

**The Passions of Helen Waddell:
Meditations on a Forgotten Medievalist**

(R. Barker, 12 January 2020)

Thank you so much to all of you for being here on this not-very-pleasant night—and a very sincere thanks to Fr. Ingalls for the honour of speaking in honour of Fr. Crouse. I'd like to begin, if I may, with a few thoughts about Fr. Crouse, before I turn to an introduction to, and then some meditations on, my main subject for tonight, the medievalist Helen Waddell.

In the great generosity and kindness of his heart, Fr. Ingalls has described me as a student and friend of Fr. Crouse. In fact, I would not dare to claim the intimacy of friendship with this great, wise, and kind teacher and scholar. I was just one of the many, many undergraduate students who were transformed by his lectures in the Foundation Year Programme and who went on to study with him in the Dalhousie Classics Department. During my undergraduate degree in English and Classics, I took two full-year classes with him and was also inspired by him to learn Latin and Italian. In January 2011, when we learned that Father Crouse had died, I went back to my notebook from his course on Medieval Philosophy and looked at my notes on his first words in the class. He said: “The history of medieval philosophy is the story of the development of thought. Aristotle says that “all people seek to know”—if so, we must also be grateful to those who got it wrong. [...] Philosophy today is seen as a discipline among other disciplines—for antiquity, it was not a ‘subject’, but a love of wisdom.”

For those of you who never heard Fr. Crouse teach, it may help to know that he had a very low, resonant, gentle voice and a slow, meditative way of speaking that bore witness to a point Wayne Hankey made in his beautiful obituary for him: “Among his greatest gifts as a teacher was his communication of the necessity, goodness, and beauty, of contemplative silence.” From the heart

of that lived silence, he had a remarkable ability to condense his “love of wisdom” into few but powerful words, as in those I noted back in Fall 1993 in his classroom. The quotation of Aristotle’s words, “All people seek to know,” was extremely typical of him; it was one of the citations I heard most often on his lips during his lectures, and the primacy of the desire for the truth was at the core of so much of his teaching. But for me, just as characteristic of Fr. Crouse is the fact that he took the time to gloss Aristotle’s dictum by adding, “if so, we must also be grateful to those who got it wrong.” As anyone who has read his commentaries on contemporary society will know, he could be passionately and uncompromisingly critical of error, false doctrine, and hypocrisy. But he always showed tremendously compassion and respect for those who sincerely sought the truth, even if they were utterly messing it up. I say this as a student who did a lot of messing up. He lived in the presence of the Logos and he sought the truth in the purest and most beautiful form. But he also modeled meeting people where they were, and showing not just tolerance but gratitude to those who—in sincerity of heart—tripped and fell at times on their path toward the good. (We all need this.)

It’s with reliance on Fr. Crouse’s spirit of compassion, love, and forgiveness that I dare to speak to you today in his memory, even though—in the words of Samuel Beckett—I have “nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express ... [only] the obligation to express.” As some of you know, after my undergraduate studies in Classics and English I went on to do my graduate work in English Literature and Theatre History. I have, like Shakespeare (but with less to show for it) “small Latin and less Greek.” I cannot presume to offer *any* scholarly reflections that are even remotely worthy of the great tradition of Fr. Crouse and his many brilliant colleagues, students and friends in the fields of Classics and Medieval thought – many of whom are now teachers in this place. Instead, I want tonight just to share some extremely personal reflections on Helen Waddell: a writer who is little read today, but who was – along with

Fr. Crouse – one of the two people who introduced me to the plurality, complexity, and wonder of the Middle Ages, and who left with me a legacy of love for that era for which I will be forever grateful.

