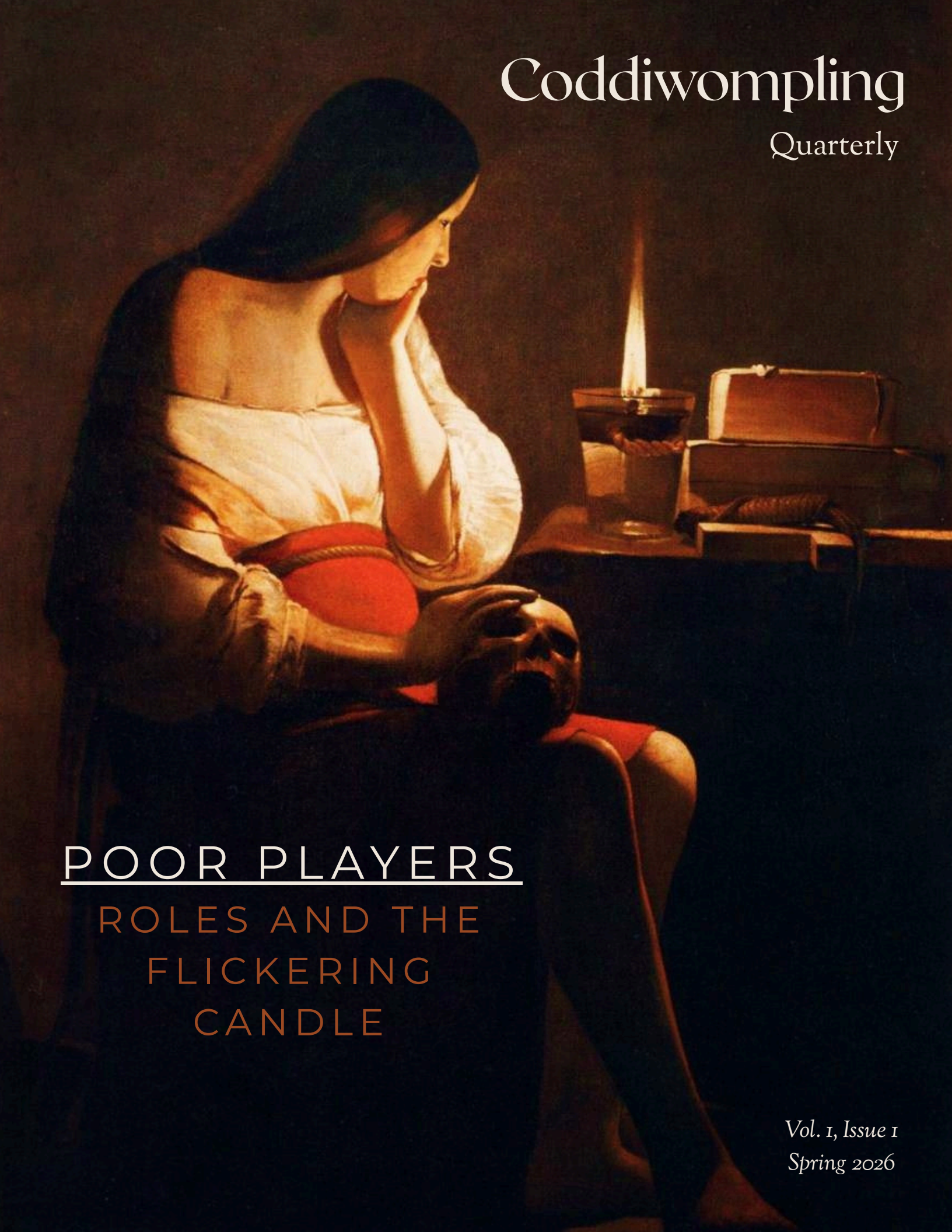




Coddiwompling

Quarterly

POOR PLAYERS

ROLES AND THE
FLICKERING
CANDLE

*Vol. 1, Issue 1
Spring 2026*

Why Coddwompling?

Coddwomple (v.) ~ To travel purposefully to an undetermined location

According to Wiktionary, the Free Dictionary, connected to Wikipedia (which we were all told not to use as a source in high school but which we are now using because we have the capacity and willingness to fact-check and are no longer in high school) there is no evidence for this term before the late 2010s, during which era it became popular. Since we also at one point did not exist, we see no reason to discriminate against it. As a description of the daily experience of human life, we find it both fitting and delightful, and have adopted it as the title of this purposeful and yet largely undetermined journal.

