

Armed in America: Portraits of Gun Owners in Their Homes, photographs by Kyle Cassidy (Iola, WI: Krause Publications, 2007).

Book review by Robert S. Griffin, 2009

www.robertsgriffin.com

On the second floor at my local Borders bookstore in downtown Burlington, Vermont last week—July, 2009--I was perusing the remainder table, I guess they call it. These are books that seem to have zero sales potential, so to get them out of the store they slash their prices and put them out on display with the other road-kill publications. The front dust cover picture of one of them, a hefty coffee table volume, caught my eye. It looked to be Mom and Dad, thirties, posed in their living room with their son, blond, about three, all of them smiling for the camera. They looked to me to be the kind of solid working people you'd see in the aisle at Wal-Mart. Dad was sitting in what looked to be an inexpensive vinyl-covered chair with rounded wooden arms with Mom standing behind him and Junior a bit to our left in the front. Mom and Dad were in their Sunday best and their young one was in a Superman sweatshirt and waving at us, couldn't be cuter. Dad's wide dark blue tie with some kind of speckles blended into his blue-and-white striped dress shirt with a white collar and was tucked into his buttoned-up black suit coat. His shoes, a bit scuffed, were no-nonsense, heavy, and square-toed, and had thick rubber soles and heels all of one piece. Mom might have made her black shiny-material sleeveless dress. The well-maintained wood floor and the fireplace to their right both looked to have some age on them. At first glance the picture had the appearance of a small town studio portrait, except the boy was dressed too casually and he wouldn't have been waving like that. And there was something else that made it different from the usual studio portrait, and it was what drew my attention in the first place: Dad was holding a rifle and Mom was brandishing a shotgun.

I took note of the book's title--*Armed America: Portraits of Gun Owners in Their Homes*--and its price in a round yellow stick-on in the upper right hand corner, \$4.98. The inside back dust cover said \$30, so evidently Borders was having a big problem getting this book sold. I flipped through its pages and saw that *Armed America* was made up of about a hundred photos such as the one on the

cover—which was one them—people in their homes, predominately working people and from the lower middle class, or so it appeared, singles, couples, families, some with pets, all but a few of them white, and all of them holding guns of some kind. Each picture took up an entire page, and the overleaf page contained his/her/their answer to the question, “Why do you own a gun?” The answers were brief, from a sentence to a short paragraph. The photographer in every instance was Kyle Cassidy. The publisher of this handsome, shiny-paged volume was Krause Publications in Wisconsin—I hadn’t heard of this publisher.

Standing at the table flipping through the book, it quickly became apparent to me that this Cassidy wasn’t just anybody clicking snapshots. These pictures were major league, full-fledged art photography. The composition, the expressions Cassidy captured on these faces, the stories he told in a single image, demonstrated top-tier photographic talent. I decided this book was worth my attention for the pictures alone. I couldn’t find a chair, so I settled in a low window sill and spent twenty minutes or so paging through the book, taking breaks a couple of times to watch people stroll along the downtown street beneath me and think about what I was going to do for lunch.

It wasn’t long before it became clear that not only was this book artful it had substance to it. I had presumed that while Cassidy was good at taking pictures, this was going to be another media cheap shot at the lesser folk. I’ve come to expect people from working class and small town and rural backgrounds, who, a lot of them, had the look of fundamentalist Christians, and particularly gun owners, would be depicted as anachronisms and affronts, even threats, to their betters.

I was dead wrong. To my surprise and pleasure, Cassidy respected the people that had welcomed him into their homes, and demonstrated both a commitment and ability to portray them as they really are and not as the lightweights and “misguided” that are called up to make pseudo-elites feel good about themselves. And not only did Cassidy show us these people, he let us hear from them; he gave them a voice, and that is exceedingly rare in our time. People of this sort are publicly silent—they aren’t TV talking heads, they don’t write articles and books, and they don’t hold court in classrooms. Whatever we hear about them comes from people who have no time for them. Even though the quotes in response to

Cassidy's question "Why do you own a gun?" were brief, I came away from this book feeling that the pictures and words put together gave me a good sense of who these people are and how they see their lives in general, not just with reference to guns. I paid the \$4.98 and took the book home and spent all evening with it, and my initial impression was confirmed—remainder price or not, this is a superb book and a major accomplishment by Mr. Cassidy.

