

Institute for Christian Teaching
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**UNDERSTANDING MORAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES IN LITERATURE:
EXAMPLES IN FOUR BRITISH AND AMERICAN NOVELS**

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1. Introduction

“Mr Collins is a pompous ass.” More than thirty years down the line, I remember the words of Mr. Rothwell, my 11th grade literature teacher, beloved by students now scattered across the globe. The novel was *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen and the topic was characterization. We were guided skilfully and patiently to an understanding of the negative and positive aspects of the various characters in the novel. We began to appreciate how words can be used to paint pictures and create themes that convey the author’s intentions and ideas. Our teacher’s obvious love for both his work and his subject led me to the decision to become a teacher instead of studying law as planned.

Reading was already one of my favourite hobbies at the time but it was done without discriminating between what was useful and what was harmful since I had grown up without the benefit of religion. My attendance at a Christian high school was the merest chance, but two of the teachers there were to make an indelible impression on my young mind. Dr. Birkenstock shared with love and understanding his concept of various Bible doctrines that everyone but I seemed to be very familiar with and that opened new avenues of thought to me. The key was the personal interest that the teacher showed in me.

In *True Education*, the adaptation of the book *Education*, by E. G. White, the following statement is made about true teachers.

“True teachers are not satisfied with second-rate work. They are not satisfied with directing their students to a standard lower than it is possible for them to reach. They cannot be content with imparting only technical knowledge, with making merely clever accountants, skilful artisans or successful professionals. It is their ambition to inspire students with principles of truth, obedience, honour, integrity and purity – principles that will make them a positive force for the stability and uplifting of society. They desire them, above all else, to learn life’s great lesson of unselfish service.”¹

Teachers cannot teach these lessons unless they get ‘up close and personal’ to borrow a phrase, to their students. One has to establish a basis of mutual trust and respect. The students must understand that the teacher genuinely wants to help them to prepare for life after graduation.

It is also important to be seen to live what you teach. A teacher who does one thing and says another will never establish credibility with the students. You have to create an atmosphere in the classroom right from day one of each course that opens the way to integrate faith and learning. It cannot be tagged on to the end of a lesson.

¹ Ellen G. White, *True Education* p27

2. Aim of the Research

The aim of this research was to document some of the moral and social issues in a selection of British and American novels and to show their value for the integration of faith and learning. I will explain how I have used the information in the classroom and share some of the feedback from the students. Some of the topics for discussion or assignments may seem very simple to someone not in an ESL environment. At a practical level it means I cannot have a discussion on the ambiguities of language or of human relationships and materialism in *Great Expectations*. This is not because the students are not mentally capable of such a discussion but because the class is conducted in English and their language abilities, or lack thereof, precludes such discussions. It is important for me to meet the students at their functioning level of English ability and then to raise that level. This needs to be done systematically so that the students can see the improvement in their ability. At the same time, I aim to foster a love of reading of good literature so that they can learn some of the valuable lessons that are to be found there.

3. Literature as a Subject in SDA Institutions

One branch of the study of literature at an Adventist institution such as Sahmyook University is the study of British and American novels. In order to incorporate the principles just quoted and reveal the beauty of timeless literature, the Adventist teacher has to choose wisely, from among all the available works, those novels that can best integrate faith and learning. It is not enough to choose a novel merely because the world at large has given it its stamp of approval as a 'best seller' or 'masterpiece.' In *The Adventist Home* Mrs White makes a statement that has serious implications for the teacher of literature.

"Let not our children, in the very process of obtaining an education, receive ideas that will prove to be seeds of sin."²

The study of novels provides the teacher with an opportunity to draw the principles of truth, obedience, honour, integrity and purity previously referred to from the works being studied. Even though the author may not have been a Christian, one can still use the thoughts that they penned to equip the student to be a force for the stability and uplifting of society. We can use the characters to teach how to give unselfish service even if it is by contrasting the actions of a character with what it could be. The novels chosen should also reflect those values that support the Adventist philosophy of education.

When I was first assigned to teach LITR325 [British and American Novel], I spent the entire vacation reading and re-reading novels in order to choose those that would be most suitable for the integration of faith and learning. According to surveys taken at the beginning of the course for the last three years, the students do not read much worthwhile literature. There is also a strong influence from the Japanese comic-style books that require little concentration and effort. In addition, the youth of today are bombarded with advertisements and media hype that is very far removed from the principles our Adventist institutions are trying to teach. So, choosing the novels that can be used to reach those students who have not yet accepted Jesus becomes even more essential and consequently more of a challenge. The single most restricting factor is actually that of

² White, E.G. *The Adventist Home*. Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1952 p413

time. The curriculum requires that four novels be studied during one semester. There is so much that one can do to integrate faith and learning that it is a constant struggle deciding what to choose.

For this course I have found cooperative learning to be very valuable. There are always students who have transferred from College in the class and some have limited English ability. The more able students are asked to mentor the ones who have problems. Sometimes all the members of the group receive one grade for an assignment. They are required to share out the work and then to state what each person was responsible for. It is also easier to grade 12-15 assignments rather than 90 and so the teacher also benefits.

4. Techniques for Studying a Novel

It is common to follow some kind of set structure when studying a novel.³ A course would normally begin with an explanation of each of the techniques.