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We focus each issue of Coddwompling Quarterly around a central question or theme. Do you have questions you would like us to explore? Can you guess what this issue was centered around?

Want to respond to anything in this issue? Deeply disagree with any one of us? Have concerns about our mental health? Thoughtful and substantial responses to this quarter's journal can be directed to:

coddwomplingquarterly@gmail.com

*Please keep responses under 300 words.
Publication will be at the discretion of the editors.*

A painting of two white goats with horns in a field of yellow flowers. The goats are looking towards the viewer. The background is a soft-focus field of yellow flowers and green grass.

Grilled Goat

An Interview with Resident Puritan

Rosemar Avelyn: Resident Puritan, did you get your beer?

Resident Puritan: [says a lot of things I {Pilgrim Puddleglum} wasn't fast enough to capture. In short, she has the beer]

[Resident Puritan takes a selfie]

RP: Whoo! Ok. I'm getting grilled?

RA: Yes. Resident Puritan! Thank you for being our first interviewee.

RP: I don't think I had much of a choice.

RA: You mentioned something about being a scapegoat, right?

RP: Yes.

RA: Want to tell us a little more about that?

RP: You know, I've always felt that my role in life has been to be the clown in the circus. You've gotta loosen up and laugh a bit to get yourself ready for the rest of the show... I'm the precursor to greatness.

Masque or Counter?

By Rosemar Avelyn

One of the seminal films that shaped my growing imagination as a teenager was the 2004 film *The Phantom of the Opera*. I was captivated by the music, the complex relationships between the characters, and the magic that is that marvel we call the theater. One of the most ancient and most important tools of the theater—and the object and symbol on which *The Phantom of the Opera* rides—is the mask.

While many characters wear a mask—literal or figurative—in *Phantom of the Opera*, the most prominent mask is of course the one worn by the Phantom himself. The Phantom's mask is not a mere accessory; it is an entire hermeneutic. The masked Phantom is a whole identity, one that is not entirely the same, nor even entirely consonant with, the unmasked man. The masked Phantom is the genius, the master of music, the architect, the lover; the unmasked Phantom is a murderer, an abductor, a freak—simply put, a monster. Yet this is all one man: the Phantom is both genius and deformed, both lover and monster. His mask plays an essential role not just in our understanding of the Phantom but also in his understanding of himself.

Masks, roles, play—these are tools of theater, but they are so because they are tools with which human beings reach a deeper understanding of themselves. The plays of the ancient Greeks, for instance, were not mere entertainment; they were explorations of human nature and means of understanding and catharsis. Even today, the richest of modern “entertainment”—books, films, and even video games—is art that is woven through with themes that are intrinsically linked to human nature and resound to the deepest chords of the cares of the human heart.

Most people “play at” roles in their day-to-day lives. One puts on the mask or role of the working professional and removes it upon leaving the office or workplace, then commutes home and assumes the role of husband, wife, parent. Some roles feel natural; others entirely alien. Some roles are more enjoyable than others. Some “fit” better than others. The Bard understood this dynamic of playing roles very well and put the following in the mouth of Jacques in his comedy *As You Like It*:

“All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts.” (*As You Like It*, [2.7.138-41])

It is important that, whatever roles one plays and however enjoyable those roles may be, they should not become a crutch to one's identity nor an excuse not to humbly exercise authentic self-possession and self-expression. If they do become a crutch in this way one may very quickly cease to be really oneself, and the self one shares with God and others will not really be the true self at all, but only a mask (cf. *Person and Being*, 68-70). This is certainly true of the fictional Phantom; it is doubly certain for man who is made in God's image and likeness (Gen. 1:26). No mask was made to be worn forever.

At some point, the Phantom must have his own mask removed by Christine. At some point, Sleeping Beauty must be kissed by the Prince.* Real self-discovery, true abundant life in Christ can only happen in relationship with God and with others. The final shattering of the Phantom's mask only happens when Christine kisses the Phantom. Her compassion, accompanied by prayer, enables the Phantom not only to release Raoul and Christine

*Clarke uses the fairy tale of Sleeping Beauty multiple times in his work to highlight the human being's need for another person to wake himself up to himself (cf. *Person and Being*, 45, 65); this indispensable need for communio and its unique characteristic as an enlightening force to the human being I call simply the “Sleeping Beauty principle”.

to each other but also to release himself from the prison of mask and mirror he had built for himself out of self-protection and self-loathing.

