

ABSTRACT

Virtue in Epic Voyages: How Homer, Sir Edmund Spenser and C.S. Lewis Displayed the Significance of the Pursuit of Virtue Throughout the Treacherous Journeys of Their Heroes

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This essay explores the profound influence of literature in cultivating virtue within its readers. By examining three timeless works, Homer's *The Odyssey*, book II of Sir Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, and C.S. Lewis's *The Voyage of the 'Dawn Treader'*, collectively referred to throughout this essay as "epic voyages," we delve into the enduring power of storytelling to impart moral lessons. These narratives have withstood the test of time, testifying to their continued relevance as tools for virtue education. Throughout the essay, we analyze the virtues exemplified by the heroes in these tales: prudence, courage, temperance, hopefulness, and humility. We observe how these virtues guide and shape each hero's journey, offering readers fictional exemplars to inspire their own pursuit of virtue and illuminate the profound impact of literature in training individuals in the path of virtue. In the world of these epic voyages, readers embark on transformative journeys alongside their heroes, uncovering valuable insights into the human experience and the pursuit of moral excellence. Through our exploration of these timeless narratives, we uncover the enduring legacy of literature as a catalyst for virtue education, encouraging readers to navigate their own moral journeys with prudence, courage, temperance, hopefulness, and humility as their guides.

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“But remember, all of you, not to regard lightly nor to ridicule the sacred things, those worthwhile things. Hold them dear, cherish them, for they alone will sustain you in the end; and remember too that only through work and oftentimes through hardships may they be attained.”

-Dr. Samuel Palmer Brooks, *The Immortal Message*

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Some of the most intriguing pieces of fiction writing involve a hero embarking upon a daring quest. These journeys present many opportunities for protagonists to choose between good and evil, virtue and vice. Virtue refers to excellent traits of one's character and, conversely, vice refers to the deficiencies in one's character. If a reader thinks hard enough about the actions displayed by their favorite story's hero, then it becomes evident that literature is often fraught with themes of virtue education. The concept of reading for the sake of ethics is not new; however, it must continue to be encouraged as a component of reading. Also, it must be a conscientious effort in the author's writing, something pondered and expressed with caution so that it might be done well. The moral lessons told in favorite tales are used to create a timeless story, one that people will hear throughout many generations. Fictional stories are an essential means by which people come to understand both the world around them and themselves. "Voyage epics"—as these stories will be referred to for the purpose of this paper—are pieces of fiction about a hero sent on an epic voyage full of fictional elements. The most important works of this literary genre are those which withstand stylistic and literary trends, three of which will be dissected throughout this paper. Homer, Sir Edmund Spenser and C.S. Lewis all approached the theme of virtue in their fictional writings. As *The Odyssey*, *The Faerie Queene* and *The Voyage of the 'Dawn Treader'* present heroes' voyages which are filled with temptation and adversity—often placing the protagonist in a scenario

demanding a choice between virtue and vice—, readers learn that man's virtue is often most able to be refined in the midst of suffering.

Author of epic voyages and close confidant of C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien creates a compelling argument for why voyage epics are a necessary tool for the study of virtue. In *The Two Towers*, the second book of *The Lord of the Rings* series, Tolkien includes a conversation between two hobbits, a fictional race of humans with hairy bodies and enormous feet, named Sam and Frodo. Sam recounts hearing stories as a child stating,

‘The brave things in the old tales and songs, Mr. Frodo: adventures, as I used to call them. I used to think that they were things the wonderful folk of the stories went out and looked for, because they wanted them, because they were exciting and life was a bit dull, a kind of a sport, as you might say. But that’s not the way of it with the tales that really mattered, or the ones that stay in the mind. Folk seem to have been just landed in them, usually – their paths were laid that way, as you put it. But I expect they had lots of chances, like us, of turning back, only they didn’t.’¹

In the midst of a fictitious story full of fantastical and mystical beasts on daring adventures throughout a mythical land, Tolkien takes a moment to touch on the importance of stories like his in the moral development of real people. For generations, people have listened to or read fictional voyage stories and desired to emulate the courage, temperance and fortitude of their heroes. One common occurrence in these voyage epics is that the heroes are thrust into their voyages against their will. Odysseus surely did not choose to wander for ten years, but his wandering was a necessary condition for his return to Ithaca. Additionally, the Faerie Queene selected the heroes who would be tasked to fulfill her quests, rather than utilizing individuals who

¹ Tolkien, J. R. R. *The Two Towers: Being the Second Part of the Lord of the Rings*, HarperCollins Publishers, 1999. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/bayloru/detail.action?docID=30060332>, pg. 321

volunteered their service. The most strikingly reluctant character to embark on their voyage is seen in Lewis's writing. Eustace Scrubb was adamantly opposed to his presence in Narnia and even Edmund and Lucy Pevensie did not choose to become king and queen of Narnia. Regardless, these men and women embarked on such quests and journeyed through many points of suffering in which they gained experience with virtue. Therefore, the voyage epic is a genre of story that must be studied philosophically and whose study is an essential tool for the teaching of virtue.

Voyage epics provide exemplars for readers to emulate in their own pursuit of virtue. Dr. Jennifer Frey, a professor of philosophy at the University of South Carolina, writes on the significance of literature and virtue, stating that "stories give us exemplars—characters we might aspire to imitate in our own lives—and show us the potential consequences of certain choices, both for ourselves and others. In this way, stories are essential to the inculcation of virtue (or vice)."² These characters provide inspiration for the type of virtuous lives that readers will desire to become. Mitchell Green, a professor of language, philosophy of mind and aesthetics at the University of Connecticut states that "one can learn to be good through fiction by emulating fictional characters [...]. But something similar would seem to be the case when we emulate characters who are not the paragon of virtue."³ He argues that people will begin to emulate those who they read about, so it is vital that the heroes of fictional writings remain virtuous and that adults, who might neglect reading fiction past adolescence or

² Frey, Jennifer, et al. "Literature and Virtue." *The Thomas B. Fordham Institute*, fordhaminstitute.org/national/commentary/literature-and-virtue.

³Green, Mitchell S., 'Learning To Be Good (or Bad) in (or Through) Literature', in Garry L. Hagberg (ed.), *Fictional Characters, Real Problems: The Search for Ethical Content in Literature*. Oxford University Press, 2016. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198715719.003.0016>, pg. 300

childhood, continue to read stories like those of Odysseus, Sir Guyon and the heroes of *Narnia*. Therefore, the reading and the study of voyage epics ought to be encouraged in the instillation of virtue in young children and in the continued pursuit of virtue by adults. Additionally, Peter Hart, Gisela Oliveira and Mark Pike, professors of education at the University of Leeds in the United Kingdom, co-authored an article in the *Journal of Beliefs and Values* entitled “Teaching Virtue through Literature”, in which they explain that in engaging with narratives, people are provided a reference point for “good” and that which is “right.”⁴ Imaginative fiction, like that seen in the following epic voyages, teaches people of all ages the importance of virtue in the very essence of humanity. Virtue saves the hero’s life. It provides a means for weak boys and girls to become the kings and queens of a magical land. It empowers readers to become courageous, prudent, temperate, just and generous.

Though this essay will argue that literature is a beneficial means by which virtue is communicated and gleaned, it is important to note that there are many philosophers who are skeptical of fiction’s role in virtue education. British novelist and philosopher Iris Murdoch, though not a complete skeptic of fiction as a tool for teaching virtue, does offer the complaint that metaphysical fiction “fail[s] to give a realistic account of authentic moral life as the conduct of psychologically complex, flesh and blood, warts and all, personalities.”⁵ True, no person will be spearing a cyclops in the eye, resisting sirens or turning into dragons. However, it is through these fictional, fantastical scenarios

⁴ Hart, Peter, et al. “Teaching Virtues through Literature: Learning from the ‘Narnian Virtues’ Character Education Research.” *Journal of Beliefs and Values*, vol. 41, no. 4, 2019, pg. 475

⁵ Carr, David. “From character to parable and allegory: varieties of moral imagination in fiction literature.” pg.104

that men, women and children gain admiration for the heroes within a voyage epic. The prudence in resisting the call of a siren, the temperance to resist sexual immorality and the courage of a small mouse to fight giant beasts instill in readers a desire to follow these heroes in the pursuit and display of virtue. No imaginative child role-plays a normal person choosing virtue in a boring nine-to-five job, but, rather, transforms himself into a daring warrior fighting off dragons. These voyage epics provide role models of virtue which readers will carry with them throughout their lives, even when their belief in the existence of dragons and fairies fades.

The Significance of the Chosen Texts

Many texts illustrate virtue education; I chose *The Odyssey*, book II of *The Faerie Queene* and *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, first, due to the theme of voyages across these texts. *The Odyssey* is the story of Odysseus's voyage home to Ithaca which presents him with many instances of suffering allowing him to grow in virtue. In book II of *The Faerie Queene*, Sir Guyon—or the Knight of Temperance—is sent on a voyage by the Faerie Queene to destroy the Bower of Bliss, a place of sensual indulgence that entraps knights who fail to display self-control. And, finally, in *The Voyage of the 'Dawn Treader'* the theme of voyaging is presented in the title of the text. Lucy and Edmund Pevensie are brought back to Narnia, this time with their insufferable cousin Eustace, where they are thrust upon a ship called the Dawn Treader. Their voyage involves finding the seven lost lords while growing in virtue along the way. In exploring *The Odyssey*, book II of *The Faerie Queene* and *The Voyage of the 'Dawn Treader'*, readers delve into the theme of voyages and how they serve as a backdrop for virtue education, allowing characters to evolve and grow in moral character.

Furthermore, the theme of voyaging is intricately connected to the human experience. Human life can be likened to a grand voyage, replete with a myriad of unforeseen trials, moments of suffering, occasional setbacks, joyous celebrations, and ultimate triumphs. In this regard, these texts provide a striking and poignant parallel to the multifaceted journey that constitutes the essence of human existence. Through the exploration of voyages in literature and storytelling, we are reminded of our shared humanity and the universal aspects of living a life filled with its own unique adventures and challenges.

Another simple detail for choosing to focus specifically on these texts is the similarity in all of these voyages involve sailing on a boat. It might seem like an insignificant detail, but a voyage on a boat can be a powerful symbol and tool for building camaraderie and fostering a sense of unity among a group of individuals. Navigating open waters or facing challenging conditions can require courage and self-confidence. Each person must fulfill their role and communicate effectively to ensure the safety and smooth operation of the boat. This environment fosters virtues such as cooperation, trust and accountability. As will be seen in the exploration of these texts in the following chapters, when crew members or fellow sailors begin to fail in virtue the whole vessel is affected. Incorporating the theme of boat voyages into the analysis of these texts reveals that this seemingly insignificant detail serves as a potent symbol of camaraderie and virtue emphasizing the profound impact of individual character on the collective well-being of the crew or fellow sailors, a theme we will further explore in the following chapters.

The authors of these texts attribute specific virtues to their protagonists, recognizing the essential role these virtues play in achieving success on their respective journeys. However, it is important to note that this theme extends beyond these particular texts, prompting the need to elucidate their relevance within the context and purpose of this paper. Each virtue exemplified by the heroes in these three narratives serves as a valuable lesson for the readers to internalize and pursue in their own lives. This application extends beyond the realm of fiction, as these virtues can lead individuals to success in their personal journeys and inspire the pursuit of additional virtuous qualities. Temperance, courage and prudence emerge as central virtues in this discussion. Book III of Aristotle's *Ethics* highlights the significance of the virtues of temperance and bravery. According to Aristotle, these virtues are indispensable for moral action, as they provide the necessary balance between the pains and pleasures of life, ensuring successful ethical conduct.⁶

Furthermore, these authors share a chronological interconnectedness that underscores their influence on one another. Homer's writings were an element of the education of Sir Edmund Spenser, who, reciprocally, had a profound impact on C.S. Lewis's work and writing. This historical continuum reinforces the enduring importance of the virtues highlighted in these texts and their timeless relevance in literature and moral philosophy.

Homer is credited for the authorship of *The Odyssey* in the 8th century BC. This is one of the oldest and most well-known texts in the world due to the influential nature of

⁶ Aristotle, et al. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Hackett Publishing Company, Incorporated, 1999, Bk. II, Ch. 3

its hero and his sufferings amidst his voyage. Throughout *The Odyssey*, Odysseus grapples with leading a virtuous and honorable life during his quest to return to Ithaca, his homeland, at the conclusion of the Trojan War. He spends ten years wandering and he encounters mythical beasts, foreign lands and the Greek gods along the way. Throughout his quest, Homer's hero receives guidance and assistance from the gods which urges him toward the virtue of prudence. Ultimately, Odysseus represents an imperfect mortal struggling morally and physically toward a desirable and honorable goal. There is much significance in both Odysseus's moral and physical struggles. Odysseus prevails as a victorious and legendary warrior. However, *The Odyssey* displays his mortal weaknesses through his struggle to act in accordance with virtue and through his physical tribulations as he encounters starvation and exhaustion. Although he is a fictional epic hero, this display of vulnerability makes Odysseus seem more relatable to the reader. His weaknesses prove his humanity. *The Odyssey* displays the virtue of prudence throughout the weaknesses and shortcomings of Homer's hero, exhibiting Odysseus's humanity.

In the 16th century, Sir Edmund Spenser authored the six poems culminating in *The Faerie Queene*. Spenser is credited as being one of the most influential and talented poets of his time. He was influenced by the religious turmoil occurring in Britain during his life and was extremely loyal to Queen Elizabeth I; both attributes are presented throughout *The Faerie Queene*. Spenser was also greatly influenced by the classics, particularly those hailing from ancient Rome and Greece, including the works of Homer. Through his study of Homer, Spenser would learn to write rhetorically and speak

eloquently for himself.⁷ In fact, Spenser's contemporaries would have noticed similarities in the writings of Spenser and Homer. In 1592, Thomas Nashe refers to Spenser and Geoffrey Chaucer—a 14th century English poet best known for his authorship of *The Canterbury Tales*—as the “English Virgil and Homer.”⁸ Ultimately, it is important to note the connection between these two authors. Homer's stories must have had a profound impact on the education and writings of Spenser. This impact is evidenced by the traditions and responses to Homer's epic poems woven within Spenser's own poetry. The chosen virtues were derived from Aristotle's twelve moral virtues described in *Nicomachean Ethics*, as Spenser intended for there to be twelve books of *The Faerie Queene*, but he died after completing only the first half. In this medieval epic poem, each novel's protagonist undergoes a quest through which they will encounter temptation and deception. Sir Guyon is the protagonist in book II of *The Faerie Queene*, representing the virtue of temperance as he is sent on a quest to destroy the Bower of Bliss. Book II will be the primary focus of *The Faerie Queene* for the purposes of this essay, though other poems will be referenced when relevant. The story of Sir Guyon is significant because of the central focus of the virtue of temperance in a hero's journey. Temperance is a necessary virtue for a successful quest. If a person is intemperate, then they will partake in every pleasure and abstain from nothing; however, if a person avoids all pleasures, then they will become an insensible person.⁹ Regardless of the specific poem or hero

⁷ Pugh, “Spenser and Classical Literature”, in McCabe, Richard A. *The Oxford Handbook of Edmund Spenser*. Oxford University Press, 2010., pg. 503

⁸ Pugh, “Spenser and Classical Literature”, pg. 505

⁹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Bk. II, Ch. 3

being discussed, it is evident that Spenser's *Faerie Queene* seems to conclude that throughout tribulation, virtue, specifically the virtue of temperance in book II, is refined and instilled in the individual.

