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We highly
recommend reading to the
end of this ebook. Not only will
you witness all-time KP awesome-
ness in abundance, you may discov-
er a special surprise at the end. Like
a magical unicorn. Or a top secret
spaceship blueprint. Or a coupon.
One of those things.

-the KP Staff

You may do a double-take at the title of this article. But read on to see how Daeus excellently shows that all great art ultimately stems from God's creation.

All art is Christian art. That's a rather bold statement. Immediately, objections start to pop into our minds. "But what about modern nihilistic art?" "What about a novel that teaches spiritualism?" "What about someone screaming viciously into a microphone with zero identifiable words?" All of these are good objections, but rather than disproving my statement, they lead us to the deeper question that lurks behind them all.

What is Art?

We are Christians and we base our lives and beliefs on the Bible. Let me bring you to the very beginning of that book. Genesis 1? Yes, Genesis 1:1 words 1-5, "In the beginning God created..." Two words stand out most in this string of five words. "In the beginning" is kind of like an announcement that a big statement is about to be made. Then we get to "God" – "In the beginning God".



Now that's something. God is preeminent because He is first. How fitting for the first four words of the Bible. But if He was in the beginning, how does the story continue? Well, God created. God created. The first doctrine we hit after the preeminence of God is art – creativity. Art comes before the doctrines of marriage, work, sacrifice, etc. Perhaps this is because art is what is most obvious and sometimes most important to us. We know God exists by His art. We are deceived, rarely by argument but more often by the art that is tied into the argument—the emotions, the symbols, and the imitations of cosmic ideas.

“God created.” That is our first introduction to art in the Bible. Shall we move on? Shall we keep looking for the meat of what art really is? No! It's right here! Let's slow down a bit and dig into the depths of richness right before us.

“Created”

That is how God expressed Himself. How different the approach of His adversaries. From the very beginning, we see the trend of sinful men and the devil to corrupt what God made. Pagans did not create a different solution to the problem of sin. They knew that redemption required sacrifice. Instead, they twisted the system of animal sacrifice to be a way for them to actually atone for their sins when God had intended it only as a sign of inward repentance and a picture of the Messiah that would come. The pagans did not create a society without government. They knew they could not exist without governments, so instead they twisted God's design into a system of tyranny.

Only God can truly create ex nihilo. He is at a level of artistry we will never match. There are only two options:

1. We can create after the pattern of God's creation and join in his creativity
2. Or we can destroy the pattern of God's creation.

If I want to share in the creative joy of some architect, I may trace an outline of his skyscraper. It may take me ten minutes and \$0, but I have become an artist. Another man may spend years of planning and thousands of dollars to blow up that same skyscraper, but he is not an artist. Why not? Because he has not created, he has destroyed. In the same way, all art must share in the creativity that God has already designed. If any so called art goes against His patterns, it will lose its beauty.

“Because God is God, that which reflects His nature will be art and that which distorts His nature will be anti-art because God is artistic.”

Does this mean that a non-Christian cannot be artistic?

No, but it does mean that we Christians have an advantage. We have a better worldview, so our worldview is going to make for some better stories—if we do everything with our eyes open. If we are going to have our artwork reflect the nature of God (and therefore become artistic) we need to study how He did things before us—after all, He did say that His work was very good. We need to become careful observers and deep thinkers. If we fail to portray an accurate picture of human nature in our stories, then we have missed a bit of how God expresses Himself—not God himself mind you, but a bit of His nature. We have not looked deep enough into the beauty and majesty of God because we have not looked long enough at His handiwork. Our worl-

dview gives us an advantage in the world of art, but we must be careful or we can easily lose that advantage. If we only express the broad picture of God's handiwork in our art and miss everything else, an atheist may easily produce an artwork far more beautiful than ours if he is able to see the myriads of beauty expressed in God's handiwork in all the little areas of life. He may not know that that is what he is seeing, but as long as he sees it and expresses it through his art, that artwork will succeed.

Our new understanding of the basic nature of art leads us to a deeper understanding of our subject in general. For instance, why is it that cliches are regarded as poor art? Is it not because the nature of God is unsearchable with limitless nuance? Why is survival such an important theme in so many stories? Is it not because the nature of God is life? Even a story of vengeance can be thrilling because ultimately God will have his own revenge on the day of judgment.

This last example ties us back into my original point. My original point was that all art is Christian art. Is a tale of vengeance Christian? Let us consider that what we must judge is not just the message of the story (which is tied into the art) but the art in its whole. A tale of vengeance well told can have great power and this is because it finds its ultimate theme in the nature of God—in Christianity.

But wait! A tale of vengeance is not about divine vengeance: it is about human vengeance. That is very true, but think of this. The power of the tale (its artistic quality) increases the closer the human vengeance appears to divine vengeance. Why else do authors have their vengeful characters view themselves as “the hand of God”? I might make a similar point about the book *The*

Scarlet Letter. If you carefully examine this book's philosophy, I believe you will find that it has a major error. In the end, it is accepting of sin. This is a distortion of the nature of God and therefore diminishes its art. The story does, however, place a very high emphasis on guilt and the fact that sin does have its consequences. It is this theme, displayed so powerfully, that makes this book a masterpiece. This book is powerful because its lie is so full of truth. The distortion is so slight that the story blows you away. It's an awe-inspiring piece of literature. Consider, however, if this book had treated sin as a light matter not even worth considering. Anyone who has read this book will know that it would have turned the book into an absolute flop. It is this way with all of art.

The closer it comes to the nature of God, the more powerful it is and vice versa.

So now we understand why human vengeance (while a distortion) can yet be so powerful. To be fair, it is still a distortion, but let's not draw any judgments just yet. Instead, let's look at what the Bible says in John 9.

"Now as Jesus was passing by, he saw a man who had been blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who committed the sin that caused him to be born blind, this man or his parents?" Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but he was born blind so that the acts of God may be revealed through what happens to him."

So we see that even a distortion of God's original creation can be good in God's eyes because He uses it to eventually point back to His own glorious and holy nature. We should consider this when writing. Light (while it is not

dependent on darkness for its existence) may often catch our attention when contrasted with the darkness.

Let us review what we have learned in this article.

- First of all, art is creation.
- Second, true creation is that which reflects the nature of God (and hence is founded in Christianity). Therefore, all art is Christian art. Q.E.D.
 - We also learned that even though we have a Christian worldview, we can still miss many expressions of the nature of God if we are not careful and observant.
 - We also learned that even an art piece that does not reflect the nature of God with perfection can still have a lot of power the closer it is to the truth.
 - Finally, we learned that darkness can sometimes be used to accent the light.

Let me leave you with a note of caution.

While we may technically find a remnant of Christianity in almost anything and learn from it and grow to appreciate God more, we have to use a cost benefit analysis. We would do well to learn from the wisdom of Paul when he said,

“All things are lawful for me’—but not everything is beneficial. ‘All things are lawful for me’—but I will not be controlled by anything.”

There may be a little bit of true art mixed in with chaotic “art” forms, but that does not make them beneficial. Poor art can often contain elements of temptation.

For instance, I try to be discriminate in the music I listen to. There are songs many of my friends might think fine that I detect a tone of anger in. Listening to such music tempts me to that same feeling of anger. This may not be the same for everyone, but for myself such music is very powerful in a negative way. At the same time, I can often detect anger in Beethoven's music, but with his music I tend to sympathize with his feelings rather than to share in them. His music also contains much good that I find beneficial. We have to carefully consider the positive and negative points of any piece of art and also judge between that piece and others.

The world of art is a battleground. It is one in which we should be very wary and very active. The good news is that God staked this ground out for Himself right from the beginning. You can find it in the fifth word in Genesis.



Daeus Lamb

Daeus is the happy lunatic behind a novel and novelette, with plans to expand that repository as infinitely as possible. He has a passion for philosophy and theology, especially in areas where most people would consider the issues too murky to draw any conclusions on. This combines perfectly with his love for fiction where the depths of theme, subtlety, and humanity can be explored with absolute limitlessness. His main interests are in action and adventure type stories with deep philosophical aspects, though he is as yet unable to rest in any single genre.

Perhaps the most addicted person to the Kingdom Pen forum ever to exist, you can always catch him commenting over there. When not writing, Daeus enjoys thinking about writing, talking about writing, and reading.

9

10 STEPS TO WRITING A SUCCESSFUL POEM BY HALEY LONG

Have you always wanted to write a poem but didn't know how? In this article, Haley guides you through how to write a poem from start to finish.

Staring at blank paper can be daunting. It's just a piece of paper, but there's so much it can hold! It is light now, but it has the potential to be a paperweight if the right words are written upon it.

The same could be said about a poem. It could be a waste of space, or a Pulitzer Prize Winner. How does one write a successful poem? I have created this easy and simple step-by-step guide for you to use as often as you like!

Step 1. Select Your Foundation

A stack of clean white paper is required. Ivory or parchment is recommended, even a soft clay tablet and an authentic stylus works just as well if that's your cup of Joe. Lined paper is heavily frowned upon because the lines interfere with the creative free spirit.



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Step 2. Locate Your Weapon of Mass Construction

Pencils are the preferred writing tools for a poet. Pens are not commonly used due to the amount of erasing a poet performs when crafting. Unless you favor the strike-through look in your poem, repeat step one until you have selected enough paper to keep rewriting, or just simply stick with a few boxes of nicely sharpened pencils. And save yourself the trouble and purchase a package of erasers. I hear Sam's Club has a great value pack.

Step 3. Mark Your Location

Where does your creative free spirit feel...freest? What atmosphere generates those creative juices and gets them flowing in a smooth stream of pure genius? Is it on top of a hill overlooking a wide expanse of creation, with the wind caressing your ears with words to your next poem? Or is it simply being locked inside four walls that unlocks your imagination into painting word pictures and metaphors?

Whatever encourages your inner wordsmith to show himself and get to work constructing, find it, cultivate it, and utilize it often.

Step 4. Find Your Type

With over fifty types of poetry existing in the universe, there's a wide range for you to choose from. The options can be overwhelming, but narrow it down to what you are trying to get across. Is it a heroic battle? Try writing an epic. Is it a love story? Try writing a sonnet. Is it humorous? Maybe a limerick would fit it like a glove. If choosing your type first doesn't work, move onto step five and then come back to this one. And who knows, you might even be the next

genius to discover the sixtieth type.

Step 5. Choose Your Subject

Not to be confused with your victim. What is on your heart? What is burning in your mind that needs seared into the annals of poem history? Start with something small and ordinary. For example, a mouse. Everyone knows Three Blind Mice. It's world renowned; for centuries! Once you have found your topic, complete step four, unless of course you already have in which case step write up onto number six!

