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Editorial

In one of those *obiter dicta* with which novelists sometimes spice their texts, Haruki Murakami suggests, in *A Wild Sheep Chase*, that 'there are symbolic dreams – dreams that symbolize some reality. Then there are symbolic realities – realities that symbolize a dream.' Symbols, figures such as prosopopoeia (personification), allegories, language, even phenomena, all refer (or may refer) to something beyond their own presence. Murakami's comment enlists a reader's understanding of the antinomy of 'dream' and 'reality', with some privileging of 'reality'. Reality, usually a state of affairs in the everyday world, sometimes becomes freighted with meaning, or credited with an ideal status.

We may think of allegory as a narrative or description which refers beyond itself to some other structure or web of meaning. On a stricter definition, in allegory the narrative or description is imagined. Whereas if the phenomenal or real is seen as referring to something else, to a fulfilment, say, in another time or place, or in another mode of existence, what we are dealing with is *figura*.

Jacob's dream ladder joined his straitened experience of flight from his brother to a transcendent reality and a much more hopeful future. Dante's imagined scenes in the three-tiered schema of a post-Judgemental alternative reality often look back at, or across to, Florentine public affairs. And in his parables Jesus constructed a web of reference to the Kingdom of God.

> Jesus told a parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed ears, then the weeds also appeared.
> 'The owner's servants came to him and said, "Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?"
> ' "An enemy did this," he replied.
> 'The servants asked him, "Do you want us to go and pull them up?"
> ' "No," he answered, "because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn." ' (Mt 13, NIV)

No point-for-point equivalence is offered, the reader's powers of interpretation are called forth to descry the characters and events, to place in a matrix supported by other parables, such as that of the Sower, the farmer, the enemy, the servants and the climactic harvest. A reading that goes beyond the literal story requires *a priori* knowledge, a disciple's experience perhaps of other parables and other sayings concerning the Kingdom. And if the Kingdom is the answer, what was the question? The world as we know it, perhaps, or the problem of evil.

Jesus also 'set his face to go to Jerusalem' (Lk 9:51), his progress being a major theme and organising principle of the gospels. The actual fulfils a transcendent schema, a metaplot, which is prefigured in the ancient scriptures. The harsh reality of the Passion is as much part of it as the ascension and glory to which it is, as it were, seamlessly connected. Paul will make this point in his kenosis passage in Philippians Chapter 2, which combines into the new Gospel unity things on earth and things in heaven. Jesus fulfilled the form, Paul says, laid down for the Christ. In John's gospel (1:51) Jesus sketches the articulation he comes to enact as the opening of heaven, with the angels of God ascending and descending upon himself, who is thus a link or ladder. Jerusalem, the earthly destination of Jesus as he approached the Passion, stands for fulfilment. It's a symbol that has acquired archetypal power.

Susanne Sklar's article discusses some rather different ideas of it elaborated by William Blake. Her article, like Margaret Kean's, who shows how Philip Pullman also tells a story that is subversive of prior Christian allegories, is substantially the paper given at the CLSG conference 'Idem in alio' on allegory, held at Corpus Christi College, Oxford, in November 2004.

Roger Kojecký

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Is this the Way?: the improving fictions of Bunyan, Milton and Philip Pullman

Margaret Kean

THE AMBER SPYGLASS, THE FINAL VOLUME IN PHILIP PULLMAN'S TRILOGY, *HIS Dark Materials*, was published in 2000, and was the first ever children's book to win the overall Whitbread Book of the Year award. The speed with which Pullman's trilogy (*Northern Lights*; *The Subtle Knife*; *The Amber Spyglass*) has become a must-read text for children and adults alike is quite remarkable, and the page-turning pace of the narrative is obviously a factor in this. Pullman defines himself as a storyteller, and is repeatedly on record as saying that what matters to him as an author is 'what happens next'. He has been quoted promoting that view of himself so often that one feels he doth protest too much. He is a storyteller with a message, perhaps even a mission, and his overt anti-Christian slant has not pleased everyone. Two quotes are already infamous – Peter Hitchens of *The Mail on Sunday* describing Pullman as 'the most dangerous author in Britain', and Leonie Caldecott in *The Catholic Herald* claiming that Pullman's texts are 'sinister', and 'far more worthy of the bonfire than Harry Potter'.[1] Happily (for Pullman), he and his publishers have been able to turn such negative press to their advantage and have gained far more media coverage for *His Dark Materials* as a result of the 'religious' controversy than would normally have been given to a writer of fiction for children.

Why have these novels caused such a furore? A synopsis of the plot of *His Dark Materials* might seem innocuous enough . . . at least to begin with. This is a thrilling adventure story which resets many of the most traditional elements of a quest narrative within the mode of fantasy. So, the quest (for a lost friend, for a father, for a magical tool) takes the reader to a number of other worlds. We follow our protagonists, two brave children – a girl, Lyra, and a boy, Will – as they struggle against the forces of oppression and sterile authority. Our heroes encounter witches, armoured bears, and many other extraordinary creatures, and they exhibit great loyalty towards their friends and incredible courage in the face of hardship. Ultimately, the two visit the Land of the Dead, and then take part in a cosmic battle where they bring about the death of the 'Authority'. At the climax of the trilogy, Lyra and Will join in an ecstatic moment of young love, but then finally they agree to part and return to their own worlds. So far the fiction may seem innocuous, but a fuller understanding of the repercussions of such a storyline can be gauged by applying a traditional four-fold allegorical division:

- Literally, we have an adventure tale through which our two young protagonists reach physical and emotional maturity, and decide how to live independent lives.

- Spiritually, Lyra's choices suggest both a revision and a reversal of standard Christian interpretations of the Genesis story and, specifically, the Fall of Eve. In the final volume, Lyra can also be seen as a Christ-like figure, a second Eve (rather than a second Adam) engaged in a 'Harrowing of Hell'.
- Morally, this is a story of adolescence which has a positive slant on the loss of innocence. It is also an attack on modern-day Sadducees, theocracy and all forms of fundamentalism (capitalist as well as religious).[2]
- Anagogically, a specific choice has been made here to deal with the salvation of 'life' on earth; this defence of existence in our present is in direct opposition to any religious belief in a better world to come.

His Dark Materials lends itself remarkably easily to allegorical interpretation, and a calculated attack on certain Christian orthodoxies becomes particularly clear from the exercise undertaken above. However, this kind of analysis may not be as familiar as the well-publicised debt owed by Pullman to John Milton for both his retelling of the story of the Fall and his renewed heroics of apostasy. The very title of Pullman's trilogy is a phrase taken from Milton's *Paradise Lost* (ii.916), and the following quotation is included as the epigraph to *Northern Lights*:

> Into this wild abyss,
> The womb of nature, and perhaps her grave,
> Of neither sea, nor shore, nor air, nor fire,
> But all these in their pregnant causes mixed
> Confusedly, and which must ever fight,
> Unless the almighty maker them ordain
> His dark materials to create more worlds,
> Into this wild abyss the wary fiend
> Stood on the brink of Hell and looked awhile,
> Pondering his voyage. . . . (*Paradise Lost,* ii.910-19)

This is a witty *apologia*, freeing up the interpretation of the Miltonic lines to allow Pullman a new 'wary fiend' at the start of his own 'epic' to inhabit the same space as Satan as he readied himself to plunge into the unknown. Pullman as 'Satan' is heir both to the Miltonic creative imagination and to the epic's great figuration of vigorous disobedience. The quotation is both a dutiful acknowledgement of a literary debt and a coup whereby the precursor is surpassed and his power seized.

Pullman is extremely serious about his epic ambitions in *His Dark Materials*. He is disappointed at writers who do not aim to include big ideas in their work,[3] and he has sought to produce a new grand narrative in the tradition of Homer, Dante and Milton. Yet, the fact that he has targeted child readers has led to a backlash from conservative groups. Their distrust of Pullman's subversive message may be linked to their presumption that a child audience is (morally) vulnerable. Pullman is unlikely to disagree with them about the sensitivity and openness of a child reader. Indeed, he has said that children's literature is now the only place where an author can be taken seriously. Writing here for young adults rather than for pre-teens, Pullman is actively introducing his readers to fundamental moral, philosophical and aesthetic debates, whilst encouraging them to challenge the rule of the father in every sense. There is then a basic difference of opinion here over whether or not children's literature should aim to secure certain norms of behaviour and social interaction in the youth of today, or whether it should give those readers the liberty to read subversive texts which encourage them to challenge, and indeed to reject, certain established structures of thought and cultural values.

Those who are uneasy about children reading Pullman unsupervised are presumably particularly disturbed by the pervasive anticlericalism in *His Dark Materials*. The religious figures in the books are commonly portrayed in extremely negative terms: self-deluding or power-crazed, or weak-willed or paedophilic. The heroic struggle set up in the novels is against the oppressive and repressive hold which the Church has over people's minds and bodies. Our main adult guide in this regard within the trilogy is the 'tempter', Mary Malone; she is positioned as a nun who has left both the convent and the Church and who is now pursuing a career as a scientist. Pullman is forthright, and quite possibly over-emphatic, but it should be remembered that an anti-clerical theme is recurrent in the Protestant tradition. It is a standard part of English Protestant polemic writing which endorses freedom of conscience in the face of dogmatism, worldliness and corrupt episcopal hierarchies. Pullman's contemporary attack on fundamentalism, and the restrictions placed upon the independent spirit and natural vitality by many religious doctrines, follows on from Milton's position. The emphasis on free will and on individual choice may have a more secular emphasis in Pullman, but it remains dedicated to the furthering of the individual human conscience.

Those who are disturbed by Pullman's texts would do well to look beyond the anticlerical plot to the subversive efficacy of his *method*, which returns us to my opening points on allegory. I would argue that what is most telling in the controversy provoked by *His Dark Materials* is our shock at re-discovering the radical and provocative power of allegory. Those who construct allegorical texts are in effect encouraging (and training) their readers to think and interpret in a certain manner – seeking for a moral meaning or the hidden truth behind a narrative. Within this mode it can appear that there is an elite or initiate group reading 'correctly'. Christian allegorical exegesis from the time of Paul has claimed to promote a radical freedom – reading and living for the spirit and not the letter. In Galatians 4, Paul identifies the maternity of Abraham's two sons as significant. The fact that one is born to a bondwoman and the other to a freewoman is 'an allegory: for these are the two covenants'. Paul is countering Hebraic hostility to the new Christian message by reading the Old Testament as subordinate to the New. Both the Mosaic covenant and the Law have been overthrown by Christ's redemptive sacrifice and grace. Such an interpretative activity both justifies and gives priority to later readers (the children of the promise). The historical story of Isaac can only be seen in its full context by those who come after. The Christian witness discovers a truth behind the Isaac story – a simple truth but one hidden from sight until Christ's sacrifice. Such an allegorical exegesis is immediately provocative, but as the Christian faith becomes a normative way of thinking, such allegoresis becomes less radical and more conservative or indeed imperialist.

So, Christian allegorical exegesis prioritises one authoritative text (New Testament) over another (Old Testament), and it offers a method of reading which both re-interprets previous texts and secures a completed interpretative process. Pullman's texts deny and defy such a definitive conclusion in the reading process. Lyra as the new 'Eve' needs to be free to develop her own narrative, and her story should not be restricted by the previous generation or by their interpretation of 'Eve's' role. This is positioned as a (new) plain truth, which can guide the next generation through their life journey. This returns us to the title for the trilogy. We have commented on the Miltonic allusion already, but the title *His Dark Materials* is also a reminder of a traditional literary term for allegorical writing. Edmund Spenser's phrase 'dark conceit' for the allegory of *The Faerie Queene* is still well-known. John Bunyan too in his prefatory poem 'The Author's Apology for His Book' repeatedly defines his allegorical mode of writing in *Pilgrim's Progress* as 'dark'. He uses the term six times in the poem and this one instance is particularly striking:

> Why, what's the matter? It is dark, what tho?
> But it is feigned, what of that I tro?
> Some men by feigning words as dark as mine,
> Make truth to spangle, and its rayes to shine

Allegory – like parables – can lead you to the truth. Bunyan's defence of his fiction also asserts that its method is akin to catching fish by tickling them, and that it is like a burr that sticks to you and won't be shaken off. Although *Pilgrim's Progress* was initially intended as a politically radical defence of nonconformity, it has long been considered a suitable book for children. Until the mid-twentieth century, many British and American children were being brought up on this story as staple reading – for some it was, along with the Bible, the only reading text allowed on a Sunday. Christian's trials and tribulations, the many obstacles in his path, his numerous conversations with other travellers, make this read like a romance or an adventure story. Adult readers know that behind the fiction lie certain moral imperatives and a specific doctrinal perspective, but children are imaginatively involved in the story well before they realise the full import of the tale. The text can be given to children in an attempt to introduce them gently to certain abstract concepts, but it is effective because the storyline sticks in the mind. This makes it hard to shake off the ideological positionings which cement the fiction, so that even now many adults cannot but retain in their memory a trace of Christian's eventful journey from the City of Destruction through the

Slough of Despond, past Vanity Fair and Doubting Castle to his crossing of the River and entry into the Celestial City.

In *Pilgrim's Progress* our progress as audience and as readers is to reverse our conventional value systems and to learn to assert a Puritan response to the world, a response constantly dependent upon our reading of Scripture and our goal of eternal life. We are in effect to learn what it means to be in the world but not of the world – to judge all worldly experiences against a greater good and to learn through grace how to tell what is the 'Way' and to witness to the 'Truth'. The ultimate goal for Christian is 'an Inheritance, incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away; and it is laid up in Heaven, and fast there to be bestowed at the time appointed, on them that diligently seek it'. Reading *Pilgrim's Progress,* I never fail to be troubled (as is intended) by the warning that closes the story of Christian's pilgrimage. This is where any sugar-coating finally comes off the moral fiction. Christian's story closes as he gains his reward and enters the Celestial City to the pealing of bells. It is a happy ending, except that this moment of communion is offset within the wider narrative by the fate of Ignorance. Ignorance follows after Christian in crossing the River but is not admitted to the City, and instead is bound hand and foot and sent to Hell from the very gates of Heaven. Revealingly, the allegorical dream narration closes with this final disturbing act of exclusion rather than with Christian. The eschatological frame here is remarkably stern and unyielding, and the fate of Ignorance is a dire incentive to the narrator and to each reader *not* to be found wanting. In the judgement of 'Ignorance' *Pilgrim's Progress* requires what Maureen Quilligan has called the 'collusion' of the reader in the perfection and completion of its allegorical scheme.[4] The reader is schooled to accept both the identification and the exclusion of this figure of 'Ignorance' because he did not follow the same Way as Christian, and thereby to admit the Calvinist doctrine of predestination. It is the final test for the reader – in order to be elect and on the road to salvation one must agree to the exclusion of Ignorance. The impact of *Pilgrim's Progress* upon the reader's moral sensibility is as likely to come from the threat of final exclusion as from the depiction of Christian's salvation.

When asked by Melvin Bragg about the influence of Bunyan upon his work, Pullman replied that he had never got through more than a few pages of *Pilgrim's Progress*.[5] It is therefore just as well that Pullman's own imaginative concept of 'Dust', as the accumulated cultural knowledge of past generations in dialogue with all individual conscious beings, means that the reader/critic is entitled to uncover inter-textual links beyond overt authorial intent.[6] However, even if the adult Pullman maintains that he has never sat down and read *Pilgrim's Progress* from cover to cover, he is more than likely to have become acquainted with its over-arching frame and specific episodes when he was a child. He was after all brought up in part by his grandparents. His grandfather (born around 1890) was an Anglican minister in East Anglia, whom Pullman recalls as being a great teller of tales taken from the Bible and from his own experience. With this kind of 'Victorian' upbringing, which of course included weekly attendance at Sunday school, it would be extraordinary should Christian's story have passed the young Pullman by completely, and he is certainly familiar with the 'Ignorance' conundrum. He reverses this exclusion of Ignorance in his episode set in the Land of the Dead, so that those religious figures who refuse to leave the confines of that Land are the truly ignorant, choosing to exclude themselves from a reunion with the pulse of life within the universe. This blatant revision of Ignorance confronts not just Bunyan but the later appearance of such exclusive morality in the work of C S Lewis. At the close of *The Last Battle*, the final volume in C S Lewis's *Narnia* chronicles, Aslan reveals to the children that they are dead and have entered a new and better land. But this is a land from which Susan has been excluded. It turns out that she is not elect because 'She's interested in nothing nowadays except nylons and lipstick and invitations. She always was a jolly sight too keen on being grown-up.' C S Lewis is rehearsing Bunyan's religious position on Calvinist election, but he also makes a link between worldliness and sexual awareness. Pullman has mentioned this episode a lot in interviews, and has termed it one of the most 'vile' moments in children's literature. *His Dark Materials* by contrast endorses the adolescent's discovery of sexual experiences as part of his counter-argument on love, salvation and the human condition. It does not deny the ascetic position (Will and Lyra do part after all) but it does assert that such a decision can be respected only when it is taken with full knowledge of what is being sacrificed. Pullman's central opposition is to the idea that one should deny or compromise one's life in the here and now because of the promise of a better life to come. His fiction affirms a more positive approach to the experiences which the world has to offer. One of his obvious truths is that of living at ease with one's body and gaining experience of the world through it. As the harpy says, 'If they live in the world they should see and touch and hear and love and learn things' (*Amber Spyglass,* Scholastic Press, 2000, p. 334 (Ch.23))). It is ignorant to wish to do otherwise. Therefore, it seems to me that much of Pullman's fight is with certain aspects of Christian doctrine as found in Bunyan and C S Lewis, and I would like to pursue the comparison of election and grace in Pullman's texts and Bunyan's allegory a little further.

The opening chapter of *Northern Lights* has Lyra hide in a wardrobe in a scene which both evokes and rejects the escapist aspects of C S Lewis's classic, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe,* but in the second chapter of *Northern Lights* we look on with Lyra as an image is projected of a Celestial City in the sky:

> But in the middle of the Aurora, high above the bleak landscape, Lyra could see something solid. She pressed her face to the crack to see more clearly, and she could see Scholars near the screen leaning forward, too. As she gazed, her wonder grew, because there in the sky was the unmistakable outline of a city: towers, domes, walls . . . buildings and streets, suspended in the air! She nearly gasped with wonder.
> The Cassington Scholar said, 'That looks like … a city.'
> 'Exactly so,' said Lord Asriel *(Northern Lights,* Scholastic Press, 1995, p. 24 (Ch.2)).

This celestial city is the initial goal to which Lord Asriel aspires within the trilogy. At a later stage however we realise that it has been introduced only to be dismissed. It is the goal of a previous generation and instead it is Lord Asriel's daughter, Lyra, who follows a better path and breaks out of established patterns of thought (including established rebellious thought). She will break the mould and achieve a greater victory by overcoming our fear of Death. Her actions will admit a new beginning for all conscious beings, whereby we may work to establish a 'republic of heaven' in our own worlds (rather than in a world to come). The 'republic of heaven' is a highly Miltonic thought – anti-monarchical, anti-authoritarian, and remarkably close to the 'paradise within thee happier far' promised to Adam by the archangel Michael (*Paradise Lost*, xii.587). The setting for the close of the trilogy, then, is significant. The girl in the garden is contemplative, but this is a moment of repose as she considers an active future: a 'solitary way' rather than a comedic marital conclusion. The joke at the end for the author is to place Oxford as the 'real' New Jerusalem, the place to aspire to because of the potential for knowledge that is held in its libraries and a place where the bells peal out just as they do in the Celestial City to welcome Christian at the triumphant close of his journey.