Throughout the whole of C.S. Lewis's *Narnia* series, virtue is displayed among the kings, queens and talking beasts of Narnia. *The Voyage of the 'Dawn Treader'* provides examples of vice like those that might be evident in the lives of Lewis's audience. Instead of discussing the horrendous vice that overcomes the White Witch or Miraz, *'Dawn Treader'* uncovers vice through the actions of Eustace Scrubb. Through his adverse journey in Narnia, Eustace, a prideful and spiteful boy, learns the meaning and value of living a virtuous life, both in the magical land of Narnia and in the human world to which they must return. King Caspian, though a generally good character, reveals the natural struggle for man to consistently position their mind and heart toward virtue. Finally, Reepicheep, the most petite character in *The Voyage of the 'Dawn Treader'*, often displays the greatest acts of courage and fortitude. These three individuals become aware of their dependence on Narnia's ultimate ruler, Aslan, for accountability and for the ability to be virtuous heroes and leaders. It is only after encounters with Aslan that Lewis's characters see their corrupt nature and realize their utter dependence upon his grace to aid them through their struggles. There are many similarities between the settings and characters encapsulated in Lewis's Narnia and Spenser's Faerie Land. Lewis had great admiration for Sir Edmund Spenser and spent much time researching and teaching about him. Doris Meyer, a former professor at the University of Northern

Colorado, writes that “learning about Spenser leads us into Lewis’s inner life,”¹⁰ showing the extent to which Spenser influenced the life and work of C.S. Lewis. In his essay from 1941 entitled “On Reading the Faerie Queene”, Lewis fondly recounts his first encounter with Spenser’s poem:

Beyond all doubt it is best to have made one’s first acquaintance with Spenser in a very large [...] edition of *The Faerie Queene*, on a wet day between the ages of twelve and sixteen; [...] those who have had this good fortune [...] will never have lost touch with the poet. His great book will have accompanied them year by year.¹¹

Additionally, Gene Edward Veith, provost emeritus at Patrick Henry College and Director of the Cranach Institute at Concordia, draws a connection between Spenser’s Faerie Land and Lewis’s Narnia. He explains that Lewis must have gleaned inspiration for his characters’ journeys and emulated Spenser in creating landscapes necessary for moral growth.¹² Finally, an important fact is that Lewis’s *Chronicles of Narnia* was published as a children’s series.¹³ This is mentioned to reinforce its legitimacy and place within this essay. Lewis serves as an example of an author who believed in the ability of children to be wise and virtuous, while also reinforcing the significance of ethical pursuits and accumulation of knowledge at all ages. The pursuit of virtue, as an endeavor,

¹⁰ Myers, Doris T. “Spenser.” in *Reading the Classics with C.S. Lewis*. Thomas L. Martin, editor. Grand Rapids, Michigan. Baker Book House Company, 2000, pg. 99

¹¹ Lewis, C.S. “On Reading *The Faerie Queene*.” in *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature*. Collected by Walter Hooper. Cambridge University Press, 1998, pg. 146

¹² Veith, Gene Edward. “Renaissance.” in *Reading the Classics with C.S. Lewis*. Thomas L. Martin, editor. Grand Rapids, Michigan. Baker Book House Company, 2000., pg. 114

¹³ Lewis, C. S., and Muir, Ross W. “Sometimes Mr. Beaver is just a Beaver: C.S. Lewis on Writing for Children [of this and Other Worlds].” *Canadian Mennonite*, vol. 10, no. 1, Jan 09, 2006, pp. 8. *ProQuest*, <http://ezproxy.baylor.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/magazines/sometimes-mr-beaver-is-just-c-s-lewis-on-writing/docview/228242108/se-2>.

should concern all people of all ages throughout the entirety of their existence.¹⁴ C.S. Lewis's *The Voyage of the 'Dawn Treader'* is a book which is beneficial to learning and instilling the virtues of courage and fortitude while also highlighting the significant role of divine encounters in the success of a virtuous person.

The Structure of the Project

For the sake of clarity, the primary texts will be discussed in chronological order beginning with *The Odyssey*, then *The Faerie Queene Book II* and concluding with *The Voyage of the 'Dawn Treader'*. Each author's background and philosophical paradigm will be briefly discussed insofar as it is pertinent to understanding the influences upon their fiction writing and philosophical disposition. Next, the hero or heroes of each story will be dissected, discussing the virtues and vices displayed by each. This will give the reader a better understanding of the innate qualities of the characters written by Homer, Spenser and Lewis. Learning about these characters' natural, and often self-focused, inclinations will help the reader understand how the pursuit of virtue might present specific challenges to each of the heroes' journeys. Additionally, the necessity of each virtue—temperance, courage, fortitude, etc.—in the journeys of each story will be explored. There are numerous examples of moral struggle and tug-of-war between virtue and vice in each of the three voyages that will be discussed. Therefore, this essay will attempt to show that fictional voyages are a significant and effective means for teaching the necessity of virtue both in the lives of fictional heroes and in the daily lives of the stories' audiences. Across generations, the voyage epics of Homer's Odysseus, Sir

¹⁴ Sanchez-Ostiz, Alvaro. "Character education at any age? Cicero on the lifelong pursuit of intellectual and moral virtue." in Brooks, Edward, et al. *Literature and Character Education in Universities: Theory, Method, and Text Analysis*. Taylor and Francis, 2021., pg. 66

Edmund Spenser's second poem regarding Sir Guyon and C.S. Lewis's continued adventures upon the 'Dawn Treader' in Narnia have influenced untold numbers of readers to pursue virtue.

CHAPTER TWO

Prudence and Courage in *The Odyssey*

The Odyssey is an epic poem which is thought to have been written in the 8th century BC by Homer and has been in continuous publication since its first printed edition appeared in 1488. It is one of the most popular texts from the ancient world and is often taught in modern American high schools, colleges and universities. *The Odyssey* follows the king of Ithaca, Odysseus, on his voyage (or odyssey) home from the Trojan War. Throughout his voyage, Odysseus endures much suffering as he encounters sirens, cyclopes, various kingdoms and trials inflicted by the gods of Olympus. His journey is not one of ease but, rather, one of much suffering. This suffering is significant, for through it Homer allows his hero to grow in virtue and to realize his purpose in returning to his kingdom and family. Homer has given generations an epic story of one man's struggle to become virtuous. Although it might not be the most traditional lens through which *The Odyssey* is read, perhaps the most profitable way to read this story is following the moral growth in the hero Odysseus. Throughout this epic poem, Odysseus is constantly placed in situations which force him to choose between virtue and vice. He is tempted by seductive sirens, taunted by a cyclops and endures the wrath of the gods. Through Odysseus's difficult journey home, Homer's audience is presented with the story of a flawed man's virtue acquisition as the hero grapples with the virtues of prudence and courage. Homer drew upon the Greek context of the time in which he was living, including significant wars and the ancient Greek mythology, to create a story of journeying through temptations and trials. However, this epic voyage has withstood time

and extends far beyond the ancient Greek context to influence people across time and geography. When readers view Homer's epic poem of Odysseus's journey with the intent to learn about virtue, there is much more to gain than the surface level reading often presented to young teenagers in the classroom context. As the hero of this voyage, Odysseus represents an imperfect mortal struggling morally and physically toward a desirable and noble objective of reclaiming both his kingdom and family while accumulating virtues, specifically prudence and courage, along the way.

This chapter is intended to highlight the virtues of prudence and courage displayed by the Greek hero, Odysseus, in *The Odyssey*. It will also identify some of the distinct components of Homer's writings, including the role of the gods and the significance of suffering. The ancient Greek gods play an active role in the story of Odysseus's journey, inflicting both pain and suffering while simultaneously saving his life and acting as guides on his voyage home to Ithaca. Furthermore, the argument can be established that suffering is a crucial element in building and refining Odysseus into a virtuous man. Once those topics have been explored and are understood to be significant, Odysseus's ability to curtail his natural instincts and inclinations becomes clearer to the reader. Homer's hero is repeatedly tried and tested throughout this epic poem; he sometimes falls short of virtue while at other times finds much success. Suffering and success of this mortal hero leads to an important revelation of virtue in mankind. Finally, this chapter will track Odysseus's prudence and courage throughout the epic poem. *The Odyssey*, by the authorship and theological slant of Homer, offers meaningful examples to the study of morality and virtue as it presents a narrative of a heroic man slaying

fantastical beasts alongside the supernatural gods in an attempt to save his homeland and kingdom from the invasion of men motivated by greed.

Background of the Text

Homer was an ancient Greek poet, credited with writing two famous epic poems: *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. There is little known about Homer. Within scholarly circles, there is speculation as to whether Homer wrote these poems or even if he was a real person; this uncertainty has been deemed the “Homeric question”. However, for the purpose of this essay, it will be assumed that Homer was indeed a real person and is to be credited with authorship of these texts. This assumption makes Homer one of the first authors credited with written pieces of literature in history, as *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* are often regarded as the first substantial pieces of Western literature and influenced many later great literary works. Moreover, these poems are still taught in academic institutions worldwide, over two thousand years since they are thought to have been written by Homer. These texts have been taught continuously throughout history influencing some of the world’s most esteemed and renowned philosophers and authors, some of which will be discussed throughout this essay. Plato, another ancient Greek philosopher, acknowledges that Homer’s works were preeminent among poets and scholars and that Homer deserved to be credited with educating Greece.¹⁵ *The Iliad* tells the story of the final year of the Trojan War, a dispute between Agamemnon, king of Mycenae and commander of the Greeks during the Trojan War, and Achilles, the hero of the Trojan War and the most decorated of the Greek warriors. In *The Iliad*, Odysseus is a

¹⁵ Plato. *The Republic*. Translated by Lee Henry Desmond Pritchard, Penguin Books, 1987., 606e-607a

secondary character; he is an asset during the Trojan War primarily due to his cunning nature and manipulative ability as a strategist and public speaker. While his physical strength is an advantage in both *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, it is but a supporting skill when compared to the strength of his words and mind. The theme of skilled manipulation and scheming is also revealed in Odysseus's voyage home after the war, but it seems to be refined into virtuous acts in the later work. Unlike the war stories of *The Iliad*, *The Odyssey* is not a story of wars between nations; rather, it follows a single man's journey home as he undergoes torment and pain, learns about virtue and his true destiny as king of his homeland and reunites with his family.

The Role of the Gods in Odysseus's Voyage

The gods of ancient Greek mythology play an active and essential role in ancient Greek literature, especially in Homeric literature, as they inflict pain and act as moral guides for mortal man. Ancient Greeks believed that virtuous living was essential to communion with the gods. Additionally, the gods differ greatly from humans as they are superior to mortal man in both power and knowledge. It is the gods who determine the need for morality and virtue. Michael Clarke, a professor of classics at the University of Galway, writes that, "if [man] were like the Olympian gods there would be no need to behave admirably and so risk death among the front-fighters but because the end of life is inevitable, the call to perpetuate our glory beyond the grave becomes imperative."¹⁶ Throughout *The Odyssey*, readers see the gods intervening everywhere and in many

¹⁶ Clarke, "Manhood and Heroism" in Fowler, R. L. *The Cambridge Companion to Homer*. Edited by R. L. (Robert Louis) Fowler, Cambridge University Press, 2004., pg. 78

circumstances. This involvement is especially seen through the actions of the goddess Athena and the gods Poseidon and Zeus. Athena was regarded as the protectress of many Greek cities, most notably Athens, and was regarded by the ancient Greeks as the goddess of wisdom and strategic warfare. This association is evident as she guides Odysseus toward prudence throughout his voyage and eventually through his success in slaying the suitors. When Odysseus triumphs against the suitors, Ithaca is protected from their pride and debauchery which likely would have led to the kingdom's demise. Athena is loyal to Odysseus throughout the entirety of the poem, continuously intervening on behalf of the protagonist and his family. The goddess is initially drawn to Odysseus due to his cunning intellect and resourcefulness throughout the Trojan War. Though he is imperfect, Athena sees his ability to navigate trying situations and his capacity for heroism. This could also be interpreted as Athena's wisdom and discernment in seeking a man capable of growing in virtue through suffering. She repeatedly encourages Zeus to show mercy to Odysseus and disguises herself for his benefit. The poem begins with Athena begging Zeus to allow her to assist Odysseus in his return to Ithaca stating, "my heart breaks for Odysseus, / that seasoned veteran cursed by fate for so long / far from his loved ones still, he suffers torments."¹⁷ Athena recognizes there is no possible way for Odysseus to begin his voyage under the curse of Calypso without the intervention of the gods. Therefore, she intercedes on his behalf, pleading for her father and the other gods' consent to assist Odysseus. However, Athena does not fully intervene in Odysseus's journey. She allows him to use his free will to make decisions and to fail. This is how

¹⁷ Homer. *The Odyssey*. Introduction and Notes by Bernard Knox. Translated by Robert Fagles, Penguin Books, 1997., 1.57-59

Odysseus grows, by Athena restraining her intervention and giving the hero opportunities to endure suffering and to seek to evolve morally. Therefore, when the time comes for Odysseus to fight the suitors, his personal physical and moral strength enables him to prevail. Athena is a necessary mentor throughout Odysseus's voyage as she continuously assists him in times of suffering and urges him to strive for wisdom and virtue.

