

critique

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2012 Issue 4

Bad Religion
Clear Heart Full Eyes
The Procession to Calvary
and
Heroine Addiction: Jane Austen's Sinful Character



CRITIQUE



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Critique is part of the work of Ransom Fellowship founded by Denis and Margie Haack in 1982. Together, they have created a ministry that includes lecturing, mentoring, writing, teaching, hospitality, feeding, and encouraging those who want to know more about what it means to be a Christian in the everyday life of the twenty-first century.

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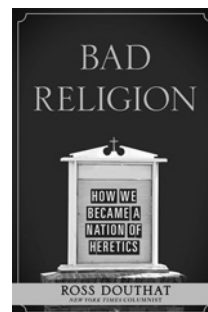
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A Broken Banjo Bobbing

by Denis Haack



On Leonard Cohen's latest album, *Old Ideas* (2012) he records a song simply named, "Banjo." It's a simple, unadorned song, yet the images he weaves into the lyrics are haunting if you let them sink into your imagination.

*There's something that I'm watchin'
Means a lot to me
It's a broken banjo bobbing
On the dark infested sea*

*Don't know how it got there
Maybe taken by the wave
Off of someone's shoulder
Or out of someone's grave*

Cohen is an accomplished poet, and the alliteration in the third line focuses our attention just as it has the musician's. An object, ordinary, out of place, directionless, mysterious yet somehow meaningful, created for beauty but now adrift. This is who we are, who I am. How thankful I am for the clarity this thoughtful Buddhist monk brings to expressing truths I believe yet struggle to speak about in ways that touch on both mind and heart.

*There's something that I'm watching
/ Means a lot to me.* The first two lines

are lovely because they could point to anything—and that makes the object of his concern all the more remarkable, *It's a broken banjo bobbing / On the dark infested sea.* Instead of something grand and impressive, there is unabashed, unnoticed humility here. Perhaps it is significant that it takes a monk to spot the thing floating in the water in the first place, to identify its shattered existence and find its meaning. Everyone else is too busy hurrying past along the shore looking for something that seems more important.

And the image grows more horrible, though at first it seems innocuous enough: *Don't know how it got there / Maybe taken by the wave.* That's what waves do, sweeping up on the sand and sucking away the child's toys they are using to dig in the sand. But this is no gentle wave, but rather a destructive force worthy of science fiction: *Off of someone's shoulder / Or out of someone's grave.* We remember the impossible memories of the tsunami wiping across the shores of Japan in March 2011, laying waste to houses, family's lives, and nuclear reactors. It was a moment when videos posted online were too fascinating to ignore yet too awful to watch. Untold tons of rolling water crushing bodies and uprooting cemeteries.

The ancient Hebrew poet spoke of similar brokenness, but in terms of the wilderness that lay just outside the safety of their communities: *broken us in the place of jackals / and covered us with deep darkness* (Psalms 44:19). Here the crushing of life is so complete that the prophet Isaiah wrote that *its breaking is like that of a potter's vessel / which is smashed so ruthlessly / that among its fragments not a shard is found / with which to take fire from the hearth / or to dip up water out of the cistern* (30:14).

As I reflect on these words and images I wonder why the horrors of brokenness are not more equally dispersed in this world. I enjoy reading philosophy and theology and have read the various responses to that question proposed over the centuries, so I can confidently say that there is no answer. No answer that ultimately satisfies, or that ties up all the loose ends of doubt.

Leonard Cohen's song ends... well, I'll let you listen to it and decide for yourself.

At this point my hope is in the voice of one who made a promise so audacious as to be preposterous, had he not gone on to endure the final breaking of torture and death, only to rise again as the ultimate Overcomer. When stating his mission Jesus reached back into the text of Scripture to identify himself with the one promised by the prophet Isaiah, the one anointed from beyond the edge of time and space to *bind up the broken-hearted* (61:1).

The language of the text assures us this is beyond the merely palliative, meaning the rightful king will bring healing to the same depths to which the brokenness extended. We are not told how this will be accomplished, and should not try to figure it out. It is enough to know the promise remains, and in that we can hope. ■

A slightly longer version is found on Ransom's Web site at www.ransomfellowship.com.

DIALOGUE: READERS RESPOND



To the editor:

We've been meeting with two other couples once a month. We call it "Dinner with Friends," and we discuss an article from *Critique*. We try to encourage each other in faith and good works. It's become surprisingly important to all of us.

Thanks for your work!
Bob & Yvonna Graham
Durango, CO

Denis Haack responds:

Bob and Yvonna: Thank you for taking the time to let me know this—and know that I am delighted.

To the editor:

I have been reading *Critique* with great enjoyment for many years and have always found your interest in cinema rewarding. Your review of *Midnight in Paris* [*Critique* 2012:1] was especially so because I would have never considered nostalgia the prevailing message of the film, nor would I have considered it one variation on a central theme in Allen's career.

By contrast, I thought Gil found himself in a creative milieu that would be rare to any time or place. However, once having found it, he had the courage to trade a comfortable bourgeoisie life for an ascetic bohemian one. Transporting him to a different time and place could also be taken as a dramatic stratagem to precipitate his tough choice.

However, you are right about Woody Allen's films in general, that life as portrayed in them presents itself as inadequate and requiring something more. The philosophic question this poses for us is whether this is caused by the absence of a Christian God or the fear of becoming more fully human. Did Allen, being Jewish, have Gil overcome that fear by using the second option, or did he do as you said, move laterally by having him seek fulfillment in a fantasy. I think Allen left the answer to that question open.

Lou Saur
St. Louis, MO

To the editor:

I finally was able to watch *Midnight in Paris* last night, and was thoroughly charmed. Yes, as Roger Ebert says, "There is nothing not to like about this film." Here are a few thoughts to add to your own reflections [*Critique* 2012:1].

Structurally, the contrast of Paul and Gil and of Gil and Inez is pitched just right. The time travel device works. The story is thoughtful enough and sweetened by some deft brushes of romance. Visually it is artful and alluring—I say "artful" because I think the visual style is part of the idea of the film, and art (something of a composite character) has a voice in the story.

