

Overwhelmed by News Headlines? Consider This Antidote

Scan the headlines. What do you see? Darkness. Rumors of World War III. Food shortage threats. Economic instability. Political turmoil. The spread of radical gender ideology. Some days it feels that we're spinning out of control: "things fall apart; the centre cannot hold," as William Butler Yeats writes in his poem, "[The Second Coming](#)."

One specific example of impending doom came on April 20th, when Russian President Vladimir Putin [announced that his military tested the RS-28 Sarmat](#). Also known as "Satan II," it's Russia's most powerful thermonuclear-armed intercontinental ballistic missile. Putin called it "food for thought" for those who would dare threaten Russia. And so it is.

Going back to "The Second Coming," one wonders if the "rough beast" of another global conflict, "its hour come round at last, slouches towards" us "to be born." Such considerations cause images of nuclear Armageddon to bloom as a black thought in the mind. Reading news headlines can be a risky affair.

I don't know whether we stand on a precipice. My concern in this article is with the psychological reality of that feeling of fear and anxiety. What do you do in those moments when you *feel* the storm is rolling in?

As a literature teacher, I turn to books. They're my defense against nuclear apocalypse. [Seven inches of books will block](#) half the radioactive gamma rays passing through them—pretty good protection if a blast occurs near you. Stack them up.

I jest, of course—because humor helps us cope, too—though what

I write is true. In all seriousness, we find wisdom and hope for uncertain times, protection for the *soul*, in certain works of literature. Literature explores universal aspects of human nature and experience, including archetypal battles against seemingly hopeless situations, teaching us how to respond. [*The Return of the King*](#), by J. R. R. Tolkien, for instance, provides medicine for dark days.

Tolkien's characters Sam and Frodo are on their way to destroy the Ring, the core of all evil in Middle Earth. They're in Mordor—a dark, broken, ashen land, filled with orcs, wholly evil. It's the underworld. It's hell. They've entered the belly of the beast. They're exhausted, discouraged, and the darkness feels overwhelming. And then this:

There, peeping among the cloud-wrack above a dark tor high up in the mountains, Sam saw a white star twinkle for a while. The beauty of it smote his heart, as he looked up out of the forsaken land, and hope returned to him. For like a shaft, clear and cold, the thought pierced him that in the end the Shadow was only a small and passing thing: there was light and high beauty for ever beyond its reach.

Sam's revelation can be ours too. Some things endure. Some beauty can't be marred. Some goodness will never be erased. Whatever may happen to us, the music of the spheres, far above us, real—even if inaudible to our ears—will continue.

Sam's consolation doesn't come from thinking about himself; for a moment he's indifferent to his own fate. What comforts him is the knowledge that truth, beauty, and goodness—at least on some level—can never be swallowed by the darkness.

For us, the principles of Western civilization will endure and remain as true as ever, even if everyone forgets them. And if we have faith, we know that love is stronger than death, and truth stronger than lies. Even if the worst happens, some forgotten votive candle in a half-ruined church will burn on

after all the rumblings have fallen silent. Nothing eliminates truth.

We may be destroyed—politically, culturally, or physically—but *it* never will be.

For me at least, that's a comfort, derived from the treasure vault of literature. The good will endure. On the dark days, I hurl that reply into the teeth of the storm.

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