As the evening went along, the pictures became increasingly impressive. I decided I wanted to see what else Cassidy has done, and it turns out that he has done a lot. Try checking him out on Amazon, and Google his name.

I was very taken with the décor in these houses and apartments. None of them would have made it into Architectural Digest magazine, that's for sure, but still, I would prefer to live in one of these modest spaces than in one of the opulent, and lifeless, soulless, environments I see featured every month in Architectural Digest. Typical of Architectural Digest is Jeff Bridge's house in Montana. Dazzling indeed, who knows what these interiors cost Jeff, but I look in the pictures of a room for a place I would sit with a book or with a friend and can't find one; the chairs and sofas look hard and new and uncomfortable and the whole setting strikes me as uncongenial to human beings. The rooms look like they were about the hired-hand decorator and not Jeff Bridges. They have the look of something he signed off on, and he did write out a big check, but as superficially impressive it is, this Montana retreat has nothing to do with Jeff Bridges, the unique human being.

The furnishings in these houses in Armed America looked as if they came from Buck's Furniture (Buck's Furniture is a low-prices store around where I live) and garage sales, but they were chosen with presence and care. These were considered environments: the lineup of knick-knacks on the shelves, the prints on the walls, the placement of the furniture, all of it. These were their homes, not way stations, not simply places to regroup for the next day's encounter with the world. They were contexts that reflected who these people are, that helped define them, that were extensions of them, that communicated their identities both to others and to themselves. And even though a quick glance might lead someone to write them off as low end condos or rentals, when you looked closer

you could see that they were welcoming, comfortable places to settle in for long stretches of time.

These rooms captured in Cassidy's photographs set standards for my own living space; I put the book down and assessed my own living room where I was sitting and made plans of what to do with it, and at minimal and, in some cases, no cost. And these last couple of days, I've acted on that. I framed a picture and set in on the fireplace mantel and replaced a blue bowl with a yellow dish on the bookcase, and it's better for me to be there now. Little things make a difference. And I'm going to keep going with it, in the living room and in the other rooms in my townhouse. Cassidy's book inspired me.

As the evening went along, I was very taken with the demeanor of the people in the photographs. They came off grounded, centered, strong, clear about who they are and what they believe, independent, their own people, at peace with themselves, happy. The husbands and wives looked united, a couple, a good fit, sharing a path in life. I had the sense that these children were loved and cared for, and that these families were indeed families; somehow, and it is to Cassidy's credit, I picked up mutual love and respect; children weren't at war with their parents or a tribe apart, on the way to their room as soon as they could manage it to play a video game or text with their friends. The dogs and cats looked to be part of the family, and healthy, and, I swear, happy. You can be happy in America; I picked that up in these photographs. You can be comfortable with yourself and with the decisions you have made and the way you are conducting your life; that came through to me. I know this is a lot to conclude from a hundred of so photographs, but nevertheless I feel confident in what I picked up. I compared the people in these pictures to so many people I know—including, sorry to say, me too often: self-conscious, jittery, shifty-eyed, looking over people's shoulders, scanning the horizon, am I OK? how am I doing?

I was also taken favorably with their clothes. Ralph Lauren or Prada, or Nordstrom's, or a TV character or the latest trend didn't decide what these people would wear; they did. Their clothes were consistent with who they are, complemented, enhanced, who they are, expressed who they are. These people, I sensed, weren't putting on a show for anyone's approval. They weren't decked out in get-ups that ten years from now will embarrass them when they go

through the family album. These weren't expensive clothes, they may well have come from K-Mart, but they were the right clothes, and they went together, and they suited the person wearing them. These people were not vehicles for the clothes; rather, the clothes were vehicles for them.

More important than anything, I've decided, is what these people said about why they owned guns and what that adds up to. I read through their statements carefully over the course of the evening and I have thought about what they said in the few days since then, and I put that together with everything else I could discern about these people, and I think that has helped me get clearer about the gun issue, and other things as well. There is a unity, integration, to these people. It all comes together, it all meshes: identity, beliefs, values, lifestyle, actions, relationships, personal adornment, and context. There is strength and solidity in these people. I have asked myself: does gun ownership result from all that? does it contribute to all that? My answer to both these questions is, yes, I think it does; and that has made the issue of gun ownership a broader, deeper, more complex, more intriguing, and more important concern than I had realized before reading this book, one worth my time to work through, at least in a preliminary way, in this writing.