Love of God and love of neighbor are the two indispensable keys to unlocking the secret of a truly abundant life. Nor is this merely a point of moral theology; Clarke calls the act of communion with another “the law of being itself” (Person and Being, 82). Love is not only a theological principle considered and explored by St. John; it is the core metaphysical truth that runs through all levels of being. The deeper one dives into metaphysics enlightened by Revelation the more surely and swiftly one moves “toward a metaphysics of love” (Person and Being, 72).

At what point, though, if any, does a role cease to be merely a role? When a role overruns one’s life, as the Phantom’s mask did his, it can cause great damage to the whole person; but is there ever a point at which a role can integrate itself so deeply into the self that it becomes a part of who one is? This seems a rather large question, well beyond the scope of this brief reflection, but I think we can gain a clue by considering for the briefest of instants the principle of simplicity.

To be simple is to be without parts—that is, to be undivided in one’s being. This, I think, is the key. The simpler one is, the more integrated one can be as a human being, the less one “plays at” roles. Or to put it another way: when a role becomes “one” with our person, it becomes less a role than a title, less a part we play than a name which forms a part of our name (perhaps even a part of the name on the white counter described in Rev. 2:17). Thus we call Our Lady “Mary”; “Mother of God”; and “Coredemptrix”—not because these were mere roles she played, but because this is who she is.

Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life” (Jn. 14:6) and “I am come that they may have life, and may have it more abundantly” (Jn. 10:10). Whatever one’s roles, they should be in service of living abundantly and fully in the Life that is at once our Source and our End. The integration of the authentic self (a life-long process, as Clarke himself attests [cf. Person and Being, 46]) by removing unnecessary masks and flowering our authentic roles into our “name”, enables us to love God and our neighbor ever more fully. Clarke puts it succinctly: “To be an actualized human person, then, is to be a *lover*” (Person and Being, 76).

Works Cited

Shakespeare, William. *As You Like It*. Edited by Frances E. Dolan; General Editors Stephen Orgel and A. R. Braunmuller, Penguin Books, 2002.

W. Norris Clarke, S.J. *Person and Being*. Marquette University Press, 2008.

Acceptance

by The Pilgrim Puddleglum

Life - defined for the purposes of this article as the sustained existence of the individual - precedes any roles or duties. They flow from it, are informed by it, can even be a necessary part of it, but are not its essence.

The significance of individual personhood, as disconnected from social roles, is a relatively recent development in the history of humanity. In ancient literature, the social opinion of others and the role one takes in the world inform the existence of the individual. Achilles' extraordinary anger results from others' refusal to take his extraordinary qualities seriously. Beowulf fights for, and from within, his community. Aeneas carries his household gods, his father, and his son across the sea, not for his own personal glory, but so that his personal glory can serve his family and race. The word "person" itself comes from the Latin *persona*, a stage mask, a role. For the ancient world, the person was the roles he played - father, mother, brother, sister, husband, wife, warrior, sorceress, hero, oracle, king, queen, thane, conqueror, peacemaker, advisor... and so on.

Philosophically, one reason this began to change was the arguments of the early Christian Church Fathers about the nature of the Trinity - if the person is nothing but his role, then having "three persons in one God" means "one God with three roles." The Fathers rejected this as the heresy of modalism, condemned finally by the Council of Nicaea.

From the struggle to explain how the Three Persons of God are distinct came the idea that the person, the individual, had ontological meaning prior to the role he played.

In the words of John Zizioulas, author of *Being as Communion* (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997):

"Uniqueness is something absolute for the person. The person is so absolute in its uniqueness that it does not permit itself to be regarded as an arithmetical concept, to be set alongside other beings, to be combined with other objects or to be used as a means, even for the most sacred goal. The goal is the person itself..." (*Being as Communion*, 47).

This took a while to take hold; the ancient concept of personhood as connected to social roles persisted and shaped society until the Renaissance, with the Church and the kingdom of Heaven containing the roles in which people identified. But the shift was slowly taking hold. The Christian knights of Arthur's Round Table seek heroism through the random quests they encounter in everyday life, failing as often as they succeed, ultimately focused on their individual salvation. In the Renaissance, this idea historically burst out into full color. Martin Luther and his emphasis on the individual acceptance of "grace alone;" Pico della Mirandola's belief in the capacity to choose as indicative of dignity; da Vinci's glorious emphasis on the human body in art; religious art (for example, the Annunciation in the background of this article) that emphasized the individual experience of sacred figures. The individual was now the point of art, history, and individual life. What will you do? What do you will to do? Why set limits to either question?

