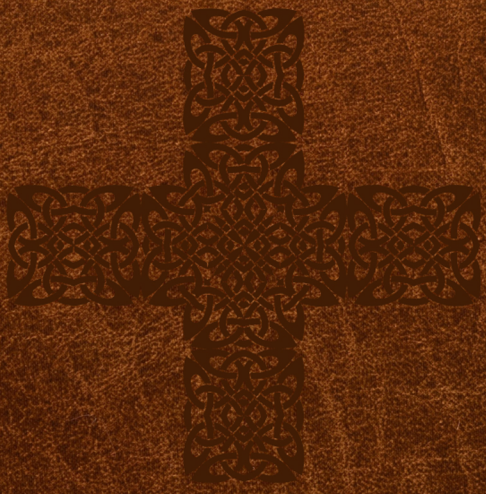
The Faithful Reader

Essays on Biblical Themes in Literature



Edited by Justin D. Lyons

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Foreword: Biblical Integration at Cedarville University

Jason K. Lee

The key aspect for distinguishing Christian scholarship from any other types of scholarship is the essential element of biblical integration. Biblical integration introduces a new set of questions into the field of study enhancing the contribution to general knowledge. For any field or discipline, one's view of biblical integration affects the tools of study deemed appropriate, the scope of study, and the ultimate goal of the study or activity in the field.

Christian scholars in various academic fields often struggle to articulate how biblical integration affects their research or teaching because of a perceived lack of overlap between the Bible and the content of their field. Greater clarity on what biblical integration is can help distinguish its value and will increase intentionality in biblical integration regardless of the academic discipline. The relationship of knowledge drawn from the Bible and that discovered in other sources is a key question for biblical integration.

Cedarville University takes this question very seriously and expects all of its faculty in all of the disciplines to be able to provide a reasoned answer. All faculty write a biblical integration paper which explores the nexus of Scripture, a theology derived from scriptural authority, and his or her discipline as part of the tenure and promotion process.

Knowledge and Truth

The Apostle Paul exhorts, "We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to

obey Christ." (2 Corinthians 10:5 ESV). Such biblical texts have implications for understanding the possible tension in how biblical knowledge interacts with some aspects of general ("secular") knowledge or religious knowledge drawn from other sources.

Biblical knowledge and general knowledge often do find complementarity. But some aspects of "knowledge" or enquiry are not compatible with biblical revelation. Paul puts this incompatibility in terms of a spiritual conflict. Theories or research in the "hard sciences" that adopt as a starting point non-theistic ideas will inevitably conflict with biblical teaching. In the social ("soft") sciences, certain understandings about human nature cannot coincide with the biblical description of humans. In the areas of the humanities and theological disciplines, drawing authoritatively on non-biblical sources has led many throughout history to adopt views that are heterodox by the church's standards and/or do not provide proper deference to the biblical canon.

The warfare analogy depicted by Paul, however, does not mean that all things found in the sphere of secular (general) knowledge conflict with biblical revelation. Christian academics strive to discern what aspects of their chosen field need to be rejected, what aspects can be revised, and which ones can be affirmed. As far as different fields of knowledge discover true things, the affinity with Scripture can be straightforward. Arthur Holmes describes this phenomenon: "The Christian regards the biblical revelation as the final rule of faith and conduct, but he does not think of it as an exhaustive source of all truth… and in the final analysis there will be no conflict between the truth taught in Scripture and truth available from other sources."[1]

Worldview and Integration

A worldview that amplifies the place of the biblical text as revelation in worldview construction prompts biblical integration into all fields of

[1] Arthur F. Holmes, *The Idea of a Christian College,* revised edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 18. Holmes' view is extended (and probably improved) in the following quotation from George Guthrie who seems recognize some distinction in the concepts of "revelation" which would prioritize Scripture's description of God's character and purpose and "truth" which would include revealed truths but not be limited to this form of truth.

knowledge. Along these lines, George Guthrie contends, "God's revelation is preserved through his inspiration of the Scripture. Thus, every area of human life and inquiry has at its foundation the reality reflected by God's revelation in Scripture. Therefore, Scripture forms the appropriate beginning point for shaping a worldview."[2] A "biblical" worldview begins with an understanding of God and how humans can know him. The one, true God has revealed Himself definitively in the biblical texts.

The Bible not only reveals God's true nature, but also depicts His activity as consistent with His being. So, to study the biblical text's depiction and explanation of God's work, is to have access to God, His truth, and His purposes. The Bible begins with God as the creator of all things. The biblical account of creation is then foundational for every understanding of reality from a biblical worldview. The Scriptures assert that a failure to recognize God as creator, will skew every accomplishment of human knowledge and will darken every motive of human ingenuity.

A central element to a biblical worldview is to see life and reality through the biblical wisdom gleaned from God's character and purposes as revealed in the Bible, an expressly theological task. A theological vision for integration that prioritizes the place of the biblical texts as revelation should ultimately result in an engagement with all disciplines and fields for the sake of the glory of God.

Biblical Integration as Central to Christian Higher Education

The scholar (or student) with this biblical-theological mindset can pursue and communicate wisdom in predominately "secular" academic fields. This pursuit and communication require penetrating the citadel of contemporary "knowledge" and brings every thought captive in service to others and for the sake of God's glory (2 Cor. 10:3-5). The mind that has been "renewed" or trained by biblical theology drawn from the biblical texts "sees" and "hears" things differently.

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[2] George Guthrie, "The Authority of Scripture" in David Dockery and Gregory Alan Thornbury (eds.), *Shaping a Christian Worldview: The Foundations of Christian Higher Education*, (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2002), 28.

Theology meshes well with other areas of a liberal arts curriculum in a Christian university. Christian higher education should be marked with distinctive characteristics including a central role for biblical revelation and situating an academic's own discipline with a theological framework. Brad Green writes on a commitment to biblical revelation, "At the heart of Christian higher education is the affirmation that God has spoken. The God of Scripture is a God who has revealed himself. This is a crucial affirmation, not a peripheral one, and a biblical doctrine of revelation has profound implications for a Christian understanding of education."[3] Furthermore, a theological framework must be constructed by drawing on a historical confessional tradition (e.g., Augsburg, Westminster, etc.) or an original document (e.g., Cedarville University's Doctrinal Statement). The academic's specific discipline is then engaged within those doctrinal commitments with the goal of a distinctly Christian body of knowledge. David Wells speaks of this intersection of theology and academic discipline as "coherence," he contends for:

> a different kind of faculty… who, regardless of their discipline, are able to think theologically and to think of their own discipline within a larger theological frame. What is needed are not more specialists to break down further the coherence of what is learned, but for those who can once again build up this coherence within their own detailed knowledge of their specific field. The only way this coherence will be found again is if it is built upon biblical and theological foundations.[4]

In 1950, S. T. Ludwig made an impassioned plea for the role of the "church college" in a prospering society. He critiqued the "gaudy" initiatives that many churches and Christians attempt to influence society. Instead, he argued that "it is incumbent upon the church college to help establish a Christian pattern for the future that will raise the level of life and make our

[3] Brad Green, "Theological and Philosophical Foundations" in David Dockery and Gregory Alan Thornbury (eds.), *Shaping a Christian Worldview: The Foundations of Christian Higher Education*, (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2002), 73.

[4] David Wells, "Educating for a Countercultural Spirituality" in D. G. Hart and R. Albert Mohler (eds.), *Theological Education in the Evangelical Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 298–99.

society more nearly Christian."[5] As Ludwig contended, if higher education is not driven by Christian principles and infused with Christian ideas, then people can "can lose their sense of 'belongingness' and become isolated units with no chart to guide." Christian education sets a different course and in so doing forwards the most holistic thinking of the current day and has an opportunity to chart a new vision of the future (both personal and corporate). Ludwig continued, "It is the function of the church college in our disintegrating society to so present Christ and teach principles of His culture in every phase of the curriculum, until the incoming power of His spirit can change lives and make them a part of God's great program."[6] What Ludwig later asserted as a need is a collection of faculty who have a "high sense of life purpose" to this calling of changing lives and thought patterns.

Cedarville University gathers a faculty who allow the purposes of God to prompt and sustain their labors. The impact of this Christian approach to education is immediate on students, has a long-term effect on society, and will bear fruit in eternity. Careful Bible reading and the synthesis of biblical texts into a theological view of reality prompts the task of biblical integration in literature and laboratories for God's glory.

[5] S.T. Ludwig, "The Church College in a Changing Culture." *Vital Speeches of the Day* 17, no. 2 (November 1950): 56. MasterFILE Premier, EBSCO*host*, 58.

[6] Ibid.

Editor's Introduction

Justin D. Lyons

This volume is an expression of a worldview.

A worldview is the lens through which we view and make sense of the world, a collection of presuppositions, convictions, and values from which a person tries to understand life and the world. Our worldview determines our self-understanding, shapes our behavior, and gives us direction.

There are different worldviews, many of them in radical disagreement with each other. While they may disagree on the answers to fundamental questions, they all concern themselves with the same basic categories: the nature and purpose of human life, the existence of objective standards of right and wrong, the nature of the universe, our relationship to ultimate reality, what happens to us at death, and whether and how we can discover the truth about these matters.

Every worldview has a starting point, a set of unquestioned assumptions or presuppositions. But, in providing answers for each of these categories, where one begins determines where one ends up. If you start with a materialist presupposition, for example, you cannot arrive at the immortal soul or concepts of duty, purpose, or justice grounded in anything higher than human will. Thus, the importance of a worldview is not fully expressed in a list of philosophical principles or theological positions; it is in its application to the world around us that its true power is revealed. A worldview affects everything that comes before us, philosophy, science, education, entertainment, politics, etc. It becomes the medium through

which we understand and experience the world.

The following essays have been written by faculty, staff, and students at Cedarville University and express a biblically-grounded, Christian worldview. The fundamental presupposition of this view is the existence of the living, personal God who can be known through his revelation. "But," adherents of non-theological worldviews will argue, "your starting point is based upon faith." In truth, every worldview is based on faith of a kind. The question is: faith in what?

The Bible has much to say in answer to fundamental worldview questions and the actions/beliefs flowing from them, either explicitly or in terms of foundational truths and principles to be applied. It is trustworthy because it is God's revealed Word. Its veracity is anchored in the character of God, who does not lie, who does not change, and who does not make mistakes. Scripture is the ultimate authority for Christian life and practice.

In addition to the special revelation of scripture, we have God's general revelation through the things He has created: "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork (Psalm 19:1). If honestly searching, our God-given reason will point us to its author, no matter what facet of His universe we are contemplating—the intricate structure of the human body, the principles of mathematics, the wonders of the stars and planets, the beauty of art and music, an ice crystal, a chemical reaction, a falling stone—all of them point to God.

Many subjects are taught and studied at Cedarville University, and all are approached, both in theory and practice, in terms of this biblically-grounded, Christian worldview. The foreword by Jason Lee indicates the seriousness with which biblical integration is pursued at Cedarville in and out of the classroom. *The Faithful Reader* is a collection of essays applying the Christian worldview to literature and illuminating biblical themes that emerge as a result.

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What makes a work of fiction successful? Putting aside elements of craft, such as plotting and character development, necessary to a gripping story, the end result must engage readers, that is, move or affect them in some way. One way we often express this is to say that a story "speaks to me."

What do we mean when we say that? It must indicate that the story has touched on something we relate to because of experiencing something like it or believe to be fundamentally true about ourselves or the world. In other words, the most powerful stories are those that are in a dynamic relationship, either positive or negative, to the worldview we hold.

The Bible is not a work of fiction, but it does contain stories. The telling of the trials of David and Goliath and Solomon and Bathsheba are universally powerful because they touch upon themes, fear and temptation, that all human beings grapple with to one extent or another. All of these stories are there for a purpose, they all convey lessons about what is true or false, good or wicked, wise or foolish.

Jesus was a frequent storyteller: "All these things Jesus said to the crowds in parables; indeed, he said nothing to them without a parable." (Matthew 13:34). The purpose of the stories He told was not entertainment but instruction. His intent was to teach truths that would transform the heart and alter behavior. To do that, the parables describe particular situations with universal applicability. But that universal applicability can only be achieved by being attached to the reality of our world.

Of course, we cannot say that the purpose of all literature is to convey spiritual truth. But all literature is directed toward an audience and attempts to engage that audience. To do that, it must "speak to them," which is to address in some way and to some extent, the questions of worldview. It need not do this explicitly or abundantly or with intent; it may just be the atmosphere in which the story moves, but that atmosphere must be breathable for human beings—it must engage the world in which we live to gather the power necessary to move the reader.

But what of purely fictional worlds, literary worlds that bear no relation to the world in which we live? There are none. As grandiose as our imaginative constructions might be, they are never entirely original. They never stand fully on their own. Their foundations must be laid on reality. The centaur, for example, is but the intermingling of two pre-existing beings, beings that we did not create—nor could we conceive of them on our own *ex nihilo*. All this to say only that all imagination has some basis in reality and therefore must bear some indications of the truth of things.

We cannot get away from it. God's reality is evident whether one points toward it or away from it.

What follows are essays in which Christian readers react to literature in light of their worldview. The authors come from different academic disciplines and play different roles at Cedarville University. They each bring a unique perspective but are ultimately united by bonds of faith. The works discussed range from ancient to contemporary and belong to different genres of literature. No claim is made that the authors of these works all intended to convey a biblical, Christian message. But they do raise, in one way or another, worldview questions. For Christians, that naturally brings them into conversation with the Bible.

Christian Virtues

A Beautiful Life in *Charlotte's Web*

Emily Ferkaluk

E.B. White's tender tale of the friendship between a spider and a pig is really a story about the potential beauty inherent in any life. Life is brief, yet it can be lovely if we are willing to risk true friendship.

What is True Friendship?

The friendship that is key to the story begins on a rainy day that spoils the pig Wilbur's plans to stay busy, so that instead he is forced to sit and keenly feel his loneliness. He flounders in dejection, hunger, and a dose of medicine forced down his throat. Charlotte has watched Wilbur's self-wallowing behavior on the worst day of his life but still announces: "I like you."

Thus begins a friendship that enriches both lives. While Wilbur had experienced the love of Fern as a baby, his friendship with Charlotte challenges his notion of love. Fern gave Wilbur an instantaneous love that compelled her to nurture him. It was easy to love Fern in return. Upon first meeting Charlotte, Wilbur thinks: "'But what a gamble friendship is! Charlotte is fierce, brutal, scheming, and bloodthirsty—everything I don't like. How can I learn to like her, even though she is pretty and, of course, clever?'"

Wilbur has discovered the difficulty of friendship. What is true friendship? It is not based on physical beauty or "cleverness"—i.e., what another can do for you. Friendship can be true if it is by choice and compels us towards selfless actions for the sake of the other. Charlotte can hardly see Wilbur at all because she is near-sighted. Unlike Fern, who fell

in love at first *sight,* Charlotte chooses to love Wilbur despite knowing his bad qualities and not seeing his physical ones. Charlotte also chooses friendship with Wilbur despite their differences. Charlotte is cleverer and smarter—she has more "know-how"—than Wilbur. Wilbur is fearful; Charlotte, cool and collected. Yet as far as Charlotte is concerned, Wilbur is terrific and sensational. The beauty in her friendship of choice is that it doesn't matter what others think, only the opinion of the friend.

Additionally, the spider and pig form a friendship out of mutual respect for the other's good qualities. The spider is proud to know that Wilbur isn't a quitter, demonstrated through Wilbur's trying to "spin a web" for the first time. Wilbur is modest, unspoiled even by fame. Charlotte loves this purity of heart (Proverbs 22:11), and she can love it in part because her own heart is kind, loyal, affectionate, skillful, and true.

Finally, Charlotte serves Wilbur even when she herself is tired, and she serves him faithfully until her death. The ultimate act of true friendship is sacrificial love. "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). Throughout the tale, Wilbur doesn't appear to serve Charlotte to the same degree. However, by the end of *Charlotte's Web,* Wilbur exclaims that he would gladly give his life for Charlotte. And he does, in a way, fulfill that desire. The rest of his life is spent befriending Charlotte's children and grandchildren. That selfless gift isn't death, but a life spent in enjoyment of the other and for the sake of the other.

The Beauty Friendship Lends to a Life of Necessity

Eventually Wilbur looks past Charlotte's beauty and cleverness and instead sees the virtue in Charlotte's way of life. Charlotte lives according to nature and necessity. Charlotte loves Wilbur in part because his smelly pen and stale food attract the flies she needs to survive (much to Wilbur's disgust, since he cannot stand killing). There is a utilitarian aspect to her friendship. Yet there are also limits to the role that necessity plays in our life. The spider's understanding of both the compulsion and limits of necessity ground her friendship with the pig. Charlotte expounds:

> "You have been my friend," replied Charlotte. "That in itself is a tremendous thing. I wove my webs for you because I liked you. After all, what's a life, anyway? We're born, we live a little while, we die. A spider's life can't help being something of a mess, with all this trapping and eating flies. By helping you, perhaps I was trying to lift up my life a trifle. Heaven knows anyone's life can stand a little of that."

In the end, we come to see that Charlotte has acted consistently upon the rule of necessity, and that friendship is, indeed, a necessary part of life. A life lived only according to necessity—only for the sake of living—is impoverished. It is necessary that we acknowledge the limits of living for the sake of our own existence. To have a satisfying life, one needs true friendship.

Wilbur instinctively understands these limits of necessity and the appeal of friendship. He is discontent with the merely necessary physical functions of sleeping and eating. Wilbur loves life and loves to be a part of the world. He wants to "breathe the beautiful air and lie in the beautiful sun." The pig's desire to live amidst beauty rightly matches his desire for friendship: both are not merely necessary for his physical existence. As White writes, "Wilbur didn't want food, he wanted love. He wanted a friend—someone who would play with him."

In scripture we also see how true friendship enriches our lives. Friends give faithful wounds (Proverbs 27:6), make our hearts glad with good counsel (Proverbs 27:9), and love us even in the midst of adversity (Prov. 17:17, 18:24). Charlotte serves Wilbur in all these ways. She often chides him for his anxiety, gives good counsel as to how to participate in tricking the human farmers to spare his intended butchery, and loves him despite the ominous impending death. These activities of friendship ultimately beautify a life that otherwise would be spent focusing on necessity.