Let me start by giving you a bit of an introduction to Waddell, and to my own relationship with her (as it's really from the perspective of my teenaged self, and not a scholar, that I'm going to speak). Born in 1889, Waddell was in the mid-20th century—from the late 1920s until sometime around the 60s—one of the world's most famous writers about the medieval era. Her 1927 book *The Wandering Scholars* offered a hugely influential introduction to medieval European intellectual and literary culture by exploring the work of the so-called “Goliards,” clerical writers of the 12th and 13th centuries who wrote poems both fervent and satirical about love, sex, wine, food, fortune, the church, and faith—to name but a few of their subjects. This book was on my mother's bookshelf when I was growing up, because she herself had read it when she was a student at Mount Allison University in the 1960s. Here's the copy: my Mom has written in it, “D. Murray July 1965.” As the first member of her family on any side to go to university, I think her mind was pretty blown by the idea that she was walking in the footsteps of the young men from the 12th-century Schools of Paris and Orléans about whom Waddell wrote. As a teenager in Calgary, Alberta, I took the book off the shelf and read it, and my mind was blown, too, by the image of these young people wandering from city to city, school to school, in passionate search of thought, knowledge, and truth. That was what I wanted, I thought, even though their world was so very different from mine. (I don't know what the goliards would have thought of the Calgary Stampede or of 80s music—though actually they might have been quite into 80s German pop.) I also read Waddell's best-selling 1933 novel *Peter Abelard*, about the great 12th-century philosopher and teacher and his tragic relationship with his brilliant pupil, Héloïse. In this novel, too, Waddell's vision of the vibrancy, the controversy, and above all the incandescent intellectual and emotional hunger of the era shone through. I loved this, I

thought, even though I understood so little of the ideas, the languages, the poetry, the philosophy, the world that Waddell was writing about.

Re-reading these two works this past fall, I realized with a sense of shock just *how* little of these two “sacred books” of my youth I had understood. Waddell would have been a remarkably learned person in any time; but for a woman who received her undergraduate degree from the Queen’s University, Belfast, in 1911—at a time when access to post-secondary education was still very new for women—she was truly exceptional. Born in Tokyo as the youngest of a Presbyterian Minister’s ten children, she learned to speak and read Japanese, and was fascinated by the literary cultures of both Japan and China; one of her first major works, *Lyrics from the Chinese*—published when she was only 24—offered English version of a series of Mandarin Chinese poems (and very unusually for her time, running and respectful comparisons between European and Chinese cultures are a typical aspect of her work). As a student in Belfast, as well as in her own personal studies during the years after her degree when she cared for her ailing stepmother, she studied Latin, French, and English Literature, as well as mathematics and physics. In 1919, in the aftermath of the first world war, she went up to Somerville College, Oxford, to study for a PhD. She did not finish it—“artists and journalists are more my sort than academic people,” she admitted—but another Oxford College, Lady Margaret Hall, gave her a fellowship to do research in Paris toward the book that became *The Wandering Scholars*.

Waddell was in her late 30s when *The Wandering Scholars* was published, and the first astonishing page of the book alone gives some sense of the density of what she had learned during her first four decades of literary study:

There is no beginning, this side the classics, to a history of medieval Latin; its roots take hold too firmly on the kingdoms of the dead. The scholar’s lyric of the twelfth century seems as new a miracle as the first crocus; but its earth is the leafdrift of centuries of forgotten

scholarship. His emotional background is of his own time; his literary background is pagan, and such furniture as his mind contains is classical or pseudo-classical. The great age of the Augustans is to us a thing set in amber, a civilisation distinct and remote like the Chinese; there is a whole world of literature, created in another language, between us and them. To the mediaeval scholar, with no sense of perspective, but a strong sense of continuity, Virgil and Cicero are but upper reaches of the river that still flows past his door. The language in which they wrote is still the medium of the artist, even the creative artist: it was so, even in the seventeenth century, to Milton, still more to Bacon. Gautier de Châtillon wrote an epic on Alexander, and the scholars of the next generation compare him with Virgil just as naturally as Macaulay compares Jane Austen with Shakespeare. Another scholar, lecturing on the two kinds of poetry, metrical and rhythmic, says that Virgil is the best example of the first, Primas of the second, just as naturally as a lecturer on blank verse and the heroic couplet would instance Milton and Pope. The gulf between the god of Renaissance idolatry and the disreputable canon of Orleans does not exist for him: they simply used the same medium in different ways. Moreover, the sacred canon of classical Latin is not yet closed: a thirteenth century text book ranges from Ovid and Cicero to Gautier de Châtillon and Matthew of Vendôme, as our own range from Chaucer to William Morris and Swinburne.

