THE GLASS

NUMBER 15 SPRING 2003

Published by the Christian Literary Studies Group, a Professional Group in association with the Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship. Editorial and subscriptions: *The Glass,* 10 Dene Road, Northwood, Middlesex HA6 2AA

ISSN 0269-770X

CLSG
www.clsg.org
editor@clsg.org

Editorial

The debate, not only political but moral and literary, about evil continues as a motif in our discussions. Sometimes the identification of evil may be preliminary to counter attack. Jesus identified and named his antagonists, though his strategy against them can still surprise.

In his article Dr Jonathan Roberts argues boldly that Isaiah, Paul and William Blake are in the same tradition, and that they partake of the same spirit. There's no question here that Blake tried to hijack Biblical concepts for the purposes of his own discourse, and his vision offers an alternative to post-Enlightenment empiricism.

Blake's ideas provide a lead-in to the subject of heresy, which in one or two of its literary aspects will be the subject of our conference next autumn. If the Greek root of the word means option, the question arises of whether and when it becomes necessary to close options off. Should we try, and for how long might we be able, to keep all of them open? Offers to give papers would be most welcome – see also 'News and Notes' on page 40.

Roger Kojecký
editor@clsg.org

In Contest with Satan: Reading the ur-Gospel

Roger Kojecký

On a simple view, biographers assemble the facts about their subject's doings and present them in a suitable order. The biographical narrative may dramatise a conflict, illustrate a trajectory, body forth a moral idea, or in other ways tell a story. The gospels stand close to the phenomena concerning Jesus, and document their authors' findings in relation to events with which contemporaries were still coming to terms. But communicated to audiences ancient and modern, the findings of the Evangelists and the apostles become a transformative message, the Gospel.

The authors of the gospels do not claim to produce *ex nihilo* their understanding of the events. One of their principal aims is to demonstrate Jesus' continuity with Jewish tradition. The Holy Spirit leads their discovery, reveals how what is already given in the Law and the Prophets prefigures Jesus, and helps interpret what he did and said. Furthermore Jesus is his own explicator, and his message is set out at the beginning as News concerning his advent. 'The time has come, the Kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!'

Much is encapsulated in that summary allusion to the Kingdom: there's a required audience response, and fulfilment is not just imminent but actual. The imperative to repent picks up warnings issued in the recent past by John the Baptist, as well as harking back to Isaiah. Like John, Jesus invoked an impending Judgement, though he did so with qualifications. His public ministry began when he lived for a time in Capernaum, where he adapted John's message, bringing it from the desert to the town and synagogue. Powerful healings and exorcisms reinforced his preaching, and he assembled a group of disciples to accompany him from one synagogue to another in Galilee. Crowds, whose commitment was more ephemeral, augmented the disciples, and when the rising numbers burst the confines of synagogue and of town, Jesus' preaching, accompanied by miracles, removed again to the open country. Some time later events reached a fateful conclusion in Jerusalem. But two of the Evangelists, Matthew and Luke, present the Temptation like a kind of viewfinder before these developments, framing them with a controlling perspective. (Mark makes a slighter reference to the Temptation in just two verses.)

When Jesus went into the desert after his 'special case' baptism by John, any intention he may have had to seek prayerful communion with the Father was displaced, or overlaid, by an intent which was not, as it were, his own. 'Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil,' Matthew declares (4:1, c.f. Luke 4:1-2). Gospel readers have thrust on them the threat that confronted the hero: his position as God's beloved Son was recently announced, but had still to be realised, or in the expression favoured by the writer of Hebrews, made perfect. Held over at this early stage of the Gospel's formulation, is the term Messiah, which would be given special notice in relation to Peter. The question for the moment was how would Jesus deal with the alternatives before him, and with adversarial powers?

So the Temptation narrative looks forward to the events that constitute Jesus

as Son. The miracles and teaching will create a pattern of conflict, the whole directed towards an objective, undertaken by and for God, against the hostile power of evil. Each temptation subsumes a significant aspect of the biographical history that is to follow, and each addresses one of three major questions.

The Embodiment of Evil

How, though, is the adversary figured? We have no difficulty with Jesus. Coordinates of the kind found in biographies are there: a geographical location, placing in Romano-Jewish history, and information about his family with its highly significant ancestry. *Prima facie* at least, he is a man as other men. The devil however is not so straightforward. The grammar attributes a conventional masculinity, suggesting, with the feature of speech, personality, and the narrative calls him also the tempter. He is an agent who suggests initiatives and proposes acts which the reader can sense to be of cosmic significance; but it is not stated that he has a human body, nor implied that he is a man. He conducts Jesus to the highest point of the Jerusalem Temple, and to a high mountain, and all the while Jesus is in the Transjordanian desert, which suggests that he functions in a non-literal, mental sphere, that of imagination and spirit.

The clue in the epithet 'tempter' leads back to Eden and to Job.[1] In Genesis 3 the primal man and woman are tempted, 'deceived' is the word used, by the wiliest of beasts, a serpent. Nothing in Genesis suggests that the tempting was done by another human figure, or even by an angelic spirit taking human form; but the Fall narrative makes it explicit that permanent damage is done to the status of mankind in relation to the Creator, and in relation to the rest of creation, and that a malign agent made the decision thinkable. The responsibility though, has to be borne by Adam and Eve who themselves made, consciously enough, their fateful choice.

The Satan in *Job* appears in the introductory scene in heaven at the same time as angels or sons of God before the divine throne. He is not accorded the status of the familiar angels, having his own dialectical function, which is to actuate the debate which makes up the Book of Job. Now, the fullness and the symmetry of Job's initial position of prosperity suggest that he is put forward as a hypothetical figure. In terms of family, property, reputation and religion Job fulfils norms, and is a test case. *Job,* setting out his peripeteia, dramatising it with different voices, sounding its depths of desolation, provides a way to consider the hardest of questions for religious faith: what when there's nothing in experience to justify it? The name Satan denotes adversary and accuser, but Job is tested as by some trial or torturous interrogation of his virtue. In this sense, his Satan is a tempter. Inasmuch as Job is vindicated in the end, he is vindicated in his own right, for although he represents a hypothesis, there's no promise of salvation for others in his dénouement.

With Jesus, the Good News is for others, and his success against evil gives them a break which, the human condition being what it is, would not otherwise be available. The ur-Gospel we are looking at presupposes rather than explains this. Its pivot *sine qua non* is Jesus' identity as Son of God. The Temptation at once presupposes and establishes his supernatural ability to take on Satan. The condensed narrative dramatises the combat over three stages and shows Jesus as a champion who is powerfully armed with an authoritative alternative to what the devil suggests. When the devil proffers, credibly or not, the kingdoms of the world, the inference must be that the values Jesus invokes are those of the Kingdom of heaven. Later Jesus would teach that he was to undergo death to

provide a ransom for many/others.[2]

The three engagements

When it is suggested that bread be miraculously made from desert stones, the reader with recollection of what comes afterwards will connect the Temptation with an event like the feeding of the five thousand. Jesus did these things, so the focus is perhaps on the manner or motive. Not stones, but the bread of disciples and followers were proper to metamorphose; or for others, perhaps, and not for private benefit. Does the devil's suggestion imply a deserted setting, or is the crowd that would attend the signs and miracles to be inferred? Is this about miracle as a potentially high impact medium of publicity, about occasions when miracles are not what God requires and so serving the devil's cause?

'Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"' What seems initially to be a straight no, must, in the light of the miracles he did later, be a qualification. Miracles yes, but not in these circumstances. Miracles not to wow an audience, but to support the message of his teaching. More important, Jesus takes the discourse to a different plane when he refers to the value of the word that issues from the mouth of God. Mankind hardly needs to be persuaded of the importance of food, but does have to learn from God, and from those he sends with his word. 'Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.'[3] People are to be taught what the life of the Kingdom is, and how they can be sustained in it. Often they need to be jogged away from mundane preoccupations. In the right circumstances miracles may do the trick.

'If you are the Son of God,' suggests the devil envisaging Jesus at the highest point on the Jerusalem Temple, 'throw yourself down.' 'Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!' is the mockery of passers-by at the moment of crucifixion. Both of these would be events with high impact, and necessarily public. Behind them is a trope of triumphant escape. Supernatural help would be required, a vindication of privilege, status and authority. Daniel had had it in the lions' den, and something of the sort happened to his friends Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.[4] Jesus did of course effect a triumphant escape from the grave, but this was after draining to the dregs the cup of wrath that went before. Moreover in the Gospel the resurrection is an event in which Jesus' role is passive, he was raised by the action of the Holy Spirit[5] rather than contriving some kind of Houdini effect on his own.

The second temptation (third in Luke) makes a further contribution to the flesh-spirit dialectic already signalled in the introduction (he was 'led by the Spirit') and developed in the first temptation: spirit and life have been conjoined, and the Kingdom of God has primacy over the claims of the world and flesh. Now the temptation is to call angels to the rescue, that is, to use the resources of heaven to prop up or save events on earth. But heaven is God's throne, earth his footstool. Interventions, miracles, are at his discretion and his initiative. To invert the order of priority is wrong, to call for such help is to 'tempt' God, trying to skew his way of working. Peter's understandable remonstrance at Jesus' prediction of his humiliating arrest, trial and death, was met with the brusque 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.' Even if the experience and the result promise failure, as with Job, as with the cross, the course set by God is the one that is to be followed. It is a principle for the life of the disciple, as it is a cardinal point for

understanding and proclaiming the Gospel.

As the reward for his worship, the devil offers Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. Marlowe's Faustus in a deal with the devil received supernatural powers, though only for a set term, and at the price of his perdition. In the Judgement revealed in Revelation 14:11, written when the Roman emperor[6] was demanding the worship of his subjects, 'There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image.' To worship is, among other things, to own the implications of one's subordination. In his reply, quoting Deuteronomy 6:13, Jesus makes an emphasis he will reinforce in parable: 'serve him only'. A slave cannot work for two masters at the same time, especially if the masters are enemies. The demands made by God exclude the blandishments of the world, the flesh and the devil. If it seems to us unlikely that the Son of God would consider for a moment worshipping the devil,[7] we should recall the deceptiveness of the power at work in the world and in the human heart. Here, and in the whole of this Temptation drama he recounts, Jesus lifts a curtain. Behind specious appearance is the reality of spiritual combat *à l'outrance*. Appearing in the arena of the created world, the Son engages not with issues and problems on their own, but with the power behind them that is not God – the power Paul would characterise as the ruler of the kingdom of the air.[8] To act outside the known will of God, or to do the right deed for the wrong reason, becomes an act of homage to the adversary.

Milton's Christ in *Paradise Regained* is victorious in this encounter, though not yet conclusively. After the temptations an angelic chorus warns Satan and salutes Christ:

> … like an autumnal star,
> Or lightning, thou shalt fall from Heaven, trod down….
> Hereafter learn with awe
> To dread the Son of God: he, all unarmed,
> Shall chase thee, with the terror of his voice,
> From thy demoniac holds….
> Hail Son of the Most High, heir of both worlds,
> Queller of Satan! On thy glorious work
> Now enter, and begin to save mankind.[9]

John makes the point about the war between two spiritual kingdoms when he writes in a letter that 'he who does what is sinful is of the devil.' No doubt remembering what Jesus said recounting his Temptation, John adds that 'the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.'[10] That cosmic reversal, all but restoring Eden, provided a signifying framework, a Gospel, for the events of Jesus' life. Jesus invokes it in John's gospel (where routine exorcisms are not mentioned), saying as he approached the final struggle at Golgotha, 'now the prince of this world will be driven out.'[11] Luke refers to a moment of conclusive triumph glimpsed by Jesus at the time of the Mission of the Seventy-two. The apostles had seen astonishing healings and exorcisms achieved on the authority of Jesus' name, but he had seen 'Satan fall like lightning from heaven.'[12] Luke describes Jesus as exulting in the victory, seeing the greater in the lesser, the certainty of the conclusion from the early success. Galileans had been liberated from the power of the devil, but potentially the world itself was exorcised when the Son of God drove out its evil prince.

[1] In Rev 20:2 four titles, dragon, serpent, the devil and Satan, are collated.

[2] Mat 20:28.

