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Peeling Back the Fig Leaves: Revelations of Truth and Beauty in the Study of Literature and Writing

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Knee deep in Alaskan waters, a team of scientists collected samples. They were studying pollutants in the streams, studying how our industries stretch their ugly arms toward even the land where no sun sets, where caribou drink and mosquitoes are so thick, the workers wear mesh masks. Dip and fill, dip and fill: These grant recipients gathered what was clear only to the naked eye. And a loon crooned nearby. While sapphire suffused the lake, sun laid its amber hands upon their shoulders. The point was numbers, of course—what they would prove in terms of content. But the math and the science were not enough. They could not bottle beauty. So the head scientist remarked, "It's too gorgeous here. Somebody should write a poem."

My sister Penney, who holds a PhD in environmental chemistry from The Ohio State University, responded with several haiku, the one form she could remember, considering her long-time absence from poetry. She and her teammates recognized that their analysis of data would not suffice in preserving or remembering or just experiencing the beauty that surrounded them. And their recognition speaks to our hunger for art. Indeed, Penney's expedition leader was inspired, and his request for poetry echoed the sentiment Wendell Berry addresses so insightfully when he says, "I don't think creatures can be explained. I don't think lives can be explained. What we know about creatures and lives must be pictured or told or sung or danced. And I don't think the pictures or stories or songs or dances can be explained. The arts are indispensable precisely because they are so nearly antithetical to explanation" (113). Berry is quick to add that his view of art does not preclude the possibility, or even the usefulness, of criticism yet concludes that "a

work of criticism is not equivalent to a work of art and cannot replace it" (118). Mary Oliver takes this sentiment even further, arguing, "Writing is neither vibrant life nor docile artifact but a text that would put all its money in the hope of suggestion. 'Come with me into the field of sunflowers' is a better line than anything you will find here, and the sunflowers themselves far more wonderful than any words about them" (58). Yet, both admit that since we are unable to create the sunflowers ourselves—or the loons or the lake—we do what we can, create what we can, to satisfy this divinely given impulse within us: write, paint, sing, dance, until as Blake himself wrote, we can "see a World in a Grain of Sand and a Heaven in a Wild Flower" (qtd. in Berry 114-115).

That is why the study of literature—of art—is so crucial to simply being alive. And why it is so vital to understand that art is the gift of a merciful, all-knowing Creator. In fact, we only know God through His art: the landscape of His creation (general revelation) and the masterpiece of His Word—the Scriptures and Christ Himself (special revelation). Romans 1 clearly teaches that man can recognize the eternal, divine Creator through the testimony of sky, land, and ocean, and many psalms (Ps. 8.1, 19.1-6, and 148.7, for example) tell us that God reveals Himself in the songs of sparrows, nickers of horses, and chatter of dolphins. For this reason, John Stott refers to creation as "God's second Bible" (qtd. in Shaw 11). Furthermore, God's flair for the dramatic is evidenced in his blue bowls of seas, His goodness in green grass, and His omnipotence in the finger of a cloud. Indeed, as Annie Dillard notes, "If creation had been left up to me, I'm sure I wouldn't have had the imagination or the courage to do more than shape a single, reasonably sized atom, smooth as a snowball, and let it go at that. No claims of any and all revelations could be so far-fetched as a single giraffe" (146). And through the creation

of man, God shaped humans in His own image (Gen. 1.27), for the same reason He created the heavens and the earth: to glorify Himself (Isa. 43.6-7 and 60.21; Col. 1.16). What is so amazing about this glorious act, however, is that God planned all along, as Erwin Lutzer points out, a far more glorious act: to redeem humans. As Charles D. Alexander explains, "The world was made for Calvary; when God created the world it was with the intention of dying for it. The remedy was in advance of the disease" (qtd. in Lutzer 145). Indeed, we worship a God who likes to color—and brilliantly so—outside the lines.

Furthermore, the Scriptures reveal the great artist at work. Consistent with the way God created—using words to bring everything on Earth into existence (Gen.1.3-27)—is His choice to use language not just to convey the message of redemption but to bring about salvation through faith. Indeed, Romans 10.17 tells us that faith itself "comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the *word* of Christ" (emphasis added). In addition, Christ says in John 5.24, "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my *word* and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life" (emphasis added). And Romans 10.10 explains, "[I]t is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved." Thus, language, mysteriously and incredibly, is the bridge that carries us from death to life: We hear the word, we believe the word, we speak the word, and we are saved. Moreover, the words in the Scriptures are inspired by God and are "useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 2.16). Therefore, the preeminence of language in the Scriptures speaks, literally, to the importance of language.