(Waddell, *The Wandering Scholars* xiii-xiv)

It's overwhelming, really, this ability of hers not just to name all those names but to grasp the unbroken line of imagination that links the Romans Virgil and Cicero to the Victorians Morris and Swinburne, the scandalous troubadours of Waddell's own youth. I remember that when I came home from the first term of Foundation Year for the Christmas of 1992, I re-read *The Wandering Scholars* and felt as though I really understood it this time. Running into Fr. Crouse in the dinner line in Prince Hall one day, I told him that I had done this—I had heard him say that he knew and loved

Waddell's work—and I thanked him that “I understood her now.” He just smiled. He knew, of course, that I did *nothing of the kind* – and in many ways, I still don't. Dr. Hankey remarked to me a few days ago that he wondered whether Waddell has not been so much forgotten as simply come to seem inaccessible in a time when so few can read Latin, far less old French and old German, which she quotes blithely and often without translation throughout both *The Wandering Scholars* and *Peter Abelard*. I think he is likely right.

If so, it's a shame that readers are daunted by Waddell's erudition, because they're missing the aspect of her work that spoke strongly to me when I was a teenage girl with immersion French, Grade 10 German (I knew how to say, ‘*Hans Peter gibt ein Party*’), and no Latin at all. This quality of her writing comes across right away in *The Wandering Scholars*. After that breathtaking tour of the history of literature, she discusses the importance of the Latin language itself in the Middle Ages:

It was not only the language of literature, of the Church, of the law-courts, of all educated men, but of ordinary correspondence: the language in which a student will write home for a pair of boots, or suggest that it is the part of a discreet sister to inflame the affection of the relations, even the brother-in-law, of a deserving scholar, who at the moment has neither sheets to his back, and in which she will reply that she is sending him two pairs of sheets and 100 sous, but not a word to my husband, or ‘I shall be dead and destroyed [*mortua essem penitus et destructa*]. I think he means to send you something himself.’ (Waddell, *The Wandering Scholars* xiv)

Waddell had the eye, and the pen, not only of a scholar but also of a novelist; she could find the human experience, the little details that bring the dead back from the ashes, in the most forbidding places. In this case, she found it in the dusty volumes of miscellaneous medieval Latin manuscripts in the French Bibliothèque Nationale. She could also find it in the revered verses of Golden Age Literature and in the writings of the Doctors of the Church. Take, for example, this magnificent

passage from *The Wandering Scholars* about the impact of Book IV of *The Aeneid* on the imagination of the Latin Middle Ages, definitely the reason I loved Dido long before I read Virgil:

Dido, Queen of Carthage, was the romantic heroine of the Middle Ages. They could not read the lines in Homer where the old men on the wall hushed their swallows' chattering as Helen passed by; they knew her only in Dictys; sweet-natured, long-limbed, and golden-haired, or in the amazing flashlight vision of Virgil, crouching on the steps of the Temple of Vesta in the light of the fires, "Erynnis to her father's house and to Troy." She is absolute beauty, even as *Venus generosa*. But Dido they took to their hearts, wrote lament after lament for her, cried over her as the young men of the eighteenth century cried over Manon Lescaut. St. Augustine broke his heart for her [...]. Nor in this do they show their simplicity. To come back to Dido after much novel reading is to recognise a great heroine in the hands of a great novelist. From the first scene to the last—the gracious welcome, self-possessed and royal, of the sea-tossed wanderers, the empty banquet hall with the lights out and the household asleep, and the queen stealing down in the light of the dying stars to lie huddled on the couch where Aeneas that night had lain, the surrender in the cave in the blackness of the thunderstorm, the night when the owl cries with its note of doom, the pitiful sorrow dreaming in Virgil's loveliest lines of herself always alone, always abandoned, wandering on long roads companionless, seeking her people far from her own land, the last murmur, her cheek crushed against the couch that had been their bed—"At least I die"—they saw for the first time 'the ambiguous face of woman as she is.' (Waddell, *The Wandering Scholars* xxviii)

We get here not just a truly loving tribute to Virgil's poetry, the tender details by which he makes Dido not a cautionary tale but a tragic heroine of titanic stature, but also a peek into the hearts and souls of the young men who read and loved her through the generations long after Virgil's. They *were* men, reading a man's image of a woman; Waddell never fudges the point that this, like her own,

was a culture in which women were more often the objects than the makers of representation. But with a wonderful slight of hand, she illuminates their world through the arts that in her time were seen as women's arts—the novelist's arts, the arts of “romance”—and through these arts, she brings the world of these dead men back to life.

