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# *Intégrité:* *A Faith and Learning Journal*

Volume 14 Number 1 Spring 2015

Special Issue on Christianity and Literature  
Guest-edited by Glenn Hopp

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## Introduction

**Glenn Hopp**  
Missouri Baptist University

This special issue of *Intégrité: A Faith and Learning Journal* addresses the content and pedagogy of the Christianity and literature course. Nearly all of the imaginative works discussed by the contributors to this issue also reveal the attraction that contemporary literature and, in particular, popular culture exert on the field of Christianity and literature. In this issue four articles discuss various popular works directly and three, counting this introduction, explore the use of other works in the classroom. In the first group, Julie Ooms examines the 1988 graphic novel *V for Vendetta*, taking up the question of its moral center and the deforming damage done to human love in the context of the dystopian government of that novel. Kelly Leavitt discusses the 2014 novel *The Book of Unknown Americans* by Cristina Henríquez, a book selected for many notable-book lists last year. This article looks at the theological implications suggested by the first-person voices and the dialogue of hope that comes to mark the immigrant experiences in that novel. Two articles address Lev Grossman's fantasy novel *The Magicians* and its implied response to C. S. Lewis's Narnia books. Amanda E. Himes provides a counter-reading to address and balance Grossman's reaction against the Narnia novels. J. B. Himes finds Grossman's ironic novel to be an effective and engaging work of fantasy and shows that the book addresses faith and doubt.

As guest editor of this issue, I have also adopted a partial focus on the classroom, and the remaining essays address that aspect of study. John Han discusses the use of the novel *Dracula* in his sophomore literature class and the responses of students familiar with the Twilight books. He explains his presentation of Bram Stoker's novel as Christian adventure fiction and as medieval chivalric romance. Darren J. N. Middleton describes his course "Jesus in Fiction and Film." Four units of study focus on the person and work of Jesus through the topics of biographical pictures of Jesus, the motif of a minor New Testament character as a narrator, the controversies of certain representations of Jesus, and cross-cultural images of Jesus. This introduction looks at some strategies behind the selection of content in a course on Christianity and literature. My own experiences as a full-time college professor cover thirty years at smaller teaching institutions with religious affiliations, Central Methodist University in Missouri (for two years as an ABD), Howard Payne University in Texas (for twenty-six years), a Southern Baptist school, and Missouri Baptist University (for two years).

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Any college literature course can allow students and often the class as a whole to see aspects of their own thinking, open-mindedness, and values, but the Christianity and literature course, since it explores the impact of elemental concepts like purposeful living, forgiveness, redemption, divine love, and brotherly love, can often reveal students to themselves and to others in different and deep ways. Yet the content of the Christianity and literature course is not as fixed as that in other courses. Unlike a course in Shakespeare or even a genre course like the development of the short story, the Christianity and literature class may almost be about whatever the teacher chooses to study. This introduction sketches some options and approaches in making these decisions on content.

As a teacher of Christianity and literature at Howard Payne University, I had experience with courses at both the general-education level and the advanced level. In planning the course, I wanted to design a syllabus that addressed in a challenging and rewarding way the interests and desires of two groups of students I had encountered in my teaching at religious schools. One group seemed to favor a Christianity and literature class that emphasized the first word of the course title; they desired a course that stressed the inspirational nature of works clearly didactic in their intent. Francine Rivers's popular novel *Redeeming Love*, a bestseller at Christian bookstores and on the Christian fiction shelves at Barnes and Noble, may be the best example of the type of novel that students in this group often know and have enthusiasm for.

I read Rivers's novel before teaching a Christianity and Literature course for the first time. It is based on the Old Testament book of Hosea and set in frontier America. The character Michael Hosea sees the prostitute Angel at a produce market and hears the voice of God tell him (in boldface italic type) that she is the woman he should marry. The novel traces their relationship, her many rejections of him, and his longsuffering forgiveness. Rivers's fast-moving story features some intriguing scenes, like the hatbox scene in chapter thirty-two. When Angel is befriended by the family of a Christian banker, she becomes a confidant of their daughter Susanna, who shows Angel a hatbox with notepaper recording Susanna's prayers for the purpose of monitoring how and when they are answered. Susanna sits with Angel to explain this practice and shows Angel her note asking God for a friend she can talk to and dated the day before Angel arrived (Rivers 433). It is a scene in which the human element personalizes the didactic intent and thereby makes the larger point more subtle.

I mention this novel early in the course to the students, many of whom will be familiar with it. It is a good illustration of the caution needed with popular books, especially popular religious books. I tell the class that I became caught up in the novel and finished the 478-page love story in two or three days, which is meant as genuine praise for its readability. We then discuss Richard Terrell's essay "Christian Fiction: Piety Is Not Enough" in *The Christian Imagination*, one of the course texts. Terrell contends that fiction like that approved by the Christian Booksellers' Association (CBA) often reveals the narrowness and artificiality of parochialism rather than the universal: "Parochialism is a spirit that demands that we create only for the safely defined boundaries of our ethnic, ideological, or spiritual community" (243). These are useful points to apply to

Rivers's novel: Does its sanitized picture of prostitution and frontier life, for example, suggest a novel keeping within the expectations of what is permissible to mention at church, a kind of fictional preaching to the choir? When does it transcend those boundaries? I try to establish yet not to push too hard at Richard Terrell's point. It may be excessive caution on my part, but I try to imagine the negative reaction I would have had as an undergraduate to a literature professor sneering at the Ian Fleming spy stories I read and re-read so avidly or even at the cherished Alistair MacLean adventure novels I had by college outgrown. Even as an adult reading Anthony Burgess's choices for the best novels of the twentieth century, I approved his putting *Goldfinger* on the list: "It is unwise to disparage the well-made popular" (74). So I try to mention reservations about *Redeeming Love* tactfully and to use the concepts from Richard Terrell's essay as reminders that a churchy attitude or a lack of complexity can be bad for art.

Characters in *Redeeming Love* who describe personal crises like Susanna (the man she loved was killed trying to evangelize the rough element of their town) seem to refer to doubts as things of the past, while their present thinking rings with certainty. Such an emphasis may clarify dogma, but it tends to reduce characters to puppets. Even when characters appear to voice doubt, their vulnerability, when seen closer, becomes an expression of an admitted weakness rather than a genuine questioning of belief: "It was all such a muddle, my emotions at war. It was no comfort to me at all to know that Steven was with the Lord. I wanted him with me. . . . I still do" (432). The criteria in Richard Terrell's essay can again be useful: Are the character's doubts constrained by the expectations of the church-group readership of the novel? What if a person's spiritual crisis might lead to some greater disobedience than wishing a loved one were still with her? And what does it mean if someone finds it harder to discern God's voice than Michael Hosea with his boldface, italicized instructions? When Angel in the final chapters converts to Christianity, her decision is rendered by her responding to an altar call at the close of a church service. Are expressions of faith made outside a church as valid as conventional expressions of belief?

Thinking about Rivers's novel helped me to see that didactic literature probably has a place on a Christianity and literature syllabus. I often choose *The Great Divorce* by C.S. Lewis as a didactic novel to study and add some short stories with a didactic intent. One mostly unfamiliar story that has worked particularly well is "The Queer Feet," a Father Brown story from 1910 by G. K. Chesterton.

The beginning of Chesterton's story is worth quoting in full, partly because it sets forth the concepts of snobbery and salvation that the story explores and partly because its wry tone surprises and even insults the reader somewhat:

If you meet a member of that select club, "The Twelve True Fishermen," entering the Vernon Hotel for the annual club dinner, you will observe, as he takes off his overcoat, that his evening coat is green and not black. If (supposing that you have the star-defying audacity to address such a being) you ask him why, he will probably answer that he does it to avoid being mistaken for a waiter. You will then retire crushed.

But you will leave behind you a mystery as yet unsolved and a tale worth telling.

If (to pursue the same vein of improbable conjecture) you were to meet a mild, hard-working little priest, named Father Brown, and were to ask him what he thought was the most singular luck of his life, he would probably reply that upon the whole his best stroke was at the Vernon Hotel, where he had averted a crime and, perhaps, saved a soul, merely by listening to a few footsteps in a passage. He is perhaps a little proud of this wild and wonderful guess of his, and it is possible that he might refer to it. But since it is immeasurably unlikely that you will ever rise high enough in the social world to find “The Twelve True Fishermen,” or that you will ever sink low enough among slums and criminals to find Father Brown, I fear you will never hear the story at all unless you hear it from me. (64)

The last sentence expresses with Chesterton’s love of paradox the advice of the angel Raphael to Adam and Eve in Milton to “be lowly wise” (*Paradise Lost* VIII.173), one of the key ideas in the story. The wry tone sounds in the way the narrator appears to accept the status of The Twelve True Fishermen as more worthy than that of the lowly reader. In my experience not too many students will see that the narrator’s seeming compliment of the club members is in the larger morality of the story a condemnation of their snobbery or see that the seeming insult to Father Brown is really an endorsement of his humility and meekness. This sentence can lead to discussion that prompts students to look again carefully at the story. Chesterton’s tack in crafting such a crusty narrative tone keeps readers off balance and opens them to the didactic point.

Chesterton’s development rewards such attention by furthering the complexity of the first two paragraphs. In spite of their holy-sounding name, The Twelve True Fishermen embrace no religious ideals. The members are really a dozen snobs who hold their dinners at the Vernon Hotel because the exclusive terrace table seats exactly twenty-four—actually only twelve if all are to enjoy the splendid view of the garden from the near side of the table. Father Brown answers a summons to hear the confession of a waiter who has suffered a stroke. The unexpected note of mortality disrupts the smooth operations of the hotel and the luncheon of its privileged guests. The narrator’s apologetic, regretful tone again seems to surprise by indicating the inconvenience of the spiritual arising in such an elitist, secular setting: “There is in the world a very aged rioter and demagogue who breaks into the most refined retreats with the dreadful information that all men are brothers, and wherever this leveler went on his pale horse it was Father Brown’s trade to follow” (66). During the commotion a thief steals the club’s jewel-encrusted silverware, a crime that Father Brown solves. We later learn that in the cloak room Father Brown challenged the thief about both his crime and his soul, wrested the jewels from him before the culprit escaped, and then returned them to the club members: “You are the Twelve True Fishers, and these are your silver fish. But He has made me a fisher of men. . . . I caught him, with an unseen hook and an invisible line which is long enough to let him wander to the ends of the world, and still to bring him back with a twitch

upon the thread” (78-79). Chesterton never lets the reader forget the jarring nature of such discourse in the modern, secular world. These disruptions, underscored by the narrator’s distinctive tone, invite the reader to see the events more freshly primarily because the viewpoints of the secular and the spiritual are combined so dramatically. Father Brown explains to the club that in his struggle with the thief he formed judgments of his foe’s fighting weight “when he tried to throttle me” and of his spiritual resistance “when he repented.” One club member guffaws at that: ““Oh, I say—repented!’ cried young Chester, with a sort of crow of laughter” (78). Chesterton’s point is similar to that of Erasmus in *Praise of Folly* when he talks about the Christian Fool: to practice seriously the teachings of Christ is folly in the eyes of the world but wisdom to heaven.

The other group of students in class tends to emphasize the last word in the course title. Not wanting a sermon in fiction form, these students primarily seek literature that looks at spiritual concepts more analytically than didactically. Donald T. Williams, in his essay “Christian Poetics, Past and Present,” surveys many authors who explore the benefits of reading literature. Quoting C.S. Lewis’s *Of Other Worlds*, Williams points out that “it [is] possible for literature to strip Christian doctrines of their ‘stained glass’ associations and make them appear in their ‘real potency’” (qtd. in Williams 17). Achieving this aim can be a primary advantage of this second approach to the course readings. But Lewis may have had in mind older literature that adopts a Christian worldview like the epics by Spenser and Milton and tragedies of damnation like *Doctor Faustus* and *Macbeth*. In the fiction of the modern era, life is often depicted with the heavens empty. Graham Greene seemed to understand that modern novelists had lost something when events are not viewed under the aspect of eternity. Greene remarked that “a disaster overtook the English novel” around this time: “with the death of [Henry] James the religious sense was lost to the English novel, and with the religious sense went the importance of the human act” (*Collected Essays* 115).

Graham Greene’s novel *The End of the Affair* addresses this matter by exploring the way non-religious people respond to the perceived presence of God. Greene’s character Sarah breaks off an adulterous affair because she feels that her lover’s life has been spared or returned to him by God. In a defining simile she says at one point, “I’ve caught belief like a disease”:

I believe there’s a God—I believe the whole bag of tricks, there’s nothing I don’t believe, they could subdivide the Trinity into a dozen parts and I’d believe. They could dig up records that proved Christ had been invented by Pilate to get himself promoted and I’d believe just same. I’ve caught belief like a disease. I’ve fallen into belief like I fell in love. (121)

The impact of Sarah’s conviction is intensified by her prior lack of a religious sensibility, and it is partly this richness of ideas that makes the book so suitable for class. Whereas Francine Rivers presents doubt as a weakness and thus undervalues its power, Greene recasts belief as a disease, which takes away its ordinariness and gives it greater power.<sup>1</sup> The norm for faith is often an insipid, vague set of notions about God, a situation touching no one very deeply. To

Sarah, however, who has not been a follower of such tepid religion, the potency of her faith is transforming. She is susceptible in the way a non-immunized child can be an easy target for a virus. The novel explores in uncompromising ways the obligations ensuing from Sarah's belief and even the behavior following from her lover's anger toward God. In the later chapters, when we learn about Sarah's childhood and her mother's choice to have her baptized as an infant, some readers feel that the book veers toward the didactic and away from the analytical.<sup>2</sup>

*The End of the Affair* is brief and accessible in its style. Greene's short story "A Visit to Morin," which students may find less accessible, is nonetheless an excellent companion reading to the novel. It concerns a celebrated, so-called "Christian novelist" who employs the same metaphor of disease as Sarah, only now it describes his lost belief: "I used to get letters saying how I had converted them by this book or that. Long after I ceased to believe myself I was a carrier of belief, like a man can be a carrier of disease without being sick" (*Collected Stories* 251). The power of the story also strangely resides in its pessimism and the reasons the title character is gradually revealed to be a burnt-out case.

The narrator is a man who admired the religious novels of Pierre Morin as a boy at school. Now Dunlop is a wine merchant who finds himself in the Alsace area of northeast France. Morin's reputation and readership have fallen over the years, so Dunlop is surprised to find Morin's books in a shop. He learns from the shop assistant that Morin's books sell in Colmer because the aged author resides nearby. Dunlop attends a Christmas Eve Midnight Mass for nostalgic reasons—he is not a believer—and he recognizes Morin. Dunlop and Morin are the only two who do not go forward to receive the Sacrament. Morin invites Dunlop to his home to sample a wine, and their talk turns to the question of belief. The Catholic novelist is no longer a believer. Morin explains his conviction that his many years without belief confirm for him the genuineness of the old faith: "I excommunicated myself voluntarily. I never went to Confession. I loved a woman too much to pretend to myself that I would ever leave her. You know the condition of absolution? A firm purpose of amendment. I had so such purpose" (254). Dunlop reasonably asks why Morin doesn't return to the faith now that his mistress has died. Morin explains: "If I went back and belief did not return? That is what I fear, Mr Dunlop. As long as I keep away from the sacraments, my lack of belief is an argument for the Church. But if I returned and they failed me, then I would really be a man . . . who had better hide himself quickly in the grave so as not to discourage others" (255). He reverses the view of Marlowe's Faustus, who rationalizes yielding to his appetites with the reminder that repentance is always a later (and later) option: "Tush! Christ did call [to salvation] the thief upon the cross" (4.1.136 A-text, 4.5.26 B-text). Morin knows such evasions are wishful thinking. The more he perceives his heart to have hardened and his soul to have shrunk by decades of self-indulgence, the more respect and validity he ascribes to the Christian faith.

As these examples show, the two categories of readings I describe are not strict, but taking in both student interests can be beneficial. In putting together readings for these two units, I also find it helpful to recall a particular student comment. In class one day we had just read Sharon Singleton's poem "And He

Shall Give His Angels Charge Over You,” reprinted in *The Christian Imagination* (273). The speaker in the poem undergoes a stressful medical test, which is described in the middle of three stanzas. In the first and third stanzas, she describes the kind waitress who served her breakfast before the test and the soothing beautician who washed her hair after. The imagery and the liturgical connotations of the word choice convey that the speaker felt ministered to by these strangers. After we had talked about this poem, a student volunteered the comment that in writing about matters of faith, some writers prefer to raise questions and others like to provide answers and that there is room for both approaches. It has been helpful for me to keep that in mind.<sup>3</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>I am indebted to Millard Kimery, Howard Payne University, for this observation and for many other helpful suggestions on reading a draft of the introduction.

<sup>2</sup>Do the seeming miracles that conclude the novel go too far in diminishing ambiguity? It’s a debatable point although it would be a mistake to omit the argument in favor. One early reviewer of the book, J. D. Scott, praised Sarah’s defining simile about catching belief like a disease: “No English novelist since Lawrence has written a phrase which is at once (a) so memorable, (b) so characteristic, and (c) so compressed a statement of the content of a novel” (qtd. in Gorra ix). Scott, however, faulted Greene, as Michael Gorra explains it, for “clos[ing] off the questions he raises, rather than allowing them to echo” (Gorra x). Gorra, who wrote the introduction to the 2004 Penguin Greene Centennial edition of the novel, seems also to view the book as ultimately didactic in intent.

<sup>3</sup>This analytical, question-asking side of the course readings can also be supplemented by an excellent collection of short stories titled *God: Stories*, edited by C. Michael Curtis, a senior editor at *The Atlantic*. This collection offers many stimulating readings, especially “A Father’s Story” by Andre Dubus. I also try to include in this unit an anti-Christian voice, as in the Hemingway short story “A Clean, Well-Lighted Place.”

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**“I don’t know who you are ... but I love you”:  
Neighborhoodly Love as Essential, Deformed,  
and Failed in *V for Vendetta***

**Julie Ooms**

If *V for Vendetta*, Alan Moore and David Lloyd’s acclaimed 1988 graphic novel, has any moral or ideological center, that center is the craving for and necessity of love. All human beings crave love—as Virgil tells Dante in the *Purgatorio*, “Neither Creator nor His creature . . . was ever without love” (Hollander and Hollander 375)—but in the dystopian world of *V for Vendetta*, readers observe that love is twisted. Just as justice is perverted, exercised swiftly and totally by the fascist Norsefire government on anyone who questions it, just as order is warped into the government’s need to control and monitor its citizens with propaganda and constant surveillance, so love, too, is deformed. Love for fellow human beings is bent, becoming constant wariness and desperate self-preservation, causing people to lash out at others violently or to treat them coldly. That, or it is displaced, becoming love of principles or of all-seeing computers rather than love of people. The characters’ inescapable need for love is thus juxtaposed with the deformed ways that are, in this dystopian world, the only ways in which any of the characters can find love, or offer love to others. This theme might seem an obvious one to identify, particularly if the reader approaches the text through a Christian lens that recognizes the fallen nature of the world and thus of all human beings’ ability to love in the first place. However, in the case of *V for Vendetta*, this theme’s presence indicates that readers not only recognize it, but also adopt a pessimistic reading of the text because of it. According to this reading, V’s revolution and those ushering it in, like the Norsefire government and its minions, are doomed to fail because both are rooted in the same distorted love.

It is easy to recognize how the distorted love of the graphic novel’s antagonists results in their agony and downfall. The best example is the Norsefire government’s leader, Adam Susan. Susan spends most of his time in the command center of the Norsefire government, sitting in front of the screens of the enormous Fate Computer, which connects him to every corner of the country he leads and allows him to surveil them and his underlings. Susan’s love, though, is not for the people he observes and whose safety he allegedly ensures; instead, he loves the machine that enables him to see them. Susan claims to know that, though he confesses his love for her, the machine does not and cannot love him (38-39), yet when the words “I love you” appear seemingly without cause across the computer’s many screens, Susan is startled into crying out, and cannot get out of his head the possibility that the computer responded to his love (177). The Fate

Computer eventually betrays him—it has been hacked by revolutionaries from the beginning.

Susan's inability to find required, personal love is one we might expect, given that he is the enemy of the book's protagonists, bent on controlling people rather than freeing them. However, he shares this inability with all of the graphic novel's other characters, antagonists and protagonists alike. The centrality of love, its simultaneous inescapability and distortedness, thus strongly suggests that any surge of victory felt as the graphic novel ends and the revolution begins is doomed to end in failure, because its source is a distorted love, directed toward the wrong objects or distorted by wrath and a need for vengeance.

In the following pages, I support this pessimistic reading of *V for Vendetta* in three ways. First, I suggest that *V for Vendetta* be read through the lens of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, particularly its structural center: the seventeenth canto of the *Purgatorio* and Virgil's discourse on love. Second, I apply this lens to the graphic novel's protagonist and antagonist and their distorted loves, showing how each does not root itself in love of one's neighbor but instead finds another object and results in the destruction of community. Finally, I apply this lens to two other characters, the heirs of the protagonist and antagonist, to show that though their loves show signs of escaping these distortions, in the end, their abilities to love their neighbor are as distorted as their predecessors', and their failure means the people they lead will linger in a purgatory of anarchy and chaos instead of ascending into a paradise of freedom and loving community.

## I

Before I begin my examination of *V for Vendetta* through the lens of the *Divine Comedy*, I want first to briefly summarize the graphic novel for those unfamiliar with it, chart the history of other scholarly explorations of it, and fit my argument here within those of other scholars, showing the viability and fruitfulness of reading *V for Vendetta* through Dante.