I work in a university setting where left-leaning ideologies predominate and where the conventional wisdom on gun ownership goes like this: Guns kill people, so we need to get rid of guns, and anybody who doesn't agree with what I just said is stupid or malevolent, or both stupid and malevolent. Yesterday, knowing I was writing this piece, a colleague said to me, "Did you know that gun ownership has gone way up since Obama got in?" And a bit later he shared, "If you get a gun, chances are it'll get used on yourself or someone in your family." Where he got either of these contentions I don't know and he didn't say, and I didn't pick up that he questioned in the least where they came from or their accuracy. As far as I could tell he sincerely believed what he was saying; no doubts, no qualifications, case closed. Guns are an example of white racism, and they are dumb moves that harm yourself and loved ones. So save us all from racism and ignorance: ban guns.

I replied to my colleague with a reference to researcher John Lott's book, *More Guns, Less Crime: Understanding Crime and Gun Laws*, which I have gone through for this writing. I said that Lott has

used statistical methods to support his argument that there is a strong negative relationship between the number of law-abiding citizens with guns and the violent crime rate. Lott asserts that criminals are deterred by the perceived risk that their victims will defend themselves. And too, crimes are prevented up the line when criminals come away with bullet holes for their most recent efforts. I tried to bolster my point with an anecdote from my army days. One of my buddies, I told my colleague, had a history of breaking and entering, that is to say, going into people's houses and stealing things. I relayed to my colleague that my burglar army buddy had told me of going into one house early in his career thinking it was empty and coming into a bedroom and there was a woman in bed sleeping, or at least lightly sleeping, and she woke up and saw him and after a moment of silent terror, screamed, and he ran out the door. I said that since that time I've frequently found myself imagining what it must have been like for that woman to wake up with a strange man looking down at her. I said that these last few days thinking about this gun book review I'd reflected on whether it would have been better for her to have a gun under her pillow or a telephone on the end table she could have used to call 911 and then waited for the police to come and save her, and that I was heavily leaning toward the gun. I said that the house burglar told me that what really scared the crap (euphemism) out of him was the thought of being in somebody's house and they come around the corner with a gun and shoot his ass, as he put it. He said that the prospect of that happening had been enough to postpone his house invasion endeavors to a future, and unspecified, date.

My colleague's response to all this was "I've got to go to a meeting," and that was the end of our encounter. I suppose he did have to go to a meeting, but nevertheless that exchange brought up something I've noticed for a while: the lack of interest among politically correct types in reality. Being on the right side—and banning guns, to stay with the topic of this writing, is being on the right side—is enough, no need for facts. Rhetoric has a higher priority than reality. Believe anything that squares with the rhetoric, and anything that contradicts the rhetoric, ignore it. Believe the right things, feel good about yourself, get stroked by your friends and benefit from the other perks of being on the side of the angels, jobs, publishing contracts, awards, and so on, and to the degree possible live as far out in the suburbs and away from

trouble as possible.

Toward the end of my evening with *Armed America* I decided that I have been taking people on the left too literally, too much at face value. I haven't looked enough beneath the surface—to their larger purpose, their bigger agenda. And what is that? No less than a transformed America, a new America. The new America they envision and work for is de-Europeanized, secularized, collectivized, equalized, and democratized (everything becomes fair game for government). Gun ownership reflects, and contributes to, the old America with its emphasis on personal liberty, individual expression and distinction, the centrality of family and friends and religion and one's private endeavors, personal responsibility, self-reliance, and limited government prerogative. Anything that is part of the old America has to go, and therefore guns have to go. The comprehension that this larger purpose, this bigger agenda, exists makes it easier, I believe, to understand why researcher John Lott's data showing that gun ownership saves more lives than it costs them has no salience with anti-gun activists. Because deep down they don't care whether guns save lives or cost lives. Guns have to go because they get in the way of the new America; that's what this issue is really about, and a lot of other issues too.

