

## Books Can Be Formative Forces

1.....Heading the list of “books that made a difference” in my life must be the BIBLE, which at age 12 I took to reading eagerly, intensely, daily, without either encouragement or discouragement from my family. Since I was on the lookout for a special food – a food not served at my home or in my school - I was not put off by inedibles and incredibles. And I came upon enough of this food to keep me reading the Bible these almost 80 years. / Where to begin? I suggest at the beginning, the first two chapters of Genesis, two very different stories about how everything began, but not different about who began everything: “the Creator,” whom Darwin honored in the last paragraph of “The Origin of Species” first edition. Next, the Psalms. Next, the Gospel of John.

2.....John Bunyan’s “PILGRIM’S PROGRESS” (1678), an English classic second only to the (1611) King James Version of the Bible, was required reading in America’s public schools when I was little. Like the Bible (indeed, on the model of the Bible, and as a Christian allegory), it stimulates the imagination to aspire, to *journey from what is to what can be* – to the better, the more than, the beyond. But it’s not escapist literature. It’s conversational clues on how to live here and now toward hereafter, as it’s full title indicates: “The Pilgrim’s Progress [progress!] from This World to That Which is to Come.”

3.....I’ll skip the Greek and Roman classics that were a part of my schooling and have largely disappeared from America’s public schools, partly because they were written by old dead white men. When I was 10, a sc-fi novel began to be serialized as a (indeed, the first) comic strip, “BUCK ROGERS.” It’s first appearance in the newspapers was on Jan 7, 1929 (a month before I turned 11). When some few weeks later I became aware of it, I was determined to make a paste-up book of it, and scoured the neighborhood basements until my set was complete up to date. My young imagination was stirred by this alternative *technological* world, as it had been by the alternative *spiritual and moral* world of the Bible and Bunyan. / That same year, another alternative-world comic strip began: “Tarzan.”

4....I’ll close with four books in the bibliography of my age-17 (1935) high-school graduation thesis, “The Nazarene”: (1) “TWELVE TESTS OF CHARACTER” (Harry Emerson Fosdick, 1923); (2) “THE CHRIST OF THE INDIAN ROAD” (E. Stanley Jones, 1925); (3) “GREAT CHRISTIAN TEACHINGS” (Edwin Lewis, 1933); and “THE LIFE OF OUR LORD” (Charles Dickens, 1934).

5.....But wait! I must add one not so pious – indeed, anti-pious. “THE ADVENTURES OF THE BLACK GIRL IN HER SEARCH FOR GOD” (George Bernard Shaw, 1933). The year of publication, I picked it off the shelf of an epileptic skeptic teacher of mine & was delighted and saddened by it. Through the forest the black girl wanders from one idol (religion) to another, finds each in its turn disappointing, and breathed a sigh of relief when suddenly she comes upon a sun-lit (Enlightenment!) clearing. In my childhood imagining, I had wandered among the religions, and came upon a clearing enlightened by “the Light of the world,” Jesus Christ, whom Charles Dickens (in the title of his life of Jesus) called “our Lord.”

BY WILLIS E. ELLIOTT | JUNE 26, 2008; 5:12 AM ETSAVE & SHARE:        

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Well, JJ, I'm sure Sen. McCain will appreciate you getting out the whacked-out bigot vote for him. :)

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | JUNE 29, 2008 1:48 PM  
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I never knew Charles Dickens wrote anything religious ("A Christmas Carol" doesn't count). I've read virtually every novel he wrote, as he's one of my favorite authors. I just may look that one up, just out of curiosity. (I don't consider myself a Christian nor am I in danger of converting anytime soon. Been there, done that... But I respect anyone who follows the true Christian spirit.)

POSTED BY: LAUREL YVES | JUNE 28, 2008 1:23 PM  
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One of the first songs I ever learned was 'Swing Low Sweet Chariot' something in that Old Spiritual spoke loudly to something in my then 8 year old soul.

Not to disappoint you but most of the songs I know and all but one of the ones that are original with me are are fairly overtly religious.

One more sample of the latter is called the Righteous judge.

It may not be the preacher who speaks so mightily,  
And it may not be the soloist who sings so wonderfly,  
And it may not be the Evangelist that sits at Gods right hand,  
But it just might be the simple man who Keeps all God's commands

Refrain:

For It's God the righteous Judge of all knows each and every heart  
And its God the righteous Judge of all who knew him from the start  
And it's God the righteous Judge of all will fill from his heart  
For God is the righteous judge of all.

Not everyone who casts out demons in his holy name nor everyone who heals the sick or causes to walk the lame  
will walk the Golden Streets of heaven on that final day  
But there you'll find the simple man who kneels alone to pray.

rrepeat refrain.

POSTED BY: GARYD | JUNE 27, 2008 9:33 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Hey, that's got some good qualities, Gary. :)

I wouldn't give up good meter for a seeming-clever rhyme, though. 'impact' in there doesn't flow.

Does make me think we shouldn't be arguing like this, though, We'd understand each other a lot better if we were singing.

Not that overtly-religious music, particularly Christian Rock, isn't generally atrocious.

Always selling something. :)

Did make me think of the Bowie song of the same title, though. Not so much about exhorting humility, as a humbler sort of heroism. :)

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | JUNE 27, 2008 2:06 AM  
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I tend, with the help of God to make my own Music.

Heroes

We all want to be heroes,  
Yes, I know it's true  
We all want to be heroes  
instead of lettin'  
the Lord shine through  
We all want to be heroes  
and leave the hurtin' and carin'  
to you o lord,  
And leave the hurtin' and carin' to you.

We all want to be heroes  
Yes it's a natural fact.  
We all want to be heroes  
But God's already seen our act.  
We all want to be heroes  
instead of lettin the Spirit impact.  
We all want to be heroes,  
And shove you right out of the Act O lord  
And shove you right out of the act.

So quit tryin' to be a hero  
and the Lord'll come shinin' Through  
Quit tryin' to be a Hero  
and the Lord'll make use of you  
Quit tryin' to be a hero and the world will come to know  
that you're God's own chosen Child by the Joy they see in you.

POSTED BY: GARY | JUNE 25, 2008 10:56 PM  
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PP,

I know what you mean about music - I'm one of those people for whom life requires a soundtrack. I can name a song that I was listening to (whether it was one that was popular at the time or something from long ago and/or far away that I had discovered) at pretty much every watershed event in my life.

POSTED BY: LEPIDOPTERYX | JUNE 25, 2008 3:47 PM  
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"When I was 10, a sc-fi novel began to be serialized as a (indeed, the first) comic strip, "BUCK ROGERS." It's first appearance in the newspapers was on Jan 7, 1929 (a month before I turned 11). When some few weeks later I became aware of it, I was determined to make a paste-up book of it, and scoured the neighborhood basements until my set was complete up to date. My young imagination was stirred by this alternative technological world, "

No rest for the temporally-displaced, eh, Reverend? \*smile.\* (No, really, that's friendly) :)

It's funny, sometimes, though, how we prioritize \*books\* so much, when sometimes I think it's our \*songs\* that really do the most.

Not too much new coming out in this corporate nightmare, (Hey, we were supposed to have lots of flying cars and New Wave face paint!)

But I was just singing along with some new Springsteen,

"Baby, don't you fret, we're  
Living in the future and  
None of this has happened yet."

:)

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | JUNE 25, 2008 2:44 PM  
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