In contrast to Athena's aid and loyalty, the main obstructionist in Odysseus's voyage home is Poseidon—one of the twelve Olympians in Greek mythology who presides over the sea, storms, earthquakes and horses. Poseidon and Odysseus are at constant odds with one another, as Poseidon favored the Trojans whom Odysseus worked to overthrow in battle in *The Iliad*. Poseidon vows to prevent the hero from ever returning to Ithaca or to his wife Penelope. Moreover, their conflict grows when Odysseus insults Poseidon during a violent encounter with Polyphemus, Poseidon's one-eyed son. Odysseus blinds and taunts the cyclops who calls out to his father for help when he learns Odysseus's identity. For the suffering Odysseus, "the demands of justice, carefully enforced by the gods, give his wanderings a certain intelligibility even as they bring out his distinctive character and form of heroism."¹⁸ Poseidon's acts of vengeance on behalf of Polyphemus delay Odysseus's voyage by years; yet, it is in these moments that Odysseus is enlightened to his pride and vanity, allowing him to learn the value of the pursuit of virtue. Indirectly, and presumably unintentionally, Poseidon is a critical player in the hero's journey toward becoming virtuous. Furthermore, Zeus—king of the Olympic gods and god of the sky—plays an important role in *The Odyssey* as he permits

¹⁸ Legaspi, Michael C. "Homer and the Wisdom of the Hero." *Wisdom in Classical and Biblical Tradition*, Oxford University Press, 2018., pg. 19

Poseidon to exhibit his wrath upon Odysseus for a time. As the god of the gods, Zeus allows Poseidon to shipwreck Odysseus, though he ultimately intervenes to save the mortal's life. Eventually, Zeus decides that Odysseus has suffered enough at the hand of Poseidon and grants him pardon. At the beginning of the poem, Zeus calls for the gods to:

come, all of us here put heads together now,
work out his journey home so Odysseus can return.
Lord Poseidon, I trust, will let his anger go.
How can he stand his ground against the will
of all the gods at once—one god alone?¹⁹

While this pardon is most likely a response to Athena's intercession on Odysseus's behalf, Zeus's mercy is necessary for Odysseus to begin his journey home to Ithaca. The physical journey and his moral growth would not have been possible if Odysseus had remained imprisoned on Calypso's Island.

Finally, Hermes—considered to be the messenger god—gives Odysseus an herb which allows him to resist the luring magic of Circe. This herb represents the protection of the gods as only gods are able to uproot it. This miraculous gift from Hermes allows Odysseus to remain human while his men are transformed into pigs. This is just one example of how Odysseus has, not just Athena, but most of the gods on his side; these gracious gods bless him throughout his journey to Ithaca. Silvia Montiglio, a professor of classics at Johns Hopkins University, writes that *The Odyssey*'s hero "triumph[s] in the end because the gods love [him]; and the gods love [him] because [he is], though with variations, exceptionally pure and innocent, and because [he] prove[s] their virtue in the

¹⁹ Homer, *The Odyssey*, 1.91-95

course of [his] wanderings, whereby [making amends] for an original fault.”²⁰ Without the omnipresence and intervention of the gods, Odysseus would likely have not had the same degree of moral development or the ability to survive such a treacherous journey. Homer uses theological appeals to virtue more than a general appeal to the human will; therefore, the gods play an active role in the intervention of human activity and decisions to behave morally rather than the hero of the epic choosing individually to behave morally²¹. Homer’s hero would not have undergone quite an intriguing and enveloping story had it not been for the actions and input from Olympus. Not only do the gods challenge Odysseus by inflicting suffering as punishment for his pride and vanity, but they also act as guides along his journey home which culminates in virtue and ultimately the blessing of a reunion with both his family and his kingdom. Homer supplies a context for the moral evaluation of his hero, Odysseus, through the intervention of the Olympic gods and goddesses.

The Necessity of the Hero’s Suffering

Odysseus’s story is most often regarded as one of a king returning to his kingdom and a husband returning to his bride; however, its greatest significance is as the story of a man who returns to his home with greater wisdom and prudence gained through suffering. *The Odyssey* is most useful and beneficial when read as a poem regarded as a

²⁰ Montiglio, Silvia. ““His eyes stood as though of horn or steel.”” in Paschalis, Michael, and Stelios Panayotakis. *he Construction of the Real and the Ideal in the Ancient Novel*, vol. 17, Barkhuis, 2013. pg. 148-149

²¹ Crisp, Roger, “Homeric Ethics”, in Roger Crisp (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Ethics*, 2013., pg. 5

moral framework for its audience. The primary purpose of Homer's writing is not his hero's happiness— contemporarily defined as a feeling of satisfaction or contentment²²— at the end of his wanderings, but, rather, his hero's accumulation of and inclination to a virtuous disposition.²³ His journey also requires courage which can only be displayed in the context of such a trying and sacrificial journey. While Homer's writings are far deeper than the supernatural or fantastical battles, he beautifully incorporates those literary elements into a much grander story centrally focused on mortality and virtue. The hero of this epic poem is far from perfect: he is often seen making hasty and rash decisions, angering the gods and inflicting harm on others. However, Homer displays to his audience that man, though imperfect, can still be heroic and can learn to be virtuous. Odysseus is most often associated with the virtues of prudence and, as a warrior and hero of an epic poem, courage. These virtues are not only applicable and valuable for people living in the 8th century BC, but also for people in the 21st century AD. Homer's writings have withstood the test of time; the beautiful verse and lyrical words create a story of the importance and necessity of the pursuit of virtue and the heroism that accompanies such a life. The prominence of the moral implications of Odysseus's actions must not fall upon blind eyes nor be lost on the reader, for it is the morality of Odysseus which makes him truly heroic.

Homer uses suffering as an element by which Odysseus is trained in moral virtue. Suffering—to have something painful or distressing inflicted upon a person²⁴—is the

²² *Oxford English Dictionary*, www.oed.com/, s.v. "happiness"

²³ Montiglio, "'His eyes stood as though of horn or steel'", pg. 150

²⁴ *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "suffering"

curse of being mortal or one who is destined to die (i.e., not supernatural or immortal like the gods), and it is a theme woven throughout Odysseus's journey home to Ithaca. Homer includes elements of suffering with deeper intrinsic value than simply to thicken the plot of Odysseus's story. Through suffering and temptation, heroes are pushed to choose between virtue and vice. This is a common human experience regardless of what century in which a person lives or reads *The Odyssey*. All people will, to some extent, endure suffering which will either allow an individual to grow in their own morality or fall prey to the vice. From the first words spoken in the poem by the Muse, Odysseus is defined by his suffering. Homer writes,

Sing to me of the man, Muse, the man of twists and turns
driven time and again off course, [...]
many pains he suffered, heartsick on the open sea,
fighting to save his life and bring his comrades home.²⁵

As humans endure suffering, as they lament and grieve, the natural inclinations of the mortal man are refined. Michael Legaspi, a professor at St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary, categorizes *The Odyssey* as "a story of Odysseus's return, but it is also of a ruler who returns to his city with wisdom gained from suffering."²⁶ He concludes that Odysseus's suffering is a necessary component of Homer's writings, one that should not be overlooked or mistaken to be accidental. Michael Silk, an author, emeritus professor and historian of classical and comparative literature at King's College, London, writes "Odysseus wandered much, learned much, suffered much, as he strove to win his life and his comrades' return. The comrades, however, perished through their

²⁵ Homer, *The Odyssey*, 1.1-6

²⁶ Legaspi, "Homer and the Wisdom of a Hero", pg. 40

own blind folly.”²⁷ Homer’s writings of the suffering Odysseus show his audiences that suffering and loss are bound to occur in human life, regardless of the time or context in which one lives. This makes Odysseus more relatable than a strong man whose life seems to work out perfectly from start to finish. Odysseus’s sufferings demand “bravery and survival” which, then, command that “the claims of honour [and] morality had to be met.”²⁸ Readers of this epic poem witness Odysseus endure personal strife apart from his family, be detained on islands by nymphs, have his life threatened by the gods and fight off suitors from his palace. It is this suffering endured on his heroic journey that Homer uses as the catalyst for Odysseus to learn self-mastery and virtue. Odysseus’s courage and prudence, his leaning into virtues rather than becoming a casualty to vice, ought to be regarded as examples for how to best endure suffering.

Prudence in Odysseus

Through Odysseus’s mistakes and sufferings amid his journey, Homer displays the difficult process of evolving into a prudent person. The virtue of prudence is defined by the Cambridge Dictionary as “behaviour that is careful and avoids risks”²⁹ and it is ultimately achieved through the accumulation of knowledge and worldly wisdom. This is a necessary virtue that people ought to learn to practice. If one is imprudent, then they tend to be reckless or rash and often lack the ability to make wise decisions in their daily

²⁷ Silk, Michael. “The Odyssey and Its Explorations.” in *The Cambridge Companion to Homer*, Cambridge University Press, 2004, pg. 33

²⁸ Lawrence, Stuart E. “Moral Decisions in Homer.” *Scholias: Natal Studies in Classical Antiquity*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2003., pg. 30

²⁹ *Cambridge Dictionary*, [dictionary.cambridge.org.](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/), s.v. “prudence”

lives. Odysseus provides readers with a model for acquiring prudence. To truly be wise, Odysseus must maintain a life of balance and self-control even in the face of temptation and suffering. He must become prudent. Odysseus displays a degree of prudence in the cave of Polyphemus when he tells the cyclops that his name is “Nobody.”³⁰ However, Odysseus’s pride eventually catches up to him when he escapes the cyclops after spearing it in the eye. As Odysseus’s crew sails away, he cries out,

Cyclops—
if any man on the face of the earth should ask you
who blinded you, shamed you so—say Odysseus
raider of cities, *he* gouged out your eye.³¹

Neither this taunting nor even visiting the cyclops’s cave was necessary; these behaviors were not prudent. During this incident, Odysseus’s pride and curiosity overtook the hero’s virtue. He could not resist the temptation to discover the character of these creatures, nor could he resist the temptation to taunt Polyphemus and assert his status as a hero as he fled the cave.³² This episode of *The Odyssey* shows Homer’s audience the imperfections of a mortal hero, displaying the fickleness of human virtue even in a character like Odysseus. Dr. Stuart Lawrence, a senior lecturer in classics at Massey University in New Zealand, writes that Odysseus begins *The Odyssey* as a man that “does not act automatically from moral conditioning, but makes a conscious choice”³³ to behave virtuously. This is a testament to the imperfect nature of human beings—even that

³⁰ Homer, *The Odyssey*, 9.410

³¹ Homer, *The Odyssey*, 9.558-561

³² Legaspi, “Homer and the Wisdom of a Hero”, pg. 37

³³ Lawrence, “Moral Decisions in Homer”, pg. 28

of the “heroes” of ancient Greek literature—and allows room for Homer’s hero to grow in virtue. Virtue is often antithetical to human nature; it must be trained and instilled in the very essence of a person. This is why it is important for fictional voyage literature like *The Odyssey* to continue to present readers with lessons in the necessity and importance of virtue. Odysseus continually reverts to his vicious human nature—displaying his incomplete morality—but his desire to act virtuously grows more prominent throughout his voyage—displaying how an individual’s tendency toward virtue ought to increase throughout their journey in life.

During the voyage, as he grows in virtue and heroism, Odysseus displays prudence more abundantly. On the Island of Thrinacia, home to the castle of Helios, the sun god, Odysseus displays prudence amid starvation. Earlier in the poem, Odysseus was warned by Circe—a goddess who seeks to prevent Odysseus from returning to Ithaca—against killing or feasting on the cattle of Helios. She clearly warns,

leave the beasts unharmed, your mind set on home,
and you all may still reach Ithaca—bent with hardship,
true—but harm them in any way, and I can see it now:
your ship destroyed, your men destroyed as well!³⁴

Odysseus heeds her warning, but his crew foolishly acts against Circe’s advice and decides to kill some of the sacred cattle, resulting in an act of terrible revenge from the sun god. Again, Zeus protects Odysseus but does allow for a great shipwreck which kills the last of Odysseus’s crew, leaving the hero lost and alone at sea. Here, the audience must recognize that Odysseus’s prudence on the Island of Thrinacia, as evidenced by choosing starvation rather than selfishness, ultimately saves his life. At first thought, it

³⁴ Homer, *The Odyssey*, 12.148-151

might be difficult to imagine a circumstance in the typical life of a person in which choosing virtue over vice might save a person's life. However, when thought about more carefully, one recognizes that this is a daily decision all people face. As one chooses to obey the law or consistently partake in virtuous activity, virtue saves physical life and reputation of a person. Virtue is like a muscle that must be trained. Odysseus did not leave the Trojan War perfectly virtuous; rather, he failed to be virtuous which led him to wander for ten years. However, Odysseus made the most progress on his journey to regaining his kingdom when he chose to behave in a manner which aligns with virtue. Through his *Odyssey* back to his kingdom, Odysseus learned self-restraint and self-mastery which cultivated the virtue of prudence. This is most clearly seen upon his arrival in Ithaca as he restrains his natural inclinations and hides his identity once more from both his family and the suitors. With divine assistance from Athena,³⁵ the hero now realizes the necessity of concealing his true identity for the sake of his kingdom and family. It would have been hasty for Odysseus to reveal his identity and wreak havoc against Penelope's suitors the moment he arrived at his palace. Much more harm likely would have occurred had Odysseus failed to properly assess the status of his family and staff's loyalty and the degree of harm being inflicted by the suitors. Through self-restraint and prudent behavior, Odysseus is able to lure the suitors into a false sense of security and camaraderie while he is disguised as an old nameless and harmless beggar. Certainly, the suitors would not be anticipating that this beggar would be Odysseus, renowned warrior and king of Ithaca. However, this prudent behavior still does not come naturally or easily

³⁵ Montiglio, "His eyes stood as though of horn or steel", pg. 154

to Odysseus. During his time in disguise, Odysseus must watch his wife mourn his presumed death and the suitors' advances³⁶. As he sat listening to his wife, he laments himself,

Odysseus's heart went out to his grief-stricken wife
but under his lids his eyes remained stock-still—
they might have been horn or iron—
his guile fought back his tears.³⁷

Though it is painful, this hero is “able to hide his emotions when it would be dangerous to show them.”³⁸ Odysseus must instruct his body, even his tears, toward prudence.

Through his many sufferings amid his journey home, Odysseus has learned the importance of controlling one's mind and body so that risk and danger might be avoided. Montiglio writes of this prudence, stating, “so full of self-control was his body in every part and his reason, keeping everything in obedience and submission, ordered his eyes not to cry, his tongue not to utter a sound, his heart not to tremble or bark.”³⁹ Ultimately, Odysseus's prudence allows him to defeat the suitors, restore his marriage and regain kingdom. However, as displayed in this section, this prudence does not occur easily or without some degree of suffering itself. Homer's hero provides readers with an example of the necessity of the virtue of prudence, without which an individual is inclined to unclear thoughts and reckless actions.

