

A close-up photograph of a wooden gavel with a silver handle, resting on a scroll of paper. The gavel is positioned diagonally across the frame. The scroll of paper is partially unrolled, showing some faint, illegible text. The background is a plain, light-colored surface.

Zaphon

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Readiness in Writing

Charles Fivaz

About a year ago I began what I thought was going to be a small writing project. God had put something on my heart to write about and it was to be conveyed in a fictional short story. I imagined it would be published on its own, as a novella—something I had never attempted before. In reality, it was harder than I imagined. But I kept faithful to the task, pouring all my energy into it. What I lacked in novel-writing experience was made up for by an unstoppable enthusiasm. I had a burning passion for it.

Then, almost a year later, I hit a wall. The story was in its second draft and the more I read, the more despondent I got at the poor quality of my own writing. That bad, I felt, that I left off writing for a few weeks and began a serious discernment process. Comparing myself to other writers, I became convinced that I simply wasn't up to it, that I just did not have the required talent. But before making the final decision to call it a day I made a mighty prayer, asking God for a scripture passage that would either confirm my decision or guide me otherwise. The reading I got was so amazingly accurate to my situation, and so absolutely clear in what I had to do, that it blew me away. It was 2 Cor 8: 10-12, which in my translation (RSV) read: "And in this matter I give my advice: it is best for you now to complete what a year ago you began not only to do but to desire, so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have. For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a man has, not according to what he has not."

So, I continue to write according to what I have – what God has given me. And as a writer friend said when I shared this story with her, "Now that you've been convinced you can't do it and God's told you to anyway, you're in a terrific position! I honestly don't think any Christian writing happens until that point is reached. Up to that point, it's still in your own strength. (And it's a matter of getting back to that point continually anyway.)"

Refuges and Rejection

Annie Hamilton

What do you do when your manuscript is rejected?

Very few writers are privileged enough to have their first manuscript published. When God has put it on your heart to write something, then there's a tendency to think that He wants the message out there as soon as possible. When you've been writing a long time and the pile of rejection letters is starting to become like a small mountain, it's very discouraging. Actually, long before it's a small mountain, most of us begin to wonder if the pain is worth it.

This last month I received not one, but several, rejections. Fortunately, God had begun to deal with me about my attitude or I might have given up writing entirely. 'What do you do when you get disappointed?' God asked me. Well, that's easy. I have developed a set routine over the years. I talk to God and I say, 'I guess it must not have been Your will anyway,' I go and make a cup of coffee, then get out a good book or watch a movie or television. Sometimes—not often—I go shopping. I eat comfort foods like chocolate. 'Yes,' God says. 'You give up.'

Excuse me?! I am the queen of not-giving-up! What do you mean 'I give up!?' 'You wait until the disappointment fades,' God says, 'and then you try again.'

Well, I had to admit that was a pretty accurate assessment. That's exactly what I do. My main refuge is books, but I have a large number of secondary refuges. And what does God say about them? He says that He is our only legitimate refuge. It is not easy, I have to admit, to call on God and ask why. I'm missing those books and calming cups of coffee, I didn't realise it was going to be so hard to root out the attitude of 'it doesn't matter anyway,' and come to a place of saying 'it does matter.' God is fortunately more patient than I am with my lack of trust in Him.

Psalms 91 : 2 I will say of the Lord: 'He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.'

The Hadron Collider and Υ it Matters

A year ago, very few people had heard of the Large Hadron Collider, dubbed 'the God machine.' In the last month, there are very few people who have not heard of it. A massive ring accelerator built under several European countries, its purpose is to plumb the secrets of the universe as they occurred in the infinitesimal fractions of a second after the 'Big Bang.' At a cost of \$11 billion, it is one of the most expensive scientific projects ever undertaken.

I was interested in the comments of people as they discussed the Hadron Collider and its potential to wipe out mankind. Every person I heard say anything spontaneous about it began with the same thought: \$11 billion would do an immense amount to relieve poverty around the globe.

