



Student Work

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Active Imaginations: A Review of The Wonders of Creation

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Title: *Wonders of Creation: Learning Stewardship from Narnia and Middle-Earth*

Author: Kristen Page

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In a growing digital age, we spend less and less time outside. As such, we experience a disconnect from creation—a separation between us and the nature around us that we rarely bridge except with our own recreational visits to national parks. The result: an acquired apathy towards stewardship and increased creational exploitation. We need a new way to reconnect.

In her new book, Kristen Page explores ways in which engaging with literary landscapes can engage our imaginations and lead us to actively care for creation. *The Wonders of Creation* plays with the fictional landscapes in works by CS Lewis and JRR Tolkien and how our engagement of these works can lead us to care more deeply for the places surrounding us. Laid out in three parts, Page's book features literature written by Tolkien and Lewis and guides the reader to ponder how this engagement can lead us to seek justice and care for our planet.

The first movement explores literary landscape engagement. Storytelling fosters imagination and invites the reader to engage with fictional worlds in similar and different ways to the real world. In fact, imagination *must* be engaged in order to care about the world around us, Page argues. Stories such as *The Lord of the Rings* “speak of truths, including environmental truths about the vulnerabilities of nature when actions within the stories destroy rather than protect the created world.”¹

A practice laid out in this first section is reading landscapes. While it is explored in greater depth in the book, reading a landscape involves looking closely and carefully at the world around us. The reader must slow down, must look, listen, feel, smell, even taste our surroundings. An absence of hurry, of rushed plant identifications and hasty conversations is characteristic — and is beautiful. We can see things like they are laid out in stories, can learn from Tolkien's emphasis on plants in his landscape, be held captive by joy and awe as we see creation with the same kind of magic that Lewis's Narnian landscape inspired in us. By slowing down, we can begin to *know* the world around us, begin to see creation as the place where God dwells.

The second part explores the response of lament. Page mentions that lament is often either overlooked or overemphasized as a response to ecological calamity. Rather, balancing lament as an appropriate response that calls us to respond truthfully to injustice without withdrawing or succumbing to apathy is a challenge that we, as inhabitants of this earth and children of a Creator God, must balance. Entering into stories that reveal injustices and potential responses to these problems allows us to see our own reliance on damaging habits and products. Page puts the importance of lament this way, “Lament allows us to confront the truths we have ignored for the sake of comfort and gives those of us living in comfort a means to petition God on behalf of our neighbors in need.”²

Images of a ransacked shire, Isengard’s plunder of the Ents, of trees in Lantern Waste being cut down, naturally inspire readers to some measure of anger and sadness. We understand that these places we have fallen in love with—have felt the characters love—are worth saving. They have value, they are worthy in and of themselves. We become environmentalists in some measure as we read these stories. And by reading these stories, we begin to see and respond to these injustices in our own world.

But beyond the evidence of environmental plunder, there is another cause for us to lament. Our own habits of overconsuming resources have harmed our neighbor. It’s not a pretty truth I like facing, but Page’s urging to enter into lament to drive us into action to begin acting in justice to counter this consumerist lifestyle offers us an alternative. Rather than becoming frozen in the face of suffering—some of it suffering we have inadvertently contributed to—we begin to earnestly petition our good God to intercede. God is interested in suffering. And we need to confront the suffering our own comfortable habits have aided. We can confront the scouring of the Shire. Can’t we also confront the messiness of the world we currently inhabit?

Last, but certainly not least, Page lays out the importance of wonder and awe. Pursuing wonder as a virtue, a practice and calling, engages our curiosity and leads us into deeper relation with creation, each other, and our Creator. Wonder allows us to be humbled, to engage with creation in an exploratory way, to ask new questions, to learn from those around us. Delight in our creation inspires us to care for it—we want to preserve and protect it to enjoy it. And wonder can lead us into a humble-acknowledgement that we don’t know it all but delights in what we can learn. As Page affirms, “Wonderful things happen around us all the time, but we are busy and quickly tune out the chorus of creation.”³ Cultivating practices of slowness helps us in this endeavor.

Seeing creation through a lens of awe is a gift we receive and a muscle we practice the more we slow down and begin to look at creation itself. And to slow down and see, we must naturally spend more time in creation, including “looking, listening, and participating in stewardship.”⁴ This good earth is a gift. We can and should appreciate the gift and care for it, because “wonder and awe are part of what it means to be human. But there’s a way in which through caring through creation we become more fully human too.”⁵

Slowing down lets us see creation—all of the delightfully surprising and the devastatingly sad. Our responses may mimic the response we have when Saruman destroys part of Fangorn Forest or the Calormen exploit of Lantern Waste. These trees are personified and alive, but so is our world. As we engage with these fictional landscapes we begin to see our own more clearly, and begin to engage our own imaginations to act as stewards of this world. Page's book reminds us to act in remembrance of Psalm 24:1 that states, "the Earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it."

1. Page 9
2. Page 64
3. Page 107
4. Page 110
5. Page 119