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Editorial

When we describe some one as a hero we allude to outstanding qualities in their acts or character. Consciously, unconsciously, or ironically, we draw on a tradition of stories where, for example, courage, strength, skill, astuteness or virtue have won a desirable outcome. A lot of heroism has been military, and passes into, or out from, the rhetoric of conflict, the stories of war which groups of people use to justify defence, conquest and the imposition of rule. The hero may be a leader, some one who strikes out a direction others follow. Historically most heroes were male, but there have been striking exceptions, Deborah, one of the Judges of Israel, or Joan of Arc; and in pagan religions there have been numerous goddesses.

Leonidas the Spartan king is famed for his heroic last stand at Thermopylae, Byrthnoth failed heroically at Maldon, as did Scott in Antarctica. The military paradigm was translated, and taken up into the moral and spiritual. The principled steadfastness of Socrates, executed in Athens some 400 years before Christ, was taken to provide an example, showing again how a triumph does not require survival and may mark out a narrative that runs counter to the judgement of contemporary authorities. N. N. Strakhov who assisted Tolstoy with the 1873 edition of *War and Peace*, wrote that 'the aim of the whole story ... is to prove the superiority of meek heroism over active heroism.'

In the Biblical inter-testamental period there were accounts of the heroic deaths of godly witnesses, but a powerful new model was afforded by Jesus. Shown by what he said and did to be the Son of God, he allowed the Jerusalem authorities to kill him as though in a judicial execution for some crime. Beforehand he repeatedly predicted what would happen, pointing out that it was an event prophesied, and was the purpose of God. As was his resurrection on the third day; and following that he was taken into the presence of God. He triumphed in moral and spiritual terms, but the achievement was more than personal, it was for the benefit of any who would as disciples take him as the divine Saviour. In Christianity the greatest heroism is the martyr's, and the hero par excellence is Christ.

His paradigm was adopted as their rule of life, death, and life in a new creation by a host of martyrs and less distinguished disciples, but with the passage of secular history, with the effects of Renaissance learning and Enlightenment rationalism, other variants of heroism became predominant where the eschatology of the Gospel narrative faded. Consummations and final destinies came back to earth, and protagonists became less heroic, or heroic in other ways. Stories were told of unpleasant and manifestly evil characters, and yet were devoured because of their awful fascination. Some protagonists, dunces or not, made a virtue of eccentricity; Candide gleefully overturned received notions of justice, morality and heroism. 'Unnatural vices /Are fathered by our heroism' Eliot wrote inscrutably in 'Gerontion'. The military form of heroism endures today as a quality which people admire, and the horror and the glory remain, both. Seeds fall to the ground and die, but Christians are not obliged to accept the fading in public discourse of eschatology, and may see and broadcast countless examples of the resurgence of their divine-human exemplar in one form or another.

Roger Kojeckj

English Literature and the Prose of the King James Version

Roger Pooley

An edited version of a lecture given in the KJV's quatercentenary year in Lichfield Cathedral, 17 March 2011.

Why is the Bible more Entertaining & Instructive than any other book. Is it not because they are addressed to the Imagination which is Spiritual Sensation & but mediately to the Understanding or Reason.

— William Blake to Rev Dr Trusler, 23 August, 1799.

Whatever else the Bible is, it is literature. It is full of stories, images and poems. It engages the imagination, as Blake wrote, and it shares an indebtedness to inspiration, though we might want to argue whether it was from the same source. There are appeals to reason, too, and some quite demanding calls on our understanding. And although academic work on literature is wary of easy moralizing, and people who don't read literature for a living often reach for ideas like escapism or losing themselves to explain why they read, I still think there's a moral congruence between reading literature and reading the Bible – about right and wrong, about what's admirable and desirable, and about finding meaning in life. There's enough similarity between crime fiction and the story of David and Bathsheba to make us realize that our response to the narratives of the Bible is not so different from our response to other narratives. We are formed, not just entertained, by the stories we read. So when C. S. Lewis suggested 'that those who read the Bible as literature do not read the Bible' he was only half right.¹ In context, he was objecting to a view that 'those who have rejected its theological pretensions nevertheless continue to enjoy it as a treasure house of English prose.' But I don't think many people nowadays read the KJV for the felicity of its prose style alone, though I suppose they might have in Oxford in 1950, when Lewis' lecture on 'The Literary Impact of the Authorized Version' was written. But what of those who read the Bible for its stories rather than its style? Is that, too, a dangerously 'literary' reading? Or is it, at least potentially, a formational activity, in the spiritual sense? Whether or not we subscribe to the post-modern suspicion of grand narrative, the stories we read and the stories we tell help make us what we are.

As well as that, there is, still, the question of beauty in literature and Christianity. For the Psalmist, we should 'worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness' (Psalm 96:9 KJV and Coverdale), which is a tricky invitation to follow: is it that holiness provides an alternative aesthetic to impressive music, beautiful vessels and great cathedrals? Or is it simply a reminder that beauty and holiness should be inextricable in worship? In his *Art and the Beauty of God*, Richard Harries argues for a different emphasis; writing of Augustine and Gerard Manley Hopkins, he argues:

¹ C. S. Lewis, *The Literary Impact of The Authorised Version*, the Ethel M. Wood Lecture delivered before the University of London on 20 March 1950, The Athlone Press, 1950.

Beauty was what haunted, drove and sustained them. Both found their longing for beauty fulfilled in God. Both exulted in the beauties of the world and saw them irradiated by the light of eternal beauty.²

That great preacher Lancelot Andrewes was chair of the first Westminster Company, which oversaw the translation of Genesis to 2 Kings for the 1611 Bible; as Dean of the Chapel Royal he presided over the refit which anticipated Archbishop Laud's campaign for 'the beauty of holiness' in the 1630s, centered round a fenced off altar.³ So did he and his fellow-translators aim to produce a thing of beauty in their translation? Not explicitly: it's not there in the instructions from the King or in 'The Translators to the Reader'. Clarity, accessibility and, most of all, exactness, fidelity to the original, that was the heart of their endeavour: 'we desire that the Scripture may speake like it selfe, as in the language of *Canaan*, that it may be understood even of the very vulgar.'⁴ And, as David Norton points out in his *History of the Bible as Literature*, it was a long time – well into the eighteenth century – before readers began to point to the KJV as an example of literary excellence.⁵ In 1661 the great scientist Sir Robert Boyle wrote *Some Considerations touching the Style of the Holy Scriptures*, which takes on his contemporary 'Censurers of the Scripture-style' by suggesting that the translators were so concerned with accuracy they had little time for style:

For the Religious and just veneration that the Interpreters of the Bible have had for that Sacred Book, has made them in most places render the Hebrew and Greek passages so scrupulously word for word. That for fear of not keeping close enough to the sense, they usually care not how much they lose of the Eloquence of the passages they translate.⁶

Subsequent apologists for the KJV have seen that feature as part of its greatness, of inadvertently creating literary effect by being verbally faithful to the original.⁷ But it was not recognized at the time, or in the Restoration, confident in its achievement on purifying and improving English prose. We would have to look elsewhere for a literary approach to the scriptures. In fact, by 1611, there was a vigorous Biblical literary culture already in full swing, but it had little to do with the prose of the translated scriptures.

Much of this took its cue from the Psalms.⁸ In his *Apology for Poetry*, published

² Richard Harries, *Art and the Beauty of God: A Christian Understanding*, Mowbray, 1993, p. 42.

³ Peter McCullough, ed., *Lancelot Andrewes, Selected Sermons & Lectures*, Oxford University Press, 2005, p. xxix.

⁴ *The Bible, Authorized King James Version*, ed. Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett, OUP, 1997, p. lxxviii.

⁵ David Norton, *A History of the Bible as Literature*, Vol. 2, from 1700 to the present day (Cambridge University Press, 1993). See esp. pp. 105-7, and Chapters 5 and 7.

⁶ Robert Boyle, *Some Considerations touching the style of the H. Scriptures*, London, Henry Herringman, 1663, p. 8.

⁷ See, for example, Gerald Hammond, *The Making of the English Bible*, Manchester, Carcanet New Press, 1982, p. 2; and Ian Robinson's work, most recently in *Who Killed the Bible? Last words on translating the Holy Scriptures*, Bishopstone, Brynmill Press, 2006.

⁸ See Hannibal Hamlin, *Psalms Culture and Early Modern English Literature*, Cambridge University Press, 2004.

in 1595, Sir Philip Sidney cited the example of David:

And may I not presume a little further, to ... say that the holy David's Psalms are a divine poem? ... For what else is the awaking his musical instruments, the often and free changing of persons, his noble prosopopoeias, when he maketh you, as it were, see God coming in His majesty, is telling of the beasts' joyfulness, and hills leaping, but a heavenly poesy, wherein almost he showeth himself a passionate lover of that unspeakable and everlasting beauty to be seen by the eyes of the mind, only cleared by faith?⁹

Sidney and his sister paraphrased the Psalms with an impressive metrical inventiveness that seems to have influenced John Donne and George Herbert amongst others.¹⁰

Shakespeare heard the Bishop's Bible read in church; but in private this son of a recusant Catholic father seems to have read the Puritan Geneva Bible. His plays are full of references to the Bible, at all sorts of levels.¹¹ When the censorship tightened up in 1605 he had to find more oblique ways of referring to God, in print at least, but the later plays are, if anything, more deeply involved with Scripture. There is maybe only one sympathetic cleric in the plays (I'm thinking of the Friar in *Romeo and Juliet*), but the demonic characters quote freely from the Bible, while letting us in on their deceit. So, here is Richard III on how to appear pious:

But then I sigh, and with a piece of scripture
Tell them that God bids us do good for evil
And thus I clothe my naked villainy
With odd old ends, stol'n forth of Holy Writ,
And seem a saint when most I play the devil.
(1.3.332-6, referring to Romans 12:17-21)

One of Shakespeare's most theologically engaged plays, *Measure for Measure*, takes its title from Jesus' saying in Matthew 7, 'Judge not that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.' The play considers the relationship between holiness and chastity, justice and grace, from a standpoint that involves a teasing, characteristically early modern mixture of the Biblical and the classical. So, when the Duke, disguised as a Friar, advises the condemned Claudio to 'be absolute for death', to treat it as 'an after-dinner sleep' and the frightened Claudio says to his religious sister:

Ay, but to die and go we know not where
To lie in cold obstruction and to rot;
This sensible warm motion to become
A kneaded clod. (3.1.117ff)

⁹ Sir Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry*, ed. Geoffrey Shepherd, Manchester University Press, 1965), p. 99. 'Prosopopoeia' here can mean personification, or the representation of an imaginary, dead or absent figure.

¹⁰ See *The Sidney Psalter*, ed. Hamlin et al., Oxford World's Classics, 2009.

¹¹ For Shakespeare and the Bible, see Naseeb Shaheen, *Biblical References in Shakespeare's Plays*, University of Delaware Press, 1999, Steven Marx, *Shakespeare and the Bible*, Oxford University Press, 2000, and, in a more general context, Alison Shell, *Shakespeare and Religion*, Arden Shakespeare, 2010.

what's interesting is that neither approach to death is Biblical, or even recognizably Christian, and I think we're meant to notice it in the context of a play that elsewhere, even in this scene, trades in Biblical words and concepts. Shakespeare is not just picking up bits of Scripture, and raiding them for images and phrases, he is thinking with it and around it – as he does with St Paul in *The Comedy of Errors* and *The Winter's Tale*, or with Genesis and Revelation in *The Tempest*, for example.

Of the great seventeenth-century Christian writers, Donne comes out as the great apologist for the all the varieties of eloquence of the Holy Spirit in the Bible:

My God, my God, Thou art a direct God, may I not say, a literall God, a God that wouldest be understood literally and according to the plaine sense of all that thou sayest? but thou art also (Lord, I intend it to thy glory, and let no profane misinterpreter abuse it to thy diminution), thou art a figurative, a metaphoricall God too; A God in whose words there is such a height of figures, such voyages, such peregrinations to fetch remote and precious metaphors, such extensions, such spreadings, such Curtaines of Allegories, such third Heavens of Hyperboles, so harmonious eloquutions, so retired and so reserved expressions, so commanding persuasions, so perswading commandements, such sinews even in thy milke, and such things in thy words, as all profane Authors, seem of the seed of the Serpent, that creeps, thou art the dove, that flies. O, what words but thine, can expresse the inexpressible texture and composition of thy word; in which, to one Man, that argument that binds his faith to believe that to bee the Word of God, is the reverent simplicity of the Word, and to another, the maiesty of the Word; and in which two men, equally pious, may meet, and one wonder, that all should not understand it, and the other, as much, that any man should.¹²

Here Donne is responding to the rhetorical and stylistic variety of scripture, addressing the Holy Ghost as its author ('the Dove that flies'), and acknowledging, as the Reformers did, that what is essential to salvation is clear to any reader. But also he is responding in a dazzling sentence of his own that it's not all at one simple, plain pitch, often not at all clear. Sometimes the Bible can impress us with its majesty rather than convince us with its clarity, and Donne is responding to that in a sentence that rivals some of Paul's in its intricacy and passion.

Donne and Herbert, like the KJV translators, and like Milton, who is the greatest scriptural poet in the language, were learned men, who knew their Bible in the original languages as well as in English. Their scripturalism was polyglot. But then the main purpose of the English vernacular translations, from Tyndale to the KJV, was to make the Bible available for men and women without Hebrew and Greek, or Latin. So I want now to consider two writers from the nonconformist, radical tradition, whose achievement is unthinkable without the English Bible: John Bunyan & William Blake.

In his spiritual autobiography, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666), Bunyan describes his rocky road to Christian conviction as an encounter with the words of God; and as he searches Scripture, it hits him with almost physical force:

¹² John Donne, *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*, Thomas Jones, London, 1624, pp. 479f.

This Scripture made me faint and fear, yet it kindled fire in my Soul.

Then I began to give place to the Word, which with power did over and over make this joyful sound within my Soul, Thou art my Love.

That Scripture also did tear and rend my Soul in the midst of these distractions....
*There is no peace to the wicked.*¹³

If the story of *Grace Abounding* is of Bunyan doing battle with scripture, the story of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, his allegorical masterpiece, is of scripture permeating every layer of the composition. For Bunyan, the Bible works as authority, as a window to the spiritual world, as an intellectual framework, and as a source of images both large scale and local. The overarching image, of Christian setting out from his home in the City of Destruction to the Heavenly City, comes from the Exodus, but also more particularly from Hebrews 11:

⁸By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went....¹³These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. ¹⁴For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country.

Bunyan's debt to the Bible is not just a matter of some local references, then, but those are there as well. Bunyan once asserted that 'my Bible and Concordance are my only Library in my writings',¹⁴ and that concordance habit comes across in many paragraphs of his theological writing, which are spattered with a variety of references. And look at the wonderful first paragraph of *The Pilgrim's Progress*:

As I walk'd through the wilderness of this world, I lighted on a certain place where was a Den, and I laid me down in that place to sleep; and as I slept, I dreamed a Dream. I dreamed, and behold I saw a Man cloathed with Rags, standing in a certain place, with his face from his own house, a Book in his hand, and a great Burden upon his back. I looked, and saw him open the Book, and read therein; and as he read, he wept and trembled; and not being able longer to contain, he brake out with a lamentable cry, saying What shall I do?

(There are marginal references to Isaiah 64:6, Luke 14:33, Psalm 38:4, Habakkuk 2:2, Acts 16:31.)¹⁵

Every detail of the pilgrim's clothing, his attitude and his words have a Biblical root; it's an extraordinary imaginative appropriation of the text, and the marginal references don't tell the whole story. The dreamer recalls Jacob and Daniel, for

¹³ John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, ed. John Stachniewski with Anita Pacheco, Oxford University Press, 1998, pp. 23, 28, 31.

¹⁴ *Solomon's Temple Spiritualized* (1688), in *Miscellaneous Works* Vol. 7, ed. Graham Midgley, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1989, p. 9.

¹⁵ John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, ed. Roger Pooley, Penguin Classics, 2008, p. 11.

example. But it's not really in a Biblical *style* – the sentences are organized quite differently. It is a recognizably orthodox, at root Lutheran Biblical theology, too.

William Blake, that other great English nonconformist writer, is by no stretch of the imagination orthodox. As the opening quotation makes clear, he was not interested in reading the Bible in order to extract rational, orthodox doctrine in the reformed tradition. Sometimes he responded to it in pictorial form – particularly in the Job illustrations, he argued with it, added to it with his own personal mythology, and parodied it. As Christopher Rowland puts it in his new book on Blake and the Bible:

Blake was not concerned with offering an apology for the Bible, as a whole or in part. If it worked as a text, to enable humans to change, then its role spoke for itself.¹⁶

Blake is a Biblical provocateur, challenging established readings of the Bible, taking on the prophetic voices of Isaiah and Ezekiel to transform what he saw as the complicity of the Church with the poverty and exploitation he saw in London:

Is this a holy thing to see,
In a rich and fruitful land,
Babes reduced to misery,
Fed with a cold and usurous hand?¹⁷

That theme, of the Bible offering a critique of religion, is strong throughout nineteenth-century literature, particularly the novel, and is part of a wider dialectic, setting individual, authentic Christianity against dogma, hypocrisy and inhumane rigidity. This runs particularly strongly in American literature. If anything, American literary culture is more Biblically inspired than British. This may go back to the pilgrims of the seventeenth century, who were more radically Biblicist than most of the Englishmen they left behind. They named their settlements after Hebrew places – Shiloh, Bethlehem, Salem – and first year Harvard students had to learn Hebrew (though not necessarily New Testament Greek). And they didn't take the Book of Common Prayer with them, and so the prose of Cranmer, very different in phrasing and syntax from the KJV, doesn't register as it does in the religious language of British English. Robert Alter calls it 'the Biblical poetic style', and identifies it in texts as different as *Moby Dick* and Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*¹⁸

Earlier this year I came across *A Bondswoman's Narrative* by Hannah Crafts, a novel of escape from slavery set before the American Civil War, written in the 1850s, but not published until Henry Louis Gates discovered it and edited it in 2002.¹⁹ In it the Bible is very clearly a book of liberation, so much so that

¹⁶ Christopher Rowland, *Blake and the Bible*, Yale University Press, 2011, p. 242.

¹⁷ William Blake 'Holy Thursday' from *Songs of Experience*, in *Blake's Poetry and Designs*, ed. Mary Lynn Johnson & John E. Grant, New York & London, W.W. Norton & Co, 1979, p. 42.

¹⁸ Robert Alter, *Pen of Iron: American Prose and the King James Bible*, Princeton University Press, 2010.

¹⁹ Hannah Crafts, *The Bondswoman's Narrative*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., New York, Warner Books, 2002.

negro slaves are forbidden to read it for themselves – they only get to hear the bits about obeying masters. The heroine/narrator, though, has been taught to read the Bible, and it has infused her thinking and her longing for freedom. When the two women escaping from slavery get lost, they find themselves by a farmhouse; they enter, and find hospitality, indicated by an old man 'sitting near the open window reading the Bible' (p.59). The presence of people reading the Bible is an index of freedom.

The same is true of many of the mid-nineteenth century novels from England, too. The opening episodes of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) form a protest against condescending charity, injustice, and the repressive cruelty of ostensibly Christian education in the girl's school where the young and rebellious Jane is put. The clergyman in charge of the institution, Mr. Brocklehurst, ludicrously and cruelly justifies starving the children if the porridge is burnt with reference to the sufferings of the early Christians:

a judicious instructor would take the opportunity of referring to the sufferings of the primitive Christians, to the torments of the martyrs, to the exhortations of our blessed Lord himself calling upon his disciples to take up their cross and follow him.... Oh, madam, when you put bread and cheese, instead of burnt porridge, into these children's mouths, you may indeed feed their vile bodies, but you little think how you starve their immortal souls.²⁰

The 'vile bodies' reference is to Philippians 3.21, where it is in the singular; the title of Evelyn Waugh's novel presumably comes from Brontë rather than Paul directly. Mr. Brocklehurst's concerns do not, however, extend to the dress of his daughters, who 'ought to have come a little sooner to have heard his lecture on dress, for they were splendidly attired in velvet, silk and furs' (p. 67). This is contrasted with the true Christianity of Jane's friends Helen Burns, and her significantly named teacher Maria Temple, who match their sense of the judgment of God with personal kindness. Indeed, the chapters of Jane's time at Lowood come to an end with Helen's death and the grey marble tablet placed later on her grave with the single word 'Resurgam' – I shall rise.

This has been a necessarily selective survey – the seven hundred-odd pages of the new Blackwell *Companion to the Bible in English Literature* make that plain, and it stops well short of the present. But that is not to say that the influence of the Bible on English literature has evaporated. It has changed; the fact that no one English translation has emerged as the successor to the KJV is one reason. Here is one, quiet voice, that of Marilynne Robinson, or rather that of her hero John Ames, reflecting at the end of his life:

My present bewilderments are a new territory that make me doubt I have ever really been lost before. Though I must say all this has given me a new glimpse of the ongoingness of the world. We fly forgotten as a dream, certainly, leaving the forgetful world behind us to trample and mar and misplace everything we have ever cared for.²¹

²⁰ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, ed. Margaret Smith, Oxford University Press, 1993, pp. 65-6.

²¹ Marilynne Robinson, *Gilead*, New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2004, p. 191.

Nestled behind those sentences are Job 20:8, 'He shall fly away as a dream, and shall not be found' and Isaac Watts' hymn 'O God, our help in ages past' with its line 'they fly forgotten as a dream'. But it's more than an allusion, it's part of a homage to the way the Bible can enter and structure a mind and its experiences, down to the paratactic way of constructing its sentences, just like Biblical narrative. Or as he says at the end, with the kind of plain eloquence so beloved of Biblical nonconformity:

This whole town does look like whatever hope becomes after it begins to weary a little, then weary a little more. But hope deferred [Proverbs 13:12 being referred to here] is still hope. I think sometimes of going into the ground here as a last wild gesture of love – I too will smolder away the time until the great and general incandescence (p. 247).

