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## The Cresset (Vol. LIV, No. 2)

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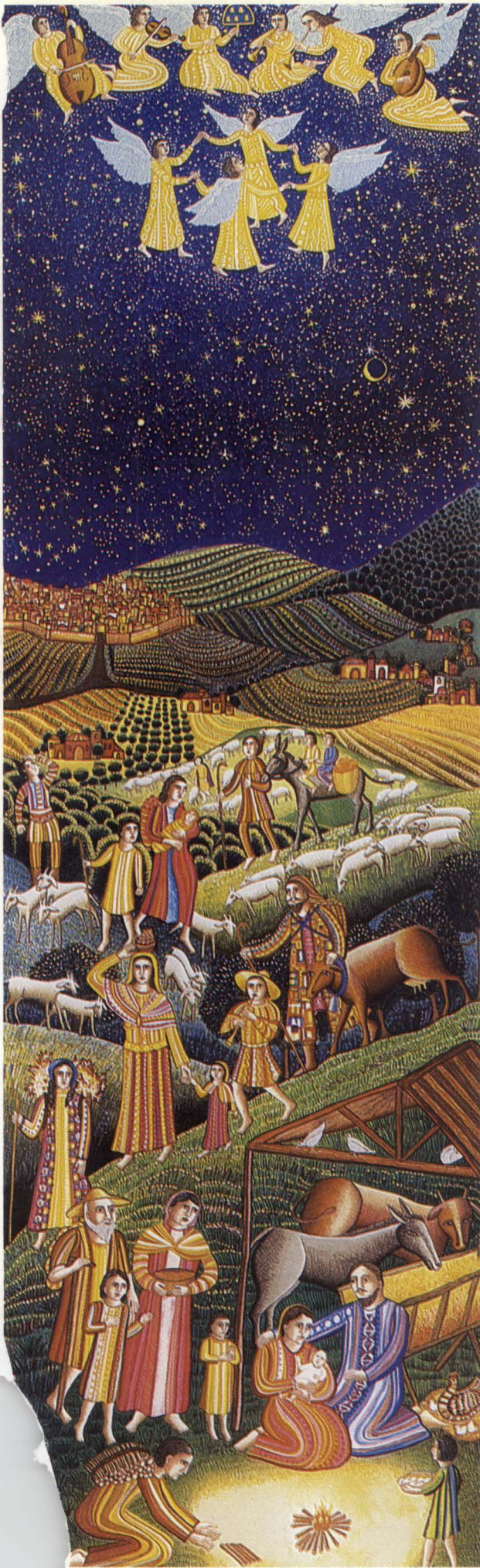
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# the Cresset

A Review of Literature, Arts and Public Affairs

December, 1990





# C<sup>the</sup>resset

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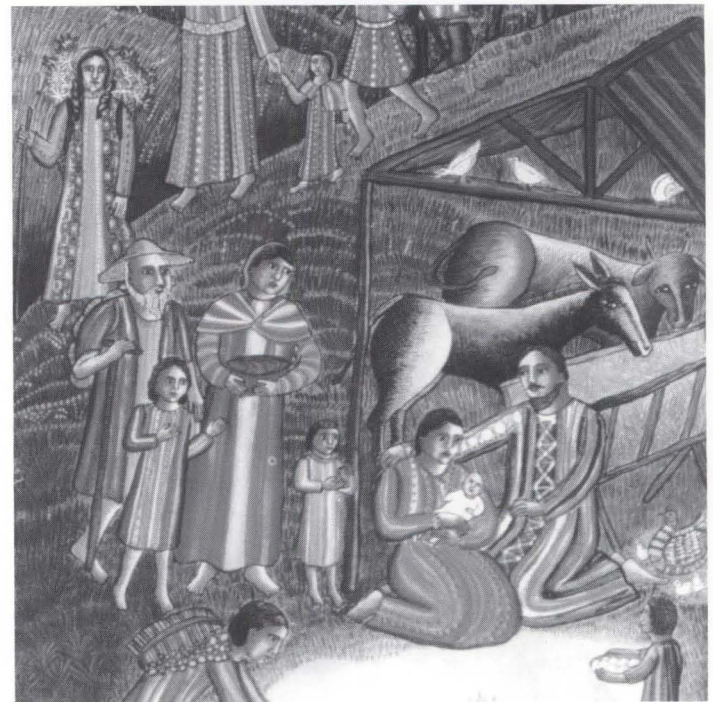
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Above: John August Swanson, b. 1938, American. *The Nativity*, Detail from serigraph, *The Triptych*, 38 1/2 x 11 3/4 inches.

Cover: John August Swanson, *The Nativity* and *The Shepherds*. Serigraph; both 38 1/2 x 11 3/4 inches.

Back Cover: John August Swanson, *The Epiphany* and *The Flight into Egypt*. Serigraph; both 38 1/2 x 11 3/4 inches.



# IN LUCE TUA

Comment by the Editor

## Art For Our Sake

It would be surprising if the editor of *The Cresset* were not thinking about art these days. At least, in the spaces of time and attention left over after worrying about war, taxes and the rising cost of gasoline. And jobless children and aging parents and degenerating environment and corrupt public officials and aimless government. Is it possible in all this welter to have thoughts about art, or the arts, as we are learning everywhere to call them?

Not only possible, but necessary. Especially that word *thoughts*, and maybe even ideas too. The recent discussions in the press about art have been focused on the political involvements of funding art, or even on the criminalization of selling or promoting art, and here and there we have been able to read ideas in this discussion. Our colleague, John Steven Paul, for instance, wrote in his article for *The Christian Century* that one of the most important functions of the arts is to provide for our culture the renewal that comes from the capacity to "examine, wonder and dream about ourselves." Thus, a sustaining support for the arts from the widest possible sector, the public sector, confirms our "nation's collective belief that not everything that needs to be said, sung, thought and dreamed has been." In our own pages, Edward Byrne, writing about specific issues of film censorship, has drawn our attention to important ideas about current challenges to the faith that artists will seek to explore the national identity with integrity. Writers about the arts have indeed sought to lead us to consider their meaning, to have ideas about the arts activities which surround us in such plentiful forms today.

In this issue of *The Cresset*, we have to some extent shifted the focus from these political and social ideas about art. One way to describe this might be to say that the issue is, for lack of a more felicitous term,

"arts-related." But another way to perceive it is to say that what you hold in your hand is art, as nearly as we can make it that. It is certainly an object, put together with human craft and technological capacity. The pages are a holder, a container for some art objects, direct and immediate.

The covers, with their reproduction of four pictures by Los Angeles artist John August Swanson, are probably the least surprising, in one sense. One is by now accustomed to seeing what almost anyone would call "art works" on *Cresset* covers. However, the fact that they have displaced the words that identify the magazine is no accident. Here, the images push the words off to one side, and ask us to see first, and to read later. They make an especially striking and direct appeal to our sense that we are in the presence of something of astonishing truth and beauty. The artist desires to bring us, as he says, "the wisdom and strength and comfort of our ancestors. . . to show the things that bring us together, not that make us different." And yet the details are not universal, but as particular as it is possible to be, each star glowingly itself, each donkey a veritable paradigm of donkeyness.

But the pictures are only a beginning. Russell Schulz-Widmar writes about art, that special kind we call hymns. His own eloquence points to four further artists—Franzmann, Brokering, Grindal and Vajda—all of them doing arts, for the church, for Christians to sing. Moving from paintings to hymns, one might ask whether the direction being traced is not closer and closer to a reality of art itself. If art like Swanson's aspires to have people know the things that bring us together, then hymns could be—at least in a perfect world—an almost perfect art. I know enough of the

sad divisions caused by differences about hymns, however, to know that such a hope indeed points more nearly to the Parousia than to the church here on earth. But the words of these hymn-writers give us the grounds on which to hope.

Hymns are only some of the music in church, and three writers have undertaken to make art themselves on that subject. Their talents and styles vary almost as much as their own stories, but taken together they are what I have called a garland, a weaving together of disparate items, the strands remaining separate, yet forming one new object. This section contains, by merest chance, what I regard as possibly the only extant published drawing by renowned Luther scholar, Roland Bainton. It is made part of the garland by permission of its owner and subject, Jerry Evenrud.

With Susan Fromberg Schaeffer's poem, *Krakow: Wawel Castle*, we come further and more deeply into the reasons for being involved with art at all. How does the creation of such a poem, with all its reference to suffering and evil, with all that it shows of pain and death, confusion and bitterness—what are those subjects doing here, in an issue that has, so far, been light and beauty and goodness? Here, I think, we come close to that incarnational aspect of art itself, in which the stuff of our world becomes more than itself when the artist shows it to us. "Sooner or later, the dragon always eats the lamb./It is a matter of waiting for the right lamb." The lines resonate with meaning, and meaning again, meaning which no other words (since they are mere translations of the chosen words) can explain or identify. It is Krakow's history, but it is our history, our truth.

Music more than any other art resists the push into language, and so, instead of words about music, we have some of the real thing. Though, of course, with that assertion, we are back into mysteries. Richard Hillert's composition for *The Cresset* is pure artistic creation. It is for your delight and enjoyment, both true and beautiful. But of course, for most of us it needs to be made into sound, co-created by a performer. So you will need someone to play it for you, or with you, or around you. Will it be more art—for itself—then, or less?

Three columns then, in our usual style. Professor Cismaru reflects, at the first anniversary of Samuel

Beckett's death, on the playwright whose doubts about the possibility of speech make him paradoxically the spokesman for silence. Michael Becker, writing for the 'Nation' column, comments on the dramatic appearances of a new economic villain. And David Black, writing a guest column for 'Sparks,' wonders whether information can substitute for knowledge.