³⁶ Homer, *The Odyssey*, 19

³⁷ Homer, *The Odyssey*, 19.242-245

³⁸ Montiglio, ““His eyes stood as though of horn or steel””, pg. 150

³⁹ Montiglio, ““His eyes stood as though of horn or steel””, pg. 150

Courage in Odysseus

Odysseus's wanderings teach the warrior not only to become prudent, but also to become truly courageous. In the past, Odysseus has proven to be an excellent soldier in time of war. However, it is outside of the context of battle that Odysseus becomes truly courageous and, evidently, displays consistent fortitude. At the beginning of Odysseus's wanderings, his courage, like that of other Homeric warriors, is driven by the desire for social validation and honor in the eyes of other men.⁴⁰ It is when the battle is over that Odysseus learns that "the wise hero also possesses courage, a sturdiness of mind and heart that allows him to persist in spite of failure, opposition and adversity."⁴¹ Throughout *The Odyssey*, Odysseus occasionally becomes privy to information usually concealed by the gods from mortal men. First, on the Island of Ogygia, Calypso—a nymph who has detained Odysseus on her island for seven years with the hope of eventually marrying him—tells Odysseus that if he stays on the island with her then he will be able to live in blissful immortality. Odysseus has experienced paradise on this island, something for which humans of all generations long. The nymph taunts him, saying,

If you only knew, down deep, what pains
are fated to fill your cup before you reach that shore,
you'd stay right here, preside in our house with me
and be immortal.⁴²

⁴⁰ Clarke, "Manhood and Heroism", pg. 77

⁴¹ Legaspi, "Homer and the Wisdom of a Hero", pg. 44

⁴² Homer, *The Odyssey*, 5.228-231

Calypso warns against the hardships Odysseus will face if he chooses to leave her. He has already been through much personal turmoil, fought in war, lost his comrades and has been detained on an island. Many men would have been eager for the opportunity to live blissfully and peacefully for eternity. However, to Calypso's surprise, Odysseus decides to act courageously and attempt the journey home to Ithaca instead of enjoying immortality on Ogygia. None of Homer's readers will encounter a nymph who offers them immortality, but they are likely to encounter numerous circumstances which present the opportunity to choose between courage and cowardice. Odysseus's choice to leave the peaceful island, knowing what lies ahead, reveals his character; he realizes that he is capable of more than brute strength and success on the battlefield. Legaspi writes that, at this moment, "Odysseus appears to be somewhat unconventional among heroes in leaving Ogygia for Ithaca and passing up the chance for immortality. Nothing says more about Odysseus's character than this choice."⁴³ Odysseus refuses the opportunity to become like a god in immortality so that he might return to his rightful place as the husband of Penelope, father of Telemachus and mortal king of Ithaca. Odysseus's choice proves that "the hero is not simply one who lives for honor; he is a man who has held nobly his allotted share and reached his end unashamed. To be mortal is to die, but to be a hero is to die as oneself."⁴⁴ Odysseus's choice to be courageous acts as a model for readers of every age. It is not a simple or easy decision to choose the more difficult, yet

⁴³ Legaspi, "Homer and the Wisdom of a Hero", pg. 33

⁴⁴ Legaspi, "Homer and the Wisdom of a Hero", pg. 45

honorable, path in life. However, Odysseus serves as an example of one who faces danger and suffering directly for the sake of something far greater than himself.

Throughout *The Odyssey*, Odysseus's courage is strengthened, much like his prudence. Odysseus is warned against listening to the sirens' song by Circe. His crew is instructed to fill their ears with beeswax to avoid the luring sound of the sirens. However, Odysseus is determined to resist the song of the sirens rather than cowering from it by filling his ears with wax. He instructs his crew to strap him to the mast of their ship, so as to restrict his movements while allowing him still to hear the sirens' call. Just as Circe promised, the sirens "sent their ravishing voices out across the air / and the heart inside [Odysseus] throbbed to listen longer."⁴⁵ Odysseus shows courage by refusing to avoid the call of the sirens and displays self-control and fortitude by continuing to move forward, physically and mentally, while hearing their song.

Finally, it is upon his return to Ithaca that Odysseus's courage is most tested. His arrival in his homeland and to his palace is far from a blissful reunion as the suitors have taken up space throughout his entire palace, courting his wife and attempting to secure a place upon his throne. Odysseus had the opportunity to turn around and attempt refuge either with Calypso or in another land. Yet, he chose to stay and fight for justice in his kingdom. Choosing to face what appears to be imminent suffering and probable defeat requires courage. Even choosing to act prudently when he arrives in Ithaca requires courage as well as faith in the gods' wisdom. In Odysseus's wanderings, he has been reduced to the barest level of humanity, he has rejected the immortality offered by union

⁴⁵ Homer, *The Odyssey*, 12.208-209

with Calypso, he has experienced suffering from the gods, he has heard the dead Achilles' explanation of the misery of death and he has become lonely and nameless.⁴⁶ Therefore, when Odysseus finally slaughters the suitors, this act of just vengeance is the culmination of the hero's journey and his newfound human excellence. The suitors' demise is more than an act of vengeance; it represents an act of absolute justice. Homer's writings of Odysseus's courage reach beyond the battlefield as he risks his life, time and again, to return to Ithaca and save his kingdom and family from the suitors. Odysseus's courage is exemplified quite blatantly throughout *The Odyssey*. It is more than a story of a warrior; it is one of a man who, though strong and successful in war, struggles to choose to have the courage to do what is right and just. In a world lacking courageous men and women, it is vital that literature continue to provide readers with examples of the virtue of courage.

Conclusion

Ultimately, in *The Odyssey*, Homer uses Odysseus's journey as a reminder that suffering is a part of the human experience, one from which virtue and personal growth is derived. This piece of voyage literature has influenced generations because it is much more than a simple story about a man fighting mythical creatures. *The Odyssey* could profoundly impact its readers' view of the necessity of suffering in the pursuit of becoming truly virtuous men and women. Homer uses the religious context of his time to display the role of divine intervention in the pursuit of virtue. Homer writes a poem in

⁴⁶ Clarke, "Manhood and Heroism", pg. 87

which his hero's success is dependent on the gods' mercy upon men as they teach them virtue and punish vice throughout their wanderings. Every person's individual odyssey, whether in ancient Greece or modern America, will be marked by suffering and hardship; some journeys will be easier than Odysseus's and some will be more difficult. Through this epic voyage of Odysseus, Homer shows that suffering is unavoidable, but that the human response to suffering reveals the true character of a person. This difficult journey allows Homer's hero to learn the significance of prudence and courage apart from physical strength and valor in battle. Though he continues to face mythical creatures in fantastical lands, this journey to virtue allows the Greek hero to resonate more with the average reader. Odysseus does not miraculously become virtuous; rather, he endured many hardships and punishments due to his wrongdoings, teaching him the utter weight of vice and enlightening him to the pursuit of virtue. Naturally, humanity is inclined to act in contrast to virtue. Nevertheless, through the desire to emulate a virtuous hero, individuals begin their journey to pursue virtue and flee from vice. Odysseus acts as a model for imperfect individuals training themselves in virtue.

CHAPTER THREE

Temperance in *The Faerie Queene*

In 1590, Sir Edmund Spenser presented Europe with a world in which virtuous knights were the heroes in his stories. His epic poem *The Faerie Queene* allowed for moral virtue to be challenged and upheld in the most difficult situations by his heroes. Spenser's writings offer challenges to people from all walks of life, but especially those who are in pursuit of a virtuous life within a world that does not particularly encourage such as morality. Specifically, book II of *The Faerie Queene* explores the virtue of temperance through the story of a knight named Guyon who is repeatedly challenged and tempted with worldly pleasures. Throughout book II, Sir Guyon and other characters become familiar with the personal and public tragedies which accompany intemperance and the glories which accompany temperance. There is also much to be learned about the very nature of temperance within the episodes of Spenser's writings. Sir Edmund Spenser created a fictional world, full of imaginary characters, to demonstrate divine grace and other spiritual parallels to the real world during a period of time when there was much animosity within and toward the Christian church. Though this poem was written during the Renaissance period, within the pages of Spenser's writings, there is much that is still relevant today and critical to the development of virtuous individuals and communities.

This chapter is intended to highlight the virtue of temperance through book II of *The Faerie Queene*. It highlights the history of Spenser's writings as well as the context in which he was contemplating moral philosophy. Next, Sir Guyon's calling and introduction into Faerie Land will be expounded upon by defining temperance and

discussing Spenser's decision to write about the virtue of temperance. Then, the significance of temperance as a public virtue as well as a private virtue will be introduced. This will be described and proven through examples within Guyon's quest in book II of *The Faerie Queene* as well as through modern examples of intemperance. Spenser uses the philosophy of many authors who came before him to create an outline for his interpretation of the virtues; however, Spenser's writing is unique as he incorporates both a secular understanding of morality and virtue as well as a Christian paradigm. Book II of *The Faerie Queene* offers meaningful insight to the study of morality and virtue by introducing a world of adventure and a desire for good to be explored by imperfect men longing for virtuous lives.

Background of the Text

Sir Edmund Spenser was a 16th century English poet who is best known for his epic poem *The Faerie Queene*, a fantastical allegory about knights, fictitious beasts and the quest for virtue through journeys toward the Faerie Queene's castle. In a letter to his friend and neighbor, Sir Walter Raleigh, Spenser expresses the intentions of his new poem. *The Faerie Queene* was intended to be a series of twelve books; however, Sir Edmund Spenser was only able to complete the first six books of the poem before his death in 1599. *The Faerie Queene* was first published in 1590, consisting of only books I-III; it was republished in 1596 with books IV-VI included. Each individual book of *The Faerie Queene* tells the story of a specific heroic knight who represents a different moral virtue. In the late 1500s, there was an increased interest in philosophy, particularly that of Aristotelian tradition and curriculum. Sir Edmund Spenser drew inspiration for his poem

and wisdom about virtue from book II of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, which is Aristotle's most esteemed study of personal morality and the goals of human life. In his *Ethics*, Aristotle outlines thirteen moral virtues necessary for accomplishing the good in human life.⁴⁷ This is where Spenser drew inspiration for his allegory. An "allegory" consists of abstract ideas or principles being represented by characters or events within a narrative. Therefore, the thirteen moral virtues were intended to be depicted through the twelve heroic knights across Spenser's twelve books and Prince Arthur.

Each episode written by Spenser further develops these key virtues which are initially presented in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* through the character development of the individual knight who embodies each particular virtue. The Redcrosse Knight represents the moral virtue of holiness in book I of *The Faerie Queene* and Sir Guyon represents the moral virtue of temperance in book II. Additionally, the moral virtues of chastity, friendship, justice and courtesy are personified in books III through VI. Furthermore, Prince Arthur appears throughout each of the six books of Spenser's poem both as a depiction of the mythological King Arthur and as a symbol of the virtue of magnificence—the perfection of all other virtues—throughout his deeds across the epic poem's entirety. Spenser writes that his version of Prince Arthur was created "to pourtraict in Arthure, before he was king, the image of a brave knight, perfected in the twelve private morall virtues, as Aristotle hath devised."⁴⁸ Additionally, Gloriana, also referred to as the "Faerie Queene" who is the ruler of Faerie Land, was intended to

⁴⁷ Spenser, Edmund. "The Letter to Raleigh." *The Faerie Queene, Book II*, Hackett Publishing Company, Incorporated, 2006., pg. 226

⁴⁸ Spenser, "The Letter to Raleigh", pg. 226

represent Queen Elizabeth I. Spenser aimed to create a Queene for his fictional land who was “the most excellent and glorious”⁴⁹ much like he viewed the English monarch. Each of Spenser’s primary characters has a distinct purpose either as an embodiment of a virtue or as a representation of somebody who Spenser thought deserved to be honored.

Similar to Aristotle’s writings in *Ethics*, Spenser’s writings do not provide a single definition of the virtues they explore, nor does any single character perfectly embody a single virtue. Rather, his writings explore the characteristics and demonstrations of the virtues.⁵⁰ Spenser claims that “the generall end therefore of all the booke is to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline.”⁵¹ Spenser also gleaned inspiration from Homer’s writings of Agamemnon and Ulysses, Virgil’s writings of Aeneas and Ludovico, and Ariosto’s writings of Orlando.⁵² He perceived that these poets created these characters to be virtuous in some respects, though none were perfect. Spenser, a poet renowned throughout centuries, gained inspiration for his personal journey to virtue and for his aim to inspire others in virtue through fictional literature. Therefore, his stories in Faerie Land should be read to learn about virtue, as he intended.

⁴⁹ Spenser, “The Letter to Raleigh”, pg. 226

⁵⁰ McNair, Maria Devlin. “The Faerie Queene as an Aristotelian Inquiry into Ethics.” *Spenser Studies*, vol. 33, Jan. 2019. journals.uchicago.edu (Atypon), <https://doi.org/10.1086/699644>., pg. 109

⁵¹ Spenser, “The Letter to Raleigh”, pg. 225

⁵² Spenser, “The Letter to Raleigh”, pg. 225-226

Temperance in Book II of The Faerie Queene

In book II of *The Faerie Queene*, Sir Guyon personifies the virtue of temperance. This entire poem is an allegory of temperance, which is the ability to show self-restraint from lusts and passions. The primary guide of the Knight of Temperance's quest is presented in Canto I of book II of *The Faerie Queene* stating,

Still he him guided over dale and hill,
And with his steedy staffe did point his way;
His race with reason, and with words his will,
From fowle intempraunce he ofte did stay,
And suffred not in wrath his hasty steps to stray.⁵³

Sir Guyon is constantly presented with situations which prey on his ability to remain temperate. However, through perseverance and learned skill, he is often able to turn away from the temptation toward that which is virtuous. It is important to remember and to observe that Guyon is not perfect, nor is his virtue of temperance perfected at any point throughout this voyage. He is not the embodiment of absolute temperance. It is essential for readers to know that Spenser's knights are the knights of the virtues, not the virtues themselves.⁵⁴ Virtue does not conquer vice in battle; rather, Guyon and the other knights conquer their vices through exhibiting virtuous characteristics. Therefore, Guyon often needs help from his guide, Palmer, who reminds him of his quest and calls him back to the virtue of temperance along their journey. Palmer is a representation of reason which encourages the pursuit of virtue within human nature. Palmer is consistently guiding Guyon and other characters toward the virtue of temperance. With Palmer's assistance,

⁵³ Spenser, Edmund. *The Faerie Queene, Book II*. Hackett Publishing Company, Incorporated, 2006., pg. 15

⁵⁴ McNair, "The Faerie Queene as an Aristotelian Inquiry into Ethics.", pg. 110

Guyon is being trained in the virtue of temperance throughout his voyage and serves as a model of temperance for Spenser's readers.