Regarding the myth of the golden era: Some theologians need to get over this myth. But, to be fair, many of us live in the grip of nostalgia, the desire for something different, the illusion of something better, a sour discontentment. The grass is always greener.... So, the film suggests that because we hold onto the myth, we find the present a decidedly unpleasant and disagreeable place to be.

In Woody Allen's view, Gil is saved by art. He enters the city of art and he steps into the frame of the picture. Inez is an interloper who cannot stay—she can only plunder. Paul is a plunderer, too, because all of his knowledge of the city is merely ornamental, and he cannot admit his superficiality even in the face of someone (the guide) who truly knows the city. But it is art that enables Gil to see himself and his

purpose—he meets the past, the voices he admires, and draws encouragement from them to live his life, to pursue his dream, to live in the present, and even dare to have hope.

Gil tries unsuccessfully to manipulate the past. He discovers himself in the old diary being translated by the tour guide (the role of the guide, whether intentional or not, fits nicely into the whole discovery theme of being led to understanding). Then he brings the earrings to Adriana thinking that they will woo her to bed (thus fulfilling what was written in the diary)—but his effort is interrupted by her own longing for another era, and they are taken to the time of her dreams...thereby foiling his plan, denying him his sexual fulfillment, and (I would guess) writing himself out of the story...his dream proving yet again to be impossibly elusive. (This seems to be a bit of Woody Allen irony... unlucky in love—here is what seems to be a foolproof script to get the girl, and...*Belle Epoque interruptus*...thus proving that all of history is conspiring to frustrate poor Woody). However, Gil benefits from the past only when he submits to it by learning from it.

It seems to me that, as Christians and with our Christian view of the world, we are saved by the past as well. Certainly the historical reality of the cross, resurrection, and ascension are the foundation for all the historical ground which follows, the long arm of the past defining the present and persuading us that, even in spite of sin, the work of creation continues so that, by grace, humans can flourish. But, in the broadest sense, we simply cannot live well in the present without listening to the voices that have gone

before us who encourage us to have hope. Gil (could he be a fish out of water...more at home getting wet in the rain?) finds his voice through the writers/artists of the past. Is this not true both artistically in general as well as spiritually/theologically for us as Christians? We are no more focused or purposeful than Gil until his thinking and direction are recalibrated by those who have gone before. Woody Allen would say, I think, that Gil is saved by art. We would say, by the Artist. But the role of art, the grace of the Artist, is no less profound for us—attending to the “graphe” gives us our voice, enabling us to live in the present without despair. What is true of the Book of the Ages, that comes to us from the beginning and is alive in the present, is also profoundly true of the church. Our heritage in history and the cloud of witnesses cheer us on. Each time we come to the Lord’s table, it is the certainty of the past shouting in the present, giving us courage to press on.

I’m looking forward to watching the film again.

Steve Froehlich
Ithaca, NY

Denis Haack responds:

Thank you both for writing. Your comments make clear that there is a great deal worth discussing in Midnight in Paris.

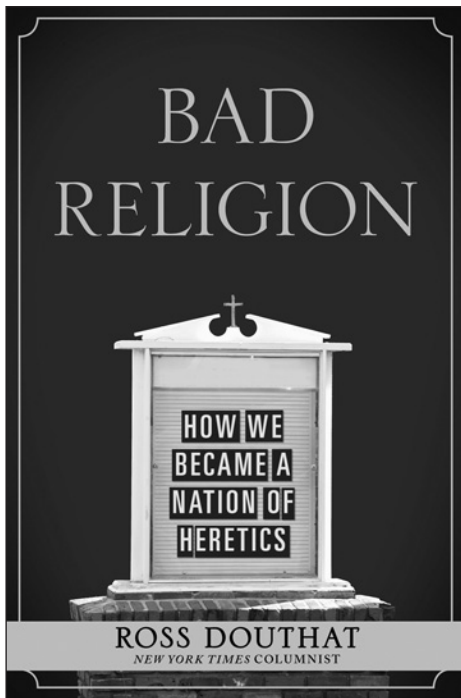
Lou: I do think nostalgia is a central theme in Midnight in Paris, though clearly not the only important one. Interestingly, in an interview in the L.A. Weekly online (2011-05-19) about Midnight in Paris, Allen raised the topic. “Nostalgia is a trap, there’s no question about that,” he said.

“It’s based on the idea that now is always terrible. So there’s always a sense that if you could have lived in a different time, things would have been more pleasant.... But it doesn’t really work that way, and that’s how nostalgia trips you up. For movies it’s great! In movies, you can create the past as you want to see it. But I do think that’s the sad note in my movie, that everybody doesn’t want to be where they are.” You are so right about how Allen leaves issues open in his films—it’s one of the reasons I find them so satisfying as art.

Steve: I quite agree that not only can we not escape the past, we should never attempt to do so. That can be so very hard when there is so much in this broken world that we desperately wish to escape, but as you say, in the past we also find the foundation for both existence and redemption. ■

The Slow-motion Collapse of Tr

a book review by **Greg Grooms**



In Prague there stands a monument to an odd couple: Tycho Brahe and Johannes Kepler. Tycho, the Catholic Dane—by far the more colorful of the two—dabbled in alchemy, wore a prosthetic nose as a result of a wound he received in a duel, and died as a result of an infamous drinking binge. In contrast Kepler—the German, Protestant mathematician—was rather dull.

This unlikely pair was brought together by a clash of paradigms. Tycho championed a variation of the old geocentric Ptolemaic view of the universe, while Kepler not only championed the heliocentric Copernican view, he corrected some of its worst errors. Tycho's strength was in his observations, which he, thankfully, documented quite carefully. But it was Kepler's mathematical skill and genius at theorizing that enabled him to make sense not only of Tycho's notes but of the heavens.

Ross Douthat is quite a colorful character, too. A Harvard-educated Pentecostal-turned-Catholic, he's made quite a name for himself as a writer of editorials and movie reviews at *The Atlantic*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The National Review*, and the *New York Times*, where he is the youngest regular op-ed writer in its history. He's also authored three books, including most recently *Bad Religion: How We Became a Nation of Heretics*. In 293 pages (plus 18 more of welcome notes) Douthat weaves an extraordinary tapestry of quotes, observations, and trivia that, while not always

convincing, are never boring. For one of such tender years, he has an amazingly good eye for distinguishing the significant from the merely interesting. That alone makes him worth reading.