Heroism and Hands: the Representation of Heroism in *Beowulf* and *The Battle of Maldon*

Shu-han Luo

The hand and its gestures have a rich currency in various traditions of the medieval period. The potency of its symbolism ranges from the feudal gesture of loyalty pledged by a retainer's hands placed between those of his lord, to the Christian tradition in which the *manus dei* represents God's presence and actions on Earth, and the human hand is understood as 'the means for man to lift himself up to God through various acts of moral and spiritual self-definition'.¹ Bearing in mind this historical context, this article will take a less frequented path to reflect on the significance of hands a propos of heroic narratives, not only considering the general rhetorical prominence of the hand in Old English heroic verse, but also examining the roles that hands may play in shaping depictions of heroism.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, narratives of action frequently show an interest in foregrounding the hand. In the *Finnsburg Fragment*, shields are not simply said to shatter, but shatter 'in the hand of a brave one'.² In *Maldon*, Byrhtnoth's spear is emphasized to be 'hand wisode' (hand guided), and the ensuing blow from the enemy highlights the hand twice through apposition – 'daroð of handa, fleogan of folman' (a spear from the hand, flew from the hand).³ It is through the hand, which Aristotle called 'the instrument of instruments', that the hero and weapon are connected, and heroic energy is transformed into heroic action.⁴ In some instances, the hand of the warrior is given such rhetorical prominence that it alone comes to stand metonymically for the warrior. For example, when the young warrior Wiglaf sees Beowulf struggling against the dragon, it is not simply Wiglaf, but Wiglaf's hand, that is said to leap into action.⁵ Likewise in *Waldere*, the warrior speaks not of an attack from Hagana, but specifically from Hagana's hand.⁶ This rhetoric of highlighting the hand is heightened exceptionally, however, in two Old English heroic verses – *The Battle of Maldon* and *Beowulf* – in which the hand participates beyond the occasional turn of phrase, and becomes the central metaphor through which heroic qualities are encapsulated, complicated, and explored. This article will first examine the layered significance of the hand in *The Battle of Maldon*, and consider how it shapes the narrative through which defeated

¹ Kathryn Lynch, "'What Hands Are Here?'" The Hand as Generative Symbol in Macbeth', *Review of English Studies*, New Series 39.105 (1988): 29-38.

² *The Fight at Finnsburg*, l.29. Texts of *Beowulf*, *Waldere*, and *The Finnsburg Fragment* are from R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork and John D. Niles, eds., *Klaeber's Beowulf*, 4th edn., University of Toronto Press, 2008.

³ Translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

⁴ Ronald Polansky, *Aristotle's De Anima*, Cambridge University Press, 2007, p.496.

⁵ *Beowulf*, ll.2609-10.

⁶ *Waldere*, l.15.

men become memorialized as heroic warriors. It will then turn to examine the myriad hands in *Beowulf*, and consider a few of the ways in which the rich hand-inspired metaphors, symbols and puns serve to highlight, counterpoint, and critique qualities of heroism.

The poem *The Battle of Maldon* celebrates the heroism of the Anglo-Saxon leader Byrhtnoth and his men in the historical battle fought against Viking invaders in 991 AD. Before battle, Byrhtnoth commands his men 'hicgan to handum and to hige godum' – literally, to think of hands and of good thoughts.⁷ This line is often translated in modern editions as 'concentrate on brave deeds and bold thoughts', and as such is not very different from General Hnæf's orders to his warriors in the *Finnsburg Fragment* – 'awake, my men, raise your shields, think of courage, strive in the vanguard, be courageous in your minds'.⁸ For both leaders, the heroic warrior is bold in thought as well as in action. Yet Byrhtnoth's order to 'think of hands' is not simply a subtler version of Hnæf's explicit command for bold actions. His words foreground the physical hand, and plant the seed for its symbolic centrality in the narrative of heroism.

Upon hearing Byrhtnoth's command, the soldier Eadric 'advanced to battle bearing his spear'.⁹ Byrhtnoth's men gear up for battle without delay, clearly grasping the rhetorical trope by which the command to 'think of hands' is effectively a call to arms. The hand's ability to grasp and wield weapons is perhaps the most fundamental aspect of its iconicity in the poem, and yet the hand and its gestures are expressive of more than physical ideals of heroic performance. Another soldier lets his hawk fly away from his hand – as a declaration, the poet explains, of the resolution he shall show in battle when his hand is applied instead to weapons of war. Similarly, the poet observes that Eadric maintained bold thoughts, 'þa hwile þe he mid handum healdon mihte bord and brad swurd' (for as long as he was able to hold a shield and sword in his hands).¹⁰ The weapon-wielding hand connotes courage and resolution as well as physical strength. It is this form of expression that perhaps also underlies the familiar motif of warriors brandishing their spears in the air before delivering bold words.¹¹ In this light, Byrhtnoth's command to think of hands and of good thoughts involves not two independent meditations, but the single-minded concentration on courage and the physical expression of it through the hand.

The iconicity of the hand is everywhere apparent in Byrhtnoth's tireless reminders to his men:

Ða þær Byrhtnoð ongan beornas trymian,
rad and rædde, rincum tæhte
hu hi sceoldon standan and þone stede healdan,
and bæd þæt hyra randan rhite heoldon
fæste mid folman, and ne forhedon na.

(Then Byrhtnoth set about drawing up the men there,

⁷ *The Battle of Maldon*, l.4. From Donald Scragg, *The Battle of Maldon, AD 991*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1991.

⁸ *Finnsburg*, ll.10-12.

⁹ *Maldon*, ll.12-3.

¹⁰ *Maldon*, ll.14-5.

¹¹ This familiar motif is used with Byrhtnoth, Offa, Leofsunu, and Dunnere in *Maldon*, and also the Danish coast guard in *Beowulf*, amongst others.

he rode and instructed, he told the soldiers
how they should form up and hold the position,
and he asked that they should hold their shields properly,
firmly with their fists, and not be at all afraid.)¹²

As he instructs his men on how to stand and form the shield-wall, his emphatic order to hold 'firmly with their hands' could potentially proceed from either of the preceding lines. Or perhaps it succeeds both, thus simultaneously referring to the literal holding of the shield whilst resonating with the metaphorical holding of each man's position in the ranks. Fred Robinson considers the shield-wall 'the perfect physical expression both of loyalty to the leader and of mutual loyalty among men'.¹³ The strength of the shield-wall depends on the fastness of each link in the ranks; as Offa later laments, the coward Godric's flight causes many others to flee with him, and thus 'men fled, the shield-wall shattered'.¹⁴ The firm grip of the warrior's hand in *Maldon* is not only an expression of the strength and courage of the individual man, but also comes to stand for the strength of the group – the resolution and mutual loyalty that hold the troop together, so that they in turn can hold their 'stead' against their enemies.

Variations on the phrase 'so long as he was able to hold in his hands' recurs four times in the poem, each time in a context of highlighting unadulterated bravery on the part of the warriors. The implication of this recurrent expression, and also the developing iconicity of the hand, is heightened dramatically when Byrhtnoth's arm is fatally wounded by a Viking soldier. The warrior is deprived of his instrument; the poet pronounces, 'no longer could he hold the hard sword, wield weapons'.¹⁵

It is interesting to note that neither the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, nor any surviving pre-12th century account of the battle, make any mention of Byrhtnoth's arm. The *Liber Eliensis* reports that the Vikings beheaded the English leader and carried away his head in triumph, but the critical blow to the arm, Byrhtnoth's earlier command to 'think of hands', as well as the account of loyal men fighting to avenge their leader, are found only within the framework of the poem.¹⁶ Either the poem is the sole surviving manuscript privy to certain details of the historical battle or, perhaps more likely, the poem heightens a rhetorical element and develops it into an extended metaphor of the hand, re-shaping the English defeat into a moving commemoration of courage, loyalty and faith.

Near death, Byrhtnoth continues to call out to his men with bold words, his heroism transcending its physical instrument. Though other accounts claim that Byrhtnoth's men fled after his death, the poem instead shows these men to be resolute and courageous. Byrhtnoth's pride, which caused him to yield too much land to the Viking army, is often recognized as his greatest error in leadership, yet it is this tragic flaw that renders the unconditional loyalty of Byrhtnoth's men

¹² *Maldon*, ll.18-21. Translation from Donald Scragg, op. cit.

¹³ Fred Robinson, 'God, death and loyalty in the Battle of Maldon', in J. R. R. Tolkien, *Scholar and Storyteller*, Cornell University Press, 1979, pp. 76-98.

¹⁴ *Maldon*, ll. 241-2.

¹⁵ *Maldon*, l. 167.

¹⁶ For surviving historical accounts of the battle, see Donald Scragg, 'The Battle of Maldon, Fact or Fiction?' in *The Battle of Maldon: Fiction and Fact*, ed. Janet Cooper, Hambledon Press, 1993, and also Scragg, 1991.

even more dramatically heroic. The men who stay to fight adhere to and echo their proud leader's noble command 'hicgan to handum and to hige godum'; even when hope fails and warriors fall, there remains an echo of Byrhtnoth's persistent emphasis on the hand. Offa, one of the many men who encourages his comrades with words as Byrhtnoth was wont to do, finally dies 'þegnlic ðeodne gehende' – 'thegn-like' or 'as a thegn should' beside his lord. Here, the symbolism of the hand develops yet another aspect – from individual strength, will and courage, to the loyalty of the group and the cohesive strength of the warrior band – the iconic hand tucked away in the adverb 'gehende' suggests physical proximity as well as intimacy between lord and thegn. Byrhtnoth's command, while more subtle than that of Hnæf, is powerful precisely for the way in which layers of meaning unfold gradually as the fateful battle progresses. In the end, the hand remains the representation of heroism even in death and defeat, despite being drained of the physical strength fundamental to its symbolism.

As in *Maldon*, the hand's iconicity in *Beowulf* is rooted in the expression of physical strength. It is clear from Beowulf's initial encounter with King Hrothgar that the king is very much aware of the hero's great reputation, and that Beowulf's 'þritiges manna mægen-cræft' – his great strength of thirty men – is the stuff of legend.¹⁷ The sheer grip of these hands also makes an instant impression on the monster Grendel, who is immediately inspired with fear in the grappling match, realizing 'that he has not met in this middle earth greater hand-strength'.¹⁸ Beowulf's hand-strength is not only his signature in the eyes of others, but also it appears to be a defining quality by which he is mentally empowered. While grappling with Grendel, Beowulf 'remembered his great strength, the ample-fast gift that God gave him ... by that he overcame the fiend'.¹⁹ Not only is the hand central to the poem's rhetoric and theme, but it furthermore becomes the iconic representation of the protagonist's identity both as a man and as a hero-king.

Just as the protagonist is characterised by his famously strong hand, so the antagonist is also symbolised by his hand, which hangs in the legendary hall Heorot as a 'tacen sweotol' – a clear sign or token – after his defeat. The antithesis between hero and monster is perhaps most clearly dramatized in the grappling match in the great hall of Heorot. Before the battle, Beowulf invokes God to be the judge of their match, asking him to grant glory 'on swa hwæpere hond' – to either *hand* – as he deems fit.²⁰ Marilyn Carens observes that, so clearly is Grendel identified with his hand that, after he loses his arm, there is no doubt in the minds of the Geats, the Danes or even Grendel himself that he would soon die.²¹ Rich hand-puns throughout further adorn the poem already wrought with details of bursting fingers and splitting sinews. For example, before Grendel's arm is ripped off, the poet warns that Grendel's death would be miserable – that his 'aldorgedal' (literally, his 'life-separation') would be 'earmlíc' ('miserable', but note the paronomasia in 'earm-lic', literally 'arm-like'). Encrypted in the prognostication

¹⁷ *Beo.* ll. 379-80.

¹⁸ *Beo.* ll. 750-4.

¹⁹ *Beo.* ll. 1270-3.

²⁰ *Beo.* ll. 685-7.

²¹ Marilyn Carens, 'Hondscoh and Grendel: the motif of the hand in *Beowulf*', *Aeolian harps: essays in literature in honor of Maurice Browning Cramer*, Ohio, Bowling Green University Press, 1976, pp. 39-55.

of Grendel's death is also the key to disabling the monster – through the *separation* of his *arm*.

Considering the poem in context of the Germanic heritage in Anglo-Saxon England, David Day points to legal documents such as the *Laws of Ælfred* that attest the authority of the 'mund' (literally, the 'hand') – a legal right 'accorded to every householder in the kingdom ... that guaranteed his right of undisturbed protection and control over the space of his home'.²² That the hand is the most prominent quality of the protagonist and the instrument through which he performs his heroic acts can therefore be seen as the epic's literalizing of the legal term, or perhaps as restoring the title that came to be associated with official duty back to the physical instrument – the hand – from which it derived its name.

The violation of *mund* called for 'myndbyrd' – a 'hand-payment' for the trespass. Indeed, the fight in hall is called a 'hond-ræs'²³ – quite literally, a battle of hands – between the thegn and the anti-thegn, both of whom are identified by the poet as 'hall-guardians'.²⁴ In the light of Day's study, the literal, physical hand-battle between hero and monster can be understood metaphorically as a conflict of *mund* between two similar yet opposite powers, and perhaps also as an extended pun on the hero's duty to exact 'hand-payment' from Grendel for feasting on Danish warriors. In the end, the hero not only defeats the monster, but also literally wrests away his hand – his *mund* – his rights, power, and control.

Weapons are described with an unmistakable sense of awe in *Beowulf*, yet the pure hand-strength of the hero is celebrated above dependence on weapons. Before fighting Grendel, Beowulf declares that he shall scorn weapons in his fight so that his lord Hygelac may be proud of him. Likewise, when Beowulf casts aside the sword Hrunting and instead 'trusted in the greatness of his hand-strength', the poet is quick to express approval: 'thus shall a man do when he thinks to gain lasting glory in battle'.²⁵ That Beowulf's hand-strength is recognized as a gift from God may simply refer to the innate, inartificial nature of the warrior's might, yet it inevitably enhances the depiction of the hero's hand as the ultimate instrument of battle, divinely empowered.

It is also in the hand's extraordinary 'mægen-cræft' (its 'great-strength'), however, that the hero's fatal flaw lies. Before the fight against the dragon, Beowulf characteristically expresses his reluctance to use weapons, while also admitting a need for them. In the end, the hero's collaboration with his weapon goes terribly wrong; his sword Næling shatters, and the poet explains 'wæs sio hond to strong' – his hand was too strong.²⁶ Taylor Culbert argues that failure on the part of the weapons is a trope to divert blame from the warrior.²⁷ In this instance, however, the poem clearly states that the problem lies with Beowulf, whose overly strong hand overtaxes the blades he wields. This interesting depiction of the heroic hand being extraordinary yet imperfect – or rather, extraordinary to excess – appears

²² David D. Day, 'Hands across the hall: the legalities of Beowulf's fight with Grendel', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 98 (1999), pp. 313-24.

²³ *Beo.* l. 2072.

²⁴ *Beo.* l. 770.

²⁵ *Beo.* ll. 1533-6.

²⁶ *Beo.* ll. 2684-7.

²⁷ Taylor Culbert, 'The Narrative Function of Beowulf's swords', *JEGP* 59 (1960), 13-20.

to hinge on the balance between two senses of the word ‘craeft’ in ‘mægencraeft’ – between the sense of unbridled strength and courageous might, and the sense of artistry and control over the hand’s actions.²⁸ When Wiglaf divulges that Beowulf insisted on fighting the dragon personally, against the counsel of his people, Næling’s fate in this final battle becomes a metaphor for Beowulf’s death and his kingdom’s demise. Bold deeds may be heroic, yet unbridled boldness is often the hero’s undoing. It is as the Old English *Maxims* say, ‘hyge sceal gehealden, hond gewealden’ – the mind must be ruled, the hand controlled.²⁹ This reflection on measure and restraint captures the fatal flaw of not only Beowulf, but also Byrhtnoth, whose boldness of mind is at once admirably courageous and excessively, disastrously proud. The hand as the iconic representation of the hero is both a celebration of heroic power, and also a critique of it.

As in *Maldon*, the metaphor of the hand in *Beowulf* is not fixed in meaning, but grows along with the protagonist. As the hero becomes a hero-king, the hand celebrated for its strength also becomes the hand beloved for the protection, stability and treasures that it provides as ruler and gift-giver.³⁰ It is all these aspects that the poet alludes to when saying that the kingdom ‘Beowulf...in hond gehwearf’ (is turned over into Beowulf’s hands).³¹ When the messenger brings news of Beowulf’s death after the dragon fight, he goes on to tell the wretched fate that the lord-less Geats will suffer at the hands of neighbouring tribes.

... ic wen hafo
 þe us seceað to Sweona leoda
 syððan hie gefricgeað frean userne
 ealdorleasne þone þe ær geheold
 wið hettendum hord and rice...
 ...Nu is ofost betost
 þæt we þeodcýning þær sceawian
 ond þone gebringan þe us beagas geaf
 on adfære.

(... I expect now,
 when the Swedish people seek us out
 after they have learned that our lord
 has perished, who had once protected
 his hoard and kingdom against all hostility,
 ... Now we must hurry
 and look upon our people’s king,
 and go with him who gave us rings
 on the way to the pyre.)³²

²⁸ Samuel Kroesch, ‘The Semantic Development of the OE “Craeft”’, *Modern Philology* 26 (1929), 433–43.

²⁹ *Maxims 1 (B)* l. 51. From Blanche Williams, *Gnomic poetry in Anglo-Saxon*, Columbia University Press, 1966.

³⁰ The hand’s symbolic importance in rites of gift-giving is reflected in the *Maxims*, as the line ‘hond sceal heafod inwyrcaþ’ (hand should lie on head) is believed to refer to a rite of gift-giving in which the king’s hand is placed on the retainer’s head. See also Hrothgar referring to Æschere as ‘the hand that was wont to give you good things’ (*Beo.* l. 344).

³¹ *Beo.* l. 2208.

³² *Beo.* 3000–10. Translation from Roy Liuzza, *Beowulf: a New Verse Translation*, University of Toronto Press, 2000.

The various duties symbolized by the hero-king’s hands are thoroughly mourned in this final lament. The speech moves from mourning the loss of a courageous protector, to thoughts of gifts and treasures, and also the imperative to cast those treasures into the pyre where they must also yield their lord. Even on Beowulf’s deathbed, one finds a shadow of the hero-king’s once-mighty hand. The powerful hand that for fifty winters ‘brade rice... geheold’ (held the broad kingdom) lies, in the end, ‘hlimbed healdan’ – holding a bed of rest.³³

While rooted in physical strength, the rich and layered iconicity of the hand transcends physicality. Via the hand, extraordinary acts may exalt man to becoming also something extraordinary, something heroic; as the indispensable instrument of human actions, the hand develops into a vital metaphor for the heroic ethos through which heroism is both exalted and critiqued. In a broader context, it is worth bearing in mind that the hand and its gestures had a rich narrative currency in the medieval period, both within and beyond the bounds of heroic poetry. There is an interesting description of the battle of Maldon in the *Life of St. Oswald*, which says of Byrhtnoth that ‘Aaron and Hur did not stay his hands; it was the Lord’s manifold mercy which sustained them, because he was worthy of it’.³⁴ Byrhtnoth is depicted here as a ‘champion of Christian virtue’, since this passage alludes to Exodus 17:12, in which Aaron and Hur support the hands of Moses so that the Israelites may have victory in battle. The *Life of Oswald* was likely composed within a decade of the battle and possibly before the composition of the poem,³⁵ and thus raises interesting questions, such as whether the Mosaic allusion in *Oswald* could have inspired the thematic centrality of hands in the *Maldon* poem, or whether the iconicity of the hand in either *Maldon* or *Beowulf* might have aroused in a reader or audience associations with other iconic hands in contemporary culture. Beyond the limited canvas of this study, it would be interesting to ponder what resonances the heroic rhetoric of hands might have evoked in a culture where Christ and saints were often envisaged as warriors, and the hand was readily associated with the depiction of God’s actions, verbally in scripture and poetry, as well as visually in art.

³³ *Beo.* l. 3034.

³⁴ ‘Cuius manum non Aaron et Hur sustentabant, sed multimoda pietas Domini fulciebat, quoniam ipse dignus erat.’ From Michael Lapidge, ‘The Life of St. Oswald’ in *Maldon, AD 991*, ed. Scragg, pp. 51–8.

³⁵ There is no scholarly consensus on the date of composition for *Maldon*, though most date the poem to no earlier than a decade or two after the battle, and some significantly later.

William Blake's Redemption of David Hartley's Hero

Sophie Rudland

In 1749, philosopher and physician David Hartley published *Observations on Man*, a Christian-based text in two large volumes which aimed to explain, scientifically, the workings of body and mind. Hartley wanted to connect physiology with metaphysics, and in so doing, clarify each person's connection to God. While *Observations* is mainly seen as a scientific text, most important to Hartley himself was his project's religious agenda.¹ It was his aim to offer a clearer knowledge about Mankind in order to shed light on each person's relationship and duty towards God. Hartley hoped such knowledge could explain how every living being would discover 'our greatest possible happiness' (ii. 197), the perfect state he believed all are due to reach, owing to God's benevolence.

In reading Blake's poem *Milton* through Hartley's philosophy, we capture a conversation of ideas that draws out the specifically Christian aspects of each text. It is my argument that the most present figures in the poem, Satan and Milton, are significant in revealing Blake's rethinking of Hartleian philosophy, because neither can be considered heroic in a traditional sense. Rather, Blake's background, female, figure Ololon, is depicted in Christ-like terms and takes precedence by the end of the poem. Received criticism of *Milton* usually sees the protagonists and the poem itself in quite secular terms. However by reading these figures alongside Hartleian ideas, the text can be seen as a retelling of the Christian message, and a response to Hartley's particular Christian philosophy.

Blake's Contention with Hartley

In seeking to elucidate a different interpretation of *Milton*, Blake's main points of contention with *Observations on Man* should be noted. Three main areas of Hartley's philosophy are discussed by Blake.

First: Hartley creates a strict hierarchy of the human pleasures and pains, categorising them under seven general classes: the pleasures and pains of Sensation, Imagination, Ambition, Self-interest, Sympathy, Theopathy, and the Moral Sense. Hartley views only the pursuit of the last three groups of pleasures as leading to happiness.

Second: Hartley believes that the practice of self-annihilation is the only way to be perfect and happy: 'our happiness is to arise from the previous annihilation

¹ *Observations on Man* amalgamates Hartley's 'doctrine of vibrations' with the theory of association to provide a Newtonian-inspired account of body-mind interaction. Most important to Hartley was the theological aspect to the text: 'Yet still there are difficulties both in the word of God, and in his works; and these difficulties are sometimes so magnified, as to lead to scepticism, infidelity, or atheism. Now, the contemplation of our own frame and constitution appears to me to have a peculiar tendency to lessen these difficulties attending natural and revealed religion, and to improve their evidences, as well as to concur with them in their determination of man's duty and expectations. With this view, I drew up the foregoing observations on the frame and connection of the body and mind.' – *Observations on Man: His Frame, His Duty, and His Expectations*, 2 vols., Poole, Woodstock Books, 1998, I. iii.

of ourselves' (ii. 310). Specifically, he suggests that it is only through losing all personal desires and establishing God's own benevolent perspective that the human achieves his or her spiritual potential: we must 'take our station in the divine nature' (ii. 310) and 'ought never to be satisfied with ourselves, till we arrive at perfect self-annihilation, and the pure love of God' (ii. 282).