4.1 Plot and Narrative Structure:

The plot is what happens in a story and structure is the order in which the novel presents the plot. So, the plot is a series of events that depend on one another, everything is related in some way. I have found it useful to select some well-known Bible stories to illustrate a few plots at the beginning of the course. The story of Haman is a good 'biter-bit' plot. The 'Prodigal Son' is a fine example of a 'Love Transformation' plot. Numerous stories have 'Episodic Plots' in which the stages of growth in the life of a character are shown. Then there are the stories that rely more on the character than on the events or action and are known simply as 'Character Plots.'

It is important to understand that conflict is essential to a plot. The plot unfolds as the main character(s) deals with conflict. The conflict may be between two characters; it may be ethical, it may involve the making of decisions that affect other people; it may be physical; it may be an internal conflict or struggle or it may be between an individual [or a group] and society.

So the point of departure will be that our lives in the real world center round conflict. The conflict between good and evil, between Christ and Satan is ever present and the Christian teacher has the opportunity to explain this conflict and its ultimate unfolding to the non-Christian students.

4.2 Point of View and Narrative Technique:

Novelists use several techniques to make their novels rich in meaning and enjoyable to the reader. These include point of view, style and symbolism. Authors also use minor devices such as imagery and irony.

4.2.1. Point of View:

It is important for the author to decide what point of view to use. This determines what limitations or freedom he has to present the plot and theme. The three major points of view are omniscient, first person and third-person-limited. A discussion of points of view enables the teacher to point out that only God can have an omniscient point of view. One does this not by means of a statement of fact but by using examples and then soliciting responses from the student. The teacher may give the example of a novel that shows what a character is thinking as he dies. You ask the students if they think this is possible for the author to know. Invariably

³ "Novel," Microsoft Encarta Online Encyclopaedia 2000 <http://encarta.msn.com> (17 Jan. 2001)

the reply is 'no.' One can use a short, guided discussion to bring the topic around to the omniscience of God

4.2.2 Style:

The way that a novelist chooses words and phrases and how they are arranged in sentences and paragraphs is referred to as style. There are three types of style viz. simple, complex and mid-style. The first one uses common words and simple sentences even when a situation is complex. This style relies on the events themselves to touch the reader instead of appealing to the emotions directly. [Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms*.] Complex style uses long elaborate sentences that contain many ideas and descriptions. [Henry James, *The Wings of a Dove*.] Mixed style is just that, a mixture of simple and complex. [Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*.] You may select certain portions of scripture and compare the King James Version with a paraphrased version to illustrate this point to the students. I have found that using 1 Corinthians 13 in different versions can illustrate style as well as some of the next points.

4.2.2 Symbolism:

Writers make use of symbolism to express their thoughts indirectly on controversial or sensitive matters. So on the surface the novel's literal plot is revealed but underneath abstract ideas and feelings are portrayed by means of images and objects. [In Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, the red A on Hester's dress symbolizes adultery.] The cross of Christ is symbolic of our redemption and victory over evil.

4.2.3 Imagery:

The difference between imagery and symbolism is that the purpose of imagery is to create an illusion of reality by stimulating the reader's senses. It uses metaphors and similes to produce the effect. Metaphors do not use the words 'like' or 'as' as a part of the description ["I am the good shepherd"/ "You are the salt of the earth."], while similes use the word 'like' as part of the description. Matthew 13 has some excellent examples.

4.2.4 Irony:

This refers to something that has a second meaning, often the opposite of the surface meaning and often bitterly humorous. Novelists may use irony to reveal something about the characters to the reader even though the characters themselves are not aware of it.

4.3 Setting:

The setting of a novel may refer to place or time or both. A setting may also be linear or circular. In the latter, the character comes back to the same place in order to come to full roundness. The life of any one of several well-known biblical characters may be used to illustrate setting. From an Adventist point of view, Creation week is the setting for our existence and it can be used to explain the origins of the Sabbath. Some novels such as *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens have been filmed in a modern setting. When dealing with such a situation one can also take a Bible story and give it a modern setting since students often say that the Bible is not relevant to modern life.

4.4 Theme vs. Subject:

These terms are often found used interchangeably but George P Landow has presented a case for better understanding of works of fiction when the student can distinguish between them.⁴ The subject is the general topic or topics the book discusses implicitly such as the conditions in the world today. The theme in contrast refers to what the novel implies we should think about such subjects such as the signs that the end of the world is near.

A novel's theme is the main idea or the underlying meaning of the story. Since novels normally have several themes the teacher may select those that are the easiest for the integration of faith and learning as will be illustrated later in this paper. Some common themes are (1) the conflict between appearance and reality, (2) the search for personal identity (3) the individual who strikes out alone to face the world, (4) social injustice and naturalism. You can use the theme of the novel as the point of departure to discuss events that affect the lives of the students. This will become clearer when we talk about the novels in more detail.

4.5 Characterization

An author uses words to create the powerful illusion of a person and that makes up what we call characterization. The writer uses literary devices such as physical description, dialogue, physical actions, thoughts and the judgment of others or the narrator or the author in order to create assemblages of language that can make the reader laugh or cry, get angry and even to treat them as more important to us than people we know. We may be amused by the addiction that some people develop to the characters in soaps but in fact it simply means that the author has managed to create, for some viewers at least, a highly believable character.

One can study one or more of the characters in a novel and from the study we can understand many aspects such as culture and human nature. In a didactic novel such as *Little Women*, it is the aim of the author to let the reader learn the same lessons that the characters in the novel learn.

