

2-2015

## The Cresset (Vol. LXXVIII, No. 3, Lent)

Valparaiso University

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholar.valpo.edu/cresset\\_archive](https://scholar.valpo.edu/cresset_archive)



Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#), and the [Public Affairs, Public Policy and Public Administration Commons](#)

---

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

# THE CRESSET

A REVIEW OF LITERATURE, THE ARTS, AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS

LENT 2015

A Packing List for Jerusalem

*Lisa Deam*

Will Beauty Save the World?

*Peter Kanelos*

A Lenten Confession

*Jennifer Ochstein*

## REVIEWS

Marilynne Robinson's *Lila*

*Mel Piehl*

Todd Davis's

*In the Kingdom of the Ditch*

*Brett Foster*

## VERSE

Anonymous Afternoon

*Linda Nemeč Foster*

Repeat Checkup

*Marjorie Maddox*



VALPARAISO  
UNIVERSITY

[thecresset.org](http://thecresset.org)

Vol. 78, No. 3



*The Last Supper (Plate I)*

*Ernie Wiley*



**Publisher**

*Mark A. Heckler*

**Editor**

*James Paul Old*

**Poetry Editor**

*Marci Rae Johnson*

**Art Editor**

*Gregg Hertzlieb*

**Assistant Editor**

*David Purvis-Fenker*

**Office Manager**

*Joseph Clark*

**General Advisory Board**

*Joe Creech*

*Sara Danger*

*Peter Kanelos*

*Frederick Niedner*

*Mel Piehl*

*Mark Schwehn*

*Albert Trost*

**Editorial Advisory Board**

*Gilbert Meilaender*

*David M. Owens*

*George Pati*

*Richard Stith*

*David Weber*

*Stan Zygmunt*

On the cover: Ernő Koch (1898–1970), *The Last Supper* (green) 1, 1961, Color woodcut on paper. Gift of Edith Koch Eeck.

Ernő Koch (1898–1970) began his career as a graphic artist in Hungary, Estonia, and Germany. Trained in classical techniques and styles, and working in pencil, etching, and painting, Koch's work bridged secular and sacred themes throughout most of his life. He completed many public and private commissions found in the museums of Estonia, Stockholm, and Budapest. After emigrating to the United States, Koch worked in Chicago and St. Louis as a mosaic tile and stained glass designer, fulfilling many church commissions, including the Polish Chapel in the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception, Washington, DC, the St. Louis Cathedral, and La Purisima Church in Monterrey, Mexico. Koch learned welding in retirement, and applied his exquisite skill and life experience into creating new works of great power and sensitivity, using birds and the human figure to express themes of aspiration, discovery, and joy in being. It was then, at the age of seventy, having survived two world wars and expatriation, that he uttered the famous phrase, "Everything is possible; only how to do?" as he continued to press his art forward into uncharted territory.



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

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

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

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

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

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



# THE CRESSET

Lent • February 2015 • Volume LXXVIII, No. 3

*Lisa Deam* 6 A Packing List for Jerusalem

*Peter Kanelos* 12 Will Beauty Save the World?

*Jennifer Ochstein* 16 Family Berserk: A Lenten Confession

## COLUMNS

*Martin DeNicolo* 22 Religion and Equal Citizenship  
in *Town of Greece v. Galloway*

*Mel Piehl* 27 Predestination and Love in  
Marilynne Robinson's *Lila*

*Brett Foster* 33 For the Thoreaus Among Us: Todd  
Davis's *In the Kingdom of the Ditch*

*David Heddendorf* 35 Boomer Memory and  
the Religious Right

*Gregory Maher* 39 Blood on the Lens:  
Dan Gilroy's *Nightcrawler*

*Jennifer Forness* 43 Better than Duels and Dances:  
Béla Fleck and Abigail Washburn

*Mark D. Williamson* 47 A More Modest Denomination

*Paul Willis* 50 The Shirt on Our Backs

*Joel Kurz* 52 Popcorn and the Passion

*Andrew G. Deskins* 55 Friends to What End?: A Review Essay  
and *Todd C. Ream*

## DEPARTMENTS

IN LUCE TUA 5

ON THE POETS 59

## VERSE

*Linda Nemec Foster*  
*Anonymous Afternoon*  
21

*Bryan Dietrich*  
*Videosphere*  
32

*Laurie Klein*  
*Apostasy*  
42

*Marjorie Maddox*  
*Repeat Checkup*  
46

*Jennifer Raha*  
*Week of Rain*  
51

*Diane Scholl*  
*Salt*  
54

## BOOKS REVIEWED

Marilynne Robinson's  
*Lila*  
27

Todd Davis's  
*In the Kingdom of the Ditch*  
33

A. C. Grayling's  
*Friendship*  
55

Samuel Kimbriel's  
*Friendship as Sacred Knowing*  
55



whatever is **TRUE**

whatever is **NOBLE**

whatever is **RIGHT**

whatever is **PURE**

whatever is **LOVELY**

whatever is **ADMIRABLE**

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

Philippians 4:8

[thecresset.org](http://thecresset.org)

[read](#) | [subscribe](#) | [submit](#) | [search](#) | [connect](#)

---

# IN LUCE TUA

## *In Thy Light*

---

### Who Do You Think You Are?

**F**LANNERY O'CONNOR'S SHORT STORY "Revelation" tells the story of Ruby Turpin, a proud, southern farmer's wife who sits in a doctor's waiting room taking stock of the other patients. She finds most of them to be dirty, rude, and common, and Ruby has very little to say to those kinds of people. Only one of them—a white woman sitting with a teenage daughter reading from a large book—appears worthy even of the effort to make small talk. Ruby notices that the woman is stylishly dressed, but she finds her daughter to be fat and ugly. The world, as Ruby sees it, is divided into different classes of people, and she is pleased to belong to one of the better classes. She even tells the stylish woman how grateful she is when she thinks that she could have ended up as a "colored person" or—even worse—as landless white trash; she thanks Jesus for making her the "respectable, hard-working, church-going woman" that she is.

What happens next is among my favorite moments in all of O'Connor's stories. I will not spoil the surprise for those who have not read it, but suffice it to say that Ruby is not spared the encounter with sudden and spectacular violence on which O'Connor's plots often turn. This violence, however, offers Ruby a moment of grace. It leaves her pride and sense of self utterly shattered by revealing to her that Jesus does not care how respectable she is, or how much land she owns, or even how hard-working she is. This is not a revelation that Ruby receives gladly. In one of the story's last images, we see her standing in her farm field shaking her fist and shouting at God. "A final surge of fury shook her and she roared, 'Who do you think you are?'"

Who exactly *does* God think He is? That is a good question to ask during Lent. A better question might be: who exactly do *you* think God is?

We sometimes think that God exists to solve our problems, to make us happy and satisfied in our lives. But God cannot be defined in terms of our own wants and wishes; instead our lives must be defined in God's terms. In Lent, Christians engage in practices that remind us of our need for God's forgiveness and grace. We let go of things that we desire to make room in our hearts for new desires to grow. We let go of our idea of a God who exists to solve all our problems, so that we can discover the God of love, beauty, and redemption. Lent then is a journey, or at least the beginning of the journey to our new selves. In "A Packing List for Jerusalem," Lisa Deam offers guidance about how to prepare for that journey. Just like medieval pilgrims, we must be ready to leave much of what we love behind, to press on into wild and unknown territory, to arrive before our God with nothing, and to have faith that Jesus will give us everything that we need.

In "Will Beauty Save the World?" Christ College Dean Peter Kanelos speaks not of a journey, but of a quest. Life is a quest for truth, and in the darkest, most discouraging moments of that quest, the way is sometimes lit by beauty, a flash of truth that bursts into our world to remind us of what has thus far eluded us. While Kanelos writes about beauty, Jennifer Ochstein considers a kind of ugliness. She describes learning of her own capacity for selfish cruelty and violence and wonders if this darkness is rooted in her very nature, encoded in her DNA. And even after embracing a faith that calls her to leave this part of her self behind and to live a life of kindness, love, and peace, she knows that the darkness lingers, waiting for her to come back and pick it up again.

The journey we make in Lent is not an easy one. We do not want to give up these lives that we think we have made for ourselves. Like Ruby, we will not be happy to be told that our pride in our own accomplishments is misplaced. Lent is a time to prepare ourselves for that truth, to begin our journey to a place where when grace descends on us—either in a flash of beauty and joy or after an explosion of violence and shock—we will be ready to accept this gift from the one who knows us better than we know ourselves. ✦

-JPO



# A Packing List for Jerusalem

Lisa Deam

**A** FEW MONTHS AGO, I MET A REAL LIVE pilgrim. He has walked over 2,700 miles in the past two years and helps other pilgrims walk too. He has a particular fondness for the *Camino de Santiago*, or the Way of Saint James. The Camino is a network of routes stretching across Europe and leading to the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in Spain, said to house the remains of Saint James the Greater. Pilgrims have walked the Camino since the medieval era, and the route is experiencing a revival now.

My friend and I discussed the Camino's rich history, and I thought we were finished. But then this pilgrim turned to me and asked, "So when are *you* going to walk the Camino?"

I was taken aback; I had never considered going on a physical pilgrimage. Spiritual pilgrimage, by contrast, is often on my mind. I frequently use the term and idea of pilgrimage to refer to my faith, and I see others doing so too. Nothing seems more natural than describing the Christian life as a journey. We're walking with God. Staying on the straight and narrow path. Pressing forward to meet our goal. These images of movement give us hope. We embrace the fact that we are putting one foot in front of the other.

For all our celebration of movement, our spiritual language often bypasses the physical realities of pilgrimage. We speak of pathways, but not of one path in particular. What is our spiritual terrain like? Is it a rugged walk along the Camino or a procession through the streets of Jerusalem? We acknowledge the rich history of pilgrimage, but we do not anchor our journey in space and time. Are we Old Testament

pilgrims, strangers to the world? Or do we feel closer to medieval pilgrims, who walked as a form of discipline? With some exceptions, our spiritual pilgrimage does not evoke a specific kind of journey.

Maybe it should. Maybe we should know exactly what we mean when we describe our faith as a pilgrimage. We should know where we're going and what we're getting into. Looking into the details of pilgrimage, its various manifestations in space and time, we might be surprised to learn what kind of journey we are on.

My pilgrim friend peaked my interest in the Camino, but I'm not likely to walk this route anytime soon. My children take me on all the epic journeys I can handle. I have, however, walked the Middle Ages, the era that gave the Camino its enduring popularity. History gives me what experience cannot. As an armchair traveler, I could do worse than to take medieval pilgrims as my guides. In this age above most others, Christians embraced pilgrimage as a physical discipline with the potential to shape one's spiritual walk. Pilgrims went everywhere, and they went often. In their travels to Santiago and beyond, I find lessons for my own walk.

My medieval mentors take me to unfamiliar territory, where the terrain is rough and faith is wild. Even geography is not what it seems. Take the Camino, for example. A glance at a map shows that Santiago is located at the northwestern tip of Spain. It looks remote, this city at land's end. For medieval pilgrims, Santiago was even farther afield; it lay at the end of the very world. Maps of the era show this clearly. In the Middle Ages, walking the Camino meant journeying to the edge of what was known.



It also meant journeying to the edge of faith. Medieval pilgrims often traveled in difficult circumstances. Much is made of Chaucer's travelers, who gossiped and gallivanted their way to Canterbury. The historical record, however, shows that many pilgrims set off in desperation. Some walked to Santiago in hopes of healing, for the relics of St. James were known to perform miracles. "The old pilgrimage roads must have been choked with the sick and dying," notes historian and pilgrim Conrad Rudolph (2004, 5). Others journeyed as expiation for a sin or a crime. Penitents walked wearing a loincloth and probably thanking God for the sun; a murderer might walk with his weapon chained to his body as part of his sentence.

The criminals and the desperate: are these my walking companions? Do these poor and needy pilgrims describe me? The Camino suggests that my journey of faith goes to wild places and involves unsavory characters, most of whom travel under my own name. If I'm going on pilgrimage, I have to take along those shady parts of myself that I would prefer to leave at home.

I take along even more when I consider where my pilgrimage leads. As much as the Camino has to teach me, my spiritual journey does not go to Santiago. It goes to Jerusalem, the city in which Jesus died and rose again. Isn't this where we all are headed? Every time we pray, every time we heed the call of Jesus, we take a journey to the Holy Land of our faith. Because it leads to Jesus, the Jerusalem pilgrimage is a potent image of our spiritual walk.

It is also a disturbing one. In the Middle Ages, Jerusalem was the most revered pilgrimage destination. Yet its allure hid many dangers. If Santiago lay at the ends of the earth, Jerusalem was the city at its center. The way was longer; the road more difficult. Think about all those criminals and desperados on the Camino and picture them crammed into a sailing ship for six weeks or more. The journey must have taken guts and

a good deal else. In fact, it took all the baggage that a pilgrim could carry. The fifteenth-century Italian pilgrim Pietro Casola devised this packing list for Jerusalem: "Each one who goes on the voyage to the Sepulchre of Our Lord has need of three sacks: a sack of patience, a sack of money and a sack of faith" (1494, 225).

Casola's statement is not without humor, something else that all lengthy journeys need. But it has its serious side. It tells us that in the most iconic pilgrimage of all, the journey to Jerusalem, the physical and the spiritual are inextricably intertwined. Casola reports that



A lone pilgrim on the Camino Copyright mohnd / 123RF Stock Photo

pilgrims need faith for their physical journey to Jerusalem. We can look at the matter the other way around. How might this journey be necessary for understanding and even living our faith? To find out, we will have to unpack everything that Casola so carefully stowed away in those three sacks.

### A Sack of Patience

The journey to Jerusalem had many legs; it was like a centipede except not as fast. It required travel by land and sea, by foot, boat, and sometimes mules or oxen. The pilgrim starting out in France began with an overland journey that proceeded by foot unless she had the wealth to own or buy a horse. I can guarantee that my medieval avatar was not one of the wealthy ones.

Walking doesn't sound too bad until you realize that the most popular route to the Holy Land,



which went by way of Venice, led over the Alps. Alpine passes had existed since Roman times or before, but they were known to be treacherous. Sometimes, one pass had to be abandoned for another mid-route due to political instability. The Spanish pilgrim Pero Tafur describes crossing the St. Gotthard Pass in 1437. He seems to have had a horse, but this prized possession did not make the road easier to travel:

It was now the end of August and the snow was melting in the heat, making the crossing extremely perilous. The people

in those parts use oxen which are used to the track. One of these goes ahead dragging by a long rope a trailer which resembles a Castilian threshing machine. The passenger sits on this while his horse, held by a guiding rein, follows behind. If any accident happens, only the ox is involved. Before entering the narrow defiles firearms are discharged to bring down any loose snow from above, for such avalanches often bury travelers. (Rowling 1973, 95-96)

When pilgrims reached Venice, they could arrange for passage on a boat, but not necessarily right away. Margery of Kempe, a mystic and visionary, arrived in Venice in the winter of 1413 and waited for thirteen weeks for a ship to the Holy Land. Boarding a galley may or may not have been a relief. Sea voyages, like Alpine crossings, were uncertain, dependent upon good winds, a strong stomach, and the absence of pirates. Pilgrims slept with rats, ate spoiled food, and witnessed burials at sea.

Upon arrival in the port city of Jaffa, pilgrims did not disembark and hit the nearest holy site. They were kept on the ship or herded into holding cells while local officials checked their visas and papers. Then there ensued another land journey of about forty miles to Jerusalem.

At what point during this journey did the pilgrim's patience run out? When rats crawled over her food? When the pack mule slipped for the third time on an ice-slicked Alpine path? When, tired and sick from the sea crossing, she waited in a dark cell to be admitted to the Holy Land? It is said that the hardships of pilgrimage were viewed as a kind of penance to prepare the soul for the Holy Land. If so, the medieval pilgrim must have been well prepared indeed by the time she reached Jerusalem. Let us hope she remembered to fill her sack with patience before the journey began.

### A Sack of Money

Faith costs money. So did a journey to the center of the world. The Jerusalem pilgrim had to leave behind his livelihood and hope it would be there when he returned some months later. And he had to take

enough gold and silver to pay for each leg of the journey. Casola of the three sacks reports that it was necessary, at one point in his journey, "to tie everything up in the sack of patience, as we did not want to loosen the sack of money" (225).

It is doubtful that he and his party succeeded. Pilgrimage involved changing currency. Hagglng. Bribery. And, as on any lengthy trip since, apparently, the beginning of time, it involved tolls. There were tolls to pay upon arrival in the Holy Land, at the port city of Jaffa. Tolls at the checkpoint in Ramle. Tolls to enter



Pilgrims journeying through an Alpine landscape  
From the prayer book of Bishop Leonhard von Laymingen of Passau  
ca. 1440. The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, Maryland.



the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and other sites in Jerusalem. And tolls to enter the sacred city itself. In the eleventh century, pilgrims were charged one gold piece each to pass through the gates of Jerusalem.

By the time they reached this point and reached into their sack, some pilgrims could not come up with the money. When Robert, Duke of Normandy, arrived in Jerusalem in 1036, he found several hundred pilgrims begging at the gates. In the fourteenth century, penniless pilgrims could be threatened with flogging and imprisonment. As the medieval era gave way to the modern, little changed. An eyewitness from the seventeenth century describes pilgrims who could not afford to enter the Holy Sepulcher, the goal of their journey:

The poor who remain outside weep bitter tears as they beg to be permitted inside. The guards standing at the door are ready to compromise for three gold pieces, and if they do not have that much, even for two. The paupers turn their pockets inside out, as if to say that even this they are unable to pay. (Peri 2001, 171)

I'm pretty certain there's a lesson here. No one gets into Jerusalem without paying a price. Yet I can't get those weeping and begging pilgrims out of my mind. Charitable travelers perhaps helped them. But after how much time? How long did the needy have to beg before earning enough to enter the Sepulcher or the city itself?

And if a pilgrim didn't have the money to get in, how would she come up with the funds to make her way home again?

### A Sack of Faith

Once a pilgrim paid the toll to enter Jerusalem, her troubles did not end. For the later medieval pilgrim, they were just beginning. From 1291, when the city of Acre fell to the Mamluk army, the Christian West no longer controlled the Holy Land. Jerusalem itself had been conquered in 1244 and remained under

Mamluk control until its capture by the Ottoman Turks in 1517.

The Mamluk sultans tolerated Western pilgrims, sometimes grudgingly. Their rule meant that following Jesus in Jerusalem was not a particularly serene or worshipful experience. It was not the grateful release that travel-worn pilgrims perhaps hoped for. At its best, it would have involved a constant negotiation of the holy places that travelers had journeyed so far to see. Some sites, such as the chapel of the Pentecost, had been destroyed. Others, like Saint Anne's house, were turned into mosques. Imagination was required to transform the political and physical landscape of Jerusalem into a site resembling the Christian faith.

Sometimes, pilgrims used a bit of daring to accomplish this transformation. Friar Felix Fabri, a fifteenth-century pilgrim, wrote a book about his travels to Jerusalem in which he describes his efforts to gain access to the city's forbidden sites. In several instances, he managed to shake off his official guides and create his own tour. He repeatedly sneaked into the mosque covering the burial places of David and Solomon. On another occasion, a Muslim official chased him out of the Fountain of the Virgin, located at the foot of Mt. Sion, and then fought with a member of his traveling party. The judicious application of a tip produced an immediate change of heart in the official.

Fabri describes these incidents with relish. His written account transforms the holy journey into more of a swashbuckling adventure. He is a pilgrim on the cusp of tourism. But his travel guide signals the reality that pilgrims had to enter the land of another faith fully to experience their own.

Attaining the Holy Land, the very heart of Christianity, guaranteed neither safety nor ease. It ensured only that a sackful of faith would be needed. The pilgrim had to have faith that Jesus was there, in the heart of enemy territory. She had to have faith to see him, despite the infidels that blocked her path. She had to have faith that he would send her home again, even if her money had run out. She had to have faith that the journey was worth it.



