



The Warrior's Pen

Communicating the Biblical Worldview for the Glory of God

Essays

“Strapping on the Armor as Issued” by Mike Burke

“The Life and Writings of Athenagoras” by Joshua Kimmerly

“Against Happily-Ever-Afters” by Callie Johnson

“Elizabeth Barrett Browning and the Social Impact of Poetry” by Abigail Tschetter

Short Fiction

“Topiary” by Amanda Harman

“Silence in the Galaxy” by Callie Johnson

Nonfiction

“Cheerio Trails and Jesus” by Ashley Harwell

Poetry

“The Thunderstorm” by Brooke Morris

“Remember” by Callie Johnson

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THE FIRST RAP BATTLE IN THE BIBLE

The first two human speech acts in the Bible are creative. First, God tasks Adam with naming the animals in Genesis 2:20. The second is a burst of impromptu poetry addressed by Adam to his newly-created bride, Eve:

This is now bone of my bones,
And flesh of my flesh;
She shall be called Woman,

Because she was taken out of Man. (Gen. 2:23 [NASB1995])

Thus, from the beginning of creation, we see that human speech is not merely functional; it is capable of much beauty. But, just as thorns scarred crops post-Fall, sin infected human speech. The next recorded poem in Genesis is a dark mirror of Adam's original. In Genesis 4:23–24, Lamech addresses his two wives:

Adah and Zillah,
Listen to my voice,
You wives of Lamech,
Give heed to my speech,
For I have killed a man for wounding me;
And a boy for striking me;
If Cain is avenged sevenfold,
Then Lamech seventy-sevenfold.

Unlike Adam's poem praising marriage, Lamech praises an act of violence and claims a blessing for it. The fact that he uses poetry to magnify an act of violence makes it more tragic.

In my English classes I refer to Adam and Lamech's poems as the first rap battle. This rap battle has continued to the present with two voices: the voice of the world and that of Christ. As followers of Christ, we are to "[take] every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5). Our writing should reflect this. Whatever the subject, whatever the genre, we are writing as His creative ambassadors (2 Cor. 5:20). This philosophy of writing is not confined to Calvary's English department; it reflects how Calvary approaches *every* discipline—from the Biblical worldview, fully submissive to the authority of Christ.

With this philosophy in mind, I am very excited to introduce you to the first issue of *The Warrior's Pen*, a journal dedicated to providing Biblical worldview-driven articles and works from all fields of discipline for the edification of God's people with the purpose of glorifying Him. This journal's contents are provided solely by the students, staff, and faculty of Calvary University. It is our prayer that those who read this journal will share and enjoy the articles and works and be built up in the truth of God.

In this issue, you will don the armor of a warrior in ancient times, rethink happy endings, and explore the lives of a Church Father and a great poet. You will weep at the feet of a topiary with a man desperately trying to avoid becoming his father. You will take a break to chomp grandma's cookies with alien babies. You will see a mother witnessing in a grocery store while hoping her toddler doesn't melt down. And you will see God in a thunderstorm and remember to check your perfection at the door.

Enjoy! And be delighted at God's gift of communication in its many forms!

Thomas Crank
Editor

ESSAYS

Introduction to Essays

Calvary values a biblical lens for every discipline, so students in English should be writing under the authority of the Bible and using the Bible as an interpretive lens just as much as the student in the Bible and Theology department. Good essay writing involves making a promise to the reader and delivering on that promise with clear organization and strong research.

* * *

Michael S. Burke originally wrote the following essay for BI100: Introduction to the Bible. In this essay, he explores the armor of God from a military perspective.

Strapping on the Armor as Issued

by Michael S. Burke

Introduction

Throughout his epistles, Paul calls on believers to take on the attributes of a soldier. He uses military metaphors a number of times in his letters to the Philippians, the Corinthians, Philemon, Timothy, and most memorably to the Ephesians. He even describes other Christians as “fellow soldiers” (Philemon 1:2).

Though it may seem odd for Christians to emulate soldierly virtues at first, there is a purposeful and practical reason. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul recognized the churches were in a spiritual war against a highly organized enemy (Benware 2003, 212).

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. (Ephesians 6:10-12).

There are also numerous Old Testament examples of warriors who conducted themselves righteously in the sight of God. Joshua, Caleb, Gideon, and David come immediately to mind.

Soldierly virtues are also often associated with loyalty, duty, sacrifice, and noble comportment. It was a Roman centurion who displayed more faith than anyone in Israel when he approached Jesus on behalf of his ill servant. (Matthew 8: 1-13). In the book of Acts, Cornelius, a centurion, and his entire household are the first gentiles baptized into the church. At the cross, when the attending centurion witnesses the events as Christ died, he praised God (Luke 23:47).

It is small wonder then that Paul uses the metaphor of a Roman Legionnaire as he encourages believers to don their kit, get in formation, and march forward together in unity and victory.

Requirements to Join the Legion

In order to enlist in the ranks of the Roman army, one had to be a Roman citizen of good standing. Slaves, criminals, and those of bad report need not apply. The prospective recruit also had to have a whole and healthy body, meet a height standard of five foot ten inches, have good eyesight, be of good character, and possess a letter of recommendation preferably from a veteran legionnaire (Matyszak 2009, 9-11). The spiritual metaphor here is obvious for the Christian believer. In order to be an effective soldier in Christ there are expected standards of moral conduct, spiritual health, and maintaining a reputation of good character.

Misconceptions

The Knight in Shining God Armor

Artist depictions of the whole armor of God are often of medieval knights errant, standing boldly with sword and shield, ready for action. Unfortunately, this is not the depiction Paul had in mind when referring to the armor or encouraging believers to emulate soldiers. Firstly, a knight-errant is described a traveling knight searching for adventure in order to exhibit his military skill, physical prowess, generosity and other chivalrous virtues (Merriam-Webster, s.v. "Knight-errant"). This is the description of someone out to seek individual glory.

The romantic knight-errant often adventured and faced danger alone in order to prove his valor. Roman legionnaires fought in unit formations, called maniples, of about 120 to 180 men each (Davis 1999, 48). No one goes to war all on their own, likewise believers are not to forsake the assembling of themselves together for the same reason (Hebrews 10:25). Christians are to campaign shoulder to shoulder together in unity. There is no such thing as a one-man gang, and even in the conventional military, the smallest unit is a four-man fire team.

Casual Everyday Use

In Ephesians 6 verse 13 the reader is encouraged to take up the armor: "Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm." Some have interpreted this as meaning the Christian must put on the armor of God, leave it on for their entire lives, and never relax the discipline needed in the event of its use (Epp 1973, 34-35). Unfortunately, no warrior in the history of warfare ever donned armor and weapons to simply walk around in it all day. The fighting man generally takes up weapons and armor with the intention of going into combat, or at least recognizing the possibility of doing so. Putting on battlefield gear should reflect an act of will and the combat mindset of the soldier. Christians who cavalierly declare they pray their armor on every day without recognizing the combative intent of such an act are in danger of complacency.

Donning the Armor

Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. (Ephesians 6:14-17).

Believers usually take for granted that the pieces of armor are what they are without question. But there is a reason Christian soldiers are to take up a shield of faith and not a shield of the spirit. Why not a trumpet of truth? Wouldn't it be handier to have a bow to shoot flaming

arrows *at* the wicked? Paul became intimately familiar with Roman legionnaires during his travels and imprisonment. He selected each item for a specific use and purpose.

The Girdle of Truth

It is interesting that the foundational item of the armor of God is the belt of truth. The world would encourage people to put on a girdle of *their* truth. One is either in the truth or not. Belts of postmodernism and relativism would fail to hold up anyone's trousers. There is a reason the first item is the belt of truth and why it is associated with the hip girdle of the legionnaire.

Athletes know the foundation of their physical performance is in their hips. Weightlifters can only move so much weight just using their arms but when they drive their hips into the movement they are able to hoist multiple times their own bodyweight overhead. In martial arts, many of the foundational techniques are hip driven movements. Traditional battlefield systems train their practitioners to initiate their movements and strikes with the hips (Armstrong s.v. "Shinkage Ryu Heiho Koryu"). Strikes that are not initiated from the hips are generally ineffective, while hip driven movement generates considerable power into the attack. Legionnaires in hand to hand combat would have trained themselves to be as biomechanically efficient as possible and would have known this. Likewise, believers who do not initiate their efforts from the truth cannot be effective in their ministry.

The Breastplate of Righteousness

Roman legionnaires wore a 'lobster-style' of breastplate called a *lorica segmentata*. This was a figure-hugging armor made of steel bands mounted on a leather frame. (Matyszak 2009, 56). This flexible steel breastplate protected the legionnaire's internal organs, particularly the heart. Scriptures view the heart as the seat of the emotions and is a prime target for the enemy, fortunately the believer's righteousness is based on God's righteousness, not his own (Epp 1973, 41). Living righteously also protects the believer from the second and third order of effects of a sinful lifestyle. These consequences can span a wide range from health issues, relationship problems, addictions, and broken homes. A life of uprightness and integrity protects the believer and is the opposite of wickedness (Barton et al 1996, 132). Titus 2 verses 7 and 8 gives an excellent illustration of this protection: "...in all things show yourselves to be an example of good deeds, with purity in doctrine, dignified, sound in speech which is beyond reproach, so that the opponent will be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us."

As mentioned above, the armor of God is not a rusty chainmail shirt one throws over their head and walks around in like a bathrobe. The *lorica segmentata* worn by the legionnaire was comprised of 34 segments and various hinges which required regular maintenance and polishing (Matyszak 2009, 56). The Roman soldier who casually wore his armor like a t-shirt would find one day his armor was rusted, scratched, and useless. Likewise, believers should continually polish their armor through self-examination, study, and most importantly prayer (Benware 2003, 212).

The Hobnails of Peace

The legionnaire's footwear was augmented with hobnails that provided traction like cleats or studded soles. This gave him sure footing on muddy or blood-churned battlefields (Matyszak 2009, 54). Christians can likewise remain sure footed in combat with a peace that passes all understanding (Philippians 4:7). Those without the true gospel of peace are liable to slip and fall due to their concerns and fears while the Christian soldier can stand firm in battle (Barton et al 1996, 133).

Marching was one of the defining characteristics of the legionary (Matyszak 2009, 70). They were expected to endure long marches and remain steady in formation in the midst of

raging combat. Believers are assured that the Word of God is a lamp to their feet which will guide their way (Psalms 119:105). Having their feet shod with the gospel of peace, Christians are able to march with confidence through the chaotic battlefields ahead.

The Shield of Faith

Possibly the most iconic item the Roman soldier carried was his shield. The ornate designs often identified which unit the legionary belonged to. Likewise, the Christian soldier should meditate on how their faith identifies them as well.

A common misconception is that the shield was solely designed for the protection of the individual bearing it. On the contrary, it was crafted to protect the entire line of troops as they advanced. The front rank stood shoulder to shoulder with shields interlocked while the ranks following could interlock their shields overhead to protect the formation from projectiles. The Roman shield wasn't for hiding behind, it was for advancing directly into the face of the enemy. It is said that many barbarians learned the hard way that a Roman shield in the right hands was also a handy offensive weapon as well (Matyszak 2009, 60).

Greek armies fought in phalanxes which were the precursors to the Roman maniples. If a Greek hoplite were to lose his helmet, he would not be punished as the helmet was for the protection of the individual soldier. If he lost his shield, the punishment was severe. Now the soldier was endangering the entire formation by his inability to protect his fellow troops.

It should also be noted that the ranks of the maniples which made up the Roman cohorts were organized in a very particular way. In the front rank were placed the youngest most inexperienced troops, the *hastati*. In the rank behind were veterans of about thirty years of age who had combat experience, the *principes*. The final rank were the older, most steady veterans, the *triarii* (Davis 1999, 48-49). When massed formations of troops crashed into each other on the battlefield the soldiers in the rear would often place their shield in the back of the men in front of them and thus push the formation forward in order to grind the enemy formation down into the mud.

The metaphor for the Christian soldier couldn't be more obvious. The shield of faith may be the most important item for the believer (Epp 1973, 47). How its use is applied covers a broad spectrum. Believers should use their faith on behalf of others not simply themselves. It has been said that Christians are the only soldiers that leave their fallen on the battlefield. Instead, faith should be used to instruct, correct, rebuke and exhort others (2 Timothy 4:2). The older, veteran believers should be a steady example to the younger ones (Titus 2). The shield of faith should be used to protect the entire church body from the flaming darts and arrows of the wicked. No soldier goes to battle alone. Believers should advance unified behind a shield wall of faith.

The Helmet of Salvation

Legionnaire helmets were designed to protect the head and neck. They were specifically reinforced to prevent the wearer from having his skull cleaved in half (Matyszak 2009, 59). A well-placed head strike can incapacitate the entire body, making a head wound a serious matter.