Heuristic Journeys

Pullman's version of the quest narrative explicitly abandons Bunyan's Celestial City, but it does not abandon the concept of the journey as a metaphor for spiritual and moral education. Clifford has defined the quest motif as:

> a metaphor by which a process of learning for both protagonists and readers is expressed. In the course of their adventures the heroes of allegory discover which ideals are worth pursuing and what things are obstacles to that pursuit.[7]

Pullman may have left the classroom but he has never stopped being a teacher. He wants ethics to remain on the curriculum, and he also wants to renew his readers' interest in a 'survey course' of Western literature and cultural ideas. So these novels are designed to help his adolescent readers discover which ideals are worth pursuing. It is clear that he fears that as the custodians of a rich and historic culture we are currently failing to interest our children in the big ideas. He is explicit in telling us that he hopes to gain their attention and revitalise our myths through his own storytelling abilities:

> 'If I talked to her about Dust? You don't think she'd listen to that?'
>
> The Librarian made a noise to indicate how unlikely he thought that was.
>
> 'Why on earth should she?' he said. 'Why should a distant theological riddle interest a healthy thoughtless child?'
>
> […] And you might be wrong, Charles; she might well take an interest in it, if it were explained in a simple way (*Northern Lights*, p. 33 (Ch.2)).

This pedagogical intent is most overt in *The Amber Spyglass*, the final book of the trilogy, where the adventure narrative morphs into a theologically-informed investigation of society, the doctrine of grace, the burden of sin, the meaning of Death and the truth of man's inheritance. It seems that this is the book readers have most difficulty with, but most have stuck with it precisely because of the basic desire to know what happens next! We have been hooked as successfully by Pullman's storytelling as previous generations were by Bunyan's, and both authors have a moral agenda.

Bunyan's narrative is markedly dependent upon the Scriptural pretext: the incentive for Christian's pilgrimage is his reading of the Bible; he carries the Book with him as he begins his spiritual journey; the Roll that is later given to him is a token of election and a constant reminder of how to 'read' correctly. It is both a guide to the true interpretation of events upon the journey of life; and a reified token of election – the prerequisite evidence and certificate required for the journey to be undertaken successfully. Christian loses his Roll at one point and must retrace his steps to recover it. The narrative focuses on his mental anguish and guilt at this point. He is all too aware of the moral weakness which caused him to fall asleep during the day rather than continue his pilgrimage. The episode is later recalled by Christian and explained in conjunction with Faithful's encounter with the first Adam – the flesh. Lyra also has a guide in her decision process, the Alethiometer or truth measurer. The existence of such an instrument is extremely effective in keeping up the pace of the narrative, but Lyra's extraordinary ability to interpret its meaning also suggests an elect status. She too loses her guide at one central point in the narrative and as a result is humbled by her inattention and selfish desires. However, in contrast to Bunyan, the Alethiometer never translates into a certificate of election, but remains dedicated to the process of training readers to make their own choices. In one of the final turns of the trilogy, Lyra discovers that she won't ever be able to use the Alethiometer again without effort:

> 'You read it by grace,' said Xaphania, looking at her, 'and you can regain it by work.'
>
> 'How long will that take?'
>
> 'A lifetime.'
>
> 'That long . . .'
>
> 'But your reading will be even better then, after a lifetime of thought and effort, because it will come from conscious understanding, Grace attained like that is deeper and fuller than grace that comes freely, and furthermore, once you've gained it, it will never leave you' (*The Amber Spyglass,* p. 520 (Ch.37)).

The Alethiometer is a man-made instrument and it is a means for 'Dust' to communicate with individuals and to guide their actions. It answers questions in a manner somewhat similar to an oracle, encouraging more interpretative work to be done by the questioner. Its guidance is benevolent but as the fiction ends it is expected that Lyra as a mature individual will take control of her own destiny and *work* for further insights. This implies a theology of good deeds and reasoning rather than one of prevenient grace and election.

The choice of protagonist for *His Dark Materials* is particularly intriguing. The role of a hero is complex, at once a representative figure and yet also a champion. Here, we have a new type of hero for epic – a child, and moreover a girl. Our hero's name is Lyra, suggesting both her ability to be a good storyteller (a liar) and her association with Odysseus, the classical hero skilled in oratory. Lyra is also the lyre – the many-stringed instrument with which the bard sings his epic, and this particular song may also prove to be lyric in that it expresses the author's own feelings. So our protagonist Lyra despite her many tomboy attributes would seem to be blossoming into a more conventional female figure within the artistic process. Moreover, her journey unites her with the other hero of the novels, Will. His name is also resonant, suggesting resolution and strength as well as signifying human passion and intellect. He is free will personified, although he may also carry connotations of a Calvinist understanding of the degenerate will to be refuted by this new epic argument. His love for Lyra and his irremediable loss may suggest the Romantic artist's relationship with Art. But although Lyra and Will are parted at the close of the novels, they each have knowledge of the other – and of each other's daemon – suggesting that they will now always be united on some deeper level.

Pullman's concept of the 'daemon' makes a remarkably satisfying addition to the canon's exploration of the human psyche. The first novel in the trilogy opens like this:

> Lyra and her daemon moved through the darkening Hall, taking care to keep to one side, out of sight of the kitchen. . . . Her daemon's name was Pantalaimon, and he was currently in the form of a moth, a dark brown one so as not to show up in the darkness of the Hall (*Northern Lights*, p. 3 (Ch.1)).

As the opening of a children's novel, this is hard to beat. Lyra, our heroine, has a secretive friend, seemingly magical in that it is capable of speech and of shape-shifting and very possibly dangerous, given the proximity of its generic name to 'demon'. This notion of a daemon is Pullman's ace. It serves an important narrative function, allowing dialogue to take place where otherwise an omniscient author would have had to tell us what a character was thinking. The 'daemon' is a talking animal, which is both part of the self and also one's best friend; it is a way of thinking about identity and individuality, about self-awareness, about embodied conscience and about the soul. It allows individual characters to be in two minds about certain issues, and to display emotional and psychological depths. It also admits a more subtle understanding of human nature, whereby each individual contains aspects of both genders (the daemon is normally the opposite gender to its human counterpart), and where the daemon settles into a fixed shape only as maturity is reached. The name given to Lyra's daemon is Pantalaimon (all merciful). He is a part of her, meaning that the child brings sympathy and right feeling with her throughout her journey. Her basic instincts are true and strong. There is a grace and a humanity to be found here from the start, making it difficult to think that Pullman is not responding to Bunyan's naming of his protagonist (and thereby to Calvinism), 'My name is now Christian but my name at the first was Graceless'. From the first for Pullman, all potential and all grace and all mercy are there in the young human being, and significantly his allegory here chimes with Bunyan's characteristic use of adjectival names – 'Not honesty in the abstract, but Honest is my name, and I wish that my nature shall answer to what I am called' – in that one will have to live up to that identification.

The two children's journey eventually takes them to the Land of the Dead. The presumed climax of the military challenge to the powers of the Authority in fact gives way to this assault by the children upon the concept of Death. This is Pullman's ultimate target – to overthrow the inherited views of the after-world and to project instead an animist re-union of each mortal individual's consciousness with the universal life force. If Pullman can 'win' here by having Lyra break out of the Land of the Dead, then the Authority and with it all the powers of repressive thought will have been overthrown. A new beginning will become available and a new way of thinking about mortality:

> 'Well, this is a mystery,' said Farder Coram, 'and I'm glad I lived long enough to see it. To go into the dark of death is a thing we all fear, say what we like, we fear it. But if there's a way out for that part of us that has to go down there, then it makes my heart lighter.'
> 'You're right, Coram,' said John Faa. 'I've seen a good many folk die; I've sent more than a few men down into the dark myself, though it was always in the anger of battle. To know that after a spell in the dark we'll come out again to a sweet land like this, to be free of the sky like the birds, well, that's the greatest promise anyone could wish for' (*Amber Spyglass*, p. 531 (Ch.38).

The harrowing of Hell, undertaken albeit unwittingly by the child Lyra, is a major element in Pullman's counterblast to Christian doctrines of salvation, and I would argue that it attempts to offer the good news of a better future based on charity rather than grace from above. The Land of the Dead is both a neutral and a sterile space to which all sapient creatures must come after their death. It is a place focussed on loss and insufficiency, where the atmosphere is one of unremitting pointlessness. It is not the case that our golden-haired girl independently brings 'hope' to this Land of the Dead. She has never needed others as much as she does here, and the means of breaking out of this Land centres unexpectedly on a new and grotesque figure, the harpy, No-Name. In classical literature, the winged goddesses known as the Erinyes or Furies protect the social order and punish wrongdoers. They are in effect torturers, who drive their victims mad. The harpies in Dante's *Inferno*, Canto 13, are there to punish the damned: they feed on the 'soul'/tree of the suicide and cause pain. In Pullman's Land of the Dead, the harpies have been enrolled by the Authority to torment the dead and to make them remember all their past mistakes and malefactions. They swoop down and attack Lyra the liar but when she tells them a true story of life beyond the Land of the Dead, a new window of opportunity has been opened up. The harpies agree to allow the dead to regain access to the living world in return for hearing each individual tell the story of their life in the world. As the harpy says, 'If they live in the world they should see and touch and hear and love and learn things' (*Amber Spyglass*, p. 334, (Ch.23)). With this agreement made, the journey up and out from the Land of the Dead begins. But as Lyra is tracking up the side of the abyss, a moment of inattention and vanity causes her to slip. She falls into the abyss and would have been lost except for the actions of the harpy, No-Name. It did seem odd that a character should have been named in such a fashion, but the intention now becomes clear. The classical figuration of the harpy as terrifying figure of vindictive punishment can now be re-cited and its place in Pullman's new narrational structure re-assessed. At this moment, she is no longer intent on causing suffering, but instead altruistically chooses to save Lyra. The negativity, sterility, and indeed anonymity, of 'No-Name' can thereby be said to have been cancelled out. The figure appropriated directly from classical texts can be re-vitalised. Lyra decides to name the harpy: her new name is 'Gracious Wings'. This is not a classical euphemism, such as using the name the Eumenides (the kindly ones) for the Furies, but an actual change of status. Out of wrath and malice has come charity. These ancient figurations will no longer work for the Authority but have won a new role for themselves within Pullman's narrative. This is Pullman's idea of grace, a social interaction based on works of charity, meaning unselfish giving. For the 'republic of heaven' to function, humanity will have to be willing to work together. It is not enough to have the Alethiometer, i.e., to know what needs to be done. It requires the assistance of other people to bring about change, and without the unexpected, charitable, assistance from the harpy, Lyra would have failed in her task and would still be falling in the abyss.

Pullman's overall intention in his allegory strikes me as high-minded and ethical. It contradicts certain exclusive Christian doctrines and exposes what Pullman sees as the intellectual and moral fallibility in fundamentalism,[8] but it is not a libertarian text. Pullman strives to retain the social responsibility and charity often taught in previous generations through religious values. However, rather than using theology to explain the universe and man's place within it from the outside, Pullman is endorsing a secular ethical system of self-reliance, good deeds and eco-centrality. He intends his truths to be simple, but there is one further plain truth to be admitted: namely, that as educators and cultural custodians we are already in Pullman's debt. The present generation are not reading Bunyan or the Bible, but they are encountering core moral and metaphysical issues through this text. The books are best-sellers, the theatrical adaptation at the National Theatre is sold out; for better or worse, *His Dark Materials* may prove the best way forward.

[1] See *http://www.touchstonemag.com/docs/issues/16.8docs/16-8pg42.html* and also the interview with Pullman at *http://www.surefish.co.uk/culture/features/pullman_interview.htm* [both accessed 7 Feb 2005].

[2] Pullman's recent essay 'The War on words' in the *Guardian* newspaper 6 Nov 2004, and soon to be published as part of the *Index on Censorship*, makes this explicit. It can be found at *http://books.guardian.co.uk/authors/author/0,5917,-184,00.html* [accessed 7 Feb 2005].

[3] 'I think the grand narratives aren't so much played out or exhausted in contemporary writing, as abandoned for ideological reasons, because they're felt to be somehow impure or improper. Maybe the whole thing is weakened by a fatal lack of ambition. This is what I find most irritating in my contemporaries among writers: lack of ambition. They're not trying big things. They're doing little things and doing them well.' Interview with Philip Pullman in the journal *Lion and the Unicorn*, 23 (1999).

[4] Maureen Quilligan, *The Language of Allegory: defining the genre*, 1979, p. 226.

[5] *The South Bank Show*, 9 Sep 2003.

[6] 'Dust' is experience; original sin; energy; communal consciousness; an affirming life force in the cosmos that is attracted by heightened consciousness amongst living creatures. It can be seen by some creatures and can be sensed or otherwise detected by others. Communication with Dust is possible and certain specific tools are available, including the Alethiometer, the computer, and the spyglass constructed by Mary Malone.

[7] Gay Clifford, *The Transformation of Allegory*, 1974, p. 11.

[8] *Guardian* essay, Nov 2004.

Sublime Allegory in Blake's *Jerusalem*

Susanne Sklar

Before engraving *Jerusalem*, Blake wrote to his friend and patron Thomas Butts, about creating 'a Sublime Allegory . . . the Grandest Poem that this World Contains,' an 'Allegory addressed to the Intellectual Powers . . . hidden from the Corporeal Understanding' (K825a).[1] Intellectual powers in Blake have naught to do with objectifying critical analyses. Blake calls deconstructing rationality 'the Abstract Objecting Power that Negatives Every Thing' (J10:14). The Abstract Objecting Power leads Blake's characters into a state called Satan. Intellectual Power in Blake's *Jerusalem* emanates from the Human Imagination – which is the Divine Body, the Body of Christ. This body is both spiritual and sensual. Blake's sublime allegory engages more than the reasonable mind. Blake's words point beyond themselves, not only to concepts or political agendas, but to the Body of Christ, a body in which all readers are invited imaginatively to participate.

Blake's sense of membership in a divine body is akin to St. Paul's, but Blake's sublime allegory is more fluid than Paul's typologies, or Christ's parables. When Jesus tells the story of the sower (Matthew 13, Mark 4, Luke 8) he explicitly tells his followers that the thorns in which the seeds cannot grow are those choked by cares and riches, but the good ground refers to those who hear the word, and bring forth goodness. Imagery points to a particular insight which should inspire moral action. The figures comprising the divine body in Blake's sublime allegory cannot be narrowed to specific meaning. In *The Apocalypse in England* Christopher Burdon observes that Blake's works undermine 'any achievement of closure'. Blake redeems 'the Satanic work of hermeneutics', the kind of interpretation that seeks closure.[2] The first portion of this paper will link Blake's open sense of allegory to medieval fourfold reading, as well as to the visual theology of Eastern Orthodox icons. It will then apply Isaac Newton's futuristic apocalyptic insights to Blake's text. The second portion examines the interrelatedness of Blake's dynamic characters.

Fourfold Reading

In his notebook Blake contradicts himself about allegory. Though he praises 'sublime allegory' in his notes about his 'Last Judgment' painting (1809), Blake denigrates allegories as 'Things that Relate to Moral Virtues' for 'Moral Virtues do not Exist' (K614). Blake despises abstraction. In his prophetic books abstract nouns like 'Good and Evil' create fragmentation within and between people and cultures and God. The angelic Eternals in *Jerusalem* declare: 'General Good is the plea of the scoundrel, hypocrite, and flatterer! / He who would do good to another must do it in Minute Particulars!' (J55:59-60).

Blake feels that every living thing should be regarded in what he calls minute particularity. Every living thing is human. For Blake (as for Swedenborg) 'the human form divine' replicates the structure of the cosmos.[3] Every person also carries a divine universe within his or her bosom. 'God is within and without!' cries Los, the poem's hero, as he battles with Demonstrative Science (J12:14). He later declares: 'General Forms have their vitality in Particulars!' (J91:30). Blake's heroes work to subdue 'Mathematical Proportion' or 'a World of Shapes' with what Blake's Eternals call the Naked Beauty of 'Living Proportion' (*Milton* 5:44 & J54:24). Dwelling in that naked beauty can involve traversing four levels of perception: the Ulro (abstract rationality); Generation (the cycle of birth and copulation and death); Beulah (a romantic or feeling state); and Eden (fourfold deification). These states do not exactly correspond to the fourfold medieval way of reading with its literal, allegorical, moral, and anagogic layers, but such reading can help illuminate Blake's prophetic books.

St. Augustine (354-430) affirmed and utilised fourfold reading in *On Christian Doctrine*. This way of reading was suggested by John Cassian (c. 415), who used it to describe a fourfold Jerusalem. The actual city is also allegorically the church, which morally animates and dwells in the human soul. Anagogically Jerusalem is also our divine home, our heavenly living.[4] Blake's *Jerusalem* is more complex than this, for his is literally a woman, literally a city, and literally an apocalyptic poem. In 1806 Blake's earliest commentator, Benjamin Heath Malkin, observed: 'The book of Revelation, which may well be supposed to engross much of Mr. Blake's study, seems to have directed him. . . .'[5]

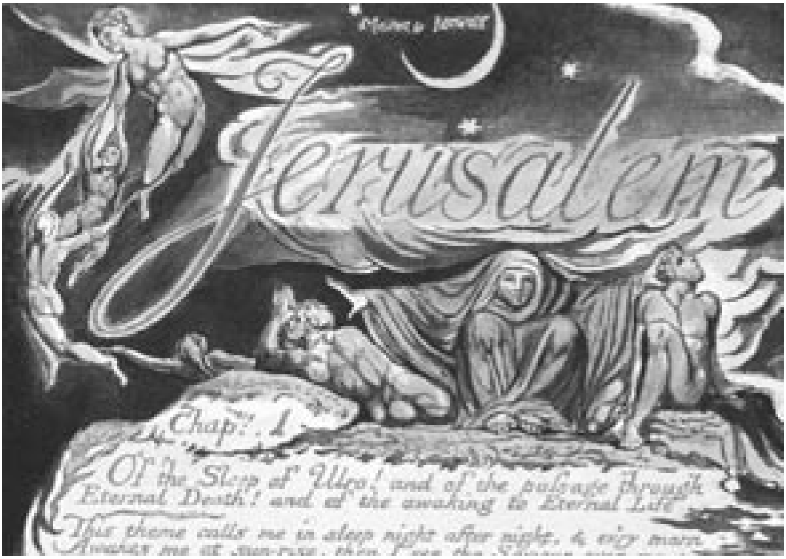
Jerusalem
Chap: 1
Of the Sleep of Ulro! and of the passage through
Eternal Death! and of the awaking to Eternal Life
This theme calls me in sleep night after night, & ev'ry morn

Plate 4 (detail)*:* a gowned and hooded sibyl sits between two nude males. The three sit on a grassy peninsula or island, perhaps a representation of Britain. To the left of this group, curving around the 'J' of Jerusalem, is a line of four hovering females. One reaches down with one hand while pointing right with the other to the Greek words for 'Jesus only'. Paul Mellon Collection, Yale Center for British Art. Used with permission.

Blake's *Jerusalem* tells the literal story of Albion's fragmenting fall, several rescue attempts, and a final awakening. Allegorically the poem has been read politically, historically, Biblically, psycho-sexually, mythopoetically. When Blake despises 'Allegories relating to Moral Virtues' he may be reacting against the notion that allegorical reading reveals a correct or codified belief. While composing and engraving *Jerusalem,* Blake drew and painted at least eight different versions of 'A Vision of the Last Judgment'. In his notebook he wrote: '. . . to different People it appears differently, as every thing else does' (K605). Blake's works are not designed to be tidily interpreted, but, in the poet's words 'to rouse the faculties to act' (K793). He wants to transform his readers and the world.