[3] Jn 3:6.

[4] *Aka* Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, Dan 3, 6, 9.

[5] Rom 8:11.

[6] Domitian, emperor AD 81-96.

[7] Ben Witherington suggests that the devil was 'offering [Jesus] a shortcut to how the prophecy of Dan 7 could be fulfilled for him' as Son of Man, *Jesus the Seer: The Progress of Prophecy*, Massachusetts, Hendrickson, 1999, p. 280.

[8] Eph 2:2.

[9] iv, 619-635.

[10] 1 John 3:8.

[11] Jn 12:31.

[12] Lk 10:18. In the antagonistic exchanges about Beelzebul, Jesus may be suggesting that he has already overcome the strong man (Mat 12:25-30, see also N T Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, Minneapolis, Fortress, 1996, pp. 457f.).

St Paul's Gifts to Blake's Aesthetic: 'O Human Imagination, O Divine Body'

Jonathan Roberts

A Poet, a Painter, a Musician, an Architect: the Man or Woman who is not one of these is not a Christian.

Prayer is the Study of Art. Praise is the Practise of Art.

Jesus & his Apostles & Disciples were all Artists.

The Old & New Testaments are the Great Code of Art.

These axioms come from Blake's late work *The Laocoön* (circa 1826), a single sheet engraving of the statue of the Trojan priest and his two sons being crushed by sea serpents. Blake interprets this Greek masterpiece in Hebraic terms (Laocoön as 'King Jehovah', his sons as Adam and Satan), and constellates his aphoristic proclamations around these engraved figures. Besides the illustration itself there is no framing narrative, no Blakean 'Voice of the Devil'; these axioms offer perhaps the most concise statement of Blake's theology to be found in his later writings.

Yet the very notion of a Blakean 'theology' is contentious for some readers, not least because of the association of the term with the methodology, order, and taxonomical rigour of the seminary or university. Clearly Blake cannot be accommodated here. It was T S Eliot who pointed out the 'crankiness' and 'eccentricity' of his work, arguing that 'what his genius required, and what it sadly lacked, was a framework of accepted and traditional ideas which would have prevented him from indulging in a philosophy of his own.' [1]

Eliot dismisses Blake's 'philosophy' (which he likens to 'an ingenious piece of home-made furniture') because it is not part of a recognizable tradition. But in doing so, he forgets that the Blakean artist-prophet is engaged in a perennial struggle with the enslaving tyranny of institutionalized knowledge. To embody this struggle in a static derivative form would have been to undermine the very political and prophetic commitments that Blake's art advances. His theology is fascinating precisely because it so thoroughgoing, because it carries the strength of its ideological convictions fully into their formal representation. To overlook Blake's theology on account of its heretical form (for instance, by placing him outside the remit of theology by classifying him as an 'artist') is to miss out on the thinker whom Ulrich Simon, in *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, matter-of-factly describes as 'probably *the* most original interpreter of the Bible' (92).[2] Bar none.

The ground where Christianity and literature meet – the territory that this journal exists to explore – is a place where the measured ideas of theology are incarnated as unquantifiable dynamic objects of art. The critical difficulty is to encounter these living theological forms without, as Blake puts it, 'attempting to realize or abstract the mental deities from their objects',[3] that is, without trying to extract an immortal theological soul from a dispensable aesthetic body. In exploring this middle ground I will argue not only that Blake's theology is essentially aesthetic (that is, complex, self-aware, & irreducible in form), but that

ה & his two Sons Satan & Adam as they were copied from the Cherubim of Solomons Temple by three Rhodians & applied to Natural Fact or History of Ilium

his aesthetic (the set of principles guiding his artistic production) is essentially theological, internally coherent, and founded on a Biblical source that would satisfy even Eliot's requirements for orthodoxy and tradition: Paul's epistles to the Corinthians.

It is not possible to reproduce in criticism the readerly encounter with Blake's prophetic works. His theology, his vision of God, can only be encountered first-hand in an art that aims to engender rather than to describe religious experience. This paper stops short of developing an aesthetic model that can elucidate this experiential dimension of his work, but provides instead some prefatory notes to encountering the prophetic voice that declares in the *Laocoön* with complete sincerity that 'Jesus & his Apostles & Disciples were all Artists'.

The theological similarities between Blake and Paul might be more obvious were it not for the very different concepts of the church with which the two men are often associated. Paul's nurture and Blake's condemnation of the church might seem irreconcilable, but the conflict is largely superficial because the ground of both men's theologies is Christological, not ecclesiological. (In each case the ecclesiology is dependent on the Christology rather than vice versa.) Blake's resistance to the 'blackning church' of late eighteenth-century London is not an unregulated defiance of Paul, or of religious institutions per se, but an identification with Christ's radical response to the temple authorities.

In the climactic argument of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* the devil proposes that 'no virtue can exist without breaking [the] ten commandments; Jesus was all

virtue, and acted from impulse; not from rules.' (pl. 22). In the same work, Isaiah describes the moment of his own prophetic inspiration by saying 'I was then perswaded. & remain confirm'd; that the voice of honest indignation is the voice of God, I cared not for consequences but wrote' (pl. 12). This illuminated indifference to social norms, religious laws, or hegemonic powers is central to Blakean prophecy, which valorizes divinely-inspired subversion, not (as is sometimes thought) prescriptive antinomianism. Blake advances a gospel of liberation rooted in a Biblical prophetic tradition in which hegemonic powers and ideologies that have separated people from God are overturned by prophetic acts. As a result, the language of political liberation and that of religious liberation are inseparable in Blake's work. Examples are everywhere in his writing, but Orc's speech in *America: A Prophecy* provides an especially powerful instance:

> The morning comes, the night decays, the watchmen leave their stations;
> The grave is burst, the spices shed, the linen wrapped up;
> The bones of death, the cov'ring clay, the sinews shrunk & dry'd.
> Reviving shake, inspiring move, breathing! awakening!
> Spring like redeemed captives when their bonds & bars are burst;
>
> Let the slave grinding at the mill, run out into the field:
> Let him look up into the heavens & laugh in the bright air;
> Let the inchained soul shut up in darkness and in sighing,
> Whose face has never seen a smile in thirty weary years;
> Rise and look out, his chains are loose, his dungeon doors are open.
> And let his wife and children return from the opressors scourge;
> They look behind at every step & believe it is a dream.
> Singing. The Sun has left his blackness, & has found a fresher morning
> And the fair Moon rejoices in the clear & cloudless night;
> For Empire is no more, and now the Lion & Wolf shall cease.
> (*America*, pl. 6)

This fusion of emancipatory politics and religion has clear revolutionary potential. The truly radical nature of prophecy, however, lies not in the fact that it speaks on behalf of a people, but that it speaks *to* and provides a voice *for* that people. Prophecy emancipates individuals and communities by enabling them to reconceptualize their relationships with God, reprioritizing the Divine over the human institution, and thereby opening the way to the manifold forms of emancipation announced by Orc. Thus a central difference between prophetic liberation and conventional programmes of social, religious, or political reform is that prophecy finds and speaks out in its own voice, flatly refusing to employ the forms of discourse of the hegemony it opposes.[4] Prophecy utters the subversive language of God. From the perspective of convention, the consequent acts and proclamations of the prophet can look baffling, causing the ingenuous narrator of *The Marriage* to ask Isaiah 'what made him go naked and barefoot three years?', and Ezekiel 'why he eat dung, & lay so long on his right & left side?' Ezekiel answers 'the desire of raising other men into a perception of the infinite', that is (in the terms of *The Marriage*) the desire of re-establishing others' relationships with God. By transforming the cognition of its readership, prophetic writing does not call for change, it implements it. Moreover, its refusal to be accommodated by any prevailing discourse gives it a formal self-awareness which – at the very least in the great visions of Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Blake – make it utterly aesthetically compelling.

Blake and Paul

Blake developed his ideas about the nature of prophecy at a particularly significant time in the history of the British understanding of Hebrew literature. Throughout the seventeenth & eighteenth centuries there had been a disjunction between the position of supreme importance occupied by the Bible as a book, and its perceived diminutive stature (compared to classical literature) as a work of art. Writers who wished to place the Old Testament on a par with classical works lacked the aesthetic justification to do so because the organizational principles of Hebrew literature remained obscure.[5] The publication in 1753 of Bishop Robert Lowth's *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews* was consequently enormously important because Lowth rediscovered the principle of parallelism in Hebrew poetry, 'a flexible undulatory rhythm produced neither by syllabic quantity nor by accentuation, but by the antiphonal sense-pattern of the passage.'[6]

In the decades that followed, other writers extended Lowth's work through further analysis of the order and sense of Biblical verse and the grammar of vision, and this precipitated a transformation in the way that Biblical prophecy, vision, and revelation were read and understood. Ancient Hebrew literature was no longer something that had to be excused on the basis of a forgotten prosody, it became the model for a powerful new type of poetry. In *Biblical Tradition in Blake's Early Prophecies*, Leslie Tannenbaum describes how Biblical language was reconceived as describing 'the sudden invasion of the eternal upon the temporal, obliterating normal conventions', a feat that it achieved through 'synesthesia, rapidly shifting images, dramatic rather than pictorial personifications, and a symbolic economy that packs a wealth of significance into a single figure.'[7]

The rediscovered Bible offered the model for a new poetics of increased emotionalism, enthusiasm, and symbolism – common characteristics of the Romantic literature that was to displace the regular forms of neoclassical prosody. These developments also had an impact on the self-conception of a number of contemporary writers, as the recasting of the Hebrew Bible as a great work of literature allowed a retrospective identification of prophecy and poetry, and through this, of the roles of prophet and poet.

The conjunction of these roles was of great importance to Blake because his belief in the oneness of poetry and prophecy allowed him to make in full the identification of the Holy Spirit with the Muse that Milton had adumbrated in *Paradise Lost*. Once this identification was made, Blake could justifiably regard himself as part of an ancient prophetic tradition, meaning that the voice that had dictated 'swift winged words' to him as the narrator of *The Book of Urizen* (pl. 12) was the same that had spoken to Isaiah twenty-five centuries before. What separated Blake, as it did Paul, from the Hebrew prophets was his chronological relationship to the Incarnation. Whereas Isaiah's prophecy reaches into the future, tense with messianic expectation, the writings of Paul and Blake, coming after Christ, reach back into history by collapsing past and present and thereby enabling the Messiah to become an immediate, indwelling presence. As Paul writes, 'I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me' (Galatians 2:20).[8] Paul's transhistorical redeemer is recognizable not by a coherent spatial or temporal presence,[9] but by his form: a crucified, transfigured, but above all human body. Both Blake's and Paul's writings have at their centre this divine figure on whose body is predicated a fundamentally anthropocentric theology.

Paul delivers a sustained theological anatomy of Christ in 1 Corinthians in

which he identifies the body itself with the Christian community, and the members of that body with individual Christians: 'The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ.' (1 Cor 12:12). This dual emphasis on community and individuation allows Paul to discuss both the necessity of differences between individuals, and the necessity of their unity. Through his discussion of the Gifts of the Spirit, and of the necessity for Christians to exercise those Gifts as a means to creating solidarity in Christ, Paul develops a theology of redemption that depends not only upon individual participation in the Body of Christ, but also upon the mutual relationships of individuals within that body. The Gifts of the Spirit are individual talents, but the Spirit that gives those Gifts is the One that unifies, and the Gifts themselves are to be used for the benefit and unity of all, in Blake's words, for 'the Building up of Jerusalem' (*Jerusalem*, pl. 77).

Blake follows Paul closely in the development of his own theology, but extends the significance of the Apostle's anatomy of Christ by arguing for the synonymy of prophecy and poetry, of Spirit and muse, and of spiritual and artistic Gifts.[10] In the context of the identification of poetry with prophecy discussed above, this is a Biblically justifiable argument, and one that is central to Blake's aesthetic. Thus Blake asks rhetorically in *Descriptions of the Last Judgment* 'What are all the Gifts of the Spirit but Mental Gifts'? (*E*562), and in *Jerusalem* he describes 'Jesus the giver of every Mental Gift' (pl. 77). 'Mental' here might suggest 'intellectual' rather than artistic, but Blake presents Art as an essentially intellectual activity, and in his *Public Address* calls himself 'a Mental Prince' (*E*580). Art, he argues, is a means to presenting mental visions, and is not an end itself. He therefore heaps scorn upon those painters whom he considers to depict material, rather than mental, realities. He condemns Titian and Rubens whose 'unorganized Blots & Blurs […] are not Art nor can their Method ever express Ideas or Imaginations any more than Pope[']s Metaphysical jargon of Rhyming' (*Public Address*, *E*576).