*V for Vendetta* is set in a not-too-distant future England; because the book was written in the 1980s, this future is the late 1990s, a decade or so after nuclear war has decimated every other part of the world.<sup>1</sup> In the years between the war's outbreak and the book's opening, a fascist government has risen in England. The Norsefire government runs a totalitarian state that constantly surveils its citizens via camera and audio feeds, limits their media consumption to state propaganda on radio and television, and has systematically captured, imprisoned, experimented on, and eradicated all dissenters as well as those who are not white and British. England, and the world, because everyone else has already died in the war, has been "cleansed" of those against the new regime as well as of Jews, gay people, and people of color. However, one of these prisoners—a man whose real identity is never revealed, but who calls himself "V"—escapes, destroys the internment camp where he was being held, and makes plans to overthrow the oppressive Norsefire government and, in its place, usher in anarchy, where each person answers only to himself or herself. V succeeds, along with the help of a

young woman named Evey Hammond, who becomes his disciple and finally his successor after he dies at the hands of one of the Norsefire police, an unusually compassionate man named Finch, for whom finding out V's identity has become an obsession. The graphic novel opens with the Voice of Fate, a radio announcer who delivers propaganda to the people and helps maintain order and control; it closes wordlessly, with the image of Finch walking away from chaotic, violent, post-Norsefire London down a dark road towards no clear destination.

Scholarly considerations of *V for Vendetta* are few, and they fit quite neatly into a handful of categories. Some consider the graphic novel in terms of what it contributes to the medium of comics.<sup>2</sup> Others focus on a particular aspect of the graphic novel's story, such as its dystopian genre or its use of the hero trope.<sup>3</sup> Still other scholars focus on the film adaptation of the graphic novel, or on the relationship between the film adaptation and its source material.<sup>4</sup> These avenues of study are worth noting, but of particular interest for my purposes here is a fourth category of scholarly work on *V for Vendetta*: that which starts by recognizing that the graphic novel is highly intertextual, full of references—whether visual or textual—to literary works, artwork, music, film, and other types of media, as well as to historical events. The character V often quotes from literary works, particularly from Shakespeare,<sup>5</sup> and V's Guy Fawkes mask and his frequent references to the 1605 Gunpowder Plot are a constant presence throughout the book.<sup>6</sup> The most thorough, though hardly exhaustive, treatment of the references and allusions that fill *V for Vendetta* is James R. Keller's 2008 book *V for Vendetta as Cultural Pastiche: A Critical Study of the Graphic Novel and Film*. Keller identifies and discusses several events, pieces of culture, and other elements that *V for Vendetta* pastiches, among them contemporary fears of terrorism, a John William Waterhouse painting visible on the wall of V's underground home, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, the Gunpowder Plot, *Brave New World*, and the AIDS epidemic (12-13). Keller's discussion, though necessarily more detailed (it is a book-length treatment of the graphic novel and film), is not exhaustive, focuses more on the film than on the graphic novel, and betrays a tendency to choose texts or events that relate only obliquely to *V for Vendetta*. However, it and other articles that take similar tacks pave the way for me to read *V for Vendetta* through the lens of a text that *V for Vendetta* not only strongly recalls, but explicitly mentions: Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

The *Divine Comedy* comes up in the prelude, entitled "This Vicious Cabaret," to the second book (of three) of *V for Vendetta*. The prelude juxtaposes rhyming text, art panels, and lines of music to suggest that readers read it as a song, perhaps a raucous opening number to a dark and sinister show, and one that draws together all the story's current plotlines and major characters. The show in question is the year 1998, when all of V's plans—and, hopefully, new freedom for the long-oppressed people of England—will be ushered in. *The Divine Comedy* becomes one of many possible titles for this show; the text reads: "At last the 1998 show! The torch-song no one ever sings! The curfew chorus line! The comedy divine!" (92). This line suggests that readers view V's "1998 show"—or even the entire book itself—as, among other things, a text with some elements parallel to those in *The Divine Comedy*. The most obvious of these parallels is

that, just as Dante journeys down through hell and up through purgatory toward paradise, so the people of England may journey through the hell of their dystopian world and the burning remains of its totalitarian government, through the purgatory of anarchy and into the relative paradise of freedom and self-governance. However, reading this graphic novel as a hopeful march upwards, away from tyranny and towards freedom, is not, in my view, the most faithful reading of the text. Instead, I favor a pessimistic reading, one facilitated by another way in which *The Divine Comedy* is parallel to *V for Vendetta*: the centrality of love to each book.

Just as love is the moral and ideological center of *V for Vendetta*, so Virgil's discourse on love in canto XVII of the *Purgatorio* forms the guiding idea and the structural center of *The Divine Comedy*. As Virgil tells Dante, and as I quoted above, "neither Creator nor His creature... / was ever without love, whether natural / or of the mind." He continues: "The natural is always without error, / but the other may err in its chosen goal, / or through excessive or deficient vigor" (375). Virgil maintains that natural love—love for God and for oneself—is without error, but the love humans use their free wills to exercise can err in ways that correspond to the seven cardinal vices; therefore, Virgil goes on to say, "it follows... / that the evil that is loved must be a neighbor's" (375). The editors and translators of the edition I quote from here, Jean Hollander and Robert Hollander, interpret this line to mean that since Virgil has discarded "hatred of self or of God . . . as motivations for immoral human conduct, hatred of our neighbor remains" (384). Love, when twisted and deformed, manifests as hatred toward one's neighbor. For Virgil, and for Dante, this twisted love takes very particular forms, exhibiting the vices of pride, envy, and wrath. In *V for Vendetta*, the correlation between deformed love and specific vices is hardly as explicit. However, love's deformations do manifest themselves as imperfect attempts to love one's fellow human beings. Because of love's twisted nature throughout the book, *V for Vendetta* is a dark, ironic version of the *Divine Comedy*. At its center is the need for love and deliverance from the sins love's malformation causes, but because love is always deformed in the graphic novel, the way to any potential ascent from the inferno of war, dystopia, and anarchy is blocked.

## II

All but one of the characters in *V for Vendetta*, hero or villain or somewhere in between, commit this sin of loving in deformed ways, and it is no wonder that the chief sinners are the main antagonist and protagonist of the graphic novel. I have already mentioned the twisted form of antagonist Leader Adam Susan's love; his devotion to a machine at the expense of his human subjects alerts readers to his eventual downfall, and when he at last leaves the control room of the Fate Computer to greet his subjects, he dies at one of their hands. V's love, though he is the protagonist, our hero, and thus presumably destined to be victor, is similarly deformed; V's love of justice and his commitment to embodying an ideal, rather than to loving the people he claims to

want to free, makes him too like Susan to be the light to his dark. Both these characters display simultaneously both Virgil's assertion in the *Purgatorio* that all human beings must love and the idea that human love can be twisted, particularly in how and whether it is truly and purely directed at one's fellow human beings.

First, we have Susan. Readers expect that he, as the leader of a government bent on eliminating undesirables and maintaining order through fear and control, would love in distorted ways, as all his interactions with other people conspire to do them harm. These expectations are fulfilled from early in the graphic novel. When Susan is first introduced, it is in the first of *V for Vendetta*'s three parts, in 1997, a year before V's "1998 show," while Susan is traveling to headquarters and to the room where his beloved, the Fate Computer, resides. Readers watch Susan's car travel past the Old Bailey, and images of the statue of Justice atop the Bailey's dome accompany Susan's first thoughts about love:

I lead the country that I love out of the wilderness of the twentieth century. I believe in survival, in the destiny of the Nordic race. I believe in fascism. [...] The Romans invented fascism. One twig could be broken. A bundle would prevail. Fascism . . . strength in unity. I believe in strength. I believe in unity. And if that strength, that unity of purpose, demands a uniformity of thought, word, and deed then so be it. (37)

Susan's words about fascism and unity are darkly reminiscent of Ecclesiastes 4:12: "And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken" (ESV). However, Susan's use of this concept means less about human community and neighborly love, and more about, as he says, "uniformity of thought, word, and deed." His love for England leaves no place for love of its people or for justice, whose symbol he observes before exiting his car (37). Susan's fascist love—a twisted, abusive love based on control—is also unrequited; it is met only by fear. Susan himself realizes this: "I am not loved," he thinks. "I know that. Not in soul or body. Have never known the soft whisper of endearment. Never known the peace that lies between the thighs of woman. But I am respected. I am feared. And that will suffice" (38). At this point in the graphic novel, Susan, while responsible for leading desperate people through their suffering, cares little for them and seeks to develop no neighborly love with them.

Susan's human need for neighborly love is displaced and attached instead to the Fate Computer, the device whose screens he monitors each day to surveil his subjects and confirm their loyalty. And in these early passages, before the "1998 show" and its accompanying chaos, Susan believes he has found a better love:

Because I love, I who am not loved in return, I have a love that is far deeper than the empty gasps and convulsions of brutish coupling. [...] She has no eyes to flirt or promise. But she sees all. See and understands with a wisdom that is godlike in its scale. I

stand at the gates of her intellect and I am blinded by the light within. [...] Her soul is clean, untainted by the snares and ambiguities of emotion. [...] I worship her though I am not worthy. I cherish the purity of her disdain. She does not respect me. She does not fear me. She does not love me. [...] She touches me, and I am touched by God, by destiny. The whole of existence courses through her. I worship her. I am her slave. No freedom ever was so sweet. My love, I would stay with you forever, would spend my life within you. I would wait upon your every utterance and never ask the merest splinter of affection. Fate . . . fate . . . I love you. (38-9)

The Fate Computer, Susan believes, takes the place of mentor, of lover, and even of God; he worships her, is touched by her, and learns from her blinding intellect. But for all Susan's statements of devotion, his acknowledgement of the unrequited nature of his love acts as a counterbalance to his ardor. Readers are led not to share Susan's awe before the Fate Computer but to pity him in his loneliness. This effect is compounded by the art throughout this sequence. As Susan's thoughts about his love for the Fate Computer appear across the panels, the art shows him saluting others but not otherwise engaging with them, walking through hallways and past security, to arrive at the Fate Computer's room, where he sits, alone. The last image of the sequence is of him, sitting in semidarkness before a black screen. Thus, the fulfillment he claims to get from Fate is undercut by these images of utter loneliness.

The bleak promise delivered by this early passage—in which Susan's declarations of love and devotion to the Fate Computer are rendered pitiable and even unreliable by the clear loneliness depicted in the art—is fulfilled later on in the graphic novel, at the end of the second of *V for Vendetta's* three parts. In this passage, which I briefly explicated in my introduction, Susan is, as usual, sitting in his control room monitoring the screens of his beloved Fate. The art shows him staring wide-eyed at the screens, which all flash suddenly in the next panel with the words "I LOVE YOU"; Susan responds with a startled shout (177). Though he denies crying out when a security guard rushes to his aid, he is clearly shaken, and his emotional response to what he perceives to be Fate's declaration of love shows that for all his seeming cool acceptance of Fate's inability to love him back, Susan really does long for his love to be requited. Susan's desire for Fate to return his love becomes even clearer in the early pages of the third and final part of *V for Vendetta*. The art shows Susan approaching Fate, stroking its screens and finally kneeling before it with his face pressed against it, as the text reads: "Am I loved? Not feared. Not respected. Loved. You said 'I love you.' I saw you say it. . . . Unless it was some fluke of the circuits, some trick of the eye. Unless I'm going mad. Please . . . please give me a sign" (184). The "sign" Susan asks for takes the form of terrorist attacks: V bombs the headquarters of the Ear and the Eye—government offices that monitor citizens through audio and video feeds, respectively—effectively rendering Susan's government blind, deaf, and far less capable of maintaining control and unity.

Susan's role as Leader should spur him on to restore order and regain control. However, Susan does the opposite, and the catalyst for this change appears to have been Fate's alleged declaration of love and its profound effect on Susan. As chaos prevails in London's streets, Susan sits in his chair before Fate, and instead of reveling in Fate's cold austerity and all-seeing, remote eye, Susan has a visceral, orgasmic experience watching the computer's screens, an experience readers are encouraged to interpret as revealing not Susan's growing emotional range and deep need for connection but rather his insanity. Watching the screens, Susan thinks,

The riots will stop. Communications will resume. Let England briefly mind itself. After my toil, I am entitled to some tenderness. I gaze, entranced, into your eye. Luminous fingers stroke my face. From your world of pure math you touch me, in this solid and encumbering place. . . Too fast to register, double exposed by memory, images race across your glass, matching my pulse, accelerating. . . There: a hanging? It went by so *quickly*. . . Letters; words; a stadium crowd; shaved Asian women herded through the showers. . . Oh God, I'm . . . burning shoes; a chimp convulsed by shocks . . . the feelings, white screens, oh my God, my . . . Fate . . . oh . . . oh my *love* my . . . oouhhh. . . (196)

Susan's words fade into gasps; it is clear that Susan has achieved an emotional and physical climax while watching the disturbing images projected on Fate's screens, spurred on by his belief that Fate returns his love, and suggesting too that Susan's human need for love has been so distorted that it responds to images of others' torture and degradation rather than to their love or concern. Bookending this passage are lines from William Butler Yeats's poem "The Second Coming," spoken by V; before Susan's episode come the words "the center cannot hold"; after it, we read "mere anarchy is loosed upon the world" (196). The suggestion here is that Susan and his perverse love, upon which he has centered his life and the stability of his government, have fallen apart. Susan seems insane, or at least unstable; the Fate Computer, we learn pages later, was hacked long ago by V, and it was V who first fed Susan the idea that his computer loved him.

From here, Susan's unraveling, rooted in the distorted expressions of his love, accelerates. Susan realizes that his cold, mechanical lover has betrayed him and is instead in the control of his enemy: one of Susan's underlings rushes in to the control room, where Susan sits transfixed before the Fate Computer, to let him know that V "has had access to Fate since the beginning" (209). V's symbol, a V within a circle, appears on one of the computer screens in one of the following panels, as Susan buries his face in his hands (209). Deprived of the love he has chosen in lieu of showing neighborly love to his people, Susan attempts to cultivate affection for—and from—those people, but it is too late. As he is driven past crowds of people waving Norsefire flags, Susan, mourning his loss, thinks about loving them: "We loved, my god and I, but then . . . then she betrayed me. Now there's nothing. Now I am alone . . . except for them, waving beyond the

glass. I'll try to love them more. They're all I have. Should I wave back? It mustn't look rehearsed, or insincere, but be instead a gesture from the heart . . . as spontaneous as their own" (232). In the last panel containing the last line of this text, "as spontaneous as their own," Susan lifts his hand to wave. Perhaps he deserves some credit for making the attempt, but his insincerity is clear: he has to perform the love he wants to convey with the gesture. Further, his attempt to show love to his subjects, even if it were sincere, does not show them actual love at all; it provides little answer to their questions or balm for their suffering. Susan's insincere attempt to love his subjects, to try to undo the ways he has loved distortedly, is answered by a woman named Rosemary Almond, the wife of one of Susan's police; he was killed earlier in the graphic novel, and his death left Rosemary destitute and relegated to performing at a gentlemen's club to scrape by. In an attempt to reach out, too late, to his subjects, Susan opens his car door for Rosemary; she pulls out a gun and shoots him in the face (234-5).

The distorted nature of Susan's love, and his demise because of it, are expected; he is, after all, Leader of the oppressive Norsefire regime, and if *V for Vendetta* has a main villain, it is he. However, the story's hero, the mysterious masked man V, loves in ways disturbingly parallel to Susan's. Susan's distorted love for the Fate Computer signifies his inability to love his neighbor rightly, and signals the sickness and eventual downfall of his regime. V's distorted love also signifies the twisted ways in which V views his fellow human beings, and although V may be a dystopian hero, the fact that his love is displaced, invested in ideas and vengeance rather than in his neighbor, indicates that V's victory should be read pessimistically.

The purity and rightness of V's motives are suspect from the beginning of the graphic novel. When we first meet V, he is doing good—he saves sixteen-year-old Evey Hammond from being raped by Fingerman, the Norsefire police—but he is also brutal, killing the offending men with no weapon but his hands (11-13). He keeps Evey safe in his underground home, the "shadow gallery," while taking frequent trips outside to methodically kill the people responsible for torturing him at the Larkhill camp; he drives one man mad, and kills the other, a bishop, with a poisoned wafer (61). He bombs government buildings and is indiscriminate about taking and killing hostages. He claims to love Evey, but abandons her, and later puts her through torture similar to that which he endured, claiming after that it was "because I love you. Because I want to set you free" (167). In some ways, perhaps V is the brutal hero this dystopian world, an England alone amid the global destruction after nuclear war, needs and deserves. However, V's questionable tactics and motives, combined with the mask he wears to keep the world from seeing his face or learning who he is, hamper readers' ability to sympathize with him or trust the love he might extend others from the beginning of the graphic novel.

Unsurprising, then, is the fact that like Adam Susan, V declares that his first love is not for his neighbor but for something abstract and cold. For Susan, it was the cold, hard lines of the Fate Computer, symbolizing his control; for V, it is the cold, hard, sightless statue of Justice atop the Old Bailey. V has a slightly mad conversation with the statue, speaking both his and her parts, before he

leaves a heart-shaped bomb at her feet and abandons her for his new mistress, another abstract idea: Anarchy. “I’ve long admired you . . . albeit only from a distance. I used to stare at you from the streets below when I was a child,” he tells the statue. “Please don’t think it was merely physical. I know you’re not that sort of girl. No, I loved you as a person, as an ideal. That was a long time ago. There’s somebody else now. [...] It was your infidelity that drove me to her arms!” (40). V tells her of his new mistress: “Her name is Anarchy, and she has taught me more as a mistress than you ever did! She has taught me that justice is meaningless without freedom. She is honest. She makes no promises and breaks none. Unlike you, Jezebel” (41). After bowing to and destroying the statue, he walks away; looking back at the flames behind him, he speaks again of Anarchy as if of a lover: “The flames of freedom. How lovely. How just. Ahh, my precious Anarchy . . . ‘o beauty, ’till now I never knew thee” (41). V’s last words here are from Shakespeare’s *Henry VIII*, words Henry speaks as he dances with Anne Boleyn. This bit of intertextuality is particularly noteworthy because it puts V in the place of the adulterer and betrayer, not that of the “beauty” in question. V’s use of this particular quote again makes his motives suspect. His displacing the love meant for his fellow human beings onto abstract ideals like Justice or Anarchy adds to readers’ suspicions and makes his love as distorted and twisted as Adam Susan’s for Fate.

V repeats his tale of his love for Justice and her infidelity later in the book when he takes Evey to what he calls his “secret love nest” to meet his mistress (200). This mistress is not Anarchy, as it turns out, but V also introduces this other lover with poetry, again describing his allegiance to and use of abstract ideas as illicit affairs and lovers’ trysts:

It is a tangled and unhappy tale of hearts betrayed and loyalties misplaced. It was not I that strayed. My love was *Justice*, and, infatuated with her truth and loveliness, I worshipped her . . . until behind my back, she took up with a man who violated and abused her; someone fierce and brutal with burned children on his breath. He changed her. She acquired a taste for leather, chains and whips. The justice that I loved was gone; who had such kindly eyes; who took such small and careful steps . . . transformed, she glared through narrow slits and ground good men beneath her vicious heel. [...] Still, all in love and war is fair, they say, this being *both*, and turnabout’s fair play. [...] You see, my rival, though inclined to roam, possessed at home a wife that he adored. He’ll rue his promiscuity, the rogue who stole *my* only love, when he’s informed how many years it is . . . since I first bedded *his*. (201, emphasis in original)

In this passage, the parallel between V and Susan is all the clearer: the panel that contains the last line of text, “since I first bedded his,” shows an image of V sitting at his own replica of the Fate Computer, which V himself uses to monitor the Norsefire government and everything else the real Fate Computer sees. The

language V uses to describe his relationship to Justice and to his new “mistress,” coupled with his lonely seat before his Fate Computer, closely resembles Susan’s thoughts of his beloved Fate as he sits in his own solitary chair. V’s devotion to Justice, her betrayal, and his new devotion to this “mistress” are just as twisted as Susan’s love for his cold machine.

Further, V’s “bedding” of Susan’s adored “wife,” particularly as V frames it in this passage, is an act of vengeance: he is getting revenge against the man who stole his love by stealing Susan’s. V’s vengefulness, juxtaposed with all this language about love and loss and betrayal, is particularly noteworthy because vengeance is one of the particular deformations of love that Virgil mentions in his discourse in canto XVII of the *Purgatorio*. It is vengeance that distorts love toward one’s neighbor into wrath, one of the seven vices. Virgil states, “[T]here is one [giver of distorted love] who thinks / himself offended / and hungers after vengeance, / and he must then contrive another’s harm” (Hollander and Hollander 377). V’s wrathful vengeance, born of failure to love his neighbor, is a form of love that “cause[s] weeping down below” in the *Inferno* (377); it may even mean V’s love is more distorted than Susan’s, because it takes the form of wrath, a particular deadly vice.

Of course, readers of the graphic novel know that V is prone to ostentatious language, metaphor, hyperbole, and theatricality. When Evey first meets V, she observes, “That’s very important to you, isn’t it? All that theatrical stuff,” to which V replies, “It’s everything, Evey” (31). V often seems more a performer than a person, and some readers might interpret his “conversation” with the statue of Justice, as well as his speech about “bedding” Susan’s adored “wife,” as just more such showmanship. This point is a fair one. However, V’s performances of love, and his rampant use of the word for theatrical effect, are not the only times he uses the word: Occasionally, V seems to describe or declare love for others with absolute sincerity, and it becomes difficult for readers to decide whether to take V at his word or to revel in his poetic language without believing his words. Ultimately, then, his performances of love detract from V’s credibility, and they do so in two ways. These performances, if we take them (as well as his more sincere attempts) as serious expressions of love rather than theatrical acts, still clearly exhibit a twisted form of neighborly love, upon which no new and healthy community can be built. If we do not believe them to be serious, however, they nevertheless severely taint V’s attempts at sincere expressions of love, because we never know what is truth and what is theatre.