What does she have to tell us about that world, the world of the Latin-speaking 12th and 13th centuries, the world of *The Wandering Scholars* and *Peter Abelard*? So much, a great deal of which I'm not qualified to speak about. So I'm going to focus, in the second half of this talk, on just three, interlocking themes that haunt these two works—some of the passions, we might call them, of Helen Waddell: desire, suffering, and memory.

Let's start with desire. One of the myths about the Middle Ages with which Waddell would have absolutely *nothing* to do was that it was an inert age of faith in which one pious, homogenous generation of scholar-clerics after another sat around chanting the *paternoster* and discussing abstruse points of philosophy. Pray and discuss they certainly did, but as she forcibly reminds us, these medieval folk were neither inert nor homogenous nor blandly, unquestioningly pious. Her Middle Ages are an era of passion: of vehement intellectual and spiritual debate, of searing disagreements, of white-hot love—both physical and spiritual—and gut-wrenching loss. In *The Wandering Scholars*, she celebrates “the glorious liberty of the children of Paris of the twelfth [century], the scholars come up, young and old, to demand the point and the line, the nature of universals, of Fate and Free Will, the sources of the Nile, dividing in the taverns the undivided Trinity, and one calls to the other to abandon this for that” (*The Wandering Scholars* 119). This is the 12th century as Waddell sees it, a time of “liberty” and struggle; a time in which people “demand” knowledge, defy prohibitions over glasses of beer and wine (“dividing in the taverns the undivided Trinity”); and try to talk one another into and out of ruling ideas. This is a world of “wandering scholars” because it is a world in which the young go from city to city, country to country, in search of the Masters—the philosophers—

who can open for them the secrets of the divine truth. And a lot of them—including some of the greatest of them all—also seek for truth in love and in the body.

Take, for example, the portrait of the great philosopher, Peter Abelard, with which Waddell begins the novel she named for him. She gives him to us at the age of 37, the greatest Master of the Schools of Paris, beloved by his students and hated by the small-minded and conventional. Very early in the novel, she gives us a glimpse of the desires that drive this supremely ambitious man, as he thinks with disdain of his more conventional contemporaries:

Sheep every one of them, with their meek faces, browsing over and over the old close-bitten pastures, with their ‘St. Augustine saith...St. Jerome saith...The Blessed Gregory saith...’ As if one could not prove anything, and deny it, and prove it back again, out of St. Augustine alone. Some time he would do it, for a testimony unto them. Pit the fathers one against the other. Smash the whole blind system of authority and substitute...Master Peter Abelard? said the mocking voice within him. He shook his head, suddenly humble. Not that. Not that. But a reasonable soul. *The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord.* Abelard shuddered and was still. It was about him again, the dark immensity, the pressure of some greatness from without upon his brain, and that within which struggled to break through to it. *I said, Ye are gods.* (*Peter Abelard* 6)

Intellectual hunger, arrogance, and—deepest of all—the desire for something that lies beyond and outside the self: the Good, the Divine, the Word. But Waddell doesn’t end her contemplation of Abelard there. Exhausted by the work of the mind and by his own delusory sense of omnipotence, Abelard looks out the window and sees something in “the shadow of Notre Dame”:

It stirred: the shadow became two shadows: for a moment the moon shone on a young girl’s upturned face, blanched in its light. Then the other shadow stooped over it, and they were one shadow again. Abelard stood looking down, his mouth contemptuous. Yet there was a

quality in the rigidity of these silent figures that held him. He could not reach them. Time was with him. Eternity flowed about those two. (*Peter Abelard* 9)

This is a wonderful little passage when read in relation to the earlier one. At first sight, we see an Abelard who on some level is instinctively just as narrow-minded as the “sheep” he criticized for their intellectual poverty; his first thought on seeing the couple embracing in the shadow of Notre Dame is “contempt.” But then, in a motion that is typical of him—and this I think is why Waddell loved this long-dead man so much—he questions his own reaction and sees beyond his own knee-jerk assumptions to a deeper truth. “Eternity flowed about those two”: he sees that something of the absolute, eternal truth that he seeks is to be found in human love, in *Eros*, as well as in philosophy, the love of wisdom. In fact, he instinctively feels that these two loves are not diametric opposites—that “eternity flows” about both of them.

