2003

The Christy Award: Excellence In Christian Fiction, An Annotated Bibliography

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**Recommended Citation**
Vol. 46 : Iss. 1 , Article 7.
Available at: [http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/tcl/vol46/iss1/7](http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/tcl/vol46/iss1/7)

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The burgeoning interest in Christian fiction that has marked recent years has brought with it a proliferation of new writers who are trying to make their way into the mainstream market. Alongside this growth has come a need to establish guidelines that would encourage a high standard of quality in the field. The Christian publishing industry itself responded to this challenge in 1999 by establishing an award that would identify novels and novelists of excellence. By acknowledging authors worthy of note, they hoped to encourage both creativity and quality in writing, broaden readership of the genre, and bring recognition and exposure to authors who had not yet reached a large readership.

Supporters of this award are dedicated to the genre. Their website states their belief in the power of story. “In a postmodern age in which the power of story has an even more significant place than in the past for establishing new ideas, influencing thought, and captivating people’s minds and emotions, Christian fiction has an increasingly important role to play in the church and to a new generation of seekers. The Master Storyteller of all time did most of His teaching through fiction. A great story captivates, entertains, educates, inspires, and challenges the reader—The Christy Awards celebrate novels from a Christian worldview that achieve these goals.”

WHAT IS CHRISTIAN FICTION?
To identify which novels may be considered as Christian fiction, the founders of the award have developed the following working definition:

“Christian fiction is a category of stories written by novelists whose Christian worldview is woven into the fabric of the plot and character development. Although this definition might seem either simplistic on the one hand or overly broad on the other, this grouping of novels is as comprehensive and as varied in age, interest, and spiritual depth as its readership. C.S. Lewis resisted the label “Christian” for his novels, contending that he was simply creating a story. But whether overtly or subtly, Lewis’ fiction came out of his understanding of God and of the universe He created, out of the knowledge that God cares deeply about His creation that has been damaged by sin, and He joined the human race to build a bridge back to Himself. This bridge between God and humanity will in some way inform and characterize every Christian novel.

Good fiction, whether or not it is identified as Christian, will provide a memorable reading experience that captures the imagination, inspires, challenges, and educates. Fiction published for the Christian book market does not include gratuitous demonstration of sin—whether language, violence, sexual situations, or the more hidden sins of idolatry and self-worship. Credible characters in a fallen world, of course, will sin. But the Christian novel’s presentation of the grit and grime of
human circumstance will not be
done for its own sake or to titil-
late, but to point the reader toward
hope, toward God.”

Because the essence of Christianity
is a relationship with God, a Christian
novelists’ well-conceived story will in
some way, whether directly or indi-
rectly, add insight to the reader’s
understanding of life, of faith, of the
Creator’s yearning over His creation.

Catherine Marshall

The name chosen for the award
honors Catherine Marshall, a notable
and best-selling Christian writer. Her
novel Christy, which was brought to
national attention by its serialization for
television, has over 10 million copies in
print. The videos of these programs
have become enduring classics, which
reach across age levels and interest
groups. Her novels and inspirational
books together have more than 25
million copies in print. If Christian
fiction is defined by the distinct
worldview woven into its very fabric,
then Catherine Marshall’s stories stand
as true examples of the genre.

Qualifications

To qualify as candidates for the
award, works must be full-length novels
published in English in the United
States. They may be in paperback or
hardcover format, but must be pub-
lished the year preceding the presenta-
tion of the award. Most importantly,
“the content must by consistent with a
Christian worldview and the historic
Christian tradition reflected in the
Apostle’s Creed.”

Further definitions and guidelines
for entry and eligibility can be found on
the Christy Award web site at
www.christyawards.com or can be
received by mailing a request to: The
Christy Award, LLC, 1571 Glastonbury
Road, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48103.

Categories

Beginning in 1999 with six group-
ings, by 2002 categories have been
expanded to nine distinct areas.

These include:
• Allegory – Includes fiction written
  in the form of extended metaphor.
• Contemporary/General – The
  setting for the novel is 1950 or after.
• Futuristic – The setting for the
  plot is at a future time. This includes
  apocalyptic works.
• North American Historical – The
  primary setting is North America. The
  time period is pre-1950.
• International Historical – The primary
  setting is in countries other than the
  United States. The time period is pre-1950.
• Romance – The focus is on
  romantic drama.
• Suspense – Events in the novel are
  strange, frightening or thrilling.
• Western – The story is set on the
  American frontier in the late 19th and
  early 20th century.
• First novel – First novels are those
  written by an author who has not
  published commercially any book-
  length work. These titles may also be
  entered in another category.

Judging Process

Each fall, candidates are submitted
for judging by participating publishing
companies. Judging panels are made up
of seven persons for each category.
They are chosen from professors,
librarians, editors and book retailers.
Evaluations are given on a scale of one
to ten, based on ten separate criteria.
Three books from each category are
touched by God’s grace.

Of these criteria are several that
relate to all works of fiction such as
effective characterization, clear
development of plot and setting, quality
of writing, and adherence to the norms
of a particular genre. Other standards
apply more specifically to Christian
fiction including a concern that a
coherent theme is presented without
extensive sermonizing. Characters and
theme are rated by the extent to which
they reflect Christian values and the
depth to which they engage the reader.

Summarizing all of these is an overall
satisfaction with the story

Anyone wishing to be a judge may
contact the Christy Award at CA2000
DK@aol.com, The Christy Award LLC,
1571 Glastonbury Road, Ann Arbor,
Michigan 48103, (734) 663-7931. (Quotes
used by permission from the Christy Award
web site.)