False Friendships: Alternatives to a Beautiful Life

White also pictures for us an alternative to this beautiful life. In contrast to Charlotte, Templeton's friendly acts towards Wilbur throughout the story

represent a form of false friendship that doesn't beautify one's life. According to scripture, we are not to reproach our friend (Psalm 15:3), withhold kindness from them (Job 6:14), bargain over them (Job 6:27), repay them with evil (Psalm 7:4), or forsake them in time of trouble (Proverbs 27:10). Templeton attempts all such unfriendly actions towards Wilbur, such as when he stalls in obtaining Charlotte's egg sack or whines at Wilbur to be careful not to trample him when getting penned.

These unfriendly acts emit from Templeton's character. Unlike Charlotte, the crafty Templeton is not well liked nor trusted; Wilbur himself doesn't think he is a decent animal. White describes him thus: "The rat had no morals, no conscience, no scruples, no consideration, no decency, no milk of rodent kindness, no compunctions, no higher feeling, no friendliness, no anything." Templeton is above all selfish, always thinking of his own best interest, in particular the satisfaction of his stomach. He is a self-proclaimed glutton. In stark contrast to Wilbur, the rat Templeton doesn't want to live forever; he wants to enjoy the necessary pleasure of eating even if it kills him. His life therefore evidences the limits of utilitarian friendship. He offers a friendship built solely on achieving physical necessities. Templeton participates in the plan to save Wilbur's life through appeals to his instincts for survival, namely eating from the pig's food trough. Hence the rat appears to be a friend but is in truth merely a slave to necessity.

In the end, we see that friendship can be false if we use it as an end towards our own existence. On the other hand, friendship can be true if it is used for the sake of another. True friendship elevates a life of necessity to a life of beauty. While none of us can escape the need to eat or sleep, all of us can choose to cultivate the type of friendship that makes eating or sleeping worthwhile as means, rather than ends. May we each choose to be a true friend to another in our brief lives together.

The Power of Mercy in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*

Bryana Fern

J. R. R. Tolkien has been a renowned and respected figure in fantasy writing since his publication of *The Hobbit* in 1937, and then *The Lord of the Rings* in 1954 and 1955. Begun while writing on the back of a student's empty exam paper, the famous first line has become synonymous with his work: "In a hole in the ground, there lived a hobbit." While the main plot of *The Hobbit* is a quest with Bilbo, Gandalf, and the 13 dwarves of Thorin Oakenshield & Co. to reclaim the kingdom of Erebor and its treasure, stolen by the dragon Smaug, it is a smaller encounter along the way that defines one of the most significant aspects of the story—one that extends into the themes of *The Lord of the Rings*. When Bilbo meets Gollum, a returning character in both texts, he shows mercy toward the creature that his nephew, Frodo, would repeat. These acts of mercy reflect a larger message of sparing judgment to those who deserve condemnation.

Bilbo's Bravery

While traveling through the Misty Mountains in *The Hobbit*, Bilbo becomes separated from the rest of his party and finds himself in a cavern far below the myriad of passageways. Lost and trying to find his way, he discovers what readers would come to know was the One Ring of Power. After pocketing it as a curious token, he encounters Gollum, the small, pitiful creature who lives in the cavern. Gollum is an emaciated, twisted version of who he once was: a creature very similar to a hobbit. They decide to

strike a deal through a game of riddles: if Bilbo wins, Gollum will show him the way out, and if Gollum wins, he will eat him. Thankfully, Bilbo narrowly wins, and along the way realizes that the Ring he found belonged to Gollum. Bilbo slips the Ring on in a nervous panic and realizes its secret: it has turned him invisible and given him an advantage. Gollum races for the exit, thinking Bilbo has escaped, and Bilbo quietly follows him to find the way out himself. While still invisible, he considers killing the creature to escape. And this is where he hesitates:

> He was desperate. He must get away, out of this horrible darkness, while he had any strength left. He must fight. He must stab the foul thing, put its eyes out, kill it. It meant to kill him. No, not a fair fight. He was invisible now. Gollum had no sword. Gollum had not actually threatened to kill him, or tried to yet. And he was miserable, alone, lost. A sudden understanding, a pity mixed with horror, welled up in Bilbo's heart: a glimpse of endless unmarked days without light or hope of betterment, hard stone, cold fish, sneaking and whispering.

Notice the switch in mindset that overtakes Bilbo: he was able to see Gollum as a sad and pitiful creature. He chose mercy. And by letting Gollum live, he shaped the future in ways he could not have realized.

Frodo's Fear

In *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Frodo is now on his own quest to destroy the very "precious" Bilbo had stolen from Gollum. Gandalf tells Frodo the story of how Bilbo acquired the Ring, and Frodo is disgusted with the thing that nearly killed his uncle, saying, "What a pity that Bilbo did not stab that vile creature, when he had the chance!" Gandalf, surprised at him, replies, "It was Pity that stayed his hand. Pity, and Mercy: not to strike without need." Frodo recognizes the truth in this, but still says that he feels no pity for Gollum because he "deserves death." Bilbo set an example, though, and chose to show mercy simply because he could, because he was in a position to do so. Note how Tolkien capitalizes concepts such as Pity

and Mercy. These terms are crucial and carry power of their own. "The pity of Bilbo," as Gandalf says, "may rule the fate of many."

In *The Two Towers,* Frodo eventually gets his chance to show Gollum the same mercy Bilbo did when he and Sam encounter him in the pass of Emyn Muil on their journey to Mordor. Like Bilbo, they find themselves lost, going the wrong way again and again. Gollum has been tracking them the whole time, and Frodo is ready now to kill him, to do what Bilbo did not. But he remembers the conversation he had with Gandalf, and he looks at Gollum and says, "Poor wretch! He has done us no harm. … For now that I see him, I do pity him." Frodo's heart is changed, just as Bilbo's was, and it is Frodo who comes to learn about Gollum, talk with him and understand his past, as a fellow Ringbearer. He is the first one to call Gollum by his old name: Smeagol. He even begs Captain Faramir to show mercy when they are intercepted by the Ithilien Rangers near Osgiliath in Gondor. He has a second chance to hand out judgment to Gollum and still, he declines. "The creature is wretched and hungry, and unaware of his danger," he tells Faramir. "And Gandalf, your Mithrandir, he would have bidden you not to slay him for that reason, and for others." Frodo defends the helpless and advocates for his safety, even if Gollum is still undeserving.

Samwise the Brave—and Just

Even Sam, the character Tolkien listed as the greatest hero of the story, struggles with showing Gollum mercy in *The Return of the King*. In the end, however, he also achieves a change of heart. While before, he was unable to recognize the bond between Frodo and Gollum through their shared experience of the Ring's hold, now he understands how his original lack of mercy toward the creature endangered them all:

> Sam's hand wavered. His mind was hot with wrath and the memory of evil. It would be just to slay this treacherous, murderous creature, just and many times deserved; and also it seemed the only safe thing to do. But deep in his heart there was something that restrained him: he could

> not strike this thing lying in the dust, forlorn, ruinous, utterly wretched. He himself, though only for a little while, had borne the Ring, and now dimly he guessed the agony of Gollum's twisted mind and body, enslaved to that Ring, unable to find peace or relief in life ever again.

Sam realizes how pitiful Gollum truly is, and he spares the creature even though he would be justified in killing him. In the end, the decision proves to be vital since Gollum is the one who inadvertently destroys the Ring and completes the quest for them. Without Gollum, the Ring would have continued to exist. If Bilbo had killed him back in the Misty Mountains, or if Frodo or Sam had killed him along their quest, they would have inadvertently sealed the fate of the whole world.

It is not difficult to look at this story and see the parallels to Christianity. Tolkien was heavily influenced by his faith, and however aesthetically unappealing a concept, it is an apt comparison to see ourselves as Gollum in our pitiful, twisted nature of sin. We do not deserve life, but rather death, and yet the Lord looked on us with mercy and spared us because he had the ability and power to do so. David tells us in the Psalms that "the LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love" (Psalm 103:8). Grace refers to freely-given goodwill, while mercy is a far more conscious decision; mercy is the act of withholding judgment that is deserved and that you have every right to deliver. Of the two, mercy is arguably the hardest to extend—it requires one to disregard justice, something we are very eager to demand as humans. All throughout the Gospels, we see people approaching Jesus and begging Him to "have mercy" on them. Paul tells us that "because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions" (Ephesians 2:4-5). It is our responsibility then, to treat others with the same mercy we have been shown, whether or not it serves our sense of justice. When we see others and pity them, it allows us to empathize with them, and then encourages us to reconsider the judgment we want to enact. It is an incredible act of bravery in faith.

Love Begets Love: The Love of Lily and Harry

Alexis J. McKay

Through J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series, we are introduced to the tragic character of Harry Potter. His life is destined to conclude in either his death or the murder of the antagonist, Lord Voldemort. At the beginning of the narrative, Harry lives with his aunt, uncle, and cousin. Their treatment of him adds to his tragic childhood, but the deeper tragedy is that he is not raised by his own parents. We later learn that Harry's parents were murdered by Lord Voldemort. Most importantly, his mother, Lily, protects Harry and sacrifices her life for him. Harry survives and becomes the "boy who lived." As we learn of her loving self-sacrifice, we are moved by Lily Potter's love for her son. As the narrative continues, we are given further details of the effects of her sacrifice, which reveals a beautiful and powerful magic that protects Harry throughout his life.

A Beautiful, Powerful Magic

Harry must return to his aunt and uncle's house each summer when school is not in session. It is not until *The Order of the Phoenix* that we learn why. Lily's sacrifice not only hindered Voldemort from killing Harry immediately, but it protects him from further harm even after she died. After Voldemort's attempt to kill Harry fails, Harry receives a unique scar, and Voldemort is left as a bodiless soul. Furthermore, Harry is protected by his mother's nearest blood relative, which is his aunt. Dumbledore, the headmaster of Hogwarts, explains this protection:

> … your mother died to save you. She gave you a lingering protection he never expected, a protection that flows in your veins to this day. I put my trust, therefore, in your mother's blood. I delivered you to her sister, her only remaining relative…While you can still call home the place where your mother's blood dwells, there you cannot be touched or harmed by Voldemort. He shed her blood, but it lives on in you and her sister. Her blood became your refuge.

As long as Harry can call his aunt's house his home, his mother's self-sacrifice continues to protect him from Voldemort. Because of this, Voldemort cannot touch him while at his aunt's house. In fact, Voldemort cannot physically touch him at all, a detail that foils his plan to regain a body at the end of *The Sorcerer's Stone*.

Eventually, Voldemort finds a way around this protection in *The Goblet of Fire* when Harry wins the Triwizard tournament. Voldemort's elaborate scheme to regain his body requires a sample of the blood of one's enemy. Voldemort selects Harry as the only satisfactory option, and his plan temporarily works to his benefit. After using Harry's blood, Voldemort regains a body and is now able to touch him, and it seems the magic of Lily's loving self-sacrifice has been overcome. However, when Harry recounts Voldemort's success to Dumbledore, Harry imagines that he sees a "gleam of something like triumph in Dumbledore's eyes." In the context of book four, this comment foreshadows the larger plot in the series, which is not revealed until book seven, *The Deathly Hallows*.

In the final book, Harry learns that he must sacrifice his life for Voldemort to be killed. Furthermore, he learns that Voldemort himself must be the one to do it. After Harry learns this piece of information, he goes willingly to his death and allows Voldemort the opportunity to kill him. As Harry walks to the forest to surrender himself over to death, he understands that he must accept death willingly for the sake of protecting his friends. Only Harry's loving self-sacrifice will give his friends the chance to defeat Voldemort. However, as Voldemort attempts to kill Harry for the second time, Harry survives. He is, once again, the boy who lived.

How could Harry survive twice? Voldemort and Harry are connected by several similar experiences: they are both orphans, they both grew up in difficult circumstances, and they both called Hogwarts, their school, home. Voldemort and Harry share the same core in their wands. They even display similar gifts. Now, Voldemort has furthered their connection. They are also connected by the power of Lily's loving self-sacrifice which resides in Harry's blood. Lily's protection of Harry now resides in Voldemort's veins. The previous gleam of triumph in Dumbledore's eye foreshadows the great effect of Voldemort's decision to use Harry's blood. Voldemort's steps to defeat Harry become the very actions that enable Harry's survival. Because of the protection of Lily's self-sacrifice, it is impossible for Voldemort to kill Harry.

These themes of love and self-sacrifice are demonstrated in another instance. At the final battle between Harry and Voldemort, Harry understands that his mother's love and self-sacrifice protected him as an infant, just as his love and sacrifice now protects his friends. As they are preparing to fight, Harry states to Voldemort,

> You won't be killing anyone else tonight…Don't you get it? I was ready to die to stop you from hurting these people…I meant to, and that's what did it. I've done what my mother did. They're protected from you. Haven't you noticed how none of the spells you put on them are binding? You can't torture them. You can't touch them.

Harry follows in his mother's footsteps and saves his friends by an act of love and self-sacrifice. They are now protected from Lord Voldemort.

The Ultimate Act of Loving Self-Sacrifice

These themes of love and self-sacrifice reflect the work of Jesus Christ. The story of the Bible culminates in Christ's death and resurrection on the cross. His reason for coming is his love. The sins of each person are so great, that the consequence is death. However, this price is fully paid by the self-sacrifice of the Son of God. John 15:13 states, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends." In Christ's

self-sacrifice, great love for humanity is revealed. He lays down his life for the life of his friends. Christ modeled his love for us in his self-sacrifice. Believers are to do the same. This command is not easy to follow. However, the command also accompanies a previous command in John 15, to abide in Christ. It is because of the love and self-sacrifice of Christ for believers, that we are enabled to do the same. Jesus uses the imagery of a vine and its branches. Only by abiding in the vine is bearing fruit possible. Believers are to abide in Christ in order to bear fruit and love one another as commanded. His love begets our love for one another.

The self-sacrifice of Christ also frees believers from the fear of death. Second Corinthians 5:1 explains that believers currently live in an earthly tent which will be destroyed. However, once it is destroyed, believers have an eternal house in heaven. Because Christ has defeated death, believers will live with him for eternity, even after their physical bodies die. First Peter 1:3-5 states,

> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Believers are guarded and protected in this inheritance. Therefore, death need not be feared because of the sure salvation to come. Until this time, the command remains, to love others and model love through self-sacrifice.

Penelope's Titus 2 Virtue

Emily Ferkaluk

The Odyssey famously recounts Odysseus' daring escapades on his winding way home from the Trojan War. Yet the story instructs us more about Odysseus' home than it does his homecoming. More particularly, the epic demonstrates the crucial role feminine intellectual virtue plays towards fostering a well-ordered home.

The Choice for Home: Penelope versus Odysseus

Every home is defined by the people within it, and every person is defined in large part by their choices, especially the choice for virtue or vice. The choices of Odysseus and his wife, Penelope, sharply contrast each other. Both are clever and resourceful. From the first line of the poem the hero Odysseus is defined by the descriptions "many-sided" or "the man of many ways." We see Penelope's cleverness in how she delays a new marriage through her weaving. Promising the suitors she will choose a new husband when a death shroud for her father is completed, she weaves during the day and takes it apart each night. Like Odysseus, Penelope suffers sorrow through their years apart. Yet at Odysseus' homecoming, Penelope tells of what she endured in Odysseus' absence; Odysseus tells of what he made others to endure. Most importantly, Odysseus often does not acknowledge that his choices affect other people. The plot moves by Odysseus's constant inward waffling between desires for peace and conflict, between using clever resourcefulness to seek the honor that comes

through adventure and wanting the security of a home that protects him from dishonorable death at sea. More often than not, Odysseus chooses fighting rather than friendship, glory rather than peace, adventure rather than home. In contrast, Penelope recognizes that she has a choice in her circumstances, and she conscientiously uses her virtue to preserve rather than destroy her home.

The First Cause of Disorder in Penelope's Home

When we first meet Penelope, she is faced with an unfortunate situation that appears to be her own doing. The Ithakaian suitors bring disorder to Odysseus' household in his absence by eating up his wine, sheep, and cows without proper recompense. According to the suitors, Penelope's actions win a great name for herself at the cost of her son's inheritance. Telemachos also blames his mother for allowing the suitors to eat up his birthright and wealth and pose a threat to his life. Both the goddess Athena and the suitors advise that Penelope return to her father's household to court and marry again, which would bring a swift end to the apparent injustice.

On second glance, however, the disorder and destruction enacted by the suitors is not caused by Penelope, but by Odysseus. Penelope is beset by the suitors against her will.

Odysseus's choice to prolong his absence brings disorder to his household. Although the poet begins by claiming that Odysseus longs for his wife and his homecoming, Odysseus himself is strangely silent in expressing that longing. We later learn that it is Poseidon who frustrates the latter half of Odysseus' travels as revenge for Odysseus' act of blinding his son, Cyclops. But why was Odysseus on Cyclops' island, and why was he trapped in Cyclops cave? Not out of necessity, but out of a thirst for adventure. Odysseus' love for adventure leads him astray, always further away from home. Moreover, his love for war-making eventually brings danger to his home, as we see at the very end of the epic. Odysseus ironically brings "peace" to his household by slaughtering the suitors, a war-like action that invites the threat of destruction upon his home from neighboring families.

Problematically, Odysseus' absence has also caused Telemachos to

grow up with a disorderly mind that fears to contribute his own solution to the household's problem. Although Telemachos asserts to Penelope that he has "the power in this household," and to the suitors that he "will be the absolute lord over my own household," he later complains that "we have no man here / such as Odysseus was, to drive this curse from the household." Telemachos cannot govern his troubled heart strongly because his mind is disordered; for these reasons, he doesn't act on his own responsibility to drive the suitors from the household. The true evil attacking the household is not the suitors or increasing loss of possessions, but the lack of a father.

