

The Struggle for Existence!

Or the Modest (but-not-bashful) Newsletter after One Year

Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions.

By Edwin A. Abbott (original pen name A. Square). Revised ed. 1884

Book Review by Jillian (of-mathematical-proclivities) Ross

Imagine a police officer coming to the scene of an accident. Four witnesses provide four different accounts of the incident. They all witnessed the same event. Why is this? Answer: it is all about perspective.

I now invite you to survey *Flatland* where one's perspective of the facts shapes one's opinion.

In order to create the proper perspective and mood, Abbott divides his short science fiction into two parts. Part One, "This World" centers on Flatland itself. In this section, A Square describes the topology, figures, and social system in Flatland. In "This World" Abbott creates a society whose social structure mimics that of his contemporary Victorian society.¹ "This World" provides a platform for satirical commentary on society as well as the foundation for exploring "Other Worlds." Since Flatland is a two dimensional world, figures only see each other as lines (men) or points (women). Education is revered since it provides the tools for figures to differentiate between figures of higher and lower classes.

A. Square's education aids him in "Other Worlds" as he encounters many dimensions. In this section, frustrations arise as various characters fail to grasp concepts and "realities" beyond their understanding. First, A. Square is translated into Lineland, a one-dimensional world where the king is a line. Next, A. Square is visited by Sphere, a guide from Spaceland. With the aid of Sphere, A. Square becomes a believer in the third dimension. In Spaceland, A. Square posits the existence of a fourth dimension or even a limitless number of dimensions. Having considered any dimensions beyond the third as absurd, Sphere reaches the limit of his patience and banishes A. Square from Sphereland. Lastly, in a dream, A. Square also encounters Pointland, an abyss with no dimension. The story ends when A. Squares, now an apostle of the Gospel of the Third Dimension, endeavors to proselytize his countrymen.

Flatland, a true romance of many dimensions, probes the mind of its readers. Readers are forced to question societal structures, their perspective, and to consider the possibilities of "reality" being outside one's scope. Critics debate whether Part Two contains spiritual overtones. I again invite you to journey through *Flatland*, a land in which Northward, but not upward exists.² There you can determine for yourself if Abbott intended such overtones.

Some Thoughts on Jane Austen

By Rachel (the-good-parts) Bauder and Joel (the-"creative"-parts) Zartman

Jane Austen has suffered popularization and therefore distortion recently. It is not for this reason that this controversial and controvertible contributor picked up Jane Austen. It was because I thought I might enjoy Jane Austen. And I have found this to be true. So I decided that with the assistance of our other controversial and controvertible contributor I would be able to tell the rest of you what it is that is

¹For example in Flatland, a two-dimensional plane, women are lines and men are polygons. One's societal position increases in proportion to one's sides and regularity (that is how similar each of one's sides and angles are). Thus, women are lower than men, triangles are lower than octagons, and polygons which appear to be circular of the High Priestly class.

²Sphere teaches A. Square that space has a dimension called upward and it is not to be confused with Northward. In Flatland when he strives to recollect Spaceland, A. Square repeats, "Not Northward, upward."

so enjoyable about Jane Austen.

To begin with, there is complication, and in this Jane Austen is very good. The novels proceed to build up, rather elaborately, the situation which will prove her protagonist. The outcome is the marriage to the virtuous. I might object to the centrality of life before marriage and the portrait of life after marriage that you have in Jane Austen, but to conclude the story with a promising marriage is arguably a Christian way to do things. But then we must think that Jane Austen does not write to teach us about marriage, and perhaps not primarily to teach at all because that would be tediously didactic. The reason this sort of observation comes up in a paragraph about complication is that I think that the complication of the novel, the mix of factors and ideas and personalities, is her main way of avoiding preachiness. The tediously didactic tone is achieved through the false simplicity of reduction.

Perhaps it is worth remarking that Austen's ability to untediously exonerate virtue is considered unique for her place in the novel's development. It may not seem unique to us, because we are as used to good novels as we are to seeing people walking around on two good legs—but until Austen's time, novels had largely been hobbling forward on only one leg apiece. The reason for this was that the early novelists were caught between the two extremes of amorality and intrusive moralizing. On the one hand, the early novelists wanted to write about “real” individual lives that were as life-like as possible in real time and real circumstances; and so you end up with Defoe throwing virtue to the winds in such “real-life” works as *Moll Flanders* and *Roxanna*. On the other hand, authors like Henry Fielding and Samuel Richardson took the other extreme and tried to use moral vindication to make a moral point; but their novels ended up limping along like fairy tales, parodies of *Don Quixote*, and long sermon illustrations.³ Austen was the first to really succeed in giving her novel two good legs. She showed that the right sensibilities do indeed have good consequences in real life, and the bad ones have bad consequences. The incredible thing is that Austen is among the most invisible of novelists; she never intrudes into her own story with moral commentary. Rather, her method of moral vindication deals mainly with her use of perspective and how moral flaws invariably result in deception. Moral vindication is the most satisfying part of a Jane Austen novel. Especially to reveal the sensibilities and to exonerate the right ones and vilify the wrong ones is what Jane Austen accomplishes without the sentimentality that mars Dickens's work.