Theology and Imagination

The most radical of Blake's extensions of Pauline theology is his identification of the 'Divine Body' with the 'Imagination'.[11] Even within the context of a literary culture that regarded the Imagination as a quasi-Divine faculty, Blake conferred on it a singularly exalted status. Wordsworth calls the Imagination a 'sacred power', but Blake goes much further that this by making it – like the Incarnate Christ – the liminal ground between the Human and the Divine. Even so, he remains entirely dependent on Paul for his topography of the Imagination, writing in *The Laocoön*, 'The Eternal Body of Man is the Imagination, that is, God himself, The Divine Body, Jesus: we are his members.'[12] Just as Paul posits the exercise of the Gifts of the Spirit as the means to participation in the Body of Christ, so Blake posits the exercise of poetic-prophetic Gifts as the means to participation in the Divine Body: 'Prayer is the Study of Art. Praise is the Practise of Art' (*Laocoön*).

By identifying the Imagination with the Divine Body, Blake inverts conventional notions of its location and agency:[13] in Blake's theology, the Imagination is not something that individuals utilize or possess, but something in which they may participate. It is not locked up inside individual beings, nor is it

simply the sublimated spirituality of a single person, it is constituted by the differentiation and interdependence of its members. As Paul writes, 'there should be no division in the body, but […] its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it' (1 Cor 12:25-6). The egalitarian politics implicit in this vision are continuous with the emancipatory nature of prophecy that was discussed earlier on: in the exercise of their prophetic gifts, prophets speak not for their own benefit, but for and as a part of their nation. Blake's vision is, for all its ostensible esotericism, communal. Jerusalem – the eschatological fulfilment of Blake's vision – is a city, not a hermitage, and Blake, like Paul, wishes to nurture a body of believers. His voice is that of the contemporary prophet leading his lost nation back to God: 'Rouze up O Young Men of the New Age! set your foreheads against the ignorant Hirelings! For we have Hirelings in the Camp, the Court, & the University: who would if they could, forever depress Mental & prolong Corporeal War' (*Milton*, *E*95).

Blake's radical extension of the meaning of Pauline theology and of the nature of prophecy is not whimsical. Its ramifications are worked out in detail throughout thirty-five years of artistic productivity, and their practical implications for Blake's aesthetic are especially clear in his discussion of the senses. Blake (following his Biblical predecessors) tends to discuss the visionary / prophetic in terms of the visual / sensory, representing mental concepts as material realities. In *The Marriage*, for example, he self-consciously adopts Emanuel Swedenborg's breezy way of recounting anecdotes about chatting with angels. As a result, biographers have often treated the accounts of Blake seeing God at the window and angels in trees in a literalistic way, as if he suffered from a sort of extra-sensory perception (that is, presumably, psychosis). The mistake is understandable given Blake's tone, but such anecdotes need to be read against the ongoing discussion of the senses in Blake's works. As Isaiah explains in *The Marriage*, 'I saw no God nor heard any, in a finite organical perception; but my senses discover'd the infinite in every thing' (*Marriage*, pl. 12). Isaiah's statement seems paradoxical, as he first disavows *perception* of the infinite, and then says that his discovery came through the senses. Here, as elsewhere in Blake's work, the argument depends upon the double meaning of the word 'sense' which can refer to both a physical faculty (sight, touch etc.) and to a mental apprehension (e.g. 'a sense of the infinite').

Isaiah's discovery of the infinite in every thing depends upon the corresponding extension (the redemption) of his 'senses'. Blake depicts the unredeemed senses as shrunken inlets of light in a prison house of material being – the 'Five windows [that] light the cavern'd Man' in *Europe* (pl. iii). In *The Book of Urizen*, *The Marriage*, and elsewhere, Blake gives different (mythological) accounts of how this shrunken state of perception came to be. The conclusion however remains the same: 'man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern' (*Marriage*, pl. 14). In *The Marriage*, Blake proposes a surprisingly pragmatic solution to this state of affairs. He argues for an enlargement of the senses, an 'improvement of sensual enjoyment' (pl. 14) that will reveal the world of experience in its eternal aspect, for 'if the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would

appear to man as it is: infinite' (pl. 14). This cleansing process, Blake argues, will be effected through the corrosive function of his own art which is capable of 'melting apparent surfaces away, and displaying the infinite which was hid' (pl. 14).

The philosophical premiss on which these ideas are predicated is that truth is eternal, and error is a temporal obscuration of truth. This is an essentially Platonic scheme that Blake fuses with his Pauline theology in a key passage of *Descriptions of the Last Judgment*:

> [The] world of Imagination is the World of Eternity[,] it is the Divine bosom into which we shall all go after the death of the Vegetated body[.] This World <of Imagination> is Infinite & Eternal whereas the world of Generation or Vegetation is Finite & Temporal[.] There Exist in that Eternal World the Permanent Realities of Every Thing which we see are reflected in this Vegetable Glass of Nature[.] All Things are comprehended in their Eternal Forms in the Divine body of the Saviour[,] the True Vine of Eternity[,] The Human Imagination.

(

The equation of Eternity with Truth ('Permanent Realities') and with 'the Divine body of the Saviour' puts the finite material world (this 'Vegetable Glass of Nature') in an ambiguous position. If it is engaged with as a reflection of Eternity, then it becomes a means of liberation, 'an immense world of delight' (*Marriage*, pl. 5). However, if it is regarded as the totality of existence, it enslaves the mind by obscuring humanity's participation in the Divine. Blake has a name for the state of being in which the individual regards materiality as the only reality: he calls it 'Satan', and characterizes it as 'the State of Death, & not a Human existence' (*Jerusalem*, pl. 49). Participation in Satan, is the opposite of participation in Christ,[14] but this is not a Manichean scheme, as Satan is not an opposite number to Jesus but only a shadow, a zero, in a theology that is – despite Blake's preoccupation with dialectic – profoundly monotheistic. In the state of Satan, blind to Eternity, individuals are possessed by their own selfhoods, and they form, in the agglomerate, not a transfigured Divine Body, but a horrible, non-human 'Polypus of Death' (*Jerusalem*, pl. 49): 'By Invisible hatreds adjoind, they seem remote and separate | From each other; and yet are a Mighty Polypus in the Deep!' (*Jerusalem*, pl. 66). This conglomerate of selfhoods is the anti-Christ, 'One Great Satan | Inslav[']d to the most powerful Selfhood: to murder the Divine Humanity' (*Jerusalem*, pl. 49).

Redemption, in Blake's theology, is a deliverance from this 'vast Polypus | Of living fibres', the 'self-devouring monstrous human Death' of materialism (*Milton*, pl. 34) through reintegration into the Body of Christ. The reason that prophetic Art is central to this deliverance is that – in accordance with the theory of the senses discussed above – the state of error (Satan) is not a reality, but only a product of perception:

> Error is Created[.] Truth is Eternal[.] Error or Creation will be Burned Up & then & not till then Truth or Eternity will appear[.] *It is Burnt up the Moment Men cease to behold it.*
> (*Last Judgment E*565, my emphasis)

It is Art (of which Scripture is the sublimest form) that is capable of precipitating this process by 'melting apparent surfaces away, and displaying the infinite which was hid' (*Marriage*, pl. 14); it is prophetic vision that emancipates individuals from the Polypus of materialism, thereby enabling them to re-enter the Body of Christ.

Blake often represents this emancipation in terms of a Last Judgment, which he interprets as an individual process that can be effected at any moment rather than as a single universal apocalyptic event at the end of time. In *Descriptions of the Last Judgment* he writes that 'whenever any Individual Rejects Error & Embraces Truth[,] a Last Judgment passes upon that Individual' (*E*562). Without this ongoing Last Judgment, error accumulates and eventually manifests in its most terrifying form as war. Hence in *The Laocoön* he writes: 'Art Degraded, Imagination Denied, War Governed the Nations'.

Blake's vision of art is intimately connected to his concept of the forgiveness of sins. Throughout his work he argues that the forgiveness of sins is *the* defining feature of Christianity, claiming 'This alone is the Gospel & this is the Life & Immortality brought to light by Jesus' (*E*875). This view is philosophically consistent with his theology of error & temporality and truth & eternity, because it makes an absolute distinction between the (eternal) individual and the (temporal) states of error through which that individual passes. Thus in *Jerusalem*, Erin urges the daughters of Beulah to learn to 'distinguish the Eternal Human [...] from those States or Worlds in which the Spirit travels: | This is the only means to Forgiveness of Enemies' (pl. 49). Blake equates artistic practice with the forgiveness of sins because both liberate the 'Eternal Human' from temporal states of error.

Blake's anthropomorphic vision

Perhaps the most striking feature of Blake's identification of 'Creation' with 'Error' (the two are synonymous in the quotation from the *Last Judgment* above) is his consequent indifference to the natural world. Blake's massive graphic output is completely dominated by the human form and contains only a handful of landscapes. His general indifference, and occasional antipathy towards Nature sharply distinguishes him from his 'Romantic' contemporaries, and his attitude can border on contempt: 'I assert for My self that I do not behold the Outward Creation & that to me it is hindrance & not Action[:] it is as the Dirt upon my feet [–] No part of Me' (*Last Judgment*, *E*565). Blake delivers his myth of the creation of the material world in *Urizen*. In that work, Creation is not the marvellous handiwork of a benevolent deity, but a tormented contraction of the Infinite, forged by tyranny. As this paper has argued, Imagination (Christ) is the eternal reality for Blake, and Creation (the 'Vegetable Glass of Nature') is a finite reification of that greater world, lodged within it. Thus Adam, the natural man, is the 'Limit of Contraction' of spiritual form into material form, and Satan is the 'Limit of Opacity', the blindness of Adam to spiritual reality (*Four Zoas*, pl. 4). In *The Laocoön* Adam and Satan are brothers, the two sons of 'King Jehovah', the urizenic demiurge.

This ontological ordering of humanity, divinity, eternity, and creation, is essential to understanding Blake's anthropomorphic vision of Nature, because it allows him to make the highly counter-intuitive move of locating the Creation

within the (eternal) Human rather than vice versa:

> all are Men in Eternity […]
> as in your own Bosom you bear your Heaven
> And Earth, & all you behold, tho it appears Without it is Within
> In your Imagination of which this World of Mortality is but a Shadow.
> (*Jerusalem*, pl. 71)

Difficult as this notion is to conceptualise, it is a logical outcome of Blake's (and it might be argued, Paul's) theology. It has, moreover, a still stranger ramification. If Eternity is the Body of Christ, and Creation is a contraction of Eternity, then it follows that the cosmos will look distinctly human. Thus when Urizen creates the world, geographical and biological features are quite indistinguishable:

> And a roof, vast petrific around,
> On all sides He fram'd: like a womb;
> Where thousands of rivers in veins
> Of blood pour down the mountains to cool
> The eternal fires beating without
> From Eternals; & like a black globe
> View'd by sons of Eternity, standing
> On the shore of the infinite ocean
> Like a human heart strugling & beating
> The vast world of Urizen appear'd.
> (*Urizen*, l. 28-37)

As with the issue of seeing angels, Blake must not be taken at face value here, as this is religious myth, not creationist pseudo-science. The ideas function within a specific aesthetic context – the theology is embodied in the myth – and it is counterproductive to attempt to interpret the work by resolving it into 'literal' and 'metaphorical' elements.

