

Inside **OUT**

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A World Premiere

Jesus **HATES ME**

By Wayne Lemon
Directed by David McClendon
Jan 12 - Mar 11
Ricketson Theatre

Illustration by Scott McKowen

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Synopsis

“ETHAN: She (Annie) prays.
She believes.
She built this, this shrine to you.
And in return you abandon her,
leave her to destroy herself.
Where are you anyway?
Two thousand years,
longest disappearing act in history.”
Jesus Hates Me

Ethan is addressing a Jesus mannequin hanging from a cross at the Blood of the Lamb Miniature Golf Course. Annie, his mother, has taken mannequins from WalMart and recreated various tableaux from the New Testament at each of the holes. Ethan and his friends, Trane, Lizzy, Boone and Georgie are stuck in a dead-end rural Texas town and can't seem to escape. Encumbered by either responsibility, ownership, disability, ignorance or too much booze and weed, they lack the motivation to move on and fear what will happen if they do. In this hilarious, irreverent dark comedy, the characters are in an existentialist crisis—examining their lives, the universe, and God—and finding all of it baffling, if not meaningless.

“What is it: is man only a blunder of God, or God only a blunder of man?”

*Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900).
The Twilight of the Idols*

THE OMNIPRESENT ONE

Christian Attractions Across the USA

Besides the Blood of the Lamb Miniature Golf Course, our nation is blessed with intricate shrines and giant crosses. God is everywhere and in these places, He is definitely a Christian.

For beginners, the Bald Knob Cross in Alto Pass, Illinois can be seen in the three adjoining states when lit at night. The cross is 111 feet tall, with arms extending 63 feet; it was paid for entirely with donations. In the welcome center one can buy a copy of PIGS! A Story of Faith about a woman who sold a miraculous number of pigs to raise money for its construction.

Christ of the Ozarks stands along a ridge near the Great Passion Play amphitheatre, New Holy Land and the Christ Only Art Gallery in Eureka Springs, Arkansas. The statue is probably the world's tallest Uncrucified Christ, standing seven stories and weighing a million pounds. At night, attendees of the four-hour-long Passion Play can walk off leg cramps around the eerie, illuminated Messiah. The largest crucifix in the world is in St. Thomas Church in Bardstown, Kentucky. Built in 1986, it is 60 feet high and "welded of stainless steel rods, garment of wire-cloth, hair of copper." ¹

The Ave Maria Grotto in Cullman, Alabama—featuring Jerusalem in miniature—was constructed by a Benedictine monk, Brother Joseph Zoettl. The grotto itself is a natural rock and shell alcove filled with 125 miniatures in a three-acre Bible-themed fair-land. The Grotto of the Redemption in West Bend, Iowa is a titanic landmark to the power of one young seminarian's devotion. Father Paul Doberstein fell gravely ill and promised to build a shrine to the Virgin Mary if she interceded on his behalf. The young priest recovered. Father Paul began his payback in 1912 and continued building until his death

in 1954. The story of Redemption through Christ covers nine grottoes and is accompanied by organ and church bell music. Every colorful mineral and crystal possible has been incorporated into the structure. Today the site is attended by an aging Father Greving, who admits it is difficult giving hour-long walking tours to visitors.

Holy Land USA in Bedford, Virginia occupies the 400-acre farm of Bob Johnson, a retired supermarket owner. Scattered across the property are numerous chronologically placed biblical scenes, from manger to empty tomb. The "Joseph/Jesus Work-shop" is the gift shop where visitors can buy a crown of thorns or cut nails "similar to the ones used to crucify our Lord." ²

In 1908, Dr. John Espey, leaving the hospital, saw a shimmering light on a hillside overlooking Trinidad, Colorado; he followed it and found a 250 pound statue of the Virgin Mary with a lit candle at its base. The locals hailed it as a divine sign and began building the Ave Maria Shrine around the statue which was completed in 1961. Unfortunately, the statue was destroyed by vandals in 1962. More misfortunes occurred. Now the restored statue rests in a floor-to-ceiling metal grate. But the most ironic fact of all is the hospital Dr. Espey was leaving that night, St. Vincent's of Trinidad, has become America's leading sex change center.

