

Unremembered Loss

For all the news and information from the world of Rathrae, and for the story Unremembered Loss

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I've told people that my novel is a "Christian Fantasy." But what does that mean? This month I thought I would explore the question, "Where is God?" in my story. It is a tough question to answer and I hope that it may start a conversation between us. Please forward this newsletter on to your friends and if you're not getting the newsletter automatically sign up at <http://DouglasGClarke.com/lists/>

Douglas G. Clarke

Where is God?

The creator of the universe is missing. He is missing from almost all of today's fantasy and science fiction stories. Sometimes he's seen in the background or seen by his absences, but as part of daily life God has been written out of most stories.

Why is that? I think there are three reasons, God is a hard character to write well, it is hard to put non-fiction characters into a fiction story, and it is hard balancing what God does with what everyone else does.

Writing about the effects God is having on a group of people is hard. Writing about a personal relationship between God and someone else is even harder. Trying to show conflict and tension on God's part is tough since he already knows how the story will turn out. What kind of personal struggles can one show God going through?

Sure, the author can show God's joy when someone repents, or sadness when someone chooses to turn away, but surprise, wonderment, despair, doubt, arrogance, or hatred – these are hard to show.

It being difficult to put a real person into a fictional story is true of all people, not just God. How do you do justice to a real character in

a made up story? There are many books on writing that point out the pitfalls in trying to put people you know into your stories. In affect you are trying to predict what someone else would do in a situation, but since you don't know the true motives of the character you have to make it up. You have to end up creating fictional motives for a real person.

There have been examples where authors have done a good job at guessing what God would do. One example is *The Shack* by William Young. In the book Young has God interacting and dialoguing with the main character, Mac. Young puts lots of words in God's mouth and most people will take exception with some of them.

No mater how much effort an author puts into picking the right words or attitude, many people will disagree with the interpretation.

Imagine a science fiction story set two years in the future in which aliens visit the earth. In the story President Obama has to make a decision whether to welcome or attach the aliens. No mater which choice you make and what reasons are given, many people will disagree. It is much easier to put the story ten years in the future and have a fictional President make the choice.

The nature of God himself makes God a hard character to write into a book. God is big. God is powerful. God is all present. How can the hero of the story compete with the creator of everything, the all knowing God. To do God justice he will out shine everything else.

If God is active and answering prayers, and the reader knows this from the beginning, then were is the suspense? If God is just going to fix everything in the end, why should the reader care about the story?

If God isn't going to be active, then what's the point of having him in the story, or at least how does the writer explain why God doesn't do anything?

Then of course there are all the questions about why God does what he does. There is the unsatisfactory answer, "God's plans are a mystery." Or the equally difficult task of explaining something we don't really have the answer to.

Trying to show a God who is actively guiding his creation either removes tension from the story or makes the story all about the main character not listening to God.

If the main character of the story is suffering, then the story needs to deal with the question, "Why is God allowing the pain and suffering to occur?"

Where God isn't

With God missing from stories, there is a natural tendency for something to take his place. Sometimes it is self reliance, others time fate or karma. If fantasy stories it is most often evil.

Whereas God is hard to write, evil is easy. It is easy to paint a picture of an evil character or even a demon. We give them some vices, make them self-centered, make them cruel and manipulative.

We can even make evil characters that we like. We can make evil characters that seem appealing - like the raw power of Darth Vader.

In these stories the heroes might be fighting the evil because they are God's champions, but more likely they are just fighting from the goodness of their own hearts - or from fear.

It has been said that the definition of hell is a place that God isn't. Authors are advised that in a good story they have to make their characters suffer. What better place to make them suffer than in a place that God isn't.

God in my story

In the world of Hathrae, which is where my story is located, everyone believes in God. The question is not, "Is there a God?" But "What is my relationship with him? Is God just a part of life, a source of guidance, or is he the lord of my life?"

I struggled with how to portray God as I wrote the book.

God does not speak in my story. Since I chose to write my novel as a collection of third person stories and personal journal entries, there really was never a place where the reader would hear God speak.

I did include several quotes from the holy writing, which are assumed to be the inspired word of God. There are also several quotes from Cleric Bosman, the high cleric of the town of Maple Grove.

During the course of the story several of the characters speak about the nature of God, and one of them often prays.

There are also several dialogs between characters on what it means to listen to God and what God has told them.

God is not a main character in the story, however he is more than just part of the backdrop. Over the course of the story prayers are answered, but not always in the way the one praying desires. People feel led by God, but don't always listen. People's lives are changed.

A large part of the story deals with the question of "How could God allow this to happen?" This is not an easy question to answer. I don't know the answer, but several of the characters come to their own understanding of the answers to their personal lives. As the author I don't give an answer, but instead share several partial answers as people discover what God has planned for them.

The characters in my novel struggle with God's promise to never leave them. They are asking the question, "Why have you forsaken me?" They struggle to feel God's presence when evil is all around them. They struggle to believe when their strength is all gone.

The characters struggle with their plans and God's plan - with their timing and God's.

Hope and despair. Love and hate. Faith and fear. These tensions show how people who believe in God struggle with their understanding of what God is doing.

The question remains, "Where is God?" I show God through the healing touch of an answered prayer. I show his love in the quiet whispers that seek to guide willing heart. I show his peace that can calm a person despite their situation.

God very much affects my story. He is part of the story. His strength sustains when there is nothing else. His peace comforts when there is nothing but despair. His mercy is shown in forgiveness. His grace is shown through acceptance.

But in the end God is not in the story.

There is evil in the story, but the story is not about the evil. There is nothing desirable about the evil - it is greed and hate.

There is pity for those deceived or controlled by the evil. There are glimpses of God's love even in the midst of the evil. There is even pure evil in the story, but even then the evil is shown as misguided.

The evil bring out many of the questions that the characters must deal with. It drives some of the suffering. It even threatens to overcome.

But the story is not about the evil. It is a story of life despite evil.

Where is God?

He is in the love lived out in the characters. He is in the mercy that can be shown even to an enemy. He is in the compassion of someone reaching out to another in need. He is in willingness of people who live lives of service to others. He is in the healing of both bodies and souls.

Where is God?

He is in his people.
He is in their acts of Love.