The dust-jacket summary of *Bad Religion* is short and to the point:

America's problem isn't too much religion, as a growing chorus of atheists have argued; nor is it an intolerant secularism, as many on the Christian right believe. Rather it's bad religion: the slow-motion collapse of traditional faith and the rise of a variety of pseudo-Christianities that stroke our egos, indulge our follies, and encourage our worst impulses.

If so, then what constitutes good religion and what distinguishes it from bad should be at the heart of *Bad Religion*. In support of this premise, Douthat samples four flavors of Christianity—orthodoxy, heresy, fundamentalism, and neo-orthodoxy—in two categories—Catholic and Protestant.

Douthat defines orthodoxy early on in *Bad Religion*; it's a historical consensus on basic dogmas, including:

...Christ's incarnation and atonement, the Trinity and the Virgin Birth, the forgiveness of sins and the possibility of everlasting life. It includes a belief in the divine inspiration and authority of a particular set of sacred scriptures, the Old and New Testaments, with no additional revelations added on and nothing papered over or rejected. It includes adherence to the moral vision encoded in the Ten Commandments and expanded and deepened in the New Testament: a rejection of violence and cruelty, a deep suspicion of worldly wealth and power, and a heavy stress on

Additional Faith

chastity. It includes a commitment to the creeds of the ancient world—Nicene, Apostolic, Athanasian—and to the idea that a church, however organized and governed, should guarantee and promulgate them. And it includes the idea of orthodoxy—the belief that there exists a faith ‘once delivered to the saints,’ and that the core of Christianity is an inheritance from the first apostles, rather than being something that every believer can and should develop for himself.

The second category—heresy—gets more attention in *Bad Religion* than the other three, but Douthat doesn't exactly offer a definition of it, preferring instead to merely call heresy heresy when he sees it. And he sees a lot of it. Indeed, much of *Bad Religion* is devoted to a critique of America's peculiar heresies, from the politicization of religion by the left in the 60s and 70s, to neo-paganism, to the rise of the health and wealth gospel, and the odd blend of east and west in the new spirituality. His purpose in identifying heresy isn't only to condemn it; he also affirms what he sees as its function:

Christian faith needs heresy, or at least the possibility of heresy, lest it become something rote and brittle, a compendium of doctrinal technicalities with no purchase on the human soul. Indeed, like flying buttresses around a great cathedral, the push and pull of competing heresies may be precisely the thing that keeps the edifice of Christian faith upright.

His third category is the vaguest of the four. Fundamentalists, he acknowledges, were once orthodox. ("The five

fundamentals from which the fundamentalist movement took its name were mainly just a restatement of orthodox Christian beliefs.") But in the aftermath of Darwinism and biblical criticism, they embraced "separatism" and "anti-intellectualism," lost their influence in modern culture, and as a result were relegated to our cultural backwaters. Fundamentalists in Douthat's usage serve primarily as a sharp contrast to those whose example Douthat admires most: neo-orthodox theologians, especially Reinhold Niebhur.

Douthat describes the "overall pattern" of neo-orthodoxy thusly:

...a rejection of utopianism in all its forms; a return to Protestantism's Reformation roots; a renewed interest in creedal, confessional, and liturgical issues; a stress on the saving life and death (as opposed to just the ethical message) of Jesus Christ; and a demand for Christian humility in the face of the mysteries of God's purposes.

In truth, the second item in his description ("a return to Protestantism's Reformation roots") is the most problematic. The theology of the Reformers is often summed up in five "solas," the first of which—"Sola Scriptura," i.e., Scripture alone—was hardly an emphasis of neo-orthodoxy. To be sure, many neo-orthodox theologians wanted to revive old theological categories, e.g., sin and redemption, which had been rejected by 19th century German higher criticism, but they were hardly champions of the authority and accuracy of the Bible. What Douthat seems to admire most about his neo-orthodox heroes isn't so much their theology as the cultural influence they once commanded. Douthat's quote of Yale historian Sydney Ahlstrom sums up his feelings well:

If one looks to the remarkable way in which theology and theologians loomed up during the forties in the nation's moral, intellectual, and cultural life... neo-orthodoxy becomes essential to an adequate explanation.

Herein, of course, lies a problem, for Douthat's heroes, theologically speaking, had feet of clay, as he acknowledges:

*The neo-orthodox theologians did such a brilliant job of making the Christian intellectual framework intelligible to a secular audience, but they also frequently seemed to purposefully dance around some of the most important—and necessarily controversial—issues of Christian faith. (Martin Gardner's 1971 novel-of-ideas, *The Flight of Peter Fromm*, features a young seminarian driven mad by Reinhold Niebhur's evasiveness on supernatural questions; "He tapped his finger on the book's brown cloth cover and said angrily: 'Can you imagine this? There are six hundred pages here. It's a full statement of the theology of America's most famous Protestant thinker. How many references do you suppose there are to the Resurrection of Christ?...Not one! Not a single one!')*

So which of Ross' four flavors are which? Heresy plainly is bad, and orthodoxy just as plainly good. But fundamentalism is downright ugly, and neo-orthodoxy, I guess, is beautiful, at least in contrast. Which leads us to the most practical question of all: what are we to make of all this?

It's in answer to this question that Douthat shows his cards most clearly, for his goal is loftier than merely distinguishing the good from the bad and the

ugly. He wants to see a renewal of the American church and American culture and in the last chapter of *Bad Religion*, “The Recovery of Christianity,” he offers four modest proposals for advancing this cause.

First, the renewed American faith should be political without being partisan. Anyone who is still blind to the failings of both the Republican and the Democratic Parties hasn’t been paying attention.

Second, it should be ecumenical but also confessional. The joint statements of ECT—Evangelicals and Catholics Together—are the kind of cooperation he has in mind.

Third, a renewed Christianity should be moralistic but also holistic. Simply put Douthat wants us to practice what we preach. Touting the sanctity of marriage while getting divorced at the same time doesn’t advance our case or our credibility.

Fourth, a renewed Christianity should be oriented toward sanctity and beauty. It’s as Francis Schaeffer argued in *Two Contents, Two Realities*. When the gospel is taken seriously, holiness and beauty are the most visible byproducts.