How Penelope's Virtue Preserves Her Home

Although Odysseus is ultimately at fault for the household troubles, Penelope still has a role in the situation. As we will see, Penelope uses the virtue of a sound mind to avoid both of the extreme choices presented to her by the suitors (either a new, hateful marriage or the destruction of Telemachos' household).

In particular, Penelope's reluctance to remarry is rooted in her recognition that a new marriage would not garner her a well-ordered home. Homer defines a well-ordered home in part by harmony between a husband and wife. The poet shows us this reality by picturing its inverse. Menelaos' household evidences clear discord between husband and wife; their lack of friendship seemingly also results in a disorder between the household and its community, as evidenced by the active guards. Similarly, Kaylpso's household confirms that a husband and wife need to be emotionally connected. Although Penelope cannot rival the goddess in "beauty and stature," Odysseus later reveals that he can "converse" in human communities rather than among "nymphs" such as Kalypso. Penelope suspects there could be no proper harmony for her in a second marriage. Instead, she holds firmly to the value that a well-ordered home can provide.

Hence, the suitors eat up the household while Penelope remains faithful to the lord of that household until Telemachos is ready to assume leadership. Unlike Odysseus, Penelope unwaveringly chooses the possibility of a well-ordered home as the standard for all her actions.

Penelope's Similarity to the Young Women of Titus

This use of Penelope's sound mind to preserve the possibility of a well-ordered home gives us a picture of the virtuous young women whom Paul describes in Titus 2. The cultures surrounding Penelope and the Titus 2 women are very similar. Like the Ithakaian suitors, the Cretans lived a culture of lying, laziness and evil that was upsetting whole households (Titus 1:10-13). Cretans were famous for their greed, gluttony, self-indulgence, and lies. Paul therefore writes to Titus to encourage the church at Crete to counter this testimony with a pattern of good works and sound doctrine.

Paul goes on to recommend specific behavior characteristics for each group of people in the church—older men and younger men, older women and younger women. More specifically, Paul charges older women to be teachers of good things, and then gives a list of descriptive adjectives that are to characterize virtuous young women: sober (self-controlled), friendly towards one's husband while also willfully subject to him; loving towards one's children; discreet; chaste; a keeper at home; good. Penelope pictures all of these virtues for us.

Throughout the *Odyssey* Penelope wraps herself in modesty. She is always accompanied by at least two handmaidens and takes a modest stance before her suitors by standing "beside the pillar that supported the roof with its joinery" and wearing a veil.

Penelope is also clearly *agathos* or good: she is distinguished, upright, and honorable and earns praise for these qualities from many people throughout the epic.

Above all, Penelope guards her home. The word for "housekeeping" in the scripture is *oikourgos,* which carries an implication of guarding the home. In contrast to Penelope, Agamemnon's wife Klytaimestra destroyed her home rather than safeguarding it. While Agamemnon was away at war, Klytaimestra took a lover who then treacherously killed her husband upon his homecoming. Importantly, Klytaimestra's adultery and murder began in her mind: "there is nothing more deadly or more vile than a woman / who stores in her mind with acts that are of such sort, as this one / did when this thought of this act of dishonor, and plotted/ the murder of her

lawful husband." In contrast to Klytaimestra, Penelope uses her intellectual virtue of sober discretion to protect Odysseus' rightful rule over his home.

Both Greek words for "sober" and "discreet" in Titus 2 stem from the same root that carries the idea that one is temperate, or that one moderates and controls one's desires, holds to one's duty, is of sound mind, and is self-controlled. These are intellectual virtues. They are virtues that begin with knowing what is good and then patterning one's emotions and actions to act on the good. While Penelope deeply grieves the loss of Odysseus, she never allows her sorrow to affect her pursuit of a well-ordered home. Penelope's self-control over her grief enables her to be good, maintain her chastity, and be loving towards her son Telemachos. All of these virtues combined contribute towards her successful protection over her home in her husband's absence.

Homer's depiction of Penelope thus gives us a portrait of how intellectual virtue affects other practical virtues, especially those that govern our home. A sound mind is the foundation upon which all other virtues of a young woman are built. Our actions adorn the doctrine we believe; actions show doctrine to be true and beautiful and good for us. Whereas Odysseus spends the epic chasing his desires to the detriment of his home, Penelope soundly chooses a well-ordered home as her ultimate good and subjects her desires in order to preserve it.

Sin and Human Nature

The Enemy Within: Defoe's *Crusoe*, A Portrait of Human Sinfulness

Robert J. Clark

Robinson Crusoe, the reflective and long-winded but adventurous castaway of Daniel Defoe's classic story—and arguably the first English novel—has often been seen as a literary forerunner of the modern value of self-reliance. Yet despite the many and often outlandish descriptions of what Crusoe managed to extract from and build on his deserted island, his frequent acknowledgment of dependence on God's providential supply for his many needs suggests that the author thought far more of divine grace than he did of human resourcefulness. And Crusoe's persistent anxiety about his current circumstances or future prospects can hardly be said to promote individual pride or self-confidence based on his accomplishments. On the contrary, Defoe's *Crusoe* offers a study in human nature that agrees with the Bible regarding the source and extent of human sinfulness.

Bad Beginnings

Though composed in 1719, Defoe set his tale of shipwreck and survival in the previous century, when both religious devotion and economic opportunity consumed the aspirations of many Europeans. It is no accident that Christian principles and a desire for wealth create conflict in the heart of the main character, for the author pits these two timely concerns against one another. Robinson Crusoe, a German immigrant to England, narrates the account of his own adventures and misfortunes and interprets them

from a thoroughly Christian perspective even though he lives—by his own confession—contrary to the Bible's teaching for the first third of the story. Indeed, the development of Crusoe as a character revolves around the struggle to understand his own internal impulse to make ungodly choices which lead to increasingly serious consequences.

His stubborn selfishness leads the young Crusoe to abandon his parents, "without asking God's blessing, or my father's, without any consideration of circumstances or consequences, and in an ill hour, God knows," and to risk physical and spiritual danger in pursuit of wealth. He even calls his abandonment of his parents' counsel, "my original sin." He admits that he was by no means poor or unprepared for success at home, because his father had done everything he could to prepare him for a "competent" living. Yet this would not satisfy the young man who—almost too late—realizes that his problem is within him: "that there seemed to be something fatal in that propension of nature, tending directly to the life of misery which was to befall me." Of course, what Crusoe observes is the universal sinfulness of humanity, for "None is righteous, no, not one …. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one" (Romans 3:10-12).

Reflecting on his inability to control sinful tendencies despite the painful consequences of his own greed, Crusoe acknowledges that this universal corruption on human nature is ultimately irresistible for those who do not know Christ. One's tendency toward sin actually grows more powerful each time one indulges the flesh.

Eventually, Crusoe is presented with an offer to make a huge amount of money quickly by stooping to grasp a share of the wicked profits of the slave trade. He laments "that I was born to be my own destroyer, could no more resist the offer than I could restrain my first rambling designs, when my father's good counsel was lost upon me." For it was on this fateful voyage bound for the Slave Coast of Guinea that Crusoe suffered shipwreck and washed up alone on the shore of an exotic island, far from normal trade routes and with no hope of rescue. By his own account, the castaway's "state of life" prior to this crisis had been persistently contrary

to God's righteousness and biblical wisdom. He had forsaken godly values and corrupted his ways seeking material over spiritual gain. Moreover, he repeatedly refused to forsake his ways and turn to God when he met the natural consequences of sinful choices.

Yet Crusoe also recognizes that such foolishness is hardly unique to himself. "How incongruous and irrational the common temper of mankind is," he declares, "to that reason which ought to guide them . . . that they are not ashamed to sin, and yet are ashamed to repent; nor ashamed of the action for which they ought justly to be esteemed fools, but are ashamed of the returning, which only can make them be esteemed wise men."

Lost– then Found

Thus, through a long series of misfortunes—resulting from his own rebellion against God's law—Crusoe finds himself stranded on an uninhabited but remarkably abundant island somewhere in the Atlantic. Alone, Crusoe is forced to reevaluate his life's ambitions and see the folly of his sinfulness, which has not only left him separated from all human society but from God as well. Though understandably despairing at first, he begins to see his circumstances, and even the misfortunes that produced them, as evidence of divine providence in his life. The grace of God in spite of Crusoe's vulnerability on the island causes him to view his condition as blessed rather than cursed. Repeatedly, the survivor's improbable resourcefulness is outdone by remarkably good fortune. The ship on which he ran aground in the storm remains intact long enough to allow him to recover essential tools and provisions to make his survival possible. Later, another ship is stranded on his coast with no survivors but containing weapons and supplies that prove critical to his success. Salvaged grain turns out to produce reliable annual harvests once Crusoe realizes, quite by accident, that the soil and climate are suitable. He even discovers native goats on the island, which he domesticates to further improve the quality of his diet. And he is preserved through events that could have been life-threatening, such as a serious bout with tropical disease and a terrifying earthquake.

Nevertheless, Crusoe admits that his initial willingness to give God credit for these blessings quickly fades in each instance. He is forced to concede that his "religious thankfulness to God's providence began to abate" after each provision or protection. His self-centeredness haunts him, even in isolation.

After two years lost on that uninhabited island, Crusoe discovers the characteristic of human sinfulness that leads him to be "rescued" from the spiritual separation which had made him a castaway from God. Searching in one of the chests he'd recovered from the shipwreck for something with medicinal qualities, he instead finds "a cure both for soul and body." Among the few books that had been protected from the surf, he took a Bible, "which, to this time, I had not found leisure, or so much as inclination, to look into." As he read the New Testament morning and night, he experienced the ability of the Word of God to bring about conviction of sin. "It was not long after I set seriously to this work," he explains, "but I found my heart more deeply and sincerely affected with the wickedness of my past life." His chief enemy and the cause of his ruin had been his own sin, not the fault of others or circumstances. The guilt was his own. It is human nature that produces sin, not one's environment. He realizes that the island prison in which he is confined—pristine, abundant, a perfect environment in many ways—leaves him no excuses behind which to hide. The enemy was within! "I was earnestly begging of God to give me repentance, when it happened providentially, the very day, that, reading the Scripture I came to these words, *He is exalted a Prince and a Saviour; to give repentance, and to give remission.*" (Acts 5:31, KJV) Claiming the hope of salvation through Christ, Crusoe cries out in repentance and faith to God and experiences deliverance from the spiritual prison of sin!

From that point on, he views his confinement in different terms. "As for my solitary life," he asserts, "it was nothing; I did not so much as pray to be delivered from it, or think of it: it was all of no consideration, in comparison to this [salvation from sin]." And he appeals to readers of his account, "that whenever they come to a true sense of things, they will find deliverance from sin a much greater blessing than deliverance from affliction." There is a more profound and universal isolation in the human

experience than any uninhabited island can create, "for all have sinned and fall sort of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith." (Romans 3:23-25a) The true enemy of humanity is within, and our reconciliation to God requires an internal transformation, made possible only through the gospel of Christ.

How Not to Chase a Turkey: Flannery O'Connor and Self-Centered Ambition

Stanley Schwartz

Many authors have written beautiful, captivating prose, filling their stories with lush sensory detail and creative, twisting plots. It is rarer, but even more enjoyable, to find literature that reveals some element of the human condition, which leaves readers with an idea to reflect on long after we turn the final page. Flannery O'Connor's short stories fit that description. The Catholic woman from Georgia, who died tragically young at age thirty-nine, created characters whose emotions, motives, and experiences always cause me to reflect on my own affections and actions. One theme exposed by many of O'Connor's works is the danger of self-centered ambition.

A Prize Worth Pursuing?

In one such story, she describes a boy rushing through the thick underbrush and tall trees of an Appalachian forest. After catching sight of an injured turkey during a morning ramble in the woods, young Ruller decided to chase it, a choice that takes him across hedges, hills, fences, and roads. Many times the eleven-year-old believes he has the bird cornered, only for it to wobble away ahead of him again. Finally, when Ruller is ready to abandon his quest, with his shirt torn, his forehead knotted after crashing into a tree, and his lungs desperately short of air, he catches sight of "a pile of ruffled bronze with a red head lying limp along the ground." The turkey gave up the struggle for life and perished, leaving the boy victorious.

While Flannery O'Connor's account of this breathless pursuit makes for exciting reading, the author is more concerned with her subject's thoughts than with his movements. Few of us, perhaps, would try to track down a wild turkey if we encountered one outdoors. I have had the pleasure of crossing paths with the large, colorful birds in several forests, but the urge to run after them never seized me yet. Why does young Ruller take up the hunt? He has a vision of himself carrying the turkey home, receiving lavish attention and praise because he conquered the beast. When he first charges after the turkey, the lad imagines his family "all screaming, 'Look at Ruller with that wild turkey!'" Later, after he runs into a tree, the bruised youth imagines his father saying "Man! That's a bird if ever I saw one!", which sustains his determination to capture the fleeing fowl. Finally, when he hesitates to drag the dead creature away, the boy thinks of how his family will see him if he returns with a catch: "Ruller gets our turkeys for us." That idea of the praise and attention he will receive leads the impulsive eleven-year-old to grab the carcass, concluding that the turkey's providential death will bring about his own elevation. As the boy snatches it up and heads for home, he dreams of his family's awe-struck admiration at his triumph.

Glimpses of Self-Centered Ambition

Ruller is not the only character in Flannery O'Connor's fiction who hungers for other people's recognition and respect. Her short stories exhibit a crowd of characters motivated by the self-centered ambition to be somebody or to be the center of attention, a need that is not limited to young boys. In "The Geranium," an elderly man who moves from the South to New York City to live with his daughter recalls life in Georgia. Old Dudley remembers that he liked to catch fish and share them with his fellow boarding-house lodgers, a group of elderly ladies who would say "it took a man to get those fish." Dudley would announce his return and loudly toss down the fish, causing the women to praise him as "the man in the house."

Another story, "Good Country People," tells of a woman named Joy whose extensive education isolates her in her thirties from her rural family. When a Bible salesman comes to the farmhouse door, he dotes on Joy,

complimenting and questioning the irritable recluse in ways that her mother has long since given up. Joy's icy exterior melts when she muses "that she would run away with" the young man, imagining herself as his true love, the center of his world. That vain dream leaves Joy vulnerable when the Bible salesman displays his true character as a cynical thief.

Like Ruller, Old Dudley and Joy reveal the influence of self-centered ambition in our personal, private life. We want to be loved, which can lead us to fantasize about how important we are to our friends and family. We long for the people around us to see that we are unique, excellent, and praiseworthy. As a result, Ruller tears through the woods at a feverish pace, focusing on the turkey as the key to achieving his self-centered ambition: becoming the focal point of his family's adoration. Sadly, the young boy's wishful thinking draws him away from home, the best place to develop truly loving relationships with his parents. Old Dudley's and Joy's imaginations also cause them to ignore the people who truly care for them - his daughter and her mother.

Flannery O'Connor's short stories further portray self-centered ambition rearing its head in characters' public interactions with strangers. "Enoch and the Gorilla" takes readers inside the mind of a young man who, living alone in Atlanta, "wanted to become something." Enoch's desire to "better his condition" takes physical shape when he sees children lined up to meet a movie star, who turns out to be a man wearing a plastic suit to play a gorilla. Enoch's vision of his own potential exaltation becomes clear: "He wanted, some day, to see a line of people waiting to shake his hand." The young man's self-centered ambition pushes him down a brutal path toward his goal, as Enoch ultimately kills the actor and steals his gorilla suit.

Enoch is not the only example of O'Connor's characters yearning for the attention of a crowd. "A Late Encounter With the Enemy" introduces George Sash, a bitter, senile old man who pretends to be a veteran of a long-distant war so that he is honored in local parades. The elderly George "liked to sit on any stage," even if it means deceiving the audience by wearing a false uniform. As his body fails and his relationship with his

granddaughter withers, "General" Sash continues to crave applause and the spotlight, oblivious to his life's moral and physical wreckage. Enoch and George's ambitions for attention, like those of Ruller, Joy, and Old Dudley, cut them off from other people, yielding disappointment and danger rather than delight.

Self-Centered Ambition in Scripture: Simon the Sorcerer

O'Connor's stories may cause readers to laugh at her characters' inflated egos and poor choices, but the vivid Biblical treatment of self-centered ambition in Acts 8 requires that we pause and search our own hearts. When Philip, one of the Apostles spreading the good news of Jesus Christ's ministry and resurrection, reached Samaria, a major city north of Jerusalem, he encountered a man named Simon. This man's practice of sorcery "amazed" audiences and enabled him to boast "that he was someone great." Despite Simon's pride, Luke recounts that the sorcerer believed and was baptized when Philip preached the Gospel. Nevertheless, after the apostles Peter and John arrived to pray for the believers in Samaria, Simon revealed the weakness of his faith. Like O'Connor's characters, the Samaritan's self-centered ambition surged, leading him to picture himself back in the center of a crowd. In Acts 8:19, Simon offered the Apostles money to give him the ability to send the Holy Spirit into people by touching them, a public ministry that, if brought from imagination into reality, would restore his fame and public power. Simon sought to make God's gift an instrument for his own glorification, leading Peter to rebuke him severely and demand that the sorcerer "repent of this wickedness."

Simon's disastrous attempt to restore his celebrity is not the only Biblical reminder that believers should be wary of the self-centered ambition that threatens to sweep us away with fantasies of our own importance and opportunities. When Eve ate the forbidden fruit in Eden, she believed that it was "desirable for gaining wisdom," indicating that she took the fruit after imagining what it could do for her. She disobeyed the Lord as part of a self-centered pursuit of her own ambitions. Paul addressed the temptation toward self-centered ambition in Romans 12:3 when he instructed believers "Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought,

but rather think of yourself with sober judgment." A humble assessment of ourselves can keep us from pursuing the dangerous, ridiculous follies that O'Connor's characters display as they chase a turkey, covet the spotlight, or steal a gorilla suit, poisoning their relationships in the process.

