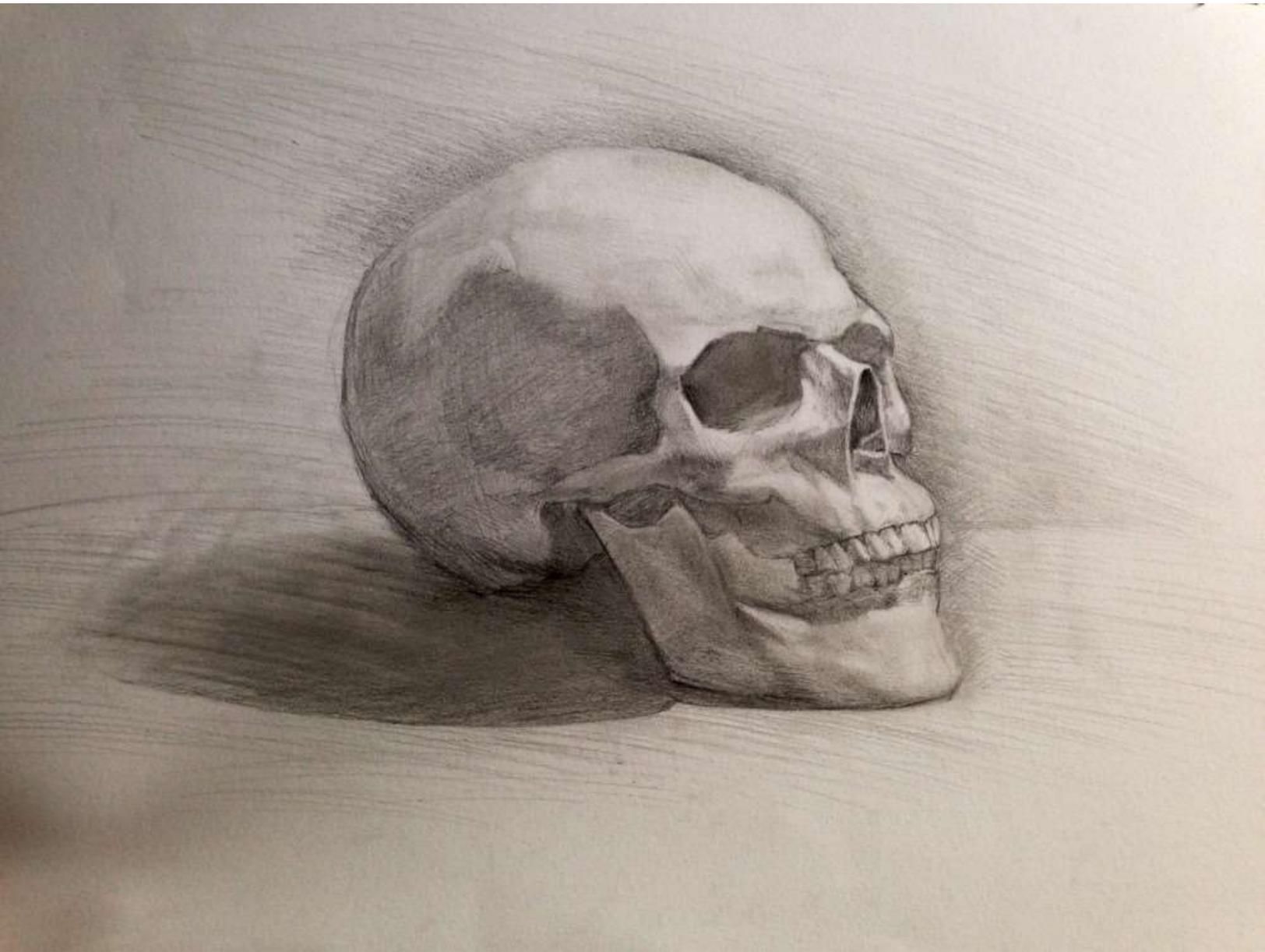


# The Scholastic

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# Editor's Column

It is appropriate that the issue of *The Scholastic* coming out during the season of Lent should commemorate the passing of two great modern traditores: Christopher Tolkien, and Roger Scruton. We are also graced this quarter by Liv Nino's *Memento Mori* for our cover, a traditional motif of the Lenten season, that one should direct one's life with an eye to the finality of death.