Step 6. Begin Construction

The role of the poet is to take something ordinary and construct it into something extraordinary, much like what God does with His people. Implant meaning into every word and every phrase, even down to the placing of your punctuation. In poetry, every detail matters. Apply metaphors, and similes where they need to be. Simply put, write your poem.

Step 7. Reconstruct

Thought you were finished? Every craftsman knows that a project isn't completed even when it is first built. What if you made a mistake? This is where your value pack of erasers will either become your archenemy or your best friend. Rewrite, edit, play with the words, mix them up. Take some out. Toy with the punctuation. Rewriting is a poet's best weapon...that and erasers.

Step 8. Submit to Scrutiny

This step almost seems harsh, cruel, and well, unnecessary. You wrote your poem for yourself, right? Some people do, but those who want to affect the culture will write their poems for the benefits of others. To refine your poem consider finding a critique group. It's scary, we understand, but part of being a poet is pushing yourself from your comfortable seat and flying into the fiery flames of criticism. Sometimes immersing yourself completely is better than getting your toes singed. Whatever works best for you, send it to people who can point out blind spots, errors, and make your work sound better. Squash the pride and let your poem be transformed into a beautiful pumpkin pie.

Step 9. Apply Finishing Touches

With any project, finishing touches are key to making a drawing into a masterpiece. Analyze the critiques you gathered from gracious friends, and don't take them personally. They're trying to help. This is your work of art so every change is ultimately up to you. However, humble pie is a highly recommended dish to consume when considering which critiques to apply to your poem.

Step 10. Take it for a Drive

Once you have completed the first nine steps, your poem should be ready for a successful outing. Dress it up and find a befitting display. This may include printing it off and presenting it to a friend as a gift, or publishing it on a Christian website such as Kingdom Pen. Whichever outlet best fits the poem you have just written, plug it in and let it shine!

Is there a step you skipped? Feel free to come back as many times and read this step-by-step guide to writing your very own successful poem. Did you follow this guide and write your poem? Consider submitting it to Kingdom Pen! If you followed the steps, it should be publishable!



Haley Long

Haley is a writer, pianist, singer, and growing disciple of Jesus Christ. She enjoys strong coffee, dark chocolate, and overcoming whatever challenges come her way. Writing, and books in general, have been one of her passions since she discovered story worlds at the age of four. Haley is one of the editors of Kingdom Pen, a piano teacher to several wonderful students, and is also the marketing manager of The Long Way To Go as well as Modesty Matters.

In our most popular short story of 2016, Jackson enticingly explores a clash between honor and prejudice.

Scotland, Early 1298. One mile South of Neidpath Castle.

Failbhe (FAL-uh-vuh) Fraser rode on horseback through the small fishing town of Peebles. The sun cast joy upon all who walked under its rays, a temporary break in the usually dreary Scottish weather. The River Tweed's flowing waters roared in the distance. Failbhe was a fit man of twenty — a Scottish knight from Neidpath Castle. Brown hair flowed down to his shoulders, and penetrating eyes of emerald scanned the surroundings. Woven in his family's colors, his woolen shirt was partially obscured by the thick, dark cloak he wore. He headed for Traquair House to deliver a message to the Laird. The main road — no more than a dirt path—carved a straight line through the town, with houses and shops cast to each side. Townsfolk walked to and fro absentmindedly, going about their business. The weathered wood structures reminded Failbhe of the tool sheds

SHORT STORY

**HONOR BEFORE
PREJUDICE**

BY JACKSON GRAHAM

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dotting the courtyard of Neidpath Castle. Traveling incessantly since sunrise, his legs tired of the monotony of riding in the saddle. Failbhe's gaze fell upon a large wooden sign reading "Tavern Murray", hanging above the entrance to one of the buildings. Failbhe paused. It was not a place he would choose to visit, but thirst resolved the matter. He cautiously entered the tavern, keeping an eye out for troublemakers.

Failbhe pushed open the ramshackle door, and blinked a couple of times to adjust his eyes to the dim light. Numerous lanterns hung from the ceiling, candles sputtering. Twenty mismatched tables crowded the room. Smelling the heavy odor of fish in the room, Failbhe wrinkled his nose. The customers were regular townsfolk, mostly fishermen, farmers, and tradesmen. A loud laugh exploded from one sitting near where Failbhe stood, and he instinctively put several feet in between the man and himself. As he settled down uncomfortably on one of the rather hard stools, a large man with a stained apron approached. "What can I get for you this fine afternoon?" the man asked. A scraggly beard clung to his haggard face. Failbhe glanced at him.

"Cold water please," he ordered. The thought of eating fish was not appetizing at the moment due to the pungent stench in the room. Nodding, the server retreated to a small counter crowded with various drinks and spices. It didn't take long for the man to fill a mug from a barrel under the counter. Failbhe drained the cup, water cascading down his parched throat. Over his shoulder, he casually examined the customers. Most were too occupied with card games and small talk to notice him.

Among all these simply-dressed men, however, one stood out. A regal-looking man sat alone in the corner, his back to the wall. Blonde hair curled around his

collar, grabbing it like the hands of a curious child. He wore long white stockings, a blue mantle, a reddish-brown surcoat over a white shirt, and pointed boots. The white insignia of a lion embroidered on his surcoat betrayed his nationality.

What is this Englishman doing in Scotland? Failbhe thought to himself. King Edward I of England had repeatedly humiliated the Scottish monarch, John Balliol, for several years since his rebellion, reigniting the deep hatred between the Scots and the English. Perhaps this violent undercurrent reminded the man to keep to himself. He was in dangerous territory. Failbhe turned to ask for another drink when he heard chairs crashing behind him. Spinning around, he saw three men approaching the foreigner. They were itching for a fight.

“Well, what do we have here? An Englishman in Scotland?” one of the men exclaimed. Threateningly, they advanced on the terrified stranger. Failbhe’s mind raced. Should he help this endangered man? The man was English after all, and Failbhe’s family had aligned with the Scottish cause, being politically connected with William Wallace and the Battle at Stirling Bridge. The English targeted his kin as potential enemies of the crown. But he knew protecting the weak and defenseless was a crucial aspect of the code of chivalry, and therefore the right thing to do. In a rush, Failbhe left his seat, and strode towards the squabble, placing himself in between the troublemakers and their intended victim.

A man with a vicious appearance regarded Failbhe with a sneer and spat at his feet. “What is this dog to you? Get out of our way!” he bellowed, attempting to reach around Failbhe.

The knight grabbed the man's arm in an iron grip. The contender yelped in pain. "Cease," Failbhe said in such a simple, yet menacing way that the man hesitated before responding. Unfortunately, the ruffian's mind remained unchanged. He sneered at Failbhe once more and swung a right hook at the knight's jaw. Failbhe dodged the punch with agility and skill only a trained warrior possesses.

"Unwise maneuver," he warned. He seized the man by his collar, and heaved him across the room with such force that everybody in the room ducked for fear of being hit. With a thunderous clatter, the scoundrel swiped a table clean of its tableware and fell to the ground, shocked. The other two rogue's eyes widened in terror. Wildly, they fled away with their stricken leader, tripping over several chairs in their rush to safety. Failbhe turned to the Englishman.

"Are you well?" he inquired. The man gaped at him in utter astonishment.

"But why?" he stammered, visibly shaken. Failbhe didn't hesitate to answer.

"Honor comes before personal prejudice." The newcomer stared at his rescuer in confusion.

"I am in your debt!" he cried, reaching for his money pouch. Failbhe shook his head.

"Do not trouble yourself. Only remember my words," he advised. Before the Englishman could object, Failbhe bid him farewell with a smile, paid for his drink, and left the tavern.

England, Spring 1314. Aydon Castle.

Sir William Benton sat behind his desk in Aydon Castle. The spacious room he occupied contained not only his desk, but his bed and necessaries. He composed a letter to an acquaintance of his in Scotland who—despite the detestable treason going on in that country—remained loyal to the crown. Pausing in his writing, he ran his hands through his hair and growled in frustration. The ideal words did not come to his mind, and he needed some time to think. He rose from his seat, ponderously moving to an immense window overlooking the courtyard of his fortress.

Long white hair cascading down his shoulders and a full beard, Benton's imposing height paralleled his standing within his jurisdiction. He was known for his wisdom, and within his blue eyes resided an expression of nobility which commanded respect. An exquisite robe trimmed with ermine fur covered his back, and his green shirt was embroidered with an impressive emblem—a lion rampant in front of two crossed swords. Staring out over the forest, his mind drifted to the time—seventeen years ago—when he had been saved from cold-blooded ruffians by a Scottish knight. Benton never learned the man's name because of his quick disappearance, but the face of the man was still ingrained in his memory.

Turning his thoughts toward more important matters, he reviewed what had occurred over the past few years. Benton had imprisoned a Scot involved with the Battle of Falkirk. Today, he would appear before Benton to answer the accusations, and later be transported to a larger court to either be acquitted or condemned. While he thought, a loud knock sounded at the door to his office.

“Enter,” he commanded. Benton turned slightly towards the entryway. The heavy door creaked open, and two guards marched into the room while roughly escorting a shackled man. The prisoner wore filthy, tattered, and foul-smelling clothes.



Long brown hair—unkempt due to rough accommodations—and a matted beard hinted at suffering. Despite his haggard appearance, the man’s emerald eyes seemed to pierce deep into Benton’s soul, his mouth firmly set. Benton recognized the resolute face, but couldn’t place any specific name to it. He put his hand to his head and closed his eyes in concentration, searching for the man’s identity. It came to him. Striding across the floor, he stood behind his desk. At Benton’s gesture of dismissal, the soldiers left the room.

“Sir, come to me!” he eagerly beckoned. The prisoner advanced. Benton looked the man in the eyes. “I am Sir William Benton. What is your name?” he inquired in a polite tone. The man’s eyes searched Benton’s face.

“My name is Failbhe. This is not the first time we have met,” he replied. Benton nodded in agreement.

“You are the man who stepped between me and certain peril, are you not?”

“I am,” he answered, giving a single nod.

“Providence must have brought us together, for some reason,” Benton marveled aloud. Failbhe assumed a more relaxed countenance, more at ease with the man, although still on guard. “Now answer this: were you associated with William Wallace, or has there been a mistake?” Benton questioned, once more assuming a serious tone. Drawing himself up with a sense of national pride, Failbhe nodded.

“Yes,” he responded. Benton, distraught at this comment, sank into his lavishly carved oak chair.

