



# LAMP

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LAMP is a literary magazine which publishes creative pieces and critical essays written by current students and alumni of Liberty University; the views expressed are those of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect those of the LAMP staff or Liberty University. LAMP aspires to stimulate readers both within and outside the University with the creativity and critical work of its contributors.



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*General Faculty Advisor*

Dr. Karen Swallow Prior

*Graphics / Layout Faculty Advisor*

Professor Edward Edman

*General Editor*

C. Ryan Knight

*Graphics / Layout Editor*

Cara Williams

*General Editor*

Nick Olson

*Contributing Editor: Nonfiction*

Sanuel Loncar

*Reader: Fiction*

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*Reader: Poetry*

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# LAMP

April 2010 - ISSUE

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FRONT AND BACK COVER BY CARA WILLIAMS  
LAMP LOGO BY JOHN CARL

# Letter from the General Editor:

In this issue of LAMP – the fourth and final of the 2009-2010 academic school year – a baton of sorts is being passed: C. Ryan Knight will graduate in May, and I will guide LAMP into its promising future. Two years ago Ryan and I engaged in a conversation about the mutual desire to see a magazine of sorts distributed on Liberty University’s campus and in the Lynchburg area that allowed for the publication of poetry, short fiction, and varieties of non-fiction; though many people have played a significant role in LAMP’s birth and gradual growth, a great deal of gratitude is owed to Ryan for enduring the many birth pangs associated with undertaking the Editor position of a new publication. Yet, perhaps most importantly, Ryan has been instrumental in edifying the “community of writers” on LU’s campus; he leaves us with two pieces of poetry in this issue for our consideration.

And it is precisely a sense of *community* that LAMP aims to cultivate within the Lynchburg area and beyond – a community of interlocutors that provides both active and written *prosaic gestures* for one another. The imprints of this goal are all over this issue: two former students in the LU community – Samuel Loncar and Jennifer Schmidt – have contributed essays, respectively, on what it means to pursue inhabitation in the academic community with the primary goal of pursuing truth, and on aspects of life in the Lynchburg community; a former student of my own, Jonathan Devin, has contributed a poem; and I am pleased to present LAMP’s first interview – a discussion regarding film with author and editor Jeffrey Overstreet.



Voices concerned with the betterment of our community – from within and without, from former and current presences, students and colleagues – contribute warnings, reminders, and pleasures to our ever-forward sojourn. Yet, even in this temporal existence, we wayfarers grasp for a sense of *home* with one another; that is, we all long for the edification and upbuilding that promote and instill acceptance and loving-kindness within a community – even if, in this life, permanence is beyond reach.

In an interview regarding her award-winning novel *Home* (reviewed in this issue by Anna Batson), Marilynne Robinson comments that “the real emotional content of lives tends to be negotiated in terms of small gestures, little courtesies towards one another, little provisions for one another's comfort, and that whether we're conscious of these things or not we read them continuously as a sort of [pause] we see them as the fabric of our lives with others, and I think that a great deal of generosity and care and love and so on are communicated in what we would call prosaic gestures, and that's just lovely to me.”

Me, too.

Nick Olson  
LAMP General Editor

# On Lynchburg: Sometimes First Impressions are the Least Reliable

Jennifer Schmidt

Within the span of ten days I had decided to transfer universities. The timing only intensified an already stark contrast. From a state university housing over 35,000 students and residing a short train ride from New York City, I had decided to move to Lynch . . . berg? I wasn't sure on the spelling, but the name's connotation was enough for me to conveniently forget it. And, despite its classification as a city, I could think of it as nothing more than a big town. Cities demand gridded blocks of government housing, parking meters, and the semblance of a foreign district. Not only was Lynchburg lacking such definitive characteristics, but it constituted nothing more in my estimation than a sprawling mass of crisscrossing roads. It's not a stretch to say I had low expectations for my new surroundings; in fact, I would go so far as to say I had no expectations at all.

I rarely ventured farther than Wards Road during my early years in Lynchburg. I considered Timberlake Road an adventure "to the other side" and only heard of the downtown district in the news. New friendships made near the end of college, however, led to some unexpected discoveries, and they in turn spawned further interest on my part. Of course, these discoveries were not clandestine secrets as much as they were features simply overlooked on my part. The more I ventured from the typical dollar theater and Macado's routine, the more surprises I found. Hiking the Blue Ridge Mountains between Lynchburg and Roanoke, traversing creek beds and streams, canoeing the James beneath the shower of the geyser, and finding roadside stores with homemade peach ice cream were experiences both foreign and transcendent. Through them all, I was changing and slowly beginning to love this ill-named town of the south.

Now, five years after moving here, I am more firmly convinced than ever that Lynchburg is a fascinating enigma; it defies simple categorizing. Its rich history spanning over 200 years is evident from the cobblestones of Commerce Street to the ancient head stones dotting the horizon of the Old City Cemetery. I've also learned that this town was not named for a despicable practice, but rather after a certain John Lynch, a progressively minded entrepreneur who established a ferry crossing in the mid-1700s. Arts, theatre, agriculture, economics, and education all hold equal and well-

established footings here, reminding me that Lynchburg is a place built by the dead and appreciated by the living. Over time, whether biking Black Water Creek trails, perusing wares at the Community Market, or enjoying an outdoor production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, I've realized how much there is to enjoy here.