Though Blake eschews codified moral virtue, his works seek to inspire imaginative and social action. Thus his works might be read on the traditional 'moral' level, the reading which leads to action. Blake condemns notions of accusation, judgement, or sin, because punitive abstractions do not help what he calls 'the little ones', those who are poor or oppressed. He calls his readers to annihilate their selfhood, to cultivate humility, and to use every mental gift to build Jerusalem. He invites each reader to enter into the Body of Christ, to go beyond 'Corporeal Understanding'. Blake's sublime allegory may be akin to Dante's description of anagogy, the allegorical level 'above the senses . . . which even in the literal sense by things signified likewise gives intimation of higher matters belonging to the eternal glory' (*Convivio* II,i).

Northrop Frye's excellent understanding of Blake informs his insights about anagogy in *Anatomy of Criticism.* He seems to be invoking Blake's fourfold vision when he explains that in anagogy nature becomes, not the context of perception, 'but the thing contained'. According to Frye anagogy happens within 'the mind of an infinite man who builds his cities out of the Milky Way'. Frye calls this perspective apocalyptic in that it reveals 'the whole of nature as the content of an infinite and eternal living body. . . .'[6] Blake calls this the Divine Body. This Body participates in sensual enjoyment.

Dante's anagogy goes 'above the senses'; Blake's fourfold vision goes *through* them. In the last plates of *Jerusalem* sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell expand 'in rivers of bliss' in Eden, when the human and divine commingle (J98-99). Blake's composite art involves both reading and seeing. Music and chanting, performance and dancing weave through *Jerusalem.* In his preface to Chapter Four, Blake invites his readers to play with the text, to wind its 'golden string' into a ball, and so enter in at heaven's gate. Prophetically elliptical, Blake deliberately omits words and phrases at key moments; we must fill in the blanks. Messages appear in mirror writing, as in plates 41 and 81. Blake's sublime allegory is interactively imaginative. The poem asks us to inhabit the space between words and images, to crawl through what Northrop Frye calls 'the narrow gap between the end of Revelation and the beginning of Genesis'.[7] That narrow gap is a place of what Blake would call limitless translucence, a place unconfined by space or time, the kind of place where John the Divine viewed the open heaven. In *The Four Zoas* and *Milton* Blake explicitly places himself, and implicitly readers, to see

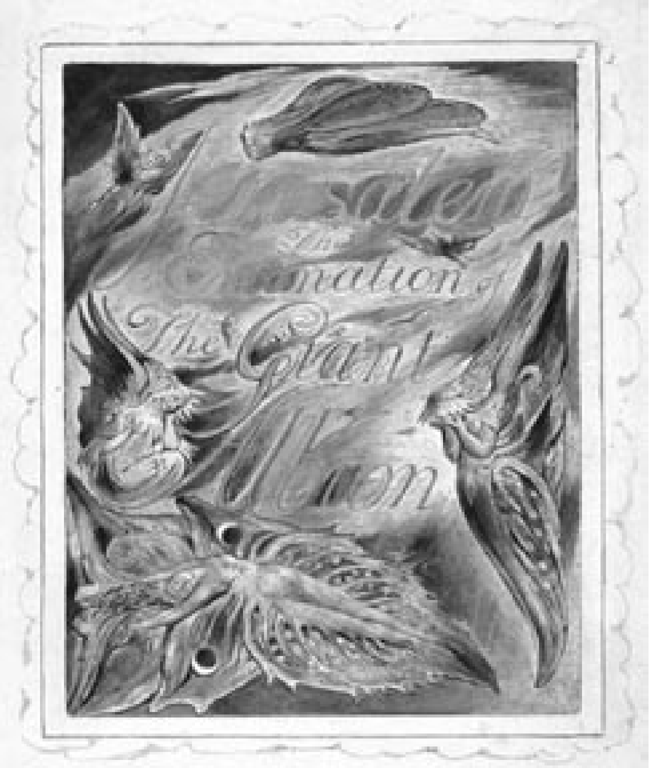

Plate 2.

'what John in Patmos saw' (M40:22). In *Jerusalem's* sublime allegory, rocks and frogs, zoas and emanations, eternals and readers participate in what 17th century apocalyptic commentators would call visionary theatre. In visionary theatre there is no 'fourth wall', no aesthetic distance. The stage is the mind and the cosmos.

What Blake writes about his painting of the 'Last Judgment' applies also to the figures in *Jerusalem*: 'If the Spectator could Enter into these Images in his Imagination, approaching them on the Fiery Chariot of his Contemplative Thought . . . or could make a Friend and Companion of one of these Images of wonder . . . then he would arise from his Grave, then would he meet the Lord in the Air and then he would be happy' (K611). In this same treatise he praises Gothic Form, calling us to converse with Eternal Realities, to enter Paradise (K613). *Jerusalem's* prophetic narrator declares that he writes '. . . to open the immortal Eyes /Of Man inwards into Eternity . . .' (J4). Perhaps we are expected to regard Blake's work as something like an icon, a window to eternity, what the Eastern Orthodox would call 'sacramental materiality'.[8] Icons invite their viewers to enter into sacred images and thus be penetrated by Christological beauty.[9]

In Blake's *Jerusalem*, entering into images, or participating in sublime allegory, involves imaginatively entering the drama of Albion, Jerusalem, the Zoas and Emanations. They fall into error, war with each other, suffer and love and finally cohere. The poem's protagonist, Albion, is England and Everyman. Jerusalem, the heroine, his Emanation, is both a city and a woman. Albion and Jerusalem contain four Zoas and four Emanations. Through Emanations the human becomes divine. The characters are called:

1. Tharmas, the primal man; Enion, an earth mother, is his Emanation.
2. Los, a prophetic artist, forges a city of art in his furnaces; Enitharmon, his emanation, weaves beams of beauty.
3. Luvah, the libidinous 'feeling-function' Zoa, is also known as Albion's spectre. His counterpart, Vala, is Jerusalem's shadow. Vala eroticises war.
4. Urizen embodies Reason and loves 'the world of Shapes'. Gracious Ahania is his emanation.

These characters can contain daughters and sons. They can change names, existing simultaneously in eternity and throughout time. In time Vala is called Rahab; she can also be called Tirzah or Babylon. In Eternity Los is called Urthona. *Jerusalem* is written from an eternal perspective.

In the fourfold (or Eden) state every Zoa, every emanation, and every

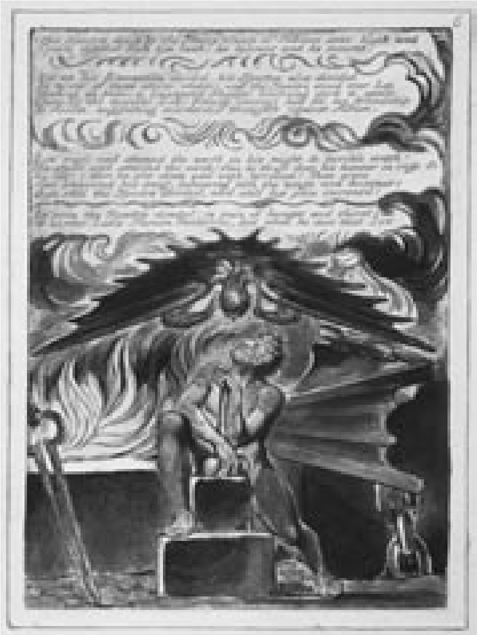

Plate 6: Los holds his hammer as he straddles an anvil on the stone floor. He looks up towards his spectre, a dark, bat-winged figure who hovers in the flames above.

living thing is not just a type of Christ; all are in Christ and each participates in divine wholeness. We are each essential to the beauty of God. To borrow an image from Dante, in Blake's sublime allegory you and I and Los and Enion and Shakespeare and Isaiah and even Isaac Newton, participate in a flaming multifoliate rose, in the embrace of the human and the divine. The poem leads from Albion's rationalising isolation to that embrace.

Albion rejects the Saviour's divine song, banishing Jerusalem, Zoas, Emanations, and the world fragment. 'Humanity shall be no more!' he cries, 'but War and Princedom and Victory!' (J4). Vala, split from Jerusalem, is called Nature, the Mother of War. Delighting in Druid human sacrifice, she dominates Albion and humanity. Los struggles to redeem him. Albion loses hope and dies several times. Los, battling his bat-winged Spectre, keeps trying to build a space called Golgonooza in which Albion can be restored. Los also falls into error; Jerusalem gets deluded in the dark Satanic Mills. War rages globally, in Canaan, Europe, Tartary, in America. Finally the Satanic Selfhood Dragon assimilates with Vala who thrusts her cup of wrath upon Jerusalem. Jerusalem ends up in the Dragon's stomach. Time ends. The breath divine breathes. The Emanation awakens. Albion awakens. He sees the ruin he's wrought; he sees that Los is Christ and Christ is Los. He throws himself into Los' fires, which become fountains of living water. Fragmented Zoas reunite in wars of love, in the Song of Jerusalem.

This little summary reduces the resonance of *Jerusalem*'s polyphonic movement. The critic Morton Paley aptly calls *Jerusalem* 'a song for many voices'.[10] As in the Book of Revelation, disasters and choral beauties interweave. The poem unfolds in kaleidoscopic montage. It is not structured like Dante's *Commedia* or Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. In Bunyan, Christian moves from the City of Destruction through the Slough of Despond, Vanity Fair, to Beulah, to the Celestial City. In Blake, Christ's celestial song eternally sings; Beulah always beckons; the Celestial Woman City always is, even when trapped in dark Satanic Mills. Albion, Vala, Los, and Jerusalem flash back to and move towards the 'time of love,' the marriage of the Lamb,' the eternal embrace of Jerusalem and Jesus. In *Jerusalem*, Jesus is a way of being as well as a character. Poetic action is unconfined by mundane space-time. 'I see the past present and future happening all at once!' the narrator cries (J15:8).

Like St. John's Revelation, Blake's *Jerusalem* can be read both allegorically and synchronically, a way of reading instigated by the 17th century apocalyptic exegete, Joseph Mede, a tutor at Christ's College, Cambridge.[11] Mede coined the term 'synchronism', and his *Key to the Revelation* (1627) was an authoritative commentary for over two centuries. Mede's reading describes a cacophony of disaster punctuated by the 'new song' thundering around the throne of God, as the woman clothed with the sun hovers and Christ triumphs on his white horse. Mede uses dramatic metaphors to read Revelation in a linear fashion in the second section of his *Key* (which includes a volume called *The Little Book*). He asserts that John's 'Apocalyptick Theatre' is historical allegory – Revelation's seals opened during the early Christian persecutions and the crumbling of the Western Roman Empire.

After Constantine, angelic trumpets blew, Huns and Herulians destroyed Rome, and Turkish infidels swarmed from the Euphrates, destroying Constantinople. Vials pour as true Christians resist corrupted papacy – from the Waldensians and Hussites to Mede's contemporaries. The fourth vial pours upon the sun (Rev 16:8) in the form of Gustavus Adolphus, 'God's revenger of wrongs'.[12] When the fifth vial spills then Rome will fall, followed by the Ottomans in the sixth outpouring. Christ and his spouse are coming soon. Subsequent interpreters applied Mede's way of reading to other apocalyptic texts, such as Daniel and Esdras. Sir Isaac Newton was especially influenced by Mede's observations.

Morton Paley considers Blake's *Jerusalem* synchronically, a pioneering reading growing out of allegorical interpretation. In the 19th century, interpreters like Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Anne and Alexander Gilchrist, Algernon Charles Swinburne, and William Butler Yeats tried to define *Jerusalem* in linear allegorical terms; Gilchrist's book compares it to and treats it like *Pilgrim's Progress.* Blake's multivalent text resists such explication. More recently, critics consider *Jerusalem's* elements as Biblical, mythic or historical allegory. David Erdman sees the poem as Blake's response to the Napoleonic wars, identifying Albion with Britain's war policy, the Druid slaughters with Waterloo, and bloodshed 'from Albion to Great Tartary' with 'the extension of the war in 1812 to Russia'.[13] Northrop Frye reads the poem in terms of ancient corn myths of death and resurrection as well as an allegory of Israel in Britain. He typologically casts Luvah as the spiritual Edom, and Albion's twelve sons as Israel's twelve tribes, conflating Atlantis and Canaan as the Promised Land. Jerusalem is the bride of the spiritual Israel.[14] The poem is meant to be seen from many perspectives. In a letter to one of his patrons Blake declares: 'As a man is, so he sees' (K793).

As an apocalyptic text Blake's *Jerusalem* might be read allegorically not only in terms of Blake's contemporary present and the Biblical and British past, but also in terms of the future we now inhabit. Jerusalem, the bride and wife of the Lamb, laments in Chapter Four:

> *And thou America I once beheld thee but now behold no more*
> *Thy golden mountains where my cherubim and seraphim rejoiced*
> *Together among my little ones. But now my altars run with blood;*
> *My fires are corrupt; my incense is a cloudy pestilence*
> *Of seven diseases; Once a continual cloud of salvation rose*
> *From all my myriads; once the Four-fold World rejoic'd among*
> *The pillars of Jerusalem between my winged Cherubim*
> *But now I am clos'd out from them in narrow passages*
> *Of the valleys of destruction into a dark land of pitch and bitumen*
> *From Albion's Tomb afar and from the fourfold wonders of God*
> *Shrunk to a narrow doleful form in the dark land of Cabul;*
> *There is Reuben & Gad & Joseph & Judah & Levi clos'd up*
> *In narrow vales: I walk and count the bones of my beloveds*
> *Along the Valley of Destruction, among these Druid Temples*

> *Which overspread the earth in patriarchal pomp & cruel pride*
> *Tell me, O Vala, thy purposes, tell me wherefore thy shuttles*
> *Drop with the gore of the slain; why Euphrates is red with blood!*
> *. . . Albion is shut apart from every nation under heaven. . . .*

In 1820 Reuben and Gad and Joseph were metonymic to a spiritual Israel. Kabul wasn't in recent headlines. The Euphrates running with blood was not a contemporary problem; soldiers and innocent children were not dying in Iraq. Shuttles dropping with the gore of the slain had to do with composite Valkyrie Norns, darkly weaving war in their elemental Valhalla in the poems of Thomas Gray, or the writings of Paul Henri Mallet.

A Newtonian apocalyptic reading would allow me to make an allegorical link from Blake's imagery to the 21st century. Blake and his heroes rail against the rational trinity of Bacon and Newton and Locke, but Newton was passionately dedicated to alchemy and apocalyptic exegesis, a devotion not widely known until recently.[15] In his *Observations Upon the Prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse of St. John* Newton declares that apocalyptic texts exist 'not to gratify men's curiosities by enabling them to foreknow things, but that after they were fulfilled they might be interpreted by the event.'[16] God's Providence, not the wisdom of interpreters, is thus made manifest. Newton allegorises Revelation futuristically, informing his readers that the fourth trumpet sounded around AD 535 with Belisarius' Byzantine victories, the sixth in 1258 with the Turkish War.[17] The last days approach. But no one can *predict* what will happen. 'The event,' Newton proclaims, 'will prove the Apocalypse.'[18] An apocalyptic text reveals what is eternal; temporal incidents may relate to this anagogically.[19] If a text gives its readers intimations 'of higher matters belonging to eternal glory' readers need not be constricted by mundane parameters of space and time, morality, economics, or gender.

If a reader sees with his or her inward eyes he or she may begin to perceive those things that are taken for granted before conscious thought begins. S/he may begin to perceive what shapes a culture's mundane parameters. Blake writes in response to some of the central texts of western civilization, such as the Bible, Shakespeare, Homer, Plato, Jacob Boehme, and Milton. The fragmentation and awakenings of Blake's central characters may be questioning the civilization's basic assumptions. Like Milton's Satan, Boehme's earthy Adam, Shakespeare's Lear, Homer's Achilles, the Biblical Israelites, and the imperialist Britons and Americans, Albion craves precedence. He cannot share with others; he keeps his mountains to himself; he thinks his Emanation exists so that he can 'pride in chaste beauty'. He cannot bear to let her be with Jesus. His imperial will blinds him to the love of God. He does not see that macrocosmically he contains all things; microcosmically he is within each thing. Craving power, Albion severs what Jesus calls 'the fibres of love from man to man' in Chapter One (J4). Blake saw that this imperial affliction wasn't confined to Albion alone; other nations could be infected. Blake felt that the ancient Israelites (in the books of Joshua and Judges) were especially stricken by this sickness.[20]

With Reuben and Gad and Joseph and Levi, Albion's Druid temples 'overspread the earth in patriarchal pomp and cruel pride'. In Blake's poem the world of Israel, the Druids and Albion exist simultaneously, as they do in some rather syncretic 18th century theological texts. From the time of the Civil Wars onwards Britons frequently identified themselves with the children of Israel. Isaac Watts occasionally substituted the words 'Great Britain' for 'Israel' in his best-selling translation of the Psalms. Handel's oratorios place the Hanoverian dynasty in an Old Testament context; 'Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anointed Solomon King' during George II's coronation.[21] Some eighteenth-century Freemasons and Antiquarians equated ancient British Druids with Israelites, asserting that Druids descended from Abraham or Noah.[22] Blake read about Druid human sacrifice in Caesar's *Commentaries* and Mallet's *Northern Antiquities*. In Blake, Urizen's Druid temples promote tyranny and war. Blake seeks to cut away Druidic 'stems of mystery', to obliterate a theology of chosenness.

The poem's prophetic narrator and its polyphonic Eternals see how Albion is in error, how his Druidic 'Princes of the Dead . . . seize the Sons of Jerusalem and plant them in one Man's Loins' (J55:12-14). These sons call Jerusalem a harlot because she espouses inclusivity. In embracing the Body of Christ she loves all humanity. Her love can guide 'Israel in her tents' to dwell in 'Comforting sounds of love and harmony' with 'Moab and Ammon and Amalek' (J86:22-32), people who might be called Palestinians today. Blake's Jerusalem is a trans-national spiritual corporation, overspreading the earth with liberty, beauty and mutually beneficial commerce.[23] Her children are allegorically everywhere: in Egypt and Libya, Ethiopia and Tartary, Poland and France, as well as in England and America. She invites all living creatures to participate in human-divine consummation.

The One and the Many

Because it includes a cast of billions, *Jerusalem* can seem confusing. The poem opens with Christ singing: 'I am in you and you in me mutual in love divine.' It ends with all living creatures, 'even tree metal earth and stone', emanating the divine music, which is the Song of Jerusalem (J99). The poem begins with a solo and ends with polyphony, but that polyphony is what Jesus sings from the beginning. Albion ignores the song of love, bringing 90 plates of chaos upon himself and the world. When Albion finally awakens to see Jesus standing beside him 'as the Good Shepherd By the lost Sheep', Albion sees that Jesus is Los. Jesus tells Albion he will die for him, 'for Man is Love / As God is Love'. Albion self-annihilates, awakens to fourfold life, and every human form (including 'the all wondrous serpent') sings the divine song. They are each distinct and they are all in Christ. They are not confined by their bodies or their names. Characters co-inhere. In Blake's vision they can morph in and out of each other. Identity is dynamic. Angus Fletcher might call Blake's characters daemonic.