I hope that in this review I’ve painted a picture of a book that is fascinating, insightful, and very worth reading, for *Bad Religion* is all those things and more. If at the same time I’ve painted a picture

that feels somewhat incomplete, that would be appropriate, too. It’s not that Douthat’s pieces don’t fit together; it’s more as if some of his pieces are missing. His stress on the primacy of good theology is welcome. His emphasis that good religion is never just a private and personal matter but always has social and cultural consequences is equally welcome. What’s missing is the link between the two: how my theology should inform my involvement in my culture.

Brahe needed Kepler to take his observations and deduce the three laws of planetary motion from them. Once his observations were properly understood, they became very useful indeed. So, too, Douthat needs a Kepler to tie his observations to the theology that will renew the church and guide it in being salt and light in our culture. Just as Brahe’s partnership with Kepler was brought about by a clash of paradigms, so too the century Douthat reviews in *Bad Religion* has been dominated by the clash of modernism and post-modernism. The neo-orthodox theologians he admires twisted the gospel to fit modernism and in so doing briefly won the mid-20th century cultural high ground, only to find that the culture changed around them and they were no longer relevant.

What kind of theology can avoid this dilemma? That would be an excellent topic for another book. And since this is a review and not chapter ten of *Bad Religion*, I’ll resist the temptation to fill in that blank myself, except to repeat C. S. Lewis’ warning in *The Four Loves*: “All that is not eternal is eternally out of date.” ■

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Greg Grooms, a contributing editor for *Critique*, lives with his wife Mary Jane in Hill House, a large home across the street from the University of Texas in

Austin, where they regularly welcome students to meals, to warm hospitality, to ask questions, and to seriously wrestle with the proposition that Jesus is actually Lord of all.

Book reviewed and recommended: *Bad Religion: How We Became a Nation of Heretics* by Ross Douthat (Free Press, 2012) 293 pages + notes + index

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POETRY

MY LIFE

*My life is
An obstacle.
Sadness is a hurdle.
My life is
A cloud.
Angriness is thunder.
My life is
A field.
Happiness is flowers.
My life
Is nothing but feelings.*

THE FEELING OF AN ARTIST

*The feeling of an artist.
Quite an amazing thought.
Like the first day of school.
A tingling feeling mixes
with nervousness.
Excitement churns inside you.
Like diving into the ocean.
The salty water meeting your head.
Whenever that happens, savor
that moment.
Remember it when you give
one last stroke
to your beautiful painting.
And savor that moment.
As an artist does.*

PALE AS MOONLIGHT

*Sunlight splashes
on the cat's fur
Pale as moonlight.
The seagulls' feathers
reflect off the water
Pale as moonlight.
The egg lays under the bird
Pale as moonlight.
The moon shines
as it's supposed to be:
Pale as moonlight.*

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veterinarian.

My name is **Sarah Davis**,
and I am 9 years old. I enjoy
playing with animals and
learning things about space.
When I grow up, I want to
be an astronomer or

Heroine Addiction:

by Timothy Padgett



Sometime ago, when apparently there was nothing worthwhile to be seen, I watched a sketch comedy show which poked fun at the sorts of characters found in a Jane Austen novel. With the exception of a “gentleman” who looked like a reject from the latest *Jersey Shore*, the set and remaining characters were done up in early 19th century garb. The plot, such as it was, centered on some very improper suggestions made to the heroines by their sleazy visitor. However, being very dignified young ladies, they had no idea what their new friend was proposing. The humor was found in the juxtaposition of an innocent ignorance and a knowing corruption.

ILLUSTRATIONS: FROM WALLPAPER FEATURING A REGENCY FASHION PLATE OF TWO COUPLES DANCING AT A BALL

Jane Austen's Sinful Character

Too often contemporary society looks back upon the writings of Austen with an attitude of benevolent condescension. We look at her oh-so polite young women attending their parties and dances as just another exercise in naiveté to be put alongside our children's worlds of make believe. We may wish the world was as it is in her books, but, in our great wisdom, we know how harsh and dark the real world is. Only a supposedly sheltered woman like Ms. Austen could have thought the world to be as genteel a place as she has portrayed.

Despite her reputation for childlike innocence, Jane Austen's characters betray no such utopian stain. Reading through her pages, you don't find a world of politeness where the greatest grievance is an uncouth remark. Nor do you encounter a vision of life wherein the heroes and villains can be distinguished with the briefest of glances. In the remarkable worlds she has created, and continues to create in her readers' imaginations to this day, you find, rather, a reflection of reality where the most intense human pride burns no brighter in the hearts of her villains than in her heroines.

Take for instance her most famous of villains, the charmingly deceitful Mr. Wickham in *Pride and Prejudice*. In his case the reader's later revulsion is made all the more potent by how delightful he is found by nearly all who encounter him. He is introduced to the reader and the characters in the most glowing of terms.

The officers of __shire were, in general, a very creditable, gentlemanlike set, and the best of them were at the present party; but Mr. Wickham was as far above them in person, countenance, air, and walk, as they were superior to the broad-faced, stuffy, uncle Philips, breathing port wine, who followed them into the room.

The narrator then notes that even for Elizabeth Bennet, she of the quick and perceptive mind, the duller of topics flowing from his mouth "might be rendered interesting by the skill of the speaker."

Yet this impression of gallantry could only be maintained so long as no one looked too closely at his words and actions. Once those with more than a moment's experience with the man came onto the scene, this archon of gentlemanly grace began to lose his luster. Instead of being what he crafted for everyone to believe, Wickham was willfully wicked. He never showed any shame for the way that he acted toward a whole host of young women, or to those men, like Darcy, who stood in his way. In one of the very last comments on him in the book, his only concern is that Elizabeth would now know the full extent of his sins, and his only hope is that Darcy might somehow decide to support his wastrel lifestyle.

Moving on to *Sense and Sensibility*, we meet Wickham's alter ego, Willoughby. The two are so much the same that a friend once noted that Jane Austen novels have a clump of sisters of above average means who meet a series of men. Inevitably the ladies find one to be good who is, in fact, quite bad and the other to be bad, who is actually good. Austen gives this knight in shining

armor the same sort of stellar description as she did at first with Wickham. "Willoughby was a young man of good abilities, quick imagination, lively spirits, and open, affectionate manners." And as with Wickham, his true nature is relatively unknown beyond the barest of shimmerings. When Marianne Dashwood seeks to know what kind of man is he who has so enthralled her, she gets a disappointing response. "Sir John was rather puzzled. 'Upon my soul,' said he, 'I do not know much about him as to all *that*. But he is a pleasant good humored fellow and has got the nicest little black bitch of a pointer I ever saw.'"