“It is so,” he signed. “I have vowed to fulfill my nation’s demands,” he sighed. Before he could command the sentries to lead him away, however, the echo of

a potent phrase played in his mind: “Honor comes before personal prejudice.” Straightaway, his face turned from an expression of regret to determination.

He stood, and called for one of the soldiers, who entered. “Hand me the complaint detailing this man’s charges!” he demanded. The sentry withdrew several papers from the satchel at his waist, and Benton snatched them from his fingers. Briskly, the man spun on his heels and marched out of the room. Benton strode to his fireplace on the opposite side of the room, shredding the notice and tossing them into the fire. Eager for the flesh of paper, the flames consumed the now useless document.

“Sir Failbhe, you are to be released,” Benton declared. Failbhe knew that his advice from the tavern had been taken to heart. Pleased to be able to finally return the good deed, Benton stood and, grabbing a key from his belt, reached for the former prisoner’s shackles.

“My thanks,” Failbhe replied, with gratitude. Benton smiled and, completely overlooking his appearance, clasped Failbhe’s hand. “Honor to whom honor is due,” he concluded. Failbhe grinned warmly, and turned to leave.



Jackson Graham

Sixteen-year-old Jackson E. Graham lives with his parents and younger brother in North Idaho. He started reading at age four and began to write soon after. Jackson's main genres are fantasy and historical fiction, and he has written three novels—which he plans to self-publish—and several short stories.

Besides writing, he loves reading, playing and composing music, and fighting with swords. He sings, plays the fedóg, guitar, and piano. Jackson has had a lifelong love of dinosaurs, and used to freak people out as a tiny tike by spewing long names such as Pachycephalosaurus. He even created his own dinosaur name: Predominicus (yet to be discovered). One of his many dreams is to discover a dinosaur fossil. Jackson firmly believes God has given us all a story—a story that glorifies Him to the utmost.

You can visit Jackson's website here: <http://jacksonegraham.wix.com/jackson-e-graham>

7

BOOK REVIEW: THE GREAT GATSBY

BY CHRISTI EATON

Many of us read *The Great Gatsby* in high school, but how should we respond to it as Christians? In this review, Christi delves into how the book relates to a Christian worldview.

If you are like most high school students, the *Great Gatsby* is on your reading list: why? Is it to experience a masterpiece of literary genius or is there something more to this novel? In 1925, F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote this story, which is a staunch example of the frivolity of life without Christ as the foundation. Wealth, power, vanity, and adulterous relationships are the four core elements that drive the characters and plot of *The Great Gatsby*.

Throughout the story, it is shown how the characters felt secure in their way of life, how they let their own desires and impulses lead them, and how they twisted the morals they did have to fit in with their sinful lifestyle. In the end, they found that their world had collapsed because they did not have a proper foundation. Matthew 7:26-27 says:

“and everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand. And the rain fell, and



*the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against the house, and it fell.
And great was the fall of it.” [ESV]*

This verse is the perfect description of the life of Fitzgerald’s main character, Jay Gatsby.

Jay Gatsby is a man who has everything, yet he is not satisfied with his life. He fails to find satisfaction and happiness in the things he pursues. Every night he throws an elaborate party at his house in hopes of gaining the attention of one woman, named Daisy Buchanan. Through secrets and deception, lies and lusts, Gatsby, Daisy and the other characters in this novel, find themselves lost chasing after the fleeting things of this world, ultimately destroying their lives.

JJ Heller says in her song ‘In the End’: “Oh this silly heart of mine, looking for new things to buy. Nothing really satisfies in the end, in the end. Greed is making fools of us, waging war, betraying trust. Empires only fade to dust, in the end, in the end...Build your kingdom all your life, then say goodbye in the end.” Everything that the characters had, their magnificent lives, their riches, their great castles, including those of The Great Jay Gatsby, were made of sand and they collapsed to the ground because they were missing Jesus Christ as their cornerstone for their lives’ foundation. If they had Christ as their foundation, their hearts would have been changed, they would be striving for Him instead of their impulses and desires, and their sins would be forgiven by their faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ who is our Cornerstone.

Content Advisory: The book contains some language



Christi Eaton

Christine Eaton is an 18-year-old, high school senior, who loves stories and hopes to someday publish a great novel. She lives in Southern California with her parents and her younger brother. She loves the ability to wear flip-flops in December and spend time with her friends at Disneyland. Besides writing, she loves drama, painting, and reading. Broadway musicals can usually be heard blasting through her bedroom. Some of her favorite authors include A.S. Peterson, Francine Rivers, Louisa May Alcott, and Andrew Peterson.

6

WHY MINOR CHARACTERS SHOULD BE FLAT CHARACTERS

BY JOSIAH DEGRAAF

Writing articles often emphasize the importance of developing the characters in your novel. But is it ever better to leave a character undeveloped? In this article, Josiah argues why this unusual approach is effective.

Four years ago, I was beginning a rewrite of *A Darkened Light*, which was my second full-length novel and my current work-in-progress at the time. It had become clear during the first draft that most of my characters were rather bland: that while a couple characters had some interesting things going on with them, the majority of my characters—including my protagonist—were kind of replaceable and largely tools of the plot without much of a personality of their own.

So as I prepared to rewrite the book to flesh out the characters as well as to revamp aspects of the plot, I was reading some articles on the importance of writing three-dimensional characters and had an idea: why not give all of my characters secret backstories, intricate personalities, and subtle motivations? I would make all of my characters interesting and three-dimensional in their own right. And in doing so, I would be able to solve all the problems that I had with my characters being rather bland.



So I went ahead and did it. I took the ten to twelve most important characters in the book, found a list online of fifty different questions you should use to develop a character, and filled it out for all of them. It would be great, I thought. Now all my characters would be three-dimensional and interesting.

As it ended up turning out, though, while they did end up being more interesting for the most part, many of them still failed as characters because I missed an important fact:

Not all characters are supposed to be round, three-dimensional characters. In fact, many characters actually work better if they are more flat and one-dimensional characters.

This article is thus going to try to argue for why most (not all, but most) minor characters should be flat ones.

Now, before I argue for why minor characters ought to be flat, I should probably define my terms. “Round” and “flat” are two terms that are often thrown around about literary characters that can often escape a general definition. Everyone agrees that round characters are more complex and more realistic than flat characters, but what exactly does that mean? Are round characters inherently interesting and flat characters boring? I don’t think so. In his classic work, “Aspects of the Novel,” E.M. Forster writes that,

“the test of a round character is whether it is capable of surprising in a convincing way. If it never surprises, it is flat. If it does not convince, it is a flat pretending to be round.” (78)

Whether or not a character is round and flat actually doesn’t have all that

much influence on how interesting he or she can be (although they do relate). It really has to do with how complex and dynamic their motivations are. Flat characters are normally driven by one motivation or represented by one ideal (e.g., this character is always angry; this character just wants to avenge his father's death), and thus they are pretty predictable. Round characters, on the other hand, have multiple motivations and multiple sides to their personality, and thus their actions should not be easily predictable.

Now, I think one of the main mistakes that can be made after examining something like this is to decide that all characters ought to be round, three-dimensional characters. This was what my view was when revising *A Darkened Light*, but this view actually ended up hurting the book, and here's why:

Round characters are not inherently worse than flat characters; it all depends on how you use them.

The thing about round vs. flat characters is that a lot of the time, when a character is accused of being "too flat," the problem isn't that a character is flat per se—it's that a major character is flat. Characters in literature generally follow a simple rule: the more important a character is to a story, the more round and complex he should be. But there's an inverse to this general rule as well: namely, that the less important a character is to a story, the more flat he should be.

"Now wait," you might be asking. "I get that minor characters don't have to be round. But does that really mean that they're better as flat characters than as round ones?" My answer is yes, for three reasons.

1. Flat characters are more memorable.

If a character is flat, what we're essentially saying is that he's a caricature. He's defined by only one (or possibly two) traits, and that means he isn't terribly realistic. This is why it's imperative that your major character not be a flat character. But this is also why it's important for your minor character to be flat: because while a caricature might be flat, as Forster points out, a caricature is also more easily memorable.

After I went through my work *A Darkened Light* and tried to make most of my characters three-dimensional, the problem that I ran into was that when I ran this by beta readers, they got confused between characters pretty easily. Without any defining characteristics, many characters blurred together and simply became less interesting. While caricatures aren't always the most realistic, caricatures do have one benefit, and that is that they tend to be remembered. Just think about different examples of this in fiction. Mr. Collins (*Pride and Prejudice*), Haymitch (*Hunger Games*), Phil Colson (*Avengers*; ignoring *Agents of Shield*), Olaf (*Frozen*), Boba Fett (*Star Wars*), and Tom Bombadil (*Lord of the Rings*) are all pretty flat characters for the most part. But that's part of the reason why they're so memorable. They portray their caricature well, and given their level of importance in the story, they don't need to be anything else.

2. Flat characters are less distracting.

Unless you're writing a 400,000 word doorstopper, you simply don't have enough space to develop a lot of round characters. This was another of my main problems in *A Darkened Light*. I was trying to make ten to twelve characters round and three-dimensional where, in a 120,000 long book, I really only had enough time to develop three or four of them really well, if even that. The



more three-dimensional characters you have, the more likely they are to distract the reader from the main point of the story. And so for each three-dimensional character you make, you need to ask yourself whether or not it benefits the story as a whole for you to shine so much of the spotlight on that particular character.

3. Flat characters are simply more realistic.

Now this might come as a surprise at first—aren't flat characters inherently less realistic because they're more of a caricature? This is certainly true, but there's another way of looking at it as well. When you look around at all the people you know, for those whom you know really well, you definitely see many facets of their personality and see their "literary roundness," so to speak. But for acquaintances, you probably just remember them by a couple different characteristics and they appear to be more "flat" in your estimation of them until you get to know them more.

Because of this, it simply stands to reason that, to the extent that a novel mirrors reality, it also mimics this aspect. Minor characters who are less important to the protagonist and the main story thus appear more one-dimensional within the constraints of the story.

If you've been following me so far, I've hopefully convinced you that minor characters often work better if they're flat characters. But all of this leads to another question: if minor characters are supposed to be flat, then how do you practically write a flat character well?

While minor characters can—and generally should—be flat, that does not

mean that they can be boring. If your character is going to be largely defined by one characteristic or one motivation, it needs to be an interesting motivation or characteristic that's going to be enough to carry the character on through the course of the book.

So here's the technique that I use when creating a minor character. Come up with one characteristic and/or one motivation for your character that you want to define that character.

Make sure it's an interesting characteristic/motivation. This can be anything by defining them personality-wise as "a grouchy old man," "an easily-scared little kid," or "a really talkative but brainless teenager," or even character-wise as "just," "spiteful," or "compassionate." But come up with one really simple characteristic to describe them by.

