

Every Literature Helps

Presidential Address to the Leicester Theological Society

by

Duncan Campbell OP

copyright © Duncan Campbell 2011

First published in electronic format

by Edgeways Books, a division of The Brynmill Press Ltd

July 2011

The Brynmill Press Ltd

The Stonehouse, Bishopstone

Herefordshire HR4 7JE England

www.edgewaysbooks.com

This lecture may be freely downloaded and printed out in one copy for private study but must not be copied or sold.

The right of Duncan Campbell to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

[click here to return to home page: www.edgewaysbooks.com](http://www.edgewaysbooks.com)

EVERY LITERATURE HELPS

What have I done?

I have undertaken to talk about “every literature”.

By any definition, “literature”, as story, drama and song is today spread over oceans and oceans of material, not only in English, of course, but in many, many languages, and all over the world.

How to select, to deal with it? By what is famous? By what is unforgettable?

There is also a distinction we may make. Some literature is commanding. It commands the attention of any person anywhere of any understanding and experience. Other literature is demanding.

It demands particular interests and concerns to be brought to it for any understanding of it.

We must select—or shall I say, I must select? With your eyebrows raised more or less. “H’m. He hasn’t mentioned P G Wodehouse.”

We shall have to give just a nod, to song; a wave, to film and television; and a bow to poetry. Millions may live by song, Folk, Country, Rap, Pop; almost as we in religion are meant to, with Psalms and Hymns. Do they? Do we? I would love to know! How to know?

Television programmes and films absorb much of people’s time today, with what effect we may wonder.

Poetry is still popular, though I don’t understand why. It is dead on the pages of a book. It has to be read aloud. There would need to be public sessions, as in Russia.

Let's begin at a beginning.

Literature may have had its beginning in little “saws” and proverbs that date from time immemorial: “Waste not, want not”—and so on. Then in what we have now in the forms of legend and fairy tale and, dare we say, some passages in the scriptures of every religion. Are there subtle coded messages in there? If I suggest that *Jack and the Beanstalk* is about the adolescent boy finding his father a sexual rival, an enemy giant? Or *Snow White* as the growing girl, running like a child from any man she meets, finding envy and not love at all from older women, learning to look after herself “in the forest”, and coming to see a comic littleness in men—the “dwarfs”—and though being almost poisoned by female hatred, wakened to life by the love of the man she is now fit to meet?

If I say all this, aren't you puzzled, disagreeing, or even laughing?

What does that say about any “message” being conveyed at all? About you? About me?

We move more soberly to the literature of the “classics”. Unfortunately this may have been an unpleasant experience for many of us, having to cut our Latin and Greek “teeth” on it.

Their world of the “immortals” just isn't ours.

A modern writer, however, Margaret Kennedy, can find significance and poignancy there. In her book *Outlaws on Parnassus* (pp. 92–4) she dwells on the scene where Odysseus carefully rejects the goddess Calypso's offer of immortality. He pleads a human love of the family and home he longs to return to. In the scene of his arrival there, after years of war, when the ability to string his bow is about to reveal him, Telemachus his son, who could of course string the bow himself, catches his eye and desists, and makes way for his father. She comments, “Men make sacrifices, they bear a love to one another, beyond what they offer to the gods. They know, therefore, in their brief and wretched lives, moments of felicity hidden from the immortals. It was to such a moment, such a son, that Odysseus longed to return.”

Classical writers did set the patterns for our literary forms—poetry, history, rhetoric, the distinction of comedy and tragedy, even letter writing, songs and ceremonies—many incorporated into our sacred scriptures themselves. Philosophy, their word for it, may not be literature in our sense but it taught us literary criticism and awareness of modes of speaking—irony, sarcasm, and the “figures of speech” (all with their Greek names!). We owe them, too, “history” and a sense of “fate”, legal proceedings, special pleading, dialogue, and many other things—politics and economics, without which we couldn’t even think about civilisation and our human world. Much of this was written “of course” in fine, later copied, “literary” styles.

There is still a significant custom, more common in modern continental writers, a habit, of quoting from classical poetry lines which powerfully reverberate, and serve to insert their writing into the corpus of generally received wisdom, represented by the “classics”. I am thinking of the historian Oswald Spengler concluding his massive work *The Decline of the West*, about the necessity of our trying to understand historical processes, with the line—

Fate leads the willing, drags the unwilling:
DUCUNT FATA VOLENTEM, NOLENTEM TRAHUNT.