Waddell understands how the passion of a great mind, the passion to know and communicate truth, inspires love in others: love for the truths taught, but love for the teacher, too. So Pierre de Montboissier, one of Abelard’s students, cries out when he hears that Abelard has been condemned for heretical ideas: “You know nothing about him! He was never your master.” As for Héloïse, Waddell imagines her as every inch Abelard’s equal in intellectual and spiritual passion, and his superior in the capacity for absolute self-giving where once she has given her love. At one early point in the book, the great Abbot and theologian Bernard of Clairvaux meets her and declares, “I think some day I shall call you sister. [...] For there is no half-way house with such as you. Let you once give, you give, I think, for eternity.” Héloïse replies quickly: “And what, Father, if one has already given? If there is no more oil in the lamp?” (94). The comment is almost breathtaking in its defiance, with Héloïse all but openly declaring that she given to Abelard all that she would be expected to have given to God. But here Waddell is simply building on the amazing letters of the historical Héloïse herself, who wrote to Abelard after they had been permanently parted, “I never

sought anything in you except yourself. . . . and if Augustus, emperor of the whole world, saw fit to honor me with marriage and conferred all the earth on me to possess forever, it would be dearer and more honorable to me to be called not his empress, but your whore.”

Those are words straight out of the twelfth century, and they bring us to one other important aspect of Waddell’s depiction of that remarkable era: that it was a great age of physical, as well as of intellectual and spiritual, desire. That side of the Middle Ages shines forth from one of my favourite passages in her writing, the chapter of *The Wandering Scholars* called “The Archpoet.” This chapter offers Waddell’s sketch of the man she calls “the greatest” of all the medieval Latin lyricists: the writer known to history only by his soubriquet of *Archipoeta*, the most poet of all the poets. An “inimitable” craftsman of Latin rhyme and metre, the Archpoet was an educated man and a cleric, like Abelard; but he was also a jester, a comedian. His poem known as “The Archpoet’s Confession,” some of which was set to music by Carl Orff in his *Carmina Burana*, showcases both his artistry and his joyful defiance of ascetic strictures. Here is a verse of the Latin, just so that you can hear the sound of the “breathless impudent rhyming” Waddell describes:

Mihi cordis gravitas
 res videtur gravis;
 iocus est amabilis
 dulciorque favis;
 quicquid Venus imperat,
 labor est suavis,
 quae numquam in cordibus
 habitat ignavis.

Via lata gradior
 more iuventutis,
 implicor et vitiis
 immemor virtutis,
 voluptatis avidus
 magis quam salutis,
 mortuus in anima
 curam gero cutis.

Here is Waddell's translation:

Never yet could I endure
 Soberness and sadness,
 Jests I love and sweeter than
 Honey find I gladness.
 Whatsoever Venus bids
 Is a joy excelling,
 Never in an evil heart
 Did she make her dwelling.

 Down the broad way do I go,
 Young and unregretting,
 Wrap me in my vices up,
 Virtue all forgetting,

Greedier for all delight
 Than heaven to enter in:
 Since the soul is in me dead,
 Better save the skin. (*The Wandering Scholars* 168)

“Droll, shameless, spendthrift, and importunate,” writes Waddell, the Archpoet “is inscrutable still.” We never quite know when he is serious in his declarations of his own depravity and when he is simply playing a sophisticated role. But for Waddell the *Confessio* is, at least on some level, a declaration of passion—not just a passion for earthly delights (“Meum est propositum / In taberna mori”), but also a passion for artistic creation itself. “It is,” she writes, “the first defiance by an artist of that society which it is his thankless business to amuse: the first cry out of the house of the Potter, ‘Why hast thou made me thus?’” (167).

There is pain as well as passion in that cry—or rather, there is passion of a second sort, that implied by the root word in Latin, *passio*: suffering. This brings us to the second aspect of Waddell’s work that I’d like to underline tonight: that is, her consciousness of suffering as a vital part of life. In the “Archpoet” chapter of *The Wandering Scholars*, much of the emphasis is on physical suffering; Waddell imagines the Archpoet as “Punchinello, with a mask half comic, half tragic: a ghost, but a ghost with a cough” (164). This vision of the Archpoet as a kind of medieval Keats, “young, consumptive, in love” shows us Waddell as very much a member of the same late-Romantic generation as her Irish contemporary and friend, W.B. Yeats; but like Yeats’s, Waddell’s interests go deeper than sentimental cliché. She stresses the point that she is taking this image of the Archpoet’s physical life out of his own work: “He is coughing in the first lyric we have from him, . . . a dramatic cough, suggesting the gift of a cloak; and he is coughing in the last, safe housed in St. Martin’s cloister at Cologne” (164). And even if he is playing up the cough for effect or to cadge money,

