ENGLISH 101: EVANGELICALS AND ENGLISH LITERATURE (REVIEW ARTICLE)

Michael Plato[116]

Tony Reinke, *Lit!: A Christian Guide to Reading Books*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011. 202 pp. US $15.99

David Lyle Jeffrey & Gregory Maillet, *Christianity and Literature: Philosophical Foundations and Critical Practice*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011. 336 pp. US $24.00

Carolyn Weber, *Surprised by Oxford: A Memoir*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2011. 457 pp. US $16.99

Evangelicals have typically had a reputation for being a one book sort of people. "B-I-B-L-E, yes that's the book for me!" we sometimes sing in church and Sunday School. And who can deny it? If there really is a book for everyone then surely the Bible is it. Yet often the robustness of our singing of this simple song carries with it not only overtones of enthusiasm for the word of God, but also undercurrents of hostility: yes the Bible is for me, and all other books can keep their distance!

This anti-literary posturing, while sometimes overt within Evangelical circles, is explicitly on display in popular culture where the ignorant, unread Christian has been a staple figure of fun or fear. One thinks of the parade of church ladies chanting "Gimmie that ol' time religion" with the giant banner proclaiming "Read your Bible" in the film *Inherit the Wind* (1960), or the book hating monks of *The Name of the Rose* (1986), or the more recent film *Agora* (2009), which depicts early Christians as snarling, rabid book (and author!) burners. One could almost entirely miss the irony of the Bible's massive influence on not only English literature, but on the history of western thought itself. As Marilynne Robinson noted in a recent

---

[116] Michael Plato is a professor of English and Popular Culture at Seneca College

New York Times article, "[t]he Bible is the model for and subject of more art and thought than those of us who live within its influence, consciously or unconsciously, will ever know", and further that "[a] number of the great works of Western literature address themselves very directly to questions that arise within Christianity."117

Even the late atheist Christopher Hitchens was willing to concede the enormous literary influence of the (King James) Bible on our language and literature. He even went so far as to declare that "[a] culture that does not possess this common store of image and allegory will be a perilously thin one."118 And when one also considers the number of literary "greats" who were also Christians (Chaucer, Milton, Donne, Johnson, Austen, Hopkins, Chesterton, T.S. Eliot, Auden, Updike, etc.) one would expect modern Christians to be enthusiastic bibliophiles.

Sadly, this is far from the case. Walk into your typical Christian bookstore and after you make your way past the ubiquitous displays of discount Christmas cards, you will generally find shelves stacked with fare that could be described as either "inspirational" or "spirituality lite". Fiction is typically "sensational" and yet also "chaste" (usually with a picture of a young Amish girl on the cover). Most non-fiction is comprised of "how to" books, as in "how to convert your Muslim second cousin in five easy steps". So what then accounts for this embarrassment of embarrassments? Why, when we possess the greatest of all books, are we completely out of touch with other books of merit?

---

117 Marilynne Robinson, 'The book of books: what literature owes the Bible' in *The New York Times,* Dec. 22, 2001, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/25/books/review/the-book-of-books-what-literature-owes-the-bible.html?pagewanted=all ; accessed 12 Jan. 2012.

118 Christopher Hitchens, 'When the king saved God' in *Vanity Fair*, May 2011, http://www.vanityfair.com/culture/features/2011/05/hitchens-201105 ; accessed 10 Jan. 2012.

For once, perhaps, the fault is not entirely our own. It turns out that there have been dangers in treating the Bible as a great work of literature. As T.S. Eliot pointed out, "Those who talk of the Bible as 'a monument of English prose' are merely admiring it as a monument over the grave of Christianity."119 In fact, the rise of the academic study of English literature in the nineteenth century was itself the result of a perceived failure of Christianity. George Gordon, one of the first ever "English Professors", stated in his inaugural lecture at Oxford:

> England is sick and… English literature must save it. The Churches (as I understand it) having failed, and social remedies being slow, English literature has a triple function: still, I suppose, to delight and instruct us but also, and above all, to save our souls and heal the State.120

Following enlightenment principles, the argument went that since traditional belief was no longer credible, it would now be up to the arts to act as its substitute. By getting the populace to read novels, (and go to museums and art galleries and attend symphonies), humanity would not only be edified, but relieved from the worst aspects of modernity. As Michael Jensen put it, "the experience of reading the great books of the culture was to be a balm on society's industrial wounds."121 Instead of religion being the opiate of the masses, many of the cultural leaders of the time preferred that it be Jane Austen and Charles Dickens. And even if a more expansive and less cynical view of the value of literature were taken, we can still see where the faithful Christian may be concerned when Matthew Arnold predicted that in the future "most of what now passes for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry." Humanity

---

119 T.S. Eliot, 'Religion and literature', in *Selected Prose*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1953, pp. 31-42

120 Quoted in Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory-An Introduction*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1983, p.23.