Sigmund Freud in his efforts to reveal hidden processes in feeling and thought, quotes—

If I can’t touch the heights, I will move the depths.
FLECTERE SI NEQUEO SUPEROS, ACHERONTA MOVEBO.

I will presume to add one of my own. Erich Heller in *The Disinherited Mind* mocks the old schoolmasters’ illusion of the classical world as of “one long jamboree of bronzed, philosophical athletes” and suggests it was “of despair, reconciled to the world through beauty”. I offer from Virgil

Everything is in tears, and the mind is touched with mortality.
SUNT LACRIMAE RERUM ET MENTEM MORTALIA TANGUNT.

I mustn't even seem to be dismissive of classical writings as I remember the Blessed John Henry Newman in *A Grammar of Assent* speaking of its "sad earnestness and vivid exactness, with a power over the mind and a charm which current literature is utterly unable to rival . . . giving utterance as the voice of Nature herself to the pain and weariness, yet hope of better things, which is the experience of her children in every time."

It is in this dark background that religious writings "glow".

There are many worlds of religion and most we aren't in touch with. We can't be "inward" with what is felt, even by people of religions we know about. I will suggest carefully that the Hindu world is the classical world still alive and colourful, as it always was, among us today. It shares with us the impossible necessity of locating divinity. We can read their "Song of God" (*Bhagavad Gita*) or Wisdom learnt "at the feet of" (*Upanishads*) with this understanding, aware of their locating divinity—in wisdom, and—in fantasy.

With our Jewish and Christian scriptures we may in fact be too familiar. I would like to meet people and I am sure there are some, and perhaps more and more today, who come across them and read them by themselves. I fear, however, that these, just as writings, may "present" as estranging and in need of interpreting.

St Augustine made the remark that he didn't believe in the church because he found it in the bible, but in the bible because he found it in church. As well as the truth in the theological point he makes, he does express well what I am trying to say. Our bible is a very strange book indeed, especially "at first sight". In fact it was not written to be found and read outside a synagogue or church, privately, as we might today, but to be read out publicly, to a community, ready with shared understanding. My original distinction between commanding and demanding may be best illustrated here.

The Koran, the “Recital” as translated, though it might respectfully be also called the “Enchantment”, is in an Arabic I am told quite particularly beautiful. It is quite closely related to Jewish and Christian writings and is full of references to persons and events there. It ends in a joyful fascination with what is called “The Banquet”—where we might see a connection with our Communion services. In fact I would risk suggesting a similarity between Muslims and Methodists—I mean no mischief here!—but think of their both locating divinity in words, and in walking daily with a cultivated sense of person and presence and power. There is a satisfaction in being an elect, and not distracted by other religions’ concerns with sacramental “practices”, or pictorial art, or a pastoral responsibility for all and sundry.

Our scriptures, I suggested, in the darkness of pagan despair, just “glow”. Let’s examine two passages that may show this, and might pass unnoticed. I am thinking of a tiny passage in the gospels, the scene where disciples were sent into a village to commandeer a donkey. They were told they would find a young animal and its colt. They did. They were told they would be challenged. They were. That they were to give the strange reply, that “the Lord needs it.” They gave it. That they would be allowed to take the animal away. They were. Surely there must have been an eerie feeling as all this happened, that it was all provided, that it all unrolled in foreseen detail? Betrayal and Denial were clearly seen and foretold, but doesn’t this trivial incident reveal that absolutely everything happens to plan? I haven’t the language to express this clearly. It would need a complete restructuring of our “common sense” reality, of time, of person, of freedom, of God.

We don’t really take God in. We think we summon Him in prayer. We think we might see Him, in heaven. We think we are here on our own. It’s almost as if we think we have him bottled, as Sinbad tricked the Genie back into the bottle. We don’t realise that divinity is everywhere, concerned with everything about us, much more “out” and “at large” than we think.

We are unconvinced and unconvincing in everything we say about God then, perhaps as a result.

The second passage I will mention is much more solemn and hallowed but develops this same sense of presence. At the last Kiddush meal Jesus takes the bread and says, so strangely, “This is my body.” I find an echo here that may be missed. When Adam sees Eve he says what is translated as—

This is now bone of my bone—

ZOTH HAPA’AM ETZEM M’ETZMI.