All too often, however, we mine the Bible for its content gems, ignoring the brilliance of their displays. In regards to this oft-ignored yet vital artistry, Luci Shaw remarks, "[T]he Scripture is not just information, data, exhortation, or proposition from God. Nor is it merely a series of abstract principles or concepts linked by stolid factual narrative. It is truth often deliberately framed in words that project brilliant images into my thinking" (13). Indeed, we can see God's artistic framing and imagery in passages like Psalm 19. David exalts the Law of the Lord, saying it is "radiant, giving light to the eyes . . . [and] more precious than gold, than much pure gold . . . sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb." The imagery in this passage works to communicate that God's words are not blinding, cheap, and bitter, but illuminating, invaluable, and yes, sweet. Could He have communicated that truth without the imagery here and in hundreds of other passages? Perhaps, that is the wrong question. Perhaps, the better question is this: Since Scripture is inspired, is not the imagery absolutely necessary, and not just fluff? And since it is necessary, can we safely conclude not only that beauty reflects God's glory and His investment in His creation but also that a celebration of such beauty is likewise a celebration of His truth? Certainly, the Hebrews recognized that the tabernacle had to reflect their extravagant, majestic God and was well worth all the meticulous details (Exod. 35.30-36.2). And how glad we are that this extravagant God did not skimp on the cross either, did not claim that grace and sacrifice and the reddish work of redemption would be too impractical or cost too much.

Consequently, through His Son, Jesus Christ, God perfected His revelation to man, combining artistry with skin, the Word become flesh (John 1.14). Thus, the Christian cannot separate God the artist from God the redeemer. In addition, He is not just the

source of all truth; He is, as Christ proclaimed, "*the* truth" (John 14.6, emphasis added). To know God, we must know His creation as much as His word, His artistry as much as His message, His poetry as much as His prose—all of which was incarnated, flawlessly, in His Son and revealed to us in the Scriptures. And He is knowable! Countless biblical passages tell us so, including Psalm 119.1-6, Matthew 11.27, Romans 1.18-23, 1 Corinthians 8.4-6, and 2 Corinthians 4.7-14. Indeed, all of them could well be summed up by John's statement in 1 John 5.20: "We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may *know* him who is true . . . " (emphasis added).

Therefore, the study of the arts, and of literature in particular, is vital not just to the human experience but to the Christian experience. As Ryken notes, literature helps us to perceive, even experience, important ideas in vivid, concrete ways because "[l]iterature is an incarnation of ideas or meanings, just as in Christian belief Jesus was the incarnation (enfleshment) of the invisible God in bodily human form" (23). Literature teaches us about humanity as it stimulates our imaginations and is a "[c]atalyst to [t]hinking," proving to be the "enemy of the idle mind" (Ryken 28-29). Thus, literature is not an end in and of itself; indeed, it is a means to an end: the discovery of truth, beauty, and goodness—and the way those truths change our thinking and our lives.

This fact, according to C.S. Lewis, results in one of two main differences between the Christian writer and the unbelieving writer. The Christian writer creates art as an act of worship to the Creator. In contrast, the unbelieving writer "is always apt to make a kind of religion of his aesthetic experiences. . . . [and who] has to be 'creative'. . . has to obey a mystical amoral law called his artistic conscience . . . " (Lewis 47). Surely, this is why we see many unbelievers in our field bow to the literature god, so many who have,

as Paul notes in Romans 1.25, "exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator . . . . " The other main difference between Christian and unbelieving writers regards the belief in the *Imago Dei*. We Christians believe we cannot create *ex nihilo* as God did. When we create, we simply reflect God's "eternal Beauty and Wisdom" (Lewis 47). We cannot, as social constructionists claim, create meaning or knowledge; we cannot create truth. For how can we create what has already—always—existed? Instead, we discover it, piece by glorious piece, through conversations both past and present, on the walls of galleries, in the pages of poetry, and in the halls of concerts. Certainly, we add to the discovery, sometimes in bold and creative ways, sometimes in keen and analytical ways. And when we create, we help to reveal another yet unplumbed depth of God's complexity. Yet, because we are, by our very nature, finite and flawed, so, ironically, are our masterpieces.