121 Michael Jensen, 'May our literature save us', in *kategoria: a critical review of modern life*, Ed. Kirsten Birkett, Matthais Media, Kingsford Australia, Autumn 1998, number 9, pp. 9-25

would be improved, even perfected, and in this process traditional Christianity would play no part.

Yet the history of the twentieth century has shattered this utopian promise that literature could soothe and even ennoble humankind. Two world wars between the most educated and literate nations demonstrated the futility of such hopes122. Books might have been able to soften, but they could never really change, the human heart. Since about the mid twentieth century, nobody has really been sure what to do with literature. If anything, the division between how literature is understood popularly and academically has fractured beyond any hope of reconciliation (at least for the foreseeable future).

This parting of the ways could not be seen more clearly than in the book surveys conducted at the turn of the millennium. When Waterstone's bookstore in Britain and several other literary organizations poled the general public on what they thought was the greatest book of the century and millennium, the overwhelming favourite every time was J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. The response from the academy to this finding was near apoplectic. Harold Bloom of Yale had described the book as "inflated, over-written, tendentious, and moralistic in the extreme"123 and Germaine Greer said of the poles themselves, "It has been my nightmare that Tolkien would turn out to be the most influential writer of the twentieth century. The bad dream has materialized."124

---

122 In his short story, *Deutsches Requiem*, Jorge Luis Borges depicts a Nazi concentration camp commandant as a refined literati who loves Shakespeare. Borges is sardonically, if grimly, telling us that great literature can have virtually no effect on our character, ethical behaviour or even comfort. In one scene in the story the Nazi tortures a Jewish poet in his camp by playing literary mind games on him, eventually driving the poet to despair and suicide.

123 Harold Bloom, 'Introduction', in *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations: The Lord of the Rings – New Edition*, Infobase, New York, 2008, p. 1.

124 Quoted in Chris Mooney, 'Kicking the Hobbit', in *The American Prospect*, Nov. 5, 2001, http://prospect.org/article/kicking-hobbit ; accessed 12 Jan. 2012.

Relations between the two camps have not improved much in the decade following, and neither seems to have done a whole lot to make literature seem like a worthy pursuit. In the popular sphere, with its best seller lists, book clubs and celebrity book endorsements125, the appeal of books appears to be driven by equal parts cultural posturing and consumerist guilt.

In opposition, the academy, except for a few rare enclaves, has become preoccupied with debunking "myths" of the value of literature and attacking the "great books" from a changing variety of moral and ideological points of view. Books are no longer to be appreciated and revered, but taken pot-shots at. As such, what matters most is not the books but the criticism… and those who issue them. The critic, not the author, is the true star of the academy126. And the academy has become as trend and fashion conscious as any carpeted runway in New York or Milan… or Paris. Paris was, after all, where anti-literary literary criticism began. First there was Michel Foucault (among others) who made criticism trendy, daring and anti-establishment. He lasted until the early eighties. Jacques Derrida, another of the Paris school and the father of 'Deconstructionism', held his place in the sun for some time, until things began to fall apart for deconstructionism (pun happily intended) just before Derrida's death in 2003. Then there was the bright star of the completely insane (and consequently 'darling') "giant of Ljubljana", Slavoj Zizek. Zizek's Marxism, particularly his devotion to Lenin and Stalin, was a deliciously retro taunting of the materialist gluttony of western society. But Zizek's star burned too brightly and too

125 Interestingly, in Canada our "most prestigious" annual book award, the Giller Prize, has in recent years begun to be broadcast on television, much like the Academy Awards and the Golden Globes, with hosts and "star studded" audiences. The winner receives, along with a great pile of money, a massive advertising blitz and book tour. So much for the quiet and contemplative literary life… even in Canada.

126 As Roland Barthes has pointed out, the author is already dead. See Barthes' influential essay 'The death of the author' in *Image-Music-Text*, Trans. Stephen Heath, Noonday Press, 1989, pp 142-48.

quickly. So who's on top now? It is perhaps anyone's guess, but there have been rumblings about the Italian critic Giorgio Agamben, who is described as a devotee of Foucault. Ah well, fashions always come back as we all know.

