

A decorative floral illustration in the top left corner, featuring several flowers and leaves in a black and white line-art style.

Coddiwompling

Quarterly

A detailed illustration of an elderly man with white hair, wearing a red robe, looking down at a young woman with blonde hair, also in a red robe, who is looking up at him. They are positioned in front of a window showing a landscape with a large blue mountain, a winding path, and a small town.

Doves and Serpents:

Wisdom in Times of Growth

Volume 1, Issue 2
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We focus each issue of Coddiwompling 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:

coddiwomplingquarterly@gmail.com

or submitted via the contact form on our website at

coddiwomplingquarterly.com

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

Cover art: "An Old Man and His Grandson" by Domenico Ghirlandaio





A Proclamation:

Let it be known that, due to the generous and ongoing efforts of a dear friend and recent member of the Troubadours, we have a website! Please check it out for back issues, weekly musings both peculiar and profound, a signup for automatic delivery of each new missive, an easy way to leave comments (please leave comments. we love them!) and a truly lovely example of virtual architecture. We are so grateful and we hope you are too.

Thank you, Ghola Haderach!

www.coddwomplingquarterly.com

-The Traveling Troubadours



Efficiency, Timelessness, and Robots

an interview with Pilgrim Puddleglum

Resident Puritan: Question: Pilgrim Puddleglum, Pope Leo recently wrote his first encyclical Magnifica Humanitas (*Magnificent Humanity: On Safeguarding the Human Person in the Time of Artificial Intelligence*). It is on AI. We're aware that you have devoted time to the study of this encyclical. Could you summarize the encyclical for us, and then share one thing that you find important from this encyclical for the world and for you personally?

Pilgrim Puddleglum: Yeah, yes he (Pope Leo) did. Are you asking me the kind of question that AI would ask?

Rosemar Arelyn: We're testing to see if you are really a robot.

PP: Oh, I better get my act together, then.

RA: Do you think that AI is an emergency for the world?

PP: I think it is a symptom of a bigger emergency, only because there are so many people who are willing to use it. Just the fact that so many people are willing to use it, but don't know what these tools are for... I listened to a lecture where a professor claimed that AI was actively going to kill everyone, but I don't know what I think about that... he seemed pretty serious, though...

RA: Do you think AI is a tool that can be utilized, or a potential threat to civilization?



PP: Here's the thing - the ways that it could be integrated, are not ways we're ready to do well. It could be great as a fact database, or if we trained AI to do menial tasks, so we didn't have people do that. But there are problems there too. Say that we train AI to take care of the electric system of the city - what happens when that goes wrong, and no one knows how to use that system? Or what if there was a really good hacker who was able to hack the system and no one knew how to fix it afterward? If we move further and further away from doing those things ourselves, we'll just get very lazy, and eventually only a few people will know how to do some things...In short, I think it *can* be used well, but I don't think it is worth it.

RP: If it can in your opinion be used well, what would we need to change about ourselves to use it (AI) well?

PP: We would need to be less lazy and it would take a lot to get there. In fact, given fallen human nature, perhaps we never would. We'd need to be an entire society of people who actively prioritized using our time well.

RP: What's the difference, if any, between the AI revolution, and prior technological developments, such as the Internet—or, going further back, the rise of industrialization? What makes AI any different from these, if at all?

PP: Where do we draw the line is the question? I'll give a preliminary answer to this question, with the caveat that it is worth a lot more thought. I think there is a lot of value to knowing how to do something with your hands, even if it takes up more time. I think automation is valuable if the thing it saves time is more worth doing. Let's take the washing machine for example. Since we (humankind) invented the washing machine, we no longer have to go down to the river and spend hours a day scrubbing our clothes and then hanging them out to dry. That time can now be used for other things. So maybe the problem is the kind of culture that we're in - that we don't know what to do with the time we're saving, we don't know what to do with the efficiency. For example, the fact that AI is creating so much "art" and so many videos is really disturbing—now you're taking the time that we're supposed to spend creating and using it to consume AI slop. We've successfully saved the time—and now we do worse things with it.

RA: I do find it worth noting (putting my two cents in where it doesn't belong) that there does seem to be a direct correlation between an increase in efficiency and a loss of regard for the beautiful. The Industrial Revolution is a really blatant example of this—if you go back in history some centuries before that you find that things were created to be both beautiful and useful.