The head is the center of the intellect and is a favorite target of the enemy of the believer. Doubts and anxiety can overwhelm the Christian soldier making him less effective (Epp 1973, 50). The enemy often attempts to convince the believer to doubt their salvation through Christ. But the hope of salvation is a certainty of believers, and God will do what He has promised (Barton et al 1996, 134). Time and again believers are exhorted to don the helmet of salvation (1 Thessalonians 5:8). The knowledge of salvation through Christ is what the Christian soldier can depend on in order to live an effective life for the Lord (Epp 1973, 54).

The Sword of the Spirit

The Roman *gladius* was a short double-edged sword designed for close combat use. Primarily crafted as a thrusting weapon, it was used to puncture through vital organs and was also effective in cleanly hacking off limbs and heads as well (Matyszak 2009, 62-63).

But why not a spear of the Spirit? Surely a longer ranged weapon would be more effective. Not so, the *gladius* allowed the Roman formations to remain much more flexible in their battlefield maneuvers. In contrast, the famous Greek phalanx relied on long spears which only allowed them to advance in one direction. This made them vulnerable to attack from all other sides (Davis 1999, 52). Once again, the individual soldier wasn't the priority of consideration, but the entire formation as a whole.

Proper battlefield use of the sword required Roman legionnaires to advance perilously close to their enemy. In many martial traditions, there is a maxim that in order to give a cut, a warrior must be willing to take one (Armstrong s.v. "Shinkage Ryu Heiho Koryu"). The legionnaire had to move his protective shield aside and possibly expose himself so he could use his *gladius*. In order to properly apply the Word of God, the believer often has to get close to someone. This means there is a possibility of the believer getting hurt in the process, but it is a hazard the Christian soldier must be willing to face.

It should also be remembered that simply flailing one's arm about with a sword is an ineffective application of the weapon. The arm is only so strong. An effective sword strike is a hip driven movement that lends power to the attack. Thus, the Word of God is most effectively used in combination with the truth for maximum penetration of the vitals.

On a final note, many Christians refer to their Bibles as their sword. This is a misnomer. The bible is an armory. One has to open it up in order to get to the weapons stored inside. Be advised though, the double-sided nature of the blade means the user may occasionally cut themselves as well.

Conclusion

Due to a lack of cultural context with ancient martial traditions, the modern believer may not understand all its applications when taking on the whole armor of God. The armor is designed for group not individual use. The application of the items isn't all necessarily violently combative either. A believer doesn't need to combat evil spirits as if he lived in a bad horror movie. Nor does the Christian soldier need to beat people over the head with the Word. Sometimes the proper application simply requires one to get close to someone and gently slide the Word between the ribs and let it take effect.

Paul knew believers were in for a long spiritual campaign against the forces of evil. The career of a Christian soldier can be hard and sometimes brutal, but the retirement package is out of this world!

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Written for the course RP445: Great Christian Thinkers – The Early Church Fathers, this essay identifies the significant cultural influences and the background considerations which shaped the specific Church Father's writings and the impact of a specific work of the Church Father studied.

The Life and Writings of Athenagoras

by Joshua Kimmerly

Introduction

Christianity today would not be the same without the foundation built by the early church fathers. Thus, it is important for Christians to study these works so that they can understand the development of their faith. One way of doing this is examining the writings and life of the early church fathers. Specifically, an analysis of Athenagoras and his *Plea* will be conducted in order to gather information applicable to Christians today.

Athenagoras and the Date of His Plea

Athenagoras was a Christian philosopher of Athens.¹ While there are more than one ancient Athenagoras, it is thought that the author of the *Plea* is from Athens because of both his name and his title of his *Plea*, which reads "A Plea Regarding Christians, by Athenagoras, the Athenian."² He lived during the second century and likely wrote his well-known *Plea* sometime between AD 176–77. The date of this writing is based off of his mentioning of Lucius Commodus, who became emperor in AD 176 and died in AD 180.³ Some try to utilize his comments on cannibalism and incest in chapter 3 as a reference to the persecution of Christians in Lyons and Vienne in AD 177; however, the charges of cannibalism and incest were very prevalent in the second century and therefore do not support giving it an exact date of after the persecution in AD 177.⁴

¹ Cyril C. Richardson, ed, *Early Christian Fathers* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 291.

² Louis A. Ruprecht, "Athenagoras the Christian, Pausanias the Travel Guide, and a Mysterious Corinthian Girl," *The Harvard Theological Review* 85, no. 1 (1992): 37, accessed January 29, 2021, Jstor.

³ Leslie Barnard, "Notes on Athenagoras," *Latomus* 31, no. 2 (1972): 413, accessed January 29, 2021, Jstor.

⁴ L. W. Barnard, "The Embassy of Athenagoras," *Vigiliae Christianae*, 21, no. 2 (1967): 89–90, accessed January 30, 2021, Jstor.

There is not much known about Athenagoras except for a few references from other early writers, most of which are unreliable. Such is the case in a third century writer, Methodius of Tyre. For the most part his work has been passed over by many early church fathers.⁵ The name “Athenagoras” is rarely mentioned by any early writers, which could be because his *Plea* was originally circulated as an anonymous writing.⁶ It makes logical sense then that there is little external background information on Athenagoras. Therefore, one must look at his writings for more details on him.

Style

A look at Athenagoras’ writing will communicate just how eloquent of a writer he was. In fact, some conclude that he was the most eloquent of all of the apologists. His eloquence is seen in the arrangement of his writing, his rhythmic style, and reference to mythology, which all combine to grab the reader’s attention. His writing of the *Plea* was with the desire for it to be given as an actual speech (although this did not happen).⁷ His *Plea* was written as an apologetic for the Christian faith, which was written for a non-Christian audience.⁸

An outside observance of his letters produces the conclusion that he was not a very creative person, nor was he a scholar. He was well informed of the various ideas of the time in which he wrote, and he often incorporated these ideas into his writing. This is shown in chapter 28 where he takes his ideas from Apollodorus’ work *On the Gods*. Another work which he utilizes is Plutarch’s *Placita*.⁹ His writing also differs from the other Apologists in that it is not Christocentric – he never distinguishes Son with either the names Jesus or Christ. He would often refer to the Son as the “Logos” or “Son.”¹⁰ His *Plea* also differs from the Apologist Justin Martyr in that he does not use Old Testament Prophecy to defend Jesus’s deity. This is in line with his purpose in writing, as referencing the Old Testament would likely have little influence upon pagan audience.¹¹ This would be similar to how the different Gospel writers all wrote to a different audience and because of this they focused on different aspects of Jesus’ life and ministry. There is no point emphasizing something which has no impact on convincing your audience of your position.

Despite not referencing the Old Testament like Justin did in his apology, Athenagoras does get the majority of his theological ideas from Justin. These include his views on “prophetic inspiration, resurrection, demonology, angelology, and so on.”¹²

⁵ Richardson, *Christian Fathers*, 290.

⁶ Oliver H. Willem, “Documents Written by the Heads of the Catechetical School in Alexandria: From Mark to Clement,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 38, no. 1 (2017), 3, accessed February 4, 2021, ProQuest Ebrary.

⁷ Richardson, *Christian Fathers*, 290–291.

⁸ Ruprecht, “Athenagoras”, 38.

⁹ Richardson, *Christian Fathers*, 294–295.

¹⁰ Mark Carpenter, “A Synopsis of the Development of Trinitarian Thought From the First Century Church Fathers to the Second Century Apologists,” *Trinity Journal* 26, no. 2 (Fall 2005): 307, accessed January 29, 2021, Galaxie Theological Journal Library.

¹¹ Richardson, *Christian Fathers*, 295.

¹² Richardson, *Christian Fathers*, 296.

Manuscripts

The text of Athenagoras' *Plea*, like other Greek Apologies, is not well preserved. All of the known manuscripts go back to the Aretas Codex, which was written in AD 914 by a scribe. The archbishop for which it was written went through the Codex and added grammatical elements such as breathing marks and separating undistinguishable words. It is from the Aretas Codex that both the Codex Mutinensis III D 7 and Codex Parisinus Graec 174 have been translated in the eleventh century. From the Codex Mutinensis III D 7, the Strassburg Codex was translated. The first edition of Athenagoras' *Plea* was published in Zurich in 1557.¹³ To summarize this, there are very few translations of Athenagoras' *Plea*. Therefore, the copy that is available for reading today may have some differences from the original written by Athenagoras. For comparison, the New Testament, which has approximately 5,700 Greek manuscripts, 20,000 versional manuscripts and more than one million church father quotations.¹⁴

One main translation of Athenagoras' *Plea* is by J.K. Theodor von Otto and is named *Corpus Apologetarum Saeculi Secundi*, Vol 7, which was written in 1858 and contains extensive notes and indexes. For modern critical study, one should use E Schwartz's *Athenagorae Libellus pro Christianis*, which was written in Leipzig in 1891. The first time that the *Plea* was translated into English was in 1714 and done by D. Humphreys. Another key text for studying Athenagoras' *Plea* is Johannes Geffcken's edition of the text, which is incisive in dealing with parallel literature.¹⁵

Occasion

Athenagoras wrote his letter specifically to "the Emperors Marcus Aurelius Antoninus and Lucius Aurelius Commodus."¹⁶ Within his letter, however, he addresses three charges brought against the Christian faith. These were: atheism, incest and cannibalism. He spends the majority of his letter (chpt 3–30) discussing the topic of atheism.¹⁷ The topic of atheism is clearly not only a modern-day issue. While many Christians within the church today must overcome the assumptions and false claims made by atheism, so did the early church. Unbelievers often accused the early church of incest and cannibalism because of their secrecy regarding the Eucharist – only baptized people could attend it. Therefore, the pagan people could only gain knowledge about what went on based on hearsay, which often included the discussion of eating and drinking Christ's body and blood. Christians often placed an emphasis on love and the brotherhood, which fueled the charges of incest.¹⁸ It is not surprising then that the claims of cannibalism and incest arose since everything was done in secrecy. A modern-day example may be something along the lines of unbelievers thinking that all priests molest children. While this is

¹³ Richardson, *Christian Fathers*, 297.

¹⁴ Darrell L. Bock and Buist M. Fanning, eds, *Interpreting the New Testament Text: Introduction to the Art and Science of Exegesis* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 42.

¹⁵ Richardson, *Christian Fathers*, 297–298.

¹⁶ Leslie Barnard, "Notes on Athenagoras," 413.

¹⁷ Richardson, *Christian Fathers*, 293.

¹⁸ Richardson, *Christian Fathers*, 293.

a false statement, the news coverage of the few instances where this happens is often all unbelievers have on the topic. Therefore, it would be natural for them to make such conclusions.

Athenagoras wrote primarily to a pagan audience trying to persuade them of the case for monotheism.¹⁹ This is demonstrated within Athenagoras' *Plea* when he says things like "since our teaching affirms one God" and "for the divine is uncreated and eternal."²⁰ It is clear from the text that Athenagoras was attempting to persuade his readers to understand monotheism so that he could then present his apologetic for the Christian faith. Since his purpose is apologetical and not theological, Athenagoras' theology cannot be determined from his letter.²¹

Message

The main message of Athenagoras' *Plea* was a defense of the Christian faith aimed to show unbelievers that Christianity is a respectable philosophy with a high standard of moral conduct. Therefore, they should view it like any other philosophy. He wanted Christians not to be persecuted because they identified as Christians, but rather each person should be "judged" based on their own actions.²² If someone truly was involved with cannibalism or incest, they should be judged for it. But to judge everyone because some could have been involved with these practices was wrong in the eyes of Athenagoras. Specifically, he wrote his *Plea* to two emperors: Marcus Aurelius Antoninus and Lucius Aurelius Commodus, both of which were philosophers.²³ While it is not explicit from the text, it would seem likely that Athenagoras assumed that if he could persuade these two leaders to consider Christianity as a legitimate option for one's religion/devotion, then it would provide a greater opportunity for the spread of Christianity to other people.

The main point of Athenagoras' *Plea* was to appeal to the emperors that Christians should not face opposition. He begins his argument by mentioning that "no one is hindered by law or fear of punishment from devotion to his ancestral ways, even if they are ridiculous."²⁴ He is constructing the foundation of his argument – if people are allowed to believe in ridiculous religions/philosophies, then Christians should not be judged. He then goes on to explain that "[the emperors] think it impious and wicked to believe in no god at all."²⁵ He develops his argument here by explaining that Christians are not wicked for they indeed believe in a God. He then concludes his introduction to his *Plea* by saying, "you allow us to be harassed, plundered, and persecuted... because of our name."²⁶ Athenagoras' point in writing his *Plea* is to defend both Christianity as a religion and also as a name. He does not want Christians to be persecuted for false claims, which he will deal with more in depth throughout his *Plea*.

¹⁹ Richardson, *Christian Fathers*, 294.

²⁰ Athenagoras, *A Plea Regarding Christians*, 4.

