



The bookracks of Baal

Why does literature in America resemble Belshazzar's feast?

A sad thing is happening in our land. More and more gifted writers are dipping their golden goblets, once dedicated for sacred use, into the wine of pornography.

As a result most secular book racks now have the flavor of Belshazzar's feast rather than the healthy food once served up by the literary chefs of America.

Pornography is nearly always badly written and carries no message other than the single purpose of achieving erotic and momentary stimulation.

It is also a cheap counterfeit of the real thing.

Real men and women don't look the way the pornographers portray them.

Our stomachs pooch, breasts sag and veins extend. Underneath our cosmetics, braces, supports, girdles, bras, toupees, dentures, glasses, deodorants, sprays, powders and fitted clothing we are not erotic bodies. Rather, we are human souls created in a variety of shapes designed to love, to be loved, and to glorify God.

Pornography is never graphic—it is twisted and distorted. Actually there is far more truth and beauty in a cattle breeding pen than today's porn. It is by and large without art or creativity—depicting only the emptiness of the soul.

But, as the writers have learned, it is a sure way to sell books.

However, it is when pornography is combined with talent that it becomes most profane.

In my own search for excellence in literary forms I finally decided to read a Harold Robbins' book. Robbins, you see, is not the run-of-the-mill pant-and-groan porn writer. He is a man of great literary talent. His publisher calls him—without apology—"the world's best storyteller."

No small claim that.

It is at that point the sounds of Belshazzar's feast are heard. Here is a man of vast talent who has taken his marvelous gift—the gift of storytelling—and married his bride to the lecherous debauchery of pornography.

What a sad, sad waste.

Robbins is not alone. Philip Roth, Gore Vidal, Gay Talese, Erica Jong—all have profaned the golden goblet of storytelling, a gift Jesus used so beautifully in his parables.

The human body, naked or clothed, remains the temple of the Holy Spirit. It is the object for which our Lord bore stripes to heal. It is sad when that body is exploited, and defamed.

Even sadder is the world in which these writers live—a world so full of hedonism and spiritual emptiness that the God of the

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universe, the only sure and certain factor in life and death, is totally ignored.

I am not offended by pornography—even when it is draped in the pure gown of art and realism. The naked body is indeed beautiful to behold. But God does not judge men on the outer appearance, rather on his inner being. It is here we discover the sickness and emptiness of those who write. Their world, sadly, is weighed on the size of their bank accounts and the genital organs of their characters.

Weighed in the balances, I add, and found wanting.

I am angered, however, when talented, gifted men and women use their gifts to depict the symbols of God and holy things to heighten eroticism. Egged on by reviewers, television hosts, and other flotsam and jetsam in the cesspool of pseudo literature, these writers glibly promote their own homosexuality and demonic perversions without even the artistic modesty of a fig leaf.

Surely, to take the gift of storytelling—a gift so many of us cherish for the purpose of communicating holy truth—and use that gift to entice young and old alike into the pit of hedonism rather than to challenge the reader to yearn for the beauty of holiness—surely that is the most hideous of blasphemy.

It is not the description of body juices which determines pornography, rather it is the revelation of the dryness of the author.

God understands biology. He called our body functions good. They are for health and enjoyment. However, the barren spirit is still as cursed as the fruitless fig tree.

There are many excellent contemporary novels on the secular market. The *New York Times* called Walter Wangerin's *The Book of the Dun Cow* "far and away the most literate and intelligent story of the year." I agree.

There are many great storytellers with high purposes. Jack Higgins, Arthur Hailey, Piers Paul Reid, James Michener—all are gifted writers.

But like eating from a can of contaminated food, I have dipped for the last time into the poisoned world of Harold Robbins.

"Why," the prophet asked, "spend money on what is not bread? Eat what is good, and your soul will delight...."

Perhaps Robbins is the world's best storyteller. However, the crayon-scribbled message of a Sunday school child, the strivings of a Christian writer whose manuscript is turned down again and again for publication—anything written for the glory of God—ranks that writer as greater in the Kingdom of God than all the Robbins, Roths and Jongs combined.

To my Christian writer friends, many of whom are listed in the special book section in this issue of *Charisma*, I say: never settle for mediocrity. Strive always for excellence. But do not judge your success on the number of books you sell.

Write for God's glory, and your two mites dropped unnoticed in the treasury will be counted as far more than all those expensive sacrifices offered on the bookracks of Baal and Mammon. ◊