Perhaps it was my original disposition which made me all the more receptive and grateful for the variegated facets of Lynchburg. Over time my opinion of Lynchburg has slowly changed from that of a place meant to be survived to one that cannot be forgotten. Much like the story of two lovers who hated one another upon introduction only to fall in love years down the road, my appreciation for Lynchburg is now unmatched by any single place.

Driving the now familiar curves of Route 221 on my way to work, I daily anticipate the breaking of the horizon with the mountains – the dramatic and ever changing beauty of those blue ridges. More than anything, it is this natural phenomenon that has made me forgetful of the big city life. Adam speaks in Twain's fictional account of the Garden of Eden of Eve's fascination with stars, saying, "None of them is of any practical value, so far as I can see, but because they have color and majesty, that is enough for her, and she loses her mind over them."

It's a similar insanity that binds a girl with Jersey roots to such an Eden as Lynchburg.



Untitled  
Chelsea Courtney



# Kayley's Last Notation

Jonathan Devin

A gentle hum numbs the ear: static in the wind now.

Composed with other lost notes and melodies never to be heard,  
Save in that second of collision, the soft blurs quietly observed.

Quotation and notation, direction for the lost,

And orange haze with cocktails tickles nostrils straight across.



Goodbye Balloons  
Cara Williams

# Domestic Complexities

## Marilynne Robinson, *Home: A Novel*

(Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 2008)

Reviewed by Anna Batson

Mirroring the events of her Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *Gilead*, Marilynne Robinson's newest novel, *Home*, takes place in the same small town but tells the story from a very different perspective. *Home* is a luminous, profound novel that explores the question, "What does it mean to come home?" through the prodigal-son story of Jack Boughton, his father, the Reverend Boughton, and his sister, Glory. Jack returns to Gilead and his family destitute and an alcoholic, but begins to forge a bond with Glory, who, after breaking off an engagement, has only moved back to Gilead to take care of their ailing father. The simplicity of the narrative allows Robinson to develop individuals who are deeply complex and even contradictory, individuals in whom we recognize qualities of our family and friends, and even of ourselves. Through these characters, Robinson convincingly illustrates that it is only within the safe haven of community—particularly family—that grief and hurt can be overcome and the soul finally find rest in its "home."

For the Boughtons, home is not simply a street address, but also the residence of tradition, memory, and inevitable pain. Recounted primarily from Glory's perspective, the Boughtons' interactions represent a long history of disappointment, loyalty, and forgiveness that creates a beautiful portrayal of the costs and rewards of family relationships. The Reverend's pain resulting from Jack's transgressions is



especially poignant, for although his favored son chose to become a philanderer and a drunkard, “forgiving [Jack] was deeper even than habit, since it was in fact the sum and substance of loyalty.” Glory and Jack’s familiarity increases as they each become aware of the other’s trials; at one point, Glory reprimands Jack, whispering, “Has it ever, ever occurred to you that you are not the only miserable person in this house?” Her frustrations with Jack are intensely personal, as they bring to light her own shortcomings and disappointments. Ultimately, however, the persistence of honesty and steadfast, familial love results in a catharsis that, though it does not lead to a “happy ending” *per se*, “implies that help and kindness and loyalty are owed where they are perhaps by no means merited. Owed, that is, even to ourselves.”

Robinson complements her beautiful themes with beautiful prose. In *Gilead*, the expression is breathtaking, reflecting deep meditation on the significance of language. In *Home*, Robinson’s prose takes a turn from *Gilead* toward simplicity, largely due to a significant increase in dialogue, but does not sacrifice the richness of prose that has established Robinson’s acclaim. Read aloud, the words are soft-spoken and gentle, an ideal vehicle for her exploration of “home,” in all its intricate complexities. In the end, we are reminded that “home” is not so much about a place, but about people and their need to be forgiven, accepted, and made whole. “In destitution,” Robinson writes,

[E]ven of feeling or purpose, a human being is more hauntingly human and vulnerable to kindnesses because there is the sense that things should be otherwise, and then the thought of what is wanting and what alleviation would be and how the soul could be put at ease, restored. At home. But the soul finds its own home if it ever has a home at all.



# On “Dangerous Moviegoing”: An Interview with Jeffrey Overstreet

Nick Olson

(Jeffrey Overstreet is in the midst of writing a fantasy series entitled Auralia’s Thread. The first two novels in this series – *Auralia’s Colors* and *Cyndere’s Midnight* – were published in 2007 and 2008, respectively. *Raven’s Ladder*, the third of the intended four-novel series, was released in February of this year. Jeffrey’s award-winning writing regarding the arts – particularly film – has been published in *Image*, *Christianity Today*, and *Paste*. He is a contributing editor to Seattle Pacific University’s *Response* magazine and publishes frequently on his web site, Lookingcloser.org. Jeffrey’s 2007 *Through a Screen Darkly*, is a self-proclaimed “travelogue of dangerous moviegoing.” It is with interest in Jeffrey’s approach to film-watching that I am here presently engaging him).