One example of V’s sincerity, about three-fourths of the way through the graphic novel, occurs as V narrates the effects of abusive, totalitarian authority on the human ability to love. V gives this speech to Evey as London is exploding into chaos aboveground; his narration is juxtaposed with images of deformed love enacted by various Londoners: Rosemary Almond, the woman who later kills Susan, buys a gun and contemplates suicide; Fingermen enlist the help of thugs to help them keep order in the streets by whatever shady means are necessary; a government official’s wife conspires with her lover to secure authority for herself (197-99). Over all this, V speaks:

Authority, when first detecting chaos at its heels, will entertain the vilest schemes to save its orderly façade . . . but always order without *justice*, without *love* or *liberty*, which cannot long postpone their world's descent to pandemonium. Authority allows two roles: the torturer and the tortured; twists people into joyless mannequins that *fear* and *hate*, while culture plunges into the abyss. Authority deforms the rearing of their children, makes a cockfight of their love. (198-9)

V's speech here seems heartfelt, but also heartless. After all, responsibility for the chaos and suffering erupting in London is something the abstract "Authority" shares with V himself. Further, V's statement that Authority warps human relationships into "the torturer and the tortured" is tragic and true—but it is true of all Londoners, V himself included. He has been the victim of torture, true, at the hands of corrupt Authority and its twisted attempts to love some of its citizens by destroying undesirable others. However, he becomes a torturer himself, tricking Evey into believing she has been imprisoned and tormented by the Norsefire government, claiming that he does so because he loves her (167). Whatever crimes V accuses the Norsefire government of, however he believes (and however accurate his belief) that the government has twisted its citizens, V himself is just as twisted and has committed the same crimes. V is thus incapable of showing the kind of neighborly love necessary to build a strong community amid the chaos he has caused.

To his credit, V seems to realize that he is not meant for this constructive task. He says as much to Evey in his cryptic way, as he leads her around his Shadow Gallery, which he plans to leave her as her inheritance. He tells her that "Anarchy wears two faces":

Both creator and destroyer. Thus destroyers topple empires; make a canvas of clean rubble where creators can then build a better world. Rubble, once achieved, makes further ruins' means irrelevant. Away with our explosives, then! Away with our destroyers! They have no place within our better world. [...] Let's drink their health . . . then meet with them no more. (222)

By the end of the graphic novel, V has named Evey his successor, telling her that while she must "discover whose face lies behind [his] mask," she "must *never* know [V's] face," which Evey interprets to mean that *she* is to be the face behind the mask, the creator to V's destroyer. V does, then, seem to recognize that he, capable of loving his fellow human beings only in the twisted ways available to the tortured and the torturer, wears the face of the destroyer—building a better world is the task of those who will "meet with [him] no more." Evey, however, so V seems to believe, is able to wear the face of the creator; it is she, V believes, who can lead the way to "build a better world." Indeed, the fact that he calls her "sweet Eve" as he dies, rather than using her nickname, Evey, places her in a creator's role: that of Eve, the first woman, the mother of all the living.<sup>7</sup>

V and Susan are both children of the Norsefire empire and—in V’s case, by his own admission—too twisted and incapable of loving in ways that would help build a true community infused with neighborly love. They have died by the time the graphic novel ends; the warped ways in which they express love toward their fellow human beings render them unable to continue in the “better world” V believes will come.

### III

Two other characters, Evey Hammond and Eric Finch, remain at the graphic novel’s end. These characters both seem better able to show neighborly love in ways that are not warped, and V at least believes Evey capable of leading the remaining English through their chaotic purgatory into paradise. However, both Evey and Finch also fail to show neighborly love in ways that could, indeed, make them the creators to V’s destroyer, and their failure encourages readers to view the graphic novel’s ending as pessimistic rather than hopeful.

Evey’s story and Finch’s, like V’s and Susan’s, seem to be set up for contrast, but in reality they are much more similar than they are different. Both Evey and Finch have had lives filled with loss, particularly the loss of loved ones. Evey’s mother died when Evey was ten, shortly after the world was lost in nuclear war, and her father was taken away by the Norsefire government two years later for being a socialist (28). Finch lost his wife and young son in the war, and his lover, a woman named Delia, who was one of the scientists at the Larkhill camp, died at V’s hand (206). Further, both Evey and Finch are simultaneously drawn to and repulsed by V, his methods, and the mystery of his identity and purpose. Evey, at first comforted by V after he rescues her from the police who had attacked her, is later horrified by his using her to help him kill the bishop (64). Still later, she confesses that she wonders whether V is, and wishes that he were, her father, a crime for which V inexplicably leads her blindfolded from the Shadow Gallery and abandons her on a London street (96-100). Finch, visiting crime scene after crime scene involving brutally murdered police, the bishop poisoned with a Host, and the body of his lover Delia, is repulsed and angered by V’s methods but also oddly admiring of their genius, a mixture that he views as deeply dangerous: “You see,” he tells Susan on the last page of the graphic novel’s first book, “you deal with something like this . . . a scheme that’s as ingenious as it is irrational and it’s like walking on quicksand. You get slowly sucked into it” (86). Evey’s confusion is exacerbated by her loss, her desperate wish that V might be her father, returned to love her again; Finch’s loss of Delia pushes him to a breaking point as well, shown most clearly when he punches a colleague (and is subsequently suspended) when the colleague remarks that Finch has “been in a state since that doctor he was kipping with got bumped off” (121). Evey and Finch’s losses, and their troubled relationships to V and his mission, have clear parallels.

The starkest parallel between the two characters, however, and the one that connects them most to V and also, unfortunately, to his inability to truly love

his neighbors, is each character's experience in the Larkhill camp. Both Evey and Finch experience false, but nevertheless disturbingly real, imprisonment at Larkhill. Evey is tricked by V into believing that she has been truly kidnapped, tortured, and will be killed. Finch visits the ruins of the Larkhill camp and endures disturbing, drug-induced hallucinations of death and destruction there after he takes LSD in an attempt to understand V's experiences and his madness. Evey and Finch also both emerge from their experiences having come to some sort of epiphany, literally naked and figuratively reborn, arms lifted to the sky (172 and 216). Between the start of their experiences and their seemingly triumphant ends, both Evey and Finch have direct encounters with other people toward whom they seem to show genuine love, love that is not twisted or deformed. However, these epiphanies do not transform their relationships with others; rather, they are moments of self-focused self-discovery: Evey has been transformed into the next V, promising not only hope but also destruction to her fellow human beings (258), while Finch is moved to kill V and leave London behind (265). Their experiences exercising neighborly love at their lowest points do not, in the end, turn Evey or Finch into those who could build a new community, a paradise after the present chaotic purgatory.

Finch's encounter with other human beings at the Larkhill camp, and his seeming ability to reach past himself by loving others, is clearly rooted in his loneliness. "I'm trapped in a job that disturbs me," he thinks, wandering through the camp, drugged and hallucinating, "but I can't tell anyone. I'm so alone . . . so alone" (212). Finch's confession of loneliness, his recognition that he needs other people to help and understand and love him, produces a painfully real hallucination: a vision of a crowd of people from every category and race the Norsefire government used the camps to eradicate. A black family smiles at Finch; an Asian woman kisses his cheek. Finch is in awe, desperately sorry, and in love:

Look, they're all smiling, they're all happy. God, it's been so long. . . I'd forgotten how rich the color of your skin was, a thousand special blends of coffee. . . The girls I saw hugging each other on the demonstrations, and the men, so gentle, so softly spoken. . . Oh Jesus, I've missed you. I've missed your voices and your walk, your food, your clothes, your dyed pink hair. [...] Say you saw beyond my uniform. Please say you knew I cared. [...] We treated you so badly, all the hateful things we printed, did, and said . . . but please, please don't despise us. We were stupid. We were kids. We didn't know. (212-13)

As the hallucinations fade, walking away from Finch and seeming to melt into a brick wall, Finch reaches out his hands and pleads with them, "Come back. Oh please come back. I love you," before falling to his knees, weeping (213). Finch clearly recognizes his fault and the pain of his deep loneliness, and even under the influence of LSD, he sees showing love and striving to build community with his fellow human beings as a way toward healing. However, this experience seems to

have little effect on his relationships once he leaves the camp, naked and joyous and believing that the reason for his imprisonment was that he kept constraining himself, not that he needed to love others better (215). Finch's realization leads him to become a destructive force and, in the end, leaves him once again profoundly alone: Finch kills V and walks out of London. The last panel of the graphic novel, as I mentioned above, is the image of Finch walking north along a dark and empty highway (265).

Evey's experience in prison has many similarities with Finch's and nearly exactly mirrors V's. Unlike Finch and unlike V, Evey does not go to the actual site of the Larkhill camp, but she believes that she has been captured, imprisoned, and tortured by the Norsefire government. Like Finch, who arrives at the camp desperately lonely, Evey, too, is imprisoned after losing everyone. Her parents are dead, V has abandoned her, and her lover, a man who took her in after V left her alone and who is kind to her, has just been killed by the thugs he worked with. In prison, Evey finds a scrap of toilet paper with the story of the prison's previous tenant, Valerie, written on it, planted there by V. In her cell with this letter, Evey lives through a cycle of suffering and of love: "I know that [Valerie] loves me. I read her letter, I hide it, I sleep, I wake, they question me, I cry, it gets dark, it gets light, I read her letter again . . . over and over" (155). Valerie, Evey discovers, was a lesbian woman captured by the Norsefire government, interned in the Larkhill camp, tortured and experimented on, and eventually killed. Evey seems to glean two things from Valerie's story; the first is the heartfelt sentiment Valerie ends the letter with, telling her reader: "I don't know who you are, or whether you're a man or woman. I may never see you. I will never hug you or cry with you or get drunk with you. But I love you. I hope that you escape this place" (160). Valerie's love for Evey affects her profoundly, but it is not Valerie's closing message of love that transforms Evey. What does transform her are Valerie's words midway through the letter, the second thing Evey gleans from it, words Evey repeats in her mind before her final "interrogation." When Valerie describes leaving her family to live with her lover, an act that broke her mother's heart, Valerie states that she "stopped pretending" because "[i]t was my integrity that was important. Is that so selfish? It sells for so little, but it's all we have left in this place. It is the very last inch of us . . . but within that inch we are free" (156). Understandably but unfortunately, it is to this last inch, not Valerie's love, that Evey clings, and which leads her to choose the former when given a choice "between the death of [her] principles and the death of [her] body" (171). Evey's choice of personal integrity, while not negative in and of itself, and while it does free her from the prison that all those living under the Norsefire government endured, does not mean that she has also chosen to share Valerie's profound love for a person she has never met and likely will never know. Evey's actions after her liberation, actions that culminate in her assuming V's mask and mission, are infused with a fierce drive to preserve her integrity and avenge its loss among the English people, not by a desire to build community through neighborly love. Like Finch's, Evey's transformation is triumphant but turns her into another V; her last appearance in the graphic novel is as this new V, greeting a new protege in the Shadow Gallery, ready to continue the cycle V began with her.

Finch and Evey are both poised in the novel in positions to effect positive, loving change in their communities. Finch is one of the few men in government, or perhaps the only one, who regrets Norsefire's atrocities and wants to save his people, while V hails Evey—Eve—as the creative force to his destructive one, a “mother of all the living” who can lead England out of their purgatorial suffering. However, neither character exhibits the ability to show neighborly love without the perversions characters like Susan and V deform. These characters' ability to love their fellow human beings is what an optimistic reading of the graphic novel hinges upon. When readers recognize that Finch and Evey only reincarnate the deformed loves of their predecessors, Finch loving his people too late and Evey loving them too much as V does, they realize that only a pessimistic reading is left.

#### IV. Conclusion

Both David Lloyd and Alan Moore wrote brief introductions for *V for Vendetta*, Lloyd in 1990 and Moore in 1988. Both introductions mention other people and involve some sense of community; for Lloyd, it is the community of people crowding a London pub in the evening after work, while for Moore, it is his immediate family and the wider community of England. More significantly, however, both of *V for Vendetta's* authors mention community in order to deliberately distance themselves from it.

Lloyd writes of sitting down for a drink as the pub's television plays a series of shows involving “cheeky, cheery characters” who populate parts of London, or a prison, or game shows. When the news comes on the television, the barman turns it off in favor of “cheeky, cheery pop music.” “Jocularity reigned” in the pub, Lloyd observes, but he does not participate in it, and in fact deliberately distances himself from the people around him. “There aren't many cheeky, cheery characters in *V for Vendetta*,” he writes to conclude his introduction, “and it's for people who don't switch off the News” (5). Lloyd clearly sees a connection between people's willful ignorance of the political tangles and troubles surrounding them, and the possibility of their losing control of their lives and government. He also states that his book is not for people like those in this pub, and his statement carries the judgment that such people are perhaps not worth trying to reach. Any neighborly connection he might have with them is, it seems, not worth trying to cultivate; their ignorance is not his business, their ears not receptive to his work.

Moore, too, states in his introduction a desire to separate himself from the community around him. He worries about the future of England and ponders a possible solution for himself and his family:

My youngest daughter is seven and the tabloid press are circulating the idea of concentration camps for persons with AIDS. The new riot police wear black visors, as do their horses, and their vans have rotating video cameras mounted on top. The government has expressed a desire to eradicate homosexuality, even as an abstract

concept, and one can only speculate as to which minority will be the next legislated against. I'm thinking of taking my family and getting out of this country soon, sometimes over the next couple of years. It's cold and it's mean-spirited and I don't like it here anymore. (6)

like Lloyd's, Moore's answer to discomfort with a controlling state and its effects on the English community is not to reform, not to educate, not to correct perverted forms of neighborly love, but rather to abandon his neighbors to their fates and to whatever disasters he sees coming, preserving those closest to him but not wishing to extend that help to others.

It seems little wonder, then, that *V for Vendetta* also offers little hope that the neighborly love necessary to rebuild community will manifest through its characters and rebuild England. This bleak interpretation persists despite the fact that if *V for Vendetta*, a dystopia graphic novel full of death, destruction, and desperate human struggle, has any moral center, it is the inescapable need human beings have to receive love and to give it. And it is no accident that the graphic novel explicitly mentions Dante's *Divine Comedy*, another text whose center is love, and which also tells the story of human beings desperate for hope, reconciliation, and an eventual end of suffering. However, viewed through the lens of the *Divine Comedy*, it is clear that the characters of *V for Vendetta* love in twisted ways, ways that render them unable to show true neighborly love, and that trap them in the same cycles of violence and suffering rather than freeing them to pursue a relative paradise of free and loving human community. Read this way, *V for Vendetta* is not a book about freedom and integrity fought for and hard won, but rather, a book about the futility of that freedom and integrity when love for one's fellow human beings is twisted beyond repair.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This setting, while serious, is also darkly humorous, as nuclear war is unlikely to leave any part of the world intact. Alan Moore notes in his introduction to the book that "back in 1981 the term 'nuclear winter' had not yet passed into common currency, and although my guess about climatic upheaval came pretty close to the eventual truth of the situation, the fact remains that the story to hand suggests that a nuclear war, even a limited one, might be survivable. To the best of my current knowledge, this is not the case" (6).

<sup>2</sup> For example, consider Jordana Greenblatt's "I for Integrity: (Inter)Subjectives and Sidekicks in Alan Moore's *V for Vendetta* and Frank Miller's *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, Shari Sabeti's "'A Different Kind of Reading': The Emergent Literacy Practices of a School-Based Graphic Novel Club," and Ben Little's "Constructing the Reader's Perspective in *V for Vendetta*."

<sup>3</sup> For example, see Peter Y. Paik's book *From Utopia to Apocalypse: Science Fiction and the Politics of Catastrophe* or Markus Oppolzer's "Gothic Liminality in *V for Vendetta*."

<sup>4</sup> Consider James Reynolds' "'Kill Me Sentiment': *V for Vendetta* and Comic-to-Film Adaptation" or Tony Williams' "Assessing *V for Vendetta*."

<sup>5</sup> Michael D. Friedman, in "Shakespeare and the Catholic Revenger: *V for Vendetta*, and Jessica McCall, in "*V for Vendetta*: A Graphic Retelling of Macbeth," both notice V's penchant for borrowing Shakespeare's words.

<sup>6</sup> They are also the subject of Oliver Kohns's essay "Guy Fawkes in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: A Contribution to the Political Iconography of Revolt."

<sup>7</sup> V's calling Evey "Eve" would, of course, be more significant if Susan's first name were not "Adam." As with V and Susan, a pair of characters that seem set up to be foils but who actually have so much in common that their similarities become eerier rather than their differences becoming starker, this parallel between Adam Susan and Eve Hammond suggests that she may be—or become—too similar a leader to make any constructive, creative difference.

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## **Hope in the Immigrant Novel: The Eschatology of *The Book of Unknown Americans***

**Kelly Leavitt**

During President Obama's immigration reform speech in November 2014, he cited Scripture to remind us "that we shall not oppress a stranger, for we know the heart of a stranger. We were strangers once, too." Obama was referencing Exodus 23:9 (ESV), when God instructs Moses to communicate various laws to the Israelites, shortly after the Ten Commandments: "You shall not oppress a sojourner. You know the heart of a sojourner, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt." With this biblical reference, Obama suggests that immigration, and the immigrant's condition, is not only a political or legal issue but also a spiritual—and distinctly Christian—one. An American author born of immigrant parents, Cristina Henríquez, published *The Book of Unknown Americans* in 2014, a novel depicting the Latin American immigrant experience in the United States. While *The Book of Unknown Americans* centers upon two Latin American immigrant families—the Riveras and Toros—and their integration into American life, the novel strives to be a composite portrait of Latin American immigrants by integrating a variety of individual immigrant stories amid the Rivera and Toro central narrative. While Alma Rivera and Mayor Toro narrate the majority of the novel, switching perspectives throughout, other Latin American immigrants, living in the same apartment building, interrupt the primary narrative by sharing their own individual immigration stories. Through this heteroglossia, Henríquez constructs a dialogue of hope, a defining characteristic of the immigrant experience, and of the immigrant novel in particular (Boelhower 6).

While this novel is secular, the common thread of hope that runs throughout the multiple voices of the novel is a predominant theme that provokes engagement with larger fundamental fields of study such as philosophy and theology. As Emily Greisinger states in "The Shape of Things to Come: Toward an Eschatology of Literature," "Hope implies transcendence" (224). Thus, this essay explores this engagement by drawing upon Christian eschatology, specifically Jürgen Moltmann's *Theology of Hope*. While I do not intend to force a Christian reading upon the novel, I argue that the text—through its dialogue of hope—opens itself to theological engagement. In addition to the permeating idea of hope, the novel lends itself to a theological discussion with its frequent references to spirituality. For instance, the protagonist of the novel is Alma Rivera. "Alma" translates from Spanish to English as "spirit." Also, there are many moments when characters directly address God. When Mayor tries to make sense of Arturo's murder, he says, "And then again, maybe it had nothing to do with any of us. Maybe God had a plan and He knew from the second the Riveras set foot here that He was putting them on

a path toward this. Or maybe it really was completely random, just something that happened” (261-262). Through such universal questions and reflections on the meaning and purpose of life, Henríquez opens the novel up to discussions related to faith. At the end of the novel, in Arturo’s postmortem chapter, he says,

I think about God sometimes, whether He’s watching us. Was this what He wanted? Was it all for some greater reason that I don’t understand? Were we supposed to come here, to the United States? Is there something better waiting for us here that God in His infinite vision can see? Is there something ahead of us that will help all of this make sense finally? I don’t know. I don’t know the answers. (285)

Again, Henríquez poses transcendental questions, opening space for spiritual or religious interpretation.

While various literary fields such as post-colonialism, migrant, and minority literature have discussed the immigrant narrative, Christian literary scholarship on the immigrant narrative is sparse. This essay hopes to fill that gap by exploring the theme of hope in *The Book of Unknown Americans* through an eschatological lens. According to Greisinger, “Hope is the belief, however tenuous, that the human thirst for transcendence, for ultimate purpose and meaning, will one day be fulfilled” (224). For the Christian believer, hope is found in the eschaton, the coming of Jesus Christ and the fulfillment of God’s Kingdom on earth. According to Moltmann,

Christianity is eschatology, is hope, forward looking and forward moving, and therefore also revolutionizing and transforming the present. The eschatological is not one element of Christianity, but it is the medium of Christian faith as such, the key in which everything in it is set, the glow that suffuses everything here in the dawn of an expected new day. (16)

Here Moltmann mentions two key qualities of his theology of hope that I further explore. First, eschatology is “forward looking” (16). Second, it does not “remove happiness from the present” by focusing solely on Christ’s return in a way that disregards the present: “Does this hope cheat man of the happiness of the present? How could it do so! For it is itself the happiness of the present” (Moltmann 32). Orienting oneself to God’s future promises begins the process of transformation in the present. It is the forward gaze, fixed on the eschaton, that brings present renewal, glimpses of God’s coming Kingdom. Moltmann further clarifies this tension as a “contradiction between the world of promise and the experiential reality of suffering and death” (19). With the hope Christ’s resurrection brings, Christians are also offered hope in the midst of suffering. This analysis examines the theme of hope within *The Book of Unknown Americans* in light of these two qualities of Christian eschatology—its future orientation and its contradictory nature. I argue that Christian eschatology, as defined by Moltmann, is a helpful

way of exploring the theme of hope within the immigrant novel and specifically within Cristina Henríquez's *The Book of Unknown Americans*.