The people in Willoughby's life are there for his pleasure or advancement, and, once they've exhausted their usefulness, he casts them aside without warning or care. Colonel Barton is mocked and Marianne is wooed, but Willoughby moves on to greener pastures once the way is clear without the slightest concern for those in his wake. In fact his only worry relates back to himself. Towards the end of the book, he comes to Elinor, Marianne's sister, to 'confess' his faults, yet it is more a confession of his own needs and desires than a true *mea culpa*. He begins so well, with all sorts of explanations of what his motives have been, that even Elinor's heart begins to soften toward him, but his true motive becomes clear as he spouts off more first-person pronouns than a campaigning politician.

My business was to declare myself a scoundrel, and whether I did it with a bow or a bluster was of little importance. "I am ruined forever in their opinion,"



said *I* to myself. “*I am shut out forever from their society; they already think **me** an unprincipled fellow; this letter will only make them think **me** a blackguard one.*” (emphasis added)

A supposed admission of guilt turns out only to be a further attempt at self-advancement. His greatest concern for the havoc he has wrought is that his victims will now think poorly of him.

There are few among Austen’s creations whom readers so love to hate as the most eminent Lady Catherine De Bourgh in *Pride and Prejudice*. She ranks so high in our memories if for no other reason than we all love to see such high pretension receive its due comeuppance. In her first encounter with Elizabeth, the Lady received what should have been a premonition of things to come when, after being asked a question, Elizabeth gave an evasive reply. “Lady Catherine seemed quite astonished at not receiving a direct answer; and Elizabeth suspected herself to be the first creature who ever dared to trifle with such dignified impertinence.”

In Lady Catherine’s mind there simply are ways that things are supposed to go, and these ways just so happen to coincide with the shape of her own will. *She* is the Lady Catherine De Bourgh and everyone else is, well, not. People exist for her pleasure, and it only makes sense that their greatest joy would be to

be with her. “Lady Catherine observed after dinner that Miss Bennet seemed out of spirits, and immediately accounting for it herself by supposing that she did not like to go home again so soon.” It does not occur to her Ladyship that there are things that do not concern her in the slightest.

When the time finally comes for her to pronounce judgment upon the defiant Elizabeth at the Bennet home, Lady Catherine’s immense and gracious mind simply cannot fathom that anyone could oppose her. “I came here with the determined resolution of carrying my purpose; nor will I be dissuaded from it. I have not been used to submit to anyone’s whims. I have not been in the habit of brooking disappointment.” To which Elizabeth oh-so pleasantly replies, “*That will make your ladyship’s situation at present more pitiable; but it will have no effect on me.*” Selfishness can have such a blinding effect upon a soul that simple comprehension slips from the realm of possibility.

While the noble Lady Catherine is truly hateful, *Emma*’s Mrs. Elton is merely annoying. It may seem strange that I wish to strangle a fictional character, but for most people doing such to Mrs. Elton is probably understandable. There is nothing in the world about which she does not see herself as the proper person to judge full value. There is no one who can have an opinion that she cannot question with a smug smile. “Such as Mrs. Elton appeared to her on this second interview, such she appeared whenever they met again: self-important, presuming, familiar, ignorant, and ill bred.”

She is constantly trying to control the behavior of Jane Fairfax with the calm assurance that she alone is wise enough to chart the young woman’s course. She cannot take a compliment on its own terms but must, instead, make a pretense at humility which denies her own claims to greatness while shining light on others who have lifted her up so. She cannot let another’s glory go unchallenged. Whenever anyone else’s property is brought up in discussion, there comes the inevitable comparison to those of her acquaintance she deems superior.

Mrs. Elton has vicarious pride in the accomplishments of other people that is actually very sad. It is tragic because there is a beautiful kind of joy that one person can have in another’s glory as well as a way to parry praise away in genuine humility. But her attitude is not one of love of another for the sake of the other, or of sincerely avoiding the limelight. Rather, this is one of commandeering another’s glory to raise herself higher and of backwards self-adulation made all the more heinous by its hypocritical mask.

As deliciously repellent as these and others of Austen’s rouge’s gallery might be, it is in her heroines that her most interesting presentations of human sin come forth. Had she been what so many think her to have been, a woman who shied away from the ugliness of life and kept to the polite society of imagined parties, her characters would have been neither so memorable nor so believable. It is one thing to enjoy a book and to leave it wishing that the story could go on longer. Many authors accomplish

*I do not want people to be agreeable,
as it saves me the trouble
of liking them.*

—Jane Austen

this without touching greatness. What Austen does is to create characters that are not merely enjoyable but almost touchable. It is not that her writing is so vivid that you feel as though you've met them on the pages of her books but rather that you have met them on the streets of your life. She fills her characters with the same wonders and warts that you see in your everyday life. Had Austen chosen to keep sin far from their doors, then the Marianne's, Emma's, and Elizabeth's of her world would be far more polite but also far less tangible.

It could be argued that Marianne Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility* is not properly the heroine and that that honor should go to her sister Elinor. While it may be true that Elinor takes center stage of the novel, it must be remembered that if any of us had actually been there it is unlikely that Marianne could have been overlooked by anyone. Her zest for life is such that, like a summer storm, you could wish her gone, but you could never pretend she wasn't there.

She is one who never does anything by half-measures, and, as such, she comes to conclusions far too rapidly. When chided for thinking she knew Willoughby after such a short time, she responded, "I have not known him long indeed, but I am much better acquainted with him than I am with any other creature in the world, except yourself and mama. It is not time or opportunity that is to determine intimacy; it is disposition alone." This high view of

her own perception leads her to think she knows all there is to know about others around her. This condescension pulls her towards joining Willoughby as he cruelly eviscerates the character of Colonel Barton and others. In her pride she does not question whether her first impression is the right one.