And could we possibly have a better finish to the issue than one of Bernie Hillila's Christmas poems? I wait for this every year, and when I read it, it is as sure a sign as tasting the first spritz cookie, or seeing the first lighted star, that the season has truly begun.

There is a richness here for which I am grateful. The artists who have put their works thus into our hands have made a gesture of trust which, because we are familiar with it, we tend to ignore. They have trusted us to see, to hear, to read, to play, to understand—to be the receivers without which art ceases to be. And at Christmas, more than at any other time, we ought to be ready to learn about being good receivers.

Peace,

GME



#### Further notes about this issue

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"The kingdom of God": Hope Publishing Co., 380 South Main Place, Carol Stream, IL 60188.

"The law, I found": Jaroslav Vajda, c/o Morning Star Music Publishers, 3303 Meramec, Suites 205-207, St. Louis, MO 63118.

"Where shepherds lately knelt": ditto.

"God of the Sparrow": ditto.

"Alleluia, alleluia": Augsburg Fortress.

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## NOW THE JOYFUL CELEBRATION

Robert Frost, Emily Dickinson, Ernest Hemingway, Tom Wolfe: these are writers' names most twentieth century Americans recognize immediately. But how many have heard of F. Bland Tucker? A fairly prolific writer whose hymns are sung around the world, he was for several decades dean of American hymn-writers. Among men and women of letters, hymn-writers are probably the least known to the general public. Perhaps this is because hymns are modest by nature and do not seek attention. Erik Routley, who seemed to know more than anyone else about this sort of thing, liked to say that hymns are poems under perpetual vows of discipline and modesty. Generally they do not make news and their authors are not well known.

Recently there has been a remarkable revival in hymn-writing. This "hymn explosion," as it has been called, began in the late 60s and only recently has begun to abate. Several American Lutherans are among the hymn-writers who have been important to this phenomenon, and in this article we shall look at a few of them, restricting ourselves on this occasion to writers of words.

Martin Franzmann (1907-1976) heads our list as the last of the old writers and the first of the new generation. His "*Thy Strong Word Did Cleave the Darkness*"—which reveals and glad and healthful faith—is justifiably popular, along with the intense "*O God, O Lord of Heaven and Earth*." Surprisingly, the hymn that many people consider his finest is in neither the *LBW* or *LW*. It is, however, in recent Episcopal,

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Russell Schulz-Widmar, a VU graduate of 1966 and Distinguished Alumnus of 1988, is currently co-director of music with his wife Suzanne (VU, '67) at University United Methodist Church in Austin, Texas, and adjunct professor of church music at the Episcopal Seminary of the Southwest in that city. He served as chair of the Episcopal Hymnal 1982 project, and is now president of the Hymn Society in the United States and Canada. He is co-editor of the New Hymnal for Colleges and Schools, to be published in 1991 by Yale University Press. He recommends that readers who have the appropriate hymnals look up the texts as they are referred to in his article.

### Russell Schulz-Widmar

United Methodist, and Roman Catholic hymnals. What a scorcher this is! So strong is this medicine that the hymn probably never will become truly popular. We should have it available in our hymnals anyway.

Weary of all trumpeting, weary of all killing,  
weary of all songs that sing promise, non-fulfilling,  
we would raise, O Christ, one song, we would join in singing  
that great music pure and strong wherewith heaven is  
ringing.

Captain Christ, O lowly Lord, servant King, your dying  
bade us sheathe the foolish sword, bade us cease denying.  
Trumpet with your Spirit's breath through each height and  
hollow  
into your self-giving death call us all to follow.

To the triumph of the cross summon all the living;  
summon us to live by loss, gaining all by giving;  
suffering all, that we may see triumph in surrender;  
leaving all, that we may be partners in your splendor.

These words were written to be sung to an extraordinary march-tune by Hugo Distler, music that had been written to celebrate the annexation of Austria to Nazi Germany. What a mighty sanctification of this music is provided by Franzmann's hymn! This is modern theology turned to poetry. Certainly it is not subtle; the music would crush it if it were. Every line strides boldly, bravely, beseechingly, and yet we are never denied the pleasures of resonant language or a gracefully and logically turned argument.

It is a great sadness that Franzmann didn't live through the late 1970s and into the 80s, because these years provided a much more agreeable climate for hymn writing than the preceding decades did. His relatively small corpus of hymns has turned out to be very significant.

Two other Lutheran writers who are important to the hymnological scene today are Herbert Brokering (b 1926) and Gracia Grindal (b 1943). Brokering is a poet-pastor who considers writing part of his ministry. "Earth and All Stars," his first well-known hymn, confesses at the outset that it intends not to preach or pray, but only to serve and delight—

us, and we must assume God. This is not criticism of the hymn; certainly there's room in the repertoire for this kind of cheer and lightheartedness. Some editors have tried to 'improve' the hymn by tightening it up and correcting perceived inconsistencies. It's a maddening and futile effort; the hymn was pasted together from the beginning and that is its essence. Take it or leave it.

That most of it was written quickly is self-evident. It has an interior refrain used twice in each stanza—*Sing to the Lord a new song*—plus a different concluding refrain—*He has done marvellous things; I too will praise him with a new song*. The hymn stretched between these refrains consists of a list of things that ought to sing to the Lord a new song. What *shouldn't* be on this list? Randomness here becomes a virtue.

All the nouns are modified by the same adjective: *loud*. This is the most memorable—and to some people, the most alarming—feature of the hymn. But it doesn't matter that the list works less than perfectly. "Loud building workers"? "Loud sounding wisdom"? Not to worry! In this hymn the most memorable phrases are, of course, those that would work least well if the usual rules of grammar were applied.

Looking at this hymn, one might be tempted to label Brokering a lightweight. But then he went on to write "Thine the Amen." Here he created another list hymn, using some of the same techniques, but they accumulate in a different way and are brought to an entirely different end.

Thine the amen thine the praise  
alleluias angels raise  
thine the everlasting head  
thine the breaking of the bread  
thine the glory thine the story  
thine the harvest then the cup  
thine the vineyard then the cup  
is lifted up lifted up.

Thine the life eternally  
thine the promise let there be  
thine the vision thine the tree  
all the earth on bended knee  
gone the nailing gone the railing  
gone the pleading gone the cry  
gone the sighing gone the dying  
what was loss is lifted high.

Thine the truly thine the yes  
thine the table we the guest  
thine the mercy all from thee  
thine the glory yet to be  
then the ringing and the singing  
then the end of all the war  
thine the living thine the loving  
evermore evermore.

Thine the kingdom thine the prize  
thine the wonderful surprise  
thine the banquet then the praise  
then the justice of thy ways  
thine the glory thine the story  
then the welcome to the least  
then the wonder all increasing  
at thy feast at thy feast.

Thine the glory in the night  
no more dying only light  
thine the river thine the tree  
then the Lamb eternally  
then the holy holy  
celebration jubilee  
thine the splendor thine the brightness  
only thee only thee.

The list is immediately apparent, stretched out within a clear metrical architecture. But whereas with "Earth and All Stars" the singer enjoys most of all the 'list-ness' with little sense of progression, with this hymn the singer is swept along in what turns out to be some sort of salvation story. The 'flaws' of the list—whatever we *don't* expect—as well as the familiar images—what we *do* expect—attract our imagination and captivate us. Somehow an old story becomes new.

Certainly this is not how one would write a catechism. Too much is left hanging loose. It is like a panoramic impressionist painting: a large scene is described, but done mostly by suggestion rather than by explanation. Because of this economy much more than usual can be said in the allotted space, and disparate things can be brought more closely together and combined in unusual ways. Some things perhaps will be seen as if they were being seen for the first time. For hymn-writers—traditionally stylistically conservative poets who have considered clarity and accuracy to be of paramount importance—this must be considered an innovative and high-risk kind of writing. Many singers find it to be wonderfully inviting, opening up a fresh kind of congregational song that manages to be both freewheeling and orthodox.

Also in this hymn we can enjoy Brokering's love of resonance. Many words seem to be chosen for the way they echo each other in sound and/or shade of meaning. While they strengthen the argument and enrich the texture, they also lighten the poem because the words roll together so easily. Brokering plays with *thine* and *then*, enjoys a brief dalliance with *gone*, and charmingly, when he runs out of words he simply repeats what he just said. Occasionally he compresses, occasionally he lets things dangle, occasionally he lets extra light flash through. Somehow all this gathers a forceful momentum, and by the time we have reached the last stanza the writing takes on a brilliance that, though

we did not see it, was planted at the beginning.

Gracia Grindal often writes hymns that are spare, occasionally severe. She draws her vocabulary from the common twentieth-century "word-horde," her useful, Scandinavian heritage term. Whereas Brokering's words often seem to tumble happily onto the page in unusual and fortuitous ways, her words seem to be first tested in every way, as if they were going to be chiseled into granite. If they are common, they are perfectly common and chosen with the utmost care.

Some of her most interesting writing involves hymns that do not rhyme. This is not easy work. Must hymns rhyme? No, but most do. Since hymns are, as it were, performed by the audience and without rehearsal, they must be effective at first hearing. Rhyme enhances this kind of instant music-making because it can give a sense of closure and thus an additional means of organization. When these closures occur periodically they help bond ideas into larger units and these units into a progression. Additionally, because rhythm draws attention to certain words, it can function like a hidden grammar. Furthermore, rhyme gives pleasure, and is welcome in a medium that forgoes many of the subtleties of poetry that we read. All this was well summarized by Sir Philip Sidney when he wrote simply that rhyme "knitteth up the memory." Therefore when a hymn-writer gives up rhyme the requirements of control and care are vastly escalated.