Blake's anthropomorphic cosmology ties up with his theory of the senses, and of the active, shaping nature of perception. The material universe remains a sort of *prima materia* for Blake, unshaped while unperceived: 'Nature has no Outline: but Imagination has. Nature has no Tune: but Imagination has! Nature has no Supernatural & dissolves: Imagination is Eternity' (*The Ghost of Abel*, *E*270). The redeemed Imagination – the Divine Body – creates 'in our image, in our likeness' (Gen 1:24), and therefore to the visionary eye Nature takes a human form. In a poem of 1800 enclosed in a letter to Thomas Butts, Blake describes a 'vision of light' that he had while sitting on the sands at Felpham:

> . . .Each grain of Sand,
> Every Stone on the Land,
> Each rock & each hill,
> Each fountain & rill,
> Each herb & each tree,
> Mountain, hill, earth & sea,
> Cloud, Meteor & Star,
> Are Men Seen Afar.
> (*E712)*

Blake's prioritization of mental over ocular vision (as in the verse above) inevitably lays him open to the familiar charges of madness. He was quite aware of this, anticipated being misunderstood on these issues, and in a *Description of the Last Judgment* explained himself to an imagined interlocutor:

> ["]What[?"] it will be Questiond[, "]When the Sun rises do you not see a round Disk of fire somewhat like a Guinea[?"] O no no[,] I see an Innumerable company of the Heavenly host crying Holy Holy Holy is the Lord God Almighty[.] I question not my Corporeal or Vegetative Eye any more than I would Question a Window concerning a Sight[:] I look thro it & not with it.
> (*E*656-6)

Blake's tendency to treat Nature either as emblematical (as above), or homogeneous (e.g. by telescoping the universe ontologically to find 'a World in a Grain of Sand' (*Auguries of Innocence, E490*)) will inevitably strike some readers as wilfully odd, even if it is theologically justifiable. His ideas are perhaps likely to find more sympathy when read as an attempt to articulate an aesthetic alternative to the narrow scientistic empiricism bequeathed by the Enlightenment. *The Book of Urizen*, for example, narrates the story of the suffering engendered by the tyrannical rise of an ideology of materialism in which humanity is shrunk to an infinitesimal speck in a vast mechanistic universe. For those of his modern readers who are living in societies in which the human is increasingly being subordinated to non-human deities such as the market and the war machine, Blake's mythologies may begin to look bitingly relevant.

Blake's politically and theologically-charged alternative is a society in which individuals – redeemed from the 'Satan' of a shallow, self-regarding materialism – coexist as a 'universal family' that is united through the Imagination in the Divine Body:

> Mutual in one another[']s love and wrath all renewing
> We live as One Man; for contracting our infinite senses
> We behold multitude; or expanding: we behold as one,
> As One Man all the Universal Family; and that One Man
> We call Jesus the Christ: and he in us, and we in him,
> Live in perfect harmony in Eden the land of life,
> Giving, recieving, and forgiving each others trespasses.
> (*Jerusalem*, pl. 38)

This vision of the indwelling of humanity in the Divine has important Biblical prefigurements such as Jesus' prayer for those that shall believe in him, 'that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you' (John 17:21). But ultimately Blake's vision of a redeemed society that takes a human, bodily form finds no closer correlative in literature than it does in the epistles of Paul:

> Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work (Ephesians 4:15-16).

[1] T S Eliot, *Selected Prose*, 1953, p. 171.

[2] *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, ed. by R J Coggins and J L Houlden, 1990 – my emphasis.

[3] *The Marriage of Heaven & Hell*, plate 11. Hereafter all references are to *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake,* ed. David V Erdman, Berkeley, 1982. All works are named by title or, when this is obscure, by page number in Erdman (e.g. *E*235).

[4] I use 'prophecy' in this paper to indicate the prophetic tradition that preoccupied Blake, most particularly the works of Isaiah and Ezekiel.

[5] Murray Roston gives a detailed account of the change in fortunes of Hebrew poetry in *Prophet and Poet: The Bible and the Growth of Romanticism,* London, 1965, pp. 42-59.

[6] *Prophet & Poet*, p. 23.

[7] Leslie Tannenbaum, *Biblical Tradition in Blake's Early Prophecies,* Princeton, 1982, p. 73.

[8] Biblical quotations are from the *NIV*.

[9] There is no material consistency between Christ's appearance to the apostles, to Saul, or to the very different descriptions of his presence in, say, Galatians and 1 Corinthians.

[10] Blake enlarges the significance of Paul's theology, but by keeping his art in a dialogical relationship with its Biblical original, he avoids simply commandeering Paul's theological structures for the purposes of his own discourse.

[11] Blake invariably refers to the Body of Christ as 'the Divine Body'.

[12] The terms 'Divine Body' and 'Imagination' are used synonymously throughout Blake's poetry. In *Milton* (pl. 3), he writes of, 'the Human Imagination, | Which is the Divine Body of the Lord Jesus, blessed for ever'; in *Jerusalem* (pl. 24), 'O Human Imagination, O Divine Body.'

[13] The inversion parallels that of Paul's reading of the Body of Christ.

[14] I refer to 'Jesus' rather than 'God' when discussing Blake's eternal redeeming Divinity, because 'God' is a highly problematic term in his work, often associated with tyranny.

Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* Trilogy

S.J. Masson

To my mind, one of the main interests of Philip Pullman's controversial trilogy is not specifically related to the books. It lies in the almost universal popularity they enjoy. Like *Harry Potter*, the series' success has extended well beyond the children's market. Is it because of its imaginative plotline? Is it its sheer adventure? Does it lie in the author's skill in winning our admiration for Lyra, the relentlessly optimistic, indomitable heroine? Is it that adults too can instinctively identify with her battle against a largely faceless, unjust authority? Or is it perhaps that Pullman offers yet another conspiracy theory to explain its evil? All of these things and more have made *His Dark Materials* compelling reading for many. Surely there is something more than the author's considerable artistic skill at work. But what is it?

Another issue we will need to consider is the uneasy sense that Pullman has transgressed the bounds of (children's) fiction and ventured into territory where he could be charged with disseminating hateful propaganda. It could be argued that Pullman's transgression of genre has a precedent in the fictional writings of his *bête noire*, C S Lewis, most notably in his *Narnia Chronicles* and 'science fiction trilogy'. This is certainly the author's own contention. The latter of these works in particular acts as a sort of framework for Pullman's novels. In fact, a non-Christian friend who cannot abide Lewis for the beliefs he feels Lewis foists upon the reader, also dismissed Pullman for misusing his licence as a storyteller to 'preach at him'. While I suspect we will need to differ about Lewis's merits (and integrity) as an artist, the comparison has some merit in it. I will venture a brief comment about this in a moment.

It is difficult to know where to begin a discussion of these challenging, troublesome and entertaining books. It would be very easy to attack them for their surprisingly facile, if not puerile, attack on Christianity; for their cavalier disregard for factual accuracy; for their admixture of scurrilous libel with half-truths; for the fact that the followers of the Authority, i.e. the church, are so 'monolithically odious', without any light or shade. This review could simply add to the tone of hostility it has understandably received from Christians for all these things. Pullman's attack on Christianity is so indiscriminate in fact that it projects a unity amongst Christians that otherwise only exists in the rose-tinted dreams of liberal ecumenism. No Christian escapes Pullman's enmity, though one might wish that all believers *were* really as zealous for Christ as the followers of the Authority appear to be for it.

Nonetheless, I can see no benefit in responding to Pullman's crude portrait of the church in kind. Such a response would probably add to its appeal to those already sympathetic to an attack on Christianity and it would probably lend credibility to Pullman's caricature of Christians as cogs in a machine designed to repress human individuality. Why engage on the terms an adversary presents when they are so obviously mistaken? I think we need to search a bit more deeply if we are to make a response that might befit people who believe that the world-view of Christianity is undergirded by the truth, which, as S T Coleridge once put it, allows us to distinguish its 'proper offspring from the changelings which the gnomes of

vanity or the fairies of fashion may have laid in its cradle or called by its names.' The reason why Pullman's books appeal is that there *is* something that rings so very true about them. And yet they are so astonishingly wrong-headed about Christianity. How do we reconcile these things?

As I suggested, the way ahead may be in answering the question why has this trilogy been so popular? My suspicion is that the primary reason lies in the constitution of the very society in which we are living. More than two centuries ago, William Wordsworth complained that:

> …a multitude of causes unknown to former times are now acting with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind, and unfitting it for all voluntary exertion to reduce it to a state of almost savage torpor. The most effective of these causes are the great national events which are daily taking place, and the encreasing accumulation of men in cities, where the uniformity of their occupation produces a craving for extraordinary incident which the rapid communication of intelligence hourly gratifies. To this tendency of life and manners the literature and theatrical exhibitions of the country have conformed themselves.

Wordsworth's observations find their echo today in politicians' complaints of voter apathy, in the experience of artists who cannot find an audience for their work unless they dally with the sensational, and with the difficulty that teachers encounter to inspire their pupils to learn anything that does not already conform to their immediate interests and experiences.

All of these guardians of authority have to compete against (and often conform to) the combined forces of the entertainment age: the reduction of public utterances to sound-bites; the uniformity imposed upon human thought and conduct to make it more amenable to analytical measurement as behaviour (as if we were nothing but animals); above all, the belief that 'reality' is the world dictated to us by economic forces. Is it any wonder that supernatural tales like Pullman's are having so strong a pull on the imagination of so many? They fill a spiritual void that the model of man as a trousered ape (or as a consuming organism) cannot. We Christians who understand ourselves to be made in the image of the invisible God should not be surprised at his success. Maybe there is even something that we can learn from it.

It is certainly not insight into the nature of God. It is an insight into what our culture now instinctively associates with the *traditional* concept of God, and what it would consequently like to see as a more enlightened alternative. Our culture instinctively equates authority with uncaring and repressive tyranny. There is no point in denying it. Contempt for authority, *aka* tolerance, is the *lingua franca* of our global society. Pullman has quite rightly observed that Christian doctrine does not conform to it, maintaining instead that all authority derives from God, and that his claim to sovereignty is just and unimpeachable.

Yet why does Pullman believe that God's authority means tyranny? How is it moreover that the church of the God who took on human flesh, who loved us and gave himself for us, sinners though we are, could become so strongly implicated with authoritarianism? We need not search very far. It is not *inherent* in church government or church history. It is not even inherent in worldly authority.

The common sentiment that Pullman expresses, that accepting authority means inviting tyranny, is a response evoked by the totalitarian nature of modern society itself.

Hannah Arendt, one of the most astute commentators on modern totalitarianism and the changes that have come about in the human condition in the scientific age, notes that the contemporary sense of 'authority' as tyranny derives from the workings of *modern* society, not any traditional doctrine:

> The striking coincidence of the rise of society with the decline of the family indicates clearly that what actually took place was the absorption of the family unit into corresponding social groups. The equality of the members of these groups, far from being an equality among peers, resembles nothing so much as the equality of household members before the despotic power of the household head, except that in society, where the natural strength of one common interest and one unanimous opinion is tremendously enforced by sheer number, actual rule exerted by one man, representing the common interest and the right opinion, could eventually be dispensed with. The phenomenon of conformism is characteristic of the last stage of this modern development.

Pullman mistakenly suggests that the relentless conformism imposed by modern forms of government is the product of the Christian idea of Divine sovereignty; when in fact it is the product of Enlightenment rationalism and its re-presentation of 'God' as an absolute mathematical necessity, without personal character, to which human society should conform in order to be 'ethical'. As Arendt again observes:

> Statistical uniformity is by no means a harmless scientific ideal; it is the no longer secret political ideal of a society which, entirely submerged in the routine in everyday living, is at peace with the scientific outlook inherent in its very existence. (43)

Pullman's response to such a mechanistic horror (which he presents terrifyingly in a scene in *Northern Lights* in which the Authority uses a machine to sever a child's body from his 'soul' – or to use Pullman's terms, *daemon*) is characteristically Romantic, even Shelleyan. His response to *this* form of authority, totalitarian human construct that it is, is understandably rebellious: rather than the 'Christian' *kingdom* of heaven, Pullman concludes his trilogy with a vision of a *republic* of heaven on earth, based on his idea that what we are essentially as humans is a sort of gooey mass of 'feeling', a primal energy without any individual character.