The second matter that one enjoys has to do with manners and sensibility. Austen shows us right and wrong sensibilities through her use of flawed heroines. The heroines' flaws give the reader a real glimpse into how the wrong sensibilities work on the every-day level and how they deceive the self. An Austen novel is like a detective story—the reader is looking through the eyes of a character whose inferior sensibilities have skewed her perception of reality and other people, and in the end, she must come to a realization of what is really going on. The most notable example of this is Emma Woodhouse in *Emma*, whose vanity consistently leads her to misinterpret the relationships between other people until reality suddenly forces her to admit her mistakes. This is common to Austen's novels: the final “revelation” of what is really going on in the story occurs simultaneously with the heroine's realization and repentance of bad sensibilities. In all of this, Austen is making the point (really, she is simply “showing”) that the punishment of vice *is* the deception it brings and the crippling effect it has on one's ability to make sound judgments. Virtue likewise is its own reward in that it brings clarity of judgment and soundness of sense. Moreover, Austen shows that only those with mature judgment and sense are capable of enjoying the best things in life—namely, a good marriage.⁴

³Not, of course, that fairy tales or parodies of *Don Quixote* are bad things. The only problem is that they are not novels. If I set out to make fried chicken for dinner, I am a bad cook if I end up with linguini.

⁴If Austen actually more than implied this I would object. Not that a good marriage is not one of the best things in life, not that Austen focuses on marriage a lot, but it seems that there is an application to all of life. In *S&S* Elinor has a much better life before marriage because she is sensible and a much smoother life because she has proper

In the novels of Jane Austen there is wit as well. Her wit has to do with her understanding of people. She makes fun of different kinds of persons. But when she makes fun she does so rightly, with the proper gentleness or the proper pointedness that is required in proportion to the nature of the flaw. Do not imagine that she undermines the job of shaping the moral imagination by making fun of what is morally reprehensible. She does not make fun of what is morally reprehensible, but she does make fun of what is ridiculous. I suppose the reason for this is that she understands what is important and what is less important.

With this idea of shaping the moral imagination and the good sensibilities that Austen displays one can see that she makes you want to be that way, and you can see why it is superior. Austen's method of novel-writing is not didactic in the sense of imparting explicit teaching. Her method, in fact, is not to "teach" at all (in the sense the word is normally used), but to "show," because she knows that art works by the latter, not the former. Austen is a child of 18th century neoclassicism, which says that art is like a mirror that reflects what is true of human nature. As long as Austen has a good mirror, i.e. one that opens the right window on reality, she simply has to hold it up and say "Look at yourself!" and we get the point. Sooner or later in an Austen novel, we always realize that our judgments about her flawed, sometimes ridiculous, always morally accountable characters are really judgments about ourselves. It is our vanity, our flawed sensibility, our hypocrisy, or even our repentance, that is taking place through the heroine. This invariably moves us to alter our affections and desire to be sensible or courteous in a way we did not desire or perhaps even understand before. All this is a hallmark of great art.

Austen's works bear the stamp of genuine artistry. It is a misguided popular notion to suppose that the novels of Jane Austen are frilly stuff for feminine appreciation exclusively.⁵ Jane Austen writes good novels that will shape your sensibilities and affections. If your sensibilities and affections are really distorted then perhaps you will remain blind to these things in Jane Austen. But if you love virtue and despise platitudes, then you will find that Jane Austen's novels are good reading.

The Creation According to Archer

by Ryan (here-we-go-again) Martin

Gleason Archer believes in Creation. In his helpful volume *A Survey of the Old Testament*, he details how exactly he believes it happened. If you have ever read his *Survey*, you may remember that he spends so much time defending potential errors in the Scripture that you kind of feel beat up after reading it. Archer begins his treatment of Genesis by dealing with the question of the days of Creation. He gives several difficulties for holding to a literal interpretation of the "evening and the morning" recorded throughout Genesis 1. Archer has some interesting points, and presents very candid objections to a young earth. He is a "day-ager." But I really do not want to focus this little article on Gleason Archer and the young earth. I want to get to a bigger point.