## I. The Immigrant's Gaze

In his book *The God of Hope and the End of the World*, John Polkinghorne says, "God is the God of hope because God is the God of past, present, and future" (101). While God is sovereign over all time and redeems the past as well as fulfills the promises of the future (Polkinghorne 96), Moltmann highlights the future orientation of Christian eschatology in his *Theology of Hope*. He says,

The God of Hope (Rom. 15:13), a God with "future as his essential nature" (as E. Bloch puts it), as made known in Exodus and in Israelite prophecy, the God whom we therefore cannot really have in us or over us but always only before us, who encounters us in his promises for the future, and whom we therefore cannot "have" either, but can only await in active hope. (16)

While future orientation is an act that causes renewal of the present, which will be discussed later in more depth, this future orientation expectedly creates a sense of longing for the future fulfillment of those promises. According to Moltmann, "Christian faith lives from the raising of the crucified Christ, and strains after the promises of the universal future of Christ. Eschatology is the passionate suffering and passionate longing kindled by the Messiah" (16).

Similarly, the immigrant novel defines itself by its forward gaze and the longing that this gaze creates. According to William Boelhower, the immigrant's future orientation can be described as "EXPECTATION (project, dream, possible world)" (5). The immigrant waits in expectation and longing for a "better life" in the "New World." For instance, in *The Book of Unknown Americans*, each immigrant expresses a hope, or expectation, of life in the United States. For Arturo and Alma Rivera, their hope or expectation was that Maribel would receive better education that will help her to heal from her brain injury. For Gustavo Milhojas, his hope was "to earn more money for my children" (89). For Micho Alvarez, he wanted to "make a difference" (238). For Adolfo "Fito" Angelino, he wanted to be a famous boxer like Juan Carlos Gimenez of Paraguay (144). While the characters' expectations of life in the United States vary, their expectations cause the characters to look forward to life in the United States in a similar way that a Christian looks forward to God's eternal promises. From this future orientation comes longing. As Arturo Rivera says, "Maybe it's the instinct of every immigrant, born of necessity or of longing: Somewhere else will be better than here. And the condition: if only I can get to that place" (286). Also, upon arriving in the United States, Alma says, "We had been planning our life here for so long. Filling out papers, hoping, praying, waiting. We had all of our dreams pinned on this place, but the pin was thin and delicate and it was too soon to tell whether it was stronger than it looked or

whether, in the end, it wasn't going to hold much of anything at all" (32). While the immigrant's gaze is forward on life in the New World, Alma hints at the inevitable disillusionment that comes with most immigrant narratives. After shortly arriving at their cramped, cheap apartment in Delaware, Alma says, "I felt acutely the meagerness of it, the insufficiency. We wanted more. We wanted what we had come here for" (27). While the immigrant novel in general, and *The Book of Unknown Americans* more specifically, illustrates a forward gaze that creates a sense of longing similar to eschatology's future orientation and its inherent longing, it also uniquely documents the disillusionment that comes when the New World does not meet the anticipated expectations. This differs from Moltmann's eschatology, of course, because within the Christian faith is the belief that God's promises as outlined in the Bible are true and will come to fruition. Despite this difference, the immigrant's disillusionment can be seen as comparable to a believer's discontent within the world. Just as the immigrant becomes saddened by the initial failure of the New World to meet the hoped-for expectations, according to Moltmann, "those who hope in Christ can no longer put up with reality as it is, but begin to suffer under it, to contradict it" (21). Due to the future orientation of the immigrant and the Christian, they both long for something better than the present reality. However, it is from this place of tension and contradiction that "hope must prove its power" (Moltmann 19).

## II. The Immigrant's Contradictory Hope

To further describe the discrepancy involved in the resurrection hope, Moltmann calls upon John Calvin:

To us is given the promise of eternal life—but to us, the dead. A blessed resurrection is proclaimed to us—meantime we are surrounded by decay. We are called righteous—and yet sin lives in us. We hear of ineffable blessedness—but meantime we are here oppressed by infinite misery. We are promised abundance of all good things—yet we are rich only in hunger and thirst. What would become of us if we did not take our stand on hope, and if our heart did not hasten beyond this world through the midst of the darkness upon the path illumined by the word and Spirit of God! (qtd. in Moltmann 18-19)

Eschatological hope—hearing the word of promise—proves its power by freeing the listener "to renew life here and to change the face of the world" (Moltmann 26). In the midst of present trials, looking forward allows the process of renewal to begin here and now.

The hope contained in the immigrant experiences within *The Book of Unknown Americans* is similarly contradictory. One example occurs toward the beginning of the novel when the Toro family plans to visit Panama, their home country. Celia, Mayor's mother, is especially longing to visit, and they plan to be

there during her birthday. However, after the terrorist attacks in New York on September 11, the family is afraid to travel. Anticipating Celia's disappointment, Rafael, Mayor's father, plans an impromptu alternative birthday celebration. "You want Panama?" he asks. "A beach is the closest thing you're going to get" (85). He gathers the family, Celia, Enrique, and Mayor, and they take a few buses to Cape Henlopen in southern Delaware. It is snowing when they arrive and "everything was so colorless and barren that it looked like the moon," says Mayor (85-86). Mayor further describes the moment:

The waves roared in toward us and then silently pulled back again, slipping over the shore. Even with the falling snow the air had the sting of salt water, and we crunched broken seashells under our shoes. But one beach isn't every beach. And one home isn't every home. And I think we all sensed, standing there, just how far we were from where we had come, in ways both good and bad. "It's beautiful," Celia said. She sighed and shook her head. "This country." (86)

The contrasts of this scene are immediately striking: being at the beach during winter while it is snowing and walking over seashells with shoes, instead of bare feet. This inverted beach scene symbolically illustrates their sense of displacement, the upside-down nature of their lives as immigrants in Delaware. While a beach acts as a symbol of their home in Panama, Mayor recognizes that the beach is only a semblance of their home in Panama, not the real thing. Whereas this truth could evoke sadness, feelings of loss, or despair, Celia sees beauty. Instead of focusing on their home in Panama, and essentially their past, Celia chooses to look forward to their life in the United States. Her ability to see beauty in a moment that so clearly highlights the difficulties of their current situation exemplifies the contradictory nature of eschatological hope and how looking forward can bring renewal and hope to the present.

Hope also manifests itself during the Riveras' moments of laughter amid challenging circumstances. When the Riveras are living paycheck to paycheck, Alma goes to the Dollar Tree to save money. She sees a Mexican woman in the store picking up containers off a shelf, and Alma asks her what the containers are. The woman tells her it is oatmeal, the American version of *avena*. The woman mentions, "one container will feed you for a week," so Alma clears the shelf of containers and returns home to prepare the oatmeal for Arturo and Maribel. By dinnertime, the oatmeal has hardened and "was like rubber" (95). Arturo and Maribel start laughing at the mush of tough rubber-like oatmeal in front of them.

"Oatmeal!" he said, and I laughed, too. . . .

And then, the sound of angels: Maribel laughed, too. Light and crystalline. Thin glass bubbles of laughter.

Arturo looked at me in astonishment. She was laughing, Laughing! . . . It was the first time in over a year that we had heard it. Just like her old laugh. Just like our old Maribel" (96).

This scene is contradictory in its picture of both the bitter reality of the Riveras' financial circumstances and their laughter. Hope proves its power at this moment in the novel by arising in spite of the harsh reality that bland, hardened oatmeal is all they can afford. The scene mimics the contradictory nature of eschatological hope.

Another example of hope manifesting itself in the Riveras' laughter comes in a similar scene surrounding food. It is Arturo and Alma's nineteenth wedding anniversary, and they want to celebrate, but Arturo has recently lost his job at the mushroom farm. Unable to afford dining out, they go to a local pizza restaurant, but they order only water, "since sodas were beyond our means by then" (185). While they watch other families devour cheesy pizza, the three of them, Arturo, Alma, and Maribel, sit with their waters and tell jokes. Arturo asks Alma to tell a joke, and she tells the only one she knows. "'Why didn't Jesus use shampoo?'" she asked. "'I don't know. Why?'" asked Arturo. "'Because of the holes in his hands'" (188). Surprised at Alma's lack of propriety, making the joke even funnier, Arturo begins to laugh and Maribel chimes in, too. Then, they all toast to each other: "To the funniest woman I know." "To the best man I know. And the best daughter." Alma looks at them—"the way Arturo's mustache turned up when he smiled, the way Maribel's face glowed. 'The best,' I repeated" (188). Again, the bitter reality of their present circumstances is clear at the restaurant, yet their joking and laughter unite them, and there's a sense of gratitude despite difficult circumstances.

In addition to glimpses of hope surrounding scenes with food and laughter, the seven other immigrant narratives woven throughout the novel also illustrate the contradictory nature of eschatological hope. While the immigrant narratives tell stories of the tensions between the Old and New Worlds as well as the disillusionment that comes as the immigrants integrate into society, these narratives go beyond disillusionment to find hope. For instance, one character in the novel, Nelia Zafón, comes to the United States when she was 17 to be a movie star, despite her mother's protests. She tries for years to get acting roles but is unsuccessful. Eventually, she starts living in a cellar under a corner grocery store. When she would return home from dancing, auditions and waitressing, she "would think, Is this what it is? This country? My life? Is this *all*? But even when I thought that, I was always aware of some other part of me saying, there is more. And you will find it. Oh, I didn't find it though" (177). While Zafón's initial dream of becoming a movie star in New York doesn't actualize, causing some disillusionment and disappointment, she decides to start her own theater company (177-178). She calls it The Parish Theater (because of the pews that were donated for seating), and it has its first performance in 1971. Over the next twenty years, it continues to run weekly productions. Reflecting upon her immigration to the United States and owning her own theater company, she declares, "And now I think, Okay, *this* is what it is. My life. This country...in a certain way, I did make it, after all" (179). The other singular immigrant narratives are similar to Zafón's, the initial hope of a new life in the United States followed by a series of challenges before finding his/her own path that always differs from his/her initial dream, but, like Zafón, they do "make it, after all" (179).

One such narrative captures the heart of the contradictory nature of hope in the novel. It is told by José Mercado from Puerto Rico. Upon coming to the United States, Mercado joins the navy and fights during the Vietnam War, on which he reflects in his chapter:

I had witnessed the sort of atrocities during the war that threaten to steal a man's soul. I saw that humans are not better than any animal or brute, and in many cases might be infinitely worse. But often in the span of the same day, I would be restored, too, by the courage of men. And I had come to understand my father's perspective about the gratification of feeling useful, of being in the world under the most demanding circumstances, and learning that I could not only survive but thrive, and that my body, the physical presence of me, could have import. (215)

His reflections of the war capture the tension inherent within eschatological hope. Through Mercado, Henríquez gives voice to the atrocities, the pain and suffering of the world, perhaps most clearly seen during war. However, again, Henríquez does not stop and leave the reader in despair over these atrocities. While sin abounds in the world, goodness and hope also abound, and Henríquez clearly presents this picture of the world in Mercado's story. From Moltmann's eschatological perspective, this contradictory picture of sin and promise is evidence of the present renewal and God's coming Kingdom. At the end of his chapter, Mercado quotes a poem by American poet Marvin Bell who, Mercado mentions, emerged during the Vietnam War. The poem, "Poem After Carlos Drummond de Andrade,"<sup>1</sup> is named after a Brazilian poet. Mercado highlights two sections of the poem in his chapter:

And it's life, just life, that makes you breathe deeply, in the air that is filled with wood smoke and the dust of the factory, because you hurried, and now your lungs heave and fall with the nervous excitement of a leaf in spring breezes, though it is winter and you are swallowing the dirt of the town. (216)

Mercado says that the following section "means everything to me":

Life got its tentacles around you, its hooks into your heart, and suddenly you come awake as if for the first time, and you are standing in a part of the town where the air is sweet—your face flushed, your chest thumping, your stomach a planet, your heart a planet, your every organ a separate planet, all of it a piece though the pieces turn separately, O silent indications of the inevitable, as among the natural restraints of winter and good sense, life blows you apart in her arms. (217)

This poem, and particularly the pieces selected here by Mercado, captures both the terror and beauty that Mercado similarly mentioned about war. Even though life

“makes you breathe deeply,” the air you are deeply breathing is filled with “wood smoke and dust of the factory.” Life and pain or struggles are intertwined here. The same thing that enables one to breathe in life deeply can also cause one to be “swallow[ed].” The second section selected from the poem highlights the same contradictory theme even more strikingly. The image of life throughout the beginning of this section suggests a positive passion that life can bring: “its tentacles around you, its hooks into your heart, and suddenly you come awake for the first time and you are standing in a part of the town where the air is sweet—your face flushed, your chest thumping, your stomach a planet, your heart a planet, your every organ a separate planet.” However, this stanza’s ending (and the actual poem’s ending) is abrupt, almost violent, and ambiguous: “life blows you apart in her arms.” These contrasts again point to life being both beautiful and brutal; it is the pain in our lives that is a sign of us living, of our humanity. This poem that Henríquez inserts in Mercado’s chapter is central to the novel’s concept of hope. The Christian exists in a state of contradiction—living amid sin and darkness yet straining ahead toward the promises. Even though Bell’s poem does not hide from the possible violence and horror of life, the poem also contradictorily mentions the passionate beauty that comes with life. According to Bell, even the pain of life contains hope, because it is a sign of being alive, which relates to Moltmann’s eschatology in that suffering and promise go hand in hand in the mortal life as we await the fulfillment of promise in the eternal life.

As the individual immigrant narratives contain glimpses of hope amid the pain and suffering of their stories, Maribel Rivera also exemplifies the contradictory nature of eschatological hope. While there is not a direct translation of “Maribel,” the Spanish word “mariben” translates as “death.” This in itself seems to be a contradiction—why would Maribel, a beautiful, kind teenage girl who suffers a traumatic brain injury, be so closely linked to the idea of death? We see “the present and future, experience and hope in contradiction with one another” in the character of Maribel—young and beautiful yet also scarred by trauma (Moltmann 18). This contradiction unravels throughout the novel in a way that proves hopeful. First, Maribel is a symbol of hope for the Riveras because Arturo and Alma tried to conceive for three years without success, until Alma becomes pregnant.

And then, after we had said enough with the doctors and with the discussion, just as we started to believe that having a child simply wasn’t going to be part of our lives, that being parents was a distinction we weren’t meant to have, when we had hardened ourselves to the pain of seeing everyone around us carrying and feeding their babies, those downy heads and wet lips, I missed my period. We had a hiccup of hope. Could it be? We thought. Nine months later we were holding her in our arms. . . . Our Maribel. “You won’t have another one,” the doctor told us. But that didn’t matter. We had her. (97)

With Maribel as the emblem of hope for Arturo and Alma, Maribel’s accident complicates Alma and Arturo’s concept of hope. Maribel was 14 when the accident

happened. Arturo was working on a construction project, repairing a roof, and Maribel had begged Alma to visit Arturo at the job site. As he was patching holes in the roof, Arturo's co-worker, Luis, told him to get more clay. Upon overhearing this, Maribel insisted that she get the clay and bring it up to them on the roof. After delivering the clay to her father, she began to make her way down the ladder. "One rung. Two. Then, a noise. Something clattered off to the side. . . . I saw Maribel's body tilt backwards. She let out a sharp scream. She reached her hand for the ladder, but her fingertips only grazed the rung. . . . Maribel dropped two stories to the ground below. Her body smacked against the mud, sending it splattering into the air" (100). From the fall, Maribel experienced a brain injury, and the doctors said that more than likely there would be permanent damage, particularly in both her short and long-term memory as well as emotional skills. Alma and Arturo come to the United States because the doctors suggest Maribel would receive better educational care in the U.S. and have more opportunities to heal and develop. So, the novel begins in this place of fractured hope; Alma and Arturo's symbol of hope darkened and deconstructed by the accident, yet still the faint hope of better care in the United States exists. The novel actually begins in the evening, on the brink of night—"It was just after sunset and darkness bled in from the outer reaches of the sky"—which seems to evoke the opposite of hope, which dawn and morning typically symbolize (3). While the beginning does represent the death and decay of which Maribel's name hints, as the narrative moves forward, characters experience renewal amid suffering and trying circumstances, further illuminating the novel's contradictory picture of hope.

The primary way hope develops through Maribel is through her relationship with Mayor Toro. After the Riveras move into the apartment building in Delaware, they meet their neighbors, the Toro family. Mayor immediately notices Maribel as "gorgeous" upon first meeting her at the Dollar Tree, and that initial meeting quickly sparks a teenage romance between the two (41). Mayor and Maribel each find a sense of belonging and acceptance in one another that they do not have elsewhere, and, while it helps both of them, it particularly helps Maribel heal and improve from her injury. Maribel says to Mayor, "I feel like you're the only person who . . . sees . . . me" (173). Again, Maribel later says to Mayor, "You're the only one who thinks I can do anything" (230). Alma even begins to notice her growth: "She had been showing so much improvement—the latest report from the school had said that Maribel could easily answer questions and follow prompts, and that her attention span had increased" (219). Although Maribel's trauma defines the beginning of the novel, throughout the course of the narrative, she improves both in school as well as in her ability to connect emotionally with others and to express herself. These breakthrough moments illustrate how the novel opens itself to hope, particularly within the contradiction of the world of death and decay and the world of promise. Hope bubbles up in the midst of the brokenness of the world, which points to the eschatological renewal of the present.

As Maribel's character development is hopeful, Alma's perspective of Maribel further exemplifies an eschatological hope. Until the end of the novel, Alma hangs on to her idea of the "old Maribel," hoping that with the right education or care, Maribel will return to her "old" self, the girl she was before the accident. In

this sense, Alma has been looking backward, instead of forward, longing for the past to return to the present. It is not until the end of the novel that Alma realizes that her backward gaze, her focus on the past, is precisely what inhibits hope, the renewal of the present. After Arturo's death, and as Alma and Maribel are preparing to return to Mexico, Alma says,

And as I looked at her [Maribel] I saw that maybe she had been here all along. Not exactly the girl she used to be before the accident, which was the girl I thought I had been searching for, but my Maribel, brave and impetuous and kind. . . . I believed that I had lost my daughter and that if I did the right things and brought us to the right place, I could recover the girl she used to be. What I didn't understand—what I suddenly realized now—was that if I stopped moving backwards, trying to recapture the past, there might be a future waiting for me, waiting for us, a future that would reveal itself if only I turned around and looked, and that once I did, I could start to move toward it. (282)

As Alma comes to this awareness and begins to let go of the past and to strain her eyes to what is ahead, she sees that Maribel “had been here all along.” The Maribel before the accident will never return, but by looking forward, Alma sees Maribel's differences after the accident as possibilities instead of hindrances. By turning her gaze from the past to the future, Alma renews both her past and her present and gains hope. Although the novel began with night encroaching upon evening, symbolizing Alma and Arturo's fears and doubts especially in relation to Maribel and her accident, the novel ends in the morning as Alma and Maribel are driving through Arkansas. This ending symbolizes Alma's renewed perspective and the hope that awaits them. Maribel's name may have carried with it a sense of death at the beginning of the novel, but, by the end of the novel, she is “reborn” under Alma's perspective and she has grown and healed tremendously, signifying the hope of a new life. As Moltmann says, “Eternal life is not a different life after death. Eternal life means that this mortal life becomes different” (“Hope and Reality” 83). Christian hope holds a similar contradiction—from Christ's death on the cross comes his resurrection and ushers in new life for Christian believers, new life that can begin here and now.

### III. Conclusion

Immigration and the immigrant are not only political, social, or legal issues relegated to a specific country or period of history. The immigrant, and in more general terms, the sojourner, is also an inherently Christian theme seen throughout Scripture. This essay sought to further explore this dynamic, the spiritual condition of the immigrant, through literature by specifically examining the concept of hope in the immigrant novel. *The Book of Unknown Americans* was a clear choice for the analysis, because Henríquez creates a distinct dialogue of hope through the

multiplicity of voices of the novel, each chapter narrated by various Latin American immigrants in an apartment building in Delaware. To explore hope from a Christian perspective, Jürgen Moltmann's *Theology of Hope* is the seminal text outlining how Christianity redefines modern ideas of eschatology. Additionally, Christian literary scholars such as Emily Greisinger of Azusa Pacific University and Tiffany Kriner of Wheaton College have already begun to apply Moltmann's theology of hope to literature. This essay has extended that discussion by adding an eschatological analysis of the immigrant novel. Using two specific qualities of Moltmann's theology of eschatology—its future orientation and its contradictory nature—allowed a way to further understand and discuss the concept of hope in *The Book of Unknown Americans*. Just as a Christian looks forward to the future promises of eternal life and the fulfillment of God's Kingdom on earth, the immigrant looks forward to the illusory promises of the "New World," in the case of *The Book of Unknown Americans*, the United States. However, Moltmann argues that the Christian is caught in a tension between the present reality of suffering and decay and the future promises of eternal life. By looking forward to future promises that engage a present renewal, one can glimpse the promises of eternal life in the midst of mortal death and decay. As Boelhower mentions, disillusionment comes as the immigrant begins to assimilate into the dominant, foreign culture. The characters' lives are fraught with hardship in the U.S., yet Henríquez creates moments of joy or beauty amid the seemingly hopeless circumstances, which give life to hope. Recalling President Obama's words during his immigration-reform speech, remembering that "we were strangers once too," and are still strangers and sojourners in the world, awaiting the fulfillment of God's Kingdom, erases divisions between the immigrant and ourselves, and that in itself is hopeful.

## Note

<sup>1</sup>Poem after Carlos Drummond de Andrade

*"It's life, Carlos"*

**IT'S LIFE** that is hard: walking, sleeping, eating, loving, working and dying are easy.

It's life that suddenly fills both ears with the sound of that symphony that forces your pulse to race and swells your heart near to bursting.

It's life, not listening, that stretches your neck and opens your eyes and brings you into the worst weather of the winter to arrive once more at the house where love seemed to be in the air.

And it's life, just life, that makes you breathe deeply, in the air that is filled with wood smoke and the dust of the factory, because you hurried, and now your lungs heave and fall with the nervous excitement of a leaf in spring breezes,

though it is winter and you are swallowing the dirt of  
the town.

