has challenged me to see something in a new light and pointed out a place where I have room to grow more deeply in faith. That's inspiration. My friends have prayed with me through dark, discouraging situations. That's encouragement. I rely on trusted friends to call me out when I say or do something that doesn't match up with what we profess to believe. That's accountability.

Inspiration, encouragement, and accountability are the gifts of the mathematical community that support and challenge me in my work. But beyond that, they're gifts to treasure as we walk and grow together in Christian community, too. ✝

Lara Pudwell is associate professor of mathematics and statistics at Valparaiso University.

Bethlehem and 1941

O. P. Kretzmann

TONIGHT AT DUSK THE FIRST SNOW OF the new winter fell on my town... Driven almost horizontally by a wind from the north, it whirled through the cone of light thrown by the lamp across the street, from darkness to darkness... On the edge of town, where the road crosses the railroad tracks, the shocks of corn which I had seen brown in October were now white on the side toward the wind... At this hour every day as night falls over my town, the air is alive with the moan of our mainline trains rushing toward New York... These are the last romantic sounds of our clattering age, the only sounds which still remind us of time and distance... All day my town has gone about its work... Later it will sleep... Just now, in this hour between day and night, it is joined for a moment to the city eight hundred miles toward the rising sun and beyond it to Europe, where soon it will be dawn, to the world beyond the end of the rails and the beginning of the sea, where men do not like snow this year, because it makes shooting and bombing more difficult... But here now, the wind and the trains make a solemn concert and the hills are reverent in silence... If I stand close to this tree and raise my collar against the wind, I can think for a while about Christmas...

THE CHRISTMAS OF CHILDHOOD... I REMEMBER that we were very happy then because, for all we knew, there was nothing in the world but happiness... There was kindness everywhere, as far as we could see, and the snow and lighted trees and the bright ribbons and the piles of oranges and candies in the shop windows were

the natural accompaniment of our joy... We had a crib under the Christmas tree and there, every year, forever young, forever fair, the Child lay in the manger, the shepherds knelt adoring, and the Kings were coming over the canvas hill from the East... It was natural that they should come every year... We knew as only children can know that they had never been very far away... They were very real, these shepherds and Kings in clay, far more real than the strange, mad world which began to loom before us in the headlines we were beginning to read... We did not know that beyond the carols, the lights, and the snow there were many to whom these things meant only a new loneliness—the loneliness of being shut out from a brightly lighted house... We did not know that the full measure of the world's unhappiness can be seen clearly only in the light of Christmas... Bethlehem, the manger, the Mother, the Child under our tree... Bedlam, hate, fear, hunger under the stars... Year by year the world stood more solidly against the light of Christmas and cast deeper shadows... Long ago we knew that the Kings would bring gifts and that the tree would stand until they arrived at the feast of Epiphany... Today we know too that the world's only gifts at Epiphany, 1942, will be hunger and fear and loneliness... We come to the manger with less than we ever had before...

THE SOUND OF THE WIND IN THE TELEPHONE wires rises to a higher note... Now, as dusk falls over my town, I know that all the lights of my brave world are impermanent swamp-lights... I have no room and no sympathy for easy optimism now at Christmas, 1941... We were and are alone, children of the dust, visitors in time and strangers in eternity, lost in the far places of sin ... If this were not true, there would have been no

This column originally appeared in the December 1941 issue of the *Cresset*.

need for a first Christmas or 1,900 since then... There were soldiers then and wars we have forgotten and fear and pain... The world was what it is, men were what we are, and it was for a world like this and men like us that Christ was born in Bethlehem... So, as night comes down, the darkness drives away the years, and Bethlehem and 1941 become parts of the same divine plan, point and counterpoint, strophe and antistrophe... One momentary, the other eternal... Also in 1941 our lighted trees will be our bonfires in the dark, the answer of our loneliness to the star that came and stood over the place where the young Child lay... A prayer for the night, to the Child on Christmas Eve:

Be close. Be with me. Hush the day's
 Last cries
 That echo in my ear.
 Put out the light that glitters in my
 eyes;
 The Night is here.
 Quiet my hands restless and quivering,
 Quench the last tear I weep,
 Dismiss my voice, blow out my
 Breath, and sing
 My heart to sleep.