Unfortunately, the results of extreme individualism can lead to extreme fragmentation (totalitarianism, nihilism, solipsism, religious sectarianism), not just extreme creativity, as the individual's glorious self-identification does still depend on his choosing one or the other of a set of perceived goods. He can and does choose, but he is still incapable by definition of creating himself.

So much for the history. Now for the experience.

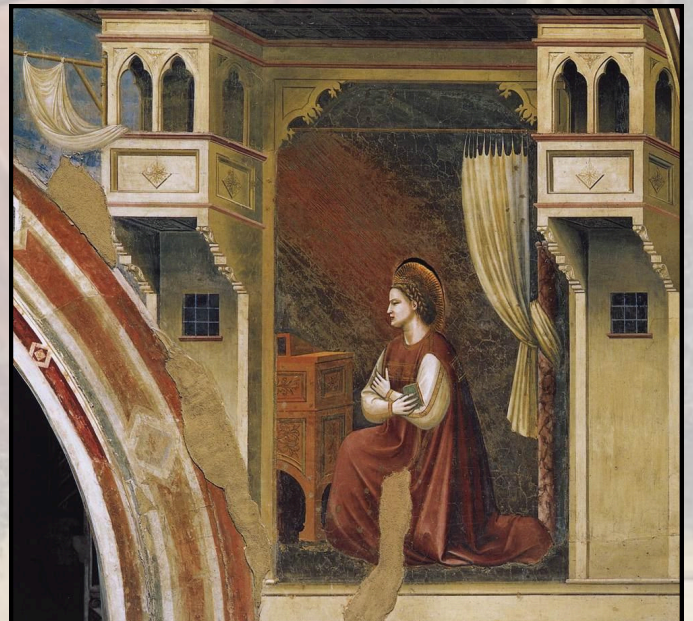
The human individual is a curious mixture of specific abilities and deep needs. We have much to give but require much to be given to us. We are ourselves in the extremities of our loneliness, and yet there is no healthy life lived in isolation (not solitude...those things are different. Topic for another day). Are roles important? Yes, but I would change the term to “responsibilities.”

What’s the difference? A role is external; a responsibility is internal. To oversimplify a lived reality - what the ancient Greeks, for example, understood by social roles had much to do with what a life looked like from the outside, and the inside was to conform to that reality. A responsibility is a freely chosen conforming to that exterior reality, or even a free choice of that reality. It is a subtle distinction, but, in a role, one’s freedom is tied up from the start; in a responsibility, one’s freedom is freely given. In the words of a wise woman I know, there are two sets of chains in every life: those tying us to God and those keeping us from going to Him. One needs to be released, and one needs to be tightened. But often both will feel like chains. I think you can insert “others” or “our larger context” for “God” and still have the statement be accurate.

Life is about persons. You are a person. I am a person. Those around us are persons. A social role has to do with you bumping up against your social surroundings, your cultural context. A responsibility has to do with you bumping up against another person, who is, along with you, a part of your social surroundings and cultural context. But existence comes first. First and foremost, how are you bumping up against yourself? Are you friends with yourself? Do you enjoy your own company? Are you happy? Are you, in the last analysis, yourself? Once the answers to all of those questions can be “yes,” the responsibilities come naturally. Where do you, as yourself, bump up against others? How can you intentionally reach out to them? What are the ways you have chosen to be faithful to this intentional game of bumper cars that is human life?

Much of your self and your intentional game of bumper cars is not chosen but given, and in this way the ancients were correct - there is no creating yourself, existentially speaking. But experientially speaking, we each must consistently, intentionally choose who we are in response to the circumstances we are given. Free will is one of those circumstances we are given to work with; we must make choices if we are to be fully human. If free choice were not the foundation of life, there would be in the end no everyday suffering, no everyday glory, no everyday happiness, no everyday heroism. Human life is a patchwork of things you expect and things you don’t, things you want and things you shrink from, all stitched together by intentional choice. That takes a lot more dignity, humility, and bravery than a social role.

*The background artwork, sans words:
The Annunciation by Giotto di Bondone,
14th century.*



To wake delight once more,
That's been too long asleep,
And worth that's exiled deep
To gather and restore

-Guiraut de Bornelh

And with fair poet's words, we bid you sweet adieu,
Till greening Spring retires, and Summer blossoms new

-The Traveling Troubadours