Dr. St-Rule's portrait of the late Roger Scruton portrays him as the consummate educator, who loved and valued the tradition which he inherited, and sought urgently to pass on both that tradition and that love. His conservatism was the result of this educational instinct that there was something inherently valuable in the history of a culture, that that was, in large part, where its wisdom lay. I am struck in reading it by Chesterton's wonderful adage in *Orthodoxy*, that tradition is "the democracy of the dead." It means that we may mourn that a conservative has died, but a conservative never utterly perishes, is never truly disenfranchised.

My own sketch of Christopher Tolkien focuses not on the soul of the educator as such, but on the soul of the scribe. The heir of J.R.R. Tolkien dedicated his life to passing on another's works, Tom Shippey's, in my estimation rightly named, "Author of the Century." The younger Tolkien saw himself and his own opportunity for accomplishment as secondary to the task of preserving the great trove of his father's work, and so delivered to us perhaps the last century's greatest repository of new literary wealth. A true traditor in the classical tradition.

You will find in these pages another kind of lament in Evan Underbrink's piece on the atrophy of the Christian imagination. In it he mourns that it has been sixty years since the publication of the last great Christian fantasy novel, and appeals for the laying again of the foundations of Christianity. Students must be taught Bible and dogma in order for their theological imaginations to be engaged. These principles may seem obvious to some of our readers, but the collective educational experience of the Fellowship of St Columbanus tells us that they are anything but taken for granted in modern Christian education.

This month, Matthew Edholm is responsible for our lead article, an interview with the controversial Villanova professor James Matthew Wilson. Professor Wilson discusses his *Wall Street Journal* article on "diversity" ratings from students, and how such a metric harms the incorporation of multiple views into class discussion. He encourages educators to turn from the mainstream and focus on preserving a core of classical education which can be rebuilt when the present establishment gives way to something new. As a professor of poetry, he explains that the reason we have found poets on the forefront of the movement for academic reform is because poetry confronts us with "the integrity of things in their particular goodness," and so point beyond themselves to a transcendent standard.

Professor Wilson's interview reminded me of a recent encounter I had in a used bookshop when I asked the, very helpful, clerk where I might find the poetry section. She looked at me with genuine and unmistakable surprise, laughed half-apologetically, and told me that poetry was usually placed on a kind of miscellany shelf below the one bookcase of classics. This despite an entire wall proudly labeled "romance/erotica." A society whose closest encounter with poetry is now filtered through the dubious taste and suspect motives of the pop music industry almost cannot help losing its perspective on transcendence. As C.S. Lewis aptly pointed out in his essays "Is Theology Poetry?" and "The Language of Religion," it is difficult if not impossible to talk about God and the sublime without turning to the forms and vocabulary of poetry. And so a society deprived of these is bound to decline from sublimity to squalor. We take it as our duty as educators and traditores to take up the torch of our deceased forbears, and strive to communicate this endangered language to our students and our society.

Pax,  
Matthew David Wiseman, Ph.D.  
Editor, *The Scholastic*

*Cover Art: "Memento Mori" by Olivia Mayoros, 2015.*

# In Memory of Roger Scruton – *Tradidi quod et accepi*

By: Osmund St-Rule, Ph.D.

Professor Sir Roger Scruton FBA FRSL died on the 12th of January 2020 leaving to the world, but more specifically, to the Western world in the throes of an existential crisis, the witness of a life dedicated to the pursuit and transmission of truth and beauty both within the bounds of the University and in the public square.

It would, indeed, be no underestimation of his character to say that he united in himself two fundamental qualities of the true educator – the lover of truth and beauty, and the transmitter of the same. Both qualities were expressed in the conviction that as educator and publicist he was dealing with fellow free persons, united in a tacit parliament of rational souls both in the present and the past. His conservatism was deeply grafted upon this fundamental anthropological insight of the Western tradition.

Scruton's turn to conservatism was early on confirmed by the events of May 68 in Paris, which he witnessed personally. As a lecturer then professor of aesthetics at Birkbeck College, London, and then later at Boston University, he observed and criticised the propagation and consolidation of the May 68 ideologies in Anglophone academia. In parallel, he supported dissidents in central European countries behind the Iron Curtain, where he organised and ran underground academies, and prepared students to sit for degree examinations in English universities.

He was also perhaps the last surviving member of the ill-defined, yet important, group of conservative academic intellectuals known as the “Peterhouse Right”, from the name of the Cambridge college from which most of them were drawn. The members of the “Peterhouse Right” were instrumental in maintaining a strongly conservative voice both in the universities and in the media. As editor of the *Salisbury Review* his appointed task of articulating social conservative principles during the Thatcher years, when economic neoliberalism was the orthodoxy, was a constant uphill battle that not only alienated people across the political spectrum, but rendered his position difficult in British academia where a largely leftist culture prevailed (and to a degree still prevails). For many, it was unconscionable that a member of the academic establishment should want to make it his duty to provide an intellectual basis and justification for conservatism.