Whatever the differences between Christian and non-Christian writers, however, one thing remains the same: Reading, studying, and even writing literature all effect change. L'Engle remarks about her own writing life, "I have often been asked if my Christianity affects my stories, and surely it is the other way around; my stories affect my Christianity, restore me, shake me by the scruff of the neck, and pull this straying sinner into an awed faith" (119). Those of us who write our own stories, whether in poetry or prose, or find in L'Engle's works as well as a thousand other authors' works the restorative power she refers to, do not fear literature. We eagerly embrace it, awaiting its "catalyst to thinking."

Unfortunately, within our evangelical culture, many do not trust, even discourage, the study of literature because they believe it has the potential to change readers for the

worse—to corrupt and degrade. This perspective has sometimes made teaching literature, especially contemporary literature that contains explicit descriptions of sexuality and violence, difficult for the Christian teacher. Yet, Ryken points out, "If the influence of literature is potentially bad, it is also potentially good. . . . [Generally,] Christians do not avoid other areas of life simply because a possibility for abuse exists. By the same logic, they should not neglect literature . . . simply because it can be abused" (106). One of literature's greatest goods is its ability to show us our humanity and how it affects our relationship to our Creator. It peels back the fig leaves and says, "Do you see that?" Unfortunately, far too often, Christianity screams, "Put that leaf back!" We like to look presentable.

As a result, when we Christians write, we tend to create what Flannery O'Connor refers to as the "sorry religious novel." She explains that the religious writer of such a novel

> supposes that because of his belief, he is somehow dispensed from the obligation to penetrate concrete reality. He will think that the eyes of the Church or of the Bible or of his particular theology have already done the seeing for him, and that his business is to rearrange this essential vision into satisfying patterns, getting himself as little dirty in the process as possible. . . . But the real novelist, the one with an instinct for what he is about, knows that he . . . must penetrate the natural human world as it is. (72)

If O'Connor is correct and many contemporary Christian writers believe there is nothing new to explore, no original perspective to appreciate, no new answers to discover, it is little wonder why much so-called "Christian" fiction is formulaic and predictable, safe

and shallow. Though it is true, as Lewis himself comments, "Our whole destiny seems to lie . . . in being as little as possible ourselves, in acquiring a fragrance that is not our own but borrowed, in becoming clean mirrors filled with the image of a face that is not ours" (50), thereby rendering contemporary art's insistence on originality somewhat misdirected, it is also true, as L'Engle writes, "We live by revelation, as Christians, as artists, which means that we must be careful never to get set into rigid molds. The minute we begin to think we know all the answers, we forget the questions . . . " (28). Remembering the questions—the ultimate questions—is the starting point for great literature. Indeed, we might paraphrase Francis Bacon's oft quoted dictum this way, in regards to writing: If we begin with certainties when writing, it is doubtful we will end with literature. But if we begin with doubts and bear them patiently, we may end with work that is most certainly literature.

Another problem that O'Connor's observation uncovers is that the imagination of the typical Christian has, in W.H. Auden's words, "acquir[ed] a Manichean cast"; that is, he believes, "whatever his religious convictions to the contrary, that the physical world is utterly profane or the abode of demons" (117). Therefore, it is not enough to produce a work of art that is simply realistic or truthful; it has to present the gospel or mention Christ to be acceptable, to be "spiritual" (indeed, protagonists must be saved!). Moreover—and more to the point—in this view, writing about the world, especially its myriad forms of sin, in vivid color is, well, downright worldly. Yet, O'Connor remarks, "St. Augustine wrote that the things of the world pour forth from God . . . [and that] this physical, sensible world is good because it proceeds from a divine source . . . The artist penetrates the concrete world in order to find at its depths the image of its source, the

image of ultimate reality" (69). Though the fall of man certainly marred creation, it did not void God's judgment that it was "good." In addition, to be truthful, Christians must portray in their art—and must read literature that reveals—man's need for redemption, man's total depravity. Certainly, the goal is not to revel in that depravity or to exult in the resulting despair. In fact, O'Connor herself notes that one of the primary problems with modern literature is that is "has domesticated despair and learned to live with it happily" (70). The same could be said today, fifty years after O'Connor's insight. The goal is rather to expose the depravity—reveal its ugliness—so that a response becomes necessary and desired. In fact, Blamires emphasizes that our "[u]nsatisfied longings must be nourished in us, and the elusive dream of fulfillment dangled before us, or . . . men's hearts w[ill] never desire the ultimate peace and joy offered by God" (179-180). How can a writer do so without "penetrat[ing] the concrete world"? And how can the teacher of literature do so without penetrating the layers of that world as depicted in the works?