Tulsa, Oklahoma boasts the Oral Roberts Prayer Tower, a 20th-century cross with a

Continued on next page

stylized crown of thorns and a spectacular view of Oral Roberts University. One extravagant presentation, “The Journey Through Faith,” recreates the life of Oral Roberts. The “Journey through the Bible” presentation has its own building and represents the first nine chapters of Genesis with darkened rooms that have embedded optic fibers in the walls that blaze “Let There Be Light”; moans and screams in the harrowing hallway known as “The Way of Sin,” and finally the swaying deck of Noah’s Ark.

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The pièce de résistance is the Holy Land Experience, a Bible-based theme park in Orlando, Florida. The \$16 million living Bible history museum, more than ten years in the planning, opened on February 5, 2001. Located on fifteen acres five miles southwest of Orlando, the Holy Land Experience is a multi-sensory experience that transports attendees 7000 miles away and 3000 years back in time to the ancient city of Jerusalem, recreating in elaborate detail the city and its religious importance between the years 1450 BC and AD 66. One can visit the Scriptorium, a center for biblical antiquities and artifacts, scrolls and manuscripts written in ancient cuneiform. Elsewhere is a recreation of

Herod’s Temple and an exact replica of the Garden Tomb where Jesus was buried.

There is a musical version of the Crucifixion and the Jerusalem Street Market is staffed by vendors in costume. As the Holy Land Experience website reads:

“It is our sincere hope—that you will be encouraged in your search for enduring truth and the ultimate meaning of life. The Holy Land Experience is a Bible-believing, Christ-centered ministry.”³

<http://www.theholylandexperience.com/home.html>

Wilkins, Mike; Smith, Ken, and Kirby, Doug. *The New Roadside America*. NY: A Fireside Book, 1992.

1. Wilkins, Smith, Kirby, p. 200.
2. Wilkins, Smith, Kirby, p. 213.
3. Holy Land Experience website.

High School Football IN WEST TEXAS

“ETHAN: Dude, I’m twenty years old. Knee’s f---
----- Can’t afford to go back to college. All I’m
qualified to do is play high school football.-----”

Jesus Hates Me

Ethan’s dreams of playing college football, maintaining his athletic scholarship and all the promises that go with it are pretty much destroyed when he injures his knee in a game. In Texas, high school football is a religion. Especially in small towns, this is the real deal for many people; there is genuine drama attached to the game that many players and onlookers never forget.

In his book *Friday Night Lights*, H.G. Bissinger examines the phenomenon of high school football in Texas by focusing on one team in one town. The team is the 1988 Permian Panthers in the economically depressed town of Odessa. Bissinger not only observed the enormous effect of sports on American life, but also the values of small town USA and their views on race, politics, education and the economy.

In interviews with players, coaches and townspeople, the author reveals some surprising insights on the game and life. For example, one player, Jerrod McDougal describes his feelings in the game. “It’s like the gladiators. It’s like the Christians and the lions, like Caesar standing up there and saying yay or nay. There’s 19,000 fans in the stands and they can’t do what you’re doing and they’re all cheering for one thing; they’re cheering for you.”¹ His sentiments are not echoed by his teammate, Brian Chavez. For Brian, playing football was not his *raison d’être*. He played the game because he liked it, and at 215 pounds, he found a special thrill in hitting his opponent, in the “physical violence that made him tingle and feel wonderful.”² Besides, he was not interested in an athletic scholarship to a Texas college; he had set his sights on Harvard.