He accurately summed up the situation in “The Meaning of Conservatism” as follows: “The European mind seeks for a

deep description of its politics, a description which reflects its real predicament, but which also remains uncontaminated by the day-to-day. Socialists and liberals have contended for this mind, each claiming to provide the system of principles with which to pass from policy to doctrine and from doctrine back to policy. (...) Until conservatives lay hold again of the principles which motivate them, they will find themselves outwitted by those who lay claim to a conviction which they may not always feel but are always ready to express. Without doctrine conservatism will lose its intellectual appeal; and (however reluctant conservatives may be to believe it), it is by intellectuals that modern politics is made.”<sup>1</sup>

Such a conservative doctrine cannot be articulated in purely discursive terms, for after all, conservatism regards the concrete objects of social and political human life whose conservation must be upheld and lived out. In the past, the universalism of the Western tradition had always been tempered by the reference to the concrete sources of obligation in the family, the guilds and corporations, the local and national communities, and the Church. Scruton placed himself in the tradition of Burke and Hume in claiming for prejudices, customs, and conventions an intellectual legitimacy that they were denied both in the philosophical schools and in the globalist institutions, among which, the European Union is not the least. In the latter case, mercantile protectionism, without the protection of cultural and national preferences, was likely to consolidate mere materialism (and the concomitant consumerism), which is incapable of sustaining civilisations, let alone make them grow.

Scruton saw that the task of giving a doctrinal body to the conservative mind was coterminous with that of restoring the University as an institution that concerns at once the cultivation of the person together with the need for shared knowledge. The crisis in the Humanities that started with the avowed rejection of the superiority of the classics and the classical languages, and of the traditional curriculum in general, is now reaching a point where faculties are not much concerned at all with transmitting the canon of Western literary, religious, and philosophical tradition as a whole through the rigorous study of books, language, ideas, and authors.

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<sup>1</sup> Scruton, Roger. *The Meaning of Conservatism*. Third Edition. Palgrave Macmillan: London 2001. p.2

Rather than training students and bringing them up in this tradition, they want to instil in them the erroneous belief that it was founded upon and promotes deep patterns of injustice that are organic features of our civilisation.

The Newmanian idea of the University as a place where knowledge is pursued not primarily for utilitarian ends is hereby rejected: “That old curriculum existed, we are told, in order to maintain the hierarchies and distinctions, the forms of exclusion and domination that maintained a ruling elite. Studies in the humanities are now designed to prove this—to show the way in which, through its images, stories, and beliefs, through its works of art, its music, and its language, the culture of the West has no deeper meaning than the power that it served to perpetuate. In this way the whole idea of our inherited culture as an autonomous sphere of moral knowledge, and one that it requires learning, scholarship, and immersion to enhance and retain, is cast to the winds. The university, instead of transmitting culture, exists to deconstruct it, to remove its ‘aura’, and to leave the student, after four years of intellectual dissipation, with the view that anything goes and nothing matters.”<sup>2</sup>

The idea that the Western canon does not contain or promote positive ethical values but, instead, manifests the justification for systemic colonial and imperial, sexual and moral oppression reflect both the historicist universalism of cultural Marxism (in alliance with liberalism), together with the now explicit rejection of the idea of natural-social normativity. This results in a hermeneutic of moral relativism that is incapable of providing students with any sort of ethical standard of right behaviour and action.

Thus, a multiplicity of rights can be claimed against the society and social institutions (the family, the University, etc.) on the basis of nothing other than being a differentiated individual with no determinate character, no history or desire of belonging to a specific national community, no promise of obligation and duty, no claim of substantive injustice. And it is this new doctrine of right, that exalts a purely statist (both at the national and global levels) view of society and social engineering, that the attack on the traditional and the rearing up of a new one are meant to facilitate. Educating students in the style and virtues of our Western civilisation would no doubt constitute too frontal a challenge to this agenda.