Yet, this approach does conflict with many Christians' primary goal in reading: to escape the harsh reality of the world, including the world's ugliness, and enjoy art without being offended or made uncomfortable (and some would argue, without putting before their eyes "evil" things). Surely, Auden understood this viewpoint, as he admits, "However sternly [the Christian] reminds [herself] that the material universe is the creation of God and found good by Him, [her] mind is haunted by images of physical disgust, cigarette butts in a half-finished sardine can, a toilet that won't flush, etc." (117). In our day, we might add art exhibits of dead animals (or even feces), movies fraught with the glorification of violence and illicit sex, and books, even for young adolescents, riddled with gratuitous profanity. And the 6:00 news. Truly, as Eliot, Lewis, and

O'Connor all observed, once God was declared dead, or at the very least, irrelevant, some art lost all its God-breathed inhibitions. Eating from the tree has become a "right."

So, somewhere in the latter half of the twentieth century, Christianity responded. We have produced books and films—even subcultures—that disinfect the world. Now we can view a movie that has no curse words and read romance novels sans sex, even while drinking coffee in cafés housed in mega churches! And everything ends happily here on Earth. Indeed, C.S. Lewis was right when he said, "[L]iterature written by Christians for Christians would have to avoid mendacity, cruelty, blasphemy, pornography, and the like, and it would aim at edification . . . Of Christian Literature, then, in the sense of 'work aiming at literary value and written by Christians for Christians', you see that I have really nothing to say and believe that nothing can be said" (46-47). Perhaps, this is why Auden also notes, "There can no more be a 'Christian' art than there can be a Christian science or a Christian diet. There can only be a Christian spirit in which an artist, a scientist, works or does not work" (115). Where did we get the idea that we could produce art without heeding the "same excellences of all literature" (Lewis 46), indeed that the only standard by which to measure a film or book is whether it is "clean"? Mediocre writing with important messages is still mediocre; it falls short of literature. And we avoid reading and studying literature that indeed is literature, graphic or explicit though it may at times be, at our own peril. It seems the general principle is simply this, to echo Auden: Whatever we do, including the art we produce and books we read, may we do it to glorify God. Thus, we probably have gone too far in our reaction against the world's indulgences, and we have been so effective in keeping comfortable, I wonder

how God will flush us from Jerusalem in this century and scatter us to the places, including the literary places, we are supposed to inhabit.

All these observations regarding the contemporary Christian's view of art go right to the heart of developing discernment, both a crucial requirement for and a beneficial byproduct of literary study. The need for discernment is not just implicit; it undergirds the entire field, for without it, no reader could sift out what is "bad" from what is "good" literature as Ryken says. Indeed, T.S. Eliot says Christians must judge all writing by "consciously certain standards and criteria of criticism over and above those applied by the rest of the world." Immediately, he then adds, "So long as we are conscious of the gulf fixed between ourselves and the greater part of contemporary literature [in terms of belief in a supernatural order], we are more or less protected from being harmed by it, and are in a position to extract from it what good it has to offer us" (29). Could this be why Paul says in Philippians 1.9-11 that he prays the Philippians' "love would abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight so that [they] may be able to discern what is best"? We Christians should not only perceive what is bad or wrong about certain ideas but also perceive—even emphasize—what is good or right about them. By recognizing the complexity that exists in each idea, we can avoid making hasty generalizations and false dilemmas; we can think critically and act wisely. Thus, if we know that an author does not share our presuppositions regarding the existence of a loving, personal God, we can read, looking for what, by God's common grace, the author has been able to discover about truth and demonstrate about beauty.

It is for these reasons that literary criticism, approached as Auden might say, in a Christian spirit, is so vital to literary study. And this forms the basis of the educational approach, for as Eliot asserts,

> The good critic—and we should all try to be critics, and not leave criticism to the fellows who write reviews in the papers—is the man [or woman] who, to a keen and abiding sensibility, joins wide and increasingly discriminating reading. Wide reading . . . is valuable because in the process of being affected by one powerful personality after another, we cease to be dominated by anyone, or by any small number. (25-26)