Etzem may mean “bone” but it really means “substance”. I am going against millennia of translation practice here, but I think he said “body, of my body”; and this is what his words echo and, are meant to echo. It may have been so obvious to Aramaic speaking and Hebrew-conscious early Christians that it wasn’t commented on; and then was “lost in translation”. Christ is speaking again the first human words, words of love and recognition, of the first man to the first woman, in the procreating love that brings us all to be. He speaks it into the food, that enters, and sustains, and creates us. Divinity in fact comes into us. It is in His, and our, body and blood, as our daily bread and wine. It is our life, loved, spoken for, in these words. I say all this but in a lifetime I haven’t really grasped it. Either?

* * *

The glow I suggested we found in these sacred writings I want to suggest is matched, however faintly, in what we find in all subsequent, real literature. It is what makes literature. There is so much, but let’s select.

We have Saint Augustine’s *Confessions*, the first real reflective autobiography, a long prayer to the God “more in me than me”; and *The City Of God*, the first interpretive history.

It is all up to the finest literary standards, to say the least.

We have the Arabian *One Thousand and One Nights* with its magic and wonder, full of a sense of divinity, and where I got the idea of bottling up God.

We have Dante's *Divine Play* in Hell and Purgatory and Heaven. This has been called "the greatest poetic exploration of the spiritual life" (Madonna Kolbenschlag) and "an unfolding of the transcendent in language which has not recurred" (George Steiner). It is difficult, and dense with topical references, but an annotated copy can open up worlds of fascinating detail.

We have Chaucer. One detail in one of the *Canterbury Tales* illustrates a humanity and wisdom pervading his world. In the *Franklyn's Tale* a husband and wife agree, in a lovely poetic "lecture" I have to transliterate, that husband and wives must be friends, and friends obey—each other. Love will not be constrained by "mastery". When mastery comes "the god of love anon / Beateth his wings, and farewell—he is gone." They must agree to a humble wise "accord" in private; and in public, she takes her servant and lord, servant in love and lord in marriage, he keeps both his lady and his love. Some glow is almost visible here, in words of such pertinence and wisdom.

We have Cervantes, whose *Don Quijote* gives us the whole idea, mispronouncing, of "quixotic". I came across a quotation by him that may warn us as to what the book is saying. "Too much sanity may be madness, and maddest of all, is to see life as it is, and not as it should be."

I must mention Shakespeare! Let's just sample two episodes. Think of that strange scene at the end of Act One of *Hamlet* where Shakespeare has the ghost wandering about under the boards and speaking hollowly to those on stage, with Hamlet exclaiming irreverently and hysterically about it. What is Shakespeare doing? Modern audiences will sit politely and respectfully—it is in fact quite dramatic in effect. At the time, though, wouldn't he be stirring up very mixed reactions from the much more lively audiences of his time—

guffawing from the groundlings, and horror from those in the galleries, at this reaction, to the presence of an unquiet spirit? It is as if this author can command not only the stage but the whole theatre; use it to tremendous effect; show a wonder at possibilities that might be denied—and might be true; that it is all to be decided—by the audience, by the likes of you and me; or not; it is all decided already.

The second scene to sample is at the end of *King Lear* when the king brings in the body of Cordelia, the daughter who has come to rescue him and has died doing so.

At about the same time in Rome Michelangelo had made his most famous sculpture, the Pietà, with the same sensibility, the hallowed grief of a parent with a dead child.

They say later audiences couldn't bear such an ending and had it changed. Listen to the strange couplet at the end of the play—

The oldest hath borne most; we that are young
Shall never see so much, or live so long.

This seems just nonsense; but often something very profound has to be said in a way that looks nonsense. Isn't there to be a sense, in the audience, that we may have to look on suffering, and not be able to share it? That there is something quite holy in suffering? Locating divinity again—there!

Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* inherits much of this. He "imagines" our human lives as journeys of difficulty and danger, in great detail. I can point out a factor that comes into our modern literature more and more. He ends famously with the words "And I awoke, and behold, it was a dream." We can admire and love this honesty in him, honesty about reality; but then we can trust the honesty of his "imagination" and find it strangely helpful.

Literature again later proliferated into new areas—essays, journalism, biography. Great biographies like Boswell's *Life of Doctor*

Johnson and Forster's of Dickens are great literature. The novel we think, rose in England, though we have foreign examples, in early Japan, and above all in Russia—Turgenev, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, with the strong religious element that is latent in literature of any quality.