It isn't death when you suffer, it isn't death when you miss each  
other and hurt for it, when you complain that isn't death,  
when you fight with those you love, when you  
misunderstand, when one line in a letter or one remark in  
person ties one of you in knots, when the end seems near,  
when you think you will die, when you wish you were  
already dead—none of that is death.

It's life, after all, that brings you a pain in the foot and a pain in the  
hand, a sore throat, a broken heart, a cracked back, a torn  
gut, a hole in your abdomen, an irritated stomach, a  
swollen gland, a growth, a fever, a cough, a hiccup, a  
sneeze, a bursting blood vessel in the temple.

It's life, not nerve ends, that puts the heartache on a pedestal and  
worships it.

It's life, and you can't escape it. It's life, and you asked for it. It's life,  
and you won't be consumed by passion, you won't be  
destroyed by self-destruction, you won't avoid it by  
abstinence, you won't manage it by moderation, because  
it's life—life everywhere, life at all times—and so you  
won't be consumed by passion: you will be consumed  
by life.

It's life that will consume you in the end, but in the meantime . . .

It's life that will eat you alive, but for now . . .

It's life that calls you to the street where the wood smoke hangs,  
and the bare hint of a whisper of your name, but before  
you go . . .

Too late: Life got its tentacles around you, its hooks into your heart,  
and suddenly you come awake as if for the first time, and  
you are standing in a part of the town where the air is  
sweet—your face flushed, your chest thumping, your  
stomach a planet, your heart a planet, your every organ a  
separate planet, all of it a piece though the pieces turn  
separately, O silent indications of the inevitable, as among  
the natural restraints of winter and good sense, life blows  
you apart in her arms.

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## ***Dracula* as a Christian Adventure Novel: A Pedagogical Essay<sup>1</sup>**

**John J. Han**

### **Introduction**

For the last two years, I have assigned Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) as an elective text in my ENGL 203 World Literary Types course at Missouri Baptist University. In one class, *Dracula* was one of the books for an oral presentation. In another class, students had the option to write about the novel in their book reports. Students are both surprised and intrigued by the assigned book. Anecdotal student surveys suggest that none of my students—most of whom are evangelical Christians—has ever read the novel or knows that the novel includes Christian themes and motifs. They are familiar with some authors, such as Jane Austen and George Orwell, mainly because they had to read them in high school, yet *Dracula* is not likely on their reading lists. Also, in general, college students today have either little time to read or little interest in reading a non-American book from more than a century ago.

My surveys also indicate that some students have read one or two contemporary vampire books, such as the Twilight series, so their familiarity with those texts is advantageous in discussing *Dracula*. Although Stoker's story is different from contemporary vampire stories, which are thinly disguised romances in which humans masquerade as vampires or in which vampires aspire to become humans, students know what to expect from *Dracula* in plot and characterization. Because more than 200 *Dracula* films exist, the most recent one being *Dracula Untold* (2014, directed by Gary Shore), most students have also seen at least one or two *Dracula* movies. Not surprisingly, when I ask my students to describe what the word *Dracula* reminds them of, they typically answer, "vampire," "gore," "blood," "blood drops," "blood-sucker," "dark," "sinister," "Transylvania," "fangs," "red/black clothing," or "capes." All of these words suggest that *Dracula* is commonly viewed as a Gothic horror story, which is how the movie versions portray; virtually all the *Dracula* movies approach Stoker's story as entertainment, which is largely in compliance with the author's intention.

My goal in teaching Stoker's story is to both entertain and inform students: *Dracula* is a spooky, entertaining tale, as well as a multilayered Victorian novel written from a Christian perspective. World Literary Types—a semester-long course—covers more than fifty required global masterpieces, mostly short pieces, anthologized in *World Literature* (comp. John J. Han and Mary Bagley; Pearson Learning Solutions, 2013). In addition, students can choose one of the recommended books and then write a report or give an oral presentation. As one of those elective books, *Dracula* serves as a suitable text for

discussing fundamentals of literary analysis, such as the context, plot, characterization, symbolism, imagery, tone, and allusions. In class, we briefly discuss the author's life and times and then review some existing critical approaches to the text. Thereafter, we discuss some characteristics of medieval chivalric romance to identify elements of Christian adventure fiction in *Dracula*.

### **Laying the Groundwork: The Context of *Dracula***

Because *Dracula* was published more than a century ago, it is important to understand the context of the novel. Resources such as Harry Ludlam's *A Biography of Dracula: The Life Story of Bram Stoker* (1962) and Daniel Farson's *The Man Who Wrote Dracula: A Biography of Bram Stoker* (1975) are old but still useful in understanding the biographical, cultural, and historical backgrounds to the novel. The "Contexts" section (pages 329-60) of the Norton Critical Edition of *Dracula* (ed. Nina Auerbach and David J. Skal, 1997) and the appendices (pages 421-88) in the Broadview Press edition of *Dracula* (ed. Glennis Byron, 1998) are equally helpful resources.

Biographically, Stoker was a sickly child for the first seven years of his life. During those years, his doting mother told him many Irish horror stories—"tales of banshees, demons, ghouls, with horrific accounts of the cholera outbreak of 1832" (Stade xi)—which likely left a deep impression on the young boy's psyche. In *Biography of Dracula*, the first full-scale biography of Stoker, Harry Ludlam cites the novelist's alleged nightmare that led him to conceive his story—an explanation that did not sound convincing to his contemporaries (99). Ludlam lists some additional materials with which Stoker likely envisioned his novel:

There were the many discussions on the supernatural with Hall Caine and [Sir Henry] Irving, the travellers' tales of Arminius Vambery of Budapest,<sup>2</sup> told in the Beefsteak Room; and, above all, the long remembered story of "Carmilla" the female vampire, written by Sheridan Le Fanu in 1871. All came to a head that night when Bram dreamed of a vampire king rising from the tomb to go about his ghastly business. (99-100)

Prior to the composition of the novel, Stoker also conducted extensive research on the Dracula legend, including the stories related to notoriously brutal Vlad the Impaler (Vlad III, Prince of Wallachia, 1431–1476/77).

Students should understand that, culturally, Stoker's novel reflects late Victorian values in matters of women's positions in society. In those days, the rights and privileges of women were limited, and the women who dared to exert their voices were suppressed. In matters of sexuality, women were expected to exemplify modesty. In *Dracula*, the title character obsessively pursues two women, Lucy Westenra and Mina Harker. Of these two women, Lucy, the flirt who oversteps her gender boundaries, becomes a vampire, whereas Mina, a modest and supposedly virtuous woman, successfully repels the forces of evil.

Lucy regains her purity only after her fiancé, Arthur Holmes, stakes her. As Glennis Byron rightly notes, *Dracula* “allows for a both exhilarating and threatening experience of freedom from boundaries [including sexual ones] before firmly reinstating them at the end with the destruction of Dracula” (16).

It is also important to know the historical context of *Dracula*, especially as we approach the novel from the perspective of international politics. During the last decade of the nineteenth century, Western Europeans harbored fears of an invasion from the supposedly sinister, non-Christian East. Read as a postcolonial text, Dracula and his minions represent latent threats from the eastern world. As Jonathan Harker approaches Dracula’s castle in chapter 1, he finds the atmosphere “so strange and uncanny”; in chapter 27, Mina Harker also finds the place “wild and uncanny” (Stoker 22, 321). On one level, the word *uncanny* simply means “eerie” or “weird.” On another level, it implies the strangeness, foreignness, or abnormality of the place—the world of the Other. Not surprisingly, in *Dracula*, the alien forces from the East are annihilated through the heroic efforts of a group of Western Christian men and women.

### **Approaching *Dracula* as a Christian Adventure Novel**

Bram Stoker’s novel is generally classified as a vampire novel, a horror thriller, a Gothic novel, or fantasy fiction. Certainly, *Dracula* is what Gabriel Ronay calls “a horror writer’s stroke of genius” and “the ultimate in sophisticated Victorian horror fiction” (53). Another way to approach *Dracula* is to consider it as a Christian adventure novel written in the tradition of the medieval chivalric romance. Throughout the novel, Stoker portrays the power of Christian faith in defeating evil forces as represented by the vampire Count Dracula.

As many critics and scholars have noted, the author uses Christian symbols (such as crucifixes, rosaries, the Host, and holy water) to situate his story in a spiritual context. In his brief essay “Stoker’s *Dracula* as Christian Fiction,” Mike Duran identifies five features of *Dracula* as a Christian novel:

1. Christianity is portrayed in a positive light throughout *Dracula*.
2. Religious imagery and practice are explicit throughout the story.
3. An absence of profanity and sex.
4. Vampires are not glorified, romanticized, or portrayed as anything but vile, hellish beings.
5. A redemptive resolution.

Considering that eroticism is unmistakably present in the novel, the third feature—an absence of profanity and sex—is questionable, yet the remaining ones are on the mark.

In addition to the obvious Christian elements listed above, *Dracula* encompasses a number of features of the medieval chivalric romance, a type of adventure narrative. An adventure story can be defined as “[a] story of popular

literature that centers on exciting action, heroic derring-do, and happy endings, often to the detriment of solid characterization” (Morner and Rausch 2). Chivalric romances of medieval times are adventures stories characterized by extraordinary figures and events, wanderings, moral codes, and happy endings. In a chivalric romance,

the main character is a *chevalier*, or knight on horseback, who fights monsters, dragons, and evil knights and saves damsels in distress. In the course of these adventures, or quests, the knight is expected to follow the codes of chivalry and courtly love, serving his lord and, especially, his lady bravely and with devoted loyalty. Often he operates in a world in which medieval Christian values are imposed on magical events and supernatural figures, remnants of the pagan sources of the chivalric romance. (Morner and Rausch 34-35)

Video clips of Arthurian movies (such as *Camelot* and *King Arthur: The Young Warlord*, both of which are available on YouTube)<sup>3</sup> can help students identify the conventions of chivalric romances. In *Dracula*, students may typically identify several elements of medieval romance, including

1. Exotic locales and supernatural incidents
2. Good versus evil
3. Temptations for the protagonists
4. Larger-than-life characters
5. Passionate love and idealized woman
6. Quest and adventure
7. Courage and honor.

After identifying some key elements of chivalric romance in *Dracula*, my students and I investigate each of them more in detail through a lecture and in-class discussions. These elements can be initially assigned to small groups and then be open for a whole-class discussion.

### **1. Exotic locales and supernatural incidents**

Chivalric romances are typified by their exotic, strange settings. As a Victorian story, *Dracula* blends exotic and modern locales. Transylvania, which the author never visited, opens the novel, the scene changes to England, and then Transylvania becomes the central scene at the novel’s end. However, the eeriness of the place Jonathan Harker visits early in the novel permeates the whole story. Before his journey, Harker “find[s] that the district [Dracula] named is in the extreme east of [Transylvania] . . . one of the wildest and least known portions of Europe.” Harker is “not able to light on any map or work giving the exact locality of the Castle Dracula” (Stoker 10). When he reaches his destination, he sees “a vast ruined castle, from whose tall black windows came no rays of light, and

whose broken battlements showed a jagged line against the moonlit sky” (Stoker 20). In the final note of the novel, Harker also writes about the visit to Dracula’s now vacated castle which “[stands] as before, reared high above a waste of desolation” (Stoker 326).

As a romance, Stoker’s work is replete with mysterious events. On his way to the castle, Harker’s “ghostly fears” increase as he sees pine woods stretched out “like tongues of flame,” “ghost-like clouds,” and “great frowning rocks” (Stoker 14, 16, 19). He also hears dogs wailing loudly in “the gloom of the night” (Stoker 18). Indeed, Dracula commands nature and wild animals, such as bats, dogs, and wolves. Count Dracula scales down the wall of castle, Jonathan Harker himself learns to scale the castle wall sideways, and vampires are beheaded. All of these incidents add thrills and suspense to the novel.

## 2. Good versus evil

Medieval romances typically portray the struggle between good and evil, clearly distinguishing the “good guys” from the “bad guys.” For example, in medieval texts, King Arthur is portrayed as a virtuous man, whereas Morgan le Fay appears as an evil enchantress. In Sir Thomas Malory’s *Morte Darthur*, the barons and the commons crown Arthur as their king according to “God’s will” (Malory); Geoffrey of Monmouth presents Arthur as a man of “a courage and generosity beyond compare, whereunto his inborn goodness did lend such grace as that he was beloved of well-nigh all the peoples in the land” (Geoffrey). In contrast, Morgan le Fay is portrayed mostly as an adversary of Arthur’s, a woman of “false crafts [and] false lusts” (Malory). In medieval romances, defeating evil is difficult but inevitable: Monsters and dragons are slayed, and evil knights are defeated.

Likewise, Stoker’s novel provides a clear dichotomy between good and evil. The good guys—including Dr. Abraham Van Helsing, Jonathan Harker, Dr. John Seward, and Mr. Quincey Morris—pursue and destroy the bad guys, Dracula and his vampires. The Christian West defeats not only evil invaders from the mysterious East, but also aggressive female sexuality, as typified by three vampire women whose “brilliant white teeth...[shine] like pearls against the ruby of their voluptuous lips” (Stoker 412). Lucy becomes a vampire because of her openness in matters of sex and marriage. Courted by Dr. Seward, Quincy Morris, and Arthur Holmwood at the same time, Lucy wonders, “Why can’t they let a girl marry three men, or as many as want her, and save all this trouble? But this is heresy, and I must not say it” (Stoker 60). It is no wonder that such an unconventional woman is condemned in *Dracula*.

## 3. Temptations for the protagonists

While the good guys in medieval romances typically turn out victorious, they also stumble during their adventures, as in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Gawain makes the continual mistake of having an affair with the Green Knight’s

wife. The Red Crosse Knight in *The Faerie Queene* also falls into temptation on his path toward Christian holiness.

Likewise, the good guys in *Dracula* have a difficult time resisting temptations of female sensuality. Numerous passages in the novel record the irresistible nature of sexual temptation. Early in the novel, Jonathan Harker records his fascination with the three female vampires as follows:

All three had brilliant white teeth that shone like pearls against the ruby of their voluptuous lips. There was something about them that made me uneasy, some longing and at the same time some deadly fear. I felt in my heart a wicked, burning desire that they would kiss me with those red lips. It is not good to note this down, lest some day it should meet Mina's eyes and cause her pain; but it is the truth. (Stoker 42)

As the three young female vampires approach him, Jonathan is completely overwhelmed with their attractive appearance. If Count Dracula did not save him, he would have changed into a vampire on the spot. Near the end of the novel, the same vampires even try to seduce Dr. Van Helsing, who steadfastly holds onto his integrity.

#### 4. Larger-than-life characters

As in medieval romances, one finds a number of exaggerated characters in Stoker's novel. Dracula appears as a kind nobleman but turns out to be a bloodsucker whose "peculiarly sharp white teeth [protrude] over the lips" and whose hands are "as cold as ice" (Stoker 23, 22). In one of his early encounters with Dracula, Jonathan Harker notices that the Count does not leave his reflection in the mirror. Startled, Harker cuts himself during his shaving, which momentarily makes Dracula crave blood: "When the Count saw my face, his eyes blazed with a sort of demonic fury, and he suddenly made a grab at my throat. I drew away, and his hand touched the string of beads which held the crucifix. It made an instant change in him, for the fury passed so quickly that I could hardly believe that it was ever there" (Stoker 31).

Another extravagant character, R. M. Renfield, is a madman who is institutionalized. Dr. Seward describes him as a man of "[s]anguine temperament, great physical strength, morbidly excitable, periods of gloom, ending in some fixed idea which I cannot make out." A bizarre incident happens in chapter 11, in which Renfield furiously attacks Dr. Seward. Dr. Seward records the incident as follows:

[B]efore I could get my balance he had struck at me and cut my left wrist rather severely. Before he could strike again, however, I got in my right, and he was sprawling on his back on the floor. My wrist bled freely, and quite a little pool trickled on to the carpet. . . . He was

lying on his belly on the floor licking up, like a dog, the blood which had fallen from my wounded wrist” (Stoker 129).

The cases of Dracula and Renfield suggest that Stoker portrays his characters in hyperbolic terms, as in medieval romances and Romantic texts.

### **5. Passionate love and idealized woman**

*Dracula* is similar to medieval romances in its emphasis on passionate love and romance. In the novel, Lucy Westenra and Mina Harker receive unlimited devotion from their fiancé and husband, respectively. Other good characters are also devoted to these women. On the other hand, Dracula’s victimization of women is presented in the form of romantic seduction. The way Dracula sucks blood out of women and their physical response to his blood-sucking are portrayed in a sensual manner.

A theme related to passionate love and romance is an idealization of woman. Similar to medieval romances, Stoker’s novel presents two beautiful damsels in distress: Lucy and Mina. They appear as snow-white figures otherworldly in their beauty and grace. In Jonathan Harker’s presence, Van Helsing praises Mina for her being an angelic woman: “She is one of God’s women, fashioned by His own hand to show us men and other women that there is a heaven where we can enter, and that its light can be here on earth. So true, so sweet, so noble, so little an egoist—and that, let me tell you, is much in this age, so sceptical and selfish” (Stoker 168-69). As Lucy lies in her coffin, her devilish appearance seems to mock her “sweet purity” (Stoker 190). Knight figures, especially Van Helsing, risk their lives to rescue them from the hands of an evil force.

### **6. Quest and adventure**

As in many medieval romance stories, quest and adventure are prominent themes in *Dracula*. The novel begins with Jonathan Harker’s journey toward Eastern Europe. From there, he undergoes many hardships, and the reader becomes anxious about whether he will return home safely. In the rest of the novel, Dr. Van Helsing and his friends struggle to find ways to defeat Dracula, and they involve harrowing adventures which provide the reader with mystery and suspense.

Even before Harker’s business trip to Transylvania, he has uncanny feelings about his journey. In the first entry of his journal, he writes, “I did not sleep well, though my bed was comfortable enough, for I had all sorts of queer dreams. There was a dog howling all night under my window.” He also feels thirsty although he has drunk plenty of water (Stoker 10). Once he leaves the hotel for the castle, native people take pity on him and implore him not to make his journey. The rest of the story, which deals with the pursuit and conquest of evil forces, is replete with elements of adventure fiction.

## 7. Courage and honor

Medieval chivalry emphasized courage and honor. Charlemagne's code of chivalry in *The Song of Roland* (early eleventh century) listed a set of rulers for knights, including the following:

To serve the liege lord in valour and faith  
 To protect the weak and defenceless  
 To live by honour and for glory  
 To guard the honour of fellow knights  
 To respect the honour of women  
 Never to refuse a challenge from an equal  
 Never to turn the back upon a foe. ("Medieval")

Dr. Van Helsing and other characters display chivalric virtues of bravery and honor. They give their own blood to Lucy, who lost her blood to Dracula, thereby risking their lives by means of their undying devotion to the women they admire. Dr. Van Helsing extolls the knightly virtues of courage and honor when he tells Quincey Morris, "A brave man's blood is the best thing on this earth when a woman is in trouble. You're a man, and no mistake. Well, the devil may work against us for all he's worth, but God sends us men when we want them" (Stoker 136). Knightly courage also compels Dr. Seward to drive a stake into his beloved fiancée's breast: "His face was set, and high duty seemed to shine through it; the sight of it gave us courage so that our voices seemed to ring through the little vault" (Stoker 192). For Dr. Seward and his fellow latter-day knights, self-interest takes a back seat to honor, even if means risking their lives or, as in the case of Dr. Seward, doing what they abhor.

## Conclusion

In *Dracula*, Stoker's Christian intent is clear, and he communicates his intent by partly depending on the conventions of the medieval chivalric romance. As an Irishman, Stoker was unusual in that he belonged to the Church of Ireland, which is a Protestant denomination. As a Christian, however, he uses Catholic symbols and icons in portraying the conquest of evil. His attitude toward Catholicism seems somewhat similar to Jonathan Harker's in chapter 1. When a concerned woman gives Harker a crucifix before his trip to the castle, he accepts it. He writes, "She then rose and dried her eyes, and taking a crucifix from her neck offered it to me. I did not know what to do, for, as an English Churchman, I have been taught to regard such things as in some measure idolatrous, and yet it seemed so ungracious to refuse an old lady meaning so well and in such a state of mind.... [T]he crucifix is still round my neck" (Stoker 13). In this regard, Stoker was an ecumenical Christian who held respect for the Catholic Church. While *Dracula* is a fundamentally Christian work, it is not Christian in the sense that Lew Wallace's *Ben-Hur: A Tale of the Christ* (1880) or Frank Peretti's *This*

*Present Darkness* (1985) is. *Dracula* is Christian fiction because faith informs its author, not because it is intended to evangelize its readers. By combining faith and adventure, Stoker produces a suspenseful yet spiritually enlightening novel in *Dracula*. In this respect, he is more in line with British authors such as Graham Greene and J. R. R. Tolkien, who maintain a Christian moral tone without using overly religious language in their works.

Because Stoker's novel is an elective text for my course, it has to be assumed that not everyone in class has read it. For that reason, I show some segments of a *Dracula* movie (such as *Count Dracula*, a 1970 movie in which Christopher Lee stars)<sup>4</sup> and make sure that each small discussion group includes a student who has written a report or has delivered a PowerPoint presentation on Stoker's novel. Student responses to the novel are generally positive. Students find the story sometimes choppy and jumpy, but they also appreciate the extremely detailed narrative, the suspense and thrill Stoker creates, and the great emotion the narrative elicits. After pointing out the dramatic nature of the novel, a student has commented, "I [have found] many illustrations of right vs. wrong, picturesque vs. eerie, good vs. evil, yin and yang, and light vs. dark" (Voumard). Indeed, as soon as students finish reading the first four chapters of the novel, they know that Jonathan Harker is facing an evil or dark force in *Count Dracula*. The rest of the story will confirm their first impression and will sustain their interest with many plot twists.