In fact, Romans 12.2 teaches us to "be transformed by the renewing of [our] mind[s]. Then [we] will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing, and perfect will." Obviously, we develop discernment by renewing our minds, but the not-so obvious question is this: If developing discernment is connected, almost inextricably so, to the reading of literature, how many non-reading Christians exist who cannot "test and approve what God's will is"? That is not to say that somehow the study of literature automatically guarantees that ability or that such study alone would develop it. Yet, it does seem that true discernment develops not from studying the Scriptures *alone*, as some Christians would argue, but from studying the Scriptures *and* other fields of study, side by side. As Michael Horton observes, "Those who do not care to read secular books will be impoverished and will be susceptible to subtle and indirect seduction, while those who do not carefully study Scripture will lose their only plumb line for judging truth from error, belief from unbelief, right from wrong" (66-67). In short, literature is certainly not inspired as the Scriptures are (I Timothy 2.16-17), so one must, with careful effort, ferret

out falsehood by identifying literary digressions from and contradictions to the Bible. Yet, literature is often truthful and beautiful, even when it offends. So we should read broadly and study deeply.

Paul, despite his zealous Judaism and later, his equally zealous yet loving Christianity, recognized the value of such study because he demonstrates an obvious knowledge of literature. He could speak fluently about the philosophers and poets of his age, most of whom were indeed pagan. Acts 17 records Paul's discernment—showing us how he could emphasize what was truthful about the Greeks' writing while he also pointed out what was erroneous. Had Paul studied *only* the Scriptures, he never could have made the address! Likewise, he would not have been able to use the rhetorical strategies he did to reach his audience.

Certainly, Cedarville University attempts to follow Paul's example by integrating biblical truth with all fields, a commendable strategy that I not only support but also practice. Yet, we at Cedarville University tend to use what Steve Winteregg rightly refers to as the "injection" method of biblical integration: Just inject the Bible into every class, and the students will learn discernment. However, Hasker explains there may be a better way to think through this process:

> David Wolfe points out that some Christians object to the very word "integration," because it seems to "presuppose a denial that truth is already one." In a certain sense, this objection is justified. It is not as though there are two completely distinct and unrelated aspects of reality—say, Christianity and biochemistry—and it is up to us to create or invent a relationship between them. There is rather a *single* reality, *all* of which is created by God

> and under his dominion, and all of which we as his children and image-bearers must seek to understand. . . . In such a situation, one is not confronted with the task of "integrating" two more or less separate and disjoint bodies of knowledge and belief; rather, there is a unitary vision of truth. (21-22)

I would go even further and suggest that our educational strategies ought to reflect the way God views knowledge—as completely interrelated—and thereby teach courses that integrate not just biblical truth with certain fields but science with literature, philosophy with biology, and education with psychology. Thus, truly effective and biblical integration might, ironically, follow a model of education similar to Antioch College's, a model that emphasizes the interdisciplinary nature of truth and knowledge.

As far as literature goes, I do believe as Ryken points out, that most "other disciplines tend to give the facts about a subject," while "literature recreate[s] the experience," helping us readers "get inside the subject so we can 'know' it experientially and concretely" (25). All the more reason, therefore, to integrate literature with science, for example. Wendell Berry notes, in fact, that science and art are not "inherently at odds with one another . . . [for] 'science' means knowing and 'art' means doing . . . Out of school, the two are commonly inter-involved and naturally cooperative in the same person—a farmer, say, or a woodworker—who knows and does, both at the same time" (124). The dilemma in the university exists, however, because it is organized into specialties, thereby dividing the very jobs that normally one (nonacademic) person would—and does—do. Unfortunately, this compartmentalization ends up communicating to generations of students that they can be engineers who do not write well, business professionals who do not read well, or to be fair, even writers who do not manage their

finances well. At Christian schools, likewise, it tragically can communicate that students can become pastors who, perhaps, do none of those well.

In attempting a solution, Berry suggests that "this convocation of specialists" must "become a conversation" by establishing "a common purpose, a common standard, and a common language," making "the good health of its community the primary purpose of all its work" (60). How difficult could that be at a school like ours, where the "good health" of Christendom is shared by all? Could we lead the way? Perhaps, the best place to start would be by integrating literature with theology more effectively. After all, at the time when O'Connor was writing, she observed, "In many universities, you will find departments of theology vigorously courting departments of English. The theologian is interested specifically in the modern novel because there he sees reflected the man of our time, the unbeliever, who is nevertheless grappling in a desperate and usually honest way with intense problems of the spirit" (70). Why do we not enjoy that courtship here? Why do we insist here that literature classes be injected with biblical truth but not Bible classes injected with literature? And more generally, why are most pastors more likely to read secondary sources written by Christian authors who refer to literary works than the primary works themselves? These are vital questions necessary to address if we specialists are to begin the conversation.

