



# **Tending the Heart of Virtue: How Classic Stories Awaken a Child's Moral Imagination**

*Vigen Guroian*

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**Tending the Heart of Virtue: How Classic Stories Awaken a Child's Moral Imagination** Vigen Guroian 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 Narnia Chronicles - 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.

## **Tending the Heart of Virtue: How Classic Stories Awaken a Child's Moral Imagination Details**

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## **From Reader Review Tending the Heart of Virtue: How Classic Stories Awaken a Child's Moral Imagination for online ebook**

### **Renee says**

Vigen Guroian, in this book, not only help us to see how our beloved classic children stories were beautifully and prayerfully crafted but makes us want to revisit them as adult, with new eyes.

This book does not only give us better understanding but challenges us to read the best book to our children . I highly recommend this book to anyone who read stories to little and not so little ones .

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### **Melissa says**

A wonderful book on the power of good stories to teach children virtue and morality. Good stories don't hit you over the head with a moral (I hate those! I don't want to be told what to think.) Rather this talks about fairy tales and how the best stories for children are those that can be read and enjoyed at any age.

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### **Betsy says**

This book has been on my shelves for more than a decade, and I've dipped in periodically to savor parts. But finally, I can say I've read the entire thing.

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### **Jess says**

There were a few theological disagreements for me in this book (ex. I don't believe Mary is the Queen of Heaven), but I enjoyed reading the author's Christian worldview of several classic children's stories.

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### **Amy says**

This was very good, albeit a VERY in-depth look at this subject. I had to read slowly and carefully to understand what the author was sharing. I REALLY appreciated his Christian worldview. I enjoyed hearing his thoughts on Pinocchio and Narnia specifically.

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### **Eliza Fitzgerald says**

This is one I'm keeping on my teaching reference shelf to come back to again. It was easy to read and inspiring.

It makes me want to just sit and read fairy tales to my kids all day!

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## Heather says

Great thoughts on classics for children, including fairy tales, and their importance in illustrating moral truth through story.

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## Heather says

This book does not deliver as much as its subtitle seems to promise. The introductory chapters I found rather interesting background, especially appreciating the distinction drawn between "values" and "virtue" as well as discussion of teaching ethics vs. cultivating moral imagination. However, the body of the book was less helpful for me.

Dr. Guroian takes various children's books and shows some of the ways in which these lay out morality for children to see and engage with. His choices of stories to examine are ok, but "classic" only from a 20th-century viewpoint. He includes the likes of E. B. White, C. S. Lewis, George MacDonald, Hans Christian Andersen, and Kenneth Grahame--all good in their own right, but not "classic" in the same way that Aesop or Greek Myths or European fairy tales are.

I found the moral emphases he chose sometimes odd and often a bit shoe-horned to make his points. In discussing *The Wind in the Willows*, for example, he focuses entirely on Mole and how he matures and develops an understanding of friendship, though I would have thought there were much stronger moral themes to be explored in the person of Toad.

In addition, the choice to examine particular books, rather than showing more broadly the ways to awaken the moral imagination through story, resulted in lots of summary of the books in question. Although some of his discussions were insightful, I don't know that I can take what he has presented and easily apply it to other tales.

I also will indulge in being picky about a very annoying quirk of Dr. Guroian's writing. His use of quotations is not seamless, and sometimes not even well-chosen, and nearly every time he uses a quotation, he either changes it with the use of bracketing (e.g. to rectify the tense to his sentence, when he could have, instead, changed his sentence to fit the quotation) or he italicizes a word to emphasize his point (even when a reasonably attentive reader would have gotten the point without the extra emphasis).

The premise of this book is right on, and I assume it might be more helpful for a slightly different audience. It was not quite what I hoped for in trying to understand the concept of the moral imagination, but it did point me to a few other possible resources.

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## Sara says

Without question, one of the most important books I own.

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### **April Tolbert says**

The book was an eye opener for me in regards to the importance of fairytales in the education of my children.

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### **Rachel says**

This book will not rest long on my shelf before I give it a second read. I am still chewing on many thoughts that surfaced as I slowly soaked this book in. Highly recommend to all those who love literature, especially those who have young children, and are interested in thoughtfully considering what we read with our children and why.

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### **Heidi says**

A more accurate subtitle would have been "The Importance of Using Classic Stories to Awaken a Child's Moral Imagination." I started reading this book with the hope that there would be an emphasis on the "how" of awakening moral imagination - I could use some practical suggestions on how to encourage children to think about and exercise moral decisionmaking. However, aside from the first part of the book, which was a great apologetic on the benefits of reading classic literature to your child, the book is actually a series of literary analyses grouped around several topics: "becoming a real human child," "love and immortality," "friends and mentors," "evil and redemption," and "heroines of faith and courage."

Guroian writes beautifully about big ideas, and I enjoy reading literary analysis from a Christian perspective, so I didn't mind. My interest has been piqued in some stories I was not previously familiar with, and I gained new insights into old favorites. On the whole, I'm glad I read it. It was good intellectual work to do so.

The analysis does suffer from a problematic understanding of key Christian doctrines, such as the infallibility of the Scripture, original sin, justification, and sanctification. At times, it felt like the author was needlessly viewing these stories through a dim mirror, or murky water.

Also, late in the book, there was a throwaway reference to the theological virtues, and at that point I realized the author simultaneously completely assumes that the reader is familiar with the Christian Virtues, and also declines to systematically discuss them all, or find a clear connection for each within the stories featured in the book. That seemed like a missed opportunity to me.

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### **Matthew Richey says**

Wonderful book on the power that quality fiction has on the moral formation of children. This has given me many avenues to pursue in reading to the boys (and eventually my daughter... there were a lot of books with morally strong young heroines). I highly recommend this book to parents, those who read to children, and those who read fiction.

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## **Mistie says**

This book is such a great resource! I really enjoyed the analysis of different fairytales. It opened my eyes to the depth presented in children's literature. I can easily see how it sparks a child's moral imagination. It is a book I will read again.

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## **ladydusk says**

Own.

I really enjoyed this when I was reading it. I've been "in the middle of it" for far too long because it is a dense book (or maybe I'm a dense reader). He packs a lot into each sentence. So I would read some, carry it to a different room and let it set, then read some more, let it set, then read some more. I think it probably took me a year to get through it.

I've heard Guroian speak on CD both on The Mars Hill Audio Journal and CiRCE Annual Conference and found myself reading in his voice. I think that helped me love it, as he has a kindly, deep, growly voice. What he has to say is perhaps better said aloud than in print. I notice that his "Mentor" talk from CiRCE (a favorite of mine) helped me understand those sections of TtHoV better.

In this book, Guroian makes the argument that the books that we read to children matter and that we need to read literature to them that is more than what it seems. He goes on to give examples explicating different stories and literature on five themes. We've read - or listened to - many of the stories he indicates in the book, so it was interesting to see how he discussed the stories.

My friend recently read Michael D O'Brien's A Landscape of Dragons and lent it to me, it should be interesting to compare and contrast with Guroian, particularly regarding Wind in the Willows which Guroian recommends but O'Brien cautions.

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