²¹ Richardson, *Christian Fathers*, 296.

²² Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers*, 293.

²³ Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers*, 300.

²⁴ Athenagoras, *Plea*, 1.

²⁵ Athenagoras, *Plea*, 1.

²⁶ Athenagoras, *Plea*, 1.

Outline of Argument

Athenagoras is very structured in his defense of Christianity. It is apparent from the length which he spends on each topic that he values the topic of atheism the most. It is also evident from his own words that he believes the charge of atheism to be the most important, as seen in his statement that, “I will meet these charges too, although I am very confident that I have made my case by what I have already said.”²⁷

An outline of Athenagoras’s *Plea* would be as follows: chapters 1–3 are the introduction to the letter and the charges made against Christians. Chapters 4–30 are his response to atheism. Then chapters 31–36 are his response to the charges of incest and cannibalism and finally he concludes the letter in chapter 37.²⁸ One can go a step further and break it down into chapters 1–3: an introduction to the *Plea*, 4–13: defending a belief in God through the teachings of philosophers and Scripture, as well as logic, 14–23: idols/gods, 24–27: a conversation on demons, 28–30: the pagan gods were originally men, 31–34: a defence against incest, and 35–36: a defense against cannibalism, 37: concluding his argument and reaffirming his loyalty to the emperors.

Observations from the Plea

A few observations from Athenagoras’ *Plea* will be addressed. Firstly, he begins and ends the *Plea* by giving great respect to the emperors to whom he is writing. He begins with “your most excellent majesties,”²⁹ and ends with “you are kind, temperate, generous, and worthy of the imperium.”³⁰ It is not likely that Athenagoras was trying to soothe the emperors with kind words, but rather that he was showing that he respects them and their decisions. The last thing an early Christian would have wanted in defending the faith would be to insult the emperors as this would only give reason for the emperors to see Christians as both illegitimate and a threat. This would be against the very nature of Athenagoras’ writing.

The state of the early church was one of persecution. Athenagoras explains this to the emperors by saying, “you allow us to be harassed, plundered, and persecuted, the mob making war on us only because of our name.”³¹ It is clear that Athenagoras was attempting to gain the backing of the emperors in an attempt to reduce the persecution of the early church. It is also clear from his writing that Athenagoras has a deep knowledge of the works and writers/thinkers of his day. Specifically, he shows a particularly good knowledge of Menander going so far as to reference and parallel his work in the introductory praise to the emperors and the concluding prayer for the long reign of the emperors.³² Athenagoras also displays this knowledge in his discussion on gods where he references various gods such as Celus, Metanira, Hector, etc.³³ He

²⁷ Athenagoras, *Plea*, 31.

²⁸ N.a., “Evangelical Responses to Postmodernism,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 5, no. 2 (summer 2011): 96, accessed February 4, 2021, Galaxie Theological Journal Library.

²⁹ Athenagoras, *Plea*, 1.

³⁰ Athenagoras, *Plea*, 37.

³¹ Athenagoras, *Plea*, 1.

³² Willem, “Documents Written by the Heads,” 2.

³³ Athenagoras, *Plea*, 14.

also mentions the beliefs of various philosophers in chapters 5–7, including Euripides, Plato, Philolaus and Aristotle. He also goes into great detail explaining the origin story of the Greek gods in chapters 18–22. Athenagoras uses each of these as examples to support his point that Christians are theists. He then transitions to the offensive and explains that those who oppose Christians do not actually believe in a God because their gods were created by humans. He summarizes it in his statement, “those who make real gods out of the myths do everything rather than form a true theology.”³⁴ This is his main attack and support for Christians being theists – if Greeks can be called theists for believing in created gods, Christians should at least be called theists for believing in an eternal God who was not created by humans.

Athenagoras’ theology is quite accurate to what most conservative Christians believe today. He held to a monotheistic view of Christianity with God being uncreated and eternal.³⁵ He believed in the Trinity including the work of the Holy Spirit in inspiring prophets. He also believed in the existence of angels.³⁶ Athenagoras also believed that God was actively ruling the world³⁷ as providing free will to choose good or evil.³⁸ He believed in demons as well, and distinguished them as demons proper – those who act according to their nature, and angels who act according to their lusts.³⁹ His belief in the omniscience of God is evident, as well as the fact that believers will have to give account for their life here on earth.⁴⁰ He also clearly believed in the authority of Scripture, as he quotes passages from Scripture within his *Plea*.⁴¹ One more questionable belief was that intercourse was merely for providing children.⁴² This is a topic which Christians today can be split upon. It appears evident from Scripture that intercourse is meant to be done often (1 Cor 7:5) and to unite a husband and wife as one flesh (Gen 2:24). Another questionable theological view is built on this and it is that one should only marry once.⁴³ This view does not appear to be supported by any Scripture and appears to be more of a tradition than a theologically backed view. Athenagoras also believed that murder is wrong (even as capital punishment) as well as abortion.⁴⁴

An examination of Athenagoras’ theological views will show that his views align with many conservative, protestant Christians today. While he may have some slightly different views, his theology appears to be grounded within the Word of God.

³⁴ Athenagoras, *Plea*, 22.

³⁵ Athenagoras, *Plea*, 4.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 33.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 35.

Benefit

While Athenagoras' *Plea* is over 1700 years old, it is still of value to Christians today. There is a lot of value in seeing how Athenagoras refers to those in power over him. He addresses the Emperors with respect and honour, just as Christians should respect and honour those in power over them today. These may include bosses, governmental authority, church authority, etc.

Another thing which stands out from Athenagoras' writing is that the church has always undergone persecution of some sort. The church during Athenagoras' time was undergoing opposition and persecution from those around them.⁴⁵ While it is true that most North American believers today do not face persecution, there are believers living elsewhere around the world who do. The *Plea* should serve as an encouragement to believers to stand fast amidst persecution. As the early church endured and stood up against the false accusations of the church, so should the church today. Believers can find encouragement knowing that "all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim 3:12).⁴⁶

Athenagoras' writing also provides a defense for the Christian faith. While his defense needs adjustment to the modern era (few people still worship the Greek gods), his main points still remain true. If one can defend the deity of God and present a Christian worldview, then the majority of attacks can be defended. For example, one argument against Christianity is that Christians are all hypocrites.⁴⁷ A simple presentation of the Christian worldview and reasoning behind it will show that the Bible forbids hypocrisy (Matt 7:1–5) but also recognizes that all are sinners (Rom 3:23). While this will not likely persuade a person to become a Christian, it will be sufficient in providing a defense to the claim that Christians are hypocrites. This is what Athenagoras was trying to accomplish – provide a defense for the Christian faith that will get people to take it seriously. He was not likely to persuade people to salvation from the writing of his *Plea*, but it would provide an open door for other Christians to step in and continue the conversation.

Conclusion

Athenagoras' *Plea* is a valuable resource for Christians today. It provides insight into what the early church was enduring as well as an apologetic for the Christian faith. While society has changed a lot since the time of Athenagoras, some things remain the same. The church is still being persecuted (although not necessarily in North America), non-Christians have rule of the day, and issues between society and Christians are evident. While little is known about Athenagoras, his writing still remains today and is of value despite not being inspired. If one wishes to learn more about what the early church was enduring as well as grow in their understanding of how to defend the Christian faith, Athenagoras' *Plea* is an essential read.

⁴⁵ See *Plea*, 1.

⁴⁶ Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations in this study are taken from ESV, © 2001, Crossway.

⁴⁷ Frank Harber, "Ten Objections to Christianity and How to Respond," accessed February 4, 2021, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/biblestudies/articles/evangelism/tcw-2000-002-7.62.html>

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Should all Christian stories end with glorious music and smiling protagonists? Callie Johnson wrestles with Christian storytelling in this essay, originally written as an persuasive research essay for EN411: Rhetoric.

Against Happily-Ever-After

by Callie Johnson

Story is an integral part of the human experience. Julie Beck of *The Atlantic* writes, “When people tell others about themselves, they kind of have to do it in a narrative way—that’s just how humans communicate” (Beck). When asked about our day, we answer in story: I went shopping, had lunch, and flushed my budgie down the loo. Story shapes us. And as Christians, we feel compelled to enter into the world of storytelling with the hope and light Christ offers. Often, however, this desire to present this redemption to our audiences leads to a very specific, picturesque form of storytelling. Effective Christianity requires stories that redeem real suffering instead of eliminating it from the narrative.

A CALL TO HAPPY ENDINGS

Christian culture touts a religion of innocence. In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ proclaims, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (*English Standard Version*, Matt. 5:8). Quite often, it seems we get caught in a miasma of happy endings. Especially in the sphere of Christian writers and storytellers, there is a pressure to craft stories that resolve happily as a reflection of the transformative work of Christ. There are ample examples of that call us to “be holy, for I am holy” (1 Pet. 1:16), and to “press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:14). Paul calls the church at Corinth to “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1).

What does this mean for Christian storytellers? It means there is immense pressure to portray characters transformed into the image of Christ. As I’ve said elsewhere, “The couple on the brink of divorce must find reconciliation... The murderer in prison ought to repent and start a highly effective Bible study. Echoing throughout the church is an ingrained demand for redemption. As we have been redeemed, so must the characters in our stories be” (“Releasing Happily Ever After”). Dan McAdams, a psychologist at Northwestern University, studies redemptive narrative, referring to it as a “quintessentially American story about how to live a good life” (McAdams and Guo). This summation essentially encapsulates the picture of redemption we see played out in Christian media: the gospel of the American Dream. Innocence, holiness, and perfection.

A CALL TO SUFFERING

The happy endings we see on screen or in the last pages of our Amish romance novel are actually the reverse of the story Christ proclaims for Christians. Donald Miller is an author and story theorist who runs a business designed to help marketers understand the power of story. In *A Million Miles in a Thousand Years: What I Learned While Editing My Life*, Miller explores the power of story translated to the power of a well-lived life. He writes, “Growing up in church, we were taught that Jesus was the answer to all our problems. We were taught that there was a circle-shaped hole in our heart and that we had tried to fill it with the square pegs of sex, drugs, and rock and roll; but only the circle peg of Jesus could fill our hole” (Miller 203). Even though Miller became a Christian, he says the hole “never really went away. To be sure, I like Jesus, and

I still follow him, but the idea that Jesus will make everything better is a lie. It's basically biblical theology translated into the language of infomercials" (203).

With these words, Miller makes a bold assertion and undercuts one of the most prevalent themes in western, American gospel presentations: Jesus has come to make your life better. Jesus states his reason for coming several times in Scripture: "to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28); "to save the world" (John 3:17); "that they may have life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10); and "to testify to the truth" (John 18:37). All of these speak to Christ's good intent towards mankind, to be sure, but none says, "Jesus came to give you a good life." Even Christ's proclamation of "life to the full," or as J. B. Phillips terms it, "far more life than before" (*J. B. Phillips New Testament*, John 10:10) indicates nothing of white picket fences or 2.3 children.

Miller addresses this misconception:

The truth is, the apostles never really promise Jesus is going to make everything better here on earth. Can you imagine an infomercial with Paul, testifying to the amazing product of Jesus, saying that he once had power and authority, and since he tried Jesus he's been moved from prison to prison, beaten, and routinely bitten by snakes? I don't think many people would be buying that product. (Miller 203–204)

Miller concludes, "It's hard to imagine how a religion steeped in so much pain and sacrifice turned into a promise for earthly euphoria. I think Jesus can make things better, but I don't think he is going to make things perfect. Not here, and not now" (204).

The happy ending stories we preach are the opposite of the story Christ proclaims for Christians on earth. As Miller made abundantly clear, Christ did not come to eliminate our suffering; he came to redeem it. In the film version of *The Two Towers*, Samwise Gamgee waxes eloquent on story, saying:

The [stories] that really mattered. Full of darkness and danger they were. And sometimes you didn't want to know the end, because how could the end be happy? How could the world go back to the way it was when so much bad had happened? But in the end, it's only a passing thing, this shadow. Even darkness must pass. (*The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*)

These words have touched many hearts and are quoted so much they are nearly cliché. But the root of what Samwise is saying, and what Tolkien fleshes out in the character of Frodo, is that the stories that mattered were the ones where suffering was redeemed. At the end of *The Return of the King*, Frodo's life is not picture-perfect, but he believes his suffering was worth the price. It is this redemption—not of circumstances, but of *suffering*—that is the storytelling Christian media needs to show.

Most Christians have heard James 1 bandied about as an admonition to "count it all joy." J. B. Phillips paraphrases these trials as "friends" come to visit and test your faith. Paul proclaims over and over, "all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (*English Standard Version*, 2 Tim. 3:12) and that we are to "rejoice in our sufferings" (Rom. 5:3). Clearly, the Christian is called to suffer, but to what end? Miller speculates on this as he describes hiking the Inca Trail to Machu Picchu. His tour guide told him there was a path to Machu Picchu that took about six hours, but the path they were going to hike took four days. "'Why would the Incas make people take the long route?' my friend from Alabama asked. 'Because the Emperor knew,' Carlos said, 'the more painful the journey to Machu Picchu, the more the traveler would appreciate the city, once he got there'" (Miller 140).