In dealing with his day-ages, Archer, along with every other "day-ager," runs into a significant problem: the first man. Again, Archer rejects outright the theories of Darwin, but he still gives the archeological fossils much more credence than most Fundamentalist Creationists. He says, "According to modern estimates the so-called Swanscombe man, . . . the Pithecanthropus . . . and the Sinanthropus . . . lived anywhere from 200,000 to 500,000 years ago" (Archer 210). And, from the sophisticated tools fossilized in the hands of the Neanderthal man, Archer is convinced that these men had a more than ape-like mentality. Never mind the fact that I am convinced I saw the Neanderthal man in Wal-mart a

sensibilities. In *Northanger Abby*, Catherine has a life that is rougher because her sensibilities have been distorted by her inordinate attachment to the novels of Mrs. Anne Radcliffe.

⁵It is a misguided popular notion to suppose that feminine taste is frilly and sentimental. It is the subject of another article to explore this common misconception that is, and the nonsense that surrounds, the modern prevailing notion of womanhood.

couple days ago, Archer believes that the Neanderthal man is over 50,000 years old. I have no intention of entering into a debate with Archer or anyone else on the validity of cavemen; my working knowledge of fossils has virtually dried up since 11th grade Biology. Nor do I want to somehow diminish the importance of studying fossils and creation and science. But I want to talk about Archer's view of Adam.

Archer gives the genealogies credence, and thus believes that the prehistoric man did not descend from Adam. He holds that there may be gaps in the genealogies, and that there was a period of five to six thousand years between Adam and Abraham. But what does he do with the cavemen? Archer believes that the Swanscombe, Neanderthal and all those other guys lived prior to Adam, and were "not involved with the Adamic covenant" (212). He says that we cannot know if these men had souls. "The clear implication of Gen. 1:26 is that God was creating a qualitatively different being when he made Adam (for note that the word rendered "man" in Ge. 1:26-27 is the Hebrew *'Adam*), a being who was uniquely fashioned in the image of God" (212). Archer acknowledges that Romans 5:12-21 can only be understood to mean those men subsequent to Adam are all literally related to Adam. Archer concludes from this principle of the Adamic headship that Adam could not have been related to these pre-Adamic races. Nor is it essential, in Archer's mind, to conclude from the similarities between the prehistoric man and *homo sapiens* that the pre-Adamic had souls or personality. Archer surmises, "They may have been exterminated by God for unknown reasons prior to the creation of the original parent of the present human race. Adam, then, was the first man created in the image of God, according to Gen. 1:26-27, and there is no evidence from science to disprove it" (212).

Now hold everything. This simply is too much. Does Archer really expect us to believe all this? This is what countless pages of reconciling the Bible with academia will do to a man—turn him into a science fiction writer. Maybe he was tired or fatigued while he wrote this chapter. I know that the biblical account of Creation can be difficult at times to reconcile with modern academia. I know that sometimes the pages of Scripture can be completely unbelievable. After all, who ever heard of a theanthropic person? Who has ever witnessed the parting of a large body of water (not counting Charleton Heston in *The Ten Commandments*)? Where did Jesus go after he ascended—no one can survive in space without a space suit! Give me a break. The proposition laid out by Archer is actually more difficult to believe than the original Genesis account! I believe in a young earth, and six literal days of Creation, but I am not a man of faith. Archer is the real man of faith. His version of the account is far more difficult to accept. He actually wants us to believe that God caused all these cave-men to evolve and then he killed them all off so he could create Adam.

If Archer were reading this article, he would probably ask me how I would explain the fossils. And I would not be able to provide any kind of acceptable answer. Perhaps I could say, "I think that Martians hovered over Antarctica in spacecraft and dropped these men into the ocean." Or I could say, "These guys are not cavemen: they are the 'sons of God' in Genesis 6." Or I could say that they are an ancient form of the sea monkeys gone bad. For each of these postulates I could defend them by saying, "and there is no evidence from science to disprove it." We need men like Gleason Archer to defend the veracity of Scripture and to form a coherent apologetic in the face of the most rigid scholarship. But at some point we need to put all the text-books away, look at the Bible, and believe it. The point of Gen 1:26-27 is not that God finally created an upright creature in His image to contrast with the thousands He just killed. Just like "the evening and the morning were 'nth' day" throughout Genesis 1 was never intended to be used as a defense against Day-agers. We must look at the Scriptures and believe them. We may never know the answer to the caveman puzzle or how Jesus ascended or how He rose from the dead. Science, you know, is pretty definitive on that whole death issue. If "day" and "morning" and evening" are all just metaphors (which they may be), then why do we all have to descend from Adam anyway? Why can't Adam be a metaphor? Why can't Abraham and Jesus just be metaphors? No. We should take the Scriptures, interpret them carefully, and believe.

Some Hymns

THE SAINTS SHALL RISE AGAIN

by Dana (I-got-what-I-asked-for) Burkinshaw

Death spread its dark dominion from Adam's fatal fall
Till Christ went to the slaughter to ransom one and all.
The gruesome deed was finished, the Savior's work was done.
For God so loved His creatures, He gave His only Son.