BETHLEHEM AND 1941... OUT HERE IN THE night I remember, beyond the noise and hate, that our first Christmas was marked by simplicity and grace, by quiet and stillness... In one respect it was of course an exciting and topsy-turvy night... God was a Child, angels spoke to shepherds, a proud king in his palace was vaguely troubled... But over it all was this divine tranquility, all things in quiet silence, and the night at midnight... We need this now more than ever...

Quiet are the meadows
 Where the Christ is born,
 And quiet are the shadows
 Of the early morn.
 Not a word is spoken
 As the moment comes; Not a star broken
 Into silver crumbs.
 Here the world's comfort is,
 Here the world's wonder.

A Virgin gives her Babe a kiss—
 Who treads the serpent under.
 Though Herod in Jerusalem
 Heed not Rachel's weeping,
 Blest has been Bethlehem
 With a Child sleeping.
 And on our sad hearts sere with care
 Glad breaks the morn.
 "Hosannah," peals the frosty air,
 "A Son is born."

BETHLEHEM 1,900 YEARS LATER... H.V. Morton in his book, *In the Steps of the Master*, tells us what men have done to the place which God chose to come into time and space... There is a cave there... "Fifty-three silver lamps hardly lighten the gloom of the underground cavern. It is a small cave about fourteen yards long and four yards wide. Its walls are covered with tapestry that reeks of stale incense. If you draw this tapestry aside, you see that the walls are the rough, smoke-blackened walls of a cave. Gold, silver, and tinsel ornaments gleam in the pale glow of the fifty-three lamps.

"I thought I was alone in the cavern until someone moved in the darkness, and I noticed the policeman who is always on duty to prevent disputes between the Greek and the Armenian priests. This church, like the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, suffers from divided ownership. It is in the hands of the Latins, the Greeks, and the Armenians. "So jealous are the various churches of their rights that even the sweeping of the dust is sometimes a dangerous task, and there is a column in which are three nails, one on which the Latins may hang a picture, one on which the Greeks may do so, and a neutral nail on which no sect may hang anything.

"In the floor there is a star, and round it a Latin inscription which says: 'Here Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary.' The removal of this star years ago led to a quarrel between France and Russia which blazed into the Crimean War.

"Such truths may seem terrible; but this, alas, is an imperfect world. It is therefore necessary, as you stand in the Church of the Nativity, or in the Holy Sepulchre, to try and forget the frailties of men and to look beyond them to the truth and the beauty which they seem to obscure.

ON THE POETS

Thom Caraway

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Paul Willis

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is associate professor of English at Johnson County Community College in Overland Park, Kansas. He has published poetry in Silver Birch Press's All About My Name series, *The Lake Journal*, and *Stoneboat*, and fiction in *Pankhearsht Raw* and *Limestone*. He blogs at stevesofgrass.wordpress.com.

Jennifer Stewart Fueston

lives and writes in Longmont, Colorado. She has published poems in *The Priscilla Papers*, *Relief*, and *Ruminate*. She published her first chapbook of poetry, *Visitations* (Finishing Line Press), in 2015. Jennifer holds degrees in rhetoric, composition, and literature from Colorado State University and Bethel University in St. Paul, Minnesota. She has taught writing at the University of Colorado, Boulder, as well as in Hungary, Turkey, and Lithuania.

Julia Friedman

received her MA in creative writing at Bar-Ilan University of Israel and currently serves as editorial manager at the medical journal *Clinical Microbiology and Infection*. Her work has appeared in *Hermeneutic Chaos*, *Adanna Literary Journal*, and *Sweet Tree Review*.

Renee Emerson

is the author of the poetry collection *Keeping Me Still* (Winter Goose Publishing, 2014) and teaches online for Shorter University.

Devon Miller-Duggan

has published poems in *Rattle*, *Shenandoah*, *Margie*, *Christianity and Literature*, and *Gargoyle*. She teaches creative writing at the University of Delaware. Her books include *Pinning the Bird to the Wall* from Tres Chicas Books (2008) and a chapbook of poems about angels, *Neither Prayer, Nor Bird*, from Finishing Line Press (2013).

Joshua Gage

is an ornery curmudgeon from Cleveland. His first full-length collection, *breaths*, is available from VanZeno Press. *Intrinsic Night*, a collaborative project he wrote with J. E. Stanley, was published by Sam's Dot Publishing. His recent collection *Inhuman: Haiku from the Zombie Apocalypse* is available on Poet's Haven Press. He is a graduate of the Low-Residency MFA program in creative writing at Naropa University.



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