Sometimes where one would expect rhyme Grindal provides repetition instead. Repetition is not the same as rhyme because it gives an aural bare spot in place of the expected resonance. Sometimes she uses slant rhyme, rhyme that is close but not perfect. In the following hymn, down the right margin we can see rhyme, slant rhyme, repetition, and non-rhyme:

The kingdom of God is like a grain of mustard seed.  
When it is sown in the earth, it has the smallest seed.  
*It is like the kingdom of God and a mystery.*

For when it is sown, it grows into the largest plant,  
greater than all of the herbs, and grows into a tree.  
*It is like the kingdom of God and a mystery.*

It grows so birds can rest inside its crown of leaves,  
deep in its shadows, away from any evil prey.  
*It is like the kingdom of God and a mystery.*

And so we can liken it to seeds which make a tree  
larger than all the trees from just the smallest seed.  
*It is like the kingdom of God and a mystery.*

This is very economical writing. It's difficult to imagine how any word could be changed without doing damage to the poem. And this writing is beautifully contrived: stanza two not only continues stanza

one but relates to it structurally in an interesting way; similarly, stanza four relates to stanza one. Stanza three (preceding the unwritten *therefore* that often introduces the conclusion of a hymn) is a tour de force of evocative images that invites our participation. Even if this writing is hewn down to essentials it is not rigid. Grindal's lines fall freely and naturally. And like many good hymn-texts, her works frequently seem to find their completion in the music.

*LBW* and *LW* contain many translations by Gracia Grindal; "Out of the depths I cry to you" is characteristic and wonderful.

When F. Bland Tucker died in 1985 there was speculation among hymnophiles as to whom the deanship would pass. The subsequent years have suggested very strongly that the laurel has gone to Jaroslav Vajda. In 1987 Morning Star Music Publishers published his complete works in an attractively printed book called *Now the Joyful Celebration*. It contains fifty-four original hymns and an equal number of translations or paraphrases from the Slovak, German, or Hungarian.

Vajda was born into an ethnic Lutheran family in Lorain, Ohio, in 1919, and spent most of his youth in Indiana Harbor (later named East Chicago and now Lake Station) Indiana, where his father was pastor of a Slovak congregation. It was his parents, he says, who instilled in him the values that have brought him to hymn-writing. *Cresset* readers will be pleased to know that another person who encouraged him was O. P. Kretzmann. The 18-year-old Vajda submitted poems for possible inclusion in *The Cresset*, of which Kretzmann was editor. Vajda received a note from O.P. by return mail telling him that he had an authentic gift for poetry. In his preface to *Now the Joyful Celebration* Vajda writes, "I can hardly estimate the effect those seven words had on my determination to write poetry and eventually hymns." Vajda spent eighteen years in parish ministry, and then became book developer/editor for Concordia Publishing House. All the while he was writing, though most of his hymns date from the late 60s and after.

What motivates people to write hymns? There are any number of reasons, but for Vajda hymn-writing is an act of gratitude and faith. In the last paragraph of his "Reflections on Hymn-Writing," which opens the collection, he asks himself the question: Why do I write hymns? He answers:

To stir up my own awareness of God's will and mercy,  
to express my own need for him and to begin to render  
some genuine appreciation for his love,  
to review my place in his plan for me and for humanity,  
to refresh myself with his love so as to be able to feed  
others with it,



to experience his forgiveness so that I can forgive others,  
to taste his peace so that I can be its instrument to others still  
at war with him, with themselves and one another,  
and to look forward to God's ultimate goal for me, for which  
I have been redeemed at so great a cost.

Vajda can write hymns brilliantly and in rich variety. One finds in *Celebration* pieces of breath-taking beauty, never for savoring with sherry in an easy chair, but for singing to good tunes at church services with other believers. These are hymns for liturgy, and they stand squarely within the Lutheran tradition.

He preaches like Luther in his powerful translation, "God, my Lord, my Strength, my Place of Hiding," which, with its resounding melody, is one of the treasures of Lutheran hymnody. Though it is not easy, it should be in the repertoire of every Lutheran congregation. Again, he proclaims the Gospel vigorously and captivatingly in his paraphrase of Paul Speratus' *Es ist das Heil* of 1523, of which this is the third stanza:

The law, I found, was not the way  
to life and health, to joy and peace;  
I'd piled up debts I could not pay,  
from death there was no sure release.  
And then, when in the deepest throes  
of gloom, I heard the hammer blows  
constructing my salvation.

Filled with vivid images and concluding with a startling image, this is not delicate or rarified writing, but, like Luther's sermons and hymns, is straightforward, vital, and compelling.

Though we've begun our brief survey of Vajda's hymns with two that echo Luther's bold, confessional style, most of Vajda's hymns relate more closely to Lutheran hymn writers a few generations after Luther—writers who were influenced by Pietistic theology, such as Paul Gerhardt (1606-1676) and Johann Franck (1618-1677). "O Sacred Head, Now Wounded" and "Soul, Adorn Yourself with Gladness" are among their best-known hymns. Many reveal a warm and fervent faith, with an emphasis on salvation through the suffering and death of Jesus. Often they seem somewhat autobiographical, or at least they make known in public the personal feelings that the authors felt and thought would be characteristic of faithful people.

In the following hymn by Vajda, the singer tells of the Incarnation as if he or she were there staring at it. The singer confesses to being "a pilgrim strangely stirred" who finds that "Love was born and burned its way into my heart." More than theology declared, we now have theology made personal, even intimate. And indeed hymns, which are sung theology as well as many other things, are very good at exactly this. There is a

characteristically passionate, longing quality about this hymn. Many of the 17th century Pietists would have provided resolution by talking about heaven—only in heaven will be able to thank God adequately—but, more poignantly, Vajda ends with a question each singer will have to answer individually. In the hands of lesser authors, this kind of writing could easily slide into undisciplined gush, or it could become merely clever. Vajda remains in charge, ever the craftsman; he is inspired indeed, never letting go of control, ever achieving clarity and existing within theological and liturgical integrity.

Where the shepherds lately knelt  
and kept the angel's word,  
I come in half-belief,  
a pilgrim strangely stirred;  
but there is room  
and welcome there  
for me.

In that unlikely place  
I find him as they said;  
sweet newborn Babe, how frail  
and in a manger bed:  
a still small Voice  
to cry one day  
for me.

How could I not have known  
Isaiah would be there,  
his prophecies fulfilled?  
With pounding heart, I stare:  
a Child, a Son,  
the Prince of Peace—  
for me.

Can I, will I forget  
how Love was born and burned  
its way into my heart—  
unasked, unforced, unearned,  
to die, to live,  
and not alone  
for me?

We have already discussed two list hymns by Brokering. Vajda's most beloved hymn probably is his elegant list hymn "Now the Silence." It is a line from this hymn that provided the title for Vajda's collection (as well as for the present article). Here the subject is worship and every one of the eighteen images in the hymn is introduced by the word *now*. Written in 1968, in retrospect we can see that this is a very 60s word.

This is a list hymn from 1983, which like "Now the Silence" has not one speck of punctuation.

God of the sparrow  
God of the whale

God of the swirling stars  
How does the creature say Awe  
How does the creature say Praise

God of the earthquake  
God of the storm  
God of the trumpet blast  
How does the creature say Woe  
How does the creature say Save

God of the rainbow  
God of the cross  
God of the empty grave  
How does the creature say Grace  
How does the creature say Thanks

God of the hungry  
God of the sick  
God of the prodigal  
How does the creature say Care  
How does the creature say Life

God of the neighbor  
God of the foe  
God of the pruning hook  
How does the creature say Love  
How does the creature say Peace

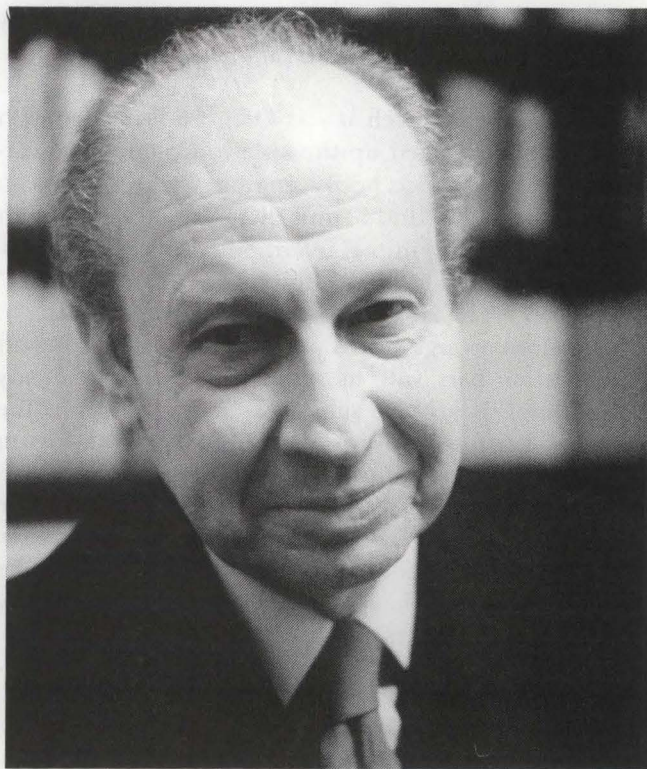
God of the ages  
God near at hand  
God of the loving heart  
How do your children say Joy  
How do your children say Home.

This hymn bears careful study. It should be pondered and sung. Though it begins with a bit of whimsy and never loses innocence, it weaves a very rich and complex web of sounds and relationships. Naivete and profundity are met together. Vajda has struck truth. His ability to hold up in the face of it is what places him at the top of our list.

Vajda likes to end some of his hymns with a rush of praise. We will conclude our survey with his final stanza to "Up Through Endless Ranks of Angels."

Alleluia, alleluia,  
Oh, to breathe the Spirit's grace!  
Alleluia, alleluia  
Oh, to see the Father's face!  
Alleluia, alleluia,  
Oh, to feel the Son's embrace!