5. An Overview of two British Novels

While there are many British novels to choose from, students appear to enjoy two Jane Austen novels especially. They are *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma*. Both are romantic although the plots differ greatly. The latter appeals particularly because matchmaking is quite a favorite pastime in Korea. I have found the former to have a lot of scope for the integration of faith and learning.

5.1 Pride and Prejudice

“For herself she was humbled; but she was proud of him. Proud that in a cause of compassion and honour he had been able to get the better of himself.”⁵

In this novel the characters and the themes are interwoven. The themes are the same as the title. It has a complex plot and we know about the internal struggles of the two main characters. Once the students have read the novel or the parts that have been assigned one can then guide them through the novel to point out the various aspects that you want to emphasize. I like to have students concentrate on the following aspects.

⁴ <http://landow.stg.brown.edu/Victoria/tech/howto.novel.html>

⁵ Austen, J. *Pride and Prejudice* 1813.London, Penguin Books, 1994, p251

5.1.1 Characterization

- a. **Mr Bennet:** We look for passages that describe him and then discuss what we think of him as a husband and a father. [We also watch scenes from the movie since the direct words from the novel are used in the 1995 version with Colin Firth and Jennifer Ehle.] It is easy to see that he has not made a success of either role. The disgrace that befalls the family when the youngest daughter elopes is the direct result of his wanting to have peace in the house and so he permits her to go away to Brighton on vacation in the charge of a silly young married woman.

"[Mr Bennet] had married a woman whose weak understanding and illiberal mind had very early in their marriage put an end to all real affection for her. Respect, esteem and confidence had vanished for ever; and all his views of domestic happiness were overthrown....To his wife he was very little otherwise indebted, than as her ignorance and folly had contributed to his amusement."

*"Elizabeth had never been blind to the impropriety of her father's behaviour as a husband. She had always seen it with pain; but respecting his abilities, and grateful for his affectionate treatment of herself, she endeavored to forget what she could not overlook, and to banish from her thought that continual breach of conjugal obligation and decorum which, in exposing his wife to the contempt of her own children, was so highly reprehensible. But she had never felt so strongly as now the disadvantage which must attend the children of so unsuitable a marriage, not ever been so fully aware of the evils arising from so ill-judged a direction of talents; talents which, right used, might at least have preserved the respectability of his daughters."*⁶

- (1) The teacher can either use scripture and/ or extracts from Christian authors such as E.G. White to illustrate the true and noble role of a husband and father and then examine Mr. Bennet against that.
- (2) Discuss the importance of choosing the right spouse. List character traits that one should look for. Alternatively ask the students for their opinions first. It all depends on the amount of time available and the ability of the students.
- (3) This may be carried even further if the same students are also in your composition class or you may set a homework assignment in which the students find information from books such as *The Adventist Home* or *Counsels to Parents, Students and Teachers*.

NOTE: One can also examine Mrs. Bennet in exactly the same manner. In Korea it is also of value because the traditional role of the husband and father is that of one who provides for the family and leaves the rest to the wife.

- b. **Lady Catherine and Mr. Collins:** Both reveal a false sense of pride. Several options are possible in dealing with these two characters. Each of the following is assigned to a different group for discussion or to prepare a role-play in the case of a Bible story.

- (1) Use the story of the rich man and the poor widow in Luke 21 or the Pharisee and the publican in Luke 18:8-14 to bring in the Biblical perspective.
- (2) The students are asked to think of anyone they know that is like one of these characters. They tell the others about the person. One student said his grandmother was like that and so he and his parents only visited her once a month even though she lives quite close to them.
- (3) Discuss why it is dangerous to depend on people or material possessions for your position in life as Mr. Collins does.

⁶ Austen, 1994, p183

- (4) Talk about the affect on the life of the character and those with whom he/she comes into contact such as loneliness; rejection; resentment and ridicule.
- (5) Discuss the Christian value-system with regard to wealth, position, honour and the way we treat those with whom we come into contact.
- (6) Read and discuss the example of Christ with the woman at the well and the story of the Good Samaritan.

c. *Elizabeth and Darcy.*

The two main characters provide ample opportunity for introspection and reflection on our own actions and reactions to people. Both judge on outward appearances to begin with and undergo a painful set of experiences before they realize how wrongly they have judged other people. Both have to admit their mistakes and have to make changes in their attitudes and behaviour in order to find happiness. The parallel with our experience as Christians is obvious and each teacher can use appropriate personal examples and illustrations and Bible texts. When the two young people finally speak about their prejudice regarding one another the conversation reveals the spirit in which we should deal with those with whom we have disagreements. I use the video of the novel to illustrate this point to prepare for a discussion on the topic.

d. *Mr Wickham and Mr. Bingley: [or Jane]*

Wickham, Bingley and Darcy arrived in the town at about the same time. People thought the first two to be amiable and a good addition to the social scene but Darcy was considered proud and rude. After Elizabeth discovers the truth about Wickham and the reasons for Darcy's behaviour, she shares her information with Jane. During the conversation Elizabeth tells Jane:

*"There certainly was some great mismanagement in the education of those two young men. One has got all the goodness, and the other all the appearance of it."*⁷

After the two sisters talked about the situation, they decide that there would be no point in making Wickham's character known to everyone since he had already left the town and it might ruin him forever. Later this decision was to cost them dearly.