Once you have accomplished that, the only other step is then to write all the scenes containing that character with that characteristic/motivation in mind. Now, you do need to be careful that the character doesn't become too much of a caricature. The more a character is present in a story, the more rounded he has to be to be realistic. As much as we talk about round/flat characters as an either/or issue, it really is more of a continuum, so the more present a character is, the more well-rounded you probably want him to be—even if he essentially remains a flat character. But you also don't need to be afraid of him being somewhat-flat if that's what his purpose is supposed to be.

And that's my unlikely defense for why flat characters are necessary—and even beneficial—in your fiction. While not every minor character has to be flat, often, they are better served by being flat, and so we can let our minor charac-

ters remain flat while also trying to make them more interesting.

Ultimately, while minor characters aren't (or at least shouldn't be) the stars of the show, they can add a ton of vibrancy to a book and really make it feel alive. They may be flat; but they most definitely aren't unimportant to the general scope of the story. So focus on them. Make them fun and entertaining. And then set them loose to populate your story.



Josiah DeGraaf

Josiah DeGraaf started reading when he was four, started writing fiction when he was six and hasn't stopped doing either ever since. After growing up with seven younger siblings, he eventually found himself graduated and attending Patrick Henry College, where he plans on majoring in literature with a minor in pedagogy (it's a fancy Greek word for education).

Someday, Josiah hopes to write fantasy novels that have worlds as imaginative as Brandon Sanderson's, characters as complex as Orson Scott Card's, character arcs as dynamic as Jane Austen's, themes as deep as Fyodor Dostoyevsky's, and stories as fun as Wayne Thomas Batson's. Plans for obtaining those impossible goals include listening to a lot of Hans Zimmer, ignoring college work so that he can find time to write, and avoiding coffee at all costs.

5

8 COMMON CLICHES IN COMING-OF-AGE STORIES BY HOPE ANN

We've all noticed these clichés in stories before. So we should try to avoid them. In this article, Hope dismantles these common clichés and demonstrates how to write a better coming-of-age story.

There is a theme which abounds across a number of genres. One in which young men are torn from their farms and thrust into events which will change the course of an age, young women rise up to fulfill prophecies, and youths are thrown into conflicts where they must fight for their very survival. The settings and characters change, but in each story a once young and immature man or woman is thrown into circumstances which forever alter their lives and thrust them into adulthood.

The lines around a coming-of-age story are a bit vague. In them, the main character begins as a youth and reaches adulthood by the end. This can either be the focus of the book or, as in some of my works in progress, merely a result of the character development throughout the story. But, however it's written, the meaning of adulthood ought to be clearly depicted, not fictionalized as some modern books portray.



Coming-of-age stories are only as compelling and gripping as the plot, characters, and emotions inside it. Though the focus of this article will be on the latter two points, the first one is important because it is the structure around which the character grows. Really, 'coming-of-age' is only a sub-theme of the greater character development which should take place throughout any book. If you're starting a book with the intention of writing a story in which the main character moves from youth to adulthood, there are a few clichés, both on adulthood and on coming-of-age that you want to be on the watch for, or at least notice.

1. Growing up is all about romance.

This is a completely unrealistic view of adulthood. Romance might be part of a story, but growing up (and romance too, when you think about it) is about responsibility. It's about growing stronger and stepping up, not finding more ways to entertain one's self.

2. The child arguing with his or her parents and moving out of the home.

Of course, if rebellion is part of your story, this could work as a portion of character development. But this should be the means to an end, building up to when the character makes it right with their parents and recognizes them as wiser than they are, not the climax where the young man or woman moves out to assert their independence and live their own selfish, little life. One doesn't have to live on their own to be an adult, and picking up personal lodgings certainly doesn't make anyone a good adult.

3. The death of the mentor.

The only real problem with this is that it's overused. As a writer, this can be extremely irritating because *glares at particular work in progress* one sometimes wants to kill a mentor to progress the story, but such a move is so common that one feels it will detract from the story because the readers' eyes will immediately glaze over. Now, this isn't to say a mentor can't die—but becoming an adult doesn't require it. If you do use this cliché, try to add a unique twist and make sure it's part of the story not just, 'oh, there goes another extremely skilled, wise, older man instead of his pupil who has half his knowledge and ability and yet somehow survives'.

4. Sudden key information.

Common leaping points into a coming-of-age story include a character suddenly being told they have unique abilities, or being given a powerful weapon, or learning about a mysterious past, or being matched to a prophecy and told they have to save the world... Now, just because these themes are common doesn't mean they are bad. They don't make one an adult by themselves, but they can propel characters into a chain of events and character developments which moves them in that direction.

And, though common, these 'leaping-points' normally work; that's why they're used. You'll never get a completely new idea. *sighs* But, thankfully, there are plenty of ways one can twist and freshen old ideas. Characters and their reactions are one key. Figure out where most stories take a common direction, then head the opposite way. For example, a character discovers that, instead of being a prince, he is really the son of a common thief. Or a rebel.

5. Be whoever you want to be!

Being told one can become anything they want is another very common theme. But, though it can make for an inspiring speech, this just isn't true. A character will probably be able to rise higher than they thought, and they will be able to fill whatever role they are meant to fill, but there are limits to what one can become. Even if the possibility of becoming king, general, president, or world-famous is there, just because the character wants it and gives all he or she has for it, that doesn't mean they can get it. Now that's a cool story theme. *shakes head vigorously* No, I don't need more ideas right now.

6. Mature before their time.

Also, just because a character comes-of-age, this doesn't mean they were immature before the events of the story. They will mature and learn throughout the book, of course, but adulthood doesn't come with the flip of a switch, even if war or great responsibility is involved. They will likely have some level of maturity beforehand and, afterwards, they should know they still have much to learn.

Adulthood doesn't happen in a moment of time either. Sure, there may be a climactic moment when the character finally comes into his own, but it's a process. It builds up, and then it doesn't just stop.

"Part of being an adult is realizing how much one doesn't know and how much one still has to learn."

So, considering your story, what will it take for this particular character to grow up, lay aside their past life, and take on the responsibilities of an adult? It won't be the same for everyone. And it doesn't require the character being ripped from a shielded life and thrown into the streets. The youth in question

could have grown up in a rough life, and then come to adulthood surrounded by comforts and intrigue.

7. Happily-Ever-After

Coming of age and entering adulthood is about meeting a whole new set of challenges—ones which are more difficult than in childhood, but which an adult is more fit to bear.

“Becoming an adult is not just about romance, or living on one’s own, or gaining a victory. It’s about sacrifice; it’s about learning how much one still needs to learn; it’s about taking responsibility and serving. It’s about the ability to stand strong against future storms, not the promise of smooth sailing.”

So no, they don’t get a happily ever after in the sense that nothing will go wrong again. This doesn’t mean they aren’t happy, just that they know more challenges will come, but that they will be better fit to bear them than before.

8. Religion

Lastly, though not leastly, *scowls at red line claiming leastly isn’t a word* taking the coming-of-age theme from a Christian viewpoint, there is one topic most secular stories ignore or spin in a negative light: religion. Instead of growing up and throwing off the ‘restrictions of their parents’ beliefs’, let the maturing young men and women learn more about them, what exactly they believe, and why they believe it. There may be tension, and there may be doubt and learning on both sides, but the story should show the strengthening of faith rather than its dissolution.

Coming-of-age stories are exciting to write, and there are many possibilities.

Just remember what becoming an adult and growing up is really about: maturing, not merely living for grown-up entertainment; sacrificing and serving, not living for self; learning, not knowing everything; growing in faith, not abandoning it. The road won't lie smooth and sunny before your characters but, due to the maturing and character development they've undergone in your story, they will be stronger, with a foundation on which to face any task or challenge which comes their way in the future.



Hope Ann

Hope Ann is a Christian wordsmith, avid reader, and dedicated authoress. Her time is taken up with writing, reading, archery, knife throwing, playing with inspirational photos, helping care for the house and eight younger siblings, and generally enjoying the adventures of life on a small farm at the crossroads of America. She has self-published fairy tale retellings on Amazon and is currently working on several projects including a fantasy novel and futuristic trilogy. You can find out more about Hope and her work on her website as well as links to download her first Legends of Light novella for free!

4

THE BILDUNGSROMAN: WHAT IT IS AND HOW TO USE IT

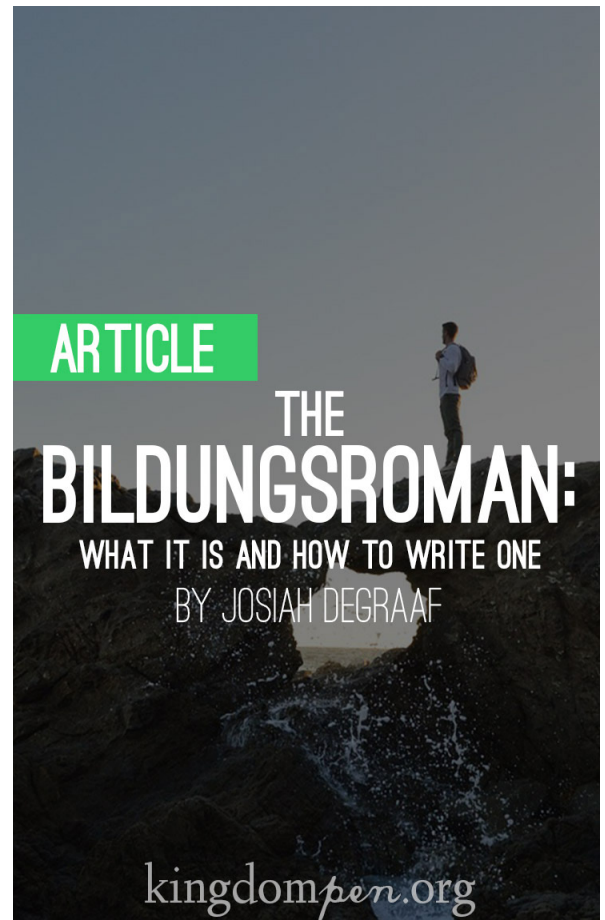
BY JOSIAH DEGRAAF

Wondering what that big word means? Read on to learn how understanding this term may help complete your story.

The transition from childhood to adulthood is an important transition that everyone has to make. So it shouldn't be too surprising to find that this transition is a common motif in literary works. Coming of age stories are staples among children and YA literature, but all of this may raise some questions. What exactly makes a story a coming of age story? Does a character just need to be at a certain age, or does a story need certain elements to qualify? And how do you write a coming of age novel? This is potentially a large topic, but in this article, I'll try to sketch out the basic elements of a coming of age novel and then examine how to do one well.

