

“Dear Mr. Crupper – A Letter of Thanks”

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by Matt Peery

Mr. Crupper was my high school English teacher. I have not seen or spoken to him for close to twenty years.

Dear Mr. Crupper,

I doubt you remember me, but the world you exposed me to in your class has never left me. It is now a part of the very fiber of my being, a part of the song that continually plays in my soul, and no amount of words can express my gratitude.

I grew up in an atmosphere void of satisfying substance for the spirit or mind. A spiritual and intellectual desert. A sort of wasteland with only cultural debris scattered here and there but impossible for a young one to piecemeal any of it together into something coherently significant.

My parents were consumed with making a living. Their lives were not particularly reflective. I do not blame them for this. Their parents, teachers, and preachers never taught them to examine and reflect upon life. Television and sports predominated our home. Our cultural outings were trips to the local movie theater. Ideas were debated only when conspiracy theories were lauded at family gatherings.

Then I walked into your class, and you opened me to another realm. The realm of the eternal, and poetic. What is often called the good, true, and beautiful. I could not have articulated it then, but all my young life my soul had been longing, famished for something, but what it was I did not know until your class began to help me grasp it. I was already Christian when I entered your room, but my imagination had not yet been baptized. It was through literature you helped my full self rise to new life.

Two pieces I will never forget reading in your class are: *Macbeth* by Shakespeare, and *The Love Song of Alfred J. Prufrock* by T. S. Eliot. To this day I remember when you read aloud my essay on how Macbeth was wrong to forgo his personal responsibility. He should not have listened to the three spirits or to his wife. I remember hearing you read my words, and thinking, “Wow! I have a voice. I have conviction. I may even have a gift.” What confidence this gave me, not in myself, but in God’s craftsmanship of me. Eliot’s poem was delightful. I still remember how you smiled and pointed at your nose when I suggested that Eliot’s character was scared of love.

It is wrong to turn any person into a savior. It is an especially cliché mistake to turn a teacher into a savior. You did not save me. Evelyn Waugh once said, “Conversion is like stepping across the chimney piece out of a Looking-Glass world, where everything is an absurd caricature, into the real world God made; and then begins the delicious process of exploring it limitlessly.” You helped me begin the delicious process of exploring the wider real world God made. This is no small thing. Thank you.