As I write this, it is the fortieth anniversary of man's walk on the moon, and last night I was prompted to check out director Stanley Kubrick's classic 1968 film, "2001: A Space Odyssey." As I watched it again after many years, I was taken by how the first part of the film related to this writing. The first twenty or twenty-five minutes of "2001" depict the dawn of man, tens of thousands of years ago. There they are, our distant ancestors, naked as jaybirds, milling about in a barren patch of land (no shelters, our people are cave dwellers) and, our topic here, they are totally unarmed and defenseless. Suddenly a tiger, some kind of big cat, leaps on one of them and begins tearing him to shreds while the others look on helplessly in horror. Kindly, Kubrick ends the scene. Next scene, a group of about ten of them in a cave, the roof close overhead, huddled together, eyes wide, on alert, looking here and there, frightened, immobilized. End of scene. Next scene, one of them realizes that a bone (of an animal? one of a dead brethren?) can be used as a weapon. End of scene. Next scene: out of the cave and into the open, now armed, now fearsome warriors, shrieking, posturing, individuals now differentiated from the group exploring

here and there. Watching the Kubrick film, it struck me that if your project is reshaping America in a collectivist and egalitarian direction you are much better off dealing with people who are vulnerable and afraid than with warriors. Without exception, I'd put the people in *Armed America* on the warrior side of the dichotomy, and thus tough to mold into what somebody wants them to be.

To illustrate and expand upon this basic thesis, I will quote the answers people in the book gave to the question, "Why do you own a gun?" and then offer my comments, often in the form of notes. The quotes will be set in and in smaller type.

- The family depicted on the front dust cover. The husband:

I'm prepared to take an active role in ensuring that my family survives. . . . I've known gun safety inside and out since I was a child. I'm confident my son will grow up with the same understanding and handle them with the same respect and care . . . whether he chooses to own guns or not.

An "active role," protector of his family. The government, the police, social service agencies, isn't the protector of his family in his mind—he is. The commitment to gun safety, which is repeated throughout the book, and which counters the stereotype of the irrational, out-of-control "gun nut." The word "confidence"—all the way through this book, I picked up on the confidence these people have, in their choices, in themselves. The father allows his son to make choices, which counters the idea that society and its agents must save children from the tyranny of their parents.

The wife:

The bottom line is if someone is threatening my child or me, I want to be able to protect us. My shotgun will take care of any intruder and I know how to use it.

She isn't huddled in a cave terrified. There's personal strength here. Many of my women students in the university tell me of being afraid in their homes and walking the streets. What is the effect on someone to live day after day, year after year, in fear?

- Wife, thirties:

After practicing together and getting better, target shooting turned into a fun hobby that we could share.

Many of the women in the book spoke of target shooting as a fun time and a way to bond with their men.

Husband:

I got a gun here because we live in kind of a rough neighborhood and I take the subway to work. I figured that since the bad guys had guns, I should have one too.

I lived in Brooklyn for a summer, in a violence-and-crime infested neighborhood. I remember getting off the subway train at midnight and facing the prospect of walking four blocks to where I was living. I remember the fear. I wasn't in a movie that I could leave or shut off, this wasn't a seminar discussion; this was real, and this was me, and I was unarmed, and I was going to have to get from where I was to where I was going. I was a zebra in the tall grass, alert, pulse racing, helpless, wondering whether the lions crouching nearby would spring on me that day and take my life. As it turned out, the lions chose not to kill me that summer. I don't want to be in that position again, and I don't want anyone else to be in that position.

- Teenage girl:

The biggest reason I own firearms is because it's my right as a citizen of the United States of America and I refuse to take my rights for granted. Anyone that reads any history at all knows how dangerous that can be.

For many of the respondents, gun ownership caused them to reflect on the political and cultural underpinnings of the founding of America. The people that manage this girl's life, including in the schools she attends, don't want her doing that. That gets in the way of the new America.

- Young married couple. The wife:

I own a handgun for self-defense. I own a rifle for target shooting. I have both because I live in the greatest country in the world and I have the right as an American citizen. When we were first married . . . I went to the range with Ryan several times and I realized how responsible he was with firearms. And I became familiar with guns, I changed my mind.

There is the marked tendency to make gun restrictions based on the predilections of the least responsible individuals among us. We don't do that with cars, which kill far more people than guns.

The husband:

My father served in World War II and taught me at a young age that freedom often comes at a high price. I own a gun because it is my God-given right as a citizen of the greatest country ever, the United States of America.

The themes of freedom and patriotism, both of which are played down currently by those in power. Gun ownership is connected to both of these impulses. The reference to God. In the new America, our rights come at the whim of politicians, bureaucrats, and courts, not God or nature as our Founders believed.