Throughout this quest, Sir Guyon is seen sparing the lives of his opponents which is unusual in an epic poem in which knights are fighting for honor. Many arguments—typically represented through battles in the story of the Knight of Temperance—ought to be resolved through temperate mediation rather than by the combat of words or weapons.⁵⁵ The book begins with the evil sorcerer Archimago deceiving Guyon by telling the hero that the Redcrosse Knight—the Knight of Holiness from book I—forced himself upon a young virgin. Guyon is instantly filled with rage and departs to fight and kill Redcrosse. However, upon meeting Redcrosse, Guyon restrains from violence and begins speaking with the knight about this alleged misconduct. After learning the truth of the story from book I and hearing of Archimago's deceitfulness, Guyon is relieved that he turned from his anger toward self-control. The Knight of Temperance is also witnessed turning away from overindulgence of food, drink and knowledge, the pursuit of wealth, honor and victory, and the incontinence of physical lusts throughout book II. Self-control and moderation can and should be pursued in almost every aspect of a person's life. There are many opportunities for temperance to be challenged and, hopefully, exhibited. Frederick Morgan Padelford, former English Department chairman and Dean of the graduate school at the University of Washington in Seattle, discusses Spenser's writings of the Knight of Temperance by presenting qualities of the temperate man. He states that the temperate man is equable in his desires—not possessing strong desires or impulses—,

⁵⁵ Jordan, Richard. "Spenser's Image of Temperance: Guyon in the Cave and the Bower." *The Quiet Hero: Figures of Temperance in Spenser, Donne, Milton, and Joyce*. The Catholic University of American Press, 1989., pg. 39

he is not quickly angered—though he will feel anger justly when appropriate— and the temperate man does not fervently give himself to the pursuit of honor, wealth or victory in conflict.⁵⁶ Aristotle deems that the temperate person is “one whose desires are naturally moderate.”⁵⁷ In Canto VI, Sir Edmund Spenser begins by consenting that temperance is a challenging virtue to learn and perfect by man:

A harder lesson to learn Contenance
In joyous please then in grievous paine;
for sweetnesse doth allure the weaker sence
So strongly, that uneathes it can refraine
From that which feeble nature covets faine:
But grieve and wrath, that be her enemies
And foes of life, she better can abstaine.⁵⁸

Temperance is unnatural to the human mind, heart and body. It is a virtue that must be cultivated. Benjamin Franklin, a Founding Father of the United States of America, wrote in his autobiography about the thirteen virtues necessary for man to live a successful and happy life. The first of those virtues was temperance—which he defines by “Eat not to dullness. Drink not to elevation”⁵⁹—followed by the virtue of moderation—which he defines as one’s ability to “Avoid extremes. Forbear resenting injuries so much as you think they deserve.”⁶⁰ Virtues are rarely, if ever, qualities perfected at the birth of man, but rather intentional personal engagements are used to refine and equip man for the

⁵⁶ Padelford, Frederick Morgan. “The Virtue of Temperance in the Faerie Queene.” *Studies in Philology*, vol. 18, no. 3, 1921., pg. 334-335

⁵⁷ Gray, Eric. *The Faerie Queene, Book II, Introduction*. Hackett Publishing Company, Incorporated, 2006., pg. XVIII

⁵⁸ Spenser, *The Faerie Queene, Book II*, pg. 82

⁵⁹ “Personal Virtues.” *Benjamin Franklin Historical Society*, www.benjamin-franklin-history.org/personal-virtues/.

⁶⁰ “Personal Virtues.” *Benjamin Franklin Historical Society*

pursuit of the good in their life's journeys. Therefore, virtue education ought to be a vital and significant component of the intellectual and moral growth of a person so that they might train their bodies and minds toward the pursuit of that which is good.

Temperance as Both a Private and Public Virtue

It is necessary for virtuous inclinations to be present in both the private and public aspects of an individual's life. Though there are many ways in which virtues like temperance can be displayed, the utter lack of virtue will quickly be discovered in the public sphere which consists of familial priorities, professional life and romantic relationships. The virtues that are prioritized and refined within the privacy of an individual's heart and mind will come to fruition and revelation in the public setting. Therefore, it is abundantly important for people to practice virtue and despise vice in the private settings of their homes and minds so that one's first reaction in any given circumstance is virtuous. The virtue of temperance, more often categorized as self-control or moderation, is too often viewed as a private virtue which is only profitable for the individual. According to this view, in Spenser's writings, temperance would only be necessary for Sir Guyon's personal life. However, temperance should be appreciated as a virtue that benefits the public life of a community as well as the personal and private life of an individual. If people lack temperance, then the vice of intemperance or overindulgence will extend into many areas which might be detrimental to a community. Aristotle and Spenser both recognized the pain that often accompanies personal pleasure achieved through intemperance. These opposite extremes, pain and pleasure, are often both experienced as one neglects temperance. Pain is experienced by the victim of

another's intemperance while pleasure is achieved through the other's selfish indulgence. Aristotle states in *Ethics*, "it must be observed too that the incontinence of angry passion is not so disgraceful as the incontinence of the desires. [...] Desire, [...] rushes to the enjoyment of a thing, if only reason or sensation says that it is pleasant."⁶¹ Just as the vice of intemperance is not solely a private vice, it is, likewise, not only relevant amongst people alive during the European Renaissance. In modern America, this incontinence of the desires can be observed clearly in the rise in awareness of sexual misconduct. This is most prominently exposed as women join in the "Me Too" movement to speak out against sexual assault or harassment inflicted upon them. Sexual assault is defined by the United States Department of Justice as "any nonconsensual sexual act proscribed by Federal, tribal, or State law, including when the victim lacks capacity to consent."⁶² Though many women have spoken out about the physical intemperance of the men they have encountered, Rachael Denhollander speaks profoundly about the lifelong rippling effects on other people when an individual lacks the virtue of temperance. Denhollander is an American attorney who was sexually assaulted as a child by Dr. Larry Nassar while seeking treatment after suffering a gymnastics injury. Not simply a private practice physician, Larry Nassar was also the physician for Team USA gymnastics. At his sentencing in January 2018, Nassar was found to have abused approximately 256 female athletes during his practice from 1998 to 2015.⁶³ In Denhollander's book *What is a Girl*

⁶¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, IV, 12, 8

⁶² Department of Justice. "Sexual Assault." Office on Violence Against Women (OVW), <https://www.justice.gov/ovw/sexual-assault>.

⁶³ Mountjoy, Margo. "'Only by Speaking out Can We Create Lasting Change': What Can We Learn from the Dr Larry Nassar Tragedy?" *British Journal of Sports Medicine* 53, no. 1, January 2019, pg. 57–60. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bjsports-2018-099403>, pg. 57

Worth? My Story of Breaking the Silence and Exposing the Truth of Larry Nassar and USA Gymnastics, she tells her story of the physical and emotional impact of sexual abuse. She recounts a disgusting modern-day account of the inability to show temperance and self-restraint: “What Larry had done was sexual. Not for any medical purpose. For his own gratification.”⁶⁴ Larry Nassar abused children for his own selfish pleasure, and he could not, or would not, stop. He chose to satisfy his physical lusts repeatedly without concern for the burden that these young women would carry for the rest of their lives. Actions of intemperance, the inability to show self-restraint or control over one’s desires for personal pleasure, are rarely momentary or private. Additionally, it is important to note that not all acts of intemperance are criminal, like Larry Nassar’s vile acts of intemperance. Nonetheless, unrestrained desire or intemperance is the root of this particular criminal act and displays the grave consequences that might be produced by intemperance. Decisions to choose to act selfishly and with wrong intent have permanent effects on one’s own morality and can inflict serious, life-altering burdens upon other innocent people. In this specific instance, 15-year-old Rachael Denhollander was seeking medical attention when intemperance was inflicted upon her by a trusted adult and medical professional. As she recounts in her memoir, this impacted her relationship with her parents and the Church and strained her relationship with her husband. As the one who displayed no self-restraint as he assaulted and abused young women for years, Larry Nassar alone ought to carry the burden and the consequences of his actions. Denhollander

⁶⁴ Denhollander, Rachael. *What’s a Girl Worth? My Story of Breaking the Silence and Exposing the Truth about Larry Nassar and USA Gymnastics*. United Talent Agency, LLC, 2019., pg. 283

writes about the motivations of people who are forced to choose between right and wrong:

there are only two motivations for doing the right thing—[people] can first be motivated by love. They can choose what is right because they do not want people around them to suffer the consequences of their wrong choices. Or they can be motivated by self-interest—because they themselves do not want to live with the consequences of their bad decisions...love is the motivation that will give them joy and peace when doing the right thing is hard and hurts.⁶⁵

The Nassar abuse is a horrifically unfortunate and heart-breaking picture of intemperance motivated by selfish intent; however, Denhollander's story and the stories she fought to have heard by the nation and the court should serve to educate people about the absolute necessity of the virtue of temperance both personally and publicly. Spenser, through fictional writing, provides examples of how to persevere in the pursuit of virtue even in a world that too often forgets these virtues, regardless of time period or national boundaries.

Sir Edmund Spenser likewise creates scenes in his allegory which display the public effects of intemperance. In Canto I of book II of *The Faerie Queene*, Sir Guyon and Palmer encounter a woman named Amavia who has stabbed herself in the stomach. The men quickly rush toward her to attempt to save her life, and as they become aware of their surroundings, they notice a man lying dead on the ground and a baby in the arms of the dying woman. Amavia explains that the man beside her was her husband, Mordant, who fell prey to sexual temptation and seduction by a beautiful sorceress named Acrasia whose sexual temptation turns men into savage beasts. Ultimately, Mordant was able to

⁶⁵ Denhollander, *What's a Girl Worth? My Story of Breaking the Silence and Exposing the Truth about Larry Nassar and USA Gymnastics.*, pg. 236-237

break himself free from Acrasia's enchantment, but Acrasia turned to anger and revenge, poisoning him so that no one but she could have him. While this sexual encounter was consensual, not assault or abuse, it is an example of falling prey to intemperance in a sexual manner. Spenser creates a very real picture of the hurt that happens when temperance is not displayed in relationships or in regard to sexual conduct. He shows that untamed lust turns men or women into beasts and that those vices hurt the innocent people both involved and on the periphery.

Amavia was in such deep pain because of Mordant's betrayal that she took her own life. Consequently, she, too, fell prey to intemperate grief leaving their child an orphan to be raised without either of his parents. In a moment, this child became the victim of both of his parents' impetuous decisions of intemperance. The audience can further visualize the pain resulting from an overindulgence of misguided pleasure as the infant is covered in the blood of his mother. Frederick Padelford states, "a child which was the offspring of parents thus deficient in self-control could only be redeemed from its inheritance by most careful discipline in self-mastery."⁶⁶ Guyon deemed that the child would best attain discipline in temperance by being reared by Medina, a representation of temperance as the middle sister of two extremes—Elissa, who finds too little pleasure in things and is, therefore, constantly angry, and Perissa, who finds too much pleasure in things—met by the men later on their journey.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Padelford, "The Virtue of Temperance in the Faerie Queene", pg. 337

⁶⁷ Spenser, *The Faerie Queene, Book II*, pg. 28, 34-35

Additionally, in the last Canto of the poem, Guyon and Palmer have finally reached Acrasia's Bower of Bliss which has been the object of the entire quest of book II. The Bower of Bliss offers its visitors all of the earthly things which people think will satisfy them. However, the Bower is far from an innocent place as it is filled with artifice and temptation. During his time there, Guyon "makes no attempt to discriminate between what is good and what is bad [...] but systematically fouls whatever he finds. The knight of temperance has become a knight of 'tempest.'"⁶⁸ As Guyon and Palmer fight through the island toward Acrasia, refusing and destroying temptation at each turn, they encounter two naked women playing in a fountain. In this moment Guyon is presented with a choice: to fall prey to his sexual desires or to remain temperate. People are sexual beings; sexual encounters are a natural and good thing when approached with self-control and appropriate consent from both parties involved. However, the fountain at the Bower of Bliss does not offer this righteous type of sexual encounter. Ultimately, Guyon is successful in his temperance:

The secrete signes of kindled lust appear, [...]
 And to him beckned, to approach more neare,
 And shewd him many sights, that corage cold could reare.
 On which when gazing him the Palmer saw,
 He much rebukt those wandering eyes of his,
 And counseled well, him forward thence did draw.⁶⁹

Sir Guyon gives the audience an appropriate image of sexual temperance as he averts his eyes, encourages Palmer in temperance and remains focused on his quest. This display of temperance is good and significant, and Guyon is able to continue his pursuit of Acrasia

⁶⁸ Gray, *The Faerie Queene, Book II, Introduction*, pg. XIII

⁶⁹ Spenser, *The Faerie Queene, Book II*, 12.68-69

and her Bower of Bliss. If Guyon had been distracted by intemperance, his mission assigned by the Faerie Queene and his pursuit of justice for Amavia would have been diverted and, possibly, derailed. Further, this self-restraint shown by Sir Guyon is essential to the success of his quest which ends in the destruction of Acrasia's Bower of Bliss. While there is no blueprint for acting temperately, there are clear examples of temperate behavior that are easily distinguishable, and which protect oneself and others. Rachael Denhollander and Sir Edmund Spenser present their readers with real consequences and the damage that entire communities suffer when a single individual lacks temperance and falls prey to the natural, overwhelming lusts of human vices.

Temperance Leads to the Pursuit of Other Virtues

Temperance affects many aspects of an individual's life. There are devastating effects on other people when temperance is not demonstrated in a public or interpersonal environment. Furthermore, practicing the virtue of temperance allows for other virtues to be realized. Of the five other virtues written about by Sir Edmund Spenser, there is a distinct correlation to the virtue of temperance and its effect on the individual's pursuit of the other virtues. In the episode in Canto I in which Archimago attempts to create disunity between Guyon and Redcrosse, Spenser proves that temperance and holiness are virtues in accordance with one another as the knights become friends, working alongside one another toward the good and the truth.⁷⁰ Chastity, which is the theme of book III, has already been discussed as it is directly related to temperance in sexual temptation.