Waddell is interested in the fact that it's his go-to trope, presumably because it has some kind of relationship to the suffering—as well as the pleasures—inherent in his actual lived experience in the body. For her, this presence of the body and its pain in the Archpoet's lyrics is one source of their greatness. Pain, I think, is meaningful to her.

It *should* be, of course, given that she chose for the topic of her only major novel the story of Abelard and Héloïse, which ended in terrible physical and emotional pain when Héloïse's uncle Fulbert had Abelard castrated in revenge for what he viewed as the debauchery of his niece. This is an aspect of the tale that Waddell deals with very delicately and by indirection. She goes more deeply into its consequences: the parting of Abelard and Héloïse as both take religious vows; Abelard's anguish not only as he is mocked for his injuries but as his writings are condemned as heretical; Héloïse's anguish as she finds herself committed to a nun's life for which she feels she has no vocation. In the amazing penultimate chapter of *Peter Abelard*, Waddell concentrates all this human suffering into the figure of a rabbit caught in a trap left behind by a careless human hand, an image that cuts close to the bone in our own time of mass loss of animal lives due to human-induced climate change. Here are some excerpts from the passage:

Thibault held the teeth of the trap apart, and Abelard gathered up the little creature in his arms. It lay for a moment breathing quickly, then in some blind recognition of the kindness that had met it at the last, the small head thrust and nestled against his arm, and it died.

It was that last confiding thrust that broke Abelard's heart. He looked down at the little dragged body, his mouth shaking. 'Thibault,' he said, 'do you think there is a God at all?

Whatever has come to me, I earned it. But what did this one do?'

Thibault nodded.

'I know,' he said. 'Only—I think God is in it too.'

[...] ‘Then, Thibault,’ [Abelard] said slowly, ‘you think that all this,’ he looked down at the little quiet body in his arms, ‘all the pain of the world, was Christ’s cross? [...] there is something in the back of it that is true. And if we could find it—it would bring back the whole world.’ (Waddell, *Peter Abelard* 163-5)

There is a whole talk in itself in this passage—one that would be better given by someone with a genuine knowledge of the historical Abelard’s controversial writings on the Atonement, for example in his commentaries on Paul’s Letter to the Romans. All I will say here is that it seems to me that part of what this scene is saying is that suffering—not human suffering only, but the suffering of the whole world—is not pointless but rather is—like thought, like love—a point at which we meet the divine. And if we could truly find that meeting-place, “it would bring back the whole world.”

How could it do this? In many ways, a number of which Waddell considers in the novel’s final chapter. Gilles de Vannes, the wise and cynical old canon who is a friend to both Abelard and Héloïse, reads Abelard’s writings on the atonement: “It is the goodness of God that leads us to repentance: we grieve to have sinned against God, from love, and not from fear” (*Peter Abelard* 269). Because God has chosen to participate in our suffering (both what we feel and what we inflict), we can recognize His grace and, stricken by His love, turn toward it. At least, this is how Gilles reads Abelard’s proposition. He himself reflects that most great poetry has been written by people who have suffered, and wonders if “a broken heart” is “the condition of eternal life, for saints or for poets” (267). Héloïse, who comes to visit him, declares that she has always acted out of love for Abelard, not for God; when Gilles tells her that the poor view her as a saint because of her compassion, she replies, “It is only the happy who are hard, Gilles. I think perhaps it is better for the world if—if one has a broken heart. One is quick to recognize it, elsewhere” (274). When Gilles begins to weep at the sight of her pain, she comforts him:

‘Dear Gilles, it was only for a moment. It is over now. It does not hurt, now.’ Suddenly she stopped and gazed at him, something like bewilderment in her eyes. ‘Gilles, did you hear what I said? I only said it to comfort you. But it has come true. I can bear it now, because—because of you.’ (277)

Suffering not only helps us to understand the pain of others, to have compassion for it, but actually in some measure to alleviate that pain through compassion and fellowship. In this sense, suffering, like thought, allows us to some degree to participate in the life of Christ, the Word Made Flesh. It’s a very different take on the words of the psalmist: “I said, ye are gods.”