Looking at the current literary landscape, both popular and academic, some of the questions needed to be asked include: why should Christians read and study books? Why step into this mess at all? Are those Evangelical brethren who sing the BIBLE song with exclusivist intentions on the right track? These are not meant to be rhetorical. Whether we are regular and habitual readers or not, it has been ingrained in our minds since childhood from teachers, literacy programs and even much of the book averse media that *reading is good for you*. We just know that books are important for us as individuals and as a society. But why? As has just been demonstrated, they hardly improve morals or provide the "soothing balm" for modernity that once was promised. And with the "school of resentment," as Harold Bloom has called it127, in charge at the universities and colleges, the quest for literary virtue seems to be on hold for the foreseeable future. Has this idea that "books are good" become just a meaningless mantra?

Before despair sets in, I want to assure that I am not pronouncing the exercise futile. Yes, we are in a period of late decadence. The serious is treated superficially and the superficial is the only thing that gets serious attention. The empire is in tatters. But can not this be seen as a providential moment of opportunity? Christianity itself began to flourish as one worldly empire was bringing itself to ruin. Why cannot the same principle apply to an empire of the mind as well? If this is to be so, then as Christians we need to begin to ask basic and fundamental questions about reading and literature and how they interact with faith. And we should not begin with inherited assumptions of merit lest we follow the same paths to despair as others. To this end, there appears to be the first glimmers of

---

127 Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages*, Riverhead Books, New York, 1995. pp. 4, 7, 20, 22, 24, 25, 29, 50, 56, 93, 292, 491, 492.

hope. Christians, especially Evangelicals, seem to be showing interest in literature and are starting to ask these questions. Along with the books under consideration here, two more by Christians on the subject of literature are also forthcoming: *When I Was a Child I Read Books* by Marilynne Robinson (Farrar, Straus and Giroux) and *The Pleasures of Reading in an Age of Distraction* by Alan Jacobs (Oxford).

The first of these books, *Lit!: A Christian Guide to Reading Books*, is the one to be most widely recommended. Author Tony Reinke has put forward in this brief and accessible read, a fundamental rethink on why Christians should read at all. He opens with two truisms which we seldom reflect on, namely "you know you need to read" (p. 15) and "books will also complicate your life" (p.21). The book is divided into two sections which will attempt to address these issues separately. In the first, which comprises the first six chapters, Reinke establishes a "theology of reading books" where he shows why Christians should, by belief and disposition, be book lovers. The second half of the book (chapters 7-15) attempts to nullify the complications created by books by providing "a collection of practical suggestions for reading books".

Reinke's "theology" begins with the observation that we have an author God who wrote his own commands at Sinai. This act distinguished the faith of the Hebrews from the surrounding pagan religions of the ancient near east with their image based cults. The resulting rivalry continues to this day and he asks whether we as Christians "will be patient enough to find meaning embedded in words, or if we will grow content with the superficial pleasures offered to us in the rapidly shifting images in our culture" (p. 43). From this he develops an eschatological view of the writing and notes that:

> Words are a more precise way of communicating the meaning behind the images of our world… What is real extends far deeper than what we can see. Our holy God is real… Our Saviour is real. Heaven is real. Angels are real. But for now these realities are invisible… This is why what we can learn about God by looking at his visible creation (general revelation) is limited. We need

> his word (special revelation) to help "see" what is invisible. (p.45)

There is a reason God chose to communicate through "mere" words and that is because they are the means of communicating to us what we have no means of apprehending on our own through our "sight". Following from this, Reinke notes that literature can be divided into two categories: the Bible and all other books. The Bible is, ultimately, the one necessary book and Reinke goes through the reasons it is so crucial for Christians to read (it is inspired, is it inerrant, it is sufficient for salvation, etc.). None of this should come as any surprise to most Christians. Where things get interesting is how he approaches the latter category, namely all other books. How are we as Christians to apprehend them? This is where developing a good Biblical worldview can help us to benefit from books, and in turn (certain) other books can make our Biblical worldview more robust.

Reinke tells us we should not be literary omnivores, reading everything that we come in contact with, but we should exercise discernment and he does provide a listing of the kinds of books we should study to avoid. He notes, for instance, the spiritual dangers of reading theologically twisted books which may be far more dangerous to read than books by outright atheists.