**In your book, *Through a Screen Darkly*, you make a distinction between films that are merely entertaining and films that point to beauty and mystery. In your mind, are there some general distinctions between these two types of films? Are the films being produced a reflection of the consumers and their culture?**

Some movies give us stuff to *watch*, stuff that provokes immediate *reactions* — gasps, laughs, groans, screams. They’re like rides; you buy a ticket, you have some thrills, and then you may buy a ticket to go do the same thing again. I just saw *The Wolf Man*, and it was kind of like that. It was fun while it lasted. But few of those movies improve with each ride. They leave you wanting something more.

Have you seen *Bedtime Stories*, starring Adam Sandler? I hope, for your sake, that you haven’t. I had to watch that movie on an airplane. It was awful. It’s one of those movies that tries to give people *everything* they want: true love, racy romance, cute kids, adult humor, wild special effects, grotesque monsters, *Princess-Bride* chivalry, make-believe sports along the lines of Harry Potter’s quidditch matches. It even has a break dancing guinea pig. It’s absolutely ridiculous. And it throws these things at you furiously, as if the filmmakers assume their audience has a serious A.D.D.

That’s not why I go to the movies. I go because I want to have an experience that will make me feel *and* think. I want movies that will give me questions to consider,

matters to discuss and debate, and they give us reason to go back and think through the experience.

If I'm paying ten bucks to see something on a big screen, I want something more than just a camera turned on while actors recite lines or crash cars. I want to see something that uses the big screen as a canvas, revealing images that invite us to consider their composition, and to ponder the relationships between light, dark, performances, writing, editing, and more.

Far too often, I walk away from movies that are no more memorable than the previews that played in front of them. Many — perhaps even most — American movies are constructed by committees who load them with whatever flashy elements will put butts in theater seats. They keep our eyes on the screen, but they give nothing to our gray matter. Art requires participation, but most movies these days don't inspire much more than a reaction.

My favorite films are those that — even if I find them difficult or challenging or even boring at first — are still on my mind days, weeks, even years later. I like films that draw me back to keep thinking about them, to keep watching them and discussing them and interpreting them.

**If your life was threatened to give a response, what are your five favorite films in order (the five films that you have enjoyed most or having impacted your life most)? Also, what were some of your favorite films in 2009? And why?**

Oh, it wouldn't take a threat! I'm always happy to rave about my personal favorites. There are several movies I try to see at least once a year, because I get so much out of them every time. But they're all very different, and they require close attention.

*Wings of Desire*, by director Wim Wenders, is like an epic poem about curious angels, broken human beings, and the full range of human experience.

*Three Colors: Blue* is a beautiful meditation on grief, art, and freedom, made by my all-time favorite director, Krzysztof Kieslowski. Juliette Binoche gives my favorite performance by an actress.

Terrence Malick's film *The New World* revisits early America and the story of Pocahontas and John Smith, and it becomes a hymn to the beauty of creation, and an epic poem about the struggle between the ego and the conscience.

*Babette's Feast*, by Gabriel Axel, is one of the greatest pictures of grace I've ever seen.

And then there's *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, by Steven Spielberg, which is my favorite

adventure film of all time. It takes the conventions of cliffhangers and fills them up with something transcendent. It has great characters, snappy dialogue, awe-inspiring stunts, and a compelling story that subverts common hero stories and gives God the last word. There are many other adventure films I love—like *The Empire Strikes Back* and *The Fellowship of the Ring*—but in my opinion, *Raiders* has no equal.

Looking back at 2009, which was a great year for adventurous moviegoers, I found several I'd like to have in my personal collection: *Summer Hours*, *Munyarungabo*, *Seraphine*, *Up*, *The Class*, *Lake Tahoe*, *A Serious Man*, *Gomorra*, *Coraline*, and *Where the Wild Things Are*. I could write a book on any of these films.

**Christians have the tendency to judge a film by its content. That is, if there is immorality present in the film, then the film is “bad” or it would be imprudent for a Christian to view it. Do you think that it is merely a matter of a film maker portraying truthful consequences to actions? Or is there a certain line that even Christian artists shouldn’t cross in their depictions?**

Well, some films portray immorality. And some films carry out immorality. It's difficult to discern sometimes, but it's crucial that we learn the difference. It's one thing to expose evil, by portraying it and its consequences. It's quite another thing to portray evil in a seductive or glamorous way, so that audiences enjoy some kind of lurid thrill.

It's dangerous to portray people behaving badly and then leave out the consequences of such behavior. Sure, the consequences are ugly, but they're true. Martin Scorsese's gangster movies are violent because the criminals in his stories live lives of reckless indulgence. If he didn't show the messy consequences of their behavior, the audience might be seduced by the allure of money, sex, and luxury. It's just as important to be honest about the consequences of materialism, or mean-spirited humor, or greed, or ego, too.

Artists should show love for their audiences just as much as they show love for their subject. That means if they're portraying evil, they should do so truthfully, avoiding any kind of excess. Excess hurts art. I'm always reminding myself of this as I write my fantasy novels. *Auralia's Colors*, *Cyndere's Midnight*, and *Raven's Ladder* all have a lot of darkness and violence in them. If any element of a movie or a story draws too much attention to itself in relationship to the rest of the picture, that's damaging to the art and, potentially, to the audience.