Heresy and tolerance

Yet mistaken identity cannot exonerate Pullman from responsibility for his work, certainly not with the pretensions he has for it. It is important to recognise his implicit claim to take on the mantle of the epic writer, which includes being a teacher of the nation. I have already observed that *His Dark Materials* models itself most explicitly on C S Lewis's science fiction trilogy. It was if anything an understatement. The plot and characters are in fact almost wholly derived from it and Narnia. Pullman begins his narrative where Lewis ends his (in *That Hideous Strength*): in a college in Oxford, the improbable site of a cosmic struggle between good and evil that unfolds upon the backdrop of the politics of dons. This is pure Lewis. So are the trips to parallel worlds through invisible windows that begin in

the second book, *The Subtle Knife*, which function for the children much like the back of the wardrobe in the attic does in Narnia.

Nonetheless, we need to look beyond Lewis's stories to realise the full extent of the heresy in Pullman's argument. Pullman is at odds not just with Christianity but with the ideas of mankind that have been held in the Western world from the Classical age onwards. For Lewis's own efforts in his sci-fi trilogy were nothing but an adaptation, for the scientific age, of the vision of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, which, for its part, was a Christian revision of the traditional epic narratives of Homer and Virgil.

Lewis, like his friend and fellow-poet J R R Tolkien, confronted the radical challenge posed by scientism, science fiction (and the ideas of modern society which pursue statistical uniformity as a political agenda) to the traditional image of man by creating an alternative, tradition-compatible *natural supernaturalism*, one that neither denied the good of God's creation nor ignored its fallenness or need of redemption. In these writers' stories, the world is not a prison-house that needs to be escaped through science; but it is not an unfallen world either. The enemy lies within; the need for redemption is total.

And God is always at work: 'Aslan is on the move' in *The Narnia Chronicles*, his is a 'deeper magic' than even the Witch who slew him ever knew; the precious 'substance wherewith Maleldil remade the worlds before any world was made' redeems the universe in Lewis's *Perelandra*; a greater power than even Sauron, the mere maker of the rings of power, is at work in Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*.

Perhaps the challenge that Pullman's brand of mythmaking makes not just to Lewis but to tradition can best be illustrated by comparing their ideal of human nature. For Shelleyan Romantics such as Pullman (and most of our society), 'the deep truth is imageless'. For them, this means that human 'spirituality' – the essence of humanity – can thus be symbolised by an empty plastic shopping bag floating in the breeze (such as we see at the end of the film *American Beauty*) or by Pullman's visible 'stream-of-consciousness' at the end of his trilogy, the 'dust' that he suggests captures the essence of human nature.

For Christian writers such as Coleridge, Lewis and Tolkien, truly *imaginative* fiction affirms itself a derivative product of 'the living power and prime agent of all human perception … a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite *I AM*.' It thus does not express human *autonomy*, it expresses the *relationship* of human lives (and human stories) to a God in whose image they have been created, male and female.

This fact has a further implication, which addresses Pullman's claims that Christianity is inherently anti-individualistic. It is the very relational character of human existence, so much a part of Christian doctrine, which *allows for individuality*, the unique sense of personhood each human being has an intimate knowledge of, but requires the presence of *others* to confirm. In the Western tradition, *plurality*, i.e. the fact that men (and not man) inhabit the earth is the fundamental human condition. For all the vitriol Pullman pours upon the inclination of 'Christian' teaching *against* our bodies – which has some truth in the unorthodox teaching of St Ambrose and Augustine it must be admitted – it is telling that in his brave new world our ultimate destiny lies in an unembodied form.

I realise that this has hardly been a typical book review, but the challenges of Pullman's trilogy actually lie beyond one. This is the work of a cultured charlatan who has appropriated the work of many writers to his own familiar postmodern ends. I have already mentioned the danger of demonising him. Yet we cannot simply ignore

him either. Trivialising the real challenges he poses is to capitulate and give them the weight of profundity that his skill as a writer warrants, but which his ideas truly lack. These are not really children's books, and there is something of the night in them.

A few examples illustrate this well. The alethiometer, the 'truth-meter' that Lyra uses, is far too suggestive of *Ouija* boards not to worry parents that their children will be encouraged down the dark path of divination. The name of Lyra's *daemon*, the alter ego Pullman has probably appropriated from Plato's reference to Socrates' tutelary spirit, is Panthalaimon, 'all of blood.' Similarly, the redemption of the universes seems to hinge upon a sexual encounter between Will and Lyra on the cusp of puberty, enacting a sort of undoing of the fall. These are thoroughly troubling ideas, and they reflect a strange amalgam of Pelagianism (the doctrine that there is no such thing as original sin) with the contradictory idea that sexuality is somehow *redemptive*. It is thus not only heresy, but poor heresy at that, though it derives some semblance of comprehensibility from the traditional clothes it puts on.

Yet one thing about Pullman's pick-and-mix theology is rather comforting. The books lose their appeal as the series progresses. I have yet to meet a single person who has not been terribly disappointed with the final book, *The Amber Spyglass*. I suspect that there is a simple reason for this. What attracts us to these stories initially is that they have all the marks of a grand adventure. They are truly well-written, and the children, Lyra and Will, *personally* exhibit the courage, loyalty, honesty and fairness that incite our genuine admiration, much as J K Rowling's children do.

However, unlike the case of Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, these virtues seem to bear no relation to the idea of ultimate good, which is only really revealed in the final instalment of the trilogy. The powers of good and evil, so admirably presented as realities in Rowling's books, give way to the 'higher virtue' of tolerance in Pullman's earthly eschatology. And this leaves the reader ice-cold, the dull sensation that is the residue of a virtue divested of sacrificial, atoning love.

Much as one would expect of one enamoured of the virtue of the Enlightenment god (which Pullman tries to foist onto Christianity), we are left with a complacent, abstract and wholly intellectual virtue. The irony is heavy indeed, though I suspect that it will escape most readers. In a sense, an awareness of this irony is far less important than the effect of Pullman's failure. I cannot imagine that the heaven of these novels will appeal to anyone not already ensnared in the superficial wiles of Pullman's abstract intellectualism.

The unfortunate fact that the media and the contemporary intelligentsia are riddled with such people is not Pullman's doing. The widespread success of these novels may however be a further sign that the persecution of orthodox Christians in this country (indeed worldwide) has now attained a ground of intellectual respectability. It certainly should signal that it is no longer possible for Christians to hold on to the vain idea that they are influential within the establishment of this country. Perhaps we should welcome the fact that the popularity of this trilogy has announced such a setback to the earthly power of the church, and pray that it is a sign that Aslan is indeed on the move. This is certainly the case; for our part, we must make every effort to proclaim Christian truth and divest it from such an ill-fitting Authority.

Reviews

Donald Davie, *Collected Poems*, ed. Neil Powell, Carcanet Press, 2002, xxi + 634pp. £14.95 p.b.
Elizabeth Jennings, *New Collected Poems*, ed. Michael Schmidt, Carcanet Press, 2002, xxiv + 386pp. £9.95 p.b.

These finely produced, substantial and carefully edited collections, both of them extremely good value, offer us the opportunity to reassess two poets who might, in the war of reputations, be described as 'minor', but whose poetic achievements are not easily dismissed.

Donald Davie died in 1995, Elizabeth Jennings in 2001. They both began publishing poetry in the 1950s, and for various reasons became associated with that movement that wasn't really one thing, The Movement. That is to say, they both wrote lyrics in a plain style about ordinary events as well as the big ideas in a style more like Hardy or even Orwell than Dylan Thomas or W B Yeats. Jennings was the only female contributor to the first *New Lines* anthology in 1956, along with Davie, Kingsley Amis, Thom Gunn, Philip Larkin, Robert Conquest and John Wain. Yet they don't seem plain in the same way, nor did they stick to Movement poetics for ever. Jennings, a lifelong Catholic, owes much to the English devotional tradition of Herbert, Traherne and Hopkins (each the subject of homages in her final collection), and to the 'art of reticence' she finds in Edward Thomas. His influence, like the others', produces another fine poem not so much in imitation of the poet as in dialogue with his particular voice and attitude. Davie's plainness also has roots in an English Christian tradition, though it is that of nonconformity first (his *A Gathered Church* is a fine characterisation of nonconformist aesthetics). The rather different restraints of Anglicanism probably claimed more allegiance from him later. Yet the modernists (Ezra Pound especially) and the Russians (he translated Pasternak, but Mandelstam is hardly less important for him) also cast their spell, not least for their moments of poetic archaeology, of digging for the history beneath appearances. While his language is mostly nonconformist plain, and occasionally early Poundishly plain, he often comes at things from an angle. In his memoirs, *These the Companions* he refers to the 'indirection' of poetry compared to his other modes of criticism and literary journalism. Jennings is, mostly, disarmingly direct.

So, they were hardly associates. Davie was a distinguished and innovative critic and literary academic, particularly of poetry both British and American, and his analysis of the role of syntax in poetry, *Articulate Energy* (1955) remains unsurpassed. It's fair to say that Davie is better known as a critic than a poet and so it is surprising to see how large his *Collected* is. Though never a celebrity, or an academic, Elizabeth Jennings began as a poet and that remained at the centre of her concerns. In her earlier years she was well known as an advocate, particularly of women poets past and present, but increasingly she did that in the medium of poetry. Even when her poems briefly became the subject of secondary school exam study in the 1980s she never became the subject of much academic analysis.

And yet they do converge, not just in their lifelong dedication to the writing and reading of poetry, or in their continuing allegiance to some of the key aims of Movement poetics. One very clear impression is that they are both Christian poets, not only that they write about Christian subjects, but that their approach to the world and their craft is suffused with Christianity, even when the subject

seems some way away. For Jennings, this is almost always visible, or at least close to the surface; in 1970 she wrote poetry 'is a vocation and any poet who writes it should be serious and reverent about it'. For Davie, it is more complex to argue because of the sheer variety of his interests and influences, and the particular trajectory of his spiritual journey. There is his clear admiration from the beginning for the Nonconformist tradition, particularly Watts and Wesley; and among the early poems reprinted here is a homage to William Cowper; later there is the sequence 'Dissentient Voice', both of them recognisably sympathetic, but outside any kinship in faith.

Davie's father was a Baptist deacon in Barnsley, and his son writes sympathetically of its social and cultural centrality of the chapel, but I looked in vain in the poems, and in the prose recollections *These the Companions* (1982) for evidence that he underwent believer's baptism. Rather, 'hung up, and with no great anxiety either, between Belief and Unbelief' is how he describes his 'spiritual twilight' for much of his life; and he retained a distrust of religious and political enthusiasm. Only much later, in his years in America, comes the change: 'If I were to pinpoint a crux, it would be when I learned from my mentor, the Reverend Harold Brunbaum of Los Altos, California, that what matters is the physical act of worship, not the mental act of belief or assent.' (*These the Companions*, p.170). It's not exactly Wesleyan; for most writers in the Puritan tradition, it would be 'carnal', but one suspects that it is at least partly, reticence.

Looking for movement towards faith in the poems, we might see the 1962 poem, 'On not Deserving' as taking the place of the conviction of sin. Again, in what is Davie's most harrowed, and probably most impressive collection, *In the Stopping Train* (1977), there is a powerful set of encounters with a sense of depravity. In 'The Harrow' an Easter poem about his dead mother, the stirring up of painful memories almost eclipses Christ's triumph over death. The subtitle 'two sermons' to a pair of poems about depravity is not particularly playful. And in the title poem, there is tormented regret, even madness. Not until 'Wild Boar Clough', a fine short sequence published in 1981, does some more spiritual sense of transformation begin to surface. Even so, it is expressed through history, one reconstructed in open opposition to T S Eliot's view of English history and Anglicanism, and it is certainly parodic of the Eliot voice as well. Instead of Little Gidding, he is inside a nonconformist chapel with its 'clear-glassed windows' yet 'Starving for dim rose-windows', for imagination. Davie recognises that

> We should be always at worship
> And trusting in His merits
> Who saves us from the pathos
> Of history, and our fears
> Of natural disasters.…

Yet even this voice, possibly out of late Auden in its benign dogmatism, cannot bring itself to make an unqualified statement. We should be, but we're not, doing something more displaced, more antiquarian, though keeping faith with Davie's constant perception that English cultural history has nonconformity and puritanism at its heart as much as Anglicanism. Again, in the following section, the troubled question of law and grace re-emerges: 'How else can a pharisee clear the accounts, and live?'