- (1) This little episode is an ideal opener for a discussion of how people in real life can pretend to be what they are not and the pain that can result from it. It also opens up possibilities for a discussion of the ethics of revealing information about other people.
- (2) Discuss how it is impossible to fool people for long. Talk about how wrong actions will become known sooner or later, even if only in the judgment.
- (3) Another approach is to compare Wickham and Bingley with regard to character traits and to speculate on the success and happiness of their respective marriages. Students are at the age when they are beginning to think of marriage. It has been very revealing to listen to them share what they think is important for successful marriages. While many will talk about the importance of love, there are always those who feel that money is far more important in the long term.

⁷ Austen, 1994 p 174

5.1.2 Themes

Social Change – good or bad?

Students are often amazed when they discover that during the 18th and 19th centuries Europeans used to bow to one another and behaved according to very strict rules of conduct when interacting with members of the opposite sex and with those of a different class to themselves. Since Asian countries have undergone a lot of change during the second half of the 20th century there are several points that can be discussed to make an impact on the students. The following are some that are relevant in the Korean context.

- (1) Identify some areas in which changes have occurred since (a) the end of the Korean War and (b) the hosting of the 1988 Olympics and (c) the preparation for the FIFA World Cup series.
- (2) Compare the attitudes of the present generation towards seniors and old people to that of their parents.
- (3) What is permissible today in terms of entertainment, friends, dress etc compared to when their parents were in their early 20's?
- (4) What has been the influence of foreign culture [Western and Japanese]
- (5) How do Christian young people relate to these changes
- (6) Discuss the unchanging nature of the Gospel
- (7) What were conditions at the time of Christ compared to what they are today – how would He have approached living on earth in the 21st century.
- (8) How does being where we are in time affect our lifestyle and how we behave towards others.

5.1.3 Plot

As mentioned this novel has a complex plot. We compare various parts of it with plots found in Scripture. If we have time, groups of students act out the various Bible stories then the other groups guess which story it is and which theme or characters in the novel it can be compared to.

- a. **Biter-bit:** Both Lady Catherine and Miss Bingley illustrate this type of plot. Both plan and scheme to show Darcy that Elizabeth is not a good choice. Both end up frustrated because the very way that they pointed to negative aspects enforces his positive attitude and they lose out. Lady Catherine does not get the son-in-law she was hoping for and Miss Bingley has to accept her 'enemies', one as the wife of the man she wanted and the other as her own sister-in-law. [Story of Haman hanging on the gallows he had erected for Mordecai.]
- b. **Love Transformation:** Both Darcy and Elizabeth change because of their love for one another. Both have to lay aside their pride and prejudice and see their mistakes and acknowledge the wrongs they have inflicted on others. [Story of Mary Magdalene once confronted with the love of Christ.]
- c. **Character:** The development of the story depends on the strength of the two main characters and their willingness to acknowledge their mistakes and to change their behaviour in order to gain ultimate happiness. [Stories of several Bible characters are applicable.]

5.2 Jane Eyre

This novel is another favorite with students. Although several characters merit closer study, none are as rewarding as that of Jane.

5.2.1 Characterization

This is the story of a young woman's journey through life from a childhood in which she was dependent on relatives who hated her, to maturity where she has her own money and is happily

married to a man that loves her deeply. She experiences many hardships. She is treated unkindly and spitefully, is deceived by relatives, experiences the hypocrisy of the people in charge of Lowood and the kindness of only one teacher but manages to hold on to her sense of what is right because she is intelligent and depends on God. She is offered an unchristian marriage and later a loveless marriage but refuses both because she wants to be in control of her life.

This novel invariably captures the imagination of the students, even the men, and invokes sympathy for the heroine. It is a *bildungsroman* or development novel in which the character of the heroine develops fully as described above. It provides plenty of scope for drawing illustrations of how in life we are often faced with choices and how our decisions impact on our future and the lives of other people.

5.2.2 Themes

This novel too has a variety of themes to choose from. I have found the most rewarding, in terms of integrating faith and learning to be the following:

a. Religion:

There are several characters that profess to be Christians but are in fact mean, bitter individuals with little or no love for others. Examples are the Rev. Brocklehurst, Mrs. Reed and Mrs Ingram. In contrast Miss Temple and Helen Burns reveal the character of Christ in their words and actions. John Rivers is a study in contrasts. He tells Jane that God has called him to be a missionary and yet he shows little compassion. He tries to force her to marry him by trying to make her feel guilty when she is not immediately prepared to accept him.

I ask students to prepare two sheets of lined paper divided into four quarters. One is labeled according to the four themes and the other has the names of two 'good' and two 'bad' characters. As we go through the novel, each student makes notes regarding the traits shown by each character and the page where it was found. At the same time they jot down the numbers of the pages and paragraphs where information about each of the themes are found. They then answer comprehension-style questions for homework. The questions are designed to get them to make comparisons and to choose between the actions of two characters. Since it would appear that students are not actively encouraged to form their own opinions about events, I use this to encourage them to think about the characters and to form and express opinions about them and their actions or to draw conclusions for given information. Every test has two or three 'opinion and support' questions.

The following are examples of questions set for homework on the theme of religion.

1. Mrs Reed tells Rev Brocklehurst that Jane is a liar. Describe in no more than 5 sentences each how (a) Rev. Brocklehurst and (b) Miss Temple deal with this information. Which of these people show the spirit of Christ? How, in your opinion can this help us when we hear rumors about people?
2. Have you ever been falsely accused? How did you feel? Were you able to clear yourself? [You do not have to give details of the accusation if you choose not to.]
3. Mr Brocklehurst tells the girls at Lowood that it is the will of God for young women to be dressed plainly and without adornment. How do we know that he is a hypocrite?
4. Food is used as a metaphor for want in this novel. Write 5 sentences in which you describe conditions at Lowood that illustrate this.