I think Christians should adhere to the same rules that govern other artists. Pursue truth, pursue beauty, pursue excellence. Avoid anything that reduces the art to an

act of ego, indulgence, or propaganda. We should be especially honest in portrayals of faith. Most so-called “Christian entertainment” I have seen seem to promise that Christian faith will deliver happiness and wishes that come true. That’s a lie. And it will harden people’s hearts toward Christian faith, because they’ll see us as false advertisers.

But there are some additional considerations for Christian artists. Christian artists know they’re serving the Almighty, so they’d better care about learning how to make art with excellence. That requires a lot of study. Further, we know where our inspiration comes from, so we should work with humility and grace. And we should attend to the creative expressions of others with compassion and humility, rather than a spirit of judgment and moral condemnation. Most “Christian criticism” I read consists of a long list of complaints, and very little thoughtful interpretation.

**I love that you cite Flannery O’Connor when speaking of “excesses” in art. You note that pornography, for instance, would be an excess. What exactly do you mean by this and are there other “excesses” that are not as overt as sexuality that average film-goers feast upon today to their unwitting spoil?**

There are so many forms of dangerous and destructive excess in art. Christians get so focused on sex, violence, and bad language that they become blind to the excesses in what passes for “Christian art.”

For example, we’ve become accustomed to excessive glamour and materialism. Just watch any half-hour of prime time TV – a drama, a comedy, whatever. Tell me, is it true to life? Or are the people made up to appeal to us sexually, or are they excessively entertaining just to hold our attention? If they are exaggerated, is it a purposeful exaggeration? (*The Simpsons* exaggerates all the time, but for good reason. By exaggerating, they help us see the ironies and absurdity of our own behavior.) Most of the exaggeration we see in TV and the movies exists just to appeal to our attention. And oftentimes, that’s appealing to our baser appetites.

You’ll probably see characters wearing very expensive clothes and makeup, actors who have gone to great and even unethical extremes to appear attractive, cars that are brand new and very expensive, and home environments that nobody I know could possibly afford. Most adventure films pour on the violence merely to entertain us, but do those scenes really contribute substantially to the storytelling? Most comedies go for the easiest laughs, and that means they’re excessively crass. Musical soundtracks often push us to experience particular emotions that the movie itself hasn’t earned. And most Christian movies are excessively judgmental, or they promise things beyond what the Gospel really promises — like happiness, and



Untitled  
Chelsea Courtney



wishes that come true.

**You discuss the ability – you call it a “science” that you want to learn – to sift art for meaning. Do you believe all Christians are equipped, or called, to attempt or pursue this sifting? Are some more equipped than others to sift through more “restricted” material?**

Philippians 4 exhorts all believers to let their minds “dwell” on “whatever is excellent, whatever is worthy of praise.” We’re supposed to “test all things and hold fast to what is good,” according to First Thessalonians. Paul was an effective teacher in Athens because he knew the popular beliefs and poetry and culture. He was able to recite pagan poetry, and then he was able to show how even the pagan imagination was pointing toward the “Unknown God.”

Now, not everybody has time or money to go to a lot of movies or watch a lot of television. But when we *do* choose to sit down and open our eyes and ears to the culture and its entertainment, we have a responsibility to exercise our conscience, and to make wise choices.

In Romans 14, we’re told, “One man’s faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables.” Clearly, this is a metaphoric statement. But it’s true. Some people I know can work in very corrupt places, do good work, and come away unaffected. Others would be distraught after an hour in the same place, or else badly influenced by that corruption.

In the same way, some people have a sensibility that can encounter visions of severe darkness and find something meaningful there; others would like to think so, but the destructive effect of the profanity or the violence might be greater than anything they might learn from the story.

Hebrews 15 says, “Solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves up to know good from evil.” And First Corinthians says, “Everything is permissible for me—but not everything is beneficial. Everything is permissible for me—but I will not be mastered by anything.” Each person needs to attend to his or her own conscience and behave accordingly.

**Christians often cry for more “Christian films” like *Passion of the Christ* or *The Lord of the Rings* or *The Chronicles of Narnia*, but seem to automatically condemn and dismiss films that are not overtly Christian in this way. Is there such a thing as a “Christian film?”**

God made all of us in his image, which means we all have some kind of God-given creativity. What’s more, we all have eternity written in our hearts. That means that

truth, beauty, excellence — all of the stuff that reflects God's glory — can come shining through the work of any artistic human being, believer or unbeliever.

I've been drawn closer to God by the truth and beauty in more movies made by unbelievers than ones made by Christians. And most of the movies made by professing Christians are usually more focused on preaching a lesson, or advertising Christianity, than they are at giving us an imaginative experience worth talking about.

I don't like using "Christian" as an adjective. Should I go looking for a Christian surgeon, or a good surgeon? Should I look for a Christian mechanic, or an expert mechanic? Should we eat Christian meals, or nutritious meals? Should we drive Christian cars, or cars that are made well? Good work honors God, whether the worker knows it or not.