> Spiritual dangers are more venomous in a so-called "Christian" book. "For no heresy has ever sprung from pagan belief, from Aristotle, and from other heathen," wrote Martin Luther. (p.60)

As for the benefits of reading non-Christian books, he gives seven reasons in chapter five. Of these, one I found compelling and applicable to some of my own recent reading was number 6, "Non-Christian literature Begs Questions That Can Only Be Resolved In Christ." To take one example that demonstrates the truth of this is the novel *Atonement* by Ian McEwan. McEwan is an outspoken atheist, but has nevertheless written very honestly on the need for atonement we humans feel for our evil actions. The secular "solution" he provides for

attaining atonement at the end of the novel I found to be ultimately hollow and unconvincing, but by leaving me so supremely dissatisfied, this book has more powerfully conveyed the need for the Cross-work of Christ than any "Christian" book I have read in a long while. I am certain avid readers will find Reinke's other points for reading non-Christian books equally suggestive.

While the first section of the book presents a coherent and developed theology of reading, the second half of the book is much more fragmented and eclectic. Here he is offering "tips and tricks" for being a more effective reader. Much of what he includes can be found more comprehensively presented in the classic *How to Read a Book* by Mortimer J. Adler128. Reinke does add a decidedly Christian flavour to his methodology (for instance, he gives tips for pastors such as "pepper" your sermons with quote from literary classics rather than pop culture references,) but for the most part this material was already done better by Adler. For anyone who isn't familiar with Adler, this is still great information and well enough presented to be extremely useful. The real value of this book for the Christian reader (novice or seasoned) however is the theology of the first half.

If *Lit!* is for the amateur, then *Christianity and Literature: Philosophical Foundations and Critical Practice* (as its name somewhat suggests) is for the more academically inclined. Specifically, it is written as part of the "Christian Worldview Integration Series" put out by IVP as an apologetic resource for university undergraduates. The purpose of the entire series (which also presently includes books on philosophy, psychology, politics, education and business) is to ensure that "our theological beliefs, especially those derived from careful study of the Bible, are blended and unified with important, reasonable ideas from our profession or college major into a coherent, intellectually satisfying Christian worldview" (p.7). The goal of this specific

128 Mortimer J. Adler and Charles Van Doren, *How to Read a Book: The Classic Guide to Intelligent Reading* (Revised Edition), Touchstone, New York, 1972.

volume is to suggest "ways that a Christian worldview can provide a pertinent and fruitful approach to literary study as an academic discipline" (p.27). As such, it is written at a much higher level than *Lit!*, exploring a great deal more theory as well as a wide range of specific texts from the last millennium of English literature. That said, the central question it explores is reassuringly simple and direct. The authors, David Jeffrey and Gregory Maillet, ask: "What has Jesus Christ to do with English literature?" (p. 35)

As they show in their opening chapter, this question could not be more pertinent at this present moment. They note first the defeatism of modern criticism:

> Postmodern intellectuals reflect an awareness that the project of Enlightenment rationalism has now pretty much run off the rails, with destructive consequences… [as such] literary criticism has in the last two decades lost prestige as an intellectual discipline (p.37)

Then there is the diminishment of cultural confidence in literature itself within the wider sphere of western society:

> … the tendency to regard literary works generally as mere diversionary entertainment rather than as a source of cultural wisdom has gained momentum in many quarters... (p.38)

Ultimately, despair and nihilism has become the pervading attitude within literary circles, with no hope of literature ever again having an "enduring and sharable meaning". What can the Christian bring to this glum party? Moreover, why should the Christian even care? Jeffrey and Maillet note that the Christian critic has three crucial resources, which are expounded in the first three chapters, namely, a sound conception of truth, a theologically informed aesthetics and finally, an awareness of the Bible's primacy in the English literary tradition.

Chapter one begins with the assumption that "a sound conception of truth is indispensable for a specifically Christian literary criticism" (p.46). To this the authors present three theories of truth as they are understood within literary studies (the correspondence theory, the coherence theory and the

pragmatic theory.) At present, the pragmatic theory is the prevalent theory adopted by most critical schools, and unsurprisingly, it is the one that has become favoured in the wider culture as well. Quoting from "a famous female talk-show host", they point out that we now live in a relativized world where "your truth" may not necessary be the same as "my truth" and neither of these "truths" may at all correspond to the objective world. What these truths in fact depend on are our own personal or pragmatic needs and wants. Believing Christians, on the other hand, who acknowledge objective truth, must ascribe to the correspondence and coherence theories, both of which require a "knowledge or reality as it is". And this is not without its dangers when it is no longer the majority position:

> In our academic context we are more likely to discover that when we are interacting with those who hold to a pragmatic view of truth they may well reveal themselves to be in practice intolerant of deviation from the prevailing consensus. (p.62)

More than anything else, holding on to and proclaiming the Christian conception of truth will be the most difficult thing for the aspiring critic.