And to this, dear reader, let us gladly say Amen. □



Jaroslav Vajda



## MEMORIES OF MUSIC IN CHURCH

### Come, Let Us Be Florid

It was the word “florid” I liked, also his enthusiasm and taste. This was the Rev. Henry E. Horn, who helped put together the *Lutheran Book of Worship* in 1978. When I encountered him early in the 1970s, he was senior pastor of University Lutheran Church in Cambridge, and I was in Boston for the year, studying a lapsed Unitarian, Henry Adams. The reason I worshiped at nondescript UniLu (rather than, say, at First Lutheran in Boston, with its acclaimed Pietro Belluschi building) was in the pews. I still have them, stolen with permission: seven little mimeographed booklets, hymns for the various church seasons. Words and music not in the old *Service Book and Hymnal*, quite wonderful things. Some of them I already knew (“My Lord, what a morning”), and new things I fell in love with.

At Henry’s church it was OK to fall in love with music. People walked up the aisle to Communion carrying the red service book, singing. People stayed in their pews at postlude time, listening to the organ instead of dashing into Harvard Square. It was permissible to love big old 19th-century tunes like “Helmsley” (*LBW*, 27, “Lo! He comes with clouds descending”). The melody swings across an octave and a quarter in the first four bars, with most syllables slurred. Its heavy sprightliness is just this side of comedy, and this is the “florid” tune that Henry, one morning at forum between services, with inimitable glee, gave expert permission to enjoy. In his book *O Sing Unto the Lord*, he mentions “Duke Street” (“I know that my Redeemer lives”) as another of these big “florid” dessert-like tunes. “It is hard to imagine,” writes Henry, “the dismay of the church fathers” when these cakes and pastries,

influenced by Italian opera, started to make their way into plain Protestant domains.

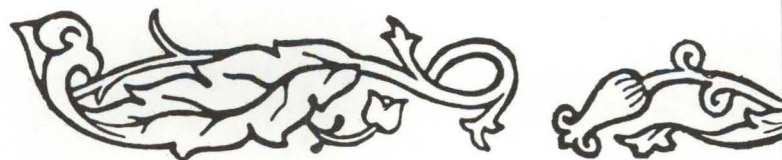
Eclecticism was the pleasure of these UniLu booklets, and many of their hymns soon (bravo!) horned their way into the *LBW*. There was “People look east, the time is near,” a Besancon tune. There was “The King of Glory comes, the nation rejoices,” an Israeli folksong tune. There was the “Sussex Carol” (“On Christmas night all Christians sing”). There was an Advent hymn, “The night is far advancing,” which starts austere, in half notes, and then, with “Join in the joyful song,” suddenly speeds up and rises to heaven’s gate. Credited to “Johannes Petzold,” its flavor seemed ancient, but in Berlin the following summer, buying a paperback collection, *Christenlieder Heute*, I found the tune dated 1939.

I don’t remember how often we turned to these homemade booklets, with ten to thirteen hymns each. Maybe not every Sunday. One hymn was from the *Oxford Book of Carols*, one from the old shape-note *Kentucky Harmony*. One tune was by Ralph Vaughan Williams, another was Japanese, another a “Latvian Melody.” But it was that year in Boston that I ordered my own copy of *The Sacred Harp*; during that year of Sundays in Cambridge, I was born again, musically.

Charles Vandersee

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Charles Vandersee, Becky Mohler, and Jerry Evenrud present here a garland of reminiscences of music in church. Vandersee is a professor of English, Mohler a mother and teacher’s aide, and Evenrud an executive for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.



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## And Exalted Them of Low Degree

My corner of the vineyard is notable for bad music. All my life I've spent more energy wincing than worshipping. I thank Thee, Lord, that I am not. . . one who relishes the anthem. But the exasperating Vintner pays the same denarius to the church ensemble that puckers your mouth as to the Kings College Choir.

There was a checkerboard pattern to the Palm Springs where I grew up, owing to an odd arrangement of land ownership. The city was jet-setty and spangled with stars in the firmament of heaven and of Hollywood; but two streets over from posh Palm Canyon Drive were dirt roads littered with bars, loan offices and trailers under shaggy tamarisk trees. In one cramped and draggled house lived my girlfriend's family.

Her dad was a Christian of mouth-stopping simplicity and sweetness, a maintenance man by day and by night a Country-Western singer with a one-man band. As Harold wouldn't have played in a bar, he sang chiefly for his own entertainment. I don't suppose he was much of a musician. He was a good man, though; a God-bearer. He was a salient flavor in our congregation.

It was an Event in the life of this family and therefore of our congregation, when Harold built a music room behind their house. This might have had something to do with his wife chasing him out with his infernal racket; but she was immensely pleased with the room and particular about its care. At any rate, it seemed to me the establishment of a studio of major weight. It was crisp and fresh and painty-smelling on that dingy street. It was a triumph of art over grunge. Harold squeezed people into it to show us his handy

arrangements for the one-man band and for recording and dubbing in the second voice and the bird whistle.

Naturally, this studio must be an offering to the church. We had no building in those days, but worshipped in the American Legion Hall. So it came about that a choir room was appointed and a skinny teenager (destined to become editor of *The Cresset*) enlisted as choir director for a school of Palm Springs small fry, by no means part of the glittering scene just two streets over. (Beloved, it doth not yet appear what we shall be.)

There were seven or eight of us. We began by learning a Christmas carol, a Healy Willan arrangement of "When the Herds Were Watching." That song we took to our hearts as essential Christmas. Our director, who was fourteen or fifteen years old, succeeded in projecting an aural image of what she was after: the chilly, ethereal, twinkling sound that embodies the response of children to the Incarnation.

I'm sure we never came anywhere close to making that sound, not any closer than Harold's music room was to Palm Canyon Drive. But the seed of the weight of glory was in it. The carol still delivers to me the full wallop of that instance of the coming down from heaven. The music room under the tamarisk trees with its smell of fresh paint and love, the horrid stinky Legion Hall where the congregation would celebrate with its new *Kinderchor*, the squalor of our place and the poverty of our music—these were our stable and our treasures. And there He was, in his word-manger, in His Vine-blood.

Becky Mohler

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## A Life in Music for the Church

This is my first attempt to chronicle.

I began working as a full-time church musician in 1955, but I had never taken the time to reflect on my experience with church music in writing until a letter arrived from Editor Eifrig. "Could you give me about five hundred words of reminiscence of music in church?"

Indeed, beginning with my musical baptism at the piano, my memories provide a cornucopia of events and a smorgasbord of musical experiences to share. I learned early on that it is possible to play all the right notes and still not make significant music.

My first piano teacher was Mrs. Winifred Remington, a graduate of the Oberlin Conservatory in Oberlin, Ohio. Her teacher was influenced by Teodor Leschetitzky, who encouraged a rhythmic energy that emphasized on-going linear phrasing and discouraged perfunctory note playing. While this elementary introduction to the shaping of music was later reinforced and augmented by an exploration of Jacques Delacroze's eurythmics pedagogy, I can still hear "Aunt Win" urging me to "play over bar line" or "and then to there."

The pipe organ was my next keyboard instrument. My most vivid recollection of that multi-keyboard study was a lesson with Arthur Poister at Syracuse University. It was devoted to J.S. Bach's "Prelude and Fugue in b minor." After playing only a few measures of the dramatic prelude, Dr. Poister tapped me on the shoulder and exclaimed, "Evenrud! Put more STUG into your playing!" I responded with dismay and wonderment,

"What is STUG?" Poister's reply; "It's GUTS spelled backwards." GUTS was equated with energetic, dramatic, vital music-making.

I reflect on a 21-year ministry at Grace Lutheran, Eau Claire, Wisconsin. An organ recital I played there serves as an aspect of theme and unity I believe is key to church music ministry. The program was influenced by a book I had been reading by Aaron Copland. In it he discussed the "many states of joy" in music.

The recital presented during the Christmas season, for organ and instruments, was based entirely on the 14th century carol "In dulci jubilo." It began with Bach's A Major prelude on the tune, which I had subtitled, "Majestic Joy." The G Major prelude on the same hymn by Bach I listed as "Lilting Joy." The program continued with seven or eight other "joy" compositions and ended with "In Quiet Joy" by Michael Dupre. I believe its pedagogical intent paid dividends in listener attitude for preludes to come.

In addition to the usual brass, woodwind, string and percussion instruments that enhanced the worship life of our congregation, I discovered yet another instrument at Metigoshe Bible Camp, Bottineau, North Dakota. Invited by the First Lutheran Church Choir, Mandan, ND, to join them for their annual retreat, I asked them to bring musical instruments to enrich our worship. The instrument that surprised us all was the harmonica. Played by one of the choir's tenors, its sound proved to provide a hauntingly beautiful introduction to Southern Harmony hymn tunes.

The crisp clarity of the Grace Church harpsichord was admirably historically appropriate for continual use, and served to augment the congregation's praise. I also discovered that this precious sound served extremely well as an accompaniment medium for much of the music sung by the children's choirs. I



also enjoy opportunities to accompany vocal soloists. The dynamic interplay of voice and instrument requires a special sensitivity; a unique and evangelistic team.

I love the sound of instrumental music, but the music making I enjoy most is with choirs; any age, any number of voices. I have directed a seven-voice boys' choir and a massed choir of many hundreds.

Sharing God's word, intensified by inspired music, is a distinct privilege, but that privilege includes a most important responsibility: Choosing the music. Separating the wheat from the chaff: a crucial music-thrashing activity. Lectionary suitability, ethnic variety and a historical spectrum are important considerations. Creative old and new compositions abound, but not all are worth learning. The volunteer choir member's rehearsal time is limited.