Ironically, the yearning for praise that led young Ruller to hunt down his turkey also causes him to lose it. On his way home, the boy stops to show his catch off to a group of lads who respond by seizing the prize for themselves. O'Connor concludes her story with Ruller running back to his family, "certain that Something Awful was tearing behind him with its arms rigid and its fingers ready to clutch." Just like Simon the sorcerer, and any of us who surrender our choices to egotistical visions of attention and celebrity, Ruller discovered that self-centered ambition leaves its victims with empty hands and hollow hearts.

Short of the Glory of God: Human Nature in *Lord of the Flies*

Mark Caleb Smith

What does it mean to be human? In the 1954 novel *Lord of the Flies*, William Golding gives a dark, unsettling answer. Golding's story strands a group of English boys on a tropical island and shows what could happen when all the things that normally keep people in line, like civilization, rules, and duty, are gone. The short answer—it's not pretty.

The Setting

Golding tells us precious little about the boys, who range in age from six to twelve, as they stumble across the beach. They are dazed survivors of a plane crash. The reader spends the most time with four characters. Ralph is fair and tall, a natural, but reluctant, leader. Piggy is an orphan, raised by his aunt. He is short and stubby and wears thick spectacles. Jack, the red head, comes with a position. He leads a choir, the only group that predates the crash. These boys march onto the scene, organized, with Jack as their head. Simon is slight, has black hair, and follows along at first as part of Jack's choir. Simon is shy and insecure, but he grows stronger.

To their credit, the boys realize quickly they need to organize. They learn they are the only humans around, and they are not sure if, or how soon, a rescue might happen. Food, shelter, fresh water, and a signal fire for ships and planes, whether around by accident or design, are all pressing needs. But nothing can be accomplished individually. Given the new reali-

ty, they collapse into a democracy. Though Jack volunteers himself to lead, Ralph is eventually chosen as "chief" by a vote.

The first decisions are simple. Ralph decides Jack and his choir should start and mind a fire. Ralph and the others attempt to build shelters, while young boys carry water. The boys struggle against the elements and grow tired of fruit. Jack's choir transforms into a hunting party in search of feral hogs. Their efforts are aided by Jack's large, sharp knife, which he proudly displays. The ingredients for survival, and perhaps a thriving settlement, are present: natural resources, a system of authority, and plenty of work to be done. Instead, the story turns toward the darkest corners of human nature. The fragile community dissolves into strife, violence, and inhumanity.

Checks on Human Nature Dissolve

Like cars on a highway, the boys arrived at the island with guardrails in place. They carried not just civilization, but *English* civilization. As Jack says early in the story, "after all, we're not savages. We're English, and the English are best at everything." When these children, in their time and place, think of England, they think of the culture that defined the British Empire, which spanned the globe. They think of themselves not as savages, but as people who civilize savages. There is more than a whiff of superiority in Jack's statement, an expectation that things will be fine simply because of the heritage they carry. For Golding, none of this matters. Away from English soil, the boys shed their proper school uniforms and the civilization they represent. On an island where the Union Jack never waved, savagery lurks within the heart of a literal choirboy who should know better. When events spiral out of control, Ralph confronts a tribe transformed, with boys wearing blood as warpaint. "Are we savages or what?" he cries.

Piggy arrives with a firm grip on "Auntie's rules." Ralph claims they need rules to get things done. Jack says, "we'll have rules!" and when those rules are broken, "Wacco!" In *Lord of the Flies*, an orderly group of children are suffering a catastrophe. As they grapple with how to respond, they begin with guidelines for behavior. Every society, from the simplest tribe

far removed from "modern" civilization to a sprawling nation that covers a continent, requires some clear standards. There must be expectations. In the book, the first, and simplest rule revolves around the conch shell. Ralph blows the shell to call the boys together in assembly. As they meet, and try to make decisions, whoever holds the conch gets to speak. While there is initial tussling over it, the symbolism of the shell's authority stands, but not for long. Eventually, the shell is destroyed, along with every meaningful restraint on the boys' behavior. Rules are not enough to deter corruption.

Jack is always more excited about enforcing rules than following them. He assumes leadership of a splinter tribe, not because he is chosen, but because he is fierce and frightening. The process of the hunt, and the glee found in killing wild boars, changes Jack. Rules are no longer determined collectively. Liberated from structure, Jack's word becomes the law, and the biggest, strongest boys threaten and intimidate anyone who resists. Jack's hunters steal Piggy's glasses, leaving him blind. As he finds the courage to confront Jack, Piggy knows instinctively there are no more rules. He appeals instead to what is "right." Finally, he targets self-interest. "Which is better, law and rescue, or hunting and breaking things up?" Piggy's words are uttered moments before one of the great cruelties of the book, an act that demonstrates Jack's ultimate power over his tribe. He summons the boys to kill, and they oblige.

The desire to be rescued galvanizes the boys early. Their best hope is to start and keep a fire burning. Initially, the boys take this duty seriously, not only for selfish reasons, but for the good of the community. The surest path home is simple, even if it is unlikely. Jack's hunters manage the fire. The group can share responsibilities by rotating tasks. Some gather wood, others keep watch, and everyone else can rest. Duty is most effective and easily achieved when it is commonly understood. Social pressure, sometimes subtle, encourages people to embrace duties though they may be difficult. Parents feel a duty to care for their children, while later in life, those same children feel a responsibility to care for those parents. Police officers must protect the vulnerable. Walking down a clean school hallway, a teacher or student may feel the duty to bend down and pick up a random scrap of trash on the floor. In *Lord of the Flies*, the collective duty to tend

the fire erodes. The hunters let it burn out because they are hungry for meat. As the tribe fractures, there aren't enough boys to keep the flame lit. Ralph understands the importance of the duty as he confronts the rogues. "The fire's the most important thing. Without the fire we can't be rescued. I'd like to put on war-paint and be a savage. But we must keep the fire burning." Ralph's arguments are ineffective because the boys are no longer motivated by duty but live to satisfy their lust for blood and meat.

Yes, There Is a Monster

Throughout the story, the small boys chatter and worry about a beast on the island. They fear rustling leaves and the blowing wind; they read malevolence into every movement. Later, even the bigger boys convince themselves they have seen a horrid brute out to kill them. Of all the boys, only Simon changes for the better on the island. He discovers his voice and learns to assert himself. He serves others even when it is dangerous. As the beast grows in the boys' imagination, Simon sees the truth. He understands there are monsters on the island, but they are not beasts from the land, sea, or air. "What I mean is…maybe it's only us." At that moment, Simon is trying, says Golding, "to express mankind's essential illness."

Human beings, the Bible tells us, are, unlike any other part of creation, made in God's image. He looked upon his creation, including Adam and Eve, and called it good (Gen. 1:26-31). But we know the human story only begins there. In the Garden of Eden, God commanded Adam and Eve not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Eve, tempted by the serpent, disobeys God, and Adam soon follows her into sin. Through sin, toil, pain, and death become part of the human condition (Gen. 3). The Apostle Paul tells us that because of Adam's sin, we too were "made sinners" (Rom. 5:19). This sin stains everyone, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). Sin takes many forms, from the white lie to murder, and it cannot be avoided. *Lord of the Flies* reminds us that our "essential illness" can be found even among small, seemingly innocent children. Marooned in paradise, where food and water are abundant, they just have a few rules to follow. Soon, it becomes obvious that like us, the boys are in dire need of rescue. Like all human beings, they cannot save themselves.

William Golding, the author of *Lord of the Flies*, was in the Royal Navy in World War II. He served on a destroyer and was part of the Normandy invasion of June 6, 1944. Golding commanded a landing craft. Golding saw, in the face of war, the best and the worst of humans: good and evil, bravery and cruelty. *Lord of the Flies* demonstrates the same thing. There is ingenuity as the boys use Piggy's glasses to start a fire, and bravery when Simon tries to persuade them the only monster on the island is found in their own hearts. There is also horror and gore as blood is spilled and death is celebrated. Human nature is complicated. Still in God's image, we are capable of majestic deeds, but riddled with sin, we are also capable of great wickedness. Many things prevent us from being as evil as we might be, even in our daily lives. Civilization, rules or laws, and duty are just some of those things, and we should be thankful whenever we find these medicines to manage our "essential illness."

Sin and Repentance

Sin and Forgiveness in Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Ethan Brand"

Justin D. Lyons

In Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Ethan Brand," the title character undertakes a quest for the Unpardonable Sin; but the story does not simply follow the Scriptural definition of this sin: blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Matthew 12:31-32; Mark 3:28-29; Luke 12:10). Hawthorne's Brand defines the Unpardonable Sin in terms of a separation of the intellect and the heart, of losing his "hold of the magnetic chain of humanity." Brand evidently experiments with people, drawing out the evil that lurks in their souls and bringing his victims to ruin to further his search.

This presentation might suggest that sin is to be seen in secular humanist terms–there being nothing higher than man, there is no greater morality than love for humanity. Yet Brand's definition incorporates much traditional language: "The sin of an intellect that triumphed over the sense of brotherhood with man, and reverence for God, and sacrificed everything to its own mighty claims!" It is not merely the connection to one's fellow men that is disturbed, but a larger chain of being and a higher obligation. Brand goes on to remark on the consequences of his sin: "The only sin that deserves a recompense of immortal agony! Freely, were it to do again, would I incur the guilt. Unshrinkingly, I accept the retribution!" This is the language of divine judgment and punishment, the language of a man shouting defiance at a tribunal higher than his fellow men.

The Dark Road of Sin and Doubt

Did Ethan Brand find the Unpardonable Sin? Hawthorne includes passages that cause the reader to doubt whether Brand truly completed his quest. The first seed of doubt is taken from the mind of Brand himself when he meets the three characters from the village and is repulsed by their vulgarity. Brand is disgusted that these men have squandered whatever potential they had by making themselves slaves to liquor. The question occurs to him whether through his own profound intellectual development he has found any greater sin than these men who have lowered themselves to the level of beasts.

The next indication that Ethan Brand may not have accomplished his mission comes from the one hint of remorse in the story. Brand has previously embraced and reveled in his guilt, but when the old man Humphrey asks Brand for news of his daughter, Esther, Brand does not trumpet his evil deeds; rather, he fears to face the father of the woman he destroyed: "Ethan Brand's eye quailed beneath the old man's." He then turns away expressing something very like regret: "'Yes,' murmured he, turning away from the hoary wanderer; 'it is no delusion. There is an Unpardonable Sin!'" Does Brand no longer exist in a state of unrepentant sinfulness? If he can feel remorse, is there a chance he could be pardoned by God, if not by Esther's father?

Brand also notes a similarity between his quest and the old dog's vain pursuit of his own tail. Hawthorne does not allow his readers to draw straight lines of correspondence, as he calls it a "remote analogy," but the comment invites speculation. The analogy could be explained by reference to the circular nature of both Brand's spiritual and physical journeys, but might not the futility of the dog's desire be the point of comparison? We note that the dog has a short tail that could never be caught no matter how maniacal and determined the inexplicable chase; yet the animal exhibits "headlong eagerness in pursuit of an object that could not possibly be attained" until, exhausted, he ceases the pursuit "as far from his goal as ever." Is Brand engaged in a similar futile quest? If so, is this the analogy that Brand perceives? We see that Brand's confidence about having com-

pleted his quest returns at the end of the story–when he is alone with no one present to cast doubts–but how confident is he at this moment? One might consider whether his unsettling laughter here is spurred by the same thought as his laughter at other points in the story.

What are we to make of the character of the traveling Jew? At first he seems merely a ridiculous figure, an old showman who ekes out a living through a mixture of obsequiousness and good humor. But it becomes clear that he has met Ethan Brand before. That their acquaintance was more than momentary is revealed by his knowledge of Brand's project. In fact, he mocks Brand, eliciting an outburst of anger: "Peace!" answered Ethan Brand sternly, "or get thee into the furnace yonder!" The Jew coaxes Brand to look into his picture box; what Brand sees spurs recognition: "I remember you now." What does he see? The qualified indication is that he sees nothing. This event seems to recall past mockery to Brand's memory–mockery that the scoffer repeats: "'Ah, Captain,' whispered the Jew of Nuremberg, with a dark smile, 'I find it to be a heavy matter in my show box–this Unpardonable Sin! By my faith, Captain, it has wearied my shoulders, this long day, to carry it over the mountain.'" This remark, which provokes Brand's anger, suggests that there is no such thing as the Unpardonable Sin.

The Path to Pardon

Whether we read this story in terms of traditional Christian notions of sin or according to a humanist conception, whether he found what he sought or not, "Ethan Brand" is a tale of self-destruction. Brand first throws his dark thoughts into the fire and then his own body; he cuts himself off from his fellow men and then embraces a death emblematic of that separation. Perhaps the message of the story is simply that the human intellect needs to recognize restraints–reverence for God, respect for fellow man–or it becomes destructive. From a humanist perspective, Ethan Brand's fate is poetic justice. He perishes in a kind of Kantian revenge as he, who had used so many others as a means in pursuit of his ends, is himself used to enrich a lowly lime-burner.

Does Brand also cut himself off from God beyond any hope of pardon? Can he? While Hawthorne's story evokes the biblical themes, the ambiguity and doubt surrounding them does not coincide with the teaching of Scripture. Brand does not appear to be a reader of the Bible. If he were, he would find there clear teaching about sin and forgiveness. From our first parent, every human being has been subject to sin and cut off from God. But in His grace and mercy, God has not left us to perish. He reached out to humanity to restore the broken relationship, and He paid the price for our sin Himself: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Christ died "to redeem us from all lawlessness" (Titus 2:14) so that "everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name" (Acts 10:43). We are promised that "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

There is no direct indication that Brand has blasphemed against the Holy Spirit, nor does he define his quest in those terms; but one suspects that finding one unpardonable sin is not the point. It is not one sin that gives him doubt, but his sinful state. Brand does not really believe in the possibility of forgiveness. He has done things that he believes are unforgiveable. If we forget or ignore what the Bible says, we, too, may fall into similar doubt. The subtitle Hawthorne gives to the story, "A Chapter from an Abortive Romance," suggests that it was meant to be part of a longer tale. But whatever our story, however far back it stretches, whatever we have done, God will forgive us if we repent, reject our sin, and turn to Him: "Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out…" (Acts 3:19). Brand does not repent. His sins are unpardoned because he does not ask for pardon.

Scrooge and the Death That Gives Life

Justin D. Lyons

Christ is alive: to begin with.

If Charles Dickens had been inspired to write a book of the New Testament, I suspect that it is how it would start—for that truth is the foundation of Christianity: "And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins" (1 Corinthians 15:17). It is instead, of course, an alteration of the opening line of his famous tale, *A Christmas Carol.* This justly celebrated classic chronicles the terrifying but morally reformative experience of Ebenezer Scrooge, as unkind and callous a miser who ever stalked the earth. Successively haunted by the ghosts of Christmas past, present, and future, Scrooge's eyes are opened to his own wretched selfishness, prompting repentance and a dramatic alteration of his close-fisted and hard-hearted behavior.

Scrooge's story is timeless because it is a spiritual story. His transformation echoes that of Zaccheus (Luke 19), the counterpoint to the rich young ruler whose inability to loosen his grasp on the things of this world introduces Christ's teaching that "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (Matthew 19:24). When we first meet Scrooge, he is that rich man. His love of money has nearly extinguished the sparks of love and joy that sputter fitfully among the gathering shadows of his dark heart. His lamentable condition is brought into stark relief by being examined in the glow

of Christmas, "a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time" when shut-up hearts are opened to let in the light of kindness and reflect it back again.

Not Birth But Death

Despite its long association with Christmas, Dickens's tale begins not with a birth, but with a death—the death of Old Marley, Scrooge's former business partner. In fact, death underlies the entire story: it casts a shadow over Scrooge's bygone memories; it lurks behind the festoons of present revelry; it awaits its inevitable victims in the future. Scrooge is aware of death, certainly. He even recommends it to the poor as a means of relieving the surplus population. But it is clear that he has never thought about it as applicable or relevant to himself. That begins to change when he is confronted by the ghost of the departed Marley, who appears to Scrooge to make him accept death and the consequences of death—to warn him to turn from the dismal road he walks or suffer eternal punishments. Bound in the trappings of death and torment, he comes to offer Scrooge "a chance and hope" of escaping his own dreadful fate.

"You will be haunted by Three Spirits," Marley tells Scrooge. The Spirits show him many things, but what they collectively reveal is Scrooge's progressing separation from his fellow man. Still, Scrooge is not wholly lost. Small regrets begin to well up in him early in the course of the spectral visitations. The Spirits know their business, fanning these embers of remorse into flames of repentance. But it is the third Spirit, so frightful in aspect that he is referred to as a "Phantom," who brings Scrooge to his knees, pleading for the chance to mend his ways. This Spirit is the revelation of death. The visions presided over by this menacing apparition, who provides not even the comforts of speech, are unrelieved by either the sweetness of recollection or glimpses of present joy. Scrooge is brought face to face with his own death, his final separation from the world. But it is not merely his death, but especially the kind of death that shakes Scrooge: a death un-mourned and even celebrated; a death that reveals the utter emptiness and selfishness of his life.

The result of Scrooge's supernatural experiences is that he is reborn a good man. He begins immediately to reform, to show compassion and

benevolence, the change in his heart displayed through good deeds: "and it was always said of him, that he knew how to keep Christmas very well, if any man alive possessed the knowledge." The shadow of death has brought forth life.

Life from Death

When Marley first appears, Scrooge, ever the practical man, wishes to establish that the ghost is in fact real rather than a gastronomically inspired delusion. In fact, he begins the interview by flatly refusing to believe in its reality at all. Yet he must come to accept that reality if he is to undergo any moral correction, and the ghost insists that he do so. "What evidence would you have of my reality, beyond that of your senses?" Marley challenges. But the concern to establish the reality of the visitation is not the ghost's alone: the narrator insists upon it. "There is no doubt that Marley was dead. This must be distinctly understood, or nothing wonderful can come from the story I am going to relate." Not only must readers accept this as fact, we must also understand that Scrooge knows it too: "Scrooge knew he was dead? Of course he did. How could it be otherwise?"