The truth is, there were several movies released in the last few years that came from Christian filmmakers. They were beautiful, thought-provoking films. But they were overlooked by Christian audiences. Why? Were they poorly made? No, they won international awards. Did they cover up the issues of faith? Not at all. One — *Seraphine* — dealt with faith directly, and it won more awards in France than any other movie this year. Another — *Ostrov (The Island)* — was given public blessings by priests and bishops who would stand in prayer outside the theaters when the film opened in Moscow. Another — *Munyurangabo* — had an American director, Lee Isaac Chung, who spoke very openly in interviews about his faith, and about how he made the movie with the help of a Youth With a Mission team in Africa. Roger Ebert called that one "a masterpiece." But I'll bet most Christians didn't give it a second glance in the video store.

So, why did most Christians ignore these films? Perhaps it was because the movies did not provide simplistic "messages" like you might get in a children's Sunday school class. Perhaps it was because they weren't advertised as "Christian." Or perhaps it was because American Christians can be as lazy as most other Americans, bothered by anything foreign or subtitled. Perhaps it was because Christians are, like most audiences, bothered by unattractive characters — and believe me, these movies did *not* focus on glamorous celebrities.

So when many Christians start complaining that there aren't any good movies out there that reflect the love and glory of God, they just don't know what they're talking about. They just show how little effort they've put into the search for meaningful art.

**I noticed in your book *Through a Screen Darkly* that you devote a significant**

section to Michael Gondry's *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, a film that you recently devoted a blog post to and that was voted by *Christianity Today* editors as the top film in 2004. What is it about Gondry's film that is so well done technically and what is it about his film's content that resonates with so many Christians? What principles about good films can be drawn from this one in judging other films?

Well, *Eternal Sunshine* is a unique film – and a discomfoting one.

It's discomfoting because its characters are like real people—they're charming and offensive, beautiful and ugly, strong and weak. The movie is brave enough to argue with the typical Hollywood definition of true love. It dares to show us how hard it can be to truly love someone, in spite of their failures and flaws.

And, like any good work of art, the form of *Eternal Sunshine* complements its function. It takes place in the minds of characters whose brains are breaking apart, and so the structure of the movie itself is fragmented, throwing us backward and forward, mixing things up, contradicting itself.

But I wouldn't say it is an example for all other filmmakers, except in the fact that it has admirable themes and artistic excellence. Filmmakers need to consider the needs of their own particular project, and the needs of their audience as well. They need to take care to ensure that nothing in their film is out of place or excessive. If it's scary, there should be a reason for that. If it's explicit, they'd better be able to explain why that graphic material was necessary. Every piece should enhance the whole, with excellence.

**At the end of your book, you give suggested films for discussion groups. I'm interested in your emphasis on community in this respect. Why do you recommend discussion groups? What role does community play in this discussion of Christians and film?**

In my experience of art and entertainment, I've been so grateful to be part of thoughtful classes and communities. Experiencing, considering, and discussing art together, we've learned a great deal about ourselves and each other. And our eyes have often been opened to aspects of the art that we would have missed otherwise. Some of my favorite movies are films that didn't impress me the first time, but later I came to see their significance by talking to someone else or reading a review.



# Intersection

Emily Anne Boyter

People say decisions loom,  
threaten like a thunderhead...

but mine look more  
like a fog-enfolded road  
splitting vaguely  
in two directions;  
six feet of muddy track  
matted thick with soggy leaves  
is a poor indicator  
of where a road leads.

"Make a list," they tell me,  
"a list of pros and cons. That  
should do the trick."

I stand in the drizzle,  
and in my need to understand,

I make a god  
of clarity.

I linger, torn, because  
the only thing I have  
to live with  
after this intersection  
is the road  
my choice will put me on



Half a City Life  
Cara Williams

# The Intellectual Life:

## An Essay

Samuel Loncar

In his wonderful book *The Intellectual Life: Its Spirit, Conditions, Methods*, A. G. Sertillanges says that a man can devote himself to the intellectual life if he has two hours every day to practice his calling. Being paid for this vocation is a luxury of the few, just as being paid to work in a job that directly supports this vocation is also a rare luxury. [Throughout this essay, A. G. Sertillanges's words are set apart in italics] *When we speak of vocation, we refer to those who intend to make intellectual work their life, whether they are entirely free to give themselves up to study, or whether, though engaged in some calling, they hold happily in reserve, as a supplement of their activity and as a reward, the development and deepening of their mind.*

We like to think we know exactly what our calling will entail, like working in a university, or being paid as a researcher. But these proper goals, towards which we order our lives to fulfill our calling, are not guaranteed us. I know I am called to pursue and share truth; I believe I am called to pursue and share truth in the university. Thus I order my life towards that latter, proximate end as a way of working towards the former, ultimate end. But many believe they are called to the university; some of us are, *by necessity, wrong* – we know this because there are not enough places for all of us. When we overly specify our calling, we open ourselves to a deep blindness, one that stops us from seeing other opportunities as anything but failures. Thus the scorn we heap on other avenues, righteously sure that these will not, cannot, be our fate. This involves confusing our good desires with our calling. Some people happily get what they desire. They often have an academic variation on the theme philosophers call 'moral luck.' Others work equally hard, lacking this luck, and through their frustrated desires God teaches them other ways in which they can fulfill their calling.

A Christian professor can know he is called, now, to be a professor; a Christian student can know, now, he is called to be a student. A student cannot know, now, he is called to be a professor. He believes. Tomorrow he may die. In six months his life may radically change. In a year his parents may require his personal care. The future is not given to us, except for to plan in prudence and wisdom. All else is presumption: "Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on



the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that" (James 4:13-15). If the Lord wills. This is the necessary, if not sufficient, condition for our most simple intentions.