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<sup>2</sup> Scruton, Roger. “The End of the University.” *First Things* April 2015

What remedy, then, does Scruton prescribe? The awareness of two truths arose out of his experience in the underground seminars in Central Europe under the Communists. The first truth is that “a cultural inheritance really is a body of knowledge and not a collection of opinions—knowledge of the human heart, and of the long-term vision of a human community.” The second one is that this body of knowledge can be taught simply outwith the current structures of the contemporary university: “It requires a handful of books that have passed the test of time and are treasured by all who truly study them. It requires teachers with knowledge and students eager to acquire it. And it requires the continuing attempt to express what one has learned, either in essays or in the face-to-face encounter with a critic. All the rest—administration, information technology, lecture halls, libraries, extracurricular resources—is, by comparison, an insignificant luxury.”<sup>3</sup>

For Scruton, these truths find root in one aspect of our common Western heritage that was suppressed under Communism, namely, the freedom of association. By virtue of this freedom, and for the time being, corrupt institutions cannot monopolise access to a tradition and culture they reject emphatically. Underground, parallel, “alternative” universities, however makeshift and informal, have the potential to be places which attract people who feel or hear the call of culture and tradition, who feel they need to be invested with a legacy that mainstream institutions are incapable of delivering. One of the most signal advantages of pursuing the “alternative” route, as Scruton outlines, may well be to inculcate us with the sense that the transmission of tradition outflows and transcends mere institutional settings.

Some of us, the present writer included, were very fortunate to be able to sit at the feet of Roger Scruton in the context of the institutional academy. But the atmosphere was already one of unmistakable waning; in spite of which, nevertheless, we persevered, under his direction and of others, in our attempt to come into our intellectual heritage, with all the questioning, doubting, and illumination this entailed. It falls to us now to carry this legacy forward, to cultivate a genuine spirit of scholarship and collegiality in the Western tradition.

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<sup>3</sup>Scruton. *Ibid.*

# Starved Imaginations:

## The Problem with Contemporary Christian Literature

By: Evan Underbrink, M.T.S.

It has been over sixty years since the last book of the Chronicles of Narnia. Certainly, it is a testament to these books, as well as the works of Tolkien and others, that they have maintained a level of cultural and spiritual significance for Christians to this day. The evidence of such relevance can be seen in the movie adaptations, seemingly innumerable editions in multiple languages, and the slew of commentaries, lectures, and explorations of these works with either overt or subtle Christian themes. An amusing joke from my undergraduate days involved a student ripping pages out of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, to which another student cries 'blasphemy!'

Yet, the last book of the Chronicles of Narnia is over sixty years old. In the intervening years, some books with notably orthodox Christian themes, such as Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* and arguably the Harry Potter series, have attained critical and commercial success. But the dearth in Christian fantasy literature remains noticeable, with even the best examples remaining in a niche market. Indeed, perusing the stories which are marketed as Christian literature betrays an entire atrophy of the genre into trend chasing and reprinting older books. A good measure of this atrophy comes from a lack of solid theological and biblical education, from which the imagination can grow.

Imagination must be educated. It is within the name itself that our acts of creativity are fostered through the imaging of presented stimulus. An imagination grows into expressions of fantasy when the presented stimulus creates the sensation of wonder, into expressions of romance when the stimulus is desire and ecstasy, into satire and irony when presented hypocrisy, and so forth. It is largely within our education that such stimulus which inspires imagination is presented to us, and within higher education that these experiences are honed into a sense of vocation or production. In other words, we may hypothesize that

students who are not presented with regular experiences of the sensation of wonder within their theological education will by and large fail to write complex or compelling works of fiction which plays with orthodox Christian themes.

Certainly this hypothesis seems to fit the average college theology classroom. One may see this in the shift towards the predominantly Cartesian or scientific approach to theology, which puts the emphasis on proving, arguing, and presenting information in comprehensive ways. Such is not to say that theology ought to be irrational or inconsistent, but merely to affirm that a theology which does not have at its core a sense of awe at the unknowable transcendence of God has failed the student's, as particularly felt within their imaginations. One may also see the origin of the problem being located in the necessity for breadth but not depth within the study of theological minds. Students may easily travel through a Bachelor's degree in theology or religion, without having to open either their bibles or the original source materials. At the Presbyterian university which the author attended, a Bachelor of Arts in Theology was accompanied by one short piece of writing by John Calvin; the Institutes themselves were neither assigned nor even recommended.

As we look toward the reform of Catholic education, we must take seriously the necessity of incorporating material which inspires the states of wonder, desire, and good passion which are necessary stimulus for the imaginative mind to create works of great and lasting merit. The older books, whether C.S. Lewis' space trilogy series or *The Pilgrim's Progress*, can act as vital supplements to this endeavor. However, our curriculums, or engagement, and our purpose in Catholic education must take seriously the concept of incorporating this sacred food for the imagination within the structure of lessons. That which remains only in concept is nearly always forgotten, and thus the mind remains uninspired, and thus the book remains unwritten.