Such arrogance could land her with either the likes of Elizabeth Bennet's sister, in her impetuosity or even Mrs. Elton in her self-importance, were it not for her good qualities. She genuinely loves her mother and sister, and she is not so self-absorbed that the impact of her actions on others is kept from her mind. In great contrast to those two characters, she is willing and able to learn from her mistakes. When Elinor rebukes her, she might not listen right away, but she does listen and takes it to heart in time.

Emma is a character that Jane Austen said nobody would like but her. I don't know about that. She has been my favorite heroine of all these novels. Perhaps it is her sunny disposition that keeps her from being what she loathes the most, a Mrs. Elton with better tact. But in contrast with that great lady, there is far smaller a gap between what she thinks of herself and what she is. She actually has the discrimination and ability that her rival only plays at.

However, Emma also suffers from the myopic effects of pride. Some of this is not her fault. Nearly all the people in her life are absolutely devoted to her. Besides, Knightly, the only person who dares offer a challenge, happens to be in love with her, a fact which does not make for objective criticism. Also, in contrast to most Austen heroines, Emma does not have a care in the world. She stands at the peak of her social

world and has no material concerns whatsoever.

She is spoiled to the core. Her high intelligence and unfettered existence lead her to think that if she thinks a thing it must then be so. Her insight deceives her to think she knows how Harriet and Mr. Elton could get together. Her lack of any real life experience leads her to think that she must be in love with Frank Churchill. Yet when she is faced with the effect of her failings upon the lives of others, she chooses another way. She has sympathy with those she has pained and works not only to console them but to change her own character to love them better. She has a healthy introspection that leads to repentance and not merely to self-pity.

Elizabeth Bennet's flaws are actually quite well known. After all, none of the other heroines has her particular failing emblazoned in the title. As with those before her, it is her all too high self-view that leads her to make her most serious mistakes. Some of these flaws are relatively small. Following the lead of her father, she is constantly demeaning to her mother. As bad as this truly is, her mother is so self-obsessed that she never even notices.

She does have more traumatic sins as well. She has such confidence in her own powers of observation that she doesn't question her initial impression until it is far too late.

At length Darcy spoke, and in a constrained manner said, "Mr. Wickham is blessed with such happy manners as may ensure his making friends—whether he may be equally capable of retaining them is less certain."

"He has been so unlucky as to lose your friendship," replied Elizabeth with emphasis, "and in a manner which he is likely to suffer from all his life."

The pain she inflicts through these words would be no less caustic in effect had they come from one of Austen's true villains.

In this way, the very sensible Elizabeth shows far less sense than the tempestuous Marianne in that while the latter recovers from her mistakes relatively soon, it takes Elizabeth the bulk of the book to overcome her initial preconception. She does learn, and she is mostly to be found on the side of right, but this does not shield her from making many more mistakes born of an unduly high appreciation of her own wisdom. In reaction to her failures, Elizabeth turns in repentance. She confesses her errors and works to ameliorate the harm she has done. There is no pretension that she has no flaws or any attempt to say that they are not her own responsibility.

The difference between Austen's heroines and their evil twins is not that some were good while others were bad. They both have the very same intense pride and self-satisfaction. Marianne's passion for life could have easily devolved into Wickham's view of others as being there merely for one's own enjoyment. The young Emma's elitist arrogance could have grown into a latter day Lady Catherine. Elizabeth's critical nature could have morphed into another snide Mrs. Elton. What kept the former from becoming the latter in each case was not the presence of sin in their lives but rather the willingness to repent in humility versus an insistence of innocence.

What is true in the fancies of great literature is true in the tumults of real life. Despite our many pretensions to the contrary, this genteel lady of long ago saw human failings with greater clarity than our own "sophisticated" age allows us even to glimpse. She saw that pride blinds the one it possesses. There are few so searing to good company as those who see no cause to fear a failing of their own. It is only when we know that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory that true goodness can be found. When the tax collector in Christ's story went from prayer absolved of his sins while the Pharisee left yet condemned, it was hardly that the "sinner" had less to be sorry for than his "religious" compatriot. The Bride of Christ was then and is now made of tax collectors and Pharisees alike. We all have the same pride in our souls, and the pathway out follows the same road of repentance. ■

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*Originally from Nashville, TN **Timothy Padgett** studied at Covenant Seminary in St. Louis where he worked at the Francis Schaeffer Institute. He and his wife, Emmalee, and their two boys now live in Chicago where he is a doctoral student at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.*

Novels mentioned and recommended: *Pride and Prejudice (1813), Sense and Sensibility (1811), Persuasion (1818), and Emma (1815), all by Jane Austen (1775-1817).*

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Holding Steady for Goodness

a review by Denis Haack



I had never heard of Craig Finn until he was interviewed on *The Colbert Report* along with guitarist Tad Kubler. Then Hold Steady performed “Hurricane J” from their album *Heaven is Whenever* (2010). I was impressed enough that when I learned Finn was releasing a solo album, *Clear Heart Full Eyes* (2011), I bought it.

*You regaled us with the way
that you triumphed over darkness
The kisses in the shadows and the
stockings
But as the pieces come together
there’s these things that I keep
hearing
About the hero that you are when no
one’s watching
I saw Wendy at the Wagon Wheel,
didn’t know what to tell her
She said she saw you walking by her
building
She said maybe you’re ashamed that
things turned out this way
You said you had to hurry off to
something...*

*Feasting on the weakness of the women
who were hoping
You might be held to half the things
you told them
The wreckage that you left at the places
that you slept
Moving through the bars and slowly
stalking
Someone you can use that finds you
charming
The story that our hero keeps well
hidden
A weak man living off of weaker
women*

[“When No One’s Watching”]

Finn’s songs are not crafted with melodies I would find easy to sing, but they consistently draw me into his lyrics and seem designed to make us reflective. He notices the brokenness that disfigures everything, but seems rooted in a quiet assurance that redemption can be found in Jesus. The arrangements consist of uncomplicated instrumental accompaniments, always supporting the lyrics but never competing.

*I suppose you thought that I’d be
eaten up
By the bars and the pigs or the sheep or
the studs
I’m alive except for the inside
I suppose you thought that I’d be the
first one to go...
But I don’t know nothing
Except for one thing for certain
The devil’s a person
I met him at the Riverside Perkins*

[“No Future”]

In Finn’s songs we hear impressionistic ballads, enough of a story to know what’s happening but never in so much detail that the ballad becomes dated. And Finn’s unabashed Catholicism provides him with hope without being sentimental or without the album becoming a religious one.