I have tried to begin such conversations myself, within the limitations of the present system. For example, in freshman composition, I have consulted with Dr. Tom Hutchison regarding how he teaches topical Bible study to his students. I have adapted some of Hutch's methods to the composition classroom for the position paper I require all my students to write. In this way, the students learn how to study the Scriptures when

confronting social and political issues (intrinsic to writing is the integration of many disciplines). Rather than forcing the Bible to fit their positions, I challenge my classes to let the Scriptures direct their conclusions. It is challenging—all too challenging—for most of the students who still, after all the instruction, opt for easy answers and pat platitudes. Yet, it is also rewarding to work with a student who does the study, truly delves, and emerges a different thinker. One student at the end of his research last year said to me, "I changed my mind. But that's good, right? Because you wanted our study to direct our decisions." I sang all the way back to my office.

Though far from completion, I have also tried to begin such conversations with the science department. A year or so ago, John Silvius and I began to discuss the development of a writing course that integrated biology, particularly environmental biology. Talks went well and eventually included my colleagues, Scott Calhoun and Ryan Futrell, and plans still exist to develop such a course for the honors program. But unfortunately, the limitations of the present system—our load demands—prevented us from finishing our work. Yet the talk was wonderful, the conversation begun, the potential enormous. It was very rewarding as well to have Dr. Silvius lead a nature hike (and quasi-lesson) for the writing camp this past June, a walk that then resulted in a variety of essays, stories, and poems our campers developed.

In my writing center course and in writing center staff meetings, I talk to students as well about how we can serve both students and faculty from all disciplines. Primarily, we focus on how writing needs to convey meaning clearly whether in business or science, literature or criminal justice, nursing or psychology. We talk, too, with faculty from those disciplines, to collaborate with them on how to help their students become strong writers.

Certainly, there are particular requirements in different fields that we also try to emphasize, but overall, the similarities between disciplines are striking: the need for clarity, specificity (and in most cases, specific evidence), logical organization, consideration of other points of view, and yes, correctness. Such similarities speak loudly to the connection between all knowledge, connection that can only be explained by its singular source. And so, integrating Scriptural principles in writing center theory and practice does not just entail my teaching about the limitations of social constructionist theory or emphasizing the wholly Christian approach to service that writing center work affords us. It entails, too, my belief that all truth is God's truth and can be clearly communicated, no matter what the class, in writing.

Teaching dramatic literature naturally lends itself not only to theological discussions but also to historical, psychological, and cultural analyses. Literature, I always tell my students, does not get written in a vacuum. Thus, as we discuss the origin of drama, we also discuss Greek religion and culture. In between our study of drama's demise and eventual resurrection in neoclassical theatre, we look at the ironic influences of the Church in drama's development during the medieval period. When we reach the modern period, the students are ready to encounter Ibsen's Gabler, Chekhov's Ranevsky, and Synge's Maurya and especially to talk about how culture, religion, science, and politics influenced the playwrights. Miller's *Crucible* opens the door to the American psyche and to discussions regarding a humanistic vision of redemption. And when we hit Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (after having, of course, first read Shakespeare's *Hamlet*), students keenly discern the tragedy behind the laughter, the fact that absurdity is no laughing matter. We study Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* and Wilson's *The Piano*

Lesson and learn our own culpability regarding racist practices and attitudes and unbiblical arrogance regarding our own white privilege. And then we study *W;t*, discussing once again redemption as we watch Vivian Bearing die toward the light. There is not a day that integration across the disciplines, including theology, is not occurring, but it never ceases to amaze me how students sometimes do not grasp that it is happening. To them, it is all just a literature course, as the title—the compartmentalization—communicates.

Whatever biblical integration may look like, every education must include the study of literature, for it helps us understand more deeply both the giftedness and the sinfulness of humankind. Through reading Austen or Ai, Balzak or Berry, Conrad or Carruth, we become more sympathetic to and wise about men and women who struggle with sin, suffer loss, and feel as though they are just muddling through. When we allow literature to point us to the truth, when we read it in such a way that we learn true discernment, when we see the "mysterious ability [of literature] to capture what is enduring and universal in human experience" (Ryken 25), then we might be ready to live the Christian life fully, offering real answers, with all their complexities, for the hope that lives within us. It is to reach this end that I study literature and writing and teach my students how to study both well.

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