⁷⁰ Padelford, "The Virtue of Temperance in the Faerie Queene", pg. 336

Temperance also affects the virtue of friendship, the theme of book IV. For example, the friendship between a husband and wife will quickly dissolve if one partner is slow to hold their tongue or quick to allow emotions to direct their response toward the other. Additionally, temperance is necessary in the pursuit of justice, the theme of book V. The principle of moral rightness, or justice, requires the ability to restrain oneself from personal desire or bias. This restraint includes preventing oneself from wronging another human purposely or from omitting personal duties which would thereby harm another person. Finally, temperance has a relationship with the virtue of courtesy, the theme of the final book of *The Faerie Queene* series. Courtesy, the virtue which entangles kindness, generosity and amicability, relies upon self-control to be able to form meaningful relationships with other people. Practical wisdom, which Aristotle believes is the source of an individual's decisions, "sets no limit on the considerations that could affect which way [the agent] goes with regard to that good [being sought] or to the points of view that might make a difference.' We may be guided by principles, but our principles remain provisional, always open to reconsideration."⁷¹ Therefore, self-restraint will evolve and emerge as a person makes decisions regarding other virtuous actions. As seen through book II of *The Faerie Queene*, temperance has a profound effect on the virtuousness of an individual person. Therefore, readers of Spenser's writings, or any person who is in pursuit of a virtuous existence, should first begin to fervently practice the virtue of temperance. It is through learning of Guyon's ability to pursue other virtues

⁷¹ McNair, "The Faerie Queene as an Aristotelian Inquiry into Ethics" pg. 122; Broadie, Sarah. *Ethics with Aristotle*. Oxford University Press, 1994., pg. 211

in addition to temperance that Spenser's audience will appreciate the relationships between various virtues.

It is extremely important for the audience to understand that Guyon's quest against Acrasia, often described as a "quest for vengeance" and beginning with his encounter with Amavia in the forest, is not vengeful but rather a temperate vengeance which spares the life of an evil person. In this book of *The Faerie Queene* and alongside many of the other books within the poem, "Spenser has no desire to put concupiscence to death; he seeks to control it with temperance and chastity"⁷², concupiscence being personified by Acrasia in this episode. Along his quest, Sir Guyon spares the lives of many who some readers would argue deserved the knight's wrath. This theme continues throughout the poem: Spenser offers grace through these other virtues when the knights encounter evil or vice. This grace is bestowed so that the knights would come to know that, by turning to virtue, they will encounter the good of life:

Yet gold all is not, that doth gold seem,
Nor all good knights, that shake well spear and shield:
The worth of all men by their end esteem,
And then praise, or due reproach them yield.⁷³

Spenser's knights are to be remembered for the virtues that they displayed, not the battles won nor the riches bestowed, because they are seeking the good in life—they are seeking virtue.

Sir Edmund Spenser's Faith

⁷² Jordan, Richard. "Spenser's Image of Temperance: Guyon in the Cave and the Bower." *The Quiet Hero: Figures of Temperance in Spenser, Donne, Milton, and Joyce*. The Catholic University of American Press, 1989., pg. 45

Fowler, A. D. S. *The Image of Mortality: The Faerie Queene, II, i-ii*. 1961, pg. 107.

⁷³ Spenser, *The Faerie Queene, Book II*, IX, 9

As a result of his Christian beliefs and worldview, Sir Edmund Spenser gently modifies his beloved Aristotle's initial teachings on virtue. Spenser recognizes that there is a point at which reason fails to save a person and where divine intervention is necessary for the salvation of the individual.⁷⁴ In Canto VII of *The Faerie Queene*, Guyon is faced with his most difficult temptation. Guyon's intemperance when battling the pagan knight Cymochles causes him to be separated from Palmer, who represents reason. Sir Guyon soon encounters Mammon who presents him with the riches abounding from the 'Garden of Proserpine', who is the bride of Hades. Guyon rightly sees the worldly riches as evil and unrewarding, just as Christ would have and as Scripture teaches, and he knows that these powerful and tempting sights must be responded to with "a quiet sufferance and a final turning away."⁷⁵ However, being a mere man, Guyon is unable to be rescued from this difficult temptation by reason alone. The stress causes Guyon to faint, leaving him to be presumed dead. Heroically and personifying divine grace, Prince Arthur arrives, the only person capable of saving Guyon. This episode is significant because the hero of the story is seen fully and clearly as a man in need of saving by another, one greater than himself. In Richard Douglas Jordan's book *A Quiet Hero*, he explains the significance of grace in this episode, writing, "Grace is something that by its very nature always comes unsought and undeserved; that a character is saved while completely unaware of [this grace]."⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Padelford, "The Virtue of Temperance in the Faerie Queene", pg. 342

⁷⁵ Jordan, "Spenser's Image of Temperance: Guyon in the Cave and the Bower", pg. 47

⁷⁶ Jordan, "Spenser's Image of Temperance: Guyon in the Cave and the Bower", pg. 32

Temptation reminds people of their feebleness and utter dependence upon the salvation of the Divine which is Christ Jesus. Additionally, John Milton claims that people learn virtue not by acting as if they are perfect but by encountering a vice and resisting it—”which was the reason why our sage and serious poet Spenser [...] describing true temperance under the person of Guyon, brings him with his palmer through the cave of Mammon and the bower of earthly bliss, that he might see and know, yet abstain.”⁷⁷ All the journeys written by Spenser in the six books which make up *The Faerie Queene* present life as a never-ending battle, wherein each knight was sent out by the fairy queen Gloriana to discover and conquer. For these knights, there is a new temptation at each turn. Paul Siegel argues that Spenser writes about the endless battles in life in order to show that “the purpose of man’s existence is to serve God, not by an ascetic withdrawal from this world, but by fulfilling the work which has been appointed to him.”⁷⁸ The knights are sent on journeys through their land which will both test their devotion to their queen and refine their virtues, leading them ever closer to her throne. This allegory offers a distinct parallel to the life of a justified Christian. God sends His people into a world riddled with temptations and lusts, redeems them and then challenges their devotion to Him as He sanctifies His children until they return to His side for eternity upon their glorification in Heaven. Throughout the many episodes compiled within book II of *The Faerie Queene*, Sir Guyon is either presented with an opportunity to demonstrate temperance or he learns something about the nature of temperance. There are battles

⁷⁷ Milton, John. *Complete Poems and Major Prose*, edited by Merritt Y. Hughes, Hackett Publishing Company, 2003., pg. 728

⁷⁸ Siegel, Paul N. “Spenser and the Calvinist View of Life.” University of North Carolina Press, vol. 41, no. 2, Apr. 1944., pg. 204

which offer occasions to show temperance by sparing another's life, there are moments when physical lust demands temperance and there are worldly riches and honors to be gained which challenge temperance. However, there are also moments when temperance is simply too difficult for the broken, depraved human flesh to pursue. In each episode, "some events may take the hero closer to his journey's end, some may not; the demands of narrative movements are secondary to the demands of symbolic developments."⁷⁹ The spiritual moments woven throughout *The Faerie Queene* do not necessarily hasten Sir Guyon or the other knights in the series along their narrative quests; however, these moments are vital to Guyon's symbolic development as the Knight of Temperance. To Spenser, Christ was the necessary means by which one finds virtue, and the journey is how one grows in that virtue. These episodes which riddle the knights bring them closer to their queen's quest bestowed upon them, though this is not always initially obvious. In his introduction to book II of *The Faerie Queene*, Erik Gray writes, "Book Two may show the triumph of temperance, but Guyon in the end is neither wholly triumphant nor wholly temperate; even as he accomplishes his quest, he reveals his limitations, both practical and moral."⁸⁰ In the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, Jesus, who is the embodiment of perfected virtue, is tempted by Satan in the wilderness. He is hungry, tired and alone. Being fully human as well as fully God, there was a pull between intemperance and temperance. However, due to His human submission to His divine nature, Jesus is able to withstand all temptation; in fact, He does not waiver from perfect

⁷⁹ Jordan, "Spenser's Image of Temperance: Guyon in the Cave and the Bower", pg. 34

⁸⁰ Gray, *The Faerie Queene, Book II, Introduction*, pg. XIII

temperance. He is the absolute image of perfected temperance. In contrast, Guyon is solely human and is, therefore, faulted and needs the help of many people along his journey to remind him of his ultimate quest for temperance and goal of returning to his queen. The spiritual connections that are woven within *The Faerie Queene*, and specifically in book II, point Spenser's audiences away from their natural sinful desires and toward the virtuous desires of a holy God.

Conclusion

Sir Edmund Spenser writes book II of *The Faerie Queene* with immaculate attention to detail as he intertwines the challenges to the pursuit of the virtue of temperance in each episode throughout the poem. This story is much greater than the simple tale of a knight gallivanting along on a quest to meet his queen; rather, it offers countless examples of the necessity of perfecting the virtue of temperance, both personally and for the sake of interpersonal relationships. Spenser delivers beautiful images of the good that is produced through the demonstration of temperance, but he also presents the fatal consequences of intemperance. Yet, Spenser leaves space for his audience to evaluate the extent to which there is a moral obligation to act with temperance. Ultimately, virtue is meaningless if not chosen by an individual's desire to do what is right out of love for others. Maria Devlin McNair eloquently writes that "The poem does not tell us to adopt this or that principle. It provides occasions for us to discern and judge the principles at work in a given case. [...] the poem tests our understanding of those principles in subsequent episodes that may force us to revise our earlier

judgements.”⁸¹ Spenser’s episodes in *The Faerie Queene* provide the reader opportunities to evaluate the ethical and moral significance of a multitude of situations faced by various characters. Additionally, through moral or physical successes and failures, the reader’s judgment is challenged and eventually trained to recognize and seek virtue. Spenser’s goal was to offer instruction to his readers which would instill generational knowledge of the significance of virtue.⁸² There are many difficulties in delivering moral lessons from past to present as people, cultures and traditions change; however, this honorable allegory of the Legend of Temperance should to be viewed as equally profitable and important to the modern 21st century reader as it was to those reading during the Renaissance period.

⁸¹ McNair, “The Faerie Queene as an Aristotelian Inquiry into Ethics.”, pg. 121-122

⁸² Spenser, “The Letter to Raleigh”, pg. 225

CHAPTER FOUR

C.S. Lewis's Philosophy of Virtue and His Presentation of Virtue in *The Voyage of the 'Dawn Treader'*

The Chronicles of Narnia series was written and published in the 20th century by Clive Staples "C.S." Lewis. C.S. Lewis was a British author and Anglican theologian. His career included authoring numerous works of fiction as well as nonfiction Christian apologetics while holding academic positions at the highly esteemed and world-renowned University of Oxford and University of Cambridge. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia* introduces a fantasy land full of magical, mythical creatures and talking animals. The series revolves around the adventures of children who find themselves in Narnia being guided by Aslan, a wise lion who Lewis deems the true king of Narnia. Aslan is not an ordinary lion; rather, he is a representation of Jesus Christ in Narnian clothing. Universal virtues such as courage, humility and wisdom are exemplified throughout the fictitious journeys in Narnia. These novels provide Lewis's audience with examples of virtuous living in a magical world. Lewis was a respected academic and a Christian; therefore, he was familiar with the popular secular teachings on virtue while understanding the Christian paradigm of the necessity of the pursuit of virtue. Ultimately, C.S. Lewis's philosophy on morality and virtue are derived from a Christian theological perspective; however, the exemplified pursuit of virtue in the *Narnia* series is beneficial for all people regardless of religious conviction. This essay will discuss C.S. Lewis's philosophy of moral virtue and how this philosophical paradigm influenced his characters amidst their voyage in the third book of the *Chronicles of Narnia* series entitled *The Voyage of the*

'*Dawn Treader*'. Through the fictitious characters of *The Voyage of the 'Dawn Treader'*, Lewis portrays the virtues which accompany those who pursue God and the consequences of living a life overcome by vice.

C.S. Lewis's Philosophical Background

C.S. Lewis studied philosophy during his time in university; however, he never actually acquired a degree in the discipline and would not have accepted the title of philosopher.⁸³ As a result of his studies, he would have been familiar with some of the different philosophies of virtue. Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas are two of the philosophers who seem to have had a profound impact on Lewis's writings on virtue, merging the secular and Christian paradigms of virtue. Aristotle was a pupil of Plato and is one of the most esteemed ancient Greek philosophers. As mentioned previously at various points in this essay, *Nicomachean Ethics* is Aristotle's best-known work on ethics. Believing that human beings participate in purposive behavior, Aristotle defines virtue as a decision to act in a manner which is the mean of two vices.⁸⁴ Man actively chooses whether to perform virtuous or vicious actions and whichever he habitually chooses will define whether he can be defined as a virtuous person. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle outlines the means by which human life can be good. He writes that happiness or flourishing is the end goal of all human life and that virtuous actions are the

⁸³ Hooper, Walter. *C.S. Lewis: A Companion & Guide*. Harper San Francisco, 1996., pg. 329

⁸⁴ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1106b36-1107a6
Shields, Christopher John. *Aristotle*. Routledge, 2007., pg. 326

means toward that end.⁸⁵ Aristotle thought that ethical excellences or the pursuit of virtue arose through habitual training.⁸⁶ He taught that “excellence is a mean between excessive and defective states of character.”⁸⁷ For example, the virtue of courage is the median, or midpoint, between two vices which, in this case, are foolishness and timidity. If an individual consistently displays prideful or selfish behavior, they demonstrate a natural inclination towards vice. Conversely, when one consistently exhibits humble or selfless actions, the inclination is towards virtue. To Aristotle, virtue can be likened to a muscle that requires regular exercise to grow stronger. Aristotle believed that virtue could be taught by praising good habits while punishing those actions which were contrary to the individual’s goal for happiness. Aristotle’s view of virtue is dependent on the ability of man to reason and habitually train one’s facilities to act in accordance with good human reason. Furthermore, coercion toward virtue does not result in true virtue. Therefore, according to Aristotle, morally commendable actions must be fully and freely chosen and understood by an individual, not performed through coercion.⁸⁸ For example, children’s “moral” actions are not truly virtuous because they are acting in an attempt to avoid condemnation from their parents rather than due to a conscious decision for good.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1097a3—b8
Shields, Christopher John. *Aristotle*, pg. 311

⁸⁶ Humphreys, Justin. “Aristotle (384 B.C.E.—322 B.C.E.).” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, iep.utm.edu/aristotle/.

⁸⁷ Humphreys, Justin. “Aristotle (384 B.C.E.—322 B.C.E.).”

⁸⁸ Lawler, Michael G., and Salzman, Todd A. “Virtue Ethics: Natural and Christian.” *Theological Studies* (Baltimore), vol. 74, no. 2, 2013., pg. 447

⁸⁹ Lawler and Salzman, “Virtue Ethics: Natural and Christian”, pg. 459-460

Aristotle's teachings on virtue likely played a significant role in shaping C.S. Lewis's academic pursuits and his career as a professor and author.