In his excellent book *Allegory: Theory of a Symbolic Mode,* Fletcher observes how daemonic characters constellate around an 'everyman' figure in Spenser or Dante. Such daemonic characters 'compartmentalize function' as Blake's Los embodies imaginative energy or Urizen embodies reason. Fletcher's daemons, like Blake's Zoas, act as intermediaries between the human and the divine. But Fletcher's sense of the daemonic highlights how such characters may be good or evil.[24] Blake's Zoas and Emanations can all fall into the state of Satan, but all can also be united with Jesus. They fragment in selfish jealousy; they cohere in creative love. They are beyond good and evil.

Blake's Albion is called the 'Humanity' (J15:6) or the 'Universal Man' (J36:26). He and his Zoas and Emanations are contiguous with Christ. He also has twelve sons, who form something like a chorus. They have twelve Emanations, a female chorus. When Albion fragments, the Zoas and Emanations fragment. Albion's sons seek to destroy Jerusalem, yet they are contiguous with the Twelve Tribes of Israel, metonymically contained in the character called Reuben. A chorus of Eternals, occasionally embodied as Cathedral Cities, try to rescue Albion, to restore him to the Divine Body. Each speaking character in *Jerusalem* is uniquely him or herself; each has motivations and history. Many develop and change. But each character is also one with all, commingling in the Divine Body. Jerusalem's characters are fuelled by the Pauline notion that 'we being many are one body in Christ and every one members one of another' (Romans 12:5). The Eternals explain how this works:

> *. . . contracting our infinite senses*
> *We behold multitude; or expanding we behold as one. . . .* (J38:171-18)

Blake's sublime allegory asks its readers imaginatively to expand and contract perception, to try to inhabit two worlds simultaneously. *Jerusalem* happens both within the mind and out in the cosmos. We are microcosmically and macrocosmically both many and one.

In 1808 the influential critic Robert Hunt considered Blake insane because Blake assumed 'representing the Spirit to the eye' was not impossible.[25] As Blake was creating *Jerusalem,* Crabb Robinson, William Wordsworth, and Robert Southey also asserted that he must be delusional. Southey was particularly disturbed by the poem's 'synchro-locality'. Only a madman could situate Oxford Street in Jerusalem![26] Blake's capacity for what he calls 'double-vision' might now be considered symptomatic of schizo-affective disorder.[27] Blake prays that all of his readers might be blessed with this gift.

Blake knew that double-vision had no place in a materialist worldview.[28] He acknowledges visionaries like St. John, Jacob Boehme, Ezekiel, and Teresa of Avila, and praises masters of Gothic form, like Albrecht Dürer. It would be very strange if Blake did not know about Dürer's 'double-vision' drawing, 'The Rabbit and the Duck'. The drawing can be seen as a rabbit; it can be seen as a duck. Very occasionally, if a viewer focuses on the eye in the drawing it's possible to see both rabbit and duck simultaneously. Blake might have been able to do this with alarming frequency. When Albion sees that Los is Jesus and Jesus is Los, Los doesn't subsume Jesus. Jesus doesn't subsume Los.

They co-inhere in a dynamic relationship. Sublime allegory asks readers and viewers to enter into that dynamic. It allows you to inhabit the space between what Martin Buber would call the 'I' and the 'Thou'.[29]

This dynamic moves through Albion and each person's interior. It emanates outwards into every living thing including the sun and the moon and the stars, the Divine Body of the infinite universe, which is the Human Imagination, the Forgiveness of Sins, the Body of Christ (J98). What is written about Andrei Rubleyev's icon of the Trinity may apply to Blake's prophetic vision: 'This image . . . rules out all egotism – whether individual or collective – all life-destroying separation, any subordination or levelling of persons. It invites all humanity to make this world a permanent eucharist of love, a feast of life'.[30]

In that feast of life, in Blake and in the theology of icons, the literal and anagogic cohere. Blake's text, like Rubleyev's, calls all to see the divine 'in those faces we see every day in the streets.'[31] There is no hierarchy – socially, politically, ontologically. When discussing Blake's 'peculiarity' Crabb Robinson notes how the poet stressed 'We are all coexistent with God.'[32] In *Jerusalem* even the earth emanates. In Chapter One:

> *The Vegetative Universe opens like a flower from the Earth's Center*
> *In which is Eternity. It expands in Stars to the Mundane Shell*
> *And there it meets Eternity again both within and without.* (J13)

This is akin to how the soul goes, opening from its centre to the ever-expanding circumference, 'going forward to eternity' (J71:8). An ever-expanding circumference (expanding because your centre emanates limitlessly) creates a world where boundaries identify – but they do not separate. Blake's characters retain their identity when containing each other or being contained.

Such shifting containment was called 'henopoeia' by the Cambridge Platonist Henry More (1614-1687). More wrote poetry and apocalyptic commentary in his battle against materialism.[33] He was a student of Joseph Mede and, like Newton, followed Mede's lead in apocalyptic exegesis. He expanded upon Mede's insights and created a collection of apocalyptic tropes, which are as useful in reading in Blake as they are in St. John. Had More been able to read Blake's *Jerusalem* he might have delighted in the characters' henopoeia. Blake had access to More's *Theological Works* in the library of his patron, William Hayley. As he worked on a series of paintings depicting scenes from Revelation (1801-3), Blake could have read how apocalyptic characters can involve 'the Collection of a Multitude of Individuals into the Show of one', how the one can also unfold into many.

Blake's characters are henopoetic, not only with each other, but also with those in the texts from which Blake's vision emanates. They interrelate within the world of the poem and outward into the world of the Bible, Shakespeare, Milton, and Jacob Boehme.[34] Blake's heroine, Jerusalem, is not only contiguous with Vala, the daughters of Albion, and Christ, she is also related to the Biblical city depicted as a harlot and/or a bride in

Hosea, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and most particularly in the Book of Revelation. In one of the many curses hurled at her, Albion calls her Cordella, linking her with Lear's daughter in Geoffrey of Monmouth's history as well as the heroine in Shakespeare's tragedy. She is also called Sabrina (J21:22), a drowned princess in Geoffrey of Monmouth, who becomes the less tragic heroine of Milton's *Comus.* In plate 32 Jerusalem resembles Blake's figure of Bathsheba;[35] she's contiguous with the Virgin Mary in plate 61 and is linked with Dinah from Genesis in plate 74. Some critics feel Blake's Jerusalem derives from Jacob Boehme's figure of Holy Wisdom, another typologically fluid figure.[36] As Albion is called 'the Humanity' and Vala is called 'Nature' so Blake calls Jerusalem 'Liberty'.

'Humanity' or 'Nature' or 'Liberty' do not define Blake's main characters; these nouns indicate something about the quality of how they relate to each other and the larger world. Jerusalem's Liberty may combine the 18th century political ideas Blake espoused[37] and the freedom he found in the Bible, his 'great code of art'. When Jerusalem and Jesus embrace, hierarchical power structures dissolve. The 'little ones' rejoice (J79); the poor are not compelled 'to live upon a crust of bread'. In Isaiah the prophet is clothed like a bridegroom and adorned like a bride after proclaiming God's liberty (Isaiah 61). The Epistle of James makes it clear that the law of liberty involves doing work, caring for the poor, feeding the hungry, cultivating kindness and mercy (James 1-3). In Blake as in the prophets, allegorical imagery can point beyond itself to social action. Blake calls upon every Christian to build up Jerusalem. Los' Golgonooza transforms London's Golgotha, Tyburn, into 'a building of pity and compassion . . . enamel'd with love and kindness . . . the beams and rafters are forgiveness . . . the ceilings, devotion' (J12:25-40). As in Bunyan's *Solomon's Temple Spiritualised,* stone and wood have soulful qualities. Humanity emanates from every brick laid, every fabric woven, 'every kindness to another is a little Death / In the Divine Image' (J96:27-8). Blake's ultimate structure, Jerusalem, is both a city and a woman. She is simultaneously a person and a place, a subject and a context. As 'the vegetative universe' and the human soul can expand in concert, so do the divine city and the divine humanity commingle. Jerusalem, the mother of myriads, is ideally where we all live and how we all live, in 'outlines of beauty' with 'the River of Life and Tree of Life' (J86:15-19). Jerusalem is a structure in which we enter a way of being, through which we might 'meet the Lord in air . . . and be happy'. The sublime allegory of Blake's fourfold vision connects intellect, feeling, imagination, and action. Jerusalem's embrace makes each responsible for all. When inward eyes open, creative work expands outwards, connecting the human and the divine.

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[1] Non-*Jerusalem* Blake quotes come from Geoffrey Keynes, ed., *Blake: Complete Writings*, OUP, 1977; all *Jerusalem* quotes come from Morton Paley, ed., *William Blake: Jerusalem*, Princeton University Press, 1991.

[2] Christopher Burdon, *The Apocalypse in England: Revelation Unravelling, 1700-1834,* New York, St. Martin's, 1997, pp. 203-05.

[3] In Blake, as in Jacob Boehme, this man is androgynous, both male and female.

[4] From Karlfried Froelich's article on 'Interpretation' in Bruce Metzger and Michael Coogan (eds.), *The Oxford Companion to the Bible,* OUP, 1993, (citing Cassian's *Conferences* 14.8), p. 314.

[5] Benjamin Heath Malkin in 'A Father's Memoirs of His Child', printed for Longmans, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, Paternoster Row, by T. Bentley, 1806, in Arthur Symons, *William Blake,* 1907, reprinted by Kessinger Publishing, Montana USA, p. 320.

[6] Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, Princeton University Press, 1957, p. 119.

[7] Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake,* Princeton University Press, 1948, p. 389.

[8] Solrunn Nes, *The Mystical Language of Icons,* 2000, p. 16.

[9] For a fuller discussion see Paul Evdokimov, *The Art of the Icon: Towards a Theology of Beauty,* tr. Steven Bigham, Oakwood Publications, Redondo Beach, 1990, pp. 178-185.

[10] Morton Paley, *The Continuing City: William Blake's Jerusalem*, Clarendon Press, 1983, p. 293.

[11] Mede may be the model for 'Old Dameatas' in *Lycidas.* See Joseph Antony Wittreich, *Visionary Poetics*, San Marion, Huntington Library, 1979, p. 37.

[12] Joseph Mede, *The Key to the Revelation*, London, Phil Stephens, 1650, 'The Little Book,' pp. 117-120.

[13] David Erdman, *Blake: Prophet Against Empire*, New York, Dover, 1977, pp. 460-480.

[14] Frye, pp. 370-79.

[15] See Michael White, *Isaac Newton: The Last Sorcerer*, Fourth Estate, 1997.

[16] Sir Isaac Newton, *Observations Upon the Prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse of St. John*, Dublin, S. Powell, 1783, p. 249.

[17] Ibid., pp. 275-301.

[18] Ibid., p. 250.

[19] Blake repeatedly laments the constricting limitations of Newtonian space and time; his poem sees space-time as a continuum, which varies 'as the organs of perception vary' (J98). Had Newton been as comfortable with Mede's synchronism as with his apocalyptic allegory, his notions about space and time might have expanded in the direction of Einstein.

[20] See especially his *Annotations to Watson* in which he calls the murdering of thousands of Canaanites 'Abominable & Blasphemous' (K387).

[21] Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837,* Yale University Press, 1992, pp. 30-31.

[22] E.g. William Cooke, *An Enquiry into the Patriarchal and Druidical Religion . . . the Earliest Antiquities of the British Islands are Explained*, London, 1755, esp. pp. 13-28.

[23] See J24; J79.

[24] Angus Fletcher, *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode,* Cornell University Press, 1964, pp. 34-48.

[25] In *The Examiner,* 7 August 1808, cited in G E Bentley, *Blake Records* 2nd edition, Yale University Press, 2004, pp. 258-60.

[26] In Crabb Robinson's *Diary,* 24 July, 1811; in Bentley, p. 310.

[27] From a lively conversation with Dr. Thomas Moran, Denver, CO, USA; October 2004.

[28] See the poem 'With Happiness . . . ' in Blake's letter to Thomas Butts, 22 November, 1802 (K816).

[29] Buber's *Ich und Du* (1923) describes varying ways of perceiving others. In an I-It relationship the other is seen as object (akin to Blake's Ulro perception); in an I-I relation

the other is consumed narcissistically (Blake's Albion and Vala do this in the state of Generation); but in an I-Thou relation the other is seen as a presence worthy of love and respect. Differences are dynamic as in Blake's fourfold vision.

[30] Dan Ilie-Ciobeta and William Lazareth, 'The Triune God: the Supreme Source of Life: Thoughts Inspired by Rublev's Icon of the Trinity', in Gennadios Limouris, ed., *Icons: Windows on Eternity*, Geneva, WCC Publications, 1990, p. 203.

[31] Michael Quenot, *The Icon: Window on the Kingdom,* translated by a Carthusian Monk, New York, St. Vladimir's, 1991, p. 159.

[32] Robinson Diary, 10 December 1825, cited in G E Bentley, *Blake Records* 2, pp. 420-21.

[33] He and his colleagues reacted against Hobbes.

[34] These are Blake's explicitly acknowledged sources (see his letter to Flaxman, 12 September, 1800, K799), but of course many other texts inform *Jerusalem*. I think Blake's poem reinterprets aspects of the Bible, Milton's poetry, and Boehme.

[35] Christopher Heppner's article, 'Bathsheba Revisited' is particularly insightful in *Blake: An Illustrated Quarterly,* 36:3 (Winter 2003).

[36] Kevin Fisher in *Converse in the Spirit: William Blake, Jacob Boehme, and the Creative Spirit,* Madison, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2004, pp. 77-8; Brian Aubrey in *Watchmen of Eternity: Blake's Debt to Jacob Boehme,* 1986, Lanham, MD, University Press of America; Kathleen Raine, *Blake and Tradition*, Princeton University Press, Bollingen Series, 1962, I:205-212: all equate Boehme's Celestial Sophia with Jerusalem. I think Blake recasts this figure. Boehme's is untouchable, like an unobtainable courtly lady; Blake's Jerusalem enjoys making love.

[37] Blake knew Tom Paine and rejoiced in the American and French Revolutions – until the Terror blighted utopian vision.

Parable of the Two Lost Boys
(New Year's Eve Song)

Our spendthrift heir loitered back pell-mell,
stinking, higgledy-piggledy, contrition on his breath –
oink-oinking in his memory, and awriggling in his hair –
No stratagem on his finger, thinking, 'I might as well…'
gnawing belly compelling, *'Ascend to the unimagined scale…'*

Bless him! Delouse his pate.
Pray, tell the chef, 'Sauté the fatted snail.'
Set a plate. Monograms peep from silver.
Slivers become wedges, oozing brie from outer edges.
'So hard to tell whether he's truly converting,
or rather, just reverting, but if really the case, all has ended well.'
Festive guests file in, fortified by violins:
'For auld lang syne,
We'll tak a cup o' kindness yet –'

But the hoity-toity elder who forewent,
knows pleasures must be obliquely grasped
to transform trails to silver.
This entails embracing the other –
once hell-bent for leather.
We'd rather sulk outside the tent,
and hope to smother resolution
than pronounce absolution.

So oft the dissolute and the disciplined
point fingers at each other,
to excuse themselves from festive dress.
We rarely guess that both
exist within us, face flickering
Janus-like, from scoffing smile
to frown, undistressed
that unrepentant,
Janus is a clown.

Stephen Blair

Book reviews

Luke Ferretter, *Towards a Christian Literary Theory*, Palgrave Macmillan (Cross-Currents in Religion and Culture Series), 2003, 221pp., £45.50, 0 33 396421 7

There are projects which never get described as apologetics, but should be. Luke Ferretter's work on Christian approaches and responses to literary theory is one of them. Ferretter is a defender of the faith (and not just 'faith') in the literary sphere, with a particular ability to introduce students to the idea that Christian theology provides resources for understanding literature, resources which other intellectual movements find hard to match.

Ferretter's book arises from a frustration with the atheistic undercurrents and proclamations of contemporary literary theory and criticism, and a strong sense that the resources of Christian theology are valuable, if not *required*, to do justice to literary production. He argues that, 'despite the rejection of the truth-claim and the value of Christian theology by the most influential schools of contemporary literary and cultural theory, it remains legitimate to interpret literary and cultural works from the perspective of Christian faith and theology.'

To defend this thesis, Ferretter sets out to discover whether three major contemporary roadblocks to Christian theology – deconstruction, Marxism and psychoanalysis – will in fact let theological traffic pass. Finding they do, he seeks to persuade the reader that the method of understanding literature by developing a theory that mediates it through the text of the Christian Bible (call this 'Christian literary theory') is a legitimate mode of discourse. The task is a large one for a small book, but Ferretter carries it through with a rare clarity of thought, judicious distinctions between viewpoints, and a firm knowledge of a wide range of philosophical and theological literature.

The book proper opens with a cogent exploration and rejection of Derrida's claim that *différance* 'blocks every relationship to theology'; rather, Ferreter argues along with Graham Ward and John Milbank, that it is only theological metaphysics which suffers at Derrida's hand. The realm of the religious imagination – metaphor, word made image, and image made word – is outside deconstruction's reach. Following Aquinas, Ferretter proposes that we use words to speak truly of God, but we do not know in what sense we are doing so. Whereas Derrida wants to claim that deconstruction is a more radical project than negative theology, which never escapes from the categories it is critiquing, Ferretter does not admit the distinction. Deconstruction is still relatively determined by the objects of its critique. A ghostly exoskeleton of Being floats by whenever one is half paying attention.

The six pages on Derrida's messianism which end this section are a good summary of Derrida's struggle with the 'scandal of particularity' in history, his equation of peace and justice with salvation, and just how close he comes to an acceptance of a Christian eschatology. Derrida's deconstruction remains within the theological problematic of employing words to denote that which cannot be denoted.

The following two chapters consider respectively Marxism and psychoanalysis, as they offer tools for literary and cultural theory and criticism. Ferretter's argument in both chapters is that whatever theory is on offer in these intellectual movements, Christianity offers something similar and then more. Ferretter advances his argument in three ways.

Firstly, he notes the structural sympathies that Engels, Marx and Jung express towards Christianity, despite their broader critiques. For Marxists, this sympathy consists in identifying with those who labour and are burdened and are potentially revolutionary; for Jung, who often identified himself as a Christian, Christian dogmas such as the incarnation and resurrection are 'articulations of the unconscious'.

Secondly, he dismantles the Marxist and psychoanalytic attacks on Christian doctrine and demonstrates them to be unwarranted. None of them defeat Christian truth claims. For instance, we simply cannot draw conclusions about the existence or non-existence of God from the phenomena of the idea of God in human thinking. To argue, as Marx and Freud do, that the idea of and human desire for God makes God's existence impossible is fallacious. Engels cannot defend his claim that 'All religion is nothing but the fantastic reflection in men's minds of those external forces which control their daily life' – he ought to have left out the words 'nothing but'.

Thirdly, he critiques the understanding of literature in each of these movements. Having established certain shared sympathies (for instance, the importance of the community to both Marxists and Christians), Ferretter argues that the Biblical text has more explanatory power than do Marxist writings. Marxist literature pulls up short of a sufficient and persuasive textual exploration of the human condition. A Biblical perspective, Ferretter suggests, will make a better account of the material, social and personal forces at work in developing the literature of ideological commitment. I look forward to some reflection from Terry Eagleton on this thesis! Ferretter's chapter on psychoanalysis is less developed, but the point is the same: Christian theology offers more comprehensive resources for analysing texts than do the writings of Jung and Freud.