## Is It Worth It?

Is the journey worth it? I hope so, because it is the journey required of every pilgrim who would travel to the Jerusalem of her heart—the interior Jerusalem, as Saint Bonaventure called it. Medieval religious leaders recognized that spiritual travelers had lessons to learn from those who walked and rode and sailed their way to the Holy Land. When these leaders talk about a journey of faith, they have a specific route in

**My daily pilgrimage has taught me why Christians speak so frequently of kneeling at the foot of the cross. It is because, exhausted by the journey to Jerusalem, we can no longer stand.**

mind, the route to Jerusalem. Walter Hilton, a fourteenth-century Augustinian mystic, makes the connection clear:

Just as a true pilgrim going to Jerusalem leaves behind him house and land, wife and children, and makes himself poor and bare of all that he has in order to travel light and without hindrance, so if you want to be a spiritual pilgrim you are to make yourself naked of all that you have... (1991, 229)

Those taking the heart's journey to Jesus are no different than "true" pilgrims, Hilton says. They have a costly voyage ahead.

Hilton's travel advice is far from comforting, especially to we who walk the world today. We may wish our spiritual journey to be scenic and uneventful. We picture a straight line from point A to point B. Maybe we imagine a jetliner, something that will help us to attain our goal with the

minimum of fuss and bother. Yet to lay claim to the riches of our interior Jerusalem, we have to forego our customary amenities. We have to travel like it's 1399.

I have found this to be true in my own journey. Setting out for Jerusalem, I am a medieval pilgrim in the most desolate sense of the term. The call of Jesus requires that I leave behind everything I know, even everything I am. I say farewell to my habits and inclinations, and hopefully to my sin, which is sorry to see me go. Then I heft my three sacks and join the other criminals who are headed my way. I am en route to the center of the world.

No sooner do I set out than a thousand road-blocks bar my path. The Alps rear up. The seas swell. The rats swarm. Everyone seems to have a horse but me. I reach into my sacks, but my faith is running low. As are my funds. And it turns out that I didn't pack enough patience to see this journey through.

As I get closer to Jerusalem, I enter enemy territory. Here, the real battle begins. I am accosted by the infidels of my heart, who would do anything to keep me from my goal. They don't want me to pray. They don't want me to pick up my Bible. They don't want me to confess my sins or sing songs of praise. So my enemies shout at me and tell me to turn back. They persuade me, almost, that I'll never be able to pay the price to enter the sacred city of Jerusalem. They are right about that. Someone else had to pay for me.

Finally, I enter the city, and I kneel—or rather collapse—before the cross. My daily pilgrimage has taught me why Christians speak so frequently of kneeling at the foot of the cross. It is because, exhausted by the journey to Jerusalem, we can no longer stand.

And then something wonderful happens. Jesus picks me up. He clothes my nakedness; pays the toll; refills my sacks. He sends me out with more than I packed in the first place. At his feet, I learn the lesson that Casola, the physical pilgrim, and Hilton, the spiritual one, teach those who wend their way to the center of the world: pack your sacks and be prepared to spend everything in them. Arrive with nothing so that Jesus can give you everything.

In this lesson lies the truth about my spiritual journey. When I use the language of pilgrimage, I do so in full awareness of the road I travel. It is no ordinary road; it is not even a sunny path in Spain. My route crosses the Alps, sails the sea, and battles the infidel within. Sometimes, it reduces me to crawling. You have probably seen me struggling along this road, because you, Christian, are on your way to Jerusalem, too.

Is the journey worth it? Yes. How could it not be, leading as it does to the very center of our faith? When we set off, we can be certain of our destination, assured of our reception. We know what glories await. But this does not make the path easier. We depart in hope but also in some

fear, knowing even as we pack our sacks that the journey will take everything in them.

This is surely the way it should be. For if we do not arrive empty, how can Jesus fill us up? If the journey does not cost everything, is it really a pilgrimage? ✚

Lisa Deam writes and speaks on medieval art, maps, and spirituality. This article is based on a chapter from her book, *A World Transformed: Exploring the Spirituality of Medieval Maps*, forthcoming in 2015 from Cascade Books.

### Works Cited

Casola, Pietro. *Canon Pietro Casola's Pilgrimage to Jerusalem in the Year 1494*. M. Margaret Newett, trans. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1907.

Hilton, Walter. *The Scale of Perfection*. John P. H. Clark and Rosemary Dorward, trans. New York: Paulist Press, 1991.

Peri, Obed. *Christianity Under Islam in Jerusalem: The Question of the Holy Sites in Early Ottoman Times*. Leiden: Brill, 2001.

Rowling, Marjorie. *Life in Medieval Times*. New York: Perigee, 1973.

Rudolph, Conrad. *Pilgrimage to the End of the World: The Road to Santiago de Compostela*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.

Sumption, Jonathan. *Pilgrimage: An Image of Mediaeval Religion*. Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1976.



# Will Beauty Save the World?

Peter Kanelos

" BELIEVE THE WORLD WILL BE SAVED BY beauty." So claims Prince Lev Nikolayevich Myshkin, the protagonist of Fyodor Dostoevsky's great novel, *The Idiot*. Dostoevsky is my lodestar. His works penetrate the carapace of humanity, slice open the human condition, laying bare our symmetries and incongruities, unlike any other writer I have yet to encounter. Needless to say, I take what he writes very seriously.

When Dostoevsky speaks of "beauty," it is not as an aesthete; beauty is not for him something precious, something affected. Dostoevsky's novels, which feature murderers, adulterers, madmen, the poor, the afflicted, and the unredeemed, in a blighted world, wracked with pain, imbrued with sorrow, and nearly devoid of light, teach us that *consciousness itself emerges from suffering*. In this context, what can it mean to say that "beauty will save the world"? I have puzzled long over this claim, the claim that beauty will save the world. Not very long ago, I was driving in my car, listening distractedly to a classical music station, when my attention was drawn gradually to the unfamiliar piece being played. I heard in it a pattern of perpetual falling, punctuated by the tolling of a bell. The song continued as I reached my destination. I put my car in park. But I couldn't leave. I remained in my seat, listening to the cascading notes, to that faraway tolling of a bell. I sat in a state of suspended attention. As the music came to its end, I felt a warm tear running down my cheek.

The announcer noted that this was the Estonian composer, Arvo Pärt's, *Cantus for the Death of Benjamin Britten*. I had no idea what

Arvo Pärt's relationship was to Benjamin Britten, one of the twentieth century's great composers. Did Pärt mourn the loss of a friend, a peer, a mentor, a stranger? I did not know.

What I did know for certain was that this piece of music was remarkably beautiful. Out of Pärt's mourning, from the void created by the passing of another person, came sounds, shaped into a form, which conveyed the sharpest edges of suffering. Yet howsoever much they expressed pain, I found in their expression something beautiful. Was this work only beautiful to me? Or did it, and by association I, touch on some current of beauty running through the world like a vein of gold running through the face of a rock?

We live in an era that insists that all value judgments are relative, that there is no way for someone to account for one thing being qualitatively better, and by inference, more beautiful, than another. We are committed only to the gauge of personal preference or taste. Moreover, we live in a world that denies that there is anything that is "true," at least beyond the verifiable hard sciences. But of course such a claim, by its own standards, cannot itself be true. The rational mind, denying truth, but holding *this* to be true, like the mythical *ouroboros*, eats its own tail.

Keats's *Ode on a Grecian Urn* declares that, "Beauty is truth, truth beauty"—that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know." To both express and contain this claim, the poem uses the rhetorical figure of the *chiasmus*, inverting a phrase "Beauty is truth," in its second appearance, "truth beauty." A pattern is formed; one claim mirrors the other. The truth about beauty



and truth is presented in a way that is not only axiomatic, but symmetrical, shapely, and dare we say, beautiful. Yet, if this statement is true, it opens onto further questions, rather than sealing them off. Are “beauty” and “truth” separate phenomena reflecting back, mirror-like, upon one another? Or are they consubstantial? Are all beautiful things true? Are *only* beautiful things true? Are all true things beautiful? Or is Keats’s line simply gilded nonsense, pretty words in a pretty configuration that confirm what we would like to believe, but know ultimately to be false?

When we think of what can be said to be irrefutably true, we often turn to the concrete facticity of mathematics. Two plus two is always four. But is “two plus two” *beautiful*?

At the root of mathematics is the observation of patterns. When we place two apples beside two other apples, we have four apples. Mathematics represents the way by which we express this self-evident truth; real numbers, that is, are the containers—“two,” “four”—that give form to that which we cannot deny.

But when we construct a mathematical system, we are not simply transcribing into concrete symbols abstract categories. Our way of constructing a language that speaks mathematical truths is intimately bound up with who we are. Our symbols are variable; the Romans used a different set, with their own internal logic. There are even other systems of numeric notation, such as the Cyrillic. But the Indo-Arabic numbers used throughout most of the world today, the ones used by the Romans, and the Cyrillic numerals are interchangeable because all are decimal systems, based upon units of ten.

In fact the entire architecture of our mathematics is based upon groupings of ten. Why? Is this because when we first began looking out into the world, trying to sort out its patterns and the purposes that lay beneath those patterns, trying to apprehend the order of things, we encountered a world bundled into groups of ten? Were there ten apples on every tree, ten trees in every grove? Of course not.

But as we began to take account of the world around us, we used quite literally what was at

hand, our ten fingers. When we reached the tenth apple, the tenth tree, we began again.

So the system of mathematics, upon which rests every science, every objective truth we have yet to compute, record, and test, conforms to *our* form. Starting with our hands held before our eyes, we were led to calculate the speed of light and the farthest distances of the observable universe. Is it sheer coincidence that our physical construction presents to us the cipher

The mathematician’s proof and Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel are works of the same order; they represent *us* trying to discover and represent the order of the universe, and, miraculously, finding the means to do so.

for the universe’s encrypted secrets? What if we had eight fingers or twelve? (There are, incidentally, cultures that use base-5, base-8, even base-12 numerical systems.) The conjunction between our subjective way of perceiving the world and the hard objective facts it contains is uncanny. Those who are mapping out the form of the universe are also marked with its form. Is this serendipity? We sometimes do hear someone claim that a mathematical proof is “beautiful,” but when a mathematician says a proof is beautiful, what she means is not that she has “discovered” a truth, but that the apprehension of that truth and the expression of that truth are both inextricably bound up in who she, and we, are.

The mathematician’s proof and Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel are works of the same order; they represent *us* trying to discover and represent the order of the universe, and, miraculously, finding the means to do so. As we look at the Creator reaching out toward Adam, we see the five fingers of the hand of God reaching for the five fingers of the first man. Ten fingers, human and divine, reaching for one another, but not quite joined.



Will the distance between the two ever be closed? Are we being in this moment gifted the key to knowledge? Or is God pulling away? The truth, captured in this painting, is that we are forever *this* far from Truth. The truth is not that there is not truth, but rather that truth is something we can reach out for, in fact must reach out for, but which remains always at a remove, howsoever tantalizingly close. Yet we need a means to convey *this* truth to ourselves, and this, I would suggest, is the truth of beauty.

As a Shakespearean scholar, when I think about things being ordered in tens, I think about the ten syllables that make up each line of Shakespearean verse. In his plays, Shakespeare's characters move back and forth between prose and poetry. It was a convention of the theater of his day that most dramatic verse was written in iambic pentameter—ten syllables, with the beat falling on every second syllable (da Dum, da Dum, da Dum, da Dum, da Dum): "If music be the food of love play on." This arrangement was not arbitrary, ten English syllables are about as many as can be spoken by an actor in a single breath: "In sooth, I know not why I am so sad..." The ten-syllable line allows an actor to reach the end of the line and to retain enough air in the lungs to continue, after the briefest pause, with the next: "But, soft! what light through yonder window breaks?" Shakespeare's poetic form, therefore, is circumscribed by the limits of the body. Our capacity for apprehension and expression is shaped by our embodied self and bounded by its limitations.

When iambic pentameter lines are unrhymed, they are referred to as "blank verse." The most famous line of blank verse may very well be Hamlet's "To be or not to be, that is the question." In thinking about the interrelationship of truth and beauty, I would like us to take a moment to look at how the poetic form of this line, its formal qualities, may help us to achieve a sort of clarity about our own limitations and possibilities.

What is it that Hamlet is probing with this question? He is frustrated by the limits that human beings face. We cannot solve the myriad problems the world confronts us with. We are

fated to suffer, and there is little we can do to mitigate our suffering. Given that we are bounded in capacity, he asks, is there any point to carrying on at all?

To be, or not to be: that is the question:  
 Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer  
 The slings and arrows of outrageous  
 fortune,  
 Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,  
 And by opposing end them? To die: to  
 sleep;  
 No more; and by a sleep to say we end  
 The heart-ache and the thousand natural  
 shocks  
 That flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation  
 Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep;  
 To sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there's  
 the rub;  
 For in that sleep of death what dreams  
 may come  
 When we have shuffled off this mortal  
 coil,  
 Must give us pause: there's the respect  
 That makes calamity of so long life;  
 For who would bear the whips and  
 scorns of time,  
 The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's  
 contumely,  
 The pangs of despised love, the law's  
 delay,  
 The insolence of office and the spurns  
 That patient merit of the unworthy takes,  
 When he himself might his quietus make  
 With a bare bodkin?

When Hamlet poses his question, "To be or not be?" he is at the point opposite to the moment of creation illustrated by Michelangelo. A bodkin is a dagger. Hamlet is considering whether or not he should turn his own hand against himself. He is contemplating his own erasure. He is mulling over not just death, but death by suicide. He ponders an act of self-abnegation. He feels anguish. He is suffering. Earlier in the play, Hamlet had cried out in torment, "Oh that this too, too sullied flesh, would thaw, melt and resolve itself into a dew." It is not only that Hamlet wants to end



his life; he wills his own annihilation. "To be or not to be" does not counterpoise "life" against "death"; it asks us to choose between "being" and "non-being." Embedded in annihilation is, "nihil," zero, nothingness. The void has its own gravitational pull, like a black hole. What brings Hamlet to its threshold? How can "being" will its opposite? This is where we can turn again to the capacity of beauty to teach us truth.

Art shuttles between expectation and surprise. All works of art, whether explicitly formalist or not, establish patterns, from the syncopated rhythm of Shakespeare's blank verse lines, to the plummeting sequence of notes in Arvo Pärt's *Cantus*. Art establishes a horizon of expectation, only to set up the conditions by which those expectations might be confounded. Where the pattern breaks—where we are surprised—is often a fault line where deeper meaning can surface.

Let us return to the opening of Hamlet's soliloquy—"To be or not to be: that is the question." The line, a blank verse line, should end on the tenth syllable—"To be or not to be—that is the QUEST." The vestigial, eleventh syllable, what is called in technical terms a feminine ending, turns Hamlet's "quest" into a "question." Hamlet's question elides with his quest; his quest is to question. He wants rational surety before he can proceed on any course of action. Yet he finds that the rational mind twists and turns, bends back upon itself. One question spawns the next. Questions for Hamlet do not lead to a solution; questioning is the end itself; it *is* his quest. When facing questions of qualitative nature—what is "nobler in the mind"—we find the mind receding in an infinite regress. We never do get an answer to Hamlet's query. In fact, were he not interrupted by the fair Ophelia, we sense that his peroration could go on without end.

It is not that there are no answers, but rather that for certain categories of questions, particularly those of an existential nature, we have to seek our answer outside the circumscribed bounds of reason. "Beauty" is that flash of lightning that allows us to apprehend, perhaps momentarily, perhaps obliquely, the order that undergirds everything. Beauty is the celebration of being-ness. It is the answer to Hamlet's ques-

tion; it *is* better to be than not to be. But Hamlet, entangled in threads of logic, cannot reach this end himself. Looking for a path through the unweeded garden of the world, through the purgatorial hours before a never-arriving dawn, Hamlet, the Prince, wanders in the dark. *Hamlet*, the play, beautifully illuminates his plight.

"Beauty" is that flash of lightning  
that allows us to apprehend,  
perhaps momentarily, perhaps  
obliquely, the order that  
undergirds everything. Beauty is  
the celebration of being-ness. It is  
the answer to Hamlet's question; it  
*is* better to be than not to be.

I believe the world *will* be saved by beauty, but I do not know that I can ever find sufficient means to articulate why. I also know that I cannot, Hamlet-like, make a rational case for my belief. And I cannot make one for you.

Some months ago, a very close friend of mine passed away. The circumstances of his death have remained shrouded by his family in secrecy, but I have every reason to suspect it was suicide. On the long drive to his funeral, I listened repeatedly to Arvo Pärt's *Cantus*. This work gave form to my grief. In its ever-declining notes, I found a way to apprehend the anguish that haunts us all. The tolling of the bell did not alleviate my friend's suffering, nor mine; it did not undo what had been done, but it was somehow necessary all the same. At some point, we cannot speak rationally about beauty any longer. We have to let beauty speak its truth on its own. ✦

Peter Kanelos is Dean of Christ College, the honors college of Valparaiso University.



# Family Berserk

## A Lenten Confession

Jennifer Ochstein

I WAS TWENTY-FOUR WHEN I LEARNED I HAD the capacity for murder. What stopped me from bludgeoning my then husband to death with a bat-length two-by-four in a fit of rage was an image of cop cars surrounding our house at the midnight hour and the glare of blinding spotlights and flashing red and blue emergency lights, like the glow of an apocalyptic bomb blast streaming through the darkened windows. The image of the lights coaxed me from my fury and into the reality of the scene before me: my near-naked husband lying in our bed with a stranger. Unable to process this odd picture of him, my mind conjured new images to replace the immediate scene.

I saw myself in a courtroom, standing before one of the three judges I had come to know and respect. I saw the prosecutor building his case against me, and the police officers I interviewed nearly every day testifying against me. At the time, I was a green reporter, two years out of college and newly hired from part-time to full-time, covering the cops and courts beat for a mid-sized daily metropolitan newspaper. I saw the headline in the next day's newspaper: "Reporter Beats Husband to Death." In my mind, I read the lede of the news story, written by a fellow reporter and friend who, like the rest of us, had a bent toward yellow journalism: *A former cops and courts Tribune reporter beat her husband to death Saturday morning after discovering him in a compromising position with another woman.*

In that moment, I understood how people, out of their minds, commit crimes of passion. They say that when you're close to death, your entire life flashes before your eyes. I don't know

if that's true, but I do know that in the moment before nearly causing the death of another person, I saw my future. The vision knocked me loose from my rage so I could see what might become of me. It wasn't the thought of taking another person's life that knocked me from my berserk; it was self-preservation. And while I'm thankful the vision engulfed me at a crucial moment, today it occurs to me that it was a wholly selfish reason to decide not to beat my husband to death. Today, fifteen years later, that moment feels like a cliché, a dark comedy or soap opera. It has the feel of bad reality television.

\*\*\*

*"I write about situations that are common, universal might be more correct, in which my characters are involved and from which only faith can redeem them, though often the actual manner of the redemption is not immediately clear. They sin, but there is no limit to God's mercy and because this is important, there is no difference between not confessing in fact, and the complacent and the pious may not realize it."*

Graham Greene, 1953  
*Paris Review Interviews, Vol. II.*

THE FRIDAY BEFORE A LONG FOURTH-OF-July weekend in 1999, the summer before I nearly killed my husband, I'd been introduced to a similar kind of human tragedy. The newsroom had been dead for most of the day as the other reporters and I anticipated a long weekend. Just before 4 PM a police dispatcher's voice



squawked over the scanner. A man with a shotgun was running through the parking lot of a local motel. I stared at the scanner, stunned, questioning whether I'd heard correctly. The newspaper I worked for had bureau offices in several counties surrounding its urban hub and home in South Bend, Indiana; I worked out of a small bureau in Marshall County, Indiana, a rural area where juicy news was often hard to come by. People's private lives rarely spilled into the public realm.