Thomas Aquinas, another notable teacher of moral philosophy and the pursuit of virtue, was a preeminent philosopher and theologian in 13th century Europe. He was influenced and inspired by the writings of Aristotle, while simultaneously building a philosophical and theological perception of virtue vastly different from that of his role model. His understanding and reconfiguration of Aristotelianism shaped much of Western philosophy and deemed him a founder of modern thought.⁹⁰ Aquinas defined virtue as a habit or disposition which orders an act. He taught that the desired end of virtue ethics is man's union with God.⁹¹ At first glance, it might appear that Aristotle's and Aquinas's philosophies regarding virtue seem to be the same; however, one key difference is the root of the virtuous act. Thomas Aquinas teaches that because the goal of a virtuous life is communion with God, then people's choices to act virtuously comes from their love of God and of his creation—specifically, their love for other human beings. To Aquinas, virtue is an expression of love born out of the will of God. The natural man, according to Aristotle, practices virtue as a result of human reason, but to the Christian—to Aquinas—the practice of virtue is a result of the quickening of human reason through charity and faith.⁹² Thomas Aquinas, heavily influenced by Aristotle's teachings yet with a distinct theological perspective, played a pivotal role in the

⁹⁰ Pasnau, Robert. "Thomas Aquinas." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Stanford University, 7 Dec. 2022, plato.stanford.edu/entries/aquinas/.

⁹¹ Lawler and Salzman, "Virtue Ethics: Natural and Christian", pg. 444

⁹² Lawler and Salzman, "Virtue Ethics: Natural and Christian", pg. 466

development of Western philosophy and laid the foundation for modern thought. His unique understanding of virtue as rooted in love for God and fellow humans, as opposed to Aristotle's emphasis on human reason, underscores the profound divergence in their philosophies on virtue.

The philosophical writings and teachings of Aristotle and Aquinas on virtue likely influenced Lewis's own perspective of morality and the pursuit of virtue. Though not a formally recognized philosopher, C.S. Lewis drew upon various philosophical ideas, particularly those of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, to explore and articulate his thoughts on virtue. Aristotle's concept of virtue as the mean between extremes and his emphasis on habituation, along with Aquinas's infusion of Christian perspectives, influenced Lewis's understanding of virtue as a combination of secular and religious values. These philosophical foundations, echoing the notion of virtue as a practiced and freely chosen habit, are prevalent in Lewis's exploration of the moral dimension in his writings. As discussed in the previous chapter, these philosophers also influenced the writings of Sir Edmund Spenser whose fictional writings of virtue then had a significant impact on the philosophy and writings of C.S. Lewis. This interconnected relationship between Spenser and Lewis exemplifies the central thesis of this essay: epic fictional journeys serve as essential and influential tools for educating individuals in virtue.

C.S. Lewis's Mere Christianity

C.S. Lewis is best known as the author of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, a series of seven fictional novels about the magical land of Narnia which has sold over 100 million copies in forty-one languages since 1956. Many of Lewis's novels, including the

Chronicles of Narnia, deal with illicit Christian themes such as sin, the fall of humankind from grace, and redemption. One of his most significant works of nonfiction, *Mere Christianity*, was published in the United Kingdom in 1952. This particular book expounds Lewis's doctrine on Christian belief, specifically, the significance of moral behavior to the Christian faith. Additionally, it provides insight into Lewis's philosophical and theological beliefs and, therefore, the themes of virtue woven into the *Narnia* series. C.S. Lewis would agree with Aristotle's initial philosophy which states that human virtue is dependent on the ability of man to reason, coupled with the more complete and Christian philosophy of virtue offered by Thomas Aquinas. Through the grace offered by God, human-beings can act virtuously because of their faith in God who is love and their love for others who are created in the image of the triune God. Dr. Mike Pence, a professor at the University of Leeds and the Principal Investigator of the Narnian Virtues Character Education Curriculum Research Project, refers to Lewis as neo-Aristotelian.⁹³ "Neo-Aristotelian" is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as "Of, designating, or relating to a new or modern form of, or a revival of, Aristotelianism."⁹⁴ In *Mere Christianity*, Lewis outlines his own philosophy on moral behavior, or virtue. Lewis writes about seven significant virtues, four cardinal virtues and three theological virtues. The four cardinal virtues, which are also discussed by Aristotle and Aquinas, are prudence, temperance, justice and fortitude. Lewis describes these virtues as being qualities available to and recognized by civilized people who recognize

⁹³ Pike, Mark, et al. "Narnian Virtues: C.S. Lewis as Character Educator." *Journal of Character Education*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2015, pg. 78

⁹⁴ *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "neo-Aristotelian."

the general moral law of being a decent human.⁹⁵ He continues by addressing the significance of habitually training oneself to practice each virtue until it can be ingrained into the very character of a person. Lewis writes “a man who perseveres in doing just actions gets in the end a certain quality of character. Now it is that quality rather than the particular actions which we mean when we talk of a ‘virtue.’”⁹⁶ Christians, according to Lewis, must not just perform prudent, just, temperate and courageous acts, but they must become intrinsically prudent, temperate, just and courageous people. He believes that this state of character sanctifies man for the next life—an eternal one with God in Heaven. Therefore, the cardinal virtues are necessary means for the end that Aquinas describes and to which Lewis adheres perfect unity with God.

In *Mere Christianity*, Lewis also dedicates a chapter to each of the three theological virtues—charity, hope and faith. First, he deals with charity which he defines as “love, in the Christian sense.” meaning that charity is synonymous with love when it is the disposition of the will rather than emotion as people often think of love.⁹⁷ Furthermore, charity, this love of one person for another person, is also extended between man and God. This explains Lewis’s understanding of the virtue of charity being an act of human will rather than human emotion because “nobody can always have devout feelings: and even if we could, feelings are not what God principally cares about.”⁹⁸ To Lewis, virtue is something people pursue out of obedience to God rather than an

⁹⁵ Lewis, C. S. *Mere Christianity*. C.S. Lewis signature classics ed., Collins, 2012., pg. 76

⁹⁶ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, pg. 80

⁹⁷ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, pg. 129

⁹⁸ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, pg. 132

emotional response to a person or situation. In this, he agrees with Aristotle that to truly be virtuous man must freely and fully choose virtue. Here Aristotle is opposing the idea that one ought to perform a good deed as a result of coercion from another person or deity or as an action based on a fleeting emotion. Lewis proceeds to discuss the virtue of hope which is a “continual looking forward to the eternal world” not “a form of escapism or wishful thinking, but one of the things a Christian is meant to do”, that is looking toward eternity with God.⁹⁹ This virtue of hope does not remove man from the earthly world, but it is a continual reminder of the higher good which is found in perfect union with God. Finally, C.S. Lewis writes about faith which he describes as “the art of holding on to things your reason has once accepted, in spite of your changing moods.”¹⁰⁰ Again, Lewis is accepting the philosophy which states that habitual training is a necessary facet in the pursuit of virtuous living. When the disposition of the human mind and heart are trained to pursue virtue, virtue will be the ultimate choice of the virtuous man even when emotion tempts man otherwise. Furthermore, Lewis outlines the source from which virtue is derived as true virtue is seen only in the Christian man who fully subscribes to the moral law of both the cardinal and theological virtues due to his commitment to becoming ever more like his savior Jesus Christ.

Lewis also places significant emphasis on the essential vice of pride, or self-conceit, which negatively impacts the pursuit of all other virtues. This vice is revealed in all his fictional villains and in the shortcomings of his heroes. Conversely, he writes that

⁹⁹ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, pg. 134

¹⁰⁰ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, pg. 140

the virtue of humility is the true division between Christian morality and all other philosophies of morality.¹⁰¹ Lewis very bluntly declares “unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness, and all that, are mere fleabites in comparison: it was through Pride that the devil became the devil: Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind.”¹⁰² Lewis speaks harshly regarding pride because it is the vice causing the most significant division between man and man and between God and man. Pride prevents man from pursuing every other virtue because, according to Lewis’s teachings, it places man in competition with God for whose character is best.¹⁰³ Though Lewis did not think that Christianity was solely about moral behavior, his dedication of *Mere Christianity* to the pursuit of virtue in the lives of Christians signifies that he did believe that moral behavior—virtue—was an outward example of inward beliefs.

Background of The Voyage of the ‘Dawn Treader’

The Voyage of the Dawn Treader was the third of the seven novels in the *Narnia* series to be published. It tells the story of Lucy and Edmund Pevensie, two of the four Pevensie children who journeyed to Narnia in the first novel and became queens and kings of this magical land, and their horrible cousin Eustace. The three English children suddenly find themselves aboard a ship called the “Dawn Treader”, realizing that they have fallen into the world of Narnia and are reunited with some of their old Narnian friends, including King Caspian and the fiercest mouse in any land, Reepicheep. *The*

¹⁰¹ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, pg. 121

¹⁰² Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, pg. 122

¹⁰³ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, pg. 122, 124

Voyage of the 'Dawn Treader' offers unique characters who represent virtue and vice in significant ways. The world of Narnia is riddled with incredibly depraved and vicious characters, such as Jadis—the White Witch who freezes Narnia in the Hundred Years Winter—and Miraz—King Caspian's uncle who unrightfully rules Narnia during the Telmarine Age. Both cannot comprehend anything apart from their own selfishness.¹⁰⁴ These characters are murderous at every turn in the novels and, therefore, are personifications of the most extreme consequences of vicious lives. Additionally, in *The Voyage of the 'Dawn Treader'*, there are certainly more extreme examples of vice as seen in Pug who attempts to enslave the novel's protagonists. While these characters undeniably embody the most profound and horrific forms of vice in C.S. Lewis's works, it is improbable that juvenile readers, who constitute the primary audience for the *Narnia* series, would readily recognize their own tendencies toward vice even in these extreme portrayals. *The Voyage of the 'Dawn Treader'* is the first novel to introduce Lewis's audience to Eustace Clarence Scrubb. The Pevensie children's cousin Eustace will become a key example of Lewis's perception of vice because he is a relatable personification of vice. The audience sees more clearly the results of their pride and selfishness in this young boy rather than through the exaggerated blood thirsty tyranny of the White Witch or Miraz. Additionally, Lewis creates a foil to Eustace by creating the character of Reepicheep, a courageous mouse whose eyes are fixed solely on the pursuit of Aslan's country. Whereas Eustace is cowardly and often tempted by vice, Reepicheep is a depiction of courage. Furthermore, Reepicheep is in pursuit of a virtuous life commanded by Aslan, who is the representative of the commander of C.S. Lewis's life:

¹⁰⁴ Kilby, Clyde S. *The Christian World of C. S. Lewis*. William B. Eerdmans, 1964.

Jesus Christ. Finally, Lucy, Edmund and King Caspian are illustrations of the sanctification, or habitual training, which creates in man a disposition toward a virtuous life. The kings and queen are not perfect, but, through their encounters with Aslan, they are disposed toward the pursuit of the good and of union with Aslan. Through the characters of *The Voyage of the 'Dawn Treader'* Lewis evidently entangles his philosophy of virtue with his fictional world of Narnia.

Reepicheep's Hope, Charity and Fortitude

C.S. Lewis uses his characters to illuminate how events in literature are shaped by the moral decisions of the characters. *The Voyage of the 'Dawn Treader'* offers three key examples of this through C.S. Lewis's characterization of Reepicheep, Eustace Scrubb and King Caspian. These characters' virtues, or lack thereof, are shown at critical moments within Lewis's story. Reepicheep the mouse is a profound depiction of Lewis's conceptualization of a virtuous person as he is described as "the most valiant of all the Talking Beasts of Narnia."¹⁰⁵ Reepicheep's life has been marked by the pursuit of a new life in Aslan's country. This is the equivalent of Lewis's end goal of virtue: everlasting union with God. Early in the novel, Reepicheep reveals that his hope for this voyage upon the Dawn Treader is to reach Aslan's country. When Lucy questions whether this is even an attainable quest, Reepicheep reveals that his life has been marked by the following prayer:

¹⁰⁵ Lewis, C.S., *Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, 1955., pg. 16

Where sky and water meet,
Where waves grow sweet,
Doubt not, Reepicheep,
To find all you seek,
There is the utter East.¹⁰⁶

Reepicheep declares that, although he does not fully comprehend the meaning of this verse, “the spell of it has been on me all my life.”¹⁰⁷ Lewis characterizes Reepicheep by the virtue of hope as the mouse is constantly reminding his fellow shipmates of his allegiance to Aslan and of his goal in the voyage. This hope allows for Reepicheep to be joyful in the hardships of the voyage and in the often-unpleasant life aboard the ship, unlike Eustace. Lewis believed that joy resulted from a desire for God and that one effect of joy is that it prevents man from deriving lasting contentment from the things of the world.¹⁰⁸ Reepicheep does not find his joy in the successes aboard the *Dawn Treader*; rather, he finds his joy in reunion with Aslan and in his calling to enter Aslan’s country. Lewis writes that Reepicheep is “quivering with happiness”¹⁰⁹ upon his union with Aslan. C.S. Lewis describes his philosophy of the virtue of hope by writing, “I must keep alive in myself the desire for my true country, which I shall not find until after death; I must never let it get snowed under or turned aside; I must make it the main object of life to press into that other country and to help others do the same.”¹¹⁰ Similar to Reepicheep’s unwavering hope

¹⁰⁶ Lewis, *The Voyage of the ‘Dawn Treader’*, pg. 21

¹⁰⁷ Lewis, *The Voyage of the ‘Dawn Treader’*, pg. 21

¹⁰⁸ Wielenberg, Erik J. *God and the Reach of Reason: C.S. Lewis, David Hume, and Bertrand Russell*. 2007., pg. 116

¹⁰⁹ Lewis, *The Voyage of the ‘Dawn Treader’*, pg. 185

¹¹⁰ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, pg. 137

throughout the journey aboard the Dawn Treader, C.S. Lewis's readers are inspired to retain hope in their own life journeys until they find everlasting unity with God in Heaven.

