

Michael Simmons

Professor Lewis

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### Analysis of “The Streets of Ashkelon”

“The Streets of Ashkelon” written by Harry Harrison in 1962 is a work of science fiction with an interesting inclusion of religion. Harrison writes about an alien world which is void of religion but seeks only peace and knowledge until a missionary arrives on the planet to bring salvation to the inhabitants and causes confusion among the residents through their pursuit of knowledge (Harrison). This text demonstrates the conflict and loss of innocence that can occur when religion is introduced to a society.

Harrison effectively established the Weskers (native creatures of the planet) as an innocent, logic processing, knowledge seeking group of amphibians. Providing us with an understanding of the Weskers Harrison writes, “The have thunder, trees, and water without having thunder-gods, tree sprites or water nymphs. They have no ugly little gods, taboos, or spells to hagrid and limit their lives. They are...completely free of superstition and appear to be much happier and sane because of it” (Harrison). In that passage Harrison states the lack of organized religion that the Weskers experience and the effect it appears to have on their lives as well as his concern for the effect that organized religion would have.

When Harrison introduces the missionary, Father Mark, he uses an interaction between Father Mark and another character, Trader Garth, who was the first human on the planet. During

this interaction Garth attempts to force the missionary off the planet at gun point but is outgunned by the ship the missionary arrived on and the encounter ends with Garth striking the missionary and then left (Harrison). From this example we gain further understanding of Garth's position on organized religion, and can assume that the Weskers have not gained any knowledge of any religion from Garth.

Later in another interaction between Garth and Father Mark where the two are discussing the Father's purpose to be on the planet Garth ask Mark to only teach "anything that will help them face the realities of the greater universe" but asked him not to "confuse them with...hatreds and pain, guilt, sin, and punishment" (Harrison). Continuing on Harrison states there are different kinds of minds that think differently and that without an understanding of this lying cannot be comprehended that the only thing believe in is truth (Harrison). With these lines Harrison is setting the scene for the climax of his story and pointing to some very real concepts, the innocent if never exposed to lies and only believing in the truth could conceivably find organized religious beliefs difficult to comprehend.

After seventeen day of being taught by Father Mark Itin, one of the Weskers, approaches Garth and asks for help, Garth agrees to answer any question and is inquired as to the existence of a God (Harrison). As beings are introduced to organized religion or other concepts that they do not fully understand and that the physical, logical proof simply does not exist to substantiate them, a general curiosity develops and they turn to trusted advisors for assistance as Harrison demonstrates.

The answer to Itin's question was that there is no God (Harrison). As Brahm points out, "conflict can arise over whose interpretation is the correct one, a conflict that ultimately cannot

be solved because there is no arbiter” (Brahm). Naturally, as analytical minded creatures when two sources are in conflict with each other you compare the two and attempt to logically determine which truth, as there is only be one truth. The Weskers again called upon Garth and asked him to join them and Mark at the church which they had built under Mark’s supervision. With both sources present together the Weskers began asking more questions of Mark. Ultimately Mark’s answer to their questions was, “I know you have your doubts because you have souls and free will. Still the answer is simple. Have faith, that is all you need. Just believe” to which the response was, “how can we believe without proof” (Harrison).

In the absence of proof from one source beings turn to the other for proof. Harrison demonstrates this immediately after the Weskers questioning of Mark as they turn to Garth to ask him the same questions. Garth’s response is to, “use the scientific method which can examine all things – including itself – and give you answers that can prove the truth” (Harrison). In a quest for truth specifically in a quest for religious truth the ethics seem to get lost so easily, consumed as a means to an end, which end is obtaining the truth. Harrison illustrates this loss of innocence near the end of his work as the Weskers ask God for a miracle, and only a specific miracle would do. Garth catches on only too late and the Weskers capture Mark, restrain him to a cross and crucify him as Christ was crucified, expecting him to be resurrected in three days’ time (Harrison).

The gravity of the situation may not be readily apparent to all those who participated in the event but the loss is discovered by some and their grief is real. Garth had struck a Wesker in the struggle to save Mark and that Wesker died from their wounds. Itin returned to Garth to warn him that while they received no proof that God exists the Weskers were discussing the eye for an eye law and he feared that they would come to kill Garth (Harrison). This demonstration

of conscious from Itin proves what really matters is not what religion you belong to but rather the good, love one another, type mentality and actions. As Pataki wrote, “It is...worth recalling that atheism is not the same as hatred of religion” (Pataki). Further demonstrating the damage that organized religion brought to the Weskers Harrison uses an exchange between Itin and Garth in which Itin asks Garth if Mark will rise to which Garth responds that we will not and Itin makes the connection that they will not be saved or made pure and Garth tells Itin, “You were pure. That’s the horrible ugly dirty part of it. You were pure. Now you are-“ Itin finishes his statement by saying, “Murderers” (Harrison).

## Works Cited

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