The intellectual life is a high calling, but it brings no sure temporal reward. Calling to this life is calling not to recognition, status, or payment.

*How much could be said of this fundamental disposition as it affects a career entirely devoted to the life of thought! I have spoken of the opposition and lack of understanding that the great are exposed to; but these things are the lot also of the little; how can they be resisted without single-minded attachment to the truth, and without complete self-forgetfulness? When the world does not like you it takes its revenge on you; if it happens to like you, it takes its revenge by corrupting you. Your only resource is to work far from the world, as indifferent to its judgments as you are ready to serve it. It is perhaps best if it rejects you and thus obliges you to fall back on yourself, to grow interiorly, to watch yourself, to deepen yourself. These benefits are in the measure in which we rise above self-interest, that is, in which interest centers on the one thing necessary.*

The intellectual life is essentially about truth; the academic life is accidentally about truth. The intellectual will wrest his academic position towards the pursuit of truth. Thus he fulfills his calling in the academy.

Can we be called toward recognition, status, and compensation for our intellectual work? No. These may be accidents of our essential task, gifts for which we are grateful. But they are not our calling. Tear away recognition, status, and compensation from the academy; tear away, that is, self-interest, rise about it, and ask if the one thing necessary is really that to which one is called. If it is, you can and will pursue it without recognition, status, or compensation.

At its best, higher education facilitates the intellectual life by richly enabling the pursuing and sharing of truth. At its worst (and I fear this is more common), it obstructs the pursuing and sharing of truth. If God blesses the intellectual with support from the academy, he must studiously ignore its obstructions and fulfill his calling, gratefully freed from other concerns.

But this is difficult. Higher education inculcates vices that strike into the roots of our being, corrupting all our fruit. It prods us to study and write about things with no intrinsic value; it corners us to subordinate the true and the permanent to the expedient and the transitory. It urges us to publish for status, advancement, and recognition, not because our work is true, important, or valuable. It is simply publishable. We may think, "I just need to get some things out there, but eventually I'll turn to the important topics, etc." Here we make the naïve assumption that our habits

can simply go away; that our being has not been reshaped through the ends toward which we have ordered our desires and the means we have used to achieve those ends.

This was profoundly illustrated by a student with whom I studied German. Intent on becoming a manager in professional baseball, he subordinated all of his academic pursuits to that end. When discussing the importance of books, which he never read (too long, too much time – just articles for him), he said, “Once I’m successful, I’m going to get a huge library and read all the time.” I felt terrible, but knew I could not persuade him how distorted a view of habituation and personhood this reflected.

Every paper we write, every project we pursue, is a soul-making act, reflecting and shaping our deepest commitments, supporting virtue or nurturing vice. Every sacrifice of the best and the true for the expedient is an act against ourselves and our fellow-men, reflecting and nurturing disordered loves.

*“Tell me what you love, I will tell you what you are.” Love is the beginning of everything in us; and that starting point which is common to knowledge and practice cannot fail to make the right paths of both in a certain measure interdependent.*

*Truth visits those who love her, who surrender to her, and this love cannot be without virtue. For this reason, in spite of his possible defects, the man of genius at work is already virtuous; it would suffice for his holiness if he were more completely his true self.*

*The true springs up in the same soil as the good: their roots communicate. Broken from the common root and therefore less in contact with the soil, one or other suffers; the soul grows anemic or the mind wilts. On the contrary, by feeding the mind on truth one enlightens the conscience, by fostering good one guides knowledge.*

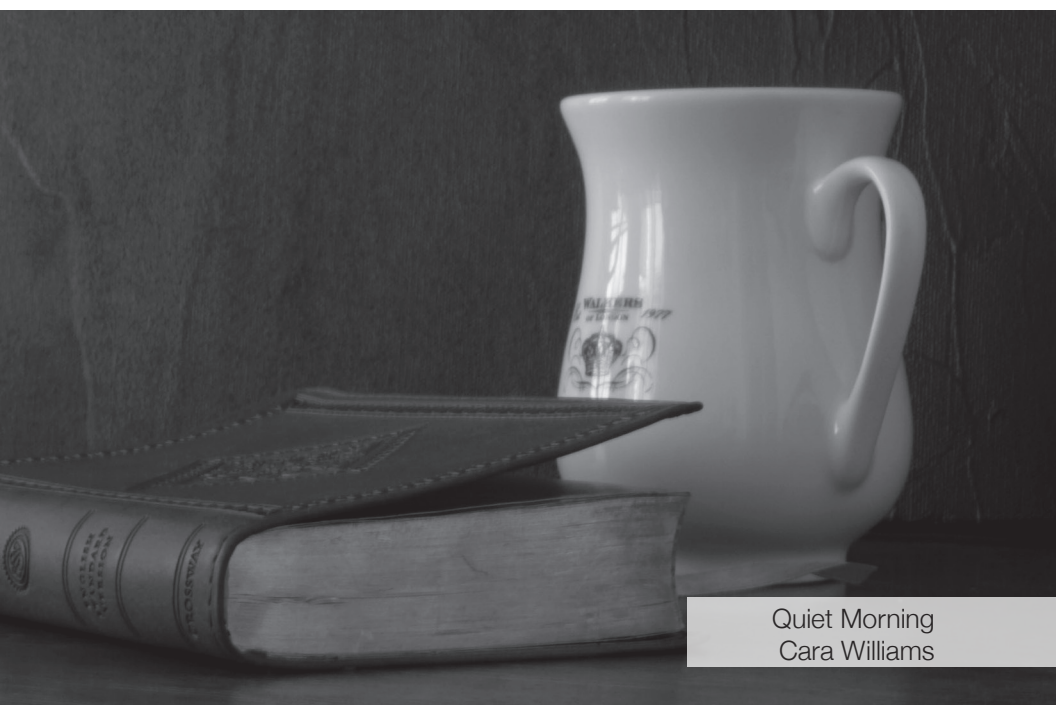
Sertillanges understood the premise that renders our arguments for the humanizing effects of the humanities sound, and without which they are so much self-important humbug. It is this: the humanities are about truth. When the custodians of culture stop believing and practicing this truth, they have betrayed their trust, forfeited their authority, and sold their birthright for a mess of pottage. Their authority and dignity pass to those who profess truth, who insist that their work is about reality, and that reality is the standard against which it should be judged. If, then, these custodians use their profession to get benefits and authority not rightly theirs, if they swindle the culture because its eyes are dim, we can complain only about that which we have given away, lament only the treachery we make possible.