To Miller, suffering isn't about being miserable, it's about character transformation. He goes on to write, "The story made us different characters than if we'd showed up at the ending an easier way. It made me think about the hard lives so many people have had, the sacrifices they've endured, and how those people will see heaven differently from those of us who have had easier lives" (143).

In his book *Man's Search for Meaning* psychiatrist and holocaust survivor Viktor Frankl writes, "In some way, suffering ceases to be suffering at the moment it finds a meaning, such as the meaning of a sacrifice" (Frankl 105–106). In the face of horror, Frankl recognized that something greater was possible. Through the beauty at the end of the pain, suffering is redeemed.

SUFFERING AND THE GOOD LIFE

An understanding of the suffering life Christ proclaims for his followers leads us to the deepest flaw with the picture-perfect-happy-ending. The notion of a story that ends happily ever after can give Christians an unrealistic expectation that their lives can achieve perfection. Does this mean we cast away our Clifford the Big Red Dog books, burn Cinderella at the stake, and cast Winnie the Pooh into the Slough of Despond? To paraphrase Paul, "may it never be!" This is not a proclamation against innocence, but a call to recognize the flaws of presenting perfect resolution in a world that offers no such hope.

Christian movies get a bad rap for being cheesy, and certainly they sometimes feel a little poorly done. But the danger lurks deeper in the stories themselves. Films like *Facing the Giants*, *Fireproof*, *God's Not Dead*, and *Overcomer* show central characters with a fatal flaw: distance from God, fear of standing up for their faith, pornography addictions, etc. As the characters turn to God, they overcome their flaw; their lives become beautiful. They are well liked and respected, they get the good job offer, and they kick that winning field goal against the wind. These films send a very clear message: Jesus can fix the problems in your life, and, by inference, if you're suffering it's because you're in sin. In the pursuit of holiness standards, we forget that life is dirty and that suffering can be a friend come to visit us.

But carried to its ultimate end, this theology is dangerous. What happens when you preach to a congregation that God wants to bring them financial stability, or tell a child to "trust Jesus and he'll make it better." What happens when the bank still forecloses or the cancer comes back or the uncle keeps raping her? These hurting souls see that they did not receive the promised good life—in fact, they've gotten quite the opposite—and the chances of them turning their back on God are astronomically high.

Author and screenwriter Steven Pressfield wrote a book called *The War of Art* addressing the obstacles and resistance that face artists. He declares that, in the pursuit of creating beauty, "The artist must be like [a] Marine. He has to know how to be miserable... Because this is war, baby. And war is hell" (Pressfield 68). As he closes out his book, Miller writes, "It wasn't necessary to win for the story to be great. It was only necessary to sacrifice everything" (Miller 231). It is this same attitude of willing abandon that Christians need the courage to live into, and consequently, need to see modeled for us in the stories we tell.

When Christian storytelling forces these happily ever afters, it preaches that story resolution means the suffering goes away—not that the suffering is redeemed. And when we infuse that into our books and movies and Vacation Bible Schools, we raise up a generation of believers that believe Christianity is the ultimate Band-Aid. And it's not. The longer we brandish an argument of happy endings, the greater our risk of turning our disillusioned audience into atheists. That kind of storytelling is not realistic at best, and a lie at worst. We need stories that

end, not with a happy perfect package, but with the knowledge that our pain means something—that it's worth it.

CONCLUSION

In *Collateral Beauty* Will Smith plays a disconsolate man who, years after losing his daughter, believes his is being visited by incarnations of Love, Time, and Death. They force him to face his grief and reconnect with the world around him, while reminding him to notice—even through the debilitating sorrow—the collateral beauty. Because nothing beautiful was ever achieved without sacrifice, without pain, without suffering. And because of this, our suffering has meaning. Christianity needs stories that redeem suffering instead of eliminating it.

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Written for the course EN324: British Literature II, this essay delineates an innovative critique of a British author's writing and how it affected the current society of her time while also comparing it to current social issues.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning and the Social Impact of Poetry

by Abigail Tschetter

For as long as writing has been circulated, authors have been using their works to call attention to the problems they see in the societies around them. Throughout history, writing of all kinds has galvanized people and catalyzed social change. The Victorian Era is no exception to this. In fact, quite the opposite, as the time period saw the intersection of a rise of popular literature and of social reform.

One of the most popular and prolific authors of the time, Elizabeth Barrett Browning used her poetry to call attention to and garner support for key social issues of the Victorian Era. In particular, she employed the heightened language and increased emotional nature of poetic form to humanize and make accessible real social ills, appealing to the people of the day to spur them to action. This can be seen through an investigation of her poems "The Cry of the

Children” and “The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim’s Point,” including an examination of why the author wrote each piece, the impact the poems had on society, and how Barrett Browning specifically used the medium of poetry to achieve these ends.

To understand why Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote “The Cry of the Children,” one must first have an understanding of the political and social issues surrounding the poem’s inception. The Victorian Era in which Barrett Browning lived and wrote was a time of great technological advancement and industrialization. As factories and other similar businesses began to increase in England, so did the demand for unskilled labor. This led to an increase in employment for working-class children, particularly because they were cheaper to employ. However, the conditions in which they worked were often less than humane (Greenblatt 1018; “Report on Child Labour”).

In 1842, Parliament convened The Children’s Employment Commission, a Royal Commission to investigate child labor conditions, particularly in factories and mines across the United Kingdom. This was not the first such committee empowered by the government during the era. Yet previous attempts at regulation and reform legislation had proved unsuccessful as they were not well-enforced. The report of the Children’s Employment Commission, however, marked a change in this pattern. This was mainly due to the shock and outrage the report generated, in part due to Barrett Browning’s work in response (Greenblatt 1587).

Reports from the Children’s Employment Commission were published in 1842 and 1843. They included testimonials from children who worked in mines and factories as well as commentary from government officials on what they observed there. The content of these reports horrified those who read them. Children as young as five years old complained of working fourteen-hour days from sunup to sundown with no breaks, being hit and verbally abused, and growing sick in such harsh conditions (Children’s Employment Commission 1589; “Report on Child Labour”). Against this backdrop of a society operating with the help of cruel and harsh child labor, and indeed, because of such brutality, Barrett Browning wrote “The Cry of the Children.”

Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote “The Cry of the Children” in 1843. It dramatizes the plight of the working-class children forced to endure such grueling and inhumane situations. The poem was explicitly written in response to the reports of the Children’s Employment Commission. Indeed, lines from the poem directly allude to details of the parliamentary commission’s investigations, as Barrett Browning herself pointed out when the poem was published. One passage is of particular note, as the author specifically cited it as being drawn from a commissioner’s report. She relates how the children are unfamiliar with flowers and therefore confuse them with the weeds they have experienced: “But [the children] answer, ‘Are your cowslips of the meadows / Like our weeds anear the mine?’” (Browning, “Cry of the Children” 1125–1126). Barrett Browning included a footnote on this line, which reads: “A commissioner mentions the fact of weeds being thus confounded with the idea of flowers” (Browning, “Cry of the Children” 1126n3). With this footnote, she points out just how true to life her portrayal of these children is.

“The Cry of the Children” was written to raise greater awareness of the problem of child labor in the Victorian Era. Yet even beyond calling greater attention to the issue, Barrett Browning wanted to stimulate her audience to make a change in society. This is why her poem specifically includes a call to action, ending with a stirring line addressing the people of England: “‘How long,’ they say, ‘How long, O cruel nation, / Will you stand to move the world, on a child’s heart,—” (Browning, “Cry of the Children” 1128).

With this line, the poet challenged her audience to take a stand against the evils of child labor she had just portrayed. Her objective is explicitly outlined in the poem. Thus, the reason Barrett Browning wrote “The Cry of the Children” is twofold. It was written to make people aware of the issue of child labor, which was dangerous and ubiquitous at the time of her writing, and to raise support for her position against such practices.

After gaining an understanding of why Barrett Browning wrote her poem and the context in which it was published, one can examine how the piece impacted the society of the day. Barrett Browning’s goal was directly tied to the society in which it was written. Therefore, examining the effect the work had on Victorian society will also show whether Barrett Browning was successful in attaining her stated objective.

In short, Barrett Browning’s call to action proved effective. “The Cry of the Children” became a rallying point for proponents of child labor reform. The poem led to a push for legislation that improved children’s working conditions and placed restrictions on the hours they could work. Such laws prohibited girls and women from working in mines and made it illegal to hire boys younger than ten years of age (Greenblatt 1587; Stone 617).

The Factory Acts passed by Parliament were just the beginning of the poem’s impact. Although the work was written in the context of Victorian England, its influence did not stop there. In 1844, “The Cry of the Children” was published in the United States of America, where it became well known to an even greater audience. The brutality of child labor was a cause that rang as true there as it had rung true in England. The poem was utilized and adapted by media and literature advocating for American labor reform as late as 1912, nearly seventy years after its arrival in the country (Stone 617).

Over time, the poem reached more and more international readers as it was translated into French, Italian, and Russian. Across cultures and time periods, people were able to relate to and employ the poem to make change. To say that “The Cry of the Children” was anything less than hugely influential would be an understatement. In fact, it is considered a key piece of literature in the industrial reform movement (Stone 617).

Taken together, these results make it clear that Barrett Browning succeeded in her goal of creating social change regarding child labor. Having arrived at this conclusion, one may wonder how she was able to so effectively achieve those aims. The poetic form Barrett Browning employed in writing “The Cry of the Children” significantly contributed to the success of the poem. Poetry as a medium was uniquely suited to accomplishing Barrett Browning’s objectives, especially in the era she was writing. This is because poetry provided both greater accessibility for her audience and added heightened emotional intensity.

“The Cry of the Children” was particularly impactful in part because as a poem it was uniquely accessible to the people of the Victorian Era. Poetry as a genre occupied a prominent place in Victorian society. It was regarded as the important literature of the day and was seemingly everywhere. Greenblatt notes the pervasive nature of the genre at the time, stating that “poetry became part of the lives of more people than ever before in the Victorian period, inasmuch as poems were printed in the pages of every kind of newspaper and periodical, regularly heard in domestic and public settings alike” (1038). According to this quotation, even those who did not read could expect to be exposed to poems regularly. Clearly, the medium was commonplace in the era.

In this way, the poetic form of “The Cry of the Children” supplies an advantage in terms of societal impact. Seeing real news and the issues of the day converted into poetry made them much more relatable to the reader. As moving and visceral as the discoveries of the Reports from

the Children's Employment Commission were, they were simply written in a less accessible medium. "The Cry of the Children" was significant because it went beyond the reports, directly to the people.

Clearly poetry was the preeminent genre of the Victorian Era (Greenblatt 1037–1038). Barrett Browning used this to her advantage. She transferred the essence of the parliamentary reports into a form with which many people were already familiar and to which they were constantly exposed. This made her cause more relatable. Even those who were uneducated or uninvolved with politics were confronted with the harsh nature of child labor.

In addition to providing greater accessibility, writing a poem also allowed Barrett Browning to apply the increased emotional intensity offered by the medium. She wanted her audience to take up the cause against brutal child labor, and the affective medium of poetry was perfect for such a purpose. Poetry, with its opportunities for imagery and its tendency to be emotional, was the perfect literary vehicle to convey the feelings Barrett Browning hoped to stir in her readers.

Some contemporary critics contend that Barrett Browning actually carried this emotional tone too far, creating a poem that was overly sentimental. However, as Henry argues, it was precisely these qualities that made the work powerful. The passionate language was artful and made the work more compelling. The inherently emotional medium of poetry gave Barrett Browning an immediate advantage in conveying her message. She intentionally appealed to the emotions of her audience and sought to create in them feelings that would cause them to act (Henry 535–536).

It comes as no surprise that Barrett Browning viewed the role of poet as one who inherently seeks to influence her readers. She believed in "ethical" poetry that would encourage and persuade her audience to act in the face of social issues (Henry 536). It makes perfect sense that Barrett Browning included a call to action in "The Cry of the Children," because it was specifically written to create change.

"The Cry of the Children" is a prime example of Barrett Browning's mastery of poetry as an affective genre. It is probably the best instance of her literature directly effecting social reform. However, it is not the only poem in which the author employed these tactics in an attempt to create social change. Many of her other works include similar themes of social justice.

A perfect example of this is her poem "The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point." The poem has a clear antislavery message. The speaker is an escaped slave woman being pursued by her captors. She describes the abuse she has suffered as a slave, including the murder of her lover and subsequent gang rape, which results in a child whom she kills (Browning, "Runaway Slave" 1130–1137).