Midwestern people are mostly good at keeping secrets. I think it has something to do with the insular nature of the landscape. As this region is interior, the people follow form. When private lives did leak into the public realm, like the time a woman was arrested and charged with domestic abuse for clubbing her husband in the head with a frozen chicken, we usually made a joke of it and played the stories up in crazy headlines like "Wife Beats Husband With Frozen Chicken." The headline was the truth, of course, but we couldn't seem to help ourselves from pointing out the underlying humor in human folly. Nor could we bring ourselves to compassion. Maybe we were thankful that our own private lives didn't seem as outlandish as the ones that ended up in the articles we wrote, or maybe we were just glad we had sense or luck enough to keep our private lives to ourselves. Often the personal calamities seemed bizarre, like most horrific events in our lives if we stopped to think about them.

Moments later, the dispatcher announced over the scanner that the man running around the motel parking lot had shot himself in the head. When I arrived on the scene to cover the incident for the newspaper, the motel was surrounded by dozens of garish red and blue lights flashing atop a pile of police cars and ambulances. I was horrified by what I saw. Bits of bone and flesh, what I thought were pieces of skull and brains, splattered across the black asphalt in a puddle of blood that streamed toward the sewer grate in the middle of the parking lot.

I learned the story gradually over a two-hour period as a police spokesman divulged information as he received it from the officers

working the scene. The man who'd shot himself had discovered his girlfriend in bed with another man. They'd all lived at the motel. The cuckold ran back to the room he shared with the woman and grabbed his shotgun. He confronted his girlfriend and her lover with it. The lover scrambled around the room and somehow managed to escape out of a window while the cuckold gave chase. Apparently unable to catch the man, the shooter decided to turn the gun

We couldn't seem to help ourselves  
from pointing out the underlying  
humor in human folly. Nor could we  
bring ourselves to compassion.

on himself. Maybe he'd had a vision of his own future and decided he didn't want to be present for it. Maybe self-flagellation was the only way he could stop the shock of such a sudden loss of love. Maybe he had to somehow stop the gut-punch pain that comes from invisible heartache. One thing we can know for sure: he wasn't thinking clearly. But who would, if you found yourself chasing a rival around a motel parking lot with a loaded shotgun?

As you might have guessed, the shooter botched his suicide. With a gun that large, how could you expect to get the job done without more careful planning? Rather than killing himself, the shotgun's scattershot blew half of his face off. He lived. Police arrested him, took him to the hospital in one of the ambulances.

At his initial hearing some weeks later, his entire face had the sheen of shiny plastic. It was swollen two to three times the normal size of a face, blotting out his human features. His head was partially covered with a bandage. The left ear was gone. Half revolted, half enthralled, I took the gossip back to the bureau office and my fellow reporters. We didn't know what to do but laugh the cuckold off. What else to do in the face of that kind of human destruction?



Thankfully the sight of that man's face confronted me before I nearly bashed in my then husband's brains a year later.

\*\*\*

*"Sin, he reflected, is not what it is usually thought to be; it is not to steal and tell lies. Sin is for one man to walk brutally over the life of another and to be quite oblivious of the wounds he has left behind."*

Shusaku Endo, 1966  
*Silence*

SINCE THEN, I'VE DISCOVERED THAT OTHER people in my family have had the capacity for murder. My grandmother, Barb, nearly shot my mother when my mother was sixteen. My mother told me the story when I asked her once about the worst beating she ever received from Barb. At fifty-eight, two weeks before she would die of cancer in October of 1991, Barb told my mother that the reason she beat her as a child was because she had been Barb's favorite. It is hard to fathom how pulling a gun on your daughter or regularly beating her tells that daughter she's favored. We all justify our behavior in our own way. Once during an argument with my now husband Sam, I balled my fists and pounded his shoulders and back while scratching him viciously enough that he bled. I justified it by telling myself his manipulations made me small and mean and caused me to lose my humanity. I convinced myself it was really his fault I'd hurt him. He deserved it for beating me up emotionally, I told myself. I've come to recognize we all have the potential to lose our humanity in our small, dark, mean, interior places. Instead of being human, we become inanimate instruments in violent service of self above all else.

IN 1970, FIVE YEARS BEFORE I WAS BORN, MY grandmother sat on her bed after arguing with my mother about whether my mother would be allowed to go out on a Saturday afternoon to visit a friend in the neighborhood. My mother wanted to

go; my grandmother accused my mother, who was sixteen at the time, of never wanting to spend time with her. I often try to place myself in my mother's life to understand how she might have felt and coped with living in violence and uncertainty. Here's how I imagine it went for my mother:

After their argument, Barb stomped away to her bedroom. I imagine hearing the scrape of the bureau drawer as she opened it and moments later as she closed it, and then I imagine hearing the squeak of the mattress springs as she sat on the bed. My mother stood in the living room, waiting for Barb to return.

*Should I follow?*

*"Mom?" I nearly whispered, overcome by the strangest feeling in the wake of her squeaking mattress. Buffeted by silence, time slowed. A kind of invisible static seemed to fill the atmosphere the way it always did just before her calm would snap, like the discharge of an electrical current. "Mom?" I said again, this time a little louder. "It's okay. I can stay. I don't need to go." I rounded the corner of the bedroom and was confronted by darkness, the shades closed and curtains drawn, the lights turned off. I couldn't see anything at first. I blinked and waited for my eyes to adjust. I saw the outline of Barb sitting on the bed. I blinked again and saw the gun. She was pushing the barrel of it into the soft flesh under her chin. "I can fix it if I'm so unbearable," Barb whispered, her voice hoarse, choked with emotion. As soon as I saw the gun, my arms raised instinctively, my palms perpendicular, like a traffic cop motioning for a motorist to stop. "Mom?" I whispered again. "It's okay. I want to stay. I don't want to go." Barb said nothing. "Mom, I can stay," I said. Seconds ticked by and I willed her to move her finger away from the trigger, drop the gun. I braced myself for the sound, already flinching at the noise and sight to come. But Barb didn't shoot. Instead, as if in slow motion, as if she were a marionette attached to a puppeteer's string, Barb lowered the gun away from her chin and stretched out her arm toward me, her finger still on the trigger, her thumb cocking the hammer... click... click... click... as the mechanism loaded and locked the bullet into the chamber, she pushed the gun away from her body, first her arm and then the gun, an extension of*



her hand, parallel with the floor, death pointed at my face.

My mother looked into her own mother's eyes. They were as blank as the hole in the gun barrel pointed at her. My mother ran.

\*\*\*

*"No one is without Christianity, if we agree on what we mean by the word. It is every individual's individual code of behavior, by means of which he makes himself a better human being than his nature wants to be, if he followed his nature only. Whatever its symbol—cross or crescent or whatever—that symbol is a man's reminder of his duty inside the human race. Its various allegories are the charts against which he measures himself and learns to know what he is. It cannot teach a man to be good as the textbook teaches him mathematics. It shows him how to discover himself, evolve himself a moral code and standard within his capacities and aspirations, by giving him a matchless example of suffering and sacrifice and the promise of hope."*

William Faulkner, 1956  
*Paris Review Interviews, Vol. II.*

**M**INDLESS CRUELTY IS WOVEN INTO MY DNA. I understand DNA partly as a kind of memory. Not only does it unite the physical traits of our father and mother, creating a new beginning, but entropic strands from the past also seem to push themselves into new pink flesh. Memory in reverse. Instead of looking over a life lived, as our individual memories do, the strands of our forebears' humanity and inhumanity emerges into the future with a dumb kind of self-preservation linking generation after generation to a past that is often as mysterious as the future. Maybe time travel does exist in our bodies as the past plays itself out in the people we choose to become and the people we seem to have no choice in becoming. I can't help but wonder what stopped Barb from shooting my mother.

My mother has told me before that I sometimes remind her of Barb.

Whenever I think of my grandmother, she is like a caricature, the evil stepmother of the *Cinderella* fairytale, a kind of one-dimensional foil juxtaposed against my mother's vulnerability. By the time she died when I was sixteen I was filled with the kind of angry teenaged wrath that feels fully justified but in reality only knows half the story and is developed through the lens of self-righteousness. This smug piety encased me along with the anger, blinding me to the moments when I began losing my own mind, just as my grandmother did before she nearly shot my mother.

Not only does DNA unite the physical traits of our father and mother, creating a new beginning, but entropic strands from the past also seem to push themselves into new pink flesh.

It wasn't only that this woman had beaten her child. By the time I knew her, she'd become the kind of Christian who believed aliens from outer space are thinly veiled demons out to possess the unsuspecting. She believed conservative televangelist Pat Robertson had the power to heal through the television screen. She chain smoked Virginia Slim cigarettes, spent hours watching soap operas, set places at the dining-room table for her pets, referred to me as a slut when, as an eleven-year-old, I begged my mother to let me wear makeup. She was also beloved by her church community. They trusted and confided in her. They told me I was lucky to have such a wonderful woman as a grandmother. They made her their pastor. It was a side of her I never knew.

Today my mother and I suspect she may have been mentally ill, perhaps suffering from depression or some other undiagnosed disorder. At eighteen, she married a man, my grandfather,



who was ten years her senior. She never got an education. Why would she? She would follow the footsteps dictated to her by a post-World War II, nuclear age, 1950s American society that believed her only worth would be found in staying home to care for her husband and children. Maybe that prescribed life wasn't enough for her. I believe this may have been true because she dominated my grandfather, and at one point they divorced but remarried because he couldn't stay away. She gave birth to another daughter, my aunt, who was severely physically disabled; wheelchair bound, my aunt spent much of her childhood in and out of hospitals undergoing surgery after surgery. My grandmother verbally abused my aunt. The pressures of a child needing near constant medical care would have been immense; they likely would have broken me, too. Maybe the reality of her situation did break her, and the only way to release that pressure was by hitting my mother, who refused to conform. My mother, who hated the dresses my grandmother made her wear and the curly 1950s-style hair permanents she was forced to sit through and who resisted the traditional family structure and wanted to be a teacher and a writer, may have been a constant reminder that my grandmother was stuck in her prescribed life. Then I see my

child mother again in all of her vulnerability and the old anger begins to smolder again. I have to stomp the coals, throw dirt on them. I have to remind myself to live in the tension of who my grandmother may have been beneath the beatings she meted out to my mother in the same way I recognize my own tendencies toward kindness and cruelty. And I have to remind myself I've adopted a religion that teaches me that the fruit of my life should embody love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control rather than self-righteous anger and piety that I can so easily wrap myself in.

But at the edges of my heart where shadows linger, the old anger waits, ready to pull me back. Hostile to who I want to be, yes. But also reminiscent of a well-worn sweater, warm and comfortable. Familiar and dependable. ✨

**Jennifer Ochstein** is Assistant Professor of Writing at Bethel College, Mishawaka, Indiana, and faculty advisor for *The Crossings*, Bethel's literary journal.



## ANONYMOUS AFTERNOON

I have invented a new genre,  
that of silence.

—Isaac Babel

The man in the red shirt is in love with the green carpet.  
Its speckled edges of gray, the orange slash of color  
in the far corner of the room. Its silence. If it could talk,  
the man knows the carpet would sound as confident  
as a fortune cookie:

*Happy news is on its way.  
Tomorrow will be a productive day,  
don't oversleep.  
Remember three months from this date!  
Your lucky star is shining.*

Shining, shining like this afternoon where there is nothing  
to do except watch the carpet be nothing but a carpet.  
There's always the window and its cavalcade of blue sky  
or that huge oak tree pointing its huge fingers  
at a random cloud. But the silence of the carpet is better.  
Somewhere there is someone who is just about to

Linda Nemec Foster



# Religion and Equal Citizenship in *Town of Greece v. Galloway*

Martin DeNicolò

ON AUGUST 22, 2011 A MEMORIAL dedicated to Martin Luther King, Jr., was opened to the public in Washington, DC. Several hitches plagued the opening, both natural and human. Regarding the former, Hurricane Irene caused a several-day delay of the memorial's dedication ceremony. Regarding the latter, some contemporary followers of King's example such as Cornel West criticized the monument, noting that "a stone and mortar edifice" could not adequately memorialize King's "flesh and blood sacrifice" (2011). King, West insisted, would not have wanted the symbolism of a monument in his memory. He would have wanted the substance of a revolution. A proper memorial for King is not an artifact we can admire, but an action we can emulate.

I had the privilege of visiting this memorial for the first time on January 19, 2015 (Martin Luther King, Jr. Day). The size and scope of the monument are indeed awe-inspiring, but I couldn't help but agree with Cornel West that the monument did King's memory a disservice. Beyond the fact that it did not amount to a flesh and blood revolution, the stone and mortar edifice was devoid of a particular kind of content: other than a few Biblical allusions, the monument lacked any explicit reference to the role religion—Christianity in particular—played in shaping King's (himself a pastor) political sensibilities. To the casual observer of the memorial unschooled in the American Civil Rights Movement, King looks like a wholly areligious advocate of social justice.

This is striking not only because King was a religious person, but because so many DC memorials dedicated to less religious individuals make explicit reference to religion. While I cannot claim special insight into the actual deliberations that

led to the construction of a memorial devoid of religious references in honor of a religious person, it seems reasonable to assume that the perception, widely shared in the United States, that religion is divisive is partly to blame. If the purpose of the memorial is to promote wide reverence and admiration of a public political figure who inspired a nation to pursue social justice, then focusing too heavily on the religious character of this figure might limit the scope of this example's appeal. Many citizens of the United States, including many who seek to advance social justice, affirm belief systems fundamentally opposed to Christianity. The absence of any explicit reference to King's religion is thus partly inspired by the desire to make all observers of the monument feel equal regardless of their religious beliefs.

This claim—that equality requires excluding reference to religion in or on public political things (governing institutions, public spaces, memorials, etc.)—is not uncommon in American political discourse; in fact, it recently was given a clear statement in Justice Elena Kagan's dissenting opinion in the 2014 *Town of Greece v. Galloway* (*Town of Greece*) Establishment Clause case. The public political thing under consideration in this case is not a monument, but the public political space of a town board meeting. Another view, one which was articulated in Justice Anthony Kennedy's majority opinion in the same case, is the American tradition of religious disestablishment achieving equality not by excluding religion, but by allowing for the expression of religious beliefs in public spaces, while ensuring that no one religious belief is privileged over others. Drawing on the work of Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor, an argument can be made that "secular," public political spaces like a town board meeting should be understood as arenas where plural sectarian



comprehensive views may be articulated *over time* rather than as arenas where these sectarian differences are ignored altogether. In this light, the decision to exclude reference to religion in King's memorial was misguided.

## Two Interpretations of the Establishment Clause

There are too many competing interpretations of the Establishment Clause to cover in an essay of this length, so I will limit the present discussion to two. The first, strict separation, is the most widely recognized in American public discourse, but it has not historically earned the Court's favor. The second, nonpreferentialism, is the interpretation that both the majority and Kagan's primary dissent advance, in some form, in the *Town of Greece* case.

According to strict separationists, the religion clauses "erect an absolute barrier to formal interdependence of religion and the state" (Stone et al. 2012, 659). Thomas Jefferson's writings on the interaction of religion and politics most closely align with the strict separationist thesis; Jefferson implies in several works that the purpose of Constitutional provisions like the Establishment Clause is to protect government from religion's corrupting influence. Because religion, as Jefferson understood it, was a matter of individual conscience, it could not be manipulated by government coercion. In his *Notes on Virginia* Jefferson writes, "our rulers can have authority over such natural rights only as we have submitted to them. The rights of conscience we never submitted, we could not submit" (2005, 394). On the other hand, government could easily be corrupted

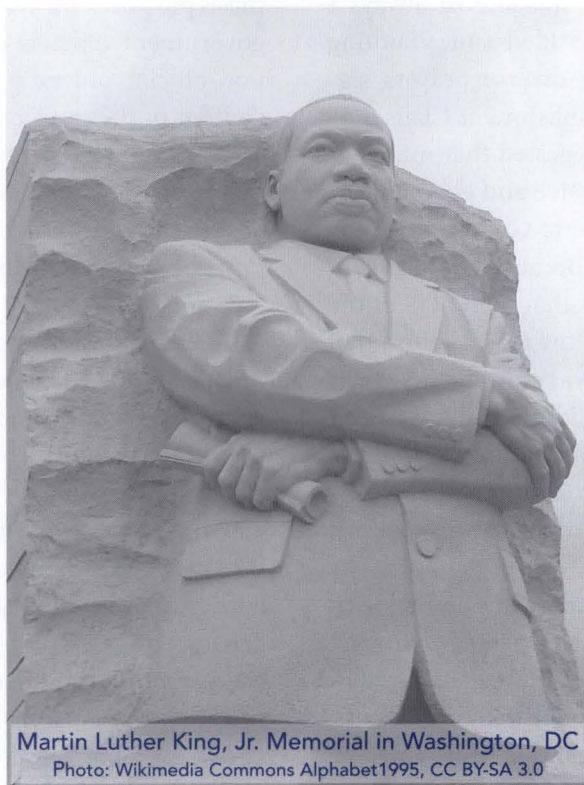
by the self-interested power grabs of sectarian factions at the expense of the common good, which Jefferson believed was best served by reason and free enquiry (ibid.).

Strict separation does not hold sway in the Court today. There are at least two reasons for this. First, it is hard to eliminate the interdependence of religion and the state, no matter how one

construes it. "Secular" laws and policies inevitably affect "religious" activities in some way (sewage, roadwork, etc.), and "religious" activities inevitably affect the political process that creates laws and policies in some way (shaping opinions, mobilizing voters, etc.). If a church burns to the ground, it seems unreasonable to expect a tax-funded fire department to stand idly by; and if a clearly unjust ruler comes to power it seems unreasonable to expect men or women of the cloth to bite their tongues if they feel it is their duty to speak out

in protest. Second, historical American political practice has allowed for the intertwining of religion and government ever since the ratification of the Bill of Rights. For example, we have publicly-funded military and legislative chaplains, presidents who regularly offer ceremonial prayers, and many national songs and symbols with religious referents.

Given the unreasonable expectations of the strict separationist interpretation, the Court has explored several more reasonable interpretations. At present, the interpretation favored by the Court is a variant of nonpreferentialism, which posits that "government may not favor one religion over another, nor may it disfavor any particular religious view (including antireligious views), but it may support religion in general." (Stone et al.





2012, 660). The question, then, is *how* government may generally support religion.

*Town of Greece v. Galloway*

Beginning in 1999, the town board in Greece, New York, introduced the practice of beginning its meetings with an invocation given by a member of the local clergy who was almost always a Christian. Galloway (et al.) filed suit, claiming that the lack of religiously diverse prayers signaled a violation of the Establishment Clause. As an alternative, Galloway suggested that meetings should begin with an “inclusive and ecumenical” prayer appealing to a “generic God.” The Court decided against Galloway. Because the Town of Greece permitted non-Christian members of the community to lead prayers, the Court found that the Establishment Clause was not violated. It is noteworthy that Galloway did not call for an end to the practice of invocation, but argued that the practice needed to be amended because preference was given to Christianity and the invocations were far too sectarian.

Anthony Kennedy, writing for the majority, and Elena Kagan, writing the primary dissent, both rely on the precedent of the 1983 landmark *Marsh v. Chambers* case to make their arguments. In *Marsh*, the court ruled that the Nebraska State Senate’s practice of opening legislative sessions with a prayer from a publicly-funded chaplain did not violate the Establishment Clause.

According to Kennedy, at least two aspects of the *Marsh* decision supported the Town of Greece’s case. First, a tradition of sectarian (including non-Christian) legislative prayer performed by a chaplain or other non-official religious figure prior to Congressional sessions has existed at the national level of government in the United States since its Founding. This shows that the Establishment Clause does not prescribe a hard and fast rule for the Court to adjudicate Church-State conflicts. Instead, the Court must rely on a common sense understanding of the relationship between the Establishment Clause and these practices that has been slowly cultivated over the last 225 years. Second, there are certain secular purposes advanced by the prac-

tice of sectarian legislative prayer. In *Marsh*, the Court found that the purpose of such prayers is “to lend gravity to public proceedings” (19). Later in his opinion, Kennedy cites other Establishment Clause decisions to put forth a second secular purpose: sectarian legislative prayer acknowledges “the place religion holds in the lives of many private citizens.” Legislative prayer can achieve these purposes on Kennedy’s account only if (1) government officials do no more than advise a non-official prayer giver without dictating the content of the prayer (as suggested by Galloway) and (2) the government maintains “a policy of nondiscrimination,” which the Town of Greece enacted by indicating that “it would welcome a prayer by any minister or layman who wished to give one” (17).