In the literary field, a coming of age novel is often known by the German term, bildungsroman, which means a novel of formation, education, or culture. This is an important element of the coming-of-age novel to understand:

“The story often represents a time of formation where the protagonist has to figure out who he is and where his place is in the world. At the beginning of the book, the protagonist often has a lot of potential, but lacks refinement and



solidarity of character—something he's going to have to gain by the story's end."

Many times, this bildungsroman will have a plot resembling the hero's journey. Unpacking what all the hero's journey looks like would take longer than I have space for in this article, but if you're unfamiliar with the term, this video¹ does a pretty good job of showing what the stereotypical hero's journey looks like:

Essentially, the young protagonist is sent out on some sort of mission in order to save the community he grew up in and, in the process of doing so, ends up discovering himself as well.

So, what exactly is it that's going to send the hero off on his journey? The call to adventure can be many different things depending on what type of story you're telling. However, often it will be spurred on by the hero's desire to find answers to life's questions. Because the bildungsroman is so focused on the psychological and spiritual development of the protagonist, it will often begin with psychological and spiritual questions. Another key event that may set the protagonist off on his journey will be an emotional loss, as often death or another tragedy ends up initiating the protagonist on his journey of self-discovery.

So, the protagonist sets off on some sort of journey. This journey can either be physical or spiritual. In a fantasy or adventure story, the journey will often be primarily physical, but not all coming-of-age stories have a physical journey. In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, for example, the journey is largely a psychological/spiritual journey of discovery. Often, the "special world" element of the hero's journey will play a large role in the story as the protagonist has to

1 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hhk4N9A0oCA>

go to some special place in order to fully transition from childhood to adulthood. This is more clearly seen when a physical journey is taking place, but is often present in non-physical journeys as well.

This journey, however, will be a hard one to make. The transition from childhood to adulthood is a hard transition to make, and this is reflected in fiction, whether the journey be physical or spiritual. Often, this journey will end up pushing the protagonist to the limits of their identity as they struggle to find themselves and complete their task. The answers the protagonist is searching for won't be easy to find, and a large portion of the story will center on the difficulties involved in finally finding them.

Before we arrive at the conclusion of the protagonist's journey, however, I need to explain another important aspect of the bildungsroman, which is the conflict between the protagonist and the society. Often, the values of the protagonist come into conflict with the values of society, and the protagonist will struggle to adjust himself to the values of society. In many ways, this mirrors real life. Many young adults in the real world struggle to submit to authority and follow along the path set for them by society. And so this plays out in fiction. Often in fiction, this is seen by the conflicts that erupt between a young hero and his parents. Traditionally, the way this conflict resolved itself is that the main character would learn to accept the values of society. Then, once he had accepted the values of society, society would then accept him back into its fold. In other words, the conflict was won by society. Recently however, in the literary world, we've seen a reversal taking place. Now, instead of the hero needing to change, the society needs to change, and the young hero ends up changing the values of society instead of the other way around.

Moving back to the conclusion of the protagonist's journey, the goal of the bildungsroman is for the protagonist to gain maturity, and the story often wraps up at the moment this is achieved. What does this involve for the protagonist?

Often it involves a resolution between the protagonist and his society. Another common element, however, is a loss of innocence. The protagonist often ends up seeing the real world as it really is, and while this will not necessarily lead to a loss of goodness, it will lead to a loss of naïvete as he sees firsthand the impact of sin and suffering on the world. Often, this element is achieved by another painful loss, as often someone close to the protagonist will end up dying by the end of the book to fully push him to adulthood. This is particularly common in stories involving pets: just think of *Where the Red Fern Grows* or *The Yearling*. But by the end of the story, the events of the book will have led the protagonist to wisdom and society, along with a proper place in society.

So now that we've looked at the various elements of a coming of age story, what does it practically look like? Several stories have been mentioned already, but here are a few more examples. This theme can be seen rather strongly in the sci-fi/fantasy world in the first *Star Wars* movie, *A New Hope*, where we see Luke coming out of a boring lifestyle (a common element of coming of age novels), learning his own identity as he interacts in a different world, and then finally accept the reality of the spiritual realm of the Force and use it to blow up the Death Star.

In the non-adventure realm, *The Secret Garden* also exemplifies this, both for Mary and for Collins, as both of them end up growing up in the special realm of the gardens as they both learn to conquer their own struggles and grow up. Pixar's latest movie, *Inside Out*, also exemplifies a lot of the common elements of a coming of age story, although in this movie it's more present as a sub-theme than as a defining element of the story. Finally, the *Toy Story* trilogy taken as a whole contains most of these elements as Andy and the toys learn what it means to grow up over the course of several movies.

So, that's what a coming of age story might look like. But you may still have one question on your mind:

How do you use it?

As alluded to with the example of *Inside Out*, just because you're using elements of a coming of age story doesn't mean it has to define the novel. While it certainly can, and while many good stories have been written like that, you can choose how much you want your story to be a coming-of-age story. The most important part of writing this type of story is to know the tropes associated with a coming of age novel and how they've been used in the past. After all, you don't want to be trying to write a coming-of-age story when you have no idea how they are typically done. On the other hand, however, you don't want to just write a paint-by-number story that's been done thousands of times before. You want to know how the tropes are used—and then write a story with them that hasn't been told before. So in many ways, just by reading about the tropes associated with this genre and reading various examples of the coming-of-age story will be enough to show you how to write it.

But there are other things to consider as well. Of particular relevance is how you want to handle the conflict between the protagonist and the society. As I mentioned before, society used to be the winner of that conflict, but recently, the pendulum has swung the other way. Which one do you want to value in your story, and what do you want to communicate with the conflict? Personally, I think there was a lot of value in the older tradition when the protagonist had to learn to adjust to society, since our modern generation's form of rebellion has often been for the worse. However, there are definite values with either way of doing it.

The important thing is to think carefully about how you want to handle it. Lastly, when writing this type of story, you'll also want to think about what the transition from childhood to adulthood looks like from a Christian perspective. The Scriptures talk about this multiple times. In the famous love chapter of 1 Corinthians 13, Paul says that,

“when I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child, but when I became a man, I put away childish things”



—and in the context of this chapter, what this looked like was learning how to love. You'll also want to consider the various passages that look at the importance of throwing off the old and putting on the new, such as Ephesians 4, which draws a contrast between the lives we once lived as sinners and the lives we are enabled to live in Christ. From this sort of perspective, when writing this type of stories as Christians, we want to use the coming-of-age story to show an end to childish and sinful ways of life and the beginning of adulthood and new life in Christ. Further could probably be said about this, but I'll leave the practicalities of how this could affect your story to your own imaginations.

The coming of age story, or bildungsroman, is a staple of children and YA novels, not surprisingly because this is a struggle that everyone has to go through. It is an important story because it's an important transition to make, and a failure to make this transition brings with it important consequences. So if you're preparing to write this kind of novel, consider the different tropes associated with it and consider what type of story you want to tell from a Christian perspective. Coming-of-age novels are not always the easiest types of novels to write. But when done well, they have a lot of power and potential. So study coming-of-age novels. Consider what kind of story you want to write. And then go out and write your novel.

3 HOW TO RESEARCH HISTORICAL FICTION

BY MELODY FAITH

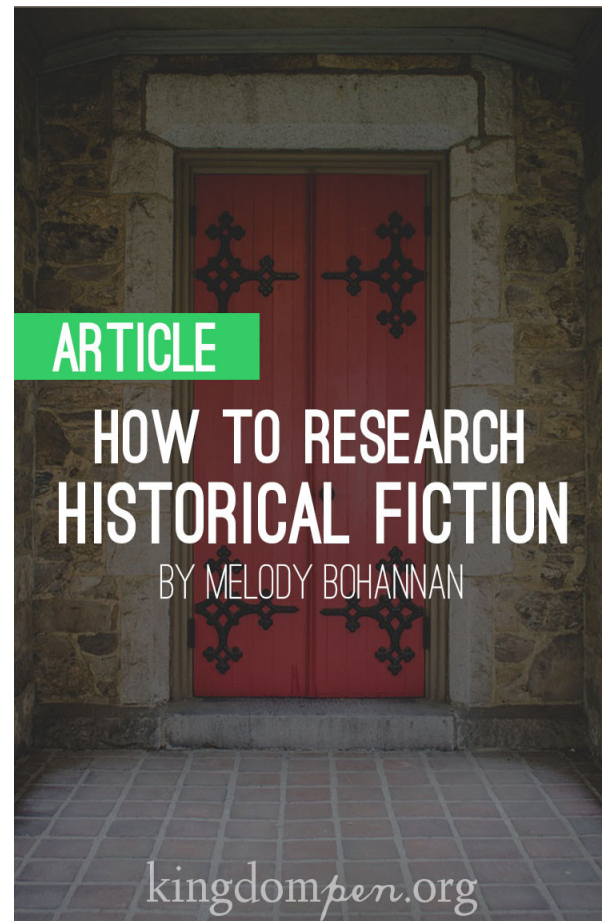
The amount of research required to write historical fiction may seem overwhelming. But in this article, Melody breaks down how to tackle this project in six simple steps.

How many of us have shied away from historical fiction because of research? Hand raises. Yes, it is a terrifying part of the process. Your biggest fear? That history buff reading your book with a disgusted face at your gall to say they used gold spoons in the Jamestown fort.

I have been a part of a debate team this past school year. The bulk of the work on the team is research. Tons and tons of research. I personally have always loved researching. Fact finding is like treasure hunting for me. So over the school year I have had way too much experience at research. Which leads me to be able to share with you all some simple steps to attack the terrifying monster we call research.