Third: Hartley's theory argues that each person will inevitably be led to a state of perfection through the natural functioning of his or her body. We naturally pass through the previous pleasures of 'sensuality, and sensual selfishness', to come to understand the value and higher pleasure of the last three classes (ii. 282). Perfection comes about through the 'perpetual correction and reformation of our judgements and ideas from painful impressions and associations' (i. 181), that is, the lower pleasures will ultimately cause pain when made the primary object of pursuit.

Blake takes issue with these points in his poem because of how they turn the Christian message into a religion based on unachievable standards and regulations, leaving little time for the individual person, or the value of error. He rejects the notion that there can be a hierarchy of pleasures, instead seeing worth in the individual's own idea of happiness and the importance of all aspirations. He highlights the irony in the active practice of self-annihilation as a means for personal growth. For him this is a state that can only be achieved inadvertently. Finally with regard to the belief that each person will inevitably reach perfection through the natural workings of his or her body, Blake reinstates and celebrates Christianity's story of a Saviour, which Hartley ultimately, if unintentionally, discards as part of this vision that each person can save himself or herself.

Blake and Hartley

We should note here, that while we cannot be certain that Blake read Hartley, he was a member of the circle most interested and influenced by Hartleian ideas. This group of writers and artists surrounded the famous intellectual, dissenter and *Observations*' publisher, Joseph Johnson, and included Joseph Priestley, Anna Barbauld, Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin.² The group had regular dinners at Johnson's house, to which Blake was invited, and it was to them that Blake initially directed his work. When *Observations* was republished by Johnson in 1791, Blake engraved Hartley's image for it at the publisher's request.

The Poem

To move on to a summary of the poem itself: it was written between 1800 and 1803 and opens with a vision of Milton who is 'unhappy tho' in heav'n',³ and still attempting to understand God and the mysteries of the universe. He is walking about in Eternity, and reported as noticing his wives and daughters who are 'scatter'd thro' the deep / In torment' (p. 63). While Milton has been in Heaven for one hundred years, it is only on hearing the Bard's prophetic song that he is inspired to take action – first to redeem his wives and daughters through self-sacrifice, and second, to annihilate Satan. The Bard's song then, is a fundamental part of the poem and it is here that the highly emotional and charismatic Satan

² See 'Johnson Circle' in Iain McCalman (ed.), *An Oxford Companion to The Romantic Age: British Culture 1776-1832*, OUP, 1999, p. 564.

³ Easson and Easson (eds.), *William Blake's Milton*, Thames and Hudson, 1979, p.63.

is described through an account of his rebellion in Eternity. The first part of the poem details Milton's journey to rescue his wives and daughters and lists the obstacles he encounters along his way. The second, shorter section of the poem records Ololon's journey to rescue Milton. This journey takes place because, in pity and guilt, his wives and daughters have sought to rescue their own Saviour, Milton, and they unite with Ololon to follow him. The conclusion to the poem includes their final release from Ololon to freedom, with attention being taken away from Milton as Jesus reappears. The poem finally looks towards 'The Great Harvest and Vintage of the Nations' (p. 131), an overt reference to the Book of Revelation and a Spiritual Revolution. Incidentally, Satan is never annihilated by Blake's Milton, who declares that to annihilate another does not suit the Laws of Eternity.

Criticism

Blake's prophetic poem is usually described by critics in one of two ways: either as an autobiography of Blake's literary identity, since the poem was written at a particularly difficult period in his career⁴ or, more popularly, as a narrative of redemption. In the second case, sympathetic views of Milton as a Prophet and spiritual-seeker lead scholars to see the character as finally redeemed by the poem's end.⁵ As John Howard states, 'Blake saw in Milton a fallen guardian whose prophetic message was greater than his own acts.'⁶ Blake's love and admiration for his own hero, John Milton, is seen as evidence for the poem's aim of restoring his reputation and repairing the spiritual errors he had made in attempting to bring people closer to God.

Milton

As is well known, Blake was fascinated by *Paradise Lost* and identified with Milton as a poet. He saw Milton as his predecessor in the path he was forging for himself,⁷ and respected him as a prophet and spiritual friend (Easson and Easson, p. 169). Blake also reported having visions of Milton on numerous occasions, including a conversation with him concerning religious doctrine, where Milton warned him against being misled by his religious principles: 'I saw Milton in my imagination and he told me to beware being misled by his *Paradise Lost*. In particular, he wished me to show the falsehood of his doctrine that the pleasure of sex arose from the Fall' (Beer, p. 31). However, we should also remember that this spiritual and intellectual affiliation is combined with Blake's awareness of John Milton as an unappealing figure; Dr Johnson's description of Milton (by which Blake is thought to have been influenced) highlights his most

⁴ Margaret Storch discusses the Satan-Hayley relationship as the most 'tormented period in Blake's life' at Felpham, 1800-1803. She argues that Blake's quarrels with Hayley were 'allegorically dramatized in *Milton*'. In Margaret Storch, *Sons and Adversaries: Women in William Blake and D.H. Lawrence*, University of Tennessee Press, 1990, p.131-132, Easson and Easson also see the poem as about Blake's own spiritual development (p. 135).

⁵ Sarah Haggarty and Jon Mee (eds.), *Blake and Conflict*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, p. 4.

⁶ John Howard, *Blake's Milton: A Study in the Selfhood*, Rutherford N.J., Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1976, p. 184.

⁷ John B. Beer, *Blake's Humanism*, Manchester University Press, 1968, p. 24.

negative attributes, for instance, referring to his 'envious hatred of greatness, and a sullen desire of independence; a petulant impatience of control, and pride disdainful of superiority' (Howard, p. 187). Gilbert and Gubar charged him with being unforgiving, misogynistic, self-righteous, pedantic and humourless.⁸ Their provocative comparison between Milton and George Eliot's Casaubon (p. 218) reveals a man characterised by selfishness, self-love, and an unloving thirst for knowledge.

Milton in the Poem

Rather than concealing them, Blake actively engages with Milton's negative traits. His flawed nature is obvious from the very beginning of the poem where he is seen as emotionally detached and lacking in sympathy for his female counterparts. To begin with, he is not moved to rescue his three wives and three daughters despite their suffering, because he is preoccupied with 'Pondering the intricate mazes of Providence' (p. 63). It is particularly significant that he fails to recognise Ololon's own act of sacrifice on his behalf, including her role in protecting his wives and daughters, or, as will be discussed, her attachment and likeness to Jesus. Instead Milton lectures Ololon in a long and condescending tirade, about the importance of self-annihilation, which, like Hartley, he believes is the means to freedom and perfection: 'All that can be annihilated, must be annihilated / That the children of Jerusalem can be saved from slavery' (p. 128). When Milton triumphantly instructs her: 'Obey thou the Words of the Inspired Man ... I come in self-annihilation and the grandeur of Inspiration' (pp. 128-129), his lack of insight about who he confronts is ironic, since Ololon is the one who most relinquishes her identity in her desire to serve others. This emphasises his general lack of self-criticism and spiritual understanding. Blake's presentation of Milton refutes the popular claims made in prefaces to his works, contending that the poet's blindness allowed him a particular depth of sight or understanding. In Eternity, Milton has the ability to see physically once again, yet his spiritual blindness is on-going and he is attached to his mortal way of thinking; he still favours his own religious interpretation and theories above the reality he encounters. Throughout the poem, true vision and spiritual revolution is dependent on honest reaction to emotion and feeling, rather than physical sight or intellectual understanding: Ololon, Satan, Enitharmon and Leutha effect change for others only by responding to their immediate feelings and passions. The poet highlights Milton's dissimilar preference for status and power, since the background figure Ololon (whose own journey mirrors Milton's) is a true example of the 'Christian hero' by displaying benevolence and servanthip instinctively.

The inevitable comparison made between the leading figures of the poem, namely Milton, Ololon and Satan, is particularly important in respect of Blake's idea of heroism. Although status-seeking is at first seen to be one of Satan's major flaws, it is more damning in Milton because the reader never learns of his personal motivations, aspirations or emotions in seeking prestige, other than to gain the satisfaction that comes with power. This love of power is reflected in one of his few impassioned speeches, which is directed at Satan. Here, although certain of

⁸ Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: the Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-century Literary Imagination*, Yale University Press, 2000, p. 218.

his impending success against Satan (which has already been prophesied earlier in the poem, 'Milton of the Land of Albion should up Ascent ... and set free / Orc from his Chain of Jealousy' (pp. 90-91)), Milton still taunts and accuses Satan, enjoying the self-flattering comparison. In a particularly self-righteous fashion, he announces: 'Satan! my Spectre! I know my power thee to annihilate / And be greater in thy place' (p. 125). About his purpose, he contrasts himself with Satan, arguing 'Mine is to teach Men to despise death & go on / In fearless majesty annihilating Self, laughing to scorn / The Laws and terrors' (p. 22).

His comments display the satisfaction he feels in his role as knowledge-bearer. He makes clear that the sole reason he will not annihilate Satan is not adherence to a revolutionary principle to change a lesser system of justice, nor from a merciful desire to relieve Satan's suffering. Rather, when he says: 'Such are the Laws of thy false Heavens, but the Laws of Eternity / Are not such' (p. 125) Milton knows he will win against Satan and wants to leave triumphant. This is not simply a reflection of Milton's desire to be heroic: Milton actually appropriates the position of the Saviour himself. Whereas in the Bible, man is invited to use Jesus' name to combat evil (Lk. 10:17-19; Mark 16:17), or when Old Testament prophets work on behalf of the Jews explicitly invoking God's power, Milton takes full ownership of his challenge to Satan, and enjoys the image that seeming merciful offers to his own identity and status. His dialogue is unencumbered by any reference to Jesus or God.

Satan in the Poem

Before considering whether Satan is more traditionally heroic in the poem than Milton, we should note that Milton relies on differentiation from Satan to take spiritual action or reveal true emotion. This gives Satan a prominent role in others' spiritual development, much in the same way as the Biblical figure. From Satan's entrance in the poem, he seems more heroic than his antagonist because of his rebellion against authority which appears justified. At his creation he is described as 'Refusing Form in vain' (p. 65), which prepares the reader for a figure who continually rejects any curtailment of his autonomy or self-expression. Satan's rebellion in heaven surrounds the injustice he feels at not being permitted to choose his role in Eternity. Satan must work at the mills, which is described as a 'subserving' task (p. 65), rather than driving the Harrow as his envied brother Palambron can. Initially, Satan is reasonable, asking his father Los for a change of station. However, his entreaties are rejected in a particularly hostile manner, and Los finally rebukes him by saying: 'Get to thy Labours at the mills.... Anger me not!... Trouble me no more, thou canst not have Eternal Life' (p. 66). The unbending nature of Los' words strongly recalls the Calvinist discourse of predestination, which runs throughout the poem. As Predestination is a concept which both Blake and Hartley disparage, Los' complicity in its concepts can only make Satan seem all the more justified in his anger. In his fall from power, Blake uses the increasingly common depictions in this period of Satan as the oppressed, charismatic revolutionary.

Unlike Milton, Satan is a deeply emotional figure and the reader witnesses his honest and dramatic outbursts throughout his journey, which are always based on thwarted ambition. In the short account of his rebellion in Heaven, the reader sees him 'terrified, overlaboured & astonished' (p. 126), continually

weeping and seeking the reassurance of others. By the time he encounters Milton in the last part of the poem, this sadness is turned into anger. However, this still seems heroic, because with the prospect of certain failure, he clings relentlessly to his ambition for status, and attempts to intimidate Milton: he is 'hung'ring to devour' him and 'howls ... as a lion round his prey' (p. 126). His frustration in not being able to touch his antagonist means that 'his torment is unendurable' (p. 126). The emotional access we have to the figure is unique in the poem, and draws readers closer to the point where they are more invested and interested in his aspirations, than in those of the cold-hearted Milton. When the latter derides Satan in his ever-growing pride and self-assurance, the reader is more interested to see the impact this will have on Satan, who will they know fall.

Ololon

In looking at these two figures' desire to be heroic and powerful, it is important to notice that it is in fact the less ambitious Ololon who is the more heroic in both Hartleian and Christian terms. Before offering herself as a sacrifice for Milton, Ololon has already relinquished her sense of coherent identity, since she is a shape-shifter, appearing in the poem as a river, a fiery circle, a moony ark, and a twelve year old virgin. In her ability to take various forms according to the needs of others, she is the figure most like Jesus himself. This comparison between Jesus and Ololon can also be seen in her immediate impulse to rescue Milton on realising he goes to his Eternal Death. She states 'Let us descend also, and let us give / Ourselves to death in Ulro among the Transgressors' (p. 92). Although she is informed that she cannot save Milton, with the Divine Family stating, 'now you know this World of Sorrow and feel Pity ... But you cannot renew Milton. He goes to Eternal Death' (p. 93), she still chooses to act, and without the desire for the personal gains of self-annihilation, spiritual wisdom, or the praise that others have sought. Rather, like Leutha and Enitharmon, she acts selflessly at her own risk, and from benevolent emotion. These females' motivation is instinctual and based on compassion, not self-promotion. Ololon possesses humility about her quest, and like Christ, remains unrecognised in her mission of saving, even by those she chooses to save. It is all the more significant then, that Jesus chooses to unite with Ololon on numerous occasions, reinforcing this connection between them, 'even Jesus / Uniting in One with Ololon' (p. 93), 'Jesus the Saviour, appear'd coming in the Clouds of Ololon' (p. 93), and 'all silent forebore to contend / With Ololon, for they saw the Lord in the Clouds of Ololon' (p. 120). The final plate ends with a depiction of Ololon in a particularly Christ-like posture, at once representing the crucifixion and the resurrection. Her arms are stretched up above her, and she looks towards the skies in apparent calm and freedom. Ololon is indicated as the protector of Jesus when she also appears at this point like the moony ark, which critic S. Foster Damon has identified as a symbol of love and rescue.⁹ The poet writes, 'Then as a Moony Ark, Ololon descended ... One Man, Jesus the Saviour, wonderful! Round his limbs / The Clouds of Ololon folded, as a Garment dipped in blood' (p. 130). As such, she saves the saviour herself, becoming his hero, and reflecting Blake's comment to Crabb Robinson that anyone has potential to be Jesus, 'He is the only God.... And so am I and so are you.'¹⁰

⁹ S. Foster Damon, *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake*, Thames and Hudson, 1973, p. 286.

¹⁰ G.E. Bentley Jr, *The Stranger From Paradise*, Yale University Press, 2003, p. 412.

The inevitable retelling of the redemption narrative is then, both about Ololon appearing as the Redeemer who saves Jesus, but also about Milton and Satan being saviours of Jesus in a different way, since they necessitate his existence as their Rescuer by being flawed. The importance of self-sacrifice rooted in love is established by those who perform it, and by those who need it. As Satan says himself in the poem, 'Till All Things become One Great Satan, in Holiness / Opposed to Mercy, and the Divine Delusion, Jesus be no more' (p. 126). The words, 'Jesus be no more', suggests Satan's satisfaction in the knowledge that he is necessary for the existence of Jesus; implied here is that Jesus' existence is only possible with people's ongoing attachment to Satan's way of thinking; if they oppose mercy and what Satan calls the 'Divine Delusion' (possibly implying the God whom he does not recognise) then Jesus as the forgiver of Sin and bridge from Man to God, remains a necessity.

Conclusion

As this analysis has tried to demonstrate, despite being the protagonist, Milton's flaws are emphasised rather than depreciated in Blake's poem. The figure of Milton helps to refute Hartley's understanding of Perfection and Self-Annihilation as the means to reaching God, since although aspiring to these states, Milton, like Satan, remains selfish and committed to achieving the pleasures appearing in Hartley's lower categories. He seeks self-annihilation only for the sake of glory and power. Most important however, is that both these imperfect figures are still instrumental in wider spiritual transformations. This relates to the New Testament promise that God uses the weak and the rejected things of the world for good, and to bring glory to himself:

But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty. And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence (1 Cor 1:27-28).

God's desire to invert worldly concepts of value, and use all of creation in his plans, also proves his universal love. Contrary then to the aforementioned criticism that sees Milton as redeemed by the poem's end, I suggest that the figure becomes an increasingly clear example of his Earthly self, and that accepting this continuity of his identity, even into the next world, shows Blake's more radical interpretation of the human, and the Gospel message. *Milton* then provides a 're-Christianisation' of Hartley's already Bible-orientated text: it is able to engage in the conversation of Hartley's controversial religious ideas, whilst still capturing a fundamentally Christian essence. For Blake, the Saviour is someone that the human being can follow and become, yet he is also important for those who are unable to aspire towards his perfection, but need his grace. It is in this way that each person is vital to Jesus, regardless of his or her ambitions and choices, and it is in this way that Jesus is the Saviour for all of Mankind.

Qualities of Heroism: Concepts of Chivalry in Malory's *Morte Darthur*

Barry Livingstone

*L*e *Morte Darthur* was compiled by Sir Thomas Malory during one of his many spells in prison. To the uninitiated this immediately raises two questions. Firstly, why should the story of such a quintessentially British figure as King Arthur have a French title? Secondly, why should the man who more than any other has given us our conception of medieval chivalry have written about it in prison? To answer both these questions, some brief background is necessary.

The historical Arthur, if he existed, is thought to have been a Roman-trained British chieftain of the late fifth century. When Britain suffered the fate of the rest of the collapsing Roman Empire – an influx of marauding tribes – Arthur led a resistance movement against the invading Saxons, rather as Alfred would later do against the Danes. Arthur, or his real-life equivalent, seems to have been a figure formidable enough to have generated stories about himself: whether among those Britons who remained, or among those who fled across the Channel to Armorica (now Brittany) taking their memories with them. The seeds for British and Continental versions of Arthurian legend were thus separately cast.

The home-grown account of Arthur arguably begins in earnest with Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain* of 1138. Although ostensibly retaining his fifth-century context, Arthur is in practice transformed into a twelfth-century Anglo-Norman king. The Norman poet Wace, who translated Geoffrey, normanised Arthur further, reinforcing the conception of medieval knighthood that – via the paintings of Victorian artists – is the default for readers and viewers today. It is largely to this twelfth-century era that Malory, from the vantage of the fifteenth century, looks back with nostalgia.

It is worth mentioning that, in the home-grown version of events, Gawain is the greatest of Arthur's knights. But Gawain – if we think, for example, of the poem of the Green Knight – has links back into the pagan past. From the British tradition something pagan hangs about the Arthuriad, giving to the sequence its strain of fatalism.

Independently of Geoffrey of Monmouth, the Arthurian story was also taken up in France, where there was a natural audience rooted in folk memory and fertilized with Anglo-Norman cross-cultural influences. Drawing on Breton sources and embellishing them, the French poet Chrétien de Troyes in around 1170 created his own cycle of Arthurian stories in which the hero, rather than Gawain, is the new knight Launcelot du Lac, or 'du Lake' as Malory later calls him. Influenced by the Provençal Troubadours, for whom the main theme was courtly love, de Troyes gives to the Arthuriad the new interest of an illicit relationship between Launcelot and Guinevere, Arthur's queen.

If the British Arthurian strain supplies fatalism, then the French strain adds divided loyalty and, via the Grail, a spiritual dimension. The Grail first appears in *Perceval* – the last, unfinished poem of Chrétien, where it is 'a grail' rather than 'the Grail' – but its full religious significance can be traced to the Burgundian knight, Robert de Boron, at the end of the twelfth century. Robert takes a pagan

story about a vessel with magical properties, and adds it to the Arthurian corpus by Christianizing it. The vessel becomes the Grail: the dish (de Troyes) or the cup (de Boron) used at the Last Supper, and later – without any Biblical foundation whatever – used by Joseph of Arimathea at the Crucifixion to catch drops of Christ's blood.

From there, the Grail has somehow to be got across to England to be incorporated into the Arthurian story. De Boron solves this by creating a brother-in-law, Bron – a name remarkably like his own – for Joseph. Bron takes the Grail with him into 'the far west' to the suitably-vague Avalon. This invention then took on a momentum of its own, beyond Robert's imagination. The bones of Arthur and Guinevere were supposedly found at Glastonbury. 'Avalon' thus became Glastonbury, and Joseph of Arimathea was duly deemed to have founded the church there. However, let us give Robert the last word. For his new material, he develops the role of the new knight, Perceval: greater – because more spiritual – than either Gawain or Lancelot.

The addition of the Holy Grail made the Arthurian story of interest to French Cistercian monks,¹ who – in their turn – added the next layer to the legend. For them, given to an existence of chastity and contemplation, the life of knightly action and worldly success meant spiritual failure. They disdained even the – for them too secular – spiritual Perceval. Gawain and Lancelot – both sinful – fail to achieve the Grail. Perceval retains an identity, but his qualities merge into the new knight Galahad, the unstained son of Lancelot, the only one fit to achieve the Grail.

That, broadly, was the state of play when the imprisoned Malory took upon himself the task of co-ordinating all these conflicting elements. This involved collating a British version of chivalry (Gawain) with a French version (Lancelot), and contrasting both these secular versions with the spiritual heroism of Galahad. Malory – although giving the Arthuriad more coherence than it ever had before – is generally conceded to have failed in the impossible task of reconciling his diverse and sometimes contradictory material. Where the *Morte Darthur* has unity, in my view, is not in its rambling, often-unrelated and sometimes tediously repetitive stories, but in its powerful themes: the sense of doom, the conflict of loyalty, and the vanity of earthly endeavour. It is these three themes that I am proposing to explore.

In *Le Morte Darthur*, Arthur's Realm of Logres is not, or not primarily, a geographical location. Like the Kingdom of Heaven, it is a spiritual concept. It is a light in the darkness: always flickering, always under threat, and ultimately fated to be destroyed. The ideal for Logres, and for the Round Table, is spelled out in detail at the end of Book III:

The king stablished all the knyghtes ... and charged them never to do outrage nothir morthir, and allwayes to fle treason, and to gyff mercy unto hym that askith mercy, uppon payne of forfeiture of their worship and lordship of Arthur for evirmore; and allwayes to do ladyes, damesels and jantilwomen and wydowes socour; strengthe hem in hir ryghtes, and never to enforce them, uppon payne of death. Also, that no man take no batayles in a wrongfull quarell for no love ne for no wordly goodis. So unto thys wer all knyghtis sworne of the Table Rounde,

¹ See Eugène Vinaver, *Malory*, Oxford, 1970, pp. 71 ff.

both olde and yonge, and every yere so were they sworne at the high feste of Pentecost (p.91).²

Prison romancer

With this idealism in mind we might now consider why Malory was in prison. In the Introduction to his edition of *Le Morte Darthur*, Eugène Vinaver provides an entertaining account of the ostensible reasons:

The records allege that he lay in ambush 'with other malefactors' with the intent of murdering the Duke of Buckingham; that he broke into the abbey of Blessed Mary of Coombe and did there steal money and valuables from the abbot's chest; that a few days later he returned and insulted the abbot; that on two occasions he stole the property and forced the wife of Hugh Smyth; that he frequently led extensive cattle-raids, and that he 'with others' extorted money by threat. Malory's denial of these charges was of no avail. Eight imprisonments, varying in length from a few days to two and a half years, are on record as well as two dramatic escapes: on 27 July 1451 he swam the moat at Coleshill prison, and in October 1454 broke out of jail at Colchester using with great skill a variety of deadly weapons – swords, daggers, and langues-de-boeufs. His last recorded arrest took place in the winter of 1460 (p. v).