We need to emphasize the importance of active congregational participation versus spectator entertainment. All the musical sounds I have mentioned serve to encourage, animate and support a congregation's participation in psalms, liturgy and hymns. When all of the

several generating forces combine—church music reaches its apogee; it becomes a "foretaste of the feast to come."

Monsignor Flemming, the pastor of St. Olaf Catholic Church, Minneapolis, was having great difficulty arousing his post-Vatican II congregation's enthusiasm for congregational singing. One Sunday, he stepped out of the chancel, looked directly at his parishioners and said, "If God gave you a good voice, use it to praise Him. If He didn't give you a good voice, use it to get even with Him."

The Luther scholar, Roland Bainton, did a sketch of me conducting the choir at Holden Village, the Lutheran retreat center in Washington's Cascade Mountains. When he presented the now-framed and treasured sketch to me, I noticed he had inscribed the admonition:

"Praise the Lord forever.  
Never quit!"

Jerry Evenrud



Praise the Lord forever.  
Never quit.

Roland A. Bainton





## KRAKOW: WAWEL CASTLE

Susan Fromberg Schaeffer

1.

A quarter of a century turns lightly in the air,  
As we used to flip a coin,  
Settling, as always, face up.  
Your face.  
So much for the idea of choice.

2.

On the way to Krakow, in your car,  
I said: what is the name for that?  
*Crow-vah* you said: cow.  
And immediately I saw it:  
A huge crow on a cow's shoulder,  
Eating at its flesh and skull with its huge sharp  
beak.  
And I had not yet seen the castle.

3.

In Krakow,  
Clouds pour from the foundries' long throats.  
The smoke is eating the faces of the saints  
and heroes.  
They stand guard like terrible lepers who will  
not die.  
Yet even here people live lives,  
Find clothes, wheel their children in strollers.

4.

Inside the castle,  
Every attitude of sorrow.  
Kings are buried here. Around their coffins,  
Little people carved in stone,  
Men on one side, women on the other,  
All grieving,  
No end to this sorrow, open-mouthed,  
Which began in the ninth century,  
And which will go on, apparently,  
Forever.

Little mustached men with long pointed noses,  
As if an evil spell had shrunken them,  
Plump women who resemble the visitors,  
All stood in sorrow at the foot of the king,  
In Wawel Castle.

5.

Nothing stays in the coffins.  
Here, a huge marble head spills out of one coffin,  
There, a roof with a ceiling of heads  
Looking down at the people below as if to say,  
This also will happen to you,  
We are on our way up,  
But the stone has trapped us,  
The sky over us is heavy,  
Grey granite clouds that never move.  
Stones, clouds.  
This is limbo, here on earth.

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Susan Fromberg Schaeffer is the author of eight novels, a collection of short stories, and five books of poetry, including *Granite Lady*, which was a finalist for the National Book Award. She is a professor at Brooklyn College.

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Out of the next coffin,  
A hand rises hugely behind a giant eagle.  
This is judgment day, now in progress, going  
on everyday,  
When the coffins can contain nothing,  
While the ticket holders go slowly by,  
Their feet in felt slippers  
(The floor must not be damaged)  
Nodding respectfully.

6.

The glorious king is buried here,  
Or his body is. His head has been taken.  
It rests in a golden sepulchre,  
And every year the head is carried in triumph.  
Through the castle to the town and back again.  
The heads in the ceiling smile down.  
Where are their bodies?  
They are beyond caring.

In the market,  
Tourists in hard shoes bargain for cement heads  
Neatly packaged in stiff, cardboard boxes.  
Do you want men or women?  
Who was this? Which king was this?  
No one knows.

7.

There are rooms full of tapestries.  
The story of Cain and Abel, the final panel,  
God's anger.  
The story of the tower of Babel,  
The final panel: God's anger.  
In the third room, Noah's ark.  
The last panel: God's blessing.  
We stop in front of this one  
And look with longing.

The animals in the tapestries are miserable,  
Their faces human.  
The turtle is suffering, as is the snake.  
The fish surface from woven waters  
With faces of dogs.

In the final panel,  
Noah is in two places at once.  
First, he receives his instructions.  
Last, he receives God's blessing.  
For surviving, as God himself  
Foresaw and intended.

Time collides into time here.  
Eras melt and move.



13.

A woman visits her hives in the country.  
She stands listening to her uncle.  
He looks up at the sun, lecturing.  
In an instant, her chest is covered with bees.  
Her bees sting her.  
She is black with them.  
She screams.  
Her uncle stops talking, looks at her.  
He asks, "Who stands in front of a hive?"

In Krakow, the bees are dead,  
The Christ is black,  
Everyone stands in front of the hive.  
To be stung is better than nothing.

*Efficiency and saving is the key to the Well-Being  
Of Socialism. The Working Class is the Leading Force  
Of Socialist Transformation.*

In the dark,  
It is easy to hit a cow or a goose.  
In backyards, cows stand under apple trees  
Eating the fruit.

14.

Do not say the word Chernobyl.  
It turns faces to stone.  
This is radiation, too,  
This intense anger.  
What happened here?  
They shake their heads:  
We will not know for years.

15.

In Warsaw, near the hotel,  
The shadows are made of people.  
They want to change money.  
They want dollars.

The *militzia* are everywhere.  
They carry rifles with bayonets.  
This terror is not new.  
It is the old terror, an everyday affair.

The interrupted song of the trumpeter,  
Not yet finished.  
The doomsday sheep.  
The coffins giving up their dead.  
No one sleeps peacefully here.

In my grandfather's town  
Three cups of water from a cracked mug.  
Two bags of popcorn.

On the way home,  
The car window opening,  
In the grey dusk,  
Blue fields of cabbages, dreaming.  
All the way home, your face,  
As it was twenty-five years ago,  
As it will always be.

For a few minutes,  
I hear the last bars of the song,  
The trumpeter's unfinished song,  
Finishing.  
For you and for me. □



A Little  
**Sonata**  
for the night before Christmas

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**Richard Hillert**

*Richard Hillert is Distinguished Professor of Music Emeritus at Concordia University, River Forest, Illinois. His music is widely known in and beyond Lutheran circles, from his liturgical music and hymns in both The Lutheran Book of Worship and Lutheran Worship. He says that this composition, "a little sound-piece" can be played on any keyboard, from harpsichord to Moog.*

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to Gloria

A Little  
**Sonata**

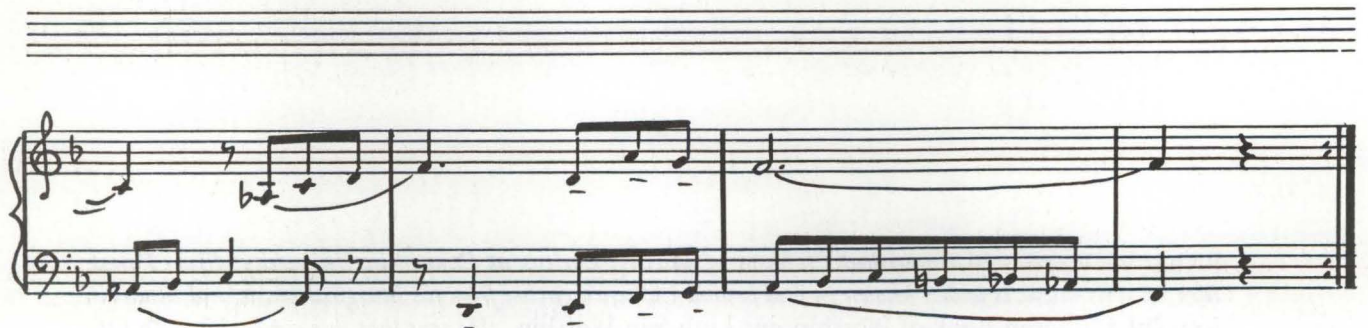
for the Night Before Christmas

**Richard Hillert**

$\text{♩} = 112 - 116$

Keyboard

*mp* *leggiaro*



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mf

f

rall.

dim.

mf

3

*rit. molto*

*mp esp.*  
*dim.*  
*p*  
*mp*

*a tempo*

*mf*  
*p*  
*p*

*p*  
*mf*  
*p*  
*p*

*rit.*

*p*  
*mf*  
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*p*



## Sam's Last Tape

Alfred Cismaru

The date 22 December 1990 marks the first anniversary of Samuel Beckett's death at age eighty-three. Not many followed his cortege to the Montparnasse cemetery, for most knew that he would not have liked anything close to an official or government-sponsored ceremony. Among the few was his good friend, Eugene Ionesco who, old and ill, followed him to the grave in a wheelchair. Ionesco was seen crying by reporters, to whom he explained on the spot that his pain was caused more by the very calamity of death itself than by the death of any individual human being.

There were no speeches, no priest, and fewer than twenty persons present. The photographers took pictures, and journalists, French and foreign, wrote obituaries in most European papers. Some of these appeared in many American newspapers and magazines, in large cities and in small ones of less than 20,000 population. These often terse notices were somewhat

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Alfred Cismaru teaches in the Department of Romance Languages at Texas Tech in Lubbock. His latest contribution to *The Cresset* was an article on the *Cafe La Coupole* in January, 1990.

surprising, because *Waiting for Godot* had its first success in the United States, when it was put on by the inmates of San Quentin prison. Moreover, every Beckett play enjoyed long runs off-Broadway, and some even at major, established New York theaters. A survey of academic interest in the last ten years reveals more than 100 dissertations on the Irish author, and almost 300 theses as well. It may be appropriate, then, to look more deeply at the legacy of Beckett now that it is possible to regard it with an eye whose vision of the writer is hardly likely to be affected by any further publications.