And there you have a very important statement. It says a lot more than you might think. Several years ago, Margaret Wertheim wrote a book called *Pythagoras' Trousers*. Its sub-title is *God, Physics and the Gender Wars*. You can read reviews of it on Amazon and they are almost as instructive as the book itself. One of the main thrusts of *Pythagoras' Trousers* is that there has been a cynical manipulation of religion, particularly Christianity, by atheistic scientists precisely in order to get the grants and funds required to build things like the Hadron Collider. One of the other main thrusts of the book is that women are excluded from modern physics partly because men see themselves as a religious priesthood in the Pythagorean tradition and partly because women ask awkward and embarrassing questions. They wonder about the ethics of the money involved; far more than men do, it seems. (I disagree, says one prominent reviewer, that the quest for the 'theory of everything' is too expensive and socially irresponsible.) \$11 billion is really just the tip of the iceberg. It's probably well beyond \$11 trillion that has been poured into esoteric research.

My church has over the last few years taken up the Micah Challenge (**To do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God. Micah 6:8**) and raises \$10000 periodically to set up micro-banks in different countries. These micro-banks loan \$100 to heads of families in Third World countries so they can set up businesses that change their entire lives. That's all it takes to change the future for so many people: a \$100 loan. So \$11 billion dollars would mean that five times the population of Australia could have been given an opportunity to come out of grinding poverty. \$11 trillion dollars would mean that 5000 times the

population of Australia would get a similar opportunity!

Having studied physics at university, I can say without hesitation that, in my experience, *Pythagoras' Trousers* is a devastatingly accurate portrayal of the situation. In fact, when I first read the book I wondered how anyone could have known exactly what I went through without having interviewed me personally. I doubt things have changed any in the intervening years.

Moreover, having subsequently become interested in the history of the Pythagorean Brotherhood and having looked into it fairly closely, I can say with a great degree of confidence that those reviewers who think Wertheim is wrong in her historical overview are themselves mistaken. I'd quibble on a few points, but her general idea is sound. The inheritors of the tradition of Pythagoras are to be found in physics labs around the world, looking for the modern equivalent of the alchemist's philosopher's stone.

What she doesn't tell us however is that Pythagorean mysticism is a hydra. It's a dragon with lots of heads. One branch of its legacy is indeed to be found in physics, but another has settled in mathematics, yet another in magic and the modern resurgence of occult arts, still another in religious beliefs about re-incarnation and another in a fusion of mathematics and goddess worship. Yes, *The Da Vinci Code* is a perfect example of the last-mentioned head of the dragon.

It's so varied in form that it's difficult to put a face to it. In the early church, Pythagorean mysticism was intimately entwined with Gnosticism. It is, in fact, the oldest opponent of Christianity. It's also the deadliest. In every age in which it has returned, it has always attacked Christianity face-on, while cynically trying to manipulate it from the side and subtly concealing its assault from the back. Gnosticism is about 'salvation by knowledge' so in many respects, it has much in common with modern scientific rationalism. The Hadron Collider is about a faith in theory; a faith so strong that it's often a wonder that scientists themselves don't recognise how close they are to religion.

Last year on September 15, a meteorite came down in the Carancas area of Peru. (C'mon, 'fess up now, you were wondering how I was going to bring up the topic of meteorites in this issue, weren't you? I've been pretty restrained when you think about it. I have yet to mention a truly wonderful crater discovery off

the coast of Scotland.) The curious thing about this meteorite was that, at first, scientists decided that there was some fraud involved: the meteorite, you see, defied all theoretical models for what meteorites should do.

One wonders at the probability of big bangs defying all theoretical models for what big bangs should do. We've had the opportunity to study so many, haven't we? Pardon my sarcasm.

Pythagoreanism in the Middle Ages utilised many symbols: one of them was Y. Y stood for the fork in the road, the two pathways, the moment of choice. The Hadron Collider is a fabulous thing, but it's out of time; if it was built *after*, not *before* we had established justice, loved kindness and walked humbly with God, it would be an amazing achievement. We lose our

humanity, however, when the pursuit of knowledge is at the cost of mercy.

