



Why We Read What We Read by Natalie Breeden

In Hamlet's famous "To be or not to be" monologue from Shakespeare's noteworthy play, the prince eloquently states: "--To die to sleep /to sleep perchance to dream Ay, there's the rub / for in that sleep of death what dreams may come." The implication is that in dying he will escape the cruelty of the world and discover the beauty of eternity. On the surface, this is a noble mindset, and one that coincides with the biblical truth of eternal treasures outweighing earthly trials and sufferings. However, delving into the context of the speech, one realizes that this is not a Christian man meditating on the joys of heaven, but rather a pagan man deciding whether or not to avenge his father's death through the murder of his uncle. This, of course, is clearly a non-biblical mindset. And yet, the richness of the words and the weight of their meaning must, as Hamlet later instructs, "give us pause."

Is it possible for literature outside of the realm of Christian doctrine to contain any worth? Countless articles have been written on this subject, and the authors have all come to the same conclusion: yes. The common thread of humanity that interweaves between the beauty and form of words is indeed worthy of study. Though characters' decisions and authors' intentions may not align with a biblical worldview, this does not mean that we turn aside from these pages. Rather, is it not more profitable to engage with the story and discover the glimpses of truth embedded within them? For just as Christ was incarnated as the Word, so has language itself embodied the fingerprints of the Creator. It is our duty as educators and learners to decipher and glean from what we have been given. We must seek to discover what He has already revealed regardless of publishing company labels. Truth, after all, is truth.

With the onslaught of texts and tweets pervading societal communication, the need for critical thinking skills is overwhelming. As teachers, we invite and encourage our students to make observations, and then be able to discuss what they think. Rather than

simplifying speech into a combination of characters after a hashtag, we are fostering an education that emphasizes the ability to decipher and articulate truth. The question arises as to what kind of knowledge should be presented to our students. Do we allow them to see how the world thinks, or do we merely inform them of our own observations? If we want our students to engage their minds and apply their skills to texts that are contrary to their convictions, then we must model the experience and allow the opportunity.

For a literature course, this means the implementation of secular stories. The purpose of their inclusion is not to glorify a pagan lifestyle, nor is it to convey the details of a godless society for shock value. Instead, we have intentionally chosen literature that reflects the human condition in its various stages of redemption. The purpose being for students to both identify characteristics of our fallen world as well as recognize the overwhelming power of grace. When we read literature, we see ourselves. We are reminded of who we are apart from Him. For without Christ's intervention, we are all lost.

As Christian readers, we are gifted with the knowledge of the Source. Through the Holy Spirit we understand why beauty is beauty and truth is truth. We can read words anticipating depth. And when we give pause, we see eternity.