Students learn a different style of fiction in *Dracula*, which consists of journal entries, newspaper clippings, letters, telegrams, and memorandums. The lack of a central narrator can confuse students, but the story can be an entertaining introduction to more serious modernist texts, such as William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying*. Through *Dracula*, students also learn about the conventions of Gothic fiction, especially vampire fiction, which in recent years has earned a wide readership among young adult readers. Although some Gothic stories rely on stock characters and open sexuality, well-written texts such as *Dracula* defy one-dimensional reading. Whether intended or not, those texts address important cultural issues that allow for reading between the lines. Finally, through *Dracula*, students learn about the conventions of medieval chivalric romance, those of modern adventure novels, and biblical themes, symbols, and images. *Dracula* has a place in the Christian classroom and can be an excellent tool by which students can learn some of the basic skills of literary analysis.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>This essay has developed out of my paper presented at the 39th Annual Meeting of the Arkansas Philological Association, Hot Springs, AR, 18-20 Oct. 2012: "Dracula as a Christian Adventure Novel."

<sup>2</sup>Vambery of Budapest (1832-1913) was a well-known Turkologist and Orientalist whom Stoker befriended. In *The Man Who Wrote Dracula: A Biography of*

*Bram Stoker*, Daniel Farson states, “There is good reason to assume that it was the Hungarian professor who told Bram, for the first time, of the name of Dracula” (126).

<sup>3</sup>Below is the bibliographic information on the movies:

1. Moviebase.com.au. “Camelot 1967 Trailer.” Online video clip. *YouTube*, 15 Dec. 2012. Web. 10 April 2015.
2. Ambassador Hollywood. “King Arthur: The Young Warlord.” Online video clip. *YouTube*, 28 Aug. 2014. Web. 10 April 2015.

<sup>4</sup>Here is the bibliographic information on the movie:

Deniau, Aubin. “Count Dracula 1970—Full Movie—Cristopher Lee.” Online video clip. *YouTube*, 1 Jan. 2015. Web. 10 April 2015.

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## On Teaching “Jesus in Fiction and Film”

Darren J. N. Middleton

Jesus of Nazareth makes more than a few passing cameo appearances in the movies, novels, poems, and short stories of the last two centuries. Recognizing this trend, my “Jesus in Fiction and Film” class at Texas Christian University (TCU) examines how the figure of Jesus and the symbol of Christ has been appropriated by recent creative writers and filmmakers.<sup>1</sup> Throughout the course, we focus on the doctrine of the person (christology) and work (soteriology) of Jesus through such fictional works and films, as well as background theological readings. We move through four units. The first unit deals with biographies of Jesus. Here, we investigate how fiction and film retells the gospel story or stories, as set in first-century Palestine, in contemporary terms. The second unit explores how fiction and film uses the device of a minor New Testament character as narrator. The third unit investigates a topical and controversial development within the genre of Jesus fiction and film, namely, the trend towards the scandalizing of the gospels. Here, we focus on one allegedly blasphemous novella and two purportedly outrageous films, exploring questions of orthodoxy and heterodoxy in light of modern theological attempts to focus on Jesus as the “scandal of particularity,” to use Karl Barth’s famous term. The fourth and final unit analyzes how fiction and film presents and responds to cross-cultural images of Jesus (e.g., Canada, Denmark, El Salvador, Japan, and South Africa). Given Christianity’s present-day growth in the Global South, we pay particular attention to the question of what the doctrines of christology and soteriology look like in international contexts.<sup>2</sup>

The first two class sessions set the semester’s tone. We use our assigned reading to address and then ponder how Jesus through the centuries has become all things to all people, noting how he appears, for example, as an apocalyptic firebrand, a cynic philosopher, a democratic socialist, and as a conservative Republican, especially in recent years. Excerpts from *The Face: Jesus in Art* film underline this approach. And they help prepare the way for an initial in-class assignment, an investigation of the claims made about Jesus in popular music.<sup>3</sup> At this time, I spin some selected tunes and I advise the class to consider as well as notice the singer-songwriter’s situational theology, the special way that her/his lyrics construct a local or contextual way of thinking through the faith. Students listen to two or three songs, which I rotate between semesters, and I urge them to take each track separately, to read an accompanying lyric sheet thoroughly, and to discuss as well as ask: What images and symbols are used in the song? Which symbols would you want to affirm, and why? Which symbols would you want to reject, and why? And what, if anything, do you learn about Jesus from this song?

Since I teach in Texas, where the Cowboy Church represents one of the state's fastest growing forms of Protestantism, songs such as Thomas Rhett's "Beer with Jesus" are educational, because they suggest Jesus is "down-to-earth," as one student put it, "the kind of 'regular guy' who talks everyday theology after ordering up a couple tall ones."<sup>4</sup> Other students note that Rhett's narrator struggles to live his faith, faced as he is with many questions, and some in the class struggle with him, eventually forging their own link to this modern story of Jesus drinking with sinners (Lk 7:34). Now, some critics might see this approach as trendy or irrelevant. But Nacogdoches relates to Nicea. Like the local ways of thinking about Jesus that reverberate throughout today's country music, the ancient creeds resound with their own contextual christologies, crafted from then-current images, symbols, and ideas, as their creators sought to communicate traditional teachings in a fresh form that would appeal to their contemporaries.

Such initial classwork leads to an early teaching point. As we peel back layer upon layer of testimonies about Jesus, whatever the source may be, so we begin to comprehend that assertions about him—however grand or modest—tell us as much, if not more, about the speaker as they do about the Nazarene Carpenter. Seasoned scholars will know that this observation forms the basic, oft-cited thesis of Albert Schweitzer's assessment of the many nineteenth-century biographers of Jesus. And in the four course units that follow my first two class sessions, I dare students to apply Schweitzer's study to the semester's assigned material, and many of them do, often in thoughtful ways.

We hear Schweitzer's echo in our first course unit, which investigates imaginative re-presentations of Jesus's first-century story. We begin by viewing Pier Paolo Pasolini's *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, focusing on how the director's identity as an Italian, ex-Catholic homosexual with communist sympathies helps him to create a political Jesus. Together we scrutinize Pasolini's commitment to *cinema verité*, discussing how his uneven lens alights on an angry Jesus, played by an amateur actor, who ministers to rural folk subsisting within penurious conditions. Also, we ponder different critical responses to the film, ranging from those who think Pasolini captures Jesus's social message as well as his divinity, to those who suspect that the auteur re-mythologizes the second canonical gospel so that his Jesus becomes what Pasolini needs him to be. On the last occasion that I taught this film, several students researched Pasolini's life, and some concluded that he radicalized Jesus, viewing him as an intellectual and social misfit because he, Pasolini, was also an outlier, pushed to the edges of his own culture and onto his own symbolic cross, namely, Italian homophobia and anti-communism. One's autobiography shapes one's christology, students surmised.

If Pasolini's film inspires students to wonder if it is possible to avoid looking at Jesus through one's own lens, Gerd Theissen's *The Shadow of the Galilean* teaches them how difficult it is to locate the historical Jesus, since he seems so mysterious, even to his generation. This novel focuses on Andreas, a fictional contemporary of Jesus, who gets involved in Jesus's story but never meets him. Andreas catches only glimpses, here and there as well as now and then, and therefore he has to learn to negotiate the hype, rumor, and gossipy add-

ons that surround the Nazarene. In short, Andreas resides in the Galilean's shadow, as Theissen thinks all of us must do. "He [Jesus] comes to us as one unknown," to paraphrase Schweitzer's conclusion concerning the *Leben-Jesu Forschung* writers, and my students often see this remark's usefulness in the context of christology and the arts. They wonder about "getting back to the 'real' Jesus," as one student said. Another speculated, "Perhaps all attempts to talk about God or Jesus, even those we see in the sacred writings, are forms of narrative theology." Our background reading underscores this line of inquiry. For instance, W. Barnes Tatum's reception history of Jesus implies that each generation's claims about Jesus testify to the multiplicity of stories out there, or what we might call the plurality of Jesuses throughout history, and that such variety highlights the difficulty of ever "getting back" to who Jesus was and what he said. Internalizing this claim presents difficulties for some TCU students, since many self-identify as evangelical, and more than a few judge Theissen to have left them—as believers as well as learners—too much in the dark about Jesus's life and legacy. This said, most come to appreciate the profundity of the question that seems to lie behind the issues we discuss: Is 'theology' synonymous with "narrative exegesis," where Theissen's term signifies the believer's attempt to work over historical material in a poetic way? For his part, Andreas spots such poetic reworking in the early Christian desire to take Jesus seriously and still confront evil's presence in the Roman Empire. And this is where my students most relate to Andreas; like him, they want to know or believe in Jesus and still deal effectively with their own broken world (Theissen 20).

Discussions concerning Jesus's relation to the modern world tend to deepen when we view Cecil B. DeMille's *The King of Kings*, an avowedly evangelistic tool when it first appeared in 1927 and for years afterward. Once again, we pause to link filmic christology to context, showing how DeMille's reverent and moral movie reflects an American cultural desire for piety in the last century's early years. The Jesus who emerges from this film is a Miraculous Healer, which intrigues my students, because they know by this point in the course that most writers associated with the first Quest of the Historical Jesus questioned theological supernaturalism. DeMille places Jesus's miracles at the center of who he is and what he accomplishes. And even if some students wonder why DeMille makes up miracles of his own for Jesus, they feel inspired to further probe the alliance between science and faith. They also query DeMille's decision to swim against the currents of biblical criticism and harmonize the four gospels, thus creating his own, a fifth gospel of sorts—an approach students will go on to see and discuss in other films like *The Last Temptation of Christ* and *The Passion of the Christ*. Finally, Toni Cade Bambara's short story "Gorilla, My Love" helps us close unit one by offering a situational study of what happens when an African American girl watches DeMille's film. Bambara's Scout dismisses *The King of Kings* as a "simple ass picture" because it is unconnected to her hard-scrabble life. And students find her outlook challenges them to think about what follows from an attempt to view Jesus's life and message through the womanist lens of race, class, and gender (Bambara 15). Only space precludes exploring the captivating discussions that arise at this juncture, though the question of what it means to say

that Jesus is black troubles students, not simply in relation to Bambara but also in connection with Mark Dornford May's *Son of Man* film, Countee Cullen's "Black Christ" poetry, and Alice Walker's "The Welcome Table" story, which my students tackle much later. For now, many finish unit one with an abiding sense of the value of contextual theologies, whether first century or twenty-first century in origin(s).

Unit two invites students to consider Jesus as an outlier, prowling the edges of first-century Palestine, and the goal of this second unit involves drawing on fiction and film that uses the device of the marginal narrator to tell his story. We focus on two case studies. The first, Mary Lee Wile's *Ancient Rage*, describes Jesus's story through the eyes of Elizabeth, John the Baptist's mother. This novella shows us a woman refusing to function as a silent outsider to revelation, as it were, and as someone unafraid to question God. Wile does not shrink from addressing her protagonist's sense of first-century womanhood before God. Elizabeth rails against purity and pollution in the context of menstruation and birth, and she bemoans her bitter grief at losing her son. Students soon realize that Wile intends Elizabeth to symbolize how women in Christian history and thought have often found themselves marginalized or pushed out to the tradition's edges, and some share her frustration, even her righteous rage. As a result, students attempt several questions: How might the maleness of Jesus serve as an obstacle for some women? What can be done to overcome this obstacle? And how should future attempts at Jesus in fiction and film absorb as well as engage insights from the feminist movement? Once again, our inquiries enable us to uphold one of our course themes: how contexts shape texts, and how circumstances fashion christologies. In the end, Wile's Elizabeth finishes her sorrowful story struck by God's silence, and this theme of divine hiddenness surfaces in the original *Barabbas* film, which concludes this second unit. Students who like this movie value the way it calibrates faith and doubt, an item that intensifies in the third unit.

Knowing that the New Testament recognizes the shocking nature of the Jesus story (Matt 11:6; 26:31) helps us, as readers and/or viewers, to understand the likely theological worth in that which causes religious offense. In our third unit, then, we study controversial fiction and film about Jesus. We read about process theology's questionable insistence that God is not unchanging and remote but is actually part of the evolutionary process, involved in the world, sometimes to the point of changing God's mind or plan. Henri Bergson taught such ideas. And we learn that he inspired novelists D. H. Lawrence and Nikos Kazantzakis. We read Lawrence's *The Man Who Died* as well as Kazantzakis's *The Last Temptation of Christ*. And we assess their allegedly insulting belief that God is subject to change as we are subject to change, which implies that Jesus's own messianic self-understanding was never fully formed but evolved across his lifetime. Some critics see Lawrence and Kazantzakis as saintly or religious rebels who spent their lives navigating the borderlands between belief and unbelief. And coming to an awareness of their fiction (and Martin Scorsese's cinematic adaptation of Kazantzakis's story) goads some students to consider what we might call "the permissible limits of Christian theological speculation." Watching

Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* adds another twist to the Jesus story, because it obliges students to investigate the film's own controversy in light of America's culture wars. Here, I assign some of my own published work, penned with the classroom in mind, and robust discussions about "liberal" and "conservative" views of Jesus frequently follow such readings. Pairing Scorsese and Gibson also facilitates talk of Jesus's humanity and divinity, and of what we might call "cinematic Ebionitism" and "filmic Docetism"—modern terms that reuse categories for the scandalous, even heretical, ways of thinking of Jesus in the apostolic and patristic periods.<sup>5</sup>

Our fourth and final unit inspects the Jesus story's international reception in recent fiction and film. Here, students carry forward one of the main ideas from the previous three units—the notion that the New Testament was shaped by a first-century worldview—and they scrutinize fresh depictions of Jesus, emerging from theology that is not dominated by Western, white men. These artistic examples include black (North American and African), Asian, feminist, and Latin American forms of liberation theology. We learn about issues such as inculturation and vernacular or mother-tongue exegesis, and we ponder globalization's impact on how the Bible is read in the future. Again, I assign my own research in this unit, inviting students to consider my own sense that with an ever-greater diversity of Christian ethnicities, cultures, and theologies, we read and/or see new images and portrayals of Jesus as well as a greater variety of ways of artistically engaging him.<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, one question tends to dominate our last few class sessions: How might this unit's artistic representations of Jesus be shaping Christian theology of the future?

In addition to providing a selected survey of recent artistic depictions of Jesus, set within an examination of the Nazarene Carpenter's broad reception history, this course is an exercise in imaginative theologizing, because students are encouraged to use their own critical thinking, debating, and writing skills to freely respond to what they seek and find.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> TCU is associated with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) denomination. For a discussion of religion's place in TCU's core curriculum, and an account of the "C" in "TCU," see the online article I co-wrote with Elizabeth H. Flowers, my colleague and wife: <https://tcuadmission.wordpress.com/2014/10/28/faculty-feature-the-c-in-tcu/> Accessed 20 February 2015. Here and elsewhere, all websites (URLs) are current at the time of writing.

<sup>2</sup> This upper-division seminar attracts majors and non-majors alike, and it carries "literary traditions" credit in TCU's common core. For a downloadable syllabus, see: <https://tcu.academia.edu/DarrenMiddleton> Accessed 20 February 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Available online, this documentary looks at history's varied visual portraits of Jesus. See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YX1yZdzOHpo> Accessed 20 February 2015.

<sup>4</sup> The song's official video is at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dphMriny1Js> Accessed 20 February 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Darren J. N. Middleton, "Celluloid Synoptics: Viewing the Gospels of Marty and Mel Together," in *Re-Viewing the Passion: Mel Gibson's Film and Its Critics*, edited by S. Brent Plate (New York: Palgrave/Macmillan, 2004), 71-81. Also see Elizabeth H. Flowers and Darren J. N. Middleton, "Satan and the Curious: Texas Evangelicals Read *The Last Temptation of Christ*," in *Scandalizing Jesus?: Nikos Kazantzakis's The Last Temptation of Christ Fifty Years On*, edited by Darren J. N. Middleton (London and New York: Continuum, 2005), 147-55.

<sup>6</sup> See the essays in Mark W. Dennis and Darren J. N. Middleton, editors, *Approaching Silence: New Perspectives on Shusaku Endo's Classic Novel* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2005). In addition, see Darren J. N. Middleton and S. Brent Plate, "'Who Do You See That I Am?': Global Perspectives on Jesus Films," *New Theology Review* Volume 24.3 [August 2011], 17-28. Finally, see Darren J. N. Middleton, "Jesus of Nazareth in Ghana's Deep Forest: The Africanization of Christianity in Madam Afua Kuma's Poetry" in *Mother Tongue Theologies: Poets, Novelists, and Non-Western Christianity*, edited by Darren J. N. Middleton (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2009), 61-76.

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## Lev Grossman's *The Magicians*: Narnia under Fire?

Amanda E. Himes

Eighteen years ago, *Time* magazine's book critic Lev Grossman began writing fiction, though it was not until the 2009 publication of his novel *The Magicians*, which provides both adulation and critique of C.S. Lewis and his Narnia books, that Grossman's work garnered much attention. His protagonist Quentin Coldwater, a disaffected seventeen-year-old math prodigy from Brooklyn, secretly longs for the fictional world of Fillory (Narnia) from a children's fantasy series written in the 1930s by Christopher Plover (Lewis). After gaining entrance to the secret magical college, Brakebills (a kind of debased Hogwarts), Quentin undergoes rites of passage such as binge drinking and falling in love as well as, with his classmates, being turned into a flock of geese and flying to another campus in the Arctic Circle for an intense study of magic. Even his college experiences fail to satisfy his longing for perfection, until the day he and his friends find the entrance to Fillory, a much more dangerous world in actuality than the one Quentin had come to know on paper.<sup>1</sup>

A number of reviewers have been intrigued by Grossman's innovative foray into this genre. Elizabeth Hand calls Grossman's *Magicians* "[a] clever, beautifully written fantasy that flickers right on the borders of greatness," though it "doesn't quite pull off the trick of being an original book composed of other fantasy novels" (44, 47). Successful or not, the name chosen by Grossman for his fantasy world, Fillory, is almost a playful acknowledgment that it *pillories* the fantasy works of his predecessors.<sup>2</sup> For Deirdre Donahue as well, *The Magicians* is "like a video game featuring scenarios from classic fantasy writers. . . . But it becomes a chore to slog through this homage to fantasy filtered through an ironic 21st-century sensibility, complete with sex and profanity. Nifty premise aside, Quentin and company never fully grab our attention" (03D).

While I differ from Donahue about the book's ability to draw readers in, my area of real disagreement centers on the thoughtful response offered in Laura Miller's critical study of Lewis's fiction entitled *The Magician's Book: A Skeptic's Adventures in Narnia*. Published a year before Grossman's novel, Miller shares with him a serious grudge against Lewis for the "irritation that most [adult] nonbelievers feel toward someone trying to convert them" (66). Even though the Narnia books were a source of joy for her, Miller explains that as a child reader, she saw in Edmund not a theological message about "original sin" due to his one huge mistake, the betrayal of his siblings in favor of the White Witch, but only a kid with "many littler, unchecked moments of spite" (66). Grossman attempts to correct the (attempted) theological intrusions and go Lewis one better by updating and improving his fantasy realm with a non-Christian, non-

allegorical Narnia-alternative. I would like to offer a counter-reading to Grossman's interpretation of Narnia, both as it exists in Lewis' original text and as it is depicted in its second embodiment (Fillory) in Grossman's novel. As I see it, *The Magicians* has four major points of contention with Lewis and *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

First, Grossman finds Lewis' Narnia too safe and sentimentalized. Grossman invents a character said to inhabit Fillory, the Cozy Horse, that Quentin and his college friends recall reading about: "God, remember the Cozy Horse? That big velvet horse that would just carry you around? I wanted one so badly when I was that age." This from Alice, who continues, "I always figured it was mechanical—somebody made it somehow. . . . Anyway the Cozy Horse is a girl thing" (178).<sup>3</sup> What Grossman may be thinking of is the scene from *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, where Aslan allows Susan and Lucy to ride on his back: "that ride was perhaps the most wonderful thing that happened to them in Narnia" (151), a thrilling, wild romp with the King of Narnia conveying them first to the Witch's castle to free prisoners and then to the battlefield in time to turn the tide of the war. What occurs in the original as a fantastic flight in a time of national emergency becomes, in Grossman's re-interpretation, a rather mundane mode of cuddly conveyance in Fillory. Grossman's gloss on magical transport is thus encoded with far more nursery flavor than the original by Lewis.

Second, although Grossman maintains that he "truly [loves] Lewis and his books," he sees in them an incompatibility with "sexual maturity" (qtd. in Nester), an odd problem to have with works written for children. And yet, he is not the only writer to feel that way: Grossman interviewed J. K. Rowling in 2005, at the time of the publication of *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*. Not having read all the Narnia books, Rowling nevertheless has strong opinions about them: "There's something about Lewis's sentimentality about children that gets on her nerves," Grossman reports. "'There comes a point where Susan, who was the older girl, is lost to Narnia because she becomes interested in lipstick. She's become irreligious basically because she found sex,' Rowling says. 'I have a big problem with that.'" ("Hogwarts" 60). More astute readers of Lewis have understood Susan's disengagement with Narnia as stemming from her vanity and self-aggrandizement.