Pythagoreanism isn't coming back. It is back. If you don't know what it is, it's probably not a wise thing to just shrug your shoulders and say it's all too much to understand. I didn't pluck that multi-headed dragon metaphor out of nowhere. I chose it because, before the last few centuries, a great number of Christians – including in my opinion, the apostle John – equated it with just that image.

Annie Hamilton

The Winged Word, Anne's latest book, is not about Pythagoreanism, even though the topic does come up in a major way. It's about the mathematical construction of the gospels, how that arrangement is reflected in creation and how Christians have allowed the modern followers of Pythagoras to claim our heritage for themselves.

Helen Lowe discusses *Thornspell*



Z: *Thornspell* is your first novel. Is it targeted mainly at children or adults? Why have you picked a fantasy format?

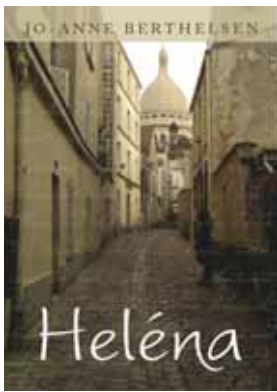
HL: *Thornspell* is targeted at middle grade readers and young adults, but like many Fantasy stories written for that readership, I believe it will appeal to a far wider audience who just like good Fantasy-fiction. And why Fantasy -- together with historical fiction it has always been my favourite genre and ever since I began writing (when I was quite young) I have had many ideas for novels, but they have always been fantasy ideas.

In terms of the specific inspiration for *Thornspell*, that initially came when I attended the NZ Ballet performance of Tchaikovsky's "Sleeping Beauty" in (I think) 1998. I was sitting there in the darkened auditorium, enjoying the ballet, and the prince came leaping onto the stage -- and I remember sitting up in my chair and thinking: "What *about* the prince? Why *would* he even be bothered with some sleeping chick, especially if --in terms of the traditional story-- many other princes had died attempting a rescue?" And later, when I got home, I found myself thinking: And what about the wicked fairy? *Would* she just be sitting around saying, "Oh well, you know, they converted my evil death spell into a hundred year sleep and that's ok. I can live with that." Hmmm, I thought, I bet she wouldn't, not if she was really wicked-- and that got me thinking about what her real agenda might be. And I had this 'flash' of a boy growing up in a small castle, next to the enchanted wood, dreaming of adventure -- and that was the beginning of *Thornspell*.

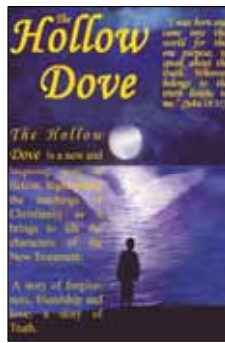
Z: Initial reviews have been very positive. Was Knopf your first choice of publisher? Or did you look elsewhere first?



HL: I was advised to "try the US" with *Thornspell* by a contact in the Australasian publishing industry, but a look at the *Writers & Artists Yearbook* quickly convinced me that I really did not know where to begin—in particular, in identifying the publishers that specialised in my type of story and might therefore consider *Thornspell* favourably. I also saw that most publishers would not accept unsolicited submissions, so I knew that I needed an agent. The first agency I approached was *Writers House*, where I was very fortunate to obtain Robin Rue as my agent. Robin initially submitted *Thornspell* to eight publishing imprints (only a couple of whose names I knew) and one of these was Knopf (Random House). But it was quickly proven that she knew her market, because Knopf purchased *Thornspell* within four weeks of submission.



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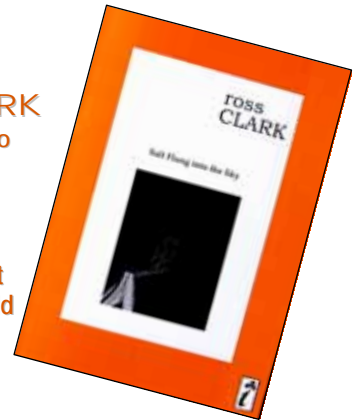


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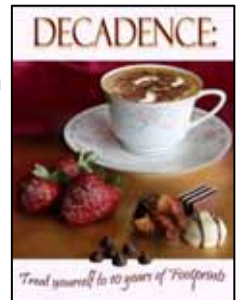
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