PP: Yes, like the old musical instruments you see at the museum. As a matter of fact, this is a lesson I have had to learn - for the longest time I thought I needed to use my time to talk, read, write, etc. as much as possible, which after some reflection I realize is a little dehumanizing. It is better to spend two hours on one conversation, than have a lot of five-minute conversations. There is something specifically human in retaining that value. Maybe I only read one book; maybe I only have one conversation; maybe I only help one person per day. But I must allow



myself to be humble in the presence of that one thing. Or if you take that one instrument and take the time to craft it to be both useful and beautiful, like you were saying—now it is a work of art, now it is timeless... efficiency is sometimes opposed to timelessness. Sometimes, of course, you do have a laundry list of ordinary things to do, but I think being more intentional about each of the the laundry list of day-to-day things is important.

R4: To change tack just slightly, let me ask you a new question, Pilgrim Puddleglum. There is a created fictional universe, where robots and humans coexist more or less peacefully. The robots have varying levels of emotional acuity, but it is pretty clear that they exist in a hierarchy below human beings and other sentient lifeforms in order to serve them. We're aware that you're unfamiliar with Star Wars (and that's a shame), but do you think we could have a Christian order in which robots assume a role in the hierarchy?

PP: That's an interesting question that I don't quite know what to do with. Are you saying Star Wars is a Christian universe? Because it's Dualistic, so it can't be...

R4: No, no, Star Wars isn't Christian. But could you build a similar universe where robots are helpers in a similar fashion?

PP: Happy robot, everyone has a robot and we're all happy...

R4: Yes, do you think there is a theoretical universe where that could be the case as a happy, healthy societal norm. Could we, (in this theoretical universe) exist in good conscience with robots?

PP: Ok, you're throwing morality into this universe.

R4: We would need to take the morality of it into account were we to live in such a world. But to rephrase the question: could you have a clear conscience owning a WALL-E?

PP: Oh, I don't think there is anything objectively wrong... as long as this robot was made for a specific purpose, such as mowing the lawn for an old lady who was unable to do it herself. Although, now that I am thinking of it, why wouldn't the old lady's grandson be mowing her lawn? Is anyone visiting her now that she has her lawn robot? Hmm... oh actually, that is really wrong. Now that I think of it, that sort of thing removes human connection and charity from the picture.

RP: Also, why haven't you seen Star Wars? Is this like it's a dangerous thing, ooh, bad, scary, stay away (does horror noises)?

PP: ARE WE GOING TO PRINT THAT QUESTION

RP: [Neither confirms nor denies]

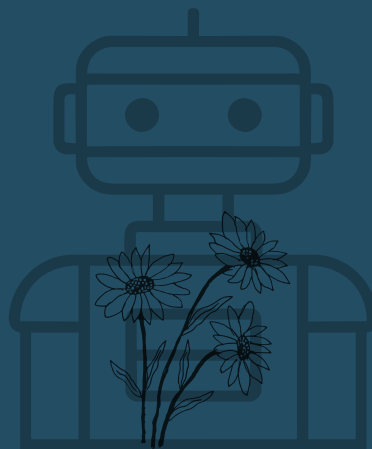


PP: My dad was a treckie, I grew up on Star Trek. My dad didn't like Star Wars; we watched a lot of Star Trek, but not Star Wars. In short, I have seen a lot of people in shrunken outfits that are too small for them, but I have yet to see a talking robot.

RA: Shrunken outfits?

PP: Actually, there's a reason for that. The costumes the actors wore in the original series of Star Trek weren't shrink proof and the show didn't have the budget to buy them new costumes. So when you see that the costumes are too small, they are actually shrunken. They do really get tighter as time goes on.

RA: I think that's a fun fact to go out on. Thank you, Pilgrim Puddleglum, that was a difficult topic to cover!



Absolutely Nothing

By Pilgrim Puddleglum

Taking joy in life itself is an ability easily lost. Too much is always happening and needs to be attended to, or has happened and needs to be accounted for, or will happen and needs to be planned for. There are old sorrows, new friendships, household duties, work responsibilities; projects, people, panic, pain; illness, emotion, recuperation, weather... and on and on and on.