This episode recalls the appearance of Christ to the disciples after the resurrection. They knew he was dead, yet they saw him now alive. He appeared to them not as a spirit (that is what they fear) but in body with "flesh and bones" (Luke 24:37-39)—which he demonstrated by eating in front of them. He overcame even the most stubborn of the doubters, Thomas, by appealing to his senses: "Reach your finger here and look at my hands; and reach your hand here and put it into my side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing" (John 20:27). The visitation is real. Christ rose from the grave and appeared before them, not as a tormented shade, but as the master of death and the king of life.

Spiritual Transformation

In Dickens's story, Scrooge reforms his life with respect to his fellow man. But the reality of the resurrection is far more powerful. Faith in Christ does not merely reform, it also transforms. His death and resurrection mean we are dead to sin but alive in Christ (Romans 6:11). We too have

been visited by a Spirit, one who offers not merely "a chance and hope" but a certain victory over spiritual death. For all who believe, Christ's death has brought about our rebirth. We are now called to do with Christ what the first Spirit said to Scrooge: "Rise! And walk with me!"

Christian Witness

Imago Dei and Spiritual Indifference: Maycomb as a Microcosm of Christian Complacency

Holly Blakely

Harper Lee's novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, takes place in Maycomb County, Alabama during the 1930s and focuses on the Finch family: widowed attorney, Atticus Finch; the black housekeeper, Calpurnia; the school-age son, Jem; and the precocious six-year-old daughter, Scout. The primary action of the novel revolves around Atticus's defense of Tom Robinson, a black man who is wrongfully accused of raping a white woman. From the beginning, even the townspeople who know Tom is being falsely charged are resigned to the fact that Atticus's efforts to defend Tom Robinson are futile. As one town citizen remarks: "in the secret courts of men's hearts Atticus had no case. Tom was a dead man the minute Mayella Ewell opened her mouth and screamed." Ultimately, that statement would prove to be prophetic.

Closed Ranks and "Community"

Although racism has long been deemed the dominant theme in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, a closer examination shows that the sins of pride and complacency play a key role.

As Maycomb is a town where church attendance is the "principal recreation," it wouldn't be a stretch to say that most of the townspeople primarily self-identify as Christian. But the people of Maycomb hide their own weaknesses by pointing at who they are *not* and devaluing those

groups. Thus, at the root of Maycomb's racism is a sense of pride that ultimately results in indifference toward the suffering of others.

In her depiction of Maycomb, Lee puts many "good people's" ills on display and dares us to absolve this behavior as "just the way people are." In effect, *To Kill a Mockingbird* forces us to watch the natural evolution of the effects of pride through the depictions of Tom Robinson, Boo Radley, Walter Cunningham, and others. Lee's assertion is that the small indignities meted out by seemingly well-meaning people all too often produce unmitigated suffering in the lives of the vulnerable and less desirable.

The lessons of *To Kill a Mockingbird* challenge Christians to recognize the *imago Dei* in each human being and call them to self-assessment. The people of Maycomb, convinced of their own righteousness, fail in these tasks, and their inaction leads to great injustice. Maycomb excuses its own sin while harshly judging others, ignoring the biblical injunction to examine ourselves: "Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? (Matthew 7:3).

Good Intentions and Culpability

Our instinctual response to stories about places like Maycomb is to see them as distant from our own reality—after all, we and our neighbors are nice people who are doing our best to live decent lives—we would do better. Maycomb's familiarity disabuses us of this notion and encourages the recognition of its likeness to ourselves.

In the aftermath of Tom Robinson's trial and death, Jem comes to this sort of awakening in a conversation with his neighbor:

> Jem was staring at his half-eaten cake. 'It's like bein' a caterpillar in a cocoon, that's what it is,' he said. 'Like somethin' asleep wrapped up in a warm place. I always thought Maycomb folks were the best folks in the world, least that's what they seemed like.'"
>
> "We're the safest folks in the world," said Miss Maudie. "We're so rarely called on to be Christians, but when we are, we've got men like Atticus to go for us."

Miss Maudie's response illustrates the complacency that has seized Maycomb. Not only is Maycomb guilty of pride and arrogance, but they also simultaneously refuse to dirty their hands to address the suffering around them. This lack of integrity among the churchgoers of Maycomb County is especially apparent in their attitude toward Atticus, who is a prominent citizen and the town's resident hero.

Through Maycomb's association with Atticus, the townspeople can be Christian by extension. Comments such as, "There are some men in this world who are born to do our unpleasant jobs for us. Your father's one of them," illustrate that through Maycomb's association with Atticus, a sense of Christian responsibility is unnecessary. Their complacency was undergirded by their association with Atticus, which was all that was necessary to salve their conscience and respond with inaction. The townspeople who recognize injustices around them but do not act demonstrate a greater fear of their fellow man than of the judgment of God. Seemingly, Atticus is the only one who truly sees the situation clearly when he explains that he chose to defend Tom Robinson because the case "is something that goes to the essence of a man's conscience—Scout, I couldn't go to church and worship God if I didn't try to help that man."

Taking a Stand and Standing Alone

To Kill a Mockingbird evokes Philippians 2:3-5: "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus." If the citizens of Maycomb had practiced the truths of these verses, they would have treated everyone with dignity regardless of the person's race or class. However, that humility might come at the cost of alienation from their community, which is a price that few are willing to pay.

Only Atticus Finch has the courage to set aside his pride and reputation to do what is right. He suffers humiliation and alienation for defending Tom Robinson. He knew he would. He also knew that he was

bound by a higher duty. "I've got to live with myself. The one thing that doesn't abide by majority rule is a person's conscience." The Bible tells us that fear of the scorn of men should not prevent us from doing what is right, and that God will uphold the righteous: "Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all you who wait for the Lord!" (Psalm 31:24).

The Parable of Witness in Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*

Steven Gollmer

It's hard to over-appreciate firefighters. The role they play in protecting citizens from harm cannot be overstated. But what if that role were subverted to control minds rather than protect bodies? This is the premise of Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, in which the greatest danger to stable society is a free-thinking populace.

The Firefighter

Montag was a firefighter. He and his unit would instantly respond to any emergency, sliding down the fire pole, revving up the fire engine, and taking to the streets. But in Bradbury's novel, the role of the firefighter has changed significantly. They fight not against fire, but with it.

The tools of Montag's trade are ax, kerosene and lighter. When a hidden library or cache of books were discovered, the firefighters were called. They stormed the building, breaking down doors and hidden walls to expose the offensive material. Shakespeare, Byron, Thoreau, the Bible, the writings of Confucius, the Constitution were all the same; sources of ideas that make people think and reflect on the value and purpose of life. As Montag's Fire Chief explains, a pluralistic society with diverse ideas and opinions tears itself apart. The firefighter now has a higher calling: to restore order by removing the sources of destructive ideas. The books they find are set alight and wither in flame.

Protecting Society

Firefighters were not the only vanguard to protect society. Entertainment catering to the whims of the populous was readily available. Fast cars and interactive video provided the thrills and social interaction necessary for a person to feel fulfilled. Conversations with real people revolved around the present and what would be served up on the next video episode. Montag had three walls of his parlor covered with video panels and his wife was pressing him to purchase a fourth so she could have a fully immersive experience with her family. "Her family" was the derisive term Montag gave to the actors his wife interacted with on the videos. When not interacting with "the family," his wife plugged in her seashells, what we would call earbuds.

Such a lifestyle left many empty and despairing of life, so a medical squad was on call to manage attempted suicides. It was not that anyone actively attempted suicide, but thoughtlessly going through life caused it to happen accidently and often. A life full of stimulus made it hard to fall asleep. Drifting in and out of sleep under the background sounds of the seashells, it was common to use sleeping pills to aid in the effort. When waking again before morning, one may ask, "was there a need for another sleeping pill" or "did I even take a sleeping pill in the first place?" After an accidental overdose, the squad is called, the stomach is pumped, a transfusion to cleanse the blood is administered, and the patient awakens the next morning, none the wiser to the events of the previous night. One such episode happened to Montag's wife.

The Unsettled Soul

His wife's overdose scare merely punctuated Montag's discontentment with life. Her preoccupation with trivial matters and disengagement from reality reminded him of the emptiness in his own life. Adding to this was the allure of the forbidden. What could be so dangerous about books? Having secretly taken books from fire scenes over the years, Montag hid them in his home, though not having the courage to read them or even open them.

During this conflicted time in Montag's life, Fire Chief Beatty served as a mentor. Beatty saw right through Montag, knowing his struggles and anticipating his actions. It was clear that Beatty was well read, implying that he not only took books but read them thoroughly. From this knowledgeable position, Beatty warned about the subversive effect of conflicting ideas. He related to Montag that censorship did not come by governmental decree but through people's loss of interest in learning and libraries. Individuals who maintained and displayed their curiosity were labeled with the swearword, 'intellectual.' In the hands of an intellectual "a book is a loaded gun" and must be removed, lest someone feel inferior. As a result, by burning books firemen became the "custodians of our peace of mind."

Impact of Witnesses

Had the interactions in Montag's life been restricted to his wife, Beatty, and his duties as firefighter, he would have endured this shallow, empty life none the wiser. However, the faithful witness of unassuming people had earth-shattering consequences. For Montag, the first witness was a young woman, Clarisse. She had recently become Montag's neighbor and shook him with such a simple question, "Are you happy?" She lived her life engaged with the world around her. She made observations, asked questions, and seemed to be in love with life. Such behavior was considered abnormal, and questions were asked whether she should be institutionalized. Although Clarisse mysteriously disappears several weeks later, her impact on Montag was immense.

A second witness strikes a more serious blow to Montag's satisfaction of life by making him question what he is willing to die for. An anonymous elderly woman's home was raided. Normally, she would have been removed by the police prior to the firemen's arrival. But there she was, remaining silent among the ruckus of the firemen, as they shoveled piles of books from the second story down the staircase. As Montag attempts to pull her from the scene, everything is doused with kerosene. While kneeling among her books, the woman produces a kitchen match and sets everything ablaze.

These two witnesses initiate a cascade of events that lead Montag away from his previously comfortable but empty life. No longer satisfied with shallow reality that catered only to his immediate and superficial needs, Montag seeks meaning. Fleeing for his life, he escapes the city to wander anonymously among bums and outcasts. It is here that he meets Granger. Prior to the mandated burning of books, Granger was an author. He introduces Montag to other outcasts: a professor, a philosopher, and a pastor. These and many others form a wandering community that memorizes books and passes their knowledge on to others. They bear messages that will be needed to rebuild a broken world when it is ready to listen.

Message Bearers

Fahrenheit 451 has all the elements common to dystopian stories. Something is seriously wrong with the world. Practically alone, the protagonist comes to the realization that something needs to change and embarks upon a journey, liberating himself and others from the soul-destroying system in which they are caught. What distinguishes Bradbury's story from others is the juxtaposition of Montag's heroic efforts with the simple, quiet, faithful lives of the witnesses. The witnesses live out the reality of what they believe, regardless of the consequences. For Clarisse it is a childlike, naive faith. For the immolated woman it is the hopelessness of life without the truth. For the enclave of individuals who had memorized books, it is the knowledge that the message they carried would one day be needed.

Fahrenheit 451 was written to address the tragedy of a thoughtless life and the role of censorship in the process. Despite Bradbury's eclectic view of religion, this novel acts as a parable illustrating II Corinthians 4:7, "But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us." Bradbury's treasure was the creative thoughts of mankind throughout the ages, but our treasure is far superior. It is the Word of God which has the power to save those who believe. The value of witnesses is not inherent in themselves, but in the message they bear, a message that must be proclaimed to the ends of the earth (Matthew 28:19-20).

Trials

Trials and Temptations: Freedom Through Conviction in *Jane Eyre*

Bryana Fern

Jane Eyre is the most popular novel written by Charlotte Brontë, the oldest sibling to her brother, Branwell, and two sisters, Emily and Anne. Emily Brontë is most known for *Wuthering Heights,* while Anne's best work is *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall.* All three sisters published under male pseudonyms: Currer Bell, Ellis Bell, and Acton Bell. Charlotte's heroine, Jane, is one of the most popular literary figures, right up with Josephine March from *Little Women* or Elizabeth Bennett from *Pride and Prejudice.* Jane suffers far more trials as a child than Jo or Lizzie did, but her hardships refine her already fiery spirit into an unbreakable character of resolve. Jane's convictions about virtue and independence will guide her in difficult decisions where, even though she suffers, she keeps hold of her beliefs in what is just and right.

Lowood School: "this girl is—a liar!"

Jane's childhood is unhappy and lonely to say the least. Orphaned, she is raised by her aunt, who does not want her. Mrs. Reed and her children, Eliza, John, and Georgiana, are all abusive to Jane. Jane spends much of her time in the library reading, and when John calls her a "rat" and hits her, she fights back and is taken to the "red-room" to be punished. Mrs. Reed sends her away to Lowood School, where Mr. Brocklehurst isolates her further by telling the other girls that Jane is a liar and that they should refuse her any friendship. He makes Jane stand on a stool all day, but a girl named Helen Burns slips Jane some food. Along with Helen, who quickly

becomes Jane's only friend, there is Miss Temple, the only teacher who shows the girls kindness and warmth. Together, they encourage Jane to release her anger toward all the unjustness she has faced in her life by turning toward God and an eternal life, rather than this cruel and temporary one. Helen tells her in a statement Jane would later echo to Mr. Rochester that "If all the world hated you, and believed you wicked, while your own conscience approved you, and absolved you from guilt, you would not be without friends." Helen soon dies of sickness, as many of the girls did from the school's poor provisions, and Jane takes her friend's words to heart.

Jane begins to care less of what others think of her and focuses instead on her own spirit and what she knows to be true about herself. Years later, she returns to Gateshead to see her dying Aunt Reed, and though Aunt Reed still refuses to acknowledge Jane kindly, Jane's temper has since tamed to wisdom: "Love me, then, or hate me, as you will," she tells Aunt Reed. "You have my full and free forgiveness: ask now for God's and be at peace." Her convictions for her self-respect remain strong, but they have now been tempered with passionate mercy instead of resentment. Her own conscience is clear of malice and wrongdoing, and that is enough.

Thornfield Hall: "I love it, because I have lived in it a full and delightful life"

Jane's new employer, Mr. Rochester, is someone she grows close to over her time at Thornfield. They have deep conversations and relate to each other in their social unpopularity; Jane is small and plain and not classically beautiful the way other society women are, and Mr. Rochester is gruff and short-tempered, hiding pain and sadness Jane cannot discern. When Jane believes Mr. Rochester is going to marry Miss Ingram, she tells him she must leave and gives one of her most popular quotes: "I am no bird; and no net ensnares me; I am a free human being with an independent will." When it turns out that Mr. Rochester wants to marry Jane instead, she agrees to stay and marry him. But another barrier presents itself in the form of Mr. Rochester's current wife, a secret named Bertha Antoinette Mason, long kept in the attic. Mentally ill and violent, she is hidden away

and safely cared for, but is still his wife by law, which does not allow for divorce. Jane will not stay at Thornfield to be with Mr. Rochester as long as he is married, even though she pities him for his circumstance: "Reader, I forgave him at the moment and on the spot." He begs her to remain with him, telling her that she would be his true wife, the one he wants to be faithful to. She replies, "If I lived with you as you desire—I should then be your mistress: to say otherwise is sophistical—is false." Jane continues to stand her ground when he presses her, and it is here that her convictions become most clear in what she is willing to sacrifice. Truth is most important to her: "The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself… Laws and principles are not for the times when there is no temptation: they are for such moments as this, when body and soul rise in mutiny against their rigour… If at my individual convenience I might break them, what would be their worth?" That night, Jane cannot sleep, and while watching the night sky, she senses a voice telling her, "My daughter, flee temptation." So she packs her things and escapes Thornfield Hall while it is still dark, making her way across the moors and empty land.

Even though Jane does eventually marry Mr. Rochester with the famous "Reader, I married him" line, once Bertha tragically perishes after setting Thornfield on fire, her convictions to follow what she knew was right are what set her apart as a character of virtue. She is able to search herself and, while treating others with kindness and empathy, still hold to her self-respect. She flees the situations tempting her to compromise her integrity. Helen's biblical advice from her childhood remains with her: "It is far better to endure patiently a smart which nobody feels but yourself, than to commit a hasty action whose evil consequences will extend to all connected with you." Even though Jane tempered her passionate need to avenge herself in the face of unjust wrongdoings, she channeled her strong convictions into an unwavering sense of quiet self-respect that allowed her to stand firm against temptations that would risk it. Her convictions gave her strength to refuse and to find freedom in those firm denials, even if they brought internal sorrow. She stayed true to her beliefs, and so kept her self-respect.

What Jane Eyre Can Teach Us: "I have an inward treasure born with me"

There are many passages throughout Scripture that speak on withstanding moments of temptations. Peter writes to say, "Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing" (1 Peter 3:9). Jesus himself preached to turn and offer the other cheek if we are slapped on the right (Matthew 5:39). Jane learns to turn her passion inward and focus on her own spiritual growth rather than her previous needs to avenge herself. She chooses forgiveness and clears her conscience in doing so. Her childhood trials give her strength to avoid larger temptations, and twice, she is determined to leave Thornfield rather than stay with the temptation of being with Mr. Rochester outside the bonds of marriage. Paul reminds Christians of their ability to fight against tempting situations: "No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it" (1 Corinthians 10:13). Jane literally flees from her temptation.

Even if fleeing the temptations we face isolates us, we are not alone. The Psalmist cries out to God, saying, "You have taken account of my wanderings/ Put my tears in Your bottle/ Are they not in Your book?" (Psalm 56:8). Though Jane wanders, lost for weeks in her grief and despair, she never turned back to Thornfield Hall because she believed what she was doing was right. Leaving temptation is hardly ever easy; we all have things that tempt us individually—some more than others. But if we retain our character and virtue by doing so, it is always better, therefore, to stand firm. Paul tells believers to "examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21). Jane demonstrates that even when circumstances are dire, it is possible to stand up to temptation and cling to convictions that grant us freedom and a clear conscience.