5. Helen Burns is a humble Christian girl who accepts her punishment, even though it is harsh and unfair. Why does she do this in your opinion?
6. Which character in the novel do you like most? Explain why in 4-5 sentences.
7. Which one of the characters in the novel do you like the least? Explain why in 4-5 sentences.

b. Resistance and Independence

At the time when the novel was written women occupied a very low position in society if they were unmarried or did not have male relatives to protect them. If they had been educated they became governesses, if not, then servants. In Korea too, women did not always occupy the position they do today. Higher education for women is a relatively modern concept and so is the idea of a working mother.

Jane's resistance begins in chapter 1 when she fights the bully John for beating her unjustly. She is defiant when Mrs Reed and later Rev. Brocklehurst falsely accuse her of being a liar. At Thornfield she resists Mr. Rochester's request for her to stay with him when she finds out that he is already married. Her strength in the face of what was for a poor lonely young woman, a very attractive prospect, shows her desire to do what is right.

The following are examples of topics for discussion. Students have indicated that they prefer discussing this type of topic in small groups and then a spokesperson reports back to the class. Each group makes a written and an oral report and then the written reports are copied for all the students.

1. If you were in Jane's position, would you choose an easy life as the mistress of a rich man, or the life of a poor governess? Give reasons for your choice.
2. Was Mr. Rochester right or wrong in asking Jane to go away with him? Support your answer.
3. Should we marry the first person that asks us? Why or why not? What must be considered before accepting a marriage proposal?
4. Is it better to be single than married to the wrong person? Why or why not?

c. Social Injustice

I have found that it works best to have the students write down their ideas of what was wrong with society at the time as we read the novel. That way I get an idea of their insight and what is important to them. After they have made a list I ask them to check which of these wrongs are still present in society today. During group discussions they compare their ideas and suggest solutions. We also take a look at how Christ dealt with some social issues.

- (1) The woman caught in adultery
- (2) Jesus and Zaccheus in Luke 19
- (3) The Golden Rule in Matthew 7
- (4) Jesus and the children in Mark 10
- (5) The importunate widow and the unjust judge in Luke 18

d. The Supernatural

In preparation for this theme, I assign one group to read and then act out the story of Saul and the witch of Endor. The rest of the class is not told about this assignment. Afterwards we talk briefly about the reasons why it is unwise to be linked with anything supernatural. Since Koreans attach quite a lot of value to the role of fortune telling there is usually some very interesting dialogue between the Christian and non-Christian students. We specifically define that things that come from God are not classed as supernatural but divine intervention or revelation before studying the various

manifestations of the supernatural in the novel. For example, Jane is convinced that there is a ghost in the house because of the strange laughter that she hears coming from the top floor. Later she discovers that it was in fact Rochester's mad wife, in other words, a very real person laughing. The 'happy ending' when Jane returns to Rochester is the direct result of her hearing him call to her and I feel it is best to prepare them with some spiritual background prior to reading that part of the novel.

6. Little Women: an Overview

Little Women by Louisa May Alcott was published in 1868 and describes the experiences of the four March sisters from childhood until they got married. It is well known that the book in fact resembles the childhood of the Alcott sisters very closely. The book was for a long time regarded as a children's story. Then literary critics realised the value of the lessons that Marmee seeks to teach her children and began to praise it as a didactic novel or a morality story. The author aimed at having the reader learn the same lessons and acquire the same values that the characters learned. At best it was regarded as an excellent guide to childrearing. From an Adventist point of view, the novel echoes in many ways the advice and counsel of Ellen G White to parents, educators and students.

Several of the lessons that are taught are based on Scripture although there is no direct reference to the Bible. The first chapter does refer to prayer. I have found it useful especially for the sake of the Adventists students in the course who are normally the majority, to compare this novel with non-fiction works of E.G. White. It helps them when they understand that the advice given by Ellen White is not 'peculiar' or just old-fashioned but makes good sense and is in fact present in the work of another writer of the same period. Even students who are sceptical of the writings of Ellen White can see the parallel and can re-think previously prejudiced opinions.

6.1 Fitting the Novel into the Structure for Study

Some of the didactic principles fit well into the traditional Korean lifestyle. Young people today are said to be losing sight of the traditional values such as the 'spirit of yielding'. Many of the values that are taught in *Little Women* are those that Korean parents would want their children to have. We normally have a discussion on what used to be thought important and how it has changed. Students enjoy this type of discussion very much. If there are several students with good ability or those who have taken ENGL411 [Presentation and Discussion] we arrange a debate. The topics in the past have included:

Whether or not they would want their parents to arrange a marriage for them such as was traditionally the case;

What the most important considerations are when choosing a marriage partner;

Why Korean brides insist on having the so-called western wedding despite the cost.

These debates tend to get very lively even if it occasionally ignores the formal rules but it does make a change from group discussions. It also enables the teacher to identify counseling needs. Above all it helps students to formulate their opinions and then to present them logically.

6.2 Setting

The novel opens with the sisters complaining because they have very little money and that "Christmas won't feel like Christmas without any presents." The eldest daughter Meg, reminds her sisters that Marmee said it would be wrong to spend money on presents while the men are away at war. They make plans to use the little money they have to buy several items that their mother

“Marmee” really needs, [such as gloves and slippers] but to pretend that they’re spending it on themselves.