It is, of course, not inconceivable that Malory the man was as bad as this record makes him sound. It does not even necessarily make him a hypocrite for failure to live up to the high ideal articulated in his narrative. All of his knights, except Galahad, also fail, in varying degrees, to live up to it. And as St Paul says in *Romans* 7: 'The good that I would do I do not, but the evil which I would not, that I do.'

An alternative explanation, however, might be found in the Wars of the Roses. As a Lancastrian aristocrat, Malory may have been a nuisance to the Yorkists, and therefore interned from time to time on trumped-up charges: a victim not of his actions but of his politics.³ Malory would then be in a position analogous to that other aristocratic literary victim of a civil war, Richard Lovelace. And after all, to be imprisoned may be an indication of virtue, rather than of vice. St Paul, if we cite him again, provides another example.

I have referred to the fatalistic strain of *Le Morte Darthur*, which I see as integral to its heroic spirit. The atmosphere is not unlike that of Norse myth. Ultimately, evil will triumph. Heroism consists in being, and dying, on the right side, even if the right side is ultimately doomed. Like *Macbeth*, *Le Morte Darthur* is full of prophecy. As in *Macbeth*, the question about prophecy is whether it will come true whatever you do, or whether it will come true unless you take steps to prevent it. In Malory, a pagan fatalism is sometimes at war with Christian free will.

The early warning of the ultimate fate of Logres is a case in point. Arthur has committed adultery with the wife of King Lot of Orkney, quite unaware that she is his half-sister. Ignoring the adultery issue, Merlin informs Arthur that he has displeased God: 'for ye have lyene by your suster and on hirye have gotyn a

² All page references are to the OUP edition of *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, ed. Eugène Vinaver, 1954.

³ See Christina Hardyment, *Malory: The Life and Times of King Arthur's Chronicler*, 2005, Ch. 16.

childe that shall destroy you and all the knyghtes of your realme' (p. 35).

If the act itself cannot be undone, other than through due penance – for the adultery, as well as the incest – the consequences can. Given a message like that do you sit back, or do you try to destroy the child that will grow up to destroy you? In a helpful clue, Merlin informs Arthur that 'he that sholde destroy him and all the londe sholde be borne on May-day' (p. 44).

The obvious answer is to kill all May-day-born male children. Such an action, however, flies in the face of humanity and is conflict with the knightly code. The death must be brought about by natural, rather than human, action. In an episode that recalls both Herod and Oedipus, Arthur has all the known male children born on May-day cast out to sea in an open boat: 'and som were four wekis olde, and som lesse'. Mordred, inevitably, is the sole survivor. Fostered, and his identity unknown, he is later brought to Arthur's court; and in due course, in fulfilment of Merlin's prophecy he does indeed destroy Arthur and nearly all the knights of his realm. A more ruthless initial response might have nipped the problem in the bud. Misfortune arising from humane intention runs like a refrain through the entire work.

A terrible example of fate versus free will, played out through knightly courage, occurs in the story of Balin and Balan. A damsel comes to Arthur's court wearing a great sword. She has a curse upon her and must wear the sword until a pure-enough knight can be found to draw it from its scabbard. Arthur, with adultery and incest still upon him, tries and fails. So do his followers, until an obscure, impoverished knight called Balin (confusingly, also spelled Balyn and Balyne) succeeds. Admiring the sword, he decides to keep it. The damsel warns him that the sword is cursed. If he keeps it, 'ye shall sle with that swerde the best frende that ye have and the man that ye moste love in the worlde, and that swerde shall be youre destruccion' (p. 47). Note, here, that the fate is not inevitable, Balin can choose not to keep the sword.

The Lady of the Lake, who gave Arthur the sword Excalibur provided he would later grant her a request, now appears. Her request is Balin's head, because he killed her brother. Arthur is confronted with a choice of his own: to break a promise, or to sacrifice one of his own knights in his own palace. He refuses the request. Balin – whose greatest fault is his impulsiveness – now intervenes. He killed the brother because the Lady had his – Balin's – mother burned alive on a false charge. Since the Lady has demanded his head he, in perpetuation of the family feud, will claim hers. With the cursed sword, he beheads her. Balin has made another choice, in addition to his decision to keep the sword. He has chosen family loyalty over the sacred rites of hospitality. Appalled, since the Lady was under royal protection while in his presence, Arthur expels Balin from his court.

In his wanderings, Balin meets up with his brother Balan. Eager to redeem himself in Arthur's eyes, Balin proposes an attack on Arthur's enemy King Royns, and the two brothers duly defeat him.

A knight to whom Balin has guaranteed protection is killed by the renegade knight Garlon, and the brothers split up as Balin goes in pursuit of Garlon. He tracks Garlon to the strange castle of Corbenic where King Pellam – cousin of Joseph of Arimathea, and also Garlon's brother – is the current Keeper of the Grail. Challenged by Garlon, Balin kills him: again violating the laws of hospitality. Attacked by Pellam, and temporarily weaponless, Balin flees up a staircase to

a room in which he finds a strange spear: unbeknown to him, the lance of the legendary centurion Longius that pierced Christ's side. With this he commits the dolorous stroke that maims King Pellam, wrecks his castle, and turns his kingdom into a wasteland until the arrival of Galahad.

Unconscious for three days, Balin departs, cursed by the populace as he goes for the destruction of their land. As he nears another castle he sees a cross with a warning on it that a knight should not approach this castle on his own. An old man gives him a further warning to turn aside. Balin ignores both warnings and proceeds. Despite Malory's exaltation of knightly heroism, he would probably have agreed with the Cistercian originally responsible for this story in seeing an example of knightly folly. For in one of the *Morte Darthur's* most evocative moments, Balin hears a horn blown 'as it had ben the dethe of a best. "That blast," said Balyn "is blowen for me, for I am the pryse, and yet I am not dede"' (p. 67). But he soon will be.

A condition imposed on any knight staying at the castle is that he cannot proceed further without fighting a resident knight who guards an island in the river. The rule of thumb throughout *Le Morte Darthur* seems to be that whenever you meet a strange male, you must fight him, no questions asked. Malory's own audience would doubtless have been reminded of the Wars of the Roses. Modern readers will be reminded of city centres when the pubs close. Even so, there must be limits, and Balin himself comments that this condition is 'an unhappy custom' (p. 67): 'unhappy', in Malory, always meaning 'fateful' or 'accursed'.

Since the other knight is a dangerous fighter, Balin is offered a new shield larger than his own. He could refuse it, but he chooses to accept. As he rides to the conflict a damsel laments, 'O knyghte Balyn why have you lefte your owne sheld? Allas! Ye have put yurself in grete daunger, for by your sheld ye shold have ben knowen.' Balin's response sums up a whole conception of heroism:

Me repenteth that ever I cam within this country. But I may not torne now ageyne for shame, and what aventure shalle falle to me, be it lyf or dethe, I wille take the adventure that shall come to me (p. 67).

His enemy is in red armour. The 'unhappy' sword, as Malory calls it, does terrible damage, and with both knights dying, and Balin's face unrecognisable it is so 'ful hewen and bledde' (p. 68), Balin asks his opponent's name and finds that he has killed his brother. Whoever defeats the knight of the island is doomed to replace him, and Balan, victorious in the previous contest, has inherited this curse. (There are a lot of curses in this particular narrative.)

Both brothers die and are buried in the same tomb, with Balin's name still unknown to those who inter him. Merlin supplies the missing name on the tombstone in letters of gold. He takes the fatal sword, and places it on a marble block where it will float above the water until claimed by Galahad: in whose hands it will become a source of healing. Thereafter, however, as Merlin prophesies, it will be taken by Launcelot, 'And Launcelot with hys swerde shall sle the man in the worlde that he lovith beste; that shall be sir Gawayne'⁴ (p. 70). The tragic story, in other words, is going to repeat itself. For the original author, the terrible sword probably represented the limitations of a martial code. For Malory, it represents the tragedy of civil war.

⁴ Malory's spellings are variously Gawain, Gawayn, Gawayne.

Comedic romance

If heroic chivalry can be shown by fighting prowess in relation to one's own sex, it is also manifested in attitudes towards the opposite sex: not to mention the heroism shown by some of Malory's women in their dealings with men. For Malory, the great chivalric quality in relation to women is fidelity, seen primarily in the relationship of Launcelot and Guinevere: one of the great literary explorations of Courtly Love. This movement arose in part in reaction to dynastic marriages, made without regard for the emotions of those involved. Arthur does, in fact, profess to love Guinevere when Merlin warns him against marrying her (p.71), but we are not told that Guinevere loves Arthur: it is her father who expresses his delight at the match (p.72). By contrast, it *is* stressed that Guinevere loves Launcelot the moment she sees him, and that the attraction is mutual (p.180).

There thus emerges the fatal split-loyalty paradox: except in respect of Guinevere, Launcelot is never anything other than completely loyal to Arthur; and in his fidelity to Guinevere, Launcelot never looks intentionally at another woman: however many of them may look at him, and however many hearts he breaks. And the paradoxical purity of this relationship is what finally destroys the Kingdom of Logres.

A lighthearted example of the problem occurs in Launcelot's early adventures. Minding his own business while asleep under a tree, Launcelot is seen by four queens, one of whom is the formidable Morgan le Fay. Since they all desire him, he is put into an enchanted sleep and whisked off to Morgan's castle (p. 183). When he awakes he is told to forget Guinevere, and is given a choice: make love to one of them, or be cast into a dungeon. A modern response would probably be to take on all four, but the medieval Launcelot, in fidelity to Guinevere, chooses the dungeon, to their fourfold fury. On this occasion there is a happy outcome: he is rescued by the girl who brings him his food, who is likewise infatuated with him, but whose father needs the help of a knight. Launcelot can thus repay the favour of being rescued without a further sexual entanglement.

In a later episode, Morgan is jealous of the beauty of the Lady of the Dolorous Tower and imprisons her for five years in a bath of scalding water (p. 582). Miraculously, this leaves her unscathed: it means simply that no can get to her to release her. Only the best knight can rescue her by taking her hand, and since this is Launcelot, he accepts the challenge. He breaks the spell, and leads her from the bath: 'the fayryst lady ... that ever he sawe' and, as Malory charmingly puts it, 'as naked as a nedyll'. Here is temptation indeed, and Launcelot is, in fact, tempted, until he remembers Guinevere: the only woman comparable (p.582).

Continuing his knight errantry, he arrives, like Balin before him, at the haunted Castle of Corbenic, where the maimed King Pellam (in this story called 'Pelles' – as confusing as a Russian novel, and a further indication of Malory's diverse sources) has a daughter, Elayne. Pelles, who has something of Merlin's gift of seeing the future, knows that if Elayne can have a son by Launcelot then that son will be Galahad: the only person capable of curing Pelles and restoring the Waste Land. Elayne is more than willing to oblige; the problem is Launcelot.

Brusen, a lady-in-waiting skilled in enchantment, has the solution. She will place a spell upon Launcelot so that he thinks he is making love to Guinevere. When the enchantment wears off the following morning, Launcelot discovers the deception. In a terrible scene, and contrary to his knightly vows, he attempts to

kill Elayne (p. 585). Her response, effective enough to induce in him a sense of shame, shows a heroism of its own:

'My lorde, sir Launcelot ... I have obeyde me unto the prophesye that my fadir tolde me. And by hys commaundmente, to fullfyll this prophecie I have gyven the grettest ryches and the fayryst floure that ever I had, and that is my maydynhode that I shall never have agayne. And therefore, jantyll knyght, owghe me youre good will' (p. 586).

When Launcelot returns to Camelot, a rumour starts via his cousin Sir Bors – who has also visited Corbenic in the course of his wanderings – that King Pelles's daughter Elayne is pregnant by Launcelot. Guinevere is furious at Launcelot's infidelity, until she accepts his explanation of the circumstances (p. 591).

If there is still something semi-comedic about all this, Launcelot's relationship with the second Elayne, the Maid of Astolat, has the note of real tragedy. Inadvertently wounded in the head by Sir Bors, and in a dangerous condition, Launcelot is tended by this second Elayne. The problem is that when he is recovered, he will leave. The well-meaning Sir Bors asks why the single Launcelot does not marry her. 'I se well by her dyligence aboute you that she lovith you intyerly' (p.773), and she would be an ideal choice. Moreover, 'she ys nat the firste that hath loste hir payne uppon you, and that ys thy more pyté.'

When Launcelot is ready to depart, Elayne declares her feelings: 'Now, fayre knyght and curtayse knyght, have mercy uppon me, and suffir me nat to dye for youre love' (p. 777). When Launcelot refuses to marry her, she makes her second offer. 'Thyan fayre knyght,' seyde she, 'will you be my paramour?' Since Elayne prides herself on being a 'clene maiden', Malory intends us to see the sacrifice of reputation that her offer involves.

Confronted with this dreadful vulnerability, Launcelot is distraught. He cannot marry her, and to seduce her would be a betrayal of her father and brother. He wishes she could marry some suitable other knight, and he even offers a financial settlement: a proposal that Elayne scornfully rejects. Launcelot departs and Elayne does, indeed, die for love of him, floating on a barge to Camelot with a declaration of her love and a request that he pray for her soul (p. 781). Even Guinevere is reproachful – couldn't Launcelot have given the girl some encouragement? – and it is only when Launcelot mentions the ultimatum of wife or mistress that she changes her tune.

As these episodes show, the chivalric code is about far more than physical battles, and the same applies to the episode of the Grail, in which the sympathetic Sir Bors is a prominent figure. With Perceval, Bors accompanies Galahad in the achievement of the Grail. The presence of Perceval is predictable – in the Germanic strains of Arthurian legend, Perceval *is* Galahad – but the inclusion of Bors is significant. Bors is an undistinguished fighter: he has won his place by the purity of his life, not by his feats with the sword. Bors is a sort of take on the idea that 'the first shall be last and the last shall be first'. And although Galahad is a greater knight than Launcelot, his real achievement is the healing of King Pellam and the restoration of the Waste Land.

That Launcelot should fail to achieve the Grail quest is inevitable in view of his adultery. What is more interesting is the failure also of Gawayne, another

embodiment of the knightly ideal. The thrust of the Grail narrative is its critique of the whole knightly code: the futility of mere physical prowess and worldly fame. This negative slant on chivalry was one Malory himself would not have shared;⁵ but his integrity as compiler rather than creator compelled him to record the work of others, even when he himself did not agree with their views.

Arthur vs. Mordred

Launcelot and Gawayne return to prominence in the last part of the *Morte*: this time illustrating the conflict between loyalty to an actual brother as against brother-in-arms. Mordred, now at court and wishing to supplant Arthur, sees the sense in ridding him of the protection of his best knight. How better than exposing Launcelot's adultery? Mordred tries to enlist the support of his half-brother Gawayne, but Gawayne sides instead with his knightly brother, Launcelot.

Provided with proof of Guinevere's guilt, Arthur reluctantly consigns her to the fire (p. 830), and Gawayne's brothers Gareth and Gaherys are given the unwelcome task of burning her. Rescuing Guinevere from the stake, Launcelot kills them both without realising who they are. He is racked with remorse when he finds what he has done, since it was he who made Gareth a knight. In addition, however, he has made an implacable enemy of Gawayne who now comes down on the side of ties of blood and engages in a feud. Family honour is at stake.

When the siege of Launcelot's castle Joyous Garde ends in stalemate, Launcelot returns Guinevere to Arthur and goes into voluntary exile in France: still wanting nothing other than to be loyal to Arthur. Urged on by Gawayne, Arthur pursues him. Launcelot fights Gawayne and inflicts a dreadful wound with Balin's sword.

The absence of Arthur gives Mordred his chance, and he seizes power. He also tries to seize Guinevere, but she manages to escape.

With Arthur now aware of his real enemy, there is a great battle at Dover, in which Gawayne's wound is opened up again, destroying him. His last action is a letter to Launcelot, urging him to come to Arthur's aid and making reconciliation: 'for of a more nobelar man myght I nat be slayne' (p. 863).

Launcelot receives the message too late; Arthur's and Mordred's armies meet at the Plain of Camlann. A truce is held, with both groups of negotiators warned to watch out for treachery in the form of a drawn sword. An adder bites one of them in the foot, and instinctively he strikes at it. Seeing the blade, both sides rush to mutual destruction. 'And thus they fought all the long day, and never stynted tylle the noble knyghtes were layde to the colde erthe' (p. 867). Is it heroism, or stupidity? Once again, we seem to hear the ironic voice of the Cistercian monks.

Mordred dies. Arthur, dying of a head wound, is taken by barge to Avalon. The Kingdom of Logres is broken. Guinevere enters a nunnery in penance for sins. Launcelot, in penance for his, becomes a monk. Sensing the death of Guinevere in a dream, he himself sickens and dies soon after.

Malory, however, will not give the last word to the Cistercians. The eulogy given by Sir Ector for Launcelot reaffirms the heroic ideal:

'And thou were the curtest knyght that ever bare shelde! And thou wert the truest frende to thy lovar that ever bestrade hors, and thou were the trewest lover of a synful man that ever loved woman, and thou were the kyndest man that ever

strake wyth swerde. And thou were the godelyest persone that ever cam emonge prees of knyghtes, and thou was the inekest man and the jentylllest that ever ete in hall emonge ladyes, and thou were the sternest knyght to thy mortal foo that ever put spere in the reeste' (p. 882).

There could hardly be a more fitting summary of the ideal of medieval chivalry. It was a code that Malory loved, and he lamented its passing; hoping that, one day, it might be renewed.

⁵ See Vinaver, *Malory*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1970, pp.78 ff.

Family Prayers

After the poem 'Vem kan längre hålla vakt', by Harriet Löwenhjelm, (1887-1918)

Who can stand, and hold at bay all the terrors growling?
Let us kneel at home and pray, while the storm is howling.

This is the world's appalling way, to be the body's killer.
Let us kneel at home and pray, to keep the spirit stiller.

Now from the death-trap I am free, but not for long, I fear me,
My dear Master stand by me, let it not come near me.

Not as yet the flesh's thrall, though the lust is biting,
Gentle Jesus, help my soul, arm it for the fighting.

Shadows humanly affright. Help me, help me, Father!
Help me both by day and night, lest darker shadows gather.

In despair I pine away, weary, near to dying.
Let us kneel at home and pray, for it calms my crying.

With thanks to Walter Nash for this translation. He notes: Harriet Löwenhjelm, member of an aristocratic Swedish family, daughter of a colonel of dragoons, died of tuberculosis at the age of 31. She was first and foremost a graphic artist, who wrote light verse for occasional commentary. Her earlier verses are nimble, fanciful, the work of a gifted dilettante. In her last, despairing years of illness, conscious of her approaching death, she wrote the above poem and some others, naked in feeling and deeply religious.

Kings, Quests and Hobbits: Heroism in T. H. White's *The Once and Future King* and J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*

Caleb Woodbridge

There are many striking parallels between J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*¹ and T. H. White's *The Once and Future King*,² but it is their shared use of Arthurian literature that is particularly revealing of their different portrayals of heroism. These texts each draw on medieval literature, adapting it to modern purposes. They were both written largely during the Second World War, and share a preoccupation with war and power. *The Lord of the Rings* is concerned with the quest to destroy the Ring of Power, set against the backdrop of war. In *The Once and Future King*, King Arthur attempts to reconcile Might with Right and sets out to 'find an antidote to war'. Against these backgrounds, both test the idea of heroism.

Both texts draw on Arthurian literature: obviously and directly in *The Once and Future King*, which retells Malory's *Morte Darthur* for modern audiences with the addition of White's own innovations, such as Arthur's magical childhood tuition by Merlyn; less clearly and indirectly in *The Lord of the Rings*, which draws on a wide variety of medieval literature to tell a more original story, but with some notable Arthurian echoes. The Arthurian influence on *The Lord of the Rings* was for a time relatively neglected. *The Road to Middle Earth*, Tom Shippey's groundbreaking study into the origins and sources of Tolkien's epic, quickly dismisses any Arthurian influence: 'As for King Arthur, Tolkien might well have seen him as a symptom of English vagueness. Why should Englishmen take interest in a Welsh hero committed to their destruction, and known anyway via a French rehash?'³ More recent scholarship has however paid closer attention to these influences, for example *Tolkien and Wales* by Carl Phelpstead, which examines Arthurian echoes in *The Lord of the Rings*, arguing that Tolkien was ambivalent towards Arthurian literature because it was 'not sufficiently naturalised in English'.⁴ Verlyn Flieger also discusses Tolkien's 'vexed' relationship with Arthur in *Interrupted Music*, arguing that, 'even in the face of his determination to make his mythos English, he settled, whether intentionally or by default or both, on ... the legend of Arthur' as his 'literary model' for his body of mythology.⁵ Despite not being a direct retelling of the Arthurian legend, *The Lord of the Rings* deliberately reuses and rewrites a number of prominent Arthurian motifs. Tolkien wrote in a letter of 1955 to

¹ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* [1954]; *The Two Towers* [1954]; *The Return of the King* [1955]; HarperCollins, 2005, (hereafter referred to as *FR*, *TT* and *RK*).

² T. H. White, *The Once and Future King* [1958] Voyager, 1996 (hereafter referred to as *OFK*).

³ Tom Shippey, *The Road to Middle Earth*, revised edition, Harper Collins, 2005, pp. 181-182.

⁴ Carl Phelpstead, *Tolkien and Wales: Language, Literature and Identity*, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2011, p. 87.

⁵ Verlyn Flieger, *Interrupted Music: The Making of Tolkien's Mythology*, Kent State University Press, 2005, pp. 32-33.

Milton Waldman detailing his ambition as a younger man to write a mythology he could dedicate to England, and explained why he deemed the Arthurian legend inadequate, which suggests that *The Lord of the Rings* deliberately sets out to correct what he perceived as its shortcomings.

Despite their shared medievalism, Arthurian influences and thematic concerns, there are also profound differences in the two texts' representations of heroism. Tolkien had direct experience of war and was a devout Catholic, whereas White was a pacifist and, despite considering conversion to Catholicism early on during World War Two, remained a freethinker. Notions of heroism often carry with them broader philosophical implications. Although literary texts do not usually present philosophical claims directly, 'literature incarnates philosophy', as Peter Kreeft argues in *The Philosophy of Tolkien*.⁶ *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Once and Future King* each embody the different worldviews of their authors through their portrayals of heroism.