Purpose in Pain: John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars* with the Gospel Truth

Jasmine DePalmo and Michael Sherr

The Fault in Our Stars, written by best-selling author John Green, follows two teenagers with terminal cancer diagnoses as they search for meaning to their suffering. As their relationship blossoms, Hazel and Augustus pursue their wish to travel to Holland and meet Peter -the author of their favorite book. Peter seems to understand the teens' pain and their wrestling with humanity's impending oblivion, but their visit with him leaves them unfulfilled, with many questions remaining. When Augustus dies, Hazel must face the reality of her lover's greatest fear and fight to find meaning and purpose in a life marked as a "failed experiment in mutation." By the end of the novel, Hazel concludes that while life is full of suffering and pain, the main issue is the meaninglessness of it all. While unfulfilled and lost in the agony of a dying world, she resolves that even though oblivion is coming, living with pain is possible, and it is the pain itself that gives one's life meaning.

Searching for Meaning

In pivotal moments throughout the novel, Hazel and Augustus attend a support group for those impacted by cancer. These teenagers, wrestling with their imminent death and mortality, are misled by a professional helper intending to provide encouragement and support. This support group meets in what is nicknamed "the heart of Jesus" - where Christ's heart would have been, were He splayed on the church's architectural inspira-

tion. Patrick, the professional helper and support group leader, emphasizes the meeting place as a reminder that the attendees, cancer survivors and sufferers alike, are deeply loved as they sit in Christ's literal heart. This scene is narrated through the sarcastic lens of young Hazel, and the tone and content of this chapter -rather, what is lacking -brings sorrow to the reflective Christian reader. The group, sitting in a church and gathered in the center of a cross, is encouraged by Patrick to find purpose in *carpe diem* - life in the moment. He calls on the name of Jesus for prayer and remembrance, a token plea, neglecting the actual Gospel of grace rooted in the inerrant Word of God. Despite their proximity to all that would point them to true hope, Hazel and Augustus remain misguided in their search for the meaning of their suffering.

While meeting in the so-called hall of Jesus, Patrick does very little to offer Gospel truth and its application to the group's attendees. The author does not include Patrick's response to Augustus' fear of oblivion, rather, records Hazel's monologue challenging Augustus to simply ignore the inevitability of human oblivion. Patrick, the professional counselor supposed to provide encouragement and direction, loses the opportunity to present sufferers with real hope. Christian readers are left to wonder how different the book may have unfolded had Patrick chosen to share the Gospel.

Gospel Reorientation

We do not learn much about Patrick. The reader is introduced to him as the facilitator of an open-ended support group for teenagers diagnosed with various forms of cancer. New members (like Augustus) join the group regularly, while seasoned members (like Hazel) come-and-go as they cope with the severity of their illness. Everything about the group presents Patrick with considerable possibilities for reaping a harvest through the true source of hope (Matthew 9:35-38). Yet, Hazel shares that Patrick resorts to recounting, "for the thousandth time his depressingly miserable life story," as he begins the group each week. Once upon a time, Patrick was also dying from cancer, but survived to adulthood and earned a master's degree. But what Patrick believes to be a story that instills hope, the

teenagers receive as a pathetic, narcissistic plea to view him as an example. Patrick then follows his cancer story with a guided discussion, encouraging the teenagers to determine the purpose of life for themselves.

Imagine Patrick's effectiveness if he began each group sharing his testimony rather than his cancer story. Instead of focusing on himself, Patrick could share about his relationship with Jesus Christ. He could share how Jesus transformed his perspective on pain and suffering, how God's Word informed his faith in the assurance of life after death, and how he has made an impact serving teens affected by illness. Patrick could then transition from his testimony into asking the group how each member views their pain and suffering. He could ask them to share what they believe about God. The group could explore their beliefs regarding creation, the fall, sin, heaven, and what it means to have faith--with Patrick unashamedly reinforcing his faith in the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord's Son. Hazel and others describe real hardships, real grieving, and real moments of joy during the group. Instead of ending the hour with a hollow prayer to a God they don't know, Patrick could lead the teens to pray to the real Lord who comforts all, so the teens can comfort each other in turn, as they are immersed in deep joy and intense suffering (2 Corinthians 1:3-7).

The kind of support Hazel needed was not psychological and emotional. Rather, she needed ontological and theological guidance as she examined the meaning of her existence. It is not a surprise that Hazel made fun of Patrick and remained unimpressed with the group's interactions. Although they met in a location intended to bring the teens as close to God as possible, the group failed to recognize the Creator as both the source of and answer to their questions (Ecclesiastes 3:11). The novel, perhaps unintentionally, reminds the Christian reader that proximity to the Gospel does not equate to having a personal and intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. Like Hazel, we are all in need of the hope and new life that quite literally flows from the heart of Jesus. Jesus Himself deeply sympathizes with our weaknesses, including our physical illnesses, and brings the promise of hope and healing, validated through His resurrection and conquering of death. There is no substitute for this truth.

Staying the Course: Endurance and Hope in *The Lord of the Rings*

Bryana Fern

"Faithless is he who says farewell when the road darkens." -Tolkien

One of the greatest strengths of Tolkien's most famous work is that it covers the journeys of so many different characters. By the end of the quest in *The Return of the King* that began in *The Fellowship of the Ring,* readers have followed the separate journeys of at least four different parties: Frodo and Sam on their way to Mordor with Gollum; Merry with the Rohirrim, including Eówyn, Eómer, and King Théoden; Gandalf and Pippin in Minas Tirith with Faramir; and Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli in The Paths of the Dead. All of these characters are worn with exhaustion and discouragement as they press on toward the end of the War—a War they have little hope of winning. And yet, their ability to keep fighting and keep seeking every opportunity is a shining example of perseverance in the face of hardship.

The Separation of Merry and Pippin

Merry and Pippin are keenly aware of how out of place they are in the War. They joined the Fellowship in Rivendell in order to help Frodo, and they did not fully understand what that would mean. When Pippin is whisked off to Minas Tirith with Gandalf, Merry is left behind in Rohan. He begs King Théoden to be put to use, and becomes a Royal Esquire of Rohan, though he is told he cannot join them on their ride to battle in Gondor

because he is small and a burden. Eówyn, under the disguise of a soldier named Dernhelm, sneaks him away with her—two desperate individuals determined to contribute despite being told they could not make a difference. And it is Eówyn and Merry at the Battle of the Pelennor Fields who defeat the Witchking of Angmar, one of Mordor's most dangerous threats. Pippin faces similar character tests through chances to prove his bravery in the Siege of Minas Tirith. He joins the service of Lord Denethor and witnesses Faramir, Boromir's younger brother, seek to fight for his country despite overwhelming odds. He sacrifices himself to try and reclaim the city of Osgiliath, and it is Pippin who saves him when he returns nearly dead. Even when the end seems hopeless in so many ways, they can't give up.

The Three Hunters

From the other side of the Battle, Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli take the road to the Paths of the Dead with the Dunedain to seek a "hail Mary" chance of enlisting Isildur's Dead Army. No one who has ever entered has been seen again, but they recognize the need to try: if they fail in this then there is no chance of victory anyway. Aragorn in particular is operating under nothing more than pure determination by this point, but it pays off and his risk aids to the victory of the Battle. Still, the War is not over, and they must all make the choice to bring the final fight to Sauron himself by marching on the Black Gate of Mordor. Aragorn knows this battle is one they will not win—they are drastically outnumbered and weakened. Yet they refuse to surrender, to hide in Minas Tirith and wait for the end. Instead, they try to give Frodo one final chance to reach Mount Doom by distracting Sauron's attention. "We have come now to the very brink," Aragorn says, "where hope and despair are akin. To waver is to fall."

The Trials of Frodo and Sam

Facing the harshest trials, Frodo and Sam must choose every day to keep walking toward their destination. By the time they reach Mount Doom, they are exhausted, injured, malnourished, dehydrated, and hopeless beyond all count. The Plains of Gorgoroth they must cross are barren wastelands of

ash and toxic fumes. "I can't see any hope of it now," Frodo says, "But still I've got to do the best I can." Sam debates with the doubts in his mind: "It's all quite useless. He [Frodo] said so himself. You are the fool, going on hoping and toiling. … You might just as well lie down now and give it up. You'll never get to the top anyway." But Sam ignores the voices in his head and presses on, showing his true heroism in literally carrying Frodo over his shoulders step-by-step up the scorching side of the mountain. Huddling in small breaks to conserve their energy, Sam does his utmost to encourage Frodo, and in their moments of greatest despair, they find the strength they need:

> There, peeping among the cloud-wrack above a dark tor high up in the mountains, Sam saw a white star twinkle for a while. The beauty of it smote his heart, as he looked up out of the forsaken land, and hope returned to him. For like a shaft, clear and cold, the thought pierced him that in the end the Shadow was only a small and passing thing: there was light and high beauty for ever beyond its reach.

Sam is reminded of the importance of their mission and why they chose to sacrifice their lives. It was Gildor, one of the Elves they met traveling to the Gray Havens back while the hobbits were still just leaving the Shire, who encouraged them to "be of good hope" because "courage is found in unlikely places." That courage is what they need now. Without it, the peace of the entire world is in jeopardy.

The War to End All Wars

Tolkien knew a thing or two about courage, as he was an officer in WWI and fought at the Battle of the Somme, the first day of which killed over 57,000 and is known as the bloodiest day in the history of the British Army. He served over enlisted men who fought with so much bravery that they directly inspired his creation of Sam's character. It is unsurprising that in the trenches and camps and the horror he witnessed every day, Tolkien began scribbling down stories of Middle-earth, focusing on Eärendil, the figure representative of the brightest star revered by the Elves. It explains why we have lines of testament from Tolkien like, "Oft hope is born when

all is forlorn." The Great War changed the entire world and traumatized generations, leading to the formalized study of PTSD which had been known up to that point only as "shell-shock." Tolkien's friend, C. S. Lewis, along with others in their literary group known as the Inklings, were also veterans of the War, and the desperation of that event heavily influenced their stories about danger, despair, adventure, and hope. When Frodo and Sam are successful in their quest and the Ring is destroyed, the relief the reader feels is an example of Tolkien's concept of "eucatastrophe," the great and overwhelming joy in an averted catastrophe.

Christians have a similar experience of eucatastrophe in the weight lifted from our shoulders when we realize the fate from which we've been saved by Christ's sacrifice. And while we can embrace this eucatastrophe by keeping an eternal mindset, it does not eliminate the trials we face every day in life. Sometimes, we can hardly put one step in front of the other—we are traveling across our own Plains of Gorgoroth, with or without a companion to help us, left only with voices of self-doubt and "what ifs." It is in these moments that we can search for the truth and beauty that still exists despite our pain. We can remember that the "Shadow is only a passing thing" next to the "light and beauty for ever beyond its reach." The disciple James reminds Christians that "blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him" (James 1:12). And the writer of Hebrews encourages believers that "since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us" (Hebrews 12:1). Frodo and Sam, as well as the others fighting the War in Gondor and beyond, remember that they are not the only ones struggling and that they are not alone; they persevere because of the hope that that their suffering will have meaning in the end. Through this, we too can be encouraged. Paul writes that "we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope" (Romans 5:3-5). Even though our trials are hard, we can be courageous and choose to persevere in hope even while we walk through the pain.

Suffering and Hope in *Still Alice*

Anna Hurt and Melissa Brown

Still Alice, a novel by Lisa Genova, follows Alice Howland throughout her journey with early-onset Alzheimer's disease. The reader is introduced to Alice at the apex of her career as a linguistics expert and cognitive psychology professor at Harvard University. Known for her impressive ability to understand language and memory, Alice begins to experience lapses in memory that continue to escalate after her 50thth birthday. Alice notably keeps her diagnosis a secret from her husband John and three adult children, Anna, Tom, and Lydia. Each family member copes differently with Alice's diagnosis. As a cancer cell biologist, John struggles to accept the finality of Alice's diagnosis and spends his time seeking a cure for Alice while in the lab. The reader will conclude that John sacrificed quality time with Alice to obtain quantity of time with Alice.

The reader walks with Alice throughout multiple stages of her disease process: onset of symptoms, diagnosis, disclosure of diagnosis to family, and finally on to later stages when she no longer recognizes her family. There are prominent themes within the book which prompt the reader to reflect on their own sources of hope and endurance.

Suffering

Like many who are faced with a chronic illness, Alice asks the question "Why" many times. Like Alice, many struggle to reconcile physical suffering with God's goodness. How can any good come from a disease like Alzheimer's? What is the purpose of suffering? The book accurately reflects

feelings of despair associated with the pain of human suffering but comes short of offering long-lasting hope or an understanding of the purpose of suffering.

As she hides her disease from her family, Alice is forced to reckon with the question "Why are we called to suffer?" Throughout the course of the book, Alice comes to accept her diagnosis and prognosis. She makes a speech on what it is like living with a terminal disease, one that will change her permanently. Alice's ability to reframe her suffering and see it as something that can be used to stimulate education and compassion, is similar to Christian teaching about the role of suffering. The ability to see suffering as a mechanism to make the Christian more like Christ is the ultimate motivator to remain steadfast in times of trial.

Identity

One of the most significant losses Alice faces is her inability to continue teaching at Harvard. Alice poured much of her time, energy, and effort into her career, often at the expense of relationships with her family members. Alice recognizes that she will soon be unable to teach, write articles, learn new things, or be called upon as a reliable source of information. Alice faces a major identity crisis as she learns that many aspects of her identity will soon no longer be true of her. This concept is in direct contrast to the truths about identity that are discussed in scripture (Genesis 1:27, Ephesians 1, Isaiah 64:8), which indicate that our value comes from being made in the image of God as opposed to our contribution to society.

Alice, as an unbeliever, does not have the ability to rest in the truth that she is made in God's image and is therefore valuable regardless of her accomplishments or contribution to society. During the early days of her diagnosis, Alice is given an Activities of Daily Living questionnaire for her husband to fill out. Alice describes the questions on the list that represent further progression of the disease as "humiliating," including needing to be fed, being home or hospital bound, and having no control over bowel or bladder. Alice does not see any value in a life without her mind and makes plans to commit suicide once she reaches a certain level of cognitive decline.

Alice struggles to accept the untimely decline of her health, which is a fear all readers can relate to. This crisis of identity that Alice experiences causes the reader to question: What gives a person value? Without accomplishments, talents, or contributions, what does a person have left? While the Lord seeks to use our abilities to glorify Himself, they are not what determines how much a person is worth. Our worth is found in the person of Christ, who values us based on who we are, not on what we are able to do (Gen 1:27-28).

Relationships

Throughout the course of the book, Alice's relationships change substantially. Perhaps the most surprising change is between Alice and John. At the beginning of the book, Alice appears to view John as her strongest support. However, by the end of the book, John is the most withdrawn and the least involved of all family members. He is unable to cope with Alice's physical decline and ultimately moves to Minnesota, accepting another job, and leaving Alice in the care of their daughter, Lydia.

The most significant change in relationship occurs between Alice and Lydia. At the beginning of the book, the reader can quickly identify the tension between them, largely due to Lydia's decision to delay her college education. As a college professor, Alice highly values continuing education and is not able to understand how a gap year would benefit Lydia. However, as Alice's health declines, Alice's primary support person withdraws by moving to Minnesota while Alice's daughter, who was previously emotionally distant, moves in with Alice and becomes her primary caregiver. The reader is confronted with the question: "If we withdraw from someone, physically and emotionally, during a time of crisis, were we ever close to begin with?"

Hope

Like Alice, the reader is confronted with the question: "When something unexpected happens, how will I respond? What gives me hope?" Throughout the course of the book, the reader will discover a variety of messages about hope: hope in finding a cure for Alzheimer's Disease, hope in dis-

covering an Alzheimer's gene, hope in the suffering coming to an end. But is this true hope? For the Christian, cure for disease and reduction in human suffering is always a positive gain. However, hope found on this earth is often temporary and will ultimately lead to disappointment. While a cure for disease could be an answer to prayer, it does not prevent death from ever occurring. The Christian can remain hopeful during immense trials and uncertainty because of the promise that trials are never wasted. True hope is found in the promise that our earthly pain is preparing us for eternity with Christ (Romans 5:1-5).

Temptations

The Redemption of Galadriel

Justin D. Lyons

One of the most impressive elements of the fiction of J.R.R. Tolkien is its depth. One walks upon the fields of Middle-earth with the awareness that you are treading ancient paths. Indications that this world was in existence long before you discovered it are everywhere: ruined watchtowers of fallen realms, tombs of bygone kings, snippets of ancient song, broken remnants of former glory. *The Lord of the Rings* tells only a small part of the history of Tolkien's world, which is then in its Third Age. The full magnificence of his achievement becomes apparent when you realize that he actually wrote the history (with staggering verisimilitude) that lies behind those stories, created the languages, composed the songs and poetry, and charted the lineage of the characters back into the depths of his invented time.

Yet Tolkien's world is vibrantly alive. As deep roots survive the frost, so Middle-earth continues to flower even after the first blooms have fallen. It is a world that moves forward without losing its past. Part of the reason for this is the presence of characters whose memory stretches back across the ages, Galadriel among them. Beauty, majesty, and power are the lingering impressions of the relatively brief encounter with her in *The Lord of the Rings*; yet her full story is only there to be gathered in hints. As we learn from Tolkien's other works, she is the last remaining in Middle-earth of the great among the High Elves who first awoke in Elvenhome across the sea; and her life has been marked by pride and disobedience.

Rebellion and Exile

Ilúvatar, the One, created first angelic beings, who participated in shaping the universe through cosmic song. Some of these angels took special interest in Arda (Earth). They became the Valar, the Powers of the World, who struggled within its confines against the rebel Melkor, who sought to mar creation and bend it to his own will. The Valar withdrew into the West, and Melkor worked his will in Middle-earth. But the Children of Ilúvatar, Elves and Men, would awaken there. For their sake, the Valar made war upon Melkor, imprisoning him. They bid the Elves return with them to the Blessed Realm. But the wickedness of Melkor endured. Released from his captivity, he practiced deceit to break the bond between the Valar and the Elves. Murder was done, and Melkor fled to Middle-earth bearing the stolen Silmarils, jewels that contained the light of Valinor. Some among the Elves were determined to pursue him in vengeance, though the Valar counseled against it. Rebellion was raised, the blood of kin was shed, and a Doom was pronounced upon the disobedient. Though she was unstained by evil deeds, Galadriel came to Middle-earth in this exodus.