In addition to hope, Reepicheep displays the virtue of charity, which is self-sacrificing love. Throughout the novel, he is indisputably the most courageous, even though he is physically the smallest character. He “faces danger” and “‘sticks it’ under pain”¹¹¹ all in pursuit of union with Aslan, rather than in pursuit of his own personal glory. There are few characters who display fortitude more often than Reepicheep. He is a constant representation of “firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good.”¹¹² C.S. Lewis remarks that other virtues are unattainable without fortitude because, as sinful human beings, humanity's first tendency is often to not remain virtuous.¹¹³ Through Reepicheep, Lewis illustrates the result of virtuous living as Reepicheep ends his story united with Aslan, the image of Jesus Christ in the *Narnia* series. Reepicheep's embodiment of the virtues of hope and charity combined with his remarkable fortitude, serve as a compelling example of how C.S. Lewis's storytelling effectively imparts lessons on virtue and the pursuit of a higher spiritual purpose to his readers. Additionally, Lewis is using the small stature of such a virtuous character to compel his young readers to pursue virtue despite their age and physical attributes. In this, Lewis urges his audience in the same manner that Paul urges Timothy to, “Let no

¹¹¹ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, pg. 79

¹¹² Lawler and Salzman, “Virtue Ethics: Natural and Christian”, pg. 469

¹¹³ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, pg. 79

one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.”¹¹⁴

Eustace Scrubb: Vice to Virtue

Lewis was more than aware of the natural human tendency toward vice. He writes about man’s capacity toward vicious pursuits in *Mere Christianity* and, therefore, incorporates this human tendency in his characters aboard the Dawn Treader, specifically in Eustace Scrubb and King Caspian. Eustace is a prime, yet realistic, representation of a character who is lacking virtue. Lewis begins *The Voyage of the ‘Dawn Treader’* with Eustace taunting his cousins and threatening to destroy a painting which makes them reminisce about their kingdom of Narnia. This painting is the only thing in the Scrubb’s home which reminds the Pevensies of home and offers comfort for them as they are apart from their family. His heartless threat to destroy it is the first indication of Eustace’s selfishness. Once aboard the Dawn Treader, Eustace is sulky and selfish, thinking of only himself and showing no gratitude for what he receives from the crew or his cousins.¹¹⁵ He keeps a journal in which his innermost and utterly self-conceited thoughts are revealed. Eustace’s complaints and dissatisfaction are rooted in his pride, deemed by Lewis as the “great sin.”¹¹⁶ According to Lewis, pride is the sin which inhibits the pursuit of all other virtues. It is through these subtle acts of discontentment, which leads to vice, that Lewis’s audience likely resonates most with their own tendency toward vice. Furthermore, when

¹¹⁴ *The ESV Bible*. Crossway, 2001, www.esv.org/, 1 Timothy 4:12

¹¹⁵ Pike, “Narnian Virtues: C.S. Lewis as Character Educator”, pg. 79

¹¹⁶ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, pg. 121

the Dawn Treader began to exhaust its water supply, resulting in rations for all aboard, Eustace greedily attempted to steal water with no regard for others.¹¹⁷ Finally, however, Eustace's pride is revealed to himself when he is transformed into a dragon. Lewis tells his audience that the transformation occurs because Eustace fell asleep on a dead dragon's treasure with "greedy, dragonish thoughts."¹¹⁸ In a moment, Eustace's prideful and spiteful thoughts are revealed to him as evil and that his thoughts and actions have not been virtuous or kind.¹¹⁹ As Eustace recognizes that his dragonish thoughts have always been foremost in his heart, he desires to change, his internal transformation begins and Aslan appears. Aslan's appearance is significant because Lewis believed that movement forward in the pursuit of virtue is due to the gracious intervention of the Divine and, in Narnia, "Aslan is a divine figure."¹²⁰ Aslan instructs Eustace to follow him and removes the painful dragon scales from the boy.¹²¹ From this moment, Eustace is utterly transformed; he begins to pursue virtue by seeking to be courageous, hopeful and humble. Through this interaction between Eustace and Aslan, C.S. Lewis is exercising another aspect of virtue education which is how one acquires virtue. The voyage is undeniably an important aspect of virtue accumulation and the habitual practice of virtue; however, it is in this particular moment that Eustace is rescued from his own vicious inclinations so that he might be able to pursue virtue. To Lewis, divine intercession is

¹¹⁷ Lewis, *The Voyage of the 'Dawn Treader'*, pg. 58-60

¹¹⁸ Lewis, *The Voyage of the 'Dawn Treader'*, pg. 73

¹¹⁹ Lewis, *The Voyage of the 'Dawn Treader'*, pg. 74

¹²⁰ Hooper, *C.S. Lewis: A Companion & Guide*, pg. 438

¹²¹ Lewis, *The Voyage of the 'Dawn Treader'*, pg. 784

crucial in the pursuit of virtue. Therefore, he creates a fictional representation of this divine encounter in *The Voyage of the 'Dawn Treader.'* Upon returning to England, Lewis notes that Eustace's character had improved so greatly that "you'd never know him for the same boy."¹²² Through Eustace, Lewis illustrates salvation from a sinfully vicious disposition through Divine intervention resulting in a newfound pursuit of virtuous living.

¹²² Lewis, *The Voyage of the 'Dawn Treader'*, pg. 189

Prince Caspian's Mortal Struggle Between Virtue and Vice

Eustace is not the only character who initially fails to pursue virtue in Narnia, or in *The Voyage of the 'Dawn Treader'*. King Caspian is often a courageous and virtuous character. However, he is not perfectly virtuous, and he displays the weakness of humanity in the pursuit of virtue. Despite his goodness and bravery, Caspian's inclinations toward Eustace-like greed are made evident by Lewis. Caspian is most greedy for Heaven, or "Aslan's Country" to the Narnians. He is prepared and eager to leave Narnia without a leader to fulfill his personal pleasure of paradise. However, Aslan explains to Caspian that nobody enters his country until Aslan calls them there¹²³. Michael Ward, a professor of Theology and Christian Apologetics at the University of Oxford, wrote in his book *The Narnia Code* that Aslan's guidance and subsequent salvation of Caspian shows that "Aslan makes the king free from greed—not for gold, but for the very best things, heaven itself."¹²⁴ Though King Caspian is flawed and falls prey to vice in this novel, he, alongside Edmund and Lucy, also depicts the virtue of faith as Lewis described it in *Mere Christianity*. Caspian must be reminded to pursue the plans of the true king of Narnia rather than seek to fulfill his own desires. Lewis writes that man's faith becomes evident when his confidence is changed from "being confident about [man's] own efforts to the state in which [man] despair doing anything for ourselves and leave it to God."¹²⁵ As Caspian turns from his desire of entering Aslan's country to

¹²³ Lewis, *The Voyage of the 'Dawn Treader'*, pg. 182

¹²⁴ Ward, Michael. *The Narnia Code: C.S. Lewis and the Secret of the Seven Heavens*. 2010., pg. 75

¹²⁵ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, pg. 146

obediently return to leading the people of Narnia, he “trusts that [Aslan] will somehow share with him the perfect human obedience which He carries out from His birth to His crucifixion: that [Aslan] will make the man more like Himself and, in a sense, make good his deficiencies.”¹²⁶ King Caspian is an illustration of the natural tendencies of the human heart, even after an encounter with the Divine. Though Caspian is learning to lead a virtuous life through habitual repetition and practice, he is not perfectly virtuous. This shortcoming has been exposed in all of the heroes discussed throughout this essay; therefore, it must be an essential component of virtue education. Lewis’s exhibits of virtue and vice in the life of King Caspian relay the realities of the fickle human disposition apart from Divine intervention.

Conclusion

C.S. Lewis’s teachings on virtue and the significance of virtue in the Christian’s journey on earth are evident in *The Chronicles of Narnia* series. Specifically, his characters’ actions and decisions in *The Voyage of the ‘Dawn Treader’* present Lewis’s perception of the significance of virtues such as charity, hope, fortitude, humility and self-control. Reepicheep’s life is devoted to unity with Aslan, which is synonymous with Lewis’s belief that virtue leads to unity with God. This journey is only attainable for Reepicheep as he pursues and demonstrates the virtues of hope, courage and fortitude. Contrastingly, Lewis offers the effects of a life marked by vice in *The Voyage of the ‘Dawn Treader’* through the life of Eustace who is prideful and overcome by greed.

¹²⁶ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, pg. 147

Ultimately, C.S. Lewis's conviction that a life can be radically transformed through Divine intervention is exemplified as Aslan removes both the physical and spiritual scales from Eustace. This event turns Eustace from the pursuit of the vices of pride, cowardice and greed toward the pursuit of the virtues of humility, courage and hope. Additionally, King Caspian, though courageous and faithful, momentarily allows his sinful disposition to overtake his pursuit of virtue and needs to be reminded of the call on his life by Aslan. C.S. Lewis believed that virtue was moral behavior consistent in image-bearers of their Creator which must be habitually practiced, and which will ultimately culminate in eternal union with God. However, Lewis also believed in the scripture which states, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick."¹²⁷ Therefore, he understood that to resemble Christ to the best of human ability, one must seek to grow in virtue as Jesus Christ is the ultimate picture of perfect virtue. Lewis believed virtuous living was an essential aspect of the Christian faith and, since Narnia is a fantastical representation of the Christian journey, was essential to the characterization of those venturing through Narnia. C.S. Lewis's profound teachings on virtue and its significance in the Christian journey are vividly reflected through the characters and their actions in *The Voyage of the 'Dawn Treader.'* The narrative beautifully underscores Lewis's belief that virtues like charity, hope, fortitude, humility, and self-control are essential for the pursuit of unity with God. Simultaneously, it portrays the transformative power of divine intervention in redeeming individuals from lives marked by vice. Furthermore, it highlights the occasional lapses in virtue even among the faithful, as illustrated by King Caspian's struggles. C.S. Lewis's conviction that virtuous living is integral to the

¹²⁷ *ESV Bible*, Jeremiah 17:9

Christian faith and essential for those embarking on the fantastical journey through Narnia serves as a profound and enduring message in his literary work.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

Fiction, with its power to transport people to different worlds and immerse them in the lives of diverse characters, serves as a powerful tool for exploring the complex realm of virtue. Through the lens of storytelling, readers can gain valuable insights into the nuances of human behavior, morality, and the pursuit of virtuous lives. As it has been discussed throughout this essay in the realm of fiction characters grapple with ethical dilemmas, confront their flaws, and strive to embody virtues such as courage, prudence, temperance amongst other virtues. As readers follow their favorite fictitious characters' journeys, they can witness the consequences of characters' choices and actions, providing valuable lessons about the importance of virtuous behavior. Moreover, fiction allows for the exploration of moral ambiguities, where characters must navigate the complexities of conflicting virtues or face the consequences of moral compromises, or vice. These narratives encourage readers to reflect on the nature of virtue itself and the challenges of upholding it in a complex world.

Through fiction, individuals can also develop empathy and a deeper understanding of the human experience. By connecting with characters who exhibit virtues or grapple with their absence, readers can cultivate a heightened sensitivity to the virtues they wish to embrace in their own lives. It is a natural occurrence for people to emulate those they spend time with, whether that be in their real-world experiences or through adventures in mystical lands through reading. The well-known phrase "show me

who you hang around with and I'll tell you who you are" can be applied even to the heroes in people's favorite stories. If one constantly reads books involving characters wrought with vice and promoting wrong behavior, it would be probable the reader would begin to emulate such behavior. Conversely, when a reader is reading the stories of Odysseus, Guyon, Reepicheep and Eustace then they will be influenced by men, and mice, seeking to live a life defined by the pursuit of virtue. When individuals engage with fictional characters who embody virtuous qualities, they often find inspiration to emulate those virtues in their own lives. Consequently, when readers approach literature with a deliberate intent to enhance their understanding of and commitment to virtuous principles, the act of reading not only becomes a source of enjoyment but also a profound and enriching educational experience. This conscious pursuit of virtue through literature not only elevates the value of reading but also reinforces the idea that books can serve as valuable guides on the path to moral growth and self-improvement.

This essay does not encompass the entirety of voyage literature that could have been explored regarding its significance in promoting virtue education. There are several texts that could have been and eventually should be explored for their role in virtue education. For example, J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* series abounds with situations where his characters must embrace virtuous choices to progress on their journey through Mordor. The goal in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* is to destroy a magical ring and prevent the dark lord Sauron from regaining his full power and dominion over fictional Middle-Earth. The One Ring is a powerful and corrupting artifact, and the main characters, including Frodo and his companions, embark on a perilous quest to Mount Doom, where they intend to destroy the Ring by throwing it into

the fires where it was forged. This mission is essential to the preservation of Middle-earth and the defeat of the forces of darkness. Along the way, the characters also strive to uphold values like friendship, courage, and selflessness while resisting the temptation and corruption that the Ring represents. Another popular contemporary example might be J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series. In this series, readers have the unique opportunity to witness the remarkable journey of J.K. Rowling's hero, Harry Potter. His growth is profoundly portrayed, starting as a child when he first enters Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry at the inception of the series, and culminating with adult Harry's appearance in the epilogue in the final book. This epilogue features a heartfelt conversation between Harry and his own twelve-year-old son, who is about to embark on his own adventure at Hogwarts. Throughout the series, various characters demonstrate and grapple with virtues in their pursuit of good over evil. Courage, justice, humility and wisdom are all virtues explored in this series. Additionally, Virgil's ancient epic poem *The Aeneid* explores various virtues and moral themes as it tells the story of Aeneas, a Trojan hero who becomes the legendary ancestor of the Romans. *The Aeneid* is a rich exploration of virtue, duty, destiny, and the moral complexities of the human experience. Aeneas's character embodies these virtues and serves as a model of Roman ideals, making the epic a foundational work in Western literature and a source of reflection on ethical and moral themes. This is just a sample of the abundance of texts which can be read with the purpose of virtue education. True, readers of these sorts of texts will not fight evil alongside hobbits or attend a magical school. Additionally, it is unlikely that many people will choose to sit down with Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* or Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologica*. However, it is an essential aspect of the human experience

to embark on journeys which will force individuals to choose between vice and virtue. This is what human life is, a series of voyages. It is essential that they be equipped to know the consequences of either decision.

There exists an extensive array of texts that could be delved into for their deeper literary and philosophical significance beyond the sheer pleasure of reading fiction. However, for the purposes of this thesis, *The Odyssey*, book II of *The Faerie Queene*, and *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* are the most advantageous choices for investigation as previously discussed in the Chapter I. Hopefully, this essay has proven that, whether intentional or not, these authors of voyage literature have provided generations of readers with a means by which they might learn the significance of virtue in their lives through the models of Homer, Spenser and Lewis's heroes.

In sum, fiction serves as a captivating and instructive tool for exploring virtue, offering readers rich worlds full of moral dilemmas, character development, and ethical reflections. It reminds us that the pursuit of virtue is a timeless and essential aspect of the human condition, and fiction provides a compelling means to embark on this profound journey of self-discovery and moral growth.

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