1. Pick Your Topic

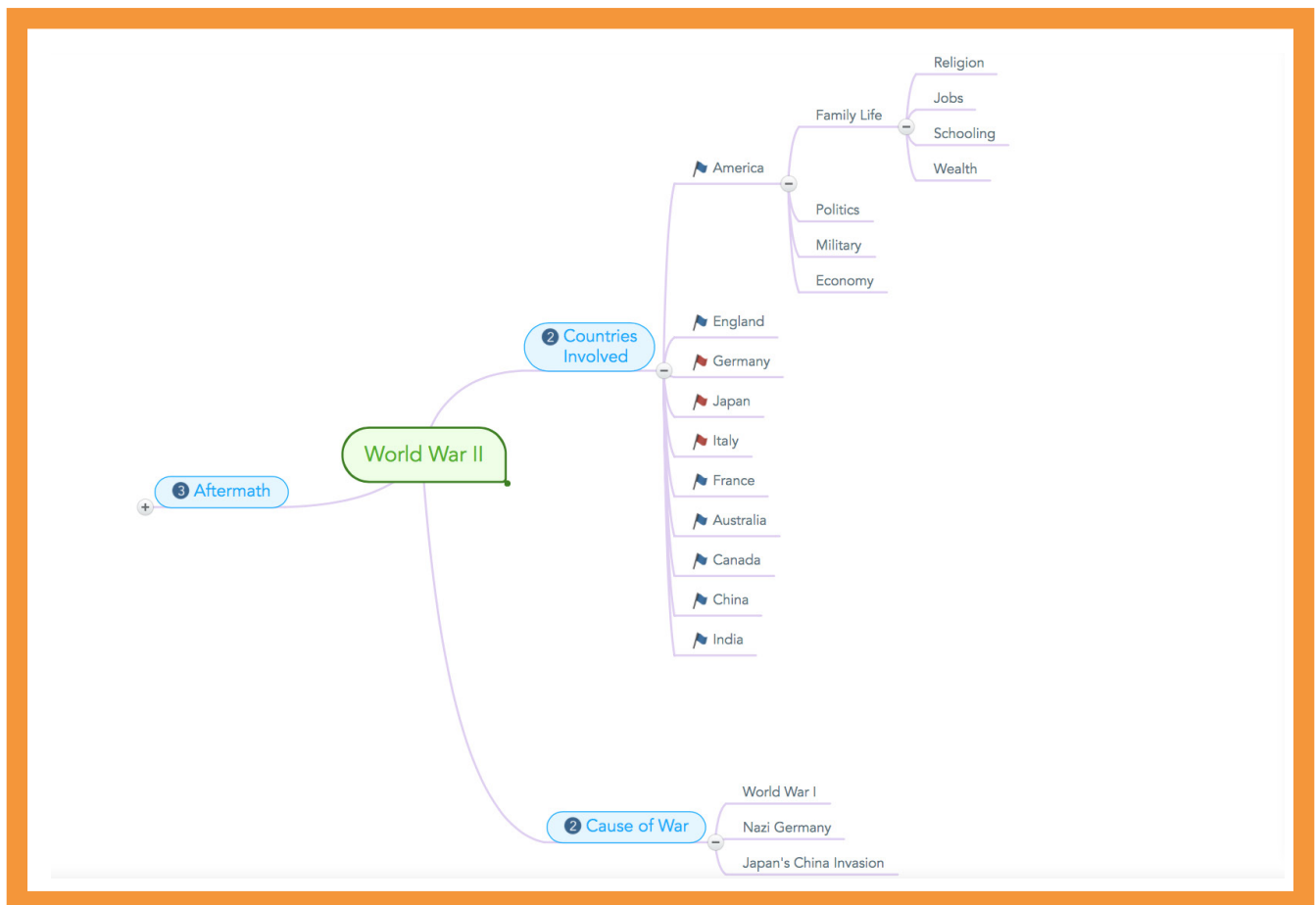
Simple enough, right? Start very broad. Are you writing in the Biblical era, Revolutionary war, Great Depression? For example, let's go with World War II. Great, we have a topic! World War II went on from 1939 to 1945. So now we have a time period to go off of. This may seem too basic, but trust me: you need to start as far out as possible. The next step is where we go in depth.



2. Mind Map

Now we get to start making our categories to research. If you already know how to mind map, you are good to go to the next step. This process is easy to do in a notebook, or you could use a resource like mindmeister.com. Begin with listing your topic in the middle of the page. Then start listing some basic subcategories surrounding your topic. For World War II, I started by surrounding it with the topics: Cause of war, countries involved, aftermath. From these three subcategories, I began writing smaller categories connected to them. For example, Countries involved: America, England, France, Germany, Japan, Italy...

Keep up with this, creating subcategories, and then adding subcategories to the subcategories. It may feel overwhelming to see so many topics to research, but don't worry! You won't be researching all of these: it is simply so you can narrow down what to research. Here is an example of one I did using Mind Meister.



3. Choose Subcategories

Now we come to deciding what information we need, and what we don't need. Remember those three main categories I picked when mind mapping? Cause of war, countries involved, and the aftermath. These will be crucial for me to research. These are the underlying facts of the time period, something I must know in order to write anything in this era. Now, think about your actual story, and look back at the mind map. Narrow down the topics to research based on the characters and the progression of the stories. If my characters are American, I will need to know about their home life. But unless they travel to Europe, I probably won't need any European home life information. After you finish your list based on the story, we are now ready to fact find.

4. Choose Resources

We have a list of things to research. Now we need research. Best place to go. Wikipedia! No, just kidding. Please do not use Wikipedia. It is easy, but seriously not reliable. If you use the internet, look for reliable websites. Blogs are not reliable or credible. Make sure you write down your sources with your research when compiling it; then you can go back if you need more info. I personally find that books are the best source when it comes to history research. The library is a beautiful bastion of knowledge. I like to order every book on my topic imaginable. Generally going to the library is more enjoyable and more handy, that way you can get reference books scanned, browse the online resources, look through stacks of books without checking them out, etc. Once you start fact finding, you will be able to identify which facts you will need and which just aren't necessary.

5. Relax and know there will be mistakes

Don't stress about accidentally saying a chair was made of a wood that was generally only used for crates. Even if your reader happens to be an insane history buff who knows you are wrong, it is not a big deal. Sometimes we can get so bogged down in the little details, we forget what year we are even writ-

ing in. Don't lose the heart of your story because you are too worried about keeping it accurate. There will be flaws. You will miss a random fact. That is okay. It happens to the best of authors, and it does not ruin your story. Just chill and have fun!

6. Write

When all else fails, when the research has clouded the story in your mind: just write! Let go of the critical-fact-oriented part of your brain, and just write your heart out. Let your story shine through. When the rough draft is done in all it's glory, then go back and make sure they actually had bananas in London during the winter months. What is the point to the story if you stop in the first chapter because you are too overwhelmed with facts? Drop the facts, embrace the story. I would rather read your story with a few warts than never get to read it because it had to be perfect.

I hope you learned a little something from this list. It's just the basic facts I have learned over the years of treasure hunting for information. Are you currently writing a historical fiction novel? I would love to hear about it! Do you have any favorite research tips to share with your fellow writers?



Melody Faith

At fourteen years old I decided to pick up writing novels. I had always loved writing essays and reports but I had never considered writing novels. I was introduced to Nanowrimo by a friend, I decided to try it out. I never stopped writing novels since. I found a new love. A new world was opened up to me, one I could create myself. I have a firm belief in using coffee as a writing fuel.

C. S. Lewis has always been my inspiration. I want to write showing messages that point to Christ and inspire others to do greater things. When I am not writing I enjoy graphic design of all varieties, listening to music, and training in Karate with my nine other siblings.

2 FOIL CHARACTERS: WHAT THEY ARE AND HOW TO USE THEM BY JOSIAH DEGRAAF

Worried that you aren't using your minor characters effectively? In this article, Josiah discusses how making your minor characters paradoxical to your protagonist may be what you need to develop a dynamic theme in your work.

So, if you've been following my articles for a while, you may have noticed that I talk a lot about the purpose of literature being to teach and to delight. However, the instructional part of literature can be easily misunderstood. After all, what does it practically mean to teach with literature? Does it mean to include random sermons midway through the novel? To end your book with a detailed explanation of what the book was supposed to do? Hopefully not, but then what does it mean?

Many things go into a successful theme in order to make a novel instructive as well as entertaining. However, one of the most important ways that a theme is brought across is by using the various characters in your book as positive and negative character examples. Today, I'd like to talk about one specific way that characters can be used as character examples: and that's through the use of foil characters.

Foil characters are one of my favorite writing tropes to utilize for several reasons. One reason I enjoy utilizing foil characters is that you can use them to develop your theme very well while still being subtle, thus avoiding the preach-



ing that too often happens in Christian fiction. Another reason is that they add a good bit of beauty to the literary text through the use of parallel.

Of course, talking about how much I like foil characters doesn't help much if you don't know what they are. So, without further ado, let's dive in.

What is a foil character?

Essentially, a foil character is someone who an author sets in contrast to another character (normally the main character) in order to highlight certain virtues or flaws of one or both of the characters. Normally, when foil characters are talked about in high school literature classes and such, they're seen as a way of highlighting the main character; however, they do also have an important impact on a story's theme, which I will be going into below. Foil characters are essentially a paradox of similarity and dissimilarity. They are made to be direct comparisons to the other character in order to make their differences clear to the reader.

Let's look at some practical examples of this in order to clarify this concept. One of the more famous examples of foil characters occurs in *A Tale of Two Cities* when Sidney Carton is set up as a foil to Charles Darnay. Both characters look almost exactly alike: a fact that features prominently in the beginning of the book and sets the two of them up as foil characters. They also both love the same woman: Lucie Manette. But at that point, the similarities end: Carton is a drunkard and allows himself to be used by others, and Darnay is successful and strong-willed. By creating parallels and contrasts like this, Dickens brings both of these characters to the forefront of the book and uses their opposites as a way of deepening both characters. Their role as foil characters is critically important to the way the book ends, but I won't spoil the ending here. Foil characters are also often seen in superhero films, as the antagonist is often a foil of the main character. To look at some examples briefly, in *Captain America: The First Avenger*, both Captain America and Red Skull have immense physical prowess due to the serum, but one uses his power to preserve life while the other uses it to take life. In *Man of Steel*, both Superman and Zod have the same Kryptonian powers, but Superman uses it to preserve human-

ity while Zod tries to use it to preserve Krypton. This is less obvious, but also present in *Spiderman II*, where both Spiderman and Doctor Octopus share a similar love for science, but, more importantly to the plot, also have to choose in the movie between doing what's right and chasing after their dreams. The different routes they take then define their characters.

Hopefully, all these examples have begun to make it somewhat-clear what foil characters are and how they tend to be used in fiction. However, there is a distinction that needs to be drawn between minor characters when they act as foils and villains when they act the part.

Some writers argue that only minor characters can really be foils, and that villains are a separate category. I personally think the designation can be used for both: however, both do need to be considered somewhat-separately. When the hero and the villain are both acting as foils, the purpose of making the villain a foil is often to drive the story conflict. However, when the hero and a minor character are both acting as foils, then the foil often serves as a way of shedding light on what type of person the main character is. Because villains and minor characters serve different purposes in this role, it's important to keep this in mind when writing one of them into the role of a foil character. So, it's hopefully clear by now what foil characters are. However, you may still have a question, namely:

How can they be practically used?

