

At twilight

by [Charles Hughes](#) in the [August 10, 2022](#) issue

The sun had lost its glare and some of its heat.
People arrived, stood talking, looked for seats.
Children resisted parents' pleas to sit
And heard their names pronounced repeatedly.
Vacationers became an audience.
(I sat restless, too old for family road trips,
Relieved the Ozarks were our final stop.)
The drama, not yet underway, already—
Like smoke from burning leaves in autumn—spilled
Into the early-August, evening air,
Lending to it a pre-performance stir,
The scent of a beginning and an ending.
Silently there, behind the outdoor stage—
All flat expanse of packed fine dirt, on which
Two rough wood structures stood—tall trees reached up
And out, full branches arching, sheltering
The little world below as darkness fell.

Today, as oceans rise and chaos quickens,
Harold Bell Wright's *The Shepherd of the Hills*
(The play I saw at age fourteen) comes back;
Or, not the play itself—the atmosphere
I breathed before the play had sprung to life.
Things do come back as gifts, forgotten things—
A tune, a name, a prayer first learned in childhood—
Unreasonably, against the evidence.
I see the faces of my grandchildren,
The bend-but-don't-break lives of their moms and dads.
I hold out hope even now, in these sad times,
A twilight hope, no more than an intuition
Of pending revels, of encompassing love.