# Education and the Poetic Imagination:

## An Interview with James Matthew Wilson

By: Matthew Edholm, M.A.

James Matthew Wilson is associate professor of Humanities and Augustinian Traditions at Villanova University. He is a scholar and critic of poetry, as well as a poet in his own right. Last year, Dr. Wilson wrote an op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal*, “A Mole Hunt for Diversity ‘Bias’ at Villanova,” responding to a new policy that students evaluate faculty based on diversity awareness. Dr. Wilson is also the author of books of criticism including *The Vision of the Soul: Truth, Goodness, and Beauty in the Western Tradition* (CUA 2017) and *The Catholic Imagination in Modern American Poetry* (Wiseblood Books, 2014), and books of poetry, *Some Permanent Things* (Wiseblood Books, 2014), *The River of the Immaculate Conception* (Wiseblood, 2018).

**Last year you wrote in the Wall Street Journal on the subject of universities policing ideological “bias” among faculty. Tell us about the problems that are created by this kind of policing in universities.**

When one writes for a newspaper, one has to choose a lede and circumscribe one’s arguments. That was hard to do, in this case, because the number of arguments against what my university was trying to do, and has since done, are many. I will list a few. What my university has done is introduce three questions, two numerical and one open-ended, intended to have students rate and comment upon all signs of “bias” and presence or lack of “cultural awareness” in the classroom.

“Cultural awareness” is an empty term for all but a very specific group of people with a specific political agenda. I suppose it is intended to ask students to judge whether the professor is aware of differences among students. To what end? If it is desirable to have students with different backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives, in the college classroom, then it must be equally desirable to have those differences show themselves in the unexpected contribution by a student. A professor in the classroom trying to be “aware” in advance will probably just result in attempts to “beware,” to avoid by a spineless flexibility every moment where differences might be generative of intellectual energy.

Of course, a properly educated person is a cultured person; it is the goal of a professor not so much to make students “aware” of the goods of true culture that they so far lack, but to help them to fall in love with those goods. As Plato

first showed us, education is the planting of seeds in the appetite, so that the young may grow up to fall in love with great and lofty things. Those who trade in the term “cultural awareness” seem not to think of culture as something genuinely to be loved, but as a marker of dangerous differences, and the aspiration to the great as, rather, some con being pulled over on people.

The students are also asked to rate professors’ signs of “bias.” A professor should bring into a classroom the fullness of his humanity; we are charged with exemplifying a particular, excellent way of life, the life of learning, the intellectual life that culminates finally in the contemplation of God. We are professors, not professionals hired to dispense some narrow or anemic drip of information. The best professor will be one who shows students how and why to fall in love with the work or idea being studied. This involves vulnerability, communion, openness, and again, a full manifestation of personhood. If a professors’ deep loves and prejudices do not become apparent, something has gone wrong. So also has something gone wrong if the professor takes his own loves as if they were themselves sacred, rather than the actual things we study and come to love together. That leads to pride and the temptation to turn classrooms into one’s personal pulpit. This happens all too often with professors on the left, I am afraid. But I don’t think they should be faulted for “bias,” but rather for failing to recognize the very special role their love of a particular object of study needs to play in the classroom. A numerical rating for “bias” is meaningless, as both a high and a low score may be desirable depending upon what the number is intended to indicate, and the number cannot tell us that.

So, the questions as a whole were intended to lead professors to tread fearfully and to do something anathema to real education, to turn it into some kind of dry instruction that is not real pedagogy. I was shocked to learn that some faculty would defend such measures; it seemed a project to be conceived only within the gears of a very ideological machine, not an idea thinkable in the breast of a real person.

These grand points do not even touch upon the problems particular to this kind of survey. People in our time routinely confuse a substantive, reasoned belief with a “bias” or bigotry. Such confusions should not be countenanced. Further, our culture presently discourages reasoned debate, and many students consequently feel

threatened by the very existence of disagreement. That shouldn't be indulged but rather corrected.

### **How do these problems carry over from the universities into society at large?**

It is a common lament that the university "indoctrinates" students, but that is naïve and, in a manner of speaking, gives both the minds of students and the persuasive powers of professors too much credit. Many young persons, not to say all, in our day have been raised in a loose epicurean spirit. They have been taught that the truth is largely unknowable and not worth pursuing; arguments are not worth having, and reason is largely a posterior reflection crafted to do the bidding of prior decisions of the will. Only very rarely will young persons have witnessed their elders bear serious and sincere witness to any truth beyond some practical, technological, immanent concern. They will have been taught that the Good is "subjective," while only "success" is real.

