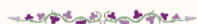




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IN THIS ISSUE

“Tyler McHenry, Middle-Aged Lover of Books”

by
Wade Ogletree

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Tyler McHenry, Middle-Aged Lover of Books

Wade Ogletree

When he woke, he was Ricky Smith. He was seventeen years old, and the year was 1956. On a simple table lay a copy of *The Last Question* by Isaac Asimov. He hurried to read it, for he was the generically perfect audience for that particular story, and it spoke to him in a way it could never speak to anyone else ever again.

After he had finished, he grew sleepy, until at last he lay down on the bare floor and shut his eyes. He awoke as Tyler McHenry, middle-aged lover of books.

The technology had not come cheap, and those who knew Tyler both envied his ability to afford the equipment and resented his misuse of it. At least, that was how they saw it, as a misuse. The program tricked the user's mind into adopting a computer-generated archetypal identity. The world marveled at the myriad possibilities for such a tool, but Tyler wanted it for only one purpose, to better explore his beloved books.

Now he could return fresh to old favorites. Moreover, he could read the stories in their proper temporal and cultural contexts. By the time Tyler first read Asimov, life had both outdone the fiction and fallen terribly short of it. By the time he discovered Bradbury, no one spoke of men in "rockets" anymore. The hope for an ancient civilization on Mars had dried up, and the imagined jungles of Venus had disappeared. None of that mattered, anymore. Now he could become that best reader at the perfect time to read any book ever written.

He quickly revisited all his favorites, and then journeyed beyond, exploring and enjoying books to which he could never quite relate before: *Beowulf*, *Moby Dick*, and the works of E. M. Forster. In each case, the differences of culture and taste melted away. He fell in love again and again and again.

At last, there was one book left on his list: *The Bible*. He entered his plain, white reading room and wondered who he would become. He had to admit that, at least historically, *The Bible* was a great and significant book. He wanted to understand it better.

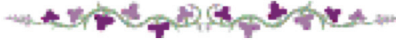
Tyler McHenry, middle-aged lover of books, prepared to sleep. When he woke, he would be the ideal reading audience for the text. Perhaps he would be a southern Fundamentalist, or a colonial Puritan. Maybe he would think himself a medieval monk or a first-century disciple in the province of Asia. Whoever he found himself to be, the result would be the same. He would be the one person for whom the book was most specifically written, and he could hardly wait.

At last, he drifted to sleep, and when he woke, he was Tyler McHenry, middle-aged lover of books.



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Wade Ogletree has been published in *Fantasy Magazine*, *The Sword Review*, *The Dead Mule School of Southern Literature*, *Surprising Stories*, and *Sane of Consciousness*, as well as *Distant Passages: the best from Double-Edged Publishing, 2005*. He runs the *Better Fiction Quarterly* and the Better Fiction critique forum, both from betterfiction.com. He is a Realtor and a Pastor in Fairhope, Alabama, where he lives with his wife and daughter.



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