According to Kagan, at least two aspects of *Marsh* supported Galloway’s case. First, the audience of the prayer under consideration in *Marsh* importantly differs from the audience under consideration in *Town of Greece*. In the former, the audience consists of the legislators themselves. In the latter, the audience consists of “ordinary members of the community” (12). Second, the prayers considered in *Marsh* were ecumenical, whereas the prayers considered in *Town of Greece* were sectarian. Kagan uses the hypothetical example of a Muslim citizen going before the town board and being confronted with the request to “pray ‘in the name of God’s only son Jesus Christ’” to show how these two aspects of *Marsh* support Galloway (17). The hypothetical prayer is clearly sectarian, rather than ecumenical, given the explicit pronouncement that Jesus Christ is God’s only son. More importantly, however, the Muslim citizen’s status as an equal, ordinary, member of her community is altered if she refuses to participate in the prayer. The prayer reflects the board’s “and the community’s most cherished beliefs,” so by refusing to participate, the Muslim citizen signals to other community members that she is not their equal.

Underlying Kagan’s reasoning is an insistence that a citizen of a community should not have to take into consideration past and future actions in that community’s public political space to feel like an equal citizen in the present. She writes,



In performing civic functions and seeking civic benefits, each person of this nation must experience a government that belongs to one and all, irrespective of belief. And for its part, each government must ensure that its participatory processes will not classify those citizens by faith, or make relevant their religious differences. (16)

A citizen of an American community must be *immediately* welcomed in public political space as an American among Americans, leaving her sectarian attachments and their historical relations with government at the doors of City Hall. Any prayer given in such a space must be a neutral prayer in the sense that any American citizen could perform it in good conscience.

Underlying Kennedy's reasoning, on the other hand, is an insistence that citizens cannot base their sense of equal status on present experience alone. Instead, they must observe whether inclusion has happened or will happen with time. Bringing this back to Kagan's hypothetical example, those like Kennedy, who advance a view of inclusion over time, would note that the Muslim citizen is too quick to judge that "Christian worship has become entwined with local governance" if her judgment is based on her experience in the present town board meeting alone.

### The Case for Temporal Equality

Charles Taylor's recent work on secularization can shed light on the merits of Kagan's and Kennedy's opinions. Taylor calls the *cultural* aspect of secularity "secularity 3." Secularity 3 characterizes a culture when "belief in God is one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace" (2007, 3). In other words, a culture is "secular" in this sense when there is a widespread recognition that God may or may not be, that God is no longer a given in the same way God was in, for example, Medieval Christendom. In order to ensure stability, a liberal democratic political system must adjust itself to this cultural fact.

Clearly, cultural secularity has *political* implications in liberal democracies like the United

States; Taylor outlines these implications in a later essay in terms of three potentially conflicting political goods: liberty, equality, and fraternity. In this situation, the focus is on equality and fraternity. Taylor claims the former good requires that "no religious outlook... can enjoy a privileged status, let alone be adopted as the official view of the state," whereas the latter good requires that "all spiritual families must be heard" in public politi-

Citizens cannot base their sense of equal status on present experience alone. Instead, they must observe whether inclusion has happened or will happen with time.

cal space (2011, 309). Taylor is right to note that the relationship between equality and fraternity is tense: equal public political space requires the use of neutral speech in the present, whereas fraternal public political space requires the use of sectarian speech in the present. However, I disagree with Taylor's claim that equality and fraternity are wholly distinct concepts. Each is best understood as a qualified form of equality: *spatial* equality and *temporal* equality.

Spatial equality, which I associate with Kagan's position in *Town of Greece*, is made manifest through political imitation of what Taylor calls a "direct-access society." In a direct-access society, there is a widespread belief that moments of significance do not happen over time. Instead, all things significant are immediately available to myself and all others who are equalized with me through the sharing of a similar object (e.g. a national identity) in the present. That is, all things significant are simultaneous; they can happen *at the same time* for those who are *horizontally*—or equally—related. Ordinary persons can be equalized by the shared object of something like a transnational identity in our increasingly multinational polities, but they cannot be equalized by religion, which divides rather than unites citizens who share the



same transnational identity. The state, according to Taylor, is the shared object that equalizes liberal democratic citizens (2007, 210). This is clearly the kind of idea to which Kagan is appealing when she claims that American government “belongs to one and all” (16). A neutral, ecumenical, prayer prior to a town board meeting achieves this end.

Temporal equality envisions society as melodious rather than harmonious. For many—though by no means all—citizens, exposure to a prayer that purports to be “neutral” or “clearly American” would illicit the same sense of differentiation in the present as that experienced by Kagan’s hypothetical Muslim citizen exposed to a Christian legislative prayer. The task of devising a “nonsectarian” prayer is, as Kennedy notes, “futile” (14). Kennedy suggests that instead of attempting to achieve a sense of equal status through the futile method of devising a neutral or nonsectarian prayer, equal status should be understood as a product of a temporal process. Every religious and nonreligious view must be given an opportunity for recognition in public political space if such recognition is pursued. These moments of recognizing significant religious difference are gathered over time, in the same way that a piece of music gathers notes to create a melody (Taylor 2007, 56). Taylor borrows the musical metaphor from St. Augustine, but this sectarian source should not invalidate the idea of melodious citizenship.

The American melody need not be popular in style, and, if the reader will permit me to reason analogically, it is worth noting that jazz and blues are the most “American” styles of music, and both heavily rely on off-pitch blue notes. The blue note has a discordant and discomfiting effect on the listener, similar to the discord and discomfort caused by the introduction of religious difference to public political spaces. Yet without this discord and discomfort, the melody in this particular political composition would be incomplete. An American citizen may be considered an equal in

public political space when her possibly discordant religious notes are given an opportunity to be heard in the ever-evolving American political melody. As long as this opportunity is granted, the Establishment Clause is not violated. ♣

**Martin DeNicolò** is Assistant Professor of Political Science at Davis & Elkins College in Elkins, West Virginia.

### Works Cited

- Jefferson, Thomas. *Political Writings*. Joyce Appleby and Terrence Ball, eds. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University, 2005.
- Stone, Geoffrey R., Louis M. Seidman, Cass R. Sunstein, Mark V. Tushnet, and Pamela S. Karlan. *The First Amendment: Fourth Edition*. New York: Walters Kluwer Law & Business, 2012.
- Taylor, Charles. *Dilemmas and Connections*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press, 2011.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press, 2007.
- Town of Greece v. Galloway*, 572 U. S. \_\_\_\_ (2014) <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/572/12-696/case.pdf> (accessed October 10, 2014).
- West, Cornel. “Dr. King Weeps From His Grave.” *The New York Times*, August 25, 2011.



# Predestination and Love in Marilynne Robinson's *Lila*

Mel Piehl

**M**ARILYNNE ROBINSON IS QUITE UNLIKE almost all contemporary American fiction writers, and those in other countries as well. Robinson's biography may seem conventional on the surface, but her intellectual and personal formation certainly is not. She was born in 1943 in a remote small town, Sand Point, Idaho, in the northern panhandle, surrounded by vast mountains and lakes. It is not the kind of place naturally conducive to the development of literary genius. In her first novel, *Housekeeping* (1980), she calls Sand Point "Fingerbone," and describes it as an unimpressive town, "chastened by an out-sized landscape and extravagant weather, and chastened even more by an awareness that the whole of human history had occurred somewhere else."

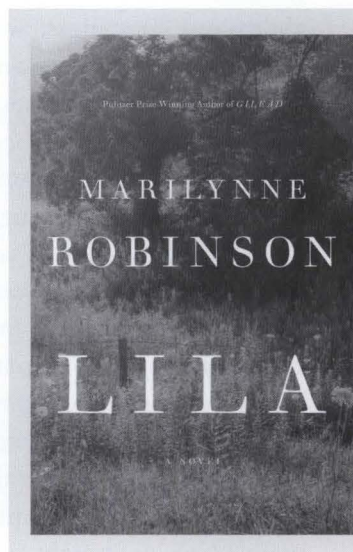
While Robinson felt the smallness and remoteness and vastness of the place, as well as what she calls its "enormous silences," what distinguished her from the rest of her community was the intensity of her childhood religiosity and intellectual ambition. Her family were churchgoing, mainstream, liberal Protestants. Robinson was thus raised, on the one hand, in a tradition that had already become "modern" in a lot of ways, e.g., accepting modern Biblical criticism, welcoming many of the changes of modern American life, including advances in social justice, toler-

ance, and the like. But her formation was, on the other hand, traditional in the sense of adhering to traditional Reformed Calvinist doctrines and sensibilities, and not treating them as vestiges of the past, while also of being immersed in the world of the King James Bible. In the Protestant world

this is a somewhat unusual combination not often found, and perhaps possible only in isolated places like northern Idaho.

According to her own account, Robinson was indeed an exceptionally religious child. In a stunning essay called "Psalm 8" from her collection *The Death of Adam* (1998) she says, "...it seems to me I felt God as a pres-

ence before I had a name for him, and long before I knew words like 'faith' and 'belief.' I was aware to the point of alarm of a vast energy of intention all around me, barely restrained, and I thought everyone else must be aware of it." Of course, she notes that those are words a child would not have used, but it does appear that she had a powerful natural religious sensibility and gift almost in the same way that some people are gifted in athletics or music or science. She found herself loving the texture and rhythms and ideas of faith and church, and she says these all seemed to come readily to her. From an early age, her immersion in the King James Bible and her affinity with not only the stories but also the doctrines and habits of faith shaped her in ways that must have seemed



LILA

Marilynne  
Robinson

Farrar, Straus  
and Giroux

2014

272 pages

\$26.00

Reviewed by

Mel Piehl

Valparaiso University



strange to many others around her. She says that even when very young she mentally inhabited a world of ancient faith quite different from her ordinary American and Western girlhood: She learned, she says, “to look to Galilee for meaning, and to Spokane for orthodonture.”

Robinson did attend what was then the women’s college of Brown University and eventually earned a PhD in English at the University of Washington, but she decided to become a writer, not an English professor, and has become a very successful one. Besides books of essays, Robinson has published four novels. The first of these, *Housekeeping*, was set in Idaho, and began to gain her attention. But it was the next novel, *Gilead* (2004), that elevated her reputation into the stratosphere; it was followed by *Home* (2008), and now by *Lila* (2014). These three novels form a kind of interconnected trilogy centered around a small town, Gilead, Iowa, and a set of striking characters and relationships there.

*Gilead* consists of a set of letters from the aged and soon-dying pastor, John Ames, to his seven-year-old son. We are made aware in that novel that Ames’s first wife has died and that the son was born to a much younger second wife. *Lila* is that wife’s story, so it forms a backstory to *Gilead*, the events of which haven’t happened yet.

Lila’s story is a shocking one, right from the get-go. The first words of the novel are these:

The child was just there on the stoop in the dark, hugging herself against the cold, all cried out and nearly sleeping. She couldn’t holler anymore and they didn’t hear her anyway, or they might and that would make things worse. Somebody has shouted Shut that thing up or I’ll do it! and then a woman grabbed her out from under the table by her arm and pushed her out onto the stoop and shut the door and the cats went under the house.

So Lila is an abused or severely neglected child, of perhaps four or five years old (she doesn’t know for sure), half-starved and maltreated by whatever dysfunctional family or non-family environment she has been living in (that’s not clear either).

And the novel’s action begins when that freezing, undernourished, nearly catatonic child is snatched off the front porch of the house by a woman called “Doll,” who is somehow connected to the people living there, in what appears to be something between a kidnapping and a rescue. It is plain that Doll has saved the child’s life. After they stop running away from the house, Doll says to the girl, “I should have knowed it was coming on rain. And now you got the fever.’ But the child just lay against her hoping to stay where she was, hoping the rain wouldn’t end. Doll may have been the loneliest woman in the world, and she was the loneliest child, and there they were, the two of them together, keeping each other warm in the rain.” This introduces the language of vulnerability and “loneliness,” which becomes one of the central themes and concerns of the novel.

The girl herself doesn’t know who she is or who her family is or where she comes from. She doesn’t even have a name until an old woman they take shelter with suggests that Doll give her one: Lila. Doll herself is a semi-literate, hard-scrabble survivor who soon joins up with a small band of poor, migrant farm workers led, if you can call it that, by a man named Doane. They follow the crops and seasons from south to north and back again, taking work where they can find it and making do when they can’t. Ignorant and suspicious, they trust nothing and no one in mainstream or straight culture.

Throughout the novel we get periodic descriptions and accounts of Lila’s early life with Doll, Doane, and the other migrants. But rather than developing their story sequentially, Robinson very early on jumps forward to the central event and focus of the novel: Lila’s random arrival in Gilead many years later as a still-poor and lonely young woman, perhaps in her late twenties, where she finds shelter in an abandoned shack outside the town, living by fishing and gathering wild carrots and dandelions and mushrooms, and generally hanging around “like a stray dog.” We learn how Lila one day steps into Pastor John Ames’s Congregationalist church to get out of the rain, how Ames and Lila develop a romantic relationship with one another, and how they are both interested—from utterly different per-



spectives—in what we recognize as fundamental metaphysical and theological questions.

From this point on, the novel is told as a constant series of flashforwards and flashbacks—forward to Lila’s baptism and eventual marriage to Ames and then her pregnancy and the birth of their son, and backward to her life with Doll and Doane and the migrants. During those sometimes extended flashbacks we gradually gain more information and detail about Lila’s girlhood and early life, and finally about the years immediately preceding her journey to Gilead. During that time just prior to the novel’s “present,” Lila is separated from Doll and moves to St. Louis to try to make it alone. The reader has to pay close attention to this constant time-shifting as events are refracted through Lila’s memories. Sometimes these memories are represented as occurring just within her thoughts, and sometimes as she talks to herself and eventually to her unborn baby in the present.

Toward the latter part of the novel, as the past and present converge, there are a number of surprises and startling disclosures about events in Lila’s past. We gain some frightening although indirect, fragmented glimpses of events that involve Doll, some of Lila’s original “people,” a killing, and a special knife. What actually happened to whom and why remains something of a mystery, not least to Lila.

But this novel is not centrally concerned with the usual revelations of narrative fiction. Rather, the constant focus in *Lila* is on what might be called spiritual questions, God’s mysterious presence and action in human life and the world, and the role of faith and grace and trust in personal relationships.

Much of the novel’s allure is in how Robinson manages to present and dramatize these great, seemingly abstract, matters through these two incredibly disparate lives and modes of consciousness. On the one hand, we have the lonely, fearful, ignorant, barely literate young Lila, and on the other, the learned, kindly, elderly, but equally lonely Reverend Ames. There have been plenty of odd romantic couples and strange courtships in literature, and plenty of lovers drawn together by different interests, but I don’t think there has

ever been one anything like this, a deeply touching love story centered on Calvinist theology and ethics.

Reverend Ames, far from being a know-it-all dogmatician, is constantly probing and puzzling over the deeper meanings and spiritual implications of these doctrines. So when Lila shows up on his front door after their first brief encounter at the church, we have one of the most unusual romantic first moments one can imagine. I don’t

The constant focus in *Lila* is on what might be called spiritual questions, God’s mysterious presence and action in human life and the world, and the role of faith and grace and trust in personal relationships.

normally think of “So what do you think of pre-destination?” as a great pickup line, but that is what in effect happens here:

[Ames says] “Can I get you a glass of water? I could make coffee, if you have a few minutes.”

She had a day, a week, a month. She said, “I got nowhere to be.”

He smiled at her, or to himself, as if he saw that the mystery of her presence might just be something that a few dollars could help with.

He said, “Then I’ll make coffee.”

She stood up. “I don’t even know why I come here.” She recognized that smile. She had hated people for it...

He shrugged. “Since you *are* here, maybe you could tell me a little about yourself?”

She shook her head. “I don’t talk about that. I just been wondering lately why things happen the way they do.”



“Oh!” he said. “Then I’m glad you have some time to spare. I’ve been wondering about that more or less my whole life.”

This exchange about “why things happen the way they do” sets in motion this peculiar and touching romance. Ames decides to respond to Lila’s innocently profound question the only way he knows how, which is by writing a letter to her explaining his own wrestling with it.

## God is working through these human beings, to draw them out of their natural condition of loneliness and isolation.

*I have worried that you might think I did not take your question as seriously as I should have. I realize I have always believed there is a great Providence that, so to speak, waits ahead of us. A father holds out his hands to a child who is learning to walk, and he comforts the child with words and draws it toward him, but he lets the child feel the risk it is taking, and lets it choose its own courage and the certainty of love and comfort when he reaches his father over—I was going to say choose it over safety, but there is no safety....*

*I have struggled with this my whole life. I still have not answered your question, I know, but thank you for asking it. I may be learning something from the attempt.*

Things develop from there. Lila starts to do unsolicited favors for Ames, like tending his garden and putting flowers on the grave of his first wife, and he in turn begins to anticipate and cherish her company and conversations. It is hard to describe how subtly Robinson portrays the tenderness and quiet emotional intensity of the developing relationship between this very odd couple. Robinson is

extremely skilled at conveying the pair’s emerging but largely unspoken endearment, leading up to Lila’s baptism and their eventual marriage.

**I**F THIS NOVEL IS ABOUT ONE THING IT IS ABOUT being led out of loneliness and mistrust into relationship and trust. Lila’s whole life has led her to refuse to trust anyone or anything, and she frequently voices her fear and suspicion. I lost track of the innumerable times she says to herself or others that she doesn’t trust them. Besides individuals, she is initially very suspicious of all mainstream institutions, including religion: In fact, Doane had once urged the migrant band to avoid religious people, especially when they offered food or other handouts, because, he tells them, it’s a trick they use to make you think they actually believe the nonsense they talk about. Lila even comes to distrust Doll after Doll leaves her alone for a time.

Throughout the novel, the ability to trust human beings and become attached to them is intertwined with the ability to trust God. We come to intuit that God is working through these human beings, to draw them out of their natural condition of loneliness and isolation. Trusting others—especially for someone who has been as neglected and deprived and deceived as Lila has been—requires a tremendous leap of faith. And throughout the developing Ames-Lila relationship we are led to see their mutual trust and faith in one another grow. What they are both so unexpectedly experiencing is something that can only be described as a mysterious miracle. As they emerge from their mutual loneliness and suffering—Lila from her hard and cruel life, Ames from the loss of his first wife and the creeping losses of old age—they become instruments of a kind of grace—God’s grace—for one another.

She said, “I been missing you.” And he said, “Oh. Well then.” And he put his arms around her, just the way she knew he would, just the way she meant for him to do. She was like all the others who came to him with their grief, and that was all right. She didn’t mind. He was blessing her. He was doing that to people all the time. He rested his cheek against hers, too, and that



was different. She felt his breath against her ear. She was his wife.

But of course Lila is “blessing” Ames as well. That this is all conveyed in lovely language, without a trace of sentimental piety or narrative manipulation, yet with constant overt discussions of core Calvinist doctrines, including predestination, hell, and Biblical interpretation is a great testimony to Robinson’s artistic skill as well as religious fluency.

Everything is certainly not perfect in the end. Lila still has severe self-doubts, periodically thinks about running away even after the marriage, and is deeply fearful about the idea that she is going to have to raise the child as a Christian. But we also see what unexpected blessings Lila and John Ames have become for one another, and how they are doubly blessed by this unexpected child. Knowing as we do, or suspecting if we haven’t read *Gilead*, that this couple will have only a few years left together, adds to the poignancy of the novel.