And so, when they enter the classroom, they have already been habituated to see serious study and rational argument as pointless. Only the moderate pleasures of comfort, and the power necessary to maintain it in the future, appears to them as self-evidently good. They have long since seen the familiar posturing about social justice from their elders as a coercive and uninteresting act that must be suffered if one is to get by in life.

When professors seek to challenge them in the classroom with more such ideas, the students, for the most part, will just try to suffer through it. They are on their way someplace else. To get a job. To live out a halfway decent material existence. It is the exception for a student to get drawn in by such postures, enough perhaps to justify the existence of certain majors of study, perhaps, but, at most institutions, not to fill a university lecture hall.

Universities for the most part, when they become engines of social change, merely confirm already disenchanted students that there is no such thing as wisdom. If you tell a young person that everything in reality is governed by masks of ideology behind which is nothing but power, the more sensible of those young persons will nod gravely to be polite, and think quietly, "if power is all there is, then I had better get mine." In brief, the leftward tilt of the university is not a Maoist reeducation camp. It is perhaps a closer analogy to everyday life behind the Iron Curtain, during the

Cold War. Those who want to get by in life, learn to tell the official lie in public, and get on with their own private concerns.

Other students, when they learn that there might actually be something called wisdom, when they encounter some good or beautiful thing and are asked to love it for its own sake, are awakened by that experience. But such experiences are too rare in their lives, and that is very sad.

### **What needs to be done to correct this trend? What can faculty and students who object to this policing do?**

It is always a good thing to call lies lies. It is good to show moral courage and to stand straight in defiance of this kind of soft soul-inuring programming. Indeed, that is the first and perhaps the only thing to be done. Universities have become increasingly "corporate," as they say, but the better term would be to say they have been "bureaucratized." Bureaucracies thrive when its human members are just barely alive enough to do as they are told, but not so lively that they want to do anything else, because bureaucracies (the Marxists tell me) seek only to perpetuate themselves.

The deep indifferentism that our culture as a whole presently encourages, that epicurean ataraxia or unbotheredness, is a world view and ethic most congenial to the bureaucratized university, which largely envisions itself as charged with being an enlightened manager to implement and keep in order programs of "diversity." While such bureaucracies require the existence of virulent bigots beyond its borders, so as to justify their ongoing rational management of things (their budgets, too), their vision of the university is largely exhausted with "diversity sketches" at student orientation. They do not therefore need intellectually lively students on their campus. Indeed such creatures would be very inconvenient.

### **Given the dire situation that you describe in WSJ, where do you see Catholic education going now, and do you see a likelihood of change in direction?**

Everyone now has Rod Dreher's idea of the "Benedict Option" in mind, when they look at the present state of things. I wrote an essay explaining what fundamentally was at stake in Dreher's argument, some years ago, by which I mean, what it would mean to consider it in light of Alasdair MacIntyre, Aquinas, and Aristotle. What does all this mean? Human beings are by nature social, and so live and flourish through institutions. We naturally do so. When institutions

become corrupt, eventually, when we sense however intuitively there's no more good to be gained by them, or too little good at any rate, we simply turn aside and look elsewhere.

In our present moment, the best hope for the future is just in the turning aside, in the building up of alternative institutions. I see small liberal arts colleges renewing their commitment to the true freedom of the human spirit, which can only be achieved in the contemplative life. Not a great number of them, but more than there were thirty years ago, many times more. I see also alternative institutions being built up within larger, already existent but moribund institutions. That is important as well, for contemporary universities have tremendous material resources; they simply don't know how to use them for any good end. The more footholds people of good mind and will get within those places, the more they will be able to work like a leaven to raise up some new whole, one which will be born out of the old, though certainly not be a mere renewal of it.

The largest colleges and universities, as the old jokes go, are often hedge funds with a school attached. They make their decisions accordingly. They will never be a source of cultural renewal; rarely have such places been such sources, in any case. The real hope for the future lies in the continued rise of classical schooling among Protestants and Catholics, primarily, but also in the context of charter schools. Colleges and universities do not form a culture, they are the butt-end of it, and any good they may accomplish will, nowadays, be remedial. I encourage everyone who cares about the future of Christian civilization to look much closer to the foundations of human life and culture for places to make a difference.