These first four chapters of *Towards a Christian Literary Theory* are largely a theological critique of major twentieth-century cultural movements; were it not for the second half of the book, this review might not belong in a literary journal. As it is, the second half of the book draws from the theological critique to consider matters of literary theory more directly.

Ferretter's long chapter on hermeneutics will be valuable to students in need of a clear but detailed account of interpretation theory in the humanities. It is a careful account of Gadamer's debate with Habermas over the place of method and tradition in interpretation. Ferretter sides with Gadamer, and proposes that a Christian literary theory is dependent on Gadamer's observation that all interpretation begins within a discourse or tradition, and proceeds by apperceptive critical reflection on that discourse. This is followed by an introduction to Paul Ricoeur's 'world of the text' approach and to

Biblical hermeneutics. A helpful discussion of Ricoeur's understanding of religious language is enhanced by Ferretter's confrontation with what might be called the *cri de Ricoeur*: how can the world of the Bible be both a literary world and a source of supernatural knowledge? Ferretter's solution is elegant: 'The world proposed by the Biblical texts . . . is distinct from those proposed by literary texts inasmuch as it claims to constitute the ground of the world of the reader's experience in general.' Finally, Ferretter issues a subpoena on Stanley Fish's notion of interpretive communities, arguing that the church acts as such a community. Ferretter finds this unexceptionable, and defuses its significance as a means of opposing Biblical truth claims. Readers who find Fish threatening may be able to report on How They Read Ferretter And Stopped Worrying About Communities Of Interpretation. And if you are among those who have struggled with Anthony Thiselton's massive works on hermeneutics, this chapter may reinvigorate you, and orient you to the task.

Ferretter concludes the book with an essay on the field of Christian theory and criticism, as it has been practised for the past 20 years. He compares mid-'90s work by Kevin Mills (*Justifying Language)*, for whom interpretation is necessarily guided by the Faith-Hope-Love triumvirate, with Brian Ingraffia (*Postmodern Theory and Biblical Theology*), who argues that postmodern theory simply misunderstands Biblical thinking, and therefore has little effect in opposing it, and Valentine Cunningham (*In the Reading Gaol*), who explores the ways in which postmodern theory is parasitic on Christianity. Ferretter's discussions of David Jasper, T R Wright, Michael Edwards and Paul Fiddes outline the way these critics integrate theology and literature. Ferretter's assessment of Edwards' work as 'the most original and constructive' in two decades was probably true at the time of writing; I would suggest that Fiddes' *The Promised End: Eschatology in Theology and Literature* moves us further towards a distinctively Christian literary theory, and has not yet received the attention it warrants. The Fall may facilitate literary endeavour (Edwards), but the End shapes and directs it (Fiddes). However, I agree with Ferretter's suspicion of Fiddes' claim that literary work elevates the reader 'towards Mystery' – that is a step too far.

Ferretter is always fair in his assessments, willing to enter into each critic's approach, but he is also sharp and perceptive in his objections. For instance, in his discussion of the work of Robert Detweiler and Mark Ledbetter, the former is described as developing a concept of religious reading that is 'based on an anthropological rather than on a theological understanding of religion', while the latter proposes a broad theory of fiction based on narrative ethics which is 'true in certain cases but not generally' and doesn't offer much that is derived *specifically* from Christian theology.

There is a slightly restrictive deliberateness to Ferretter's writing style, perhaps betraying the doctoral origins of the work, and in some places the book is more a literature review than a prolegomenon for a comprehensive literary theory. Some of the choices of critics to be examined appear to have little rationale (apart from the twenty year cut-off) – we aren't told why there is no focus on Harold Bloom or George Steiner or René Girard, or on influential evangelical critics such as Leland Ryken and David Lyle Jeffrey. But what Ferretter does give us is all necessary and careful work, and its apologetic value should not be underestimated. This is a book to put into the hands of undergraduates in arts, especially but not only in literary studies, who are struggling within an environment where Christian faith appears to have few resources to reply to its critics. *Towards a Christian Literary Theory* demonstrates that this is far from the case, and that there are good reasons for developing a specifically Christian understanding of literature that takes into account the challenges of alternative world views, and responds with richer intellectual offerings from the Christian Bible. Furthermore, this Christian theory may gain from some of the frameworks that have failed to negate it – deconstruction, Marxism and psychoanalysis all have elements that may valuably be enfolded into a robust Christian approach. Ferretter's seven-page conclusion, in which he summarises his arguments throughout the book, offers something like a manifesto for the project.

Greg Clarke

Claire Gorrara, *The 'Roman Noir' in Post-War French Culture: Dark Fictions*, OUP, 2003, 242pp., £32, 0 19 924609 2

Like the detectives in the novels she investigates, Claire Gorrara is in the business of tracking down clues and recovering lost stories. While the French *roman noir* has often been marginalised by the literary mainstream as a pulp purveyor of cheap thrills and guilty pleasures, Gorrara reads this neglected genre as a privileged cultural narrative of our uneasy times. *The 'Roman Noir' in Post-War French Culture* revisits six seminal *noir* works published or released between 1943 and 1994 from a cultural studies perspective. Gorrara's detective work consists in revealing the ways in which each text reinvents the *roman noir* for its time in order to diagnose and explore contemporary social and political anxieties. Her book traces the evolution of the French *roman noir* as a barometer of national fears, desires and frustrations, and as a lens through which to re-view salient developments in the nation's post-war history. Texts which can be consumed purely as salacious stories of crime and retribution can also be digested as narratives of the national identity crises spawned, for example, by the trauma of the Occupation during the Second World War, the turbulent era of decolonisation and the violent events of May 1968. Informed, informative and engaging, Gorrara's book provides a valuable introduction not only to a literary and filmic genre but also to French post-war history, thought and culture.

Despite the ambitious scope of her book, Gorrara preserves a finely tuned balance between the general and the particular, between discussion of the broad trends and trajectories of the genre, and close textual analysis which highlights the specificities of each work. One of the most compelling aspects of her investigations is their keen, consistent attentiveness to the ethical stakes of *noir* narratives. From this perspective, the name 'roman noir' is arguably a misnomer: 'roman gris' might constitute a more faithful designation of the morally ambivalent world depicted by *noir* writers and filmmakers, a world shaded in variegated hues of grey, where black and white morality is deconstructed and seamless moral resolution is short-circuited. The *noir* urban landscape is peopled by conflicted characters, whose actions and choices recurrently invite us to question the validity of habitual moral distinctions. As Gorrara points out, this is a morally disordered world where 'treachery and confusion blur the distinctions between detective, criminal and victim. Characters' positions are unstable and subject to sudden change and role reversals that problematise notions of individual guilt and innocence.' Moreover, the play of shifting roles, identities and perspectives which is the hallmark of many *noir* texts, and which is compounded by the unreliability of many *noir* narrators, foregrounds ethical questions about interpretation and reading.

Gorrara challenges the assumption that this morally ambiguous world must always produce a morally disorientated reader. Her eloquent re-readings of *noir* fictions show that the refusal to posit a stable moral centre can also be a textual strategy to promote an ethical agenda. A genre that has traditionally leant towards the left, from the 1970s onwards in particular, the French-authored *roman noir* has mutated into increasingly politicised hybrid forms, in response to a wide spectrum of concerns; targets have included, for example, the corruption of a capitalist state, the complacency of the dominant bourgeois order and the proliferation of racism in French society. What has been called the *roman noir engagé* (politically or ethically committed examples of the genre) rewrites *noir* conventions and reconfigures *noir* morality in the service of trenchant socio-political critique. Indeed, the genre's capacity to offer cultural commentary from the margins has proved appealing to writers intent on narrating histories that are all too often marginalised, suppressed or silenced. Daniel Pennac's *La Fée Carabine* (1987), for instance, engages with the troubled heritage of France's colonial past by reworking the detective narrative into a story of a socially inclusive community which denounces racial hatred and embraces multiculturalism. An alternative form of *engagement* is exemplified by Maud Tabachnik's *Un été pourri* (1994), which exposes and dismantles the insidious gender stereotyping and misogynist tendencies of much writing in the *noir* genre. By casting women no longer as sexual objects and passive victims but as killers who revisit on the male body the violence and abuse they have suffered, Tabachnik subversively reclaims the *roman noir* as a fertile form for feminist fiction which can trouble the security of male and heterosexual reading positions.

If these are secular visions laden with modernist pessimism which steadfastly refuse to redeem the fallen world they represent, they nonetheless vigorously contest moral relativism and the deadening spiritual emptiness of much twentieth-century writing. It is arguably the *roman noir*'s capacity to reinvent itself in response to the ethical and socio-political preoccupations of the present that continues to assure its resilience and durability. As Gorrara puts it in the conclusion to her book, 'suspicion, doubt, and a healthy disregard for received views mean that the French *roman noir* remains a form of protest writing, ready to engage in a battle of words with a conservative and often reactionary social order'. This promising prognosis leads Gorrara to the provocative speculation that *noir* might be the future of fiction. Hers is an illuminating and timely book, which whets the reader's appetite for the *romans noirs* that have yet to be written.

Libby Saxton

……

Why weeps the widow?

Why mourns the widow most her loss
When, having early woken, sleeps?
Why you, the pillow soft, yet toss;
Unchecked, the troubled psyche weeps?

The preacher opens, makes his point,
But you must ask your hidden heart.
Can the Spirit still anoint
When fails in grief the human part?

The frozen prisoner feels the wall
Come pressing in; when ice and snow
Shall melt, avalanches fall.
This the secret children know,

Frustrated if you guess the cause,
Needing to be asked their grief.
Castaways know the tidal laws
Jail them severer than the thief.

Why weeps the widow most her loss
When, having woken, troubled sleeps?
Unwombed, the dark renews the cross
Not yet descended to the deeps.

David Barratt

Saints' Towns

(St Andrews, Scotland, and St Augustine, Florida)

Seeing the tall square tower,
The sea, the wide expanse of sand,
The tamed Atlantic tide rolls back the years,
Sainting now with then across an ocean
Of purposed featureless motion.
A two-hundred year difference –
Scotland and Florida – now fit forty of mine.

First I disavow *Immensee* and *die Leiden-*
Heimweh in an ancient panelled library.
But honour-burned bones, the ruined tower
And the cornered cross still cry
Bloody from the ground and altar,
'How long, O Lord, how long how long?'
In to-day's unindulgent martyrdoms.

This town, too, has castle and college,
And too much blood spilled, of Huguenots
And Indians, slaves and settlers: too much history
For this country's unacknowledged start.
Flagler's railroad tower sinks beneath
The jets roaring into El Dorado
A hundred miles across the flatland swamps.

How sad, then, should be the towers
In such sainted towns? Why witness sad at all?
Is not our man from Hippo's vision
Of duality the real *Erfremdung*,
The different drummer's beat, the pilgrim's
Stumbling climb to another city, rejoicing?
Is that not mine across the sands?

Both towns face east, from where the sun
May rise blood-red as Jerusalem burns.
In Knox's town princes new reside;
The other has made no stand for holiness,
Nor yet knows how long, how much,
Still says, 'Not yet, O Lord, not yet
Not yet.'

David Barratt

Edward Stourton, *In the Footsteps of Saint Paul*, Hodder & Stoughton, 2004, 248pp., £16.99, 0 340 86186 X

Books about Paul continue to pour from the printing presses. This one, originally researched for a Radio 4 series, and elegantly written up by the *Today Programme* and *Sunday Programme* presenter, has, like all its predecessors, a personal agenda to address. Stourton writes from a Roman Catholic background, and considers the Catholic tradition to have suppressed Paul's witness in favour of Peter's, considering the Petrine tradition less radical, benefiting apparently from a more direct access to the historical Jesus. So Paul, the passionate controversialist, the restless thinker, the originator of a more independent brand of Christianity, fascinates Stourton, as well he might.

Stourton brings a journalist's skills to the task. He writes with verve, and his eye for contemporary parallels makes his account come alive. He travels to the places where it all happened, sniffs out telling details and gripping stories. His eclectic (not to say idiosyncratic) list of informers includes churchmen, top-class scholars, popular writers and classical authors; but discrimination is sometimes lacking. Though this account includes much admirable scholarship, and impressive awareness both of the relevant Scripture and of associated controversies, the better informed reader will feel irritated by points where other evidence is unknown or not given sufficient weight. Stourton's main position is that of 'critical orthodoxy' (only seven reliably authentic letters, questionable value of 'Acts as history' etc). Of Paul's conversion he writes on page 69, 'If we sum up what we do and do not know about Paul's Damascene moment we cannot, with the best will in the world, accept the simplicity of the account in the Acts of the Apostles, however dramatically satisfying it may be. It probably did not happen on the road to Damascus, it did not immediately turn Paul into a Christian, neither did it transform him from a very bad man into a very good one.'

The positive side is that Stourton's Paul is dynamic and radical, warm and attractive. Stourton is very aware of how controversial a figure Paul is to Jews and Muslims. He is at pains to absolve Paul of the charge of incipient anti-Semitism, but concludes that the seeds of such are to be found in Paul's controversial work and particularly in his attitudes. Paul is seen not so much as a careful and well thought out theologian, as a man with a mission whose written advice to churches is occasioned by the heat of the moment. For Stourton this means that Paul's thought must be accessed with great care today. Theology, however, is not the strongest suit in this book. What Edward Stourton does provide us with is a fast moving, appreciative and affectionate portrait of one who in some quarters today is despised and feared, or paid the courtesy of faint praise and neglect. Stourton addresses his agenda very well indeed. For those of us with a different agenda the book reads as something of a curiosity but no less interesting for that.

Robert Willoughby

Donald Davie (ed.), ***The New Oxford Book of Christian Verse*****, OUP, 320pp., £9.99, pb., 0 19 280486 3**

Oxford University Press is to be congratulated for re-issuing Donald Davie's splendid 1981 anthology of Christian poetry at a time when renewed interest is being shown in Christian literature. When the collection was first published over twenty years ago, Davie proved himself to be a worthy successor to Lord David Cecil, who edited the first collection of Christian verse for OUP in 1940.

Davie's introduction to his 1981 edition is still relevant and worth reading for any would-be editor of Christian literature. He sets out his reasons for selection lucidly and with directness. 'As soon as we set up "Christian verse" as a category on a par with, say, "political verse" or "comic verse", we are making a distinction that the truly devout and thinking Christian is bound to repudiate.'

He also draws the distinction between 'verse' and 'poetry':

> What readers did not find in Lord David's anthology, and must not expect to find in this one, is verse which fails to measure up strictly in *artistry* to the best of secular verse written through the same centuries. This is easy to say and to agree to; but there is something called 'devotional verse', to which it may seem that this criterion of artistry need not, and probably should not, apply. For it is not hard to think of verses, which, though deficient in artistry, could well, because of the purity and sweetness of their spiritual sentiment, minister to the private worshipper in his devotions more effectively than verse which is a great deal better written. Accordingly it seems that 'Christian verse' must be thought of as distinct from 'devotional verse'. And I must confess that this distinction has weighed so much with me, that, rightly or wrongly, I have in my own mind abandoned the carefully neutral word 'verse' for the more exalted word 'poetry' . . . and this explains why I have found myself including considerably fewer poems than he [Lord Cecil] did.

Although Davie considers 'poetry' more exalted than 'verse' this does not prevent his including some very 'plain style' poems in the anthology. He tells us why. Such hymns as he has included are those which have stood the test of time and appealed to generations of church-goers in the pew; hymns sometimes honed down from their original length to speak meaningfully to worshipping Christians Sunday by Sunday; to congregations who may not consider themselves poetic, but whose memories and hearts are moved by the men and women who wrote them their hymns. That is why the canon of Christian hymnody is not elitist. Hymns which have survived in today's churches have appealed through the centuries to a whole range of worshippers, from the episcopate to the illiterate.

Another reason Davie gives us for his selection is the embattled position of the Christian Church in British society. The Church is faced with living in a secular world which is searching for 'something beyond. Yeast yearnings for the translucent [sic]. Yet it must surely be for the exclusion of such poems, good and bad, that this anthology is still called a book of *Christian* verse, rather than . . . religious verse.'

The editor cites W B Yeats and the agnostic Philip Larkin as poets who have written good religious verse, but with no specifically Christian content. Indeed, I would hold that the cynicism of modern poets like Larkin is anything but Christian. So Davie limits inclusion, rightly I believe, to poems whose contents hold to Christian doctrine: the Fall, the Incarnation, Forgiveness, Redemption, Judgement, the Holy Trinity.

Yet Davie also makes the point that Christian belief rests not only on doctrine, but it also revolves around the life of Christ, from which doctrine is worked out. Even Old Testament stories which have inspired Christian verse must foreshadow events in the New Testament, such as the Middle English poem, 'Adam lay y-bounden'.

Davie includes quite a few anonymous poems, from the seventh century to the twentieth. Texts from the earliest years of English often have no name attached to them, but they deserve inclusion nonetheless for their uplifting content. I was pleased to see the anonymous Old English poem 'The Dream of the Rood' (sensitively translated by Michael Alexander) open the anthology, and a little later we have an anonymous Middle English poem, 'Moon-like is all other love' (translated by the editor himself). And there are anonymous poems right through the centuries including the glory-poem 'The Heavenly Aeroplane', written around 1935.

Langland and Chaucer are well represented among poets from the Middle English period, and Shakespeare (whom I've always considered agnostic) has one poem in the collection, Sonnet 146, 'Poor soul, the centre of my sinful earth . . .'. But his more overtly Christian contemporary, Mary Herbert, Countess of Pembroke, has her fine translations of several psalms included. Donne, of course, is there, and George Herbert. John Milton's 'On the Morning of Christ's Nativity' is given in its entirety, along with two sonnets and extracts from *Paradise Lost* and *Samson Agonistes*. John Dryden is well represented, too.

The Metaphysicals Andrew Marvell, Henry Vaughan, Thomas Traherne have poems in the collection alongside 'the plain style' poets: John Bunyan, Charles Wesley, Isaac Watts and William Cowper; and I was delighted to read Robert Burns' dialect poem, 'Address to the Unco Guid'. (Dialect literature has rich seams of Christian verse, yet to be mined by some enterprising editor.)

The American Emily Dickinson has a rightly deserved place in the anthology; so has Hilda Doolittle. Poets from the nineteenth century include William Wordsworth, John Keble, John Henry Newman, John Greenleaf Whittier and Lord Tennyson. T S Eliot's 'Journey of the Magi' is included, and amongst his other poems is W H Auden's sonnet 'Anthem'. When this anthology first appeared, the then contemporary Christian poets were Stevie Smith, R S Thomas, John Betjeman, Jack Clemo, Elizabeth Jennings among others. I hope a future anthology will be published by OUP and will include more of today's Christian poets like Robert Irwin, Walter Nash, Isabella Strachan, Susan Glyn, Laurie Bates and one or two younger contemporary poets writing notable verse.

All in all, despite its age, this wide-ranging anthology is still invaluable as a source book either for teaching purposes or for personal devotion. It can be read simply for enjoyment or, more importantly, for a deeper understanding of the Christian faith.

John Waddington-Feather

Henry Vaughan: Selected Poems, selected and introduced by Anne Cluysenaar, SPCK, 2004, 182pp., £12.99, pb., 0 28 105542 4

This recent collection of Henry Vaughan's verse provides an accessible introduction to one of the least well-known of the Metaphysical poets. Unsurprisingly, given the orientation of the publishers, and the express purpose of the series of which this volume is a part ('The Golden Age of Spiritual Writing'), the selection is weighted in favour of Vaughan's religious verse, particularly poems from *Silex Scintillans I*. But there is also a judicious selection of poems from the period, which, according to his own testimony, were written prior to his religious conversion and taken from his second published volume of verse, *Olor Iscanus* (although these poems were produced earlier, they were not published until 1650 after his first volume had come out).