The concept of heroism has not gone unchallenged. Ecofeminist critic Margery Hourihan argues in *Deconstructing the Hero* that 'Not only is it [the story of the hero and his quest] everywhere about us, it inscribes the set of related concepts, the fundamental dualisms, which have shaped Western thought and values.'⁷ She blames the dualism that underlies the hero story for a whole litany of ills, including racism, sexism, imperialism, European/American patriarchy, domination over nature, and competitive free-market capitalism. Both the story of King Arthur and *The Lord of the Rings* are cited as examples, and she claims that '*The Lord of the Rings* simply reasserts the traditional dualisms and the superiority of the Western patriarchal elite'.⁸ This article argues that many of her charges against the 'dualism' of the hero story are misplaced. Tolkien's Christian outlook is indeed dualistic in the sense that it is founded on basic distinctions such as that of Creator and Creation, Nature and Grace, and indeed Good and Evil. White's outlook, despite his flirtation with Catholicism, is materialistic and therefore monistic, both idiosyncratically his own and deeply affected by modern Marxism, Darwinism and Freudianism. Hourihan's arguments may be valid in relation to some hero stories, but these texts show that they do not necessarily hold true of heroism in general or dualism in general, and the alternative of philosophical monism carries problems of its own.

A comparison of how the two texts draw on Arthurian literature provides a useful key for unlocking these differences. The first point of comparison is of the two kings, Arthur and Aragorn; the second is between the quest to find the Holy Grail, and the anti-quest to destroy the Ring of Power. In the process, two types of heroism can be seen, 'high' and 'low'. Roger Sale makes this distinction in terms of 'ancient' and 'modern' heroism in his study *Modern Heroism*,⁹ while Peter Kreeft discusses the 'the relation of mutual dependence between the high-heroic and the humble-Hobbit-like'.¹⁰ The 'high' is the ancient heroism of great deeds

⁶ Peter Kreeft, *The Philosophy of Tolkien: The Worldview Behind The Lord of the Rings*, San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 2005, p. 22.

⁷ Margery Hourihan, *Deconstructing the Hero: Literary Theory and Children's Literature*, Routledge, 1997, p. 2.

⁸ Ibid, p. 34.

⁹ Roger Sale, *Modern Heroism*, University of California Press, 1973, p. 221.

¹⁰ Kreeft, *The Philosophy of Tolkien*, p. 212.

of honour and renown, the achievements of kings and warriors, which seems to have little place in the modern world. The 'low' is the inner heroism of personal courage, humility and conviction, more elusive, but perhaps more durable.

Arthur and Aragorn

Aragorn and the medieval Arthur are both 'high' heroic figures, great kings who achieve deeds of renown. However, *The Lord of the Rings* affirms 'high' heroism while *The Once and Future King* re-describes Arthur in order to demythologise 'high' heroism as mere 'hero-worship'. In *The Lord of the Rings*, hereditary right and nobility are realities. Aragorn's lineage and his inherent and inherited nobility are gradually revealed as the story progresses. Like Arthur who draws the sword from the stone, Aragorn's claim to the throne is supported by the possession of a particular sword. He is 'descended in direct lineage, father to father, from Isildur Elendil's son himself. And the sword that he bears was Elendil's sword' (*TT*, pp. 663-664). Further validation comes from the ancient lore: 'The hands of the king are the hands of a healer, and so shall the rightful king be known', and through Aragorn's healing hands, he saves the lives of Faramir, Éowyn and Merry (*RK*, p. 862). In Middle-earth, those of the line of kings are actually of greater stature, having an 'air of high nobility', embodying the medieval idea of sacral kingship.

In common with the Victorian medievalists, but in radical contrast to most post-First World War writers, Tolkien presents a sense of honour, majesty and heroism in war.¹¹ Tolkien is careful to avoid glorifying war itself, however, and his representation of war is in keeping with the tradition of Just War Theory, based in Roman philosophy and developed by Christian theologians, particularly Augustine and Aquinas.¹² Faramir gives a statement of Just War principles:

War must be, while we defend our lives against a destroyer who would devour all; but I do not love the bright sword for its sharpness, nor the arrow for its swiftness, nor the warrior for his glory. I love only that which they defend (*TT*, p. 672).

War is presented as a sad necessity rather than an end in itself, but fighting in a just cause can be an occasion for honour and for heroism. Whereas *The Once and Future King* does not focus on Arthur's battles, and when it does describe them, typically does so from a bird's eye view, *The Lord of the Rings* devotes vivid detail to various battles, often told from the perspective of the hobbits. This can be attributed at least in part to Tolkien's experience of fighting in the trenches, compared to White's lack of experience of battle.¹³ This makes it all the more striking that the writer who actually experienced the horrors of war was the one who also portrayed the heroism that may occur in such situations.

Although in principle Arthur is also the rightful king in *The Once and Future King*, there is much less emphasis on Arthur's lineage. When he comes to draw the sword from the stone, Arthur calls on Merlyn for help, and hears all the

¹¹ Andrew Lynch, 'Archaism, Nostalgia, and Tennysonian War in "The Lord of the Rings"', in *Tolkien's Modern Middle Ages* (ed. Jane Chance and Alfred K. Siewers), Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, pp. 77-92.

¹² Kreeft, *The Philosophy of Tolkien*, p. 167.

¹³ See John Garth, *Tolkien and the Great War: The Threshold of Middle-earth*, HarperCollins, 2004.

animals he has encountered giving him advice, and it is this that enables him to succeed (OFK, pp. 216-218). Arthur is described after becoming King as having 'fair hair and a stupid face, or at any rate there was a lack of cunning in it', and 'a good learner who enjoyed being alive and did not believe in original sin' (OFK, p. 233). He is presented as a suitable king because of his native goodness and for his education from Merlyn, not because of his lineage or prior deeds of heroism. Neither is the young Arthur presented as promising hero material. The narrator says 'he admired Kay and was a born follower. He was a hero-worshipper' (OFK, p. 8). 'Hero-worship' is an important theme in White's portrayal of heroism. Sir Lancelot, another character who might also be thought of as a hero, is also described as a 'hero-worshipper', looking up to Arthur as his hero (OFK, p. 353). Lancelot is described as 'hero' both to Guenever (OFK, p. 393) and to Elaine (OFK, p. 418), while Perceval is said to have 'been seized by a sort of enthusiastic hero worship of Galahad' (OFK, p. 489). This theme of hero-worship suggests that heroism is in the eye of the beholder rather than an objective reality. In later life, King Arthur, and with him Guenevere and Lancelot, become to the younger generation 'figures instead of people', to whom, 'a sight of Arthur as he hunted in the greenwood was like seeing the idea of Royalty'. Of Sir Lancelot, they say, 'How condescending, how splendidly democratic of Sir Lancelot, to laugh, as if he were an ordinary man! Perhaps he eats and drinks as well, or even sleeps at night' (OFK, p. 455). White undermines 'high' heroism by suggesting that 'hero-worship' that elevates people in this way is a misguided delusion.

'High' heroism is often associated with deeds of arms and glory in battle. White remained faithful to Malory in outline, but is much less interested in describing Arthur's battles. The only battle described in detail in *The Once and Future King* is that of Bedegraine, in which Arthur fights to break the power of the feudal lords by waging a campaign of 'Total War' to 'press the war home to its real lords – until they themselves were ready to refrain from warfare, being confronted with its reality' (OFK, p. 318). Of Arthur's Roman War, the narrator says 'It need not concern us long', and treats it as 'the logical consequence of Bedegraine – the continuation of that battle on a European scale' (OFK, p. 363). For White, Arthur's battles are not an occasion for glory, but an attempt to fight a 'war to end wars'.

White retells the story of Arthur as an 'Aristotelian tragedy' (OFK, p. 335), and Arthur's attempts to reconcile Might with Right ultimately fail. However, Arthur retains his dignity throughout. Towards the end of *The Once and Future King*, Gareth sees the aging Arthur:

He did not see a hero of romance, but a plain man who had done his best – not a leader of chivalry, but the pupil who had tried to be faithful to his curious master, the magician, by thinking all the time – not Arthur of England, but a lonely old gentleman who had worn his crown for half a lifetime in the teeth of fate (OFK, p. 602).

White is sceptical of heroism in the 'romance' sense, but affirms in Arthur a deep sense of human decency that is in its own way 'heroic': he has 'done his best'. In 'The Book of Merlyn', the final section of the novel, Arthur reflects on the human capacity 'to mean well', 'that extraordinary faculty in man, that strange, rare and

obstinate decency which will make writers or scientists maintain their truths at the risk of death' (OFK, p. 789). White recasts Arthur as a modern hero, not a glorious warrior but a decent man with good intentions.

Quest and Anti-Quest

Another side to heroism can be seen in the quests in each story: Frodo's quest is to destroy the Ring of Power, while the Knights of the Round Table go in search of the Holy Grail, though few achieve it, most notably Sir Galahad. In many ways, the quests are opposites: the Ring is a symbol of evil to be destroyed, whereas the Grail is a symbol of goodness to be sought. For Malory, the Grail was the cup used by Jesus at the Last Supper, and represented the real presence of the Eucharist. In *The Once and Future King*, the Grail represents the Round Table as a spiritual ideal. Arthur recognizes that the Round Table had been 'a temporal ideal. If we are to save it, it must be made into a spiritual one. I forgot about God' (OFK, p. 469). In White's version of events, the Grail is an afterthought; it is picked almost at random by Arthur and Lancelot as a means of redirecting Might towards God in an attempt to save the Round Table from corruption. This suggests that Christianity may be useful as an ideal and civilizing influence, but does not have the authority of truth. Whereas Tolkien's dualistic worldview allows for the spiritual as a reality that is above and beyond the temporal while also giving meaning to it, for White, the spiritual is not truly transcendent, but merely a temporal ideal elevated to the status of spiritual.

In *The Once and Future King* the quest for the Grail proves problematic both as a social ideal and a personal quest for holiness. Galahad, the perfect knight who achieves the Grail, is presented as cold and aloof. Lancelot attempts to defend him, saying that he 'may have seemed inhuman and mannerless, and so on' because 'he was far away in his spirit, living on desert islands, in silence, with eternity' (OFK, p. 498). Arthur observes prophetically, 'If people reach perfection, they vanish, you know. It may mean the end of the Table. Supposing somebody were to find God?' (OFK, pp. 470-471) Galahad does indeed vanish on achieving the Grail. Arthur sees the quest as a failure, 'because those who had achieved the Quest had become perfect and been lost to the world, while those who had failed in it had soon returned no better' (OFK, p. 686), and decides of Christianity that 'Advising heaven to earth was useless' (OFK, p. 690). White presents the Grail Quest as chasing after an impossible ideal, and the spiritual as inhuman and otherworldly.

Whereas the Grail Quest attempts to turn Might to good use, the destruction of the Ring represents the renunciation of Power exerted for dominion. Further, for Frodo as Ring-bearer, it carries a great personal cost. From learning of the nature of the Ring, he is willing to bear it, to make 'a flight from danger into danger' in order to 'save the Shire' (FR, p. 62). At the Council of Elrond, he volunteers, 'I will take the Ring ... though I do not know the way' (FR, p. 270), even though the only outcomes he can foresee are 'dark and unpleasant' (FR, p. 273).¹⁴ Whereas

¹⁴ Kreeft hears in Frodo's words an echo of Mary's *fiat*, 'Let it be to me according to your word' Luke 1:38: 'They are opposite sides of the same coin: Mary consented to carry the Savior of the whole world, the Christ, to birth, to life; and Frodo consented to carry the destroyer of the whole world, the Ring, the Antichrist, to its death', *The Philosophy of Tolkien*, p. 204.

Sam is optimistic that they will return safely, Frodo holds no such hope: 'If we can nurse our limbs to bring us to Mount Doom, that is all we can do. More than I can, I begin to feel' (*TT*, p. 624). Frodo's journey to destroy the Ring is sacrificial, going willingly to his seemingly certain death. This is the other side of heroism in *The Lord of the Rings*: not glory and great deeds in battle, but the 'low' heroism of humility and the sacrificial renunciation of power.

Frodo receives what Tolkien described as 'an Arthurian ending' by Tolkien in his letter to Waldman. In Malory, Arthur says 'For I muste into the vale of Avylyon to hele me of my grievous wounde',¹⁵ and at the end of *The Lord of the Rings*, Frodo departs with the elves to Valinor in the West to be healed of his wounds. Verlyn Flieger argues that the contrast between Frodo and Arthur shows that 'the actions of hobbits, of ordinary people caught up in extraordinary circumstances have superseded the larger-than-life heroes'.¹⁶ However, Frodo is the one departing while Aragorn remains to begin the Dominion of Men, suggesting a place in this world for the 'high' heroic. Frodo's Arthurian departure dignifies the humble: 'whoever humbles himself will be exalted', but taken as a whole, *The Lord of the Rings* is also a recovery of the heroic for a post-war audience suspicious of it. The ending of *The Lord of the Rings* splits the figure of Arthur between Aragorn the returning king, suggesting Christian hope, and Frodo the wounded saviour, departing this world without any promise of return, placing that hope beyond any earthly ruler or kingdom. In these Arthurian borrowings, Tolkien integrates high and low heroism, as well as combining a fairy-tale ending with a profound sense of loss.

Conclusion

The Once and Future King shows the difficulty of finding hope and purpose starting from a materialistic, monistic philosophy. White exposes high heroism as 'hero-worship' while wanting to retain a sense of human dignity and well-meaning. Yet without some standard or reality that transcends the here and now, even this is called into question. In the final chapter of 'The Candle in the Wind', Book Four of *The Once and Future King*, Arthur wrestles with various possible explanations for his failure. In each case, he fears that his efforts have been useless against a deterministic universe. He considers the Christian doctrine of original sin, though not the Christian hope of redemption, fearing that if 'the heart of men was deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, the purpose of his life had been a vain one. Chivalry and justice became a child's illusions' (*OFK*, p. 686), and he expresses similar fears about evolutionary determinism (*OFK*, pp. 686-7), historical determinism centred on ancestral wrongs (*OFK*, p. 688), and a Marxist economic determinism centred on private property (*OFK*, p. 689). He is close to despair: 'He could not see the real solution.... Justice has been his last attempt – to do nothing which was not just. But it had ended in failure' (*OFK*, p. 691). For Arthur, as for White, human agency and dignity seem illusive in the light of Darwin, Marx and Freud, and in the shadow of twentieth-century war

¹⁵ Thomas Malory, *Works*, ed. Eugène Vinaver, 2nd edn., Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 716.

¹⁶ Flieger, *Interrupted Music*, p. 44.

and totalitarianism. Arthur's hope is that humanity would learn from the animal kingdom to have 'civilization without war – because they claimed no boundaries' (*OFK*, p. 696). Yet White's anarchistic solution to abolish nations and establish a system of free trade and passage is too powerful a solvent: having dissolved the boundaries between nations, there is nothing logically in Arthur's anarchism to stop it from dissolving the boundaries between individuals. Philosophically, individuality and difference become very difficult to account for.

Despite having the potential to be distorted into a structure of domination and oppression, Christian dualism allows for unity in diversity. Theologian Gillian McCulloch argues against ecofeminist attempts to deconstruct theological dualism saying that 'Dualism takes different forms, and the concept of a distinction-in-unity or a holistic dualism may better characterise aspects of Christian theology'.¹⁷ The same applies to *The Lord of the Rings*. Dualism is not necessarily oppressive, and the belief in a triune God gives a metaphysical basis for unity in diversity. Both the high-heroism of Aragorn and the low-heroism of Frodo are necessary for good to triumph. There are real distinctions between nature and grace, good and evil, noble and humble, but the one does not stand in domination over the other, but in a mutual relationship of service and complementarity. The story embodies the principle 'Do not overcome evil with evil, but evil with good' (Romans 12:21). Contrary to Hourihan, *The Lord of the Rings* is a profound critique of the dangers of domination on the basis of theological dualism that is holistic rather than dominating.

Taken together, the similarities between *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Once and Future King* only serve to emphasise what a profound difference Tolkien's Christianity made to his writing compared to White's much more typically modern outlook. White's materialistic monism reduces 'high' to 'low' heroism, whereas Tolkien's Christian dualism has room for both 'high' and 'low' heroism in mutual relationship.

¹⁷ Gillian McCulloch, *The Deconstruction of Dualism in Theology: with special reference to ecofeminist theology and new age spirituality*, Paternoster Press, 2002, p. ix.

A Modern Hero? Tropes of Heroism in John K. Toole's *A Confederacy of Dunces*

Elisabeth Gilbert

Modern literature has given birth to numerous striking protagonists who fulfil our notions of an anti-hero rather than a classical hero. But there are few 'heroes' who are as aesthetically and emotionally off-putting as Toole's Ignatius J. Reilly: he is a self-centred, intolerant, lazy, obese, and ill-kempt hypochondriac. Ignatius's mother has invested all her money in the boy's education, with the result that he has a master's degree in medieval philosophy and finds himself unable to integrate into normal society. Instead, he tries to live a parallel life by the moral and philosophical standards of the Middle Ages. In a way, Ignatius embodies the clash of cultures between pre-Renaissance western thought and 20th century life.¹

This contrast even shows in the way John Kennedy Toole portrays his character: he uses a wealth of cross-references and allusions to the traits and representatives of hero types popular in Western society, referencing our high-brow culture, philosophy and religious thought. However, every incident described is so full of allusions to famous heroes, saints or scholars that the events become preposterous through sheer overemphasis. In the following discussion, several of these tropes and patterns of heroism are highlighted in order to raise the question of whether Ignatius Reilly, for all his ludicrous traits, is in any sense a traditional hero and if so, what this says about modern society.

Toole uses a variety of narrative devices to call to mind familiar heroic tropes (emphasised in brackets in the following plot synopsis) and, often through extreme exaggeration, stresses the incongruity of his protagonist. The novel opens with the description of a bulging and unkempt young man who embodies contrasts and contradictions even in his looks. He does not wait to be ostracised but defines himself as ultimately superior to the rest of the world (*the outsider*). He even feels called upon to judge and criticise his surroundings, implying that he not only has better taste but is morally superior, too (*the chosen one*).

A green hunting cap *squeezed* the top of the *fleshy balloon* of a head. The green earflaps, *full of large ears* and *uncut hair* and the fine bristles that grew in the ears themselves, stuck out on either side *like turn signals indicating two directions at once*. Full, pursed lips protruded beneath the bushy black moustache and, at their corners, sank into little folds filled with disapproval and potato chip crumbs. In the shadow under the green visor of the cap Ignatius J. Reilly's *supercilious blue* and yellow eyes *looked down upon* the other people waiting under the clock at D.H. Holmes department store, studying the crowd of people for signs of bad taste in dress. Several of the outfits, Ignatius noticed, were new enough and expensive enough to be properly considered *offenses against taste and decency*. Possession of anything new or expensive only reflected a person's lack of theology and

¹ See also Elisabeth S. Bell, 'The Clash of World Views in John Kennedy Toole's *A Confederacy of Dunces*', *The Southern Literary Journal*, 21 (1988), 15-22. Bell rather sees it as a conflict between modern pragmatic and mystic medievalist world views, p. 16.

geometry; it could even cast *doubts upon one's soul*² (p. 1, emphasis added).

The story unfolds in 1960s New Orleans, famous for its frivolity and excesses. The opening scene is vividly and colourfully described, yet the reader immediately feels at some distance from the protagonist, mainly owing to the ironic tone and anticlimactic, often grotesque descriptions, as in the syllepsis 'filled with disapproval and potato chip crumbs'. The hero of this novel is evidently more focused on the inner life than on outer appearances; he has chosen to act by leading a life that shows his contempt of modern superficiality and instead centres on intellectual qualities embodied by 'theology and geometry', in other words the spiritual life and order, which he has chosen from the *Septem Artes Liberales*, fundamental to medieval education.

Ignatius's mere appearance and disdainful way of staring at people is enough to raise the suspicions of patrolman Mancuso, and when Ignatius refuses to show his documents and instead accuses the policeman of disrespectful behaviour, he causes a commotion. Irene, his mother, joins him and they run away – to the next best bar in the red-light district, called Night of Joy (*fate forces him into an unusual situation*).

On their way home, Irene, slightly drunk, has an accident and hits a wrought-iron balcony support. The costs for this damage are high, and she is unable to cover them. She insists that her thirty-year-old son give up the meditative life he has pursued in his bedroom since his graduation, and find some work (*initiation into the quest*).

The story now unfolds in the style of an episodic picaresque novel to show how Ignatius fails to secure any long-term position and to recount his various encounters. His first job is in the office of trouser factory Levy Pants, where he takes an interest in the conditions of the Afro-American workers and organises the Crusade for Moorish Dignity (*first heroic task showing him as a crusader and commander*).

Having offended the company's few customers and wrought havoc with the company records, Ignatius is fired, and moves on to become a hot-dog vendor in the French Quarter, a job for which he has to dress up as a pirate (*new task showing him as an adventurer*). Here he meets a homosexual dandy and decides to subvert the system through the introduction of homosexuals into political and military key positions (*new task showing him as a political leader*). To this end, he founds a political party, but during his inauguration speech is chased away by radical lesbians (*hero involved in physical action scenes*).

Frustrated, Ignatius indulges his only two passions: watching B-movies and reading medieval philosophy, especially Boethius. On one occasion, instead of selling hot dogs, he leaves the vending cart in the care of a young man and goes to the cinema. What he doesn't know is that this young man is part of a criminal syndicate selling pornographic photos at high schools, and that the latter proceeds to hide these pictures inside the hot-dog cart's warm compartment. It happens that the photos show a half-naked woman hiding her private parts behind the cover of Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*. Ignatius gets to see one of these pictures, advertising an event at the Night of Joy bar, the one where he and his mother hid

² All references are to John Kennedy Toole, *A Confederacy of Dunces*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1980.

at the outset of the story. He feels that this damsel in distress must be rescued (*action hero*). He heads to the bar, in fact the headquarters of the pornographers, and virtually stumbles into the network, thus unwittingly helping the police to detect and arrest the criminals (*coincidental yet very heroic deed*).

Ignatius's mother is quite overwhelmed by her son's involvement in the police raid, and finally decides to have him taken to an asylum. Just before the medics arrive, his friend Myrna appears, inviting him to New York (*last-minute escape from danger*).