I do find a few flaws in *Lila*. While Robinson is generally quite good at capturing Lila’s and the migrants’ uneducated speech, at times their diction seems more elevated or complex than I think Lila could manage (writing low colloquial speech must be one of the hardest things for a novelist to do). And one side of me kept looking for what might be called more social context or complexity in the novel. For example, the people of Ames’s small-town Iowa Congregationalist church seem to just go right along with the marriage of their white-haired, widower pastor to a scruffy young female drifter nearly young enough to be his granddaughter. In fact, the church ladies end up bringing in food—or I guess in Iowa that would be “hot dishes”—to Ames’s home after the birth of the baby. Maybe that would happen; Congregationalists are a tolerant bunch. But this is supposed to be the 1950s, and unless Iowa small towns were a lot different than I suspect, one would imagine that even parishioners who have benefited from Ames’s preaching and cherish his presence among them might react in more complex ways.

But the response to such quibbles is that the novel, and Marilynne Robinson, are ultimately just not very interested in such questions or in ordinary social milieus. This is not mimetic or realistic fiction

of the sort we tend to expect, at least when an historical and social world like this has been created. *Lila* is certainly not a dramatic and action-packed novel. Nor is it experimental meta-fiction or slippery postmodernism or magical realism. Rather, this is grave, probing, meditative writing informed by an unfashionable but highly learned theological sensibility and imagination. It is the kind of fiction the Puritans or Jonathan Edwards might have produced if they had been into writing novels. Many American writers have spent the better part of two centuries trying to escape what many regard as the fatal grip of Calvinism on the American imagination. Imagine their surprise to find their worst nightmare suddenly resurrected, like some literary Freddie Krueger, in the form of a prose poet of the God-haunted Midwest.

Robinson’s Iowa town is named Gilead, which is a Biblical place, a place of grace. The strongest reference to it is Jeremiah 8, where the prophet asks “Is there balm in Gilead?” And the great African-American spiritual answers Jeremiah’s question:

*There is a balm in Gilead, to make the wounded whole.*

*There is a balm in Gilead, to heal the sick soul.*

*Sometimes I feel discouraged, and think my work’s in vain.*

*But then the Holy Spirit revives my soul again.*

*There is a balm in Gilead, to make the wounded whole.*

*There is a balm in Gilead, to heal the sick soul.*

Robinson surely knows that hymn, and it fits her novel well. Many wounded souls, we are led to believe, are being quietly healed on the prairies of Gilead, Iowa. And in the hands of their richly talented author, Marilynne Robinson’s readers may find that balm as well. ✝

Mel Piehl is Professor of Humanities and History in Christ College, the honors college of Valparaiso University.



## VIDEOSPHERE

There was a time it balanced, black and white,  
at the edge of my dresser. My first television,  
my secret sharer, my conduit to art and darkness.  
A perfect globe, all glitz and seventies kitsch.  
A techno helmet too like the astronauts' I adored.  
In it, I watched everything that mattered. *Planet  
of the Apes, Trog, Beast from 20,000 Fathoms.*  
So many large and small screen heroes, so many  
monsters, all unsettled from the deep. Space  
time, sea. But one night it was Kong, king  
of them all. That night, long before the divorce,  
before the screaming, before the Alzheimer's,  
dementia, talk of retirement homes, before poems  
about his anger, before poems about my anger,  
before poems about how he could have gone  
to the moon, after pilot, after Air Force, after all  
he'd wanted had begun, already, to fade the way  
it has now, amongst only the beginnings of the ruin  
of a man I called my father, my father sat with me  
to watch. I rarely saw what I was supposed to see  
when someone watched beside me. More often,  
I watched *them, their* reactions, and that night,  
one of the last we had together in that house,  
I couldn't tell if he was seeing my crystal sphere,  
the TV itself, or the ape aped within, the lonely  
beast contemplating his kingdom from his tower,  
this strange new world where the plane was coming,  
coming from some unimaginable future, coming  
to knock him down before the curtain.

Bryan Dietrich



# For the Thoreaus Among Us

## Todd Davis's *In the Kingdom of the Ditch*

Brett Foster

**E**ARLY IN HIS FOURTH POETRY COLLECTION, Todd Davis explores the question of our relationship to the world and our interdependence with it, a giving and getting. Despite our capacities for naming (symbolized by the botanist Linnaeus in the opening poem "Taxonomy"), we merely give back names after the world names us. In this collection, dedicated to his father's memory, Davis implies the ways our physical lives both limit us and define what are later called "these transitory days." There may come a health, a wisdom maybe, from confronting this humbling fact: "our way is one / of unknowing," that first poem declares. This relationship assumes artistic dimensions in the next poem, where the world gives Georgia O'Keeffe something, and she gives something back. This also describes Davis's book-long project well: how do we make something from our inheritances and losses? Or at least, how do we make peace with them? In the finely observed wooded settings of Davis's poetry, the world is quite garrulous: "stream talks on and on," one poem says, much like those "tongues in trees, brooks in the running brooks" of Arden Forest in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. If one can infer its message, one may even find in nature a "gospel of beauty." Frequently, Davis is a worthy listener.

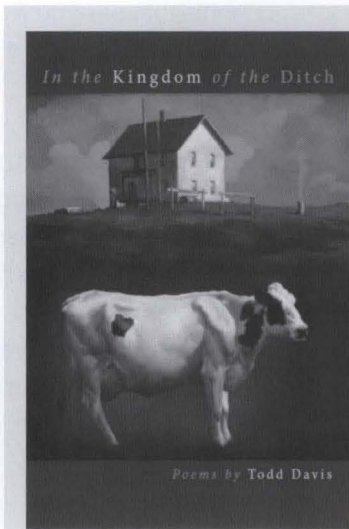
The world he tracks (in the Alleghenies for instance; Davis resides in central Pennsylvania)

presents fruitfulness in the midst of decay, life and death nearly paired: dark fruit turns sweeter as the vine withers, or a coyote watches from the bush as a doe births a fawn. "Bees have made honey under the ribs of the dead," begins one poem. That tension exists in the human realm as well, and several poems here provide elegiac scores to the "mortal-song the body sings,"

most memorably in their treatment of a father's dying. One poem describes him in a hospice bed. The days when he could eat "seems like a hundred years ago," and the exploring speaker surrounds him with our human options in the context of suffering, a grandmother's assurance in angels, the morphine pump kicking in every ten

minutes. Poems with this subject are not without surprises, or even displays of humor: in "What I Told My Sons after My Father Died," the speaker wishes for another mode of comfort rather than explanation or even poetry—"If I could play three notes / upon the fiddle, I'd do that instead"—while another broods in the key of Tom and Jerry: "How odd it seems that happiness / can skitter away into the small door along the baseboard / of the body, like a cartoon cat chasing a cartoon mouse."

Davis concentrates the paradox of existence in a memorable image of light and dark: "Deerberry hangs its pitch / black fruit like lanterns / carrying bits of night / into daylight."



IN THE KINGDOM  
OF THE DITCH  
Todd Davis  
Michigan State  
University Press

2013  
112 pages  
\$19.95

Reviewed by  
Brett Foster  
Wheaton College



Readers of Chinese poetry will find much that is admirable in this poetry, whose sensory sensitivities reflect the author's hunting experiences. And those Chinese poets clearly influence him (one title mentions Li Po). Attention to the power of spare images prevails:

After the first snow  
the tallest stalks of goldenrod  
bed down in the far field.

Elsewhere, saws bring down trees "restlessly like hummingbirds among the honeysuckle," and "Heliotropic" begins, "In the evening light the dove's undersides / look yellow[.]" Noticeably lengthy titles and anniversary poems also mark this Chinese influence, as does a penchant for reflection: "At 44 I'm not sure if I'm halfway to my death. / How many of us know what's coming when the first / heavy snow starts down?"

Davis devotes the middle of this book's three sections to a series of poems from Thoreau's point of view, ranging from a praising psalm to a poem about emptying a bedpan. This conscious shift in focus is welcomed when it comes, but more welcomed is the way that this naturalist poet values throughout the book, in Thoreauvian spirit, those places where daily life meets natural surroundings. The signs are many, literal or

imaginative: two bucks who rub antlers on the slats of a deck railing, or an adolescent son who like a pine snake "leaves behind / the skin / of his former / self." In a few poems, the woods' dark is happily left behind for the warmer comforts of home and family: a spouse is seen from outside, moving in the window's light, or bedside moonlight traces the curve of her back. Overall, Davis's sustained vision here is one to make proud those thoughtful, independent Thoreaus still among us:

These are the beautiful deaths  
of usefulness. Imagine your life  
taken to feed another, your very  
being consumed in the belly's  
furnace, awaking to heavy  
wing-beat as you fly above  
the tallest spruce. ❄️

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



# Boomer Memory and the Religious Right

David Heddendorf

RANDALL BALMER'S RECENT BIOGRAPHY OF Jimmy Carter (*Redeemer: The Life of Jimmy Carter*, Basic Books, 2014) patiently and thoroughly tells a story he has told before: how progressive evangelicalism was eclipsed by the Religious Right. At the heart of Balmer's account are Carter's presidential campaigns of 1976 and 1980, the first of which confirmed evangelicals' concern for equal rights and the poor, the second of which signaled the emergence of a new evangelical coalition opposed to abortion, homosexuality, and other threats to morality. Poor Carter almost disappears from his own biography as Balmer documents the rise of religious conservatives, but the focus on cultural factors in the Reagan landslide, rather than on the candidates themselves, makes the book unique and valuable. The late 1970s, Balmer shows, witnessed a revolution in the way Americans perceive Christianity and politics.

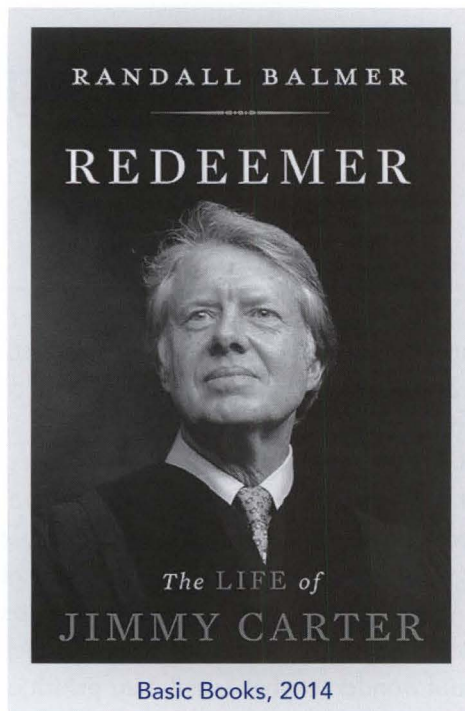
The results, of course, remain with us today. As Balmer complains, "Leaders of the Religious Right have managed to persuade many of my fellow evangelical Christians that it is something akin to sin to vote for anyone who is not a Republican" (2006, ix-x). This notion prevails not only among Baptists, Pentecostals, and the like. In his earlier book, *Thy Kingdom Come* (Basic Books, 2006), Balmer visits a school run by Missouri Synod Lutherans as he illustrates conservative opposition to public education. LCMS Christians, in my experience at least, prefer not to call themselves evangelicals. Yet in the LCMS congregation where I have worshipped for twenty years, I am a lonely, if not quite only, non-Republican. At the men's Bible study, the regulars politely acknowledge the environment and economic justice as worthy issues, but you get the feeling these matters are considered distractions at best. Nationally, pockets of evangelical and other theologically conservative progressives can be found at places like

*Sojourners* magazine, but these voices constitute a minority alternative to the reigning political conservatism.

Balmer explains how this state of affairs came about in the 1970s, tracing the complex and often hidden connections linking activists, party strategists, financial contributors, media organizations, and voters. Thoughtful conservatives, reading Balmer's historical analysis, might be compelled to stop and wonder to what extent their priorities have been shaped by Jerry Falwell and similar fundamentalists. For all his conscientious thoroughness as a historian and his sharp, sometimes caustic reporting, Balmer is most persuasive when he tells his own story. A heartfelt personal narrative runs through many of his books (the preface of his Carter biography is called "Jimmy Carter and Me"), lending his commentary the emotional impact of an insider's narrative. When he mourns the progressive evangelicalism he knew as a youth during the 1960s and 1970s, before the triumph of the Religious Right, he draws on a deep, affecting reservoir of memory.

Balmer tells of coming to faith when he was three or four years old, of "rededicating his life" numerous times, and of "witnessing" to a childhood friend, all formative experiences for the typical American evangelical, regardless of political persuasion. But also, not quite as typically, he remembers attending public schools, which, he says, "taught me about people different from myself," and allowed an "encounter with ideas and individuals outside of my own insular world" (2006, 86). In 1972, he traveled from Trinity College in Deerfield, Illinois, to hear George McGovern speak at Wheaton College and was dismayed when students demonstrating for Nixon disrupted McGovern's speech. A history major, he admired the nineteenth-century evangelical reformers who crusaded against slavery and championed women's rights. He





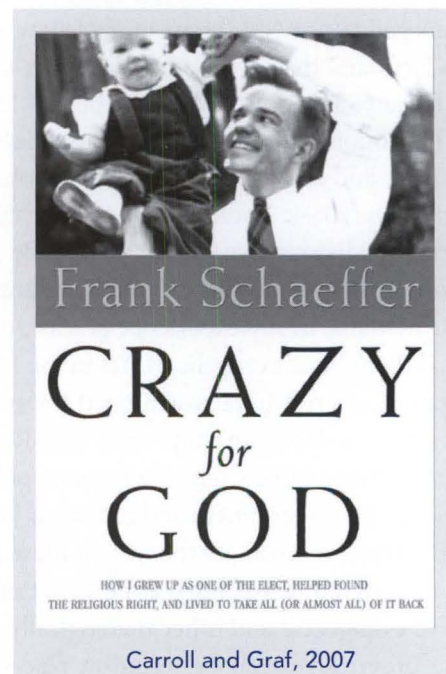
developed a lifelong concern for the environment. After a congressional internship in Washington, DC, he handed out fliers for Carter's 1976 campaign.

Balmer draws on memories of growing up in another time when he criticizes the Religious Right and calls for a progressive evangelicalism. Before the 1980s, he insists repeatedly, evangelicals offered an alternative; they had a sense of being different. As a subculture, evangelicalism could be stiflingly "insular," but it also stood as a counterculture against the dominant shapers of opinion. Comparing today's religious landscape with that of his youth, Balmer misses this sense of a counterculture that, as he wrote in *Thy Kingdom Come*, "can provide a critique of the powerful because it is utterly disinterested—it has no investment in the power structure itself" (2006, 189).

The same elegy for an abandoned counterculture, and the same potent tonic of memory, pervade Frank Schaeffer's *Crazy for God* (Carroll and Graf, 2007), a memoir about his parents Francis and Edith Schaeffer. Frank grew up at the Swiss study center L'Abri, where Francis and Edith, highly regarded evangelical writers in the 1960s and 1970s, ministered to backpacking, soul-searching youth. Compared to Balmer's middle-class Midwestern upbringing, Schaeffer's teenage years were turbulent and exotic, but he ends up telling a similar story of

a subculture hijacked by politics. After an insulated evangelical childhood—described with considerably less affection than Balmer's—Frank watches his father begin making anti-abortion films in the mid-1970s. "Frankie" even lends his budding directorial talents to the cause. Soon the Schaeffers are caught up, without quite realizing what is happening, in the crowd of preachers, activists, fundraisers, and donors that would eventually help unseat Carter.

When he describes his parents' ministry and theology, Frank Schaeffer affects a cocky, sneering superiority; he is still the bad boy feeling up girls while his dad lectures in the next room. But Schaeffer can also write with surprising generosity and affection, especially when he recalls his father's earlier work, before its transformation by conservative politics: "Dad liked art better than theology and people better than rules and was most comfortable in a room full of hippies" (256). When Francis Schaeffer's early books made him an evangelical hero, he fiercely maintained his countercultural stance, confronting materialism, defending the environment, even becoming a Jefferson Airplane fan. "He was the coolest dad anyone I knew had, and the only one who knew the words to 'White Rabbit'" (2007, 211). A hint of irony lingers, but Schaeffer clearly admires his father's liberal values, many of which would be included in Balmer's vision of "progressive evangelicalism." Looking back from the culture warrior his





father became, Schaeffer sees an independent, intellectually adventurous man who preached from the margins of society.

**H**ISTORY CAN EXPLAIN THE RISE AND FALL of a movement, and social scientists can analyze its merits and defects. But memory—living, personal memory—engages the emotions, helping us to relive what was and to believe in what could be again. When Baby Boomers like Balmer and Schaeffer reminisce about what it felt like to be an evangelical in the 1970s, they offer a means of seeing beyond the present, when so many Christians see abortion and homosexuality as the central problems, while poverty and the environment are widely forgotten. Thanks to memory, we can do better than just imagine a future; we can remember a more balanced, ideologically diverse past, and try to revive it. We can remember when Christians from many theological camps held views across the political spectrum, including views many now disparage or ignore as “liberal.”

In his increasingly influential book *The True and Only Heaven* (1991), Christopher Lasch contrasts the idea of memory with the modern tendency toward nostalgia. Memory looks to the past for restorative beliefs and practices, while nostalgia mourns a sepia-toned lost world. Nostalgia smiles fondly at pictures of horse-drawn hay wagons. Memory employs crop rotation on small organic farms. As prescribed by Lasch, memory would presumably learn from the past by reading history, or through watching documentaries, taking courses, or listening to our elders. It is a collective calling to mind of a period before we were born, and thus “memory” only in a figurative sense, a social equivalent to the psychological faculty. No one today “remembers” the nineteenth-century populism Lasch describes or an economy of small farmers and artisans.

But people like Balmer and Schaeffer—and people like me—who grew up in the 1960s and 1970s *do* remember an era that challenges our current stale divisions. Because we experienced real openness and diversity of opinion, we know what vigorous debate and live options feel like. Because our memories are more than just snapshots, slogans, and manifestoes, they convey a sense of daily life that is startling and energizing. We know things can

be different because we have been there. We have seen it.

My own memory of being an evangelical teenager in the 1970s corroborates Balmer’s and Schaeffer’s to a remarkable degree. Reading their books returned me to my western Pennsylvania youth of bell bottoms, terrible hair, and gas rationing, of waiting in the dark for the school bus during expanded daylight-saving hours. Like Balmer, I remember admiring George McGovern, thinking vaguely that he represented the little guy’s best hope.

Memory looks to the past for restorative beliefs and practices, while nostalgia mourns a sepia-toned lost world. Nostalgia smiles fondly at pictures of horse-drawn hay wagons. Memory employs crop rotation on small organic farms.

My parents said nothing to discourage my enthusiasm. With my fellow evangelicals, I knew the name of Republican US Senator Mark Hatfield, one of our own, who opposed the Vietnam War. In 1976, I joined an excited crowd in a mall to see born-again presidential candidate Jimmy Carter. I remember the “Jesus people,” whose language, music, and anti-establishment ways filtered into our Presbyterian youth groups. The term “counterculture” came up frequently in those days among evangelicals, even as I attended public school and considered myself one of the guys. I felt the tension between church and my “non-Christian friends.” We were different—sometimes painfully so with our quaint customs and wariness of those we considered unbelievers—but we neither removed ourselves from the secular world nor tried to overcome its dominance. We took our strangeness for granted, perhaps intuiting that, as Balmer says, our outsider status gave us strength.

One of my favorite memories from the 1970s is my father’s passion for recycling. Rinsing milk jugs,



balancing newspapers, flattening tin cans, he had us doing all of this before the days of curbside pickup. Then he drove our loaded station wagon to a noisy parking garage where the volunteers from GRIP—Group for Recycling in Pennsylvania—sorted and processed our stuff. My dad believed in being a steward of the environment. It was one more thing we did for God, along with hymn sings, covered-dish dinners, and prayer meetings.