And yet, aren't these also life?

Take a moment to step back from all of the everything, not to forget it or to leave it behind, but to see it. What *is* it all? What do you see?

Here's what I see: Sometimes a whirlwind, in which everything appears as bits of paper or rubbish blowing about wildly. Sometimes an ocean, heaving us all along while we flail ineffectually. Sometimes single moments of bright, clear joy and bright, clear sorrow alternating like light and shadow. But always something steady and always something moving.

It is these two elements, the single specific moments and the inexorable inescapable movement, that make up life within time. Both of them together. Neither can be forgotten or the whole image falls apart.

For a long time, summer was an unbearable stretch of time for me. No classroom; no schedule of incessant intellectual activity; nobody in my house but me. It seemed so meaningless, even my reading, my projects, my family, my friends. And yet, I knew that when I lived in the midst of a thousand things without ever stopping, I lost sight of myself. I wanted silence, but I couldn't live it. What a conundrum.

A couple of things broke me out. The first: recognizing that I wasn't really with myself. My mind and heart were still whirling around after everything else stopped. I wasn't really in silence because I didn't let myself see everything that was going on. There were parts to the whole that is me that I didn't really want to deal with, and so I didn't; I needed to painfully sit still before I could peacefully sit still.

The second: recognizing that I wasn't really with God. Who is God? Who knows, except for Him? And *that* is a truth accepted by many thinkers and pray-ers. But once I was able to be with myself (painfully, without full understanding) I could then be with God (painfully, without full understanding) and could only then be even open to being at peace. But the important thing couldn't be this constant chase after peace; it had to be an acceptance of being myself with God. Peace is a consequence, and it isn't my consequence to create.

The silence, for me, is a foundation of who I am. It is the beginning of the larger pattern that is my life. And keeping that larger pattern in mind as I go through each little part of it makes me feel less like a collection of small bits of torn paper blown on the wind. I can be present to a difficult conversation with my family because it is a part of a larger whole of love and life. I can be present to the trees blowing in the wind in my backyard because it is part of a larger whole of nature and poetry and physicality. The parts are whole, and make a whole; I am parts, but I am whole; God is the Creator of all of it, so there must be some thread holding it together. And then it all works, even my beautifully chaotic fall and winter and my beautifully empty summer.