Even this cursory look at the main plot shows many different tropes and features of conventional hero tales. Most strikingly, Ignatius incorporates two different types of hero – the man of action and the man of letters.³ Moreover, Toole establishes his hero on several levels: one of the most striking features of Ignatius, apart from his strange looks, is the way he speaks. In contrast to his mother and the other people he encounters, Ignatius uses an extremely formal register with hyperboles, and slightly antiquated or little used complex terms and vocabulary which often refers directly to the Middle Ages. Whether he cannot or will not adapt his language in accordance with the actual speech situation (code switching) is not clear, but he undoubtedly deploys his eloquence to establish his superiority. This sets him off as extraordinarily well educated, and is often understood by those about him as a sort of verbal offense. The moment he begins to speak, people know he is not one of them, and often, if they are not daunted by his eloquence, they tend to trust and believe in him, thinking that his superiority of expression must correspond to a better understanding than theirs.

In the opening scene of the novel, Ignatius first reacts normally to the policeman approaching him ('What?... Who are you?' and 'I don't drive. Will you kindly go away? I am waiting for my mother' – p. 3), but then he lashes out in a high-toned way, voicing contempt for modern society and putting forth his exceptional verbal powers:

'Is it the part of the police department to harass me when this city is a flagrant vice capital of the civilized world?... This city is famous for its gamblers, prostitutes, exhibitionists, anti-Christ, alcoholics, sodomites, drug-addicts, fetishists, onanists, pornographers, frauds, jades, litterbugs, and lesbians, all of whom are only too well protected by graft. If you have a moment, I shall endeavor to discuss the crime problem with you, but don't make the mistake of bothering *me*' (p. 3, original emphasis).

Toole's exceptional quality lies in pointing to the truth and yet exaggerating at the same time, so the reader is challenged to find a deeper, more serious meaning beyond the superficially grotesque scenes. In the above-quoted passage, for example, the many vices of the 'vice capital' may sound preposterous, yet, at the end of the novel, we have to admit that most of these cases do appear, embodied in some character of the main plot or in subplots. In his outspoken and fearless way, Ignatius recalls Christian saints, martyrs and scholars. So from the very

³ These categories, as well as many other details concerning the protagonist, can be traced back to fundamental hero patterns as defined in Thomas Carlyle's *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*, [1840], OUP, 1950.

beginning of the novel, the recurrent motif is established of contrasts between the Middle Ages and the twentieth century, and between the hero's self-perception and reality.

Emulating Milton

The patterns of a picaresque novel are not only applied to the storyline of *A Confederacy of Dunces*, the title of which is taken from an epigraph by Jonathan Swift, creator of the famous picaresque hero Gulliver; it is also reflected in the hero's character. Typically, in a picaresque novel the protagonist refuses to change and adapt to society, and is astonishingly lazy. This sets him against those around him, who are defined by a bourgeois work ethic. Ignatius fiercely rejects any products of the modern age on account of its focus on the material world. This shows for example in his emphasis on the importance of leisure as the precondition for the *vita contemplativa*, which leads to wisdom and understanding.⁴ Ignatius manifests his worldview with allusions to and naming of famous medieval scholars. Throughout the novel, references to Abelard,⁵ Beckett, Boccaccio, Boethius, Dante,⁶ Hroswitha,⁷ Langland⁸ and Milton abound.

Initially, as a propagator of the contemplative life, Ignatius spends his time shut up in his cave-like room, writing indictments against the modern world. According to Carlyle, a hero's intellectual qualities correspond with moral superiority; every now and then he has to withdraw from the world into his 'empire of silence'.⁹ Ignatius seems well-aware of this aspect of the hero myth and likens himself to none other than John Milton: 'I was emulating the poet Milton by spending my youth in seclusion, meditation and study in order to perfect my craft of writing as he did.'¹⁰

All these authors are known for their steadfast beliefs; and some, Dante most of all, for their harsh and unrelenting criticism of their societies. Ignatius,

⁴ C.f. Gabriele Stumpp, *Müssige Helden: Studien zum Müsiggang in Tiecks 'William Lovell', Goethes 'Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre', Kellers 'Grünem Heinrich' und Stifters 'Nachtsonner'*, Stuttgart, Metzler, 1992, pp.13, 17. This can be traced back to Aristotle.

⁵ In this respect, the letters he writes to and receives from Myrna can be understood as a direct reference to the famous correspondence between Abelard and Héloïse.

⁶ For instance, Ignatius describes his visit to the trouser factory as 'a descent into that particular inferno' (p. 87). Later, in the French Quarter, he likens himself to Dante again: 'I am apparently trapped in a limbo of lost souls' (p. 195); 'The balconies of the old buildings hung over my head like dark branches in an allegorical forest of evil' (p. 197). New Orleans to him is a 'sinkhole of vice', a new Sodom and Gomorrah (p. 181).

⁷ The articles he is planning to publish include 'Boethius Observed', 'In Defense of Hroswitha: To Those Who Say She Did Not Exist', as well as 'Abstinence, the Safest Method of Birth Control' and 'New Orleans, City of Romance and Culture'. See Toole p. 85. Roswitha of Gandersheim (935–c. 975) wrote poems of the legends of the saints. To Ignatius, she represents the ideal woman: chaste, pious and intellectual.

⁸ Ignatius identifies himself with the protagonist of *Piers Plowman*, an analogy which Toole uses to suggest an allegorical import for the entire novel, c.f. p. 26. Also: 'Symbolically, a Desire bus hurtled past me...' (p. 197).

⁹ C.f. Momm, p. 165; Carlyle, vol. 5, p. 101.

¹⁰ Toole p. 87. See also p. 109: 'Too long have I confined myself in Miltonic isolation and meditation.'

too, writes to contribute to the betterment of society.¹¹ When his mother forces him into the world of work, the 'abyss', as he calls it (p. 125), he describes his actions and experiences in journal entries (*The Working Boy's Journal Or Up From Sloth*) and letters to his college friend Myrna.¹² Toole now allows Ignatius to paint the mishaps he stumbles into in a much more heroic light, creating by this means striking comic effects. These stem from the incongruity of Ignatius' understandings of situations, constantly portraying himself as a man with a mission, a modern pilgrim of sorts, and underlining the discrepancy between his perceptions and reality.

Ignatius's worldview is directly related to his favourite author, Anicius M. S. Boethius, whose theory of the Wheel of Fortune, as presented in the *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, serves to exculpate Ignatius from anything that happens to him, since he feels exposed to forces beyond his control. Fortuna's involvement means Ignatius doesn't need to take responsibility for his own life.¹³ Like Boethius, he suffers the 'plight of a just man in an unjust society' (p. 139). Boethius was not actually Christian himself, but was incarcerated and killed for allegedly having conspired in favour of Roman liberty. In prison, he wrote the *Consolation of Philosophy*, which led to his being widely accepted in the Middle Ages and even placed into the *Paradiso* by Dante, as one of the ten most important theologians. Ignatius uses Boethius and the Middle Ages in general as a positive foil to his society. This worldview also shows in his aesthetic standards and political aspirations: theology and geometry not only guide his choice of clothes and assist his moral judgements of his contemporaries, but the medieval worldview also reverberates in his outspokenly anti-democratic position – he favours a feudal system with a social elite ruled by a 'tasteful and decent king who has some knowledge of theology and geometry' (p. 183). In reference to Boethius, Ignatius calls for unreformed churchmen and a general pre-Lutheran state. Like Carlyle, Ignatius writes to take a stand against social changes that are worrying him. Like the mid-Victorian cultural critic, he is afraid that the 'mechanical age' and the ensuing secularisation have destroyed the foundations of society. Carlyle felt imminently threatened by chaos, anarchy and spiritual emptiness.¹⁴ In the same vein, Ignatius complains that 'Chaos, Lunacy and Bad Taste gained ascendancy' (p. 25) and fears that now, being forced to work, he has to face 'death, destruction, anarchy, progress, ambition, and self-improvement' (p. 26). This aversion to modernity and progress is again a feature of the medieval worldview, where *modernitas* was a negatively connoted word, meaning a distraction from the really important things.¹⁵

A critical observer of the modern world, Ignatius styles himself as a

¹¹ 'My pencil, my engine of truth,' Toole p. 109.

¹² The likeness of her name to the ancient city of Smyrna, a centre of Early Christianity, is remarkable here, especially in view of the fact that she will rescue him in the end.

¹³ C.f. Michael Kline, 'Narrating the Grotesque: The Rhetoric of Humor in John Kennedy Toole's *A Confederacy of Dunces*', *The Southern Quarterly* 37 / 3-4 (1999):283-90; Noel Harold Kaylor, Jr., 'Fortune's Wheel, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, Boethius, and Recent American and British Fiction', *Carmine Philosophiae* 10 (2001): 73-81.

¹⁴ C.f. Momm p. 2.

¹⁵ C.f. Aaron J Gurjewitsch, *Das Weltbild des mittelalterlichen Menschen*, Dresden, 1978, p. 128.

messenger with a moral obligation to act. To underline this, Toole created a hero who plays the lute and the trumpet – both instruments of angelic messengers (pp. 2, 88). What's more, he is named after St Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556), the Spanish priest and founder of the Jesuit Order and the brain behind the Inquisition. St Ignatius propagated poverty, chastity, obedience, education and, more than anything else, a relentless fight against heretics. With the exception maybe of obedience, his modern namesake has all these characteristics. Ignatius longs to lead a spiritual army to change society. His first major attempt to do so takes shape in what he calls the 'Crusade for Moorish Dignity'.

Fighting Fire with Fire

Ignatius's first job is as a filing clerk in the office of a run-down trouser company, Levy Pants. But instead of filing away, he plans to innovate and revitalize the flailing business. Step one is to 'become more militant and authoritarian' towards the few customers (p. 77). In a letter to a client who had complained about being delivered shorts rather than normal-length trousers, he takes on the tone of a military leader and uses words resonating with medieval imagery, recalling practices such as flagellation:

We have received via post your absurd comments about our trousers, the comments revealing, as they did, your total lack of contact with reality.... You are in your incomprehensible babble, unable to assimilate stimulating concepts of commerce into your retarded and blighted worldview.... We do not wish to be bothered in future by such tedious complaints. Please confine your correspondence to orders only. We are a busy and dynamic organization whose mission needless effrontery and harassment can only hinder. If you molest us again, sir, you may *feel the sting of the lash across your pitiful shoulders*. Yours in anger (p. 77, emphasis added).

The lack of contact with reality is something that defines Ignatius, who dedicates himself to rearranging the office: he grows plants that entwine themselves among the filing lockers so they can no longer be opened, he builds a cross to stand in front of his desk, he decorates his workspace with purple monk's cloth drapes, and he puts up a small statue of St Anthony of Padua, the Franciscan friar known for his fervent preaching. This done, he visits the factory proper and is shocked by working conditions there. Instead of realising that the workers are either not doing anything or sewing gowns for themselves, he fancies himself being witness to social injustice and, comparing the workers with slaves, feels called upon to take action. Ignatius organises a demonstration in which the workers are to storm the office. As reported by one of the workers, he tells them 'you peoples all be happier in the middle age. You peoples gotta get you a cannon and some arrows, and drop a nuclear bum on top this place' (p. 115). Evidently, when modern technology comes in useful, Ignatius does not shy away from including that into his medieval repertoire. Cannons and arrows can be listed alongside nuclear bombs.

The actual demonstration or 'crusade scene' is told from different points of view: the third-person narrator, Ignatius himself reporting in his journal, and the workers. His cross has impressed a few; some wish to come to the office to pray and sing gospel songs. He is even described as a 'white savior cat' (p. 115). Clearly, his eloquence and references to Christianity – in lexis, in office decoration

and in showing a humanitarian interest – have managed to convince the workers to trust him.

Before they march into the office to demand higher wages and better working conditions, Ignatius delivers a speech full of Biblical metaphors, simultaneously recalling the famous address to the Romans by Mark Antony ('Friends!' p. 118; alluding to Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*). He inspects their 'engines of war' (p. 118) – in reality fence posts, broomsticks, bicycle chains and bricks – and in order to mobilise them calls to mind crusades such as the various attempts to regain Jerusalem in the Middle Ages, or even the *Sacco di Roma*, the pillaging of Rome in 1527. 'In our wake, we must leave a sacked and pillaged Levy Pants, we must fight fire with fire.'¹⁶

To Ignatius, the whole crusade is a symbolic act rather than a real attempt to improve the conditions of the workers; he's more focused on the form and the impression he leaves than the content (he even buys a film camera to document the event). He is thrilled to be acting out the rituals of a proper political demonstration. These include banner-bearers, a choir singing madrigals and the 'warrior's battalion'.

'If you wish to simply rush into the office like cattle, you will have participated in nothing more than a riot. This banner alone gives form and credence to the agitation. There is a certain geometry involved in these things, a certain ritual which must be observed' (p. 119).

But the whole scene is one of slapstick and comic anticlimax: his banner is in fact an old used bed sheet painted with crayons, which none of the workers want to have to touch; instead of the medieval church songs Ignatius had hoped for, they sing a 'spiritual' about being caught by the police.

The anticlimactic effect of the scene is further stressed by the very martial vocabulary used to build up the suspense: arriving at the office, Ignatius '*burst like a torpedo through the door*,' his 'scarf-shawl flying horizontally in his wake *like the flag of some mobilized Scottish clan*' (116). The company boss, Mr Gonzalez, begins to worry when Ignatius goes straight to the factory and loud cheers can be heard: 'Mr. Gonzalez dreaded the thought of a *battle* with him. His feet grew numb when he thought of one of those *bear's paws ... driving him perhaps like a stake* through the ... flooring of the office' (p. 117; all emphases added).

After inspecting the 'armory', Ignatius tells the workers:

'The violence of our attack may surpass my expectations. ... My cursory inspection of your arms ... confirms my faith in the ultimate success of our crusade today.... We shall storm the office very shortly, thereby surprising the foe.... All of you must realize that our cause has many enemies' (p. 118).

Shortly before setting off, Ignatius explains the '*battle plan*', which is to enter the office peacefully until the battalion is needed: 'I shall call, "*Attack!*" That will be the signal for your *onslaught*' (p. 121). The crusade is, however, quickly aborted when the warriors accidentally break his plant pot but refuse to hurt anyone. In

¹⁶ Toole p. 118. The same Biblical phrase is also used in his political rally later: 'No one can deter me.... The world today is in a state of grave unrest.... We must prevent the apocalypse. We must fight fire with fire' (pp. 275f.).

the end, 'the procession' (p. 124) shuffles back to the factory. In short, the high-flying Crusade for Moorish Dignity is a complete failure. The bare facts of reality notwithstanding, astonishingly – and typically – in Ignatius's own reflection the event is raised to a more momentous, even heroic level:

The Crusade for Moorish Dignity, my brilliant first attack upon the problems of our times, would have been a rather grand and decisive coup had it not been for the basically bourgeois worldview of the rather simple people who were members of the vanguard (p. 232).

Toole plays with cultural constructions and some of the notions we have when thinking of famous hero types, especially the ones known through literature and films. Needless to say, Ignatius likens himself to typical American heroes such as Zorro or the Marvel comic figures Superman and Batman in his daydreams – 'I rather respect Batman' (p. 219). When he meets art dealer Dorian Greene, the latter draws parallels between Ignatius and famous actors of the 1930s and 40s: Fatty Arbuckle, 'Charles Laughton in drag as the Queen of Gypsies' (p. 211), or 'Betty Davis with indigestion' (p. 212). Unimpressed by this ridicule, Ignatius retorts: 'I am the avenging sword of taste and decency' (p. 213). It also comes as no surprise that, as a hot-dog vendor in the French Quarter, Ignatius dresses up as a pirate. This pays homage to the tourists' imaginations of the olden days in the Southern States. Ignatius ties a red sateen pirate's scarf over his green hunting cap, wears a golden earring, and fixes a black plastic cutlass onto the side of his white vendor's smock. The avid movie-goer even play-acts the daring pirate to the point where he imagines his life to be threatened, and the descriptions immediately call to mind cloak-and-dagger classics such as the films with Errol Flynn – again, Ignatius is unable to distinguish between reality and his perception of the world:

Brandishing the plastic cutlass at Clyde, I cried 'Walk the plank, Admiral!' ... He proceeded to attack me with his spear-like fork. We lunged about in the garage like two swashbucklers in an especially inept historical film.... I know that Clyde was really trying to kill me (p. 196).

Yet, a pirate should not be restricted to an eye patch, a sabre, and a head band. To the British reader at least, famous adventurers like Sir Francis Drake come to mind – thief to some, national hero to others. A pirate may be a bold and courageous traveller, a circumnavigator, a man who obeys nobody, a symbol of personal freedom. Once this image is confronted with an oversized weenie seller in a cheap and silly costume who dares not venture beyond the boundaries of his hometown, the incompatibility of traditional heroes and modern life comes to the fore.

A hero feels compelled to save society, even against its wishes, from the looming new – he is a guardian of old values although his actions might look contrarian: rebellious, radical, ignoring rules and regulations. The conflict between hero and society can go to extremes, the hero might suddenly feel disconnected and disoriented, producing antisocial feelings. Ignatius is well aware of the fact that his system of values doesn't correspond to that of his contemporaries: 'Employers sense in me a denial of their values.... They fear me ... they can see

that I am forced to function in a century which I loathe.... You must realize the fear and hatred which my *weltanschauung* instils in people' (pp. 44f.).

Whether and how a society accepts a hero serves to reflect the condition of that society. Clearly, the portrayal of a hero who is not acknowledged tells us a lot about the flaws of that society. 'Ours is an age without heroes,' Arthur Schlesinger stated in 1962, and it seems that Toole was driven by a similarly negative view of his social environment.¹⁷ Indeed, maybe Ignatius is only such a grotesque figure because he has not changed in the way society has – he is, as he himself states, an anachronism (p. 52), and the world no longer knows how to deal with uncompromising 'saviours'.

At the time when *A Confederacy of Dunces* was written, in early 1960s America, an increase in social pressure after the war led to political and ethical conformity. The reaction was a countermovement in literature: idiosyncratic types, outsiders, people acting against the norms and conventions, so-called 'crazy' characters entered the scene, as portrayed in Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962); Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* (1963) or Joanne Greenberg's *I Never Promised You A Rose Garden* (1964). Like Ignatius, these characters appear to be a threat to social mores, values and political systems; they are seen as subversive and dangerous. The grotesque comic mode of *A Confederacy of Dunces* contributes to the idea that in our society a true hero who lives by the rigid standards of medieval Christianity is an anachronism and will not be appreciated. Maybe Toole endowed his one unlikely hero with so many typical heroic features in order to show how in so many ways heroism can no longer be understood or recognised today – literally or metaphorically.

¹⁷ Arthur Jr. Schlesinger, 'The Decline of Greatness', 1962, quoted from Ray Browne and Marshall W. Fishwick (eds.), *The Hero in Transition*, Bowling Green UP, Ohio, 1983, p. 6.

Myths

after Nils Ferlin, 'Stjärnorna kvitta det lika'.

So many, beyond recalling,
the myths that people devise,
they say that a star is falling
whenever a person dies.

I can hear in the chill of an evening
and the frozen song of a gale,
how all the hound-dogs are keening,
as though for a death they wail,

widows shrieking at midnight,
children crying for bread,
– but it's all the same to the starlight
if anyone's born, or dead.

Nils Ferlin, 1898-1961. From his En dóddansares visor ('A Killjoy's Rhymes') Stockholm, 1938. Translation by Walter Nash.

Book Reviews

W. R. Owens (ed.), *The Gospels: Authorized King James Version, Oxford World's Classics*, 2011. lv+ 281 pp. pb., £8.99, 978 0 19 954117 1

'Jesus Christ is the central figure in Western culture.' So begins Bob Owens' introduction to his edition of the KJV gospels. A good enough reason for placing this book into the World's Classics list (which already has an edition of the whole KJV), and to entrust it to a specialist in the editing of early modern texts (Defoe and Bunyan in particular) rather than a Biblical scholar. Owens is aware that the four gospels constitute one of the foundation documents of European culture; and he is interesting on the literary and historical characteristics of the four gospels and the differences between them. But he is just as clear on their religious focus, giving the final word in the introduction to 'the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith' (in neat opposition to the title of Pullman's latest book, but that may be coincidental). For the most part, the introduction is a very good starting point for study of the gospels, following the mainstream scholarly consensus on the synoptic problem, for example, without assuming advance knowledge, faith, or even enquiry. One could recommend the introduction as well as the text to any student or reader who realizes (as my students often do) that their ignorance of the Bible is a hindrance to understanding English literature, let alone Christianity. There are some helpful pages on the origins of the Authorized Version (or KJV as the quatercentenary has taught us to label it¹) and its literary qualities.

The text itself is nicely presented for continuous reading – no double columns, and verse numbers in unobtrusive superscript. The spelling of 1611 has been modernised, but not the punctuation, following Owens' practice in his edition of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, and intended to be helpful in following the sentence structure when reading aloud. The brief explanatory notes are mainly concerned with identifying references to the Old Testament and other uncontentious matters, and there are indices of names and places, a chronology of the life and times of Jesus and a simple map of Palestine. So, all in all, this is a very useful addition to the series. Probably more than most products of the anniversary, it will help people to read, or re-read the gospels – better than dusting down the old India paper, tiny print version you might have on your shelves (mine from my 21st birthday!). It's not, ostensibly, an evangelical tool, but may be all the more effective for letting the text speak.

Roger Pooley

John Leary, *Shadows and Illuminations: Literature as Spiritual Journey*, Sussex Academic Press, Brighton/Portland/Toronto, 2011, ix + 163 pp., £35/\$50, 978 1 84519 431 4

John Leary's latest work is a sustained application of Post-Jungian theory to a wide variety of literary and cinematic texts. His consistent hypothesis is that only by dissolving the dichotomy between spiritual darkness and commonly accepted aspirations regarding spiritual enlightenment (light) can true understanding and personal growth occur. Recognition of the 'shadow' in personal identity allows one to confront, own and control subliminal aspects of one's nature that would otherwise be repressed or become destructive. Both the extremes of repression

and complete licence in response to the 'shadow', Neary asserts, result in serious limitations to spiritual growth. One truly finds God when one learns to 'relax in the midst of chaos' and accept that the contrary elements within one's being are interdependent and ultimately transformative.

Neary supports his hypothesis with close reference to an eclectic range of theorists. Pema Chödrön, an American Buddhist nun, John S. Dunne, Catholic theologian, and James Hillman, post-Jungian psychologist, provide differing viewpoints on this central proposition, 'that journeys to the dark side', contrary to common belief, can also be productive and life enhancing.

In the opening chapter ('Glow in the Dark: The Journey to Hades') Neary engages in a discussion of two texts to illustrate his point. Stanley Kubrick's film, 'Eyes Wide Shut' (1999) and Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story, 'Young Goodman Brown' (1835) embody contrasting approaches to this issue. Goodman Brown's encounter with the dark, hidden world of seventeenth century Salem society leaves him embittered and appalled, whereas in the highly replicative film, 'Eyes Wide Shut', the dissolute activities that the central character, Bill Harford witnesses, achieve the opposite effect. At the end of the film he has learned some harsh but helpful lessons about life.