In my recollection of those years, evangelicals generally were good at rendering to Caesar the things that were Caesar's. Like Jesus sparring with the Roman Empire, we had no illusions about the government. It was an instrument at best, a source of services for the common good. Christians like Hatfield and Carter could be faithful public servants, but to us they seemed like innocents in an alien realm, a hostile territory where we weren't at home. Evangelicals felt toward government a healthy indifference that stopped just short of contempt: "Here you go, Caesar. Here's my 1974 tax check. Now excuse me while I get back to my Bible study." Caesar needed our money. Caesar did some good things. We might as well coexist with Caesar. The last thing that would have crossed anyone's mind was to try to *become* Caesar, to confuse our identity with that of the state, or to imitate its coercive power.

Unlike Balmer, who can sound at times like a Bible-quoting Jon Stewart or a Baptist Bill Maher, I am not arguing that Christian conservatism should be replaced with Christian liberalism. I would settle for a little reshuffling of categories and a freshening of the conversation. I think Balmer is right that, for some of us at least, political discussion seems cramped by preset boundaries and hardened battle lines. For example, if evangelicals wish to reclaim the environmental zeal that moved my father, it would require, according to Balmer, "summoning the courage to refute the babble about New Age or neopagan entanglements" (2006, 161–2). Speaking for myself, I have never been called a neopagan for worrying about dirty water or climate change, but I am familiar with a reluctance to emit more than a bashful environmentalist peep. It is easier to keep quiet and avoid the funny looks. Deep inside, maybe some of us *do* think it's a sin not to vote Republican. These are hazy, inarticulate, long-entrenched feel-

ings that have settled over the country for three and a half decades.

To replace a feeling, you need a different feeling, and that is what memory provides. Personal memory reminds us of a time when denominations did not come with political slogans, and when it was acceptable to vote for either major party. Reading memoirs like Schaeffer's can help recall that time, restoring a sense of wider possibilities. Better yet, for Boomers who remember a more expansive era, would be a do-it-yourself, on-the-fly kind of "memoir," an ongoing inner cultivation of a world that might be mostly past but isn't altogether lost. In that world, people—the *same* people—went to Bible study, lobbied for clean air, opposed abortion, questioned military intervention, demanded justice for the poor, sang "The Old Rugged Cross," promoted racial equality. Remember? ✚

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

## Works Cited

- Balmer, Randall. *Redeemer: The Life of Jimmy Carter*. New York: Basic, 2014.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Thy Kingdom Come: How the Religious Right Distorts the Faith and Threatens America, An Evangelical's Lament*. New York: Basic, 2006.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: A Journey into the Evangelical Subculture in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.
- Lasch, Christopher. *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics*. New York: Norton, 1991.
- Schaeffer, Frank. *Crazy for God: How I Grew Up as One of the Elect, Helped Found the Religious Right, and Lived to Take All (or Almost All) of It Back*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Carroll and Graf, 2007.



# Blood on the Lens

## Dan Gilroy's *Nightcrawler*

Gregory Maher

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO LEAVE YOUR home, your apartment, to enter your vehicle and drive? Is it a transfer of power, a jolt of control as key strikes ignition and sends fuel to the engine, and the car goes and speeds and slows and does as it is bid? Driving is a willful action, but it often serves as the vehicle for another deed beyond; it is the access, the pilgrimage. Driving films push viewers to ask: is location so holy, so essential for a film? They present filmmakers with the challenge of designing a space between, lighting it, and controlling the action which occurs along the way. In driving, the actor is loosed from the outside world, one which cannot shy or wallow in a spotlight, but merely exists, streaks by, and glowers in its insistent presence. A relationship and a rhythm: the road, the vehicle, the driver. "Gliding along an endless valley," to which this road, and all roads lead, "a dream of some imagined Eden" (*Nightcrawler* screenplay).

It is hard not to connect *Nightcrawler*, director Dan Gilroy's first film, to the spree of driving films in recent years, films which count the insular space of the car as important as that of the home. Vehicles give way to action, and seem to channel and accomplish the cinematic question: what does a character desire? *Nebraska* (2013) offers a grassland journey toward a fictitious jackpot, while the appropriately-titled *Drive* (2011, reviewed by Charles Andrews in *The Cresset*, Lent 2012) is propelled by a tense meditation on violence. Or maybe the vehicle is a place of vulnerability, the site of a life's deterioration as Tom Hardy in *Locke* (2013) drives on and on amidst mocking headlights and the solitude of his bluetooth phone conversations.

*Nightcrawler*, Gilroy's first film, is a poignant survey not of film noir's typical violence, but of the aftermath and the dissemination of that violence.

Gilroy, at fifty-five, is an old hand at the Hollywood screenwriting scene and, as an LA native, knows the city well. The over seventy-seven locations he filmed—many in-between or no-places, whether roadsides, freeways, junkyards, or dead apartment buildings—offer a strong sense of the sordid whole of Los Angeles. The city is not composed merely of bright, palm tree-lined boulevards, nor conversely of smoky nightclubs and muggy alleyways, but is a vast, sprawling city whose veins are freeways, lit up at night like fiber optics. In one instance, a shot reveals scores of antennae rising over the city as the sun broaches the crest of the mountains. Meticulous editing layers in the static of radio broadcasts bouncing from antennae to antennae, to morning news shows rioting over each other in a hyper-saturated frenzy. News anchors float by in bright-hued ties and blouses, high definition hairstyles, and turn amorphous in the ceaseless flicking from channel to channel. It's an overload, a pulsing of parallel strains, the same robberies, murders, and break-ins from different mouths, different channels.

*Nightcrawler* opens with barren ground and night sky, a billboard looming before the glow of a freeway-cut Los Angeles. A silhouette against the city lights slices through chain-link fencing with a bolt cutter, then scurries toward its car as high beams and a security guard challenge it. "I'm lost," we hear the figure speak, washed pale in the headlights of the other vehicle. The exchange continues, the camera focuses on the guard's glinting watch, and the two figures are suddenly down. A scuffle ensues, and the shot wipes to the same figure driving through the desert valley, face illumined by streetlights and grinning at the new watch adorning his wrist.

So we meet Lou Bloom (Jake Gyllenhaal), gliding his way through LA nightscapes of noir

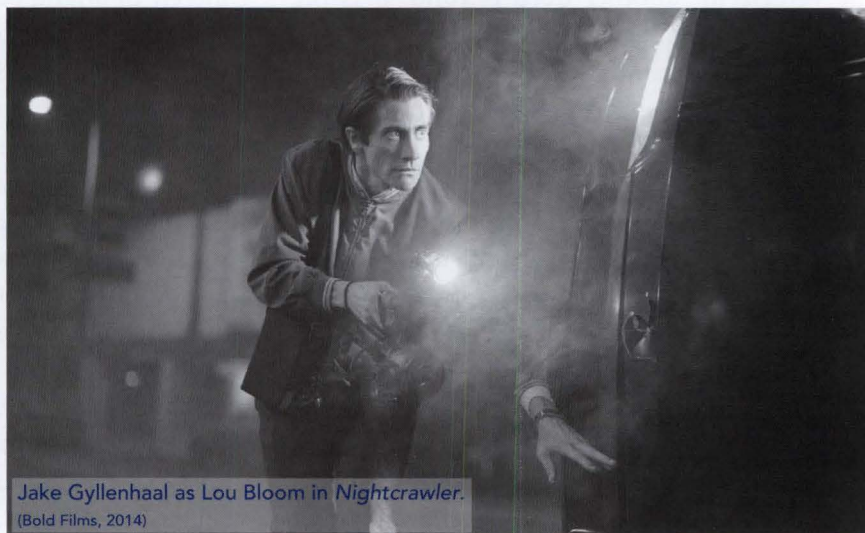


proportion. Except, without the romance: Lou's eyes are downturned; he is pensive with a lip-pursed mediocrity. This is neo-noir: heavier, more confrontational, letting the blood splatter onto the camera lens. Lou is a man on the periphery of society and, as branded by the scrapyard owner to whom he sells the chain-link fence and various manhole covers, a thief. But he drives—and is driven—toward his own Eden.

From a distance, flashing lights signal an accident, a highway obstruction. Lou drives closer, pulls over on impulse and is drawn to the scene: a woman pulled from her burning car by emergency personnel. But the scene is already staked out, captured by a freelance team of cameramen. "We're first!" yells one, to which another replies "Got a view in the car!" and you realize that they are not there to report so much as to capture an elusive moment. Lou is galvanized.

If there is a track upon which this film is set, it is forward, only forward. Obsessed with climbing the career ladder, Lou is propelled by little more than his own assertiveness, his unwillingness to back down. He is unassuming and sincere, but beneath the surface of this character there is a creeping feeling of instability. Gilroy's script describes him as "pure primal id." Instinctive yes, but with a touch of *savoir faire*, an ability to charm via his innocent façade, his bargaining, and smiles of assurance. The disconnect between character appearance and inner motivation is only heightened by the film's musical cues. The soundtrack wavers, a mounting orchestral drift that is often struck with a quick editing cut like a rock through rippling water. A cellphone beeps—static—then skittering feedback as if held too close to a speaker. These are, in truth, cues from within Lou's head, what he hears as he dramatizes the world outside his mind, a mind that is "disconnected... feral," wavering between misanthropy and a fierce drive.

Back at the scrapyard, Lou bargains with the wary owner for a better price, as the moon inches over the city, gleaming in its pale wash. Rebuffed, Lou states that he will accept the original offer if it helps establish a "business relationship." It is almost absurd, talking business with a shady broker, and this taste for bargaining becomes one of his greatest tools as the film progresses. It secures him his first camcorder and police scanner off a pilfered road bike and then his first deal with a news station selling footage. Invigorated by his first video capture, Lou heads to KWLA-TV, the channel on which he saw coverage of the first accident (and the lowest-rated station in the area). There he gets his first tips from Nina Romina (Rene Russo), the commander of the news stu-



Jake Gyllenhaal as Lou Bloom in *Nightcrawler*.  
(Bold Films, 2014)

dio, as she dictates instructions and overrules the skeptical reactions of the news staff. Another forward-driven character, for whom regrets might never be acknowledged, who paces along with the sad march of a low-end cable news station. She brushes him off—"the shot's all grainy," or "get a close-up"—but they finally strike a deal. As she looks him over, she shares: "we find our viewers are more interested in urban crime sweeping into the suburbs."

Right. Check. So Lou masters the police radio codes online and hires a partner, Rick (Riz Ahmed), to assist with filming and navigation. Rick is a sad hustler, without even a covert talent; he responds to situations with the slow incredulity of a washout. But he is important for Lou as a mal-



leable partner, a contrast for Lou's successes and a spectator for his sense of grandeur. Together, they form an unlikely duo; the one fearless and pushy, and the other timid, unwilling. They press on with the venture, learning which calls might prove fruitful and competing with other stringers for the exclusive shot. Yet even as Lou works his way up in the industry, purchasing a new, scarlet-hued Dodge Challenger and high-quality video equipment, Rick still sits passenger-side, slightly incredulous, and mostly along for the ride. He's a double for us, the audience; we too are sitting shotgun, hearing Lou's reprimand of "Seat belt. Seat belt!" as he pumps the accelerator and glides onto a lamplit LA freeway. It's truly breathless.

After the film, I couldn't help but hear the theater crowd murmur, "He's a sociopath. The blood is clearly on his hands." But this is the easy critique, the kind of artificial distance that makes the film, and Lou as a character, easy to digest. Certainly he looks like a psychopath—hollow-cheeked (Gyllanhal lost twenty pounds for the role) with a bleakness unsoftened by his tireless momentum. But it is how he deliberates and acts on the job that most obscures his humanity. It's a kind of envisioning on one part, a daydream, and a kind of deliberation on the other. This is clearly the mark of a manipulator, weighing the scales of power in each situation as if to inquire, "What is allowed?" Every good manipulator knows, of course, that the ultimate tool of manipulation is understanding and using currents of power, pushing things to the fulfillment of his desire so that it is hardly realized as it is happening.

There's hardly anything to uncover from Lou's personal life; his apartment is populated with little more than a weedy plant, a couple of milk crates, and a blocky computer. On the job though, Lou's bloodshot eyes press onto the viewfinder as he circles in for a shot. Skulking, peering, like a wolf to a carcass, his eyes reflect the flames or blood of the wreckage, translated through lens and mirror to a thousand television screens. Then, without a pause, snapping shut the monitor, he skids away to the low buzz of the police scanner. As Susan Sontag, the seminal writer on violence and imagery reminds in her 1977 essays *On Photography*, there is an implicit aggression in the very use of

a camera: "like a car, a camera is sold as a predatory weapon—one that's as automated as possible, ready to spring... it's as simple as turning the ignition key or pulling the trigger." Lou's camcorder is more dangerous than he can imagine, a vehicle to his own dissociation from reality as he sees his clip playing on television: "It looks so real!"

So how exactly does the camcorder—and its monitor, the television—change how we view violence? Of course, there is a certain distance removed, a space of analysis and reflection in a book or newspaper culled away by the immediacy of television news or the "breaking" tweet. Anesthetized by repeated doses of violence, we no longer recoil as we might have used to, but frown and mutter at the sickness of the world. This anesthetization is central to Gilroy's use of Lou. What complicates our understanding of him is the lurking question of whether the episodes of violence he has experienced have dulled (or stifled) his empathy or whether he is already a product of our culture, deadened to the macabre.

Driving movies speak to us out of the romantic instinct of 1970s cop thrillers. The groovy soundtracks and turtleneck-jacket combos may be gone, but the somber, unemotive driver remains. Lou is no Steve McQueen; that kind of laconic, self-possessed coolness is too easy for neo-noir, in which characters thrive in their dark complexities. Lou is alone, emotionless, perhaps socially maladjusted. Society falls away like cool metal scaffolding before the driver and his car. Neon punctuates a murky street, yet neon is rendered here with ambulance lights, the dying tone of sirens, and the acrid taste of smoke. There's a gritty realism here that never appeared behind the smoke of noir. It drips into the camera's frame with the blood of victims, not black and white but high definition, and not a detail is missed.

But there is a kind of absurdity, too, one which softens the utter devastation of the final deadly scene and exposes the news anchors for their affection. News becomes a kind of theater in which the truth, the captured experience, is interpreted and framed by the camcorder and assembled into a narrative. This is one of the cruxes of the film, the way in which Lou physically alters scenes and then reframes them to mirror a better shot (read:



a more horrific narrative). It is a deliberate action which steps so far beyond our willingness as normal humans that we can't help but feel alienated, disgusted by him. The only people who appreciate, or can look past it are Nina and the news anchors, desperate to retain their jobs, desperate to continue feeding us—the public audience—the corrupted soma we unthinkingly desire: fear, through scenes of violence, creeping into our hyper-managed lives. Through this veneer, *Nightcrawler* implores

us for self-analysis, for a realization and shock out of our day-to-day, out of the distracted state of screen-viewing in which we are too often numbed to violence, and transfixed by its aftermath. ♣

**Gregory Maher** is a writer who lives in Chicago. He covers art and architecture for *KNSTRCT Magazine*, and contributes to *The Seen* contemporary art magazine.

## APOSTASY

No lightning bolt answers  
your choices these days.  
Instead, a growing blindness  
exposes theology strict as the slit  
of a scalpel. Friend, it is I,  
skewed by a growing cataract,  
as pupil and retina splinter  
all oncoming light. Dear God,  
the impossible trust  
to be mustered, the sterile  
draping of face, save  
this defect—how will I ever  
lie still enough? Prayer-less,  
your hand squeezes mine, having  
survived this surgery, twice,  
and, as sedation takes hold, you  
believe I will see.

Laurie Klein



# Better Than Duels and Dances

## Béla Fleck and Abigail Washburn

Jennifer Forness

“**O**N MY RIDE TO YOU/ WHERE AM I GONNA go when you’re gone?” The opening lyrics to “Ride to U” from Béla Fleck and Abigail Washburn’s eponymous album (Rounder Records, 2014) speak to the deep love between a couple and the grief at the prospect of losing one’s lover. Fleck’s and Washburn’s banjos work together to create one sound that encapsulates a relationship between two lovers. The intricate weaving of their picking demonstrates how marriage knits two people together, intertwining them in a manner that death cannot undo.

Béla Fleck and Abigail Washburn are convincing not only because they are married to each other but also because they have married their distinctive musical sounds and playing styles. Béla Fleck is considered one of the world’s best living banjo players. Inspired by Earl Scruggs, Fleck’s impeccable technique in the three-finger style of banjo playing brought the banjo out of bluegrass obscurity and displays its virtuosic possibilities and colors. He has won fifteen Grammy awards and has been nominated in more categories—including country, pop, jazz, bluegrass, classical, folk, spoken word, composition, and arranging—than any other musician in Grammy history. Fleck’s adept playing in a variety of styles demonstrates that the banjo is good for more than accompanying square dances.

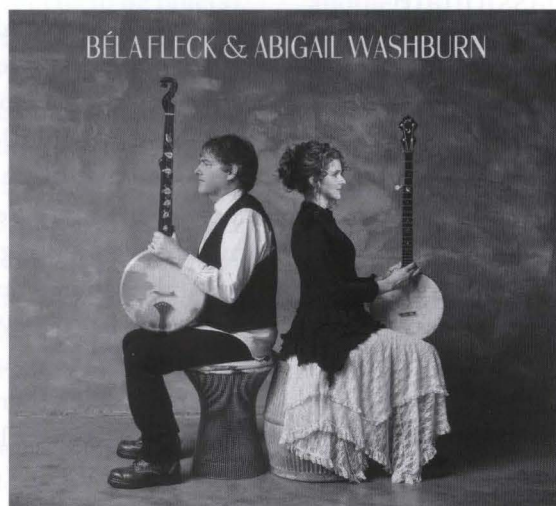
Washburn discovered the banjo in college after listening to a Doc Watson album. She was

drawn to the sound of the banjo and learned to play in the older clawhammer or frailing style that reaches back to the banjo’s roots in West Africa. Washburn always has been fascinated by Chinese language and culture and originally planned on becoming an international lawyer based in China. In an interview with the *Chicago Tribune*, Washburn explains that she abandoned her initial plan in favor of

being a musician, because she was looking for a better way to connect with people (October 12, 2012). She always felt a barrier between her and her Chinese friends when discussing law and language, but that barrier dropped when playing music.

Fleck and Washburn met at a square dance (although Fleck will point out that it was one of the only square dances he’s played at in decades) and

started playing as a duo soon after. After their son, Juno, was born, they made the decision to tour and record together as a way to remain close as a family. How close they really are is reflected in the merging of their distinctive playing styles. Fleck’s three-finger style of playing is achieved through the use of finger and thumb picks, and gives the banjo a loud and bright sound. Washburn’s clawhammer technique emphasizes a downward strum that gives the banjo a softer, rounder sound. One would not expect their divergent musical and playing styles to blend, but that is the magic of this album.



Béla Fleck & Abigail Washburn  
Rounder Records, 2014.



Fleck's virtuosity and Washburn's passionate lyrics combine to re-imagine traditional songs and to create new ones.

The most satisfying moments on the album come in the three instrumental tracks when the combined effect of their playing styles is most impressive. "New South Africa" is a reworking of an earlier Fleck piece. To the untrained ear, it is impossible to tell who is playing the solo and who is accompanying. The seamless transition speaks to Fleck and Washburn's ability to communicate intimately as a couple. It is even more impressive to watch them play the song. (eTown has several webisodes available on YouTube that

## Béla Fleck's virtuosity and Abigail Washburn's passionate lyrics combine to re-imagine traditional songs and to create new ones.

feature interviews and performances by Fleck and Washburn.) Their effortless playing is highlighted by their silent communication through facial expressions and playful affections. It is a joy to watch them make music together. The buoyancy of "New South Africa" reflects not only the hope of a country being reborn but also the joy of making music together.

"Banjo Banjo" is no "Dueling Banjos." Instead, it is a conversation between two people and two instruments. The song features several themes that are echoed between Fleck and Washburn. Each new section is introduced by an arpeggiated figure that they trade every four notes as the figure moves through several octaves. The echoing and trading of motives demonstrates the sharing of ideas between two people. In a nod to Fleck's namesake, they also arrange two pieces by Béla Bartok. "For Children, Nos. 3 and 10" displays the rippling sound created by the combination of their pick-

ing styles. It is fascinating to hear Bartok played on the banjo; it is also a testament to their ability to re-imagine the possibilities of the banjo and, perhaps, even a marriage.