**Our journal has found in the past, in interviews with Ben Myers and Paul Griffiths, that it is often poets and scholars of poetry who are leading the opposition to current trends in higher education. As a professor of poetry, can you comment on that trend and on the role of poetry and the arts in education?**

All institutions of liberal education has three purposes which work to one end, the formation of the human person to live in the light of God. First, a school provides an atmosphere where one simply encounters things worth knowing and lives side by side with those to will encounter these things with one. As Newman observed about Oxford in the generations before he arrived, even when the

curriculum was in decadence, simply bringing young men together within the walls of a college generated a fruitful humanism among them. Second, a school provides its students with intrinsically good things to learn. And, third, it helps them to order those goods properly so that one's love of the particular arises and journeys afoot and arrives at last at the Good Itself, the light of God.

Art and literature, and I think poetry perhaps most of all, because it is what I have called elsewhere the paradigmatic artform, insists upon these three realities and of its own nature resists their reduction or corruption to something else. A poem operates slantwise and associatively, first of all, so that need first just to be near it to get a vague sense of its goodness. A poem always contains an argument, that is, it has a real content, but it shows by its formal actuality, that form and content finally are one and cannot be collapsed one into the other. It thus reminds us of the integrity of things in their particular goodness. But poems, as with all the arts, show us that just because a particular form always transcends itself, and refuses to be broken down, dissected, and reduced to its parts, it also is always going beyond itself. The integrity of form is also, therefore, the occasion of splendor, the radiance by which we see that any one particular thing is part of a total order of all things that infinitely transcends it, and that total order is finally transcended by the principle of all, the One, as Plotinus fumblingly put it, Our Father, as we call Him.

Anyone could, anyone can and should, see all this for himself, but when you are a poet, you are kind of confronted with these realities every day.

**Poetically, what are you currently working on?**

I try to be desultory and roving in writing verse, so that, if I write in a particular form or mode one day, I will try something very different the next. In consequence, I'm always working on more than one longer set of poems at any given moment. My first two books, for instance, *Some Permanent Things* and *The Hanging God* overlap chronologically, to some extent, but I was parceling the particular poems to this book or the other book, based upon the larger whole they would form.

I'm doing the same now, and it's been a real pleasure. I have one book that is almost done, called *Saint Thomas and the Forbidden Birds*. I need to write exactly three poems to bring it to completion, but those three poems are the most

difficult and ambitious of the book, so they will take awhile and have to wait until I have freer time for concentration. All three touch upon the disenchantment that has come upon us all through the cruelty and corruption within our institutions, but also the way in which, by a certain kind of ironical play, we can begin to test out and take seriously beliefs that feel too discredited at the moment.

Another book, which I will publish much later, is called *On the New Physics*. This book too is almost done, but needs maybe three or four more poems for the title sequence. In the meantime, I notice I've got some good starter dough for another book, which I am calling for now, *The Strangeness of the Good*. Some of the poems for it have already been published, but, you know, one can only publish a book of poems every half decade or so, so this is taking me precariously close to the beginning of old age.

**How do you see your poetry engaging with the current state of academia?**

I'll be giving a lecture on this subject at Hope College, at the end of March. We need to learn how to "dwell poetically" again. By this I mean not thinking of our

experience of the world as something we construct by the powers of the "primary imagination," as Coleridge called it, but rather, that we learn to use our intellectual power of abstraction and reason with a more proper reverence. Human reason works by abstraction; there's no getting away from that. But abstraction begins in the deep, concrete vision of the soul of reality and, finally, issues in a fullness of vision. We need to take poetry as the paradigm for every intellectual endeavor: beginning with the concrete whole, proceeding by distinctions that abstraction alone makes possible for us, but arriving once more at a better, deeper, understood whole. It's not just poems that resist being reduced to their abstracted arguments; Plato does too. We need to philosophize more poetically, but also to poeticize more philosophically, to put it crudely.

Since the present state of the academy is a pretty loveless, unlovely, and dreary place, I see each poem I write as standing athwart the irrational disenchantments of the present age and also pushing back against its petty idolatries, to insist that there are many goodnesses and one Good.

## **Many Partings: Remembering the Life of Christopher Tolkien**

By: Dr. Matthew David Wiseman

It is appropriate for us to memorialize the passage of our teachers, and so allow their lives to push us to be better teachers and scholars ourselves. On the January 16, one of my great teachers, Christopher Tolkien, passed away.

Christopher was the son of J.R.R. Tolkien, and although he was a scholar and lecturer in his own right, having translated *Heidrek the Wise* and taught at New College, he is most remembered as the editor of his father's vast *Legendarium*. Through his diligence we received *The Silmarillion*, *The History of Middle Earth*, the magisterial translation of and commentary on *Beowulf*, and a host of other works. Christopher's work fleshed out the vast background that his father worked so hard to evoke in *The Lord of the Rings*.