As for the town, Bob Rutherford, a realtor, spoke for thousands when he said: “Life really wouldn’t be worth livin’ if you didn’t have a high school football team to support.”³ When H. Ross Perot, billionaire businessman and later an independent candidate for US president, was interviewed on ABC’s *Nightline* in 1983, he criticized the town of Odessa for building

a \$5.6 million high school football stadium instead of focusing the resources on educational reform. His remarks created an outrage. Brad Allen, president of the Permian Booster Club, was the first to respond. Telling Perot to mind his own business and not make West Texas look like a bunch of hicks, Allen defended his town. “It’s our money. If we choose to put it into a football program and the graduates from our high schools are at or above the state level of standards, then leave us alone.” Allen continued: “There are so few other things we can look at with pride. When somebody talks about West Texas, they talk about football. You take it away and it’s almost like you strip the identity of the people.”⁴

The story of the 1988 Permian Panthers ends in disappointment; they are defeated in the semi-finals by the Carter Cowboys of Dallas who go on to win the state championship. In the locker room, after the defeat, teenage boys were in tears, their belief in themselves punctured. But Coach Gary Grimes gathers the team together and leads them in prayer. “Heavenly Father, it hurts so much because we did so many things good and came up short. We pray that you would help each one of us to overcome this setback, that you lessen the hurt, that you give all of us strength and comfort that only you can give us.”⁵

Perhaps the words of an Odessa father of high school boys best expresses the allure of sports and the danger of adults living vicariously through the young. “Athletics lasts for such a short period of time. But while it lasts, it creates this make-believe world where normal rules don’t apply. We build this false atmosphere. When it’s over and the harsh reality sets in, that’s the real joke we play on people.”⁶

Bissinger, H.G. *Friday Night Lights*. Cambridge, MA: DaCapo Press, 1990.

<http://houston.about.com/cs/sports/>

1. Bissinger, p. xxiv.
2. Bissinger, p. xxx.
3. Bissinger, p. xxxviii.
4. Bissinger, p. 24.
5. Bissinger, p. 324.
6. Bissinger, p. xvi.

MINIATURE *GOLF*

“An informal version of golf played on a series of short obstacle courses.”
Concise Oxford English Dictionary.

Even though minigolf in its present form has been around nearly fifty years, its popularity has never been properly acknowledged. Estimates show that there are 40,000 organized minigolfers worldwide and more than fifteen million people play the game annually. In the United States professional players play in tournaments where the prize money is often in excess of \$100,000; the sports channel ESPN often includes the bigger tournaments in their coverage. Sometimes called “Crazy Golf,” “Minigolf” or “Adventure Golf,” miniature golf is the generic American term to describe all variants.

True golf, as we know it, requires money for clubs, admission to golf courses or club dues and considerable time to play 18 holes. To replace the traditional game with a much smaller venue and embellish it with highly imaginative obstacles gave the game a real entertainment value for those without much time and money.

Credit for miniaturizing the game goes to James Barber of Pinehurst, North Carolina who, with the help of an amateur architect, Edward Wiswell, designed a miniature golf course on the grounds of Barber’s estate in 1916. In 1926, innkeepers Garnet and Frieda Carter constructed the Fairyland Golf Course at their resort on Lookout Mountain, Tennessee. They created the hazards and obstacles and ornamented them with elves, gnomes and other fairytale figures.

Credit for miniaturizing the game goes to James Barber of Pinehurst, North Carolina who, with the help of an amateur architect, Edward Wiswell, designed a miniature golf course on the grounds of Barber’s estate in 1916. In 1926, innkeepers Garnet and Frieda Carter constructed the Fairyland Golf Course at their resort on Lookout Mountain, Tennessee. They created the hazards and obstacles and ornamented them with elves, gnomes and other fairytale figures.

The Depression years dampened the interest in miniature golf. But the post-war baby boom of the 1950s and the sprawl of suburbia ignited a renewed interest. Miniature golf was now recognized as wholesome fun for the entire family. Growth continued through the 1960s when the booming business of miniature golf attracted the attention of professional golfer, Arnold Palmer. By 1964 there were 125 Arnold Palmer miniature golf franchises all over America and by 1965, one in England.