Actually, Beckett never believed that death was always possible. People lived too long, he claimed, even when they did not have a shred of interest left in life. His own wife, Suzanne Deschevaux-Dumesnil, who preceded him in death at age 89 by some six months, lived too long. Because of decay and decrepitude she suffered so that for years she was immobile and silent. Speak she did, but only to ask her husband to buy a revolver and one bullet so she could shoot it in the middle of her heart. Beckett did not oblige.

He remembered, perhaps, that it is very difficult to commit sui-

cide. His characters had attempted it at times, but only in pathetic and unsuccessful fashion. Faced with unlimited waiting, Estragon of *Waiting for Godot* removes his belt and ties it to the branch of a tree. When he tries to hang himself, the branch breaks. When the mimist in *Without Words* attempts to lasso a bough of the tree in order to try his hand at hanging, "the bough folds down against the trunk." In *Happy Days*, Winnie, a character who is absurdly happy even though she is buried deeply in a mound, does have a revolver in her purse, which she seems to seek earnestly, perhaps because her sub-persona wants to die; but she is unable to get hold of it. Later, together with the other paraphernalia which has fallen out of the purse, it lies beyond her reach. In this context one recalls that in one of his first attempts at writing, a critical work entitled *Proust*, Beckett had declared: "The Proustian consists, in so far as it has been examined, in the negation of Time and Death, the negation of Death because of the negation of Time. Death is dead because Time is dead." Beckett agrees with Proust, who has scorn for the "vulgarity of plausible concatenation," in this case because suffering, which leads

to the desire of self-annihilation, does not bring natural death closer, nor does it make suicide possible.

Beckett's own physical problem (which ultimately caused him to be transported to a hospital in a coma, where he died promptly), was breathing. The most natural of human activities became difficult for him in the late 1960s. We do not know why, and his doctors (if he ever consulted any), have not mentioned anything about it yet. The patient, though, wrote a play called *Breath* (1971). It lasts only thirty-five seconds, it has no actor, and there is only a tape playing the sound of a baby's cry, trying to breathe. This is no easy task. Actually, in the case of people of his generation, babies would be slapped on the behind at birth in order to shock them into breathing. Assuming that life is not done voluntarily, one is forced violently into the sordidness of existence. It does not matter that at the London opening the public was upset, did not feel that any play lasting thirty-five seconds was worth the price of the tickets, asked for their money back and got it. Beckett made his point: being shocked into breathing is painful, and it becomes painful again, in old age, when the shock has been long forgotten. One might want to find a button, push it and terminate the suffering; but suicide remains more often elusive than at hand. It took the author some twenty years of belabored breathing before he was finally successful in dying, that is, in exiting sordidness.

Successful is indeed the word. Such a stirring event as natural death, or suicide, might even occur, but one has to wait a long time, sometimes even eighty-three years. In the meantime, all he can do is stir. In 1987, so very tired of living, Beckett wrote and published *Stirring Still*. The first word suggests movement, but barely, and it recalls also

the emotions of melancholy caused by movement going nowhere, aborting into stillness. The second word suggests stillness. Yet, *still* may also mean *always*, for always one stirs, trying in the face of the impossible, crawling when he can no longer walk, eating mud when he finds nothing else, even getting to like it, as does one character in *Texts for Nothing* (1955). There is a semblance of activity, Beckett seems to say throughout. In his trilogy, for example, *Molloy*, *Malone Dies* (but not quite), the *Unnameable* (written between 1946 and 1950), there are only stirrings, more suggestive of pathetic paralysis than of consoling movement.

Silence, of course, is another aspect of passivity. Writing for the elite only, and not caring if he is understood or liked, makes only for more stirring, not real action. In all his novels characters are crippled, or paralyzed, and if they are very lucky, they move a bit. In his plays they hardly move more, or want to. Mostly they keep silent, because neither speaker nor listener would understand, that is, if the first were able to speak and the second capable of hearing. There is a limited number of words one knows how to use, so few that one is tempted to tape them and listen to them later (as does Krapp of *Krapp's Last Tape*).

Beckett himself always preferred to be silent. When he was called to make a speech in Stockholm upon receipt of the Nobel Prize in 1969, he opted to flee to Tunisia. The international press tracked him down and he was shamed into granting an interview. He stood gaunt and erect, emotionless in front of the camera, and he listened to the questions. He listened for so long that finally one reporter apologized for intruding and Beckett said: "That's o.k. I understand." That was the extent of the interview.

Inaction is so natural that action, the requirement for drama sanctified by Aristotle, is ignored by Beckett, who makes passivity the core of his plays. Passivity ends in silence. Consider, for instance, the last words of *Krapp's Last Tape*: "The tape runs in silence"; or the last three words of *Embers*: "Not a sound"; or the very ending of both acts of *Waiting for Godot*, the lines being spoken by Estragon and Vladimir alternately:

Well, shall we go?

Yes, let's go.

They do not move. Silence.

And so they go on then, living.

Passing on to another realm, from the paralytic state to the cadaveric, may be a solution, but it still requires action unless it happens by accident. In an early short story, *The Calmative* (written in 1946 but published in 1955), the hero-narrator begins with the astonishing remark: "I don't know when I died." He had lived, or rather existed miserably until age ninety, longevity being considered, of course, a cruel punishment. And yet, he cannot quite stay dead and unexpectedly returns back to life to contemplate his dying: this time more leisurely, perhaps to enjoy the pleasure of it, and to make sure that he would be successful in staying dead for good. There is nothing masochistic in this. Quite the contrary. Dying is actually a huge orgy, so attractive that one's consciousness should never miss it. It is a sexual happening, just as birth is the result of one; it annihilates the act of conception, one's parents, one's family, one's world.

Making death a goal a second time is attractive, but the *life* one has to go through again is not any prettier. All he can do now is to walk among ruins, in a town which appears to be that of his birth; but failing memory, which had always

failed him before, makes it impossible actually to recognize it. Unintelligible life defeats the attempts to organize or understand its details.

In a beautifully lyrical passage at the end the story we are told:

Little by little, in a slow swoon, darkness fell about me. I saw a mass of bright flowers in an exquisite cascade of paling colours. I found myself admiring, all along the housefronts, the gradual blossoming of squares and rectangles, casement and sash, yellow, green, pink, according to the curtains and blinds, finding that pretty. Then, *at last*, before I fell, first to my knees, as cattle do, then on my face, I was in a throng. I did not lose consciousness . . . they paid no heed to me, though careful not to walk on me, a courtesy that must have touched me. . . . It was well with me, it was what I had come out for, sated with dark and calm, lying at the foot of mortals who could not fall yet. I was fathom deep in the grey of dawn. (*italics mine*).

The flowers and all that he finds pretty, the first time in this second life, are a tease. He knows that what he wants more is to die; and to be aware of it. Falling is likewise a tease. For a moment he thinks it is well with him in the dark, but then the dark changes to the grey of dawn, which indicates that death is not at hand, nor really possible on a conscious level.

At the end of the story the hero-narrator confesses:

Reality, too tired to look for the right word, was soon restored. The throng fell away, the light came back and I had no need to raise my head from the ground to know I was back in the same blinding void as before. I said, Stay where you are, down on the friendly stone, or at least indifferent, don't open your eyes, wait for morning. But up with me again and back on the way that was not mine, on uphill along the boulevard.

Ultimately he cannot remain down, any more than he could expire, before or now. And after all, what he thought was the first death was merely a darkness followed by

the grey of dawn: the cruel dawn of a repetitive and endless beginning.

In spite of all this, though, Beckett is not likely to come back from the grave and have to endure a new beginning. It is more likely that his death is the absolute zero to which, so soberly, he had traveled all along. For example, in his youth, he kicked away a promising career as an academician, with a specialty in Romance Languages. He could have been a literature professor at the university level, either in Ireland or in France. The burlesque pomposity of such a job made him sneer with scorn. To be sure, others had lauded his youthful but dense essays on Dante, on Proust, on Joyce. Actually, the latter made him his friend and allowed him to become his unpaid assistant. But even that communion fought the recluse in him.

Writing was another way of remaining alone. That could be achieved if one wrote cryptically, for the few, and if one refused explanations. In 1958 he wrote to an acquaintance in America:

We have no elucidations to offer of mysteries that are all of [the critics'] making. My work is a matter of fundamental sounds (no joke intended) made as fully as possible, and I accept responsibility for nothing else. If people want to have headaches among the overtones, let them. And provide their own aspirins.

Reducing it all to sounds and overtones is quite in line with his desire to reach the purity of absolute zero, his only possible destination. Writing briefer and briefer works (thirty-five seconds is not far from zero) was surely deliberate, logical and consistent in his case. He despised readers and critics who pretended to elucidate and infuse metaphysics in sounds and overtones. They are the aspirin-takers, he thought, who exist precariously, by means of pills and palliatives.

Beckett so branded many of

his famous contemporaries, Camus and Sartre, for example, who believed that commitment was the way. For him commitment was just another form of aspirin. It takes care, though not always, of a symptom; it does not attack or eliminate a fundamental wrong. Commitment is the simple panacea of another kind of believer, this time the atheist existentialist who points to engagement as the pie-in-the sky salutary agent. Sartre and his followers, like all those who preach, propose, and impose, are believers, for they accept the others and pompously think that they make their lot better. They do not wait for Godot; they are all Godots themselves, already here, dominating the others from a pedestal, in the hypocritical manner of prophets. They promise, pledge, proclaim and promulgate, aggrandizing the worthiness of life, without understanding that it is only an accident of a foul and reeky contact of two membranes.