I use this opening as the introduction to a discussion about the value of Christmas and why many Christians celebrate it in some form even though they know it is not the real birth date of Christ. Since the course is during the fall semester, we do this novel last, if it is one of those chosen.

6.3 Characterization and Themes

In this novel, the study of the characters almost always illustrates the didactic principles. The various principles are in fact the themes. The characters of Marmee and Beth best illustrate unselfish service. Amy shows the most evidence of a selfish and envious nature. It is only once she is living in Italy that she becomes more sensible. Meg is more concerned with appearance than her personal value as a woman and the beauty of a good character. Once she is married the struggle continues. Under the influence of her rich friend Sally Moffot she spends housekeeping money so unwisely that her husband John has to cancel his order for a new coat that he desperately needs. Jo is strong and always ready to defend her family. She sacrifices her beautiful long hair to get money for her mother to go and take care of her father. She faces internal struggles over her writing. She has to choose between writing worthwhile stories and pleasing the sentimental readers of the time in order to get an income.

Each student receives a list of the quotations from E.G. White used in this paper. Each team is assigned one of the didactic principles to match with the quotations. This is an optional assignment for which they receive bonus points. Each group is given a theme to concentrate on and as we read the novel and watch excerpts from the movie, they try to identify which quotation fits best with each event. This enables them to see the parallels between a work of fiction and a work of non-fiction while at the same time learning the moral lessons that both authors sought to teach.

Normally every group decides to hand in a report. Students always seem to enjoy this activity and those from one group will even look for the quotations from the themes assigned to other groups.

6.4 Themes or Didactic Principles

There are at least a dozen worthwhile didactic principles to choose from. I have selected four for inclusion in this essay.

6.4.1 Social Obligations and Unselfish Service

At Sahmyook University many groups of students go out during the summer vacation on ‘summer service’ trips. The majority of the students in the course have either just returned from such a trip or went on one the previous year. So it seems natural to choose this principle. In addition, during the Week of Prayer, students are encouraged to take part in the blood donating campaign. I normally open a discussion/study of this aspect by asking for a show of hands of those who have participated in either of these. I ask them to share what they enjoyed most or least. It helps them to understand that serving others has both positive and negative aspects. Then I show parts of the video that relate to the following incidents in the story.

To illustrate how this works here follows some events in the novel and the quotations that I consider to correlate well.

On Christmas morning Marmee told the girls about one of the families where she has been doing charity work. They had no food or wood for a fire and there were 6 children. The girls took their breakfast to the family and fed the children. This is a real sacrifice since the March family is poor and the housekeeper had gone to a great deal of trouble to save to have something special for Christmas. This example of Christian charity is similar to that mentioned by Ellen White.

"The desire for amusement, instead of being quenched and arbitrarily ruled down, should be controlled and directed by painstaking effort upon the part of the parents. Their desire to make gifts may be turned into pure and holy channels and made to result in good to our fellow men by supplying the treasury in the great, grand work for which Christ came into our world. Self-denial and self-sacrifice marked His course of action. Let it mark ours who profess to love Jesus because in Him is centered our hope of eternal life."⁸

In *Messages to Young People*, chapter 67 there is reference to work that can and should be done among our neighbours.

"We do but a small part of the work that He desires us to do among our neighbours and friends. By kindness to the poor, the sick or the bereaved, we may obtain an influence over them so that divine truth will find access to their hearts. It is the highest missionary work that we can do."⁹

When Marmee goes to help nurse her husband, the youngest daughter Beth, carries on the work she has been doing among the poor of the neighborhood. Beth contracts scarlet fever after taking care of the sick Hummel children. She became gravely ill and at one time everyone thought she would die. Her illness causes the other sisters to think about her life and her sweet disposition. Each in turn is thankful and decides to change so that she can be loved as Beth is. The character and personality is like the reference Ellen White makes to:

"Those who cherish the spirit of Christ will manifest politeness at home, a spirit of benevolence even in little things. They will be constantly seeking to make all around them happy, forgetting self in their kind attentions to others. This is the fruit which [sic] grows upon the Christian tree."¹⁰

Beth died as a result of the damage to her heart when she had scarlet fever so many years before. Before her death she discovered a poem that Jo had written about her and was astonished that her life had helped someone. In her unselfish attitude she showed the spirit of self-denial and love of duty that Mrs White exhorts Christian youth to have. There are many references to this aspect such as:

"Parents should learn to live within their means. They should cultivate self-denial in their children, teaching them by precept and example. They should make their wants few and simple, that there may be time for mental improvement and spiritual culture."¹¹

Amy and Laurie are rich and exceptionally happy. They discuss how they can live their lives so that they can help those around them. They agree to share their wealth with others who are less fortunate. In the attitude displayed by the young couple the advice given by Mrs White on the wise use of money and means can be clearly paralleled.

⁸ White, 1952, p478

⁹ White, E.G. *Messages to Young People* Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1930, p217

¹⁰ White, 1952, p423/4

¹¹ White, 1952, p376

*"Money has great value, because it can do great good. In the hands of God's children it is food for the hungry, drink for the thirsty, and clothing for the naked. It is a defence for the oppressed, and a means of help to the sick. But money is of no more value than sand, only as it is put to use in providing the necessities of life, in blessing others and advancing the cause of Christ."*¹²

Other references to the use of money may be found in *Messages to Young People* [MYP] pages 310, 351 and 360.