Swinging the pendulum the other way, Grossman's twenty-something protagonists have sex with each other and even with characters or creatures in Fillory. Spending their first night in the country they had all previously assumed was fictional, Quentin's gay friend Elliot sidles up to a faun at the bar, "a slender, shy-looking man with horns jutting through his blond hair," "round glasses," and "goat's legs" with "backward-bending knees," and eventually they leave, "presumably together" (307, 313).<sup>4</sup> Nothing so explicit occurs in Lewis's chronicles, but one wonders if Grossman has underestimated Narnia's capacity for more "mature" themes or even Freudian readings. After all, some adult readers of the Narnia books have seen in Mr. Tumnus a pederast in faun's clothing: In his book *The Skeleton in the Wardrobe*, David Holbrook considers the faun's umbrella to be a phallic symbol since it can be made erect (68), while Joe R. Christopher, though seeing no overall harm to children from reading the

Narnia books, even the supposedly more dark or sinister parts, points out a better phallic image in the limp tail draped over Tumnus's arm, if one insisted on such a reading ("Darkest").<sup>5</sup>

Third is the most serious accusation Grossman hurls at Lewis, despite his claim to love the author and his works. Grossman's Lewis-figure, the author Christopher Plover, has assaulted Martin Chatwin and given him the necessary motivation to run away to the dark Fillorian forests, where he becomes "The Beast," a cannibalistic world-destroyer. As Robbi Nester points out, this change gives Grossman's readers the sense of a moral critique of Lewis rather than a merely artistic one: not only does Plover molest Martin, the oldest Chatwin child and the first to discover Fillory, but he takes the Chatwins' lived experiences in the fantasy world and rewrites them for monetary gain and literary fame: "Perhaps it is the hints of sentimentality in Narnia, which is purged of much that is unsavory or dark, that Grossman means to critique here." If so, then is Grossman merely forgetting or simply ignoring the violent or disturbing scenes (war with White Witch) and pederastic overtones (Mr. Tumnus' cave) mentioned above? After all, fairy tales themselves deal with difficult, even disturbing aspects of life faced by many children. Narnia is no exception.

Grossman could also be implying with Plover's "bastardization of the Chatwins' adventures" (Nester) that Lewis himself was a literary poacher,<sup>6</sup> exploiting the genre of children's literature, only to brainwash young readers with his religious ideals (a kind of "mind rape"). For instance, to give readers a sense that Narnia is somehow real (and to give moral support for that sensation), Lewis has Professor Kirk invoke the Platonic Forms in assuring Lucy's siblings that their experiences in the world within the wardrobe were not just pretend play: "Why it's all in Plato! All in Plato! What *do* they teach them in the schools nowadays?" (*Last Battle* 170). Or it could be that the unfavorable comparison to Plover writing fantasy based on "real" excursions to another world could be taken as a back-handed compliment to Lewis, whose Narnia books have seemed so real to generations of children that few readers can pass by a wardrobe without placing their hands to feel the wood at the back, just to be sure there is no door to another world. Self-styled skeptic Miller admits that one of her vivid childhood memories centers on this finding, via Narnia, of "a new world, which at the same time felt like a place I'd always known existed . . . . All I wanted was more" (23).

Fourth, Grossman's rendition of divine beings in Fillory reads as a pathetic parody of the noble savior of Narnia, Aslan the Lion. Earlier in the story on a vacation from college, Quentin has re-read the Fillory books and describes the actions of the gods of that world:

At the end the twin rams Ember and Umber show up as usual, like a pair of ruminant constables. They were a force for good, of course, but there was a slightly Orwellian quality to their oversight of Fillory: they knew everything that went on, and there was no obvious limit to their powers, but they rarely bestirred themselves to actively intervene on behalf of the creatures in their charge. Mostly they just scolded everybody involved for the mess they'd

made, finishing each other's sentences, then made everyone renew their vows of fealty before wandering away to crop some luckless farmer's alfalfa fields. (169)

The cleverly sarcastic way Quentin views Fillory's gods in the novels is not undercut when he meets one face-to-face. When Quentin's party finally makes their way through Ember's Tomb, a video-game-like quest they undertake to be worthy of the four thrones of Fillory, they discover Ember trapped in an underground chamber. Quentin thinks how

Ember and Umber had always come off as slightly sinister, but in person Ember didn't seem that bad at all. He was nice even. Warm. . . . He was like a kindly, crinkly-eyed department-store Santa. You didn't take Him too seriously. He didn't look any different from an ordinary ram, except that He was larger and better groomed, and He gave off more of an air of alert, alien intelligence than you would expect from your average sheep. The effect was unexpectedly funny. (347)

Penny, the borderline autistic character, falls down to worship the Ram immediately, but Quentin asks the hard questions first, such as why Ember would allow his world to fall apart, letting his people suffer (348). The answer, it turns out, is that Martin Chatwin has killed Umber and maimed Ember, who is imprisoned and completely dependent on human agency to save him and his world. No Aslan sacrificing Himself for a traitor, Ember is what Quentin thought from the first, a department store Santa, a fake religious icon. This radical departure from Lewis' Narnia has less to do with Lewis' Christian worldview than Grossman's agnostic view of the way things are. Grossman makes the point several times in *The Magicians* that Ember and Umber's main function is to send children home at the end of the books, like divine spoilsports, ending the fun for no real reason, other than the vaguely referenced deeper magic and "Higher Laws" (348). The loss of Martin Chatwin's humanity would seem to substantiate the gods' claim that children should not stay indefinitely in this magical realm, and even as king of Fillory, Quentin's ennui and depression never fully leave him, a lesson in self-understanding Alice had tried—and failed—to teach him previously.

The humans do manage to save Fillory, though not without paying a huge price. Quentin's brilliant girlfriend Alice allows her magic to become unstable, turning her into a non-human spirit, and thus enabling her to defeat The Beast Martin, whose desire, as J. R. R. Tolkien explains in his classic essay "On Fairy-Stories," is for "power in this world, domination of things and wills," "the mark of the mere Magician" (53). Penny loses his hands and Quentin his shoulder to Martin's insatiable maw before Alice's self-immolation destroys the monster.

All told, *The Magicians* is an engrossing story, with a clear debt to Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*. Grossman is perfectly entitled to over-sentimentalize Narnia, parody Aslan, and even turn the author of the Narnia-esque

books into a pederast. All of these re-workings can be considered fair game in the nature of literary mash-ups. The final indication of the flawed nature of Grossman's purported love of Narnia, however, comes in Quentin's assessment of the last Fillory book: "Almost nothing happens. Jane and Helen [Chatwin] fill up the pages with interminable conversations about right and wrong and teenage Christian metaphysics and whether their true obligations lie on Earth or in Fillory" (168). C. S. Lewis' Narnia chronicles are many things, but they are not preachy or boring. And had they been so, it is impossible to imagine Quentin or his creator, Lev Grossman, obsessively re-reading such books throughout childhood and adulthood. In fact, when asked which fantasy world he would choose to live in if he could, Grossman confesses, "Not Fillory. . . . I think in the end there's nowhere better than Narnia" ("Popular"). I enjoyed Grossman's book and his magical Fillory, but ultimately, and despite its Talking Beasts and numerous other parallels to Lewis's books, it cannot tarnish Narnia: Lev Grossman himself concurs with that.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This paper was first presented at the 16<sup>th</sup> annual C. S. Lewis & Inklings Society conference (March 22, 2013) at LeTourneau University, Longview, TX.

<sup>2</sup> See Robbi Nester on the intertextuality of *The Magicians* (par. 36-41).

<sup>3</sup> By the end of the trilogy, when Quentin has successfully created his own land, he and Alice do meet the Cozy Horse, leading them to theorize that Quentin's land and Fillory must be connected, somehow, and also giving Grossman's series a definite fairy tale ending.

<sup>4</sup> Fillory becomes a reality for Quentin and his chums when Penny discovers magic buttons (just like the ones Uncle Andrew crafted in *The Magician's Nephew*) that transport the user from Earth to the *Neitherlands*, a city with fountains that work like the pools in Lewis' Wood Between the Worlds, and from there to Fillory, then back again.

<sup>5</sup> Christopher elaborates on this Freudian interpretation in his poem "Lucy Pevensie Meets a Satyr":

Ne'er Lucy told the truth that she had found  
while wandering across the icy ground,  
the wintry land the Witch-queen Jadis held,  
for evil's realness had for her not jelled,  
as yet, when she went wandering in that bound.

A child she was, who knew not evil wound  
about each solitary wood, and downed,

like parasites which sap the vital yield—  
this Lucy never told.

And so a satyr, by a snowy mound,  
she met—child rapist, rather say—who clowned  
an innocence at first, but soon compelled  
her to his cave; and O the grief that welled,  
the deep despair, the misplaced guilt which drowned—  
all brutal harms untold.

<sup>6</sup> Like Grossman, Lewis does *mash-ups* of various fairy tales that preceded his Narnia stories (and these are well documented in too many Narnia studies to count), some of the most famous being Father Christmas with Hans Christian Andersen's "Snow Queen," a quality that Lewis's friend and colleague J. R. R. Tolkien found irritating.

<sup>7</sup> Umber is worse, himself a traitor to Fillory. In the third book of the trilogy, *The Magician's Land*, readers discover that Umber has previously betrayed his own world by exchanging Martin's coveted humanity for the boy's permanent stay in Fillory as The Beast (233-235).

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## Questioning God(s) of Other Worlds in Lev Grossman's *The Magicians*

J. B. Himes

In 2009 Lev Grossman, book critic for *Time* magazine, published his first fantasy novel, *The Magicians*, which *The New Yorker* named as one of the best books of that year. In 2011 Grossman was awarded the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer by the World Science Fiction Society, and his book is still ranked in the "Top 100" books by Amazon in at least three categories. The novel is a *bildungsroman* of sorts set in a Hogwarts-type college of magic near Brooklyn called Brakebills, where the ennui-suffering protagonist Quentin Coldwater and his friends learn that their newfound magic powers, after many mind-numbing years of training, can transport them to Fillory, the fantasy realm of their favorite children's series written in the 1930s: *Fillory and Further* is Lev Grossman's parody of *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Far from being a panacea of wish-fulfillment or the land of heart's desire, however, the real Fillory is deadly. It threatens characters' lives and their dreams. Because human beings bring their struggles with them wherever they go, this land of enchantment is fraught with the same dilemmas of danger, bewilderment, and even boredom they faced back at home. Even in Fillory, Quentin finds that he cannot make himself happy.

My aims for this paper are modest: mainly I want to point out some of the ways this non-Christian writer addresses issues of faith and doubt while crafting a truly engaging fantasy that is winsome precisely because it is so ironic.<sup>1</sup>

Against the criticisms of reviewers who find Grossman's book pandering to vulgar tastes with its profanity and mature content (though there is nothing graphic except the violence), I contend that this irreverent, ironic work of contemporary fantasy actually re-enchants the reader in an age besotted with magic and tales of the faery realms. It does so by challenging the very premise that fantasy worlds offer escape and by providing readers put off by the Anglophilia of Hogwarts, Narnia, or Middle-earth with a no-holds-barred American attack on the idea of a god or gods behind these worlds. This book is thus more transparent than the Narnia books, more soul-searching, and less idealizing. It is gut-wrenching and it takes more risks. It raises direct questions about the existence of God. The characters lapse into ample hedonism, but the book hardly glorifies that. It shows how hollow a life of youthful dissipation can be and realistically portrays the phases people go through as they try to believe in higher powers.

For most of Quentin Coldwater's young life, the Fillory books have provided an escape from a life he feels is too dreary. Its Narnia-like talking beasts summon children from a family in Cornwall, the Chatwins, to confer on them a

Quest, usually to retrieve an enchanted item before the wicked Watcherwoman can call the four seasons to a halt with her ominous ticking clocks embedded in the trees of the Fillorian forests. At the end of each tale, the Aslan-figures Umber and Ember, twin rams who are the gods of that world, show up to enforce a strict curfew for the children to return home and not linger overlong in this world of moral and not-too-unpleasant dangers and marvels. The books are a sort of “cuddle-fiction” that consoles Quentin even more than his peers, to his chagrin.

Quentin, a math prodigy for whom entrance exams are a breeze, hopes getting into Princeton will bring the happiness he feels entitled to. However, Quentin soon finds that neither an Ivy-league university, nor even the hidden college for magicians where he winds up instead, can measure up to the joys he experiences when re-reading the Fillory books:

Here he was, a freshly licensed and bonded and accredited magician. He had learned to cast spells, had seen the Beast and lived, had flown to Antarctica on his own two wings, and had returned naked by the sheer force of his magical will. He had an iron demon in his back. Who would ever have thought he could do and have and be all those things and still feel nothing at all? What was he missing? Or was it him? If he wasn't happy even here, even now, did the flaw lie in him? As soon as he seized happiness, it dispersed and reappeared somewhere else. Like Fillory, like everything good, it never lasted. What a terrible thing to know. (220)

The way Grossman describes happiness here being elusive is C. S. Lewis's point about Joy, the term he used for the ecstatic reactions he had to literature and certain forms of art. Lewis's spiritual autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*, is basically the account of his life's search for the source of these feelings, a process that led him to Christ. All other signifiers in this world, whether in print or in person, simply pointed beyond themselves to symbolize something other, transcendent, in endless deferrals; or, as Lewis put it in *Mere Christianity*: “If I find myself with a desire that which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world” (106).

Grossman's narrator describes how the Fillory series is almost about the power of good books to lure readers into their microcosms and leave them enthralled there: when the eldest child of the Chatwin family, Martin, got through a grandfather clock to Fillory for the first time, it was truly entering another world, one far more engrossing. In depicting the alluring terrain of Fillory, Grossman uses imagery that conforms to Lewis's concept of the *kappa* element (a kind of literary secret sauce), which lends a literary work its particular gestalt that in some cases can inspire an intense longing in the reader:

The world Martin discovers in the walls of his aunt's house is a world of magical twilight, a landscape as black and white and stark as a printed page, with prickly stubblefields and rolling hills

crisscrossed by old stone walls. In Fillory there's an eclipse every day at noon, and seasons can last for a hundred years. Bare trees scratch at the sky. Pale green seas lap at narrow white beaches made of broken shells. In Fillory things mattered in a way they didn't in this world. In Fillory you felt the appropriate emotion when things happened. Happiness was a real, actual, achievable possibility. It came when you called. Or no, it never left you in the first place. (7)

The literary technique Grossman employs here is not too different from the one identified by Michael Ward in his analysis of the Narnia books as *donegality*, a textual flavor arising from an author's attempt to plant imagery consonant with a chosen atmosphere he wishes to impart to the reader (16). Ward proposes the term *donegality* for this literary element, based on Lewis's love for the wild Irish coast of county Donegal (75), where he swam, as a child, every holiday and whose crashing beaches, sea-salt, and crying seagulls Lewis longingly evokes at the end of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*:

The castle of Cair Paravel on its little hill towered up above them; before them were the sands, with rocks and little pools of salt water, and seaweed, and the smell of the sea and long miles of bluish-green waves breaking for ever and ever on the beach. And oh, the cry of the seagulls! Have you ever heard it? Can you remember? (198)

This yearning for enchantment in life, what Lewis calls *sehnsucht* (borrowing a German word), and our human failures to maintain such feelings at will, forms the major theme of Grossman's novel.<sup>2</sup> For example, when The Dean of Brakebills tells Quentin that magic is real,

Quentin said nothing. . . . Part of him, the part he trusted least, wanted to leap on this idea like a puppy on a ball. But in light of everything else that had ever happened to him, in his entire life, he checked himself. . . . He wasn't going to be suckered in just like that. It was like finding a clue that somebody you'd buried and mourned wasn't really dead after all. (37)

The description of Quentin's acceptance resembles the dawning realization for a convert that something as outlandish as the Resurrection of Christ could be a *good spell* or Gospel: "And then a vast stony weight suddenly lifted off Quentin's chest. . . . They were going to make him a magician, and all he had to do was sign. . . . He was finally on the other side, down the rabbit hole, through the looking glass. . . . 'Okay,' Quentin said evenly. 'All right. On one condition. . . . I don't want to go home'" (40).

In Grossman's novel even the Magicians who graduate from Brakebills must eventually leave behind their lofty position and return to an inhospitable

world of desk jobs or other ways to eke out an existence, or as Hamlet says, “To grunt and sweat under a weary life.” Even the magic of the magic world begins to fade, as Quentin begins to learn as he nears the end of his college years. He hears about the kind of inane career paths awaiting his classmates in government positions or international think tanks where magicians could only exert a minimal influence covertly, or even in “massive art projects” or in extensive war gaming just for the fun of it. It was a problem of graduating with immense world-bending powers but without sanction to use those powers openly in equally epic ways, as it could be done in magic worlds like Fillory: “No one would come right out and say it, but the worldwide magic ecology was suffering from a serious imbalance: too many magicians, not enough monsters” (210).

And then he meets the parents of his girlfriend Alice on a Christmas break in Illinois. Now Quentin sees that life even for career magicians cannot maintain the lustre of either Brakebills or Fillory. Alice’s dad uses his magic skills to do a total makeover to their house every few years; this winter it is a bourgeois Roman villa complete with nude frescoes, low-lying couches, and sparkling fountains in the halls. Despite his diverting magic abilities, Alice’s father is bored with life, as he tells them sitting in his wrinkled toga: “‘It took me three years to put it together,’ he said. ‘Three years. And you know what? I’m already sick of it after two months . . . . What is the point of my life?’ He looked at Quentin furiously, as if he actually expected an answer, as if Quentin were concealing it from him. ‘Would someone tell me that, please? Because I have no idea! None!’” (203).

Even the professors at the magic college campuses around the world suffer from this intense longing. When Quentin has finished his sojourn in Antarctica under the tutelage of the gruff Russian Mayakovsky, he returns to Brooklyn through a portal opened by his teacher. Mayakovsky may be a hard-bitten taskmaster, but the students later learn that he was exiled to this isolated teaching post due to inappropriate relations with a student years ago at Brakebills. As Quentin looks back to wave as he crosses through the portal, he sees that “Mayakovsky wasn’t looking at him. He was looking out at . . . the rest of the Brakebills campus. The unguarded longing on his face was so excruciating Quentin had to look away. Then the portal closed. It was over” (164).

Some months after graduation, as Quentin and his friends flounder to find their purpose back in regular society, they host a dinner party for reunited Brakebills grads, where a character named Richard theorizes about the ultimate source of magic and its purpose on earth. Grossman’s depiction of Richard reveals the ways that Christians, even those who attain high levels of education and achievement, are often viewed in the secular world. Richard

was friendly enough to Quentin—firm handshake, lots of eye contact with his big, dark eyes. In conversation he liked to address Quentin directly as “Quentin” a lot, which made him feel kind of like they were having a job interview . . . . He was, in a quiet way, an observant Christian. They were rare among magicians. Quentin tried to like Richard, since everybody else did, and it would just be simpler. But he was so damn earnest. He wasn’t

stupid, but he completely lacked any sense of humor—jokes derailed him . . . and Richard knitted his thick Vulcan eyebrows in consternation at his companions' merely human foibles. (232-33)

At the dinner table, Richard shares his views on the origins of magic and a Maker, who, the characters force him to admit, is the same as God, reflecting a classic Deist position:

“Magic,” Richard announced slowly, flushed, “is the tools. Of the Maker.” . . . He looked first left and then right to make sure the whole table was listening. What a fatuous ass. “There’s no other way of looking at it. We are dealing with a scenario where there is a Person who built the house, and then He left.” He rapped the table with one hand to celebrate this triumph of reason. “And when he left, He left His tools lying around in the garage. Then we found them, and we picked them up, and we started making guesses about how they work. Now we’re learning to use them. And that’s magic.” (233)

Richard (and therefore Grossman) might as well have been discussing science and modern technology. When Richard goes a step further and interprets the irregularity of magic as “part of a higher regularity, a higher order, that we haven’t been allowed to see,” Eliot objects: “Yeah, that’s the answer . . . to everything. God save us from Christian magicians. You sound just like my parents. That is exactly what my ignorant Christian parents would say. Just, if it doesn’t fit with your theory, well, that’s just because, oh, it actually does, but God is mysterious, so we can’t see it. Because we’re so sinful. That’s so . . . *easy*” (234).

However sincere Richard’s Christian theology of magic may be, it does not translate into charitable action, at least not until the heavy lifting has been done by his peers. Once in Fillory with the Brakebills team, Richard balks at too much contact with the locals, worrying at every turn what the “authorities” will think of their meddling with another world and its fate. He refuses to seek Ember’s Tomb with the others, staying behind at the lodging they found in the forest.

Even after using a magic button to cross over worlds and find their way into Fillory (like the rings in Lewis’s book *The Magician’s Nephew*), Quentin finds out that even being there is a letdown: the companions must trudge through a bitter winter wind in trackless wastes, get shot at by a praying mantis firing a bow from a carriage, and endure the witless banter of a drunken bear named Humbledrum at a local tavern. After acquiring guides to help them locate Ember’s Tomb, the team from Brakebills survives a dangerous dungeon crawl with homages to the American role-playing game *Dungeons & Dragons*,<sup>3</sup> providing them an unexpectedly harrowing quest that beats most of the Narnia

books in terms of sheer action and atmospheric adventure. Finally, they fall before the injured but only surviving ram of Fillory's twin deities.

Like the Christian mage Richard, Ember espouses heavy-handed religious ideals, yet the theology of Fillory is not that of Narnia; it is more nearly Zoroastrian: "There are Higher Laws that are past your understanding, daughter. The power to create order is one thing. The power to destroy is another. Always they are in balance" (348). "Well, but why would You create something that had the power to hurt You? Or any of Your creatures?" Janet responds. "Why don't You help us? Do You have any idea how much we hurt? How much we suffer?" Janet's furious appeal to this god evokes a tear of pity from Ember, which makes Quentin think of "the proud Indian in the old anti-littering commercials. From behind him Josh leaned into Quentin's shoulder and whispered, '*Dude! She made Ember cry!*'" (349). As cheeky as these scenes can be, the narrative does not reward the characters for being snarky or irreverent, but neither does it condemn them. Characters like Janet raise valid questions of theodicy, the problem of suffering, and evil in the world. After Quentin has blown a silver horn out of desperation, unwittingly summoning The Beast thereby, Ember draws himself up to say, "'I am sorry you came here. . . Children of Earth. No one asked you to come. I am sorry that our world is not the paradise you were looking for. But it was not created for your entertainment. Fillory'—the old ram's jowls shook—'is not a theme park, for you and your friends to play dress-up in, with swords and crowns'" (354).