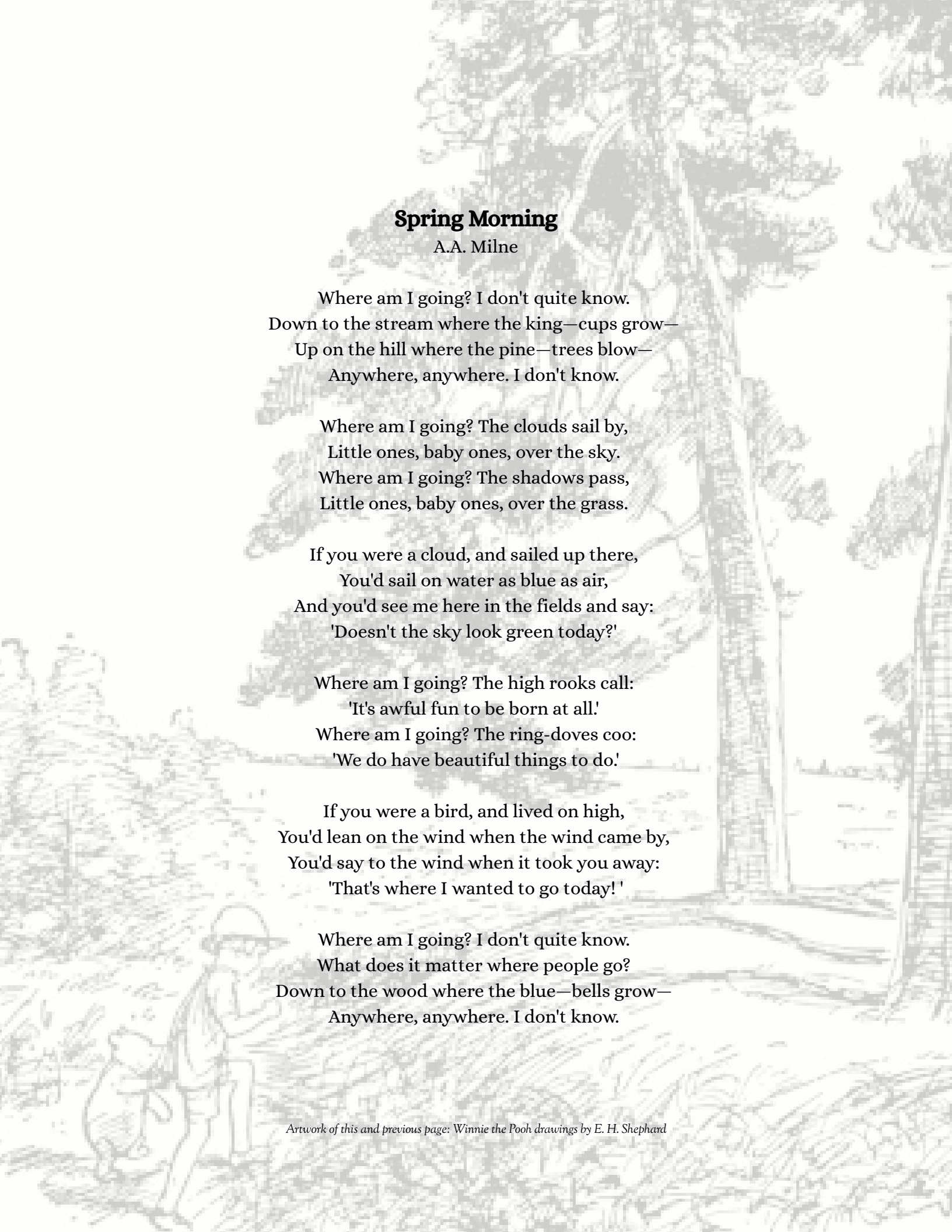
What does all this have to do with taking joy in life?

This year, I read Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* for the first time, and encountered this quote:

"The languor of Youth - how unique and quintessential it is! How quickly, how irrevocably, lost! The zest, the generous affections, the illusions, the despair, all the traditional attributes of Youth - all save this - come and go with us throughout life. These things are a part of life itself; but languor - the relaxation of yet unwearied sinews, the mind sequestered and self-regarding - that belongs to Youth alone and dies with it." Evelyn Waugh, *Brideshead Revisited*, Book 1 Ch. 4

I had never thought of youth as a time of *languor* before, so this gave me pause. Isn't youth - childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood, all in different ways - a time of energy? But it's the "yet unwearied" part that is the key here. For someone young - young of limbs or young of mind or both - energy often comes from a place of wonder or excitement, or at least has an immediate inner source. It is not a driven or an exhausted or a panicked or a deadline-ridden energy. Languor, in this sense, is an attitude, one that Waugh's narrator thinks to die with youth. But I don't think it does; I think it just becomes harder and harder to experience through all the layers of experience, past and present, and anticipation of the future. Perhaps the sometimes painful practice of recognition and acceptance could unlock it, or something like it, again - this sense that no matter how many Things there are, no matter how many Happenings happen, no matter how many Pains and Sorrows accumulate, no matter how quickly the Joys float like clouds over the horizon, there is still an I and a God underneath it all. Or perhaps I'm wrong, and something in the way I see needs to change - but if there is, if the still point itself turns over beneath my feet, there will *still* be an I and a God underneath it all.





Spring Morning

A.A. Milne

Where am I going? I don't quite know.
Down to the stream where the king—cups grow—
Up on the hill where the pine—trees blow—
Anywhere, anywhere. I don't know.

Where am I going? The clouds sail by,
Little ones, baby ones, over the sky.
Where am I going? The shadows pass,
Little ones, baby ones, over the grass.

If you were a cloud, and sailed up there,
You'd sail on water as blue as air,
And you'd see me here in the fields and say:
'Doesn't the sky look green today?'

Where am I going? The high rooks call:
'It's awful fun to be born at all.'
Where am I going? The ring-doves coo:
'We do have beautiful things to do.'