Their fellowship sundered, the Elves struggled not only with their enemy, now called Morgoth, but also with each other. They once again raised kingdoms of splendor, though they were embattled and wounded by much sorrow. The might of Morgoth threatened finally to destroy the Children of Ilúvatar. Once again, the Valar girded themselves for battle. They came in wrath to Middle-earth, overthrew Morgoth, and cast him into the Void. The Doom having run its course, pardon and offer of return to the West were extended to those who had rebelled so long ago. But not all departed.

Galadriel is one who stayed. Of Tolkien's references to this event in his letters one suggests that she was barred from both pardon and return: "The Exiles were allowed to return-save for a few chief actors in the rebellion of whom at the time of the L.R. only *Galadriel* remained"; but another finds the cause in her pride and continued disobedience: "At the end of the First Age she proudly refused forgiveness or permission to return."

Renewed Obedience and Return

Despite its origins, Galadriel's presence in Middle-earth is wholesome. As one of ancient lineage, guardian of Lothlórien, and bearer of one of the Three Rings of Power given to the Elves, she is a preserver of goodness and beauty in the troubled world, a strong tower against encroaching darkness. At the time of *The Lord of the Rings*, Morgoth's disciple, Sauron, threatens to bring all under his dominion, prompting the free peoples to attempt to destroy the foundation of his power, the One Ring, now carried by the unlikeliest of heroes, a hobbit from the Shire.

Galadriel will now face her greatest test as Frodo, overwhelmed by her grace and wisdom, offers her the Ring. "I do not deny that my heart has greatly desired to ask what you offer," she says. "For many long years I had pondered what I might do, should the Great Ring come into my hands, and behold! it was brought within my grasp." Here was the weapon with which she could blot evil from the earth! She appears to succumb for a moment to "the essential deceit of the Ring to fill minds with imaginations of supreme power," but in reality, Tolkien wrote, her "rejection of the temptation was founded upon previous thought and resolve" She knows that victory does not lie upon that path; she will wait upon power and wisdom greater than her own. She abandons her pride: "'I pass the test,' she said. 'I will diminish, and go into the West, and remain Galadriel.'" Tolkien writes that she "was pardoned because of her resistance to the final and overwhelming temptation to take the Ring for herself." The last we see of her is when she boards a ship at the Grey Havens to return to the Blessed Lands, her long exile at an end.

The Moral Applicability of Galadriel

Few of Tolkien's authorial sentiments are as well-known as his pronouncements against allegory. Indeed, he repeatedly expressed his dislike for formal allegory in part because his work was so often read as such by early reviewers who were tempted to see Sauron as Hitler or Stalin and the Ring as a lament of the advent of atomic weaponry. But these declarations do

not remove all connection between Tolkien's fictional world and our own: "That there is no allegory," he wrote, "does not, of course, say there is no applicability. There always is."

The devoutness of Tolkien's faith and intention that his work be "consonant with Christian thought and belief" have naturally led to strong theological associations. Many have compared the image of Galadriel to that of the Virgin Mary. Yet Tolkien always remained aloof from too-strong an association between the two figures. Responding by letter to such a suggestion, he acknowledged an influence, but made it clear that the details do not correspond: "I was particularly interested in your remarks about Galadriel…..I think it is true that I owe much of this character to Christian and Catholic teaching and imagination about Mary, but actually Galadriel was a penitent: in her youth a leader of the rebellion against the Valar (the angelic guardians)." This disobedience is in stark contrast to the obedience of Mary: "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38). Yet both examples are morally applicable to our own lives. Do we submit to God's will with a quiet heart, or do we, in our pride, prefer our own way?

Tolkien's world is undeniably a moral world. It is, like ours, one in which rebellion has disfigured creation and a call to repentance and return to obedience has been sounded. "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17). What will be our answer?

All the King's Men: Power Corrupts

Mark Caleb Smith

"But what is government itself, but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? If men were angels, no government would be necessary."

James Madison, *Federalist No. 51*

Willie Stark, a folksy fascist, is the governor of a southern state during the Great Depression. Jack Burden is a wily fixer, a close aid to "The Boss," who digs up dirt to destroy anyone with the temerity to get in Stark's way. Their complicated relationship drives the plot of *All the King's Men*, a 1946 novel by Robert Penn Warren.

Neither Stark nor Burden are angels. They are precisely the kind of men Madison was worried about when he wrote in defense of the new U.S. Constitution. Madison hoped that a well-designed government—with separated powers, shared powers, and checks and balances—could limit the political damage demons might do. Warren's story, which is a thinly disguised recounting of Huey Long's control of Louisiana, examines the worst-case scenario. What if one man, by the force of his will, controls all the parts of government? In short, Willie Stark destroys himself and nearly everyone around him, and he damages his state and the people he governs for a generation.

The lessons of *All the King's Men* are legion, but let's focus on the recognition of political corruption. Corrupt political leaders follow patterns

that can be observed not only in fiction, but in the real world of politics. The Bible contains examples of corrupt leaders, and it thankfully provides principles for leaders who seek to glorify God.

Corrupt Leaders Are Easy to Recognize

When we think of corruption, our minds naturally turn toward money. We may think of a judge or a jury member being bribed, or a politician taking a stack of cash in exchange for a vote. Corruption in *All the King's Men* isn't about money, but about the true currency of politics—power.

Power, like money, is not evil or wicked by itself. Power can be used properly to pursue good and noble things. Justice requires the ability to punish a criminal, and punishment, through arrest, trial, conviction, a fine, or imprisonment, only happens through government's power. When used with authority, power is a necessary element of good government. The abuse of power is at the heart of political corruption.

Crooked politicians, more than anything, use their power to their own benefit, and not for the good of citizens or society. Leaders like this lash out at obstacles. They see themselves as above rules, procedures, laws, or constitutions. They are natural opponents of limited government, and institutions that curb their power must change or be burned to the ground.

Some obstacles are flesh and blood. Treacherous rulers see people as tools to be used or discarded as necessary. Human beings, for them, have no inherent value or dignity. Instead, people are a means to an end, either a benefit or a detriment based on what they can provide.

One story in *All the King's Men* highlights Willie Stark's corruption. Byram B. White, one of "Willie's boys," is the State Auditor, and he is mired in an investigation. White is using his office to enrich himself illegally, and Stark is faced with a choice. He can do nothing and let justice run its course. If this happens, the nefarious White will likely lose his job and go to jail, and Stark would get a political black eye. Or Stark can protect the guilty man, guarantee his loyalty in the future, and use all his power (legal and otherwise) to stop the investigation and skirt the law. For Willie, this is an easy decision.

The Governor's Attorney General, who oversees enforcing law in the state, tries to persuade Willie to do the right thing, especially since White is guilty. Willie's response is revealing. "My God, you talk like Byram was human! He's a thing! You don't prosecute an adding machine if a spring goes bust and makes a mistake. You fix it." By comparing White to an inanimate object, and then treating him as such throughout the process, Stark shows that White's only value is what he can do for "The Boss."

White survives, but then Stark himself is threatened with his own investigation and impeachment. He wins this conflict because Willie and his cronies, like Jack Burden, have spent years searching for embarrassing or damaging information on potential enemies. Stark threatens to publicize every speck of dirt. Shady business deals, illicit affairs, and bad habits are dragged near the spotlight, so Willie can put the matter simply to his foes:

> "'This is your last chance…do you know what I can do to you?' And he could do it, too. For he had the goods."

Willie Stark has no interest in justice, or the government systems designed to produce it. The state's constitution allowed for impeachment as a mechanism to thwart dangerous governors. The system allowed Stark to present evidence, to counter the charges against him, and raise the support of the people. But like always, Stark is never constrained by the system. He did what was necessary to win, even if what was necessary was illegal.

Laws are not all that different than rules in a game. In basketball, a player may only take two steps with the ball unless they are dribbling. A player can only spend three seconds at a time in "the lane," a defined area around the basket. These rules should make the game fair for all the participants, and referees should enforce the rules in the same way for all the players. The rules and the referees don't determine who wins the game, but they do define what the players may do to win. When players and referees act within the rules, the outcome of the game can be judged as fair or just. Winners can walk away sure of their victory, and losers can be confident the system worked, the game was fair, and the loss was deserved, even if painful.

For Willie Stark, and other corrupt politicians, the law is never honored or respected. Rules are for suckers. Judges, like referees, can be threatened or bribed, and laws, if inconvenient, can be ignored or changed, depending on what is available. The law, Stark says, is "like a single-bed blanket on a double bed and three folks in the bed on a cold night," or "like the pants you bought last year for a growing boy…The best you can do is do something and then make up some law to fit."

Willie Stark's corruption is rooted, we are told in *All the King's Men*, in his selfishness. Willie is the center of the universe, and everything in it must bend to his will and for his own satisfaction. When Jack Burden, during a moment of reflection, is asked to explain Governor Stark, he proclaims that Stark is not interested in money, or sex, or even power. In the end, "He's interested in Willie. Quite simply and directly."

The Bible and the Corruption of Political Power

The Bible is full of history, especially in the Old Testament. The rise and fall of kingdoms and empires can be traced across its pages. God's plan is for government to pursue righteousness by rewarding the good and punishing evil (see Rom. 13:1-7). Government's justice should be blind, showing no partiality to the rich or powerful (see Amos 5). Israel's history, unfortunately, provides manifold examples of political corruption, of leaders who ignore God's teaching and use their power for themselves. The story of Ahab and Jezebel is just one example.

Ahab was King over Israel for twenty-two years. He married Jezebel, a woman who worshipped Baal instead of the one, true God. Ahab's reign did not glorify God or live up to God's standard for government. Instead, Ahab "did more to provoke the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger than all the Kings of Israel who were before him" (1 Kings 16:33).

Ahab desired a vineyard (see 1 Kings 21) next to his palace, and it was owned by Naboth. Ahab tried to purchase the land, but Naboth inherited it from his ancestors and valued it more than whatever Ahab might give him. Ahab, sullen because of the refusal, told Jezebel, who then hatched a scheme to secure the vineyard.

Using Ahab's name and royal seal, Jezebel put Naboth in a difficult situation. Two scoundrels accused him of cursing God and the king. Naboth was stoned to death for blasphemy. "And as soon as Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, Ahab arose to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it" (1 Kings 21:16).

The chilling story obviously demonstrates corruption. Ahab wanted a vineyard and Jezebel used their power to get it. This instance is joined by many others in Scripture. David lusted after a woman, impregnated her, and used his power as king to put her husband in mortal danger during battle. The prophet Micah describes "the rulers of the house Israel! Is it not for you to know justice? You who hate the good and love the evil" (Micah 3:1b-2a). The prophet Habakkuk says, "Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. So the law is paralyzed, and justice never goes forth" (Hab. 1:3b-4a).

Responding to Corruption

Political corruption, where leaders choose their own good over the good of society, is common in literature and history, and is described in the Bible in detail. The truth of corruption persists because human beings are sinful. We, by nature, put ourselves above one another and above God. When this bent is combined with the power of government, corruption is almost the inevitable outcome.

This is one reason why America's founders, like James Madison, were wise. They were aware of this tendency, so they constructed a government based on this belief. The government must be strong enough to govern but made so it might control itself.

But governmental designs, especially in free societies like ours, are only as good as the people being governed. It is our responsibility, as voters and citizens, to hold those who govern us responsible for their actions. The ballot box, when stuffed by a virtuous people, is the most potent medicine for political diseases. Even Willie Stark would tremble in the face of a righteous electorate, and he would rethink his choices or suffer the consequences.

"Gatsby believed in the green light": Materialism and Treasures in *The Great Gatsby*

Bryana Fern

"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (Matthew 6:21)

F. Scott Fitzgerald's most famous novel is well-known for its commentary criticizing the growing materialism in America after the Great War. Literature from the Modernist period is all about adjustment: after a war that killed almost 20 million people and wounded even more, what was there to life anymore? Where did people find their meaning? Enter the Jazz Age of the Roaring 1920s and humanity's violent attempt at suppression through alcohol, partying, and consumerism. Imagine flappers with fringed sequin dresses, headbands and bobbed hair, feathers, long cigarette holders, bootlegged liquor from Prohibition, and more martini glasses than anyone could possibly need. This "Lost Generation" of partiers doesn't seem dangerous at first—if only irresponsible. But Fitzgerald, a veteran of the Great War, channeled the meaninglessness of life and people's twisted search for it into the novel that remains popular today.

Nick's Narration: "I am one of the few honest people that I have ever known."

Nick Carraway is the narrator of *The Great Gatsby,* and it is through his eyes we see the tragic love story of Jay Gatsby and Daisy Buchanan. Nick, a Great War veteran, moves to New York after the war and settles into West Egg village next to a mansion he would later learn belonged to Gatsby.

Across the river, in East Egg, lives his cousin Daisy, who is married to Tom Buchanan, a friend of Nick's from college. Nick observes the two of them, along with their friend, Miss Jordan Baker, as they exchange conversations in which nothing is really said. Uncomfortable truths, such as Tom's affair with a mechanic's wife, are known but ignored by everyone, even when she calls the house during dinner. People are as fake as the smiles they give everyone. Real relationships are hollow, and true joy is abandoned for monetary indulgence.

Between these two gloriously fake communities of West Egg and East Egg is the true picture of existence, a place Fitzgerald terms the valley of ashes: "a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens; where ashes take the forms of houses and chimneys and rising smoke and, finally, with a transcendent effort, of men who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air." A billboard stands above the valley, advertising the business of eye doctor T. J. Eckleburg. A giant pair of yellow glasses fills the billboard and effectively watches over the valley, seeing past the façade of East and West Egg. This image is the common cover for *The Great Gatsby* novel, and symbolic in demonstrating people's inability to truly see each other or their own lives.

Gatsby's Grandeur: "I didn't want you to think that I was just some nobody."

When Nick attends his first party at Gatsby's mansion, he realizes he is one of the few who were actually invited. Everyone else just came: "Once there they were introduced by somebody who knew Gatsby, and after that they conducted themselves according to the rules of behavior associated with an amusement park. Sometimes they came and went without having met Gatsby at all." As Nick meets Gatsby and gets to learn about him over that summer, he discovers that he is trying to get back into the life of his former love, Daisy Buchanan. All the parties he throws are in a hope that she will attend one of them. Gatsby had met Daisy before the war and they fell in love, but while Gatsby was away, Daisy thought him dead and decided to marry wealthy Tom Buchanan. Now, Gatsby seeks to win her back.

Gatsby eventually tells Nick the truth about himself, that he was originally James Gatz, the son of poor farmers in North Dakota. But he had grand ambitions for life and fanciful imaginations to be someone important. One day, Gatz rescued rich sailor, Dan Cody, and Cody took him on as a protégé, teaching him how to be someone completely new: Jay Gatsby. Gatsby's entire life is a façade of his own determination to make something of himself. And what Gatsby wants now more than anything is for Daisy to tell Tom that she never loved him. She is ultimately unable to do this. She's unable to trade stability with Tom and their daughter for her passionate love with Gatsby, even though she had led him along that she would. Daisy, who had come from a rich family and had dozens of suitors throughout her life before marriage, is even more superficial than Gatsby, a man who had made up his entire life: "She vanished into her rich house, into her rich, full life, leaving Gatsby—nothing. He felt married to her, that was all."

In the events that follow, Tom's mistress is killed in a hit and run, Tom frames Gatsby even though Daisy was driving, and Gatsby is murdered in his home, all while thinking that Daisy is going to change her mind and call him. After his death, Nick is left to handle all the reporter phone calls and arrangements because he can't stand to leave Gatsby's side. "I wanted to get somebody for him," he recalls. "I wanted to go into the room where he lay and reassure him: 'I'll get somebody for you, Gatsby. Don't worry. Just trust me and I'll get somebody for you—'" No one comes.

The Green Light: The Lie of Prosperity and Promise

Until the very end, Gatsby continues watching the green light at the end of the Buchanan's dock across the water, watching for Daisy. He never stops believing that he can make his own future, that anything is possible if he works hard enough: "He had come a long way to this blue lawn, and his dream must have seemed so close that he could hardly fail to grasp it. He did not know that it was already behind him." And it is all for naught at the end, and Nick is the one who deals with the fallout of losing his friend. "They were careless people, Tom and Daisy," he says. "—they smashed up

things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their cast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made..." Gatsby had been a mountainous figure in life, but it didn't matter to anyone except Nick, who wasn't swayed by money. Instead, it was Gatsby's positivity and possibility he exuded that attracted and inspired his friendship with the man. Gatsby believed he could make his own fate and get what he wanted out of a life that everyone around him thought was meaningless. He "believed in the green light," the color possibly alluding to envy and/or money itself.

While Gatsby is kind and confident and full of life, he is woefully ignorant of how cruel most people are and of the pointlessness in trying to control every outcome in life. Just as Gatsby "stretched out his hand desperately as if to snatch only a wisp of air, to save a fragment of the spot that she [Daisy] had made lovely for him...and he knew that he had lost that part of it," so too are our lives, as Scripture reminds us: "yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes" (James 4:14). Gatsby tells Nick that Daisy's voice is "full of money," but he refuses to see its corruption the way Nick can. The Modernist movement saw the greatest economic boom in American history up to that time after the war, and consumerism has only become more and more frivolous and corrupting in the century since.

Scripture has numerous warnings about the worship of money, which is "a root of all kinds of evil" (1 Timothy 6:10). There are over 2,000 verses about money in the Bible, and almost half of Jesus' parables deal with money, including wealth and giving. In one of Jesus' angriest moments, he trashes the business tables men had set up in the temple (Matthew 21:12-13). Multiple times, Scripture instructs people to "sell your possessions and give to the poor" (Luke 12:33). While the Modernists thought life was pointless, Scripture says that it is rather the search for wealth that is pointless: "Whoever loves money never has enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income. This too is meaningless" (Ecclesiastes 5:10). Just as pointless is the attempt to try and control our fates or desti-

nies at all. We can either build up treasures for ourselves in this life, where life itself will destroy them, like Gatsby and Daisy, or we can store up eternal treasures in heaven (Mathew 6:19-20).