Responding to Quentin's bugle blow, the rotten eldest child of the Fillory books, Martin Chatwin, now resurfaces as the same Beast who had devoured one of Quentin's classmates back at Brakebills when accidentally summoned by Quentin during a professor's lecture. The companions are shocked to hear him reveal that years ago, Martin had hidden himself somehow in the Darkling Woods, as related in the third Fillory book, his disappearance forming what Grossman's narrator calls "the real mystery [of the series] . . . analyzed by zealous fans and slumming academics" (74). Having acquired god-like powers as a juvenile delinquent in Fillory, Martin practically severs Quentin's shoulder, almost kills off the other divine ram, and nearly destroys everyone until Alice summons the only spell that could stop him—an incantation that dissolves her very soul in the process (363). Her self-sacrifice fulfills her reason for coming to Fillory, which she had told Quentin was not to satisfy her longing for fantasy but to protect him. In the end the quietly observant Christian-mage Richard catches up to help them escape from the deathtrap at the tomb by rendering them invisible to monsters, a gesture of decency that redeems him somewhat, or as a Fillorian puts it, "almost makes you like him" (391). Unlike other prominent secular works of fantasy today such as Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy, in which God is killed off to liberate humanity, the *deicide* in Grossman's novel works in a fashion more similar to that of Christianity—it puts characters outside the moral boundaries of all possible worlds but at the same time affords them the chance to be saved.

This novel is innovative in telling a coming-of-age story set in urban America, reflecting much about youth culture and its tendencies toward excess

with drinking, drugs, and sex. Like so many disaffected young people of this lost generation growing up in a pampered suburbia (“lost” being Grossman’s term), the characters Quentin, Alice, and Eliot have excess cash to burn, indifferent parents, low accountability for their actions, and despite all the diversions they can summon with their magic, a desire for Joy that cannot be quenched. They are what Lewis called in *The Abolition of Man* “Men without Chests,” or as Flannery O’Connor’s character Hulga might put it, they have been educated to “see through to nothing” (200). They are thus woefully unprepared to meet the challenges to their spirits when transported to Fillory. They cause themselves a great deal of pain and nearly bring about the death of Fillory’s gods, yet they experience grace in the process.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>This paper was first presented at the Southwest Conference on Christianity and Literature, John Brown University, Siloam Springs, AR, Nov. 2014.

<sup>2</sup>Lewis describes this stabbing sensation of yearning or longing triggered by aesthetic experiences with art or music in *Surprised by Joy*, especially formative moments in his life that made him later strive to seek the source of these feelings. Examples include his brother’s biscuit-tin “garden”; reading about the death of Balder in a Longfellow poem (page 11); and meeting Arthur Greeves, who shared his passion for Norse legends (page 72) and thus became a pen pal for decades as a fellow “apostle” of *sehnsucht*.

<sup>3</sup>This part of Grossman’s novel has the flavor, the *donegality*, of the sample D&D game session offered in Gary Gygax’s *Dungeon Master’s Guide*, which reads almost like a transcription of players sitting around a table reporting their characters’ actions to the game referee known as the “dungeon master.” In this sample adventure, the fantasy characters explore an abandoned monastery filled with perils, requiring the players to act as a team to stand guard while others look for hidden exits; as a gnome tries chiseling into the ceiling, he gets killed by a ghoul reaching through a crack from a room above (96-100), somewhat like Quentin getting assaulted by a menagerie of dark elves and other creatures who surprise him through a doorway. This encounter with “wandering monsters” calls to mind countless D&D modules published by Gygax and others. The penultimate battle waged by Quentin’s “team” (before finding Ember and Martin Chatwin) involves fighting a giant red demon in a large room which resembles the cover illustration for *The Dungeon Master’s Guide*.

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## Book Reviews

**Eszterhas, Joe. *Crossbearer: A Memoir of Faith*. New York: St. Martin's, 2008. 242 pages, \$24.95**

**Reviewed by Glenn Hopp**

From 1983 to 1995 Joe Eszterhas wrote the screenplays to *Flashdance*, *Jagged Edge*, *Basic Instinct*, *Sliver*, *Showgirls*, and *Jade*, among others. His career as a screenwriter had made Eszterhas's name synonymous with edgy, dark, sexual thrillers. However, in 2001 he and his wife Naomi moved with their sons back to Ohio, near Cleveland, where Eszterhas, then 56, and his wife had grown up. Their motive was to protect their sons from the drug culture in Hollywood. This geographic dislocation was followed by physical and emotional upheaval when Eszterhas was soon diagnosed with throat cancer. He underwent a surgery that removed eighty percent of his larynx. When he felt himself unable to stop smoking and drinking even after such massive personal disruptions, he began to pray for help and returned to the Catholicism of his childhood. *Crossbearer* is the refreshing and ruthlessly honest story of his spiritual journey.

The memoir has deservedly been placed on the reading lists of some courses in literary or creative nonfiction and Christianity and literature. Lest this accolade sound too lofty or dignified, it should be said that the power of the book largely resides in its candor and informality, in its ability to find truths too often sugared over with the icing of pious language for its own sake. Eszterhas's prose as a reawakened Christian at times delivers the live-wire jolts suggestive of his scripts, and his directness in scrutinizing himself, organized religion, and Christian behavior is bracing. His book thus avoids the moral superiority and the truisms sometimes associated with the didactic manuals of instruction in Christian bookstores. With his new spiritual vision, Eszterhas submits just about everything to his scrutiny—the double standards of organized religion, the repeated embarrassments of a believer's failures at obedience, the threats to spiritual growth posed by compartmentalized living, the impossibility of not noticing other believers' feet of clay, and the equal hardship of not resenting the corrective comments received from others. Eszterhas puts a human face on daily Christian living. He writes in short, blunt paragraphs and slangy, conversational observations that sometimes rely on structure and the implied comparisons and contrasts of adjoining scenes to convey meaning.

In one of these pairings, for example, he first discusses his painful and repeated failures to reunite with and to be accepted by his estranged daughter

from his first marriage: “I knew that my daughter Suzi had contempt for God, so I was nervous and afraid when I told her that I’d been saved” (224). The scorn heaped on the father by the daughter in both word and gesture is brutal: “I saw something else in her eyes when I spoke to her about God. Pity. She looked at me like I had become some kind of drooling fool, ready to be wheeled from my stupid church to a nice smiley face neighborhood nursing home” (226). Suzi’s words are no less harsh than her eyes: “You’re not the Dad I knew. You and all your crap about God and church. *What’s wrong with you?* The only people who ever go to church are losers. That’s what you used to tell me. Look at you now, with all those dumb crosses you’ve got everywhere. You live in some kind of holy Halloween house, you know that, Dad?” (228).

The next section, however, relates his rediscovery and connection with another daughter from a relationship in the 1960s, a woman he had never met until 1996. The hesitant telephone talks between father and daughter include discussions of a shared belief in God leading to their reconciliation: “I felt closer and closer to her. She was my friend, the daughter I had abandoned almost forty years ago, the daughter who had given me my first grandchildren, the daughter whose belief in God was a staff to lean on during my time of trouble” (235). This blessing, however, unexpectedly conceals a hurt as devastating as the break with Suzi. He and his reunited daughter discover that Zoe, her two-year-old daughter, has mitochondrial disease, a degenerative and progressive disorder without a cure. Later, they learn that Zoe’s sister Olivia has the same disease. Readers who expect the section with the second daughter to balance and contrast the first by offering only solace and healing instead find the poignancy of a new challenge. A Hollywood ending eludes the reformed screenwriter. Eszterhas’s conclusions, however, are nonetheless humble and chastised: “I pray often during the course of a day for Zoe and Ollie. And I thank God for my greatest gift. For giving me back the daughter I abandoned. His gift revealed a divine generosity that I knew I didn’t deserve” (238).

Again and again the book delivers the slanted, problematic truths of edgy life rather than the prepackaged moralizing of conventional thinking. In another powerful section, Eszterhas and Naomi make friends with a couple from their church, Ed and Noreen. After a while Ed notices that Eszterhas avoids Holy Communion, and he writes him a letter of encouragement, asking Eszterhas to forgive himself for his past, and reminding him of his good qualities and of his need for the nourishment of the Eucharist. Ed does this somewhat timidly, as a self-conscious suburbanite in Cleveland hesitantly and apologetically offering advice to a famous and successful screenwriter. Eszterhas uses the scene to explore the way worship can lead people to God but still keep them at a distance from one another: “And so we became—Ed and Noreen and Naomi and I—more than just church friends. We crossed that rarely crossed line that limited church friendships to the worship space” (96). Such a lowering of barriers leads Eszterhas and Naomi to discover that Noreen as well had been fighting cancer for years. He gives us a glimpse of the deepening love shared by Ed and Noreen in their crisis. In Noreen’s candor he finds a parallel to his own: “I asked her quietly, when we were alone, if she was afraid of dying. Because I too was a

cancer survivor, it was a question I had a right to ask. She answered it with heartbreaking directness: ‘I’m only afraid of what’s going to happen to Eddie’” (97). The shared struggle with cancer eventually gives Eszterhas, as initially instructed in Ed’s letter, the strength to forgive himself for hating God and for not taking Holy Communion. In it all, a complex picture emerges of Christian friendship as a resource amid the severest struggles of life, a reminder of the rarity of being fully known and fully accepted.

The main strength of the book is the way Eszterhas’s faith pervades his entire life rather than simply a compartment marked “church.” He forces himself to consider and uproot seemingly every impediment to his growth: “Now, as I contemplated the meaning of my newfound Christianity, my ‘baby faith,’ I realized that there was an even more problematic underlying issue. I was a deeply cynical man” (143). After mapping out the biographical causes of his cynicism, which seemed to crystallize in Hollywood (“the coldest, most unloving, cynical place in the world” [145]), he realizes that he must change: “But . . . I really didn’t know if I could do it . . . if I could be a truly good Christian” (146). When his little boy comes home from school to report that a bully bloodied his nose, Eszterhas wants to teach his son to turn the other cheek, but instead he instructs him in how to fight, if only in self-defense:

In my prayers that night as I fell asleep, I asked Jesus to forgive me for not telling Joe to turn the other cheek. . . . No dummy, I also told Jesus that I didn’t deserve His love. I didn’t deserve his forgiveness for acting cynically and coldly much of my life. . . . I looked sometimes at our littlest boy, Lukey, and I thought, *That’s who I’m striving to be like.* . . . I thought it not completely impossible (or just barely possible) that the day would come when I could rid myself of my cynicism and look at people with that kind of love . . . Lukey’s love, Jesus’s love. (147, 148)

Eszterhas is repeatedly hard on himself as he discusses his present and reflects on his past. He frankly depicts the criticism he gets from others at his church for the sexuality in his famous film scripts and even for his casual dress at church (“I particularly liked wearing the Stones T-shirts when I carried the cross because I wanted to demonstrate that you didn’t have to be some goody-two-shoes twerp to believe in God and love Jesus” [30]). His rigorous self-scrutiny colors the entire book. He mentions that Naomi thanks the Blessed Virgin for every day that Eszterhas lives without cigarettes and alcohol. His self-recrimination makes him wonder if his throat cancer was a kind of divine karma: “I had said many ugly, hurtful things to my fellow human beings (all God’s children) throughout the years” (42). He discusses returning to Hollywood to offer apologies to the people he had treated badly. He assesses his fury about the scandals of priestly abuse and ecclesiastical cover-up. He catches and corrects himself when judging a friend’s gambling addiction. He shows charity in forgiving the weeping Fed-Ex driver who had struck and killed the family’s pet dog and spontaneously asks him to pray with him. He invites to his home a

young man who sent him a movie script that had quality and potential and begins the process of getting it produced, but the project, which even his Hollywood contacts agree deserves to be completed, gets sidetracked and is left to languish. As so often happens, the conclusion here is a hard one: "I hoped that by trying to help him, by trying to be a good Christian, I hadn't broken his heart" (188). In the pages of Eszterhas's memoir, loving God and seeking to be a good Christian, even for just one whole day, is a noble and courageous undertaking with heartbreak never far away.

Eszterhas's uncompromising vision of Christian commitment reminds us that, like the larger-than-life romance and action novels on the bestseller lists, escapism also all too often colors the nonfiction titles in Christian bookstores. Eszterhas's reawakened faith is relentless at pursuing a fuller, more obedient life for himself and candid at presenting the results of his changed outlook. *Crossbearer* is a book to savor and learn from.

**Dostoyevsky, Fyodor. *Notes from the House of the Dead*. Trans. Boris Jakim. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013. 344 pages, \$24.00**

**Reviewed by John J. Han**

This book is a new translation of Dostoyevsky's semiautobiographical novel *Zapiski izmyortvogodoma* (1862), which was originally serialized in *Vremya (Time)* magazine the year before. Constance Garnett first translated the novel into English in 1915 under the title *The House of the Dead* (Macmillan; reissued by Dover Thrift, 2004). Since then, additional English translations have appeared, such as *Memoirs from the House of Dead* (trans. Jessie Coulson, 1956; reissued as an Oxford World's Classics in 2008) and *Notes from a Dead House* (trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky, Knopf, 2015). The number of translations reflects the enduring literary merit of, and the undying interest in, Dostoyevsky's early novel.

*Notes from the House of the Dead*—which is distinct from the author's existentialist novella *Notes from Underground* (*Zapiski izpodpol'ya*, 1864)—contains a fictionalized account of his political imprisonment in Siberia. Similar to the author, Alexander Petrovich Gorianchikov (the narrator) is a nobleman and landowner who serves his time among peasant convicts. Whereas Dostoyevsky himself was condemned to four years of hard labor in Siberia for political reasons, the narrator is sentenced to ten years of hard labor at a Siberian prison camp for murdering his wife. (Dostoyevsky presented Alexander Petrovich as a common-law criminal to avoid the czarist regime's censorship.) In the introduction to the novel, Dostoyevsky explains that, upon completion of four years' penal servitude, Alexander Petrovich had settled in a small Siberian town, living as a misanthropic recluse and giving private French lessons for pay. *Notes from the House of the Dead* is supposedly a transcription of Alexander Petrovich's prison notes the author obtained after his untimely death.

A detached observer, Alexander Petrovich writes about the harsh realities of penal life, providing keen insights into the inmates' extreme feelings of hopelessness and despair. Violence pervades the setting, and the overall mood of the novel is dreary. No matter how violent a convict may have been, his willpower is eventually shattered under the harsh prison conditions. Once incarcerated, inmates' heads are shaven, and they are shackled and branded. Further, they are subject to vicious corporal punishment; some inmates are beaten as many as 4,000 times for one punishment. Each blow can "cut the guilty body like a razor" (199); it is not surprising that some of the beatings can result in death or insanity. In the meantime, the more severe beatings a convict receives, the more respect he earns from his fellow prisoners. Regarding the sadistic punishments he observed in prison, the narrator declares that they go against Christian principles:

There are people, who, like tigers, are thirsting to lick blood. Whoever has once experienced this power, this unlimited domination over the body, blood, and spirit of a fellow human being—his brother, according to the law of Christ—whoever has experienced the power and the full possibility of humiliating with the most extreme humiliation another being made in the image of God will involuntarily become powerless when it comes to his own sensations. Tyranny is a habit; it has a tendency to evolve, and in the end it evolves into a disease. (203)

The inhumane treatment of inmates, especially peasant convicts, shows how easily one can degenerate into animality. In addition to a culture of brutality, convicts are subjected to humiliation in social settings. When he was a child, the narrator despised the commoners who stood at the back of the Orthodox Church. Now a convict, he finds himself standing behind even the commoners at church and feeling like a leper; interestingly, the convicts are some of the most fervent prayers. Meanwhile, peasant convicts share camaraderie in their hatred of inmates from a noble background. The narrator recalls, “The prison was oppressive.... The anger, the hostility, the violent quarrelling, the envy, the persistence with which the other convicts picked on us ‘gentlemen,’ the spiteful, menacing faces!” (216).

Life in prison is hard, but inmates learn to sustain themselves emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. Hope—any kind of hope—is an indispensable ingredient of survival for them. No matter how grim the future looks, they look forward to better days ahead. They search for something they can latch on to: some find meaning in religious faith, others turn to hedonistic pleasures, and still others find their self-worth by completing assigned labor ahead of fellow inmates or by winning an argument on some trivial matters. Moments of happiness may be fleeting and illusory, but they help them keep their sanity for one more day. Inmates learn to appreciate beauty in mundane scenes, such as a sickly flower and a nomadic family they see beyond the prison walls. Not surprisingly, the return of springtime, service attendance, and other events civilians take for granted prevent them from falling into total despondency.

Despite the prevalence of violence, one encounters the intrinsic goodness of humans in this work. The narrator recalls kind civilians he met during his prison term. Early in the novel, a very poor widow befriends inmates, bringing news from outside the prison, lightening up the convicts, being agreeable to them, and serving them refreshments. In another episode, a tradesman kindly gives five kopeks to an inmate and then crosses himself before his departure. Later, the inmate buys white loaves of bread and divides the delicacy equally among his fellows. Also, unlike officials, prison doctors are portrayed as caring people universally respected by the convicts, who call them fathers.

Dostoyevsky’s novel offers many character sketches drawn from his own years of forced exile in Siberia. In addition to sadistic guards, it describes various inmates in the barracks—their backgrounds, their crimes, their idiosyncrasies, their antics. Readers encounter convicts who committed crimes in different

ways—some premeditatedly, others impulsively, still others accidentally. Mood swings are common among inmates. Some inmates remain calm for an extended period of time before their violent nature erupts on the spur of the moment. For instance, a quiet man who has been reading the Gospel (the only book allowed in the prison) from midnight until morning for a whole year suddenly attacks a high-ranking official; as a result, the inmate is arrested and severely punished, and, three days later, dies in the hospital. Other inmates do not speak for weeks before they insist on telling their life stories to those who are not interested. Many convicts, especially those who committed crime against the authorities, are convinced that they are innocent; they believe that society will eventually acquit them. Finally, convicts abhor meaningless labor; even as prisoners, they want to spend their time doing something worthwhile.

Thematically, *Notes from the House of the Dead* foreshadows Dostoyevsky's later novels. Similar to *Humiliated and Insulted*, *Notes from Underground*, *Crime and Punishment*, and *The Brothers Karamazov*, the novel features the theme of salvation through suffering. Near the end of the story, the narrator reflects on how his years of imprisonment were beneficial to him:

I remember that only a passionate desire for resurrection, for renewal, for a new life gave me the strength to wait and hope. And in the end I did become stronger. . . . Solitary in my soul, I surveyed the whole of my past life, sifted through everything down to the last trifling detail, pondered my past, judged myself mercilessly and severely, and even sometimes blessed fate for sending me this solitude. . . . I sketched out a program for the entire future and resolved to follow it strictly. A blind faith was reborn in me that I would accomplish all this and that I could accomplish it. . . . (293)

For the narrator, life in exile proved to be a blessing in disguise.

The author's keen insights into criminal psychology are also evident throughout the story. One learns how crime takes place, what goes through a person's mind when he commits crime, how convicts view themselves, and how they deal with punishment for their crime. The title of the book suggests that the narrative will be a recording of harsh experiences, yet one also learns how inmates deal with the loss of freedom, how hope is essential for human survival, and how kindness makes life livable. The overall mood of *Notes from the House of the Dead* is gloomy and sad, yet one can peek into human nature, the human condition, and the possibility of redemption in this book.

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## Call for Papers and Book Reviews

# *Intégrité:* *A Faith and Learning Journal*

*Published Semiannually by the  
Faith & Learning Committee and the  
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*Intégrité* (pronounced *IN tay gri tay*) is a peer-reviewed scholarly journal on the integration of Christian faith and higher learning. Founded in the fall of 2002 with the Institutional Renewal Grant from the Rhodes Consultation on the Future of the Church-Related College, it is published both online and in print copy. Interested Christian scholars are encouraged to submit academic articles and book reviews for consideration. Manuscripts should be sent as e-mail attachments (Microsoft Word format) to the editor, John J. Han, at [hanjn@mobap.edu](mailto:hanjn@mobap.edu).

Articles must be 15-25 pages, and book reviews must be 4-8 pages, both double-spaced. Articles should examine historical, theological, philosophical, cultural, and/or pedagogical issues related to faith-learning integration. Possible topics include, but are not limited to:

- the current state and/or future of the church-related college
- history of Christian liberal arts education
- Christianity and contemporary culture
- a Christian perspective on multiculturalism and diversity
- service learning
- academic freedom in a Christian context
- implementation of Christian truths in academic disciplines
- Christian education in the non-Western world
- global Christianity.

Articles must engage in faith-learning issues or controversies in a scholarly, critical manner. We generally do not consider manuscripts that are merely factual, devotional, or sermonic. Due dates are March 1 for inclusion in the spring issue and September 1 for the fall issue.

Articles are expected to be research-based but must focus on the author's original thought. We typically do not consider articles that use more than twenty-five secondary sources; merely present other scholars' opinions without developing extended, thoughtful analysis; and/or use excessive endnotes. Direct quotations, especially lengthy ones, should be used sparingly.

Considering that most *Intégrité* readers are Christian scholars and educators not necessarily having expertise on multiple disciplines, articles and book reviews must be written in concise, precise, and easy-to-understand style. Writers are recommended to follow what William Strunk, Jr., and E.B. White suggest in *The Elements of Style*: use definite, specific, concrete language; omit needless words; avoid a succession of loose sentences; write in a way that comes naturally; and avoid fancy words.

For citation style, refer to the current edition of *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. Articles should include in-text citations in parentheses, a list of endnotes (if applicable), and an alphabetical listing of works cited at the end of the article. Book reviews need only page numbers in parentheses after direct quotations.