If you were a bird, and lived on high,
You'd lean on the wind when the wind came by,
You'd say to the wind when it took you away:
'That's where I wanted to go today!'

Where am I going? I don't quite know.
What does it matter where people go?
Down to the wood where the blue—bells grow—
Anywhere, anywhere. I don't know.

from Psalm 103

Bless the LORD, my soul;
all my being, bless his holy name!

Bless the LORD, my soul;
and do not forget all his gifts,

Who pardons all your sins,
and heals all your ills,

Who redeems your life from the pit,
and crowns you with mercy and compassion,

Who fills your days with good things,
so your youth is renewed like the eagle's.



For as the heavens tower over the earth,
so his mercy towers over those who fear him.

As far as the east is from the west,
so far has he removed our sins from us.

As a father has compassion on his children,
so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him.

For he knows how we are formed,
remembers that we are dust.

Art: "First Steps, after Millet," by Vincent Van Gogh

“Don’t You See How Beautiful I Am?”

By Rosemar Avelyn

In the quiet golden evenings of summer when the cooling sun filters through the branches of the trees and the breeze whispers a promise of a gentle evening, sometimes it feels easy to imagine what eternity might, in just a very small way, be like. Time takes on a strange character in summer. At times it seems to move differently than in other seasons; sometimes it seems to stop altogether. Summer is perhaps the most changeless of all the seasons, and so is a ripe time for the contemplation of eternity. (In fact, Wallace Stevens wrote an entire poem devoted to just such a reflection called “Credences of Summer” which you ought to go and read for yourself.) Man’s draw toward eternity and his tendency to contemplate it is eminently understandable when one considers that man is drawn naturally toward God, to whom eternity solely and properly belongs (cf. *Summa Theologica* 1.10.3).

Man, however, insofar as he is a changing being, exists in time (cf. *ibid.*). Man is born, grows up and eventually grows old, in the same manner as the morning turns to evening or the spring and summer to the colder months. This later stage of growth too is valuable, despite the hardships that come with it. So valuable is this facet of man, the ageing one, that I would like to take a moment to consider it in the quiet golden light of the fading summer. I shall turn with confidence then to one of George MacDonald’s Grandmothers here for insight into this gilding age of life.

In MacDonald’s short story “The Golden Key”, a young girl named Tangle comes upon a beautiful woman in a poor cottage in the forest and the two immediately engage one another in a lively and lovely dialogue. After the woman (who soon reveals herself to be simply “Grandmother”) asks Tangle how old she is, the following plays out:

“How old are you, please?” returned Tangle.

‘Thousands of years old,’ answered the lady.

‘You don’t look like it,’ said Tangle.

‘Don’t I? I think I do. Don’t you see how beautiful I am?’...

‘Ah! but,’ said Tangle, ‘when people live long they grow old. At least I always thought so.’

‘I have no time to grow old,’ said the lady. ‘It is very idle to grow old’” (“The Golden Key”, 430).

Grandmother notes two different meanings of “old” here. One is that decay of age with which man is intimately and painfully familiar: the decrepit body, the weakening mind, the white hair, and so on. Yet through Grandmother’s eyes something significant is noted: idleness, not count of years, is the cause of that unpleasantness of “growing old” that Grandmother absolutely rejects. The unwelcome infirmities of becoming old have nothing, in Grandmother’s account, to do with a certain count of years. Beautiful Grandmother in her quiet cottage in the forest is certainly far from idle.

It would be a great mistake however to think therefore that Grandmother is young. George MacDonald takes great care never to call her young and she does not consider herself so. This is a crucial

key to an proper understanding of the narrative of “The Golden Key”: *none of the characters of fairy land that Mossy and Tangle encounter are eternally young*. Quite the contrary. It is their age that grants them distinction. Grandmother, The Old Man of the Sea, The Old Man of the Earth, and the Old Man of the Fire are all characterized by the same hallmark: they are all very old. Grandmother owns her age to Tangle from the very beginning and links it directly to her beauty. By her own account, Grandmother is not beautiful apart from or in spite of her age; she is beautiful because of it. Age and beauty are expressly and inextricably interwoven, a theme that persists through the entirety of the story and finds its deepest expression in the Old Man of the Fire of whom MacDonald says: “the love in his large gray eyes was as deep as the centre” (“The Golden Key”, 441). One can hear in this a distant but perceptible echo of that Beauty that St. Augustine calls “Beauty Ever-Ancient and Ever-New”. (Confessions, Book X).