This opening chapter contains a potentially dangerous proposition. Neary's discussion of depression as a means of 'soul-making', as 'a way into depth' that is ultimately beneficial, does not take into account the true nature of clinical depression. Failing to differentiate in his discussion between mild depressive episodes and the completely debilitating effects of clinical depression (a state that would have few if any advocates in real life) leaves the reader cautious. Only when he utilises Hillman's metaphor of 'blue', the mid-point between 'black' and 'white', a metaphor often drawn from alchemy by Jungians, does this proposition seem to have some validity. There, in a rational, controlled state where one has the ability to objectify depression, there could be some personal benefits.

In the second chapter Neary expands on the notion of the 'shadow', exploring doubling images, such as those represented in R. L. Stevenson's novella, the *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) and Toni Morrison's novel, *Sula* (1973). He draws on the work of other theorists, including Marie-Louise von Franz, the poet, Robert Bly, and the writings of psychologists, Connie Zweig and Steven Wolf. All express, in a variety of metaphorical contexts, the manner in which the 'shadow' can be understood and controlled. This discussion achieves its greatest intellectual traction when it is applied to these chosen texts. Stevenson's familiar novella receives extended analysis, as does Toni Morrison's fascinating depiction of her novel's two main characters, Nel Wright and Sula Peace, figures who provide a clear example of shadow doubleness.

In the third chapter ('Illuminating Family Shadows') Neary appropriates the notion of the 'shadow' to a family context. It includes a discussion of three contrasting texts: Shakespeare's *King Lear*, and two novels; Jane Hamilton's *The Book of Ruth* (1988) and Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything is Illuminated* (2002). These texts provide the basis for an examination of the 'shadow' within the complex, dysfunctional families portrayed. Again, the predominant approach fostered throughout this chapter is that the recognition and acceptance of the various, sometimes dark manifestations of difference within families are better than avoidance or assumptions of conquest and superiority.

1 Oxford's Manifold Greatness campaign of 2011 settled for 'King James Bible' – Ed.

The final chapter ('The Better Story') is arguably the most intellectually engaging section of Neary's work. Focussing on Yann Martel's novel, *Life of Pi* (2001) he suggests, with the support of his primary theorist, James Hillman, that creating fiction 'can itself be a healing activity, a move beyond the deadness of literal facts to soul-making imagination'. Neary illustrates the 'value of fictionalizing, fabricating, image-making' by drawing on the interview that Pi, the main character in Martel's novel, has with representatives from the Maritime Department of Japan's Ministry of Transport. He convinces them that the 'better story' is the one that describes how, after the sinking of his ship, he spent '227 days in a lifeboat with a tiger'. This, he manages to get them to agree, is much better than the believable, but grim alternative version he also gave that emphasised cruel human behaviour. The ability to live with multiple possibilities, allowing fictive alternatives, brings healing, Hillman asserts, rather than the closure and limitations of a single, factual interpretation. Neary supports Hillman when he 'suggests that we break open our shallow limitation to ego by reimagining our lives not as singular, heroic master narratives but as plays with a multiplicity of characters.' Truth then becomes relative, and 'the goal of the spiritual journey is the seeking itself'. It is better not to assert that there is 'one, correct, curative plot', but to allow for multiple possibilities. Accepting the co-dependency of shadows and illuminations, rather than dichotomizing them, allows one to achieve balance, openness and understanding. Applying this approach to our religious understanding, Neary contends, God becomes a 'verb' rather than a 'noun'. The journey is thus more important, 'the path is the goal'.

Despite the fact that the journey motif is appealing to literary minded Christians, when taken this way it denies the central, eschatological themes that are so important throughout Biblical revelation. The individual journey is important, as is our capacity to maintain choice and alternatives, but there is a destination that each believer aspires to reach, a reality that sustains every patient pilgrim. Neary's work is devoid of any such recognition or reference.

The application of Jungian concepts to literary analysis seems strangely tired in our contemporary world. Appealing as they may appear to the commentator seeking to find a paradigm that is consistent with Christian belief, they fall short in many respects. The Christian life is more aspirational than Neary's model allows. It is transformational not through accepting and favouring the co-dependency of spiritual darkness and spiritual enlightenment, but by the individual seeking to be transformed into the light and likeness of Jesus Christ. There is a clear imperative in scripture to turn against spiritual darkness.

This does not mean that Neary's work is without merit. It introduces and discusses some excellent texts, some of them little known to a non-American readership. It contains a consistent hypothesis that is interesting and worth re-visiting. It provides an effective lens through which to view character development and interaction in the chosen texts. But, in the end, many of the underlying assumptions, while providing an engaging model for analysing literary texts, are highly questionable for the Christian believer.

Peter Stiles

Tom Rogers, *God of Rescue: John Berryman and Christianity*, Oxford/Bern, Peter Lang, 2011, xii + 423 pp., £48, ISBN 978 3 03910 748 3

Berryman's poetry stirs conflicted emotions, even in his admirers. Like any talented alcoholic, I guess. You can catch a bit of both as he holds forth, pretty drunk, to Al Alvarez in a pub in Dublin c. 1967 for a BBC arts programme (now on YouTube) while Alvarez fiddles nervously with his pipe. And then he reads one of the best early Dream Songs slowly, far more slowly than I thought they ought to be read, and it's terrific, and the rhythm and the odd syntax makes sense, and you realize what an original he was.²

Tom Rogers' book is a long, thoughtful and loving exploration of an aspect of Berryman's poetry that has been underplayed by most of his admirers but, he argues, is central to making sense of the work. It's Berryman's Christianity. Not that his work or his life was very Christian, much of the time. Only in the addresses to the Lord in the late volume *Love & Fame* does Berryman's personal conviction explicitly surface, but Rogers argues that it goes much deeper, and that Berryman 'saw himself as being a kind of counter-cultural Christian apologist, ironically even during the long period when he did not profess to be a Christian himself and was highly critical even towards the most fundamental aspects of the faith' (p.4). To establish this he works his way through the published work, poems and prose, and the cornucopia of Berryman's papers in the University of Minnesota – including, for example, drafts for a life of Christ, which he had worked on intermittently for eighteen years.

The strength of Rogers' argument is cumulative. He amasses readings of the poems from this particular viewpoint, so that in the process his book becomes the most systematic critical account of Berryman's oeuvre, even more than Haffenden's critical commentary and Linebarger's perceptive early summation. Rather than translating the various crises of conscience Berryman and his personae go through, he takes them at their own valuation, one that is at least residually Christian, and sometimes rather more. He shows, for example, that *Homage to Mistress Bradstreet*, Berryman's poem celebrating and investigating (and, bizarrely, trying to seduce) the first American woman poet, turns into more than a dialogue between the faithful poet of the seventeenth and the restless, lustful poet of the twentieth centuries; it becomes a contest between Berryman and God for her soul and body. Rogers is not blind to his hero's failings, his embarrassing, self-serving fantasies. But there is a vision of God there, and he teeters on the brink of conversion.

Ultimately, Berryman's reputation rests on the Dream Songs, and in the hundred or so pages he devotes to them Rogers points out the currents and counter-currents of faith and scepticism that animate them. There is a particularly illuminating reading of Dream Song 234, 'The Carpenter's Son'. Rogers' research in the Berryman archive shows how this derives from Berryman's reading in the New Testament scholarship of the mid-twentieth century, in the course of the wide range of humanities teaching he was doing at the time. The critical approach to the New Testament that he took for his 'Christian Origins' course from a small sample of writers, Guignebert and Goguel in particular, led him to a relatively sceptical view of the historicity of the gospels. As a result, the encounter of Henry, Berryman's persona, with Jesus becomes a complex matter of choice: what are

² See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1YUu3L-qGMI> (accessed 20 Jan. 2012), or search on YouTube for 'Berryman Life Friends is Boring'.

reliably the words of Jesus, and was he mistaken about the imminent coming of the kingdom? Rogers argues that Berryman's own viewpoint, as it comes through some of the later Dream Songs, is that he is waiting for an (orthodox) eschaton:

Mary Baker Eddy's telephone
in her vault with a direct line to the *Monitor*:
it ain't rung yet, pal, nor has Christ returned,
according to the *World Almanac*
which I read less for what it say than for
what's missing: the editor of the *Atlantic* burned
for instance, & Christ come back.
(Dream Song 347)

Then there are the numerological patterns of the Dream Songs, particularly round seven and seventy-seven; and the comment, made long ago in an early, typically perceptive review by Christopher Ricks, that the Dream Songs were a kind of theodicy. Rogers negotiates this feature deftly and soundly: 'God, in Henry's eyes, allowed great suffering to be inflicted on him as an innocent boy, and so if he is not guilty then God must be.' So Henry is like Job, and his interlocutor a kind of Job's comforter. 'Henry, without any faith in a personal or self-sacrificial God, but one who does have faith, of sorts, in a detached, unknowable God, whose apparent indifference to his suffering must be accounted for.' Spot on; and a demonstration that Rogers has theological insight as well as theological knowledge, that he has some sense of how it feels not to have solved the intractable problems of God and suffering.

I guess that for many readers of this journal some sort of conversion experience would appear to be the solution in such circumstances as Berryman found himself in towards the end of his life, still stuck in serious alcohol dependence and still seriously searching for God. And so the final chapter, from which the study takes its name, on the novel *Discovery* and the two final collections, *Love & Fame* and *Delusions &c* (Berryman loved the ampersand), confronts what seems to be a conversion and a suicide. A failed conversion? The alcoholism never really disappeared, but the 'Eleven Addresses to the Lord' in *Love & Fame* encapsulate a new sense of a God of rescue, one that, as Rogers notes, is both intellectual and experiential. He traces the immediate sources in Luther and Andrewes, and the images derived from Titian's painting 'The Tribute Money'. As Rogers traces it through the poems, though, he observes a corrosive self-contempt hand in hand with a recognition of grace. After all, the 'allegorical, triumphant finale' of 'King David Dances' (the last poem in *Delusions &c*) is as much a celebration of God's spirit as a farewell to the world.

Although this book bears many of the signs of a thesis book – the comprehensiveness, the dutiful acknowledgement of all his predecessors, the need to be completely explicit – it will become an important reference point for readers of Berryman. Rogers also knows his theologians – not just the ones that Berryman read, and there were a number of them. As any dedicated Berryman reader should know, and Rogers certainly does, the works are various, wonderful, moving and impressive. But it's as well not to be seduced by them.

Roger Pooley

Anne Dunan-Page (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Bunyan*, Cambridge University Press, 2010, xx + 187pp., £18.99 pb. (£53 hb.), 978 0 521 73308 3

In the verse 'Apology' which opens *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Bunyan invites the reader to 'loose thy self, and catch no harm ... and yet know whether thou art blest or not'. In his contribution to this *Cambridge Companion*, Roger Pooley comments wryly on this: 'Bunyan's book may work like other fictions in which readers might lose themselves; but knowing whether their eternal life is or isn't secure is a more unusual feature'. Pooley's comment underlines how Bunyan's pastoral and evangelistic imperative unavoidably engages the personal convictions and commitments of his readers, whatever those convictions might be. This focused zeal causes discomfort in polite academic circles to a degree unusual even with regard to other explicitly Christian writers in the English literary canon. Yet, despite this discomfort, Bunyan has long been valued and appropriated by readers lacking in sympathy for the beliefs of seventeenth century Dissenters.

In the nineteenth century, Samuel Taylor Coleridge famously distinguished the Bunyan of the Conventicle and the Bunyan of Parnassus, the Bunyan of the Conventicle being the Puritan preacher committed to an unfashionable and, to many, unpalatable theology, and the Bunyan of Parnassus being the imaginative literary genius who wrote *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Since then, contrasting readings of Bunyan have multiplied, some of which are noted by the editor in the introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Bunyan*. These include Bunyan as 'a tinker [and] a poor man' (William York Tindall and Christopher Hill) manning the barricades to protest against his economic victimisation, and Bunyan as a patient on the psychiatrist's couch whose morbid spiritual experience renders him, in William James's judgement, 'a typical case of the psychopathic temperament'. To borrow an essay title from another collection, in which Tamsin Spargo adapts Bunyan's citation of Paul, there are 'Bunyan's abounding'.

Publications in Bunyan studies form a steady stream in comparison with the torrent of work devoted to John Milton, the other 'Puritan' writer admitted to the English literary canon, but Bunyan scholarship has been gathering momentum since the tercentenary of Bunyan's death in 1988, which, besides several conferences and essay collections, saw the establishment of the journal *Bunyan Studies* and stirred up interest resulting in the formation of the International John Bunyan Society in 1992. (It is hardly coincidental that a high proportion of contributors to this volume have held office in the IJBS; some will also be familiar to readers of *The Glass*.) This modest flourishing of work on Bunyan is deeply indebted to the meticulous critical editions of Bunyan's works published by Oxford's Clarendon Press between the 1960s and 1990s.

Yet despite this recent increase in scholarly interest in Bunyan, Bunyan's writing is far less well known by general readers than it was fifty years ago, and his thought world is rather alien and off-putting to many students in British universities. When I included *The Pilgrim's Progress* in a survey of seventeenth century literature, one student complained of being 'a bit Godded out'. This *Cambridge Companion* aims to fill a gap in the market by introducing Bunyan and his world to those unfamiliar with him. Anne Dunan-Page claims that 'This *Companion* is the first accessible collection of essays seeking to introduce Bunyan's life, works and posterity to students, scholars and the general reader

in the light of the most recent scholarship'. In this review, I will consider the extent to which the *Companion* succeeds in its stated aim of introducing Bunyan to beginners, but will also reflect on its content in the light of more general trends in Bunyan scholarship – I suspect that, besides their scholarly credentials, the contributors were selected partly as representatives of a range of perspectives on and approaches to Bunyan.

The structure of the volume is fairly straightforward, with twelve chapters being grouped into three sections of differing lengths. The Introduction states that 'At the heart of this *Companion* are readings of Bunyan's six major works of fiction', with these readings being framed by an initial section of four chapters on Bunyan in his seventeenth century context and followed by three chapters on the subsequent reception of Bunyan. The implied identification of Bunyan's spiritual autobiography *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* and of his children's verse collection *A Book for Boys and Girls* as 'fiction' is somewhat curious, especially given that the editor states on the previous page that, of Bunyan's 58 works, 'five are larger works of fiction and seven are verse collections'. However, I suspect that this is not an attempt to denigrate the veracity of Bunyan's account of his spiritual experience – to speak of Bunyan's five major 'narrative' works (around which Michael Davies's *Graceful Reading*, for instance, is structured) might have communicated the intended meaning.

The first two chapters, by N.H. Keeble and Nigel Smith, complement each other nicely, as Keeble sees Bunyan as a writer emerging from the print explosion accompanying the Civil Wars and abolition of the monarchy in the mid-seventeenth century, whereas Smith points out that Bunyan's works were mostly written and published during the Restoration period, contemporaneously with the very different writing of Dryden and the Royal Society. Keeble thus emphasises how Bunyan's post-Restoration works formed part of an oppositional nonconformist culture, as evidenced by the politically as well as religiously radical affiliations of Bunyan's publishers, whilst Smith asserts that 'Bunyan was a true separatist who really did turn his back on the world', a statement which seems to me only partially true, since Bunyan did not participate in revolutionary plotting but demonstrates continued awareness of political affairs after the Restoration. W.R. Owens follows with a chapter which briefly outlines the history of early modern Bible translation into English and of Bible reading in early modern England, before pointing out a number of ways in which Bunyan's writing manifests his 'quite extraordinary immersion and absorption' in the Biblical text. Particularly useful here is how Owens draws attention to parallels between the modes of Bible reading found in Bunyan and those encouraged by a range of commentaries and devotional guides available at the time.

Part I concludes with Vera Camden's 'psychoanalytic approach' to 'John Bunyan and the goodwives of Bedford'. This is one of the most interesting essays in this volume, but also sits a little oddly with the other chapters. The books in the *Cambridge Companion* series seem to differ as to whether their primary aim is to offer readers new to a field accessible summaries of the existing scholarly consensus, or whether they seek to shape the field by showcasing new scholarly perspectives. Camden's essay takes the latter approach: this is more an intervention in the field than an introduction to it, and there are one or two places where readers not already familiar with psychoanalytic theory might get lost. However, Camden

makes some suggestive connections, which deserve further reflection, between the vivid imagery of spiritual rebirth in Bunyan's writing and Bunyan's complicated relationship with women, arguing that more attention should be given to 'the presence of the maternal' in Bunyan's conversion experience.

As the introduction signals, Part II is at the heart of the book – each chapter centres on one of Bunyan's major works, and each also looks at that work through a particular lens which could be applied to all of Bunyan's narrative works. We begin with Michael Davies on Bunyan's spiritual autobiography *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*. Much of this chapter summarises material in Davies's book *Graceful Reading: Theology and Narrative in the Works of John Bunyan* (OUP, 2002), which came out swinging against the 'persecutory' reading of Bunyan's work prevalent in many literary studies of Bunyan. In this chapter, Davies acknowledges that *Grace Abounding* is 'confusing, diffuse and labyrinthine', but sees Bunyan's account of the ups and downs of his wrestling with scripture not as a sign of ongoing psychological instability but rather as a map of misreadings whose aim is to guide readers through to a right reading of the Bible which lays hold of God's promise of saving grace. Davies argues that reading Bunyan's narrative alongside other early modern spiritual autobiographies offers a corrective to common readings of *Grace Abounding* in two ways. One is that the 'castings down, and raisings up' recounted by Bunyan are typical of the genre rather than being unique markers of an individual psychiatric disorder, and the other is the broader reminder that, whilst focused on the dealings of God with an individual, spiritual autobiographies are in fact written to and from a community of faith.

Like Davies, Roger Pooley and Stuart Sim both discuss their assigned texts in relation to other texts from the period of a similar genre. It is to Pooley that the plum assignment of writing about *The Pilgrim's Progress* falls. He does so in the context of early modern allegorical writing, and of the tricky questions raised by the genre of allegory in general. Pooley argues that, despite Protestant suspicions of non-literal modes of reading which might obscure the plain sense of Scripture, early modern Protestants had, by Bunyan's time, 'come to an accommodation with allegory', evident in works by Edmund Spenser, Richard Bernard, and the Leveller Richard Overton. Pooley also helpfully draws our attention to more apparently secular works of the period which use allegory as a mode of topical political commentary. Though Pooley is sceptical of the critical tendency to want to identify characters in *The Pilgrim's Progress* with named historical individuals rather than types, he argues plausibly that the work is political in a broader sense in so far as many of the villains 'are representative of an oppressive and unchristian legal and property system'. Pooley's chapter could be fruitfully read alongside *The Cambridge Companion to Allegory* (also published in 2010), and in particular Brian Cummings's essay in that volume on 'Protestant Allegory', which covers similar ground. For readers truly new to Bunyan, more of a plot summary might have been useful, though this may not have been possible in the limited space available.

Sim's text is *The Life and Death of Mr. Badman*, which in some ways is a counterpart to *The Pilgrim's Progress* in that it traces the journey through life of a reprobate sinner rather than an elect saint, but in other ways is very different in its chosen genre, a much more realist depiction of life in Bunyan's England. Sim's focus is on the literary-historical question of the rise of the novel. He concedes

that, by comparison with the eighteenth century novels of Defoe, *Mr. Badman* is somewhat sparing in its narrative detail, but proposes that Bunyan makes up for this by a 'psychological realism' in Bunyan's tracing of Badman's degeneration which puts *Mr. Badman* in the company of recent post-realist novels.

Though this may simply indicate that different reading strategies work better for different texts, one suspects that differences in the authors' degree of sympathy with Bunyan may underlie the contrast between Pooley's recommendation that to follow the plot of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 'at least provisionally, the reader will need to share in Bunyan's metaphysics', and Sim's suggestion that the literary merit of *The Life and Death of Mr Badman* can be better appreciated if the reader sympathises with the central character 'very much against the grain' of Bunyan's 'particularly unforgiving theology'.

The most historicist of the chapters in Part II is David Walker's reading of *The Holy War* in the light of the political crises of 1678-82. Walker provides a very helpful and accessible survey of these events and the accompanying tug of war between the emerging Whig and Tory parties. However, Walker's apparent suggestion that the allegorical violence of *The Holy War* indicates Bunyan's belief in 'the right to resist an ungodly ruler' with 'physical force' if necessary is questionable, given that Bunyan's post-Restoration pastoral writings urge the godly to the passive suffering of persecution.

Of the major works given chapters of their own in Part II of the *Companion*, the surprise inclusion is *A Book for Boys and Girls*, Bunyan's collection of verse for children, which is ably introduced by Shannon Murray. Murray points out the irony that *A Book for Boys and Girls*, a pioneering work of children's literature in which Bunyan consciously accommodates himself to his young audience, teaching spiritual lessons through the everyday sights available to children in seventeenth century England, was largely forgotten, whilst *The Pilgrim's Progress*, intended for an adult audience, became one of the most culturally pervasive children's stories of all.

Part III surveys the 'Readership and Reception' of Bunyan's works from his death in 1688 to the present day. The editor, Anne Dunan-Page, picks up from Bunyan's death and looks at how Bunyan's posthumous legacy was secured and passed on into the eighteenth century. Dunan-Page stresses especially the importance of the 1692 folio edition of Bunyan's works produced by Charles Doe, a Baptist combmaker who, as Dunan-Page intimates without quite elucidating, perhaps had a shady side. She also notes some early biographies of Bunyan written to meet an evident market demand for the Bunyan brand, which include such endearing episodes as the profligate young Bunyan losing his ability to read and so relapsing into illiteracy. This chapter highlights how publications of questionable accuracy and individuals with mixed motives provided an invaluable link in the chain enabling us to appreciate Bunyan's work today.

As with Keeble and Smith's chapters in Part I, Emma Mason's chapter on Bunyan and the Victorians and Isabel Hofmeyr's essay on 'Bunyan: colonial, postcolonial' have contrasting but complementary foci and can profitably be read together. Both deal with Bunyan's reception since the eighteenth century, but whilst Mason focuses principally on English men and women of letters, Hofmeyr's stage is global. A striking theme common to both Mason and Hofmeyr's chapters is how writers whose early imaginations were shaped by *The Pilgrim's Progress*,

both in Victorian England and twentieth century Africa, reproduced its symbols and narrative patterns in other guises and with other goals, even, in many cases, after moving away from Christian faith.