- Man, early 30s:

There are a lot of people who assume that because you own guns you're more of a violent person—I don't believe that.

I spent part of sabbatical leave from my university in Switzerland. I learned during that time that after a year of compulsory active military service, men are issued an automatic weapon and serve in a civil defense force for decades. That is to say, everybody in Switzerland has an automatic weapon in their basements. As far as I could see in my time there, that hasn't resulted in Swiss shooting each other in droves.

- Forty-year-old woman:

I really enjoy target shooting and am attracted to the energy and feeling of self-empowerment.

Guns boost energy, feelings of self-empowerment—and they decrease group dependence, which doesn't serve the cause of a new America.

- Wife:

Matt went up north and took all the guns with him. I was sitting alone in the apartment, suddenly realizing how vulnerable I felt.

It matters that women feel vulnerable.

- A father, 50s:

We are our own line of defense. I haven't seen a compelling argument as to why law-abiding citizens shouldn't have guns . . . what's the advantage of taking guns from good people?

Note that he knows what he believes but at the same time isn't insisting that everybody see and do things his way.

His grown son:

He's a terrible golfer, but he's a great shot. We've definitely bonded over the years shooting sporting clays.

Guns and bonding. Bonding in a family matters.

- Husband:

If there ever comes a time when I have to defend my life, I wouldn't trust that to anyone else—no matter what oath they took or what contract they signed. I came from America from Brazil. The Second Amendment is one of the best things about this country.

Wife:

I grew up in Russia. My dad always had guns in his closet. I always knew where they were . . . if anything imposed on my life or my relatives, I would be ready to use them.

People from other countries understand how important it is not to be helpless.

- Husband:

We are our first line of defense. In the event that we are the victims of an attempted violent crime, we are both trained and ready to protect our family and property from harm.

His family is the first line of defense. Not the state.

Wife:

Instead of being fearful, I decided to try shooting a gun myself, and now I'm hooked. It's a plus that my closest friends enjoy shooting, too. It's a way to bond."

Being in fear is no way to live. And again, guns as a way, especially for women, to bond with those close to them.

- Two apparently gay women, middle age. One of them:

I find shooting enjoyable, but I also own guns for self-defense, against criminals of all sorts, including those who single out minorities. We have the right to be the source of our own salvation from evil if we so choose. That right must not be usurped by those who would run our lives according to their own agendas, whether it be for the basest of self-interests, or the noblest of altruisms.

How unfortunate, and unfeeling, to disarm, disempower, those among us most likely to be attacked.

- Older man:

I own guns because I'm free. Freedom is taken, never given.

I'm trying to think of the last time my freedom was increased rather than restricted.

- Man, thirties, with wife and young son:

We believe fervently in the sovereignty of the individual and the family unit. We are citizens, with inalienable rights, not subjects to be ruled. Our right to keep and bear arms comes from our Bill of Rights and this right, as enumerated, is not granted by any local, state, or federal authority. It is a recognized right, endowed by our creator, upon every citizen in this country. The right to keep and bear arms isn't so that the citizens can hunt or target shoot. It is recognized so that they may protect this country, their state, their community, their families, and themselves against those that wish to do them harm, be it a foreign enemy, their own government, or some thug.

Where else but in Cassidy's book would we hear from this man.

- Man, thirties:

As a Jewish American [and as a] civil rights advocate I know that at some point words are not going to be enough when people are kicking down your door to pull you out of your house because you're Jewish, or black, or gay. You can't be pro civil rights without being pro gun. It's hypocritical to deny someone the most basic of all human rights, which is the right to defend yourself.

I have always found it remarkable that, so it seems, most American Jews are anti-gun.

- Black man, forties:

I grew up in West Philadelphia. It is still pretty rough around there. You see a lot of violence, which has more to do with the people who are getting the guns and not the guns themselves. Sometimes you need a little protection for yourself. . . . I enjoy the camaraderie of shooting on the range.

I enjoy the history of guns and gun makers. And of course the sense of security that comes from owning and knowing how to use a firearm.

White liberals in the leafy suburbs pontificate to urban blacks how they should conduct their lives.

- Man, thirties:

Growing up I was always fascinated with the American cowboy and the cowboy's sense of fair play, justice, and self-reliance. If a cowboy was wronged or slighted or attacked or robbed, he didn't call 911 and wait for somebody to come and save him. He handled the situation himself.