I learned a great many lessons in Middle Earth, about nobility and courage and keeping faith, but when I reflect on it, I think two stand out above the rest in my own experience of that realm. The first lesson, the lesson of Resistance, recently leapt out at me from a passage in "On Fairy-Stories," which I shall quote here at length:

"Not to mention...electric street-lamps of mass-produced pattern in your tale is *Escape*. ... But it may, almost certainly does, proceed from a considered disgust for so typical a product of the Robot Age, that combines elaboration and ingenuity of means with ugliness, and (often) with inferiority of result...The escapist is not so subservient to the whims of evanescent fashion as these opponents. He does not make things...his masters or his gods by worshipping them as inevitable, even 'inexorable'. And his opponents, so easily contemptuous, have no guarantee that he will stop there: he might rouse men to

pull down the street-lamps. Escapism has another and even wicker face: Reaction.”<sup>4</sup>

Here Tolkien ironically suggests that he belongs to the camp of the “wicked reactionaries,” which we see perhaps most starkly demonstrated in the Ents’ destruction of the industrial pits at Isengard. But we who know the *Legendarium* must think also of the Girdle of Melian and the Hidden City of Gondolin, and the iconic duel of Fingolfin with Morgoth. We are presented over and over again with these images of resistance against a rising tide of autocracy and the black magic of will-to-power. These images arise both in the form of the defensive work of builders and weavers, and of the active counter-stroke of soldiers, and even thieves.

Tolkien’s fantasy, the working out of an internally consistent world to which he refers in “Fairy-Stories,” presented me with this image which appealed, and woke a spirit of resistance in me. Academic reform is our act of tearing down street-lamps. The new academy is not inevitable or inexorable, and that is something that I learned in the volumes of the *Legendarium*.

The image of Fingolfin howling defiance into the cavernous gates of Angband is appealing in part because of its hopelessness. He cannot win. The odds against him are unimaginable, and he never flinches. But this is not the end of the story. The other lesson that I wanted to mention is hope. When all is said and done, despite the odds, there is always cause for hope. Though Sam’s experience outside Cirith Ungol is better remembered, my personal favorite expression of hope is Beregon’s: “Though the walls be taken by a reckless foe that will build a hill of carrion before them, there are still other fastnesses, and secret ways of escape into the mountains. Hope and memory shall live still in some hidden valley where the grass is green.”

This hope is tied to tradition, to the preservation of the good that mankind has won from the darkness of the world, and the good gifts that we have been given. Hope is not an empty emotion to be filled by the arbitrary desire of individuals. Rather, it is the endurance of these particular goods, and among these goods we are blessed to count the *Legendarium* itself. And we had no reason to hope for it. Before Christopher’s diligent work it was a hopeless confusion of exercise books and dashed off notes, mostly incomplete, and years from prepared for publication. No one who was not already familiar with the material could have sorted through it to give us *The Silmarillion* and the rest. And there was little expectation among publishers that there would be a market for it, and who had the will and the time to sort and edit it?

We owe it to those who preserved the Tradition before us to continue their work. The task of a movement dedicated to the classical traditions of education owe our existence, and therefore our further effort, to those copyists and teachers and editors who did the often thankless job of handing on this precious heritage. We feel the loss of Christopher greatly, and it adds to our sense of loss of the world that he and his father so eloquently showed us. One more of the chain of tradition has passed from this world. But the odds have always been stacked against us, and that is what the *Legendarium* is all about:

“The consolation of fairy-stories the joy of the happy ending [or eucatastrophe]...does not deny the existence of dyscatastrophe, of sorrow and failure: the possibility of these is necessary to the joy of deliverance; it denies (in the face of much evidence, if you will) universal final defeat and in so far is evangelium, giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> J.R.R. Tolkien, “On Fairy-Stories,” 1947 and 1964, reprinted in *On Fairy-Stories: Expanded edition, with commentary and notes*. Eds. Verlyn Flieger and Douglas A. Anderson. (Harper-Collins: 2014). 70 [para. 89]

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 75. [para. 99]

# About the Artist

## Olivia Mayoros

Olivia works and lives in Edinburgh, Scotland while completing a Master's degree at the University of St Andrews in sacred photography. Her classical training from the Sacred Art School in Florence provides the foundation for her sculpture work and more recently, for her paintings.

Much of her fine art wraps itself around the myths and relics while she approaches photography more like a performance or installation piece. She crafts a particular photography experience for clients in her business, "The Photo Adventure," and uses many forms of art to draw people together.

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