Anne Cluysenaar, herself a published poet and resident in the Usk Valley that was Vaughan's home, contextualises her discussion of his work with a brief but useful biography of the poet. Her analysis of the poems themselves is illuminating, though rather disjointed; perhaps an inevitable feature of the genre of the 'scholarly introduction' to a series meant for popular consumption. The graphic snippets moving from childhood to marriage, closely followed by the traumas of the Civil War and the tenuous sense of equilibrium Vaughan achieved in his dual callings as physician and poet, are crucial in providing the background and rationale for Cluysenaar's selection and arrangement of individual poems from Vaughan's *oeuvre*. The discussion entitled 'Work' which follows this biographical section grants glimmers of insight, but fails to present a coherent critical framework for one coming to the poet's work for the first time. Quotations from Louis L Martz, Rowan Williams and Gwyn Williams are interspersed amongst Cluysenaar's own readings of various poems, and the overall effect is incidental and piecemeal.

The poems are well-chosen, containing a mix of the familiar ('I walkt the other day (to spend my hour)') and those striking, but less frequently anthologised (such as 'Resurrection and Immortality'). Generously spaced, each poem can be appreciated individually, without the kind of textual claustrophobia induced by a hatred of white margins that frequently oppresses popular anthologies. The most intriguing and delightful aspect of these 'selected poems' is the inclusion of two pieces of prose by Vaughan himself, the preface to *Silex Scintillans I* and a letter written to his cousin, Aubrey, just prior to his death. Along with a shift in tone, the preface provides a colourful critical perspective upon Vaughan's own poetry and how he saw himself in relation to his contemporaries.

> Many . . . in no better imployments, then a deliberate search, or excogitation of *idle words*, and a most vain, insatiable desire to be reputed *Poets*; leaving behinde them no other Monuments of those excellent abilities conferred upon them, but . . . a soul-killing Issue. . . . And well it were for them, if those willingly-studied and wilfully-published vanities could defile no *spirits*, but their own; but the *case* is far worse. These *Vipers* survive their *Parents*, and for many ages after . . . infect whole Generations, corrupting always and unhallowing the best-gifted *Souls*, and the most capable *Vessels*: for whose sanctification and well-fare, the glorious *Son* of God laid down his *life*, and suffered the pretious *blood* of his innocent *heart* to be poured out. (p. 45)

The metaphorical and rhetorical energy of Vaughan's observations, along with the theology that infuses his analysis of the creation and publication of poems, forms a remarkable contrast to our own critical context. His view of poetic skill as a 'poor Talent' (p. 49) entrusted by God to be used for the good of the Church and other human beings is what underlies his critique of his own earlier poetry and also the impressive performance of his peers, whether in creation or translation. The ability to use words is a divine gift, for which those 'best-gifted *Souls*' will render account on the Day of Judgement. Acutely aware that verse possesses the potential to survive many generations, Vaughan considers the moral effect and responsibility this places on the poet, and the necessity of 'a saving assistance' to suppress his '*greatest follies*' (p. 47); bemoaning the fate of those who have not given this teleological certainty sufficient consideration (p. 47). It is a different expression of the same concern, attested to in many of the poems in this selection, of a desire to be liberated from 'this body of death' and experience the transformation of resurrection and immortality.

> O Father of eternal life, and all
> Created glories under thee!
> Resume thy spirit from this world of thrall
> Into true liberty.
>
> Either disperse these mists, which blot and fill
> My perspective (still) as they pass,
> Or else remove me hence unto that hill,
> Where I shall need no glass (p. 132).

The Biblical reference is possibly to 1 Corinthians 13:12: 'For now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face,' where the apostle Paul testifies to the liminal nature of our present experience poised between time and eternity, 'in the shadowlands.'

The accessible introduction, representative anthologising, and attractive, yet affordable presentation, renders this collection ideal for a first-time encounter with this poet. Though from the 'golden age of spiritual writing' in seventeenth-century England, and unmistakably of Herbert's ilk, Vaughan has his own idiosyncratic temperament and individual voice. He has proven over time that in 'communicat(ing)' his 'poor *Talent* to the *Church,*' he has been useful to 'the *publick*' of numerous generations, flourishing 'not with *leafe* onely, but with some *fruit* also' (pp. 49-50), according to his own fervently expressed desire.

Alison O'Harae

Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Myth and Rabbinic Mythmaking*, OUP, 2003, 474 pp., £74, 0 19 826733 9

Michael Fishbane is among the most erudite scholars in the field of Jewish and Biblical Studies, as he proved in 1985 in his *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*. This is another formidable book, which makes great demands on the reader. The book falls into four main sections: a substantial introduction (pp. 1-27) to the topic as a whole leads into I. Biblical Myth (pp. 31-92). There follow II. Rabbinic Myth and Mythmaking (pp. 95-249) and III. Jewish Myth and Mythmaking in the Middle Ages (pp. 253-305). Final conclusions are given on pp. 306-314, and the book ends with two substantial appendices: translations from Talmudic and Zoharic Sources (Zohar is the chief book of the Jewish Kabbalah) (pp. 325-401); and a consideration of the term *kivyakhol* (some sort of exegetical comment found frequently in rabbinic writings) and its uses.

As the helpful summary on the jacket says, the extensive introduction 'deals with the contention that myth is foreign to monotheism and Judaism; that its occurrence in Biblical and rabbinic literature are either faded fragments, metaphoric conceits, or figurative embellishments, all without any ontological validity; and that the occurrences in the mystical literature are the result of foreign influences'. My impression of this part of the book is that it reveals wide reading and mastery of other authors' views on the subject, but that it contains a good deal less argument than it should. Dogmatic statements occur throughout, along with refutations of other works which are not detailed enough to allow a reader to interact properly with the arguments advanced. This is quite frustrating for me, since I begin from the position of sympathy with the views that Fishbane seeks to discredit.

He defines myth carefully and describes it rather nicely as providing 'not a fixed Archimedian [*sic*] point, agreeable to all . . . but as a wobbling pivot round which we may analyse certain cultural data . . . ' (p. 12): Myth refers to '[sacred and authoritative] accounts of the deeds and personalities of the gods and heroes during the formative events of primordial times, or during the subsequent historical interventions of actions of these figures, which are constitutive for the founding of a given culture and its rituals' (p. 11). Clearly the 'historical interventions' could refer to things that actually happened, and for Christians this would include the incarnation. This does not *seem* to be within the possibilities envisaged (or envisioned) by Professor Fishbane.

He adopts a 'typological approach' and seeks to isolate 'paradigmatic configurations' with which to investigate the 'varied character and construction of monotheistic myth' (p. 13), and arrives at the following 'myths and mythologems [fundamental themes or motifs of myth; *OEDS*]': 'divine combat; divine wrath and sorrow; sympathetic identification'.

Conservative Jews and Christians may already experience some discomfort at the *assumption* that 'myth' is a suitable term for these *realities*.

In considering myth-making or 'mythopoesis', Fishbane states some basic principles. The *principle of parsimony* is that a 'mythic topic . . . should be assumed to have the same literary effect or value (whether literal or figurative) in all its various occurrences unless there is a marked reason for thinking otherwise' (p. 17). So that if we find, say, divine combat in Mesopotamian, Canaanite and Biblical literature, we should start with the assumption that the topic conveys similar content if it bears the same or similar imagery in the same or similar contexts. Perhaps – only perhaps – this is true. But the origins of a word or phrase do not necessarily have the same meaning in a later text. The worldview of the (canonical) Hebrew Bible is very different from that of ancient Mesopotamia. The second principle is that of *charity*, to take each text 'in the best possible light, taking into account all its factors' (p. 18) – a salutary reminder of many polemical religious writings.

Fishbane is concerned to emphasize the creative and revitalizing value of myth. Mythmaking did not die out in ancient times, to be replaced by more intellectual and advanced thinking, but continued at various times throughout the Biblical and rabbinic periods. Is he claiming that the ancient writers thought that their 'mythic creations' were 'literally real'? Yes, I think so, and I find this difficult to accept. For example, I have always thought that 'the sea saw it and fled' was a poetic figure, so I read with dropping jaw, [this passage is about] 'transforming the personified sea into a mythic personality with will and character, and inventing a fabulation that narrates what or whom the sea saw that inspired such fear at the Exodus. The God who is presented as its antagonist walks onto the pages of Midrash with a marvellous mythic vitality' (p. 21). On the other hand he says, 'though myths are fictions, they are . . . real fictions which are embedded with their own presuppositions and cognitive claims' (p. 81).

In dealing with Ps 74:12-17 (pp. 37-41), as an example of the combat myth, he says, 'For the speaker of our psalm especially, it would hardly make sense to reduce the divine hand to a mere [*mere* occurs many times] metaphor or the sea monsters to allegorical figures – as if these images are simply the products of an inability to speak abstractly. Within the literary and religious framework of the prayer, both images partake of a vivid mythic realism whose facticity the speaker hardly doubts. This is, in fact, a core element of the psalmist's hope that God will re-actualize His ancient acts of victory for him in the present' (pp. 40f). This is a very odd discussion since Fishbane almost hints at the historical overtones or implications of the passage (cf. 'hand' in v.11, Ex 6:6; 15:16), but seems to deny this element in this passage. I continue to believe that the Psalmist links God's power in creation and in the Exodus by using language that refers to both. It does not seem to be resorting to 'mere metaphor' to refuse to believe in the facticity of dragons as God's opponents in creation.

He mentions Judg 5:4-5 and 20-21 (p. 84), but does not note the incongruity of having the stars in their courses fighting against Sisera, surely no more possible than describing Pharaoh as *tannin* (dragon). He does not note, either, that Judg 4 tells the same story in a more prosaic way, though still ascribing direct action to YHWH: 'YHWH routed Sisera . . . before Barak.'

Overall, I found this a stimulating and frustrating book. The sections on the way that myth-making was continued are more easily substantiated, since the Rabbis are dealing with a closed text and we have that text as a foundation for comparison. It will be of less value for non-Jewish readers, but is likely to give insights into Jewish thinking, ancient, fairly ancient and, from the author's own statements, contemporary.

Mike Butterworth

Stephen Orgel and Jonathan Goldberg (eds.), *John Milton, The Major Works*, OUP, 2003, 1,008pp., £11.99, pb., 0 19 280409 X

This Oxford World's Classics edition (first printed in 1991 in the Oxford Authors series) remains an excellent tool for the student of Milton. The strength of Stephen Orgel and Jonathan Goldberg's edition lies in its generous provision of Milton's prose, those theological and political writings to which he devoted over twenty years of his life, and which aid our understanding of his Restoration poems, *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*. Besides the often-printed *Areopagitica* (1644), Orgel and Goldberg draw from a range of Milton's prose writings, including autobiographical excerpts from *The Reason of Church Government* (1642), *An Apology for Smectymnuus* (1642), and, translated from the Latin, his *Second Defence of the English People* (1654). More valuable still are those among the less accessible works that are included in full: *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* (1643), *The Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth* (1660), and *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* (1649) (although students of the latter work will still want to use the Cambridge edition published in the Texts in the History of Political Thought series).

It seems a shame, however, that in revising and reprinting this edition, Orgel and Goldberg have made only limited changes. Apart from the removal of Frank Kermode's name (he was the general editor of the Oxford Authors series), the revisions are confined to an updated bibliography. Yet the introduction, with its emphasis on critical responses to Milton, has not been updated accordingly. Nor have the headnotes to the poems which refer to critical reception. This seems like a missed opportunity, especially since much of the scholarship of the last decade has furthered our understanding of the historical contexts of Milton's writing and the relationship between his prose and poetry. In some notable books and essay volumes of recent years critics have examined, for example, Milton's republicanism, and how it relates to *Paradise Lost*; how *Samson Agonistes* meditates upon the issues of conformity and conscience in the Restoration church; and they have continued to tackle his unorthodox beliefs and *The Christian Doctrine* (also excerpted in this edition). Some guidance towards this recent secondary material might have made the volume even more useful to Milton students.

This aside, setting the prose and poetry together in one volume does provide a much fuller sense of the breadth of Milton's career. It allows us to appreciate that behind the rhetorical power of *Paradise Lost* is the Miltonic voice honed on the pamphleteering stage. By pointing us to *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* (1643), the editors highlight an early example of what is much debated in Milton – his handling of scripture. Here he both declares and demonstrates his view: 'all places of Scripture wherein just reason of doubt arises . . . are to be expounded by considering upon what occasion everything is set down, and by comparing other texts' (p. 202). But we see Milton working hard here with the scriptures, and the treatise is a good introduction for the student getting to grips with the controversies that surround *The Christian Doctrine* and the major poems. The prose works also demonstrate Milton's remarkable consistency over time, fighting for liberty in social, political, and religious spheres. Again, the editors are sensitive to the tensions, especially surrounding the scope of that freedom. So, the liberty of the press in *Areopagitica* is for Protestants and not for Catholics; the vision of a free commonwealth in *The Ready and Easy Way* is one governed by a 'senate of principal men', ahead of the will of the people. Together it makes the volume one which should continue to broaden students' understanding of Milton's writing in the context of his wider career, and helpfully moderate views of him as a proto-modern.

Paul Matholé

Graham N Stanton, *Jesus and Gospel*, CUP, 2004, 239pp., £40, 0 521 81032 9 and £15.95, pb., 0 521 00802 6

It is generally understood within the Christian tradition that there's a message to be proclaimed and that it is the Gospel. This word, message or good news is not only about Jesus Christ, but derives from him. Centuries beforehand, Isaiah had prophesied Good News, and a few years afterwards Paul was expounding and developing it. But in Galilee and beyond, Jesus preached that ancient prophecy was fulfilled, that the Kingdom of God was now present, and that people should respond by repenting and believing his message (Mk 1:15).

What though is the Gospel? Today's preachers will sometimes speak as if the message of Paul were pretty well the same as the message of Jesus. Yet there were differences, and whether you go back to the OT scriptures, or forward through church history, the Gospel is always subject to change. (In a long essay, *A Gospel Reading*, on the CLSG website at *www.clsg.org,* I have sketched (pp.143-147) a seven-stage development from the beginning of Jesus' public ministry to the international mission after Pentecost). Despite its title, Stanton's book (he is Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity at Cambridge) is not a monograph on the developing Gospel. It is a collection of papers on various topics: the phonology and contextualisation of the 'word group' which includes *τὸ εὐαγγέλιον* (n.) and *εὐαγγελίξω* (v.); its evolution towards the name of a genre, ‘gospel’; Paul’s one-off epithet ‘the law of Christ’ in Gal 6:2; early objections to the resurrection of Jesus; accusations that he was a magician and a false prophet; the Roman imperial cult as the politically correct alternative to the Gospel; and some discussion of how and why Christians were early adopters of the codex (book) format.

In these sections Stanton discusses recent discoveries, such as the waxed wooden leaf tablets from Vindolanda near Hadrian’s Wall, or the papyrus fragments of verses from the gospels, some copied as early as the second century AD, bringing the reader up to date with what has been discovered, and with scholarly discussions of their significance. The book might alternatively have been entitled The Gospels and their Media.

Papyrus was hard to obtain in the north-west reaches of the Roman Empire, and thin slats of wood were often used for records, book-keeping, notes etc. The layer of wax could be erased, but in some instances the wood retained the impression from the stylus. (Stanton does not say so, but you will find Vindolanda tablets currently on display at the British Museum.) No gospel fragment has been found on this medium, but there’s a question of whether the leaf tablets, dating from c. AD 100, were the forerunner of the codex, a format extensively used by Christian copyists before its adoption elsewhere in the Graeco-Roman world. Stanton has a long chapter on ‘The Fourfold Gospel’ and another, ‘Why were early Christians addicted to the codex?’

The leaf tablets differed from ‘membranae’, the notebooks asked for by Paul (‘Paul’ for Stanton) in 2 Tim 4:13 along with a cloak and regular books (scriptures probably, *βιβλία*) in scroll format, left behind at Troas. The parchment notebooks could not be erased and re-written as a palimpsest, but they were more legible. Because leaf tablets were sometimes bound together, e.g. in concertina format, they can be regarded as precursors of the codex.

Among numerous scholarly speculations, some involving a pretentiously named ‘big bang’ hypothesis that a now-lost church ordinance required that the four gospels be collated, three reasons for the use of the codex for the gospels stand out. The codex was compact, portable, and used by travellers. Peter, Paul, Apollos and others were travellers who as teachers needed documents and written sources. The first Christians adopted a Jewish practice of collecting into an anthology a number of scriptures, *testimonia*, on a theme, and such are found in codex format. In Luke Jesus draws the attention of two disciples near Emmaus to various scriptures which explain the true nature and calling of the Christ. In this tradition Paul would argue to synagogue congregations in places like Thessalonica that the Christ had to suffer, that Jesus was the Christ, illustrating all this from the scriptures (Acts 17:2). Finally, the codex format allowed copies of all four gospels, once all had been written, to be bound into one volume, something that would not be physically possible with a scroll.

A Roman invention that did not at first catch on, the codex was taken up with understandable enthusiasm by Christians several decades before the more general transition from roll to codex c. AD 300. Stanton echoes the patronising tone of predecessors such as F G Kenyon, speaking of 'addiction', 'obsession' and 'precocious devotion' to the format. But subsequent history is on the side of the early adopters. A rough parallel in computers would be the trend away from desktop PCs, as notebooks are increasingly favoured for their compactness, portability and convenience.

Some chapters serve as makeweights, highly competent pieces of journey-work giving a conspectus of the scholarly discussion of a topic. Stanton's virtues are critical readings of the texts, up-to-dateness with recent publications, and a sure sense of the subtle shifts of the consensus. His chapter on Jesus as magician and false prophet, for example, rehearses evidence and opinions in order to reach unsurprising conclusions: 'Both the teaching and the actions of Jesus drew criticism. Were his exorcisms and healing miracles signs that God's kingly rule was breaking into history, or were they the result of his collusion with the prince of demons? Was Jesus a prophet sent by God, or was he a false prophet who was deceiving Israel? The polemical traditions confirm that, as Jesus moved around Galilean villages, his relationship to God was a central issue.'

On the subject of early objections to Jesus' resurrection Stanton justly points out that the risen Jesus appears only to a small number of disciples, and that their doubts go down in the gospel record. His conclusion is a fine one: Justin and Trypho refer to a general resurrection, but when they mention Jesus they say nothing of his resurrection. For them, as for Luke, suggests Stanton, an issue more important than his resurrection was the theological one of whether Jesus fulfilled scripture.

Readers of Acts and of Paul's letters are familiar with the fierce opposition aroused among members of the Jewish community by the preaching of the new Gospel. It's easy to trace a continuity back to the murderous antagonism faced by Jesus. But in the last decade NT scholars have been paying increasing attention to the imperial cult as a religious force and central element of ancient religious life. Their argument, which Stanton supports, is that not Judaism but worship of the emperors was the obstacle to Christianity, and threatened to draw converts back into conformity with paganism.