A way is made for sinners; a holy Lamb was slain
To save the lost from peril and make man whole again.
Giving life to all who come, the Shepherd is the door.
His scattered sheep He gathers that death should boast no more.

When heaven's Gift was given, the Temple veil was rent,
Its sacred precinct opened by suffring Servant sent.
New stones comprise the Temple - the livened heart of man,
Constructed by the Spirit according to His plan.

Those buried, dead, decaying, like seed ignoble sown,
Now rise in raptured wonder to bow before His throne.
Though dust has covered o'er them, those for so long concealed
Rise shining forth in splendor, their glory now revealed.

Refrain: Though death should clutch its victims, its greedy grasp
restrain,
Christ burst its bands asunder; the saints shall rise again.

HAD GOD BEEN MORE POLITE I WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN SAVED

by Joel (none-of-this-Arminian-stuff) Zartman

Hostile and un-virtuous
I was through and through.
Rebel and tumultuous
Indifferent to you.

It was by invasion
You have set me free.
Not by soft persuasion,
but by tyranny.

Love of old elected
and now overcame,
so that only gratitude
can at last remain.

Note: One may wonder what these two unequal hymns may be doing side by side (if the one on the right is not a praise chorus). Dana was intrigued by my title and I said I'd put mine in if he'd put his in. There you have it.

Advertisement

Retreat!

Date: June 4-5 of 2004

Place: St. Olaf College

Schedule so far:

Arrive at 7PM or so on Friday - obviously depending on people's work.

Fri 7.30 Have Bauder do some tone setting stuff..

Fri 8PM Read fairy stories and talk or just talk.

Or talk about Tolkien on Fairy Stories! Or even MacDonald on Fairy stories!!

Sat 7:15-8:45 Breakfast

Sat 9AM Worship preliminaries—practice some Quietism?

Sat 9-11 or thereabouts, worship - Speaker: Ryan.

Sat 11:30-1PM Lunch

Sat 1? not sure how long we can stay but probably something. Talk on Herbert or something like that.

That's it.

Price: \$33 each person. That covers lodging and the two meals.

Extra: Offering for the speaker. Snack stuff for Friday night.

WE NEED TO GET THE MONEY FROM YOU BY February 28. It will not be convenient for people to give us money after that time because we have to make a deposit. We can add some afterward, and we certainly can invite non-Immoderates, but don't fool around with us.

Doctrinal Fidelity

by The (this-is-over-right?) Gravitas Crowd

A commitment to fidelity in doctrine is true about all of us who regularly attend Gravitas. Since our commitment is not to just any doctrine, here is a sketch of what we believe:

Concerning the Scriptures,

We believe that the Holy Scriptures are God's Word, true, God-breathed; infallible and inerrant in whatever topics they address. They are man's sufficient and necessary authority for faith and practice.

Concerning God the Father,

We believe that God is a Spirit, revealed to us as He reveals Himself, existing perfect, unchangeable, incomprehensible, infinite, and sovereign. God is the self-existing Designer, Creator, and Sustainer of all things. His name is the LORD, inexpressibly glorious in holiness and worthy of all possible honor, confidence, and love. God is holy, true, righteous, good, loving, just, gracious, and merciful. God is omniscient, and His omniscience extends to all things past, present, and future. God is a Trinity, one God in essence, yet three distinct Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God alone, being one, is worthy of man's worship.

Concerning God the Son,

We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is very God and very man, eternally begotten of the Father, one Person existing indissolubly in two natures. We believe He was born of the virgin Mary and lived a sinless life. We believe in His substitutionary death upon the cross, His burial, and His bodily resurrection. He is now seated at the right hand of God the Father and will return bodily to the earth to judge the living and the dead. His kingdom shall have no end.

Concerning God the Holy Spirit,

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life. He is coequal with God the Father and God the Son. He is a distinct Person proceeding from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified. The Holy Spirit imparts ordinate affections, resulting in the fruits of holiness.

Concerning Mankind,

We believe that man was created on the sixth of the seven literal days as a distinct person in God's image, in a state of sinlessness, for the purpose of bringing glory to God. Adam's rebellion plunged all of mankind into sin. Man therefore not only lost that original righteousness, but is naturally inclined to all manner of evil, being conceived in sin, and brought forth in iniquity. Therefore, every man justly deserves God's wrath and damnation.

Concerning Salvation,

We believe that man's salvation from the just wrath of God is according to God's causal foreordination, predestination, and effectual calling. Man is saved through faith alone because of which faith the righteousness of Christ is imputed to him. God does this for His own glory and according to His sovereign pleasure.

Concerning the Church,

We believe in the church invisible, holy, and universal, the bride and body of Christ, consisting of those saved through faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ, for the purpose of worshiping God.