Waddell had need of such teaching herself, for while she was still in her 50s and hoping to write more books she began to suffer from early onset dementia or perhaps Alzheimer’s Disease. Her memory failed slowly but inexorably, until one family member wrote that at the end of her life, “Mute, unheeding, unfeeling, blind to all beauty, a stranger to the family she had so loved, she sat day after day before a picture of Christ crucified.” It was a cruel fate for someone who had believed so passionately in learning, understood as the memory and understanding of the legacies of the past. Her own writings, which for three generations were read and loved, seem largely to have vanished from shelves today. If you google her, one of the first things that comes up is an article entitled “Helen Waddell: The Influential Author Time Forgot.”

But memory, not forgetfulness, is the theme on which I want to end this talk—not just because I hope some of you may be interested enough to check out Waddell’s work and to “remember” her in the way she would have wanted, but because I think that in the end she understood her work as an act of memory. This act was less about her own individual reputation than about her part in a great procession that she helped to document, but that started long before her and would continue long after her. In this procession, the desire and suffering of each individual plays its part in handing on to the next generation what one of the other great writers of Waddell’s

generation, T.H. White, called “the candle in the wind”: the legacy of humanity’s search for truth, beauty, compassion, and understanding in the face of humanity’s constant hypocrisy, ugliness, cruelty, and stupidity. In *Peter Abelard*, Gilles de Vannes responds to the burning of Abelard’s book on the Trinity by imagining this procession: “They [the burners] will do what they will do. But I know this. . . . When this generation is dead, the youngsters in Paris will be reading his books, though some other name will be upon them, and they will be taught by the men that Abelard taught to think, though they will not name his name” (243). The person may be forgotten, but the search for understanding—*fides quarens intellectum*—to which they contributed lives on, and is the better for what they gave to it.

Someday—though I think it is a long way off—the day may come at King’s when the name of Robert Darwin Crouse will be known only through his books and articles in the library, and no one alive will remember the sound of his voice. It doesn’t matter. In his address to King’s Encaenia in 2007, Fr. Crouse remarked that “Recollection is the fundamental business of the University – not recollection as dwelling in the past, but recollection as basis of renewal in the present, and hope and expectation for the future. Thus, King’s College, ‘beloved community of memory and hope,’ among the most traditional of universities, has been able to be most fruitfully innovative.” Out of Fr. Crouse’s dedication to this fundamental business of recollection has come, and will come, the fruit of many minds he taught to think and to love the past’s living legacy in the here and now.

In the end, it’s because Helen Waddell, like Fr. Crouse, spoke so eloquently on behalf of recollection that I wanted to bring her memory, along with his, before you today. And so I’d like to close this talk not with my words but with hers, the final words of *The Wandering Scholars*, a tribute to the forgotten writers of the Middle Ages that serve as a perfect tribute to the author herself:

But these..., who served a ruinous altar and got a scanty living by it: the grammarians of Toulouse sitting up at nights to argue the frequentative of the verb to be: Rahingus of

Flavigny filling his scanty leisure with copying Virgil: Froumund of Tegernsee collating manuscripts of Persius with chilblained hands: Primas shivering and mocking in his shabby cloak, writing a lament for Troy with Bacchanalian tears: the Archpoet coughing his heart out on the Lombard roads; a century of nameless vagabonds: on these the iniquity of oblivion hath blindly scattered her poppy. They kept the imagination of Europe alive: held untouched by their rags and poverty and squalor the Beauty that had made beautiful old rhyme. And for those of us who are the conservatives of letters, for whom literature obeys the eternal movement of the tides, for whom the heavens themselves are old, there remains the stark simplicity of Terence—‘In truth they have deserved to be remembered of us.’

‘O no man knows

Through what wild centuries

Roves back the rose.’ (Waddell, *The Wandering Scholars* 238)

Thank you.

Further Reading

Waddell, Helen. *Peter Abelard*. 1933; Chicago: Thomas More Press, 1978.

---. *The Wandering Scholars: The Life and Art of the Lyric Poets of the Latin Middle Ages*. 1927; New York: Anchor Books, 1961.