*Everybody is saying that the lights
don’t shine
But the lights shine down on me
I’ve got a new friend and my new
friend’s name is Jesus...*

*People say we suck at sports
But they don’t understand
It’s hard to catch with holes right
through your hands*

*Wish I was with Jesus when you loved
me
I would have been a better me
That much I can guarantee*

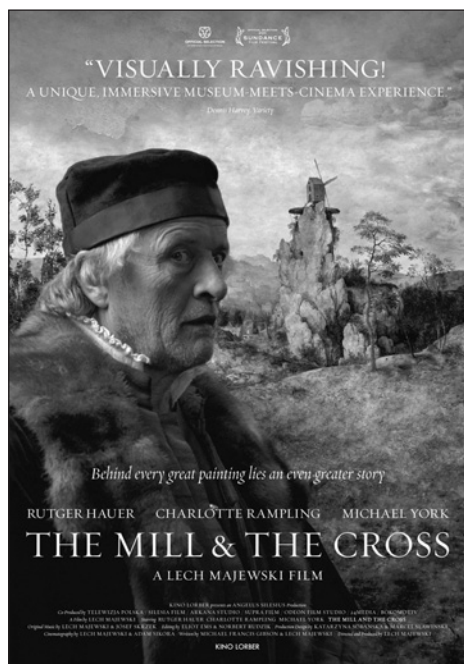
[“New Friend Jesus”]

Finn says that when he set out to do this solo work he wanted to produce music that was a bit quieter and more narrative than *Hold Steady* was performing. Since I don’t know Hold Steady’s music I can’t say whether he accomplished that, but certainly the quiet narratives that are woven into the songs on *Clear Heart Full Eyes* are full of images and phrases that hint of ordinary life, the need for grace, and the hope that is found in Christ. ■

Album recommended: *Clear Heart Full Eyes* by Craig Finn (Vagrant; 2011)

The Story in a Painting

by Denis Haack



Credits for *The Mill and the Cross*

Starring:

Rutger Hauer (Pieter Bruegel)
Charlotte Rampling (Mary)
Michael York (Nicholas Jonghelinck)

Director: Lech Majewski

Screenplay: Lech Majewski, Michael Francis Gibson

Producer: Lech Majewski, Freddy Olsson

Original music: Lech Majewski, Jozef Skrzek

Director of photography: Adam Sikora, Lech Majewski

Production design: Katarzyna Sobanska, Marcel Slawinski

Costumes: Dorota Roqueplo
Poland; 91 min; 2011

In 1564, the Flemish artist Pieter Bruegel the Elder (1525-69), painted *The Procession to Calvary* (or *The Way to Calvary*, depending on the translation) for his wealthy patron, Nicholas Jonghelinck. The work is large, oil on panel measuring 4 feet by 5.6 feet (124 cm × 170 cm). At the top of the painting stands a mill on an impossibly high promontory of sheer rock, the source of bread watching over a sprawling landscape. That landscape is filled with busy ordinary life, and includes if you look carefully enough, over 500 characters in a variety of settings and activities—historically accurate—common to everyday life in Bruegel's world.

In a remarkable exercise in cinematic art, in *The Mill and the Cross* (2011), Polish director Lech Majewski takes us into the painting section by section, allowing each scene to come alive as Bruegel might have seen it as he composed his great work. The film is highly stylized, and contains almost no dialogue as we watch Bruegel (played by Rutger Hauer) sketch out *The Procession to Calvary* and explain details to Jonghelinck (played by Michael York). The essence of the film is not its plot (there really is none), but rather its invitation to join an unhurried meditation, a creative exercise in art interpretation, unfolding the stories of ordinary life that are implied in the details of Bruegel's painting.

Flanders was in turmoil in Bruegel's day. The region was ruled by Spain, who inflicted a regime of brutal repression on the Flemish people. The ideas of

the Protestant Reformation had found fertile ground in Holland, but King Philip II saw himself as a champion of Catholicism, determined to stamp out those he deemed heretics. Flemish men who ran afoul of the red-coated Spanish authorities were crucified, or beaten and whipped and left exposed as a feast for crows on wheels fastened to the tops of high poles. Flemish women so accused were simply buried alive. In such a setting, the suffering of Christ was embraced not merely as a religious belief but as a metaphor for life, a reason for hope, and source of meaning.

Central to *The Procession to Calvary* is a depiction of Christ carrying his cross, but instead of Roman soldiers with whips, there are red-coated Spanish mercenaries. Though this is central in the painting, it is not the focus, since that would have likely caused Bruegel's work to be seen as subversive by the Spanish authorities. Spreading out from this central motif are a variety of scenes of Flemish life, ordinary moments made extraordinary because they are seen in light of Christ's suffering, historical moments given significance because a greater moment had transpired, forever changing history. It is these details that *The Mill and the Cross* bring alive. We see scenes of ordinary life slowly unfolding, and then suddenly frozen and absorbed into Bruegel's work.

Do not watch *The Mill and the Cross* expecting to follow a story, or to enter an adventure. Watch it as a series of living snapshots of life in Flanders in the 16th century, celebrated by a great artist and given meaning by Christ's death. The film's scenes will be permanently emblazoned in your imagination, you will see Bruegel's painting differently, and you will be made to think. ■

RIGHT ABOVE: PHOTOS FROM THE MILL AND THE CROSS (KINO LORBER, INC.)
RIGHT BELOW: THE PROCESSION TO CALVARY PAINTED BY PIETER BRUEGEL THE ELDER, 1564



When Trust is a Matter of Life

a film review by Denis Haack



Credits for *The Hunger Games*

Starring:

Jennifer Lawrence (Katniss Everdeen)
Willow Shields (Primrose Everdeen)
Josh Hutcherson (Peeta Mellark)
Liam Hemsworth (Gale Hawthorne)
Elizabeth Banks (Effie Trinket)
Wes Bentley (Seneca Crane)
Stanley Tucci (Caesar Flickerman)
Woody Harrelson (Haymitch Abernathy)
Lenny Kravitz (Cinna)

Director: Gary Ross

Writers: Gary Ross, Suzanne Collins (novel),
Billy Ray

Producer: Robin Bissell, Suzanne Collins,
Louise Rosner, and others

Cinematography: Tom Stern

Original Music: James Newton Howard

USA; 142 min; 2012; Rated PG-13 (for intense
violence and disturbing images)

The story is set in some unidentified period in the future. The United States has collapsed, and in its place is a nation named Panem. Panem consists of twelve isolated, oppressed districts, essentially slave labor camps ruled by a capitol whose citizens live in ease. In commemoration of a past rebellion against the capitol and to be certain it is never repeated, once each year each district must pick two tributes. These 24 young adults are brought to the capitol where they are feted and paraded before being placed in a dome in which the annual Hunger Games are played. There they must fight to the death until just one remains. The district whose tribute wins receives added food and resources in the coming year.