In the long term it is the goal of the World Minigolfsport Federation to have miniature golf included as an Olympic sport. Its goal was the 2008 games in Beijing, but mini-golf must wait at least seven years to even be considered for participation. Therefore, unless there is a massive surge in popularity, we probably will not see miniature golf in the summer Olympics until at least 2016 or 2020, if ever.

Gough, David; Foster, David; Gallen, Alan; Burke, Darren and Devlin, Barry.
Minigolf: from Summer Holidays to the Summer Olympics?
<http://www.miniaturegolfer.com/>

Annie, Mannequins from Wal-Mart and *Christianity*

“ANNIE: —Do what He did.
Fill yourself with forgiveness and love.”
Jesus Hates Me

Annie believes in Jesus so much that she constructs a shrine to him in the form of the Blood of the Lamb miniature golf course. She finds solace in the biblical figures and seems to be the poster child for Jesus’ words on the cross: “Love one another.” (John 13: 34.)

But is she a conservative Christian? She disdains cousin Bobby’s homosexuality but that is her only strong condemnation. Fundamentalist Christians, or as Bruce Bawer prefers to call them, “legalistic Christians,” are distorting religion, he writes. In his book, *Stealing Jesus*, Bawer says legalistic Christians cling to certain laws and practices that they believe are necessary to be really religious. For example, legalistic Christians “See truth as something established in the Bible and known for sure by true Christians.”¹ Fundamentalist religious zealots exist in every country, but here in America they have taken a firm root, maybe because of our Puritan heritage. In addition, Bawer believes, they reflect a distrust of the mind and reason and avoid the obligation to think, or, at least, think for oneself. These conservative Christians are prominent because they offer a safe, security blanket for lost souls who are looking for a new direction and meaning in life and can’t find it through secular means.

In the book *Extreme Answers to Extreme*

Questions, the authors contend the “answers” are based on the solid Word of God. Thus, they believe the Bible has every answer we need to live our lives. From Aliens to Worry (in alphabetical order), these authors have solutions for the weightiest problems of the world. For example, when the question is: “Is it wrong for TV preachers to get millions of dollars for what they do?” *Extreme Answers* says it all depends what the preacher is doing with the money. “The Bible says that it’s OK for a minister to be supported financially by his ministry. It also says that leaders will be judged for what they’ve done with their leadership.”² But who will judge? The people who send in their dollars for Christ’s blessing? The book doesn’t say. On the next page is the question: “Money: where is it going to come from?” The Extreme Answer is: “He’s (God) so concerned that He will even give you strength to make a living. He wants to give you creative ideas that will cause you to turn the corner financially.”³ This is a comforting response, but it does not take into account the importance of education, individual talents or abilities, and the economic state of the nation, just to name a few. If *Extreme Answers* has the answer, it hasn’t given it to Ethan.

Annie, in her desire to make the golf course a biblical shrine, finds her materials at that ubiquitous feature in small town America, Wal-Mart. She searches for character and expression in the mannequins she salvages from the dumpster outside of Wal-Mart. Her unusual roadside shrine has brought her com-

Continued on next page

fort since Ethan's dad died. As her son contemplates leaving her and this small town, she grows more desperate—leading her back to Wal-Mart—this time engaging in inappropriate and even illegal behavior.

Her behavior at WalMart underscores her conflicting feelings toward her son. She professes to love Ethan, but is so needy (or is it manipulative) that he cannot leave her. From her hospital bed, Annie confesses to her son that she had considered an abortion, but instead had a vision of the two of them together, “self-contained, just me and my son.”⁶

Armstrong, Karen. *The Battle for God*. NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000.

Bawer, Bruce. *Stealing Jesus*. NY: Crown Publishers, 1997.