Just as with "The Cry of the Children," to fully appreciate the poem and why Barrett Browning wrote it one must understand the historical context in which it was written. "The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point" was published in 1848. At this time, slavery had been outlawed in England for over a decade. Parliament passed a bill emancipating those in slavery and abolishing the practice in 1833. In fact, abolition had been a popular cause in the country long before this legislation, gaining substantial support as early as the end of the eighteenth century (Greenblatt 88–89).

Although it was no longer legal in England, slavery was still common practice in the United States of America at the time. In England, the question of abolition had already been settled, at least from a legislative standpoint. Yet, in the United States the debate continued to

rage contentiously. Amid such a divisive issue, many organizations arose to advocate against slavery. One of these associations was the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society (King 3).

The Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society was a radical organization, even among the abolitionist groups of the time. The group supported immediate abolition, and its membership operated under integration which was unusual at the time. For example, seating at their meetings was unsegregated by race, class, or gender. The organization also advocated for women's rights (King 3). In 1845, this extreme group invited Elizabeth Barrett Browning to write for their publication, *The Liberty Bell* (Miller 638).

This context is important to Barrett Browning's poem as it demonstrates that even from its inception "The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point" was meant to be an explicitly political work. The poet wrote this work for the very purpose of inciting antislavery sentiment. Additionally, the radical nature of her affiliations shows not only her depth of feeling regarding slavery, but also offers insight into her views on women's issues. It helps the reader to view "The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point" through the dual lenses of the two issues it most discusses. This includes both slavery and women's rights, albeit to a secondary degree. Taken together, this shows that Barrett Browning wrote her poem to inspire people, particularly Americans, toward the abolition of slavery and toward a greater recognition of women's rights everywhere (Miller 638).

After considering why Barrett Browning wrote "The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point," one is better able to see how the poem impacted the societies at which it was aimed. The poem was received with reservation and anger from both Americans and those in England. Unsurprisingly, Americans who sympathized with slavery viewed the poem as incorrect and worthless. But criticism also arose in England, even from those who agreed with Barrett Browning's views on slavery. She was criticized for arguing an issue that was not broadly socially acceptable for women to discuss. The way the author addressed women's issues also upset some of her audience. Some of the language and imagery she employed was considered improper or shocking by conservative readers. Still, others admired the strong stand she took (Avery).

It is difficult to claim that "The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point" had as singular an impact on society as did "The Cry of the Children." Unlike the labor reform that closely followed the publication of the "The Cry of the Children," slavery continued in the United States for decades after the publication of the antislavery piece. It is similarly difficult to quantify the impact of the poem on people's views of women's rights. Miller argues that the readers of *The Liberty Bell* were already sympathetic to the causes for which Barrett Browning advocated, and therefore the effects of the poem on public opinion were negligible (652–653). Still, the fact that the poem was printed at all is rather remarkable and does indicate a shift in American culture. Even the author herself believed it was too controversial for an American audience and expressed disbelief that it would be published anywhere (Harrison 54–55).

From both a poetic and a political standpoint, Barrett Browning used a similar tactic with "The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point" as she did in "The Cry of the Children." She employed the empathetic nature of poetry to help people relate to what the speaker was experiencing. This is a key component of literature that intends to influence social change. Once again, the medium in which Barrett Browning chose to write was integral to her message. By employing poetic devices, she was able to show her readers how they were similar to the enslaved speaker in "The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point." Helping the reader identify with the subject is especially

important to a work that centers on the issue of slavery, which necessarily hinges on the question of people's humanity.

This feat is made still more impressive when one considers that Barrett Browning made the task even more difficult for herself. Not only was the speaker in her poem a black person, whom many at the time considered less than human, but she was also a mother who committed infanticide. Once again, the author plays to the strengths of her chosen medium to accomplish the herculean task of making this character relatable. The ability to make the speaker sympathetic despite the fact that she is a black woman who murders her baby is an impressive example of how Barrett Browning used poetry in service of her message (Harrison 54).

Harrison notes how Barrett Browning simultaneously utilizes and subverts traditional poetic structure to make this point. Her poem, unlike many from the time period with similar themes, is not openly didactic and presents no formal argument. Instead, the author relies on rhythm and meter, allusions to other literature and the Bible, and a poetic form of dramatic monologue to create her desired impact. She makes the speaker, a polarizing figure at the time, not only a sympathetic character, but even the hero of the poem. In this way, "The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point" represents an exceptional social and literary accomplishment (Harrison 55).

Authors have always been writing about the world around them. After examining "The Cry of the Children" and "The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point" one can see where Barrett Browning stands in this long tradition of writers. Investigating why the author wrote each piece, the impact the poems had on society, and how the poet specifically used the medium of poetry to achieve these ends makes it clear that Barrett Browning wrote to encourage social change based on what was happening at the time. Her poetry spoke explicitly to contemporary social issues in the Victorian Era.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning was a masterful poet and a master of using that poetry to comment on and impact the society in which she lived. The Victorian Era was rife with social problems and controversial issues. This provided Barrett Browning with ample opportunity to use her skills to make a difference. She utilized poetry's unique elements, including heightened language, elevated emotion, and the accessibility of the genre to create literature that was relevant and relatable. In doing so, she changed the world around her.

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SHORT FICTION

Introduction to Short Fiction

Short fiction uses creative tools, such as character, setting, and plot to immerse the reader in a fictional narrative experience that entertains, instructs, or provokes thought. The lessons learned through narrative stick with us in ways lectures do not. This is one reason our Lord Himself employed so much narrative in His teaching, so much so that Matthew says “He did not speak anything [to the crowds] without a parable” (Matthew 13:34).

Christian fiction should reflect the themes of the Bible, but sometimes this results in an ending that is not “happy.” Instead, Christian fiction may lead the reader to question difficult themes or grapple with the emptiness of a Christless worldview.

* * *

Are we destined to take on the sins of our parents? Amanda Harman explores this challenging question in the following short story, which she originally wrote in EN312: Creative Writing Fiction.

Topiary

by Amanda Harman

Clouds hung low over the city, as if an angry lover were holding a pillow over its face. Around dinnertime, the threat of rain had turned into a full-on Noahic downpour just in time to walk to his recently empty home.

Great.

The rows of headlights loomed out of the wall of water, reflecting off the puddles on the pavement, giving the impression there were two cars: one above the ground and one below, holding tight to its upper counterpart. The streetlamps also had their eerie partners on the ground below them, as did many of the skyscrapers—illuminated while people finished the work of the day. Their partners were narrow and close, like children clinging to their mothers.

Wyatt shuddered.

As the rain pounded the ground, people stomped in the puddles, like they were trying to punish the precipitation. That seemed to anger the clouds more, and they pressed ever closer, concealing the tops of the taller buildings, making sure the city stopped kicking before letting the pillow off. Horns blared—people always drive worse in the rain—adding to the cacophony. The raindrops’ impacts almost drowned the sounds of angry voices bumping into each other, intermingling, separating, and doing it all over again. No one wanted to get wet, but now everyone was.

The rain pities no man.

Wyatt could feel, but not hear, the gentle squish of the water between his toes in his shoes. Every step was annoying. Shoulders among the crowd jostled him while his shoulders jostled others; there was no room to be polite with everyone huddled in solidarity against the angry weather. Under normal circumstances, he wouldn’t have allowed the crowd to swallow him, but he had forgotten his umbrella, and a herd felt safer than facing the scorned love of the

elements alone. He shuddered again; those thoughts would quickly lead to ones of his latest breakup or worse.

Stop it.

When the crowd parted slightly, Wyatt caught a glimpse of a puddle. His own reflection, a ghostly counterpart, stared up at him from the world below. His hair was hanging, plastered against his forehead, dripping water that traced his nose and jaw. The jacket he wore, while warm against snow, was not waterproof. It looked like a soggy trash bag clinging to his frame and creating its own miniature rainstorm around his legs and feet. Suddenly, the expression in the reflection's eyes shifted, a cruel tint marring them, and it was no longer Wyatt staring up from beneath; it was his father.

Wyatt tore his eyes away from the image and scanned the street. There was a coffee shop two doors up, and he splashed there as quickly as he could, leaving the twisted specter of the puddle behind him. But it didn't matter. He was already back.

Back.

"Wyatt, you have ten minutes before supper. You better be in this house!" His mother hollered from the front porch. She sounded angry, but he knew she wouldn't do anything to him. That wasn't her job.

"Be there in a bit!" He yelled back from his hiding spot in Mrs. Nesbit's topiary garden. He hadn't known the word topiary then, but he'd loved the place. The tall hedge walled in the 100-yard square except for the gap at the four-foot entrance, the perfectly manicured bushes were spaced randomly around the world's greenest lawn, the mist seemed to always hug the ground, the other-worldly shapes emerging from the bushes. Elephants, houses, and one time, an army man. Wyatt didn't realize until much later that she had put it there for him; he thought his escapes there were a secret.

He heard his mother sigh, even from all the way across the street, "Just be home before your father."

"Duh," he said to himself as he ran his hand over the trunk of the newest elephant. Mrs. Nesbit's skills were getting better; Wyatt could see the folds and big wrinkles in the trunk, just like the ones at the zoo.

Ten minutes passed as he played elephant-tamer, an imaginary whip in hand, then fifteen, then twenty. Twenty-three minutes after his mother had yelled for him, Wyatt heard a car across the street pull into their driveway. "Crap!" He ran so fast, the elephant's trunk swayed after him, waving goodbye.

Dark clouds hung over the street; he hadn't noticed them in the garden. Most of the house was dark, but the second-story windows frowned down on him in disappointment: How dare you be late for dinner? The only light seeped out of the open door, and he could hear his parents inside before he even reached the driveway, already screaming at each other, "Where is he?" Wyatt clenched his jaw and his fists.

"He's on his way; I told him to come home five minutes ago," his mother lied, and Wyatt was grateful. Five minutes late hurt a lot less than twenty minutes late. He looked to the garage, which turned its nose up at him, crossing its arms and blocking that path. His only option would be to walk in the door, no doubt right into his father's anger. He mounted each of the four stairs slowly, like it was incredibly painful to walk. The clouds burst overhead, and a drizzle started, picking up intensity with every second.

"Why'd you tell him so late? Maria, you stupid, ugly cow!" His father had his back to the door and hadn't heard Wyatt's quiet footsteps on the concrete; he faced Wyatt's mother and

slowly, deliberately raised his hand. Wyatt froze on the dark porch and squeezed his eyes shut, pushing his fists into his legs to keep control. His mother had told him never to watch when things like this happened. Apparently, it wasn't something a child should see, but he could still hear it. He always heard it.

Smack! Quickly followed by the hollow *thump* of a body hitting the floor and his mother's agonized groan. Wyatt cracked his eyes open just a bit and saw the scene framed by the open door.

His mother was sprawled on the entry rug—a really ugly Oriental-type thing Wyatt had always hated—cradling her left cheek with her hand. She was holding back tears. His father loomed over her, a taskmaster over his slave. He still hadn't noticed Wyatt, but the woman on the floor was looking straight at him. She nodded slightly and mouthed one word: “Go!”

Wyatt bolted, all too happy to avoid the beating and attempt to leave his own anger like a package on the porch. The street was soaked already, and small streams had started flowing down either side. Wyatt splashed across these and through the gap in the hedge. The rain was much less intense within the wall. It was only after he was safely under the topiary elephant, blocked from the rain completely, that he even thought to be worried about his mother.

The barista cleared her throat; somehow, he had successfully fought his way into the line at the coffee shop while on autopilot. She had asked him something. “Umm, what?” Wyatt said.

She rolled her eyes, “Can I get you a drink, sir?”

“Oh, um, yeah. Sure.” Wyatt ordered a black coffee and sat at a small table away from the windows. He wanted nothing more than to avoid his dark, empty house, the echoes of his last fight still ringing in the halls.

Wyatt hadn't remembered spending the night outside, but he must have because he remembered slipping into his house early the next morning, sore and tired. He just assumed he had fallen asleep in the topiary garden under the watchful eyes of the elephant. The plan was to make it to his room without anyone noticing, but his mother was sitting on that ugly Oriental-rug in the fetal position.

“Mom, what's wrong?” She looked like she might faint or puke or both. Her cheek was a deep shade of blue, but he couldn't see anything else wrong.

“He's dead, he's dead, he's dead, he's dead,” she repeated the phrase over and over again.

“Who?” A cold fist clenched his racing heart. “Mom, who is dead?”

“Dad's dead, dad's dead, dad's dead, dad's dead,” she adjusted her answer without pause, still chanting the incantation.

Wyatt ran up the stairs to his parent's room. He was forbidden from ever entering, but this was an emergency. Wyatt gritted his teeth and pushed the door open.