The communication between the two banjos continues as Fleck and Washburn retell old stories on this album. "Railroad" is a bluesy reworking of "I'll Be Working on the Railroad." Fleck told Washburn they should record it after hearing her sing a minor version of the song to their son. They created an adult version of the song that speaks to the hard work and injustice railroad workers experienced. The constant sixteenth-note picking mimics the endless work of the laborer, with the blues notes and yodeling acknowledging the influences of African-American and Appalachian music on the song.

"Pretty Polly" is a murder ballad in which the bride, Polly, is taken to the forest and killed by her fiancé, Willie. Its inclusion, along with other traditional songs, pays homage to the Appalachian banjo legacy. Washburn's ethereal voice emerges from the banjo playing like a ghost of the murdered bride. Rather than rushing through the song, as bluegrass versions such as Ralph Stanley's do, Washburn takes her time to contemplate why Willie wants to kill Polly. The pared-down banjo accompaniment supports the narrative rather than outshining it. Before finishing the last three lines of the song, Washburn inserts several cries of "Oh Pretty Polly" which rise to an octave and respond to a brief banjo solo, a foreshadowing of "Shotgun Blues."

"Shotgun Blues" is one of the original songs on the album that Fleck and Washburn wrote to tell new stories. In the liner notes, Washburn explains that she wanted to seek retribution for the women who have been killed in traditional murder ballads. It begins with Fleck and Washburn exchanging thumps on the head of the banjo, imitating a shotgun firing. Washburn picks a unison line during her vocal solo that is as straightforward as her lyrics. Fleck's solos during the instrumental breaks are as skittish and fast as might be a man who wants to escape a woman's wrath. The pairing of these murder ballads speaks to Fleck and Washburn's ability to



acknowledge the role that old-time banjo music has played in their musical development and to demonstrate modern interpretations of the instrument.

The final song on the album is a perfect package of their musical life together. "Bye Bye Baby Blues" takes its name from the chorus originally written by George "Little Hat" Jones. Like the traditional wedding saying, Fleck and Washburn take something old and marry it to something new—original lyrics on the verses—and they borrow the chorus, which happens to be blue(s). Washburn plays a cello banjo in the style of walking blues to accompany Fleck's solo that finishes out the song. Like much of the music both artists are known for, the song moves through several musical styles, from Randy Newman story-telling to the blues to pop-inflected jazz. It ends with a joyful punctuation of a few baby babbles from their son, Juno. The inclusion of Juno's babbling is a beautiful way to honor the reason for the album's creation, to make music together.

This album is about more than just great banjo music. The virtuosic playing and the fusion of old and new styles make for a musically satisfying listening experience. But the ease with which the couple plays together comes not just from stage experience but from the familiarity created by a long relationship. Some people like to classify Fleck and Washburn's music as

"roots" music, because it draws from a variety of old musical traditions. This is appropriate not just for the musical genre but also because making music as a family has always been a common pastime. Families made music together when a parent sang lullabies to a sleeping child, when a family sang work songs in a field, or when a family joined together in a festival or celebration. Fleck and Washburn continue that tradition in this album and demonstrate how beautiful music is when it is made by those who love one another.

Béla Fleck and Abigail Washburn depart from the stereotypical "dueling banjos" routine to educate audiences about the unique possibilities of the banjo. The music inspires listeners to find new ways of communicating age-old ideas. This is good and worthwhile but, in the end, it is the joy and beauty of a family making music that is the success story of this album. ♣

**Jennifer Forness** is choir director at Fisher Middle School and Ewing High School in Ewing, New Jersey. She lives in Princeton, New Jersey, with her husband and daughter.



## REPEAT CHECKUP

“There was never yet Philosopher  
that could endure the Toothache patiently.”

*Much Ado About Nothing*, V.i. 35–36

At the root, in the *o* of *howl*,  
the un-Novocained pain of excavation,

no patience grows for poetry,  
no pithy acceptance of oratory endurance.

The stoics are liars,  
their lips trembling

with the same terse curses  
and angry anathemas

toward anyone sporting drills  
or orthodontia.

Listen to Leonato:  
open your mouth and scream.

Pity each thirty-two  
enameled square of pain.

Afterwards, you can shoot up  
with amnesia or

meditate on your reconstructed memory or  
compose insightful epics on

the ontological components  
of suffering and the human shriek.

Marjorie Maddox



# A More Modest Denomination

Mark D. Williamson

**A**S A PASTOR IN THE AGE OF THE SOCIAL network, I can't respond to every parishioner who voices distress on my Facebook news feed. But when Derrick, a law-enforcement officer in my congregation, wrote that he was considering "making targeted donations to [his] home church that can't be kicked up to the ELCA," I figured it was time to pay him and his wife a visit.

Derrick, like over 36,000 others, had viewed a one-minute video, posted by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, featuring church-wide staff holding a die-in style demonstration at the denomination's Chicago headquarters following the grand jury's non-indictment of the white officer who shot and killed—under much disputed circumstances—an unarmed black teenager, Michael Brown, in Ferguson, Missouri. The video includes a few moments from a prayer service in the lobby and then cuts to images of the sixty or so staff members lying still in the grass, with one individual sitting upright in a cruciform "hands-up" position.

Only those who were there can know the full content and context of what took place. Derrick's interpretation of what he saw on the video was that the ELCA leadership, from its safe (he would say protected) distance had "taken a side" against law enforcement officers and their families. Sitting in their living room that Sunday night in Advent, I heard Derrick voice feelings of anger and hurt, and a sense that he and his colleagues who regularly put their lives at risk for others had been judged, devalued, and betrayed by this group of strangers who represented the denomination. When we had arrived at the heart of the matter, Derrick said, "If I'm in a high risk situation where my training calls for split-second action, and I fire my weapon, and he happens to

be black and I'm white, and now I'm living with the fact that I killed a man, is the church going to turn its back on me?"

Judging from the extensive comment thread, Derrick was far from alone in his interpretation. (Notably, when I asked him about Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton's statement, he found it appropriate and pastoral. "She said we needed to pray for everyone," he said.) Rightness or wrongness aside, the action of these staff members raises questions about how the ELCA can most wisely live into its vision of being a public church.

This perennial impulse of the churchwide organization—"We need to say something or do something about x!"—can be traced partly to the ELCA's original self-conception as being the big, united, "new" Lutheran church on the US scene. Even if it was something of an exaggeration to say that American Lutherans had united with the birth of the ELCA, the possibilities for "the fourth largest Protestant church in the United States" finally to have some real influence in Washington and society at large seemed endless. But as Edgar R. Trexler, a former editor of *The Lutheran* magazine, eventually concludes in his history of the ELCA's formation, *Anatomy of a Merger*, "[T]he emphasis on forming a 'new' Lutheran church was the new church's biggest liability... It was an optimistic word, suggesting that this new entity could do whatever it set out to accomplish. In some ways, a 'wish-list' kind of church was created" (1991, 257).

One could likewise argue that a tradition of imprecision around the "three expressions" ecclesiology of the ELCA itself opens the way for bureaucratic overreach. Early on, congregation, synod, and churchwide organization were commonly described as three "equal" expressions, a kind of pseudo-doctrine, reflective of



compromise by predecessor bodies. When misunderstood—as a metaphor of scale, authority, or power—this legacy of “equal” expressions can lead those who work for the churchwide entity, or the synods for that matter, to believe that they have a mandate to make statements, sometimes hastily, on every social and political issue under the sun.

Article VII of the Augsburg Confession, of course, stresses that the church exists first and foremost as an event. “[The church] is the assembly of all believers among whom the gospel is purely preached and the holy sacraments are administered according to the gospel.” The vast majority of the time, this event takes place in the local congregation. No less do Lutherans affirm that when we gather around Word and Sacrament we are united with the church universal across time and space.

“Congregations find their fulfillment in the universal community of the Church, and the universal Church exists in and through congregations,” states Chapter 3 of the ELCA’s Constitution on the nature of the church. Taken together, this confessional ecclesiology, which is both evangelical and catholic, reveals the synodical and churchwide expressions—so often groping for a more profound ontology—to be rather humbly positioned “in the middle.” While their work remains critically important in building capacity for mission at the local level, extending the congregation’s generosity, and in facilitating cooperation, including internationally, the character of these expressions is decidedly instrumental, at least most of the time. Synods and the churchwide organization are the church’s bridge builders.

On a more pragmatic level, if the ELCA wants to continue on its course of becoming a much smaller, monolithically liberal denomination, akin to certain other Mainline denominations in the US, it can disregard Derrick and the others it alienates by taking predictable sides at an official level on wedge issues in American society. It can become a tribe of the like-minded with a Lutheran brand mark. Such a path makes for a more comfortable and routinely affirming experience for the insiders who remain. But it also

translates into a body whose one foundation has become obscured, a church less resourced for reaching evangelically outside of its own ranks.

SOME MIGHT ARGUE THAT, WITH THE POST-2009 departures and the formation of a breakaway denomination like the North American Lutheran Church, the ship has already sailed on the original vision of the ELCA as a broad, unified Lutheran church body. However, we can still uphold this vision if our churchwide expression can show restraint at the right times and maintain a sharp focus. In recent years, a number of encouraging signs that the denomination is coming around to a more modest self-conception have appeared. Presiding Bishop Emeritus Mark Hanson, going back at least to 2009, put a great deal of effort into helping the church give fresh consideration to what he called the “ecology of the ELCA.” This organic metaphor connected well with another term historically used in the denomination to describe the relationship of its various parts: interdependence. Whereas the subtext of “equality” language often had to do with matters of authority, asserting against congregationalism the importance of the synodical and churchwide institutions, Hanson’s shifting of the conversation toward ecology, sustainability, and interdependence placed the emphasis on relationship.

In 2011, a “Living into the Future Together” (LIFT) taskforce, commissioned by the ELCA Church Council two years earlier to study the ELCA’s ecology in light of changing societal trends, presented its report, which was adopted by the churchwide assembly that August. Recommendations included a simplification of the churchwide organization’s structure, a (qualified) hiatus on bringing new social statements to assembly, and shifting assemblies from a biennial to a triennial cycle. Synods were designated “...this church’s chief catalysts for mission and outreach,” and the primary role of the churchwide organization, according to a summary of research findings provided in an appendix, should be “to support synods in their local mission efforts, to continue to guide the global mission work of this church and to continue to support a system of lay, lay rostered and clergy leadership development.” Stated



the report, in sum, "...this church needs to renew its focus on developing disciples who understand the primary function of the church *as engaging the local community for the sake of the Gospel*" (emphasis mine).

Does a more modest denomination necessarily mean a less publically engaged church, one that no longer takes seriously its prophetic calling in society? No, it does not. It simply means that our energy and resources shift toward the local, where people get to know each other on a deeper level than they can on a YouTube channel. Stephen Bouman, Executive Director for ELCA Congregational and Synodical Mission and a longtime champion of broad-based community organizing, writes near the end of his book *The Mission Table*, "Mission initiative needs to return to the grass roots of the church in renewed relationships among local congregations (Lutheran and ecumenical partners) and in rerooting the lives of our congregations and institutions of the church in their communities.... All mission is local" (2013, 97).

Where attachments are loose, trust can and will erode quickly. It doesn't take much. Every relationship is thicker on the local level. Just a few weeks before the ELCA posted its demonstration video, one of our congregation's west African members, a junior in high school named Ella, was detained by police as she was walking to work. The officer in question made her stop and put her hands up, demanding to know "where the rest of her gang was," and then transported her to a Victoria's Secret store to watch a surveillance video of a robbery that had just taken place. When it quickly became apparent that Ella was not the woman who had committed the theft—the suspect in the video was an African-American female *with dyed orange hair*—our member was released and permitted to go to work.

On the night I met with Derrick and his wife, I mentioned this incident as an example of how one of our own youth had been impacted by racial profiling in our community. He was aware of it. He also knew that the first person Ella had called when she got off work was her confirmation mentor, and how Ella's mentor had accompanied her and her mother to the police station the next day

to express their outrage. He knew that our senior pastor also had gotten involved, harnessing years of strong relations with the mayor to secure apologies from the chief of police and assurances that proper protocols would be followed in the future, including by the officer who had detained Ella. I could tell Derrick's empathy again lay with law enforcement. And yet, if he was disappointed with leaders in his own congregation advocating for Ella "against" police, disaffiliating or holding back offerings had not even entered his mind. In his home church, the connections were too rich, the spiritual investment in his family too deep.

The statement the same church made to and on behalf of Ella was concrete and purposeful. If change is called for on a more systemic level, the primary arena of action for us is DuPage United, our Industrial Areas Foundation affiliate. In the same way, across the ELCA, the local congregation, working in concert with its ecumenical and interfaith friends, *is* the frontline when it comes to doing justice and working for peace. We need a churchwide organization modest enough to be our supply chain, and much more rarely our mouthpiece. ✝

**Mark D. Williamson** is Associate Pastor of St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church in Wheaton, Illinois.

## Works Cited

- Bouman, Stephen P. *The Mission Table: Renewing Congregation and Community*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2013.
- Evangelical Lutheran Church of America. *Living into the Future Together: Renewing the Ecology of the ELCA*. Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, 2011. Available at: <http://liftelca.wordpress.com>.
- Trexler, Edgar R. *Anatomy of a Merger: People, Dynamics, and Decisions that Shaped the ELCA*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1991.



# The Shirt on Our Backs

Paul Willis

**G**ROWING UP, MY BROTHERS AND I SHARED and thus fought over an olive-green wool shirt with clumsy buttons. It was our grandfather's, from the First World War, and thus a prize. But it was also very scratchy, and thus more often admired than worn. Also, it was too big for any of us.

Our grandfather was a Fleischman whose parents came from East Prussia, where many of his fifteen brothers and sisters had been born. They emigrated in part to avoid the draft under Bismarck, and now here they were, farming in the Willamette Valley of Oregon, and called up to fight against speakers of their native tongue. I don't believe our grandfather made it past Fort Lewis, in Washington, mustered in and mustered out before he could be shipped overseas.

Still, the olive-green shirt held a kind of romance for all of us. We put it on to play army in the woods, and later on to backpack in the rain and snow of the Cascades. By the time we were through with it, oversized and scratchy as it may have been, the shirt had become a torn rag.

I think the shirt also attracted us because we had not really known our grandfather; he died when the oldest of us was not yet five years old. Even so, my earliest memory, before even the age of two, concerns him. In the living room of our grandparents' home in Anaheim, California, our grandfather had a favorite chair, a green stuffed rocker. Dark-green, as I recall, and not over-stuffed but lean and scuffed, with a worn, white doily at the head. During one particular family gathering, he left the room briefly and I crawled up into the dark-green chair by myself. When he came back, he made a generous to-do about my being in his place, and I became the center not only of his attention but also of the entire

room's (which is probably why the experience became pressed into my memory).

I wonder now if my climbing into my grandfather's chair, and my wearing of my grandfather's shirt, was an attempt to be this person who must have been so kind to us all. In her most recent birthday card to me, my eighty-nine-year-old aunt wrote that a few days after her father had died, I walked over to that green chair and looked at its emptiness in confusion, and that the sight of this made everyone else very sad.

Knowing him in my bones, then, but not really knowing him, I have been an eager collector of stories about my grandfather. Some of these I put in a poem, "Common Ground," that Garrison Keillor twice read on the radio, which was appropriate, I guess, since I probably had Keillor's voice in the back of my mind when I wrote it.

The poem begins with an anecdote about his moving to Anaheim to cultivate an orange grove: "How'd you learn to grow oranges, Bill?" / friends said. 'Well,' he said, 'I look at what // my neighbor does, and I just do the opposite.'" So matter-of-fact. So self-effacing. And yet there is a definite self being asserted.

Long after I wrote that poem, my aunt told me another story. Soon after they had arrived in Anaheim, one Sunday, when the morning service had just let out and people were talking amiably on the steps of the church, a man happened to say he'd heard that up in Portland, they rolled up the sidewalks every evening at six o'clock. "I wouldn't know," my grandfather said. "I was always in bed by then."

Our grandfather had moved to Anaheim because he had married a girl from there, an Urbigkeit, and she had nagged him until he agreed to bring their family out of the rain in Oregon and back to southern California. This was during the



Depression, and once they got there the ten-acre orange grove wasn't enough to support them. So he worked for a laundry during the nights and, in his optimistic way, "Struck it rich in pocket knives."

But they didn't completely escape the rain. One winter, the torrents came and the house flooded, and he carried his children, one at a time, waist-deep through the orange grove to higher ground. Perhaps that is the image I like best, a little like those nineteenth-century paintings of Jesus, carrying the lambs in his bosom.

Is it possible that our parents and grandparents still carry us, still enfold us in their arms, long after they're dead and gone? My mother, who made that trip across the brown floodwaters in his embrace, has now crossed that final flood

by herself, and sometimes I feel that my brothers and I are left here in the rapids alone, trying to carry the ones who have in turn been entrusted to us. But that feeling ignores the fact that in having been carried we still are carried, in memory if not in actual, tangible presence. The olive-green shirt, though worn to rags, still rests upon our shoulders, and the dark-green chair, though empty, is full. ♣

Paul Willis is Professor of English at Westmont College and has recently served as poet laureate for the city of Santa Barbara.

## WEEK OF RAIN

I distract myself: open blinds, invite  
the light and life's bleary traffic  
into this morning's havoc of blue  
coffee mug breaking in porcelain sink.

Google: exhaustion.  
Google: fatigue, symptoms of—  
No one cares when I say  
*this city has no gumption,*

*no green. Even with all this rain.*  
Even with all this rain, I join in.  
I act like rain: tremble around town  
until my boots soak through to socks,

find grace only in observation:  
the neighbor's cellar door,  
its whitewash thin as an old t-shirt, peculiar  
flesh peeking through—

Jennifer Raha



# Popcorn and the Passion

Joel Kurz

I MUST CONFESS MY HERESIES FROM THE start: I see, on average, only one movie in a theater a year, and when I do, I fast. I have never understood munching popcorn and slurping soda while undergoing a catharsis, but I guess that says more about what I choose to watch than anything else.

Imagine my surprise then on seeing cast members of an outdoor “passion play” hawking popcorn and ice cream before the production began. *Really*, I thought, *indulge in comfort food while taking in the bitter suffering and death of Jesus?* Maybe Roman centurions and members of the Sanhedrin were selling snacks for that day’s entertainment, but I can’t stomach eating during the unfolding betrayal and brutality. Granted, I wasn’t very keen on attending in the first place, given the tendency for such things to be sensationalized and sentimentalized, but I went because the evening retreat schedule was cleared to encourage attendance. (I will admit to smirking at breakfast the next morning when a fellow retreatant described it as “Jesus on Prozac.”)

The problem, as I see it, is the stark dissonance between mild amusement and representations of human suffering, whether endured by an average person or by the Son of God. Does *passion* (suffering) beheld lead to *compassion* (suffering with) even for those accustomed to a steady flow of visual cruelty and violence, as most of us are these days? The authors of *Compassion: Reflections on the Christian Life* (Image Books, 2005) observe that human suffering usually “comes to us in a way and on a scale that makes identification practically impossible... the most obvious response is to invest no more energy in it than in brushing your teeth before going to bed” (54–55). Even for those whose faith is centered on the redemptive suffering of Jesus, it is difficult

to feel a connection with the grinding afflictions of fellow humans near or far. Carl Sandburg, in his incendiary poem against revivalist Billy Sunday, “To a Contemporary Bunkshooter,” drew a sharp distinction between the financially-backed “peddler of a second-hand gospel” who ignored the suffering of people living in shanties and “this Jesus of Nazareth” who had “real blood” spurting in “red drops where the spear of the Roman soldier rammed in between the ribs.” Maybe we Christians have gotten so used to seeing depictions of the crucifixion that the shock factor and physicality of it is gone. And maybe we have gotten so used to focusing on Jesus’ hours on the cross that we fail to recognize them as the culmination of his whole ministry of taking on the suffering grief and sorrow of the afflicted ones he came to heal and make whole.