In *The Hunger Games* (2012), Katniss Everdeen, played by Jennifer Lawrence, is horrified when her younger sister Prim is chosen as the tribute from District 12. Everdeen volunteers to take her place. She is assigned a mentor, Haymitch Abernathy (played by Woody Harrelson), a previous games winner who she must depend upon but who has descended into alcoholism since his victory. In the capitol, Cinna (Lenny Kravitz), a fashion stylist, prepares her for the crowds, a task that extends

past mere looks since the impression she makes can cause wealthy viewers to purchase favors for her during the games. It is customary in the opening section of the games for the tributes to make alliances, working together to knock off more dangerous opponents before they turn on one another. Friendship, community, and relationships are shown to be matters of life and death and, at every turn, Everdeen must decide whom she can really trust and who is merely using her for their own selfish ends.

If I had young adults living at home I would look forward to reading *The Hunger Games*, by Suzanne Collins, and watching the film together. Though I do not think the novel is as well crafted as the Harry Potter series, it is an exciting story that forces us to consider questions of ethics and meaning that every young adult must face in our broken world. It is a parable, a piece of science fiction that serves as a metaphor for our world. This means that different viewers will likely see in the story different real-world equivalents to the world in which Everdeen exists. Their conclusions will say more about their own ideological and worldview commitments than it will the true meaning of *The Hunger Games*.

In a column on the novels in the *New York Times*, Stanley Fish, professor at Florida International University (Miami) asks, "just what is it that the characters, and by extension the readers, hunger for?"

On the literal level the answer is obvious. Kept at a near-starvation level by their rulers, the inhabitants of the nation of Panem (bread) hunger for food, and one

and Death

of Katniss's virtues is that as an expert archer she can provide it. Food, however, is a metaphor in the trilogy for another kind of sustenance, the sustenance provided by an inner conviction of one's own worth and integrity. (Man cannot live by bread alone.) The hunger to be an authentic self is a basic constituent of the game we call life, and the difficulty of achieving that state—Polonius tells Laertes "to thine own self be true," but forgets to provide the how-to manual—is intensified for the "tributes," the name given to those selected by lot to be contestant competitors who must exercise the twin skills of deception and violence if they are to survive. How can one maintain integrity in a context that mandates aggression and betrayal?

One of the strengths of *The Hunger Games* is that it removes ethical issues from a purely individualistic setting. Living in a corrupt system, Everdeen discovers that simply doing what is right may not always be sufficient because at times her correct choice can have very negative consequences for someone else. As in reality, faithfulness requires not merely that we do what we believe is right (though it is never less than this) but that we out-think the world system in which we live that promotes values in opposition to God's kingdom and shalom. Faithfulness includes creatively subverting those values, so that human beings can flourish even as we live, day by day, tasting on our tongues the acrid tang of the dust of death. ■

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. What was your first impression or reaction to *The Hunger Games*? Why do you think you responded to the film this way?
2. Consider the story as a science fiction parable. What real-world realities do you see reflected in the story? What do you think this says about your way of viewing society and the world?
3. Discuss the flamboyant character Caesar Flickerman, played by Stanley Tucci. What does he represent in the story? What roles—good and bad—does he play in Panem? What is revealed through him about the media and its celebrities in our world?
4. In what ways were the techniques of filmmaking (casting, color, direction, lighting, script, music, sets, action, cinematography, editing, etc.) used to get the film's message(s) across, or to make the message plausible or compelling? In what ways were they ineffective or misused?
5. Why is *The Hunger Games* so attractive to so many people?
6. Would you identify Katniss Everdeen as a true hero? Why or why not?
7. Some adults have objected to the violence in *The Hunger Games* as being inappropriate for a young adult audience. Do you agree? Why or why not?
8. "Hope, it is the only thing stronger than fear," President Snow, played superbly by veteran actor Donald Sutherland, says. "A little hope is effective, a lot of hope is dangerous. A spark is fine, as long as it's contained." What is the significance of this statement in the flow of the story? How does hope stay viable in a broken and oppressive world?
9. In what do you hope? How is that hope expressed in the way you live your life? Would a stranger who simply watched you live be able to identify that hope?
10. In what ways has the system(s) of which you are a part—say in your work, political commitments, or friendships—had an impact on your ethical choices or the results of those choices?
11. Trace the issue of trust as a theme through the story. Whom do you decide to trust and why?
12. Using Stanley Fish's statement as a beginning point, what is it that the characters are hungering for in this story? In what ways do we sense similar hunger in ourselves, and those we know best? To what extent are our hunger games—our effort to relieve our hunger—also a matter of life and death?

An Open Life in Stories

a memoir by **Margie Haack**

A three-room house in northern Minnesota with no running water can seem crowded with a mother, stepfather, five siblings, and a dog. It was swamp-land barely claimed from wilderness, where temperatures of 40 below could freeze a chicken house full of hens. It was the place Margie accidentally killed her favorite dog, was chased by a timber wolf, learned to love work and humor and hate sheep. Her roots were tangled with the death of a father who was killed before her birth, leaving her mother a widow at seventeen.

This was also where her spiritual awakening began. She yearned for home, for a father who loved her. Her stories of childhood show how suffering ripened the landscape of her life. From her earliest memories through dark nightmares, she became aware that God received her as a beloved daughter. She had been, all along, in *The Exact Place* she needed to be.

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[Wesley Hill, author]

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