Meg and Mr Brooke get married after a four-year wait. Laurie sends several bottles of wine to the wedding. When he goes looking for it, Meg tells him that they don't drink wine and begs him not to either. He promises not to drink again. MYP p496

*"As Disciples of Christ we shall not mingle with the world from a mere love of pleasure, to unite with them in folly. It is through the social relations that Christianity comes in contact with the world. Every man or woman who has received divine illumination is to shed light on the dark pathway of those who are unacquainted with the better way."*¹³

6.4.2 Marriage, The Home and the Mother's Role:

In most of Asia, the marriage and the home and the mother's role are still important. For that reason I believe that this theme is appropriate to study. In the first chapter of the novel we find a description of Marmee that closely resembles what Ellen White in Chapter 2 of *The Adventist Home* says about mothers:

*"The home should be to the children the most attractive place in the world, and the mother's presence should be its greatest attraction."*¹⁴

The four sisters always await their mother's return eagerly and they greet one another with affection.

Jo discovers that Mr Brooke has Meg's missing glove and that he seems to be in love with Meg. Jo becomes angry because Mr Brooke is poor and she wants Meg to marry a rich man because she finds it the most difficult of the sisters to cope with being poor. Marmee tells her that she would be content if her daughters could find true love. When Ellen White describes the ideal home among other things she says

*"Four walls and costly furniture, velvet carpets, elegant mirrors, and fine pictures do not make a home if sympathy and love are wanting."*¹⁵

As Meg tended to the needs of her children, she made the mistake of neglecting her duties to her husband. He began spending the evenings at the home of friends. After six months Marmee visited her and found her crying. Meg complained that John didn't spend much time at home. Marmee advised her to let John help with the children and also offered the services of Hannah as a nurse so that she could have more time with John. That night she was attractively dressed and attentive to her husband who helped with their son when he became difficult. Later they discussed politics that he

¹² White, E.G. *Christ's Object Lessons* Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1923, p351

¹³ White, 1930, p 496

¹⁴ White, 1952, p21

¹⁵ White, 1952, p155

was passionate about. She told him about her conversation with her mother. After that the house became a happier place.

"Let her keep cheerful and buoyant. Instead of spending every moment in endless sewing, make the evening a pleasant social season, a family reunion after the day's duties. Many a man would thus be led to choose the society of his home before the clubhouse or the saloon."¹⁶

Meg began spending a lot of time with Sally Moffat. She ended up buying things that she and John could not afford. He had to cancel his order for a coat that he really needed because of her unwise spending. They quarrelled bitterly and became somewhat estranged. Later they made peace again and after that their twins were born. There are several statements in the writings of Ellen White that address the need for economy and the dangers of extravagance or of trying to emulate the neighbours.

"It is not best to pretend to be rich, or anything above what we are – humble followers of the meek and lowly Saviour. We are not to feel disturbed if our neighbours build and furnish their houses in a manner that we are not authorized to follow."¹⁷

"The natural turn of youth in this age is to neglect and despise economy and to confound it with stinginess and narrowness. But economy is consistent with the most broad and liberal views and feelings; there can be no true generosity where it is not practiced. No one should think it beneath him to study economy and the best means of taking care of the fragments."¹⁸

Professor Bhaer asked Jo to marry him and then he leaves for the West to make his fortune so that they can afford to get married. Prof Bhaer sees the importance of being able to afford the demands of a family.

"The family tie is the closest, the most tender and sacred, of any on earth. It was designed to be a blessing to mankind. And it is a blessing wherever the marriage covenant is entered into intelligently, in the fear of God, and with due consideration for its responsibilities."¹⁹

6.4.3. Value of Work

In Singapore and Korea, generally people work very long hours. Middle and high school students are under great pressure to prepare for the school leaving exams. Many students have part-time jobs to earn extra money and they seem to have little balance in their lives. As a result, I often choose this aspect as one of the themes that we study. The following are some of the events in the story that are used to illustrate the point. In June the girls have a holiday from work and decide not to do anything for one week. Marmee agrees hoping that they will learn a lesson from the experience. They have to cook their own meals with disastrous results because Marmee decides to give the housekeeper some vacation. The sisters found out by the end of the second day that it was fun not having to work but that the days passed by very slowly. By the end of the week the girls admit that although all work and no play is tiring, all play and no work makes life uncomfortable as well. Marmee asks them if it isn't better to have time for both and they agree wholeheartedly. Marmee advises the girls:

¹⁶ White, 1952, p110

¹⁷ White, 1952, p384

¹⁸ White, 1952, p387

¹⁹ White, 1930, p 356

*"Have regular hours for work and play; make each day both useful and pleasant, and prove that you understand the worth of time by employing it well. Then youth will be delightful, old age bring few regrets, and life become a beautiful success, in spite of poverty."*²⁰

Ellen White mentions several principles regarding the obligations of children in the home. She says that children are to be partners in the home and that mothers are to teach their children that they are members of the family firm and must bear their share of the responsibilities of this firm.

*"God wants the children of all believers to be trained from their earliest years to share the burdens that their parents must bear in caring for them."*²¹

This chapter also mentions the perils of idleness [p284] and that sharing burdens gives satisfaction. [p285].

Laurie had gone to Europe to get over his feelings for Jo and spent a few months with Amy. She realised that he had changed. She told him that he was lazy and wasting his life. At first he tried to disregard her comments but then they hurt him when he realised that the life he was living was wrong. Amy realized why Laurie was acting as he was and tried to help him. He returned to his job with his grandfather.