Almost the last poems in the book, 'Our Father', published posthumously, are still, as it were, sideways on to the question of personal faith. The firmest

statement is an imitation of Isaac Watts; elsewhere the Father is presented as (to our perception at least) 'god of the glitch', 'Apparent fumbler tripping the wrong switch', though the conclusion, albeit a rhetorical question, is no less than anyone could affirm:

> What can it be but love
> That He is tendering,
> Possessed of so much power
> So much surrendering?

Surrendering is not a quality one associates with Davie; yet here it is, the admired, final attribute of God.

I have been tracing an important theme in Davie's thought and poetry, but one that does not occupy the bulk of his poetic effort; in fact, probably less of his poetic effort than it does in his critical prose. Like that other writer from the English dissenting tradition, D H Lawrence, Davie spent much of his energies arguing with England, sometimes from exile; wanting its culture to be more honest, more inclusive though intellectually more rigorous at the same time. He argues with the USA in much the same terms. Davie's dissent is argumentative, intellectual, a bit bookish, not obscure but uncompromising. But it's not at all misanthropic; it's part of a world where friendship and family love are important, part of the truth of being.

You would never guess from the poems of hers that opened Robert Conquest's *New Lines* anthology that Elizabeth Jennings would contribute so much to the English Christian tradition of poetry, or, rather, to that important tradition within it of attempting to unite the making of poetry with the making of prayer. In her 1961 book of essays, *Every Changing Shape,* she notes the affinity between poetry and mysticism, which, she argues, comes from the same creative source. In the same year, she wrote in the *Poetry Book Society Bulletin* 'writing a poem is, like mystical experience, a gratuitous gift. One can prepare oneself for it but one has no right to demand it.' While she is not a mystical poet according to her own quite rigorous definition, she moves towards the same desiderata of simplicity with precision in an exploration of the simplest ways of articulating profundity. This is a dangerous area for the poet, of course; if it comes off, it is extremely effective, but if it doesn't, it is merely banal. To take one late example, 'Carol for 1997', which hovers on the edge of cutesy banality but somehow escapes it:

> Made flesh, made poetry, made art,
> The little child was born for this.
> His mother held him to her heart
> And touched his brow with her warm kiss,
> Underneath a bursting star
> This God-Child came to us from far.

This first stanza begins with a neat double-take on Incarnation as the ultimate artistic achievement which moves even further from theological abstraction in the human worth of the mother of Jesus. The 'bursting star' is good, too, inserting a likely astronomical explanation of the star in the east without the huff and puff of displayed knowledge. But the last line trails off into a weak filler rhyme. It's not

unknown in sung carols ('The First Nowell' is a notorious example) and it could hide in a musical setting, but not on the page. The last stanza has a less acute version of the same, less acute because the final line is stronger, and so it skirts the borders of the trite but doesn't move over it:

> But for our sake he comes down here
> And we wait for his little hand
> That all the world may understand.

Well, it cries out for a musical setting, as, for example the composer Bob Chilcott has done for one of her earlier poems. But look a few pages later on, to 'Carol for 2000', and you will see a much more assured piece, not least because the thinking is more rigorous, but also because the rhyme is not driving the poem into a clichéd corner:

> Put memory away and watch a world
> Grown almost still because a baby can
> Convince us he is born as God and man.
> The world's no longer old.

Jennings herself argues in another late poem on 'metaphysical' poetry that metaphysics is as much about love as intellect, and there is an area of conviction these last poems explore where the two might coincide. Her very first poems explore that area too, but they are happier with longer words, the sound of thinking about 'nostalgia', for example, or 'identity' that has stepped into a poetic idiom established by the Christian Auden as much as her earlier models.

So, over the whole collection, we see a poet treading the hard road to profound simplicities. These simplicities are not just those of the large, abstract, metaphysical sort, though. I was particularly struck by re-reading the poems about her mental illness and hospital experiences in the 1960s. 'Sequence in Hospital' is bound to be compared to Plath's *Ariel* poems, particularly 'Tulips'; and the contrast between Plath's hectic, overlit transformations of ordinary flowers into animals out to hurt her and Jennings' praise of the comforts of the ordinary is salutary. This is not to diminish Plath's achievement. After all, Jennings recovered, and Plath never really did. But Jennings' cry of pain and uncertainty is no less real for being located round the pun of patients/patience, and refuses the pat answers:

> The world itself is here brought down
> To what is suffering and small
>
> The huge philosophies depart…

As Michael Schmidt points out in his sympathetic Preface, it is the 1975 collection *Growing Points* that the poet was most happy with, and here it is, virtually complete, and full of fine poems. Lessons from Plath, maybe, inform the starker, almost Gothic first person anxieties at times:

> I feel I could be turned to ice
> If this goes on, if this goes on.
> I feel I could be buried twice
> And still the death not yet be done. ('I Feel').

But the sensitivity is matched by an awareness of grace and the need to endure the knocks of sociability to stay in human touch; which produces an interweaving which is far from banal, even as it is small-scale and aware of it. And the rhymes don't clunk, either:

> And yes, I want to bear
>
> Anticipated laughter, jokes which once
> Meant calibre and bite but did not make
> Anyone sad. Prayer yet could be a dance
> But still a cross. I offer small heartbreak,
> Catch grace almost by chance. ('Easter Duties')

There is no sense of falling off in the last poems in craft or spirituality; in fact, it is positively heartening to read such serene conclusions to her oeuvre as 'Perfection' or 'Assurance Beyond Midnight'. There remains the worry that words like 'grace' are given a lot to do; as Yvor Winters once argued in an essay on sixteenth-century poetry, poetry which achieves 'the realization of the truth of the truism' (the moral side of 'What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed') is difficult to bring off without complete mastery of style. As he describes it, 'a poetry not striking nor original as to subject but merely true and universal' is the last to be recognised. One might add, forty years later, that it is no more fashionable now than it was at the height of modernist complexity. But it has always had its adherents, and, eventually, its due recognition. At her best, one can see from this *New Collected*, Elizabeth Jennings transformed ordinary words and feelings with a sense of their eternal value.

Roger Pooley

References:

Donald Davie, *These the Companions*, Cambridge, 1982
Elizabeth Jennings, *Every Changing Shape*, London, 1961
Blake Morrison, *The Movement*, Oxford, 1980
Yvor Winters, *Forms of Discovery,* Chicago, 1961.

Taylor Bassett, *NWEA*, 2002, Archival Imaging (First Division Computer Services 020 8361 4318 archival@fdcs.freeserve.co.uk, London N11 3NF), 303pp. £8.99 pb., inc p&p, no ISBN.

I didn't expect to enjoy this book. Since Garrison Keillor's inimitable evocation of post-war small church life in the mid-west, one approaches later offerings from any similar territory with as little anticipation as, say, scientific poetry post-Lucretius. But I did gain quite a lot of enjoyment – in the first two-thirds at least – mostly because of the little touches. This is a story of everyday Brethren folk (though the 'B' word is never actually articulated). London 1970s Brethren folk. Nothing to lose but your flairs.

NWEA is a small London free church – *North Whetstone Evangel-Autonomia*. The story? Philip (transport administrator) moves to town from a northern pit village and becomes a garage mechanic/proprietor. (There are lots of nostalgically pleasurable references to Cortinas, Vauxhalls etc. as the character's viewpoint interweaves, sometimes ambiguously, with the author's.) The central event, as Liza Minnelli might have told it in those post-*Cabaret* days, is that Philip first gets the church – NWEA – then loses the church. The trouble is, yes, a new churchworker is appointed – he hails 'from the antipodes' no less, even if he has been to LBC. The newbie wants to change things, turn up the heat on stuff like tithing. (I thought the Brethren did this anyway?) Or is it really just *I do not like thee Dr Fell?* Anyway, Philip drifts away as a new housegroup begins to emerge which clearly has ambitions to become – this was of course the era when all that was getting into its stride – a 'new' house church. But Philip finds in the end that, although he won't return to NWEA, he can't entirely extract his being from the social and cultural cocoon the church offered him.

Lake Wobegon's 'Sanctified Brethren' NWEA ain't. But we are in a similar ecclesiological alley, albeit up there in Whetstone somewhere beyond Tottenham's ground, far from the Whippets, Bunsen motors and the brothers of young Garrison's housechurch. The novel has two main strengths, it seems to me, parallel in a sense to Keillor's strengths in evoking small town and small church life in Minnesota. The novel is very successful in catching the ethos and habits of NWEA against its terribly urban background. Most obviously, to anybody who, boy, has been there, Taylor Bassett tunes in brilliantly to all sorts of little touches. One apparent divergence, however, is the amount of drinking that goes on – it really is constant, open and normalised. A bit unexpected for 70s Brethren circles? And virtually a correlation with this is the similarly surprising lack of discussion of 'what Christians shouldn't do'. Perhaps we're into hybridity here, with 2003 perspectives mapped back sometimes onto the 1970s.

Otherwise, most of the usual situations and suspects are quite nicely portrayed. Only pre-Kendrick singing habits ('Angels from the realms of glory'). The bachelors who do Sunday lunch, and the ladies who bake. And all the Janet-and-John normalities of then ('After tea, some of the girls cleared the trestle-tables, which a group of young men bore away...' (13)). There are those who are portrayed as rich in faith and little else, and those who are richer than you first thought, along with a floating female academic (UCL English), one ex-academic who has a mysterious though monied present, a lawyer, and more ladies who bake. As I say, been there, done that. There are the young people seeking, finding, and leaving accommodation. Among the fuller in years there is the Elder Emeritus whose forename is 'Arthur' (there are also bits on class, as well as generational

conflict, the latter reminding us that Gen-X weren't the first to start this). The elders' titles, incidentally, are played for all they are worth. They come amusingly in the full range. Elders may be senior, ruling, senior ruling, teaching, pastoral or even just plain elder. This both reflects and sends up perspectives of the time, both defamiliarising and entertaining (compare Keillor still, *Ship-of-Fools* mystery worshipper reports, Rabelais). There are in fact endless little in-jokes of various kinds. For example, the soft-spoken Ulsterman whose church Philip half-heartedly attends towards the end is Pastor Strangford (a bit Happy Families this one – it's a famous lough [sic] 'across the water', as old N.I.-hands will recognise). In fact this brings us to the second major feature of the novel – its evocation of metropolitan attitudes north of Croydon and south of that other place.

This is a novel about London, the free church world, but so London. Albeit without Marc Bolan, emerging punk (no mentions), though *with* a kind of Abigail's Party ennui (something of a pervasive sense of this). The ennui at least isn't fuelled by Blue Nun and prawn cocktails, as one might have got from a cruder writer. What they tend to drink, in fact, is Chianti, and it's taken, I'm afraid, at the trattoria where some of the members meet to discuss church affairs. And everywhere there is London, London, London – the street and district names and tube stations ('Next morning, as usual, Philip went to work by Northern Line tube from the Angel' (19)). In the coffee break during a course Philip attends, people stand watching, not the diet-coke break builders of the 90s, but, in the 70s, the traffic on Tottenham Court Road. This is a cold, grey, colourless 70s London (one reference to strikes and rubbish piles). And a sense of a strongly self-contained world comes through strongly. Ulster Pastor Strangford's Ulster name – Mr Baker-the-baker – evokes the tendency to be faintly amused by outsiders, especially those from the north. And, art imitating life, no, art, even the novel itself in fact goes downhill for a while when it and the characters leave London. (Perhaps I'm missing something very profound here.) In the last third there is an over-long section where church members attend a houseparty in the west country. (The extra pages may aptly make the novel a chunkier read for the tube.) Bereft in Dorset, Philip, originally the pit village boy from the north, has clearly seen the light – he can't wait to get back to town, he says. The reader will heartily agree.

The enclosing nature of the metropolitan mentality is well conveyed, and ultimately seems to be a resonance board for the enclosing world of NWEA. (Lear and the weather here? Sorry.) Both may be doomed to self-perpetuate in their navel-gazing, and towards the end, without any final resolution (this is 2002), one feels the whole cycle of church-disillusionment-another church is to continue.