So when Paul reproaches the Galatians for listening to those who would impose circumcision (6:12-13) on Gentile converts, 'to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ', the persecution referred to, he suggests, is from upholders of the imperial cult. Circumcised Christians would be regarded as members of a *religio licita* (Jews had an imperial dispensation) and so escape. Stanton says that Paul does not identify the pagan persecutors, but in the context provided by Acts and his letters *passim* he does not need to. Everywhere Paul went his antagonists were Jewish. The often-repeated pattern was of synagogue congregations divided when he preached, some accepting that Jesus was the Christ, others up in arms, stirring up street riots, setting upon Paul as a blasphemer against the God of Israel, and on several occasions trying to kill him. Thessalonica was typical of what happened elsewhere in Macedonia, in Asia Minor, Galatia, Achaia, Jerusalem: Paul preached in the synagogue for three Sabbaths, the Jews were 'jealous' for their understanding of God, and started a riot. To the city's representatives of Roman authority they claimed that Paul and his associates were 'defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus' (Acts 17:7). No mention of a religious offence, the false charge was political. In Acts 19 the goings-on at Ephesus were about Artemis/Diana, about perceived threats to commercial interests, to the *pax Romana*, but there is nothing about impiety towards the emperor. Similarly when Paul appeared before the emperor's viceroys Felix and Festus, when his accusers would have cast around for the most convincing case against him, there is no accusation of impiety towards Rome, and no reference to the imperial cult.

Roger Kojecký

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The Lost Lands of the Heart

Reclaiming from the sea of death
The lost lands of the heart.
But green were the deaths the saints died
And morning followed evening on a spinning globe
As breath entered dust a second time
When death shall die in a tree of life
And the sun jumps over the moon.

Summer and winter, fire and water
Spin on a wheel
To the end of days.

Nothing is new under the sun;
But a day is coming when
Christ shall make all things new.

In the Parliament of angels,
One love stands alone.

Barry Gritt

Bradley J. Birzer, *Sanctifying Myth: Understanding Middle Earth*, Wilmington, DE, ISIBooks, 2003, 219pp., US$24.95, 1-882926-84-6
Kurt Bruner and Jim Ware, *Finding God in The Lord of the Rings*, Wheaton, Ill, Tyndale House, 2001, 120pp., US$6.99, 0 8423 8555 X

Till recently, books on J R R Tolkien's Middle Earth fantasies have tended to concentrate on the questions: What sort of fantasy is it? How does it work as fantasy? In the pages of *The Glass*, for example, Colin Duriez and Colin Manlove have discussed the possible shape of Christian fantasy in the light of the works of Tolkien, C S Lewis and others. Since *The Lord of the Rings* movies, however, there seems to be a new wave of writing by Christian writers, seeking to reclaim the Tolkien world for Christianity. They are more concerned to use the material apologetically than literarily. Such are the two books reviewed here.

Bradley Birzer's *Sanctifying Myth* is more specific even than reclaiming Middle Earth for the Christian faith: he wants to reclaim it for Tolkien's Roman Catholicism, claiming Middle Earth can only be fully understood as a Catholic construct. There are seven chapters to his book, with extensive notes, bibliography and index taking up the final one third of the volume. A biographical first chapter is followed by one on Tolkien's understanding of myth and sub-creation, ground well covered by many previous books. The term 'sanctifying myth' is used by Birzer to denote the Catholic tradition of building Christian sites over pagan ones. Perhaps one reason Tolkien did not like the too-protestant Narnia of C S Lewis was that in it Christian symbol spelled out the Gospel too specifically, even though it is still missed by many readers.

Chapters Three and Seven develop Birzer's central thesis: that Tolkien's treatment of the created order and natural grace are traditional Catholic doctrines central to Tolkien's personal theology, and they are deeply imbued with the pre-incarnational, but still sacramental and redemptive, world of Middle Earth. The order of natural grace is spelled out in Chapter Four as heroism, in terms of duty, action and churchly offices. The other two chapters deal with the nature of evil, especially its place in the created order, and modernity and the tradition of Christian humanism.

I have to admit that I have never been convinced of any Christian framework for Middle Earth. Only the account of creation in *The Silmarillion* has any specific Biblical parallel. The most Christian feature I have been aware of is Tolkien's depiction of a powerful, pervasive and personal evil, in many manifestations, but centred on one archangelic personality. This has made the central mythic struggle between good and evil so convincing. So I come to any attempt to find Christian truth systematically embedded in Tolkien's fantasy with some scepticism. The fact that Tolkien was a devout Catholic is, ultimately, irrelevant: the personal heresy is, after all, a heresy.

So it is not surprising that I find Birzer's attempts to reclaim the fantasy for Catholicism unconvincing, being unsystematic both in its approach to Catholicism and to the fantasy itself. What emerges for me from Birzer is an account of Tolkien's deeply conservative, almost reactionary, political and theological stance. Medieval Christendom, it would appear, was for Tolkien the high point of Christian civilization. But the virtues of this worldview are not specifically Catholic in their claims, even if typical. Many of the other Catholic truths cited, such as the Marian inspiration for Galadriel and Elbereth, have other explanations which are not explored. Or the Eucharistic significance of *lembas* or way-bread could be countered by an Exodus reference to manna; and in any case, such Eucharistic significance cannot be held to be exclusively Catholic. In fact, much of what Birzer claims for Catholicism, I would see as generally Christian: the prophet, priest, king and servant aspects of Christian heroism, for example, or the Fellowship of the Ring as image of the church. On the other hand, Birzer's categorization of Tolkien as an 'agrarian distributist' I find interesting, as are some of the parallels with early American republicanism.

What happens with such a wide-ranging epic universal fantasy is that we read into it the sort of belief system we already have, rather than read out of it some other coherent system that may be markedly different from ours. Thus as a charismatic Christian, I find in the Fellowship of the Ring all the marks of a charismatic church: speaking in tongues, interpretation, prophecy, words of wisdom and knowledge, miracles, healings, discernment of spirits, singing in the spirit, anointed leadership, gifts of hospitality and giving, and so on. And spiritual warfare in abundance. Not that I would think of Tolkien as 'charismatic', nor limit the myth to such parameters. I suspect other readers of *The Glass* will be able to discern their own versions of Christianity. Tolkien was a more universal writer than Birzer allows. And is that not the nature of true myth: to tell wiser than we know?

Less ambitious, but more coherent, and so more successful, is the little book by Kurt Bruner and Jim Ware, *Finding God in* The Lord of the Rings. This has twenty-two brief chapters, each one focused on some aspect of Christian truth, tying in one or two examples of it from *The Lord of the Rings* with one or two Biblical examples. This sounds simplistic, and in a way it is: but it does not claim more than it delivers. Used as a basis for meditation, this little book works. And it is certainly sufficient to rescue *The Lord of the Rings* from the hands of New-Agers and occultists. Its chapters on power, its corrupting force, and the encroachment of evil are especially good.

David Barratt

Stephen Pattemore, *The People of God in the Apocalypse: Discourse, Structure, and Exegesis*, SNTSMS 128, CUP, 2004, xv + 256pp., £45.00, 0 521 83698 0

A consultant with United Bible Societies, and involved in translating Scripture into languages of Asia and the Pacific, Stephen Pattemore is clearly interested in the relevance of the book of Revelation. But the 'relevance' in focus here has to do with 'Relevance Theory' (RT), that sub-discipline of the linguistic field of pragmatics, of 'language in use', associated especially with Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson (*Relevance: Communication and Cognition*, 2nd edn., Oxford, Blackwell, 1995) and H P Grice (*Studies in the Way of Words*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1989).

RT recognises that communication is contextual and inferential. The hearer of an utterance uses aspects of the communicative context to *infer* that certain things are meant by the utterance. Understanding comes not simply by analysing the meaning of individual words in the clause; hearers/readers make inferential decisions about the probable intentions of the speaker/writer based on the shared cognitive environment. All of which is helpfully explored in the second chapter of this volume, where Pattemore summarises RT and its application to texts, and considers the implications of RT for interpreting the Biblical text in general and the Apocalypse in particular. The concern of RT with cognitive environments, that 'which the interlocutors share by their participation in a common culture' (p. 37), is useful for studying intertextuality, for instance – important for the Apocalypse which makes no explicit citations from the Old Testament but whose whole fabric is a tapestry of allusion to it. RT can also help define the cognitive environments within which much of the book's imagery occurs, and so offer insights into the way an original audience might have interacted with the texts.

The 'cognitive environment for the Apocalypse' is briefly discussed in Chapter Three, where Pattemore outlines his working assumptions on the external context and internal co-text of the book of Revelation, summarising the discourse structure of the book (defended more fully in a separate publication). He notes that the people of God are featured as *addressees* in the outermost layer (1:1-11; 22:20-21), as *audience* in the first vision narrative (1:12-3:22), and as *actors* in the second vision narrative (4:1-22:9): sometimes *off stage*, referred to by other actors; sometimes *in the chorus*, as members of a larger group on the heavenly stage; and on a few occasions where they take *centre stage* – as the souls under the altar (6:9-11), for instance, or the great crowd of those who have come through the tribulation (7:9-17). The substance of the volume then examines these latter significant references against the background of the communication situation envisaged by the author and audience.

Chapter Four considers the first visionary depiction of the people of God, as souls slain under the altar (6:9-11). The remainder of the Apocalypse is an answer to the cry of the martyrs, argues Pattemore, noting how the passage provides a starting point for threads which are woven through the book as a whole, with John challenging the audience to model themselves on the Lamb, 'finding vindication and victory through suffering and martyrdom' (p. 68). The consequences of victory are discussed in the next chapter, which traces militaristic depictions of the people of God in 14:1-5 and elsewhere. This 'militant' thread contributes its own colours and textures to the self-understanding of the audience, but is also related to the 'martyr' image in that the mode of victory is the path of faithful testimony to the point of death. As with the relationship between the 'one like a son of man' and 'the holy ones of the most high' in Daniel 7, the people of God are here defined by their relationship to the Lamb, showing that the ecclesiology of the Apocalypse is patterned on its christology. The audience is encouraged to be obedient and faithful, and to witness to Jesus in the face of hostility – all of which points to the culmination of the visions of the New Jerusalem, explored in Chapter Six. The various thematic threads laid out in the Apocalypse anticipate and require the New Jerusalem visions for their completion, visions which not only fulfil, but exceed, the expectations created, and supplement ideas about the people of God. Chapters Twenty-one and Twenty-two clearly function as a source of hope, but the 'exclusion lists' (21:8, 27) remind readers that not all will share in the holy city. Relevance is optimised when the hearers/readers identify themselves with the people of God as portrayed in the New Jerusalem visions, who thus find themselves challenged to respond in faithful obedience.

The work is topped and tailed with an introductory and concluding chapter, each of which exemplifies the clear writing style which marks the book as a whole. Full notes throughout document Pattemore's careful engagement with wider scholarship in linguistics and the book of Revelation, as do the substantial bibliography and indexes (though, alas, there is no Scripture index, which would be helpful in chasing up his discussion of individual passages).

The volume stands as a rare and very helpful example of the sustained application of RT to a Biblical text, treating it as a record of genuine communication between the author and original audience – a refreshing change from so many current decontextualising approaches. RT also allows for a more precise definition of 'context', and can be used to prioritise cognitive environments, and judge between competing co-texts and contexts. Nor, however, does Pattemore claim too much for RT, noting that it stands alongside traditional tools of Biblical criticism, 'to sharpen the interpretive focus' (p. 10), and doesn't *guarantee* recovery of authorial intention. The book also provides an excellent way into exploring the literary texture and theology of the Apocalypse, especially on how the vision narratives depict the identity and tasks of the people of God, and how they motivate the belief and behaviour of the audience. In short, those concerned with the application of linguistic approaches to the Biblical text or those interested in the Book of Revelation will want to check out the book.

I would have liked more reflection on the relationship between RT and theological approaches to interpretation, currently so important in contemporary discussions of Biblical hermeneutics; I would also like to hear more from Pattemore on 'ethics' and the Apocalypse: what if I resist aligning myself with the 'cognitive environment', and choose to read, for whatever reason, 'against the grain'? But these are merely expressions of personal interest, and shouldn't detract from what is an already full, stimulating, and highly recommended work.

Antony Billington

Sadness of Lost Messages

No call for Santa Claus in Belarus
After imagining yourself there
Baggageless; nor generosity,
However miserly, to me,
As the stationery slipped from the roof
Of my no longer stationary ageing
Station wagon, as it moved
Between two memories, ironising
Two lapses of communication.
The twice-intended, never-given gift,
This Crane hundred percent cotton pad
Blankly writes that it is dearly sad.

All possible letters are now briefed
To this one poem, franked too heavily
The self-adhesive stamps of rejection.
In a relationship where all is spoken,
The unsaid and the unread both source sadness.
Only in secrecy are such miscarriages acceptable.
Such the e-mails deleted by fear or accident,
Received too late, virussed by insecurity,
Where foldered retrieval is redemption.
Such, too, the crafted poems read by none or one.
So seed is spilled, whilst empty wombs sigh
To hear the sounds of ecstasy nearby.

Images of the voided void,
The Word grieving, having provided
Both message and messenger,
Posted the very file of the body,
Only to find the printouts used as door stops,
Or leafleting suburban streets.
Ninety-nine blanks to one return:
(We solipsize the one lost ewe).
All sadness to the impossibly
Altruistic passible One
Who messages the air our friendship needs,
Out of which it is written, signed, seeds.

David Barratt

Ben Witherington III with Darlene Hyatt, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004, 421pp., £24.99, p.b., 0 8028 4504 5

Yes, another commentary on Romans. It is with some justification that we all chorus, 'What more can there be to say?' and feel justified in suggesting that it can only be a re-hash of the preceding ones. Yet Romans is an almost inexhaustible source of discussion and reflection both at a scholarly and a popular level, though representatives of the latter frequently feel completely out of their depth. Let me hasten to say that the fantastically prolific Ben Witherington really does have some new perspectives which have not been aired in commentary form before. The first is enshrined in the title. Witherington makes much of applying socio-rhetorical insights to the text. The whole of Romans is mapped out with such conventions in mind. Striking examples would include Witherington's view that in 2:1-16f. Paul addresses an imaginary interlocutor, and in 2:17-3:20 he is engaging in the ancient practice of diatribe. Furthermore in chapter 7:7-13 he is impersonating Adam, and in 7:14-25 the whole of fallen and helpless humanity is considered from the perspective of a Christian. All this is perfectly comprehensible on the basis of first century rhetorical norms.

The second original contribution is that it is written from a position sympathetic to an Arminian/Wesleyan theological perspective. Indeed, nearly all serious commentaries on Romans are written from within a Reformed perspective, or are strongly influenced by it. This means that Witherington is disinclined to read original sin as classically expounded from Romans 5. Neither does he take a classical view of election/predestination and the perseverance of the saints in Romans 8-11. There are, after all, other ways of making sense of these passages within the context of the rest of Romans, and Witherington places the debate securely within the field of contemporary Jewish discussions of election. Indeed Israel were called, but many failed the test. This puzzled the rabbis.

The third innovation is familiar from Witherington's previous 'socio-rhetorical' commentaries – that of the periodic sections entitled 'Bridging the Horizons'. Here he takes seriously the need to answer the question, 'So what?' What might we do with this text now? Strangely enough Witherington does not always seem to be sure. Sometimes there is little comment – only one and a half pages follow Romans 3:21-31. He is certainly not about to suggest how the preceding verses might have been used in dogmatic discussion. On other occasions he seems inspired to undertake a full exposition – six and a bit pages follow chapter 12! The intention seems to be laudable but it is ill-defined. Is it intended to provide pointers towards sermons, or what? These sections are patchy – a criticism I would make of the whole commentary. Quite frequently one is left wanting more discussion or a fuller treatment. A traditional reading of Romans 1:26-27 is offered in less than a page, with no discussion of alternative readings. Surely the contemporary church and world demands more than this! 'Bridging the Horizons' does not take it up.

Dylan Dead?

Rack-ribbed ghost of the hollow bullets
Fingerprint of metal, the fearsome stone
Interruption of light at the speed of slugs
Planetary rotation in the lie of ellipses.

Globe of skeletons and tomorrow's breath
Spiral of holes from the gunner's shot
Pound of lead in Pisa's tower
Whirling brace against the bravery of steel.

Dead? Undead? Who knows?
Leave the Undead to raise the Undead.
A pound of dust would have been more light.

Lattice of spirits, the false dawn gave us hope.
Telephone the dead of Appolyon's abyss
The secret died with him:
The man who had a skull for a face.

Barry Gritt

More than Conquerors

Beethoven: deaf. Sandow, a weakling.
Nietzche confined to the madhouse,
Van Gogh to his cornfield.

But there is strength in weakness,
So we are promised by the One who does not lie
Long in the tomb.

For even God was dead
One Easter Sabbath
            But we shall overcome.
Yes, death, even death itself shall die

Before the mirror that is justice
On the day when the shadows are banished
To the burning history books.

Barry Gritt

But I would not wish the reader of this review to conclude that this is not a really good addition to our commentaries on Romans. Each of the three main innovations makes it that. The commentary is well-written, superbly up-to-date, addresses matters of special significance in separate boxes and is judiciously conservative. It is a very worthwhile addition to the student's bookshelf. Provided you have something of similar stature to fill the gaps and offer a different perspective.

Robert Willoughby

John Schad, *Queer Fish: Christian Unreason from Darwin to Derrida*, Sussex Academic Press, 2004, 177pp., £35 1 84 519019 X, and £15.95, pb., 1 84 519020 3

Despite its subtitle, this volume does not offer a narrative account of the irrational strand of Christian thought, belief or action from the mid-Victorian age to the modern. Neither does it offer an argument nor even stage a discussion of philosophical or theological currents. Rather, it comprises a series of interconnected critical performances anchored in the works of Darwin, Marx, Freud, Dickens, Wilde, Joyce and Derrida. Anyone who has read Schad's previous works will know what to expect – unlikely connections, strange affinities, and playful associations, that throw up startling insights and unusual perspectives. A single page can move the reader from laugh-out-loud jokes to stunned disbelief, as Schad takes us from beached fish, cracked pianos, and dripping umbrellas to the Holocaust, in a breathless progression of historical, literary and linguistic ideas, facts and conceits. By turns brilliant, quirky, imaginative, and slightly odd, the writing is never less than engaging as it uncovers both the endearing madness and the chilling illogicality of multiform Christian presences. Figures of Christ, the Church, Christians and religious belief turn up in the most unlikely places – whether it be the unrecognised angels in the text of Marx, the subterranean Church in Dickens, or the homoerotic Passion in Wilde.

The connections that Schad makes are often truly enlightening. Such a nexus can be found in his surprising catalogue of brief walk-on parts for Christians in mackintoshes, that ranges from *The Picture of Dorian Gray* to Derrida, via *Mrs Dalloway* and *Ulysses,* taking in the critical work of Frank Kermode. These odd ecclesiophanies herald, for Schad, the emergence of the Christian as a marginal figure, extraneous to plot.

We could not be further from that first novel, *Pilgrim*'s *Progress* (1678), where, of course, the character Christian is at the very centre of the narrative. After two centuries of the English novel in which Christian gradually vanishes into the bourgeois Everyman of the *Bildungsroman,* he finally re-emerges as a man in a mackintosh who has nothing whatsoever to do with the novel's narrative logic or direction but everything to do with its illogic, or indirection. The Christian in the mackintosh is not only an illogical figure but the very figure of illogic (p. 107).