Geiser, Katie E.; Drygas, Paige; Hudson, Christopher D.; Taylor, Ashley; Smith, Carol; Watson, C. J. and Washington, Linda. *Extreme Answers to Extreme Questions*. Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2001.

Lemon, Wayne. *Jesus Hates Me*.

Ribeiro, Silvia. *The Costs of WalMartization of America*. <http://www.rense.com/general>

1. Bawer, p. 7.
2. Geiser et al, p. 176.
3. Geiser et al, p. 177.
4. Ribeiro, p. 1.
5. Ribeiro, p. 4.
6. Lemon, p. 91

ETHAN

and existentialism

“Doubt grows with knowledge.”

—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe
(1749-1832). *Proverbs in Prose.*

“We are what we make of ourselves.”
Faith means not wanting to know what is true.”

—John Paul Sartre (1905-1980)

“Do not wait for the last judgment.
It takes place every day.”

—Freidrich Nietzsche (1844-1900)

Ethan and Lizzy are having “god issues” and find themselves in a state of doubt and mired in an existentialist crisis.

Existentialists stress the fact that every human being is only a limited creature who must face important and difficult decisions with limited knowledge and time in which to decide. This predicament lies at the heart of the human condition. Human life is basically making a series of decisions with no knowledge or certainty of what the outcome will be. There are no objective standards or rules to which an individual can turn for answers to the problem of choice, for different sources supply conflicting advice. Thus, all human choice is subjective. Because humans make our own choices, we are free, but because we freely choose, we are completely responsible for our decisions.

Existentialist philosophers argue that religious belief is not a problem involving proof or disproof, but a decision, like all others that must be made separately by each individual in the absence of conclusive evidence.

While Yossarian and Ethan have doubts about God, our playwright has existentialist musings. In his article called “Jesus Hates Me, and Other Lessons Inspired by Mel Gibson’s *The Passion*,” Wayne Lemon writes: “I envy my father and Mel their absolutes. Life would be much less complicated if right and wrong were so clearly delineated. I used to see what I thought was the hand of God at work in my life, but now when I look for signs of God’s mercy, of His favor, I come up blank.”⁴

Notes

on the Playwright

Wayne Lemon is the son of a Southern Baptist minister. As a boy, he was expected to go to Sunday school, morning worship, training union, evening worship, Wednesday prayer service and all things churchly. He learned quickly that church always took precedence with his parents; they missed his high school basketball games because they were intent on saving souls.

When the family moved to West Texas, Wayne began his liberation. He got a job at the local radio station and asked for the Sunday shift so he wouldn't have to attend church. After high school he attended Baylor University, a Baptist college. After publishing pictures of strippers in the campus underground newspaper, he was kicked out of Baylor and transferred to the University of Texas in Austin where he majored in film and screenwriting.

Los Angeles beckoned and Wayne wound up at the Writers' Computer Store where he met Norman Lear, the famed TV director/producer of such shows as "All In The Family" "Maude," and "The Jeffersons." Lear introduced him to several agents, but nothing happened. Then he attended an American Film Institute seminar where he met Hugh Wilson, the writer of "Frank's Place" and "WKRP in Cincinnati," two acclaimed TV series. The meeting led to Wayne being hired as a staff writer for Wilson's new show, "The Famous Teddy Z."

After the demise of "Teddy," he wrote for "Sunday Dinner," "The Torkelsons" and "Grace Under Fire." Disenchanted with writing sitcoms, Wayne decided to learn playwright-

ing. He read plays, how-to-books and went to New York to see theatre. He then wrote a 67-page draft and, with the encouragement from friends who read it, continued until he had a 101-page play. Wayne sent the play to the Southern Writers' Project at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival, then headed by Artistic Director, Kent Thompson. It was workshopped and read in February of 2005; that led to further reading at Hartford Stage and The Steppenwolf Theatre. This revised version is receiving its world premier in Denver.