I read part of this novel in a pub where the left-handed barman – Feltham is just down the road – had four letters blue-etched into one, and probably both, sets of knuckles (this being Surrey, I didn't like to stare). Another language-game of good and evil. The cosmic conflict supposed to be represented and settled by the beliefs of the likes of NWEA comes out as being addressed – if at all – in navel-gazing mode. The characters of NWEA mean well, but no evangelism is ever mentioned, while personality clashes seem to emerge rather too easily. Writ large in the novel is the then situation now clear with hindsight. Much thankfully has improved since late 70s NWEA in these days of Steve Chalke, and FaithWorks. But this novel did ultimately speak to me from the past and the present of the need to think more about looking beyond our navels to the spiritual needs of the barman with the blue-etched fingers.

Noel Heather

David Peterson (ed.) *Where Wrath & Mercy Meet: Proclaiming the Atonement Today*, Carlisle, Paternoster, 2001, 175pp., £14.99 pb., 1-84227-079-6.

This book's sub-title is slightly misleading. It reads as though you might expect a basic overview of ways of looking at the atonement today. 'Basic' inevitably since 175 pages aren't a lot when it comes to covering such a huge subject. Either that or the authors have such a whizz-bang new theory that a brief statement is enough to sum it up, leaving the reader to work out the implications for herself.

And this book is certainly not a whizz-bang new theory. In fact it is a very spirited defence of one (the central?) model of the atonement, that of penal substitution and all of the authors lay about themselves quite vigorously to engage those (usually evangelicals) of a different persuasion. That we are being invited to rediscover the certainties of the past is well illustrated by the inclusion of an appendix originally from 1958, penned by Alan Stibbs. Two crucial chapters, written by the overall editor, examine the Old Testament, especially the Servant Song of Isaiah 53, and the New Testament. The third contribution, by Garry Williams, looks at the nature of law and punishment in Scripture and the fourth (Mike Ovey) considers the cross in relation to the renewal of creation. The fifth essay finally considers proclamation today focussing upon John's account of the crucifixion in chapter 19. Needless to say the author, Paul Weston (well-known in UCCF circles), shows how penal substitution can be preached from that text.

This is an impressive and important book, taking up a strangely and sadly neglected area of Christian doctrine. Why is it neglected? Perhaps it makes unpleasant reading for many of us in the culture of late modernity with its emphasis upon God's wrath and Christ's death as a substitutionary penal sacrifice. If so then we need to return to the Scriptures to engage once again with the foundations of our faith. But I suspect that there are other reasons. We may endorse whole-heartedly the view of the authors that substitutionary atonement is somehow foundational. But when it comes to the initial communication of our faith and the cross as its central feature, metaphors other than that of substitutionary sacrifice, such as ransom or reconciliation, frequently resonate much more readily both with ourselves and with those whom we wish to address. For this reason proclamation to our neighbours would appear to need more than this book, admirable as it is, has to offer.

Robert Willoughby

George MacDonald, *Phantastes: A Faerie Romance*, Introduction by Colin Duriez, Azure/SPCK, 2002, 320pp., £8.99 pb.
Colin Duriez, *The C S Lewis Encyclopedia: A Comprehensive Guide to his life, thought and writings,* Azure/SPCK, 2002, 240pp., £14.99 pb.

George MacDonald's first work of fantasy, written in 1858, has long remained virtually unobtainable. Grateful thanks must therefore go to Colin Duriez for resurrecting the delightful 1905 edition, originally edited by MacDonald's son Greville three years after his father's death, and illustrated by Arthur Hughes, a personal friend as well as a renowned Victorian book illustrator. Colin keeps Greville's preface, adding only a short introduction of his own.

Most of MacDonald's other fantasies have remained in print, particularly the children's ones, *The Princess and the Goblin* (1871); its sequel, *The Princess and Curdie* (1882); and *At the Back of the North Wind*. These have intrinsic value as Victorian children's fantasy at its best; as well as literary interest as being foundational for children's literature in the twentieth century- including, of course, C S Lewis's. Even MacDonald's rather second-rate adult novels have seen a revival in print, at least in the USA over the last fifteen years, a result of the growing demand for Christian fiction of a not too demanding nature. Reading fiction for Christians is now politically correct, perhaps thanks to Frank Perretti.

Lilith, too, MacDonald's final adult fantasy (1895) has remained in print. W H Auden wrote an introduction for a 1954 reprint. The edition I possess is the 1981 Eerdman's edition, with an introduction taken from C S Lewis's *George MacDonald: an Anthology* (1946) – also itself strangely unavailable in print. So if *Lilith* survived, why not *Phantastes* till now?

At one level there is an obvious answer. At another, there is a real puzzle. The obvious answer is that it is not really very good. It is his first novel, about a hero, Anodos, whose name literally means 'pathless' or 'aimless'. And the novel does seem 'aimless' in its obvious lack of quest. What seems to develop is a quest to find a quest, which eventually evolves into a search for identity as a poet, in the widest sense of the term. The fantasy is of the sort similar to that of *Lilith*: the earthly entrant into the secondary world of Faerie. But unlike successful secondary worlds, this has no obvious features except endless forest; no society; no internal structures. In *Lilith*, the structures in place are significantly Christian; in *Phantastes,* by contrast, they promise a form of German Romanticism, but end up a vague blend of Arthurian quest for noble adventure and Shakespearean pastoral. There are good ideas and motifs, for example, Anodos's shadow self, but they remain undeveloped at this point, though developed later by MacDonald and of course later by post-Jungian fantasy writers such as Ursula le Guin in her *Wizard of Earthsea*.

The puzzle arises at two levels: famous authors usually get their worst efforts into continuing print, if only to complete the set. Here, MacDonald clearly has not sufficient stature. Like Charles Kingsley, an equally neglected worthy Victorian, he falls below the line of constant reprintablity; unlike say Meredith or Gissing. But even if not of sufficient overall merit, what about the extrinsic enthusiasm of so famous an author as C S Lewis? Here I come to the crux of the review, for I am quite clear in my own mind that the reason Colin edited *Phantastes*, and the reason I have been asked to review it, is on account of Lewis's fulsome praise of the volume specifically, and of MacDonald in general.

Lewis gives several accounts of his discovery of the novel as a seventeen-year

old. In his preface to the MacDonald Anthology he talks of the work as converting, even 'baptising' his imagination, particularly by the feel of the supernatural as a place of real spiritual goodness. Yet even here Lewis has to temper his praise, limiting it to the good effect it had on him, rather than the intrinsic quality of its writing, Indeed, he admits that for him myth works whether the telling of it is good or bad – it is the 'story' that matters.

I have to admit I am very dubious about this, and have to say it hasn't worked for me like this. More importantly, perhaps, is for us to think back to when we were seventeen: what profoundly affected us then? And does that still have a continuing interest for us now? Fortuitously, the question has arisen for me at the very moment of writing this review – a visit to the magnificent newly-opened Steinbeck Centre at Salinas, California, has reminded me of my adolescent enthusiasm for Steinbeck, and my firm opinion that *East of Eden* and *The Grapes of Wrath* were second only to *Wuthering Heights* as the world's greatest novels! Even though that opinion is now somewhat modified, I have stayed with Steinbeck himself, and also things Californian, and more generally American, recognising still that British perspectives into human nature and spirituality are limited, and that here are other, more dynamic forces that could – and should – influence me. In other words, even though my admiration was overblown, it was not seriously out of sync with my future development. And so, I am sure, with Lewis.

Which leads me back to the puzzle: if MacDonald was so central to Lewis's development, why the neglect of the one novel that Lewis praises more often than any other? The answer must be that what Lewis read MacDonald for, we now read Lewis for. Lewis has superseded MacDonald in the business of converting imaginations – and intellects, too. So by all means read *Phantastes*, and if you like it, read *Lilith* too – you will like it even more.

Colin Duriez's *C.S.Lewis Encyclopedia* is now published in a British edition. Readers may remember Colin spoke on the Inklings at last November's CLSG Conference. Fewer will remember I reviewed the American edition two years ago in these pages. It is almost completely the same apart from the original grandiose sub-title being replaced by the term 'comprehensive' guide, which it truly is. The introduction has been very slightly altered, otherwise the entries and bibliography remain the same, perhaps effecting financial economies for the publisher. It means, however, that Professor Don King's definitive work *C.S.Lewis, Poet: the Legacy of his Poetic Impulse* published by Kent State University Press in 2001 finds no mention. But do dig out your old *Glass (*No 13, Winter 2000, pp. 73-74) and read there again my commendations.

David Barratt

Fred Whalley, *The Elusive Transcendent: the Role of Religion in the Plays of Frank Wederkind,* Peter Lang AG, Bern, (series: British & Irish Studies in German Language & Literature, Band 23) (info@peterlang.com), 2002, 208pp., Bibliog., footnotes, no index, £23 p.b. 3-906766-43-8

The Royal Opera House in Covent Garden has recently staged, for the first time for some years, a performance of Alban Berg's epoque-making opera, Lulu (1934). It made Berg's name and, along with Wozzeck, ensured that he would become one of the acknowledged seminal figures in twentieth century music. Wozzeck was adapted from the equally famous fragment, Woyzeck, by the early nineteenth century dramatist Georg Büchner and matched its source for revolutionary artistic form and social comment. Lulu also used as source the text of another revolutionary German dramatist and journalist, Frank Wedekind.

Frank Wedekind, who died in 1918, was an expressionist before his time. He scandalised the German middle classes with his apparent immorality, though some saw that beneath the shocking surface was concealed the heart of a moralist. Wedekind was a true original, subscribing to no identifiable ideology or political grouping. During his lifetime his plays, translated as *The Awakening of Spring* (1891, 1909), *Earth Spirit* (1895, 1914), *Pandora's Box* (1903, 1918), amongst many others, were only ever performed in carefully censored versions, dealing as they did with issues of sexual freedom, ecstacy, misunderstanding and violence. He used grotesque fantasy and unconventional characters to attack bourgeois hypocrisy. His art was brilliant even if his morality was considered suspect and, like Büchner before him, Wedekind would be widely considered one of the founders of modern drama.

All three of the plays mentioned above are considered in Fred Whalley's fascinating study of the transcendent in Wedekind's plays. We begin with the observation that Wedekind takes his cue from Nietzsche's call for freedom for the artist in his/her search for life and self-expression. Religious and moral values had been definitively undermined and conventional barriers classified as arbitrary constructs. Religious imagery was turned to, not in a traditional way, but pointing to the spiritual world of the artist. Wedekind was certainly '… irreverent, provocative and controversial…' but also set himself against artistic self-importance. Whalley explains that two issues underlie Wedekind's work, the question of whether it is possible to have religion without God, and whether it is possible to have morality without religion. Whilst he rejected traditional theism throughout his life, he never felt he found a credible substitute. But he was fascinated by religion and it illuminates every aspect of his work.

Whalley's study places Wedekind in his philosophical and theological context. Basing his research on the text of Wedekind's plays, Whalley examines the playwright's early rejection of Christianity, his (paradoxical?) search for the transcendent, his use of Biblical allusion and the life of Christ, his 'deification of reason' and his understanding of heaven and hell. As Whalley concludes, Wedekind presented himself and his characters in the reconciling, sacrificial role of Christ, pushing morality to the limits and suffering the consequences. The artist-martyr pays the ultimate prize. Wedekind assumed the role of clown to the bourgeoisie, titillating them with moral horror but not really mattering that much. They could remain perfectly reassured and justified in their own superior and highly complacent lives. In the end the artist's failure to offer a genuinely saving

experience is tragic. With what sadness Wedekind's search ends. To the Christian this conclusion is both illuminating and saddening.

Robert Willoughby

Dr Fred Whalley, a CLSG member, studied English and German at the University of Wales Swansea, graduating in 1991. He stayed on in the Department of German at Swansea to complete a PhD in 1996. Since 1998 he has been working for the Church of England in London.