His father stared at the ceiling, stiff and unmoving. Everything was so still. Wyatt was afraid to breathe; he glanced around the room, trying to determine why he was dead. The dresser was cluttered with mismatched socks, old magazines, and a couple knickknacks—including the baseball Wyatt had given him for Father's Day last year, since it was their favorite sport. His note on the side never removed because they had never played.

In the coffeeshop, Wyatt stared into his coffee, the steam rising to caress his face like his girlfriend used to. He remembered most of what happened next as if he had lived it in fast-forward. Things had moved so fast.

The police came and arrested his mother for murder while Wyatt hid under the elephant in Mrs. Nesbit's garden, staring at his bloody knuckles and scratched arms.

There was a trial, but he wasn't allowed in court. Instead, he told the elephant all about what he imagined it was like: "Then, two guys called lawyers pull out swords and attack each other; the winner gets to decide if someone is innocent or guilty."

His mother's lawyer must not have been a very good swordfighter because she was found guilty and sentenced to twenty years. Then, Wyatt went to a crowded group home (which always smelled a little like cabbage) until he graduated from high school.

That was all Wyatt ever cared to know until he got curious his sophomore year of college. He looked up the investigation and trial, which had been extensively covered in the local press. The headlines screamed: HOUSEWIFE GONE MAD, SUBURBAN MURDER and PILLOW TALK. The writer of that last one must have felt particularly clever since his mother had apparently smothered his father with a pillow in his sleep.

Wyatt tried to imagine it. His quiet, devoted mother—who rarely raised her hands, even to defend herself—holding a pillow over his much stronger father's face until he was dead. A massive pivot.

The papers either didn't mention the domestic violence, or they used it as further proof of her guilt. Journalists knew nothing of life in that house. They had no idea the pain his father had caused them both, and Wyatt was shaking as he read their tales of the murderous housewife, anger taking control of his body.

Anger. Something tugged in Wyatt's memory as he sat in the coffee shop, his bruised hands cradling the mug. Something missing from the story, like the final piece in a puzzle. Wyatt thought of how his father had glared up at him from the reflection in the puddle and shuddered.

That watery mirror pushed on Wyatt's mind, forcing the piece to snap in place, and horror rose in Wyatt's throat, almost escaping with a scream.

His father would have put up a fight—he certainly did so in life. His mother had had no injuries except the bruise from the blow Wyatt had witnessed earlier that evening. Police explained this by saying the victim was asleep. But Wyatt knew his father was a very light sleeper; he'd gotten in trouble enough times for waking him. If his mother had done it, she should have had more injuries.

Wyatt held his head in his battered hands, a tear rolling down his cheek and dropping into his coffee cup. The police hadn't investigated anyone else because his mother had confessed immediately. But for the first time, Wyatt could see himself clearly the morning after his father's death. He had a fat lip, scratches on his hands and arms, a clotted bloody nose, and bruises tracing over his ribs.

His coffee rippled as more tears splashed on the surface. The current bruises on his hands throbbing at the memory of his girlfriend's tears. He wanted to run away to the topiary garden, where he could be dry and safe. Where his father couldn't reflect on him with pride from the grave, where his mother wasn't rotting in jail for murder, where the elephants looked almost real and protected him from the rain.

* * *

Betcha never thought cookies were powerful. You will after reading Callie Johnson's short story, which she originally wrote in EN312: Creative Writing Fiction.

Silence in the Galaxy: The Story of One Lionel Pearson

by Callie Johnson

Chapter 1. In which Lionel discovers his dislike for crowds.

When Lionel was one year old, he was brought to the biannual Pearson Family Reunion. It was blazing hot, and intergalactic travel in economy class had not agreed with his stomach at all. But he was passed around to all of the Aunt Veetas and Great Aunt Marges, who pinched his cheeks and said *Wasn't he just a doll?* Lionel was not very fond of this, but there was nothing he could do, so he bore it. He considered spitting up all over the pudgy hands that pinched and patted, but he thought better of it.

When Lionel was seven, his teacher asked him to read his report about relations between Earthlings and Martians aloud to the class. He trembled his way up to the front of the class and stuttered his way through the report. He could feel their eyes on him as he stumbled over words. So many eyes, staring, waiting eagerly for his next mistake. Lionel wanted to rush down the aisle to the door and turn off all the lights so they couldn't stare with their beady and squashy and pus-filled eyes, but he knew he would only get detention. So he trembled all the way back to his seat and decided he did not much care for these sorts of crowds either.

When Lionel was twelve, he was cast against his will in a supporting role for a play, where he was supposed to say three whole lines. He shuffled his way onstage, took one look at all of the staring eyes, and promptly forgot all of his lines. He panicked, blurted, "Macbeth!" and rushed off stage as the director gurgled out an ungodly screech and fainted. As set pieces collapsed, cast members milled in circles, and the auditorium devolved into chaos, Lionel caught himself thinking perhaps large groups of beings just weren't his thing.

The last straw went up like kindling in high school. Lionel was invited to a party and decided to give it one more try. He arrived promptly at six, stuck to the edge of the room, and tried to ignore the intense throbbing in his skull from the overpowering stereo system. Across the room was Betsy Miller, a gorgeous Corsmock who made his stomach do funnier things that it was already doing. Should he say hello? He snatched a cup of suspect liquid off the drinks table and gulped it nervously, ignoring the stinging feeling in the back of his throat. Would she laugh at him? He snatched another cup and started pacing. What if she didn't, though? He'd just have to find out.

Lionel chugged the last of his drink and turned to see Betsy Miller walking right by him. "Oh, hi Lionel!" she said, and waved. Her golden eyes sent a beam of heat straight to his stomach, which was feeling funnier by the minute. He gasped smiled a weak smile, and tried to back away, but too late! His stomach did another flip and Lionel projectile vomited the suspect liquids all over the Betsy Miller and the Persian rug she was standing on.

At this point, Lionel gave up on society. "It's just not for me," he told his parents. "Well what are you going to do then?" they asked him. "Pretty soon you'll be an adult and need to get a job." "Don't worry," he said. "I have a plan."

Chapter 2. In which Lionel feels somewhat offended.

When Lionel was seventeen, he packed a very large stack of manila folders into his backpack and bicycled to the VMB, or the Vocational Management Bureau. He had laced his sneakers extra tight, put on a button-up shirt, and even attempted to comb his chaotic nest of scruffy dark hair. He plastered on what he hoped was a winning smile. It was time to put his plan into action.

The lobby of the VMB was painted an unimaginative shade of grey and filled with stiff and uncomfortable chairs, which were in turn filled with creatures of all descriptions. Humans, the tiny blue men whose native language seemed to be yelling, a few robots that were unusually well behaved, a goat, a strange glob that Lionel assumed was sentient, and a few more he couldn't remember from the Speciology course he took in tenth grade. Lionel seated himself if the first empty seat and tried not to notice the bustle of activity around him.

He straightened the collar on his shirt, ran his long flexible fingers through his hair again, and anxiously scratched his rather large nose. "One, two, three, four..." He started to count the water-stained ceiling tiles, but his counting was drowned out by the hubbub of conversation. "Meeping society," he thought to himself, and then blushed a little. "I mean, uh, stupid society," he muttered under his breath. His mother had been very firm that he wasn't allowed to curse until he was eighteen.

His eyes bounced around the room like balls in a pinball machine, trying to take in all of the chaos with his pale, green eyes. It was just too much. He focused his attention on digging through his battered backpack, riffling through papers and doublechecking forms. It went on like this for some time. He would check his papers, count ceiling tiles, avoid eye contact, repeat.

"Pearson, Lionel?"

"Oh, thank heavens!" he exclaimed, leaping from his chair in a flurry of papers and scrambling to pick them up from the grungy floor. "Coming! Er, excuse me, sorry, beg your pardon, uh, ma'm." He squirmed through the long line of humans, humanoids, and various gelatinous objects to the desk at the end of the room. It was a massive, wooden, fortress of a thing, piled high with papers and oversized manuals. Lionel was a little surprised there was no drawbridge around it. He dropped into the creaking chair that sat in front of it, clinging to his papers so they wouldn't scatter again.

"Lionel, I assume?" The lady behind the desk, if indeed a Glorpatian could be called a lady, was a warted and slimy creature resembling the mixture of lime Jell-o and a toad, with just one eye sprouting out of a stalk on her head. Her voice echoed with the most unnerving phlegmy rattle. Lionel fidgeted as he read the certificate hanging above her desk that said "Neptune's Greatest Mom." Lionel fidgeted some more.

"Uh, yes, that's me." She peered at her computer screen through a monocle she held up to her eye, slowing sipping from her polystyrene coffee cup. "Your name is Lionel Pearson?" "Yes?" "Well I suppose it can't be helped," she sighed, turning to see him for the first time. "Oh, you're one of those, eh?" Lionel didn't care for the way she drew out the word "those," like he was carrying the Black Plague or something.

"Yes ma'm—er—miss—er, uh, yeah. A homo sapien, yeah."

She let out a "hpmh" noise and turned back to her screen. "Well you're just about as scrawny as they come, aren't you? I see you're here applying for your E1020 status." She muttered under her breath, "Like they let just anyone in these days."

"Well, I think I, um, could be alright—"

“As an evil mastermind? In your dreams, honey.” She drawled the words like a southern waitress, and her jowls flapped at the hint of a laugh. Lionel squirmed a little as she took her last sip of coffee, and promptly ingested the foam cup as well. Little flecks of polystyrene scattered onto the table as she talked. “You know how many E1020s I get a year? And you wanna guess how many get approved?”

“Uh, not really. Could we just—”

She sighed and adjusted herself in her seat. Her bulges wobbled and seeped through the cracks in the chair before bouncing back, reminding Lionel once more of a lime Jell-O toad.

“Alright, well let’s see your stuff. I assume you brought the appropriate paperwork?”

Lionel started hastily shuffling his papers, trying to reorder them. “Yes, of course. Here’s the E1020 application form, the corresponding E860, and a copy of my Global ID.” He dropped a thick stack of papers on the desk.

“What about proof of residence?”

“Oh, yeah.” He shuffled some more, flipping pages with growing anxiety. “Er, just one second.” He started rummaging in his backpack, mumbling under his breath, before reappearing with a stack of envelopes. “Here!” Lionel tossed them on by one onto the desk, “Electricity bill, Life Juicer receipts, Intergalactic Missile Insurance, Library notice...”

“Alright, alright!” the blob interrupted, blorping impatiently. “You don’t have to cover my whole desk, what kind of hovel do you think this is? Humans these days, no respect for the other species.” She obsessively straightened her desk until it was partially visible again.

“Now. I assume you have your E-application verification files?”

“My what?” Lionel’s fidgeting was severe now. He found himself scratching his nose again. The lady blob sighed and began a monotone recitation. “The E-application verification files supplement your E860 form as proof of diabolical activity in the requisite time frame.” The phlegmy rattle in her voice made Lionel felt a little squeamish inside.

“Oh, I—I have all of that written down there,” Lionel rummaged through her neatly arranged piles pf paper. “Yeah! Right here. See? My E860. Name, Lionel Pearson. Species, homo Sapien. Age, 17 earth rotations. It is okay that I put it in earth rotations, right? My lawyer said it wasn’t necessary to convert them. And here! Record of Evil, Diabolical, or Otherwise Distasteful involvement. And there’s a list. See? In first grade, I spiked the punch bowl at my family reunion with laxatives. I filled my sixth-grade teacher’s flying saucer with eleven cans of body spray. And it was the strong stuff, too! And I sort of destroyed my high school’s production of *Three Tall Crustaceans*. And—”

“Thank you, that will be quite enough.” Lady blob was looking very disgruntled at him leaning eagerly over her desk bumping into her neat stacks of paper. “Oh, gosh, sorry. Er, I can uh, straighten those.”

“Please, don’t’ bother. I’m afraid without proper documentation of these events, as lined out the E1020 application you filled out, your application cannot be processed.”

“You’re kidding,” Lionel protested. His palms were sweating so much he could feel it through his jeans, now. “Do you realize- I can’t just—Do you understand?”

“My understanding is not a requisite part of the process.”

“Come on,” he pleaded, slumping back in his chair and running his hands frantically through his hair, “can’t you help a guy out? I’ve just got to get my Evil Mastermind status filed.”

The lady blob snorgled through what must have been her nasal cavity. “Trust me, honey. You don’t want to be an evil mastermind.”

“Uh, heck yes I do. Er, I mean, gosh yes. Sorry.”

The blob laughed and poured coffee into a new cup from the stack she had on her desk. “Oh please. I have a friend, Susan, who works in the Painful and Gruesome Death Department, and do you know how many of the things that came through there in the last year were E1020 status holders? Four thousand, six hundred, twenty-eight. Or is it twenty-nine, now? I can’t recall. No, a young sprout like you’d be better off in a different department altogether. Have you thought about filing a C2680?” She sipped her coffee with a condescending smile that made Lionel’s eye twitch.