All Will Be Well

The Dream of Narnia's Kings & Queens versus the Mirage of Edmund

J. Michael McKay Jr.

A common trope in storytelling is the young man or young woman who comes from humble beginnings and finds himself or herself to be a king or queen by the end of the story. As readers, we love observing the unfolding of their adventure and culmination to rule. Usually, these characters are sympathetic and good-natured; we would enjoy meeting them, befriending them, and we trust them to rule well. But what about a character who does not yet know they are destined to be a king and who has such deep character flaws that we recognize their rule would be a self-centered disaster? We neither like them, nor want to be near them, and we certainly do not want them to have authority over others. We have just such a scenario in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis.

Narnia's Dream for Benevolent Rulers

Edmund is one of the four Sons of Adam and Daughters of Eve who by the end of the story is crowned co-ruler over Narnia with his siblings in Cair Paravel. However, as the story begins, Edmund has no idea that he will one day be a ruler of Narnia. As careful readers, we learn from Mr. Tumnus' conversation with Lucy that Narnia is expecting a day when Sons of Adam and Daughters of Eve will come to that country. During Mr. Tumnus' confession to Lucy, he states "I had orders from the White Witch that if ever I saw a Son of Adam or a Daughter of Eve in the wood, I was to catch them and hand them over to her." Moments later even amidst his

fear of the White Witch, he confesses a faint hope that one day "the four thrones at Cair Paravel are filled – and goodness knows when that will happen, or whether it will ever happen at all." In fact, Mr. Tumnus recognizes Lucy as a Daughter of Eve and only addresses her by that title throughout their entire initial conversation.

Later in the story, we learn more from Mr. and Mrs. Beaver as they entertain Peter, Edmund, Susan, and Lucy. In a similar way to Mr. Tumnus, they always address the four as Sons of Adam and Daughters of Eve in their initial meeting. Mr. and Mrs. Beaver reveal their hope in the expectation that Aslan will return one day to defeat the White Witch, end the eternal winter, and install the two Sons of Adam and two Daughters of Eve on thrones to rule over Narnia. Mr. Beaver states,

> Down at Cair Paravel – that's the castle on the sea coast down at the mouth of this river which ought to be the capital of the whole country if all was as it should be – down at Cair Paravel there are four thrones and it's a saying in Narnia time out of mind that when two Sons of Adam and two Daughters of Eve sit in those four thrones, then it will be the end not only of the White Witch's reign but of her life, and that is why we had to be so cautious as we came along, for if she knew about you four, your lives wouldn't be worth a shake of my whiskers!

The Beavers' fear of the White Witch is kept in check by their hope in the power of Aslan and in their hope of the future rule of the four Kings and Queens. Hope feeds their faithfulness and keeps their fear from fueling faintheartedness.

Edmund's Mirage

During this informative luncheon, Edmund had vanished. Why? Because he was ignorant of his part in the true dream, expectation, and hope of Narnia's Kings and Queens; instead, he had believed another story. This story was neither true nor even had a possibility of being genuine. This alternate story was told to him by the White Witch when he first entered

Narnia. Edmund had told the White Witch about his siblings while he was enjoying the drink and food of Turkish Delight that she had provided for him. Edmund was told by the Witch that she would make him her prince and then one day king. He would rule over his siblings with power and eat Turkish Delight all day. All he had to do was to gather his siblings and bring them to her.

In the story, Edmund demonstrates his poor moral character. He lies to Peter and Susan about the existence of Narnia; he betrays Lucy; he is unapologetic when he bullies and hurts others; he is greedy for Turkish Delight and in the thought of humiliating Peter when he is king. As good readers, we realize that Edmund would be a terrible ruler. Nevertheless, despite being an unsympathetic character, we do muster some sympathy for him as he slowly realizes that his dreams of Turkish Delight and being a prince (and ultimately a king) are merely a mirage; they are a *will-o'-the-wisp*; a shadow with no substance. When he enters Cair Paravel for the first time, he is without his siblings and discovers that the White Witch is cruel, unforgiving, and that all the promises she made were empty statements. His first meal is not Turkish Delight but stale bread which he can hardly choke down. Instead of being called a prince, he is called a brat. And instead of being crowned with a gold crown and bending his siblings to his will, he is ultimately a prisoner, tied up while walking to the Stone Table with the White Witch.

From Shadows to Substance: The Real Story

Edmund's story has strong parallels to humanity's story in the Bible. These parallels go beyond the titles of Sons of Adam and Daughters of Eve. Humans were made by God in his image (Gen 1:26-28) which is defined as exercising governance over the created order. In short, while God is the great King, he has delegated to human beings to be vice-regents over his creation. This exercise of rule is illustrated in Genesis 2 where Adam and Eve are stationed in the Garden of Eden to work and to serve (Gen 2:15). However, the biblical story quickly reveals that Adam and Eve betrayed their God and proved unfaithful to the responsibilities he gave them. They believed another story, the serpent's story. This story told them that they

could govern themselves and be like God. In short, the serpent's story promised them a kingdom of their own; one that would not be subservient to God's kingdom. Involved in that betrayal is the taking of food that looked delicious. One wonders what the angels thought as they watched humanity become a rebellious unsympathetic character in God's story. How could humans rule God's good creation in light of this terrible betrayal of trust?

The end of the biblical story is just as important as the beginning for this theme of human rule. In the heavenly scene of Revelation 5:9-10 (ESV), the heavenly court sings about King Jesus and his vice-regents,

> Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals,
>
> For you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation,
>
> And you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.

How is it that humanity's purpose could be reinstated? How can God have taken a people and made a kingdom which shall reign on the new heavens and earth? How can the original function of being human have been restored?

Once again, Edmund's story mirrors the biblical story. Edmund must be redeemed from the enslavement of the White Witch by Aslan' sacrifice for him so that he may rule subserviently under Aslan and alongside his siblings. As is well known, this is a picture of Jesus the Messiah's death for human beings so that they might be redeemed and so rule subserviently under King Jesus alongside their spiritual siblings. This is to fulfill their God-given responsibility to reign on the earth in service to the great King! This is no mirage. This is our future hope which fosters faithfulness as we live for the King today.

Eucatastrophe in *The Lord of the Rings*

Kirsten Setzkorn

And they all lived happily ever after..." It is a ubiquitous phrase that over time has come to reflect the quintessential ending of fantasy stories and fairy tales. To imagine a story without this concluding phrase is nearly as difficult as imagining a narrative unfold without the opening words "A long, long time ago". Yet, as a reader, the joy of the happy ending is often sweeter than the excitement of the tale's beginning. Why does the happy ending, the victory snatched from the jaws of defeat, resonate so deeply? One of the greatest authors of the modern age, J. R. R. Tolkien, offers an answer to this question in the conclusion of his masterful work of fantasy, *The Lord of the Rings*.

The Lord of the Rings is a story of epic scale. It has a most unlikely hero, not a man of great deed and renown, but a simple hobbit of small stature named Frodo who hails from the quaintly insular and idyllic Shire. The unwitting recipient of a ring of great evil, Frodo learns that he holds the One Ring of Power forged long ago by the Dark Lord Sauron. Possession of the One Ring is all that stands between Sauron and the strength and power to destroy Middle-Earth. Rather than give into the temptation to use the power of the Ring for himself, Frodo and a small band of companions undertake a perilous quest to destroy the Ring in the one place it can be unmade, the fires of the volcanic Mount Doom where it was forged in the very heart of Sauron's dark domain. The fate of all free peoples of Middle-Earth depends on the success of this quest.

A Valley of Shadow

In the climax of the *Lord of Ring*s, Frodo and his companion, Samwise, must traverse the desolate wasteland of Mordor to reach Mount Doom. Utterly exhausted from months of treacherous journeying, it will take all the strength that is left within them to complete the task. A sea of Orcs, monstrous servants of the Dark Lord, stand between these two hobbits and the belching fires that will destroy the Ring.

In Mordor, Frodo and Sam find themselves in a literal and metaphorical valley of shadow. As Frodo moves deeper into Sauron's domain, "the growing weight of the Ring," writes Tolkien, becomes "a burden on the body and a torment to his mind." In their struggles, even the ever-hopeful Sam begins to realize that even if they destroy the Ring, they will not survive the quest or ever return home to the Shire.

As Frodo and Sam reach the heart of Mount Doom, all hope seems to fail. Just as Frodo is about to destroy the Ring, he succumbs to its seductive power and claims the Ring as his own. At that same moment, the miserable creature Gollum, who once served as a guide to Frodo and Sam but then betrayed them in an attempt to take the Ring for himself, reappears. Driven by his unquenchable desire for the Ring, he had stalked the hobbits across Mordor and finally caught them in this most vulnerable moment. An intense struggle between Frodo and Gollum ensues, culminating in Gollum biting the Ring from Frodo's finger. As Gollum pauses for a moment to admire his precious prize, he slips and falls into the flames below. The Ring is destroyed! An unexpected turn of events in a moment of utter darkness leads to the unmaking of the Ring and the undoing of Sauron.

Relief and Rescue

The Ring now gone, Sauron's power crumbles. His armies flee in terror, his high towers topple, and his mighty ramparts fall. For a moment, Sam and Frodo feel "only joy, great joy" at the lifting of this terrible burden and the relief of knowing their quest is at long last finished. But their joy is diminished as they seek shelter on imploding slopes of Mount Doom.

They are stranded, alone, and awaiting death. Frodo and Sam collapse from exhaustion, believing that their story has ended, not knowing their delivery from danger is close at hand. The wizard Gandalf, with the help of the Great Eagles, rescues Frodo and Sam from the mountainside, and they fly to safety.

When Sam awakes, he is met with many happy surprises. He first realizes that he and Frodo have survived. At his bedside, he sees that Gandalf, who he had long thought dead, is actually alive! He cries, "I thought you were dead! But then I thought I was dead myself! Is everything sad going to come untrue?" Indeed, many sad things do come untrue in the conclusion to *The Lord of the Rings*. The Ring is destroyed, and the ultimate evil of Sauron is defeated. Frodo and Sam survive the quest to be reunited with their friends and companions. They even witness the return of the king, the coronation of Aragorn as the long-lost heir of the kingdom of Gondor.

Eucatastrophe

In the climax of the *Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien orchestrates numerous unexpected victories that elicit hope and joy not only in the characters, but vicariously in the reader as well. The destruction of the Ring when all hope seemed lost, and the miraculous rescue of Sam and Frodo as Mount Doom collapsed around them, represent what Tolkien has coined a "eucatastrophe", or a "good catastrophe". Just as a catastrophe is an unexpected disaster, a eucatastrophe is a sudden joyful turn of events. It is a miraculous turning of the tides that lifts the readers' hearts and makes them catch their breath. It is the happy ending.

The eucatastrophe is a literary device suited particularly well to fantasy and fairy stories, according to Tolkien, but it also points to a truth far greater than the plot of a story. As he explains in his essay "On Fairy Stories," Tolkien believes the eucatastrophe in literature can serve as "a far-off gleam or echo of evangelium in the real world." In fantasy, the joy of the happy ending and the characters' miraculous defeat of evil can reflect the greater joy of the real, true story of the Gospel. While the joy of the

eucatastrophe in fiction is only a faint and finite representation of the joy of the good news of the Gospel, it reminds the reader that in the end evil will not win. It reminds the reader that when all hope seems lost, God is still at work to accomplish His sovereign plan.

In his letters, Tolkien points to the Resurrection as the great eucatastrophe in human and redemptive history. What at first appears to be an utter defeat, Jesus' death on the cross, becomes an ultimate victory over death in His Resurrection. In the Gospels, after Jesus' crucifixion, the disciples and the women who followed Jesus are weeping and mourning over His death. But as they approach His tomb in sorrow, their mourning is suddenly turned to great joy as they learn that the tomb is empty and He has risen from the dead (Matthew 28:8, Mark 16:10-11)! A skilled author like Tolkien, inspired by the eucatastrophic joy of the Gospel, can craft moments of lesser eucatastrophe in their fictional works that elicit joy in their reader because they provide a glimpse into the true joy of the Gospel.

Longing in *The Wind in the Willows*

Justin D. Lyons

All great stories are about longing," a friend recently said to me. I immediately thought of *The Wind in the Willows* by Kenneth Grahame, the classic book about the adventures of four animal friends: Mole, Rat, Badger, and Toad. Grahame's tale is beautifully wrought, not only in richness of language, but in calling forth what it describes, longing, which pervades and indeed begins the story. As Mole is busy with spring-cleaning his little underground home, he feels an imperious call: "Spring was moving in the air above and in the earth below and around him, penetrating even his dark and lowly little house with its spirit of divine discontent and longing." He quickly makes his way to the upper world where he rejoices in the air and the sun.

The Longing for the Other

Mole's wanderings take him at last to a riverbank. He is captivated; the gurgles and gleams hold him spell-bound, murmuring rumors of a larger world. The extent of the alteration he has already undergone is apparent in his daydreaming about setting up residence there, adopting an existence so different from what he has known. Indeed, he does precisely that, though not on his own: he will have a guide into this new life, the Water Rat. But Mole's transformation is not complete; his longings have not yet been satisfied: "…with his ear to the reed-stems he caught, at intervals, something of what the wind went whispering so constantly among them."

For his part, Rat feels no desire to experience anything else: he believes there is no better life to be had. When Mole asks if it is true that he really lives along the river, he sermonizes on its sufficiency: "'By it and with it and on it and in it,' said the Rat. 'It's brother and sister to me, and aunts, and company, and food and drink, and (naturally) washing. It's my world, and I don't want any other. What it hasn't got is not worth having, and what it doesn't know is not worth knowing.'" He cautions Mole against fanciful longing. When his friend wishes to know what lies beyond, Rat tries to dissuade his interest by hinting at the dangers of the Wild Wood. But when Mole persists, he becomes firmer: "'Beyond the Wild Wood comes the Wide World,' said the Rat. `And that's something that doesn't matter, either to you or me. I've never been there, and I'm never going, nor you either, if you've got any sense at all. Don't ever refer to it again, please.'"

But Mole's curiosity is not so easily quelled. He desires to see more. He wants to meet Mr. Badger, about whom he has heard so much. But Rat continually puts him off. Finally, impatient with Rat's cautiousness and stay-at-home contentment, Mole undertakes the journey to the Wild Wood on his own. He gets into a great deal of trouble from which good-hearted Rat endeavors to extract him.

Mole also wished to be introduced to the famous Mr. Toad, the character most driven by a longing for the other. They find Toad full of exuberance over his current fitful obsession: a canary-colored caravan cart. "'There's real life for you, embodied in that little cart," he expounds. "'Here to-day, up and off to somewhere else to-morrow! Travel, change, interest, excitement!" Rat is disgusted by this latest fixture of Toad's cycle of infatuation and abandonment, but he knows that it will not take long for this fad to change. When the cart is thrown into a ditch by a speeding car, Toad, far from being angry, is immediately entranced by this new, motorized vision. His mania will lead him to theft, imprisonment, disgrace, and the near-loss of his ancestral home.

The Longing for Home

The yearning for the new and undiscovered is balanced in the story by the powerful draw homeward. When the new becomes fatiguing or frightening, the familiar comforts of home begin to beckon. After their adventure in the Wild Wood, both Rat and Mole are more than ready to return to snug security.

As they return, Mole meditates on belonging: "Mole saw clearly that he was an animal of tilled field and hedge-row… he must be wise, must keep to the pleasant places in which his lines were laid and which held adventure enough, in their way, to last for a lifetime." This realization is followed swiftly by a summons home as commanding as that which had originally called him away. He is following Rat across the darkening fields, led by "that small inquiring something which all animals carry inside them, saying unmistakably, 'Yes, quite right; this leads home!'" when he feels a pull. But this is not now the same voice that speaks to Rat: it is Mole's old home pleading for his return. Mole experiences all the warmth of familiarity, but his love of home is now tempered by larger perspective. Its sanctuary is more desirable because it exists in the context of a larger world. Neither the one nor the other can fully satisfy on its own. Mole can never now relapse into insular contentment, but neither will he, like Toad, be led astray by the siren calls of novelty. He has found a harmony between the two: he is pulled, but not torn.

The Longing for God

But Rat and Mole will be struck with a longing that infinitely exceeds anything they have known in their normal lives. They are out searching for the son of their friend Otter, Little Portly, who has been missing for several days. Just as dawn is rising, Rat becomes mesmerized by a sound impinging upon the edge of his consciousness. He attempts to describe it to Mole: "'O Mole! the beauty of it!....Such music I never dreamed of, and the call in it is stronger even than the music is sweet! Row on, Mole, row! For the music and the call must be for us.'" They are led to a small island in the river, which they approach with awe: "'Here, in this holy place, here

if anywhere, surely we shall find Him!'" Indeed, they look into the very eyes of "the Friend and Helper," then bowing their heads in worship. We need not be troubled by the pagan associations of Pan. How should the Lord of Creation appear to animals? Rat and Mole encounter God as the embodiment and source of nature; they encounter Him who is undeniably other and, at the same time, undeniably the anchorage of their existence.

The Wind in the Willows evokes much of what C.S. Lewis wrote about *Sehnsucht*—longing. Born from the vision of distant hills and awakening a desire for otherworldly joy, this longing, Lewis eventually realized, pointed to Christ. Indeed, it is in God that the longing for the other and longing for home meet. God is our origin and our end, our home and our destination. We long for the otherworldly, yet we often mistake the good things of this world for what shines *through* them, and so we chase after what cannot satisfy, we drink from wells that will never quench our thirst. As Lewis wrote in *The Weight of Glory*, "These things…are good images of what we desire; but if they are mistaken for the thing itself they turn into dumb idols, breaking the hearts of their worshippers." We are told to set our minds on things above rather than earthly things (Colossians 3:2). But in doing so, we come to enjoy the earthly gifts of a gracious God truly and fully. We can cross the fields of life awake to the upward call that tells us "Yes, quite right; this leads home!"

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