Yet growing old comes with a cost. Before Tangle and Mossy reach the land from which the shadows fall, both taste loss: loss of each other, loss of the very functioning of their bodies. Both taste death in the house of the Old Man of the Sea. Even beautiful Grandmother has sadness in her smile.

Again, here one sees that beauty and suffering are not only compatible but indeed that they often go hand in hand. Pope Benedict XVI in his book *Introduction to Christianity* offers some key insights here. In his section discussing Christian worship, Pope Benedict XVI strongly affirms that the principle of Christian worship and sacrifice is not destruction—despite the suffering that comes with it, including Christ’s own suffering on the Cross—but love (cf. *Introduction to Christianity*, 287, 289).

One must avoid two errors regarding the link between beauty and suffering, however. Firstly, we must not despise our suffering. It is far from purposeless; indeed, according to St. Paul, our suffering finds an extraordinary place in Christ’s work of salvation (cf. Col. 1:19-24). Secondly, (and this is a subtler error) we must not glory in our sufferings for the sake of the pain itself. Suffering in this life is never for that. If it were, it would be purposeless indeed. Rather, in this world we endure suffering because “this process of being torn apart is identical with love” (*Introduction to Christianity*, 290). And is not love what makes one beautiful? Certainly their Source is one and the same.

Age and suffering, beauty and love are all threads of which man is woven, in a sense, in the Providence of God. Fallen man cannot avoid some of the infirmities of old age for we have, as it were, a certain “idleness” entangled in the threads of our being (that is to say, original sin). Yet there is an insight we can carry just as Mossy and Tangle carried it—the insight that the gaining of the “country whence the shadows fall” is worth the pain of it, that every trial encountered on the way is only another step onward, that every age that we gain and own is one that makes us more beautiful. With such an insight (such a certain hope!) locked deep in one’s heart, one can rightly affirm that in the face of it even death is, as the Old Man of the Sea says, “only more life” (cf. “The Golden Key”, 442)—a life most beautiful indeed.

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*"Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date;
But thy eternal summer shall not fade"
-From Sonnet 18 by William Shakespeare*

Art: "Woman with a Parasol - Madame Monet and Her Son" by Claude Monet

Missive Responses

from the Troubadours

Dear Pilgrim Puddleglum,

Regarding your article in the spring issue of the Quarterly: certain parties have expressed concern over the lack of a definition of the term "freedom" which has been used and stressed in the latter half of your article. Freedom as a term is used today with a wide range of meanings, some of them rather unsavory. For the sake of said parties' gain of sleep, could you kindly address this concern?

Most sincerely,

A Confused Holder of an Ambiguous Term

Dear Confused One,

You must really be confused - nobody can hold a term. They are by definition non-physical. However, your question is salient. By freedom I mean the quality that gives a human being responsibility for going where he was always supposed to. It is the quality that lets a middle schooler stand up to a bully and is equally the quality that lets a helplessly bullied child decide not to turn around and bully the children younger than he is. It is not a quality that removes all external circumstances, in other words. It is rather a quality that informs one's inner world. I hope this makes things clear as mud.

Pilgrim Puddleglum



Beware the anteater
Because anteaters eat ants
And anything which devours whole civilizations
Cannot at all be trusted
So I say:
Beware the eater of ants

Submitted anonymously

Dear Anonymous,

Is the anteater necessarily evil,
or are his purposes beyond our comprehension?
One can beware while respecting.
Please clarify.

Pilgrim Puddleglum on behalf of the Troubadours

(And if you don't want us to send anteaters to your houses, please send letters to ours!)



When the greenery unfolds
And the branch is white with flower
With sweet birdsong in that hour
My heart gently onward goes
When I see the blossoming trees
And hear the nightingale in song
Then how can a man go wrong
Who chooses loving and is pleased

-Bernart de Ventadorn



Summer is a maiden fair
Laughter golden wreathes her hair
Yet reverently with graceful bend
She welcomes Autumn's breezes in

-The Traveling Troubadours