He stared at her in disbelief. “A C2680. You—you think I should take up cookie baking?”

She huffed a little. “Well there’s no need to get touchy, young... man.” Lionel’s already pale face had gone much paler, and he was sweating and shaking so much he looked more like a twitching damp rag than a human.

“Look, lady, er, ma’am. I promise you, I have a lifetime of training. Do you really need the—the—verification files? This is my shot, okay? This is my one, you know, chance. To not go insane. I am not going to give it up for—for—gingersnaps!”

The lady blob started stacking his papers back together and passed them across the desk to him. “Well maybe you should have spent some of your ‘lifetime of training’ reading the instructions for submitting your application. Have a nice day, and feel free to come back if you decide to take up baking.” She screeched for the next applicant and chomped down another polystyrene cup.

Chapter 3. In which Lionel has a brilliant idea.

Lionel did not appreciate the blob lady’s advice, nor did he intend to adhere to it. He rushed straight home and thundered up the stairs to his bedroom. His bedroom was a carefully organized disaster. There were piles of papers and books everywhere, with thin paths of carpet visible between them, and each stack was precisely classified.

Lionel flung his backpack onto his bed, snatched up the nearest stack of books, and plopped onto the edge of his mattress to begin reading them. If it was documented evidence the VMB wanted, well they would get plenty of it. He glanced at spines until he found the one he was looking for. “*The Egress of Civility, Jane Austen’s Model for Civil Disorder, 10 Ways to Seem Less Intelligent, ah! Passive Aggressive Ways to Ruin Society: Case studies from the past 30 years.*”

He thumbed through the well-worn pages, skimming for something practical. He had tried the glue in the shampoo trick, he’d run a scam tricking people who were trying to poach elephants, he’d even fed the class hamster to the class snake. He needed something bigger.

Stealing the Tower of London was impractical, turning the Chancellor into a black hole seemed a little vindictive, and shrinking the moon had been done three times just this decade. He was going to need reinforcements. Lionel navigated his way back through the stacks of books and called down the steps, “Mooooooooom!”

“Yes, dear?” She appeared at the bottom of the steps, flour-covered and stirring a bowl of dough.

“What’s the most, uhh... evil thing you can think of?”

She eyed him a little suspiciously and stopped stirring. “Ummm... I don’t know, honey. Why?”

“Well it doesn’t have to be, like, the most evil thing. Just something sort of, er, mean and clever...ly atrocious?”

“Hm,” she started to stir absent-mindedly. “I suppose those scams you get saying, ‘I’m a hamadryad prince and they’re cutting down my forest, I need to wire you 30,000 euros.’ Those sorts of things seem pretty nasty.” She gave her batter a few more stirs before asking again, “But why, Honey?”

Lionel stared at the eggshell shag carpet. “Er, well I tried to file for my E1020 today, but the lady said I didn’t have enough, uh, documentation. So I guess—I mean, I need to... I dunno... do something really big for it to go through.” He shoved his hands in his pockets and dug his toe into the carpet.

His mother was far less restrained. She bounded up the steps and caught him in a bear hug, bowl and all. “Your E1020? Oh, my goodness, how wonderful!” She grabbed his arm and pulled him back down into the living room, hooting like a deranged bird. “Howard, did you hear that? We could have our very own evil mastermind!”

Lionel’s father walked in from his office. “That’s great, hon,” he said, putting one hand on her shoulder and trying to sneak dough from her bowl with the other. “What are you planning to do, son?”

Lionel flinched a little. “I dunno. I can’t seem to come up with anything.... She said—the lady, er blob, or—she thought I should just bake cookies.”

Lionel’s father smirked a little as he made another pass at the dough, which was just out of his reach. “Aha! Come to think of it, I do know of something really evil.”

“Really, what?”

“Baking cookies and not allowing your family to eat any of them.”

Lionel’s mother snatched the bowl of cookie dough away from his hand and stomped off, huffing. “Oh, good grief, Howard, you know these are for the Robotic Arthritic Awareness Club, stop trying to steal them.”

“It’s pure cruelty, I’m telling you,” his dad said, sauntering out of the room with a handful of pilfered cookie dough. And that was when Lionel had his brilliant idea.

Chapter 4. In which Lionel files his C2680.

Lionel slapped his stack of forms onto the desk and plopped into the creaking VMB chair. The blob was behind the desk again, and he could see her watery eye widen behind her smudged monocle. “Back already? What did you do, explode a planet?”

“I’m here to file my C2680.”

She blinked. “Your what?”

“My C2680.”

The lady snorted a little and tried to cover it up with a cough, which turned it into a sound more offensive than a simple snort or a cough would have been in the first place. “For real. You’re actually going to take up cookie baking?”

“Y-yes.”

“Well that’s... that’s real nice honey.”

“You have no idea,” he mumbled under his breath as she processed his papers. Lionel collected his notarized form, tipped his ball cap to the lady blob, and marched outdoors into the best evil plan he’d ever made.

His mother had been skeptical at first, but by the time he’d diagrammed and explained the process on the family whiteboard, even she was behind it. “I just can’t believe my own Lionel is going to use his grandma’s cookie recipe to take over the world,” she said, tearing up. “They grow up so fast.”

The next few days were a flurry of flour, butter, and advertisement fliers. “BUY GRANDMA ETHEL’S SUGAR COOKIES. YOU’LL BE BEGGING FOR MORE.” And the ads didn’t lie. Boxes flew out of stores like birds on a telephone wire, and soon their fame reached across the galaxy. Chancellors from across the solar system were writing desperate letters to Lionel, begging that he send them more cookies before their people rioted. In the few sectors where shipments were delayed, angry mobs filled the streets screaming “Fffferf duf meeple dong!” and “Cloooro roning purso frusco!” which roughly translate, “Give us the Ethel bread lest we perish.” It had been a busy week.

Production was at an all-time high. Children walked to school chanting “E-thel for you, E-thel for me, if I can’t have my cookie then you can’t have peace.” No less than two inter-planetary wars had started over redirected cookie deliveries. Space pirates attacked shipping lanes, plundering cargo vessels of their cookies. Criminal cookie smuggling operations proliferated. And at least seventeen countries had built temples to the Ethel Cookie Goddess, praying that it would “rain the blessed bread from the heavens.”

And then, it stopped. On a perfect, sunny day, production just stopped. Lionel said, “I am finished with this,” and shut down the factories.

If you have ever seen a water balloon hit bit a baseball bat, that was the effect Lionel’s actions produced. The impinging bat of Lionel’s shutdown momentarily flattened society in shock. But the built-up pressure was too great, and the shockwaves multiplied with such force that society shattered into a flood of tears. These tears propelled to every quadrant of the galaxy, and a great cry went up, “Ethel has gone!”

Chapter 5. In which Lionel’s dreams are unfounded.

There was no line at the VMB this time. The bland grey seats were empty, and the lady blob was making some sort of snoring sound in her chair, oblivious to the sound of a city rioting outside her doors. Lionel burst in, out of breath from dodging through mobs of rampaging citizens. He panted for a moment on the dingy rug, peeking through the blinds to watch the flood of humanoids, robots, and various life forms sweep by. He caught the words on a few of their signs: “What Would Ethel Do,” “We want the cookies,” “Give me Ethel or give me Deathel,” and on and on.

He hurried up to the monstrous desk and coughed politely. The blob was unresponsive, and another gurgling snore met his ears. “Uh, excuse me? Er, uh, ma’am? I have a—a thing...”

“Whu?” She woke with a start and a snort, so loud that both she and Lionel jumped at the sound of it. Trying to clear her grogginess, she shook her head so that her jowls wobbled violently, and her eyestalk flopped back and forth. “What do you want?” She groped around on her desk for her monocle and whipped it up to her bleary eye.

Lionel could see past the lens that there were dark rings under her eye. Maybe she wasn’t so oblivious to the rioting after all. “I, er, I have my application. Again.”

“Application? For cookies?”

“No, for the, uh, E1020.”

And this time, he had plenty of documentation. When she asked for verification of ability to create chaos, he just opened the window, and she notarized his documents right away. He walked home with a song in his heart and, apart from forcing his way through the mobs, perfect peace.

When the VMB mailed him his Evil Mastermind Verification Card, he only had to walk two blocks to the courthouse, file a claim for evil residency in sector 27, and he could start

building his evil lair. He could almost taste it, the sweet caramel-popcorn flavor of victory and isolation. No more crowds. No more group projects where he had to talk in front of class. No more little old alien ladies asking, “What are you going to do after you graduate?” Peace.

And that is exactly what Lionel did. He filed his residency claim and built an ominous evil lair on the remote corner of fifth street and chestnut. It was glistening metal, high security, all he had ever dreamed of. He had arrived.

Of course, eventually the chaos died down, governments regained control, and chancellors stopped sending him angry letters. Little old grandma robots, grandma squidmen, grandma humans, and even grandma horfpotts started baking their own cookies again. Chubby blob babies would clap their hands and scream “googee!” and soon the Great Ethel Craze was nothing more than a forgotten dream. Lionel looked out from his rebar-reinforced steel windows and thought it was absolutely perfect.

A year passed, and the time came to file his E1020 renewal. Lionel smiled to himself as he stuffed the forms into a massive envelope and posted it. He smiled all that day, thinking how nice it was that evil masterminds weren’t required to file documents in person. He smiled all the next day, thinking how peaceful life was now that he wasn’t bombarded by society. In fact, he smiled all the way up to when he got his envelope back in the mail with “rejected” stamped across it in fat, red letters.

Lionel stared at it in shock. This couldn’t be happening to him. He’d filled out every form with completely legible handwriting; what could be wrong? He took a deep breath and ripped the envelope open. Out fluttered all of his painstakingly filled out application documents, and one chipper yellow sticky note. The note read: Applicants must provide evidence of diabolical involvement within the past twelve months. Better luck next year.”

And at that, Lionel fainted.

Chapter 6. In which Lionel takes desperate measures.

Lionel regained consciousness to the incessant beeping of machinery backing. He looked around, dazed, and scrambled to the window. Beyond his heavy-duty, light-blocking curtains, he saw a metal contraption hoisting a massive wrecking ball. He screamed. A voice over a megaphone called out, “Mr. Lionel Pearson. Seeing as your evil mastermind status has been revoked, you are no longer authorized for the possession of an evil lair. You have two minutes to exit the lair before we begin demolition. Have a nice day.”

Lionel’s green eyes went as wide as tennis balls. He dashed through the lair, snatching up his most treasured possessions. His vinyl Beatles collection, a Coca Cola ball cap, a whufflebuster, and his worn copy of *Passive Aggressive Ways to Ruin Society*, all jumbled messily into his backpack. Catching up his pet cactus and disabling his motion-activated-death-rays, Lionel dashed out the back door just as the ball dropped. It crashed through the roof and fragmented into a myriad of robots bent on destroying the lair.

Running at a breakneck pace, Lionel made his way south along fifth street until the sounds of destruction were only faint echoes. He slowed to a trot, his chest heaving with exertion and emotion. His evil lair, gone! Looking around him, he saw social threats in every direction. The mother buying her daughter an ice cream cone, what if she spoke to him? What if the businessman speeding down the street in his convertible should wave? Or the group of ambling green grandmother squids stopped him and mumbled, “Hello there, sonny, what’s your name” through their ill-fitting dentures?

Another scream was building in his throat. This was what he had fallen to? Doomed forever to inane social interactions. Lionel ran again, this time harder, not stopping to check directions or catch his breath. He just ran. He ran and ran, past cyborg bakeries and bright blue soda shops, until he found himself unexpectedly in front of a massive stone building.

It was ancient and creaky looking, made of dark grey granite that now hosted large patches of mildew. The sign in front read, “Saint Nicolaus Zinzendorf Monastery. Brotherhood of Reticence. All Species Welcome.” “At last,” Lionel thought, “peace.”

He raised the doorknocker on the large, molding gates and allowed it to drop with a thud that echoed through the walls and the courtyard and even Lionel’s bones. The gates creaked open and a small blue keerkle in a rough brown robe greeted him with a bow. Lionel bowed in return. The keerkle held up a sign that read, “Welcome the Monastery. We are a brotherhood sworn to silence. If you have any questions, please direct them straight to God.”

Lionel felt tears welling up in his eyes. “You mean you don’t speak at all?” The blue creature nodded in silence. “Where do I sign?”

Chapter 7. In which Lionel finds solitude.

Lionel joined the monastery that very day. As he pulled on the rough, brown habit of the Order of the Brotherhood of Reticence, he felt a deep peace washing over him, like a warm flood of chamomile tea with a hint of cream. This was where he belonged. Far from the maddening crowd, he thought to himself, and chuckled.