When Beckett paraphrased Descartes' "I think therefore I am," by saying "I stink therefore I am," he was of course referring to the smell of procreation, to the stench of a child who has to be washed, immediately after he has been beaten into breathing. Unlike Ionesco who believed that death was a calamity, Beckett argued that it was indeed life which was catastrophic; the two are reported to have had private, vivid discussions on this subject. Death could be a relief from life, if only one did not have to come back and start all over again. The narrow door of which the Bible speaks is not that which gives access to Heaven. For Beckett, whose death anniversary we mark this month, the real narrow door is the one which rarely, and only after much effort, lets you reenter the clean, chaste nothingness. □





## Corporate Melodrama

Michael Becker

*Ed. note:* Mr. Becker explains the following terms for his article:

1. a corporate takeover is called unfriendly when those attempting to acquire controlling interest do so without approval of directors or management; 2. unfriendly corporate takeovers are sometimes defeated by finding a more friendly party to take over the corporation, a white knight who rescues management from the other raider; and 3. greenmail is an offer by a target company to purchase the raider's shares at a premium over what the shares are selling for in the market in exchange for the raider's abandoning his takeover attempt.

Three recent works exploit the dramatic possibilities of the unfriendly corporate takeover. Each takes the form a modern morality play, to use the phrase of one reviewer of *Other People's Money*, and sets a corporate raiding villain against the more-or-less good guys. The authors raise important questions about the

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social costs and benefits of not only the corporate takeover artists who flourish in our free financial markets, but the sort of passive management style which can turn a company into a takeover target. Taken together, they give us a revelatory new perspective on the American scene, its reliance on and suspicions about business.

Oliver Stone's film, *Wall Street*, the most realistic of the three dramas, has at its base the classic theme of a son's ambivalent struggle both to be accepted by, and at the same time to dominate, the father. Bud Fox, the first generation college educated stock broker tries unsuccessfully to impress his father, the maintenance foreman at Blue Star Airlines. Two additional father figures are provided, Gordon Gekko the corporate raider, and Lou, a senior executive in Bud's brokerage house, who mirrors the traditional values of Bud's actual father. (These reverberations are probably enhanced by our knowledge that the movie father and son are played by real-life father and son, Martin and Charlie Sheen.)

Bud receives Gekko's approval by reluctantly revealing inside information about Blue Star obtained from his father. The Bud Fox-Gordon Gekko relationship leads ultimately to an attempt to take over Blue Star. Bud engineers a wage rollback agreement with the firm's unions, with the help of his real father, and the unions endorse the takeover. Curiously we never see any of Blue Star's management who, one supposes, have some responsibility for the fallen stock price which attracts Gekko's attention. Gekko promises Bud the presidency of Blue Star.

Before the deal is complete, however, Gekko decides that he can

make more money by selling Blue Star's assets and shutting the company down. His dream of dominance over his father destroyed, Bud seeks revenge by a dramatic display of financial manipulation, reminiscent of Eddy Murphy and Dan Ackroyd in *Trading Places*. He not only defeats Gekko's takeover plan, but causes him to lose millions. Bud reports Gekko to the Securities and Exchange Commission for insider trading, at the cost of a possible prison term for himself. Bud does the right thing. The senior broker, Lou, and Bud's real father approve. And we are left to imagine that Blue Star will continue in business with secure jobs for all.

Caryl Churchill's play, *Serious Money*, is pure satire. Its characters have no motivations more subtle than getting money, except for the would-be heroine, Scilla. She is briefly motivated by a desire to find her brother's killer and avenge him. Gradually her search for the murderer turns to a quest for her brother's money. The murdered brother, broker Jake Todd, also has made insider dealings that have led in some never-revealed manner to his death. Scilla, also in the brokerage business, loves her brother but deeply resents that he is their father's favorite. Again, the struggle for parental approval is wedded with financial market manipulation.

Billy Corman is *Serious Money's* industrialist and corporate raider. A rude cockney, his target is Albion Industries, named, a little high-handedly, after Blake's symbol for England itself. In contrast to *Wall Street*, we are allowed here to see the target company's management. Duckett, chairman of Albion, is a not-very-bright manager whose values are pretty much the same as Corman's, except that he doesn't

care to work so hard. Zac Zacker-  
man, the American investment  
banker, supplies the brains for Cor-  
man's takeover attempt while  
Corman supplies the viciousness.

Ultimately Corman's takeover is  
blocked by the conservative govern-  
ment which thinks that subsequent  
layoffs at Albion may damage the  
party's chances in the forthcoming  
elections. Albion goes instead to  
white knight, Ms. Biddulph, one of  
several powerful women in the play,  
in sharp contrast with *Wall Street*.

Jerry Sterner's play, *Other Peo-  
ple's Money*, has only five characters.  
The takeover target is New England  
Wire and Cable, whose Chairman,  
Andrew Jorgensen, has run this  
"family business" for decades. In  
fact there are many shareholders  
other than family. Unlike Duckett  
in *Serious Money*, Jorgensen seems  
genuinely concerned for his  
employeees. Lawrence Garfinkle,  
the raider, is obese, elegant, and  
cunning. Sterner shows Garfinkle  
constantly eating doughnuts and  
smirking dirty jokes to endear him  
to the audience.

Jorgensen has kept the obsolete  
wire and cable business afloat by  
acquiring other companies and  
using their cash flows to subsidize it  
and keep its employees working.  
Garfinkle's plan is to liquidate the  
cable business, which he says is  
"worth more dead than alive," a  
plan similar to Gecko's for Blue  
Star.

The takeover comes to a dramat-  
ic showdown at the annual  
shareholders' meeting. Jorgensen  
makes an impassioned speech pre-  
ceding the vote between Garfinkle's  
and Jorgensen's director nominees.  
He characterizes Garfinkle as "Larry  
the Liquidator—the entrepreneur of  
post-industrial America, playing God  
with other people's money. . . He cre-  
ates nothing. He builds nothing. He  
runs nothing. In his wake lies noth-

ing but a blizzard of paper to cover  
the pain." In *Wall Street* Gecko  
brags, "I create nothing—I own."

Jorgensen's speech is a prayer,  
says Garfinkle in his response, a  
prayer for the dead wire and cable  
business. "Don't blame me. I didn't  
kill it. It was dead when I got here."  
He then addresses company  
responsibilities to its employees and  
to the community:

What will happen to them? I got  
two words for that—Who cares? . . . They  
didn't care about you. They sucked you  
dry. You have no responsibility to them.  
For the last ten years this company has  
bled your money. Did this Community  
care? Did they ever say, "I know things  
are tough. We'll lower your taxes,  
reduce water and sewer?" Check it out.  
We're paying twice what we paid ten  
years ago. And the mayor is making  
twice what he made ten years ago. And  
our devoted employees, after taking no  
increases for three years, are still making  
twice what they made ten years ago.  
And our stock is one-sixth what it was  
ten years ago.

Garfinkle wins by a landslide. Jor-  
gensen dies shortly thereafter, and  
Garfinkle heads into the sunset with  
New England's attractive female  
attorney.

In *Chicago Magazine's* mini-  
review of *Other People's Money* the  
work is called a "modern morality  
play about what happens when a  
financial devil comes up against a  
small business run by angels." A lit-  
tle extreme in phrasing, but pretty  
much what we are expected to see  
in all three dramas, I suspect. The  
raiders—Gecko, Corman, and  
Garfinkle—are not without words in  
their own defense, however. Cor-  
man makes this speech in the verse  
in which *Serious Money* is written:

Albion is obviously deficient  
In management. Old fash-

ioned and paternal  
These figures stink.  
I can make it earn a l-  
ot more for its shareholders,  
who are  
The owners, after all. It will be far

Better fun, streamlined, ratio-  
nalized,  
When it forms part of Corman  
Enterprises.  
(and anyway I want it).

Gecko addresses an annual  
shareholders meeting in an earlier  
takeover attempt which precedes the  
Blue Star deal. Like Corman, he  
asserts that he will manage better  
than the current officers who, as a  
group, own less than three percent  
of the company, the CEO less than  
one percent. Gecko holds many  
times that. "Who will serve you bet-  
ter?" he asks. "Current management  
is concerned with golden parachutes,  
perks, and hunting lodges," says  
Gecko. "There are 15 vice presidents  
earning over \$200,000 a year. What  
do they all do?" He is not a destroyer  
of companies, but a liberator, he tells  
them. And he concludes by quoting  
Ivan Boesky's most famous words,  
"Greed is good."

Gecko, Garfinkle and Corman's  
claims to altruism are subverted by  
their own words. They will make a  
nice profit for the shareholders and,  
as shareholders themselves, they will  
profit in proportion. Garfinkle, the  
Satan of *Chicago's* review, has a gen-  
uine moral sense, however. He  
refuses to accept greenmail, even  
when the company's attorney  
assures him it's not illegal. "No, it's  
not. It's immoral," replies Garfin-  
kle. Greenmail is indeed immoral,  
for the practice allows a single share-  
holder, the raider, to be favored in  
an unequal distribution of assets in  
exchange for letting management  
alone.

How seriously are we meant to

take the raiders' words of self-justification? Suppose we do take them seriously, however. Many millions of dollars were lost on the stocks of Blue Star, Albion, and New England Wire and Cable, long before their managements heard of Gekko, Corman, or Garfinkle. Who are those who lost the money? Not a lot of people own stock directly, but millions have pension funds which are filled with corporate stocks. There are IRAs and mutual funds and cash values of life insurance invested in corporate securities. There are college endowment funds and private funds for medical research and minority scholarships and art museums and community symphony orchestras which depend on the success of corporate management to make their stock investments grow. New England Wire and Cable stock fell to one-sixth its value ten years ago. A very great deal of "other people's money" must have been spent by Jorgenson to maintain jobs, and his family's reputation.

The "other people" are, in fact, us. We provide money to create products and jobs, in the hope of increased wealth for down payments on homes, for our children's education and for our retirement. Most of us do not create industrial jobs. Like Gekko, we do not create, we own. But the funds we save through free financial markets make creation of new factories and products and jobs possible.

