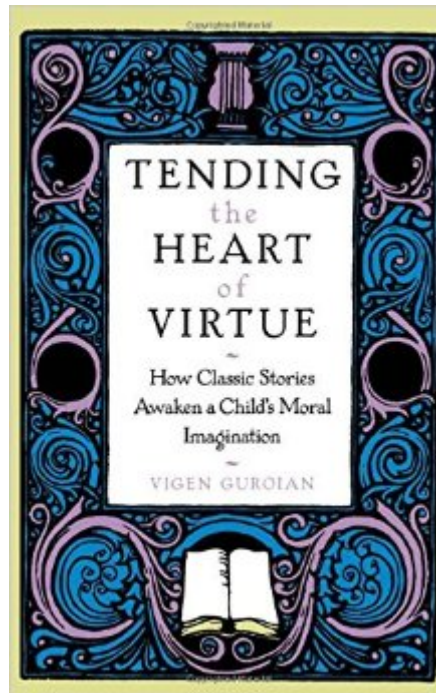


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Tending The Heart Of Virtue: How Classic Stories Awaken A Child's Moral Imagination



Synopsis

As the popularity of William Bennett's *Book of Virtues* attests, parents are turning more and more to children's literature to help instill values in their kids. Now, in this elegantly written and passionate book, Vigen Guroian provides the perfect complement to books such as Bennett's, offering parents and teachers a much-needed roadmap to some of our finest children's stories. Guroian illuminates the complex ways in which fairy tales and fantasies educate the moral imagination from earliest childhood. Examining a wide range of stories--from "Pinocchio" and "The Little Mermaid" to "Charlotte's Web," "The Velveteen Rabbit," "The Wind in the Willows," and the "Chronicles of Narnia"--he argues that these tales capture the meaning of morality through vivid depictions of the struggle between good and evil, in which characters must make difficult choices between right and wrong, or heroes and villains contest the very fate of imaginary worlds. Character and the virtues are depicted compellingly in these stories; the virtues glimmer as if in a looking glass, and wickedness and deception are unmasked of their pretensions to goodness and truth. We are made to face the unvarnished truth about ourselves, and what kind of people we want to be. Throughout, Guroian highlights the classical moral virtues such as courage, goodness, and honesty, especially as they are understood in traditional Christianity. At the same time, he so persuasively evokes the enduring charm of these familiar works that many readers will be inspired to reread their favorites and explore those they may have missed.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

When Vigen Guroian [veegun ga-ROY-un] set out to teach a class on children's literature to his undergraduate students at Loyola College in Maryland, he invited his daughter's fourth-grade class in for some of the discussions. But after a discussion of Pinocchio, the undergrads were shocked and embarrassed to find that the fourth-graders had understood the book better than they had. Why was this? The answer, Guroian says, is that we have neglected the development of the moral imagination. The college students literally were less capable of understanding the moral themes in the story of Pinocchio. As Guroian writes in his new book, *Tending the Heart of Virtue*, the undergrads noticed that the fourth-graders were better at grasping "the nature and source of Pinocchio's temptations and backsliding, and were less ready to excuse him for the behavior that got him into so much trouble and caused his father such grief." His students even began to suspect that "maybe they had lost something in growing up -- a sense of wonder that might have been better tended and retained" if they had been brought up reading books like Pinocchio. "Perhaps," Guroian concludes, "the fourth graders they had met were actually nearer than they to the wellsprings of human morality and were better served by reading Pinocchio than they had been by taking a required college course in ethics." Guroian's new book is subtitled, *How Classic Stories Awaken a Child's Moral Imagination*, and in it he explains that children are born with a strong moral sense. They always want to know if a character in a story is good or bad.

I teach at a Christian Classical school and we have been reading this book together as a faculty over the school year. Recently we brought the author to town and were treated to both group and personal discussion with him about this book. Please ignore the "professional" reviews by those who cannot tolerate their conscience to come in contact with any work that appeals to a Christian source of morality. This book does a great job of reminding us that moral education is best taught through narrative, that a simple story carries more weight than years of lecture. Modern child psychology tells us that we are respecting our children's "freedom" by allowing them to determine right from wrong and to choose for themselves clear goals of moral living. But this is synonymous to allowing them to choose for themselves what is good and healthy for them to eat, or what to learn at school. It is ridiculous to leave children to make such decisions for themselves because they lack the knowledge and life experiences that would allow them to choose properly. Children need our guidance as parents, teachers, and concerned adults to care for and nurture their moral being as well as their physical and mental being. Guroian defines moral imagination as the process by which the self makes metaphors out of experiences and then uses those metaphors to find and suppose

moral connections in experiences. Children naturally lack a wealth of life experience, and so fairy tales allow a child to explore metaphors without having the experience themselves. They can be transported to other worlds, imagine themselves in the place of heroes, and live through the struggles, glories, and moral dilemmas of the characters.

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