One method is to set two foil characters against each other. All of my examples that I've given so far have been built off of this principle, so it should be pretty clear by now. My current work-in-progress, *Empyrean Vengeance* draws rather heavily on this principle as I set up my two protagonists as twin brothers in order to then showcase their differences—differences which end up driving most of the story. Essentially, to follow this method of foil characters, you take two semi-important characters, and then set them up as parallels and contrasts to each other in order to bring about your intended effect.

Another method is to create a web of foil characters. This web can accomplish many different things, but often is used to represent different paths the main character could end up taking, or different solutions to the protagonist's problem. For an example of this, let's look at one of the Christian writer's favorite classics: *The Lord of the Rings*. In the book, we can see many characters acting as foils to Frodo's struggle with the Ring. As a negative example, Gollum represents the worst possibility of what the Ring ends up turning everyone into if they give in to its power. Bilbo also acts like a foil by reminding Frodo (and the reader) that this change can happen to anyone. Boromir is slightly-less-corrupt than these, as he represents the temptation to use the Ring pragmatically to try and achieve peace.

On the positive side, however, Gandalf and Galadriel both represent the healthy fear that Frodo ought to have concerning the Ring. Tom Bombadil also possibly shows the freedom that the righteous ought to have, even with instruments of great destruction. However, his character is kind of complicated, so this interpretation is more speculative than my other examples. I'm sure you could draw similar elements from other characters as well.

Basically, what you have in the end is a whole web of characters acting as foils around each other based on the common interest of the Ring. And it's this interplay that makes the theme in *The Lord of the Rings* so well-done. Frodo is presented with many different possibilities for what he will become, and is tempted by each one of them in turn. But he is still able to make the right choice of which possibility to follow. And this isn't just seen in *The Lord of the Rings*. Other stories like *Crime and Punishment* or even a story as simple as *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* feature similar webs for a similar effect. As you can probably see, this method of utilizing foil characters puts more of the focus on the main character and who he is in the story. It's also a more complicated way of integrating it into your book, which can lead to a more complex theme.

There are a lot of different ways that foil characters can be used. But hopefully, this article has done its job of describing what they are, providing some

examples, and sparking your imaginations. Foil characters have a lot of potential, both in terms of writing a good story and in terms of executing a powerful theme. By showing different possibilities of how the main character can turn out, they provide the reader with a lot of case studies to look at. And by providing these sorts of positive and negative character examples, a writer can effectively develop and advance a theme without preaching.

Examples are important to developing moral character. Scripture warns us many times about who we associate with and also encourages us to imitate those who are worthy of imitation. By using these kinds of examples in your book, as an author, you can subtly encourage your readers to imitate the righteous and shun the wicked, and foil characters are a great way of doing this. So write subtle yet effective foil characters into your story. And then use those foils to bring about your point.

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10 ROMANTIC CLICHES TO BOYCOTT

BY MELODY FAITH

In our most popular article published this year, Melody examines the genre of romance and defines common clichés that are best steered clear of when writing a romance novel.

Romance. Generally, a genre I choose to steer clear of. Always. Which can occasionally put me in an awkward situation. Being a girl and all. I am just more of an action girl. It has always been my favorite. But I hear the word ‘romance’ and wince. I have nothing against those who love writing romance fiction; it is simply not my strong point. (Believe me, I tried. Don’t ask about it. It was ugly.)

Besides all this, I do appreciate some romance fiction; properly executed, I really love it. My favorite romance author is Francine Rivers. She is fantastic with the unexpected. I never know what direction the story is going to take, she keeps me guessing the whole time. I highly recommend her Mark of the Lion series.

Part of the reason I dislike a lot of romance is because of the way many writers handle it. So, I have compiled a little list of clichés and pitfalls in romance fiction. A lot of these I learned from experience when I attempted a romance.



1. Perfect guy falls for boring girl

The biggest cliché of all romance fiction. I am guilty of using this method in one of my stories. The nobody girl, struggling in life, not confident with her body, meets the hot, handsome, and successful guy who magically has interest in her over tons of other hot girls. Practically everyone has had this idea roll through their head while considering romance in a story. It's pretty typical. Awfully typical. This ties in with my next point.

2. The perfect guy

This one is the worst. It is all over the place. The guy has the absolute perfect body, great career path, and is fantastic at everything. But then, sometimes you have the counterpart, which can be equally annoying.

3. Losing plot as romance takes over

This is so painful. I look into a book, super excited with the description. But as I begin reading, I watch as the intricate and creative plot fades away. I beg for it to come back, but gradually its life has been sucked away by a sappy romance between the protagonist and a random side character.

4. Love at first sight

Cliché. Cliché written all over it. Butterflies in her stomach, the moment his hazel eyes met hers. Please no. If you do pull anything like this off, I appreciate it when it backfires on them. Princess Diaries is an awesome example. She has been dreaming about this hot shot forever, and finally she gets him. Only to be slapped in the face with the result. Make things unexpected.

5. Emotional issues solved by meeting their soul mate

You are introduced to an emotional wreck of a character who is magically cured when this guy appears in their life. There is nothing wrong with them being emotional wrecks. But don't pretend that a guy can fix all those for them. If

she is struggling with her body image, show how she conquers it—don't let the reader assume that a guy entering her life solves that problem.

6. Attraction based on physical appearance

Now this happens a whole lot more in books where romance is the subplot. The protagonist likes this girl, and they end up in a long term relationship, all based on how attracted they are physically to each other. Please, please add more to their relationship! Real romantic relationships should be more than attraction, so give your character a real relationship.

7. Characters get physical too soon

Unless your characters have been in a close relationship for some time, do not have them kissing in the second chapter. It is just disturbing. If your characters have known each other for a week or two, they should not be getting serious just yet.

8. Zero plot besides the romance

Some people like this method. I do not. There must be something else going on. I am not interested in all her emotional turmoil over this guy. We need to have something else to distract our attention besides the endless “he loves me, he loves me not” sob story. A simple little character goal on the side is fine. Make her attempting to get a job the whole book while also getting to know this guy who happens to work at the same place.

9. Romance between young characters

This one happens all the time in YA novels. Characters under the age of eighteen, having deep romantic relationships. A little playful liking to each other is fine. In fact, I enjoy a little bit of a crush throughout the story, or hints of a future relationship. But please spare me the long drawn out kissing scene between two fifteen year olds.

10. Girl realizes she doesn't need a guy to save her, but still gets the perfect guy in the end

This method is so popular today. Pop culture is all about how “You don't need a man to save you!” but we still have the girl falling in love with the guy in the end. Somehow she still gets the perfect, hot guy. If the girl doesn't want a guy to save her, great. Now, please don't give her the guy she trashed in the last chapter. Honestly, it is like objectifying the guy. “She doesn't need him to be saved! She is her own hero! But she still needs a boyfriend, so he can come back later.” If she is her own hero, but you still want her to have the guy in the end, make her treat the guy properly throughout the story; don't toss him to the side.

This list may seem overly critical, but that is just how I am with romance. It needs to be really good. These are some typical clichés authors fall into. Now is cliché always wrong? No, but that is an article for another day. These all tie back to what a good romance looks like.

Think about the real, romantic relationships you have seen. Do many of these points apply to them? Probably and hopefully not. It is just unrealistic. As writers it is our job to tell stories that are true. We want our reader to be able to relate, and apply what they read to the real world. Let's not give people unrealistic expectations for their future spouse. Let's encourage them that romance is beautiful and difficult. It's a struggle, but it is worth it.

honorable

MENTIONS

TOP 5 MYTHS TO AVOID WHEN WRITING ABOUT GRIEF

BY SIERRA RET

How do you realistically deal with grief in stories? In this thought-provoking article, Sierra debunks five myths people believe.



ARTICLE

TOP 5 MYTHS TO AVOID
WHEN WRITING ABOUT GRIEF

BY SIERRA RET

kingdompen.org

Character death is everywhere. A classic favorite among authors, playwrights, and script writers alike, its uses are numerous. Killing off a character can add realism, advance the plot, provide motivation for other individuals, or satisfy the audience with a well-deserved end. Although the exact circumstances of a character's death and the immediate impact on those who witness it are heavily covered in literature, a less commonly portrayed aspect of death is the long-term effects it has on those who experience it.

Mourning in literature is often seen as an obstacle to overcome. The assumption is that people in grief need to be cured, the melancholy mustn't drag on too long, and the most important goal is to make sure the loved one's death was not in vain. Sadly, these common themes in fiction are inherently

wrong. As respected bereavement counselor Earl Grollman once said, “Grief is not a disorder, a disease, or a sign of weakness. It is an emotional, physical, and spiritual necessity, the price you pay for love. The only cure for grief is to grieve.”

Sooner or later in life, everyone is forced to experience a deep loss. And without the guidance of counselors or family, the only voice telling people how to grieve is our shallow, profoundly confused culture. As authors, we do a disservice to our readers if our heroes are praised for ignoring their grief, or if the main obstacle is that the character just needs to decide to “be happy” again.

Since I have experienced a tragic loss personally and am closely involved with volunteer work at a local hospice, I know firsthand how shallow a story with glossed-over grief comes across. Furthermore, I know how cathartic it can be to sympathize with a well-written character as they work through their loss, with all of its rawness and hardship.

Our pens are under the same charge to convey truth as our lips, and we should not shirk from describing the pain and devastation that bereavement causes in our fallen world. Here are five myths to avoid the next time you write the death of a character.

Myth #1: Grief only lasts for about a year.

This is one of the most prevalent grief stereotypes (though in film it’s likely to be shortened even further). The truth is, grief never completely ends. The wound will heal over time and the pain won’t seem as raw, but the scar never entirely fades. Some people find the second year of grief to be even harder than the first, as the rest of the world moves on and forgets. If your characters act like everything’s fine and dandy again after a year, they probably haven’t taken time to fully grieve their loss.

Myth #2: Showing grief and tears is a sign of weakness.

Some people take pride in keeping a stiff upper lip, not crying, donating or disposing of the deceased's belongings after a short time, making all apparent efforts to move on, etc. These "signs of strength" are praised by outsiders and those unfamiliar with grief, but may indicate that the bereaved are failing to address their grief. This can be particularly difficult for men, whose pain is no less poignant than women's, but are instead expected to remain strong and hide their emotions.

Writing a character who keeps his or her grief bottled up without suffering any ill effects is in most cases unrealistic. Children who don't have healthy outlets for their emotions can be more prone to angry and violent outbursts. Adults who don't cry may suffer more internal havoc, as tears contain toxic chemicals brought on by the stress response. Having a good cry is a healthy way to release these toxins and acts as a natural stress reliever.

Contemplate how much your character is inclined to cry and what it would take to bring them to that point, as this (like all aspects of grief) is highly individualized.