Chapter two addresses not only the lack of meaning so many students find once they enter a university literary studies programme, but also its ability to negate any sort of enthusiasm and pleasure which may have directed the student to the study of literature in the first place.

> The young Keats's certainty that objects of aesthetic beauty offer eternal joy (a conviction that still draws a substantial number of students to the discipline) is not on the curricular radar of most contemporary theory courses. (p.68)

Here the authors propose the need for a "theological aesthetics" to rekindle that initial and passionate conviction; one which takes into account not only the need for an understanding of the beautiful, but which isn't reducible to an 'art-for-art's sake' obsession with self-indulgent pleasure.

> In Christian understanding, an appreciation of beauty is much more than a matter of intellectual hedonism… beauty is intrinsically linked, inseparably interdependent with the intellectual truth and moral beauty existent within the life and presence of the Christian God. (p.85)

In other words, ideals of beauty cannot be separated from conceptions of truth. Beauty and truth reveal each other and, as such, any quest for truth in art and literature must also take into account aesthetic form. The truth is always beautiful in the Christian view, and authentic beauty is always truthful… Truthfully, this is a truth that is sadly ignored.

The third contribution the Christian can bring to criticism is presented in the third chapter and has to do with the literary character of the Bible. The Bible is a book after all. As such, before we begin to study literature, we should reacquaint ourselves with some of the Bible's most distinctive literary features so that we may become aware of them when we eventually encounter them in other works. The authors list and describe ten features of Biblical narrative and poetics that the student of literature should be familiar with. These include binary construction129, archetypal narrative, grand narrative, confessional autobiography, parables and internal scepticism concerning the limits of literary language.

With this tripartite foundation (the quest for truth, a theologically informed aesthetics, and a literary grounding in the Bible), the authors use the next six chapters to answer the question as to why Christians should care about English

---

129 To take the one example of binary construction, the authors point out that this is a feature of the Bible and books in the Biblical tradition that rankles many deconstructionist theorists. The Bible quite often posits binary or "either/or" choices and characteristics (ex. Adam and Eve are faced with the choice to either obey or disobey, Ishmael and Isaac represent oppositions that will permeate the entire history of the Jewish people, God loves Jacob and hates Essau, Jesus statement in Matthew "He who is not with me is against me"). This is described by many critics as the "black and white fallacy" as it does not allow for a variety of shadings and ambiguity and which they see as therefore limiting and unrealistic.

literature. Using examples starting with medieval literature and working up to the present, they demonstrate how a Christian critique draws attention to the many thematic, aesthetic and ethical influences of Christianity. As such, it soon becomes apparent to the astute reader how much of our literary heritage expresses the Gospel message. Their survey of the history of western literature ends with a look at the contemporary scene, drawing attention to several of the most prominent Christians writers in North America. It is important that we recall that this is a heritage that is not dead; as such, we should be able to recognize those Christian voices that are active among us. In the United States, along with Marilynne Robinson, there is also Wendell Berry, Leif Enger and Ron Hansen actively writing from an Evangelical Protestant perspective. From Canada there are the prolific novelists David Adams Richards130 and Michael D. O'Brien and the poet, Margaret Avison.

The last chapter of *Christianity and Literature* serves as a call for Christians to take up the study of literature at the academic level (graduate as well as undergraduate) and engagement with what Tolkein called the work of "recovery". For too long in its short history, literary studies has traded its Biblical birthright to a quest for truth and beauty for a mess of feeble authority and political pottage. For the authors, a Christian literary revival seems to be the discipline's best (and perhaps only) hope.

If the first two works looked at how the Christian can become a student of literature, then the third one shows how it is possible for a literature student to become a Christian131. *Surprised by Oxford* is the memoir of Carolyn Weber, a professor at Seattle University, and tells the story of how a year of studying English at Oxford converted her from an agnostic who had no need of God, to a baptised Christian.

---

130 David Adams Richards is a Giller Prize winner and has also written a feisty apologetic/autobiography called *God Is: My Search for Faith in a Secular World*, Anchor Canada, Toronto, 2010.