In *Anna Karenina* “Levin was less horrified by death than by life without the least knowledge of whence it came, what it is for, why and what it is.”

Jane Austen in her very own way has a manifesto on the novel as “only some work, in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour, are conveyed to the world, in the best chosen language.”

Beautiful and true, remarkably of her own work; but novels went on to other themes; *Wuthering Heights* for instance is on to—damnation; in broad daylight. Everyone is damned there, except Nelly Dean, and the young couple who struggle to find respect and love in the end.

The narrator himself, who ends the book in a famous purple passage, in total denial of events he himself had witnessed, is—damned. He had reported himself coldly, in an episode of his own past, that showed he couldn't love. That's what it's like to be damned; just that.

Dickens is on to—salvation. In *Bleak House* however I think he goes too far, as usual. The narrator has been disfigured with smallpox. Her guardian gallantly proposes and is accepted; but then, first of all, it appears that her looks recover; and, a young doctor is around. The whole is a beautiful exercise in delicate feeling. Her guardian nobly releases her. “I felt the brightness on him might be the brightness of angels.”

Speaking for myself I must demur. In fact I protest. As a common or garden celibate I wish to report that there is no such brightness or glamour there. Celibacy is a deprivation and humiliation undertaken, in

the spirit of that strange scene at the end of John's gospel, where the man-beyond-death humiliates Peter by asking three times if he loves him, loves him, loves him. Peter is commissioned at this humble acceptance to shepherd others through the deprivations and humiliations that seem our provisions on earth, on to death—and beyond.

I will come back to angels later.

Before we leave the nineteenth century let me remark on a change in reading habits that explains something sometimes misunderstood. We mustn't think the Victorians were prudish about sex, or conventional about religion. Books in their day were envisaged as being read out aloud, to a family or group, with all the obvious constraints that brought. In fact, I used to be ashamed that I didn't fully appreciate the Alice books or *The Water Babies* until I was a young man. I marvelled at the precocity of Victorian children, Of course these, too, were meant to be read by adults to children, and appreciated at all the different levels. With the coming of the individual private reader things would and could change, very much.

Joseph Conrad is a harbinger of such great changes. Lord Jim has committed the ultimate dereliction of duty. As captain he abandoned ship without providing for the safety of passengers and crew. He tells this later in the four most frightening words in all literature. "I jumped. It seemed." The sense is, could he be the man who did that? Is Conrad on to what we call—possession? "Satan entered Judas" we read in the gospel. Is this the "horror", of sin?

The individual in the nineteenth century could speak secret truths. The individual of all individuals was Emily Dickinson. Let us, with her, make our bow to poetry. She wrote her poems on the backs of recipes and shopping lists with, it seems, no thought of publication at all. Here she represents the ultimate in private religious sensibility, "closing the door of her room" as is suggested in the gospel. These are the people

we church and chapel people long to reach, and teach—but may learn from? Let’s hear from her. In poetry the words are mounted and set, like precious stones, in “patterns” of rhyme and rhythm, as the valuable things they are, and have best effect if read aloud.

The world is not Conclusion
A Species stands beyond—
Invisible as music—
But positive, as sound
It beckons, and it baffles
Philosophy—don’t know—
And through a Riddle, at the last—
Sagacity, must go—
To guess it, puzzles scholars—
To gain it, Men have borne
Contempt of generations
And Crucifixion, shown—
Faith slips—and laughs, and rallies—
Blushes, if any see—
Plucks at a twig of evidence—
And asks a Vane, the way—
Much gesture from the Pulpit—
Strong Hallelujahs roll—
Narcotics, cannot still the Truth
That nibbles at the soul—

* * *

At the beginning of the twentieth century Henry James pronounced that “the novel still, under the right persuasion, remains the most independent, most elastic and most prestigious of literary forms.” I’ll never forget one short story of his. A gentleman is in the habit of visiting a lady friend, week after week, in the most courteous and civilised manner. She begins to look at him, strangely and intently. He politely

ignores this, until she stops, and begins to decline. She falls ill. She dies. He adopts the habit of visiting her grave. One day at the cemetery he sees another visitor go and look at another grave—with the same look, of longing and intensity, that he remembers being given to himself. Only then does it crash in on him that he had been offered such love, and had simply not recognised it.