Award Winners

Over the past three years, winners have
included authors familiar to readers of
Christian fiction as well as many new faces.
Titles of winners are listed below. For a full
description of the works, visit the Christy
Award web site at www.christyawards.com.

Winners for 2002

Contemporary

A Garden to Keep

Jamie Langston Turner
Bethany House

The discovery of her husband’s
faithfulness forces Elizabeth Lundis out
of complacency into an examination of her
life that she compares to an untended
garden. Coinciding with personal discovery
is her growth from fledgling Christian to a
believer of greater understanding and
maturity. The rambling reminiscence of her
past life could become tedious, but instead
is insightful and powerful. This is an honest
look at lives of human failure that are
touched by God’s grace.

Futuristic

Oxygen

Randall Ingermanson and John Olson
Bethany House

The flight of Ares 10, the first manned
mission to Mars, is plagued with trouble
from the very beginning. As problems
mount, Valkerie Jansen, a Christian
physician assigned to the crew at the last
minute, begins to suspect sabotage. When
an explosion in deep space reduces the
oxygen supply, drastic measures must be
taken to save the ship and the lives of the
crew. Well-developed characters are
presented in a highly suspenseful mystery.
Caught in the maelstrom of World War II, young German pastor Josef Schumacher finds himself vacillating between feelings of national pride and his conscience. While pressured by members of his congregation to fully support the Nazi movement, Josef increasingly becomes aware of the evils being committed by those in political power. The choices he must face could jeopardize his family, his congregation, and his very life.

Ann Hedden
Hidden Places
Bethany House

Left with three children to support after the death of her husband, Eliza Wyatt is determined to maintain the family orchards in spite of the Depression that has seized the country. When a mysterious young vagabond named Gabriel offers help, Eliza is uncertain whether to be grateful or wary. It takes intervention from eccentric "Aunt Batty" to help Eliza find her way. Underlying themes include recovery from abusive relationships and having the courage to follow your dream in spite of opposition from others.

Dee Henderson
Catholicism
Multnomah Publishers

When Judge Carl Whitmore is murdered, U.S. Marshal Marcus O'Malley is assigned to track down the killer. At the same time, he must protect Shari Hanford, the crime's only eyewitness. The situation becomes complex as Marcus and Shari begin to fall in love. Shari's faith also challenges Marcus to reexamine his beliefs. Henderson successfully mixes suspense, humor, mystery and realistic character development in this inspirational thriller.

Gayle Eileen McElderry
Unashamed
Francine Rivers
Tyndale House Publishers

Although others in the city of Jericho
saw the danger posed by the approaching body of Israelites, only Rahab understood that life or death lay in the hand of the God of the Hebrews. Her journey from shame to faith and her courage in the face of extreme danger are vividly portrayed in this offering of Biblical fiction.

NORTH AMERICAN HISTORY
Edge of Honor
Gilbert Morris
Zondervan Publishers

In response to a troubled conscience, a young Union doctor travels south to Arkansas to aid the widow of a Rebel soldier that he accidentally killed at the end of the Civil War conflict. When he falls in love with the widow, he must decide whether to return to his wealthy fiancé in the New York or remain and fight for the affections of one who used to be an enemy.

Reaping the Whirlwind
Rosey Dow
Wine Press Publishers

Weaving a murder mystery in and around the famous trial of John Scopes, Dow creates a suspenseful drama while revealing much of the untruth that surrounds this historical event.

SUSPENSE
The Great Divide
T. Davis Bunn
Doubleday Publishers

Marcus Glenwood, a formerly successful corporate lawyer, agrees to investigate the disappearance of Gloria Hall, an activist who is investigating slave labor conditions in China. To do so, he must oppose corporate greed, Chinese government officials and politicians who seek to gain from these gruesome practices.

ROMANCE
A Touch of Betrayal
Catherine Palmer
Tyndale House Publishers

Alexandra Prescott plans a trip to Africa but finds circumstances in the bush country of Nairobi, more difficult than she had thought. Adding to her troubles is news of financial problems back home. When repeated attempts are made on her life she turns to anthropologist Grant Thornton for help. Drawn together by circumstances, they both face larger challenges than they have ever anticipated.

FUTURISTIC
By Dawn's Early Light
Grant R. Jeffrey and Angela Hunt
Word Publishers

Based on prophecies given in the book of Ezekiel, this sequel to Flee the Darkness is a gripping account of possible coming world events.

NORTH AMERICAN HISTORY
The Meeting Place
Janette Oke and T. Davis Bunn
Bethany House

A chance meeting on the day of their weddings, between Louisa, a Frenchwoman and Catherine, who is English begins a tentative relationship. This is the time of the French and Indian War, however, and their villages are on opposite sides of the conflict. In spite of obstacles placed in their path, the two women pursue their friendship, supporting each other through the difficult tragedies of war.

ROMANCE
Whispers from Yesterday
Robin Lee Hatcher
Waterbrook Press

When her world collapses, socialite Karen Butler reluctantly finds a home on her grandmother Sophia's Golden T. Ranch. She is little prepared to cope with the rough life and the summer camp for troubled teens that Sophia allows Dusty Stoddard to operate on her land. As she struggles with her pain, Karen finds truth that bring her peace in the diaries of a woman who died many years before she was born.

SUSPENSE
Final Witness
James Scott Bell
Broadman & Holman

Rachel Ybarra, a paralegal recently hired by the U.S. Attorney’s Office, is assigned to work on a case against a member of the Russian mob. When the prime witness is murdered, the suspense moves outside the courtroom and Rachel finds her own life in danger. *