The humanities are an abstraction; they are books and people, teachers and scholars, who make up the concrete world the abstraction signifies. The humanities are as healthy or as weak as its custodians. The custodians are what they love. Thus we need lovers of truth, those called to the intellectual life, working in the academy. But

we need them in that order: lovers of truth, called to the intellectual life, and, if blessed and fortunate, working in the academy.

Bypassing the love of truth and the demands of the intellectual life and pursuing the dangerous, abstract remainder, “working in the academy,” will not solve our problems, as teachers, scholars, students, or cultural custodians. It will deepen them. If God calls us to the academy, if we find ourselves in it and we can thus say that we are so called, it should be because we arrived there on our journey towards truth, and we should remain there only as long as it supports and does not hinder that journey.

In the end, that journey is the only one that matters, for when our eyes are too dim to read, our limbs too weak to walk, and our lungs too tired to breathe, when recognition is a dim memory or a vain wish, we will rest blessed in the Truth, Goodness, and Beauty that we have loved and for which we have lived, or we will complete our journey away from Truth, Goodness, and Beauty, receiving in full measure that which we loved and for which we lived.



Quiet Morning  
Cara Williams

# The Suicide of Ajax

Kelly Hamren

You would not drink the blood, nor would you speak,  
Your mortal powers were spent but not your ire.  
Ulysses shrank beneath your glare, you shade,  
As scorning him entirely  
You drifted down the path by empty soles of spirits made.

You were too strong in life; now weak in death,  
Alone you wander daily by the Styx.  
No voice beside recounts how once your spear  
Through shattered armor fixed  
In hearts of Priam's men, who shrank from you in fear!

You were too strong in life, even as you stood  
Before stout-hearted Hector unafraid.  
Even as you raised your spear against the throng  
That for your strong ships made,  
And drove them back from there in terror: then you were too strong!

You were too strong in life, you stood alone,  
With none beside but he who shared your name.  
As one by one the others' blood was drawn,  
You lived up to your fame,  
And saw the hosts of Troy thrown back in mad retreat at dawn.

You were too strong in life, you could not bear  
To lose the prize that was your soul's delight.  
Oh warrior, could your strength not once abate?  
Had you a sage's sight,  
Perhaps – but no, the armor lost, you met a tragic fate!

You were too strong in life and dealing death.  
Had you seen past the curtain of strong wine,  
Your sword had rested stainless by your side.  
O deed without design!  
O blade moved not by thought or reason but by wounded pride!

You were too strong in life—you could not leave  
Long unavenged that soul to Hades sent.  
Your sober eyes knew well that blameless friend,  
Whose lesser strength was spent,  
And on that tainted sword came soon your own inglorious end.

You would not drink the blood, nor would you speak,  
For what is there to say when strength has fled?  
When once your greatness crumbles into dust—  
Proud helm upon your head  
Has fallen, lays beside the sea, and molders into rust?



Pear  
Cara Williams



# Game of Chess

C. Ryan Knight

Felt-footed pieces trip,  
guided by the missteps  
of the mind amidst  
this cognitive crossfire.

The whittled king and queen  
cannot unseal their lips  
to address their subjects:  
Kill, capture their tiles.


Rooks unfound themselves  
from cornered mounds  
and ground themselves elsewhere  
like explorer's flags.

A peasantry of pawns, yes,  
but an ambassador?  
Nowhere to be found.  
Polite barbarity is all.

The sidestep blitz of slender bishops,  
the way they flank their enemies,  
still seems unsanctioned  
though rules of war permit it.

Could they, would they  
strike up a ditty,  
a national anthem,  
a threatening jingle?





Thank God, the knight thought,  
this isn't checkers.  
How would I ever train  
a horse to hurdle enemies?