Lionel was always considered one of the stranger brothers there. Of course, no one ever said anything of it—they would have been excommunicated for breaking their vows of silence. But if the brothers thought him odd, they were nonetheless gracious to him. He was, after all, the best cookie baker they had. Lionel restarted his cookie business on the down low. Every Thursday evening after prayer, the brothers would gather in a basement room to package cookies in silence. No words, just the crinkling of plastic bags sealed for freshness; the faint sound of cardboard being folded, like the noise of a far-off colony of squirrels line-dancing; and the *thwap! thwap!* of boxes being stacked for shipment.

Each week, an order would go out on the black market. Suspicious tentacled beings slithered down alleys in the remotest corners of the galaxy, stopping passersby to reveal their trench coats packed full of the boxes. “Ethel’s Cookies, somehow preserved through the Great Ethel Craze! Your last chance to taste this manna from heaven!” It was a lucrative business. The Order of the Brothers of Reticence found they now had more than enough funds for their yearly ice cream social, their monthly community oil change service, and even enough left over to buy name-brand cereals for breakfast.

Two years after Lionel joined them, the Brotherhood canonized dear old Grandmother Ethel as their patron saint. Each morning in the predawn light, Lionel walked slowly from the dormitories to the main building, listening to the birds chippering about their daily plans, the wind whispering secrets to the trees, and the sun booming out its big hello as it peeked over the horizon. “There are so many things to hear,” he thought to himself, “when everyone isn’t talking all the time.” On his way through the courtyard, he would wave at the life-sized marble stature of his grandmother that stood surrounded by small bits of shrubbery. And once in a while, if he was certain no one was around, he would edge right up the base of the statue and whisper in her ear, “Thanks, Grandma.”

* * *

NONFICTION

Introduction to Nonfiction

Similar to fiction, nonfiction uses tools, such as character, setting, and plot to present an immersive narrative experience to the reader. Unlike fiction, these stories are true events, and they are often accompanied by author reflection. Some stories may feel like a blend between narrative and essay.

* * *

The students in EN112: College Composition I were challenged to write a short story from their life that taught them a lesson, but they also had to incorporate research. This assignment was quite a challenge, but not only did Ashley Harwell meet the challenge, she did so with strong imagery, a good sense for suspense (those of you who've ever shopped with your kids will understand), and a beautiful message of God's grace in action.

Cheerio Trails and Jesus

by Ashley Harwell

This shopping trip was much like any other. With my detailed shopping list in hand and my one-year-old son securely buckled into the grocery cart, we entered our local grocery store on a mission. This mission had two goals: stick to the list and exit before my shopping buddy became a hysterical mess. Little did I know this trip to the store would soon detour and gain a whole new mission ending in a lesson on kindness and God's grace.

As most weekdays go, my husband was at work and my two oldest children were in school. This was my window of opportunity to run out and buy a few groceries while I only had one child in tow rather than three. Grocery shopping is one of my least favorite tasks and my inability to focus usually guarantees that I will leave feeling frazzled and missing a few necessary items. However, on this particular day, I came prepared. I had my shopping list in hand and a full container of Cheerios to occupy my son. I was determined to make this a successful outing.

We were off to a great start. As we entered the produce section he was happily babbling, playing with my car keys, and munching on his Cheerios as I carefully inspected and collected the vegetables for the coming week. We rounded the corner to the meat department and things started going downhill fast. The car keys were no longer fun to play with, and my son decided that the Cheerios were better suited for throwing than eating. As we walked, I was picking up Cheerios as fast as he could throw them and any actual shopping to be done was no longer happening. After a few failed attempts to refocus him on eating the Cheerios, he decided it would be more fun to see how many Cheerios he could fit in his mouth at one time. I considered this a success. Many of those Cheerios still ended up on the floor but while he was still relatively happy, I knew it was time to make a mad dash through the rest of my list and get out of the store. Fast.

God had other plans. We had just walked over to the dairy section when a man I had never met before started commenting on the cute, cheerio-covered kid in my cart.

“Oh, thanks.” I said as I continued walking.

“How old is he?”

“One”

“What’s his name?” the man asked.

“Owen”

“Well, hello, Owen. My name is Rob.”

I kept my answers short and direct. I was hopeful that he would be able to recognize my current struggles and desire to keep on task through my obviously uninterested body language. After all, body language has been described as “a silent and true language, which can express a person’s inner world,” (Yang 1333). My “inner world” was practically screaming to be left alone. I could tell that if I didn’t keep my cart rolling and my eyes focused on the yogurt selection before me, we were going to be here a while. This was not part of my plan. Despite my uninterest, Rob began sharing a bit of his life story with me. I’m sure he had a fascinating life, but Cheerios were once again being thrown and all I could think about was the ticking time bomb in my son. His patience would soon come to a screeching halt, the Cheerios were running low and I still had groceries to buy.

“I have a brother and a sister. My parents have been married for over 30 years, but none of their children ever married or had children,” said Rob.

In an attempt to end the conversation with pleasantries, I said with a smile, “Well, it’s not too late! You never know what God has planned.”

As I began to walk away Rob chuckled. “Oh no,” he said. “I don’t believe in God.”

Now I had a choice to make. I could either ignore his comment and continue shopping or I could take this moment to follow the nudging of the Holy Spirit and unpack this comment with Rob. The interesting thing about this moment was that I had recently gone through evangelism training, where we learned practical ways to begin gospel conversations and to share the gospel using a method called Ask, Admire, Admit (Dare 2 Share). Without even realizing it, I had turned my simple conversation with Rob into a gospel conversation just by mentioning God’s name. This was an opportunity to use what I had learned and share Christ with a complete stranger. No sooner had those thoughts crossed my mind when the following words flowed out of my mouth.

“I am sorry to hear that,” I said. “I will be praying for you.”

There it was. I had just blurted out the most generic Christian comment I could have possibly made. I knew this was a moment that God had orchestrated, but I managed to brush it off in all of six words.

Thankfully this did not stop Rob. He continued to talk and tell me all about how he had grown up in church but could never believe any of it. He explained how much research he had done and all the ways that science has debunked God. Somewhat thankful for his stubbornness at this point, I continued to share my faith with him. With every comment I made, he had five more reasons not to believe. As our conversation carried on, his words began to cut deep, and I could feel my demeanor shifting from pleasant to frustrated. I took a deep breath and at that moment it was as if I could hear the Holy Spirit telling me that it was okay, this wasn’t my fight to win.

Feeling somewhat defeated, I finally told him, “Rob, I hate to hear all of this, but I’m afraid we are going to have to agree to disagree here. I know you don’t think it will do any good, but I really will be praying that God changes your heart.” And with those words, I walked away.

“Don’t bother.” Those were his final words to me.

I completed my shopping trip, loaded my groceries and now fussy baby into the car, and with an aching heart, I prayed for Rob all the way home. J. I. Packer says, “The prayer of a Christian is not an attempt to force God’s hand, but a humble acknowledgement of helpless dependence...what we do every time we pray is to confess our own impotence and God’s sovereignty.” (11-12). I shared the experience with my husband, and we prayed that God would continue to work in Rob’s life and bring others into his path that would point him to the truth of the gospel.

This experience did not go how I had expected. My mission was to get in and out of the grocery store as quickly as possible. God had other plans. Had I stayed so focused on my desires and not shown kindness to Rob by acknowledging his initial comments when we first met, I would have missed an opportunity to share the gospel and plant a seed of truth in a complete stranger. I also wish that Rob would have accepted Jesus that day, but he did not.

The most amazing thing about this whole experience was that over a year later my husband went out to run a few errands, and when he returned home, he began to tell me about how he was able to have a gospel conversation with a man at Walmart. As he told me of his own experience, a few details about the man he had just witnessed to seemed so familiar. I laughed and said, “It almost sounds like you are talking about the same man I talked to at the grocery store a year ago. Remember Rob?”

“This guy said his name was Robert. Maybe it was the same guy. Would you know him if you saw him? Because I actually took a picture with him.”

As he showed me the image on his phone, I couldn’t believe my eyes, “Yes, that’s him!” In a city of over 248,000 people (Winston Salem), God placed the same man in the paths of me and my husband in different locations over one year apart. We each had the opportunity to share Jesus with him.

I would love to be able to say that as a result of these conversations Rob has given his life to Jesus but unfortunately, that is not the case. However, I learned many things through this experience. I was reminded of how important it is that we share love and kindness with everyone we encounter no matter what is going on in our personal lives. Kindness comes in many forms, and it is like a language that transcends all barriers (Pohoata 20). Scripture tells us, “Do not let kindness and truth leave you; Bind them around your neck, Write them on the tablet of your heart” (NASB, Proverbs 3:3). I learned that if I am not careful, I can let my selfish desires get in the way of what God has planned for me. I was reminded that God answers prayers. We specifically prayed that God would send more people into Rob’s life that would share Jesus with him. God chose to do that by allowing my husband to be one of those people.

So, what does a trail of Cheerios have to do with Jesus? As it turns out, that trail of Cheerios, left by a restless one-year-old little boy, led to a unique Gospel-centered conversation. One routine shopping trip taught me a lot about my selfish heart and that my gracious heavenly Father has a plan in every situation. I just have to be willing to lay aside my desires and follow his leading.

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* * *

POETRY

Introduction to Poetry

Poetry is the most ancient of human language arts. The first recorded human poem is Adam's love poem to Eve in Genesis 2:23. Poetry is notoriously difficult to define, but it usually involves highly organized language that is structured in lines, rather than in paragraphs. Poets give great attention to strong imagery and use tools, such as rhythm, rhyme, and repetition. Regardless of the tools, the poet offers a vivid and highly-emotional experience to the reader. A careful reader explores, plays, and meditates on the poetry, uncovering deeper meanings in the process.

* * *

In EN218: Introduction to Creative Writing, students learn the basics of writing fiction, nonfiction, and poetry. The poetry unit is often especially hard for students, but Brooke persevered with the genre and with "The Thunderstorm" in particular, striving to glorify God in her observations about nature.

The Thunderstorm

by Brooke Morris

Thunder crashes through the sky.
Bolts of lightning flash up high.
The leaves are falling.
Is the wind calling
Me?

Raindrops patter on the ground
And hit the trees all around.
Branches are quaking,
Leaving one shaking:
Me.

Darkness comes to replace light,
Filling my heart with a fright
Of God's great power
Shown in this hour
To me.

The rain stops. The wind is calm.
God's holding me in the palm
Of His mighty hand.
Now I understand
His love for me.

* * *

Students in EN314: Creative Writing Poetry continue to refine their poetry skills. In this poem, Callie challenges us to—well, we'll let you figure it out. That, after all, is part of the point of poetry.

Remember

by Callie Johnson

Remember, remember the fifth of November,
The gunpowder, treason and plot.
I know of no reason
Why powder or treason
Should somehow be ever forgot.

Remember, in embers it's always remembered
The one who put flint to the stone.
You would have concluded
That I was deluded
If you knew that the flame was my own.

A sign for the heavens announcing my presence
And hiding the secrets within.
As I mask my mistakes,
Light the fuse, pray for grace,
Oh, Father forgive, I have sinned.

Have mercy on me, Lord, if I let you see,
If I show you the form of my face.
Would I not be an emblem,
Misguided decisions,
A heretic burned at the stake?

For the spark in my soul shows the depth of the hole,
The void that is now all my aim.
Consumed by a need
To impress the Unseen
Though hellfire kindles the flame.

In poets and preachers I search for his features,
A prodigal, stranded, alone.
Crushed by the Masses
As every hope passes,
For no one is calling me home.

And so, here I stand with the powder in hand,
 No matter the price to be paid.
 I bring to the Father
 A gift for the altar,
 Will that not elicit his praise?

Surely this pyre, the flaming desire
 Cannot go unnoticed above.
 Ablaze allegory,
 To God be the glory
 For all of the things I have done.

You see why I bear it, this burden of merit,
 My pure and unblemished façade.
 For the visage beneath
 Tells the tale of my grief
 Disfigured in search for my god.

The guise is my guard, a shield for my heart,
 Protection from saints such as you.
 Would you reel at my wounds,
 Push me into my tomb,
 And burn me in effigy too?

A penny, a penny, the zealot is sinning,
 Condemned for the deed he has done.
 To garner the love
 Of the Father above,
 Yet he burns, Kyrie Eleison.

The fifth of November, you'll find in the embers
 Gunpowder, piety, zeal.
 An inferno to laud
 Our perfection as god,
 Heaven help us if we should be real.

* * *

CONTRIBUTORS NEEDED FOR FUTURE EDITIONS OF *THE WARRIOR'S PEN*.

The Warrior's Pen is a journal dedicated to providing Biblical worldview-driven articles and works from all fields of discipline for the edification of God's people with the purpose of glorifying Him. This journal's contents are provided solely by the students, staff, and faculty of Calvary University. It is our prayer that those who read this journal will share and enjoy the articles and works and be built up in the truth of God.

All CU students, staff, and faculty are encouraged to submit work (academic papers and creative writing) for inclusion in *The Warrior's Pen*.

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