We might, by this, be led to question the very cold ways we have of treating each other, one that foreigners often notice; but I nervously add that we had better not too precipitately depart from the cool good manners we observe among ourselves at present.

D. H. Lawrence wrote another manifesto on the novel.

It's the way our sympathy flows and recoils that really determines our lives, and here lies the vast importance of the novel, properly handled. It can inform and lead to new places the flow of our sympathetic consciousness, and it can lead our sympathy away from things gone dead; therefore the novel, properly handled, can reveal the most secret places of life; for it is in the passional secret places of life that the tide of sensitive awareness needs to ebb and flow, cleansing and freshening.

He speaks about sexual passion “singling out” feelings in men and women, the manly into the man, the womanly into the woman, for them to become strangely “constellated” to each other and aflame like angels. Like Dickens perhaps he is thinking of the gospel passage where Jesus says we will become like angels in heaven; but, unlike Dickens, angels in love, and not celibate, as traditionally interpreted, unloved and unloving. An important and intriguing subject we much need to develop.

Novels in the twentieth century went on to other things.

E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* is marvellously honest about Indians and the British there. He probes the minds of an English girl and man talking.

She was at the end of her spiritual tether, and so was he. Were there worlds beyond, which they could never reach, or did all that was possible enter into their consciousness? They could not tell. They only realised that their outlook was more or less similar, and found this a satisfaction. Perhaps life is a mystery, not a muddle; they could not tell. Perhaps the hundred “Indias” which fuss and squabble so tiresomely, are one, and the universe they mirror is one. They had not the apparatus for judging. Yet they were dissatisfied. When they agreed “I want to go on living for a bit” or “I don’t believe in God”, the words were followed by a curious backlash, as though the universe had displaced itself to fill a tiny void. Not for them was the infinite goal beyond the stars; but a wistfulness descended on them now, as on other occasions. The shadow of a shadow of a dream fell over their clear-cut interests, and objects never again seemed messages from another world.

To me that catches a tone I find among many educated people today.

I could mention other novels demanding our particular readiness to follow.

William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies* (“Beelzebub”, a Hebrew demon) is horror-in-the-sun. A group of boys is marooned on a desert island and go native, except for a few strong characters. Young Simon is one, and even he has stopped at the sight of the hunted dead pig’s head, stuck on a pole, swarming with flies. A Voice speaks to him. “Fancy thinking that the Beast was something you could hunt and kill. You knew, didn’t you? I’m part of you! Close, close, close! The reason it’s no go. Why things are as they are.”

This is very interesting as a study, in quite secular and contemporary terms, of the Apparatus of Apparition, and the reality of evil, which we have to try to deal with, “inside” religion, or “out”. Another is Muriel Spark’s *The Only Problem*—the problem being, of course, evil. I just can’t be fair to the book, and there is also throughout a cool reference to the Book of Job (“Adversary”) that I find helpful. Let me point out

that you are drawn into the problem yourself, by your interest in reading the book. You collude.

Patience, pallor, and deep anxiety: there is suffering, and I found him interesting. Is it only by realising how flat the world would be without the sufferings of others, that we know how desperately becalmed our own lives would be, without suffering? We all need something to suffer about, real experience, not vicarious, as is often assumed. To study, to think, is to live and suffer painfully.

The main character is studying The Book of Job, and takes note of the ridiculous names given Job's new, replacement daughters—Dove, Cinnamon, and Mascara. Is this “a word to the wise”, like the (impossible) glass slipper in Cinderella to older, wiser children, that happy recompense like this just doesn't happen, is a dream? Is that the sort of insight a novelist can bring to the study of Scripture?

Another surprise area of such helpful insight was provided for me, in a tense and intense discussion I took part in. A group of clergy was debating how we were, after all, servants to our people; or were we in truth and honesty, shepherds, masters, lords spiritual? You understand the issue appears in all attitudes. Traditional, liberal, progressive, clergy, can be either supportive or masterful in their positions. I don't think I answered the question but I raised a laugh by suggesting we should be servants—we have Scripture's word for it—but superior servants. Like Jeeves.

I did bring in Wodehouse after all.