Should other people's money be used by the likes of Jorgenson, Duckett, and the anonymous managers of Blue Star to maintain a family tradition in New England, to afford a country squire's life for a mediocre executive, or even to provide employment for airline employees? Shouldn't the other people whose money is being used be consulted? That is not possible in a large corporation, of course, and that is where the corporate

raiders perform their service. The corporate takeover, or even just the threat of corporate takeover, has become a strong incentive to management in recent years. Corporate executives know that if they don't keep up with manufacturing technology, product development, and market structure changes they will have to face the consequences. Boards of directors may be slow to fire an inept CEO, and stockholders almost never force a change in management, but corporate raiders can move with breakneck speed when they sight an undervalued stock. The CEOs who create such bargains for the raiders know that their ineptitude will be rewarded with the loss of employment. Unfriendly takeovers are mainly unfriendly to a handful of managers at the top on badly-run companies.

What if there had been corporate raiders thirty years ago, takeover artists with enough financial resources to attempt a takeover of Chrysler or Ford or even General Motors? One wonders if the Japanese could have become so competitive so fast. The threat of sudden and unfriendly takeover might have caused US auto executives to pay more attention to the other people's money they were stewarding and keep their products up-to-date in economy and quality. The number of jobs lost through unfriendly corporate takeovers pales to insignificance beside the jobs lost in the automotive business through the shortsightedness of the management of an entire industry. Ditto for the steel industry.

If Gekko does liquidate Blue Star, it doesn't necessarily mean a net loss of jobs. If he sells Blue Star's planes in Mexico, there are new jobs in Mexico. But that will disrupt the lives of Blue Star's employees, who must seek other employment. There lies the heart

of the matter, I think. People want to lead lives of certainty, stability, and comfort with no surprises or inconvenience. If the world doesn't deliver such a life, they want to find out whose fault it is and stop them—even if it takes a whole lot of other people's money. This is a morality of the status quo. But can we really live lives without economic uncertainty?

Companies that become targets for takeovers are not just pulled out of a hat. Typically they are companies whose stock is selling for far less than what it might be worth under the changed circumstances the raider believes he can bring about. Undervaluation is often the result of mismanagement, wasted resources, wasted opportunities. "Fifteen Vice Presidents making over \$200,000 a year. What do they all do?" Undervaluation may be the result of events no one could have foreseen, but it still represents misallocation of resources. Misallocations of resources do not last long in a free market.

There are corporate raiders, I suppose, who are every bit as unlikeable as Gekko, Corman or Garfinkle, but that is beside the point. They do not often kill companies. They are the means to an asset reallocation which may well be beneficial as well as inevitable. Many people don't like that message, and see the messenger as Satan, arch-villain of our melodrama.

The creation of mythic figures of evil to blame for economic uncertainty is profoundly disturbing. Granted, it is an ancient tradition, but the creation of witches often leads to witch burning. One of the most vile aspects in the tradition of economic devils seems to live again in these three dramas. Gekko and Garfinkle are Jewish. Zackerman, the brains behind the Albion raid, if not Jewish himself,

works for the firm founded by Ben Klein, a Jew, as Churchill takes pains to establish. Each of the three works provides yet another image of the Jewish financier who is responsible for the evils of an uncertain economy. They are all versions of the long series of characters of whom Shylock is only the most famous example.

The Jewishness of the three raiders may be completely inadvertent, of course, literary archetypes entering the dramatist's work unconsciously. That is beside the point. Two wrongs have been brought about. First, a mythic being is called into existence to account for economic uncertainty which may

result from earlier mismanagement and may be as controllable as the weather. Secondly, in making these figures Jewish, an ancient and abominable lie has had new life breathed into it.

Free financial markets, which make personal savings and business investment possible, also make it possible for a few people with unpleasant personalities to amass more money than they need. In this, free markets are a little like free speech. If we want the benefits, we are forced sometimes to see and hear things we'd rather not. Free markets don't always adjust smoothly to changing conditions either, and this creates uncertainty in

employment and investment values. Corporate raiders, as agents of market adjustment, escalate uncertainty and upset the status quo.

If this is an evil, it is not one which will be defeated by opposing the fact of corporate raiders, for uncertainty and change are in the nature of life, down to the final great uncertainty itself. Corporate raiders provide an unfriendly reminder of this truth and they aren't liked much for it. But we will not be helped in our understanding of their function by turning them into agents of evil in a corporate melodrama. □

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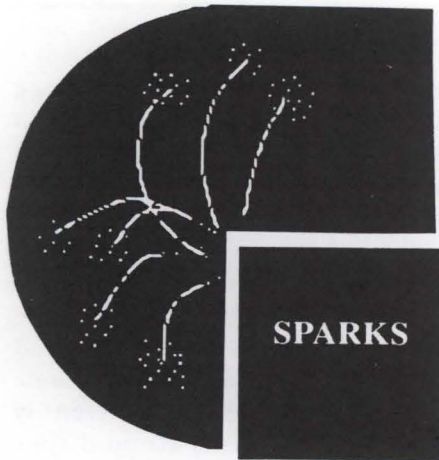
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## Data Gathering

### James David Black

My son was about eighteen months old when he toddled up to our car and traced a letter on the license plate with his index finger. It was a T, I told him, and he remembered. Soon he knew all the letters in the uppercase (license plate) form. Sister Montessori would have been pleased. I was, certainly—it's a warm glow you feel when your two-year-old spells out any word, even if he does require that it be printed in all caps.

Hindsight, however, makes me ask questions about the process by which he began to become lettered. Surely, I tell myself, there must be some cultural significance in the fact that an automobile was involved. For a couple of generations now, we've dated, honeymooned, conceived, commuted, and vacationed in cars; today we learn our letters at their knees, as it were. "A is for apple," I learned, and when I struggle with my Puritanical side, I recall the Bay Psalm Book's "A is for Adam." In a spasm of virtue, I wonder what sort of

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moral foundation is being laid for a child whose primer has four wheels and is named "Honda Accord"?

When the spasm subsides, I remind myself that Josh was only two, and the letters were at just his height, and they were large and raised and wonderfully tactile. I reassure myself that an environment is to learn from—after all, I'm not worried that already he watches clouds for weather signs, or that he tracks deer and raccoons down by our creek. It's the machine that worries me.

Consider this. At the supper table a couple of nights ago, he was playing the 'what-relation-to-me-is-so-and-so' game, and doing very well until a nephew relationship came up. With a very thoughtfully posed finger to his chin, he answered, "I'll have to work that out on the computer." An amusing answer for a four-year-old, if he weren't a Southern. In fact, he's not merely Southern, he's a Virginian, and we Virginians don't work out family relationships on a computer; we know our relations firsthand—vivid family accounts of the distant or dead counting as firsthand experiences, of course.

But back to the point—he shouldn't even know that computers are used to solve problems. What he knows about computers is (I thought) quite limited: left/right games, counting, drawing a clown's face. But problem-solving? Maybe he picked it up from television, and there's another problem.

I can't bash the misuse of television any harder than it's already been bashed, and I won't try. But I'd be silly not to acknowledge that TV is probably going to be as much a part of his environment as clouds or woolly worms. Besides, I've been won over. If there's a danger or innate immorality in occasional and judiciously planned viewing, I can't find it. I don't think that some good TV will rot Josh's brain as quickly as bad books will. So, we let

him watch. We limit his viewing time, select the programs, and discuss them with him. We hope it's the right way, and so far he doesn't seem addicted or even mildly zombie-like. Most afternoons he voluntarily avoids or turns off the TV and asks us to get out to play soccer or baseball, or go on safari in the woods.

Actually, it takes very little to seduce him into some active and involved games. My wife, a card fanatic, recently taught him to play Uno, and he's becoming quite a master of its strategy. He works jigsaw puzzles and solves mazes, he does connect-the-dot pictures, and he absolutely adores riddles and rhyming games. All of which he learned without benefit of either computer or TV.

Don't get me wrong. Despite an occasional twinge about twentieth century technology and even the Industrial Revolution, I've come to grips with most of my Luddite inclinations. I love my rototiller, and I love the Apple IIe I'm typing this piece on. The time is fast approaching that we will buy some simple math and word-game software and teach Josh to operate our computer. But I am going to fight a complete conversion.

I think that we were wise to stay in the country and build our home in the middle of seventy remote acres where Josh can catch lizards and woolly worms by the pint to share with his friends. From TV he's learned that Monarch butterflies migrate to Mexico, but from his back yard he's learned that caterpillars have a texture and soft muscularity that computerized images will never have. He's learned that butterfly wings leave a shimmering dust on his fingers. He's smelled real skunks and touched the dark still eyes of a dead deer.

I can't resist saying it. Beat *that* with your computer. □

## Little Troubles

At the engagement party, Moshe winked:  
"May all your troubles be little ones!"

All Nazareth soon knew there'd be a little one.  
Could I trust Mary's innocent story?  
Or make some sense of my strange dream?

In the midst of my wild questions, Caesar  
levied taxes, and we journeyed to Bethlehem,  
seventy miles as an angel flies.  
But burdened donkeys never fly,  
and I too walked those dusty miles.  
I would not have planned such a honeymoon!

In Bethlehem, every bed taken,  
we finally found a stable behind an inn.  
Bethlehem was no rest stop, believe me,  
especially for her in her labor.  
I was there, of course, but of little help.

That unforgettable night brought a wondrous  
mix of animals and angels, of fear and peace.

Afterwards we still had forty anxious days  
for Mary's cleansing. I agonized  
about lost wages, earned a skimpy  
sixteen denarii helping Abel build a shed.

Then, caught in Herod's holocaust of infants,  
we fled as refugees to Egypt. Skirting  
Judea, we returned home exhausted.  
But we had become a family.

**Bernhard Hillila**