Another facet to consider is your characters' childhood. Parents who aren't afraid to show grief in front of their children actually help by modeling healthy behaviors to cope with loss. The manner in which your characters express grief should reflect on their upbringing and how their immediate family handled tragedy.

Myth #3: Only weak Christians struggle with grief.

If the characters in your story are strong believers, it may seem tempting to glaze over their grief, because they know in the end that everything will be all right. Although this fact is unquestionably true, it does not mean that the brutal, throbbing ache in the heart after a loss is any less real. Even Jesus, who knew he was about to bring Lazarus back from the grave, wept.

First Thessalonians 4:13 is often quoted by well-meaning but clueless com-

forters. “Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope.” Paul is not condemning grief in general, but specifically grief without hope. It is still a crushing burden to go on living each day, inexorably separated from your loved one for the entirety of your life on earth. The Bible is full of characters who wept and refused to be comforted, and death is shown to be the enemy of mankind (1 Cor. 15:26). But hope for eternity might be the saving grace that keeps your characters moving—the only thing that makes their pain bearable.

The catchy phrase “those who believe need not grieve” simply isn’t true. Grief can be used as a powerful force to drive a character closer to or further from God, and should not be minimized.

Myth #4: Everyone goes through the five stages of grief.

This list of emotions was first “discovered” in 1969 by Swiss psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross when she wrote about them at length in her book *On Death and Dying*, which was based on her work with terminally ill patients. These are usually summarized as denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Since then the list has been treated as the world standard for understanding grief, which its own author regretted (*The 5 Stages of Grief and Other Lies that Don’t Help Anyone*). Unfortunately, real life is more complex than a tidy five-point list, and the vast range of human experience means that grief is neither orderly nor predictable.

As you write your characters through their loss, don’t feel confined by this list. There will never be a typical response to loss, because no loss is typical. Humans have a vast array of emotions and reactions, and it’s important to express that variety. Within a single family or group, each member will express themselves differently, and often not in harmony. The already complex emotions of a person may be further complicated by the grief of those around them.

Myth #5: The goal of grief is to let go and move on.

In past eras, people were allowed more time to grieve, and they did it in public. Think of the women wailing in the streets during the funeral procession that Jesus interrupted, or aristocratic widows who painted their rooms black and dressed in mourning the rest of their lives. Infant mortality and death in general was more common, and people accepted it. Today in our western world we keep death and grief at arms' length, and we dislike being around people who are sad or talking about it.

People who are facing loss and trauma are pressured to carry on with life and forget their grief. Expecting someone to just “move on” when the very fabric of their former life has been torn to shreds reveals ignorance and lack of compassion. C.S. Lewis summarized the problem well in his book, *A Grief Observed* : “We were promised sufferings. They were part of the program. We were even told, ‘Blessed are they that mourn,’ and I accept it. I’ve got nothing that I hadn’t bargained for. Of course it is different when the thing happens to oneself, not to others, and in reality, not imagination.”

The depth of pain that death causes can only be fully understood after experiencing it. However, that doesn't mean people who have never experienced loss can't write well or movingly about it. But a combination of research and empathy is required. Reading blogs of people currently enduring grief can be a good way to see what daily life is like, with all its peaks and troughs. Grief should not be written as a problem for the protagonist to conquer or a plot line to eventually tie into a neat bow. Rather, it should be presented as an opportunity for growth as the characters learn to live with the loss, and not merely forget it.

Writing Grief Well

As the author of your story, you are of course at liberty to ignore any of the errors I've pointed out. Maybe you're writing a fantasy piece about emotionally disconnected immortals who've lost all capacity to grieve, or you want to write a character who poorly handles his loss, thus pushing him further down the path to destruction. But the key is how these reactions are portrayed. Don't try to glorify stoicism or denial anymore more than you would extreme violence or ambition.

“Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep,” Romans 12:15 tells us. As writers, we can take that exhortation to heart by treating grief with the significance and compassion it merits.



Sierra Ret

Sierra Ret is a homeschool student who spent nearly her entire childhood with her nose buried in a book, and consequently decided she wanted to write one of her own (preferably filled with dwarves and elves). Actually getting her thoughts down on paper regularly has proven to be a far greater challenge than she first thought, but Kingdom Pen was kind enough to step in and give her some much-needed deadlines by honouring her with a temporary spot on their writing team. When not hermiting behind a laptop screen, Sierra enjoys gallivanting across Canada and adventuring near her home in rural Ontario with her family. Currently her chief fantasies include making a living as a travel blogger and someday moving to New Zealand. But above all, her chief aim is to live a passionate and meaningful life for the glory of God.

POTSHARDS

BY SARAH SPRADLIN

How do you handle the challenges of moving from childhood into adulthood? In this beautifully evocative poem, Sarah explores one element of this transition.



When I was younger,
 I collected potshard stories
 about a place where grown-ups lived.
 I wondered about it on summer days—
 feet had grass-tickled toes and mud-caked heels,
 fingers were perches for butterfly kisses,
 ears were homes for the angels' laughter,
 eyes were puddles for shooting stars to land,
 lips were promises of bedtime stories and adventure.
 People in those places,
 pinecone textbooks told me,
 had a kind of fluorescent-kissed skin.
 They stayed in these
 forests of cookie-cutter cubes and cork board canopies
 held up by aching metal arms and cold, stilt-like trunks.

Maybe I'll never grow up;
 grown-ups always find what they aren't searching for,
 tucked away in their offices,
 happily perpetual acquaintances
 used for good mornings and good evenings and good weekends,
 then tossed away,
 tempered by the cold,

fragile like their hands,
with fingers like spit-shined soldiers clicking across keyboards,
always carefully watched after.
If I never grow up, then perhaps I'll never find it—
I'll never wander onto haggard, threadbare gray carpets
in shoes that feel like balloons,
chain myself to a world governed by ticking clocks,
buzzing, humming, whispering machines that steal away the smell of rain;
I can hear myself breathing.
I am afraid;
what if I forget what sunrises feel like
and warmth that floods like late-August storms—
that clears the sleep from my eyes?
That friendship isn't about holding a cardboard of highlights
as much as it is cleaning off the cobwebs around doors
and exchanging stories with something beautifully old-school,
mumbling in the backdrop of days that leave you tired—
dirty, aching, full of so much life.
Could I forget drawing lines in my palms,
covered in God-knows-what from God-knows-where,
hidden under a noonday sun and azure sky
that have washed away worries with simpler things
like earth beneath nails.
I pray it never washes away—
that I never forget what it feels like
to push past my breaking point
and live,
leaning into the seat of a pickup truck that makes me feel

ten feet taller and smile five feet wider.
Work smells like home,
and you smell filthy,
but all I can taste is victory and dust
kicked up by tires that have tread many miles on unpaved roads
and untilled soil.
I am afraid I might forget how much I need these simple moments—
these lessons I don't deserve,
but someday I hope I might
claim this land like it claimed me;
my heart is overflowing,
so I'm drawing my line in the sand
with potshards from a place where grown-ups go
and I have visited,
in hands that extend brotherhood, callouses, and push-pin grease.
The dust and grime of the field has flown north,
made its home where it has landed
on my skin, I find new islands in the uncharted waters
of arms always reaching (often trembling),
only now arriving to this conclusion:
one day I plan to lose myself
in a forest that never stops reaching for its creator
with gnarled fingers that hold up the sky by day,
but let darkness fall by night
and follow the path of stars instead,
veiled elsewhere by spotlights that never reach them.
A forest never stops growing, giving;
it forgives the rain for its faithlessness,



and man for his forgetfulness.

It has a ceiling that leaks;

it isn't safe,

but it smells suspiciously like home.

These potshard stories have their cracks,

and as I clamber through them,

I know I love this place

where the artist-in-residence created the universe

and mud pies.

Sarah Spradlin



If you've ever emailed us at KP, you've probably "met" Sarah—a passionate storyteller with a huge heart that loves Jesus and everyone she meets. Sarah grew up in Georgia with her mom, dad, and little sister, Merry, where she attends the University of Georgia, majoring in International Affairs and Agriculture Communication. When she graduates, Sarah wants to help people all over the world succeed in the agriculture industry and tell the all-important story of the farmer. She joined the Kingdom Pen Team as Secretary in September 2013 and now serves as the Director of Community Happiness. Sarah has been homeschooled, private-schooled, and graduated from Madison County High School in May 2015. She attended Summit in July 2015. She'll read pretty much anything (if she had to pick, though, her favorite author would be Frank Peretti) and has tried her hand at pretty much every kind of writing out there, though she likes writing fiction and poetry best.

SOMEBODY'S LOCKET

BY HANNAH CARMICHAEL

Once you've chosen to remove yourself from the world so that you can stay safe from pain, how do you engage in it again? In this moving poem, Hannah describes how one girl manages to break free.

She lives in someone's locket
Alone and tucked away

She wishes they would stop it
And she wishes she could stay
Inside of someone's locket
So pain would not quite hurt
She wouldn't have to watch it
As people all left her
But someone pried it open
The locket could not hide
The girl that lived there broken
The treasure lost inside
He cut his finger on the frame
Of her jagged home
But held His hand out freely
And asked her, "come?"
But fearfully she stepped back
Someone's locket was her home

How could she leave the darkness
She'd learned to call her own?
And though she could not see it



That darkness was a thief
It ate up all the light and love
And left her fear and grief
But He would not give up on her
He pulled her from her tomb
The locket sucked Him in instead
And covered Him in it's gloom
She couldn't open someone's locket
No matter how hard she tried
He took her place in side her cage
And for her love He died
And on the third day the locket snapped
But no man lay inside
She felt a hand upon her back
It was He who she thought had died
Alive again He kept her close
And sent her into the world
She needed to tell others about
The Man who had saved a lost girl
She lived inside a locket
But no longer was that her home
He'd fixed her up and claimed her
He called her his very own
She now had a new locket
One she called her heart
And He lived there inside it
He'd made it a work of art



Hannah Carmichael

Hannah Carmichael has been writing short stories since she was seven and has been drawing ever since she first discovered that pencils aren't food. She hopes to become a published author and illustrator. She is currently working on editing the sequel to her first work in progress along with planning her next.

Hannah was fully homeschooled from square one and currently floats in that odd void between graduation and college.

Her main goal is to write for the Lord and bring hope into the darkness that is our world through her words and artistic creations.

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Please continue to pray for Kingdom Pen in 2017. Your prayers and faithfulness are a huge encouragement to us. We look forward to seeing God's kingdom advanced through Christian writers like you this year and in the years to come!

-The KP Staff

"Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

Phillipians 3:13-14