Denis Donoghue, *Adam's Curse: Reflections on Religion and Literature,* University of Notre Dame Press, 2001, 178pp. $24.99
Denis Donoghue, *Words Alone: The Poet T S Eliot,* Yale University Press, 2000, 326pp., £17.95
Jewel S Brooker (ed.), *T. S. Eliot and Our Turning World,* Macmillan, 2001, 238pp., £40

Denis Donoghue, Henry James Professor of English and American Letters at New York University, read Latin and English for a BA at University College, Dublin, in the late 1940s. A 300-page dissertation on Charles Macklin, a late 18th century Irish dramatist and director in London, won him a scholarship to do an MA. Sixty-five years later *Adam's Curse*, successor to over twenty books, takes W B Yeats' poem of that title as a *point de départ*, Donoghue's theme being the conditions that make any achievement difficult: the Fall, limitations inherent in the nature of things, mortality and the conditions of human existence, and (Locke's point in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*) the deceitful figuration of language.

His chapter 'Christ and Apollo' takes its title from a 1960s book by Fr William Lynch recommended by Allen Tate: Apollo standing for literature, or the secular literary imagination. The discussion refers to, among numerous others, Aristotle, Aquinas, Dante, Kant, Baudelaire's sonnet 'Correspondences', Kierkegaard, Auerbach, Robert Frost, T S Eliot, Crashaw, Frank Kermode, Paul de Man, Hillis Miller and back to Lynch ten years on in *Christ and Prometheus*. Analogy and metaphor are much of what it's about – 'analogy implies identity and difference at once' – and the question of how language manages to refer to things of the spirit.

'Church and World' is another survey of wide scope, though the church is Roman Catholic and the world the USA. John Paul II is criticized for defending indulgences, canonising 280 new saints and imposing papal controls on US Catholic universities. Donoghue agrees with J H Yoder (and incidentally *contra* Rowan Williams) that the church should not engage in 'Constantinianism', the assumption of responsibility for the moral structure of non-Christian society. He considers, Ireland's history in view, that the best constitutional arrangement keeps church and state for most purposes separate. Only then is the church in a position to criticize. 'I think our priests would do well to elucidate the sacred texts.'

In 'Beyond Belief' he takes issue with Wallace Stevens for retaining the figures and metaphors, but not the doctrines, of religion. His poetry is 'crossed with images and shadows of divine things.' A book by Robert Bellah is slated for giving religion the role only of clarifying the community's values; and the Roman Catholic David Walsh is taken to task for arguing (*The Growth of the Liberal Soul*, 1997) that the liberal order can be considered the political truth of Christianity.

He scores some palpable hits discussing, in relation to Jean Baudrillard's *The Transparency of Evil: Essays on Extreme Phenomena* (trans. James Benedict, London:Verso, 1995), changes in depictions of evil through Milton, Shelley, Baudelaire and Wallace Stevens. Good is as constructed by (American) television: bourgeois liberalism, consumer style. In the resultant brainwash Evil is metamorphosed (this before September 2001) into 'all the terroristic

forces that obsess us.' Hunting down what Baudrillard calls *la part maudite* and allowing only positive values, 'we have made ourselves vulnerable to the least viral attack, represented in the rhetoric of the White House as international terrorism, "weapons of mass destruction," weapons that we have but that we don't want any one else to have. We denounce as evil every irruption of apparently archaic motives into the ensolacings of modernity.'

With Milton, Baudrillard believes in a dialectic implying the autonomy of both Good and Evil, though evil is no longer a moral principle, having been translated into political terms. Donoghue replies that to pretend that a universal consensus or comprehension is possible is to provoke confrontation. 'Islam will never become Western.' Roland Barthes' book on Japan has his approval: 'the other must be maintained in his foreignness.' Donoghue puts forward tragedy as a secular form of understanding 'leading from evil appearances to a principle of value and order.' He might also have mentioned historiography.

Donoghue met Eliot in 1960 or 1961 in Eliot's office at Faber and Faber in Russell Square. Having established that Donoghue was a Catholic they spoke of Dublin and of Herbert. 'Eliot said nothing worth making a note of. . . . Still, I'm convinced that in his earlier years he had been a man of exceptionally intense and dangerous feelings. He feared for his sanity, and had cause to fear for it. The demeanour he turned towards people was palpably a mask to conceal the feelings he lived in dread of. I see him as a character in a novel by Dostoevsky.'

In regard to his poem 'Marina' it is just not appropriate for the reader to ask the question 'who?' 'The poem's story is Eliot's conversion to Christianity, his waking up to find himself a Christian and wondering what to make of it all. The poem is his Recognition Scene as a Christian.'

In *The Idea of a Christian Society,* as in *After Strange Gods,* Eliot was willing to annoy. On the eve of war in 1939 he spoke of evil and of absolutes, such discourse being acceptable in times of major disaster. In Kipling 'the vision is almost that of an empire laid up in heaven.' *The Waste Land* had been a set of lyric moments, each isolated for consciousness. The *Quartets* on the other hand, written before and during the Second World War, aim to persuade their readers to 'void their allegiances', their renunciation to be a sacrifice to a God who was 'now certified by the quality of the sacrifice itself.'

T S Eliot and Our Turning World was, in 1996, a conference at the University of London Institute of United States Studies. Not all the papers of the conference appear in the book, and some of the articles in the book did not feature at the conference. The background in Eliot studies, pointed out by Jewel Brooker in her introduction, is the publication of previously sequestered material: the facsimile of the original drafts of *The Waste Land* published in 1971, the first volume of letters in 1988, the Clark Lectures delivered in 1926 in Cambridge published in Ronald Schuchard's edition in 1993, and in 1996 the notebooks of early verse, *Inventions of the March Hare*, edited by Christopher Ricks.

The contributors take these texts as read (Christopher Ricks, though he gave a paper does not contribute to the book), and they do businesslike work of their own discovering and assessing neglected aspects of Eliot's writings. William Blissett for example juxtaposes aphorisms from Heraclitus with lines of Eliot's to produce striking consonances. One example:

I am aware of the damp souls of housemaids
Sprouting despondently at area gates ('Morning at the Window', 1916).

Compare: 'The psyche rises as a mist from things that are not. . . . It is delight, or death, for souls to become wet. . . . A dry soul is wisest and best.' In 'Burnt Norton' the poet is aware of 'eructation of unhealthy souls.'

A joint contribution by Jewel Brooker and William Charron turns over two papers on Kant which Eliot contributed to a Harvard seminar for postgraduates. Eliot was, until 1917, planning a career in academic philosophy and would soon write a doctoral thesis on Bradley. In these essays on Kant he comes forward arguing strenuously for a thoroughgoing relativism, approving Kant's subversion of epistemology. 'The phenomenal is the real, for us.' Or, as he wrote three years later in the thesis, 'the ideal and the real, the mental and the non-mental, the active and the passive, these are terms which apply only to *appearance*; which take their meaning from narrow and practical contexts.' For Eliot good and evil were, at this point in his thinking, mere phenomena, apparently.

Michael Coyle consults the BBC's archives to discover a sustained seriousness in Eliot about radio broadcasting. Coyle points out that whereas theorists such as Adorno have represented High Modernism as opposed to mass culture, Eliot bucks the trend, enjoying jazz and the music hall, detective stories and the radio, agreeing to be interviewed, sending flowers to singer Eartha Kitt and exchanging photos with comedian Groucho Marx. His poetry alludes to and includes slang and 'pop culture'. The Third Programme, to which Eliot contributed, would teach middle class values to working class audiences, its ideal not of leisure but of unalienated labour. When the Third was under threat, Eliot defended it 'as if it were an ancient and integral part of traditional British culture.'

The book has an index and bibliography, but there's a problem for readers wishing to pursue the many references to the *Selected Essays*. Whereas the Faber 1951 edition is listed, the references in the text are to American editions, where the pagination has a 40-page discrepancy, a matter patiently explained by Ronald Schuchard (to whom this book is dedicated) in his excellent *Eliot's Dark Angel* (OUP, 1999, *vide* 'American Publishers and the Transmission of Eliot's Prose', pp. 198-216). Ronald Bush, in a review for the *Review of English Studies,* Vol 53, Issue 212, Nov 2002, finds the essay on Kant mentioned above 'grossly inadequate', and 'too many of the contributions abandoned in an unfinished state.' Bush's strictures, though, are too harsh. The collection makes a useful contribution to Eliot studies.

Roger Kojecký

Notes on Contributors

David Barratt* with Roger Pooley and Leland Ryken edited *The Discerning Reader: Christian perspectives on literature and theory*, Apollos/Baker Books, 1995.

Noel Heather is lecturer in humanities computing at Royal Holloway, University of London. He has published books on Huguenot poetry, and contemporary religious discourse.

Roger Kojecký,* author of *T S Eliot's Social Criticism* is among the contributors to the *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (IVP) and OUP's *New Dictionary of National Biography*. His book-length study, *A Gospel Reading: Believing Jesus of Nazareth,* can be found on the CLSG website.

Scott Masson teaches in the English Department at the University of Durham, where he received his PhD on 'Silence and the Crisis of Self-Legitimation in English Romanticism' in 2000. His thesis, which tackled the problematic role that Romantic hermeneutics has played in forming subsequent misunderstandings of being human, is due to appear as a monograph in Ashgate's series on the nineteenth century in 2003. He has served as an elder at Claypath URC in Durham for the past four years.

Roger Pooley's* publications include *English Prose of the Seventeenth Century*, and he is co-editor of *The Discerning Reader*, Apollos, 1995. He is Lecturer in English at Keele University and a former Chair of the CLSG.

Jonathan Roberts wrote his DPhil at Oxford on Wordsworth's elegiac and epitaphic poetry. He has research interests in Romantic literature, particularly in the interrelationship of the religious, the political, and the aesthetic. He is currently working on a reappraisal of Wordsworth's poetry 1807-14.

Robert Willoughby, a modern languages graduate and member of the CLSG Committee, teaches New Testament at London Bible College. He combines a commitment to Scripture with a love for all kinds of literature.

* Contributor on the CLSG website Reading Room at *www.clsg.org*.

News & Notes

Joint initiative

Rupert Kaye, the new chief executive of the Association of Christian Teachers (*www.christian-teachers.org*), has proposed a weekend event to be held some time in 2003, to look at fantasy fiction from a Christian point of view. The scope might include books by Philip Pullman (*His Dark Materials* trilogy), Stephen Donaldson (*Chronicles of Thomas Covenant the Unbeliever*), Isaac Asimov, Arthur C Clarke, Terry Pratchett (Discworld novels) and C S Lewis.

Robert Willoughby, who with Paul Cavill serves on the CLSG committee, is liaising with the ACT, and would welcome your comments, suggestions and offer to contribute. He can be contacted at London Bible College, Green Lane, Northwood, Middlesex HA6 2UW Tel 01923 45 6000 (*robert.willoughby@londonbiblecollege.ac.uk*).

Literary aspects of heresy: 2003 conference

The next CLSG conference is planned for Saturday 8 November, 2003 at Corpus Christi College, Oxford. Offers to present papers are welcome, and should be made as soon as possible, and in any case by 30 April. Conference details including a booking form will be mailed to members (who benefit from a special rate conference fee) and posted on the website. Contributors of conference papers attend free of charge with reimbursement of expenses.

Keep in touch

Members and any others who are interested, are invited to join the email list and receive occasional information about events and activities, on- and off-line, relating to Christianity and literature. The list can also be used for ideas and news, even discussion. There is no charge for membership of the e-list. Email the editor if you would like to join.

The leaflet 'Introducing the CLSG' is available from the Editor.

Subscribe

Membership (£15 p.a., concessions £10) and subscription forms are available on *www.clsg.org*, or from the Editor by post, fax or email. Members' mailings include *The Glass*.

Contribute

Contributions for *The Glass* should be sent to the Editor, Roger Kojecký, at 10 Dene Road, Northwood, Middlesex HA6 2AA, email *editor@clsg.org* . The optimum length for articles is 5,000 words; reviews 450 + words. There is no style sheet for *The Glass* , but contributors are asked to study the form, e.g. for the punctuation of endnotes, in the most recent issue to hand.

Submit soft copy as an email attachment, or on a 3.5" DOS-formatted diskette, in a file format accessible to Windows PCs. Preferred WP formats are MS Word for Windows (versions to 2000) or Rich Text Format (RTF).