The Victorian era which Mason surveys has been identified as the high point of Bunyan's prominence as a cultural icon. Whilst Evangelicals and Nonconformists championed Bunyan for his theology, Romantics and others embraced him despite it. Mason demonstrates how Bunyan 'haunts' the Victorians, his working-class credentials providing inspiration to political radicals, whilst the power of his imagery surfaces in the great Victorian novels in both direct allusions and more disguised manifestations. Shedding as much light upon Dickens as upon Bunyan, Mason suggests that Dickens's complicated relationship with Bunyan's work mirrors his complicated relationship with Christianity in its various competing varieties.

Hofmeyr, reprising some of the themes of her prizewinning book *The Portable Bunyan* (Princeton, 2003), provocatively argues that Bunyan's incorporation into the literary canon (partly effected by the Victorian greats whom Mason invokes) nationalised and secularised Bunyan (in the sense of giving relatively more attention to the aesthetic than the doctrinal qualities of Bunyan's writing) at the expense of Bunyan's earlier 'transnational presence, which had been premised on an evangelical Protestantism and which reached people of different races and cultures'. Readers of *The Glass* who identify with the evangelical tradition will find matter both to hearten and to chasten them in this chapter. Hofmeyr distinguishes missionary from colonial enterprise and notes that 'mission translations [of *The Pilgrim's Progress*] bore the imprint of converts' ideas and opinions, and were seldom, if ever, straightforwardly imperial'. She further argues that, far from being simply the ideological tool of empire, the faith of the missionaries and their converts offers a transnational standpoint which can empower a postcolonial critique of Western Enlightenment values. However, she also notes that 'evangelical theories of reading' tend to 'imbue texts with magical properties' and so to 'suppress material questions of how media technologies work'. Perhaps this is a salutary reminder to the Christian scholar that divine grace typically makes use of human means.

This *Companion* should succeed in communicating to interested newcomers that Bunyan is an important writer both in his engagement with his own historical context and in his cultural impact, even if not all readers will go as far as the editor in hailing Bunyan as 'one of the greatest early-modern authors'. It also conveys Bunyan's versatility as a writer in different genres and something of the energy of the varied approaches people take in reading Bunyan.

One regrettable omission so far as usefulness to beginners is concerned is the lack of a student-friendly short biography of Bunyan's life so far as it is known. The late Richard Greaves's monumentally thorough *Glimpses of Glory: John Bunyan and English Dissent* (Stanford UP, 2002) is frequently cited, but its length might well intimidate undergraduates and others new to Bunyan. With Greaves no longer with us, I suspect that many Bunyan scholars could have done the job competently. The omission is partially compensated for by an admirably full 'Chronology', which, as well as the main events of Bunyan's life and the publication dates of all of his works, includes significant political landmarks in the turbulent history of seventeenth century England and works by authors contemporary with Bunyan

as varied as George Fox, Thomas Hobbes, Andrew Marvell, and Aphra Behn. The 'Guide to Further Reading' is also useful in pointing readers to significant sources they may not know, particularly journal articles, without being too long.

Given that *The Pilgrim's Progress* (principally the First Part of 1678) continues to be where most readers start with Bunyan, it might have been good for it to have been allocated more than one chapter, perhaps showcasing the different approaches to Bunyan represented in this *Companion* as applied to Bunyan's best-known work. The 1684 *Second Part of the Pilgrim's Progress* probably deserves a chapter of its own (rather than being squeezed into a page and a half) as a separate narrative on a par with *The Holy War* and *Mr. Badman*.

Reading many of these chapters, I felt that the authors had more to say than space to say it in within the tight confines of chapter length which seem to have been imposed. There are several places where a new and suggestive line of thought is introduced, but is crammed into a page or a paragraph and is not given space to develop. This is the case, for instance, with Vera Camden's paragraph on how Vermeer's painting of women in domestic interiors illuminated through doorways may parallel Bunyan's encounter with the Bedford women sitting at a doorway in the sun, and Roger Pooley's brief mention of the Russian formalist Vladimir Propp in relation to the plot of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. However, since a number of these essays borrow and précis material published by their authors in other books and articles, following up the references given may allow readers to enjoy the fuller working out of these seemingly undigested nuggets. Nevertheless, *The Cambridge Companion to Bunyan* will be among the first places to point undergraduates for secondary reading on Bunyan, and I for one am grateful to the editor and contributors for filling this gap in the market.

I would like to conclude by commenting briefly on one of the faultlines in Bunyan scholarship which may be of particular interest to the readers of this journal. Academic literary studies of Bunyan in recent decades have often seen Bunyan as having a 'persecutory imagination' (the title of an influential 1991 book by John Stachniewski), which is morbidly obsessed throughout his writing career with anxiety over predestination, often linking this to the psychological disturbance evident in *Grace Abounding*. (The persecution in Stachniewski's discussion is inflicted by the troubled imagination of the subject.) More recently, Michael Davies has argued that, on the contrary, Bunyan's aim is consolatory, and that Bunyan's writings preach the comforts of grace rather than advocating predestinarian paranoia. Davies argues that, although Bunyan undoubtedly underwent emotional trauma in the course of his own conversion experience, he came through to a 'comfortable' understanding of salvation by God's freely promised grace and an assurance of his own possession of it, and his pastoral aim in his writings is to bring his readers through to the same experience of the comfort of grace. Though provocatively out of sync with much of the scholarly literature, Davies's account resonates well with the reading experience of many Christian readers of Bunyan through the centuries (though Davies himself does not explicitly profess a confessional standpoint in his work).

On the whole, my sympathies lie with Davies's reading of Bunyan rather than Stachniewski's, but yet I am inclined to agree with some of the criticisms Davies has faced and to accept some of the reservations Stachniewski articulates about the tendencies of Christian literary critics. Scholars with Christian commitments,

Stachniewski claims, 'are given to seeing the essence of their faith as unchanging, so that they are guided by an inclination to read their own religious experience back into the past, fleshing this out with the historical accidentals' (*The Persecutory Imagination: English Puritanism and the Literature of Religious Despair*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1991, p. 2). Stachniewski acknowledges that 'Sometimes the work of these critics benefits from sympathetic engagement with their subject' but that 'the drawback, however, is that where such engagement is frustrated by the text the stubborn material tends to be edited out, or at least pushed to the margin' (*Ibid.*, p. 3). Whilst lack of sympathy with or understanding of Christian subjects can also lead scholars to misread, we need to heed Stachniewski's criticisms and resist the temptation to tidy up loose edges to make texts say what we think they ought to say rather than what they do say.

In his *Cambridge Companion* chapter, Davies is more restrained in his criticism of 'medicalised' readings of Bunyan's experience as mental illness than he is in *Graceful Reading*, in which he argues that readings of Bunyan which pathologise his experience are complicit with the Restoration persecutors of Nonconformists who stigmatised them as mad. Reviewers have queried Davies's refusal to accept clinical categories as useful descriptive tools for those moments in which the young Bunyan's spiritual anxieties take the form of odd modes of reasoning recognisable to psychiatrists. (Curiously, in my copy of the *Companion*, a fly happened to get squashed in Davies's chapter on the 'e' of 'compulsive' in 'obsessive-compulsive disorder'.) Readers who share Bunyan's core faith commitments are understandably reluctant to accept readings of Bunyan which see his entire belief system as pathological, but I would suggest that there is a middle way which can acknowledge some degree of psychological disorder accompanying the young Bunyan's search for grace without reductionistically assuming that this is all there is to it. It is not discounting Bunyan's own conviction that his writings form 'a Relation of the work of God upon my own Soul' (preface to *Grace Abounding*) to recognise that the way in which that grace was appropriated in Bunyan's experience was shaped by his historical context, coloured by his psychological make-up, and recounted in accordance with certain literary conventions. Applying a Biblical understanding of how God works through flawed individuals within the concrete realities of human history, we do not honour God's grace by adopting a sanitised and ahistorical reading of our heroes and their writings. Rather, it is in and through the contingencies of historical circumstance and the idiosyncrasies of individuals that the grace of God abounds.

David Parry

Russell Hillier, *Milton's Messiah: The Son of God in the Works of John Milton*, Oxford University Press, 2011, 272pp., £60, 978 0 19 959188 6

Russell Hillier's monograph is a comprehensive study that aims to illuminate the messages of mercy and grace encrypted throughout Milton's work. This is a book that seeks to correct previous scholarship attached to accepting Milton's God as 'emphatically not good', and uses close readings of Milton's work to offer privileged insight into his theological beliefs. For Hillier, the 'positive theology' of Milton is that which is 'worthiest about his poetry', and the assumption that Milton's Deity can only be regarded as a negative force is strongly refuted: 'The

purpose of this study is to restore the balance by returning Milton's reader to that other face of Holy Scripture, that is, to the more affirming side of Milton's poetic theology and his theological poetry.' As Hillier reminds his readers, 'a hidden God who embodies living dread ... is correspondingly a deity who reveals a side of Himself that understands how to compassionate and to love.' Restoring Jesus to his Messianic position is vital in capturing this point for Hillier, and it is to this purpose that his project is directed.

Chapter One begins by confronting the controversial issue of the Son's divinity: 'The Nature of Milton's Son and his Justification of Men's Ways to God: Things Indifferent?' raises the anachronism of using the term 'Arian' in this context, and examines its changing definition from AD 325. This is a book that aims to discover the intended theological meaning of the texts, and it is Hillier's view that if readers are 'fair-minded in their interpretation of Milton's treatise and epic, they discover that both documents advocate a high Christology that expounds, if not the Son's strictly Athanasian identity as very God, then his distinctively divine and consecrated nature, set apart from humanity.' Developing this discussion further, a key word in Chapter Two, 'Milton's Great Argument', is 'fideistic', where Hillier maintains that, 'Milton's major epic spells out the fideistic condition of salvation through justification by faith in Christ's atonement'. This is in opposition to scholarship which views Milton's epic as rationalist in its approach, in line with its exordium. In keeping with this insight into Milton's own beliefs, Chapter Three, 'Manner new to gaze', gives attention to the incarnation, creation and to sacramentalism, so the reader can more clearly explore how Milton's own theological interpretation is encoded within *Paradise Lost*. Hillier examines the sophisticated use of analogy, whereby metaphor works to reinforce specific doctrines relating to the Son's power.

Chapter Four 'On other surety none', is a particularly powerful chapter, and concerned to display the love of the Saviour, as seen through Milton's use of allegory. For example, the War in Heaven, 'which lasts for four days and three nights, parallels the Paschal *triduum*, the three days of Passion Week that culminate in Jesus's resurrection', and Hillier reminds us that, 'at the War's climax ... re-creation is a possibility'. Writing about the restorative process in which the Son involves himself, Hillier argues that: 'In each instance the essential pattern to the restorative process is identical. The Son leaves his throne beside his Father and descends to allay, repair, or reorder matters'. This interest in Christ as the necessary healing presence in a chaotic world fits with Hillier's reading of Milton as one horrified by the idea of the world without the Son. This chapter seeks to defend accusations of Milton's Christ as 'the emissary of the *odium Dei*', to maintain instead that 'his function is equally to regenerate and replenish the vandalized Heavens'.

Chapter Five, 'The Good Communicated', takes a more psychological approach and offers a particularly fascinating character analysis of Adam and Eve. Hillier renders the root cause of Milton's version of the Fall as Adam and Eve's travesty of the double love. The concept of double love pertains to the 'Love of God and the love of oneself and of one's neighbour', and Hillier reads Satan's goal as 'to mar Adam and Eve's pristine capacity to love God, self, and neighbour'; in *Paradise Lost*, 'Satan works an imbalance within Creation out of Eve's privileging of her back-to-front self-love over her love of God or Adam'.

Satan 'turns Creation's hierarchy topsy-turvy', reflecting his desire to 'abuse the divinely sanctioned order'. Refuting the claim that Adam proves 'Selflessness in love', Hillier disclaims any likeness between Adam and Jesus, because Adam chose to die *with* rather than *for* Eve and 'has learned little about God's goodness from Raphael's narratives'. For Hillier, he 'has forgotten God's disposition to create and retire Himself out of love', merely believing that the Deity 'should need to preserve His reputation among His subjects', a 'deluded' belief, which is 'without consideration of God's probable mercy'.

This excellent study of Milton's use of character is continued into Chapter Six. 'Surprised by Sin, Assured by Grace' is a particularly enlightening examination of irony in the epic, which Hillier argues is 'homeopathic in its results'. Irony is present when Adam reproaches God for 'having failed to populate the world with an alternative, "woman-free" manner of pro-creation', being 'oblivious to the potential for salvation' which is 'predicated upon nuptial love, sexual delight, and the epiphany of a Messiah, a seed, not of man, but of woman'. In turn, Eve is interpreted here as 'inscribed with the figure of the suffering Messiah' whose 'humiliation' motivates the couple's 'spiritual metamorphosis'; her speech 'goads Adam to reason his way towards redemption' and 'defines true Miltonic magnanimity'. This 'species of allegory' which can 'say one thing while intending another' is sustained throughout Milton's epic, and encourages readers to engage in a more sophisticated reading experience, one that 'would discern God as merciful behind His apparent wrath, Christ crucified as victorious and undefeated, and repentant sinners as justified, despite their abiding sinfulness, and not damned to perdition'. Hillier makes a fascinating argument for the ability of the poet to reveal the power of grace through irony, leading to his final claim that, 'If Milton's readers are so inclined, their imperfect vision, polarized and perfected through redeeming irony, partakes of a fullness of knowledge that brings them "face to face" with the epic's redemptive subject'. The final chapter, 'Paradise Found' is particularly fitting in bringing together many of the book's debates, as it seeks to amalgamate discussion of the person of Jesus with the discussion of salvation. Hillier argues that *Paradise Regain'd* 'examines the nature of Messianic heroism and the Messianic model of salvation' by focusing on the kingly values promoted by Milton, such as altruistic endurance and patience. Jesus' temptation is seen to be apt for the passionate theme since, 'Christian typology conceived Jesus as a second Moses who hungered, thirsted, and fasted in the wilderness for forty days and nights'.

Most striking about Hillier's analysis is his excellent use of Milton's *De Doctrina Christiana* which continually supports his readings of Milton's faith in the power of redemption. It is by accessing the heart of Milton's ideas, through this text, that Hillier's argument for his 'redemptive theology with its tenets of charity, sacrifice, altruism, and forgiveness' is made so powerful. Hillier's study is one that empathises with his modern reader, and while he concedes that 'The average modern reader is probably desensitized to, and at a disadvantage in recognizing, the extensive lexicon of nowadays mostly neutralized redemptive terminology', he can conclude that his study 'aims to show these terms continually inflect the semantics of Milton's verse, animating the poetry with soteriological wordplay'. Hillier asks readers to be 'willing to take Milton's faith seriously' and his detailed discussions of the Bible and Milton's work offer invaluable support

and depth to the reader's understanding of seventeenth-century Protestantism. While the study could have dedicated more time to examining how and why other scholars have interpreted Milton's work so differently, one familiar with Milton scholarship will be able to enjoy the consistently in-depth analysis. Hillier invites readers into an interpretation of the Christian message where to exclude an appreciation of love and mercy is to misunderstand the Messiah himself, and Milton's confidence in him.

Sophie Rudland

Sharon Jebb, *Writing God and the Self: Samuel Beckett and C. S. Lewis*, Eugene OR, Pickwick Publications, 2011, 281 pp., \$32/£20, 978 1 60899 738 1

This book is the fifth volume in a series entitled *Distinguished Dissertations in Christian Theology*, which, the series foreword tells us, 'showcases the contributions of newcomers' to the 'ongoing and lively conversation' within academic Christian theology (p. ii). In this densely argued and highly informed study, Sharon Jebb takes as her focus an unlikely pair of writers from the mid-twentieth century, C. S. Lewis and Samuel Beckett. The idea of putting together the author of the Christian fable *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* with the writer who gave us that masterpiece of post-existentialist theatre, *Waiting for Godot*, may strike us at first as bold, even astonishing. But when we reflect, as Sharon Jebb does, that C. S. Lewis and Samuel Beckett had much in common in their lives, we realise just how much their writing shares, both thematically and biographically. Both born in Ireland to Church of Ireland parents, both interested from an early age in the work of psychoanalysts such as Freud and Jung, both fluent in a number of languages, Beckett and Lewis were contemporaries whose work shares, perhaps above all else, one important uniting factor. 'Both were extremely sensitive to suffering,' Jebb writes in her introduction, 'and struggled to reconcile it with the idea of a good God' (p. 10). From this premise, Jebb sets out to explore how both authors engage with the notion of selfhood on the one hand, and the concept of the Christian God on the other. What emerges, perhaps inevitably, is that we are dealing not so much with two distinct themes as two closely related ideas: self and God are never far from one another in Beckett and Lewis.

Jebb devotes the first half of her study to Beckett, and in particular chooses to focus on the trilogy of novels published between 1950 and 1953 in French (1955-8 in English), comprising *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, and *The Unnamable* (often known as *Trilogy*; following the translation she uses, Jebb refers to these works collectively as *Three Novels*). The second half of the book is given over to Lewis, and her principal focus here is the 1956 novel *Till We Have Faces* – 'a myth retold', as the novel's subtitle has it. If such an approach seems to have its limitations – Lewis wrote many other theological, critical, and fictional works besides this one relatively obscure work, and Beckett's other fiction, to say nothing of his drama, has much to say about crises of the self – then Jebb is reassuringly ready to reach for other texts when the occasion calls for it. She is especially strong on Lewis's literary criticism, and draws some enlightening comparisons between the idea of kenosis and the privileging of the subject over the object in literature since the Middle Ages.

Jebb's book is not one for the lexicographical conundrum. The reader looking for close and forensic dissections of the nuances of (in particular) Beckett's language is likely to be disappointed: this is not only a work of literary criticism but theological criticism, and Jebb is concerned more with exploring important concepts in Christianity, such as pleroma, kenosis, and apophatism, than she is with close semantic or lexical analysis. The decision to focus chiefly on such a narrow body of texts is justified more by the thoroughness of her theological knowledge than her readings of the texts themselves; and many of these Christian concepts are central to Beckett's work, even if they are not always so obviously religious in nature. Emptiness, and the status of God as the Other, are found repeatedly in Beckett's writing. However, sometimes there is a danger of the texts themselves getting lost underneath all of the scholarship, which goes to the heart of the difference between a 'dissertation' and a 'monograph' in the usual sense. This is partly a reflection of just how revealing some of Jebb's textual readings can be: one wishes there were even more of them.

Occasionally, one expects a line of inquiry which never materialises. This is by no means necessarily a criticism of the work, however. In her discussion of the self in Beckett she explores the view that many of Beckett's narrators in the *Three Novels* are schizoid. Perhaps surprisingly, she does not discuss Deleuze and Guattari's influential concept of schizoanalysis. It is hard to avoid this theory when one is engaging with the matter of schizophrenia in literary texts, so ubiquitous has schizoanalysis become in literary circles wherever schizophrenia is discussed. It was T. S. Eliot, following his conversion to Anglo-Catholicism, who first used 'schizophrenia' to refer not merely to a clinical psychological condition but to a more general sense of split personality; and whilst Jebb pays sensitive attention to the psychological nature of the condition, the 'schizophrenia' of Beckett's work clearly goes beyond the original meaning of the word. Perhaps refreshingly, Jebb's discussion does not take such a predictable philosophical turn; though one cannot help feeling a nod to schizoanalysis would have at least demonstrated the potential usefulness of such an idea in relation to Beckett's writing. Like Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus*, Jebb is concerned with the wider connotations of schizophrenia as a state of social disembodiment rather than the usual narrow psychological formulation. Elsewhere, the omissions are minor, often so minor as to make commenting upon them seem captious. In one of the chapters on Lewis, Jebb quotes Lewis's definition of Romanticism as 'spilled religion' (p. 178), which seems to owe something to T. E. Hulme, who described Romanticism using these precise words and may have influenced Lewis's classification of Romanticism on these terms. But such absences are not necessarily lacks, merely inevitable gaps that are always going to be found in a book that covers such vast terrain and such weighty topics.

Whilst most certainly not a book aimed at the microscopic reader of literature – and many of Beckett's critics have been of a forensic disposition – *Writing God and the Self* never pretends to be treating Beckett's work in this way. Instead, Jebb reads the *Three Novels* sensitively in the light of their allusions to such Christian writers as Augustine, Julian of Norwich, and Thomas à Kempis, and their more general exploration of sin, selfhood, and the nature of existence. The writing on Lewis is more convincing because it is on firmer ground: Lewis's theological views are amply set out in such works as *Surprised by Joy* and *The Pilgrim's Regress*,

books which Jebb knows well and draws on effectively. Beckett's meaning is a notoriously slippery thing, and his engagement with Christianity hardly less so. Jebb is generous in her nods to the relevant scholarship and has some illuminating things of her own to say, particularly about Lewis's interest in Jung and the nature of the God presented in the *Three Novels*. This is a book that pairs two ostensibly dissimilar writers, but, as with its two central themes, God and the self, succeeds in showing that they are often not as far from each other as we might believe.

Oliver Tearle

A Binding Agreement

after the poem 'Kontrakt', by Hjalmar Gullberg

Between God and N.N., hereinafter called 'the poet',
This day a binding agreement, as follows, has been made:
The poet's office is with the eternal, he shall do it
With God's will his one law, not the botchwork of a trade.

His obligations lapse when his poems are all completed.
His words may touch on the Word's forever unspoken fact.
It being made clear herewith that God remains uncommitted.
Both parties give their free assent to this contract.

Hjalmar Gullberg, 1898-1961. From his collection Andliga Övningar ('Spiritual Exercises'), Stockholm, 1932. Translation by Walter Nash.

Notes on Contributors

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Dr Roger Kojecký's *T S Eliot's Social Criticism* describes Eliot's attempts to engage as a Christian man of letters with social issues. The book has first publication of a paper contributed by Eliot to the proceedings of a discussion group, The Moot. He is among the contributors to the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* and the *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (IVP).

Barry Livingstone grew up in Africa, before moving to Britain for postgraduate work as a Commonwealth Scholar. An English teacher until his retirement, he now divides his time between Sussex and Normandy. He is currently working on a fantasy trilogy.

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Dr Roger Pooley's publications include *English Prose of the Seventeenth Century*. He is co-editor of *The Discerning Reader*, Apollos, 1995, and is currently working on a new edition of *Pilgrim's Progress*. He teaches English at Keele University and is a former Chair of the CLSG.

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Autumn conference 2012

Attend, or offer to read a paper at the CLSG autumn conference at Oxford on 3 November. This year's conference theme concerning conversion narratives will afford scope for contributions dealing with varied texts and even, in his bicentenary year, Charles Dickens (1812-1870). Offers of papers are invited by 31 May 2012. A call for papers will be sent to members of the e-list and posted on the websites of the European Society for the Study of English (ESSE) and the University of Pennsylvania Calls for Papers. The CLSG website www.cls.org gives the fullest information and will be progressively updated.