I grew up watching the movies of cowboy heroes Roy Rogers and Gene Autry. I'm trying to imagine Roy and Gene furtively calling 911. They were just "B" movies, but I think the values reflected in those films, including standing up for yourself against bad people, make sense.

- Man, forties:

I am a liberal Democrat and many of my friends are surprised that I am a gun owner. They have this idea that gun owners are all a bunch of rednecks out in the woods poaching deer, but we're all over the spectrum, not some monoculture. My primary reason for owning a gun is self-defense. Also because it's a duty as a citizen to be able to defend not only my home but also my neighborhood if I have to.

Liberals can be pro-gun.

- Man, forties, with ten- or eleven-year-old daughter:

As a Jew, one thing I'm sadly aware of after studying the Holocaust is that if those individuals had the means to defend themselves, they more than likely would have done so and perhaps the Holocaust would have gone a different way.

Like helpless cattle driven to the slaughterhouse. Could it have been any worse if they had been armed?

- Black man, twenties:

I think everybody should own a gun. It levels the playing field.

The only reaction at all I got out of my colleague when we were discussing gun ownership was when, thinking of this man's response, I said, "Having a gun levels the playing field." My colleague's eyebrows went up. At first I thought that meant "That's a good point." Now I'm not so sure. Maybe it meant "That's so uninformed." Or, "Why are we even talking about this; this issue is resolved."

- Woman, thirties, with husband and pre-teen son and daughter:

I'm not really into guns, but they are in the house and I know how to use them. I hope I'll never have to put a person at the other end of one, but if I do, it's because it's me or them, and I'm going to choose me.

The personal strength reflected in that statement.

- Man, twenties:

I have read Gulag Archipelago, and I will not let it happen here without a fight. Advocates of gun control think they will someday take my arms from me. But they are wrong. I'll own guns all my life.

This man owns his life. He has a sense of history. And he's not debating or pleading; he is going to do what he is going to do. There is not the malleable "putty man" the new America needs.

- Man, twenties:

I own a gun because a disarmed populace is required for genocide, and should it come around again, I'm not going to be standing on the side.

He stands tall.

- Man, thirties:

I was a criminal justice major in college, and while I am a big supporter of law enforcement, I was always struck by how reactive law enforcement ultimately is. Too often, crime has already been committed before law enforcement becomes involved.

In my discussion with my colleague, I said, "I live alone. My bedroom is on the second floor. The house is dark and I'm up there just about to fall asleep and the light goes on downstairs. I'm unarmed. What are you saying I'm supposed to do?" No response other than a slight (patronizing?) smile.

- Man, twenties:

Freedom is something you assume and then you wait for someone to try to take it away. The degree to which you resist is the degree to which you are free.

Armed America prompted me to think about the inverse relationship of weakness and freedom. I'm armed, and I experience directly how that enhances both my commitment to my own freedom and my actual freedom. But that doesn't mean that I'm not weak and captive. About two-thirds of the way through this book I put it down and wrote in a personal journal all the ways I'm weak and how that costs me in terms of freedom, autonomy, and living honestly and fully, along with actions I can take to strengthen myself in those areas.

- Man, thirties:

The sheer joy of one-handing the Bushmaster XM18 . . .the cold precision of something like a 10/22 . . . the feel, the action, the smell . . .

The esthetics of gun ownership. The importance of esthetics in all areas of life.

- Teenager:

I'm just one little girl in the world.

As far as I'm concerned, she can carry a concealed weapon. Enough of being frightened. Enough of being a zebra standing in the tall grass hoping they don't attack you today, and then there's tomorrow. Enough.

A man in his twenties who had read some of my web site writings e-mailed me and asked me what I am writing currently. I mentioned this review and sent him an Amazon link to the book. An hour later he e-mailed me and said, "Wow, that's a powerful looking book. Guns have always scared me. I've never owned one." This person needs to figure out why gun ownership makes him go "Wow," and why guns make him scared, and where that comes from. And he--and I, and you, all of us--needs to use reflection about guns in society and in his own life as a springboard to identifying everything that makes him weak—all the people, all the experiences, all the circumstances, all the personal failings—everything that makes him frightened, shaky, unsure, vulnerable, deferring, and captive, and then he (we too) needs to get to work expelling all of that from his being and from his actions while he still has the time on this earth to do so.