Hours wear and pass, pass and wear  
the players. The carved pieces  
don't complain, defecate,  
or laugh. Only motion, only death.

The mind a puppeteer,  
the pieces below marionettes  
unstrung but possessed by the mind,  
vengeful God, fatal sky.

Endgame they voicelessly chant—  
a word they learned in the dark  
when stowed away in a box,  
the rules of the game their comforter.

# From the Greek

C. Ryan Knight

As though Athena tattooed  
love along the bumpy mass  
of my throbbing heart,

her Attic letters illegible  
yet the divine ink saturating  
each appendage of this flesh,

my flesh, redirecting my eyes  
toward what love loves:  
everything in sight, everything,

even all beyond sight's cracked scope:  
the uncolored, the unnamable,  
the unspeakable, the... the...



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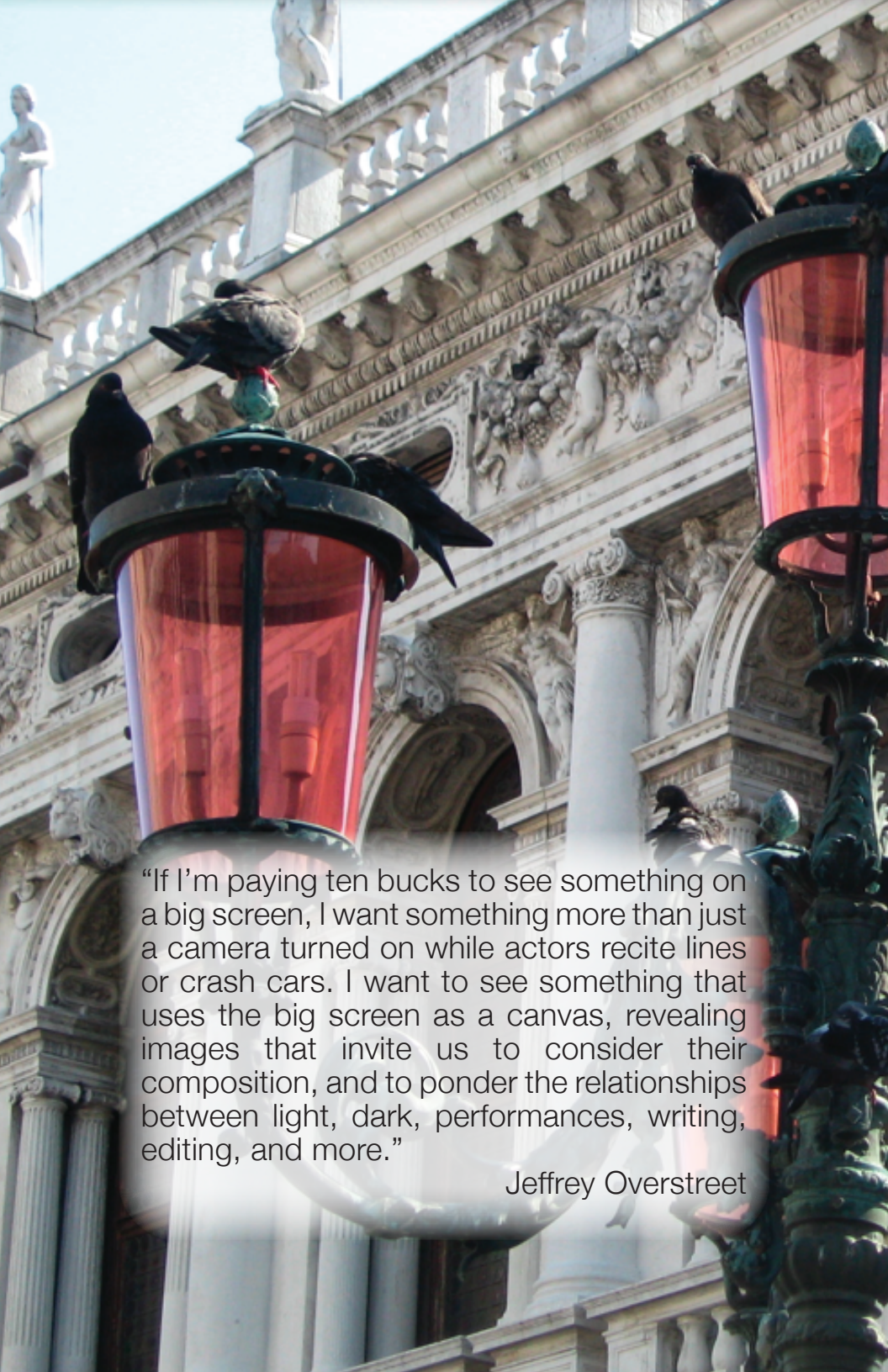
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Contact:

Dr. Karen Swallow Prior  
(General Faculty Advisor):  
*[kprior@liberty.edu](mailto:kprior@liberty.edu)*

Nick Olson  
(General Editor)  
[nsolson@liberty.edu](mailto:nsolson@liberty.edu)



"If I'm paying ten bucks to see something on a big screen, I want something more than just a camera turned on while actors recite lines or crash cars. I want to see something that uses the big screen as a canvas, revealing images that invite us to consider their composition, and to ponder the relationships between light, dark, performances, writing, editing, and more."

Jeffrey Overstreet