If we had to conclude with a representative piece of writing today we should have to take *The Hitch-hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. You may know it; a total “send-up” of science and administration and business, and yes, religion doesn't escape. Earth is destroyed in an administrative blunder. A pity, as it was really a supercomputer, built to find the question to the “answer” science has discovered “was” the universe: the number 42. A man and a woman survive and in their adventures meet a supreme intelligence called Marvin, a “paranoid

android". The man asks, can you see into my mind? What do you think? "I can't imagine how anyone could live in a space so small." Marvin's intelligence is no joy to him. "I'm far too intelligent to think that anyone cares what happens to me." He receives the final revelation of the meaning of everything. As the book was written with an American readership in mind, it is the notice posted there at roadworks: "We apologise for the inconvenience." Ours is "Sorry for the delay" which is open to more meaning perhaps?

The universe is simply a vast messy roadworks and that's all there is to be said about it.

"And so it goes" as a similar author Kurt Vonnegut recites as a mantra of modern incomprehension. You will be glad to know that Douglas Adams gave an interview in the *Sunday Times* in which he repented, slightly, and recanted, a little, of this universal black humour.

I will end with a book I am simply unable to forget, though it came out quite fifty years ago, a historical novel, by H. F. M. Prescott, *The Man on a Donkey*. The Man is Jesus, who visits a nuns' abbey just before it is suppressed by Henry the Eighth. We are to be under no illusion about the lives of these Religious. The nuns don't like the look of their visitor at all, and he has nothing to say to them. He spends the time with the many servants and dependants who are soon to be turned out on the road. The story opens with the suppression and the nuns leaving. The abbey and grounds are littered with parchment pages from the nuns' choir books, any one of which would be a prized exhibit in a museum today; the soldiers have ripped off the covers to take the leather. We follow in "chronicle" flashbacks the lives of Malle the mystic who isn't focussed on this world, Gib Dawe the runaway priest turned preacher, July one of the young nuns, and Aske, the leader of the great rebellion called the Pilgrimage of Grace, and many others.

The priest has had a tumble in the hay with one of the local girls and instead of following the hard road of repentance, recompense and

amendment, starts running. At the end of the book he is passing old St Paul's, where in the sunset

the light blazes fire-red as though a feast were prepared within for the celebration of some high holy day; as if a great King held carousel there, with all His joyful people, all His children brought safe home. But because Gib fled, and because he was ashamed that he fled, he did not look up, and he did not see.

Other men God might save. Gib Dawe He could not save.

July has been taken to London and married. She has feelings for Aske of an intensity beyond the ordinary. She hears that he has been tricked and hung in chains from York Keep, to spend days in torment before dying.

As his eye told him of the sickening depth below his body, and his mind foresaw the lagging endlessness of torment before him, he knew also the greater gulf of despair above which his spirit hung, helpless and aghast. God did not now, nor would in any further future, prevail. Once He had come, and died. If He came again He would die, and again, and so forever, by His own will rendered powerless against the free and evil will of men. Then Aske felt the full assault of darkness without reprieve of hoped-for light, for God ultimately vanquished was no God at all. But yet, though God was not God, as the head of the dumb worm turns so his spirit turned, blindly, gropingly, hopelessly loyal towards that good, that holy, that merciful, which though not God, though vanquished, was the last dear love of a vanquished and tortured man.

When he dies "he was aware of One, vanquished God, Saviour who could as little save others as Himself; but now, beside Him and beyond was nothing; and He was silence and light."

July hangs herself, and is rescued by her husband. " 'Wife, we must pray God for him.' She cried so that it tore her throat—'No! God made pain. He chose it for Himself.' " That was all she could say and

Laurence must guess the rest. God had made pain so that the whole universe was corrupt with it God could do nothing to help one who, hanging in chains, moved yet.

Her husband took her hands in his and held them closely. “You do not understand,” he said, “There’s nothing to fear in pain. Love makes it all different. I love you. If I might suffer for you, I would be glad.”

We are back at the abbey and Malle is making paper boats of the manuscript pages and is floating them down the river—the river, flowing like our lives, to the sea, to an immense and unimaginable destiny. All our writing, all our scriptures and worship, is bobbing on the surface, but we see words glowing on the pages, even in the sunlight, words the nuns were taught to sing and we are allowed to recite in the creed:

God of God
DEUM DE DEO

Light of Light
LUMEN DE LUMINE

Real God of real God
DEUM VERUM DE DEO VERO

And He was made man
ET HOMO FACTUS EST

* * *

Literature has helped me, and, I hope, you.