*"Our business in this world ... is to see what virtues we can teach our children and our families to possess, that they shall have an influence upon other families, and thus we can be an educating power although we never enter into the desk."*²²

NOTE: This aspect may be equally applicable under the first part viz. The Home or another of the themes not included here, that of Honouring Parents.

6.4.4 Choices

Mr and Mrs March had insisted that John and Meg wait before getting married. Ellen White gives similar advice in *Messages to Young People* on p438 and 452-3.

*Early marriages are not to be encouraged. A relation so important as marriage and so far-reaching in its results should not be entered upon hastily, without sufficient preparation, and before the mental and physical powers are well developed.*²³

Jo left one of her stories with a newspaper called the Weekly Volcano. A week later she was told that it could be published if she removed all the moral lessons in it. Jo agreed to the suggestion and was paid \$25. She continued writing "sensation stories" until she realises that Professor Bhaer does not approve of such publications. She then began to feel guilty about writing for the paper. He had in fact guessed that she wrote for the newspaper but wisely did not rebuke her. Instead he advised her to "write from the heart." In *The Adventist Home* chapter 68, a great deal of counsel is given on the harmful effects of reading exciting novel, myths and fables. The objections that Professor Bhaer has to the newspaper in which Jo's stories are published are similar to what Mrs White refers to when she says,

²⁰ Allcott, L.M. *Little Women* 1868, Oxford: OUP, 2000 p118

²¹ White, 1952, p 283

²² White, 1952, p32

²³ White, E.G. *The Ministry of Healing* 1905 Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Ass. 1942

*"Parents should endeavour to keep out of the home every influence that is not productive of good. To those who feel free to read story magazines and novels I would say: You are sowing seed the harvest of which you will not care to garner. From such reading there is no spiritual strength to be gained. Through the agency of novels and story magazines, Satan is working to fill with unreal and trivial thought minds that should be diligently studying the word of God."*²⁴

In Korea, even though the writings of Ellen White are reputedly very widely read, the young people can frequently be seen on the public transport, reading just such story magazines. In our Chapel periods and even during the divine service on Sabbath it has become common to make use of the same cartoon-type of material to get the attention of the students. Perhaps we should once again study these instructions and be more careful in the choice of subject matter for our classrooms and religious exercises. Of course the argument is that the students are so bombarded with advertisements that they will not be reached unless this method is followed.

Jo missed Beth very much and wrote a story for her family about their life. Her father sent it to a magazine and it was published. Later Professor Bhaer came to visit her and met the rest of her family, including Amy and Laurie who had returned from Europe. Prof. Bhaer congratulated Jo because she had written a story that would be worthwhile instead of the meaningless stories that were published in the journals of the time. Mrs White cautioned many times against the influence of the novels of the time and the stories that were printed in the magazines.

*"The world is deluged with books that might better be consumed than circulated. Books on sensational topics, published and circulated as a moneymaking scheme, might better never be read by the youth. There is a satanic fascination in such books."*²⁵

Young Adventist parents might want to consider these words today in the era of Harry Potter books that seem to fascinate both children and parents. In addition, many different genres of literature, not available in Korea, can be readily accessed on the Internet. It is the duty of Christian teachers to warn their students, especially the young ladies who will be mothers in the future about the harmful effects of the literature of the 21st century.

*"Never should books containing a perversion of truth be placed in the hands of children or youth."*²⁶

7. The Great Gatsby

This novel is considered to be the best work of F. Scott Fitzgerald and one of the great American novels. It contrasts markedly with generally accepted Christian ideals and is perfect for comparing the lifestyles portrayed in the other novels with the changes that came about during the 'Jazz Age' of the 1920's. We talk about friendships and I ask the students to choose the character in the novel that they would like to have as a friend and to give reasons for the choice. We study the metaphor of the green light at the end of Daisy's dock in three ways. It can be compared to the future that the Puritans saw for themselves when they first approached the coast of the New World. Jay Gatsby believed that it represented the exciting future that he would one day have with Daisy. As Christians we can have various objects, or 'green lights' that represent our future.

²⁴ White, 1952, p411

²⁵ White, 1952, p412

²⁶ White, 1952, p314

We have discussions during which we compare specific events in the other novels studied. This will depend on the selection for each semester but it works best if compared with *Little Women*. It presents the opportunity to talk about the changes that have taken place in society [like with *Pride and Prejudice* already mentioned in 5.1.2] and the dangers of chasing after what we cannot have.

8. Conclusion

In this essay I have presented some social and moral issues found in four British and American novels that are useful for the integration of faith and learning. The methods described are those that suit the ESL situation at Sahmyook University but can be used anywhere by adapting the difficulty level. As we teach our students about plots, characterization and themes we can find many ways of integrating faith and learning. One may do this by using Scripture, stories of faith in the modern world or examples from Christian authors as the basis for our illustrations and examples to tie in with each novel. In addition, choosing novels that reflect Christian values can enhance the lessons that we teach. The final result of the integration of faith and learning in the study of literature should be that we equip our students to face the world by making the content of the course relevant to life. Our attention to, and love for each student should leave them in no doubt of the sincerity of our concern for them. We should prepare students to work for the benefit of others, especially at this time when there appears to be very little love lost between nations. At the same time, given the events that are happening around us, particularly the presence of terrorist activities in the world, we should also make sure that we have not neglected our duty to help them to be prepared for the next world.

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