In this regard, nothing has been so powerfully corrective for me as the 2014 Irish film *Calvary*. Beginning with the words of St. Augustine—“*Do not despair; one of the thieves was saved. Do not presume; one of the thieves was damned.*”—in white letters on a black screen, the film depicts the complexity of suffering a priest encounters during the final week of his life. The opening scene is set in the confessional booth where a parishioner vows to Fr. James (Brendan Gleeson) that he will kill him in a week. The parishioner vows to kill this good priest who has done nothing wrong in retaliation against a priest who made him suffer in silent agony through years of sexual abuse. The bad priest is now dead, and since murdering a bad priest does not make much of a statement, he has decided to take the life of a good priest free from guilt. The film goes on to explore not only the personal emotional strain with which Fr. James has to contend, but also the distress of others in his



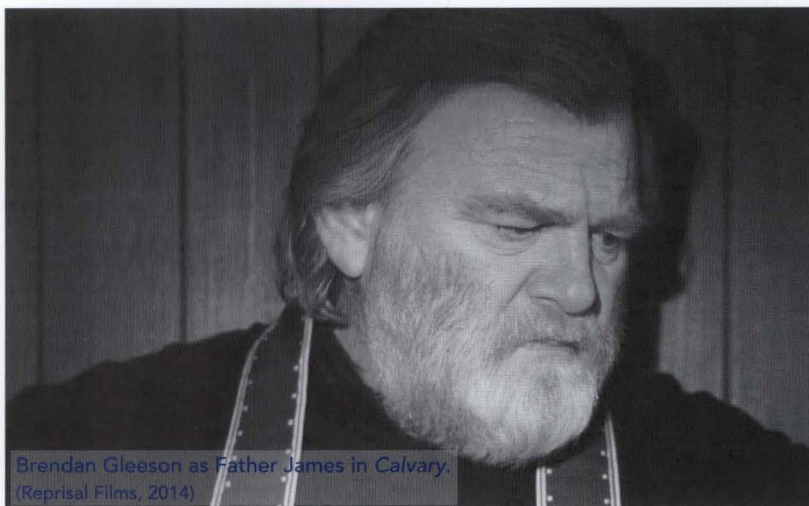
village who suffer from addictions, economic hardship, fear of death, sudden death, living an ongoing death, racism, repressed and expressed sexual passion, and meaninglessness. Life is heavy and weighted with grief for all.

At one point during the week, Fr. James decides to flee the village and go to Dublin, but after seeing a coffin about to be loaded on his flight, he decides to accept his fate. He returns to the village to face not only his own Calvary but those of others as well. When the fateful day arrives, he says in a phone conversation with a family member that people focus more on sins than on virtues. When asked what his greatest virtue is, he answers “forgiveness.”

Even though I watched the film on a small screen from my sofa, I am grateful I didn’t have a snack in one hand and a drink in the other. I had no idea how intensely the ending would affect me. My empty hands crossed at my chest as it heaved with sobs. My voice kept choking out “No!” as tears streamed down my cheeks. The ensuing scenes of those other souls continuing in suffering, indifference, and forgiveness contrast with Fr. James’s absence from the places he inhabited and link profoundly with Christ and his Calvary.

Writing in the *Small Catechism* about the Sacrament of the Altar, Luther advised that “fasting and bodily preparation are certainly fine outward training” for partaking in Jesus’ given body and shed blood in the holy meal. I grew up with this practice of fasting and continue to do so. It teaches me about “doing without” and puts me in solidarity with others who do so in a variety of circumstances, often not chosen. It

forces me to hunger and thirst not only for food and drink but also for righteousness, recalling that those who do so will be filled (Matthew 5:6). It instructs me that the Lord desires fasting from the bonds of wickedness and the yoke of oppression on behalf of sharing food with the hungry, bringing in the homeless, covering the naked, and meeting the needs of the afflicted, so that light will rise in the darkness and gloom become



as the noonday (see Isaiah 58:6–11). It reminds me that fasting is not just for Lent but year-round for Christ’s people who live in the way of his cruciform death and transforming resurrection. It points to the convergence of *passion and compassion*, of suffering and healing, of fasting and feasting, of partaking the flesh and blood of Jesus and being raised up to eternity on the last day (John 6:54)! ✠

Joel Kurz is pastor of Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Warrensburg, Missouri.



## SALT

It drinks water from the air, the steamy  
pot lid and the cradle of my sweating palm.  
On the kitchen table, rice grains fatten  
in the salt shaker, sulky as slugs. Nick  
my finger and the thin, transparent  
skin slip smarts with it. Leave it out,  
all flavor's lost.

Grandma drops a white pinch where potatoes  
simmer on the kerosene stove. She misses  
her sister, dead in Norway, the stiff  
hay racks and the water's steep black edge.

The round box with its little girl flaunting  
an umbrella, her saucy skirt flared, one foot  
placed with confidence before her,  
goes back on the shelf. I taste the time  
I'm grown, the abrading thrill,  
the sharp saltiness of it.

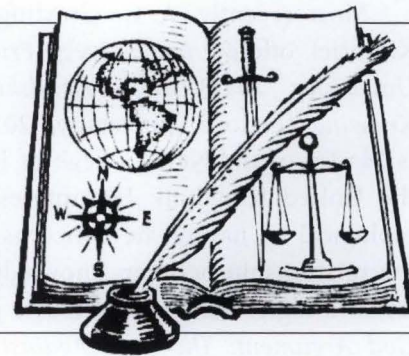
Diane Scholl



## Reviewed in this issue...

A. C. Grayling *Friendship*

Samuel Kimbriel *Friendship as Sacred Knowing*



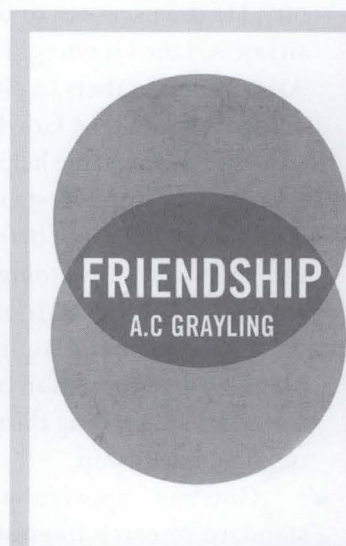
### Friends to What End?

LIKE MANY WORDS POPULATING THE English language, “friend” is in a state of flux. Social media platforms such as Facebook have now turned friend, once strictly a noun, into a verb. In addition to being a friend, one can now friend someone else. Perhaps of greater concern than the fact that friend now functions as multiple parts of speech is that its meaning as a noun is also changing. At one time in the not so distant past, a friend was someone defined by an ongoing relationship of measured intimacy. You not only shared trivial matters with that person but also your struggles and pain. The word friend, as a noun, in the realm of social media can mean something far more casual and thus may include hundreds of people with whom you once shared only a passing existence in contexts such as high school. Looking

at the rising number of recent titles considering the nature of friendship, we are of the impression that we are not alone in our confusion about what the word friend has come to mean.

Lest we think such concerns are new, reflections upon the concept of friendship, at least in the West, are common in the writings of Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas. One noted treatise on the topic, *Spiritual Friendship*, was offered by Aelred of Rievaulx in the twelfth century. In the introduction to a new edition of Aelred’s text, Dennis Bill, CSsR, notes that Christian friendship “is all about extending the fellowship of Christ to one another” (Ave Maria, 2008). This theme then appears in modern studies of friendship, such as Gilbert C. Meilaender’s *Friendship* (University of Notre Dame, 1981) and Paul J. Waddell’s *Friendship and the*

*Moral Life* (University of Notre Dame, 1989) and *Becoming Friends* (Brazos Press, 2002).



FRIENDSHIP

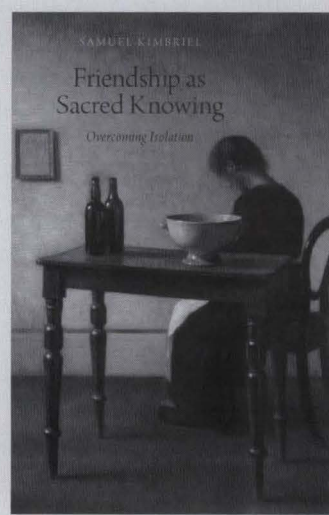
A.C. Grayling

Yale University Press

2013

248 pages

\$26.00



FRIENDSHIP AS

SACRED KNOWING

Samuel Kimbriel

Oxford University Press

2014

240 pages

\$74.00

Reviewed by

Andrew G. Deskins

and Todd C. Ream



Most recently, A. C. Grayling and Samuel Kimbriel offered respectively *Friendship* (Yale University, 2013) and *Friendship as Sacred Knowing* (Oxford University, 2014). Grayling is Master of the New College of Humanities in the United Kingdom. His interests are epistemological in nature; he concerns himself with the relationship between knowledge, metaphysics, and logic. Earlier in 2013, he published *The God Argument: The Case Against Religion and for Humanism* (Bloomsbury) in which he offers a philosophical grounding for the “new Atheist” movement. It is thus not a surprise that this atheistic perspective is apparent in *Friendship*. In contrast, Samuel Kimbriel is a Teaching Fellow in Philosophical Theology at the University of Nottingham with interests in metaphysics and knowledge/perception. With names like John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock dotting the acknowledgments in his book, a safe assumption is that he arrives at different conclusions than Grayling.

The authors’ religious perspectives are not the only thing that sets apart these books. Although both authors deal with many of the same sources, Grayling’s approach is like the person who goes to the grocery store and wanders the aisles looking for good stuff to add to the cart. Kimbriel’s approach, in contrast, is like the person who goes to the grocery store with a list of specific items to get and accordingly attacks the aisles. Grayling’s approach is an erudite meandering through philosophical and literary texts, trying to discover the special nature of friendship. Kimbriel is more focused on a specific task; he sees the brokenness of human relationships and sets out to explain that the remedy for this brokenness is friendship with God, or more appropriately, God’s friendship with us.

Grayling’s book is divided into three parts. He follows up a quick historical tour through the history of the philosophy of friendship with a tour through literary and historical examples of friendship, along with a personal reflection on everything he has just surveyed. He predictably begins with Plato and Aristotle and unpacks his critique from there. He appreciates much in their work but ultimately argues that their

examinations of friendship are incomplete. He seems particularly frustrated with the amount of mental energy spent by subsequent philosophers and literary writers on Aristotle’s definition of a friend as “another self.” He argues that the statement was “more or less an aside” and believes it has had too much influence on setting the terms of discussion of friendship. As he works his way through later philosophical writings and his own personal experiences, he develops what is, for him, a much more psychologically satisfying understanding of friendship.

In contrast, Kimbriel begins with an expansive discussion, via Charles Taylor, of the disengaged or buffered self that defines and plagues modernity. He then sets out to offer his remedy for this sickness. Like Grayling, Kimbriel employs Plato, Aristotle, and others to establish the groundwork of his critique. Like Grayling, he also recognizes that their work, while helpful, has limitations. For example, Kimbriel’s strongest chapter emphasizes that God’s act of befriending us through the incarnation is an ontological breakthrough to a realized definition of friendship. He then moves on to Augustine and Aquinas, not surprisingly, to build on the foundation of Plato and Aristotle as a means of defending the rationality of this incarnational friendship.

Grayling, apparently stepping beyond his standard research interests, wants to move away from a strictly technical discussion of friendship in favor of a more personal approach. He lauds Cicero’s *De amicitia* precisely because it is “richly human” while still using the framework of Aristotle and others. As an aside, he also admires Cicero’s desire to avoid “pedantic accuracy,” an accusation some might make against Kimbriel. Of all the material he discusses, there is one type of source for which Grayling, not surprisingly, has little to no use, theology. Aquinas’s thought is dismissed as a “barrage of casuistries” (73), and he is interested only in the works of Augustine that focus on the “notably secular” accounts of friendship in the *Confessions*.

Furthermore, theology’s contribution to the discussion must be discredited because it has been historically unsupportive of the relationship between homosexuality and friendship. At one



point, Grayling basically describes Christianity as a parasite that infected Europe and suppressed the sexual expression of friendship (156). In his broader conversation, he recognizes the importance of the moral/ethical language involved in discussions of friendship “at least when they are sufficiently down to earth.” However, he ultimately arrives at a description of friendship as a “mutual tie” that is supportive, forgiving, and durable in nature (170–71). This point surfaces at the specific “psychological” shift he makes at the end of this work where he writes, “The answer lies in the psychological fact underlying human sociality” (170). Friendship is thus a marvel in that it enhances human individuality and helps develop the person’s ability to fit into the various social groups or the various “personae” as he describes them.

Kimbriel sets out to articulate the validity of that which Grayling dismisses. He argues that any treatment of friendship without a discussion of the incarnation is casuistry and sophistry. The usual philosophical suspects are trotted out: Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero; even Heidegger and Sartre, to a lesser extent, join the list. Like Grayling, Kimbriel goes to great lengths to describe how all of their efforts fall short of a complete epistemology of friendship. “Disengagement’s metaphysical poverty is embodied in our practices of love” (35). Contra Grayling, this failure does not lead to a more psychological/emotive (or humanist for Grayling) definition of friendship. Rather, it opens the door to a proper incarnational understanding of friendship, as seen especially in the Johannine account. “Because of the Son’s role in creation and because of his intertwined dependence with the Father, he is able to catch human life up into this love. This is the kind of agency that is being exercised in the discourse of friendship” (67).

Augustine and Aquinas are not dismissed; rather, they are the linchpins that link the philosophical discourse to the reality of the incarnation. Kimbriel proposes that the difficulties that arise in the “secular” discussion find their solution in Augustine and Aquinas. “The gift of grace for Aquinas comes in two forms, both of which have to do with movement. The

first... involves the Divine activity of moving the creature either to some new knowledge or to a particular activity... [and the second] imparts, as Aquinas says, a quality to the soul, enabling it to move itself” (141). Kimbriel’s incarnational account of friendship emphasizes that the God

Friendship is thus a marvel in that  
it enhances human individuality  
and helps develop the person’s  
ability to fit into the various social  
groups or the various “personae”  
as he describes them.

who creates the world will not allow humans to completely disengage from each other or from God, in the manner of Taylor’s buffered soul. All love reflects this divine reality whether we want to admit it or not. “But in [the Gospel of] John, it is friendship which brings this dynamic to its completion, for here the very character of God has become incarnate” (171).

As a whole, Grayling’s text is more engaging than Kimbriel’s. Its eclectic and accessible style allows for an almost conversational tone that individuals prepared by a wide array of disciplines can appreciate. In particular, the narratives, be they literary or historical, throughout his work offer something for everyone. For example, in chapter six, arguably Grayling’s most technical, he moves from Kant to Hume to Voltaire to Adam Smith within approximately eight pages. As a result, he avoids bogging his readers down in the details which often accompany discussions of figures such as these.

However, Grayling also arguably passes over some of the details that can allow readers fully to appreciate the philosophical offerings of one figure, not to mention how those offerings connect to the next. Some readers will look at Grayling’s five-page discussion of Kant as insufficient and



thus incapable of offering even the most casual of readers a surface-level understanding of Kant. Some readers will also look at that five-page discussion as insufficient in terms of what comes next. For example, Grayling moves with almost no transition from his discussion of Kant to a discussion of David Hume (100). While such a move makes sense to the student of philosophy, Grayling's accessible style is incapable of appropriately helping more novice readers make connections from one to the next.

Kimbriel's text arguably struggles with the opposite challenge. Simply stated, his relatively inaccessible style is not for everyone. One could even argue that his work is likely of limited accessibility, and thus appeal, to individuals not schooled at some reasonable level in philosophical theology. As previously mentioned, Kimbriel frames his account around the ideas drawn from Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age*. The physical heft of Taylor's invaluable tome has likely scared off as many readers as the dense nature of its content. Regardless, Kimbriel begins his discussion of Taylor in the first paragraph of chapter one and assumes a certain prior knowledge of that text. Compounding this challenge is Kimbriel's writing style. Whereas some may rightfully criticize Grayling's style as too conversational, Kimbriel is in no way susceptible to such criti-

cism. Kimbriel's sentences and paragraphs can prove to be punishingly long.

The larger difference between the two books, of course, is where they begin and thus where they end in terms of their respective explorations of friendship. Despite the dismissive posture A. C. Grayling takes toward theologically focused forms of friendship, his otherwise wide array of beginnings thus allows for a wide array of ends. According to Samuel Kimbriel, the Church's teachings on friendship begin and end with the incarnation. Friendship under these terms means that our relations with others are grounded in the reality of a God who, out of love, took human form, and that we are called to a love that reflects the love of our Lord and Savior. ✠

**Andrew G. Deskins** serves on the faculty at The Episcopal School of Jacksonville, Florida. **Todd C. Ream** serves on the faculty at Taylor University. They met and became friends over twenty years ago while graduate students at Duke University.



# THE CRESSET on the web

thecresset.org

Advent-Christmas 2014 | Michaelmas 2014 | Frost 2014 | Social Justice 2014 | Fall 2014

Read the latest issue online.

Campus Conversations about Sexuality and the Church

Martha Greene Eads

Subscribe to The Cresset.

Request a free sample issue.

Find your favorite essays and columns from back issues.

Distinguish, Not Divorce:  
One Christian Exegete's Take on His Task

Cover Art

Cyrus Manyard Running  
Untitled, undated.  
Ink, watercolor, and graphite on board, 5 1/2 x 9 1/4 inches.

Connect!

Like 1056 Follow

Most Popular Articles

Imagining America: Mobsin Hamid's The Reluctant Fundamentalist

## Submission Guidelines

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

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

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.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Long View*. London: Secker and Warburg, 1974.

## ON THE POETS

Linda Nemeč Foster is the author of nine collections of poetry, including *Amber Necklace from Gdansk* and *Talking Diamonds*. Her poems have appeared in *The Georgia Review*, *Nimrod*, *America*, and elsewhere.

Bryan Dietrich is Professor of English at Newman University and the author of a book-length study on comics, *Wonder Woman Unbound*, and six books of poems. He is also co-editor of *Drawn to Marvel*, the world's first anthology of superhero poetry.

Laurie Klein is author of *Bodies of Water*, *Bodies of Flesh*, which won the Thomas Merton Prize for Poetry of the Sacred. She co-founded *Rock & Sling: A Journal of Literature, Art, and Faith*. Her poems have appeared in *The Southern Review*, *New Letters*, *Ascent*, *Commonweal*, and other journals.

Marjorie Maddox is Director of Creative Writing and Professor of English at Lock Haven University. She has published nine collections of poetry, five chapbooks, and over 450 poems, stories, and essays in journals and anthologies.

Jennifer Raha is an aspiring poet. She currently has poems forthcoming in *Triquarterly*, *Foothills*, and *The Santa Clara Review*.

Diane Scholl is Professor of English at Luther College, where she teaches courses on poetry, American literature, modern British literature, and women's literature. Her hobbies and interests include biking in scenic Northeast Iowa.





VALPARAISO  
UNIVERSITY

**The Cresset**

1300 Chapel Drive  
Valparaiso, IN 46383-4525

NONPROFIT ORG  
US POSTAGE  
**PAID**  
VALPARAISO, IN  
PERMIT No. 3

ROBERT VEGA  
CHRISTOPHER CENTER  
VALPARAISO UNIVERSITY

# THE CRESSET

*IN THE NEXT ISSUE*

**THE 2014 LILLY FELLOWS PROGRAM  
NATIONAL CONFERENCE AND ADMINISTRATORS WORKSHOP**

Student Success in Church-Related Higher Education

**Bobby Fong**  
*Ursinus College*

**Patricia O'Connell Killen**  
*Gonzaga University*

Also featuring:

**"Under the Rose," an exhibit by Kenneth Steinbach**  
*Winner of the 2014 Arlin G. Meyer Prize in Visual Arts*