At the other end of the spectrum, some of the leaps made by the work seem a little too contrived. A case in point occurs when, in the chapter on Freud, Schad recounts an anecdote about a Jew on a train with his feet up on the seat, who is said to 'cheat gravity' (p. 66). While this furthers a reading of Freud that explores images of gravity, leaps of faith and hermeneutical bridges, it is less than clear how such a posture can be made to bear the weight required of it. On the very next page, Schad quotes Freud: 'No connection [is] . . . too loose . . . to serve as a bridge from one thought to another.' If it is tempting to apply this dictum to some of Schad's own interpretative moves, it should be remembered that since the uncovering of the textual unconscious is very often the goal of his analysis, a certain Freudianism is appropriate. This methodology, while it does occasionally overstretch itself, highlights not only the complex indeterminacy of the intertextual condition, but also the fact that Christian unreason, with its Pauline *anacoloutha* and its Kierkegaardian leaps, is deeply embedded in the familiar hermeneutical procedures by which light is cast on the hidden synapses of culture, text and psyche.

Despite (or maybe because of) such leaps of faith, *Queer Fish* leaves one with the overriding impression of a critic who is able to use scholarly procedures and a sophisticated critical apparatus to produce work of great wit, sympathy and humanity, that is quite unlike anything produced by his peers. One cannot but be moved by the ways in which culturally marginalised, persecuted or abused figures such as Jews, black people, homosexuals, boy soldiers, are foregrounded by a searching analysis of the texts and cultural proclivities in which and by which they are often confined to the shadows. The chapter on Wilde is particularly well done and exudes a genuine admiration and sympathetic understanding rarely encountered in academic writing. Add to this an impressive breadth of knowledge, an uncanny ability to identify the most unlikely figural affinities, and a splendidly idiosyncratic style, and you have a rather extraordinary book that deserves a wide and appreciative readership.

Kevin Mills

Timothy Ward, *Word and Supplement. Speech Acts, Biblical Texts, and the Sufficiency of Scripture*, OUP, 2002, x + 332pp., £50, 0 19 924438 3

It is the final part of the sub-title which clarifies what this book is really about: the Reformation and post-Reformation doctrine of the sufficiency of scripture, which Ward wants to argue can be rescued from certain attacks that have been made on it, by way of a critical appropriation of various recent interpretative tools, notably the speech act theory of J L Austin and John Searle.

After a lucid introduction to the project, Ward devotes a lengthy chapter to tracing the history of the doctrine, noting its decline in the modern period. He then offers three 'reconstructive' chapters. The first analyses divine speech, appreciative (though not uncritically so) of Barth. The second explores 'text' and its potential supplements in the familiar speech-act framework of author-text-reader. The third discusses how scripture is self-supplementing as canon, which in turn leads to a discussion of its 'inspiration' (or in Warfield's preferred term, its 'being breathed out by God' (*theopneustos*, 2 Tim 3:16). A short conclusion demurs to fundamentalism, underlines the 'ethical' dimension of the project, and summarises the reformulation: God speaks, primarily through scripture; scripture is sufficient for salvation and discipleship (though it is not *self-sufficient*), and the canon as a whole is self-interpreting (p. 298).

The strengths of the book betoken its origin as an Edinburgh PhD thesis under the ever-illuminating eye of Kevin Vanhoozer. Indeed at times I wondered if *Word and Supplement* would be best described as a doctrinal midrash on Vanhoozer's literary-critical epic *Is there a meaning in this text?* The appearance of many inimitable Vanhoozer epigrams in the footnotes is only the tip of the conceptual iceberg: this is full-scale widescreen engagement with the brightest and best of the critical stock of modern (and postmodern) textual interpretation, all with a starkly Protestant theology of the Word quietly driving the thesis through untroubled waters. Remarkably untroubled, in fact. By p. 287 we learn that it is (my emphasis:) '*simply* by virtue of his historical location' that Warfield was unable to deploy 'a sophisticated approach to the genre, literary characteristics and illocutionary force of the whole Biblical text being studied'. The impression is given throughout that were the framers of the Westminster Confession, or Turretin, or Warfield, to be brought back today and given a crash course in speech act theory and an introduction to a kind of Bakhtinian polyphony, they would all immediately assert (declaratively), 'This is just what we had in mind'. Whatever the merits of Ward's actual argument, this point at least is debatable.

The other major strength, for which the book may be recommended unreservedly, is its patient and unusually clear discussion of theorist after theorist. I almost wished that Ward had written instead an A-Z of contemporary thinkers and what they said about interpretation, both general and Biblical. The roll-call is impressive: new criticism, Hans Frei, E D Hirsch, Jacques Derrida (and his free-wheeling Biblical studies spokesperson Stephen Moore), Stanley Fish, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and this is only in Chapter 4. Elsewhere we have Wolterstorff, Barth, Kristeva, Bakhtin and Ricoeur, and further theologians a-plenty. Ward is ever irenic, even, delightfully, when he is describing what he finds patently ludicrous. Although his account of Gadamer is oddly situated (resulting in a self-confessed mismatch of Ward's Gadamer and Gadamer's own self-description, see p. 197 n. 189), and he adopts a 'polyphony' from Bakhtin which is actually Bakhtin's 'heteroglossia', confusingly side-lining the Dostoyevsky-orientated 'polyphony' which Bakhtin proffers, nevertheless Ward's summaries and evaluations are models of clarity, precision, fairness, and a piercing ability to get to the point.

Enough has been said, I hope, to indicate the many riches which this book offers for a Christian understanding of texts, and especially Biblical texts, as communicative acts with a definite (theological) content. It is thus indebted that this reviewer has to report a certain amount of frustration with the specific thesis defended herein, and with its adoption of the language of speech act theory to do so. Ward is correct to note that speech act theory offers a great deal of conceptual clarity in its discussion of words as communicative actions. That this insight applies to texts is I think entirely defensible, but it is at least surprising that those works which have explored this area (notably Mary Louise Pratt's *Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse* and Susan Lanser's *The Narrative Act*) do not contribute to Ward's project. Instead he turns to Wolterstorff's *Divine Discourse* for his central notion that speech acts operate by way of a 'normative ascription' of a 'normative standing' to performers and hearers of illocutionary acts. For Wolterstorff, and thus for Ward, there is an irreducibly ethical dimension to communicative action, as well as a fixed semantic content in any illocutionary act. Wolterstorff's view, though, looks for all the world like a description of the problem as an answer: the real question is to explore how it is that texts are *counted as* certain illocutionary acts in ways which can sometimes bear no relation to any form of authorial intention. To say that they 'should' be (i.e. there is a normative ascription of ethical obligations) solves the problem by fiat. Scripture 'controls' theology, Ward concludes, because of 'an ethical readerly attitude to the illocutionary acts by which God conveys Christ to us in Scripture' (p. 301). But how is this determinative? Ward offers no discussion of 'the ethics of reading' as developed by, for instance, Daniel Patte (*Ethics of Interpretation*) or Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza. Speech act theory is allowing a clear definition of the *problem*, not a means for solving it.

Furthermore, Christian interpretation of scripture, despite Ward's frequent urging to the contrary, does not on the whole provide a series of case studies of fixed semantic content being normatively appropriated as (divine) illocutionary acts. Ward's brief studies of Christological interpretation of Isaiah are fairly unconvincing on this point: he appears to allow no scope for the observation that the NT writers craft their accounts in conscious indebtedness to Isaiah's phrasing because they have perceived a 'fulfilment' which was not, one may be sure, a part of Isaiah's intentional illocutionary act. Ward's appeal to Richard Hays' use of intertextuality (Paul's 'echoes' of scripture) is better here. Traditional typological reading is absent throughout. I would argue that if speech act theory were being used to describe certain kinds of (performative) texts, it could take its place as one critical tool alongside these others in a way that would do better justice to what the church has in fact traditionally argued to be the way (Biblical) texts work. A final point on speech act jargon: when Ward writes 'As a *person* who is also an act of revelation, Jesus is a divine illocutionary act performed without a verbal locution' (p. 132), one may be forgiven for feeling grateful that speech act theorists were not around in the first century.

Two other points of content. First, this book comes very close to Hans Frei's famous category of being about scripture while discussing no scriptural texts. Maybe this would not matter, but Ward reminds us several times that case-by-case exegesis is necessary for weighing up aspects of the argument. When the Biblical text pops into view here, the signs are not encouraging (such as the Isaiah argument, or the failure to grasp the point of the silence in heaven in Rev 8:1, on p. 228).

Second, the opening sentence of the book sets up a nagging worry that is never entirely laid to rest. ‘Christian faith cannot but be a Biblical faith’, we are told. On p. 245: ‘canon as a closed list is essential to Christianity’. Such fleeting comments suggest that Ward’s project is self-consciously Protestant. Nevertheless, Protestants have been able to account for the first-century mixture of oral tradition, textual development, and the rule of faith, and ‘Christian faith’ there most certainly was before the canon was closed. Perhaps Ward’s thesis makes most sense of ‘reformed Protestant faith’, but it seems to eye a wider horizon.

It is unlikely that anyone not already convinced of the ‘sufficiency of scripture’ will be persuaded by this book (though this would be an interesting piece of empirical research to carry out). Most likely, those already sensing that they ‘should’ be committed to it will come away from reading Ward feeling that there are new ways available of defending the doctrine, although these ways will not, I suspect, convince speech act theorists or other literary critics, even Protestant ones. But as a tour of contemporary interpretative battlegrounds *Word and Supplement* offers an informed and informative perspective on all manner of hermeneutical thinking.

Richard Briggs

Christopher Ricks, *Dylan’s Visions of Sin*, Ecco (HarperCollins), 2004, 517pp., US$26.95, **0 06 059923 5 and Penguin, £9.99, 0 14 007336 1**

This, the fruition of Ricks’ decades-long labour of love, is a warm, large, and generous act of homage. Given Dylan’s disdain for critics (‘dissecting rabbits’) the volume is a feat of valour, too. And voluminous it is, a veritable critical epic. Although Ricks claims that the Empsonian ‘right handle to take hold of the bundle’ is sin, Ricks’ approach slots Dylan’s lyrics into the scheme of the seven Thomistic sins, the four Platonic cardinal virtues, and the three Pauline heavenly graces. The reading experience is cosmic, Dantean in its scope, as we drop from infernal circle to circle, protestantly skip purgatory, and then mount from beatific sphere to sphere. *Visions of Sin*, then, is something of a mis-title or a marketing strategy (to my knowledge, few of today’s consumers of Dante manage to get past the Inferno’s rancid bits).

Ricks’ introduction recognizes the importance of a triangle of music, voices, and words when savouring Dylan, but subsequently gives a masterful examination of Dylan’s use of the device of rhyme, that ‘goddess of secret and ancient coincidences’ (Rilke). His treatment of Dylan the rhymester is one of the work’s major strengths, but betrays Ricks’ real prioritisation of Dylan’s static words on the page. Rather, Dylan is first and foremost a living voice – his jeremiads, Job-like laments, exultations, exhortations, diatribes, and exaltations – each serve a time and a place (consider the tremendous potential import transmitted by a Masters of War or A Hard Rain’s Gonna Fall sung in a Dylan concert in our current political climate). Previous reviewers of

Ricks' homage seem to forget that homage is a form of charity. This book doesn't reflect typical Ricksian literary analysis, for the author is intimately involved in his writing (so, too, Ricks on his colleague and contemporary Geoffrey Hill). If previous reviewers have classed Ricks' style in this work as too 'knowing', too 'clever', and too 'pleased with itself', this is because Ricks knows a great deal about Dylan, is clever, and is very pleased to be writing Dylanology. The very woof of Ricks' text deftly weaves in asides and variations on Dylan's words, and Ricks' Dylanesque internal rhymes and ungrammatical staccato sentences proliferate (and can sometimes frustrate). If Ricks' singular style is regarded as a frustratingly 'casually hip' book-end, so be it, but his motivations for adopting it are nonetheless well-intentioned.

Dylan's lyrics are a minefield on which Ricks might deploy his lifetime's teeming arsenal of literary knowledge. We find Keats's 'Ode to a Nightingale' at the back of Not Dark Yet, and both Smoke Gets in your Eyes *and* Handel's Messiah jostling together in I Believe in You; Eliot's J. Alfred Prufrock whispering in the wings of Desolation Row and Foot of Pride handed with Psalm 36; Robert Burns hiding out in the Highlands and Lord Randal snuggled up with A Hard Rain's Gonna Fall; and, once more, in a preposterous formulation, that 'that Dylanesque writer' William Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* is a revisioned Seven Curses (p. 60). More often than not Ricks' ear and eye appear impeccable. That the book of Ecclesiastes and *A Tale of Two Cities* might have heavily influenced The Times They Are A-Changin' few would be reluctant to concede (one might also add Everything is Broken), but sometimes the reader is led along the road to the end of a pier, and then abandoned there to be mesmerized by the ocean of possibilities. The almost infinite reach of connotations and allusions that Ricks parades, as in his study of the riddling Handy Dandy, makes us wonder if the origin of Ricks' inspiration was the egg that is the song's riddle's answer, or the chicken that expelled it. At other times the palimpsests and perplexing criss-crosses of meaning that his powerful erudition puts on show are overstretched. For example, Ricks marshals such various (re)sources for the expression 'eyes wide' in The Times They Are A-Changin' as Lawrentian 'wide-eyed responsibility', or Madison's 'wide-eyed prudence', where the listener would do just as well to plump for the third chapter of the book of Genesis (p. 268).

But then Ricks is at his weakest when it comes to sin. Greed gets a mere five pages because 'greed simply isn't a sin that either sufficiently attracts him (his art) or sufficiently repels' (p. 109). Extraordinary, that claim, when we recall Foot of Pride ('They like to take all this money from sin, / Build big universities to study in'), or the painful pertinence of the wincing words of Union Sundown ('Sure was a good idea, / 'Til greed got in the way'), or the awful and telling historical panorama of the West in Blind Willie McTell ('Power and greed and corruptible seed / Seem to be all that there is'). When we do meet Ricks on Blind Willie McTell (curiously categorized under envy), we are rewarded with Ricks' scholarship on the importance of the Biblical phrase, 'this land', and with his recognition of allusions to Robert Browning and the sweet blooming magnolias of Strange Fruit, but we still can't see the land for the sea. Could the song's painfully obvious message, that a civilization's history 'is ruled by violence, / (But I guess that's better left unsaid)', be too relevant, that is, too risky a business for a Professor to spell out?

On the subject of Dylan's message, in this book we encounter a new Ricks, a modified Ricks. Dylan is not a dead white European male, a Johnny Keats or a Milton, he is an alive and kicking Jewish-American. Child of New Criticism, proponent of the intentional fallacy, Ricks is conflicted on the matter of interpreting Dylan. Permit me to chance committing the heresy of paraphrase. Ricks initially admits edgily that Dylan (the man, the singer, the persona) betrays in his art a 'cooperative subconscious' or 'unconscious intentions' (p. 7), and later vindicates that: 'it is the character of his songs (not Dylan's own character) that matters to me' (p. 63); and, again, 'who except an uncouth sleuth-hound cares' (p. 65)? Ricks repeats his mantra: 'The impersonality that is one of art's strengths is a feat' (p. 192) and 'anyone who gets his or her kicks from biographizing Dylan's songs is likely to end up with a medical condition' (p. 360); and yet Ricks similarly advocates a counter-discourse that '(Dylan) means it. A poet, as Chesterton maintained, is someone who means what he says and says what he means' (p. 230). Ricks similarly maintains that Dylan is capable of 'bring(ing) us responsible pleasure' and that he 'undertakes the responsibility of putting tragedy in its place' (p. 246). Ricks here even accepts Dylan on his own terms: 'I knew exactly what I wanted to say, and for whom I wanted to say it' (p. 269). At times Ricks, albeit grudgingly, appears to be conceding that Dylan, the great contentious pretender, is a true intender whose songs' 'accumulation of probabilities leads to a conviction' (p. 367).

Ricks, perhaps rhetorically, asks of us, 'What, pray, is the antonym of a sin' (p. 4)? If a sin is, etymologically speaking, a turning away or a shunning, the answer to this riddle is, surely, a grace, a giving. Skirting the sins (in 220 pages), he depends upon the virtues and graces, Dylan's 'supreme acts of gratitude', for the better half of the work (over 290 pages). For me, Ricks' most worthwhile criticism lies within these pages. Ricks is strongest on Dylan's overtly 'Christian songs'; here he is most at home, and at his most candid and luminous:

> It is inspiriting to meet a heartfelt expression of faith that would constitute – if, say, you were ever to find yourself converted – so true an example as to become a reason. If I were ever to become a Christian, it would be because of the humane substantiation that is to be heard in many a poem by George Herbert. And in many a song by Dylan. (p. 380)

Ricks prefaces his study of the graces with an exceptional philosophy of language where words are 'built not only *upon* but *of* faith', as 'a body of agreement and acts of trust', a social contract or pledge (echoes of George Steiner here). At this point the book becomes less of a roaming and free-spirited inquiry than a new apologetic for the fideistic basis of Dylan's, nay all, acts of creation, where art is 'sympathetic access to systems of belief that are not our own' (p. 377). Ricks seems critically on fire when he accounts for Dylan's 'triumph of feeling and thought over the natural sin of language'; or when he gleefully parries the censurers of Dylan's songs of grace for their 'menacingly coercive' illiberal liberalism. All of this rumbles like Ricks' openness to the idea of a redeemable intentionalism. Dylan's critics who undercut the Pauline rhetoric of 1 Corinthians 13 in 'Watered Down Love' ('one of the most noble progressions ever realized') and the positive power of agapic love that it celebrates are caustically greeted by Ricks as sounding brasses and tinkling cymbals needful of their own shots of hate. Refreshing too is Ricks' acknowledgement of Dylan's view of the sacred as 'willing to accommodate the secularly human (whereas the secular is usually loath to accommodate the sacredly divine)' (p. 350).

A thoroughgoing appraisal of the wealth of Biblical allusion and its effects in Dylan's songs remains to be written. A monograph would be justified on the relationship between Dylan's words and the Sermon on the Mount alone. *Visions of Sin* is not that book, although on occasion a work of that nature does seem to be brewing in the margins. To give him his due, Ricks does readily acknowledge the importance of Scripture for Dylan's art as 'the bridge by which one word of Dylan's has crossed over to another' (p. 266); and, as Ricks stresses, Dylan himself points out that people have mostly turned a deaf ear to his themes about such things as salvation and sin: 'Make something religious and people don't have to deal with it, they can say it's irrelevant' (p. 210). Likewise, in a tantalizing footnote, Ricks understates Dylan's concerns: 'Several of the early songs have more than a turn-of-phrase that is Christian' (p. 325). Ricks' own vision of Dylan, for all of its whirligig digressions and self-contradictions, reads as a tendentious testimony to the fact that Dylan always knows his song well before he starts singing. As such, *Visions of Sin* is heartfelt, soulfelt, and uncommonly grateful, howsoever Dylan's critical rabbits and Ricks' own Mr Joneses might nibble and quibble.

Russell M. Hillier

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News and Notes

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Attend, or offer to read a paper at the autumn conference. This year's conference, 'Beyond Derrida', at Corpus Christi College, Oxford, on Saturday 12 November, notices the demise of Jacques Derrida and takes the opportunity to consider states of play in one or two areas of literary study.

Professor John Schad, Professor of Modern Literature at Loughborough University, will give the keynote paper, 'Derrida via Oxford'.

Offers are invited for papers which take stock of a field of study which has Christian aspects, or is considered from an explicitly Christian point of view, with a retrospect and prospect. The deadline for offers is 1 April. Information will be updated on the CLSG website *www.clsg.org.*

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