131 In terms of mission, this makes *Surprised by Oxford* perhaps a bit more valuable, as will be shown.

Unlike many conversion "testimonies", which typically involve abusive families, drug addictions, life on the street, suicidal despair, etc., this book demonstrates that God's love is so great that he will even save well-adjusted, successful English majors at secular universities. A little less sarcastically, *Surprised by Oxford* shows not only all of the obstacles that the contemporary university puts up against Christianity (higher Biblical criticism, feminist theory, postmodernism, cultural pluralism, atheist professors), but also many of its secret resources for proclaiming the Christian message.

Weber's (née Drake) first encounter with the Gospel message came via a 17th Century poem and an elderly professor who also happened to be an Evangelical. Expecting that a poem by John Donne that she had been assigned to write on was about rape and the "classic subversion by the dominant patriarchy" (p.3), she is surprised when her typically gentlemanly professor shoots down her notions, explaining that the poem is really about how "anything not done to the glory of God is doomed to failure, frailty and futility." Underlining his point, he stresses that without God as our focus, "the rest is all Bull---t, Miss Drake." This surprising response from her professor is the first of many unexpected revelations in the book as the texts she studies and many of the people she meets at Oxford proclaim in odd and unexpected places the faith once and for all delivered to the saints.

One of the most interesting passages in the book involves her first serious reading of the Bible. Ashamed of the fact that, as an English graduate student, she had never read so seminal a literary work, she stalks off to a nearby church to find a copy, not having one of her own. Instead of pinching one from the pews and having to deal with the awkwardness of reading from a stolen Bible, she makes visiting the empty church part of her daily routine as she works her way through both testaments. We overhear the literary scholar encountering the one book that will truly be said to change her life and her description of the experience is, well, literary.

> In this back pew I read the Bible steadily on borrowed pages. I devoured it, just as a best-selling book (which,

> coincidentally, it always has been). Even the long, monotonous lists. Even the really weird stuff, most of it so unbelievable as to only be true. I have to say I found it the most compelling piece of creative non-fiction I had ever read. If I sat around for thousands of years, I could never come up with what it proposes, let alone with how intricately Genesis unfolds toward Revelation. That the supposed Creator of the *entire universe* became a vulnerable baby, born in straw, to a poor girl who claimed to be a virgin and who was betrothed to a guy probably scared out of his wits, but who stood by her anyway. It unwinds and recasts the world and our perception of it: that the Holy Grail is more likely to be the wooden cup of a carpenter than the golden chalice of kings.
>
> *No wonder this stuff causes war*, I thought as I read, *between nations and within each of us*. (p.103)

Overall, this is a very readable and engaging book, written with a great sense of humour and romance [this is also the story of how Weber met her future husband, who is referred to as TDH (for Tall, Dark and Handsome) throughout the text.] As a professor of English literature, she has a strong command of the language, despite the occasional lapse into prose that is a bit breathless and florid. If anything, I would have liked it if she had spent more time discussing her encounter with faith in the literary texts she was studying. Weber did her Masters and PhD on the influence of the metaphysical poets (Donne, Herbert, Marvell, Vaughan) on the early romantics (Keats, Shelly, Wordsworth, Byron) and her insights would have been rewarding. What I love about the book is that it shows, by real example, how it is possible study and work in an environment of the highest academic and literary achievement and still maintain a strong Christian worldview and faith. It should prove encouraging to those Christians who desire to pursue higher learning in the Liberal Arts. This book also makes a marvellous apologetic to give to unbelievers of a more artistic or literary bent. I have a friend who has already done so with a dying relative and I have given out several copies to non-Christian friends in academia as well. Most apologetics books

deal with philosophical, historical and scientific arguments, but the field of literary apologetics has so far been ill-served (an irony given the great wealth of material to work from). This appealing work, along with the other two books reviewed, will hopefully be the first of many future forays.

At the moment relatively few professing Evangelical Christians occupy positions as literature professors or graduate students. Yes, Christians need books, but books also need Christians, both to defend and articulate them. As has been shown, the academic study and public estimation of books may continue to precipitously decline if Christians are not there to champion their truth, their beauty and their God inspired Biblical pedigree. If anything, a deep reflection on our literary heritage should confirm more and more the estimation of many great authors throughout history, as well as not a few loudly braying congregations: "The B-I-B-L-E, yes that's the book for me!"